The Orientalist Photograph: An Object of Comparison

Ali Behdad
University of California, Los Angeles

It is indeed a great honor to be speaking at the inaugural session of the Milan Dimić Lecture Series in Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta. As a distinguished comparativist, Dimić was a champion of intercultural awareness and understanding, so to name this lecture series after him strikes me not just as commendable but as particularly appropriate given that, at the present moment, the word *culture* is arguably used most commonly in association with the term *clash*, suggesting an unfortunate continuity with the Cold War era in which Dimić and his fellow comparativist Northrop Frye began their academic careers as scholars of comparative literature in Canada. Also, naming this lecture series after Dimić, particularly in light of the fact that the two great comparative literature programs founded by Dimić and Frye at the University of Toronto and the University of Alberta, respectively, have narrowly escaped their attempted curtailment by the higher administration thanks to the concerted efforts of students and faculty at these universities, makes one hopeful indeed about the future of comparative literature. For comparative literature as a discipline and critical approach does matter, especially in the context of a multicultural and multilingual country such as Canada. As Dimić, in his 1996 "Preface: W[h]ither Comparative Literature?" presciently observed, the triumph of English as a global language and as a department since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union has undermined other language departments and non-European cultural and literary traditions. To the extent to which "Comparative Literature has always been concerned with *alterité*" (8) as Dimić insisted, departments of comparative literature have a crucial role to play in working against such linguistic and cultural conformism by questioning the truths of commonly monolingual, English-speaking North America. I should add that in my paper I am very much inspired by Dimić's astute observation in his "Preface" that "Comparative Literature means the

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recognition of and the engagement with 'the Other' whether that is 'non-canonical' text (i.e., popular literature), the 'other' arts, or the literary and cultural aspects of another race, gender, nation, etc." (7).

I: Comparative Literature in Crisis, Again

Comparative literature departments, like many other academic units in the humanities, are facing two sets of interrelated challenges in the present moment. One set is intellectual in nature and has to do with the field's changing self-understanding in the face of radical transformations in the pursuit of literary knowledge wrought by the globalization of literary studies and information technology. The second challenge is professional and has to do with rearticulating the place of humanities training in the twenty-first-century academy amidst reported declines in undergraduate enrollment and what Louis Menand has called "the PhD problem." These challenges were prominently on display during the recent prospectus defense of one of my graduate students at UCLA. After the student had successfully defended her interdisciplinary, and important, dissertation on the relationship between literary representation (specifically novelistic fiction) and photography in the antebellum US with a focus on race and racialization, a senior member of the department voiced concerns during the deliberations about both her focus on a single literary tradition and her viability as a candidate for advertised positions in comparative literature. "Although I very much admire her great prospectus," this colleague remarked, "I am not convinced that this is a true comparative literature project since it focuses only on American literature. What worries me most is the fact that she will never be employable in a comparative literature department with a dissertation on a single literary tradition." At that point, a more junior colleague intervened, reminding our more senior colleague of the paucity of job opportunities in comparative literature—for anyone. This younger colleague confessed that he now regularly trains his graduate students in comparative literature in such a way that they will be able to compete for English department jobs. As chair of the committee, I was grateful not to be obliged to voice an opinion; in all honesty, I felt confused about which side to take since both colleagues seemed to make perfectly reasonable conjectures about my student's professional prospects. Later, I came to appreciate how the exchange between my colleagues perfectly foregrounded the dual problems that haunt comparative literature today: the dwindling job opportunities and the discipline's crisis of self-definition, if not self-justification, by its practitioners.

