Orientalism

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDWARD W. SAID

Edward Said was born into a Palestinian Christian family in Jerusalem in 1935. Although both Said's parents had been born in the Ottoman Empire, the entire family was granted United States citizenship following his father's voluntary service for the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I. Said's family left Jerusalem at the beginning of the 1947-1949 Palestine War, first relocating to Egypt and then to America. Although he struggled with disciplinary issues in high school, Said was successful in secondary education, receiving his BA in English literature from Princeton, and a Master's and PhD from Harvard. Said became a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in 1963, where he remained for his entire career. Trained primarily as a literary critic, Said became a public intellectual with the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978. This book became one of the foundational documents of the new scholarly discipline of Post-Colonial Studies, which seeks to understand the long-term social, political, and cultural consequences of colonialism and imperialism on formerly colonized societies. Said was also a vocal advocate of Palestinian resistance, especially after the 1967 Six-Day War. Said's anti-Zionist positions and his critique of U.S. foreign policy, especially as it related to the Middle East and Islam, as well as his intellectual critiques of well-established and influential Orientalist scholars in *Orientalism*, made him a controversial figure. During his life, his political stances drew the attention of the FBI and resulted in numerous death threats and attempts to oust him from his academic position; once his office at Columbia University was even firebombed. Said died in 2003 at the age of 67, following a long battle with leukemia.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Edward Said firmly locates Orientalism and Orientalist discourse in the context of a long history of exchange and contention between Christian Europe and the Muslim and Arab cultures of the Near East. These include the establishment of trade relationships between Europe and the countries of the Silk Road and similar trade routes; the establishment of a Umayyad rule in Spain and the resulting centuries of military campaigns by which Christian rules reconquered that territory; and the Crusades fought over control of the Levant—modern day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jorda, and Palestine—between Christian European forces and Muslim Arab forces between 1029 and 1291. In the 18th and 19th centuries, European colonial ambitions meant that European countries had colonized over 80% of the earth—including all of the areas that fall under the thought-category of the Orient—by 1914. In the later 20th century, Orientalism is a concern for Edward Said because of contemporary discussions of and beliefs about Arab and Muslim subjects and countries as they related to American geopolitical plans. Two events that shaped public discourse were the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt and its Arab allies and the 1973 Oil Embargo, during which OPEC (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Kuwait, Libya, Indonesia, and Venezuela) stopped exporting oil to countries (including the United States) that had supported Israel during the Six-Day War.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Orientalism is a work of cultural criticism that examines colonial history and asserts a need for Western scholars, policymakers, and ordinary citizens to seriously reevaluate their received ideas about countries and cultures that have been absorbed under the umbrella of the Orient—particularly Arab and Muslim people, as well as those living in the areas of modern-day Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula. In its plea for reappraisal and its attempts to give a voice to the peoples whose voices have been subsumed by Orientalist discourse, it does similar work to Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*. This book, published in 1950, is a sort of call to arms for colonial and former colonial subjects to free themselves from the narratives about their own inferiority that European nations used to subjugate them. Like Orientalism, Discourse on Colonialism is also considered a foundational text of post-colonial literary and cultural criticism. In creating the framework for Orientalism, Edward Said consciously draws on the example of Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1929). In them, Gramsci elaborates on the idea of cultural hegemony—the way a ruling class shapes a shared identity for a diverse population in order to better achieve its aims—and makes an eloquent argument for the ways in which the personal and the political are related, making it incumbent on responsible intellectuals and scholars to examine honesty their personal, political, and intellectual commitments.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Orientalism
- **When Written:** 1970s
- **Where Written:** The United States
- **When Published:** 1978
- **Literary Period:** Postcolonialism
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, Literary Criticism, Cultural Studies,

Postcolonial Studies

- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Music to My Ears. In addition to his scholarly activities, Said was a devoted and accomplished musician. In 1999, he co-founded the West-Eastern Divian Orchestra with Argentine Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim. This orchestra, based in Spain, brings together musicians from across what was once known as "the Orient"—Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria.

Western Hegemony. Edward Said's allegedly disliked his name, Edward, which his Anglophile father had selected in honor of Edward VIII of England, who was still the Prince of Wales at the time of Said's birth.

PLOT SUMMARY

Edward Said begins his book by laying out the multiple and liked definitions of Orientalism. In one sense, Orientalism is an academic discipline and anyone who studies or writes about the **Orient** is an Orientalist. But Orientalism is also a discourse, a style of thinking predicated on a belief in a fundamental distinction between the Orient and the West, and it's the way that people have used this discourse to dominate and restructure the Orient to serve Western interests. Then, Said outlines the themes the book will explore in its survey of Orientalism's many faces: the distinction between pure and political knowledge; the unique position of Britain, France, and America as Orientalist societies; and the way that personal and social investments color any scholar's work, whether that scholar acknowledges them or not.

The first chapter begins with British attitudes toward the question of Egypt and India at the turn of the 20th century, then flashes forward to Henry Kissinger, writing about the political uprisings and discontents in the Near East, Southeast Asia, and Asia in the second half of the 20th century. These accounts are united by their use of Orientalist discourse. The academic discipline of Orientalism was founded in 1312 when medieval European universities began to offer instruction in Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew, but some of its assumptions—namely, about the irreconcilable difference between the East and West, the sense of danger posed to the West by the East, and the Western desire to dominate the East—date back to the ancient Greeks.

These ideas quietly circulate, but they aren't expanded much until the end of the 18th century. Two events at this time—an increasing interest in the study of ancient languages and Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798—lead to an Orientalist renaissance. Now there is demand in Europe for experts to explain the Orient to a European audience. Linguists and men of science like Silvestre de Sacy, William Jones, Jean-Baptiste-Jospeh Fourier, and others rise to the occasion and begin to do this work. Their highly mediated version of Semitic and Indian cultures begins to solidify Orientalist discourse—the set of received ideas that limit and define what one can say about the region and its cultures.

In the 19th century, Orientalist discourse has become quite entrenched in French and British societies. This can be seen in the way it underwrites literary and artistic creations, such as the novels of Gustave Flaubert and Gérard de Nerval, among others. Orientalism is increasingly used in this period to justify and enable colonial projects in Egypt and the Near East as European colonial empires reach their greatest extents around the turn of the 20th century. Academic studies like Edward William Lane's survey of Egyptian customs and the travelogues of François-René Chateaubriand, Alphonse Lamartine, and Richard Burton both confirm and promulgate Orientalist ideas, with an increasingly narrow focus on Arab and Muslim subjects.

In the early 20th century, Orientalism becomes increasingly geopolitical and less academic as trade and modernization increase but Britain and France lose colonial territory in the East. By now, Orientalism is so entrenched that the figure of the White Man—an allegedly benevolent but often domineering man intent on modernizing people he sees as savages—appears both in literature (Rudyard Kipling wrote many books centering the White Man) and in real life in the figure of men like T. E. Lawrence who travel to the Orient as agents of British imperial power.

In the post-war period, however, Orientalism reaches a crisis as it becomes clear that the discourse cannot adequately explain things like nationalist and independence movements in Egypt and Iraq because the discourse has always posited that Oriental subjects are irrational, passive, and incapable of facing changing circumstances. Pressed to explain these puzzling developments, Orientalism migrates toward the social sciences from the humanities, and it becomes increasingly policy focused. Orientalists of this period (for instance, Gibb, Massignon, and Grunebaum) make strenuous efforts to explain Muslim and Arab subjects to the West, although their explanations are mostly rehashings of previous Orientalist discourse that fail to move the conversation forward.

It's in this context that Said sets out to unveil Orientalist discourse, show that it's more committed to promulgating its own received ideas or to advancing the cause of Western colonialism and imperialism, and explore how Orientalists' assertions that they are rational and neutral have made it harder for them to do meaningful work. As a way forward, Said suggests that academic disciplines need to consider their ties to social and political power structures and disinvest from colonial and imperial ideology. He also makes an impassioned plea for empathy and for a reconsideration of Oriental subjects

as human beings, complex, diverse, and homogenous, rather than as the unified bloc that Orientalism has made them out to be for the past nine centuries and more.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Edward Said – The author of *Orientalism*, Edward Said was a 20th-century Palestinian American literary scholar and cultural critic who taught at Columbia University in New York City. Troubled by the representations of the so-called **Orient**—where he himself was born and grew up as an Oriental subject—Said sets out in this book to analyze the discourse of Orientalism; trace its history; and show how it has been used to vilify Semitic peoples, including both Jewish and Arabic or Muslim subjects and underwrite colonial expansion.

Orientalists – The Orientalist is a character type in Oriental discourse. An Orientalist is, broadly speaking, any person who subscribes to Orientalist discourse. More specifically, however, Orientalists are usually people with special expertise in the area of the world described as the **Orient**. Sometimes this expertise is academic, with roots in the study of language (like Edward William Lane, Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan, William Jones, Hamilton Gibb) religion (Louis Massignon), history, anthropology, or sociology. Other times, it's the result of public service, as with former colonial administrators and British politicians Arthur James Balfour and Lord Cromer or British soldier T. E. Lawrence. An Orientalist can also be an interested layperson who absorbs and replicates Orientalist discourse in travel narratives or fiction (like Gustave Flaubert, Alphonse Lamartine, Françoise-René de Chateaubraind, Gérard de Nerval, Richard Burton, Rudyard Kipling, or Maurice Barrès). Orientalists see themselves as rational, almost scientific observers and interpreters of the world. They consider themselves experts in their own topic of interest but, by extension, as having something meaningful and valid to say about the Orient or Oriental subjects more generally.

Oriental Subject – The Oriental subject is a character type in Orientalist discourse. Oriental subjects are two things at once. On the one hand, they are real human beings who live in the Near East (Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey) and beyond (India, Indochina, China, Japan). As such they are often the target of geopolitical control by the West. On the other, they are a racially stereotyped caricature of the kinds of people the Orientalist imagines live in the **Orient**, a place that the Orientalist creates out of their own assumptions, interpretation, and imagination. As such, they are often the target of Orientalist discourse which seeks to silence their voices and explain them to themselves and the rest of the world.

Hamilton Gibb – Hamilton Gibb was a 20th-century historian and Orientalist, born in Egypt and educated in Scotland and England, who ended his career in the United States. As an Orientalist, the initial focus of Gibb's studies was Semitic languages. Apart from his early life, most of Gibb's contact with the **Orient** was through Orientalist scholarship and institutions; he studied at the University of London's School of Oriental Studies, which was founded by the British Government in 1917. Although Gibb's training was in the study of languages, much of his scholarship focused on the religion of Islam, which he described to his Western audiences as a unitary and overwhelming force over the lives and culture of its adherents. In doing so, he demonstrates a key feature of Orientalist discourse, by which expertise in one area (for Gibb, Arabic) is understood as expertise to explain anything and everything about the Orient (in this case, Islam). Gibb's scholarship also indulges in the typical assumptions of Orientalist discourse, like constructing an Orient and a group of Oriental subjects that are hegemonic, monolithic, and unchanging across time. In *Orientalism*, Gibb represents for Said the culmination of the academic institution of Orientalism, as well as the pivot in the 20th century away from the academy and the humanities and firmly toward government institutions and social sciences. Gibb was a strong advocate for the expansion of Anglo-American Oriental Studies programs in the name of political power.

White Man – The White Man is a character type that appears frequently in the works of British poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling. The White Man is strongly associated with the British citizen. Like the Orientalist (there is indeed a lot of overlap between the two), the White Man has specialist knowledge—the knowledge of civilization and power conferred to him by dint of being a member of the White race and a Western power. The White Man has a strong sense of his superiority over Oriental subjects, and also a finely tuned sense of responsibility toward them, which he uses to explain his acts of dominion over them. When pressed, he could and would turn to violence to impose his will on the world. Living examples of the White Man ideology include T. E. Lawrence and Richard Burton.

Napoleon – Napoleon was a French military officer and politician who rose to prominence following the French Revolution, after which he became the first leader of the French Republic. Famed for his military powers, Napoleon led a series of successful military campaigns in Europe and beyond around the turn of the 19th century. In 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt in an attempt to compete with British interests in India. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt kicks off what Said identifies as the modern (18th and 19th century) Orientalist revolution, one in which knowledge of the **Orient** became increasingly valuable as a tool of empire. In this light, Napoleon isn't just important as an enthusiastic lay Orientalist in his own right (he read as much scholarship as he could consume before

launching his expedition) but as a patron of the field. Napoleon brought more than 100 scientists and scholars with him to Egypt and charged them with studying the culture. Their findings were published in 1809 in the multi-volume *Description de l'Égypte*. Napoleon commissioned works from academic Orientalist Silvestre de Sacy and Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier.

Silvestre de Sacy – Silvestre de Sacy was a French nobleman, diplomat, and Orientalist who studied Semitic languages before deciding to stake his career on Orientalism, which was a growing field in the late 18th century. Sacy's contributions to the field of Orientalism include three textbooks on Arabic, in which he collected educational and instructive excerpts for students to study. Because of his position and because his excerpts were heavily drawn on by subsequent generations of scholars, Said names Sacy one of the founding fathers of modern (that is, 18th and 19th century) Orientalism. As such, he doesn't just help to define the limits of the field of study but to establish the tone of Orientalist discourse. In this vein, Sacy favors the excerpt and the tableau—forms of representation that freeze and isolate elements of the **Orient** which are presented as typical—and he emphasizes the necessary role of the trained expert—the Orientalist—in mediating between the primary sources and the modern public.

Louis Massignon – Louis Massignon was a 20th-century French Orientalist and scholar of Islam. Although he was a devout Catholic and although he was trained long after Orientalist discourse had ossified its representation of Oriental subjects (and more specifically, Arab or Muslim subjects) into a racist caricature, Massignon was in general more sympathetic in his portrayals of Islam and Muslim people than his contemporaries. However, in *Orientalism*, Said uses Massignon's legacy to dissect the ways in which contemporary Orientalists continue to construct personal visions of the **Orient** based on received ideas, stereotypes, and their own cultural contexts rather than through a more neutral exploration of the regions, cultures, and people under consideration. Thus, Massignon's sympathy for Islam leads him to rewrite and reinterpret the faith and its history through the lens of his own Catholic religiosity.

Gustave Grunebaum – Gustave Grunebaum was a 20th-century Austrian Orientalist who moved to the United States in the 1930s to escape the Nazis. His positions at the University of Chicago and UCLA gave him clout in post-war American Oriental Studies. Trained in Arabic languages and literatures, Grunebaum nevertheless spent much of his career focused on the topic of Islam as a religious and cultural force. He depicted Islam in polemical terms as a backward, ignorant, violent, and antithetical to Western culture and social progress. These depictions, many of which were published in the 1940s and 1950s coincided with increasing American investment in the Near East and its involvement in the creation of the state of Israel in that period. Thus, for Said, Grunebaum represents the way that the discourse of Orientalism was both increasingly brought to bear on specifically Arab and Muslim subjects, and the way that academic Orientalism had become more or less a tool of political power by the second half of the 20th century.

William Jones – William Jones was an English linguist, polymath, and colonial administrator in India in the late 18th century. To many, Jones is the undisputed founder of Orientalism. For Said, he is the undisputed founder of modern (18th and 19th century) Orientalism because the goals of all his scholarship were to learn about the **Orient**, to compare the Orient to the West, and to rule the Orient. His study of indigenous Indian law contributed to the application of British law in the colony, and his study of Sanskrit led to the postulation of the Indo-European language from which most modern languages of Northern Europe derive. In addition, his participation in learned societies contributed to the expansion of Orientalist knowledge—and discourse—throughout the period of colonial expansion.

Ernest Renan – Ernest Renan was an 19th-century French Orientalist who studied Semitic languages and the history of Christianity and the Bible. Belonging to the generation of scholarship after Sacy, Renan was an important intellectual figure in his time (the later 19th and early 20th centuries), although his work wasn't without controversy. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said offers Renan as an example of the kind of Orientalist who who draws from their study of the past to self-consciously create the **Orient** for others to consume. In his patriarchal view of history, Renan also exemplifies some of the latent sexism and gender dynamics in Orientalist discourse.

T. E. Lawrence – Thomas Edward Lawrence was a 19th-century British military officer, diplomat, and writer. A student of history and an archeologist, Lawrence's academic career was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I, during which he served as an interpreter until he was dispatched with a group of other British officers to oversee the Arab Revolt. Lawrence embedded himself with a group of Arab revolutionaries whom the British supported in an uprising as part of a British strategy to further undermine and weaken the Ottoman Empire. A vivid writer and storyteller, Lawrence's later accounts of this time would immortalize him as "Lawrence of Arabia." In *Orientalism*, Said sees Lawrence as a living example of Rudyard Kipling's White Man character type in how Lawrence considers himself the kind of enlightened leader the Arab revolutionaries need because he accepts as truth Orientalist assertions about the backwardness and ineffectuality of Oriental subjects.

Gustave Flaubert – Gustave Flaubert was a 19th-century French novelist who traveled extensively in Greece, Egypt, Turkey, and Lebanon between 1849 and 1850. Deeply influenced both by the latent Orientalism in 19th century French culture and also by his experiences in his **Orient**, Flaubert's account of his trip and his use of Orientalist motifs in his later fiction show how pervasive and hegemonic

Orientalism and Orientalist discourse had become in Western European culture by the 19th century.

Richard Francis Burton – Richard Francis Burton was a 19th-century British explorer, adventurer, and writer, and military officer. Although he studied Arabic formally, Burton was a perpetual outsider who was expelled from university as a disciplinary action before he could graduate. Despite this early severing of ties with academic Orientalism, Burton's life and work—particularly his travel narrative, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*—show the extent to which Orientalist discourse steeped the worldviews of 19th century Europeans. Burton deploys the usual Orientalist tropes in his narrative, including a sharp division between the West and the **Orient**; attributing both exoticism and backwardness to Oriental subjects; and a sense of Western superiority and potential geopolitical power.

Arthur James Balfour – Arthur James Balfour was a British colonial administrator and politician who lived in from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries. A staunch proponent of British colonial authority and apologist for British colonial projects, Balfour is a useful figure in the history presented by *Orientalism* because he exemplifies the ways in which Orientalist discourse aligned itself with and became a tool of colonial oppression in the second half of the 19th century. Balfour also authored the Balfour Declaration, which announced the British government's support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland (the modern-day state of Israel) in Palestine, as part of the British government's plan to divide the land of the former Ottoman Empire.

Lord Cromer – Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, was a British statesman and colonial administrator who lived in the last 19th and early 20th centuries. Cromer initially served the British colonial administration in India and later became the controller-general and consul-general in Egypt in the years immediately before and during the British occupation of that country. Like James Balfour, his contemporary and fellow politician, in *Orientalism*, Lord Cromer exemplifies the marriage of Orientalist discourse to political power. Cromer often wrote and spoke about "subject races" (Oriental subjects) whom he claimed needed to be studied by Orientalists so that Western governments could understand and control them better.

Edward William Lane – Edward William Lane was a 19th-century Orientalist whose training was in the Arabic language. In his youth, Lane spent two years traveling in Egypt. He is best known for the book he wrote about those experiences, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. In Orientalism, Edward Said looks at the way that Lane's accounts draw on Orientalist discourse and present an essentialized version of Egypt and Islam that has little to do with the modern (c. 1830s) Egyptians he purports to discuss.

Françoise-René de Chateaubriand – Françoise-René de Chateaubriand was a French politician, diplomat, and writer who lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As a lay (that is, non-academic) Orientalist, Chateaubriand's contribution lies in the account he wrote of his trip through the Near East (Asia Minor, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Tunisia) in 1806. In *Orientalism*, Said uses Chateaubriand to illustrate how pervasive the ideas of Orientalist discourse had become even in the early 19th century. His work helps to perpetuate ideas like the hopeless degeneracy of the modern **Orient** (which therefore needs to be conquered for its own good), and it typifies the Orientalist's sense of their ability to control the world by circumscribing it with language.

Alphonse Lamartine – Alphonse Lamartine was a French politician and writer of the 19th century. He wrote an account of his travels in the **Orient**—modern-day Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Syria—in the 1830s. For Said in Orientalism, Lamartine shows how Orientalist discourse perpetuated itself outside of the academy, because Lamartine prepared for his trip by reading scholarly Orientalist works and, when he didn't like what he saw in real life on his trip, didn't hesitate to impose Orientalist theories and ideas on reality.

Gérard de Nerval – Gérard de Nerval was a 19th-century French writer. Like Flaubert, Nerval's contributions to Orientalist discourse include an account of a trip to Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey (following a nervous breakdown) in 1842 and 1843, as well as works of fiction set in his version of the Orient and perpetuating racist and essentializing stereotypes of Oriental subjects.

Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier – A French mathematician, Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier was one of the scientists and scholars Napoleon brought along on his Egyptian expedition in 1798. Fourier subsequently became the secretary of the Institut d'Égypte (now known as the Egyptian Scientific Institute), which Napoleon founded in Cario at that time. In his role, Fourier wrote the preface to the *Description de l'Égypte*, which became a focal and foundational text of modern (18th and 19th century) Orientalist discourse. In the preface, Fourier emphasizes the historical importance of Egypt, its current state of cultural degradation, and its need for the strong leadership of a European country like France.

Henry Kissinger – Henry Kissinger was an American diplomat of the 20th century. Edward Said offers Kissinger as an example of contemporary Orientalism, in which Orientalist discourse has become almost wholly subsumed by the political sciences and governmental organizations. Despite his long years of experience as a diplomat, Kissinger's writing betrays the stamp of Orientalism in its assumptions about the difference between the West and a generalized and decontextualized **Orient**, its casual dismissal of the agency and power of Oriental subjects, and its need to establish the authority of its author and its author's (Western) society.

Maurice Barrès – Maurice Barrès was a French philosopher and writer who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He published an account of his travels in Egypt in the early 20th century. Said uses Barrès's work to demonstrate the continuity of Orientalist discourse, both outside of the academy where it had begun (Barrès was writing for a popular audience) and into the 20th century, even in places like France which had, by then, lost their colonial toehold in the Near East.

Karl Marx – Karl Marx was German philosopher and political theorist of the 19th century. Although his intellectual and philosophical work, focused mainly on class conflict, lie outside the purview of Orientalism, his writings about the fate of Indian people under the British colonial government nevertheless help Said illustrate how pervasive Orientalist discourse—particularly its dehumanizing of Oriental subjects—had become by the mid-19th century.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Rudyard Kipling – Rudyard Kipling was a 19th-century British writer who was born in India and whose childhood in the British **Orient** influenced his work. In *Orientalism*, Said only discusses Kipling's work briefly, mainly finding Kipling useful to his analysis for Kipling's use of the White Man character type.

Ferdinand de Lesseps – Ferdinand de Lesseps was a 19th-century French diplomat and developer who oversaw the construction of the Suez Canal, a project that occupied him from 1854-1869.

TERMS

Discourse – In *Orientalism*, **Edward Said** uses the concept of a discourse as articulated by a French cultural theorist named Michel Foucault. In this context, a discourse is a group of ideas or facts that are accepted as true not because they necessarily are true, but because enough people participating in the discourse believe that they are true. In the context of Orientalist discourse, for example, early **Orientalists** tended to see an essential, irreconcilable difference between the West (Europe) and the Orient (the Near East and beyond). Based on this assumption, subsequent Orientalists produced successive visions of the world that confirmed the essential difference between the West and the Orient.

