Richmond Barbour. *Before Orientalism: London's Theatre of the East 1576–1626*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii, 238.

Richmond Barbour's *Before Orientalism* is a useful if uneven contribution to the growing scholarship on England's imaginative and commercial involvement with India and the East in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth- centuries. In situating his project, Barbour rehearses the by now well-worn critique of Edward Said's *Orientalism*: its confinement to a (Western) discursive system that treats "its own accounts of others as the accounts that matter" (4), effaces alien agency, and oversimplifies "the complex processes by which societies engaged, articulated, and shaped each other, in multiple and shifting alliances" (5). (As is often the case with such critiques, the author does not entirely avoid the pitfalls he identifies.) Barbour's corrective emphasizes "the imitative, fitful, uncertain, and not infrequently disastrous" (3) aspects of England's early modern expansionist ventures: its Eastern engagements reveal less the incipient domination of an Orientalist model à la Said than relative weaknesses that serve instead to undo Eurocentric confidence. He further distinguishes domestic constructions of Asia—often as crudely dualistic as later Orientalist models—from the "more pliant, polyvalent attitudes towards various 'others'" that emerge when we study accounts of those agents actually responsible for England's strategic and economic relations with Asia. This division between the domestic and the foreign "theatres" of English eastern initiatives supplies the book's overarching structure: its first part examines how the East was staged in London, while the second studies two "inaugural scenes" of Englishmen in the East (Thomas Coryate and Sir Thomas Roe).

Drawing on the work of Matar and others, Barbour begins with the presumption that England's view of the East was mediated by the ambivalent figures of the Turk and the Ottoman empire. This rhetorical engagement, exemplified by Richard Knolles' 1603 *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*, reveals a proto-orientalist binarism opposing a Christian Europe to an Islamic Orient. But the opposition, Barbour argues, functions ambivalently: it both alarms and reassures, invokes and dismisses danger. On the one hand, Knolles treats the Ottoman Empire as a model to imitate in that it has "assumed for itself that secular imperium which Jacobean mythology intended for Great Britain" (19). It represents a model of unity and discipline all too lacking in Europe. On the other, Knolles' emphasis on Tamerlane and Scanderbeg, the Battle of Lepanto, and on the "Asiatic mores ascendant in the Turkish regime" (25) marks the Ottomans (and by extension Asia) as vulnerable. In accusing them of "oriental excess," Knolles further implies that Ottoman power is at heart empty, more theatrical than real. Barbour aligns this rhetoric with the language of antitheatrical attacks on London's theatre—where "[a]ntitheatrical and masculinist discourses converged...to build a fundamental proto-oriental critique" (29)—while arguing that such rhetoric ought to be seen as compensatory rather than as assertive, reflecting England's weakness abroad rather than its strength.

The subsequent—and to my mind rather weak—chapter on *Tamburlaine* builds upon these insights to draw "three major links between England and Tamburlaine:

his appetites extrapolate those of England's merchants; his rhetoric caricatures and subverts humanist ideologies; and his theatrics of self-legitimation mimic the Queen's" (55–56). A brief coda on *Antony and Cleopatra* positions Shakespeare's play to Marlowe's as woman to man: whereas Marlowe fosters the fantasy of "a primarily masculine, militarized world" which the English might some day inherit, Shakespeare posits the "alternate 'oriental' danger to 'western discipline': absorption and effeminacy" (56). The triumphalist tone of *Tamburlaine* is amplified, according to Barbour, in civic pageants and courtly spectacles, despite a persistent underlying uncertainty indicative of the more complex reality of commercial negotiations with the East. The wide-ranging rich chapter sketches the differences and commonalities in how such entertainments used the East to construct Britain's (and in particular London's) global centrality. Examining the imperial mythology surrounding James Stuart's London entry, Barbour identifies its projection of an idealized community in terms of an English ethnocentrism at whose heart lies the power of the sovereign. This gesture is accentuated in court masques, such as Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* and *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, where a haphazard ethnography serves primarily to "enrich and magnify" aristocratic and royal self-presentation. Their aim is not "a strategic attention to geography and ethnicity, but rather a British desire to embrace, and thereby to refine, the greater world" (83). Mayoral pageantry complicates this agenda. More attentive to ethnographic difference, it unites commerce and religion, celebrating English trade in terms of the "suasive impact of English conduct and beliefs" (92) on the "others" they encounter. Produced for elite and prosperous men deeply invested in mercantile ventures overseas, spectacles designed by Peele, Munday, and Middleton distinctively assert civic and commercial, rather than royal, prerogatives. They insist upon London's centrality as the hub of commerce, even as they rewrite commerce as civilizational mission.