To be sure, the predicament of self-definition and, indeed, a sense of crisis have marked the discipline since its institutional formation in post-WWII America. (I hasten to note here that I am well aware of the complications of any attempt to fix the birth of the discipline as such in light of Natalie Melas's brilliant discussion in *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison*, to which I will return shortly). In his well-known 1958 talk at the Comparative Literature Congress in Chapel Hill, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature," René Wellek remarked that "[t]he most serious sign of the precarious state of our study is the fact that it has not been able to establish a distinct subject matter and a specific methodology" (282). And yet, in spite of an identity crisis heralded by one of its founding figures, comparative literature as a discipline grew dramatically during the Cold War, thanks in no small measure to the support provided by the National Defense Education Act, which was passed in 1958 in response to both the Soviet Union's success in the space race and the perceived need for foreign language instruction to counter the threat of communism. It is for this reason, among others, that Melas thoughtfully urges us to attend to the relationship "between the exclusively European scholarly scope of the expatriate philologists that is crucial to the formation of comparative literature as we have inherited it and the particular Cold War context in which the discipline flourished" (8).

What distinguishes the current comparative literature crisis from its historical antecedents is a disciplinary fragility that combines the disadvantages of what David Damrosch calls "the specter of amateurism" with that of the precipitous withdrawal of institutional support for comparative literature departments. As Damrosch explains, "[a]s formalist approaches have waned, scholars have found so much to learn about the full outlines of individual cultures that they have often preferred delving deeply into one time and place over pursuing broad-based comparisons" (326). In other words, the more literary traditions we come into contact with and incorporate into comparative literature as legitimate objects of study, the more we may feel compelled to move toward a singular literary tradition, largely because, as Franco Moretti confesses, even a scholar of West European narrative like him has only been able to "work on its canonical fraction, which is not even one percent of published literature" (55). The discovery of the "great unread" (Margaret Cohen, qtd. in Moretti 55) has been further compounded during the past three decades by the displacement of "high theory" with "traveling theory," not to mention the discipline's late awakening from its "long Eurocentric slumber" (Damrosch), additionally complicating comparative literature's disciplinary *raison d'être*. Moreover, the tightening of the job market in the humanities, especially in comparative literature, has compounded the disciplinary identity crisis with ever increasing professional pressure. Indeed, as my colleague from the exam committee observed, there has been a steady decline of job opportunities in comparative literature, leading concerned faculty to train their graduate students primarily in a single national literature to help them find jobs. While understandable as a survival strategy, this approach to the crisis seems only to have made it even more difficult to justify academic training in a field whose primary *raison d'être*, according to Moretti, is "to be a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures" (68).

II: Tackling the Crisis, or the Will to Expansion

Surprisingly, contemporary comparativists have responded to the disciplinary and professional challenges facing the field in a fashion similar to our predecessors, namely through a logic of addition and expansion. As Jan Ziolkowski observes, "In each past episode of anxiety about its own viability, comparative literature has responded by enlarging its purview and self-definition" (24). As early as 1963, René Étiemble, in his *Comparison n'est pas raison: La Crise de la literature comparée,* suggested the study of non-Western literatures such as Arabic, Chinese, and Bengali as an antidote to the crisis of the field, a solution with which even Wellek, who took issue with Étiemble's "sanguine" claim "to change the direction of comparative literature," had to agree. Wellek conceded, "in principle he is surely right in asking for a comparative poetics, for a genuinely universal study of world literature" ("Comparative Literature Today" 335). A decade later, Thomas Greene and the members of the

1975 American Comparative Literature Association's Committee, who prepared the "Report on Standards," responded to the disciplinary crisis and proclaimed at that time by acknowledging, albeit ambivalently, that "[a] new vision of *global* literature is emerging, embracing all the verbal creativity during the history of our planet, a vision which will soon begin to make our comfortable European perspectives parochial" (30, emphasis in original). Several years later, as the rise of multiculturalism and cultural studies posed an even more serious crisis of disciplinary consciousness for comparativists, the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) leadership answered by calling for a massive expansion of "the discipline's goals and methods":

