Edward Said (b. 1935) is a Palestinian, who was educated in Palestine and Egypt when those countries were under British jurisdiction, and subsequently in the United States. He is Parr Professor of English and Cooperative Literature at Columbia University, New York. Said’s first book was critical study of Conrad, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), that took a phenomenological approach to its subject, but was recognizably within the tradition of Anglo-American ‘New Criticism’. Said was one of the first critics in America to respond to the challenge of European structuralist and post-structuralist theory, and his thoughtful, sometimes anxious reflections upon these developments may be traced in his books *Beginnings* (1975) and *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983). Said has disliked the increasing hermiticism of deconstructive criticism, and has been drawn to Marxist and Foucauldian analyses of literature and culture as sites of political and ideological struggle. In *Orientalism* (1978) he found a rewarding subject for such an approach, and, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he examined his earlier premises in relation to the Western canon. *Orientalism* is the discourse of the West about the East, a huge body of texts -- literary, topographical, anthropological, historical, sociological -- that has been accumulating since the Renaissance. Said, concentrating his attention on writing about the Near East, is concerned to show how this discourse is at once self-validating, constructing certain stereotypes which become accepted as self-evident facts, and also in conscious or unconscious collusion with political and economic imperialism. ‘Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point,’ says Said, in the introduction to his book, *Orientalism* can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient -- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, setting it, ruling over it: in short *Orientalism* as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.' Said is uniquely qualified to undertake such a study, and *Orientalism* impressively combines political passion with wide-ranging scholarship. The following extract, called simply ‘Crisis’ in the original text, conclude the first section of the book, entitled ‘The Scope of *Orientalism*.’

**CROSS-REFERENCES:** 9. Foucault
30. Spivak

*continued*
Crisis [in orientalism]

It may appear strange to speak about something or someone as holding a textual attitude, but a student of literature will understand the phrase more easily if he will recall the kind of view attacked by Voltaire in *Candide*, or even the attitude to reality satirized by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. What seems unexceptionable good sense to these writers is that it is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books -- texts -- say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin. One would no more think of using *Amadis of Gaul* [a Spanish romance of uncertain origin, first printed in the sixteenth century] to understand sixteenth-century (or present-day) Spain than one would use the Bible to understand, say, the House of Commons. But clearly people have tried and do try to use texts in so simple-minded a way, for otherwise *Candide* and *Don Quixote* would not still have the appeal for readers that they do today. It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human. But is this failing constantly present, or are there circumstances that, more than others, make the textual attitude likely to prevail?

Two situations favor a textual attitude. One is when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant. In such a case one has recourse not only to what in one’s previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has read about it. Travel books or guidebooks are about as 'natural' a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book one can think of, precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one's equanimity. Many travelers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn't what they expected, meaning that it wasn't what a book said it would be. And of course many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that it is colorful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than

---

[a] A Spanish romance of uncertain origin, first printed in the sixteenth century.
It may appear strange to speak about something or someone as holding a *textual* attitude, but a student of literature will understand the phrase more easily if he will recall the kind of view attacked by Voltaire in *Candide*, or even the attitude to reality satirized by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. What seems unexceptionable good sense to these writers is that it is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books -- texts -- say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin. One would no more think of using *Amadis of Gaul*\(^3\) to understand sixteenth-century (or present-day) Spain than one would use the Bible to understand, say, the House of Commons. But clearly people have tried and do try to use texts in so simple-minded a way, for otherwise *Candide* and *Don Quixote* would not still have the appeal for readers that they do today. It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human. But is this failing constantly present, or are there circumstances that, more than others, make the textual attitude likely to prevail?

Two situations favor a textual attitude. One is when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant. In such a case one has recourse not only to what in one’s previous experience the novelty resembles but also to what one has read about it. Travel books or guidebooks are about as ‘natural’ a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book one can think of, precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one’s equanimity. Many travelers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn’t what they expected, meaning that it wasn’t what a book said it would be. And of course many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that it is colorful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes. The comedy of Fabrice del Dongo’s search for the battle of Waterloo\(^b\) is not so much that he fails to find the battle, but that he looks for it as something texts have told him about.

A second situation favoring the textual attitude is the appearance of success. If one reads a book claiming that lions are fierce and then encounters a fierce lion (I simplify, of course), the chances are that one will be encouraged to read more books by that same author, and believe them. But if, in addition, the lion book instructs one how to deal with a fierce lion, and the instructions work perfectly, then not only will the author be greatly believed, he will also be impelled to try his hand at other kinds of written performance. There is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers’ experiences. A book on how to handle a fierce lion might then cause a series of books to be produced on such subjects as the fierceness of lions, the origins of fierceness, and so forth. Similarly, as the focus of the text centers more narrowly on the subject -- no longer lions but their fierceness -- we might expect that the ways by

\(^3\)A Spanish romance of uncertain origin, first printed in the sixteenth century.

