Srinivas Aravamudan. *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2012. 358 pp.

Aravamudan has written a useful, wide-ranging, engaging, and thought-provoking study of what she calls Oriental "imaginative fictions" and their role in resisting the rise of the novel. Her book examines several English and French Oriental fictions written or translated in the Enlightenment period. It is evident that she has written it with the heat of conviction as well as the warmth of advocacy of both the writers and the Orientals, a paradoxical dual purpose. The way she approaches her topic and her capability of criticizing narrow views of Orientalism and looking beyond them make even familiar arguments seem fresh. However, what is unequivocably certain is that in a field that has received a lot of scholarly invigoration in recent years, the amount of original contribution expounded by her argument is minimal. For instance, Ros Ballaster's *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (2007) covers the same period—but limited to England—and presents a parallel argument regarding the double meaning of these fictions.

I certainly agree with Aravamudan's argument pertaining to the European connotations of these fictions. I find good reason to suppose that I have seen in these works much of what she has seen. She offers passionately to advocate a reading that was certainly my conviction; the room for such duality in interpretation, in these representational tales, is definitely there. Regrettably, when she attempts to convince her reader that Enlightenment Orientalism was equally about the West as it was about the East and ascribes to the writers what is hard to digest, I am obliged to part company. Her point is that "the new Orientalism that developed throughout the eighteenth century was not as restricted by limitations of the biblical studies." Unfortunately, she does not present the context in which the rise of the set of values she describes is to be situated and explained. Therefore, her characterization of these works in this way seems an overstatement and leaves her reader ambivalent toward this statement. Scholars as well as general readers, reading her book, may observe that she has, inconveniently, wrought these works to serve her ends.

Likewise, I find Aravamudan's conception of the Oriental process somewhat vulnerable and lacking in persuasion. In spite of what she suggests, it is difficult to accept her notion of this process in its entirety and drop the counter argument launched by Edward Said against which she has declared her argument. This difficulty begins in the Introduction— taking it as a starting point: "Enlightenment interrogation was not innocent... but it was not just bent on the domination of the other but also aimed at mutual understanding across cultural differences, for Enlightenment the self was under critique as much as the 'other'."

At this point the reader is asked to mix water with fire, for the contradiction between mutual understanding and domination and between domination and self-critique is strikingly obvious. The reader knows well that Orientalism was a one way process. The Europeans wrote about the Orient. They did not introduce the European culture to the peoples of the Orient,

nor did the Orientals endeavor to introduce their culture or to write about Western culture (Occidentalism) to make mutual understanding a plausible goal of either party. On the other hand, the denotative meaning of domination clashes with the connotative meaning of mutual understanding (unless this understanding is venomous in its intention and is meant to reinforce domination and make it more feasible).

Moreover, to acknowledge that Orientalism was partly bent on "domination" is to acknowledge that the Occident was the superior opponent, bearing in mind that the feeling of superiority and self-critique are rarely found as partners. The outcome, predictably, is that Aravamudan finds herself unable to solidify her position, for establishing a concrete premise based on her consolidating understanding of Orientalism becomes problematic. To avoid this hazardous path, she wisely backs away and contains herself to the argument that "imaginative fiction [...] defined European understandings of cultures that were seemingly foreign but that shared the past in ways that needed expert explanation."

Her retreat is a prudent move because it enables her to exercise an unshakable control over her analyses rather than being led into incoherent and vague discussions achieving no considerable progress in any dimension. Her contention with this goal is reinforced by her announcement that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient in these works "needed expert explanation." Even though this complacency comes at the expense of the subtlety of her earlier statement, it certainly keeps her on the safe side but fails to redirect scholarly debates about Oriental fiction. Aravamudan is herself an actor in the fictions she analyzes to her reader and she shares, as Said does, the values of those whom she advocates. Sometimes, her admiration of Oriental values suggests that she may be, at heart, on the side of Said; simultaneously, she is not clumsily apologetic at all.