> The space of comparison today involves comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines, between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures; between the pre- and post-contact cultural productions of colonized peoples, between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analyses of its modes of production and circulations; and much more. These ways of contextualizing literature in the expanded fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender are so different from the old models of literary study according to authors, nations, and genres that the term 'literature' may no longer adequately describe our object of study. (Bernheimer 41-42)

In the contemporary, this pattern of response through expansion continues to predominate. David Damrosch, for example, has suggested that "[c]omparative literature can thrive in the coming years […] only through a renewed engagement with national traditions and with global contexts" as well as by "embrac[ing] translation far more actively than it did during the past century" (327, 328). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak, in *Death of a Discipline*, attempts to resurrect the field through a "planetary" consciousness that "supplements" comparative literature with area studies (72). This "new comparative literature," she hopes, "will touch the older minorities: African, Asian, Hispanic. It will take in its *sweep* the new postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sector and the special place of Islam in today's breaking world" (84, emphasis added).

III: A Comparative Frame of Mind

I have traced comparative literature's evolution in North America to underscore not only how the practitioners of the field have traditionally responded to a perpetually claimed crisis of disciplinary identity with a will to expansion, but also to point out that such a "limitless serial extension," as Melas astutely observes, leaves unexamined and "obscure" the very "meaning of the verb 'to compare.'" Now, at the risk of sounding prescriptive, I wish to suggest a shift of focus from the logic of expansion and extension towards a reflective reconsideration of the very notion of comparison by way of addressing the seemingly perpetual state of disciplinary crisis in comparative literature. Comparative literature, as Haun Saussy correctly observes, can be identified neither through its objects of study nor its methods of inquiry (340). Additionally, as an interdisciplinary enterprise, comparative literature cannot necessarily be viewed as a "discipline" that incorporates a specific form of knowledge (such as literary or linguistic knowledge), a range of expertise (such as theory or historicism), or a set of skills (such as close reading or textual analysis). Rather, I wish to suggest, comparative literature ought to be viewed as a practice of engaging and realizing ideas through a comparative frame of mind. The adjective "comparative" is key in my formulation and, to elaborate my notion of comparison, I would like to take a brief detour through the complicated relation of comparative literature with the very notion of comparison itself.

In comparative literature, the adjective "comparative" points to the intellectual origins of the field in the nineteenth century, and its affiliation with comparative philology, in addition to the "comparative method" as a means of studying the development of languages and of tracing their historical origins and relationships. Like comparative philology, comparative literature, at least in its French formation in the nineteenth century, arose from a positivist will to comprehend the origins, sources, and influences of literary production in different nations. Comparison, in this instance, implied the consideration of more than one literary tradition and a systematic approach to locating the historical development of literary forms. Such a model of comparison, as Saussy points out, entailed a "tree-shaped" discipline "organizing historical and typological diversity into a common historical narrative with many parallel branches" (337). Developed in an era of European colonial hegemony, this model of comparison assumed the primacy, if not supremacy, of French and European literary traditions and entailed an evolutionary model of literary production. For nineteenth-century comparativists such as Philaréte Euphémon

Chasles, "comparative literature contained a presumption that comparing would involve […] French literature as either the source or destination of the comparison," as Ziolkowski (20) points out. The practice of comparison aimed at once to establish a universal poetics and to map the historical origins of all literary traditions, with Europe always positioned at the center. Likewise, in his 1886 *Comparative Literature*, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, one of the earliest practitioners of comparative literature in the English-speaking world, defined the "internal and external aspects of literary growth" as "the objects of comparative inquiry" (85). Claiming that "the comparison of literatures belonging to different social states" would allow the practitioners of comparative literature to treat "literature as capable of scientific explanation," Posnett advocated an evolutionary model of the discipline in which "the gradual expansion of social form, from clan to city, from city to nation, from both of these to cosmopolitan humanity, as the proper order of our studies in comparative literature" (86).

