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EDWARD W. SAID

Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas

... de bouger indéfiniment en ne variant jamais, de s'échapper toujours en restant à l'intérieur d'un méandre. . . .

POET, BIOGRAPHER, MAN OF LETTERS, novelist, editor, translator, and scholar, Raymond Schwab is neither known (to most of the standard Anglo-American authorities on the Romantic movement, for example) nor has any of his work been translated into English. For a man whose interests observed no national boundaries and whose capacities were deeply transnational, this is a depressing irony. He was born in Nancy in 1884 and died in Paris in 1956. The little that is easily discovered about his life and personality comes from three issues of the *Mercure de France*,¹ where some of his hitherto unpublished poetry and his memoirs appeared, along with reminiscences about him written by his friends. He seems to have been a quiet and rather modest man who spent most of his life in the service of letters. For a few years (1936-40), he edited a journal devoted to poetry with Guy Lavaud, which was called *Yggdrasill*; its catholicity of interests and openness to currents in poetry other than those either European or fashionable were noteworthy. Schwab leaves behind him the impression that he had the tastes of a fastidious man and that he was intensely meditative by nature and withdrawn in his habits, with a kind of powerful, yet muted, religious sense that would cause him to translate the Psalms or write an epic poem on Nimrod without his necessarily having been committed to an organized faith.

In many ways, Schwab resembles Borges, if not also a character in one of Borges' *Ficciones*. When he dealt with literature, he would produce books about little-known figures such as Elémir Bourges; when asked to write a preface to a French translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*, he would write instead a three-hundred-page work on Antoine Galland, a late seventeenth-century personality who was the *Nights*' first French translator. We are reminded of Borges' interest in such odd figures as John Wilkins and Chesterton, who benefited from the rather surprising seriousness displayed in his studies of them, since unknown books and shadowy writers do not often command this kind of attention. Both Schwab and Borges reveal a fundamental personal reticence married to an almost Mallarméan idea of The Book—the quest for it, its life, the gentleness and calm heroism to be found in it despite the almost unthinkable effort expended on its behalf. One always has a sense in Schwab, as, of course, in Borges, of a

sort of library of humanity slowly being discovered, walked into, and described, but valued less for its ponderous classics than for its surprising eccentrics.

Endless detail is the mark of Schwab's major scholarly work, of which *La Renaissance orientale*² is the greatest achievement. The underlying theme of this work is the European experience of the Orient, which is in turn based on the human need for absorbing the "foreign" and "different." To his description of this experience, Schwab brings a rare gift for dealing with very concentrated and meticulously gathered detail. In Schwab's view, the Orient, however *outré* and different it may at first seem, is a complement to the Occident, and vice versa. The vision, as one admirer of Schwab has put it, is that of an integral humanism.³ Its style—that is, its verbal idiom as well as its angle of vision—is both subtle and difficult, since Schwab manages always to depict a phenomenon as it is in itself and (often more interesting) as something that affected many lives over a long period of time. He is up to the painstaking effort required to document the cultural interchanges between Orient and Occident; but he can also create fascinating nooks, sheltered from the gross outline of his large theme, in which new, often intimate spaces appear.

Two examples will suffice here: First, in describing the complex series of events just prior to Galland's leaving Paris for Turkey, Schwab also manages to reveal how these events are alluded to by Molière in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.⁴ Then, in *La Renaissance orientale*, Schwab demonstrates not only the curious symbiosis between the biological sciences and Indo-European linguistics, but also the interplay of these forces in Cuvier's work, as well as its social effect in Parisian salons of the period (LRO 321-27). Whether it is a batch of seemingly transparent phrases spoken by M. Jourdain or Cuvier's presence in salons frequented by Balzac, Schwab unlocks an impressive range of allusions proving, for example, that parvenu chitchat conceals references to a crisis in relations between Louis XIV and the Turkish court, or that Balzac's understanding of Cuvier's scientific achievements was an aspect of cultural diffusion peculiar to Paris in the eighteen-twenties and -thirties.

The detail in such instances is the detail of influence—how one writer, or event, bears on another writer—a topic recently of interest to advanced theoretical criticism in literary studies. Like Erich Auerbach, however, Schwab is stingy about giving a theoretical explanation for what he does; like Auerbach discussing in *Mimesis* the classical notion of high and low literary styles, he is content to take on an almost ingenuously obvious motif, the influence of the Orient in the West, and to let the imprints of that motif appear in myriad places in a vast body of later literature. Indeed the analogy with Auerbach and an even more compelling one with the German literary historian Ernst Robert Curtius press home Schwab's *philological* learning, especially its capacity for revealing how enormous unities (the Latin cultural *imperium*, or the Orient) inform, live, and take textual body in consequent ages and cultures. For, to a very great extent, Schwab, like Auerbach, Curtius, and Borges, is possessed by the image of the text as a locus of human effort, a "text-ile" fertility gathering in cultural identity (indeed, making it possible), *disseminating* human life everywhere in time and space as a result. The importance to Schwab of the Oriental Renaissance (the phrase is taken from Edgar Quinet's unduly neglected work of 1832, *Le Génie des religions*) is that,

whereas the classical Renaissance immured European man within the confines of a self-sufficient Greco-Latin terrain, this later Renaissance deposited the *whole* world before him. The second Renaissance, as Schwab put it in one of the compact generalities with which his work abounds, combined India with the Middle Ages and thereby displaced the centuries of Augustus and Louis XIV (*LRO* 20). The job of displacement was apportioned to the great capitals: Calcutta provided, London distributed, Paris filtered and generalized (*LRO* 133).

