

SULTAN'S COURT BY ALAIN GROSRICHAUD



The S u l t a n ' s C o u r t

EUROPEAN FANTASIES OF THE EAST

ALAIN GROSRICHAUD
Translated by LIZ HERON
Introduced by MLADEN DOLAR

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Review

“What Said’s Orientalism achieves in breadth, The Sultan’s Court provides in depth: the precise outline—the elementary formula—of the sexual-political fantasy of ‘Oriental Despotism’ which structures our perception of the Muslim countries from the seventeenth century to our own times, and on to which Western ideology projects its own inconsistencies and repressed traumas. Combining French elegance and clarity of style with the highest conceptual stringency, this immensely readable book demonstrates the extraordinary potential of Lacanian psychoanalysis for social analysis. A classic of the theory of ideology, to be ranged with the greatest achievements of Adorno, Foucault or Jameson!”—Slavoj Žižek

About the Author

Mladen Dolar taught for 20 years in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he now works as a Senior Research Fellow. He is the author of a number of books, most recently (with Slavoj Žižek) "Opera's Second Death".

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Edward Said's Orientalism has been much praised for its account of Western perceptions of the Orient. But the English-speaking world has for too long been unaware of another classic in the same field which appeared in France only a year later. Alain Grosrichard's *The Sultan's Court* is a fascinating survey of Western accounts of "Oriental despotism" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It focuses particularly on portrayals of the Ottoman Empire and the supposedly enigmatic structure of the despot's court—the seraglio—with its viziers, janissaries, mutes, dwarfs, eunuchs and countless wives.

Drawing on the writings of travellers and philosophers such as Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire, Grosrichard goes further than merely cataloguing their intense fascination with the vortex of capriciousness, violence, cruelty, lust, sexual perversion and slavery which they perceived in the seraglio. Deftly and subtly using a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework, he describes the process as one in which these leading Enlightenment figures were constructing a fantastic Other to counterpose their project of a rationally based society. *The Sultan's Court* seeks not to refute the misconceptions but rather explore the nature of the fantasy and what it can reveal about modern political thought and power relations more generally."

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