\(^b\)is
which it is recommended that a lion's fierceness be handled will actually increase its fierceness, force it to be fierce since that is what it is, and that is what in essence we know or can only know about it.

A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual, and arising out of circumstances similar to the ones I have just described, is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most important, such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it. This kind of text is composed out of those pre-existing units of information deposited by Flaubert in the catalogue of idées reçues.

In the light of all this, consider Napoleon and de Lesseps. Everything they knew, more or less, about the Orient came from books written in the tradition of Orientalism, placed in its library of idées reçues; for them the Orient, like the fierce lion, was something to be encountered and dealt with to a certain extent because the texts made that Orient possible. Such an Orient was silent, available to Europe for the realization of projects that involved but were never directly responsible to the native inhabitants, and unable to resist the projects, images, or mere descriptions devised for it. Earlier I called such a relation between Western writing (and its consequences) and Oriental silence the result of and the sign of the West's great cultural strength, its will to power over the Orient. But there is

———

The reference is to the hero of Stendhal novel, La Chartreuse de Parme (1839).

The Catalogue or Dictionary of Received Ideas is an ironic appendix to Gustave Flaubert novel Bouvard et Picuchet, published posthumously in 1881.

Napoleon Bonaparte led a military expedition to Egypt in 1798 and initiated an academic study of that country whose findings were published in twenty-three volumes between 1809 and 1828 under the title, Description de l’Égypte. Ferdinand de Lesseps (1805-94) was a French diplomat and engineer who designed and supervised the construction of the Suez canal in 1859-69.

another side to the strength, a side whose existence depends on the pressures of the Orientalist tradition and its textual attitude to the Orient; this side lives its own life, as books about fierce lions will do until lions can talk back. The perspective rarely drawn on by Napoleon and de Lesseps -- to take two among the many projectors who hatched plans for the Orient -- is the one that sees them carrying on in the dimensionless silence of the Orient mainly because the discourse of Orientalism, over and above the Orient's powerlessness to do anything about them, suffused their activity with meaning, intelligibility, and reality. The discourse of Orientalism and what made it possible -- in Napoleon's case, a West far more powerful militarily than the Orient -- gave them Orientals who could be described in such works as the Description de l’Égypte and an Orient that could be cut across as de Lesseps cut across Suez. Moreover, Orientalism gave them their success -- at least from their point of view, which had nothing to do with that of the Oriental. Success, in other words, had all the
actual human interchange between Oriental and Westerner of the judge’s ‘said I to myself, said I’ in Trial by Jury. 

Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient, we will encounter few surprises. For if it is true that historians like Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt emplot their narratives ‘as a story of a particular kind’, the same is also true of Orientalists who plotted Oriental history, character, and destiny for hundreds of years. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Orientalists became a more serious quantity, because by then the reaches of imaginative and actual geography had shrunk, because the Oriental-European relationship was determined by an unstoppable European expansion in search of markets, resources, and colonies, and finally, because Orientalism had accomplished its self-metamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution. Evidence of this metamorphosis is already apparent in what I have said of Napoleon, de Lesseps, Balfour, and Cromer. Their projects in the Orient are understandable on only the most rudimentary level as the efforts of men of vision and genius, heroes in Carlyle’s sense. In fact Napoleon, de Lesseps, Cromer, and Balfour are far more regular, far less unusual, if we recall the schemata of d’Herbelot and Dante and add to them both a modernized, efficient engine (like the nineteenth-century European empire) and a positive twist: since one cannot ontologically obliterate the Orient (as d’Herbelot and Dante perhaps realized), one does have the means to capture it, treat it, describe it, improve it, radically alter it.

The point I am trying to make here is that the transition from a merely textual apprehension, formulation, or definition of the Orient to the putting of all this into practice in the Orient did take place, and that Orientalism had much to do with that -- if I may use the word in a literal sense -- preposterous transition. So far as its strictly scholarly work was concerned (and I find the idea of strictly scholarly work as disinterested and abstract hard to understand: still, we can allow it intellectually), Orientalism did a great many things. During its great age in the nineteenth century it produced scholars; it increased the number of languages taught in the West and the quantity of manuscripts edited, translated, and commented on; in many cases, it provided the Orient with sympathetic European students, genuinely interested in such matters as Sanskrit grammar, Phoenician numismatics, and Arabic poetry. Yet -- and here we must be very clear -- Orientalism overrode the Orient. As a system of thought about the Orient, it always rose
from the specifically human detail to the general transhuman one; an observation about a
tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental
mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia. Similarly a verse from the Koran would be considered the
best evidence of an ineradicable Muslim sensuality. Orientalism assumed an unchanging
Orient, absolutely different (the reasons change from epoch to epoch) from the West. And
Orientalism, in its post-eighteenth-century form, could never revise itself. All this makes
Cromer and Balfour, as observers and administrators of the Orient, inevitable.