Hegemony – Cultural hegemony is a concept developed in early Marxist theory. It holds that the ruling class of a society can gain or reinforce power by shaping the worldview of that society to fit their aims and goals. Self-reinforcing discourses can become a tool of cultural hegemony. In the context of Orientalism, certain Orientalist ideas—the utter foreignness or irrationality of **Oriental subjects**, for example—served the cultural hegemony of Europe insofar as they provided justifications for European countries' imperial and colonial ambitions.

Semitic – Semitic refers to the cultural and ethnic groups associated with the family of languages that include Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, ancient Phoenician, ancient Akkadian, and others. The term was coined in the early 19th century as the study of ancient languages (philology) was uncovering the associations between different languages and cultures in the ancient world. Although in the contemporary period, "semitic" has come to be strongly associated with the Jewish culture, throughout much of the 18th and 19th centuries, the umbrella term lumped Jewish people with other cultures of the so-called Orient, including Muslim and Arab people.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE WEST'S VIEW OF THE EASTERN WORLD

Edward Said's *Orientalism* explores the ways in which the West (broadly speaking, Northern Europe and eventually America) talk about and relate to the **Orient**—which mainly stands for modern-day Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. Positioning Orientalism as a uniquely powerful discourse because of the ways in which it has both been fed by and used to feed European colonial ambitions, Said spends much of his book articulating Orientalism's basic tenets and tracking them through time. His analysis shows how unexamined biases, prejudices, and geopolitical goals have always warped the West's study of Eastern history. This means that Orientalism says more about the West that created it than the East it purports to study. Indeed, Said even claims that the Orient as constituted by the discourse of Orientalism is a wholly fictitious entity that's fundamentally opposed to any real understanding of the region under consideration.

Some of the basic tenets of Orientalism relate to the discourse's understanding of itself, and others to its depiction of Oriental subjects. As an academic field, Orientalism flourished and expanded in the fertile intellectual ground of the European Enlightenment. It thus sees itself as a rational, even scientific field that merely repeats facts as they exist in the world. But in its depiction of Oriental subjects, Orientalism betrays its biases, blind spots, and prejudices. It is committed to the idea of a fundamental division between the East and the West, with the further implication that the West is rational, empirical, and superior while the Orient is irrational,

superstitious, and inferior. Commitment to this fundamental division leads Orientalism to indulge in sweeping generalizations and a de-historicized approach to its study. In other words, Orientalism creates an idea of the Orient as hegemonic, timeless, and ancient. Because it has no connection to the modern world, it can only be studied, understood, and explained by trained experts—Orientalists. And because the Orient is so unified, anything said by one Orientalist is automatically assumed to apply to any other aspect of the Orient. This unity of discourse offers a simplified (and consequently incorrect) view of the Orient and is fundamentally dehumanizing, essentializing, and divorced from reality. Yet it is worth studying because it is a discourse that has exercised a powerful hold over Western imaginations—and Western applications of power—around the world from the Middle Ages up to the present day.

KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

Because the lands that comprise it are situated close to and have been in almost constant geopolitical and economic contact with Europe since the bronze age Trojan War, the concept of the **Orient** has a long and rich history in the Western imagination. Although this relationship has sometimes been characterized by a more reciprocal balance of power, Europe eventually gained a stable upper hand in the 18th and 19th centuries. Edward Said sees Orientalist discourse consolidating, reinforcing, and driving these geopolitical gains in the way it articulates a relationship between knowledge, authority, and power. Two key features of Orientalism drive this connection. First, Orientalist discourse refuses to let Oriental subjects speak for or about themselves. By depriving Oriental subjects of their voices, expert Orientalists gain the space to explain them, their beliefs, and their actions as they wish to. Recreating the Orient through scholarly discourse, the Orientalist exercises power over it and forces it to signify what the Orientalist wants it to signify.

Second, and relatedly, Orientalism as an academic discipline gains more and more prestige and power as it associates itself with the geopolitical ambitions of Western governments. Thus, both Orientalism and the forces it serves continue to use the power of knowledge as a tool of domination. When Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, he ingratiated himself with Egyptians using his knowledge of Islam. He also founded an institute charged with gathering information about the country, its history, and its culture that he could use to serve his imperial ambitions there. Similar attempts to circumscribe, define, and limit Oriental autonomy continue into the late 20th century, in which Western governments fund and benefit from the research of Orientalists. Thus, despite plentiful evidence for the Orient's desire (and ability) to represent itself in the contemporary era, Orientalism protects itself (and the interests of the governments and corporations it serves) by maintaining a stranglehold on knowledge and representation of its subjects.

BELIEF, CONSENSUS, AND REALITY

Edward Said's work reveals Orientalism as a discourse (that is, an agreed-upon set up beliefs) rather than the empirical, observational science it has long understood itself to be. In tracing the history and development of Orientalism, then, Said explains how discourses shape reality in a more general sense. Although the ideas that make up a discourse may start with empirical observation, they eventually take on so much power that they overpower everything else. Whatever a person experiences that confirms discourse reinforces it. Conversely, if a person experiences something that contradicts the discourse, then the discourse demands that they understand this personal experience (not the discourse) as somehow incorrect. In the realm of Orientalism, when reality intervenes, the Orientalist shoehorns these occurrences into their previously existing worldview, making reality serve the discourse, rather than adjusting the discourse to reality. One example of this is taking Egyptian nationalist movements in the early 20th century or Palestinian resistance to the establishment of Israel in the late 20th century as evidence for Muslim religious intolerance rather than as a political statement.

Because discourse is hegemonic and ubiquitous, it operates at all levels of society, from the government on down. Orientalist scholars tend to align their scholarship with their society's geopolitical aims, and they tend to accept received ideas (for instance, that the East and West are fundamentally opposite to each other) as truth. Popular depictions reinforce cultural assumptions and biases about Oriental subjects, too, from Flaubert's sexualized and exploitable Oriental women to modern American pop culture's depictions of Arab people as dangerous malefactors reinforce cultural assumptions and biases about Oriental subjects. In general, Said shows the way that discourse thrives on remaining unchallenged and the ways in which it works to silence and sideline challenges. He thus shows why dismantling it is important and guides readers on the important, initial steps of that work, which involve seeing and understanding how discourse itself works.

THE PERSISTENCE OF RACISM

As Edward Said traces the cultural continuity of Orientalist discourse from the 8th century BCE in *The Iliad* to opinion pieces authored by American statesman Henry Kissinger within a few years of *Orientalism*'s publication, it becomes clear that Orientalism is based on racist depictions of Oriental subjects, particularly Semitic ones. Orientalism casts these people as menacing and dangerous, backward, tribal, simple-minded, and incapable of rational thought, and other harmful things. As Said traces these ideas

across time, he shows how little they themselves change, even if the areas subsumed under the **Orient** change. Even as places are added and subtracted, a primary identification between the Orient with Semitic languages, Semitic cultures, and Semitic religions remains. The history of Orientalism is, then, the history of antisemitic and anti-Islamic racism, at least in part.

Contemporary iterations of Orientalism separate Jewish and Muslim subjects, although, as Said points out, there is considerable overlap in the way a virulently antisemitic book like *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* depicts Jewish people and the way the British Zionists describe Arab people. Said traces this shift to European and American interest and investment in Israel, with the implication that it can be revoked at any time that it might serve the West's interests to return Jewish people into the purview of Orientalism. Looking at the way historical shifts displace but do not dispel racism, *Orientalism* asks readers to consider the lingering effects of such dehumanizing biases and prejudices and to become alert to the way they operate both overtly and implicitly in the discourse of modern Western societies.

THE PERSONAL AS POLITICAL

The way that discourses shape reality and the relationship of knowledge and power—ideas that Edward Said explores at length in *Orientalism*—suggest that no one can have a purely disinterested view of their own culture or anyone else's. Anticipating this critique of his work, Said takes pains to emphasize that the problem with Orientalism isn't that scholars, policymakers, and ordinary citizens are caught up in cultural and geopolitical webs of influence. Issues arise, instead, when these influences remain unexamined and unacknowledged. This is obviously true when a person has overt political or social power, like British statesmen James Balfour and Lord Cromer, or the French Orientalists (including Silvestre de Sacy, Jean-Baptiste-Jospeh Fourier, and others). It is far less obvious yet equally true when a person has no overt political power. The writings of Richard Burton, Gustave Flaubert, and Gérard de Nerval show this; although these men wrote fiction and travel narratives for a public audience, they both gained and exercised power through their mastery of Orientalist discourse.

In the introduction, Said outlines his own political position when he notes that he is an Oriental subject who grew up and was educated in former British colonies and that he lives and works in the United States. He is thus personally invested in breaking Orientalism's stranglehold on the public imagination. But rather than seeing his personal investments as a liability, Said presents them as a strength. They give shape and purpose to his intellectual projects. With this in mind, his book makes an impassioned plea for others not to disregard his work as merely political but to investigate their own social and political investments as a way to make less biased and more meaningful inquiries into human experience.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE ORIENT

The Orient represents Western consciousness's collective vision of the Near East (Turkey, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula) and beyond (India, Indochina, China, and Japan) beginning in ancient Greek and persisting up to the contemporary era. It is an imaginary space invented by the West that says much more about how the West sees itself than anything else. As such, the Orientalist discourse often deploys the Orient as a mirror through which Europe can see and understand itself, or as a theater where Europe can work out its ideas about itself and the world. As a concept, the Orient is associated with unfathomable antiquity and important contributions to human history. But the Orientalist makes a sharp distinction between the Orient's glorious past and its current debasement. The conceptual Orient is hegemonic and unitary, and it is conservative and old-fashioned (if not backward). It is also characterized by unthinking religious fervor. Its people are a unitary, undifferentiated mass without minds of their own, with conventional Orientalists casting Oriental subjects as irrational and unintelligent. Orientalism also portrays the Orient as a place of danger and seductive promise. Moreover, Orientalists see the Orient as a place cannot be trusted to take care of itself and therefore must be subjugated and ruled by more rational and mature societies, like those of Great Britain, France, or America.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Orientalism* published in 1979.

Introduction Quotes

It will be clear to the reader […] that by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent. The most readily accepted definition for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist and what he or she does is Orientalism. Compared with *Oriental studies* or *area studies*, it is true that the term Orientalism is less preferred by specialists today, both because it is too vague and general and because it connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European colonialism […But] Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

One of the first things Edward Said does in his book is to define the concept that it covers. This isn't as easy as it might seem, because Said attributes no fewer than three distinct (yet interrelated) meanings to the word. This passage gives the first definition, Orientalism as academic discipline. Although this term has now (in the 21st century) fallen completely out of favor, when Said was writing in the mid-1970s, it was still, as he indicates, in use. It's important for him to link Orientalist discourse to the academic field of Orientalism because these two developed hand in hand throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, developments which Said will cover at length in subsequent sections of the book.

Readers should note at least two features in this definition. First, Said defines Orientalists as Orientalists first and foremost. The specific discipline in which they conduct their study of "the Orient" (a place that Said will later claim is a wholly fictious realm imagined and described by Orientalists) matters less than the Orient itself. This speaks to the cross-disciplinary and enduring power Orientalist discourse has in Western societies. Second, the passage hints that the reason the term "Orientalism" is falling out of favor is because its ability to maintain neutral authority has been compromised by the uses to which it was put by colonial governments. Said isn't willing to let Orientalists off the hook on this, and he insists on using the old-fashioned name as part of his argument that Orientalism never was—and still is not—as neutral and objective as its adherents want people to think it is.

Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West. Thus the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it. My analyses consequently try to show the field's shape and internal organization, its pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical texts, and new authorities; I also try to explain how Orientalism borrowed and was frequently informed by "strong" ideas, doctrines, and trends in the ruling culture.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

As Said reflects on the methodological constraints of his survey of Orientalism, including the text he chooses to use (or not), he makes a stark claim about the relationship between Orientalist discourse and the area of the world it allegedly studies and represents (the Orient). Here, Said claims that Orientalism actually says very little about the Orient and quite a lot about the Western or European culture that created it. This in turn helps to explain why Orientalist discourse is so very consistent.

When Said emphasizes Orientalism's "consistency," he means that it changes very little from its earliest incarnation to its most current iteration, but also that the academic discipline and the public discourse of Orientalism always align perfectly with the geopolitical aims of the dominant culture. This suggests that they are not neutral but are in fact informed by and meant to inform the use of power. In setting out to analyze Orientalism, then, Said doesn't lay out the history of the discourse. Instead, he shows readers how knowledge can be—and often is—used as a source of power. In doing so, he builds a case for holding academic institutions accountable for their political investments.

Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an "Oriental" as a child growing up in two British colonies. All of my education, in those colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways, my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals. This is why for me the Islamic Orient has got to be the center of attention.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25-26

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the introduction, Said notes his personal investment in the project of understanding and critiquing Orientalism. In doing so, he not-so-subtly claims that the personal is political. In fact, one of the major critiques he has of Orientalism is not just that Orientalists are biased, but that they're so unaware of their biases that they believe they're being rational and neutral. Instead of pretending to impossible neutrality Said places his identity front and center, so that readers can measure his work for themselves and decide to what degree it has been affected by his history. He's also making a powerful statement in his refusal to continue to play the role of an Oriental subject. Silencing and speaking for Orientals subjects is one of the ways Said claims Orientalist discourse becomes a tool for geopolitical power. By refusing to be silenced or spoken for, Said aims to break the stranglehold Orientalism has on Western society.

Chapter 1, Part 2 Quotes

The two aspects of the Orient that set it off from the West in this pair of plays will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography. A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant. Aeschylus *represents* Asia, makes her speak in the person of the aged Persian queen, Xerxes' mother. It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries. There is an analogy between Aeschylus's orchestra, which contains the Asiatic world as the playwright conceives it, and the learned envelope of Orientalist scholarship, which also will hold in the vast, amorphous Asiatic sprawl for sometimes sympathetic but always dominating scrutiny. Secondly, there is the motif of the Orient as insinuating danger.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

In tracing the history of Orientalist discourse, Said goes as far back as the ancient Greek civilization, where the Orient enters the Western imagination through conflicts, like the 5th century BCE Greek-Persian War, and the art that comes out of and is influenced by those conflicts, like Aeschylus's plays *The Persians* and *The Bacchae*. Part of Said's argument here rests on keeping readers attentive to the way that the West creates the Orient out of words—the history of the war by Herodotus and the plays about it by Aeschylus are written from the perspective of the victors, and thus can never be neutral. The Orient thus isn't depicted so much as it's created by the investments, biases, and beliefs of the playwright or historian.

In this passage, Said articulates the two basic premises of Orientalist discourse as he sees it: that the East and West are irreconcilably different in how they look at and approach the world, and that there's something dangerous about the Orient. Furthermore, he locates these foundational beliefs long before Orientalism or any of its related fields exist as academic disciplines. He thus suggests that Orientalism was *never* an uninvested academic or intellectual project—rather, it grew directly from pre-

established assumptions about the way the world works. These ideas become so stubbornly tenacious and so invisible to Westerners because they're everywhere in Western discourse and art, going back to the very roots of recorded history in the West.

Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes or hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of the seventeenth century the "Ottoman peril" lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger, and in time European civilization incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life. [...] the European representation of the Muslim, Ottoman, or Arab was always a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient, and to a certain extent the same is true of the methods of contemporary learned Orientalists, whose subject is not so much the East itself as the East made known, and therefore less fearsome, to the Western reading public.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 59-60

Explanation and Analysis

Tracing the history of the relationship between Europe and the Orient from the Classical period through the Middle Ages, Said shows how Islam and Arab subjects came to distil many ideas about the Orient, its differences, and its dangers. In this passage, Said asserts that public discourse, history, and the arts come together in a sort of public mythmaking that both creates and reinforces stereotypes about Oriental subjects which later become the foundational ideas of the academic discipline of Orientalism.

This happens through the creation of a series of Arab or Islamic bogeymen. Islam and Arab empires did indeed pose a spiritual and political threat to Christianity and European powers, beginning in the early Middle Ages with the massive and speedy spread of Islam through the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and Eastern Mediterranean. The Umayyad Caliphate conquered Spain in the 7th century, and although Europe reconquered much of that territory in the 8th century, they were less successful in a military sense with the Crusades over control of what Said calls the "Bible lands" (modern-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria) in the High Middle Ages. Lack of military and political success, Said argues, fuels a need to create a sense of religious or cultural superiority. In periods of Arab or Muslim ascendancy, this helps Europeans to feel safe; in periods of European ascendancy, as Said will explore in detail throughout the book, it fuels racism and colonial conquest.

Our initial descriptions of Orientalism as a learned field now acquires a new concreteness. A field is often an enclosed space. The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. An Orientalist is but the particular specialist in knowledge for which Europea at large is responsible, in the way that an audience is historically and culturally responsible for (and responsive to) the dramas technically put together by the dramatist.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Having identified the Muslim or the Arab subject as the particular threat Orientalist discourse sought to control from the European Middle Ages on, Said reviews the work of historians who consider the relationship between the Christian West and the Muslim Orient in that period. The consensus seems to be that the biggest threat to Western understanding was the profound ignorance of Western scholars and writers about their subject—Islam—which they refused to understand on its own terms but insisted on representing it solely through the lens of Christian theology.

This leads Said into developing the metaphor at the heart of this passage, the metaphor of the Orient as a stage on which Western scholars and audiences recreated what they wanted to see rather than what there was to see. Readers should remember that Said set this metaphor up when he discussed the roots of Orientalism, which he finds

in—among other examples—the 5th-century plays of Greek playwright Aeschylus. For Said, then, the Orientalist becomes a sort of playwright, whose vision of the Orient responds more to the demands of his or her audience—in context of Islam, the need to feel superior and safe—than to reality. This becomes the foundation of Said's argument that Orientalism says more about European or Western psyches, fears, and goals than it does about the areas of the world it labels "the Orient." Because "the Orient" is not so much an actual place as it is a nexus of ideas created and repeated by Orientalists to suit the demands and tastes of Western societies.

> The didactic quality of the Orientalist representation cannot be detached from the rest of the performance. In a learned work like the *Bibliothèque orientale*, which was the result of systematic study and research, the author imposes a disciplinary order upon the material he has worked on; in addition, he wants to make it clear to the reader that what the printed page delivers is an ordered, disciplined judgement of the material. What is thus conveyed by the Bibliothèque is an idea of Orientalism's power and effectiveness, which everywhere remind the reader that henceforth in order to get at the Orient he must pass through the learned grids and codes provided by the Orientalist.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 66-67

Explanation and Analysis

After tracing the origins of many of the ideas and assumptions that inform Orientalist discourse, Said explores the foundation of the discipline itself. Orientalism in his work is always pointing to more than one thing at a time. Here, it isn't just that "Orientalism" becomes a specific field of study, like astronomy or geology. Rather, it's that the field takes on a life of its own—it is animated by the increasingly powerful force of Orientalist discourse. A work like d'Herbelot's necessarily imposes order and structure on its material, and that isn't the part that Said has a problem with. In fact, he is himself imposing order and structure on his material. The problem arises in the way that Orientalist works present themselves as pure science, pure rationality, pure fact.

D'Herbelot's ideas about Mohammed and Islam are presented as simple fact and his readers don't have any way to know the difference. To give one example, d'Herbelot, like many other 17th-and 18th-century Orientalists, presents Mohammed as a heretic because Islam diverges from Christianity. This idea has no basis in reality. Mohammed didn't consider himself as a failed Christian any more than Islam presents itself as a heretical splinter group of Christianity. It's based in medieval theological interpretations of Islam that sought to reduce the sense of danger it posed to the West and Christianity by downgrading it as a failed religion. But, because of the power the discourse has to self-replicate and shape people's view of the world, the more that d'Herbelot's ideas replicate the ideas of other Orientalists, the more accurate they will seem, even when they're wholly incorrect.

> As a discipline representing institutionalized Western knowledge of the Orient, Orientalism thus comes to exert a three-way force, on the Orient, on the Orientalist, and on the Western "consumer" of Orientalism. It would be wrong, I think, to underestimate the strength of the three-way relationship thus established. For the Orient ("out there" towards the East) is corrected, even penalized, for lying outside the boundaries of European society, "our" world; the Orient is thus *Orientalized*, a process that not only marks the Orient as the province of the Orientalist but also forces the uninitiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications [...] as the *true* Orient. Truth, in short, becomes a function of learned judgement, not of the material itself, which in time seems to owe even its existence to the Orientalist.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

As Said analyzes the *Bibliothèque orientale*, an important precursor text to what he calls "modern Orientalism" (the Orientalism of the 18th and 19th centuries), he lays out this schematization of how he thinks Orientalist discourse, at its most basic level, functions. The learned expert—the Orientalist—presents information to a lay reader that the Orientalist has drawn from a diffuse sea of material. His work defines the Orient as it presents it in a circular, tautological manner—in other words, the Orient is what the

Orientalist studies, so therefore whatever the Orient studies is the Orient. Because he is the expert on the subject, whatever he says about it must be true. And because his material is mysterious and difficult to understand, readers have to trust him. They cannot assess the Orient themselves because it doesn't exist. All that exists is the Orient as created by the Orientalist and Orientalist discourse.

Thus, an implicit faith in experts to understand and illuminate truths means that most people will accept whatever the Orientalist says, especially when it aligns with what other Orientalists say or what "common knowledge" represents as true—for instance, that Oriental subjects are inherently different and mysterious to Westerners. Through this process, the discourse slowly and almost completely detaches itself from reality, taking on, in the end, a life of its own.

Chapter 1, Part 3 Quotes

❝ Because Egypt was saturated with meaning for the arts, sciences, and government, its role was to be the stage on which actions of a world-historical significance would take place. By taking Egypt, then, a modern power would naturally demonstrate its strength and justify history; Egypt's own destiny was to be annexed, to Europe preferably. In addition, this power would also enter a history whose common element was defined by figures no less great than Homer, Alexander, Caesar, Plato, Solon, and Pythagoras, who graced the Orient with their presence there. The Orient, in short, existed as a set of values attached, not to its modern realities, but to a series of valorized contacts it had had with a distant European past. This is a pure example of the textual, schematic attitude I have been referring to.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Napoleon, Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 84-85

Explanation and Analysis

Said contextualizes Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798 as not just a military campaign meant to extend the French Empire but as an explicitly Orientalist project—that is, a project that aimed to bring the Orient (or a small part of it) under the control of Europe, both physically and rhetorically. Egypt isn't important to Napoleon so much in its own right as it is important because it suits his political ambitions (interrupting the British trade routes with its large, valuable, and successful colony in India) and because it suits his image of himself. Casting himself as a new Alexander the Great—a new leader capable of unifying the known (European) world and extending its dominion over the globe, Napoleon wants to possess a territory that has unquestionable importance in the arc of human history.

In dominating Egypt, Napoleon claims his place as the latest in a long line of exemplars of Western intelligence, learning, and conquest. If the West is represented by conquerors of the known world (Caesar and Alexander the Great), philosophers (Plato), and the fathers of literature and mathematics (Homer and Pythagoras, respectively), and the contemporary world order (Solon is credited with founding Athenian democracy), then by implication the Orient is the opposite: dark, superstitious, backward, ignorant, and repressive. It can do or be nothing on its own but must be enlightened by beneficent European leaders. This is an Orient created by and for Europeans, not for Oriental subjects. In fact, Orientalist discourse completely writes Oriental subjects out of the picture rhetorically, so that European powers can dominate and exploit real Oriental subjects with no wrinkle in their consciences.