I also have a problem with "Enlightenment Orientalism," a key phrase in the book and used, for assertion, in her title. Enlightenment is usually associated with reason and experience whereas, in contrast, dogma and tradition characterize Orientalism. The combination just does not seem sound albeit she says that her study "takes the modifier Enlightenment to qualify *Orientalist* fiction as its main target." "Enlightenment Orientalism" is reiterated throughout the book with the air of a kind of defensive triumphalism, as if it were blasphemy to doubt its use and as if it were self-explanatory. It is indeed possible to make out what Aravamudan means by it, but she does not defend it by stating and solving the problematics of its use; and there are problems. In theory, Enlightenment and Orientalism do not meet and neither one was part of the vocabulary of the period. Aravamudan seems to have combined the two terms to convey the message that European writers approached the Orient in a rational way. It might be agreed for argument's sake that the writers she has advocated did hold the views she ascribes to them under the rubric "Enlightenment Orientalism." But still there is a problem because she does not recognize the fact that many of those writers had their own cultural prejudices and even political loyalties, for some of them held authoritative political positions. That is to say, they did not write these fictions as adherents of the Enlightenment, but more probably motivated by political agendas. It might be possible, though I suspect it would be uneconomic, to employ the phrase as a strictly analytical expression in describing these fictions, though I have explained why it cannot be used to describe the relationship between the two spheres. But she employs it as both an analytical and a concrete phrase. Since the phrase is without an established concrete meaning in English, the analytical uses are held to justify using it as the name of a concrete reality. Mystification begins, and there is something disturbing about the repetition of "Enlightenment Orientalism" in an attempt to drown out any challenge to its meaning.

Resisting the Rise of the Novel is the subtitle which provides the distinctive focus for the book, however, also deprives it of an ability to focus on the distinctness of the drama of the period. Aravamudan's primary concern here is to analyze the function and effect of the Oriental tale; she is not concerned with the parallel texts found in the forceful drama of the Enlightenment.

The book is satisfactorily informative, the material covered is broad, and the style is graceful. Since no extravagant claims have been made, the book appears to work inductively, favoring presentations which proceed from details to modest conclusions. Happily, no one can deny the merits of the friendly, wide-ranging, and even homespun effect. Aravamudan proceeds in her chapters, as she says, "thematically through time." She divides her book into two parts. Part 1, titled "Pseudoethnographies," consists of the first two chapters. Chapter one examines Oriental fictions by Marana, Behn, Galland and Defoe. It stresses the notion that the novel was not "central" or was not "the specific national genre," as it is usually assumed. Whereas chapter two elaborates on works by Montesquieu, Goldsmith, and Hamilton. It draws out on the proliferations of the search for singularities, "as expressive of difference" in the Oriental tale and the effect of making singularities a feature of the genre. Part 2, titled "Transcultural Allegories," includes chapters three, four, and five. Chapter three dwells on Oriental tales and Orient-related fictions by Fontenelle, Bidpai, Swift, and Voltaire. It examines three kinds of trans-cultural fictions—interplanetary, intercultural, and interspecies—to show that Enlightenment Orientalism looked "beyond national realism and identity politics." The fourth chapter loosely reviews the works of Prévost, Crébillon, and Diderot in the Oriental fiction genre. It is supposedly meant to explore different aspects of libertinism and sexuality and their combined role in "developing forms of fictional subjectivity, both Orientalist and domestic." But the outcome is modest. In the fifth chapter, Manley's, Haywood's, Sheridan's, and Smollett's Orient-related fictions are addressed. The focus of the chapter is on the superiority of the transcultural allegory to national realism. Finally, a conclusion that unexpectedly does not assess Aravamudan's achievement in her book, but roughly reviews Benjamine's essay on Nikolai Leskov and the role of Joyce's writings in showing, contrary to Benjamine's statement, that the "generativity" between the near and the far is still alive.