The closeness between politics and Orientalism, or to put it more circumspectly, the great
likelihood that ideas about the Orient drawn from Orientalism can be put to political use, is
an important yet extremely sensitive truth. It raises questions about the predisposition
towards innocence or guilt, scholarly disinterest or pressure-group complicity, in such fields
as black or women's studies. It necessarily provokes unrest in one's conscience about
cultural, racial, or historical generalizations, their uses, value, degree of objectivity, and
fundamental intent. More than anything else, the political and cultural circumstances in
which Western Orientalism has flourished draw attention to the debased position of the
Orient or Oriental as an object of study. Can any other than a political master--slave relation
produce the Orientalized Orient perfectly characterized by Anwar Abdel Malek?

(a) On the level of the position of the problem, and the problematic . . . the
Orient and Orientals [are considered by Orientalism] as an 'object' of study,
stamped with an otherness -- as all that is different, whether it be 'subject' or
'object' -- but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character . . . . This
'object' of study will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed
with a 'historical' subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous,
nonsovereign with regard to itself: the only Orient or Oriental or 'subject'
which could be admitted, at the extreme limit, is the alienated being,
philosophically, that is, other than itself in relationship to itself, posed,
understood, defined -- and acted -- by others.

(b) On the level of the thematic, [the Orientalists] adopt an essentialist
conception of the countries, nations and peoples of the Orient under study, a
conception which expresses itself through a characterized ethnist typology . . .
and will soon proceed with it towards racism.

According to the traditional orientalists, an essence should exist -- sometimes
even clearly described in metaphysical terms -- which constitutes the

inalienable and common basis of all the beings considered; this essence is
both 'historical,' since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally
a-historical, since it transfixes the being, 'the object' of study, within its
inalienable and non-evolutive specificity, instead of defining it as all other
beings, states, nations, peoples, and cultures -- as a product, a resultant of the
vection of the forces operating in the field of historical evolution.

Thus one ends with a typology -- based on a real specificity, but detached
from history, and, consequently, conceived as being intangible, essential -
which makes of the studied 'object' another being with regard to whom the studying subject is transcendent; we will have a homo Sinicus, a homo Arabicus (and why not a homo Aegypticus, etc.), a homo Africanus, the man -- the 'normal man,' it is understood -- being the European man of the historical period, that is, since Greek antiquity. One sees how much, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the hegemonism of possessing minorities, unveiled by Marx and Engels, and the anthropocentrism dismantled by Freud are accompanied by europocentrism in the area of human and social sciences, and more particularly in those in direct relationship with non-European peoples.  

Abdel Malek sees Orientalism as having a history which, according to the 'Oriental' of the late twentieth century, led it to the impasse described above. Let us now briefly outline that history as it proceeded through the nineteenth century to accumulate weight and power, 'the hegemonism of possessing minorities', and anthropocentrism in alliance with Europocentrism. From the last decades of the eighteenth century and for at least a century and a half, Britain and France dominated Orientalism as a discipline. The great philological discoveries in comparative grammar made by Jones, Franz Bopp, Jakob Grimm, and others were originally indebted to manuscripts brought from the East to Paris and London. Almost without exception, every Orientalist began his career as a philologist, and the revolution in philology that produced Bopp, Sacy, Burnouf, and their students was a comparative science based on the premise that languages belong to families, of which the Indo-European and the Semitic are two great instances. From the outset, then, Orientalism carried forward two traits: (1) a newly found scientific self-consciousness based on the linguistic importance of the Orient to Europe, and (2) a proclivity to divide, subdivide, and redivide its subject matter without ever changing its mind about the Orient as being always the same, unchanging, uniform and radically peculiar object. Friedrich Schlegel, who learned his Sanskrit in Paris, illustrates these traits together. Although by the time he published his Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier [On the Language and Wisdom of India] in 1808 Schlegel had practically renounced his Orientalism, he still held that Sanskrit and Persian on the one hand and Greek and German on the other had more affinities with each other than with the Semitic, Chinese, American, or African languages. Moreover, the Indo-European family was artistically simple and satisfactory in a way the Semitic, for one, was not. Such abstractions as this did not trouble Schlegel, for whom nations, races, minds, and peoples as things one could talk about passionately -- in the ever-narrowing perspective of populism first adumbrated by Herder -- held a lifelong fascination. Yet nowhere does Schlegel talk about the living, contemporary Orient. When he said in 1800, 'It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism,' he meant the Orient of the Sakuntala, the Zend-Avesta, and the Upanishads. As for the Semites, whose language was agglutinative, unaesthetic, and mechanical, they were different, inferior, backward. Schlegel's lectures on language and on life, history, and literature are full of these
discriminations, which he made without the slightest qualification. Hebrew, he said, was made for prophetic utterance and divination; the Muslims, however, espoused a 'dead empty Theism, a merely negative Unitarian faith.'