❝ In the Suez Canal idea we see the logical conclusion of Orientalist thought and, more interesting, Orientalist effort. To the West, Asia had once represented silent distance and alienation; Islam was militant hostility to European Christianity. To overcome such redoubtable constants the Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures in order to posit them—beyond the modern Orientalist's ken—as the true classical Orient that could be used to judge and rule the modern Orient. The obscurity faded to be replaced by hothouse entities; the Orient was a scholar's word, signifying what modern Europe had recently made of the still peculiar East. De Lesseps and his canal finally destroyed the Orient's distance, its cloistered intimacy *away* from the West, its perdurable exoticism.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Napoleon, Ferdinand de Lesseps

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 91-92

Explanation and Analysis

Said associates Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798) with the beginning of what he calls modern Orientalism and the construction of the Suez Canal (which was completed in 1868) with its culmination. Thus, the history of Egypt's 19th-century relationship with France helpfully illuminates the way that Orientalist discourse functions. Experts—Orientalists—study the distant and exotic Orient; their work inspires the great powers of Europe to invade and lay claim to the Orient's untapped potential; Orientalists deal with the slight difficulty of the real Orient—where, for example, the Ottoman Empire actively resisted Napoleon's invasion—by ignoring it, burying it under volumes of academic prose. Through this work, through the creation of learned societies and the publication of books like the *Description de l'Égypte*, professional Orientalists create or re-create an Orient easily under their control and authority.

Ironically, however, by focusing so much attention on the Orient, Orientalists eventually succeeded in collapsing the distance between Europe and the Orient. At least, they did so physically; as the final section of this chapter will discuss, they did not erase the fundamental sense of division between Europe and the Orient on which Oriental studies was founded. If de Lesseps succeeds in Orientalizing the Orient—in taking an ancient Egyptian idea and bringing it to fruition through the wealth and power of Europe, and for the primary benefit of Europe—this doesn't end Orientalism. Instead, it pushes Orientalism into a new phase.

Chapter 1, Part 4 Quotes

❝ As anticolonialism sweeps and indeed unifies the entire Oriental world, the Orientalist damns the whole business not only as a nuisance but as an insult to the Western democracies. As momentous, generally important issues face the world—issues involving nuclear destruction, catastrophically scarce resources, unprecedented human demands for equality, justice, and economic parity—popular caricatures of the Orient are exploited by politicians whose source of ideological supply is not only the half-literate technocrat but the superliterate Orientalist. The legendary Arabists in the State Department warn of Arab plans to take over the world. The perfidious Chinese, half-naked Indians, and passive Muslims are described as vulture for "our" largesse and are damned when "we lose them" to communism or to their unregenerate Oriental instincts: the difference is scarcely significant.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

After introducing the concept of Orientalism and tracing its history from the ancient Greek world through the 19th century, Said turns to contemporary issues. In this passage, he asserts that Orientalist discourse isn't dead. In fact, the more events in the real world contradict its basic claims and narratives—that the East and West are fundamentally different, and that Oriental subjects are fundamentally unchanging and stuck in time—the more Orientalists double down on these claims. One of the things a discourse does is ensure group cohesion with whatever those in power want people to think. Since the West still views the Orient as an area to exploit and control, Orientalists—even those whose subject area expertise, like Arabic translators in the State Department who might have unmediated access to the things Arab subjects are writing and saying—toe the party line.

What makes this dynamic even worse is the way that it openly engages in racist rhetoric to concentrate power in the West and not just to disenfranchise but to vilify Oriental subjects. Thing that would be—and are—considered valiant when done by Western subjects, such as revolting against a colonial government (as the United States itself did in the late 18th century) become dangerous threats when they're done by Arab or Muslim—by Orientalized—subjects.

Chapter 2, Part 2 Quotes

The importance of *Tableau historique* for an understanding of Orientalism's inaugural phase is that it exteriorizes the form of Orientalist knowledge and its features, as it also describes the Orientalist's relationship to his subject matter. In Sacy's pages on Orientalism—as elsewhere in his writing—he speaks of his own work as having *uncovered*, *brought to light*, *rescued* a vast among of obscure matter. Why? In order *to place it before* the student. For like all his learned contemporaries, Sacy considered a learned work a positive addition to an edifice that all scholars erected together. Knowledge as essentially the *making visible* of material, and the aim of a tableau was the construction of a sort of Benthamite Panopticon. Scholarly discipline was therefore a specific technology of power: it gained for its user (and his students) tools of knowledge which (if he was a historian) had hitherto been lost.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Silvestre de Sacy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

In his discussion of what he calls modern (18th- and 19th-century) Orientalism, Said starts with Silvestre de Sacy, who contributed an essay on Orientalism for a French book outlining the state of human knowledge (at least in France) at the turn of the 19th century. In this passage, Said looks at the way Sacy describes his—and all Orientalists'—work in that book. Essentially, Said sees Sacy constructing a view of the world in which everything—even living things like languages and cultures—can be boiled down to an unchanging essence which can then be described by a sufficiently knowledgeable expert. This is the kind of thinking that underwrites Orientalism's tendency to create an Orient that is stuck in an imagined past.

This kind of rhetoric also serves to burnish the image of Orientalism as a disinterested science. When Sacy imagines himself as the humble servant of civilization who brings information to light, he speaks and acts with no acknowledgement of his own work as a scholar. Yet Said rejects the idea that knowledge can be produced in a vacuum, instead arguing that a researcher's biases, received ideas, and cultural alignments will always influence their work. The Panopticon is an idea for a prison designed by 18th-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham in which a single guard in a high tower would be able to observe each cell without the inmates seeing. Because they would never know when they were being watched or not, the theory went, the inmates would always behave. Yet, experience shows that people will misbehave even when they're being watched. So, Said uses this metaphor to mock the naïve idea of Sacy and others that seeing everything—understanding and categorizing everything—is possible at all.

What is given on the page and in the museum case is a truncated exaggeration, like many of Sacy's Oriental extracts, whose purpose is to exhibit a relationship between the science (or scientist) and the object, not one between the object and nature. Read almost any page of Renan on Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, or proto-Semitic and you read a fact of power, by which the Orientalist philologist's authority summons out of the library at will examples of man's speech, and ranges them there surrounded by a suave European prose that points out defects, virtues, barbarisms, and shortcomings in the language, the people, and the civilization. The tone and the tense of the exhibition are cast almost uniformly in the contemporary present, so that one is given an impression of a pedagogical demonstration during which the scholar-scientist stands before us on a lecture-laboratory platform, creating, confining, and judging the material he discusses.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 142-143

Explanation and Analysis

After considering the contributions of early philologists like Silvestre de Sacy, Said turns to the generation that inherited and expanded on their work. If Sacy is the father of modern philological Orientalism, then Ernest Renan, who lived about a century later, is its culmination. While Said sees Sacy presenting decontextualized specimens, he interprets Renan's scholarship as more interventionist, since it actively compares ancient and Oriental languages to modern European ones. In his critique, Said reminds readers that he sees scholarship as a technology and application of power over what a person studies. Without understanding or acknowledging this situation, scholars like Renan at best unthinkingly and at worst purposefully imbue their scholarship with their own biases and assumptions. Given the inherent racism Said describes in Oriental scholarship that sees Europe as the epitome of human civilization and

the Orient as a cultural and political backwater, the stakes of claiming a neutrality that doesn't exist are high.

Said is also making a claim here about what kinds of knowledge are and aren't Orientalist. It isn't that scholars like Renan study so-called Oriental languages that makes them Orientalists; Renan is an Orientalist because of the attitude he adopts toward his subject. Said identifies Orientalism by looking for the scholar who emphasizes the mastery and control his knowledge and expertise imposes on his subject. He identifies Orientalism by looking for the scholar who presents his biased ideas as unvarnished fact. Essentially Said claims that Orientalist knowledge—that is, knowledge of the Orient or anything touching on it (languages, culture, history, religions, art)—is never about the real places. If it were, then it would be in a different category for him. What makes it Orientalist is its attitude of ownership and its desire to control knowledge rather than to engage in critical and clear-eyed study.

Chapter 2, Part 3 Quotes

❝ Unlike [others], Lane was able to submerge himself amongst the natives, to live as they did, to conform to their habits […]. Lest that imply Lane's having lost his objectivity, he goes on to say that he conformed only to the *words* […] of the Koran, and that he was always aware of his difference from an essentially alien culture. Thus while one portion of Lane's identity floats easily in an unsuspecting Muslim sea, a submerged part retains its secret European power, to comment on, acquire, possess everything around it.

The Orientalist can imitate the Orient without the opposite being true. What he says about the Orient is therefore to be understood as a description obtained in a one-way exchange: as *they* spoke and behaved, *he* observed and wrote down. […] And what he wrote was intended as useful knowledge, not for them, but for Europe and its various disseminative institutions.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject , Edward William Lane

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 160-161

Explanation and Analysis

Said discusses at length *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, a book written by Englishman William Edward Lane in the 1830s. Having gone to Egypt to study Arabic, Lane was asked by a British educational society to produce a textbook on Egypt and its people. Lane represents an evolution of Orientalism necessitated by increasing contact between Europe and the Orient in the 19th century. As more Westerners travel east, they observe (and sometimes, as Lane did, embed themselves) in Oriental cultures and life. Yet, this increasing exposure doesn't lead to an update of Orientalist discourse to reflect the complex and changing realities of living societies. Instead, it doubles down on the idea of difference, distance, and the Orientalist's sole power and discretion to understand and interpret the Orient as he or she sees fit.

In this passage, Said describes how Lane posed as a Muslim believer to get closer to his subjects. Said suggests that if Lane weren't capable in this impersonation, he wouldn't have been granted access to some of the places he visited, such as a mosque. But Lane's reporting doesn't generate new understandings of Islam—as Said implies one would expect it to do if it were conducted in good faith. Instead, Lane rehashes the same Orientalist tropes, presenting his Muslim acquaintances as exotic (at best) and uncivilized (at worst). Important for Said's exploration of how a discourse works, Lane reflects Orientalist attempts double down on their rhetorical control the Orient through discourse. He re-imagines and re-creates events and scenes to say what he—not their subjects—understand them as saying, which he can do because he is in the privileged position of a European observer, rather than a silenced Oriental subject.

Chapter 2, Part 4 Quotes

❝ In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of a previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these. Direct observation or circumstantial description of the Orient are the fictions presented by writing on the Orient, yet invariably these are totally secondary to systematic tasks of another sort. In Lamartine, Nerval, and Flaubert, the Orient is a re-presentation of canonical material guided by an aesthetic and executive will capable of producing interest in the reader.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Napoleon, Gustave Flaubert, Alphonse Lamartine, Gérard de Nerval

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

After having established the scope of traditional or academic Orientalism, Said considers how Orientalism functions in texts written for a broader readership than other academics, policymakers, and would-be emperors of the world like Napoleon. Alphonse Lamartine, Gérard Nerval, and Gustave Flaubert were all French writers—poets, novelists, or both—of the 19th century. These writers and others like them aren't the first to include Orientalist ideas in their writing. In an earlier chapter, Said looked at the way Dante treated Mohammed and others in the *Divine Comedy* and found elements of Orientalism, including a hostility toward Islam and a tendency to interpret its practice through the framework of Christianity. The difference is that by the 19th century, Orientalism has become, in Said's analysis, a fully-fledged and self-sustaining discourse.

The self-sustaining aspect of discourse is on display in this passage. At this point, Orientalism has been an academic discipline for around a century. Yet, despite increasing contact between the West and the Orient, the ideas about what the Orient stands for and what its relationship to Europe should be haven't changed much. As Said alleges, academic studies claim to present empirical observations. But because their observations are always predetermined by the assumptions of Orientalism—and, increasingly, by the demands of governments interested in expanding their colonial holdings—what these studies present isn't fact but ideology. Then, when these ideas seep into writings for a popular audience, they reinforce the preconceived ideas (the Orient is different; the Orient is inferior; the Orient is exotic, but its customs are degraded or strange or inappropriate) that then determine what scholars find worthy of research. In all of this, the Orient becomes less and less a real place than an imaginary realm and a set of ideas that various Western actors use to meet their own goals, whether those goals are to invade and colonize a strategically located country like Egypt or to merely manipulate their audiences' interest.

Chapter 3, Part 1 Quotes

"I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map […] I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up, I will go there."

Seventy years or so before Marlowe said this, it did not trouble Lamartine that what on a map was a blank space was inhabited by natives […] The important thing was go dignify simple conquest with an idea, to turn the appetite for more geographical space into a theory about the special relationship between geography on the one hand and civilized or uncivilized people on the other.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Said sets himself the task of explaining the relationship between Orientalism and colonialism. In this passage, he uses a quote from *Heart of Darkness*, an anti-colonialist novella published by Joseph Conrad in 1899, to describe the European (and, although to a lesser extent, American) hunger for more and more land in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The protagonist of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlowe, expresses a desire for world domination but it is, as Said points out, domination of a curiously un-peopled world. Marlowe experiences the world as a map and world domination as if it were a sort of board game that had few, if any, real-world consequences.

In the real world, Orientalism does some of the work of turning real geography into a version of Marlowe's map. By lumping Oriental subjects together into one monolithic whole, Orientalist discourse drains humanity from the regions it considers, dehumanizing Oriental subjects enough to make their lives seem less important than Westerners. What's more, Orientalism disguises the brutal physical violence and greed of colonialism in two ways. First, it positions the Orient as the cradle of human civilization and Europe as the best example of it. Since Europe commands the greatness of the past through Oriental scholarship, it's not a big leap to assume that Europe has the right to command the modern Orient, too. And by painting Oriental subjects as backward and benighted, it provides not just a justification but a moral imperative to colonize and

civilize the allegedly empty regions of the globe.

Chapter 3, Part 2 Quotes

Being a White Man was therefore an idea and a reality. It involved a reasoned position towards both the white and the non-white worlds. It meant—in the colonies—speaking in a certain way, behaving according to a code of regulations, and even feeling certain things and not others. It meant specific judgements, evaluations, gestures. It was a form of authority before which nonwhites, and even whites themselves, were expected to bend. In the institutional forms it took (colonial governments, consular corps, commercial establishments) it was an agency for the expression, diffusion, and implementation of policy towards the world, and within this agency, although a certain personal latitude was allowed, the communal idea of being a White Man ruled. Being a White Man, in short, was a very concrete manner of being-in-the-world, a way of taking hold of reality, language, and thought. It made a specific style possible.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), White Man , T. E. Lawrence, Rudyard Kipling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

The era of "New Imperialism"—a massive expansion of the European and American colonial project, during which as much as 84% of the earth was under colonial control—began in the 1880s, not long after the opening of the Suez Canal, and ended in 1914, with the beginning of World War I. During this period, Orientalism morphed from an arcane academic pursuit into the means by which European countries, particularly Britain and France, sought to expand their territorial control of the world. For Said, the character type of the White Man who lives among indigenous people without ever truly understanding them or losing his sympathy and identification with the White (European) society from which he comes, represents the early 20th century's iteration of the Orientalist character type.

Notably, as Said describes him, the White Man is an ideological worldview, a creation and a creator of discourse. The White Man is thus a facet of Orientalism, a creation of it, and also the ultimate expression of Orientalist discourse. The White Man always exists in opposition to non-White people in much the same way that the Orient exists in opposition to the West's perception of itself. And the White Man wraps up the new Orientalism's ideas of greed and responsibility in one figure. The White Man rules the world because he can, in much the same way that European empires expanded because they could. And both the White Man and European colonial powers hid this greed and sense of entitlement behind a veneer of responsibility to civilize, rule, and guide others.

It was assumed that if languages were as distinct from each other as the linguists said they were, then too the language users—their minds, cultures, potentials, and even their bodies—were different in similar ways. And these distinctions had the force of ontological, empirical truth behind them [...]

The point to be emphasized is that this truth about the distinctive differences between races, civilizations, and languages was (or pretended to be) radical and ineradicable. It went to the bottom of things [...] it set the real boundaries between human beings, on which races, nations, and civilizations were constructed; it forced vision away from the common, as well as plural, human realities like joy, suffering, political organization, forcing attention instead in the downward and backward direction of immutable origins.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Said discusses trends in early 20th-century Orientalism that show both how pervasive Orientalist discourse had become and how the discourse worked to limit the ideas that could be expressed or imagined about the Orient. As elsewhere, he suggests that this dynamic works in large part because people tend to believe what experts tell them, and because people tend to accept as stronger arguments those which have more evidence supporting them. Thus, if experts say Oriental and Western minds are essentially different, people believe them, especially as more and more experts repeat the same conclusion.

The heart of Said's critique in this passage—also an

important part of his critique of Orientalism generally—is that it is an inherently dehumanizing ideology. Orientalism is based on looking for differences, not for similarities, between the researcher's culture and another. And because it looks for differences, it overlooks the humanity of Oriental subjects. Thus, a quiet undercurrent of Said's work is the idea that if Orientalists had looked at Oriental subjects as human beings first and foremost, they might not have found them so strange and different. And by extension, the only way to release contemporary society from the stranglehold of Orientalism's reductionist and racist ideas is to recognize the humanity in those whom Orientalism has long marginalized, silenced, and vilified.

> Our of such a coercive framework, by which a modern "colored" man is chained irrevocably to the general truths formulated about his prototypical linguistic, anthropological, and doctrinal forbears by a white European scholar, the work of the great twentieth-century Oriental experts in England and France derived. To this framework these experts also brought their private mythology and obsessions. [...] Each [...] believed his vision of things Oriental was individual, self-created out of some intensely personal encounter with the Orient, Islam, or the Arabs; each expressed general contempt for official knowledge held about the East. [...] Yet in the final analysis they all [...] expressed the traditional Western hostility to and fear of the Orient.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject , T. E. Lawrence

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

For Said, there is always the foundational, fundamental difference, the "us" vs. "them" mentality that maintains a strict boundary between the Orient and the West. Everything, everything grows from this or is an expression of this truth. By ignoring shared or common humanity as the foundation of anthropological work, Orientalism can never overcome itself. For Said the point is that, once you identify the foundational aspects of the discourse, you see the discourse everywhere because it is self-reinforcing and self-sustaining. It requires more effort to break out of it than to replicate it, to the point that even ppl who think they're being empirical and rational are not. And the way he claims you can tell who's being empirical and rational and who isn't is based on whether they start from an assumption of shared humanity or not. And if "the Orient" is a permanent, static idea or a living, breathing, changing place.

A possible critique of his work is that he makes grand sweeping generalizations like this, then provides a few cherry-picked examples. This passage in the book has a lot of name dropping of people that are probably unfamiliar to readers who aren't already specialists in a field related to Orientalism or Oriental Studies. The counter to this critique is to point out that Said didn't say he would (or could) be complete, and his work incited a lively debate about Orientalism but also the relationship of those in power and those who are marginalized and how former colonial subjects encounter and engage with the world. Etc.

> The main issue for [early 20th- century Orientalists] was preserving the Orient and Islam under the control of the White Man.

A new dialectic emerges out of this project. What is required of the Oriental expert is no longer simply "understanding": now the Orient must be made to perform, its power must be enlisted on the side of "our" values, civilization, interests, goals. Knowledge of the Orient is directly translated into activity, and the results give rise to new currents of thought and trends in the Orient. But these in turn will require from the White Man a new assertion of control, this time not as the author of a scholarly work on the Orient but as the maker of contemporary history, of the Orient as an urgent actuality [...]

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Oriental Subject , White Man , T. E. Lawrence

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Having established the new flavor of early 20th-century Orientalism, Said quickly surveys the work of some of its representative Orientalists, focusing most of his attention on T. E. Lawrence. Lawrence is a convenient figure not only because he wrote much about the Orient, but also because he represents the new application of manifest (that is explicitly geopolitical) Orientalism in action. In earlier

iterations of the discourse, knowledge itself was the power—the power to understand that which modern Oriental subjects couldn't know about themselves. Now, the vast storehouse of accumulated knowledge and rhetorical power over the Orient becomes the means by which individuals and their governments can exert real power and control.

For example, Lawrence serves an important function as a liaison between the British government and Arab revolutionaries during the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I. But even as he gains the allegiance of and expresses benevolence toward the revolutionaries, Lawrence never loses sight of the interests of his own (British) government and people. In fact, he portrays himself in his own writings (and is portrayed in films like *Lawrence of Arabia*) as a hero who orchestrated the uprising, rather than as the agent of a government with a vested interest in weakening its enemy (the Ottoman Empire) and discouraging nationalist sentiments among people it wished to colonize after the war. The White Man may have a sense of affinity for the Oriental subject, may even be able to present himself as sympathetic to the Oriental subject's feelings or goals. But when the cards are on the table, the White Man's loyalty is to his own government, and Oriental subjects are little more than a resource to be utilized.

❝ [The] metamorphosis of a relatively innocuous philological subspeciality into a capacity for managing political movements, administering colonies, making nearly apocalyptic statements representing the White Man's difficult civilizing mission—all this is something at work within a purportedly liberal culture, one full of concern for its vaunted norms of catholicity, plurality, and open-mindedness. In fact, what took place was the very opposite of liberal: the hardening of doctrine and meaning, imparted by "science," into "truth." For if such truth reserved for itself the right to judge the Orient as immutably Oriental in the ways I have indicated, then liberality was no more than a form of oppression and mentalistic prejudice.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

Having detailed the way in which late 19th-and early 20th-century European powers wedded Orientalism to geopolitical power, both actively (as when the British supported the Arab Revolt) and more latently (in the images and ideas disseminated through literary works like those of Rudyard Kipling's novels about White Man characters), Said provides a sharp critique of the hypocrisy of Western cultures when it comes to Orientalism. Indulging Orientalist discourse is, he says here, the very opposite of the values Western societies claim to hold dear. The conflict between these stated values and the real beliefs that Said's exploration of art and geopolitics provides shows the power of Orientalist discourse to shape the way Western subjects interact with and understand the world.

Part of Said's argument (both here and throughout the book) is that the only way Orientalism could accomplish what it has is by utterly dehumanizing Oriental subjects. If Western values profess the importance of "plurality and openness," but deny this experience to Oriental subjects, this implies (or perhaps confirms) Orientalism's basic assumption about the ultimate inhumanity of Oriental subjects. An important part of this critique is that a hegemonic discourse works by blinding people to anything other than what the discourse wants them to see. It is necessary to understand a discourse like Orientalism in order to correct historical wrongs and to address the consequences of colonial history. And Said positions himself as the agent of this critique because he is both a member of a modern Western liberal society (the United States, where he spent his adult life and career) *and* an Oriental subject, a victim of the ideas he works to expose.

Chapter 3, Part 3 Quotes

Because we have become accustomed to think of a contemporary expert on some branch of the Orient […] as a specialist in "area studies," we have lost a vivid sense of how, until around World War II, the Orientalist was considered to be a generalist […] who had highly developed skills for making summational statements. By summational statements I mean that in formulating a relatively uncomplicated idea, say, about Arabic grammar or Indian religion, the Orientalist would be understood […] to be making a statement about the Orient as a whole, thereby summing it up. Thus every discrete study of one bit of Oriental material would also confirm in a summary way the profound Orientality of the material. And since it was commonly believed that the Orient hung together in some profoundly organic way, it made good hermeneutical sense for the Orientalist scholar to regard the material evidence he dealt with as ultimately leading to a better understanding of such things and the Oriental character, mind, ethos, or world-spirit.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject , Hamilton Gibb, Silvestre de Sacy, Louis Massignon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

As his survey of Orientalism's history draws closer to the contemporary moment, Said pauses to address a shift that likely affects how modern-day readers might accept his arguments. A late 20th- or early 21st-century reader is likely to think of experts as people who have command of an increasingly narrow subject area. In earlier chapters, Said showed in great detail how early Orientalists claimed or were invested with authority for "the Orient" as a whole; to take but one example, readers can remember how philologist (student of languages) Silvestre de Sacy was tasked with explaining the Orient in encyclopedias like *Tableau historique de l'érudition française*. In this section, Said will explore how mid-20th-century Orientalists, particularly exemplars Louis Massignon and Hamilton Gibb, continue this tradition by making just such universalizing pronouncements about the Orient based on their studies of Islam.

