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Looking the Same? A Preliminary (Post-colonial) Discussion of Orientalism and Occidentalism in Australia and Japan.

When Edward Said's *Orientalism* appeared in 1978, it evoked enormous interest in a number of academic fields. As Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg point out in their "review of reviews," the book constituted a highly "self-conscious intellectual/political intervention into institutions of research and higher education, seen as key sites of the production of knowledge" (179). It has become one of the most frequently cited and most controversial texts for academics working in oriental studies, in literary theory, in discourse analysis, and in post-colonial studies. More recently, a number of critics otherwise sympathetic to Said's project have pointed to problems in his work¹--specifically, to the book's construction of orientalism as a monolithic discourse which permits no space for subversion, evasion or contestation. Dennis Porter, for example, suggests that it is necessary to leave open the possibility that literary works themselves may contain "contra-dictions," and that we need to consider "the feasibility of a textual dialogue between Western and non-Western cultures . . . a dialogue that would cause subject object relations to alternate, so that we might read ourselves as the others of our others and replace the notion of a place of truth with that of a knowledge which is always relative and provisional" (181).

This paper explores the contours such a dialogue might follow in literary representations of the racial/sexual Other² in Australia and Japan. We are looking at two quite different texts, *Confessions of a Mask*, an autobiographical novel by Mishima Yukio, and *Shimada*, a play written by Jill Shearer in the 1980s and subsequently performed to wide acclaim in the eastern states

¹We would wish to differentiate these basically positive critiques of the book from the politically and intellectually conservative responses which sought to defend "orientalism" and its history.

²In this paper capitals are used to indicate that the reference is to the stereotypical meaning in the terms "Other," "Orient" and "Occident."

of Australia.³ The play deals with the projected Japanese takeover of a small factory in rural Queensland, and, through a retrospective focus on the experiences of one of the factory workers in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in the Pacific War⁴/World War Two, foregrounds a long history of intercultural conflict inflected by ambivalent sexual politics. Mishima's novel details the experiences of an adolescent boy in Japan before and during the same war, and, like Shearer's play, is also concerned with questions of representation, gender and sexuality. Despite the fact that *Confessions of a Mask* does not position Australians, but rather Europeans, as the racial/cultural Other which is simultaneously feared, desired, and resented, the text's ambivalence towards European culture has important resonances for reconceptualising where both countries might (not) fit in the orientalist/occidental paradigm.

We are concerned here not only to interrogate the implicit binarism of Said's model but also to consider specificities of geography and history. As Lisa Lowe suggests in her readings of Flaubert, it is necessary to locate the "orientalisms" and "occidentalisms" under discussion in a particular time and place:

The notions of what constitutes the Occident or the Orient are not constant; nor is the represented relationship of Occident and Orient . . . and the inconsistencies reveal different . . . concerns, desires, and anxieties, specific to each historical period. The representations, and the means of representation, of the Orient and the oriental, reflect the changing historical circumstances, and the changing proximity and shifts of power, between western and non-western worlds. (44)

Although Japan and Australia are geographically peripheral to Europe, each country's discourses of nationhood are nevertheless inflected by European politics and culture. However, the oppositions of "east" and "west," Orient and Occident, are splintered not only by geography and political and cultural history, but also by the neo-imperial presence of the United States, and long-standing ambivalences in both countries about claiming either a European or an Asian identity in the future. In Australia, recent policy documents have urged the government to facilitate exchange with Asia, and to accept that the dictates of geography require economic

³Japanese names are given with the surname first, as in Japanese. *Shimada* is one among many recent Australian plays to deal in some way with Australia's relationship with Japan. Others include Nigel Triffitt's *The Fall of Singapore*, Barry Lowe's *Tokyo Rose*, *Tokyo/Now/Thriller* by Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch, and John Romeril's *The Floating World*.

⁴The oxymoron comes from a literal translation from the Japanese to whom of course it was not *World War Two*.

integration with Asia and the Pacific; at the same time, there is intense debate over the remaining significance (if any) of British cultural and political influence. Likewise in Japan debates are focussing on the role of the nation and its people in world economics and politics, in the United Nations, and in issues pertaining to the Pacific region. Post-war hatred and mistrust between the two countries have long been replaced with an official politics of co-operation, but sedimented within current debates on both sides of the fence are arguments and deep anxieties about racial identities and racial otherness.

In analysing the structures of racism, fear and desire which such anxieties encode and are encoded by, it is possible to use some concepts of post-colonialism which have been so fruitfully applied in readings of literatures from post-European colonies.⁵ This approach deliberately intervenes in accepted epistemologies and sets the stage for the provisional and relative knowledges that Porter has called for in his critique of Said. As Diana Brydon contends,

the challenge the post-colonial literatures potentially pose is . . . that of rethinking the organisation and function of knowledge. If as Said argues, the presently accepted 'mission' of the humanities . . . is 'to represent *noninterference* in the affairs of the everyday world,'⁶ then our task is to define a "program of interference." (28)

In its agenda of intervention, post-colonial theory has long been concerned to foreground the kinds of "contra-dictions" suggested by Porter. Homi Bhabha, in various analyses of colonialist discourse, argues that the construction of the colonising self is always already caught up in identification with/against the Other, and that this dependency on the positioning of the Other offers a space for subversion and transgression. The necessary ambivalence which destabilises representations of the self rests on the stereotypical construction of the Other:

[I]t is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. (1983: 18)

⁵The term is used by Max Dorsinville in *Le Pays Natal: Essais sur les Littératures du Tiersmonde et du Québec* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1983). For a brief discussion of its significance for post-colonial critics, see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (24).