Much of the racism in Schlegel's strictures upon the Semites and other 'low' Orientals was widely diffused in European culture. But nowhere else, unless it be later in the nineteenth century among Darwinian anthropologists and phrenologists, was it made the basis of a scientific subject matter as it was in comparative linguistics or philology. Language and race seemed inextricably tied, and the 'good' Orient was invariably a classical period somewhere in a long-gone India, whereas the 'bad' Orient lingered in present-day Asia, parts of North Africa, and Islam everywhere. 'Aryans' were confined to Europe and the ancient Orient; as Léon Poliakov has shown (without once remarking, however, that 'Semites' were not only the Jews but the Muslims as well), the Aryan myth dominated historical and cultural anthropology at the expense of the 'lesser' peoples.

The official intellectual genealogy of Orientalism would certainly include Gobineau, Renan, Humboldt, Steinthal, Burnouf, Remusat, Palmer, Weil, Dozy, Muir, to mention a few famous names almost at random from the nineteenth century. It would also include the diffusive capacity of learned societies: the Société asiatique, founded in 1822; the Royal Asiatic Society, founded in 1823; the American Oriental Society, founded in 1842; and so on. But it might perforce neglect the great contribution of imaginative and travel literature, which strengthened the divisions established by Orientalists between the various geographical, temporal, and racial departments of the Orient. Such neglect would be incorrect, since for the Islamic Orient this literature is especially rich and makes a significant contribution to building the Orientalist discourse. It includes work by Goethe, Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Kinglake, Nerval, Flaubert, Lane, Burton, Scott, Byron, Vigny, Disraeli, George Eliot, Gautier. Later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we could add Doughty, Barrès, Loti, T. E. Lawrence, Forster. All these writers give a bolder outline to Disraeli’s 'great Asiatic mystery'. In this enterprise there is considerable support not only from the unearthing of dead Oriental civilizations (by European excavators) in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey, but also from major geographical surveys done all through the Orient.

By the end of the nineteenth century these achievements were materially abetted by the European occupation of the entire Near Orient (with the exception of parts of the Ottoman Empire, which was swallowed up after 1918). The principal colonial powers once again were Britain and France, although Russia and Germany played some role as well. To colonize meant at first the identification -- indeed, the creation -- of interests; these could be commercial, communicational, religious, military, cultural. With regard to Islam and the Islamic territories, for example, Britain felt that it had legitimate interests, as a Christian power, to safeguard. A complex apparatus for tending these interests developed. Such early organizations as the Society for Promoting Christian
Knowledge (1698) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701) were succeeded and later abetted by the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (1808). These missions 'openly joined the expansion of Europe'. Add to these the trading societies, learned societies, geographical exploration funds, translation funds, the implantation in the Orient of schools, missions, consular offices, factories, and sometimes large European communities, and the notion of an 'interest' will acquire a good deal of sense. Thereafter interests were defended with much zeal and expense.

So far my outline is a gross one. What of the typical experiences and emotions that accompany both the scholarly advances of Orientalism and the political conquests aided by Orientalism? First, there is disappointment that the modern Orient is not at all like the texts. Here is Gérard de Nerval writing to Théophile Gautier at the end of August 1843:

I have already lost, Kingdom after Kingdom, province after province, the more beautiful half, of the universe, and soon I will know of no place in which I can find a refuge for my dreams; but it is Egypt that I most regret having driven out of my imagination, now that I have sadly placed it in my memory.

This is by the author of a great Voyage en Orient. Nerval's lament is a common topic of Romanticism (the betrayed dream, as described by Albert Béguin in L'Ame romantique et le rêve [The Romantic Spirit and the Dream]) and of travelers in the Biblical Orient, from Chateaubriand to Mark Twain. Any direct experience of the mundane Orient ironically comments on such valorizations of it as were to be found in Goethe 'Mahometsgesang' or Hugo 'Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe'. Memory of the modern Orient disputes imagination, sends one back to the imagination as a place preferable, for the European sensibility, to the real Orient. For a person who has never seen the Orient, Nerval once said to Gautier, a lotus is still a lotus; for me it is only a kind of onion. To write about the modern Orient is either to reveal an upsetting demystification of images culled from texts, or to confine oneself to the Orient of which Hugo spoke in his original preface to Les Orientales, the Orient as 'image' or 'pensée,' symbols of 'une sorte de préoccupation générale [a kind of general preoccupation].'