The positivist and universalizing model of comparative literature was also embraced by early proponents of the discipline in the United States. As Melas elaborates, Charles Mills Gayley, in his 1903 essay "What is Comparative Literature?" used the notion of comparison in literary studies to mean "first a scientific approach that is at once systematic and historical, and second a global scope for the study of literature" (Melas 13). Like his European precursors, Gayley, and other comparativists such as E.R. Curtius, applied the comparative method to discover the common characteristics and qualities of all literary forms and productions. The comparative method enabled these scholars to fashion an evolutionary model for the study of literature that "allowed all the differences in *kind* to be measurable as differences of *degree* in development and growth," as Melas explains (15).

After what Wellek called the "revolt against Positivism," ushered by members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, the Russian formalists, and New Critics, the evolutionary comparative method was displaced with a formalist and Eurocentric notion of comparison after World War II. Wellek, for example, who admonished comparativists to "stop being all things to all men" and to embrace once again "the old task of understanding, explaining, and transmitting literature," defined the aim of comparison as identifying the "proper interplay between a study of national literatures, their common tendencies, [and] the totality of the Western tradition" ("Comparative Literature Today" 334, 330). With the rise of multiculturalism and postcolonial theory in the 1980s, the formalist and Eurocentric model of comparison was deconstructed, leading to a more historical and politicized form of comparison. In *Culture and Imperialism*, for example, Edward Said drew attention for the first time to the ways in which the development of comparative literature coincided with, and was imbricated in, "the emergence of imperial geography" (50). Observing that "the field was epistemologically organized as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe and its Latin Christian literature at its center and top" (45), Said called for a politically oppositional mode of secular comparison through which "we begin to reread [the cultural archive] not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (51). In the contrapuntal model of comparison, Said remarked, "it becomes incumbent upon you also to reinterpret the canon in the light of texts whose place there has been insufficiently linked to, insufficiently weighted toward the expansion of Europe" (60). More recently, Melas has built on Said's contrapuntal model of comparison to develop what she calls "postcolonial comparison," which "involves a particular form of incommensurability: space offers a ground of comparison, but no given basis of equivalence" (xii). Melas's critical aim is to bring a set of diverse literary and theoretical traditions "into relation over a ground of comparison that is in common but not unified" (43).

My notion of comparative literature as a practice of engaging and realizing ideas through a comparative frame of mind differs in several ways from the other models I have sketched above. Above all, my notion of comparison designates an analytics as opposed to an operation performed on comparable or incommensurable objects. In my understanding, a comparativist is invested neither in demonstrating the intrinsic connections between cultural or literary objects as traditional practitioners of comparative literature have been, nor committed to disclosing incommensurable differences, as postcolonial comparativists have been.

Instead, the comparative frame of mind is defined by the fundamental insight that any cultural production is inherently heterogeneous and hence requires no external object of comparison. Put otherwise, a comparative frame of mind does not require the co-presence of two or more cultural or literary archives in practicing comparative literature, for any single object can be read in relation to, or even against, its own context. Relatedly, a comparative frame of mind also takes seriously the arbitrariness of the divisions drawn among cultural productions, and may even make the problematization of genre categories the object of analysis itself.

IV: An Object of Comparison: The Orientalist Photograph

To provide a concrete example of what such a model of comparison would look like, I would like to use some of my recent work on Orientalist photography. I should acknowledge here that my own history of scholarly engagement, moving from comparing French and British travel narratives (in *Belated Travelers*) to studying the figure of the immigrant in US political discourse (in *A Forgetful Nation*) to my current work on Orientalist photography, might understandably be viewed as evidence that I am myself a fallen comparativist. But, in fact, my own intellectual trajectory is an instance of what I wish to argue here: that the practice of comparison may encompass precisely the kind of mobility and apparently single-subject analysis so often thought to define the very antithesis of comparative scholarship.