So profound and beneficent does Schwab think the Orient is that one is doubtless more accurate in describing him as an *orienteur* rather than an *orientaliste*, a man more interested in a generous awareness than in detached classification.⁵ Insofar as European awareness of the Orient can be said to have had an effect, Schwab believes it was a productive one, since Oriental influences in pre-Romantic and Romantic cultures are everywhere to be found. Yet two recent scholars of the Romantic period, Harold Bloom and W. J. Bate, have advanced the opposite thesis that *all* influence produced anxiety and a sense of inferiority and belatedness in the writers of the time for whom an uninfluenced originality was the highest (and least possible) goal. Schwab takes the position that Romanticism welcomed the Orient as an influence benefiting poetry, prose, science, and philosophy. So here already is one major theoretical and scholarly contribution of Schwab's work: influence in Romantic literature as enrichment and useful persistence, rather than as diminishment and worrying presence. But again it is detail that Schwab so plentifully sees and provides to back up the generalization. He seems to be saying that if so much work—which he chronicles with vertiginous minuteness—went *willingly* and *consciously* into the discovery of the Orient, then we must regard influence finally as supplying something that would otherwise be felt as burdensome absence. What results is not that violent contest among writers for time and space sketched by Bloom with such urgency, but rather an endlessly performed *accommodation* similar to the one Schwab sees in the Asian temperament, which does not contrast novelty with latecoming, but instead sees all time as the poet's possession.

Il répète sans fin les mêmes modèles d'entrelacs, non pour gagner de temps, mais parce qu'il a tellement de temps sous la main qu'il ne risque jamais rien à le dépenser dans de petites choses forcément provisoires. [He repeats the same interwoven patterns endlessly, not to save time, but, on the contrary, precisely because he has so much time at his disposal that there is no danger of his using it up in necessarily transient little details.]⁶

Schwab's, then, is a criticism of sympathetic, rather than antithetic, cast. Dualities, opposition, polarities—as between Orient and Occident, one writer and another, one time and another—are converted in his writing into lines (elements) that are crisscrossing, it is true, but also weaving a vast human portrait. A year before his death, he mused that what was needed was a "History of Universal Poetry," yet unfortunately he had not written it. For his part, he had attempted a physiognomy of literature as a step in that direction.⁷ Always, the human image dominates in Schwab's criticism, but what provokes its interest for us is that, when we perceive it, such an image is the writer's achievement, never his given. There are the details of human effort, then their

organization, finally their total portrait. In its attempt to appropriate and reproduce the subject of its study, Schwab's criticism belongs with that of Georges Poulet, Albert Beguin, Albert Thibaudet, Jean Starobinski, and others like them, whose patient and engaged imagination dominates the business of industrious fact-gathering. Unlike all of them, however, except perhaps for the Starobinski of *L'Invention de la liberté*, Schwab is continually guided by events, privileged historical moments, and large movements of ideas. For him, consciousness is a cultural affair, heavily laden with empirical experience in and of the world. Whether he is describing the rise of linguistics attendant upon the numerous discoveries made in Zend, Sanskrit, Semitic, or Indo-European, or the fabulously rich interlacing of Oriental themes in English, French, German, and American writing, or even the precise data involved in scientific or artistic activity during the years between 1771 and roughly 1860, his work is always literally a treasure of insight and information. Most of all, it deepens our appreciation for a particular and extremely rare type of unhurried *scholarship*, whose role, I feel, is too infrequently examined by theorists of either criticism or literature.

Appearances notwithstanding, Schwab is no Taine or Lanson. Historical criticism for him is not science, even though facts must of course command respect. But man's history gets its impulses from the *desire* for truth, not simply from its establishment:

Elle [l'histoire] montre qu'il importe beaucoup moins d'établir que de faire désirer une vérité; et quel grand inventeur atteinait une vérité nouvelle sans la chercher du côté de l'erreur? [It (history) teaches us that establishing truth is less important than making a particular truth desirable. What great inventor has ever found a new truth without first looking for it in the wrong place?]⁸

Schwab wrote this about the early Orientalists, but it applies as well to his own work. The tremendous cultural drama with which all his scholarship was concerned is the struggle between either acquired or felt *certainities* (and not facts) that takes place both within a culture and between cultures. Reinforced by his own background, the Judeo-Christian component in Western culture is seen by Schwab as being forced to submit to the discovery of an earlier civilization; thus Indo-European linguistics rival the primacy of Hebraic society in the European mind. Later that mind will accommodate the discovery, making the world into a whole again. But the gripping drama of Orientalism, as Schwab puts it in the superb first thirty pages of *La Renaissance orientale*, is the debate it initiates about the meaning of "the primitive," how different worlds are seen as claimants to originality and genius, how the notions of civilization and savagery, beginning and end, ontology and teleology, undergo marked transformation in the years between 1770 and 1850:

Juste au moment où une soif de discordance se répand sur l'Europe comme une crise solidaire des révolutions politiques, la masse des orientalismes, où tient la dissonance fondamentale de l'Occident, fait son irruption. [At precisely the time when a craving for disagreement spread throughout Europe in a single crisis which arose from the wave of political revolutions, those countless Orientalisms which made up the fundamental dissonance in the West burst upon the scene (*LRO* 31)].

His task therefore is to study the progress by which the West's image of the Orient passes from primitive to actual, that is, from disruptive *éblouissement incrédule* to *vénération condescendante* (LRO 32). There is a saddening impoverishment, obviously, from one image to the other. Yet so judicious and modulated is the rendering and so encyclopedic the scale that we feel the impoverishment less as sentiment than as a law of cultural change. From being a *bibliothèque . . . privé de départements* (LRO 30), the Orient becomes a scholarly or ideological province, thus *les révélations glissent à la spécialité* (LRO 131). Before 1800, Europe possessed *le monde du classé*, with Homer its first and final classical perfection; after 1800, a new secular world intrudes, *c'est "le dissident"* (LRO 30). Gone is the dependence of fables, traditions, classics. Instead texts, sources, sciences reposing upon difficult, tiring, and worrying work thrust a strange new reality upon the mind. How this occurs and how quickly even the novelty is transformed into orthodoxy are what occupy Schwab.

A peculiar feature of Schwab's scholarship, however, is that he does not take explicit note of the sheer folly and derangement stirred up by the Orient in Europe. For, as a subject, the Oriental Renaissance is no less bizarre a current in the Romantic imagination than those currents of which the historian is Mario Praz, and Schwab is no less equipped than Praz to comment on them. Yet, he does not, even when he is recording in detail, for instance, the madness of most of Anquetil-Duperron's life, as he trekked through steamy jungles, enduring impossible physical hardships, unrecognized even as a scholar until his very last years. *L'abnégation des érudits* is only partly useful as an explanation for such men. What they saw and felt about the Orient in many cases literally took their minds, but Schwab is too concerned with demonstrating the humanistic symmetry between this Renaissance and the earlier one to care much for the crazy enthusiasms that could produce a Beckford, an Anquetil, a Renan, or a Rückert. And conversely, Schwab's Oriental Renaissance, while it avoids the disorienting aspects of the European experience in the East, also shuns the other great Romantic appetites for nature, for the macabre, for heightened consciousness, for folk culture.