⁶Quoting Edward W. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community." *The Politics of Interpretation*. Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 28.

Colonialist discourse, then, marks out the colonised as a "fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha 1983: 23). As Bhabha's colleague Jonathan Dollimore points out, though in reference to the work of Michel Foucault, "extrapolated, the model which emerges here is one in which the marginal and the deviant are indirectly creations, effects of the dominant"⁷ (1986: 181).

The "force of ambivalence" which Bhabha describes as energising the colonial stereotype is, in the case of Australian representations of Japan, an ambivalence which rests on feminisation, as Adrian Kiernander argues:

The Orient is so defined in order to render it colonisable; this feminised Asia waits ready to be taken, in marriage or in rape, by an Occident which is male and potent. The oxymorons of a falling Orient and rising Occident are not the only paradoxes at work here--the idea of colonisability depends itself on an elegant series of paradoxes: it is desirable to colonise the feminine because she is fascinating, attractive and weak; it is necessary to colonise the female because she is powerful, threatening and different. (1992: 187)

Thus Asia is read as the seductress, the wilful temptress; if Africa offered an encounter with the "barbarian Other," Asia is presented as the feminised enemy within. The perpetual requisition of the Other through recognition takes place.

A recurrent concern with sexuality--the Orient as a site of exotic/erotic mystique--is not new but rather one of the most important concerns of orientalism as defined by Said. The contemporary power and pervasiveness of this discourse in the West can be seen in the orientalisering of commodities such as perfume, which captivates the West through the capture of the East (Stevens 18). But Bhabha's point about the instability of colonial discourse is well illustrated here by the ease with which Japanese constructions of sexuality reverse the racial stereotypes. In Japan, white models, mainly American celebrities, are used to sell sensuality; it is white women who are metonymic of passion and power, who are advertised as "exotic dancers," and who command higher prices in the sex industry. In both cultures, then, "woman" is a free-floating signifier, and female sexuality is harnessed in the production of a colonisable

⁷Dollimore goes on to suggest that "by moving away from the misleading language of entities towards that of social process and representation, we identify a situation in which the marginal may not only be repressed by the dominant (coercively and ideologically) but actually produced by it. At the same time there emerges a different conception of resistance and subversion, one stemming from the fact that production often exceeds the control which is its own rationale" (1986: 181).

other. The interplay of fear and desire which necessarily results from this process emerges strongly in the texts under discussion where the "others" of Japan and Australia are constructed on discriminations that are not only national and racial, but also subtly and pervasively gendered. Each work shows complex intersections and metaphorical transfers⁸ between the masculine, the imperialist and the nationalist, which can both compound and undercut discrimination in significant ways. At the same time, orientalist and occidentalist discourses are inflected by a homoeroticism/homosexuality which offers a threat to coloniser/colonised male/female binaries and a means by which they may be disrupted.

In his article entitled "Fashion/Orientalism/the Body," Peter Wollen suggests that

the Orient is the site of scientific and political fantasy, displaced from the body politic of the west itself, a field of free play for shamelessly paranoid constructions, dreamlike elaborations of western traumas. [It is] a secular, licentious narrative, with almost no trace of moralism . . . but full of tales of deviant, transgressive and fantastic sexuality. (17)

These fantasies stand in sharp opposition to the experiences of Australian prisoners during the Pacific War. Nevertheless, they form an important part of the discursive space which "Japan" and its people have occupied in Australia throughout different historical periods, and they clearly inform the presentation of Japanese characters in *Shimada*. The play interweaves two narratives of Japanese/Australian conflict: one presents a dramatic vision of Australian POWs and their encounter with the Japanese soldier, Shimada; the other charts the psychological disintegration of one of these prisoners when, in contemporary times, he faces the prospect of working with Japanese executives after a business merger. Although the play does invoke orientalist stereotypes to construct the Japanese as both the barbaric/threatening and mysterious/sensual Other, it also fractures such discourses in a number of ways, and the narrative point of view shifts uneasily among Japanese and Australian characters, decentering the orientalist (or occidentalist) perspective.⁹ Australian audiences might feel empathy for Eric, the beleaguered veteran, but Shearer takes pains to suggest that he "mistook [the] sign" (49) in

⁸For an example of the nature of the metaphoric transfer of difference from the known to the unknown, in this case between race, gender, and vegetarianism, see Adams.

⁹In drama, usually a polyphonic discourse, the possibilities for hearing the Other speak are amplified by the avoidance of a single narrative perspective. The represented role of the Other can also be inflected by the particular actor, though this is obviously strongly mediated by the text itself.

constructing the Japanese as irrevocably the enemy Other. Hence the war narrative, filtered through his consciousness in a series of intermittent externalised dream/memory sequences, is clearly inflected by the fears and fantasies of an unreliable narrator.

