



Edward W. Said Orientalism

MODERN CLASSICS





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ORIENTALISM

Edward W. Said was University Professor at Columbia University, where he has taught English and Comparative Literature. He was born in Jerusalem in 1935 and educated at Victoria College, Cairo, Mount Hermon School, Massachusetts, and at Princeton and Harvard universities. In 1974 he was Visiting Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard, in 1975-6 Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Science at Stanford, and in 1979 Visiting Professor of Humanities at Johns Hopkins University. He was editor of the *Arab Studies Quarterly*, and a member of the Council of Foreign Relations, New York, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Philosophical Society and the Royal Society of Literature. He has received Harvard University's Bowdoin Prize and the Lionel Trilling Award at Columbia in 1976 and in 1994. In 1998, Said received the Sultan Owais Prize for general cultural achievement; he became an Honorary Fellow of the Middle Eastern studies Association in 1999; and in 2002, he received the Prince of Asturias Prize. His books include *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*,

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Edward W. Said died in 2003.



EDWARD W. SAID

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PENGUIN BOOKS



PENGUIN CLASSICS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Group (U S A) Inc., 375 H u d s o n Street, N e w Y o r k , N e
w Y o r k 10014, U S A

Penguin Group (C a n a d a) . 90 Eglinton A v e n u e East, Suite 700, T
o r o n t o , O n t a r i o , C a n a d a M4P 2Y 3

(a division of P e a r s o n Penguin C a n a d a Inc.)

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's G r e e n , Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of
Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell R o a d . Camberwell,
Victoria 3124. Australia

(a division of P e a r s o n Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 C o m m u n i t y C e n t r e , Panchsheel
P a r k , New Delhi - 1 1 0 017 , India Penguin Group (N Z) , 67 A p o l
l o Drive. Rosedale, N o r t h Shore 0632, N e w Z e a l a n d

(a division of P e a r s o n N e w Z e a l a n d Ltd)

Penguin Books (S o u t h A f r i c a) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,

R o s e b a n k , J o h a n n e s b u r g 2196, S o u t h Africa

Penguin Books Ltd. Registered Offices: 80 S t r a n d . L o n d o n WC2R
O R L , E n g l a n d

www.penguin.com

First published by R o u t l e d g e & K e g a n Paul Ltd 1978

Published in Peregrine Books 1985

R e p r i n t e d in Penguin Books 1991

R e p r i n t e d with a new A f t e r w o r d 1995

Reprinted with a new Preface 2003

13

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Printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives pic

Typeset in Times Roman

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978-0-14118742-6

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George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.: Excerpts from *Subjects of the Day: Being a Selection of Speeches and Writings* by George Nathaniel Curzon.

George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.: Excerpts from *Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies, proceedings of a seminar*, edited by P. J. Vatikiotis.

American Jewish Committee: Excerpts from "The Return of Islam" by Bernard Lewis, in *Commentary*, vol. 61, no. 1 (January 1976). Reprinted from *Commentary* by permission. Copyright © 1976 by the American Jewish Committee.

Basic Books, Inc.: Excerpts from "Renan's Philological Laboratory" by Edward W. Said, in *Art, Politics, and Will: Essays in Honor of Lionel Trilling*,

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Excerpt from *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* by T. E. Lawrence.

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in *The Georgia Review* (Spring 1977). Copyright © 1977 by the University

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Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.: Excerpt from a poem by Bornier (1862), quoted in *De Lesseps of Suez* by Charles Beatty.

Macmillan & Co., London and Basingstoke: Excerpts from *Modern Egypt*,

vol. 2, by Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer.

Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.: Excerpt from "Propaganda" by Harold

Lasswell, in *The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by Edwin R. A.

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Northwestern University Press: Excerpt from "The Arab Portrayed" by Edward W. Said, in *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective*, edited by Ibrahim Abu-Lughod. Copyright © 1970 by Northwestern University Press.

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University of California Press: Excerpts from *Modern Islam: The Search for*

Cultural Identity by Gustave von Grunebaum. Copyright © 1962 by the Regents of the University of California.

University of Chicago Press: Excerpts from *Modern Trends in Islam* by H. A. R. Gibb.