Now returning to my recent work, I would like to elaborate how one may look at a single object such as Orientalist photography comparatively. To begin, we can study Orientalist photography comparatively in relation to its history. What my comparative approach has enabled me to do, unlike much of the scholarship on the topic by art historians, is to bring into dialogue the rhetoric of the Orientalist image with a historical understanding of its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century. Let me briefly discuss what this approach entails.

The history of photography has been intimately connected with Europe's knowledge about the Middle East since the invention of the medium in 1839. Significantly, at the very meeting in which Daguerre's invention was introduced to the Chamber of Deputies, the presenter, Arago, commented upon "the extraordinary advantages that could have been derived from so exact and rapid a means of reproduction during the expedition to Egypt" (Arago 17). He then recommended that the French government immediately furnish various institutions of knowledge gathering about the Middle East, such as the Institut d'Égypte, with the new technology to further the project of Orientalism. It is not a coincidence that only eighty days after this meeting, a group of French painters and scholars led by Horace Vernet, an Orientalist genre painter who had traveled to Algeria with the French Army in 1833, and the Daguerreotypist Goupil-Fesquet went to Egypt to photograph Egyptian antiquity, or that as early as 1846, Daguerre's British counterpart, William Henry Fox Talbot, published a pamphlet, titled "The Talbotype Applied to Hieroglyphics," which was distributed among archaeologists and Orientalists (Perez 15). Indeed, in subsequent decades, many early European traveling and expeditionary photographers followed Arago's suggestion and went to the Middle East to photograph various places and monuments, making the Middle East one of the original and most popular sites for the practice of photography.

Art historians and museum curators have generally treated early amateur and expeditionary images of the Middle East either as distinct artistic expressions of individual photographers, or as documentary projects to provide European audiences, in particular archeologists and Egyptologists, with verisimilar images of the Holy Land and Egyptian antiquity.[1] What these approaches fail to acknowledge is the network of practices, institutions, and relations that made possible the production of these images in the first place, as well as the politico-cultural context that led them to be so rapaciously consumed as visual and exotic objects. That representations of the "Orient" figured so prominently in the early history of photography, specifically in England and France, speaks to the complex web of cultural, economic, and political relations between Western Europe and the Middle East, relations that provided the logistical means and conceptual paradigms for various photographic projects. Indeed, the photographic undertakings of Du Camp, Teynard, or Salzmann would never have been realized were it not for the great interest in Middle Eastern antiquity generated by Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt and the subsequent establishment of the Institut d'Égypte, the intellectual and discursive contributions of earlier Orientalist scholars, painters, and travelers, and the sponsorship of the French government and institutions. Du Camp, for instance, belonged to the Orientalist institution, Société Orientale, had a government commission from the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce to photograph historic monuments in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, was trained prior to his journey by Gustave Le Gray and Alexis de Lagrange to produce good negatives, was accompanied by Gustave Flaubert who fancifully documented their trip, and was finally able to publish his photographs in 1851 using the printing process developed by Blanquart-Évrard—photographs which became immediately known because of the popular and scholarly interest in Orientalism. Far from being the result of a manic obsession with photography, as Flaubert claimed, Du Camp's images are products of a network of individual and institutional relationships that not only determined the content of his photographs but also provided the technical knowledge and logistical support to execute them. Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* thus contains an intricate interplay of textual and visual traces that inscribe it within the iconography of Orientalism.

Figure 1. Maxime Du Camp, "Le Kaire. Mosquée et tombeau des Ayoubites."
Taken 1849; printed 1852.
The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 84.XO.1303.1.6
Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

As in Frith's *Egypt and Palestine*, Du Camp's photographs in the book, which became an instant success in spite of its costliness, are accompanied with texts containing verbatim extracts from eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Orientalist travel narratives in order to make these images meaningful and legible.[2] These textual precursors not only function as explications for photographic representations of the "Orient," but they also circumscribe what is considered worthy of photography in the Middle East. Put otherwise, the earlier travel narratives play a crucial role in the practice of Orientalist photography by providing it with the knowledge, the framework of classification, and the formal concerns of its representations.