Although evacuated from the front lines and visible conflicts of the war, woman is insistently present throughout the historical narrative of *Shimada*, as metonym for the Orient, and conversely the Occident, in the subtext of the military confrontation between Japan and Australia. In the context of war, desire devolves into particularly strong fears of feminisation and an overwhelming need to exhibit mastery over the woman/Other. Her latent but always partial power emerges in the play's contemporary scenes when male Australian and Japanese protagonists negotiate over a bicycle factory which is owned and predominantly run by women. Thus woman is the space on and through which the men can be sorted from the boys, the battleground which determines not just the military/economic victors but also the cultural constructions of the masculine.

Shimada's war narrative establishes Australia's encounter with Japan as catastrophic emasculation:

"You go off and the bands are playing. Girls throw flowers at you. (PAUSE) Then all of a sudden it's a mess. Like a typhoon . . . a hurricane. Cutting us down, paring us down . . . to what we really are. The fearful, the mediocre . . . the cowards." (24)

As a testing ground for national identity, war becomes a double edged sword which simultaneously constructs and destroys the masculine because heroism and cowardice are inextricably linked in the victor/vanquished binary. In the absence of woman as potentially vanquishable Other, each side attempts to feminise its opponents in order to keep the concept of manhood intact, for the defeated man, even if racially different, testifies to masculine vulnerability. Metaphorically, war enacts a sexualised battle, the outcome of which determines who'll wear the pants and who the dress. In the context of orientalism and the historical gendering of the Orient as implicitly feminine, the spectre of a Japanese victory over the Occidental involves not just racial defeat but, more frighteningly, a sexual one.

The Australian soldiers, Eric, Clive and Billy, are clearly disadvantaged in this battle by their position as prisoners, with all the real and symbolic disempowerment that incarceration involves.

In such a situation, the fear of total feminisation becomes pervasive, and the need to resist it, paramount. That the Japanese have the upper hand is potently demonstrated by Billy's recurrent appearances as the quintessential emasculated soldier: frail and in *geisha* costume--a hessian kimono and fan--he is visibly marked by the signs of the woman/oriental Other. Forced to play camp singer and entertainer in exchange for food for the prisoners, he acts as prostitute and castrate, but not of his own volition.

Clive and Eric are also implicated in this symbolic castration; unable to prevent it, they are not only made impotent by their confrontation with the Orient but they also actively contribute to their own feminisation even while vehemently resisting it. As the dressmaker and costumier who fits Billy with the clothes for his role, Clive in particular becomes increasingly aligned with the feminine. It is fitting then, if ironic, that he must don the *geisha* costume after Shimada kills Billy during a performance. The *geisha* role, overtly constructed and then forcibly attached to successive prisoners, foregrounds gender as a costume that functions to signal defeat of the enemy Other while maintaining the masculine warrior ideal intact. On one level, gender as an imposed costume gives the Australians an alibi for their demasculinisation--they are after all only playing a role--but on another level, it also poses questions about the relationship between the self and the role played. The notion of gender fluidity that this masking implies accounts for the Australians' intense need to resist feminine roles lest they prove to be self-actualising, a fear which is poignantly expressed when Billy tries desperately to divest himself of the *geisha* clothes lest he die, gender-fixed, "done up like some tart" (20). In the admixture of orientalist discourses invoked by the *geisha* figure, it is difficult to determine which disturbs Billy most--being associated with Japanese women, or with prostitutes. The threat of both images impels dilution by the mobilisation of "soldier" status as a defining characteristic of the masculine. Hence, in response to Billy's fears, Eric replies: "You're a man. We're all men. Soldiers" (20).

In the character of Shimada, also a soldier, the play provides a lens through which Australian audiences may see themselves as "the others of their others" and thus recognise the ways in which orientalist discourses function to mask similarities and build unbreachable walls of difference between cultures. The Japanese and Australian constructions of each other as

adversary differ in degree rather than kind, and this is a result of the power accorded the respective sides by the outcome of their conflict. Clearly war as the context for cultural contact foregrounds common concepts of masculinity in the soldier figure, and Shimada's contempt for the feminine belies a fear as deeply rooted as that of the Australians. As Susan White points out, "constructions of the masculine, especially in war, expel anything infantile, female, or homoerotic;" however, the infrastructure of the military is formed by "blood and violence and desire for male love, all of which must be externalized onto women and enemy" (125). As woman soldier, Billy represents the ultimate threat because he embodies the repulsive and castrating otherness of womanhood as well as the virginal warrior ideal, the child/man in his first battle. Post-Hiroshima, the surrendered Australian soldiers reflect Shimada's imminent fate: they are the mirrors in and through which he must view the woman in himself.

The fantasy of cross-dressing is more complicated in Mishima's text where the narrator is outraged to discover that the compelling soldier figure he had adored as a child is not a man, but Joan of Arc: "If this beautiful knight was a woman and not a man, what was there left? (Even today I feel a repugnance, deep rooted and hard to explain, toward women in male attire)" (14). In this, the only appearance made by a European woman in the text, there is deception and thwarted desire, again linked in complex ways to fantasies about war and death. It is Joan's costume which has enabled her duplicity, sexual and military, to be convincing, and it is the European image which captures the imagination of the awed child. The narrator's fantasies about his own sexual disguise are quite the reverse--or perhaps the same--as Joan's, when he describes a highly feminised child luxuriating in the textures and colours of brightly coloured silks. In an unusual paragraph in which the narrative suddenly switches to the third person, there is a description of a baby "clothed in undergarments of flannel and cream-coloured silk and [a] kimono of silk crepe with a splashed pattern" (9). The dress of the baby prefigures the young boy's appearance as Tenkatsu in a scene in which the child parades before his grandmother as a female magician before he is roughly stripped of his "outrageous masquerade" by a maid (18).