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Preface (2003)

Nine years ago, in the spring of 1994, I wrote an afterword for *Orientalism* in which, in trying to clarify what I believed I had and had not said, I stressed not only the many discussions that had opened up since my book appeared in 1978, but also the ways in which a work about representations of "the Orient" lends itself to increasing misrepresentation and misinterpretation. That I find the very same thing today more ironic than irritating is a sign of how much my age has crept up on me, along with the necessary diminutions in expectations and pedagogic zeal which usually frame the road to seniority. The recent death of my two main intellectual,

political and personal mentors, Eqbal Ahmad and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (who is one of the w o r k ' s dedicatees) has brought sadness and loss, as well as resignation and a certain stubborn will to go on. It isn't at all a matter of being optimistic, but rather of continuing to have faith in the ongoing and literally unending process of emancipation and enlightenment that, in my opinion, frames and gives direction to the intellectual vocation.

Nevertheless it is still a source of amazement to me that *Orientalism* continues to be discussed and translated all over the world, in thirty-six languages. Thanks to the efforts of my dear friend and colleague Professor Gaby Peterberg, now of U C L A , formerly of Ben Gurion University in Israel, there is a Hebrew version of the book available, which has stimulated considerable discussion and debate among Israeli readers and students. In addition, a Vietnamese translation has appeared under Australian auspices; I hope it's not immodest to say that an Indochinese intellectual space seems to have opened up for the propositions of this book. In any case, it gives me great pleasure to note as an author who had never dreamed of any such happy fate for his work that interest in what I tried to do in my

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book has n't completely died down, particularly in the many different lands of the "Orient" itself.

In part, of course, that is because the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam have continued to fuel enormous change, struggle, controversy and, as I write these lines, war. As I said many years ago, ***Orientalism*** is the product of circumstances that are fundamentally, indeed radically, fractious. In my memoir ***Out of Place*** (1999) I described the strange and contradictory worlds in which I grew up, providing for myself and my readers a detailed account of the settings that I think formed me in Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon. But that was only a very personal account that stopped short of all the years of my own political engagement that started after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, a war in whose continuing aftermath (Israel is still in military occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights) the terms of struggle and the ideas at stake that were crucial for my generation of Arabs and Americans seem to go on. Nevertheless I do want to affirm yet again that this book and, for that matter, my intellectual work generally have really been enabled by my life as a university

tion of the Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights) the terms of struggle and the ideas at stake that were crucial for my generation of Arabs and Americans seem to go on. Nevertheless I do want to affirm yet again that this book and, for that matter, my intellectual work generally have really been enabled by my life as a university

academic. For all its o f t e n noted defects and problems, the A m e r i c a n university — a n d mine, C o l u m b i a , in p a r t i c u l a r — i s still one of the

few remaining places in the United States w h e r e reflection and study can take place in an almost Utopian fashion. I h a v e never taught

anything about the Middle East, being by training and practice a

teacher of the mainly E u r o p e a n and A m e r i c a n humanities, a special-

ist in modern comparative literature. T h e university and my peda-
gogic work with t w o generations of first-class students and excellent
colleagues have m a d e possible the kind of deliberately meditated
and analyzed study that this book contains, which for all its urgent
worldly references is still a book about culture, ideas, history and
power, rather than Middle Eastern politics *tout court*. That was my
notion from the beginning, and it is very evident and a good deal
clearer to me today.

Yet ***Orientalism*** is very m u c h a b o o k tied to the t u m u l t u o u s
d y n a m i c s of contemporary history. I e m p h a s i z e in it accordingly
that neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any
ontological stability; each is m a d e up of h u m a n effort, partly affir-
mation, partly identification of the Other. That these s u p r e m e fictions

lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time, when the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust and resurgent self-

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pride and arrogance — much of it having to do with Islam and the Arabs on one side, "we" Westerners on the other — are very large-scale enterprises. ***Orientalism's*** first page opens with a 1975 description of the Lebanese Civil War that ended in 1990, but the violence and the ugly shedding of human blood continues up to this minute. We have had the failure of the Oslo peace process, the outbreak of the second intifada, and the awful suffering of the Palestinians on the reinvaded West Bank and Gaza, with Israeli F-16's and Apache helicopters used routinely on the defenseless civilians as part of their collective punishment. The suicide bombing phenomenon has appeared with all its hideous damage, none more lurid and apocalyptic of course than the events of September 11 and their aftermath in the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. As I write these lines, the illegal and unsanctioned imperial invasion and occupation of Iraq by Britain and the United States proceeds, with a

prospect of physical ravagement, political unrest and more invasions that is truly awful to contemplate. This is all part of what is supposed to be a clash of civilizations, unending, implacable, irremediable.