La Renaissance orientale is in fact the apogee of Schwab's scholarly career, although chronologically it stands more or less at its center. Just as its subject matter is the preparation for, then the encounter with, then the absorption of the Orient by the West, so, too, it is already suggested by Schwab's earlier work as well as assumed by his later. I shall speak briefly here of a circle of historical and scholarly books and monographs surrounding *La Renaissance orientale*, a circle that must, alas, exclude the substantial body of his poetry, fiction, and translation. We must keep in mind Schwab's alternation between linear, or genealogical, fidelity to his subject and his encompassing structural ambitions to show prefiguration, latency, refraction, metalepsis despite linear history—in short the alternation in his method between filiation and affiliation as modes of perceiving and conducting cultural history.

Schwab's first book was the *Vie d'Anquetil-Duperron* (1934), a strict biography of the French scholar, theoretician of egalitarianism, ecumenist of beliefs (Jansenist, Catholic, and Brahman), who between 1759 and 1761 transcribed, and later translated, the *Zend Evesta* while in Surat. This event, for Schwab, prefigures the spate of trans-

lated documents that would appear in the West during the Oriental Renaissance. Aside from an uncritical analysis of Anquetil's strange follies and enthusiasms, we find in the book an adumbration of most of Schwab's later motifs. First among them is *l'abnégation des érudits*, that selflessness during the quest for a manuscript, that total commitment to the cause of learning: *Ce que nous appellerions des calamités, c'est à ses yeux une chance de plus de bien s'instruire* ("What we would regard as calamities were in his eyes just one more chance to learn something").⁹ Second is Schwab's penchant for the telling detail, as when he describes the real conditions of shipboard life in the eighteenth century, or when he chronicles Anquetil's attitudes toward and relations with Grimm, Diderot, William Jones, Herder, and others. Third is Schwab's attention to the contest in the European mind between Oriental priority and Biblical "history." Both Anquetil and Voltaire were interested in India and the Bible, but *l'un pour rendre la Bible plus indiscutable, l'autre pour la rendre encore plus incroyable* ("the one to make the Bible more indisputable, the other to make it more unbelievable").¹⁰ Schwab's epigrammatic flair will strengthen in his later work into passages of extraordinary poetic beauty.

Yet the motif to which Schwab's imagination is mostly dedicated is the life of images and forms in the human consciousness, which is always located existentially in a specific historical context and is never left to float freely here and there. Cultural history is drama because the ideas that derive from archetypal images, on the one hand, cause men to struggle in their behalf or, on the other, induce in men a kind of entranced passivity or even, as in Anquetil's case, a disconcerting appetite for all ideas or faiths, regardless of contradiction. Images are historical, quasi-natural artifacts created out of the interaction of *nous à tous*. Moreover, they are limited in number, so economic is the imagination and so powerful their range: Orient, Occident, community, the human, the Origin, the Divine. Among themselves they form a matrix that generates cultural romance and adventure, expressed as ideas in conflict—or in concert—with each other. Although idea and image seem to move freely, they are first the product of men and the texts men make, then they become the focal points of institutions, societies, periods, and cultures. For images are constants in human experience; the ideas they legitimate take different forms and varying values. Here, in a passage from the *Vie*, Schwab illustrates the interplay that will hitherto dominate his writing:

Il va réclamer à l'Asie une preuve scientifique de la primauté de Peuple Elu et des généalogies de la Bible: seulement il se trouve que ses investigations ouvrent brusquement la voie à une critique des livres admis pour révélés, que bientôt l'assyriologie rendra irréparable. [He goes to find in Asia a scientific proof for the primacy of the Chosen People and for the genealogies of the Bible: instead it happened that his investigations soon led to criticism of the very texts which had hitherto been considered as revealed, a process which Assyriology would subsequently prove irreversible.]¹¹

These ideas of necessity have a *physical* dimension, which conveys not only the alternation in culture between the limited and the limitless (as when Schwab talks of pre-Anquetil Orientalism: *l'exotisme sort du bibelot*¹²) but also the metamorphoses of notions of distance, time, relationship, memory, society, language, and individual life effort:

Anquetil, en 1759, achève à Surat sa translation de *L'Avesta*, à Paris, en 1786, celle des *Upanishads*,—il a percé un isthme entre les hémisphères du génie humain, débloqué le vieil humanisme du bassin de la Méditerranée; il n'y a pas cinquante ans que ses compatriotes demandaient comment on peut être Persan, lorsqu'il leur apprend à comparer les monuments des Perses à ceux des Grecs. Avant lui on ne reclame de renseignements sur le haut passé de la planète qu'aux écrivains latins, grecs, juifs, arabes. La Bible apparaît comme un bloc isolé, un aérolithe. L'univers de l'écriture tient dans la main; à peine si l'on y soupçonne l'immensité de terres inconnues. Par sa traduction de l'*Avesta* commence la perception, devenue maintenant vertigineuse avec les exhumations de l'Asie centrale, des parlars qui foisonnèrent après Babel. Dans nos écoles, jusque-là fermées orgueilleusement sur l'étroit héritage de Renaissance greco-latine, il lance une vision de civilisations innombrables et immémoriales, d'un infini des littératures; désormais quelques cantons européens ne sont plus seuls dans l'histoire à laisser des noms gravés, "le bon sens de l'univers" cesse d'être "fixé entre le nord de l'Espagne et le nord du Danemark, d'un côté, et, de l'autre, l'Angleterre et les limites occidentales de la Turquie." [In 1759, Anquetil finished his translation of the *Avesta* at Surat; in 1786 that of the *Upanishads* in Paris—he had dug a channel between the hemispheres of human genius, freeing the old humanism of the Mediterranean basin. Less than fifty years earlier, his compatriots were asking how one could be Persian, when he taught them how to compare the monuments of the Persians to those of the Greeks. Before him, one looked for information on the remote past of our planet exclusively among the great Latin, Greek, Jewish, and Arabic writers. The Bible was regarded as a lonely rock, an aerolite. A universe in writing was available, but scarcely anyone seemed to suspect the immensity of these unknown lands. The realization began with his translation of the *Avesta*, and reached dizzying heights owing to the exploration in Central Asia of the languages that multiplied after Babel. Into our schools, up to that time limited to the narrow Greco-Latin heritage of the Renaissance, he interjected a vision of innumerable civilizations from ages past, of an infinity of literatures; moreover, the few European provinces were not the only places to have left their mark in history, "the right direction of the universe" ceased to be "fixed between northern Spain and northern Denmark in one direction and England and the borders of western Turkey in the other."]¹³