If personal disenchantment and general preoccupation fairly map the Orientalist sensibility at first, they entail certain other more familiar habits of thought, feeling, and perception. The mind learns to separate a general apprehension of the Orient from a specific experience of it; each goes its separate way, so to speak. In Scott novel The Talisman (1825), Sir Kenneth (of the Crouching Leopard) battles a single Saracen to a standoff somewhere in the Palestinian desert; as

the Crusader and his opponent, who is Saladin in disguise, later engage in conversation, the Christian discovers his Muslim antagonist to be not so bad a fellow after all. Yet he remarks:

I well thought . . . that your blinded race had their descent from the foul fiend, without whose aid you would never have been able to maintain this blessed land of Palestine against so many valiant soldiers of God. I speak not thus of thee in particular, Saracen, but generally of thy people and religion. Strange is
it to me, however, not that you should have the descent from the Evil One,
but that you should boast of it. 2

For indeed the Saracen does boast of tracing his race’s line back to Eblis, the Muslim Lucifer.
But what is truly curious is not the feeble historicism by which Scott makes the scene
'medieval', letting Christian attack Muslim theologically in a way nineteenth-century
Europeans would not (they would, though); rather, it is the airy condescension of damning a
whole people 'generally' while mitigating the offense with a cool 'I don't mean you in
particular.'

Scott, however, was no expert on Islam (although H. A. R. Gibb, who was, praised The
Talisman for its insight into Islam and Saladin 10), and he was taking enormous liberties with
Eblis's role by turning him into a hero for the faithful. Scott's knowledge probably came from
Byron and Beckford, but it is enough for us here to note how strongly the general character
ascribed to things Oriental could withstand both the rhetorical and the existential force of
obvious exceptions. It is as if, on the one hand, a bin called 'Oriental' existed into which all
the authoritative, anonymous, and traditional Western attitudes to the East were dumped
unthinkingly, while on the other, true to the anecdotal tradition of storytelling, one could
nevertheless tell of experiences with or in the Orient that had little to do with the generally
serviceable bin. But the very structure of Scott's prose shows a closer intertwining of the two
than that. For the general category in advance offers the specific instance a limited terrain in
which to operate: no matter how deep the specific exception, no matter how much a single
Oriental can escape the fences placed around him, he is first an Oriental, second a human
being, and last again an Oriental.

So general a category as 'Oriental' is capable of quite interesting variations. Disraeli's
enthusiasm for the Orient appeared first during a trip East in 1831. In Cairo he wrote, 'My
eyes and mind yet ache with a grandeur so little in unison with our own likeness.' 11 General
grandeur and passion inspired a transcendent sense of things and little patience for actual
reality. His novel Tancred is steeped in racial and geographical platitudes; everything is a
matter of race, Sidonia states, so much so that salvation can only be found in the Orient and
amongst its races. There, as a case in point, Druzes, Christians, Muslims, and Jews hobnob
easily because -- someone quips -- Arabs are simply Jews on horseback, and all are Orientals
at heart. The unisons are made between general categories, not between categories and
what they contain. An Oriental lives in the Orient, he lives a life of Oriental ease, in a state of
Oriental despotism and sensuality, imbued with a feeling of Oriental fatalism. Writers as
different as Marx, Disraeli, Burton, and Nerval could carry on a lengthy discussion between
themselves, as it were, using all those generalities unquestioningly and yet intelligibly.

With disenchantment and a generalized -- not to say schizophrenic -- view of the Orient,
there is usually another peculiarity. Because it is made into a general object, the whole
Orient can be made to serve as an illustration of a particular form of eccentricity. Although
the individual Oriental cannot shake or disturb the general categories that make sense of his
oddness, his oddness can nevertheless be enjoyed for its own sake. Here, for example, is
Flaubert describing the spectacle of the Orient:

To amuse the crowd, Mohammed Ali's jester took a woman in a Cairo bazaar
one day, set her on the counter of a shop, and coupled with her publicly while
the shopkeeper calmly smoked his pipe.
On the road from Cairo to Shubra some time ago a young fellow had himself publicly buggered by a large monkey -- as in the story above, to create a good opinion of himself and make people laugh.

A marabout died a while ago -- an idiot -- who had long passed as a saint marked by God; all the Moslem women came to see him and masturbated him -- in the end he died of exhaustion -- from morning to night it was a perpetual jacking-off. . . .