The connections between homosexuality and war are also explored in Mishima's novel, and are linked both to a longing for (a spectacular) death, and a simultaneous recognition that the army can provide a site for the fulfilment of desire: "I realized I had been secretly hoping that the army would provide me at last with an opportunity for gratifying those strange sensual desires of mine" (97). The analogy between battle and sex as satisfying desire is drawn elsewhere: confronted with an opportunity to have sex for the first time, the narrator is "as tense as a new recruit" (134). But fulfilment is always deferred during the unconsummated relationship between the male narrator and the girl Sonoko, a relationship about which the narrator is highly ambivalent as it exemplifies the tensions between the desire for the homoerotic and the idealisation of the Madonna which is outlined in the epigraph to the novel (discussed below). The narrator seeks/fears a moment of penetration of the female, the male "rite/right of passage" which will "normalise" his desires and identity, while always knowing that such a moment or process of transformation will not occur. The mask of heterosexuality is torn away during a disastrous encounter with a prostitute on his twenty-second birthday, an encounter in which the woman is at once the testing ground of normality and a substitute for both Sonoko and other men--legitimate and illegitimate lusts entwined.

Perhaps I will not be understood when I say there is a numbness that resembles fierce pain. I felt my entire body becoming paralyzed with just such a pain, a pain that was intense, but still could not be felt at all. . . .

Ten minutes later there was no doubt about my incapacity. My knees were shaking with shame. (154)

This representation of the female as crude and emasculating also co-opts orientalist stereotypes, which are first presented through the childhood fantasies about the magician Tenkatsu Shokyokusai:

She lounged indolently about the stage, her opulent body veiled in garments like those of the Great Harlot of the Apocalypse. On her arms were flashy bracelets, heaped with artificial stones; her make-up was as heavy as that of a female ballad-singer, with a coating of white powder extending even to the tips of her toenails; and she wore a trumpery costume that surrendered her person over to the kind of brazen luster given off only by shoddy merchandise. (17)

Women are commodified and associated with a sexuality that is morally and spiritually corrosive, but they are nevertheless sensual and desirable. Later at home, the child tries to mimic

Tenkatsu by putting on an "exotic" costume, beginning with an *obi* decorated with scarlet roses which is wrapped around his waist "in the manner of a Turkish pasha," seeking in every point "to be made worthy of creation of mystery" (18). After Tenkatsu, the child then takes up a fascination with Cleopatra; it is the orientalist fantasy of Middle Eastern rampant sexuality which is being invoked here, rather than the "cool" or fragile sexuality of Japan.¹⁰

Mishima's representations of men dichotomise and yet invert the stereotype of Madonna and whore, juxtaposing the lusty agrarian bodies of (Japanese) youths seemingly oblivious to their (homo)sexuality with the subtly seductive intellectualisation and textualisation of male homosexuality and sadistic desire by European writers. Throughout the novel, the texts/bodies/desires of European writers such as Proust, Wilde, Sade, and Dostoevsky underwrite the expression, representation, and legitimation of homosexual desire. This intertextuality is established in the epigraph of the novel which is drawn from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and which sets out the tension between "the ideal of the Madonna" and "the ideal of Sodom." The epigraph concludes:

Believe me, most men find their beauty in Sodom. . . . The dreadful thing is that beauty is not only terrifying but also mysterious. God and the Devil are fighting there, and their battlefield is the heart of man. But a man's heart wants to speak only of its own ache. Listen, now I'll tell you what it says. . . [sic]

In *Confessions of a Mask*, the good and evil of women--the passive virgin and the overpowering harlot--are presented through orientalist stereotypes while Europe is constructed as an exotic site where homosexual desire may be validated through literature and art (164). Such a presentation entwines the anxiety of the colonised, and the anxiety of the sexually (socially) illegitimate.

As in *Shimada*, cross-dressing and masquerade are used to raise questions about gender as a mask, and the enactment of desire as a kind of performance. The narrator declares that

by the end of childhood I was already firmly convinced that [life was a stage] and that I was to play my part on the stage without ever revealing my true self. . . . I believed optimistically that once the performance was finished the curtain would fall and the audience would never see the actor without his makeup. . . .it is simply a matter of sex, of the role by means of which one attempts to conceal, even from himself, the true nature of his sexual desires. (72)

¹⁰This point is discussed by Stevens. See also *Confessions of a Mask* (35, 67) where the fantasy of male sexuality also conjures stereotypes of the "Middle East" rather than of Japan.