Schwab's portrait of Anquetil goes very far in attempting to dispel *l'obscurité [qui] couvre toujours les commencements des découvertes* ("the obscurity that always hides the beginnings of discoveries").¹⁴ Ultimately Schwab locates the beginning in a change of focus generated by a mysterious fragment of Zend that appears in Oxford; whereas *les savants ont regardé le fameux fragment d'Oxford et sont rentrés dans leur cabinet; Anquetil le voit, il va aux Indes* ("the scholars looked at the famous fragment of Oxford and then returned to their studies; Anquetil looked, and went to India").¹⁵

Although in the end Schwab was to voice some misgivings about the fetishized Western biographical mode, his next work, *La Vie d'Elémir Bourges*,¹⁶ is governed by the life-and-works framework. Bourges's dates are 1852 to 1925, and even though he was admired by a number of authors—among them Edmond Jaloux and Henri de Régnier—he will remain, I think, an obscure and minor writer. The book on Bourges is the least distinguished of Schwab's output; one wonders why—except for the undeveloped personal connections hinted at between Bourges and Schwab—he had taken on this particular chore for his *thèse complémentaire* at the Sorbonne. Occasionally we get glimpses of the authentic Schwab, notably in his analyses of Bourges's eclecticism, as well as in his capacity for spiritual renovation within an otherwise episodic life. Nor should we overlook the fact that Schwab was in his early sixties when he undertook a formal petitioning for the doctorate; like the subject of one of his own studies, he trans-

formed himself from a man of letters into an academic scholar. The *méandre* of Schwab's work—that attractive expanding sweep within which occurred the very alchemy of ideas he was so expert at describing—allowed him the maximum of self-transformation with the maximum of coherence and intelligibility. Consequently it is hard to believe that the inward-tending intensity of Bourges's life is not really Schwab's own, rendered with comradely loyalty by Schwab as belonging to Bourges.

The contrast with *La Renaissance orientale*, which was to follow two years later in 1950, is immediately obvious. Its itemized subtitle reads like an encyclopedia, if not also like a doctoral program in East-West literatures (incidentally, the book was the *thèse principale* for Schwab's *Doctorat-ès-lettres*): *La découverte du sanscrit—le siècle des écritures déchiffrées—l'avènement de l'humanisme intégral—grandes figures d'orientalistes—philosophies de l'histoire et des religions—sciences linguistiques et biologiques—l'hypothèse aryenne—l'inde dans la littérature occidentale—l'asie et le romantisme—Hindouisme et Christianité*. It was followed in turn by two works, both of them logically outcomes from it. One, a two-hundred-page portion of the *Pléiade Histoire des Littératures*, was entitled "Domaine Oriental" and modestly subtitled "Le Porche oriental." As we shall see in a moment, Schwab here turned his attention to all that material whose *effects* he had so assiduously recorded earlier. It was as if Mallarmé had finally decided to write about the object whose *absence* had previously engaged him (for, of course, *La Renaissance orientale* is a work of scholarship written from a *symbolic* standpoint). Then posthumously, in 1964, *L'Auteur des Mille et une Nuits: Vie d'Antoine Galland* appeared. A less exciting work than the Anquetil-Duperron, it nevertheless complemented the earlier book, as well as rounding out Schwab's career, by treating the phenomenon of pre-Orientalism as style and literature at a moment before the Orient succumbed to Western science.¹⁷

A principal feature of all of Schwab's mature work is his interest in what he calls *le secondaire*, the smaller figures—the translators, the compilers, the scholars, whose unflagging effort make possible the major work of the Goethes, Hugos, and Schopenhauers. Thus, the major cultural renaissance called "Oriental" by Schwab is inaugurated by the translations made by two practically forgotten men, Anquetil and Galland—the one opening the road to linguistic and scientific revolution in Europe, the other initiating the stylistic, literary exoticism associated in Europe with Orientalism.¹⁸ What clearly fascinates Schwab in such men is that they have none of the finish of the major literary or cultural figures, no easily discernible shape to their careers, no fully appreciated role in the larger movements of ideas they serve. Rather they are like fragments contributing, Schwab once said, to an imaginary manuscript whose will they obey¹⁹ and whose totality resembles what Michel Foucault would call the "archive" of a particular period.²⁰ Moreover, their abnegation exerts a sort of inverse reaction in the contemporary scholar, who will not allow their modesty to disappear behind the major works or figures to which they have so obviously contributed. One of Schwab's successful restorations of justice occurs when he demonstrates how Galland's style, more than being a dumb transcription of an Arabic original, in fact creates the ambiance within which the achievements of the *Princesse de Clèves* are made.

There is another aspect to Schwab's interest in the "secondary," namely, his

appreciation, evident throughout the “*Domaine Orientale*,” for the anonymity of Asiatic literature and the comparative disregard for strong ego-individuality it displays. How much this appreciation derives from Schwab’s impressions of the literature he discusses and how much it is a real factor in it (since one is disappointed—though perhaps the expectation was totally unwarranted—to discover that Schwab knows Oriental literature mainly through translations), I cannot tell. I suspect, however, that as he grew older he was searching for—and in his own way finding—other means of communicating cultural history, new unities sought by the exacting and original scholar, more effective generalizations. For his work starts the process that will bridge the gap between the polymathic historians—formalists all of them—such as Élie Faure, Henri Focillon, and André Malraux and, to their left, the systematic verbal and institutional materialism of Foucault’s archeological investigations. There is, of course, a political meaning to this type of work, although Schwab himself rarely makes it explicit. Early in the “*Domaine Oriental*” he does say, however, that Europe, or Western culture, needs to be reminded that it, its achievements, and its heroes are at most a particular case in the transcendental generality of human culture at large.²¹