Comparison as an analytics can also enable the possibility of reading the object against its aesthetic context. In my recent work, for example, I study Orientalist photography comparatively in relation to other aesthetic modes of representation. Let me be more specific.

The relation between Orientalist painting and photography is not that of a linear influence but of a circular reciprocity. Even a cursory glance at early Orientalist photography reveals its indebtedness to the conventions of Orientalist romantic paintings: Jacques Moulin's erotic and ethnographic photographs of the Orient explicitly borrow from the works of Romantic painters such as Eugène Delacroix, just as Hammerschmidt's and Frith's photographs of Egyptian antiquity and the monuments of the Holy Land relied on the topographical works of English painters such as David Roberts. Like their precursors, the Orientalist photographers were preoccupied with the past, sentimentalized ruins, turned to the religious and mystical, focused on the mysterious and the exotic, and fetishized the erotic. That Orientalist photography's subject matters and formal concerns were mediated by a particular painterly tradition should come as no surprise since some of the early photographers of the Orient, such as Fenton, Salzmann, and Vernet were accomplished painters or began their careers as (Orientalist) painters, but switched to photography as the new medium provided them with a more efficient means of realistic representation. More surprising, however, are the ways in which photography altered Orientalist genre painting, transforming its techniques and turning its romantic reveries into realist fantasies. As was predicted by Daguerre in 1839, since the mid-nineteenth century, Orientalist painters such as Ludwig Deutsch, Jean-Léon Gérôme, and William Holman Hunt became increasingly dependent on the works of amateur and professional photographers of the Orient such as Henri Béchard, G. Lékégian, Frères, and Sébah to create what was considered documentary realism. That Théophile Gautier compared the new documentary realism and its precise techniques to the objective precision of photography points to the crucial mediating role of the Orientalist photograph.[3]

The circular relation between Orientalist painting and photography at once complicates notions of artistic influence, originality, and origin, compelling us to consider Orientalist representation as the interplay of formalistic and discursive relations. The sometime suspicious attitude among art historians and museum curators toward

Said's discussion of Orientalism as a discourse of colonial power has obscured the crucial links among painters, photographers, archeologists, writers, and travelers, and how their practices and discourse have influenced each other. Frith's *Egypt and Palestine* provides an early example of the interplay of the discursive and the visual. The juxtaposition of his photographs with their descriptions after each image points to the supplementarity of textuality and visuality in the field of Orientalism. Frith's texts are peppered with references to the works of other travelers, archeologists, and Orientalists. Consider the following quotation from Albert Smith, an accomplished traveler at the time, which Frith offers by way of describing the role of photography in providing truthful images of other worlds:

> Artists and writers will study effect, rather than graphic truth. The florid description of some modern book of travel is as different from the actual impressions of ninety-nine people out of a hundred, allowing all these persons to possess average education, perception, and intellect, when painting in their minds the same subject, as the artfully tinted lithograph, or picturesque engraving of the portfolio, or annual, is from the faithful photograph. (n.p.)

Frith responds to this claim by pointing out:

> Yet it does not follow, O Albert Smith, that a photograph, because it is not "over-coloured," is therefore *faithful*. I am all too deeply enamoured of the gorgeous, sunny East, to feign that my insipid, colourless pictures are by any means *just* to her spiritual charms. But indeed, I hold it to be impossible, by any means, fully and truthfully to inform the mind of scenes which are wholly foreign to the eye. There is no effectual substitute for actual travel, but it is my ambition to provide for those to whom circumstances forbid that luxury, *faithful* representations of the scenes I have witnessed, and I shall endeavour to make the simple truthfulness of the Camera, a guide for my Pen. (n.p.)