Quid dicis [what say you?] of the following fact: some time ago a santon (ascetic priest) used to walk through the streets of Cairo completely naked except for a cap on his head and another on his prick. To piss he would doff the prick-cap, and sterile women who wanted children would run up, put themselves under the parabola of his urine and rub themselves with it. 12

Flaubert frankly acknowledges that this is grotesquerie of a special kind. 'All the old comic business' -- by which Flaubert meant the well-known conventions of 'the cudgeled slave . . . the coarse trafficker in women . . . the thieving merchant' -- acquire a new, 'fresh . . . genuine and charming' meaning in the Orient. This meaning cannot be reproduced; it can only be enjoyed on the spot and 'brought back' very approximately. The Orient is watched, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the Description de l’Égypte called 'bizarre jouissance'. The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness.

And this tableau quite logically becomes a special topic for texts. Thus the circle is completed; from being exposed as what texts do not prepare one for, the Orient can return as something one writes about in a disciplined way. Its foreignness can be translated, its meanings decoded, its hostility tamed; yet the generality assigned to the Orient, the disenchantment that one feels after encountering it, the unresolved eccentricity it displays, are all redistributed in what is said or written about it. Islam, for example, was typically Oriental for Orientalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carl Becker argued that although 'Islam' (note the vast generality) inherited the Hellenic tradition, it could neither grasp nor employ the Greek, humanistic tradition; moreover, to understand Islam one needed above all else to see it, not as an 'original' religion, but as a sort of failed Oriental attempt to employ Greek philosophy without the creative inspiration that we find in Renaissance Europe. 13 For Louis Massignon, perhaps the most renowned and influential of modern French Orientalists, Islam was a systematic rejection of the Christian incarnation, and its greatest hero was not Mohammed or Averroës but al-Hallaj, a Muslim saint who was crucified by the orthodox Muslims for having dared to personalize Islam. 14 What Becker and Massignon explicitly left out of their studies was the eccentricity of the Orient, which they backhandedly acknowledged by trying so hard to regularize it in Western terms. Mohammed was thrown out, but al-Hallaj was made prominent because he took himself to be a Christ-figure.

As a judge of the Orient, the modern Orientalist does not, as he believes and even says, stand apart from it objectively. His human detachment, whose sign is the absence of
sympathy covered by professional knowledge, is weighted heavily with all the orthodox attitudes, perspectives, and moods of Orientalism that I have been describing. His Orient is not the Orient as it is, but the Orient as it has been Orientalized. An unbroken arc of knowledge and power connects the European or Western statesman and the Western Orientalists; it forms the rim of the stage containing the Orient. By the end of World War I both Africa and the Orient formed not so much an intellectual spectacle for the West as a privileged terrain for it. The scope of Orientalism exactly matched the scope of empire, and it was this absolute unanimity between the two that provoked the only crisis in the history of Western thought about and dealings with the Orient. And this crisis continues now.

Beginning in the twenties, and from one end of the Third World to the other, the response to empire and imperialism has been dialectical. By the time of the Bandung Conference in 1955, the entire Orient had gained its political independence from the Western empires and confronted a new configuration of imperial powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Unable to recognize 'its' Orient in the new Third World, Orientalism now faced a challenging and politically armed Orient. Two alternatives opened before Orientalism. One was to carry on as if nothing had happened. The second was to adapt the old ways to the new. But to the Orientalist, who believes the Orient never changes, the new is simply the old betrayed by new, misunderstanding dis-Orientals (we can permit ourselves the neologism). A third, revisionist alternative, to dispense with Orientalism altogether, was considered by only a tiny minority.

One index of the crisis, according to Abdel Malek, was not simply that 'national liberation movements in the ex-colonial' Orient worked havoc with Orientalist conceptions of passive, fatalistic 'subject races'; there was in addition the fact that 'specialists and the public at large became aware of the time-lag, not only between orientalist science and the material under study, but also -- and this was to be determining -- between the conceptions, the methods and the instruments of work in the human and social sciences and those of orientalism. The Orientalists -- from Renan to Goldziher to Macdonald, to von Grunebaum, Gibb, and Bernard Lewis -- saw Islam, for example, as a 'cultural synthesis' (the phrase is P. M. Holt's) that could be studied apart from the economics, sociology, and politics of the Islamic peoples. For Orientalism, Islam had a meaning which, if one were to look for its most succinct formulation, could be found in Renan's first

\[1\]

At this conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia, twenty-nine nations of Africa and Asia (including Communist China) planned economic and cultural co-operation, and opposed colonialism.