The avoidance of ethno- and anthropocentric attitudes dictates an interest in Oriental literature for its own sake. And the “*Domaine Oriental*,” within the limits I indicated above, is a marvelous prose-poetical meditation. At times the difficulty of Schwab’s autumnal style is as demanding as that of R. P. Blackmur. An example:

De même que l’interminable des rhapsodes nécessite des accommodements avec la cheville et le bouche-trou, le fulgurant des moralistes a pour postérité le formel des verroteries. C’est que les routines qui vont venir trouvent des lits tout faits dans ces gaines indéformables dont nous faisons honneur aux bonnes mnémotechniques: car, par sa force même, cette rigide armature deviendra une cause d’affaïssement et d’avilissement; la mémoire encourage l’imagination au moindre effort, les vertus de la répétition aboutissent à des excès: littératures de centons et de marqueteries dans l’Inde, en Perse, en Arabie; littératures de citations, d’allusions, d’anthologie, en Chine, au Japon, en Judée. [Just as the endlessness of the rhapsodes required compromises with useless words and stop-gap aids, so the fulminations of the moralists appears to posterity as partly worthless. This is because those things that become tradition are found in rigid forms which we then honor by turning into mnemotechnical devices; then by its very strength, this rigid armature becomes a source of weakness and degradation; memory discourages imagination, the virtues of repetition result in excess: the literature of the centos and the miscellanies in India, Persia, Arabia; the literature of citations, allusions, anthologies in China, Japan, and Judea.]²²

A much worked-over prose such as this moves from large generalizations about Asiatic literature to nuanced instances of its variety. And, indeed, one of that literature’s characteristics continuously asserted by Schwab is its exemplification of unity combined with infinite variations. The Bachelardian side of the “*Domaine Oriental*” then demonstrates, for instance, how certain figures—shepherds, laborers, trees, voyagers, riders, and walkers—give Asiatic literature its strong anchor in actuality. But it is in his consideration of aesthetic and verbal means that Schwab is most impressive. Starting from the notion that Oriental literatures view historical reality as something to be transformed into “mythical parabolas” by transgression, he investigates the predomi-

nance of the nominative mode in Oriental artistic grammar, the typology of rhythmic accent, the poetics of length, time as a meditative category, the use of *mot-germes* in the structure of rhythmically obsessive poetry, the interplay between infinite particularity and infinite generality, and the frequently employed festival mood in what he calls Oriental oceanic epics. All this, with a wide range of illustration, is subordinated to the proposition that Western literature attempts to turn all the means at its disposal into verbliness and articulation, whereas Oriental literature seeks to transform everything, including words, into musicality.

The comparative rarefaction of the "Domaine Oriental" is a function of limitations imposed on Schwab by the collective general work to which he was contributing and by the unimaginable scope of the subject he was attempting to treat. No such limitations exist for him, however, in *La Renaissance orientale*. In it he disposes of enormous amounts of detailed information, all of which is obviously treated at first hand. Read as both a prefiguration of and an important complement to Foucault's *Le Mots et les choses*, the book is of inestimable importance for the understanding of that great transformation in culture and learning that took place at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. But where Foucault is rather ambiguous, that is, in assigning a particular set of causes to the change, Schwab is uncompromising and, it must be added even by an admirer of Foucault's work,²³ more unstinting with information supporting his case for the Orient-as-cause. Yet both men see how it was that the acquisition of knowledge, its institutions ("discourse" in Foucault's terminology), and its currency determine not only cultural praxis generally, but aesthetic praxis as well. For neither of these scholars is the hagiolatrous view of the "poet" sufficient for understanding literary production; nor is it their view that literary works can be studied in unheeding isolation from those conditions of verbal production and textual revolution that were more or less commanding all types of verbal activity during a given period. Schwab gives flesh to such of Foucault's statements as are unquestionably true—for instance, that near the beginning of the nineteenth century we have a period in which philology as well as biology was invented. And still more, Schwab demonstrates with inexhaustible patience what it means in Foucault's sense (formulated nineteen years after *La Renaissance orientale* in *L'Archéologie du savoir*) literally for an archive to be formed.

The agents and the heroes of cultural change and formation are scholars according to Schwab, since cultural transformations take place because of men's appetites first to know and then to organize new things. The formula is perhaps simple, but it encompasses in *La Renaissance orientale* the reeducation of one continent by another. The work is divided into six main sections with dozens of smaller subdivisions and a conclusion. Just as its subject matter seems to have operated by dilation and contraction so, too, does *La Renaissance orientale*. Book One identifies and asserts the phenomenon of the European awareness of the Orient—how geographical discovery, the prestige of Egyptology, and the various colonial missions to India fortified the Oriental challenge and the predisposition for dealing with it systematically in European society. Book Two details the movement of integration by which Europe received the Orient into the body of its scientific, institutional, and imaginative structures. This section includes the

wave of Sanskrit studies that swept the Continent, with a base in Paris primarily, and the enthusiasm which, in Schwab's happy phrase, multiplied the world. In Book Three, Schwab doubles back over the first two sections in order to show the active changes that take place in knowledge of the Orient. Central here is the metamorphosis in knowledge about language from being a religious issue to being a linguistic, scientific, and even a racial one after Bopp, Burnouf, and others. Accompanying this change is the one by which India acquired a whole figurative dimension in Western literature, from the pre-Orientalism of Milton and Dryden, through the Lake poets, to Emerson, Whitman, the Transcendentalists, Richter, Novalis, Schelling, Rückert, Heine, Goethe, and, of course, Friedrich Schlegel.

Book Four is an elaborately constructed mosaic of "case histories," items of personal witness drawn from forty or so lives—mostly erudite lives—of Oriental effect. Schwab's interest is to give an intimate as well as a panoramic vision of reorientations in the work of scholars, scientists, critics, philosophers, and historians. Each portrait multiplies the complexity of Orientalism as a phenomenon of reception and transmission. The treatment of subject matter is scenic, which is to say that whether he examines Balzac, Cuvier, Jules Mohl, Sylvestre de Stacy, Ampère, Ozanam, Fauriel, or many others, Schwab represents the changing conceptions of time and space brought forward by each as well. Concurrently Schwab's antennae fetch out shifts both in informal relations among people affected by the Orient (salons, paraoccult leagues, gossip factories) and among disciplines (linguistics, geology, biology, for instance). His investigations of discursive formations can show, for example, that the library, the museum, and the laboratory underwent internal modifications of paramount importance. Dotting Schwab's web are countless dates, names, journals, works, exhibitions, and events (for instance, the Nineveh exposition of 1846 in Paris) that give his narrative its gripping immediacy.