Frith's palpably defensive commentary on Smith provides an example of how early photographic projects were in dialogue with travel writing and other Orientalist representations. Although Frith underscores the camera's claim to objectivity and truthfulness, his response nonetheless speaks to the complementary relationship between the camera and the pen, photography and witnessing. On the one hand, the supplementary relation between the photographer, archeologists, and earlier travelers to the region, suggests that what became worthy of photographing in "the Orient" was mediated through earlier descriptions and painterly depictions of holy sites and antiquity. On the other hand, by photographically re-presenting these sites, Frith provides further evidence for their studies while at the same time popularizing Orientalism as a discourse. Reaffirming the value of travel and first-hand observation, Frith nonetheless points to the value of photography as a substitute for the Orientalist journey. For him, the Orientalist photograph has a supplementary function, providing the viewer with a visually objective experience of "the Orient," otherwise unavailable to most people. Orientalist photography, therefore, neither displaced its painterly counterpart nor did it outdate its textual precursor, but rather joined them to further the project of Orientalism as a dominant mode of representation.

If early and mid-nineteenth-century European travelogues and Orientalist genre paintings defined what was worthy of photographing in the Orient, the Oriental photograph, in turn, powerfully informed the vision of every traveler who went to the Orient. Evelyn Waugh's description of the scene of his arrival to Constantinople offers a telling example of this mediation:

> It was getting dark by the time that we came back to the mouth of the Golden Horn. A low sea mist was hanging about the town, drifting and mingling with the smoke from the chimneys. The domes and towers stood out indistinctly, but even in their obscurity formed a tremendous prospect; just as the sun was on the horizon, it broke through the clouds, and, in the most dramatic way possible, threw out a great splash of golden light over the minarets of St. Sophia. At least, I think it was St. Sophia. It is one of the delights of one's first arrival by sea at Constantinople to attempt to identify this great church from the photographs among which we have all been nurtured. (140)

Figure 2. Pierre de Gigord, "Panorama de Constantinople." 1920.
The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 96.R.14.A34.001
Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Like other travelers to the region, Waugh seems already familiar with what he would see in Istanbul before his arrival thanks to many photographs of the city and its attractions disseminated throughout the West. Indeed, European travelers were "nurtured" as early as the 1850s by images of Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Egypt by pioneer photographers such as James Robertson, Du Camp, Teynard, and Salzmann. Orientalist photography as a mass medium democratized the access to Orientalist representation by liberating it from its elite confinement in the Salon. The common display of photographs of the Middle East in the World Exhibitions of the second half of the nineteenth century and their circulation in photographic studios provided almost everyone a glimpse of "the Orient."[4] The Orientalist photograph was therefore not merely an expression of a European desire for "the Orient,"[5] but *productive* of the lure of the East. Unlike the phantasmagoric image repertoire of the *Arabian Nights* that had defined and then disillusioned earlier travelers like Nerval and Flaubert, the Orientalist photograph was constitutive of the "Oriental" real that made the traveler's encounter with the reality of "the Orient" more meaningful, albeit somewhat déjà-vu. Unlike the intertext of the *Arabian Nights* or the romantic paintings of Delacroix, the Orientalist photograph did not counter the traveler's own experience of the "Oriental" real by making it seem banal, but rather enhanced it through the pleasure of identification. The photographic image was not merely an indexical reference point for the Orientalist traveler, but the mediator of his or her desire for "the Orient." The Orientalist photograph thus intensified the desire for "the Orient," helping it grow as a cultural phenomenon throughout the West.