This is, for Said, one of the things that distinguishes Orientalism from other academic disciplines, in which expertise is not so readily generalized. The reason expert judgments can be generalized in Orientalist discourse lies in the way that Orientalism takes the Orient to be a hegemonic, monolithic, and timeless concept. Said claims that Orientalism exerts power over the Orient in part by refusing to acknowledge its complexity and in part by the way this refusal allows Orientalists to substitute Orientalist dogma and their own interpretations for reality.

[The] real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambiance of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (as I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* [thereby] implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the "truth," which is itself a representation. What this must lead us to methodologically is to view representation (or misrepresentations—the distinction is at best a matter of degree) as inhabiting a common field of play defined for them, not by some inherent common subject matter alone, but by some common history, tradition, universe of discourse.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Louis Massignon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 272

Explanation and Analysis

Having surveyed the contributions—and misrepresentation—of 20th-century Orientalist Louis Massignon, Said briefly discusses critiques that other scholars had recently made of his work for the ways in which his emphasis on mystical practice misrepresents Islam as most of its (non-mystical) adherents practice it. While Said seems to agree on the whole with this critiques, in this passage he explains what he sees as the larger mission of his exploration of Orientalism. By exploring the ways in which this one discourse fundamentally and willfully misrepresents that which it claims to understand, Said comes to a place where all representations become suspect.

In his thinking here, Said participates in a philosophical debate about whether it is possible to attain a pure or purely empirical knowledge of anything in the world or whether all knowledge is inherently imbedded in the systems of meaning, discourses, and identities of the individual. And as this passage states clearly, Said comes

down on the side of knowledge being deeply contextual. And this in turn feeds into Said's two-fold critique of Orientalism. On the one hand, he criticizes the way that the discourse has blatantly misrepresented all things it labels as "Oriental." Yet, he acknowledges that a certain degree of misrepresentation is inevitable, so his second critique takes the discourse to task not so much for its biases and misrepresentations as its absolute refusal to acknowledge the possibility of these. Even as other fields of human knowledge have started to consider their own fallibility, Said charges Orientalism with doubling down on its efforts to present itself as the arbiter of truth.

Chapter 3, Part 4 Quotes

❝ Thus if the Arab occupies space enough for attention, it is as a negative value. He is seen as the disrupter of Israel's and the West's existence, or in another view of the same thing, as a surmountable obstacle to Israel's creation in 1948. Insofar as this Arab has any history, it is part of the history given him [...] by Orientalist tradition, and later, the Zionist tradition. Palestine was seen—by Lamartine and the early Zionists—as an empty desert waiting to burst into bloom; such inhabitants as it had were supposed to be inconsequential nomads possessing no real claim on the land and therefore no cultural or national reality. Thus the Arab is conceived of now as a shadow that dogs the Jew. In that shadow—because Arabs and Jews are Oriental Semites—can be placed whatever traditional, latent mistrust a Westerner feels towards the Oriental.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Alphonse Lamartine

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

When Said turns to contemporary Orientalism, he gestures toward other more-or-less current events in the 1970s, like revolts against Western-backed governments in Iraq and Syria (both in 1963), and rising tensions in Iran that would lead to revolution shortly after the book was published. But the one contemporary event that earns Said's special notice is the Israel-Palestine conflict. In part, this seems to be due to exacerbations in the 1960s and 1970s that kept the conflict in the West's attention. In part it is due, as Said admits in the introduction, to his personal investment in the conflict as a Palestinian.

In this passage, Said points out how thinking of this conflict in terms of Orientalism (an us-versus-them worldview with Israel and the West on one side and Arab or Muslim subjects as a bloc on the other) frustrates any possibility of progress, since it locks the debate in terms that distinguish and differentiate between the sides rather than looking for their shared humanity. Moreover, by reducing Arab subjects to a unified bloc, which it then interprets solely through Islam, contemporary Orientalism downplays and ignore the more complex sociopolitical realities in favor of a simple narrative that confirms Western and democratic values. However, whatever a person's political or religious views, the simple fact of the continuous conflict between Israel and Palestine since the creation of Israel in 1948 makes it clear that the idea of the Orient as a blank space on the map (Lamartine's "empty desert") is nothing more than a creation of Orientalist discourse. Resistance suggests that the desert was not a blank space. And this in turn, Said implies, should lead not to further insistence on the tenets of Orientalist discourse, but a fundamental reassessment of a discourse that no longer adequately explains the world (if ever it did).

❝ Von Grunebaum's Islam, after all, is the Islam of the earlier European Orientalists—monolithic, scornful of ordinary human experience, gross, reductive, unchanging.

At bottom such a view of Islam is political, not even euphemistically impartial. The strength of its hold on the new Orientalist (younger, that is, than Von Grunebaum) is due in part to its traditional authority and in part to its use-value as a handle for grasping a vast region of the world and proclaiming it an entirely coherent phenomenon. Since Islam has never easily been encompassed by the West politically—and certainly since World War II Arab nationalism has been a movement openly declaring its hostility to Western imperialism—the desire to assert intellectually satisfying things about Islam in retaliation increases.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject , Gustave Grunebaum

Related Themes:

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

Tracing the history of Orientalism in the West in the period

following the end the World Wars, Said finds that the discourse is becoming more blatantly political in its focus as it also narrows its field of vision to encompass, primarily, the Arab or Muslim subject and the Islamic faith. Midcentury Orientalist scholar Gustave von Grunebaum exemplifies these shifts. Grunebaum specialized in the study of Islam, yet, Said contends, his analysis and research suggest that he was less studying Islam as a historical, political, or cultural phenomenon than repurposing Islamic history, politics, and theology to fit the orthodox Orientalist view of the world—that the East and the West are inherently different and that the East is a dangerous threat to the stability and dominance of the West.

Said wants readers to understand not just that Orientalist discourse is reductionist and racist, but also that it is this way *by design*. And the design serves inherently political goals. Europe and Islam have a long, hostile, and unfinished history. Neither side ever gained a definitive upper hand. Europe expelled the Umayyad Empire from Spain but failed to hold onto Eastern Mediterranean territory during the medieval Crusades. Europe ultimately defeated the Ottoman Empire and divided its lands, yet nationalist movements in these territories in wake of the World Wars refused to grant Europe or the West ultimate victory. Thus, Said sees Grunebaum indulging in a classic Orientalist move, resorting to rhetorical control over that which refuses in the real world to conform to his expectations. And this, by shaping and directing public perceptions of Arab and Muslim subjects and of the Orient, turns into the social capital needed to justify increasingly interventionist activities in the Near East by Western powers in the 20th century.

> [Bernard Lewis] will, for example, recite the Arab case against Zionism […] without mentioning—anywhere, in any of his writings—that there was such a thing as a Zionist invasion and colonization of Palestine despite and in conflict with the native Arab inhabitants. No Israeli would deny this, but Lewis the Orientalist historian simply leaves it out. […]
>
> One would find this kind of procedure less objectionable as political propaganda—which is what, of course, it is—were it not accompanied by sermons on the objectivity, the fairness, the impartiality of a real historian, the implication always being that Muslims and Arabs cannot be objective but that Orientalists like Lewis writing about Muslims and Arabs are, by definition, by training, by the mere fact of their Westernness.

Related Characters: Edward Said (speaker), Orientalists , Oriental Subject

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 318-319

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter, Said singles out Bernard Lewis, an Oriental scholar with a specialization in history and a focus on Islam, whose work represents for Said the epitome of a propagandistic, contemporary Orientalism. In this passage, Said critiques the one-sided way Lewis addresses the Israel-Palestine Conflict. He especially criticizes Lewis for one of the cardinal sins of Orientalism—speaking for the Oriental subject in order to make that subject say what confirms the Orientalist's preconceived ideas. As Said explains here, these ideas can be expressed just as easily through the omission of key details as by ascribing damning words or ideas to the subject. Said is at his most polemical here, and it's worth remembering that he has more than an academic interest in how the west views Palestinian Arab people, being one himself.

However, the focus of his critique is less on what Lewis does or does not say about Arab subjects and more on the way that Lewis takes for granted his right to do so, both as an Orientalist expert and as a citizen of the West—Lewis had British and American citizenship in his lifetime. It's clear that Said takes umbrage at the content of Lewis's ideas. But the larger point in this passage is that Orientalist discourse, even in less blatantly political forms, can never be impartial, in no small part because the discourse and its practitioners arrogantly and blindly insist that they are categorically incapable of being biased. Instead, they project their own blind acceptance of ideology onto the very subjects they claim the right to speak for. In essence, Said claims that Orientalism in its current iteration has become just as fundamental, backward, closed-minded, and stuck in time as it believes the Orient itself is.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION

Said opens with the allegation that there is a long history of Europe (mostly France and Great Britain) defining itself by comparison to "the **Orient**"—which mostly coincides with the part of the world typically identified as the "Middle East" or "West Asia and North Africa" in 21st-century parlance. Said names this attitude "Orientalism," and he explains that it has three related, mutually self-reinforcing meanings. One is a field of academic studies related to the countries and civilizations of the Near East; the second is a "style of thought" that divides the world into the Orient (the East) and the Occident (the West); and the third is discourse West has employed to exert control over the Orient and justify doing so. Orientalism's history is so deep and pervasive that it colors all engagements between the West and the East.

Said begins by identifying what he sees as a serious problem in the contemporary world. Received ideas about and attitudes toward the part of the world he loosely defines as "the Orient" exercise outsized influence on the cultural imagination and geopolitical aims of Europe and North America—the West. And this has political, social, and economic consequences for the people who live in the Orient. By naming this set of received ideas "Orientalism," Said identifies it as a discourse—a complex of ideas and attitudes—rather than a good faith attempt to understand or describe the world. His careful definition takes into account that, in the mid-20th century moment in which he was writing, "Orientalism" was the name of a scholarly field, as well as a discourse. And he tells readers that he will spend his book examining the way this discourse has shaped reality and how it has been used as a tool for powerful interests.

Western discourse creates and maintains the idea of the "**Orient**." Although it maps onto real places with real people and cultures, Orientalism is more invested in its own ideas about these people and cultures than in their reality. And the discourse of Orientalism serves political, social, and military power structures. Moreover, Orientalism itself is a complex system that has been and must be rigorously maintained by its beneficiaries—European or Western hegemony (the social and political ideas that hold people together). Because Orientalism is a tool of Western hegemony, Said claims that it says more about the "desires, repressions, investments, and projections" of the West than anything else.

One part of Said's project involves debunking the assertions of Orientalist discourse. Another part involves showing his readers how and why discourses form in the first place, and how those who have power can use discourse to manipulate others. This includes not only the Oriental subjects who were the most direct victims of Orientalist ideology, but also ordinary citizens, who are encouraged to believe in fictions that serve their leaders and the ideologies they uphold. By showing how discourses serve entrenched power structures, Said hopes to empower his readers to think critically about the cultures in which they live, and the ideas they hold.

Western cultural hegemony is predicated on the idea of European superiority, especially—although not exclusively—over the **Orient** and its peoples. Thus, the Orient emerges from ideas about who or what is Oriental (as opposed to Occidental) and is maintained by a self-perpetuating logic that says more about the "desires, repressions, investments, and projections" of the West than anything else.

Because it is defined by and in contrast to the West, the Orient is created as an inherently negative and impoverished place. This is part of what makes Orientalism a discourse rather than an academic endeavor in Said's view. In essence, Western assertions of superiority are built on and serve to maintain racialized stereotypes and prejudices.

The fact that Orientalism as a discourse was and is created in a political context means that there are three important ideas underpinning Said's study of it: that all knowledge is political to some degree; that the study of anything is limited by the researcher's methodology; and that a researcher's personal investments affect the way they go about their study.

Orientalist discourse as defined by Said serves the geopolitical interests of Western powers. In this context, it is important to understand the relationship of knowledge and power and for researchers to remember that their interests and investments are to at least some degree determined by their culture, whether this is conscious or subconscious.

Said first explores the idea that all knowledge is inherently political. This is because the leaders of any society give a sense of urgency to subjects important to their society's political interests. Discourses like Orientalism affect civil society's interests and beliefs by "distribut[ing …] geopolitical awareness" (specifically, Britain's, France's, and the United State's colonial ambitions in the **Orient**) onto artistic and scholarly work. Orientalist discourse mediates political, intellectual, and cultural power. Thus, studying it reveals far more about Western "political-intellectual culture" than the Orient itself.

Because everyone lives in a culture, no one can fully separate themselves from the concerns or interests of that society. So, when Western powers like Britain, France, or America decide that they want to achieve a certain goal (colonizing Egypt or securing a steady supply of crude oil, for instance), they can most effectively achieve this aim when they get everybody on board by manipulating discourse to support their goals.

In answer to literary and humanities scholars who want to avoid responsibility by saying that they aren't trained in "politics or ideological analysis," Said points out the ubiquity of allegedly political issues like empire, race, and class in literature and the arts. In fact, he says, political interest has been a key driver of creativity and imagination. Studying Orientalism is thus key to understanding Western societies, because it is an intentional—if unacknowledged—project. And because responsible scholarship requires understanding the connection between original sources or ideas, the subject matter they explore, and their historical context.

Said claims that Orientalism is both deeply contextual and deeply ingrained in the psyches of Western subjects. Thus, part of his critique involves pointing out the ways in which he feels humanities scholars have tried to ignore the political dimensions of the texts they explore, especially imperialism. His analysis of literary works in later chapters will develop the idea that almost everything created by a colonial society will reflect that society's ideas about colonialism.

The next limitation on Said's study has to do with methodology—how he decides what to include and exclude from analysis. Pointing out that the starting point of any intellectual inquiry is always somewhat arbitrary, he explains why he feels the limitations he has chosen are appropriate. He considers his starting point—one among many possibilities—the "Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam" because of Britain and France's dominance in the Near East between the 17th and 20th centuries, as well as America's deepening geopolitical interests there following the end of World War II. Moreover, since about the 9th century, the **Orient** has served as a handy Western shorthand for both Arabs and Islam.

Said mentions some of the specific reasons that he's interested in the relationship between the West and Arab people (or Islam) elsewhere: the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine and American attempts to ensure its access to oil reserves in the Near East. He thus looks backwards from his vantage point and limits his study to what will help him explain how Orientalism operates in this context. This isn't the only or even necessarily the best way to limit his study, but that doesn't matter. What does matter is that he outlines the boundaries clearly so that readers can better understand—and assess—his claims.

The main characteristic of Anglo-French and American Orientalism is "intellectual authority" over the Orient. Analyzing how authorities on the **Orient** locate themselves relative to their subject, Said intends to explore how academic Orientalists represent—literally, re-present or recreate—an image of the Orient that suits the preconceived ideas of the discourse rather than reflecting reality. In the way it creates (rather than reflects) the world, Orientalism denies Oriental subjects the ability or the right to represent themselves. Because of this, Orientalism reflects and explains more about Western culture than the people it claims to study.

Here, Said outlines the central claim of this book: that the Orient as it is used both by academic Orientalism and by political powers has very little, if any, correspondence with reality. To be able to make their claims without contest or dissent, Orientalists must silence Oriental subjects. Thus, their intellectual project doesn't just serve power structures, it is a power structure in its own right. And it's a power structure Said challenges not just as a scholar, but as an Oriental subject.

Because Orientalist discourse is so internally consistent, Said feels comfortable selecting a few representative examples, including the scholarly work of Edward William Lane, Ernest Renan, Silvestre de Sacy, and the literary work of Alphonse Lamartine, Gustave Flaubert, and others. Yet, because the topic is so broad, the present study will necessarily be incomplete. Said hopes that in the future, others from his intended audience—literary and political science scholars, governmental policymakers, and even interested general readers—will take up and expand on his ideas, especially about the "structure […] dangers and temptations" of colonial cultural domination.

The internal consistency of Orientalism is one of its most salient features—indeed, it is the basis for a large part of Said's argument that Orientalism is a discourse rather than the neutral academic enterprise as which it has historically understood itself. But Said doesn't want readers to take his as the last word—he doesn't want the ideas in his book Orientalism *to become an uncritical discourse themselves. Instead, he encourages others to grapple with, challenge, and expand his ideas in the future.*

The final limitation on scholarly study is the scholar's personal investments. To this end, Said points out that he is himself an Oriental subject. He grew up and was educated in two British colonies (Palestine and Egypt) and now lives in America. He is personally affected by the Cold War divisions between East and West, the increasing strategic importance of the **Orient**, and the stigmatizing of Arabs and Islam in Western popular culture. But while Orientalism is thus not an "exclusively academic mater" for him, he still considers his work primarily as an intellectual (rather than political) project that aims to improve the way academic scholarship is produced.

One of Said's most consistent critiques of the Orientalists whose work he considers is that none of them acknowledge their political commitments—or even seem to recognize that they might have political and personal investments that influence their work. By setting out his own—that, as a Palestinian, he is an Oriental subject; that as a Palestinian, he has a personal investment in the Israel-Palestine conflict; that as a scholar, he is personally involved in the creation and maintenance of various academic discourses—he seeks to avoid that same pitfall and to forestall criticism that his scholarship is purely political.

CHAPTER 1, PART 1

Said begins his analysis of Orientalism's scope by analyzing Arthur James Balfour's impassioned speech in favor of ongoing British involvement in Egypt in the summer of 1910. Balfour draws his ideas directly from Orientalist discourse. He associates power with knowledge when he bases the British right to rule Egypt in its superior knowledge of Egyptian history and culture. When he says that Egyptian society is chaotic and disorganized and must be controlled by a British colonial government, he asserts that civilization itself requires the domination of the **Orient** and implies that Oriental subjects are irrational. When he explains that current agitation for independence lies not in Egyptians' real desire for autonomy but in their fear of losing British protection, he treats the Egyptian population as a unified bloc, then speaks on its behalf as a knowledgeable Orientalist rather than letting the Egyptians express their own preferences.

Balfour's statements are directly political, since he makes them as a member of the British ruling class and in the context of the British Parliament—its main governmental body. Yet these ideas aren't just imperialistic or colonial. In fact, they're built on a sense of ownership over Egyptian history and culture. This sense of ownership in turn feeds into frankly racist assertions that Egyptians are less evolved or capable of rational thought than their Western counterparts. And it becomes part of a controlling and paternalistic idea that if Egyptians perhaps don't appreciate being subjugated by the British, this merely shows their ignorance rather than their capacity for self-determination. In fact, Balfour's position requires deliberately *excluding evidence to that effect.*

Other late 19th- and early 20th- century British civil servants echo the logic of Balfour's Orientalism. This is evidence, Said says, of an effective discourse. Orientalism divides the world into two spheres (East and West) and excuses the subjugation and exploitation of Oriental subjects. Like Balfour, Lord Cromer's accounts of his years as a colonial authority in India and Egypt (written around the turn of the 20th century) continually assert that because "subject races" cannot understand or supply what they need to thrive, the British must colonize them for their own good. Both Balfour and Cromer draw evidence for their assertions from what Said calls "the codes of Orientalist orthodoxy," which had developed over preceding centuries. These described "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, [and] 'different'" Oriental subjects as the polar of "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" Europeans.

Balfour's ideas are echoed by other British politicians with a vested interest in maintaining the British colonial empire. By starting with these political statements by former colonial administrators, it's easy to see the overt racism inherent in judgments that men like Cromer and Balfour seem to believe are entirely rational and self-evident. In casting "subject races" as inferior, Cromer is stating a value judgment and then legislating as if it were a proven fact. But neither man articulates these ideas in a vacuum; over a hundred years of scholarship reinforces (and creates) their sense that there is an inherent, possibly biological, difference between Europeans and Oriental subjects.

The Orientalism of Balfour and Cromer, which Said classifies as "modern Orientalism" takes older ideas, repackages them in the scientific and rational language of post-Enlightenment Europe and uses them as a political tool to justify European dominance during the great era of colonial expansion, which took place between 1815 and 1914. For example, in an essay titled "The Government of Subject Races," Cromer describes colonialism as a machine designed to extract knowledge, human capital, and resources from the **Orient** and deliver those back to the Western leaders capable of administering them properly. Crucially, Cromer's writings insist that certain kinds of people—Oriental subjects—should be studied by certain experts (Orientalists), because understanding a culture is a prerequisite for Western command.

When Said differentiates "modern" Orientalism, he means the Orientalism of the 18th and 19th centuries—the great era of colonial expansion—as opposed to contemporary (20th century) Orientalism. Here he articulates a very clear pattern in which pseudoscientific ideas are given power through repetition. And he shows the blatantly exploitative ways colonial powers have used Orientalism by offering readers Cromer's own assessment of the role of a colonial empire. Readers should note how little of this occurs behind the scenes. The power of men like Cromer assures such men that they have the right to dominate others.

To show the persistence of Orientalist discourse, Said gives two contemporary examples showing how these ideas still have cultural currency in the United States of the 1970s. An essay written by American diplomat Henry Kissinger neatly divides the world into "us" (Americans or Westerners) and "them" (the so-called Third World). Of course, in Kissinger's view, the West is superior, and the "new" countries of the global south are ignorant and impotent, despite ample 20th-century evidence—in the form of wars, revolutions, and cultural production—that these binary views ae inaccurate. And like his predecessors, he hides his value judgments with deceptively neutral language. Likewise, when an essay explaining the psychology of Arab people by a former State Department bureaucrat collapses millions of people from dozens of cultures and centuries of history into the racist caricature of the brutal, vengeful, bloodthirsty, irrational, antisocial, anxious, hostile, and deceptive Arab subject, it offers these value judgments as empirical facts.

Before tracing back in time to show how Balfour's and Cromer's ideas repeat and repackage older forms of Orientalist discourse, Said gives two contemporary examples—both of which appeared within six years of Orientalism*'s publication. Though these essays, Said shows the power of discourse—of language—to shape reality. When an ambassador like Henry Kissinger or a person who's worked with the State Department and FBI says that Arab or Muslim subjects are bloodthirsty and ignorant, people tend to believe them because expertise confers a sense of infallibility. Although Said mostly explores how this power is misused, he idea that language can shape the world (for good or ill) is a deeply pro-humanities idea.*

CHAPTER 1, PART 2

In the West, the academic discipline of Orientalism is established in 1312, when European universities began to endow chairs of Semitic (Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac) languages. Over the next 650 years, the discipline expands to encompass not only half of the world (the **Orient** begins in the Near East but eventually includes lands as distant from Europe as Japan) but also social, linguistic, historical, political, and artistic subjects. Until the mid-18th century, most Orientalists were Biblical scholars or philologists (scholars of languages) but by the mid-19th century, a "virtual epidemic of Orientalia" in literature, philosophy, and the arts piques public interest. In this era, an Orientalist can be a scholar, a "gifted enthusiast," or both.

One of the reasons Said claims that Orientalism is a discourse more than anything else (especially an academic discipline) is the way that it metastasized so completely that it became an entire worldview. Moreover, its roots lie in inherently political territory: the study of Hebrew by medieval academics served theological ends, including asserting the primacy of Christianity over Islam and Judaism. By the 19th century, however, it hardly matters where Orientalism started, since it has become so common that it has force outside of the academy.