In a sense, Books Five and Six lift all the myriad details of Orientalism from the plane of schools, scholars, academies, sciences, salons, and ideologies into the more discriminating dramas enacted within the careers of major imaginative writers. Book Five concerns French writers wrestling with the travail of creation as erudition impinges upon it: Lamartine, Hugo, Vigny, Richelet, Leconte de Lisle, and Baudelaire. In addition, there is a section on what Schwab calls the "external Orient," the exotic East so influential in the work of Nerval, Gautier, and Flaubert. There are some especially fine *aperçus* on Flaubert's *roman archéologique* whose matter is adopted from Quinet but whose tone contradicts him flatly. Book Six, entitled "Détournements et Prolongements," focuses for the most part on German (among them Nietzsche, Wagner, and Schopenhauer) and Russian writers later in the century. Gobineau's presence also circulates throughout these pages, and with it the doctrine of the inequality of races. For, as his study nears its end, Schwab attends to the often pernicious divisions (Iran vs. India, Aryans vs. Semites, East vs. West) that filter through the gigantic cultural mass created, during almost a century of "comparatism," by the Orientalist consciousness. These divisions are all traceable to the two *techniques spirituelles* facing each other from West to East. Thus:

Au cours des *xix^e-xx^e* siècles, trois tendances divergentes se développent: des strictes écoles de techniciens, philologues et philosophes, poursuivent des définitions rigoureuses qui éloignent les adeptes hâtifs; des cercles d'idéologues ou d'initiés font du produit étranger des expériences de greffe locale; chez des théologiens reparait l'ancien esprit missionnaire aboutissant à un scrupule double de science et de conscience. Ce triple intérêt explique que jamais clientèles si nombreuses et incessantes ne soient venues d'une civilisation à une autre. [In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, three divergent tendencies developed: the strict school of the technicians—the philologists and philosophers—pursued their rigorous definitions and this served to eliminate the amateurs; the circle of ideologists and initiates grafted foreign influences onto local experience; and among the theologians the old missionary zeal reappeared, resulting in conflicting doubts between science and conscience. These three considerations explain the numerous and incessant contacts that grew up as never before among the different cultures (LRO 475)].

A concluding section, written in a complex and compact style, affirms that the Oriental Renaissance was fundamentally a phenomenon of difference, generating comparative techniques, whereas the first Renaissance was essentially assimilative in that it flattered Europe without disturbing Europe's self-affirming cultural centrality. Thus the second Renaissance multiplied, rather than decreased, the points of comparison (and the techniques) available to Western culture and its "invisible interlocutor," the more so—as Schwab explains brilliantly—because the later Renaissance was a verbal event, not a verbal and plastic one as the earlier one had been. Orientalism made possible a *premier tour du monde parlé*, which in turn initiated a linguistic theory of constantly receding (and impossible) origins. Standing between history and faith, such a theory was an event

... de consequence: les linguistes avaient cru tenir le grand remède à Babel, les poètes attendaient le retour à Eden: l'appétit des origines remonte du coeur des hommes à chaque fouille archéologique, un peu comme, à chaque synthèse des chimistes, l'illusion qu'on va fabriquer de la vie: le postulat d'une langue mère, c'avait été la parthénogenèse de la linguistique. Or, la notion de primitif ne fut confirmée qu'en se dénaturant: elle n'affirme plus un point zéro de l'histoire, mais désigne seulement une gradation toujours plus basse de l'échelle. C'est un mobile, et il met en jeu des idées de déplacement; l'histoire ne promet plus un mur des âges, partout on abandonne la promesse d'un fond. En même temps, canon esthétique et théorie scientifique renoncent à un acquis pour toujours; chaque ouvrier de ce qui fut antiques certitudes croira trahir s'il poursuit ou procure du stable. Esthétique romantique du mouvement, dogme biologique d'évolution, imperialism du langage dans les empires intellectuels, voilà bien des concordances inédites et graves. De nos jours, héritiers des poètes de la mobilité, des metaphysiciens de l'inconscient, et de médecins du mythe, les plus révolutionnaires usagers du langage et de la littérature parlent de "mots en liberté" comme d'une "expérience spirituelle,"—ils réalisent à leur insu la formule de Burnouf: *Nomina numina*. [... of consequence: the linguists believed they had found the answer to Babel, the poets expected the return of Eden; a passion for origins rose up in the hearts of men with each new archeological excavation, a little as if, with each new formula produced by a chemist came the allusion that he had created new life: the postulate of a mother tongue produced linguistics by parthenogenesis. But the notion of the primitive could be confirmed only by distorting it; it could no longer be regarded as the starting point of history, but only as an increasingly lower point on its scale. It was movable and it therefore brought into play notions about change; history no longer provided a bulwark for all time, and certainly it could not provide a foundation. At the same time, both aesthetic canons and scientific theories renounced their claims to permanence; each worker in what had been the ancient verities felt that he had been betrayed if he pursued or acquired anything durable. The

Romantic aesthetic of movement, the biological dogma of evolution, the imperialism of language in the intellectual empires, these were now the new and important things that one could agree upon. In our days, the heirs of the poets of instability, the metaphysicians of the unconscious, and the doctors of myth, the most revolutionary manipulators of language and literature speak of “free words” as a “spiritual experience”—they are confirming without knowing it Burnouf’s formula: *Nomina numina* (LRO 497-98).

The coincidence of the advent of Romanticism and Orientalism in the West, as Schwab so carefully portrays it, gave the former its complex dimensions and led it to the reformulation of human limits—indeed, to that frontier where the unconscious and even the monstrous can claim the *titre de naturel*. Governing the coincidence are two laws: one, the *chance des époques*, two, the *mission des générations* (LRO 502). Therefore Schwab’s conception of cultural history in *La Renaissance orientale* is cosmological, because he sees himself as mediating between the two laws and their claims upon historical understanding.