Nevertheless, I think not.

I wish I could say, however, that general understanding of the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam in the United States has improved somewhat, but alas, it really hasn't. For all kinds of reasons, the situation in Europe seems to be considerably better. In the U.S., the hardening of attitudes, the tightening of the grip of dominating generalization and triumphalist cliché, the dominance of crude power

allied with simplistic contempt of dissenters and "others," has found a fitting correlative in the looting, pillaging and destruction of Iraq's libraries and museums. What our leaders and their intellectual lackeys seem incapable of understanding is that history cannot be swept clean like a blackboard, clean so that "we" might inscribe our own future there and impose our own forms of life for these lesser people to follow. It is quite common to hear high officials in Washington and elsewhere speak of changing the map of the Middle East, as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many

peanuts in a jar . But this has often happened with the " Orient , " that

semi-mythical construct which since Napoleon 's invasion of Egypt in the late eighteenth century has been made and re-made countless times by power acting through an expedient form of knowledge to assert that this is the Orient 's nature, and we must deal with it accordingly. In the process the uncountable sediments of history, xiv

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which include innumerable histories and a dizzying variety of peoples, languages, experiences and cultures, all these are swept aside or ignored, relegated to the sand heap along with the treasures ground into meaningless fragments that were taken out of Baghdad 's libraries and museums . My argument is that history is made by men and women , just as it can also be unmade and re-written, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that " our " East, " our " Orient becomes " ours " to possess and direct.

I should say again that I have no " real " Orient to argue for. I do, however, have a very high regard for the powers and gifts of the

peoples of that region to struggle on for their vision of what they are and want to be. There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living-room. The breathtaking insouciance of June publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no live notion (or any knowledge at all) of the language of what real people actually speak has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct there an *ersatz* model of free market "democracy," without even a trace of doubt that such projects don't exist outside of Swift's Academy of Lagado.

What I do argue also is that there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge — if that is what it is — that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency and outright war. There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to

understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion. It is surely one of the intellectual catastrophes of history that an imperialist war concocted by a small group of unelected US officials (they've been called chickens, since none of them ever served in the military) was waged against a devastated Third World dictatorship on thoroughly ideological grounds having to do with world dominance, security control, and scarce resources, but disguised for its true intent, hastened and

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reasoned for by Orientalists who betrayed their calling as scholars. The major influences on George W. Bush's Pentagon and National Security Council were men such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, experts on the Arab and Islamic world who helped the American chickens to think about such preposterous phenomena as the Arab mind and centuries-old Islamic decline that only American power could reverse. Today, bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written

by political polemicists pretending to know led g e imparted to them and others by experts w h o h a v e supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange Oriental peoples over there w h o h a v e b e e n such a terrible thorn in " o u r " flesh. A c c o m p a n y i n g such w a r m o n g e r i n g

expertise have been the omnipresent C N N s and F o x s of this world, plus myriad numbers of evangelical and right-wing radio hosts, plus innumerable tabloids and even m i d d l e - b r o w journalists, all of t h e m re-cycling the s a m e unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations so as to stir up " A m e r i c a " against the foreign devil.

Even with all its terrible failings and its appalling dictator (w h o was partly created by US policy t w o decades ago), w e r e Iraq to have been the w o r l d ' s largest exporter of b a n a n a s or oranges, surely there would have been no war, no hysteria over mysteriously vanished w e a p o n s of m a s s destruction, no transporting of an e n o r m o u s army,

navy and air force 7000 miles a w a y to destroy a country scarcely known even to the educated American, all in the n a m e of " f r e e d o m . "

Without a well-organized sense that these p e o p l e over there w e r e not like " u s " and d i d n ' t appreciate " o u r " v a l u e s — t h e very core of

traditional Orientalist d o g m a as I describe its creation and circulation in this b o o k — t h e r e would have been no war.