Despite the long history of their field, 18th- and 19th-century Orientalists tend to focus on the classical periods of the civilizations they study. They have little interest in (and sometimes outright disdain for) modern cultures. And despite extensive travel and commerce between Europe and the Near East in the period, most Orientalists, like the European public that avidly consumed their work, primarily encounter their subject in the mediated realm of texts rather than first-hand experience.

One of the ways that Orientalist discourse constrains Oriental subjects is by a resolute focus on the past, because the past can't argue with the expert. And expertise is important for creating and maintaining a discourse like Orientalism, in both a past and a present where most European (or American) people have little to no personal experience of anything subsumed under the umbrella of the Orient.

Even the term "Orientalist" says something interesting about the relationship between knowledge and geography, because the **Orient** is ultimately a creation of the discourse, too. Anthropologists have long understood that it is normal for people to impose order on the world by labeling and classifying things. Nor is it hard to understand how this leads to geographic distinctions between "us" and "them." But people tend to forget that when it comes to social organization (as opposed to, say, fashion trends), these distinctions are always at least a little bit arbitrary, informed more often by emotional associations than rational decision making. People hold poetic, emotional, and imaginative knowledge as well as empirical knowledge, and the two often go hand in hand.

Orientalists study the Orient, but the Orient is also a place that they create by their scholarship—that's part of why Said classifies Orientalism as a discourse first and foremost and only tangentially as an academic discipline. It's important to pay attention to the care with which he constructs his argument here. Said isn't trying to argue that people shouldn't try to make sense of the world around them by categorizing things—he does that himself by identifying and studying Orientalist discourse as a category. The problem is when the human-imposed classifications and distinctions are taken as hard and fast reality.

Because of these emotional and imaginative associations, Said explains, the **Orient** has always signified more than what the West empirically knows about a certain geographic region. And some of this imaginative knowledge is very old indeed, dating back to the ancient Greeks, who were already depicting the Orient (for them, Asia Minor and Persia) as a distant, exotic, irrational, hostile, defeated but nevertheless dangerous entity—images which persist in 18th and 19th century Orientalism. Then, when people like Herodotus and Alexander the Great begin to explore Asia Minor, the discourse shifts into domesticating a region formerly full of exotic and alarming things.

When Said talks about the Orient here, he's talking about an idea that's bigger than Asia Minor or the clash of cultures that took place during the Greco-Persian wars (499-449 BCE). The unknown that the Orient initially represented is initially threatening precisely because it is unknown. What marks Orientalist discourse as uniquely political is that even as the region became more known, the sense of danger and threat was preserved in ways that licensed political domination.

But a sense of the **Orient** as dangerous persisted, bolstered by the successful expansion of Muslim control across the Near East and Turkey and into India, Indonesia, China (in the east), North Africa and Sicily (to the west) and even into Europe itself on the borders of French and Spanish terrain in the 9th-17th centuries. Orientalist discourse becomes attractive in this context because imposing a narrative on the Orient allows the European Orientalist to feel a sense of control over it. But domesticating perceived threats in this way generates increasingly limited and limiting ideas. For example, medieval theologians tended to dismiss Islam as a misguided form of Christianity until it had become nothing more than that in their eyes, then they used that perception to stoke fear of the other and to stage their own intermural doctrinal debates.

Another factor contributing to Orientalism's longevity is the way it flexibly accommodated shifting political circumstances. Within a century of Mohammed's death in 632, the Umayyad Caliphate had brought Islam into close contact with Europe through (among other things) its conquest of Spain. This political might—as well as the theological competition between Christianity and Islam, both of which claimed to be the final revelation of God—conspire to give Islam and Arab people a tremendous importance in European conceptions of the world. And at times when Arab political power was in ascendance (for instance, the 8th century), Orientalist discourse put them in their place, at least intellectually, by assuring European Christians of their superiority.

Said sees the discourse of academic Orientalism turning the **Orient** into a theater that endlessly reproduces European ideas about the Orient. This can be seen in the way that allegedly encyclopedic accounts about the Orient, such as Barthélemy d'Herbelot's late 17th-century *Bibliothèque oreintale*, convey European superiority and flatten the complexity of the Orient and its cultures with racist caricatures and behind the seemingly neutral and rational veneer of alphabetically arranged entries. Books like this allow the expert Orientalist to impose order and discipline on their subject while at the same time ensuring that no one will have unmediated access to primary sources that might give them a different idea. Again, Said stresses that he isn't taking issue with encyclopedias or trying to understand other cultures. Rather, his concern is to interrogate the political ends the discourse of Orientalism has always served—bringing the Orient under the colonial control of Europe.

Said jumps through history offering a few examples from each century along the way. The continuities between these help to build his argument that Orientalism functions more on received ideas than on actual observation of the world. This becomes especially problematic in the 17th and 18th centuries, after Europe undergoes its Enlightenment. Although there's been a revolution in the way that people look at the world in other realms, namely science, that values empirical knowledge (that which can be supported through direct observation), Orientalist scholars tend to look only for the facts that fit the discourse that has already been established. The more they close ranks and keep outsiders from having unmediated access to the Orient and its primary sources, the easier it is for them to control the narrative—and the narrative is increasingly focused on conquering the Orient.

In the realm of literature, a work like Dante's *Inferno* shows how entrenched and hegemonic Orientalist discourse has always been. Dante places Mohammed in the eighth circle of Hell, where he is punished as a schismatic (a person who causes the division of a religious group) because earlier medieval Christian theologians (and Orientalists) had misinterpreted Mohammed as a failed Christian. The fact that Dante places other Muslim figures (philosophers Avicenna and Averroes and the chivalrous warrior king Saladin) in the afterlife realm reserved for virtuous non-Christians shows that he didn't just hate Muslims, but that his depiction of Muslim characters has more to do with how European culture understands Islam rather than with how Islam understands itself.

After introducing d'Herbelot's encyclopedia, Said turns back in time yet again to the Middle Ages and the Divine Comedy, *written by Italian poet Dante Alighieri in the 14th century. Dante isn't an academic Orientalist, so his views about Islam and Mohammed aren't establishing the discourse, they're just participating in the discourse that's already in existence in Dante's time. Since Said has already covered some of the history, it's easy to see how Dante's work draws from earlier theological debates about the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Moreover, the way Dante decides, on his own authority, which historical Muslims are allowed a pleasant afterlife (or a terrible one) implies the sense of Western superiority Orientalist discourse provides. Muslims, in this view, are too shortsighted to understand that their religion is wrong. But an enlightened Christian like Dante can explain for them what kind of behavior is and isn't acceptable.*

Islam is a particular target of Orientalist discourse because it is the "outsider" against which medieval Christian Europe defined itself, especially as the Eastern Mediterranean increasingly came under Muslim control in the 6th century and the center of Christian culture migrated north from Rome toward modern-day Germany. Islamophobic Orientalism as sketched by Said shows how the discourse doesn't represent the actual **Orient** (indeed, such a thing doesn't really exist) but simply replicates the figures, tropes, and ideas that Europe uses to signify (and devalue) the Orient. Instead, Orientalist discourse is a self-reinforcing machine. The Orientalist uses "declarative and self-evident" phrases to describe the Orient. Each time they say, for example, "Mohammed is an imposter," they give that declaration the weight of proven fact.

At the end of this section, Said returns consciously to a theme that runs throughout the whole book—from the Middle Ages on, Orientalist discourse doesn't just take aim at some general Orient. Rather, it always has Muslims, Arabs, and Islam at the center of its sights. This focus on Islam and Arab people might wax and wane, but it persists, nevertheless. And, as he hinted in the introduction, an anti-Muslim, anti-Arab bias is the primary feature of contemporary (that is, late 20th century) Orientalist discourse. And the way this discourse gains so much traction is by cherry-picking evidence and only presenting that which proves its foregone conclusions, no matter how biased or racist those might be.

CHAPTER 1, PART 3

Having briefly sketched the history by which Orientalist discourse organizes and describes the **Orient**, Said turns to Orientalism's political projects. At first, these are focused almost entirely on the contest (both spiritual and temporal) between Christianity and Islam, for which there are multiple and complex reasons. But by the mid-18th century, the Orient has expanded beyond the confines of "the Bible lands" and Islam to encompass new places like India—which, crucially, are colonies of European countries.

Orientalism's ability to expand or narrow based on the political and social circumstances of the societies in which it exists are part of what, for Said, proves that it's a discourse rather than a discipline. So too is the fact that its cultural currency goes hand in hand with the colonial projects of the British and French, who, by the 18th century, had turned away from their (by that point, largely failed) colonies in North America toward countries south and east of Europe.

It wasn't until the mid-18th century that the idea of the **Orient** began to expand beyond Islam, the Arabs, or the Ottomans and into new places like India. Interest in the Orient expands with translations of ancient Zoroastrian and Hindu religious texts in the second half of the 18th century and by catalogs of Indian laws, customs, and history written by colonial administrators like William Jones. These 19th-century Orientalists feel duty-bound to "rescue" "classical Oriental grandeur" to improve the lot of modern Oriental subjects.

Like their earlier and later counterparts, 18th- and 19th-century Orientalist serve the interests of empire, like understanding indigenous laws as a first step for creating colonial laws that would allow them to better control indigenous people. Nor is it hard to see the blatant racism in the desire to protect the classical Orient from the modern Orient. Orientalist discourse recognizes the value that the Orient has in the context of human history, but it plays rhetorical games to deny this value to modern cultures.

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1797 is a crucial turning point because it marks the first—but not the last—time European colonial powers put the Orientalist's specialist knowledge to use for conquest. Napoleon's actions in Egypt stand out in three important ways: first, he prepared by immersing himself in the Orientalist scholarship about Egypt. Second, once there, Napoleon carefully positioned his invading force as a friend of Egypt and Islam. He had declarations translated and promulgated in Arabic, and he made a point of flattering Muslim clerics and respecting the Quran. Third, amidst his political conquest, Napoleon established a full-scale academy charged with documenting and describing Egypt.

Said sees Napoleon's conquest as different from those which went before because it's an entirely Orientalist project. Napoleon starts with the idea that he wants to invade Egypt—both to disrupt Britain's trade route with India and as part of his general plan to expand French territory and influence. During the period, he was conducting a series of territorial wars within Europe, as well. From there, he consults experts with the knowledge to furnish him both the rationale (rescuing its ancient, glorious history from allegedly degenerate modern citizens) and the means (knowledge of Arabic language and Islamic practice) to do so. And by aligning themselves with Napoleon's geopolitical aims, the Orientalists that accompany him gain further access to the area and history they want to study.

This French account of Egypt is *Description de l'Égypte*, a 23-volume encyclopedia published between 1809 and 1828. The preface, written by Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier (secretary of the Institut d'Égypte) sets out the stakes for French domination of a country that lies at the confluence of Africa, Asia, and Europe—a country whose undeniably important contributions to human history France wants to assimilate via its annexation of the country. Throughout his account, Fourier stresses that France does everything for the good of the Egyptians themselves, who had plunged from their former glory into a state of modern "barbarism."

One of the interesting things about Orientalist discourse is that it isn't even very subtle. The encyclopedia very openly states France's geopolitical reasons for invading Egypt, even if it tries to defend those reasons as beneficial rather than exploitative. This is part of Said's argument about the discourse of Orientalism—it's powerful and seductive because it manufactures consent for the powerful to exploit the vulnerable.

Although Napoleon's Egyptian expedition fails, it sets the model for future colonial efforts in the **Orient**. It also gives birth to a cottage industry of Orientalist writings (novels, ethnographies, and travelogues) and to scientific and geopolitical attempts to exert control over Egypt, such as Ferdinand de Lesseps's Suez Canal project, completed in 1868. Said claims that de Lesseps brings it to fruition primarily because he skillfully activates Orientalist theatrics. European Orientalists see this project as the achievement of an ancient pharaonic vision and a stunning example of how the West has "known, then invaded and possessed, then recreated" the Orient as the rightful property of the West.

France's invasion of Egypt—the very idea that it would be easy for Napoleon to waltz in and claim a country that just declared independence from its last colonial power (the Ottoman Empire)—testifies to the power Orientalist ideas. Especially about the essential weakness and passivity of Oriental subjects, who were too backward to take care of themselves. The discourse also takes over when reality shows its ideas to be false. If France can't hold on to Egypt in the real world, it will cling to a fantasy of domination in the imaginary realm. When de Lesseps succeeds in constructing the Suez Canal, he casts the project not as an aggressive takeover but as the culmination of Egypt's own potential.


CHAPTER 1, PART 4

In the mid-20th century, when Said is writing, the academic discipline of Orientalism is coming under fire for its links to geopolitical power and colonial oppression. Said finds the roots of this crisis in the way the discourse of academic Orientalism became aligned with imperial projects following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt.

Said's critique of Orientalism is both a geopolitical and an academic one. As a literary scholar, his field (literary studies) is related to and in some cases interwoven with the academic field of Oriental Studies. In asking readers to consider the geopolitical impacts of Orientalist discourse, he's both showing how Orientalism itself works and showing how the control of knowledge can generate power—for good or for ill.

Before delving into how, Said describes what he means by "discourse." Orientalism is a particular way of looking at the world mediated by ideas that primarily circulate in books. One way to understand the idea of a discourse is to think about how a travel or instructional book might match up (or not) with a reader's experience of reality. When there's a discrepancy, readers often give the book's authority greater weight than their own experiences, which they begin to suspect. Conversely, when a person's experience confirms what the books say, the books seem even more authoritative. By setting readers' expectations, Said points out, the books aren't just describing reality but creating it, too. The accumulated weight of these expectations is a discourse. The ability to self-reinforce—each contribution shores up the whole edifice—is another important component of discourses.

Although Said brought up the idea of discourse in the introduction, he revisits it in the first chapter in greater detail. This is typical of Said's writing style, which is iterative and interwoven. He revisits key ideas at various points throughout the book in ways that create a densely layered argument. In his analogy, he shows how a discourse can reinforce itself even when it fails to do its job of explaining how the world works. It's easiest to see how controlling information generates power when reality doesn't conform to the discourse's claims. In a way, a discourse seems little different from a conspiracy theory, except that it has more cultural currency.


The discourse of Orientalism begins in universities and is associated with a great expansion of knowledge in the West. But its central thesis—that the **Orient** is unchanging, utterly foreign, and inferior to the West—obviously has political force, too. This political force lies beneath the consistent debasement of the Orient and Oriental subjects, especially as the field expanded and developed in the 18th century.

The more mismatches there are between a discourse and reality, the more urgent it becomes to understand what purpose the discourse's lies and manipulations serve. If Said reiterates the connection between Orientalist discourse and colonial conquest time and again in the book, it's because he feels that the West has successfully buried this connection—and he offers the history of Western domination in the Near East and beyond to prove it.


The first characteristic of this period is a growing sense of disenchantment. Early Orientalists produced a body of work that excavated a glorious, glorified, and sanitized Oriental past. With increasing colonial involvement, more Europeans visited—and were disappointed by—the modern **Orient**. This led, in some cases, to a redoubled commitment to the grandeur of the imaginary Orient. Similarly, increasing contact between East and West exposed Europeans to plenty of contradictions between their generalized and generalizing ideas about the Orient and the real Orient, leading to anxious efforts to shore up the discourse and hide these contradictions behind a wall of words.

The first crisis for Orientalism comes as an increasingly wealthy, modern, and mobile society gains a greater ability to experience the world firsthand rather than through the mediation of experts. First-hand knowledge, which has the potential to expose discourse, is a powerful force. But the logic of a discourse operates to take away that power. Said's argument basically asserts that, faced with a disconnect between a received idea and reality, most people find it more comforting to insist on the truth of the received idea rather than to admit they were wrong or to reassess their thinking. This is the human habit that a discourse exploits.

In the 19th century, the **Orient** piques travelers' curiosity, visitors find the modern Orient disappointing, Orientalists assuage this disappointment by explaining it away in books that inspire new travelers to visit the Orient, and so the cycle continues. But in the years between World War I and the 1950s, this system becomes untenable as all the countries in the former Orient claim independence from their colonizers. And awareness about the ways that Orientalism is out of line with modern humanistic and social science research increases. The career of Hamilton Gibb illustrates this conundrum and Orientalism's attempts to grapple with it. In 1945, Gibb is comfortable describing Islam in baldly Orientalist (that is, racist and essentializing) terms. By 1963, Gibb advocates for augmenting the Orientalist's expertise with the new approaches of the social science in an interdisciplinary approach.

Said reserves his harshest criticisms for Orientalist academics because they are operating at the conflux of two discourses—one which tells them that the Orient is essentially bad or backward and that encourages them to align their scholarship with this thesis, and one which tells them that as scholars, their work is neutral. From his viewpoint as an Oriental subject, Said knows that the latter isn't true. The problem isn't that a scholar like Gibb exists, necessarily. It's that scholars like Gibb seem to be genuinely incapable of recognizing their biases. And their willing blindness turns them into tools in the hands of the politically savvy and powerful.

At this crossroads, Orientalism has three options: pretend that nothing has changed; adapt the old patterns to changing times; or abandon the outdated discourse altogether. When Orientalist discourse refuses to acknowledge changing circumstances, it perpetuates the silencing and oppression of Oriental subjects. It silences those who object to colonial oppression by insisting that Oriental subjects cannot understand or practice self-governance like Westerners. For example, Orientalism sees Arab Palestinians' resistance to Israeli occupation in solely religious, rather than historical, political, or economic terms because in Orientalist discourse, Islam blindly opposes all "non-Islamic peoples." And these injustices only get worse as Orientalists in the post-World War II era increasingly abandon the academy for government positions.

At this point, Said's argument directly addresses the part of his audience composed of other academics—scholars, researchers, professors. Orientalism *builds on late 20th century work in the humanities and social sciences that began to reveal how discourses work and the harm they can cause. Said also speaks here about the power Western societies in Europe and the United States have over the world. The consequences of anti-Islamic or anti-Arab biases in public discourse aren't theoretical. Orientalist discourse seeks to control the narrative of the Israel-Palestine conflict by casting it in only one light—as a battle between Judaism and Islam. Not only does this ignore the political or economic impacts of the conflict, but a focus on Islam also ignores the complex reality of Palestinian society. Said himself came from a Palestinian Christian family that fled the conflict when he was a child. For him, the political is deeply personal. And as an Oriental subject, he asks his readers to recognize the humanity—and complexity—of people like himself.*

The contemporary West tends to dismiss Oriental subjects and their demands for freedom and self-determination as "a nuisance [and] an insult." Racist and prejudicial Orientalist attitudes are just as common as in the past, if not more, thanks to wide dissemination in the press and popular culture. The result, as described by Egyptian political scientist Anwar Abdel Malek, is an attitude among middle-class Westerners that they have a monopoly on humanity and thus have the right to own and manage the sub humanized, non-White world.

Not only does Orientalist discourse serve the interests of the powerful by cloaking their goals in an aura of academic objectivity, but it also licenses racism and prejudice by positioning stereotypes as facts. The overt colonialism of previous eras has been replaced with a sort of cultural or spiritual colonialism in which Westerners don't think of themselves as better because they're Westerners, per se, but because they have been encouraged to see some marginalized groups—particularly Arab and Muslim people—as subhuman.

This attitude sums up what Said sees as a unique and enduring aspect of Orientalism as a geopolitical discourse: the idea that the West is "actor [...] spectator, [...] judge and jury" of a completely passive, static, and monolithic **Orient**. Thus, the demands of Oriental subjects for self-determination—demands that even appear aggressive to Western eyes—are a shock. And instead of updating their views, modern Orientalists continue to circumscribe Oriental subjects with jargon. In this context, Said proposes not only to demonstrate the disparity between Orientalist discourse and reality (the focus of the first chapter) but to reflect on what the humanities more generally can learn from Orientalism's failures.

Again, Said returns his focus to the two characters in the Orientalist drama: the active, conquering, fully human (and often male) Western subject and the passive, abject, dehumanized (and often feminized) Oriental subject. These two characters—in the form of the Oriental subject and the White Man character types—will be explored in depth throughout the rest of the chapter. It's a testament to the enduring power of Orientalist discourse that as the world changes—as formerly colonized populations declare their freedom throughout the end of the 20th century, for example—it continues to refuse to acknowledge that Oriental subjects are fully human, and it continues to deny them autonomy—in ways that helpfully align with Western political goals.

CHAPTER 2, PART 1

When he died in 1880, French novelist Gustave Flaubert was working on an unfinished novel satirizing the bumbling incompetence of the 19th-century bourgeoise's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and dominance. In it, Flaubert has one of his protagonists blithely declare that contact with Asia is bound to "regenerate" Europe. Although this sketch is underdeveloped, it gestures toward Orientalist ideas that had become entrenched by the late 19th century, specifically, the ongoing distinction between the East and West as geographic and cultural regions; the use of the East (here Asia) as a tool for Western use; and a sense, borrowed from the Romantic movement, that Western culture has been drained of energy. Flaubert also gives readers an image of Orientalism as a closed system of knowledge, when he has his protagonists decide to become copyists who endlessly and uncritically replicate received knowledge.

Said interprets Flaubert's bumbling protagonists as perfect examples of Orientalist discourse. What makes this more interesting is that Said presents Flaubert as able to see through the discourse, at least at some moments. How Flaubert encounters—and uses—the Orient will be the focus of a later section in this chapter. That matters to Said because it shows, yet again, how pervasive and powerful a discourse like Orientalism can become. And this scene from Flaubert's notes shows the continuity of Orientalism's main ideas (the Orient is different, the Orient is less developed yet still a valuable resource). Romanticism was a 19th-century literary and cultural movement that reacted against the rigid rationality of the Enlightenment. It emphasized, instead, emotions and imagination. In this light, the Orient for Flaubert's characters isn't a place to colonize physically but a place from which Europe can steal the best, most exciting and titillating experiences to prod its imaginative faculties back to life. Romanticism thus becomes, for Said, a key driver of Orientalism's expansion from scholarship to the realm of literature.

In this chapter, Said proposes to trace the development of Orientalist discourse between the Middle Ages and the 19th century. Several things change in this time: European explorers and colonists travel farther and farther beyond the Islamic lands of the Near East; historical anthropology begins to put civilizations into conversation with each other; some thinkers and artists, inspired by history, become interested in Oriental cultures, bringing Orientalist discourse increasingly into public consciousness; and the scientific revolution led to a frenzy of classifying the natural world as minutely as possible.

As in the previous chapter, Said starts with a late 19th- or early 20th-century example that illustrates Orientalism. He invites readers to recognize the continuity between the ideas it expresses and ideas that might still be current in their own culture, then turns toward the past to show how long Orientalist discourse has held sway and how deeply entrenched it is in Western consciousness. The creative borrowing of Oriental themes and images Said describes here explains how Orientalism begins to seep from universities and learned societies into public consciousness.

Thus, what Said calls "modern" (18th- and 19th-century) Orientalism mainly distinguishes itself from its predecessors by an appeal to a quasi-scientific objectivity. The 18th-century Orientalist understands himself (they were all men) as rescuing the **Orient** from obscurity through heroic acts of scholarship. No longer a representative of Christianity, the Orientalist becomes a sort of god, recreating their world through their expert interpretation. Individual contributions to the discourse codify and pass down ideas that often ultimately take on the force of quasi-religious beliefs. This chapter examines the legacies of two key Orientalists, Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan, whose work bears witness to these shifts and the way that Orientalism doesn't just contribute to imperialism and colonialism but in fact *demands* it.

"Modern" (as opposed to medieval) Orientalism bears the stamp of the Scientific Revolution (16th and 17th centuries) and Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries), two European developments which saw a massive shift in the way society produced knowledge. A new emphasis on empiricism—on direct observation and description of events—led to massive scientific advances. But rather than following suit, Said alleges, Orientalism indulged in a faux empiricism, which used the language of science to give weight to an already hopelessly biased discourse.