The presentation of self and other involves a subversion of gender stereotypes through performance. The space between self and other becomes a theatrical one in which the differentiation between and within gender and desire is exploited by masquerade. The novel ends with an image of a spilt drink in a sleazy dance hall, "throwing back glittering, threatening reflections" (173), an image in which reflection and refraction are made to seem parts of a perpetually fluid transformation of gender roles--even the realities and desires of heterosexual couples in the dance hall are (covertly) splintered by the narrator's attraction to a young man who is captured as firmly by the text as he is by his clothing:

The thick, fetterlike sinews of his flesh narrowed down from different directions to the sides of his chest, where they interlocked in tight coils. The hot mass of his smooth torso was being severely and tightly imprisoned by each succeeding turn of the soiled cotton belly-band. . . . My fervent gaze was fixed upon that rough and savage, but incomparably beautiful, body. (171-2)

The imperial gaze of the cultured artist/writer re(con)textualises and captures the image of the male, and momentarily but permanently severs the relationship between the young man and the woman he is with.

The exploration of homosexual desire is much more tentative in Shearer's *Shimada*, and the play tends to suppress homoeroticism even while subtly enacting it. Ironically it is woman herself who is invoked to dispel the fear of feminisation and act as the locus of legitimate desire. Colonialist discourse commonly mobilises the internal Other--female and/or indigenous--to resist the tropologies of the external Other. Though categorically excluded from the masculine domain of war in Shearer's play, women are insistently present as the absence through which men maintain their tenuous hold on masculine identity. In a more amiable moment, Shimada shows the Australians a photo of his wife, proudly proving his virility by his ownership of a beautiful woman. That this precarious construction derives from a complex cultural/sexual matrix of fear and desire is suggested when the image of the *Geisha* (insistently linked to Billy in the play's semiotics) comes up in the shadow box at the same time as the photo is put on display. The discourses of heterosexuality are similarly invoked to lift Billy's flagging courage when Eric asks if he has a girl. This is the first hint we get that Billy might not be gay. On cue, he produces a letter from a girl as tangible evidence of his "normality;" it

seems to matter little that he met her only once, and then only for a moment on a railway station. Subsequently, "you'll get married Billy" (30) becomes the platitude designed to stave off his death wish. In war as in contemporary society, woman circulates as the surface and image designed to affirm masculine strength and potency, regardless of national identity; yet, paradoxically, her absence from the scene of battle also renders man impotent because it inevitably entails frustrated desire, and frequently displaces such desire onto other men.

Billy functions as an object of desire for both Japanese and Australians. His initial appearance in the shadow box upstage evokes the oriental woman in all her mystery and eroticism. Technically, the shadow box is an ambiguous space which reveals and conceals the Other, creating surfaces or depths depending on whether it is lit from within or without. Within this box, an area largely delineated in the rest of the play for the projection of reified images of Japan, Billy is framed, contained, and packaged through a cinematic reduction of depth so that he more precisely functions as the object of the male/imperial gaze.¹¹ Reappearing in the shadow box later in the play, Billy is visually linked to the Wisteria Lady, a *kabuki* character, when the contemporary Japanese protagonist, Toshio, brings a doll puppet for his prospective Australian business partner. A gift intended for a fellow businessman--Toshio didn't know he'd be dealing with a woman--the Wisteria Lady functions as a passive object of exchange between men. Such an exchange, Gayle Rubin argues in an article entitled "The Traffic in Women," situates "woman [as] a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it," and locates her oppression within social systems rather than in biology (174). Similarly, Billy as *geisha*/Wisteria Lady is a desired commodity whose ritual exchange is conducted according to the context of the cultural contact between those who desire ownership. In war, ownership of commodities is contested rather than negotiated so that woman becomes not the gift but the bounty.

As androgynous woman soldier, Billy's body is further mapped according to orientalist epistemologies which focus on the boy/Other as a locus of homoerotic desire and the Orient as

¹¹For a discussion of the male gaze and its application to cinema, see Mulvey. Some feminist theorists have argued that drama posits a space which disrupts the male gaze through the presence of actors who can look back; in this play, however, the actor in the shadow box tends to become a two dimensional representation rather than a fully embodied presence.

a place of sexual freedom. But imperialist relations here are somewhat problematised by the fact that Billy is at least nominally occidental and also desired by both groups. Shimada's attraction is evident in his insistent hounding of "Miss Birrie," his pleasure in the display of Billy's body paraded in costume, and in his final sadistic annihilation of the soldier temptress. When the bombs fall on Hiroshima killing Shimada's wife, who is the focus of his culturally legitimate lust, Billy must also be killed lest illegitimate lust function as the primary desire defining Shimada's sexuality. In the context of orientalist discourses, such an action also suggests an "erotic fantasy combined with the scenograph of despotism to produce a perverse and sadistic visual theatre, which can suggest 'the connection between sexual possession and murder as an assertion of absolute enjoyment'"(Wollen 17).¹²

Clive and Eric's attraction to Billy cannot be fully disentangled from their relationships with the Japanese. Ironically, the threat of homosexual rape of Billy by the "enemy Other" is paralleled by the Australians' homosocial bonding. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines male homosocial desire as "the whole spectrum of bonds between men, including friendship, mentorship, rivalry, institutional subordination, homosexual genitality, and economic exchange" (227), many of which are evident in *Shimada*. The letter reading scene between Billy and Eric is a case in point. Though it purportedly conjures a memory of Billy's girl, this scene becomes a poignant expression of homoerotic desire between the two soldiers as they divvy up the woman's words and recite them to each other, erasing her presence except as an alibi for their dialogue and its emotional subtext. As the play suggests, there is a very fine and indistinct line between the homosocial and the homosexual.