As well, photography's potential for the evolution of Orientalism as an "objective" discourse was widely acknowledged early on. For example, in a review of Maxime Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, Louis de Cormenin wrote:

> A daguerrian excursion is thus fortuitous from the dual points of view of eternal art and the written voyage (*voyage cursif*), above all when this excursion is undertaken in little known, unique, and strange countries of which science possesses only insufficient data. Nor is it rash to say that the publication of Maxime Du Camp completes, in brief and comprehensible fashion, the works of Denon and des Champollion-Figeac, and opens a new way of investigation to Orientalists, just as it offers a horizon particular to artists' studies. Art, as much as science, can gain precious information from [such photographs]. The intellectual movement directed towards the Orient can, from now on, take it as the helping hand (*vade mecum*) of its research, and the most intelligent and the most definitive of guides. (98; my translation)[6]

The new medium, which is viewed as a smart "helping hand," is valued for its potential contribution to the arts and the sciences. In his review, Cormenin underscores the importance of photography to the project of Orientalism in that it completes the works of earlier scholars like Denon and Des Champollion-Figeac. Photography, according to him, contributes to the production of "scientific" knowledge about non-European societies by providing new and objective "data." Indeed, photographic works such as Du Camp's were valued not only for advancing the research and artistic projects of earlier Orientalists, but also for paving the way for new approaches to the exploration and representation of "the Orient" and other non-Western societies visually, thus critically enabling the Orientalist will to knowledge.

Figure 3. Maxime Du Camp, "Haute Égypte. Vue générale d'Esneh."
Taken 1850; printed 1852.
The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 84.XO.1303.2.3
Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

V. Conclusion

Rejecting Werner P. Friederich's "view that comparatists 'cannot and dare not encroach upon other territories,'" Wellek wrote, "Everybody has the right to study any question even if it is confined to a single work in a single language and everybody has the right to study even history or philosophy or any other topic. He runs of course the risk of criticism from the specialists, but is a risk he has to take" ("Crisis" 290-91). The notion of comparison I have elaborated on here is not only in accordance with Wellek's observation that as comparativists we have every right to study any question even if it is confined to a single work, but also suggests that infringing upon others' specialized territories can actually enable new insights and ideas. Indeed, one of the critical motivations behind my current project has been the problematic claims by some art historians and literary scholars that Orientalism no longer provides a viable conceptual framework to study nineteenth-century representations of the Middle East by European writers, travelers, and photographers.

My comparative approach to Orientalist photography has enabled me to critique both the postcolonial understanding of Orientalism as merely an ideological discourse of power, as well as the neutral art historical definition of the term as a particular artistic genre, and to posit a notion of Orientalism as a network of aesthetic, economic, and political relationships that cross national and historical boundaries. Understood in this way, I argue that Orientalism is indispensible to the understanding of nineteenth-century photography of the Middle East. Whether considered in the context of their production and dissemination in the nineteenth century or in relation to their current afterlives as collectable objects or archives, photographs of the "Orient" become meaningful and legible only if they are considered in terms of the geopolitical distinctions, economic interests, and cultural assumptions about the Middle East and its people.

Notes

1. For an example of the first approach, see Talbot; and for an example of the second approach, see Lyons et al.

2. For a discussion of the commercial aspect of Frith's photographic business and his collaboration with the London-based firm of Negretti and Zambra, see Nickel 68-71.

3. See Gautier, *Les Beaux-Arts en Europe*.

4. For a discussion of photography in relation to World Exhibitions, see Souto and de Matos.

5. For a discussion of "the desire for the Orient" vs. "the Orientalist desire for knowledge," see Behdad 18-35.

6. "C'est donc une bonne fortune au double point de vue de l'art éternel et du voyage cursif, qu'une excursion daguerrienne, surtout quand cette excursion est entreprise dans des pays peu connus, singuliers, curieux, sur lesquels la science ne posséde que d'insuffisantes données. Aussi n'est-il pas téméraire de dire que la publication de M. Maxime Du Camp complète, sous une forme brève et compréhensible, l'ourvrage des Denon et des Champollion-Figeac, et ouvre une voie nouvelle à l'investigation des orientalistes, comme un horizon particulier aux études des artistes. L'art, à l'égal de la science, y pourra puiser de précieux, renseignements. Le movement intellectual dirigé vers l'Orient peut désormais le prendre comme le vade-mecum de ses recherches et le manuel le plus certain et le plus intelligent."

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