-281-

treatise: in order best to be understood Islam had to be reduced to 'tent and tribe'. The impact of colonialism, of worldly circumstances, of historical development: all these were to Orientalists as flies to wanton boys, killed -- or disregarded -- for their sport, never taken seriously enough to complicate the essential Islam.

The career of H. A. R. Gibb illustrates within itself the two alternative approaches by which Orientalism has responded to the modern Orient. In 1945 Gibb delivered the Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago. The world he surveyed was not the same one Balfour
and Cromer knew before World War I. Several revolutions, two world wars, and innumerable economic, political, and social changes made the realities of 1945 an unmistakably, even cataclysmically, new object. Yet we find Gibb opening the lectures he called *Modern Trends in Islam* as follows:

The student of Arabic civilization is constantly brought up against the striking contrast between the imaginative power displayed, for example, in certain branches of Arabic literature and the literalism, the pedantry, displayed in reasoning and exposition, even when it is devoted to these same productions. It is true that there have been great philosophers among the Muslim peoples and that some of them were Arabs, but they were rare exceptions. The Arab mind, whether in relation to the outer world or in relation to the processes of thought, cannot throw off its intense feeling for the separateness and the individuality of the concrete events. This is, I believe, one of the main factors lying behind that 'lack of a sense of law' which Professor Macdonald regarded as the characteristic difference in the Oriental.

It is this, too, which explains -- what is so difficult for the Western student to grasp [until it is explained to him by the Orientalist] -- the aversion of the Muslims from the thought-processes of rationalism. . . . The rejection of rationalist modes of thought and of the utilitarian ethic which is inseparable from them has its roots, therefore, not in the so-called 'obscurantism' of the Muslim theologians but in the atomism and discreteness of the Arab imagination.  

This is pure Orientalism, of course, but even if one acknowledges the exceeding knowledge of institutional Islam that characterizes the rest of the book, Gibb's inaugural biases remain a formidable obstacle for anyone hoping to understand modern Islam. What is the meaning of 'difference' when the preposition 'from' has dropped from sight altogether? Are we not once again being asked to inspect the Oriental Muslim as if his world, unlike ours -- 'differently' from it -- had never ventured beyond the seventh century? As for modern Islam itself, despite the complexities of his otherwise magisterial understanding of it, why must it be regarded with so implacable a hostility as Gibb's? If Islam is flawed from the start by virtue of its permanent disabilities, the Orientalist will find himself opposing any Islamic attempts to reform Islam, because, according to his views, reform is a betrayal of Islam: this is exactly Gibb's argument. How can an Oriental slip out from these manacles into the modern world except by repeating with the Fool in *King Lear*,

---

^Said's parenthesis.

-282-

'They'll have me whipp'd for speaking true, thou'l have me whipp'd for lying; and sometimes I am whipp'd for holding my peace.'

Eighteen years later Gibb faced an audience of English compatriots, only now he was speaking as the director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard. His topic was 'Area Studies Reconsidered', in which, among other aperçus, he agreed that 'the Orient is much too important to be left to the Orientalists'. The new, or second alternative, approach
open to Orientalists was being announced, just as *Modern Trends* exemplified the first, or traditional, approach. Gibb’s formula is well-intentioned in ‘Area Studies Reconsidered’, so far, of course, as the Western experts on the Orient are concerned, whose job it is to prepare students for careers ‘in public life and business.’ What we now need, said Gibb, is the traditional Orientalist plus a good social scientist working together: between them the two will do ‘interdisciplinary’ work. Yet the traditional Orientalist will not bring outdated knowledge to bear on the Orient; no, his expertise will serve to remind his uninitiated colleagues in area studies that ‘to apply the psychology and mechanics of Western political institutions to Asian or Arab situations is pure Walt Disney’. 17

In practice this notion has meant that when Orientals struggle against colonial occupation, you must say (in order not to risk a Disneyism) that Orientals have never understood the meaning of self-government the way ‘we’ do. When some Orientals oppose racial discrimination while others practice it, you say ‘they’re all Orientals at bottom’ and class interest, political circumstances, economic factors are totally irrelevant. Or with Bernard Lewis, you say that if Arab Palestinians oppose Israeli settlement and occupation of their lands, then that is merely ‘the return of Islam’, or, as a renowned contemporary Orientalist defines it, Islamic opposition to non-Islamic peoples, 18 a principle of Islam enshrined in the seventh century. History, politics, and economics do not matter. Islam is Islam, the Orient is Orient, and please take all your ideas about a left and a right wing, revolutions, and change back to Disneyland.