In part systolic, in part diastolic (the images are Schwab’s own), *La Renaissance orientale* is a virtual education in the meaning of intellectual adventure, a species of vital detective work²⁴ that neglects neither the material clues nor the higher speculations involved in formulating general observations. Schwab’s monumentality lies in never letting us doubt that philology, as employed by him in the large, Nietzschean sense and as studied by him in the history of philological archeology through which Oriental texts were brought into European knowledge and consciousness, is the study of texts as constantly worked-upon monuments, arranging and re-arranging the culture’s sense of its identity. Recent studies of Romantic literature—for example, the work of M. H. Abrams, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man—would find their inescapable underpinning in Schwab; for, as Romantic writing seems best understood as a prolonged investigation of language and poetic form constructing and deconstructing planes of meaning, Schwab’s textual odyssey furnishes the necessary first material. If, after reading Schwab, there is not always an orderly, or at least a clear, path to be seen from words to forms, or from linguistic discovery to linguistic and aesthetic performance, the difficulty is that as students of literature we have not yet mastered the relationship between language *in* history and *as* art. Schwab argues that the relationship is crucial, but his method reposes (as I said above) upon the dramatization, presented complexly and encyclopedically, of a cultural encounter, one whose driving force originates in the love of words, the web of textuality, the society of learning and of cultural appropriation. Thus, rather than to read Schwab as a failed theorist, one would do best, I think, to appreciate his great scholarly achievement as providing an occasion for theoretical orientation and self-examination.

Except allusively, what Schwab seems uninterested in are the economic, social, and political forces at work during the periods he studies. He is an expert at giving us the *circumstances* of the period, and these may include economic and social details; but the circumstantiality of his details is far from adding up to a dynamics of shaping, or shaped, forces acting within history. Thus he mentions that the first British Orientalists were medical men with a religious-missionary vocation. In addition, they were asso-

ciated with commercial enterprise in the Indian colonies. Yet nowhere does he try to fuse these disparate circumstances into a political interpretation of British Orientalism. Similarly he remarks here and there that the great Sanskrit wave and the epidemic of Sanskrit professorships throughout Europe were connected to a very rapidly developing colonial trade and that the privileged status of Egyptology was derived from the Napoleonic adventure in the Middle East. Never does he coherently put forward a thesis about Orientalism as a science, attitude, or institution for the European military, political, and economic control of Eastern colonies.

The disparity that exists between what Schwab knows in the way of awesome detail and what he concludes from that detail strikes one forcibly. It is not only that there are political conclusions he will not draw about the European ravaging of the Orient, but also that he chooses to see the East-West relationship as basically an equal one—whereas in fact, of course, it was no such thing. Sanskrit was a language that stood for a very high cultural value in Europe, but it was as a dead language, far removed from the backwardness of modern Indians, that its value accrued. The romantic imagination of European writers and scholars was impregnated with Orientalism, but their Orientalism was gained at the expense of any sympathy they might have felt for the benighted natives they ruled. One of the faint lines of thought running through early nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship—in the work of Abel Remusat, for example—is that Orientalist enthusiasm is often fueled by apathetic ignorance not only of the ancient Orient, but especially of the modern Oriental. Read Schwab and you will not remember that Conrad's Mr. Kurtz is one of the chief products of Orientalism, or that race theory, scholarly anti-Semitism, and proto-Fascism are literal products of nineteenth-century Oriental philology. At the same time that Friedrich Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Ernest Renan were making their distinction between organic, lively, wonderful Indo-European and inorganic, agglutinative, uninteresting Semitic, they were also constructing the doxology of twentieth-century anti-Arab and anti-Jewish Orientalist scholarship. And all this was possible not because, as Schwab seems to have it, of a desire to know, but because of a desire to possess and control.

That this is not merely an academic issue can be proved easily enough in the case of a topical instance. The contemporary academic Orientalist is the direct heir of the nineteenth-century Oriental philologist I referred to above. On questions of immediate political moment he is looked to for perspective, information, and help as United States policy, say, toward the Middle East, is being formulated. Yet because Orientalism is a political phenomenon that cannot be dissociated from European (white) colonialism, its modern progeny bear that ugly past on their back and in their work: they take the Oriental to be an essentially backward, primitive human in need of civilizing control. Their views as Orientalists, no matter how sophisticated the form in which they are put, are consequently debased in the extreme. The October, 1973, war in particular produced a whole mass of analyses, having for their background some almost incredibly atavistic pieties about the Arab mind, the Islamic mentality, Arab society, and so forth, all of them resting upon a wickedly simplified *colonial* view—openly racist in its more honest expressions—of the Oriental personality.

We should, then, not simply say that what is missing in Schwab is Foucault's sense of the material and political control exemplified in such systems of discourse as Orientalism; nor ought we to say exclusively that Schwab fails to take into account the socio-political aspect of ethnocentrism as it is represented by Orientalism. Rather we should draw attention to the problem of any encyclopedically conceived work like *La Renaissance orientale* whose virtues of scope and author's devoted intimacy with circumstantial detail make it shy of tendentious political generalities. What Schwab's ambition principally entailed was the wish to assert the presence and the importance of an Oriental Renaissance, and to do so with as much fidelity to the inner dynamics of the movement as possible. Despite Schwab's dialectic reconciliation of states through which the movement passed, he seems unwilling to have admitted that Orientalism had a *problematic* that everywhere touched strictly and systematically upon socio-political attitudes and actualities.²⁵ Consequently, he raises in our minds the question of how one can write the best sort of scholarly cultural history and at the same time take account of power, money, and colonial conquest. Clearly neither a vulgar teleology nor a vulgar theory of immediate reflection answers the question. Too carefully engineered an avoidance, however, will not do either.