The brutality of Japanese soldiers as expressed through their treatment of prisoners of war is, in Australia, a powerful cultural myth undergirded by racism and inflected by European constructions of masculinity. Likewise Mishima's presentation of cruelty is inextricably linked to both racial otherness and to sexuality, as perhaps exemplified by his own suicide by *seppuku*,¹³ the traditional *samurai* method. His meshing of masculinity, racial otherness, suffering, sexuality

¹²Quoting Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* 71 (1983). No page number given.

¹³*Seppuku* is the more polite and more formal term for what is usually known by English speakers as *harakiri* which, literally translated, means "cutting the belly."

and sadism is exemplified by a recurrent fascination with the picture of Saint Sebastian whose tortured body is the object of the narrator's obsessive erotic fantasy (31-36). The image becomes the basis of other fantasies relating to ritual slaughter (120) and cannibalism (69). Presented through the European representations of Saint Sebastian and the European writings of de Sade, it is western culture which is the locus of the Japanese narrator's recognition for sadistic and homosexual desires. Because these desires are present only in European cultural forms (in Mishima's text at least), the act of recognition complicates rather than validates them as a necessary component of the narrator's sexual identity.

A different kind of colonial sadism, a highly exoticised sexuality, is also presented in Mishima's novel through the narrator's envisioning of himself as an escapee in a world of tropical excess. For homosexual writers, travellers and colonial administrators, the colonies have been represented as an ideal world in which homosexuality might be freely lived, both with the indigenous population and with those fleeing metropolitan puritanism.¹⁴ The narrator of *Confessions of a Mask* indulges in the same kinds of fantasies about equatorial islands, positioning Japan as a first world/colonial power, and at one stage noting that he himself is the grandson of "a colonial governor" (8):

Probably the only place in which I could have lived at ease would have been some uncivilized tropical land where I could not speak the language. Now that I think of it, I realize that from earliest childhood I felt a yearning towards those intense summers of the kind that are seething forever in savage lands. (48)

After finally admitting to his ultimate fantasy, which involves the capture, bondage, torture and stabbing of a lithe and beautiful young man, the narrator describes the resulting sexual experience in terms which replay colonialist desires:

Your mind quivers under the rush of primitive, mysterious excitement. The deep joy of a savage is reborn in your breast. Your eyes shine, the blood blazes up through your body, and you overflow with that manifestation of life worshipped by savage tribes. Even after ejaculation a fevered, savage chant of exultation remains in your body; . . . Perhaps by some chance the memory of the deepest emotion in the life force of your savage ancestors has taken utter possession of your sexual functions and pleasures. (121)

¹⁴See Kiernander (1991) and Dollimore (1991: 3-18) for further discussion of this issue.

Unlike *Shimada*, in which the female acts as a displaced enemy over whom victory can be achieved without threat to the male warrior ethos which energises the process of war itself, *Confessions of a Mask* celebrates the feminisation of the male in the defeat of the racial Other.

Although both authors complicate concepts of the male/imperial gaze by demonstrating how gender, race and sexuality are sometimes unstable markers of otherness, Mishima's narrator emerges from the intercultural encounter less uncertain of his identity than do most of Shearer's Australian characters. The difference is perhaps linked to the play's emphasis on that other common Asian stereotype of "inscrutability," an emotional and cultural impenetrability, that heightens both interest and irritation for the West. As Michael Dalby argues, the Japanese are "the fascinating and elusive, yet recalcitrant objects of our scrutiny" (486). The modern day meeting of the two cultures in *Shimada* is marked by precisely this kind of frustration and fascination. Toshio's entrance via a *hanamichi*¹⁵ into the offices of the bicycle factory immediately conjures an air of mystery which deepens in the awkwardness and silence that characterise the Australians' responses to him. Confronted by this outsider, Sharyn, director of the company, displays what Bhabha discusses as the prominent features of colonialist discourse: a simultaneous recognition and disavowal of racial, cultural and historical differences (1983: 19). Hence she assumes shared codes of business behaviour--"talk helped by tea" (Shearer 15)--but remains uncomfortably positioned in what develops as a Japanese/ Australian tea ceremony.

During this, Toshio's inscrutable difference emerges most clearly through his ritual gift giving, both in the choice of gifts--a *kabuki* doll and a *samurai* mask--and in his emphasis on the wrapping, a cover designed to obscure the gift even while enhancing its aesthetic appeal. The idea of Japan as a culture obsessed with form, with masking and theatre, with appearance and a warrior tradition, is here reinforced. The play links the mask and the doll to the war narrative through its iconography, and uses the same actor doubling as Toshio and Shimada, but doesn't

¹⁵A *hanamichi*, a convention borrowed from *Kabuki*, is a ramp which extends from the stage to the back of the theatre. In the Brisbane production of *Shimada*, this platform was built across water to symbolise socio-geographical relationships between Australia and Japan. (Directed by David Bell. Royal Queensland Theatre Company, 5 July 1990)

confirm or deny that the two are indeed the same person, further deepening the enigma that the Oriental/Other poses. In masquerading as the stereotype, constructing himself as the enigmatic Japanese *and* the knowable outsider whose difference can be captured and packaged like a souvenir, Toshio acts as provocateur to the Australians' confusion through a kind of colonial mimicry. In other words, Toshio's self-parody/mimicry undermines those colonial stereotypes which seek to fix his identity in recognisable and repeatable images.¹⁶ Whereas orientalism generally commodifies the East for consumption by the West, here the Orient commodifies itself or selectively presents to the occidental gaze those reified images which, removed from their appropriate cultural contexts, merely reflect the West's biases. The imperial and patriarchal relations between observer and observed are therefore neither constant nor stable; as power and the centre of vision shift, the position of the Other becomes highly problematic.