That such "protocols of imperial ostentation" (112) express wishes and desires rather than the more sobering reality of actual Englishman abroad is the central theme of the book's second part. In Thomas Coryate Barbour locates the emergence of an archetypal figure: the tourist. Arguing that Coryate's accounts of his travels are distinctive in valorizing "personal hedonism and opportunistic self-promotion" (123) over religious, pedagogic or imperial ends, Barbour sees in him "a major cultural innovation: he commodifies travel" (124). The claim seems open to the very charge of anachronistic projection elsewhere laid at the door of those who view the early modern period through the lens of Said's *Orientalism*—indeed, it remains unclear why earlier atlases and geographical compendia could not themselves be seen as commodifying travel. But Barbour's contribution here has ultimately less to do with the question of tourism and commodification than with Coryate's valorisation of consumption, of a will to appropriate evident in the visual ingestion of otherness.

But Coryate died in India, undone by his own appetite. The bathos of this would-be tourist is both writ large, and in some measure reversed, in the book's final (and strongest) chapter, on Sir Thomas Roe's 1615–19 embassy to the Mughal court. Roe's mission was ultimately successful in securing provisional trading rights

for London merchants in the Mughal dominions. However, as Barbour convincingly demonstrates, this hard-won result exposed not only Roe's own naiveté but persistent tensions between England's commercial and royal imperatives, as well as the "crippling ironies in England's reliance on theatrical display as an instrument of state" (146). These tensions become visible in the abiding gap between the grandiose representation of Roe's mission and the meager reality of its royal and mercantile support. Moreover, if Roe's role had been fashioned by James and the London Company, its performance was conditioned instead by Mughal expectations and customs, and its reception immeasurably complicated by Roe's own Eurocentrism and the difficulties of translation. Against the odds, Roe does indeed succeed in winning the Emperor Jahangir's esteem, one of the routes being the skilful exploitation of Mughal interest in foreign artifacts and pictures. Nevertheless, participating in the play demanded by the Emperor results in a splitting of his own subjectivity: on the one hand, Roe's letters reject theatricality (projecting it instead, like Knolles, onto the Mughals as a sign of effeminacy and decadence); on the other, he is forced repeatedly into playing the part demanded of him in India. Split between aristocrat and merchant, English and Indian imperatives, his accounts of India are likewise contradictory, directed as they are at different audiences: India is both an empire "of daunting opulence and sophistication" and "a wilderness of ennui and squalor" (192). And ultimately theatre doesn't suffice: Roe must resort to bribery and covert action. Even as he insists upon English difference from others, his first two years of experience in India make him other to himself—"a subtler man: at once more 'eastern' and more Jacobean" (185).

Before Orientalism does suffer from weaknesses in its argumentation and interpretative practices. To elide, as Barbour does, London's theatre with its overseas trading ventures on the grounds that they both represent a "collusion of royal and commercial cultures" (38), or to collapse Antony's taking his "pleasure" "I'th'East" into the "indifference of remote employees" to the will of London shareholders (59), frankly strains credulity. Such associative logic might perhaps even be engaging were it localized, as speculative brio; however, the loose equations often turn out to constitute the argument's spine. Consequently, they seem symptoms of a broader, recurring problem: the relative absence of an intermediate level necessary to make plausible the movement from one term of the analogy to the other. No doubt, as Walter Benjamin claimed of baroque allegory, "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else." Nonetheless, "can" need not immediately lead to "does." And this caution would seem especially appropriate for our critical allegories. Despite these reservations, however, *Before Orientalism* is a welcome addition to ongoing work on colonialism and literature in the early modern period. Often rich in detail and choice of texts, as well as in its attention to alternative, generally neglected sources (such as Mughal paintings), *Before Orientalism* can profitably be read both by advanced students and specialists working on the Renaissance.

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