CHAPTER 2, PART 2

Born in 1757, Silvestre de Sacy was a gifted and devoted student of the **Orient** who studied Arabic, Syriac, Chaldean, and Hebrew. He ultimately became a scholar, teacher, government consultant, and an active member of several learned societies. Thus, it's not an exaggeration to name him as one of the founding fathers of modern Orientalism. The conversational tone in which he writes his books creates a sense of intimacy that suggests the relationship between a student and a trusted teacher. Writing as if he's in the classroom, Sacy teaches his readers by displaying and interpreting carefully selected excerpts from history and literature. He expects his readers to passively receive his wisdom, which he offers via static and mediated forms like anthologies and tableaus.

Said positions Sacy as a typical 18th-century Orientalist in two regards: first, he comes to his study of the Orient through the study of languages. Second, he self-consciously positions himself as an expert, part of whose job entails disseminating knowledge to others. Said shows how Sacy carefully controls his readers' access to his source material by offering them excerpts and snippets. His knowledge of the raw material becomes a way that he can exercise power both over his subject (by presenting it the way he wants to) and his audience (by allowing them only to see what he thinks they should see).

Said analyzes Sacy's contribution to the *Tableau historique de l'érudition française* (an authoritative accounting of all French knowledge commissioned by Napoleon) to explain his methodology. In it, Sacy describes the Orientalist as uncovering and explicating his "obscure matter" to help build the edifice of human (or French) knowledge. Implicitly, his academic study is a "technology of power" by which experts like himself mediate material and present interpretations for others to consume. He defends this interventionist approach by appealing to European sensibilities, which he claims would find unmediated Oriental texts unrefined if not incomprehensible—ideas that are commonplace by the 19th century.

Sacy is a modern Orientalist, too, because his intellectual project is intimately tied up with the interests of the French empire of which he was a citizen. Said's interpretation of Sacy's words emphasizes the ways in which Sacy's distance from his subject isn't a neutral or critical distance, but an overdetermined distance in which he sees himself as superior to that which he studies. And it shows how self-consciously experts like Sacy use the creation of knowledge and the control of information as tools. There's nothing neutral about the work, no matter how scientific and impersonal Sacy makes it sound.

Nineteenth-century Ernest Renan inherits and expands on Sacy's ideas. Renan was a philologist—a scholar of language and word histories. Philology was a prestigious field of study in the 19th century, and Orientalists like Renan used it to articulate a relationship between the ancient past and modern present—one which unsurprisingly, privileged the modern Westerner's powerful application of pure rationality and scientific inquiry to the study of humanity.

Sacy studied ancient languages in the 18th century; by Renan's day the study of ancient languages had become integral to the intellectual project of Europe. Nineteenth century philologists were making exciting discoveries about the ancient historical connections between modern-day languages that initially seemed quite distinct from each other, like Sanskrit and English or French. But, Said points out, rather than letting these discoveries stand on their own rights, they were immediately put to use confirming European ideas of superiority.

Renan displaces the drama of the encounter between the philologist and the **Orient** (specifically, for him, the study of Semitic languages and people) from a religious framework to a scientific one. In this light, he understands the Semitic as not just his subject but also, to a great extent, his creation, a thing he isolates from its context, compels to reveal its secrets, and fits into the grand edifice of human understanding.

This is one of several points where Said touches on the ways Orientalist discourse didn't—and doesn't—just serve large, society- or nation-wide goals (like colonizing another country) but works on the individual level. Insofar as it gives him power (and assures him of his own superiority), Orientalism fills Renan's emotional needs.

Renan gives his works an air of objectivity by evoking the library, the museum, the laboratory, and the biological science of anatomy. But Said points out that Renan's justification for his studies—based on the foundational idea that the Semitic (person, language or culture) is somehow aberrant—is circular. By identifying the Semitic as different, he isolates it for study; in studying it, he both declares and itemizes its differences from the norms. And his scholarship, full of "remarkably harsh [...] and unfounded" ideas, demonstrates the generous application of his biases, namely that Semitic people are basically inhuman, inorganic phenomena given real meaning only through his study.

Although Renan uses the language of scientific objectivity he inherits from the Enlightenment, Said claims here that a close reading of Renan's work disproves his objectivity, because Renan isolates the Semitic as a category by looking not for its inherent traits but its deviance from alleged norms. He starts, in other words, with the idea that the Oriental subject (the Semitic subject) is wholly different from the European subject—an idea he inherits from Orientalist discourse stretching back at least to the Middle Ages. Then, he looks for evidence that proves his idea. And his findings thus always reinforce it. To make matters worse, his ideas are dehumanizing and racist, so his scholarship reinforces the very racism that suggested it to him in the first place.

Said sees Renan's later career—which turned from languages to history—as an extension of this quest to revivify a dead past through the Orientalist's salutary attention. Said also notes a deeply patriarchal strand that runs subtly but persistently though Renan's ideas and work, which not only generally fails to mention women but also consistently locates the generative force in the world in the actions of (male) scientists and thinkers who order (rather than give birth to) life. Notably, this imposition of power can best be achieved when the objects of study are unchanging—inorganic, unliving, abstract.

Renn's career shift exemplifies a dynamic by which an Orientalist expert in one subject could, because of the Orient's alleged simplicity, meaningfully comment on any other subject. Renan's judgment of Semitic languages as debased turns effortlessly into ideas about the debasement of Oriental subjects. This further demonstrates the ways in which Orientalist discourse grows from received ideas rather than empirical observation. Renan's sexism merely confirms something Said has already claimed: that discourses serve not to expand human knowledge, but to concentrate power in the hands of a few people. Patriarchy, in this interpretation, is a discourse aligned with Orientalism and serving similar goals.

CHAPTER 2, PART 3

Through his case studies of Sacy and Renan, Said argues that part of the way modern Orientalism entrenched itself was by giving oversimplified cultural generalizations—which were often quite racist—the aura of scientific truth. Whether the racism or the oversimplification came first is impossible to judge, but these become mutually reinforcing impulses in Orientalist discourse. Oversimplification also makes it easy for the consumers of Orientalism to swing between desire and revulsion. The **Orient** begins by offering a welcome and salutary shakeup of European thought. On further study, however, the Orientalist finds that the Orient is, in fact, "underhumanized" or "barbaric." More than one academic Orientalist found himself ultimately horrified by the contemporary (that is, actual and complex) Orient. And then this necessitates further explanation.

Said reiterates and summarizes the argument he made in the preceding section using the works of Sacy and Renan as evidence. Said keeps his—and readers'—focus on one of the book's main contentions: that one of the reasons Orientalist discourse is so pervasive is because it repackages and makes racist and prejudicial ideas palatable for the broader public. The things that make it different and therefore exciting can easily be turned into justifications for oppression when it suits those in power. Importantly, Orientalist discourse doesn't just note the differences between one culture and another—it combines those observations with value judgments.

Even less overtly racists studies, like Causin de Perceval's study of pre- and early Islamic Arab culture or Thomas Carlyle's character study of the Prophet Mohammed (both composed in the 1840s) fall prey to oversimplification. By focusing on the political and ignoring the religious implications of Islam, de Perceval sanitizes Mohammed of the religious threat he once posed to European Christianity. Carlyle also proposes to historicize and humanize Mohammed which, in Said's opinion, he mostly does. But he also can't resist comparing—and thus devaluing—the Prophet's contributions to history according to European standards of literary and theological excellence. This oversimplification serves to assure a European audience of the comparative "subordination" of the Orient, thereby rendering it both safe and exploitable.

Here, Said analyzes the way that Orientalists and Oriental discourse mediates the interface between Europe and other cultures. An Orientalist account doesn't need to traffic in the worst racialized stereotypes to be harmful. It only needs to adopt as its basic viewpoint the idea of Western or European superiority. Then, no matter what else it does, it will always confirm the basic, foundational ideas of Orientalism: that the East is essentially and eternally different in quantifiable ways from the West. And the benefits from dehumanizing and devaluing a group of people are obvious: dehumanized people are easier to exploit.

Even studies that are far more sensitive to colonial exploitation, such as Karl Marx's analyses of the British Raj in India (written in the 1850s) cannot escape the idea that the subordinate Orient needs contact with the superior West to achieve anything. While Marx is moved by the plight of oppressed Indian subjects, he still concludes that, insofar as their exploitation moves them closer to socialist revolution, colonial occupation might be a good thing for India. And he takes it as an article of faith that the development of a "Western society" in India is beneficial.

If Orientalist discourse can bend the thought of as countercultural thinker as Karl Marx, then it is powerful, indeed. To Marx's credit, in Said's eyes, his musings on the British Raj recognize the overt oppression Indian colonial subjects experienced. But even Marx can't shake the idea that the best or most important ideas (including his own) somehow derive from Western culture itself.

Like other thinkers of his era, Marx tends to conceive of people in groups, a tendency that necessarily simplifies and reduces the humanity of individuals. Yet, his sensitivity to the suffering of oppressed Indian subjects suggests that he can nevertheless maintain an innate sense of common humanity between himself and distant others—at least until the powerful discourse of Orientalism reasserts itself in his thought. The question of how Orientalism became so powerful and so hegemonic occupies the rest of this section.

The problem Said identifies in Orientalist discourse isn't that it makes generalizations. Marx couldn't have written his theories about the working class if he had focused solely on individual workers. The problem is that Orientalist discourse has become so powerful by the mid-19th century that the only identity available to Oriental subjects was "Oriental subject"—the discourse doesn't grant them the same autonomy or even humanity it gives Western individuals.

Said identifies three kinds of people who wrote about their Oriental travels: those who were consciously collecting scientific material to contribute to academic Orientalism; those who were intent on observing the **Orient** but were less academic and more personal in their records; and those for whom the trip represents the fulfillment of an "urgent" and personal project. These categories shared many salient Orientalist ideas: the "sheer egoistic powers" of the European observer; the sense that the Orient is a thing to be possessed *by* the observer; the Orient as a place of pilgrimage for the Westerner and stasis for the native; and an overall motif of interpreting the Orient for itself and others.

Having reiterated the ways that Orientalist discourse saturated the consciousnesses of 18th- and 19th- century Europeans, Said traces the way that it perpetuated itself. In this era, there was no shortage of books about the Orient written by people of varying degrees of expertise. Yet, no matter who was writing or from what vantage point, all accounts share the same basic features of Orientalist discourse. Everything is circular, growing out of and ultimately confirming the same ideas over and over.

The exemplar of the first category (collecting observations for academic Orientalism) is Edward William Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, which was published in 1836. Lane presents his work as an "immediate [...] unadorned and neutral" description, even though it is obviously a constructed and imposes an orderly (almost mathematical) arrangement on its material. It differs, Said says, from the *Description de l'Égypte* commissioned by Napoleon, primarily because it is the result of direct, first-person, embedded observation rather than scholarly distance.

With increasing contact between Europe and the Orient thanks to trade and tourism, the discourse adjusts—not in content, but in tone. Lane describes the contemporary Orient in exciting, first-person narration, but it's his authority as a professional Orientalist that gives him the right not only to describe what he sees but to explain it.

Lane organizes his book chronologically, according to the phases of human life, but, unlike the "modern Egyptians" who are his subjects, his narrative voice isn't bound by time. It is authoritative and ageless. Each section begins with a general observation followed by extensive evidence that confirms it. Lane presents his evidence in such sheer and "untidy" volume that it interrupts the narrative logic of his work, thus constantly reminding readers of the typically chaotic **Orient** that Lane must subdue and make it intelligible for his readers.

Turning to the modern orient requires the Orientalist to put more effort into controlling the Orient through discourse. Renan or Sacy derived authority from their command over ancient texts. Lane doesn't have that luxury; in theory, modern subjects could speak for themselves. Lane gives himself the space to speak for them by decontextualizing himself and situating his authorial voice in a timeless vantage point. The modern Egyptians are, his book suggests, untidy and excessive. Only he, the expert Orientalist, has enough context to discover the hidden order.

The distance Lane must hold from his subject to maintain his authority can be seen in his discussion of marriage; when his Egyptian friends became anxious about his own bachelor status, they offered to find him a wife. Lane tells the story of his refusal, but only up to a point, dropping it before it's complete as if to suggest the erasure of Lane the human being in favor of Lane the disembodied authority, forever free of real ties within the group.

Said interprets the narrative in which Lane narrowly avoids being married off to an Egyptian woman as a way of explicitly writing Lane-the-character out of Lane-the-expert's account. Because Orientalist discourse confers more authority on the distant expert than the insider, Lane, in order to maintain his status, must scrupulously avoid anything that would make him look too sympathetic with the people he describes. The point here is that knowledge is a technology of power, not of empathy or identification.

Said reads Lane's work not just as an entry in the annals of Orientalism, but as a model for the authoritative stance academic Orientalism sought to maintain. Lane writes for one of the many academic Orientalist societies of the 19th century, societies which sought to categorize and itemize the **Orient** as well as to collect, reproduce, and disseminate its material and intellectual culture to the masses—after they had been properly prepared for Western audiences by Orientalist experts.

Lane exemplifies 19th-century Orientalism for Said because he lives among his Egyptian subjects yet still manages to describe them and their behavior in ways that only confirm Orientalist orthodoxy. Importantly, he does this by maintaining a rigorous distance between himself and his subjects, and by never allowing them to speak for themselves without his mediation.

CHAPTER 2, PART 4

Nineteenth-century Europeans in the **Orient** all seek, like Lane, to distance themselves from—and purge their accounts of—"unsettling" (usually sexual) Oriental influences. However, more literary writers eagerly embrace topics that are taboo to academic Orientalists. And the primary form of these literary accounts—both real and fictional—is the pilgrimage. These pilgrimages share two main features: the pilgrims learn about the Orient through scholars before embarking, and their writings tirelessly conform (and thus contribute) to Orientalist discourse.

As more and more Europeans visit the Orient, the discourse shifts. Its basic premises don't change, but writers from outside academic institutions start to add their own flavor. The very idea of a pilgrimage—a journey (often long and arduous) to a shrine or other place of special, usually religious significance—contributes to the idea of the Orient as an unusual place, a place full of experiences that are unthinkable in daily life at home in Europe.

Accounts of Oriental pilgrimages also highlight important differences between French and British writers in 18th- and 19th- century Orientalism. British pilgrims are usually bound for India, a major and well-established colony of their empire. For them, the **Orient** exists in an inherently political realm: it is a thing that their people possess and from which they extract material for their own use. For the French, the modern Orient is a place of loss, from the medieval Crusades up to Napoleon's evacuation from Egypt. This dynamic evidences itself in the work of academic French Orientalists, too. Academics and pilgrims all seek an "exotic [and] attractive reality" rather than a scientific one.

Because Said sees Orientalism as a tool of empire, he makes distinctions between the French and the British as his account circles toward the 19th century. France's first colonial empire had largely collapsed thanks to competition with the British, while the British Empire was flourishing. What Said wants readers to understand here, however, is that Orientalism is a tool of empire that doesn't necessarily need colonies to flourish. Even when their foreign land holdings were small, Orientalism allowed the French to maintain their sense of themselves as different than and superior to the kinds of people a European nation colonized—Oriental subjects. This in turn lays the groundwork for their conquests in North Africa and Southeast Asia.

François-René de Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire* tells the story of his trip through the **Orient** in 1805-1806. In it, he presents the Orient as a "decrepit canvas" to be restored. More specifically, he articulates one of the earliest and most powerful versions of the idea that the modern Orient is so "low, barbaric, and antithetical as to merit reconquest" by enlightened, liberal Europeans—the same ideas Cromer will articulate a century later. Thus, from the arrogant and self-assured height of the 19th-century Orientalist, Chateaubriand cares less about modern Orient itself than the space it gives him for the imaginative work of accessing the meaning of its past—something unavailable to the native but obvious to the enlightened outsider.

While academic Orientalists in the 18th and 19th century certainly trafficked in racist stereotyping to prove the superiority of Europeans compared to Oriental subjects, racist tropes come to the forefront in accounts written by amateur Orientalists like Chateaubriand in the 19th century. Chateaubriand's nakedly political ideas express openly ideas that are often expressed more subtly in 18th century academic Orientalist discourse. This shows how they're taking on a life of their own, and how they develop into the concepts a later Orientalist like Cromer will inherit. Said alleges that the discourse of Orientalism is attractive to writers like Chateaubriand because it allows them to see what they want to see in the Orient (usually, a reflection of their own superiority).

When Chateaubriand travels back to Europe via Egypt, he hires a representative to carve his name into one of the pyramids. This is the cheeky act of a vandalizing tourist. But it also speaks to his obsession with the legacy of his writing. This in turn points to one of the attractions of Orientalist discourse, which provides a ready and capacious realm in which a person could leave a mark on the world. But it also gestures toward the limitation of personal writings like Chateaubriand's, which lack the aura of scientific objectivity and risk turning the **Orient** into a purely individualized fantasy realm. Notably, both the power and limitation of discourse require the depersonalization of the Orient, turning it into a *topos* —a set of received ideas—rather than a place.

The other thing that Said finds particularly telling in Chateaubriand's account is the way that it privileges the written word over direct experience. Chateaubriand is more interested in the mark he leaves on the world than anything else. He casually uses the Orient as a way to enhance his own reputation, without concern for the consequences this might have on the people who live there—he doesn't care, Said has established, because he already thinks of them as subhuman. For him, Orientalist discourse is a means of accessing and deploying social and literary attention and power. And each time a writer does this, he or she augments and reinforces the discourse, making it stronger for the next person.

Similarly, French poet Alphonse Lamartine exposes his "bundle" of preconceived notions when he goes east in 1833. His narrative immediately imposes his vision on the **Orient**. When he doesn't like what he sees, he refers to Orientalist accounts that (in his opinion) describe it better or he interprets what he sees to fit his worldview. If he can do neither of those things, he dismisses what he sees entirely. Unsurprisingly, he then claims this circumscribed and tamed Orient for European possession. In remaking the world so thoroughly—in reducing it to a purely abstract conceptualization to be used as a mirror reflecting his own poetic genius—he goes even farther than Chateaubriand in imposing himself on the Orient.

Again and again, Said critiques Orientalism and Orientalists for failing to give proper weight to the world as it is rather than as Orientalism says it is (or should be). For him, Lamartine represents one of the worst examples of this willing myopia, one that highlights the role of the Orientalist's sense of superiority. If Chateaubriand saw his written words as a way to impose his vision on the Orient, Lamartine seems to see the whole library of Orientalist discourse as a tool for making the Orient palatable—and for reinforcing his own sense of cultural and individual superiority.

The next two writers under consideration, Gérard de Nerval and Gustave Flaubert, are important to Said's argument because they, of all 19th-century travelers made the most "personal and aesthetic" uses of their visits. Key features of the way they talk about the **Orient** had already been suggested to them by European visions of the Orient—its exoticism, its macabre and sadomasochistic potential, its "secrecy and occultism" and, above all its mysteriously alluring women. Moreover, both seek to put the Orient to their personal use, to reinvigorate themselves by its exoticism and antiquity. For these Orientalists, the Orient exists as a place to rediscover themselves. Although this is different from academic Orientalists discourse, which wants to grasp, appropriate, and codify the Orient, but it draws from the same sense of superiority and power. And the similarity shows how pervasive Orientalist ideas have become in 19th-century Europe.

Said points to the way that lay (that is, non-academic or non-political) Orientalists not only feed and strengthen Orientalist discourse but help it to diffuse more widely in society. He does this more by implication than anything else, but it's worth noting that one of the major shifts in 19th-century society is a vogue for the Orient in fashion, decoration, music, and literature. This shows the power of an unquestioned discourse to shape reality, as people with no direct knowledge of or contact with Eastern cultures were given frameworks with which to think about it—frameworks which emphasized its difference from their culture and implied the value of the Orient for adding interest to their lives, whether in a racy novel or a piece of art to hang on the wall.

Narratively, Nerval structures his trip as a voyage into the depths of an **Orient** that Chateaubriand and others had only superficially described. Ultimately, then, Nerval's Orient becomes nothing more than a giant memorial to absence—an unstable, fragile place that he takes as a blank slate for the expression of European genius.

Despite his complete lack of formal training as an Orientalist, Nerval stakes his authority on his ability to plumb its depths in order to really understand what it means. But this "understanding" is really just a projection of his own (and Oriental discourse's) beliefs. In doing so, he must ignore what's there, making a blank space for himself to fill up with these ideas.

It is hard to comprehensively address the Orientalism of Nerval's countryman, French novelist Gustave Flaubert, because it's so pervasive in his large body of work. But Said lists what he feels are its most salient features. For Flaubert, the **Orient** was a "visionary alternative" to the boring and familiar French landscape, an "exciting spectacle" instead of "humdrum routine," and a great, ancient mystery, dead and ready to be brought back to life by a skilled writer like himself.

Said opened this chapter with Flaubert, and now he circles back to the French novelist's work. At the beginning of the chapter, Said analyzed the way that one of Flaubert's unpublished stories depicts the workings of 19th-century Orientalist discourse. Now, he contextualizes Flaubert among his countrymen. Flaubert, like the others, sees the Orient simultaneously as a stimulatingly exotic place and as a blank slate that allows him almost unlimited artistic license. It's no longer a real place where real people might suffer the consequences of Europeans' ideas about them—instead, it becomes a wholly fictional realm that can be used to titillate audiences without any sense of responsibility.

Flaubert, in general, dehumanizes his Oriental subjects in the name of vivid description. For example, when he describes a visit to the syphilis ward of a hospital, he renders the ill patients in gory yet clinical detail, draining them of their humanity and reducing them to cankerous disembodied parts. Rendering this scene as a theatrical production allows Flaubert—and his readers—to repress their disgust or sympathy. Similarly, Flaubert empties Oriental women of their own humanity and considers them valuable only as objects that allow the European male subject (Flaubert) to rejuvenate, inspire, and express himself, as when his sexual encounter with Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem becomes a place where he seeks to master her in much the same way that academic Orientalists control their material by encompassing and domesticating the Orient with words.

A writer like Flaubert exercises his power over readers by directing their attention. Said contends that he does this by dehumanizing Oriental subjects until they're empty enough of meaning to be used as metaphors. Put that way, it's easy to register the violence inherent in his writing. It's harder to see in action, however, because Flaubert operates under the umbrella of Orientalism—a commonly accepted discourse that already treated Oriental subjects as subhuman and as a convenient mirror that helps Europeans to see and understand themselves. In a way, this isn't unlike the way Marx uses suffering Indians to add weight to his pro-socialist-revolution arguments without fully acknowledging the autonomy of potential revolutionaries who happen to be Oriental subjects.

This points to the paradox at the root of academic Orientalism. In seeking to codify the exotic and strange, it drains the **Orient** of its living, complex reality. Said thinks that Flaubert might have perceived his own exuberant and exciting descriptions as an antidote to rigid and dry academic prose. But, whether one is constructing the Orient with "verve and style" or "copy[ing] it tirelessly," the discourse isolates it as a place totally foreign to the allegedly real world of Western experience. It becomes, as always, a tool for Westerners to think with and through.

In identifying and describing Orientalism, Said draws on his training as a literary critic (training which, in the second half of the 20th, century focused heavily on contextualizing literature) and his perspective as an Oriental subject. No longer willing to let Westerners speak for and describe him, he instead describes for them the discourse of Orientalism, discourse that became so widespread and so compelling in the 18th and 19th centuries that it was practically invisible to its practitioners and beneficiaries.