Shimada explores the insider/outsider dichotomy further by using the theatrical tropes and styles of one culture to illustrate the psychic processes of the other. Unglossed Japanese language at the opening of the play immediately establishes a gap which "intercepts notions of 'infinite transmissibility'" of meaning between the two cultures (Ashcroft 72), positioning the western audience as outsider in its own narrative, in its own theatrical spaces. Self-referentially, the text foregrounds its similarities to a *Noh* play, and it also appropriates the *geisha* and *samurai* figures which signify the Australian suspicion of, and fascination with, Japanese culture. The *Samurai*, as an alter-ego figure for Eric, forms the masculine counter-part of the *Geisha*. This indicates a new aspect of orientalist discourse which generally places little emphasis on construction of the male Other, except as dirty, villainous, and lecherous. The threat of neo-imperialism comes into play here--the power of the Other must obviously be taken seriously, and countermanded through co-option. Thus, as well as representing the ghost who stalks Eric in his nightmares of the war, the *Samurai* also becomes the warrior ideal whose strength and morality expels woman/Other from the contemporary scene through an overarching construction of the masculine. The struggle over the bicycle factory can then be removed from

¹⁶For further discussion of colonial mimicry as a subversive strategy, see Bhabha (1984: 75-8).

the sphere of woman's influence and redrawn in Eric's mind as a ritual battle in which two *samurai* fight to defend their honour. As Eric and the *Samurai* warily circle each other in the final moments of the first act, the play provides a potent metaphor for the current Japan/Australia relationship.

To a certain extent, Eric is positioned in contemporary society as outsider to a new world order where the "digger"¹⁷ code no longer applies in a workplace becoming increasingly hybridised by the influences of women and foreigners. When, *samurai*-like, he commits "honourable" suicide after the contract to merge the bicycle factory with Uchiyama is signed, he is responding not only to defeat and deep racial hatred but once again to the Orient as a feminising threat. The ultimate masochistic act, Eric's suicide paradoxically restores and simultaneously destroys his masculinity through the attempted appropriation of the *samurai* code as he merges with his Other in death. Echoes of Mishima's ideas about honour and his obsessions with the male body, display, and the *samurai* ethos also occur elsewhere in the play. But in the Australian cultural context, Eric's suicide is a gesture of nihilism, though it does accrue some meaning artistically when Toshio points out the parallels between Eric's story and a *Noh* play. Ironically, only Toshio can fully appreciate the import of this final gesture. Eric's claim to insider status *vis à vis* Japanese culture is clearly problematic; hence, he functions more as a puppet than as director of his own death, and as such fails to interrogate the conventions of the theatrical narrative and thus to differentiate the chimera from the real. What is missing from Eric's carefully staged *Noh* drama is an insider's understanding of the subtlety of the plot.

The crucial factor of race notwithstanding, the nature and degree of outsidership in the two societies is quite different, and founded on different discursive histories. While "outsidership" in Australia is geographical and cultural, Japan has historical and linguistic fortifications of difference which run much deeper. The values of Japanese society demonstrate that an ontological desire for self-centredness is not always and only a product of Cartesian rationalism, but may also result from philosophies which submerge the individual interest to that of the

¹⁷"Digger" means literally an Australian soldier, but is used here also to evoke connotations of the code of male mateship, bonhomie, and bravery that the term infers.

collective. The tight constraints over behaviour and thought enacted in and by the Japanese language itself fortify the culture internally and during encounters with the West. Japanese culture, like that of the Chinese, is all the more difficult for westerners to "read" because of its writing system, and the Japanese language itself makes constant and strict division between notions of inside and outside, which also functions to strengthen a sense of cultural exclusivity. The most frequently used word for foreigner, "*gaijin*," means literally, "outside person," and words of a foreign origin are also written in a different script, thus literally inscribing racial and national difference.¹⁸

In both countries, however, there remains a dependence on the radical construction of difference, the paradoxical appropriation of the racial and national outsider through gendering, silencing and distancing of that (necessarily) inscrutable Other. There is also the inexplicable presence of the indigenous Other, the Aborigines and the Ainu who haunt our cities and gather in our remote parts, whose mere existence challenges the foundation myths of the two nations. In these situations, the hold on culture and identity always seems tenuous, likely to fragment under pressure from different cultural groups within the nation, under pressure from women, under pressure from the indigene. These centrifugal forces are marshalled in the services of countering the centripetal threat, which paradoxically co-opts some characteristics of the internal Other in its construction of the periphery.