It seems often to be believed of rigorous scholarship in the humanities generally, and literature particularly, that scope and detail are achieved by staying clear of *Tendenz*-mongering. The converse is no less true: that brilliant theorizing comes without heed for circumstance, depth of knowledge, or range of concrete illustration. Perhaps it is in the nature of scholarship and of contemporary intellectual discipline to imagine work as doing one kind of specialized thing or another, to see a rational task as involving the circumstances either of the theorist or of the historian-scholar, or—to cite a very modern case—of the popular journalist. The theorist sees himself as answering to his own circumstances: as Marxist, as structuralist, as New Critic, as phenomenologist, and so forth. For the historian, what matters is the past “as it really was,” in detail and in depth. One will object and say that no intellectual still works according to such unsubtle schema, but in practice these distinctions rigidly obtain. For there is very little thought or time given over to understanding the dialectics of pressure and response to pressure in intellectual work, circumambient and impinging circumstantiality as it bears on the production of the critical, or theoretical, or historical work, or, finally, the way in which one might manage to write *accurately* while also writing with some sense of the acute political matters which, as is the case with Orientalism, are relevant.

This is not the place to deal with these issues. Schwab's scholarship, by virtue of its excellence and interest, brings them to mind, as it does also the predicament of any scholar who does not feel it to be imperative to take an explicit political position toward what work he does or toward things in general. But then we come to the difficult problem of deciding what scholarly or even theoretical subject matter *does* (or does not) require an explicit political attitude or position in order for the subject to be dealt with fairly and accurately. As I have argued elsewhere, Orientalism as a subject fairly screams out for an open understanding of its unpleasant ethnocentric and colonialist background. Yet I must say in all candor that I would prefer Schwab's apolitical schol-

arship to a noisy and correct but less historically thorough analysis of Orientalism—but obviously that is not the only alternative. Probably it is true to say that in work like Schwab's, aside from its documentary richness, one can at least point to, and perhaps later supply, the aspects of reality that are missing, whereas in less impressive scholarship there are mainly attitudes (that often dissolve history) which one can support or attack and little else. My polarities are too reductive of course, and there are many other alternatives I have not cited; still, my gist will be clear.

But I am trying to be precise about how some scholarship, even as it excludes material, demonstrates the complexity both of what it includes and of what it does not include. There is no surgical way of prescribing just how much complexity and richness will suffice, and how much will not. Exemplary instances, such as *La Renaissance orientale*, help, although they cannot be used as originals to be copied slavishly. We return, thus, to such matters as patience, affection, enthusiasm; they seem to express themselves infectiously and implicitly in a scholar's work, however much his learning is formidable and impartial. If one sometimes chafes at the overwhelming simplicity in such phrases as "the Asiatic mind" (in "Domaine Oriental"), one is nonetheless always aware that Schwab's intention in generalizing is sympathetic, and not aggressive or hostile. In short, Schwab's work, as much in its subject matter as in its method, multiplies the opportunities for study and learning; it does not restrict them, even though Schwab's political quietism prevents him from making a stern judgment of Orientalism's cultural rapacity. That we can make the judgment, or thereafter study Romanticism, or investigate the influence of academies upon nineteenth-century intellectual life, or analyze the relationship between philology and ideology—or all of those things and then many more—is why Schwab's romance of ideas itself deserves serious attention. To mention, in addition, the sheer pleasure of its learning will further enhance its unique status.

But "pleasure" used so blithely to characterize "learning" does not imply an idle enjoyment on the reader's part. In Schwab, there is never art analyzed or intellectual achievement limned without some corresponding sense of actual involvement in the world. Thus what his historical research discovers for him, and causes his readers actively to enjoy, is the real underpinning of cultural life, which is that a culture is not mere collection, or *incorporation* by triumphant egos here and there, but rather that it is work performed by human agents—of society, social bonds, generational place, history. Here I employ the vocabulary used by Quentin Anderson to contrast two opposing views of literary culture and literary study.²⁶ Schwab is no believer in the efficacy of imperial selves. The point to make about him is that for all the aesthetic, civilizing, transforming import of the cultural event he describes, and for all its political thinness as he renders it, he never assumes work to be the result of the ego's linear appetite to remake the world as simply as one makes a bookshelf. Culture for Schwab is less a pantheon than a lyceum, and a bustling one at that. To the contemporary critic, still uselessly transfixed by pure form and often gullibly enraptured with an un-circumstanced structural poetics, Schwab must be the antidote. He urges the network over the isolated cell. By no other perspective can cultures be understood as the systems

they really are, systems over whose activity the individual intellectual historian holds the bridles of an educated, vigilant, historical understanding and a moral judgment.

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¹The three issues of *Mercure de France* are as follows: No. 1115 (July, 1956), 560-61; No. 1120 (December, 1956), 637-91 ("Hommage à Raymond Schwab"); No. 1134 (February, 1958), 242-309 ("Inédits de Raymond Schwab").

²Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale* (Paris, 1950). Hereafter quotations from this work will be identified in the text with the initials *LRO*, followed by a page number.

³See André Rousseaux, "Raymond Schwab et l'humanisme intégrale," *Mercure de France*, No. 1120 (December, 1956), 663-71.

⁴Schwab, *L'Auteur des Mille et une Nuits: Vie d'Antoine Galland* (Paris, 1964), pp. 48-51.

⁵Rousseaux, "Raymond Schwab et l'humanisme intégrale," p. 665.

⁶Schwab, "Domaine Oriental," in *Encyclopédie de la Pleiade: Histoire des Littératures*. Volume I: *Littératures Anciennes, orientales, et orales*, ed. Raymond Queneau (Paris, 1955), p. 213.

⁷Schwab, "Au moins des coïncidences," *Mercure de France*, No. 1134 (February, 1958), p. 299.

⁸Schwab, *Vie d'Anquetil-Duperron suivie des Usages Civils et religieux des Parses par Anquetil-Duperron* (Paris, 1934), p. 3.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁶Schwab, *La Vie d'Elémir Bourges* (Paris, 1948).

¹⁷Schwab, *L'Auteur des Mille et une Nuits*, p. 17.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁹Schwab, "Au moins des coïncidences," p. 298.

²⁰See Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972).

²¹Schwab, "Domaine Oriental," p. 108.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 182-83.

²³See my essay on Foucault's *Archeology*, "An Ethics of Language," *Diacritics*, IV:2 (Summer, 1974), pp. 28-37; also the pages on him in my *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York, 1975).

²⁴Schwab, "Domaine Oriental," p. 152.

²⁵I discuss this problematic at length in my *Orientalism* (forthcoming).

²⁶Quentin Anderson, *The Imperial Self* (New York, 1971).