The farther into the 19th century Said's survey goes, the more any text about the **Orient** becomes burdened by the discourse's past and by layers of "interests, official learning, [and] institutional power." English pilgrims' trips, for example, were almost always to India. The sense that the British government had a better handle on the Orient than the French did comes through in a heightened assurance of the British writer's inherent superiority and even more baldfaced racism. Readers can find the epitome of this British arrogance in Alexander William Kinglake's travel narrative *Eothen*, or—in a more complex form—in Richard Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*.

Part of the reason Orientalism became so invisible was because its invisibility served the interests of the powerful. The turning of European attention toward the oil-rich and strategically positioned Near East in the late 19th and early 20th centuries sharpened colonial appetites and added urgency to the project of domesticating the Orient and turning it into a European possession. And that's also true for the British, who (unlike the French) had both an imaginative and a literal claim to much of the Orient in the 19th century.

Thus, Said finds that Richard Francis Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* bears the marks of a struggle between Burton's sense of himself as a rebel and as a potential "agent of [European] authority." To a far greater extent than any other writer in the 19th century, Burton immersed himself and participated in the Arab culture, even successfully disguising himself as a Muslim and participating in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Thus, his observations and generalizations about life in the **Orient** feel far more compelling than anyone else's, because he presents himself as a participant rather than a distant observer. Yet, his authorial and authoritative presence is everywhere in the text, from the extensive footnotes to his personal sense of triumph when he understands—masters—a previously esoteric law or custom.

Richard Francis Burton was an explorer and travel writer. He was also, although Said downplays this in his analysis, a British soldier in India for a time before he took his pilgrimage to Mecca. Burton seems to have been genuinely interested in the cultures and languages he immersed himself in, as Said admits. Yet, he sees in Burton an ultimate failure to overcome the accumulated weight of Orientalist discourse. Although he participates, Burton can't shake his sense of himself as a Westerner, a person with a right to walk the world as he wanted to and to impose his interpretation on it. In a way, Burton's work is more dangerous than others, because it offers itself as with such immediacy even though it utterly fails to acknowledge or even recognize the position (and therefore actual and potential biases) of its author.

Despite Burton's originality, his work—like the others discussed in this chapter—exists in the context of what Flaubert dismissively called a "regulated college of learning." By the mid-19th century, it was impossible to think of the **Orient** as a real place rather than a "domain of [...] scholarly rule and [...] imperial sway." Early Orientalists like Renan, Sacy, and Lane gave both the Orient and their academic discipline a setting and rules; later Orientalists merely added detail and color to the scene. The question of how Orientalist discourse turned itself into an inescapable, endlessly self-replicating institution in the 20th century is the question of the third chapter.

No European writer of the 18th or 19th century could—or did—produce their work in a vacuum outside of their culture, and since their culture was stepped in Orientalist discourse, no European writer could escape its gravitational pull. Even the most imaginative and clearsighted of them—for Said, Flaubert and Burton—end up regurgitating the ideas first formulated in academic Orientalism generations earlier.

CHAPTER 3, PART 1

After reviewing the sweep of Chapters 1 and 2, Said reiterates the premises on which his exploration of Orientalism is based: that fields of learning are embedded in cultural contexts; that both learned and imaginative writing remain subject to this same cultural context and are never truly "free;" and that allegedly objective claims of Orientalist "science" are less objective than they appear. Some of these ideas directly contradict an intuitive sense of progress in humanity, civilization, or knowledge. Yet, Said contends that it's important to interrogate our academic, scientific, or literary consensuses, especially Orientalism.

Said's writing style is iterative. Each time he returns to his definition of Orientalism after an extensive period of analysis and examples, he re-grounds readers in his main ideas. He also offers a clear opportunity to reflect on the definition each time readers have gained further contextualization. As his analysis draws closer to the contemporary era, he reiterates the idea that the personal is political—that cultural, social, and political contexts influence thinking. This in turn informs one of his critiques of academic institutions that allow Orientalism (or other unquestioned ideologies) to flourish unchecked.

Doing this kind of investigative work reveals the inherently political nature of contemporary Orientalism. As a discourse, it is preconditioned by the language and the culture in which it is embedded and which it perpetuates. Because what it has to say is rooted in imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism, it preconditions the range of ideas late 19th- and early 20th-century Europeans could hold or express about the **Orient** to be racist, imperialist, and ethnocentric. Importantly, it was easy for this discourse to become entrenched because politically, after the height of Islamic power in the Middle Ages, the Orient had become was weaker than the West.

Said maintains that if or when Western scholars and citizens look critically at the way the Orient (and, more specifically, Islam and Arabs) are depicted—really critically, not through the faux-critical distance of Orientalist discourse—they will see how politics and racial bias influence the conversation. The urgent need for this reappraisal lies beneath the entire project of Orientalism, *given the military and economic power of the West in the 19th and 20th centuries, combined with its thirst to control the world.*

Said identifies a manifest and a latent strain of Orientalist discourse. Manifest Orientalism is produced by academics in universities and learned societies; latent Orientalism is a society's largely subconscious sense of what the **Orient** stands for. Changes in late 19th-century Orientalism—in which the Orient largely coincides with the Ottoman Empire, that era's focus for Europe's colonial ambitions—occur as slight modifications in manifest Orientalism, but the biases of latent Orientalism, which perpetuates stereotypes of the "eccentric, backward, passive, feminine" and helpless Orient. Often, changes in manifest Orientalism merely perpetuate latent Orientalism's beliefs, as when the theory of evolution is used to prove that Oriental societies are less evolved than Western ones. Little attention is paid to contemporary "thought or culture" in the Orient because according to Orientalist discourse, the Orient exists only to become a possession of the West.

Chapter 2 investigated the way that the manifest Orientalism of Renan, Sacy, Lane, and others influenced and overlapped with the latent Orientalism of Flaubert, Chateaubriand, and Burton. Now, he turns to some of the real-world consequences of this discourse. The Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century included the territory of modern-day Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and parts of Saudi Arabia. It was the last vestiges of a once great Muslim empire that stretched across North Africa and into Eastern Europe. Although it was a dynamic and modernized empire, Said argues that this mattered little in the context of colonial greed and the Orientalist discourse that underwrote it. To justify conquering the Ottomans, Europe needed them to be weak and helpless, and Orientalist discourse obligingly depicted them that way.

This section explores how incorporation and assimilation of the **Orient** in a geopolitical sense affected Orientalist discourse. The language of empire had become the common tongue of Orientalism by the late 19th century. This is why, in 1916, the British government established a School of Oriental Studies at the University of London, because understanding (that is, classifying and possessing) the Orient is key to the success of the colonial project insofar as Orientalism showed the British how to transform "traditional societies" in the Orient into likeminded and obedient "modern commercial societies."

By the early 20th century, Orientalism as a discipline openly serves the needs of empire. Thus, the School of Oriental Studies is a clear development on Napoleon's idea that understanding Egyptian culture and history was an important prerequisite to conquering the country. Yet, as Said's analysis has shown, the West's basic assumptions about the Orient haven't changed since Napoleon's day, which begs the question of whether academic institutions are actually learning about the Orient or are just regurgitating ideas about it.

Orientalism also serves empire because it articulates a rationale for territorial expansion. For example, when the study of geography comes into vogue in the early 20th century, it impacts both latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism. By eliding national borders and cultural distinctions, geographic Orientalism (like its predecessors) renders the **Orient** a feminized and fertile blank slate for European activity. In the (latent) cultural sphere, the protagonist of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* stares at maps and fantasizes about claiming the "blank spaces on earth." In the (manifest) academic sphere, the French seek to make up for territorial losses in the War of 1870 by spinning the globe for new territories like Indochina where they hope to create a "French India." Orientalist discourse begins to describe the Orient in geographic terms, as a field or garden to be cultivated and subjugated.

Said's analysis suggests that Orientalism doesn't serve empire by producing knowledge; it serves empire by giving quasi-scientific and authoritative rationales for imperial desires. The spaces on the map in Heart of Darkness are obviously not empty—there are people and other resources there. They're only "blank" with reference to Europe. By giving the dehumanization of Oriental subjects the gloss of empirical fact, Orientalism paves the way for colonial expansion. Said contextualizes France's colonial ambitions in Southeast Asia by pointing out their humiliating loss to the Prussians in an inter-European conflict over national borders.

Even before World War I, the British and French were plotting to divide the dying Ottoman Empire between themselves, and thus the most dramatic convergence of manifest and latent Orientalist discourse occurs in this realm. The British and the French have competing designs on the Ottoman Empire, and they hope to calm their inter-European rivalry with the fair division of territory. And to do that, both sides deploy Orientalist discourse to justify their claims.

By the early 20th century, the Orient as created by Orientalist discourse has so thoroughly become a site of European action that France and Britain start using it to try to settle their disputes with each other. Obviously, this has serious and long-lasting consequences for Oriental subjects—but these aren't considered because Oriental subjects are barely people in the eyes of Europe.

CHAPTER 3, PART 2

Said uses the work of British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling, much of which is set in the **Orient**, to explore latent Orientalist discourse in the late 19th early 20th centuries. Kipling often writes about the White Man, an "amiable leader" who's nevertheless willing to use force when necessary. The White Man is culturally constructed yet is so common as to seem like a fact of nature. Like the academic Orientalist, the White Man constantly defines and works to preserve the boundary between "us" and "them." British soldier T. E. Lawrence and anthropologist Gertrude Bell are real-life examples of the White Man (or Woman) character at work. While both profess a deep respect for the Orient and its inhabitants and customs, neither ever escapes their sense of inherent superiority, and they consistently present their Oriental subjects as manifestations of a timeless, changeless essence rather than as living, complex human beings.

As the flavor of Orientalism grows more actively colonial in Said's analysis, he introduces another pertinent concept in the character type of the White Man—someone who comes from the West to lead or educated abject and helpless Oriental subjects into modernity or civilization. Theodore Edward Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, was an early 20th-century British soldier who was sent (along with others) to spearhead a revolt against the Ottoman Empire by Arab groups during WWI. The British hoped doing so would weaken the Ottoman Empire, their enemy. Although Lawrence lived as a member of the Arab revolutionaries, his writings betray his sense of superiority, in part because he gives himself—not Arab leaders—most of the credit for organizing the revolt. Gertrude Bell was a late 19th- and early-20th century British explorer and archaeologist whose long career in Egypt, Iraq, and elsewhere made her an invaluable advisor to the British government during and immediately after WWI. Again, in both cases, knowledge—of Western war aims or of local languages and culture—gives Westerners power.

Said then turns his attention to how Orientalism establishes and maintains the set of assumptions that create the character of the eternally primitive and hegemonic Oriental subject. In large part, this grows out of a simplistic faith that sciences—like the linguistics, biology, and anthropology on which contemporary Orientalism is based—always represent facts rather than values. Thus, when debates about the "racial characteristic" of Oriental subjects or the evolutionary stage of various civilizations bled from the esoteric circles of the university and learned society into the broader culture, society wholeheartedly and uncritically embraced whatever generalizations they entailed.

At this point, Said has already shown the real-world political and social consequences of reducing Oriental subjects to a character type. Racism plays a significant role in creating this type in that it supplies the figure of the subordinate and inferior non-White subject. But an overly-credulous academy and public—people who are willing to believe what they're told rather than to think critically about the world around them—gave these stereotypes and prejudices ample room to take root and flourish into full-fledged Orientalism. The irony, of course, is that in doing so, European policymakers and scholars showed the very same simplemindedness they accused Oriental subjects of.

One of the most harmful beliefs of modern and contemporary Orientalist discourse is that Jewish and Muslim people—Semitic people—specifically are "primitive," unable to transcend their "tent and tribe" mentality or to reclaim the greatness of their ancestral civilizations. This is reinforced each time an Orientalist or White Man reproduces the same racists and essentializing tropes while claiming to have discovered the truth about the **Orient** through personal experience. Thus, William Robertson Smith's influential account of his trip through modern-day Saudi Arabia in the early 1880s consistently collapses Muslim people, modern Islam, and ancient Islam into one generic category, which he judges as primitive, conservative, barbarous, obsolete, hypocritical, and wrongheaded.

Having established the racist tenor of Orientalist discourse specifically, Said homes in on some of its most pernicious manifestations, antisemitism and anti-Arab or Islamophobic beliefs. Said tends to focus more on the Islamophobic aspects of Orientalism, given changing attitudes toward Jewish people in the wake of World War II, although part of his argument rests on the idea that while the targets of Orientalism might change over time, the way the discourse operates and its basic assumptions about inferiority don't. The way people like William Robertson Smith describe Arab subjects is blatantly racist, but in a way that's often overlooked because Orientalist discourse had already given the aura of scientific accuracy and empirical truth to any observations about the difference and comparative backwardness of Oriental subjects.

With increasing colonial involvement, the Orientalist project shifts to compelling the **Orient** to serve European interests. This requires the White Man's role to evolve into manipulation (rather than simple observation) of the contemporary Orient. This requires a static and visionary Orient, so early 20th-century Orientalist discourse works hard to downplay and sideline any suggestions that Oriental subjects and societies are capable of growth, evolution, and self-determination. Thus, for example, Western Orientalist discourse gives credit for the Arab Revolt to its Western masters, like T. E. Lawrence. In his own accounts, Lawrence understands his role as necessary because he sees Arab people as essentially helpless without a strongman leader. And because he conveniently ignores history or any interrogation of what his Arab compatriots might have themselves hoped to accomplish during the Revolt, he makes himself the central hero of their story.

An important part of European powers' justifications for their imperial and colonial projects is the assertion that the people they are conquering need care or direction by a beneficent civilization. Thus, it must silence any evidence that indigenous people were doing just fine on their own. The whitewashing of the Arab Revolt by Lawrence and others provides one example of this. Orientalist discourse allows the British to get what they want while conveniently erasing the needs or desires of other groups than themselves. Lawrence's British government isn't interested in helping the Arab Revolutionaries achieve their own aims (the establishment of Arab self-rule from Egypt to Iran). It's interested in weakening the Ottoman Empire both to win WWI and to gain more territory for itself in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

The mythology of the White Man seems to bring East and West closer together than ever while nevertheless strictly maintaining a sense of difference and division—regardless of whether one's culture is in ascendance in the East (as Lawrence's Britain was) or not, as in the works of Frenchman Maurice Barrès. Barrès sought to a French narrative on the orient by looking for (and finding) a "constructive French role" in the Levant during a trip in 1914. Of course, he finds what he's looking for: touring French schools assures him that France still represents the epitome of Western culture, "spiritually, justice [...] and the ideal," and that her example has the potential to lift the Orient from its backwardness. Yet even as he expresses his hope for this outcome, his ongoing belief that the Oriental mind is somehow different, if not antithetical, to the Western one, persists.

It's easy to see the way Orientalist discourse works (and to trace its impacts on Oriental subjects) in the case of blatant colonialism (Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, for example) or geopolitical strategy (like Lawrence's role in the Arab Revolt). Said wants to make readers see how the same logic works in much more subtle but equally harmful ways when it comes to soft power. Barrès obviously writes for the benefit of a Western audience, and his assurances about their superiority are meant to make them feel better. But their sense of superiority rests on a racially informed ideas and a reductionist presentation of the Orient according to the logic of Orientalism, not according to its reality as a vibrant, living, and changing place.

As, the tenor of Orientalism shifts from an academic to an "instrumental attitude," Orientalists starts seeing themselves more as representatives of their governments than their academic disciplines. The need to control the **Orient** through discourse as well as political power increased between the World Wars as Oriental subjects began to make claims for independence (encouraged when it was expedient for Europe, as in the Arab Revolt, discouraged when not.) In this period, academic Orientalists like Sylvian Lévi, president of the French "Société asiatique," become increasingly vocal about the need to answer the so-called Eastern Question before it reaches a crisis—not just for the benefit of the West, of course, but also for the good of colonial subjects portrayed as too primitive to be trusted with their own futures.

The comments made by Sylvian Levi—which are roughly contemporaneous with and run in parallel to Balfour's and Cromer's at the beginning of Chapter 1—implicitly recognize the autonomy and political power of Oriental subjects, because their actions give rise to the "question" at hand. But explicitly, Orientalists like Levi, Balfour, and Cromer work to fence off and limit this autonomy, first through rhetoric—insisting that Oriental subjects are what Orientalists say they are, not what they show themselves to be through their actions—and then, through direct actions that shore up Western social dominance and political control.

The need to see the modern **Orient** as it is—but "see" in an Orientalist sense of categorizing, organizing and extracting intellectual and political resources—becomes more urgent even as the West otherwise embraces modern political liberalism. Authority to mandate and rule the Orient is still, as it ever was, based on dehumanizing Oriental subjects. This is as true in latent Orientalist discourse as in its manifest forms. For example, in 1939, George Orwell describes the residents of Marrakesh as "undifferentiated brown stuff" rather than the "same flesh" as the White European subject.

The blatant hypocrisy of Orientalist discourse becomes more obvious to Said the closer his analysis draws to the contemporary era. As a political philosophy, liberalism suggests the goodness of human subjects, the idea of civilizational progress, an emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy, and a support for civil liberties. Orientalist discourse denies Oriental subjects these rights and freedoms, then uses the lack of these rights and freedoms in so-called Oriental societies as evidence for the backwardness (if not outright inhumanity) of Oriental subjects. And it does this, as Orwell's words suggest, with a large (if unrecognized) dose of plain racism.

Importantly from Said's late 20th-century vantage point, in the inter- and post-World War era, the ongoing need to control the **Orient** becomes ever more strongly associated with fearmongering about Islam and Muslim people. And this happens even in the context of otherwise "purportedly liberal culture[s]." In its most advanced form, Orientalism argues that it wants to offer the benefits of liberal society to Oriental subjects, while actually deploying the alleged liberality of modern Western civilization as a tool of "oppression and mentalistic prejudice."

For Said, who grew up as an Oriental subject, it is fairly easy to see how Orientalist discourse works, yet his book suggests how difficult it is for Western readers to see Orientalism at work, because the discourse is so common and deeply rooted in social and political ideas. His intellectual project therefore seeks to reduce Orientalism's stranglehold on Western imagination and policy by revealing its motives and moves.

CHAPTER 3, PART 3

Orientalism undergoes sizeable political, economic, and academic shifts in the 20th century. Globally, the economic recession of the 1920s, colonized subjects' increasingly loud demands for freedom, and the rise of fascism in Europe undermine a sense of Western stability. While the latter half of the 20th century has seen the humanities generally move toward a humbler acknowledgement that the relationships between scholars, their societies, and the topics they study has an impact on the scholarship they produce, in Orientalism, the sense of distance between the Western scholars and their (now almost exclusively) Islamic material primarily reinforces a sense of Western superiority.

Said will spend most of this section analyzing the work of two early to mid-20th-century Orientalists whose work he considers typical of the period. To set the stage for that analysis, he begins with a discussion of what sets Orientalism of the postwar period apart from prewar Orientalism (meaning before and after the World Wars). Mostly, this has to do with modernity and increased globalism. It's harder to depict the Orient as perfectly preserved in some mythical primal state when it suffers the same misfortunes as the rest of the world (e.g., the Great Depression) and when Oriental subjects demand the autonomy and political self-determination Western discourse has long claimed they were incapable of even wanting.

Said shows this by tracing the way that Islamic Orientalists emphasize Islam's resistance to change and to mutual understanding or cooperation with the West. These ideas preserve the subject of study—if Islam won't cooperate with the West, then the West will still need Orientalists to explain it—and assert Western dominance. This dynamic can be seen clearly in the work of two important 20th-century Orientalists, Louis Massignon and Hamilton Gibb, even though their cultures of origin (Massignon was French, Gibb was British) impact their findings somewhat.

Said's argument implies that as the Orient continued to prove their general assertions wrong, Orientalists reacted by focusing on increasingly narrow subjects. "The Orient" shrinks from everything east of Europe down to just the Eastern Mediterranean and Arabinan Peninsula. The Oriental subject increasingly refers specifically to Arab people. In addition, Islam reemerges as the traditional threat to Europe it has been in the Western imagination since the Middle Ages. A smaller arena of expertise makes it easier for Orientalists to control the narrative about the Orient with scholarly discourse.


Massignon's early ideas are deeply informed by his own devout Catholic religiosity. He describes Islam generally as a religion of "resistance," then seeks to reclaim what he feels is its real truth, which he find this in the mystical practice of a Sufi called al-Hallaj. Massignon thus creates a vision of Islam that conforms with Christian theology, in which mysticism allows Muslim believers to transcend the limitations of Islamic orthodoxy and experience God's grace. Otherwise, he claims, they remain stuck in a state of soul thirst for God that leads them into a sterile and excessively legalistic practice of their faith. Despite Massignon's great and evident sympathy for his Muslim subjects and the intellectual richness of his analyses, his work still fails to transcend an essentializing distinction between East and West, between ancient and modern cultures, and between Christianity and Islam.

Another way Orientalism does violence to the things it studies is by refusing to acknowledge or consider them on their own terms. For Said, Massignon's analyses of Islam may be somewhat more sophisticated than his medieval counterparts (if for no other reason than, thanks to generations of Orientalist scholarship, he has access to a greater range of primary sources), yet his assertions are hardly more sensitive than Dante's. As an Orientalist, Massignon implies the superiority of his own knowledge and experience when he insists on interpreting Islam in ways that measure it against (and ultimately make it conform to) his own understanding of Christian theology. And his position as an expert gives his mistaken and incomplete interpretations authority.


And although his work assigns some responsibility for current trends to the destabilizing force of European colonialism, Massignon cannot transcend the essentializing idea that modern Oriental subjects are first and foremost Semites—that is, a vestige of an ancient past perfectly preserved and somewhat incongruously set down amid a modern world. Because Oriental subjects don't belong in the modern world, Westerners (particularly the French, in Massignon's opinion), must defend, protect, and explain Muslim subjects to themselves. Thus, despite the important ways in which his scholarship diverges from tradition, he nevertheless repeats and maintains many of the foundational assumptions about the Islamic **Orient**, namely that it is "spiritual [...] tribalistic, radically monotheistic, un-Aryan" and must be forcibly brought into alignment with the modern world.

For Said, Massignon makes a series of typically Orientalist moves in his scholarship. He starts with his (frankly racist) assumptions about the East and West and then looks for things to explain the essential difference between the two. When evidence presents itself that the Orient is more complicated than the discourse has previously allowed, Massignon reverts to assertions that fly in the face of critical thinking—and that work to preserve the status quo in which Europe overpowers and exploits the Orient. Thus, rather than looking at the way colonialism had perhaps slowed the economic development of modern Arab societies, Massignon claims that they are fundamentally incapable of adapting to historical shifts. And this, in turn, justifies ongoing Western exploitation under the guise of guidance.

Yet, Said points out, it isn't right to criticize Massignon personally. The blame lies with the Orientalist discourse of which Massignon's scholarship is just one small part. All representations, Said says, are necessarily mis-representations because they cannot be divorced from the "language, culture, institutions, and political ambiance" of the presenter. This might sound dehumanizing, but it's the way that scholarship happens. Accepting this truth means that it's more helpful to interrogate the structure of a shared discourse than to attack its representatives. The point isn't that Massignon and so many others misunderstand and therefore misrepresent Islam (or any other aspect of the Orient). The point is to ask what purpose this misrepresentation serves.