These observations have importance in terms of "intervention" in contemporary debates in both countries about the nature and future of national, cultural and political identity. Both Japan and Australia are trying to come to terms with colonial status which disrupts the racial pattern that has been established over the past four centuries--Japan bewildered and angered by the refusal of the West to accept its cultural status and political authority, Australia bewildered and angered by Japan's assumption that it is a nation of equal cultural significance and political status to any in the West. In both nations, a concern with various cultural and national insecurities figures prominently--just as Australia has obsessively followed itself through

¹⁸The script used for foreign words is *katakana*. The other script used to supplement Chinese characters, or *kanji*, is *hiragana*, which for historical reasons has particular associations with the feminine.

a seemingly endless series of declarations of cultural and political independence, Japan has subjected itself to intense self-scrutiny exemplified by the writings which have become known as "*nihonjinron*," treatises attempting to define and explain the essential nature of Japanese-ness. There has been a concern, perhaps an obsession, with what Lowe calls "adamant differentiation" of self and other (45), not only in the West, but in Japan too.

A whole series of tensions in both countries, however, are implicit in the definition of self and other as Asian or European. Australia has an economic investment in defining itself as Asian, and most contemporary policy documents stress the need to accept and assert Australia's Asian identity. But, as *Shimada* shows, this desire is countered by fears relating to military colonisation in the past, and economic colonisation in the present and the future. As a nation, Australia shifts uneasily on the cusp between fear and desire, between hatred and need, always ambivalent about its role in and relations with the "Orient." Increasingly there is a sense that while our economic future may lie with integration into Asia, the threat to our racial, cultural, sexual, and political identity posed by such a move is not worth the cost. It is important to understand that there are parallel anxieties in Japan, the Asian nation most anxious not to be. Japan has a cultural, historical and political investment in defining and maintaining its difference from Asia--many Japanese prefer to think of themselves as a separate race, and they were prepared to accept honorary White status in South Africa.¹⁹ In its own mind, then, Japan's position as an Asian country and its relation to the West are both far more ambivalent than orientalist discourse might lead us to assume.

We have argued that the description of orientalism provided by Said is not appropriate to our circumstances--Japan and Australia are at once the subjects and objects of colonial scrutiny, a gaze that seeks to encode relations of political power and to hierarchise relations of race, nation, and gender. Post-colonialism is important to our approach because it posits a speaking space for the Other, a genuinely radical concept of society as inevitably hybrid and multi-discursive. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in *The Empire Writes Back*, have

¹⁹Ironically, Japan has had, at various times, policies which exclude white immigrants. These parallel the "White Australia" policy in their attempts at racial exclusivity.

pointed out that "all post-colonial societies realize their identity in difference rather than essence. . . . [hence] identity both as a distancing from the centre and as a means of self-assertion comes into being" (167). The example of Japan and Australia shows that colonial relations are not simply a question of Europe and its imperial periphery. As Veronica Kelly suggests, there are even ways in which Australia itself might be positioned by orientalism:

[T]he appeal of an existing system of always-modifying representations of the 'desert' and the unknown land is potentially enabling for an evolving colonial repertoire of images and identities. Orientalism could provide the imaginary repertoire to naturalise what is seen as another ancient, mysterious and boundless country. (3)

It is necessary, then, to begin work on a comprehensive archaeology of discourses about Japan and Australia, tracing the "emergence, production and theorization . . . of one culture's representation of another, i.e., the historical beginnings and ruling principles (the arches) which determine the way human societies relate and think of each other, and the role of discourse in the constitution and preservation of this archaeology" (Rasul 1134). To begin, we might remember that "orient" can indicate not only the East, but the necessary provisionality of perspective. We have attempted to merge some Eastern perceptions of the West with Western perceptions of the East, problematising not only the view of the "other" that is taken by these societies, but the concept of perspective itself. As Richard Terdiman points out in his discussion of Flaubert,

'Perspective' is a system of relation of elements in the tableau, not only to each other but, crucially, to one privileged element *outside* it; that is to the source of perceiving consciousness (which it can represent only by its absence. . . . perspective is about *difference as a hierarchical mode of relation*, and about how it can be depicted or managed. (28)

Perspective is always implied in and by differences of power, differences that emerge in *Shimada* not only on the level of narrative but through the play's metadramatic emphasis on representation as a reciprocal process that both masks and unmasks its antagonists, while also revealing their resistance to scrutiny. *Confessions of a Mask* also plays with the idea of disguise, and there is little or no sense of a coherent version of the racial or sexual Other which Said's concept of orientalism may imply--neither Mishima's homosexuality nor his "occidentalism" leads to a simple inversion of the orientalist stereotype.

By problematising the question of identity of both Japan and Australia and the positioning of the foreigner in the intertextual "tableau," we wish to unsettle the notion of fixed colonial binaries which refuse a discursive place to the colonised. A focus on perspective as always relative and provisional opens up opportunities for the marginalised to "reterritorialize the act of narration itself," and to interrogate the complicity of narrative "with the privilege of consciousness" (Jackson 457-8). But it seems to us that until what Ania Loomba calls the "coloniser's monologue" (5) is interrupted and splintered in and between both societies, it will still be easier to hear the silent, and to speak the unspeakable, than to stop screwing the inscrutable.

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