Undoubtedly, from her earlier works (particularly *Tropicopolitans* and *Guru English*), Aravamudan established herself as a scholar of Orientalism par excellence. These works seem to have exhausted her weightier ideas, for this book, more or less, appears self-reassuring and self-congratulatory when, in fact, there is little progress achieved in the Oriental argument across this body of material. Nevertheless, on the role of the Oriental tale in resisting the rise of the novel the work is pertinent. The holistic contextualizing provided by the discussions in this book illustrates the competition between the Oriental tale and the rising novel, and thus to some extent reshapes our view of the history of the novel. But amidst its instructive array of cultural details, the flaws in Aravamudan's work are easily identified. A plot summary of some of these tales, sometimes extending to two pages, with flimsy analysis to follow, is an obvious flaw which results in the reader being left wondering to where the summary is leading. Occasionally, Aravamudan's voice is stifled by the voices of the many scholars she cites. The author also falls into what she disapproves of in Said's thought—that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is based on hegemony. In her turn, she accuses the novelists of exercising hegemony on both the reader and the novel to turn the latter into a bourgeois biography. A statement I dislike and deem as unscholarly in this regard is her saying that the readers in that time were herded by some writers "like so many stray cats into the national realist enclosure."

Even though the book is not an extraordinary and profound contribution to the core of the Oriental debate, we cannot help coming to like it, for all its flaws, and appreciating it for all its analyses. It remains a book worthy of reading, a book that considerably lives up to the statement, though a modest one, made in the introduction. *Enlightenment Orientalism* effectively demonstrates the ways in which what was to become a dominant genre debased the Oriental tale and imposed itself on the reader. Aravamudan is quite effective in her discussions of the linkages between the then popular Oriental tale and the emerging domestic novel—one of the indisputable strengths of this her study. Moreover, she does, convincingly and with expected authority, show how Oriental tales

played a significant role in shaping the literary marketplace of Europe during the Enlightenment period. On the whole, her criticism is superior to that of some contemporary scholars which, instead of discovering what the debates might have been about, is resolved into the fury of cultural loyalties and made to reinforce the misunderstandings it attempts to dispel.

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– *Abel De Britto*. "Small Press Legends: S.A. Griffin." Received for Publication: July 18, 2012; Acceptance for Publication: December 3, 2012. Published: April 2013.

– *Isabel González Díaz*. "Memories that Turn into Tall Tales of Magic Rings and Men Caring for One Another: An Interview with Michael Messner." Received for Publication: October 10, 2012. Accepted for Publication: November 2, 2012. Published: April 2013.

– *Jeff Hearn*. "Contradictory Male/Masculine/Men's "I"s: The Unwriting of Men, and the Concept of Gex." Received for Publication: October 29, 2012; Acceptance for Publication: December 21, 2012. Published: April 2013.

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– *Mark McCormack*. "Friendship Dynamics and Popularity Hierarchies Among Inclusive Men." Received for Publication: October 28, 2012; Acceptance for Publication: December 20, 2012. Published: April 2013.

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– *Ana Ojea*. "The Functional Structure of the Sentence: Evidence from Non-Finite Clauses." Received for Publication: February 13, 2012; Acceptance for Publication: December 18, 2012. Published: April 2013.

– *Pablo Pérez Navarro*. "Absences that Matter: Performativity and Female Masculinities." Received for Publication: October 15, 2012; Acceptance for Publication: November 30, 2012. Published: April 2013.

– *Teresa Requena Pelegrí*. "Negotiating a Masculine Bloc: Jonathan Franzen's The Corrections." Received for Publication: November 9, 2012; Acceptance for Publication: January 9, 2013. Published: April 2013.

– *Aishih Wehbe Herrera*. "Performing Masculinity, Performing the Self: Rudolfo Anaya's Bless me, Ultima and Heart of Aztlán." Received for Publication: October 19, 2012; Acceptance for Publication: December 14, 2012. Published: April 2013.