The ideas in this section are key to the whole of Said's argument. He wants to take Orientalism, Orientalist discourse, and Orientalists to task for the harm their ideas have caused in the real world, and he wants to hold them responsible for the racist stereotyping they perpetuated. But Said takes less issue with the individual contributions to discourse than discourse itself. He asks his readers—the academic community that fostered Orientalism as a discipline for so long, but also the lay consumers of Orientalist discourse, which is practically everyone living in a Western society, given how deeply is Orientalism imbued into Western consciousness—to open their eyes and pay critical attention to the things they're told to believe. That way, they won't be bamboozled by discourse but will instead be able to create a more reasonable understanding of the world based on facts.

This is the context in which Said examines the contributions of Hamilton Gibb, whose work represents the culmination of the "academic-research consensus," of contemporary Orientalism both because of his status in the field and because, unlike his 18th- and 19th-century predecessors, he was always a scholar and never a colonial administrator or rapt visitor. Therefore, his **Orient** was completely mediated by the previous scholarship of Orientalism.

In earlier sections of the book, Said built a case for his ideas that Orientalist discourse is a technology of power. Gibb doesn't represent the most direct geopolitical application of this power, which took place during the height of European colonization. But he does represent for Said the height of academic Orientalist hubris, the idea that he, a Western expert, knows and has the right to explain the Orient to itself and to the world.

As a mature scholar, Gibb advocates for the expansion of Anglo-American Oriental studies so that the West can maintain cultural dominance in a post-colonial world. These ideas develop from his earlier work, which explores Islam. Taking Islam as the sole lens through which Oriental subjects can or should be viewed draws on essentializing ideology articulated by earlier Orientalists. And orthodox Orientalist discourse also provides his image of the Muslim as a person wholly incapable (without Western help, that is) of an empirical grasp of reality or understanding of natural laws, who can therefore be easily blinded and manipulated by powerful figures and ideas. This truism even has such force that it allows Gibb to blithely ignore the centuries of Islamic contributions to Western science.

Said hints that Gibb's interest in the professional reputation of Orientalism and his tendency to diminish Arab and Muslim subjects both serve to elevate his sense of himself. In Gibb, Said presents a figure of the individual Orientalist living out the dynamic of Orientalism, in which the West uses the Orient as an idea to shape and define itself against. Moreover, Gibb represents for Said the epitome of Orientalism's refusal to accept evidence that contradicts its narratives. Gibb not only ignores the contributions of Muslim and Arab subjects to human civilization but cannot see that he is as blinded by a powerful ideas he accuses Muslim subjects of being.

Although Gibb displays more generosity and sympathy toward Islam than many of his predecessors, Said argues that he's nevertheless guilty of essentializing Islam. Rather than investigating the ways its various sects and doctrinal debates affect each other, Gibb turns *everything* into evidence of Islam's unity and paints a picture of an essential reactionary and conservative ideology that perceives the changing nature of time itself as an attack on its essence. And he fails to consider the impact of colonialism on Muslim cultures.

Gibb, like Orientalism generally, does extra work to make reality conform to his expectations, rather than updating his ideas to reflect the evidence he finds.

Moreover, Gibb asserts his own authority over the religion he studies (and its adherents) by insisting on calling it "Mahommedanism" and by claiming without evidence that its "master science" is law. Gibb's idea of Islam doesn't explain the existence of sectarian disagreement in actual Islam. And it refuses to allow that the religion might perceive itself as engaged with the real world. Gibb's Islam is a lifeless dogma that runs the risk of extinction because its failure to keep up with the innovations of the West. Yet, Gibb never bothers to ask what modern Muslim subjects think about their faith, nor does he listen to what modern clerics say about it. He defines Islam as an Orientalist because the entire edifice of Orientalism privileges the general and the universal over the specific and the complex, and it trusts the Western expert far more than the Eastern subject.

Gibb renames Islam in accordance with his (incorrect) assumptions about the faith (namely that if Christians worship Christ, Muslims must worship Mohammed). But renaming it is also a means by which he claims authority over it, because this suggests he understands the essence of Islam better than its own practitioners. But the renaming seems appropriate, too, since Gibb isn't describing Islam as it is, but Islam as he imagines it—a categorically different thing. And by this series of displacements, Gibb (and other Orientalist thinkers) perpetuate Western misunderstanding and fear of whatever they label Oriental.

The **Orient**, then, is intensely and carefully created by Orientalism. It is not a reflection of reality. Rather, it is a fiction, a creation of the scholar's worldview and choices more than anything else. It exists nowhere but in the pages of Orientalist discourse, which collect, arrange, interpret and pass the material down to subsequent generations of experts.

As Said prepares to turn to the latest phase of Orientalism—the Orientalist frameworks and assumptions in which his contemporary readers were steeped, he reminds them once again that Orientalism presents a vision of the world that is fundamentally biased (at least—and often outright racist) and which grows ever more distant from reality over time.

CHAPTER 3, PART 4

Three major shifts have changed the course or Orientalism in the in the post WWII era: France and Britain are no longer dominant, but America is; the Arab-Israeli conflicts have brought the figure of Arab Muslims to the fore; and Orientalism now offers its services directly to government and business interests. With the increasing Western attention on the region, the Arab person has become an empty vessel into which Westerners can put their "traditional, latent mistrust" of Oriental subjects, specifically Semitic—and even more specifically, Arab—people. This has something to do with the West's involvement in the creation of Israel in 1948, and something to do with the fact that the menacing figure of "the Arab" controls perhaps the single most important commodity in the contemporary world: oil.

Said's exploration of contemporary (that is, late 20th-century) Orientalism emphasizes the way that knowledge and expertise become tools and technologies of power. As Western countries (particularly America) pay renewed attention to the Near East both because of its rich fossil fuel resources and because of their political investments in Israel, Orientalist discourse offers palatable explanations for modern events. That is to say, Orientalist discourse offers explanations that conveniently suit the narratives of Western hegemony, even when they don't necessarily reflect reality—especially when it comes to Arab and Muslim subjects and the long history of racist depictions of them in Western discourse. And because it's so hard for Western thinkers to escape the gravitational pull of Orientalism, there is little awareness in the West of how ideological its viewpoints are.

Films and other popular cultural representations perpetuate menacing, Orientalist stereotypes about Arab Muslim people, building on both traditional tropes and the fear that Muslim people (or Arab people) will take over the world through jihad. Likewise, contemporary academic Orientalism (now rebranded as "area studies") undervalues the contributions of the Near East to either modern geopolitics or to the historical development of the arts and sciences. What makes latent and manifest blindness to the complexity and strategic importance of the Near East so astonishing is that it's being articulated even as the United States and the West are increasingly dependent on (and involved in) the area.

One of Said's criticisms of contemporary Orientalism is that it perpetuates negative stereotypes of Muslim and Arab subjects. In an earlier chapter, Said asserted that the West has long construed Islam as an existential threat, thanks to the history of Islamic conquest and along the borders of Europe during the early Middle Ages and the Crusades. Anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments waned as the balance of power between the East and the West shifted decisively toward Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. But renewed involvement in the region has brought not increasing understanding, but rising enmity once again.

Said draws examples of this from the mid-century work of Morroe Berger, a sociologist and professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University in the 1960s. Berger not only exemplifies the newest iteration of Orientalism's disdain for its subject of study but also the post-WWII shift from philology and the humanities toward the social sciences, which Said sees as a result of the fact that America's interest in the **Orient** (mostly after WWII) is always in the realm of policy first, culture second. Accordingly, American Orientalists have little awareness of Arab or Islamic literature and the arts. American Orientalism's focus on statistics and sociological trends dehumanize, while literature speaks to experience and is inherently humanizing. By neglecting Islamic culture's arts and literature, American scholars continue to dehumanize Arab and Muslim subjects.

One of the ways that contemporary Orientalism dehumanizes Arab and Muslim subjects is by conveniently ignoring their contributions to human society. This aligns with the way Orientalist discourse shapes reality in part by claiming authority to represent the Orient in discourse. By downplaying any evidence that evidence that Muslim or Arab subjects are or have ever been anything other than backward, ignorant, and dangerous, the discourse shapes the assumptions people in the West hold about Arab and Muslim subjects. Again, Said asserts that the insistence on an essential difference between the (enlightened) West and the (backwards, strange, dangerous) Orient allows people to overlook and ignore the humanity shared by Easterners and Westerners alike.

In this American social sciences version of Orientalism, the study of language and literature is only important to serve military, political, or business ends. This control of language gives cover to other illiberal and silencing attitudes toward the **Orient**. For example, during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the *New York Times* newspaper commissioned two point-of-view articles, one representing the Israeli side and one the Arab side of the conflict, which not only offered two individual opinions as indicative of each side's beliefs but also perpetuated an asymmetry between the two. The Israeli article was written by an Israeli lawyer, while the Arab point of view was explained by a White American public servant who had previously been an ambassador in an Arab country.

Said asserts that modern Orientalism values the study of literature only in service to learning languages that can then be used to conduct trade or political negotiations with Oriental subjects who are assumed to be hostile and who are never allowed to speak to correct that assumption, as in the example he offers. While Said has presented this dynamic of speaking for the Oriental subject as inherently problematic from the outset, it becomes glaringly evident in this modern example when there is no real excuse for refusing to allow Oriental subjects to speak for themselves—in a modern era of interconnected communications networks and translators, it should be as simple to allow an Arab person to speak as an Israeli person.

This isn't a new phenomenon. Even though the United States doesn't become a world empire until after WWII, it had imperial ambitions (albeit limited ones) in the **Orient** in the 19th century, too. When the American Oriental Society was founded in 1843, its explicit goal was to follow the imperial example of Europe—to understand the East in order to dominate and control it. It is an inherently political organization with political goals. Then, American involvement in the World Wars betrayed its interest in the Near East. It entered WWI only after the Balfour Declaration and was heavily involved in the oil-rich Middle East—Iran, North Africa, and the Levant—during WWII.

Said suggest that modern American discourse continues to silence Oriental subjects because this serves American foreign policy goals, including not just support for Israel but a vested interest in controlling access to the valuable resources contained in the region. The Balfour Declaration, published in 1917, asserted British support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, an area which the British and French had just agreed to divide between themselves after taking it from the Ottoman Empire during WWI.

Thus, when the Middle East Institute is founded in Washington, D. C. in 1946, its aims are almost entirely political, with no veneer of pure scholarly interest. In this context, American Orientalism should be understood as a logical extension and appropriation of the academic Orientalist tradition in Europe. For example, Harvard appoints the British Gibb as director of is Cetner for Middle East Studies in the 1950s, and the University of Chicago and UCLA hire German Orientalist Gustave von Grunebaum in the 1940s and 1950s.

Contemporary Orientalism in the United States, like late 19th- and early 20th- century Orientalism in Europe, openly serves explicitly political aims, and, according to Said's evidence here, even picks its Orientalists with an eye toward controlling public perceptions of Islam and Muslim subjects.

Said has already cataloged Gibb's anti-Muslim stereotypes. Grunebaum shares many of them, including belief in the myopia and "antihumanism" of "Muslim civilization." Said points to critiques demonstrating how Grunebaum presents an image of Islam as a timeless monolith "incapable of innovation." And Grunebaum doesn't notice the irony that if his assertions are true—if Muslim subjects are wholly incapable of growth or change—then there is no need for his work, because there can never be productive cultural exchange between the West and the **Orient**. The more that Islam—in the form of Arab nationalist movements—demonstrates its opposition to the West, the more satisfying it seems to be for Western scholars to take control by making assertions that justify Western aggressions.

Grunebaum and Gibb are both guilty of one of Orientalism's original sins: acting and speaking as if all Muslims are one hegemonic and monolithic edifice throughout time. This view gives no space to doctrinal or cultural debates within Muslim societies or in Islam generally. But discourse creates the reality that it presents. Orientalist discourse asserts that in a Muslim society, everything can be explained or understood through the lens of Islam. But that's only because Orientalist discourse insists on interpreting everything that happens in a Muslim society through the lens of Islam, even when a historical, geopolitical, or economic explanation might be more appropriate.

If Gibb and Grunebaum represent a "hard," overtly geopolitical form of Orientalism, there's a softer version operating in contemporary area studies departments, which are trying to modernize their scholarship without reckoning with the circumstances that brought the field of Orientalism into existence in the first place. Nor have area studies been able to transcend the fundamental sense of difference between East and West; the belief in Western rationality and Eastern irrationality and inferiority; the preference for "classical" civilizations rather than the lived reality of modern societies; the sense of the Orient as a timeless and unchanging place; the alleged objectivity of the Western observer; or a sense of the **Orient**'s threatening nature.

Said concedes that late 20th century scholars are producing increasingly sophisticated scholarship on the Orient. But he alleges that unless these scholars and the disciplines they represent reckon with the history, manifestations, and consequences of Orientalist discourse, they will never be able to truly escape an essentializing, politicized, and essentially incorrect representation of the Orient.

The Islamic East is the primary victim of this contemporary Orientalist discourse. Scholars and geopolitical analysts of other parts of the world (Asia, Africa) have already begun the reappraisal and evolution of their work. Only Islam—or the narrow, 7th-century version of it recreated by Orientalists—is treated as if it stands apart from the otherwise widely acknowledged influences of imperialism, colonialism, and racism. People feel free to discuss the modern Muslim person—reduced primarily to the "despised heretic" and "anti-Zionist"—in terms that are no longer publicly acceptable when it comes to other marginalized groups like Black or Jewish people.

Said openly claims that the distinction between scholarship on the Orient and the rest of the world is simple anti-Arab or Islamophobic racism. Most specifically in the overlap between these two. Not all Arab people are Muslim, nor are all Muslims Arab. But contemporary ideas of the Orient as Said defines it (the place that is antithetical to Europe or the West) map onto Islamic religious practice almost completely. That's why Israel, although an "Oriental" country by geography, is exempted from modern conceptions of Orientalism.

Said offers the three volume *Cambridge History of Islam*, published in 1970, as an example of how Modern Orientalism treats—or, more accurately, mistreats—the subject of Islam. First, it downplays any consideration of Islam as faith in favor of geopolitical history. Second, in focusing on politics, it ignores the flourishing of arts and sciences during the early centuries of Muslim expansion. Third, it focuses on a geographical area corresponding only to the Near East, excluding North Africa and Andalusian Spain. It ignores or dismisses nationalist and anticolonial movements without acknowledging Zionism or Western colonial interventions. The result of giving unquestioned power to Orientalist discourse is that the History presents Islam as a Platonic ideal rather than a living thing. And thus it raises questions about whether "ethnic origins and religion" are the best lens through which to explore human history and experience. Or even if they're a legitimate one.

Said presents the Cambridge History of Islam *as the culmination and natural endpoint of Orientalist discourse. This is all the more alarming to him because the* History *understands and presents itself as an unbiased, critical, and rational account. Moreover, it is a textbook meant to explain Islam (and, by extension, Muslim believers and their societies) to Western students. This yet again illustrates how a discourse (in this case, the discourse of Orientalism) shapes reality as people living in the discursive system experience it. The West construes the Orient (and more specifically Islam) as a threat, and the discourse helpfully produced evidence to support this claim. The fact that so few people seem to even notice the discourse at work speaks to its power and ubiquity. And this in turn, adds urgency to Said's calls for Western scholarship and society to examine its assumptions and to recontextualize the history of its engagement with the Orient.*

One of the deepest and most entrenched truisms of Orientalism is the "simplicity" of mind possessed by the Oriental subject. This belief underwrites both antisemitic and Islamophobic sentiments in popular and political cultures throughout Orientalism's history. But one quirk of contemporary Orientalism is the way that the Zionist movement and the creation of Israel split the "Semitic myth" in two, aligning the Jewish people (or at least democratic Israel) with Western Orientalism while leaving Arab people stuck in the role of "the Oriental." Rather than seeing Palestinians as resisting foreign colonists, contemporary Orientalist discourse undermines the dignity of their struggle by casting them as typical Arab subjects: timelessly, inherently, and irrationally vengeful; "incapable of peace"; untrustworthy. Orientalist discourse thus seeks to control the **Orient** and Oriental subjects by defining them, emphasizing their essential and unchanging foreignness, and imposing a more salutary (Western) viewpoint on them.

Although Said only explicitly engages in the Israel-Palestine conflict at a few points in the book, he makes it clear in the introduction that this is an important context to his study. As a Palestinian-American man, Said cares deeply about the conflict and understanding how Western discourse and received ideas influence the way it plays out. In claiming that contemporary Western Orientalism mostly exempts Jewish people from the category of Oriental subjects (to which they once belonged), Said suggests yet again that the categories with which the discourse divides the world into "us" and "them" are based in ideology and political expediency, not empirical fact.

From a vast sea of modern examples of the way Orientalist discourse dehumanizes and defines Oriental subjects, Said selects a few—Raphael Patai's attempts to elucidate the Middle Eastern mind, Sania Hamady's assertions that Arab people are fundamentally incapable of cooperation, Manfred Halpern's claims that Arab people are only half as mentally flexible as their Western peers—that demonstrate the ongoing essentializing of the Arab and Muslim subject through blatant racism.

Said backs up his claims that contemporary Orientalism essentializes and misrepresents Arab and Muslim subjects with a few examples, all drawn from within 20 years of the publication of Orientalism. *The fact that ideas of the 18th and 16th centuries and even those present in medieval works remain intact—that Oriental subjects are inherently different and inherently dangerous—appear almost unchanged speaks to the power of Orientalist discourse, and it suggests the ways in which any discourse that becomes detached from reality and incapable of change limits thinking in ways that promote racism, division, and strife.*

This raises the question of why, if the Arab person is so profoundly limited and negative, anyone bothers to write about them at all. Said argues that the sheer size of Islam as a cultural influence threatens Western dominance. The Orientalist can deny or hide evidence for the existence of "intellectual and social power" in Muslim societies but cannot explain away their large numbers. So Orientalist discourse tries to control the narrative by reducing the activity of Islamic or Arab subjects to an endless, politically pointless, and potentially dangerous reproductive sexuality. Of course, casting the (Muslim) Oriental subject as procreative undermines ideas about their essential passivity, but Orientalist discourse isn't a reflection of reality as much as a myth, in which such illogic can pass by unremarked.

Said points out a paradox or irony at the heart of orthodox Orientalism: if Oriental subjects are as simple and unchanging as Orientalism imagines them to be, no one would need to keep writing about them. Unfortunately for Orientalist discourse, however, no matter how many times the Orientalist makes these assertions, the actions of Oriental subjects in the real world escape rhetorical control and defy the discourse. The real purpose of Orientalism isn't to promote human knowledge but to exercise power over the Orient, whether that's real geopolitical power or simply the rhetorical power of Orientalist discourse.

The paternalistic bent of modern Orientalism is particularly apparent in the work of another contemporary scholar, Bernard Lewis. In an essay titled "Islamic Concepts of Revolution," Lewis first asserts (without evidence) that Islamic thought doesn't include the idea of a right to resist and then defines the word *thawra* ("revolution") by its basic root (to rise up) with the inelegant visual image of a camel struggling to get up from the ground. Then he paternalistically counsels Arab people toying with ideas of revolt to "wait till the excitement dies down." In Lewis's work, Said sees an Orientalism so propagandistic and polemical that it collapses in on itself and loses all connection with any sort of reality—past or present.

Said depicts Lewis as the epitome of Orientalist arrogance (and also uselessness). Pressed to explain modern phenomena—namely nationalist movements in Iraq and Syria in the 1960s—Lewis fails, because he instead insists that Islam means what he says it does despite all evidence to the contrary. The fact that Muslims participated in revolutions very pointedly suggests that Islam—as it is practiced by its adherents—does have a concept of revolution, and no Western expert can change that fact no matter what he or she says.

Contemporary Orientalism is, then, a particularly dangerous form of political propaganda because it presents itself as an objective and fair history. Moreover, the field resolutely refuses to recognize its failures of objectivity and fairness. Yet, despite being a series of "intellectual discreditable" fictions, the discourse of Orientalism remains powerful and dangerous as long as the Western remains interested and involved in the Near East. Understanding and dismantling it is an important project because Orientalism is, if anything, more powerful than ever. In the 1970s, it's beginning to take hold in the Near East among the ruling classes and cultural elites, thanks to the vacuum that exists in the **Orient**'s ability to represent itself. There are no major Arabic studies journals or internationally prestigious universities in the region, so students and professors in the East are mostly taught in the West and continue in large part to replicate Orientalist models.

The urgency of Said's project lies in the geopolitical situation of his moment in time. As tensions between the East and the West rise, he sees Western discourse continuing to paint this conflict in existential terms. It divides the world into "us" and "them," depicts "them" as an eternal and existential threat to "our" way of life, and then it strictly controls the production of knowledge to censor or silence any dissenting viewpoints. And although the discourse suggests that this is for the good of all, Said makes a compelling case that it has more do to with Western greed—first to colonize the world, later to control its resources through softer forms of political power than outright colonies.

Said is aware that he has described the discourse of Orientalism and raised questions about how cultures can be represented accurately without offering alternatives or answers. The broad outlines of what he sees as a way forward include challenging the alignment between the scholar and the state, a suspicious attitude toward received ideas and dogmas, "methodological self-consciousness," and interdisciplinary cooperation, rather than the cross- or super-disciplinary authority of the old-school Orientalist. Above all, Said wants scholarship to stop pretending to exist separate from the divisions and tensions in society. Scholars must never forget that "the study of human experience" has political and ethical implications.

At the outset of the book, Said explained that much of the urgency he feels in identifying and describing the history and functions of Orientalism lie in his personal experience, both as a scholar and as a Palestinian-American. It's clear that this isn't just an intellectual exercise but an urgent mission to counteract the harmful effects of a previously underexamined scholarly and social phenomenon. Although he doesn't have a simple answer—indeed, the very breadth and depth of his analysis suggests that Orientalism is so deeply rooted that there could never be a simple or unitary solution—he does suggest some concrete steps, namely the urgent need for people to understand the ways in which their social, cultural, historical, religious, political, academic and all other kinds of contexts influence their thinking. Having shown the relationship between knowledge and power, Said now argues that knowledge is *power when it comes to dismantling and correcting discourses.*

The failure of Orientalism isn't just academic arrogance: it is the absence of human empathy, the inability to see humanity in a people and a region of the earth declared to be (for suspect reasons) irredeemably alien. The contemporary recognition of the political and historical experiences of so many of the world's diverse people opens the door to challenging Orientalism's hegemony. And, as Orientalism offers a warning about how easy it is to fall prey to the "mind forg'd manacles" of ideology, Said hopes that his work warns against just replacing Orientalism with another equally limited discourse.

In the end, Said's main complaint about Orientalism and all that it led to—from colonial conquests in the Middle Ages and beyond to the ongoing dehumanizing and vilifying of Arab and Muslim subjects in the Western imagination—is that it is essentially dehumanizing and anti-empathetic. By looking for the differences and distinctions between the East and the West (or between the Westerner and the Oriental subject), Orientalism can only cause division. It ignored (and continues to ignore) the shared humanity of Oriental subjects—and for no better reasons than prejudice, racism, fear, arrogance, and greed. In the end, then, Said calls on all his readers to think and engage critically with the world around them and to work toward a world in which humanity will be free from the limitations it imposes on itself—the "mind-forg'd manacles" Said takes from a poem by 18th-century British Poet William Blake—and able to realize its full potential.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Duprey, Annalese. "*Orientalism*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 26 Nov 2024. Web. 26 Nov 2024.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Duprey, Annalese. "*Orientalism*." LitCharts LLC, November 26, 2024. Retrieved November 26, 2024. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/orientalism.

To cite any of the quotes from *Orientalism* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Said, Edward W.. Orientalism. Vintage. 1979.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Said, Edward W.. Orientalism. New York: Vintage. 1979.