If such tautologies, claims, and dismissals have not sounded familiar to historians, sociologists, economists, and humanists in any other field except Orientalism, the reason is patently obvious. For like its putative subject matter, Orientalism has not allowed ideas to violate its profound serenity. But modern Orientalists - or area experts, to give them their new name -- have not passively sequestered themselves in language departments. On the contrary, they have profited from Gibb’s advice. Most of them today are indistinguishable from other ‘experts’ and ‘advisers’ in what Harold Lasswell has called the policy sciences. 19 Thus the military -- national-security possibilities of an alliance, say, between a specialist in ‘national character analysis’ and an expert in Islamic institutions were soon recognized, for expediency’s sake if for nothing else. After all, the ‘West’ since World War II had faced a clever totalitarian enemy who collected allies for itself among gullible Oriental (African, Asian, undeveloped) nations. What better way of outflanking that enemy than by playing to the Oriental’s illogical mind in ways only an Orientalist could devise? Thus emerged such masterful ploys as the stick-and-carrot technique, the Alliance for Progress, SEATO, and so forth, all of them based on traditional ‘knowledge’ retooled for better manipulation of its supposed object.

Thus as revolutionary turmoil grips the Islamic Orient, sociologists remind us that Arabs are addicted to ‘oral functions’, 20 while economists -- recycled Orientalists -- observe that for modern Islam neither capitalism nor socialism is an adequate rubric. 21 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 vultures for 'our' largesse and are damned when 'we lose them' to communism, or to their unregenerate Oriental instincts: the difference is scarcely significant.

These contemporary Orientalist attitudes flood the press and the popular mind. Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization. Always there lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world resources. Why? Because he, unlike the Oriental, is a true human being. No better instance exists today of what Anwar Abdel Malek calls 'the hegemonism of possessing minorities' and anthropocentrism allied with Europocentrism: a white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition 'it' is not quite as human as 'we' are. There is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought.

In a sense the limitations of Orientalism are, as I said earlier, the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region. But Orientalism has taken a further step than that: it views the Orient as something whose existence is not only displayed but has remained fixed in time and place for the West. So impressive have the descriptive and textual successes of Orientalism been that entire periods of the Orient's cultural, political, and social history are considered mere responses to the West. The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behaviour. Yet if history during the twentieth century has provoked intrinsic change in and for the Orient, the Orientalist is stunned: he cannot realize that to some extent

the new [Oriental] leaders, intellectuals or policy-makers, have learned many lessons from the travails of their predecessors. They have also been aided by the structural and institutional transformations accomplished in the intervening period and by the fact that they are to a great extent more at liberty to fashion the future of their countries. They are also much more confident and perhaps slightly aggressive. No longer do they have to function hoping to obtain a favorable verdict from the invisible jury of the West. Their dialogue is not with the West, it is with their fellow-citizens.

Moreover, the Orientalist assumes that what his texts have not prepared him for is the result either of outside agitation in the Orient or of the Orient's misguided inanity. None of the innumerable Orientalist texts on Islam, including their summa, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, can prepare their reader for what has taken place since 1948 in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, or the Yemens. When the dogmas about Islam cannot serve, not even for the most Panglossian Orientalist, there is recourse to an Orientalized social-science jargon, to such marketable abstractions as élites, political stability, modernization, and institutional
development, all stamped with the cachet of Orientalist wisdom. In the meantime a growing, more and more dangerous rift separates Orient and Occident.

The present crisis dramatizes the disparity between texts and reality. Yet in this study of Orientalism I wish not only to expose the sources of Orientalism's views but also to reflect on its importance, for the contemporary intellectual rightly feels that to ignore a part of the world now demonstrably encroaching upon him is to avoid reality. Humanists have too often confined their attention to departmentalized topics of research. They have neither watched nor learned from disciplines like Orientalism whose unremitting ambition was to master all of a world, not some easily delimited part of it such as an author or a collection of texts. However, along with such academic security-blankets as 'history,' 'literature,' or 'the humanities,' and despite its overreaching aspirations, Orientalism is involved in worldly, historical circumstances which it has tried to conceal behind an often pompous scientism and appeals to rationalism. The contemporary intellectual can learn from Orientalism how, on the one hand, either to limit or to enlarge realistically the scope of his discipline's claims, and on the other, to see the human ground (the foul-rag-and-bone shop of the heart, Yeats called it) in which texts, visions, methods, and disciplines begin, grow, thrive, and degenerate. To investigate Orientalism is also to propose intellectual ways for handling the methodological problems that history has brought forward, so to speak, in its subject matter, the Orient. But before that we must virtually see the humanistic values that Orientalism, by its scope, experiences, and structures, has all but eliminated.

Notes


13. This is the argument presented in Carl H. Becker, Das Erbe der Antike im Orient und Okzident (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1931).


15. Abdel Malek, xa, p. 112.


-286-