

mention a literary work. In fact, I refer in passing to several, but since *literary study* was the subject of our panel, I concentrated on that. What a silly objection!

He is even more ignorant when he proposes to remedy the critique of Eurocentrism (which, like Eurocentrism itself, is a vast subject about which Shattuck shows that he knows next to nothing) by citing the Qumran scrolls and Judeo-Christian tradition and then concluding only that this is “European culture [...] trac[ing] its origins.” What he doesn’t seem to realize is precisely that the processes of selectivity and incorporation are themselves Eurocentric (*Judeo-Christian* is another word for it), and what Immanuel Wallerstein and others have in mind is how Asian and African cultures were (and still are) in those processes either ignored or designated inferior, lesser, backward, and so on, in order to preserve the alleged coherence and specialness of Western culture, an inflated, ideological fiction if there ever was one. In the case of Islam, for example, an unremitting war against it continues to take place, even as it has been robbed (by silence or silent incorporation) of its scientific and humanistic achievements in the official culture celebrated by Shattuck and others like him, who have never taken any notice of and seem to know nothing about these achievements. Besides, all cultural traditions are made, and often even invented, including those that Shattuck seems to take for granted as “ours.”

He speaks of ideology without realizing first of all that, in his dismayingly censorious work *Forbidden Knowledge* and in his association of like-minded rejectionist “scholars,” he openly advocates ideological positions of the narrowest kind, forbidding students and others to read and know what there is to be read and known. I advocate freedom of thought and expression. By mockery and intimidation, he wants to exclude and curtain off the shameful United States bombings of Asian and African and Latin American countries, the killing of innocents, and the hypocritical repetition of meaningless ideological slogans that are a part of our literature and literary study, their world, the context in which they are produced; these historical surroundings need somehow to be connected, not crudely or stupidly, to the scholarly sphere. He speaks dismissively of my facts without citing *one*, not one factual mistake in what I have said. How much more ideological can you get? Surely it is the case that every work of literature is enmeshed in

its worldly circumstances, and it won’t do at all to dismiss them out of hand by calling them irrelevant. Relevance and irrelevance are not self-evident; they must be shown rationally, not dyspeptically affirmed. Who has given Shattuck the right to decide what we should think and what we should forbid, anyway?

I am sorry that so formerly serious a scholar as Roger Shattuck has descended to such a level of name-calling and a sort of McCarthyism of the righteous. I have always called for the open-minded scrutiny and skepticism with which as humanists we face an inhumane and barbarous world. But I also know that turning one’s back on the world by asserting both the independence of literature and literary study’s aloofness is foolish and irrational. All great spirits and minds have acknowledged that literature is a part of human history and deserves to be read, recognized, and studied as such. What a pity that in his Vermont aerie, Roger Shattuck has come to represent the worst aspects of a closed mind and a disapproving, puritanical rejection of the world we live in.

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Derrida and Chinese Writing

TO THE EDITOR:

In “How (the) Inscrutable Chinese Led to Globalized Theory” (116 [2001]: 69–74), Rey Chow refers to “the as yet unidentified picture of Chinese writing on the cover of the English translation of *Of Grammatology* published before 1998” (70). The endnote gives as the source for this claim a footnote from an article by Stanley K. Abe published in *Boundary 2*. Abe had claimed, “A spectacular example of the visual allure of Chinese writing can be found on the cover of the paperback version of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. Interestingly, the publisher, Johns Hopkins University Press, is unable to identify the source of the image” (qtd. in Chow 74n2).

Since I clearly recalled Richard Macksey’s showing some of us the proposed design for the cover when it first came out and discussing the image’s provenance, I was quite puzzled about why the image should suddenly have become unidentifiable. Indeed, the facts are otherwise. Abe’s assertion is without foundation. On the back cover of the paperback edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP,

1976; my copy is the 1977 printing) one reads: "The artist's seals and emblems of longevity, from a *kake-mono* (hanging scroll) by Nikka (19th cent.). Ink on paper. Reproduced from *The Uninhibited Brush* by J. Hillier, with the permission of Hugh Moss Publications Ltd., London. From the collection of Nick Grindley." One could hardly expect more explicit information about the artist, the source, and the provenance of an image, certainly not from a book cover.

What is even more puzzling is how Chow could have missed this identification, particularly when it is given such rhetorical prominence in an argument about Derrida's "habit of hallucinating China" (70). Closer inspection raises some doubts whether Chow has actually held, much less read, *Of Grammatology*. It appears that Chow has relied mainly on inaccurate representations of Derrida's work from secondary sources.

For example, Chow cites "John DeFrancis's succinct criticism of this common misreading of Chinese as an ideographic language": "Chinese characters are a phonetic, not an ideographic, system of writing [. . .]. There never has been, and never can be, such a thing as an ideographic system of writing." The innuendo is that this is somehow representative for Derrida. Chow claims that "Derrida replicates the age-old idea of Chinese as an ideographic language in his groundbreaking critique of phonetic writing: 'non-phonetic scripts like Chinese or Japanese [. . .] remained structurally dominated by the ideogram or algebra and we thus have the testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing outside of all logocentrism'" (70). This is highly selective quoting, for what *Of Grammatology* has is "But we have known for a long time that largely nonphonetic scripts like Chinese or Japanese included phonetic elements very early. They remained structurally dominated by the ideogram or algebra" (90). On the next page, Derrida insists that care must be taken precisely *not* to accept a theory of Chinese script as enunciated by Gernet, who had claimed, "Writing in China, never having *reached* a phonetic analysis of language [. . .]" (qtd. in Derrida 91). Against such leveling generalizations, Derrida underscored the need to avoid losing historical differences:

So by what right can it be supposed that speech could have had, "in antiquity," before the birth of Chinese writing, the sense and value that we

know in the West? Why would speech in China have had to be "eclipsed" by writing? If one wishes really to penetrate to the thing that, under the name of writing, separates much more than techniques of notation, should one not get rid, among other ethnocentric presuppositions, also of a sort of graphic monogeneticism that transforms all differences into divergences or delays, accidents or deviations? (91)

I for one fail to see how this could be reconciled with Chow's following interpretation of Derrida's attitude: "As the other, Chinese writing is greeted by him with idealism and utopianism; on it is bestowed the value of a primitive logic, a pre-Western past in which are to be found the West's many 'posts' or futures" (72). The evidence goes in the opposite direction.

Nor is it good faith to accuse Derrida of "the habit of hallucinating China that has been characteristic of European thinking since the sixteenth century" (Chow 70). After reviewing Leibniz's appropriations of some notions of Chinese script, Derrida wrote, "The concept of Chinese writing thus functioned as a sort of European hallucination. This implied nothing fortuitous: thus functioning obeyed a rigorous necessity. And the hallucination translated less an ignorance than a misunderstanding. It was not disturbed by the knowledge of Chinese script, limited but real, which was then available" (80). As I read the discussion of Leibniz, Derrida is taking aim against the culturally biased misinterpretation of Chinese script—that is, he is siding with Chow. Here again Chow has been misled by Abe, whose truncated discussion of Derrida quotes the phrase "functioned as a sort of European hallucination." Had Chow checked Derrida's original, the context would have made it very clear that Derrida was attacking the hallucination, not joining it.

At the end of Chow's article, we are asked to consider whether Derrida's "'error' of simplifying and falsifying the other is not in fact fundamental, indeed indispensable, to the operations of cross-cultural, cross-ethnic representations" (73). That may be so, but resisting the desire to simplify and falsify the other should remain fundamental to sound scholarship.

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