So from the very s a m e directorate of paid professional scholars enlisted by the Dutch conquerors of Malaysia and Indonesia, the British armies of India, M e s o p o t a m i a , Egypt, West Africa, the French armies of Indochina and North Africa, c a m e the American advisers to the Pentagon and the White House, using the s a m e clichés, the same d e m e a n i n g stereotypes, the s a m e justifications of power and violence (after all, runs the chorus, p o w e r is the only language they understand) in this case as in the earlier ones. T h e s e people have now been j o i n e d in Iraq by a w h o l e a r m y of private contractors and eager entrepreneurs to w h o m shall be confided everything f r o m the writing of textbooks a n d the constitution to the

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refashioning and privatisation of Iraqi political life and its oil industry. Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it h a s a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order a n d democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a

chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest *mission civilisatrice*.

One specifically American contribution to the discourse of empire is the specialized jargon of policy expertise. You don't need Arabic

or Persian or even French to pontificate about how the democracy domino effect is just what the Arab world needs. Combative and woefully ignorant policy experts whose world experience is limited to the Beltway grind out books on "terrorism" and liberalism, or about Islamic fundamentalism and American foreign policy, or about

the end of history, all of it vying for attention and influence quite without regard for truthfulness or reflection or real knowledge. What matters is how efficient and resourceful it sounds, and who might go for it, as it were. The worst aspect of this essentializing stuff is that human suffering in all its density and pain is spirited away. Memory and with it the historical past are effaced as in the common, dismissively contemptuous American phrase, "you're history."

Twenty-five years after its publication, *Orientalism* once again

raises the question of whether modern imperialism ever ended, or whether it has continued in the Orient since Napoleon's entry into Egypt two centuries ago. Arabs and Muslims have been told that victimology and dwelling on the depredations of empire are only ways of evading responsibility in the present. You have failed, you have gone wrong, says the modern Orientalist. This, of course, is also V. S. Naipaul's contribution to literature, that the victims of empire wail on while their country goes to the dogs. But what a shallow calculation of the imperial intrusion that is, how summarily it scants the immense distortion introduced by the empire into the lives of "lesser" peoples and "subject races" generation after gener-

ation, how little it wishes to face the long succession of years through which empire continues to work its way in the lives of, say, Palestinians or Congolese or Algerians or Iraqis. We allow justly that the Holocaust has permanently altered the consciousness of our time: why do we not accord the same epistemological mutation in

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what imperialism has done, and what Orientalism continues to do?

Think of the line that starts with Napoleon, continues with the rise

of Oriental studies and the takeover of North Africa, and goes on in similar undertakings in Vietnam, in Egypt, in Palestine and, during the entire twentieth century, in the struggle over oil and strategic control in the Gulf, in Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Afghanistan. Then think contrapuntally of the rise of anti-colonial nationalism, through the short period of liberal independence, the era of military coups, of insurgency, civil war, religious fanaticism, irrational struggle and uncompromising brutality against the latest bunch of "natives".

Each of these phases and eras produces its own distorted knowledge

of the other, each its own reductive images, its own disputatious polemics.

My idea in ***Orientalism*** is to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate whose goal is a belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange. I have called what I try to do "humanism," a word I continue to use stubbornly despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated post-modern critics. By humanism I mean

first of all attempting to dissolve B l a k e ' s m i n d - f o r g ' d m a n a c l e
s s o

as to be able to use o n e ' s mind historically and rationally for the
purposes of reflective understanding a n d genuine disclosure. M o r e -
over, h u m a n i s m is sustained by a sense of c o m m u n i t y with other
interpreters and other societies and periods: strictly speaking, there-
fore, there is no such thing as an isolated humanist.

This is to say that every domain is linked to every other one, and
that nothing that g o e s on in our world has ever been isolated and
pure of any outside influence. The disheartening part is that the m o r e
the critical study of culture s h o w s us that this is the case, the less
influence such a view s e e m s to have, and the m o r e territorially
reductive polarizations like " I s l a m v. the W e s t " seem to conquer.

For those of us w h o by force of circumstance actually live the
pluri-cultural life as it entails Islam and the West, I h a v e long felt
that a special intellectual and moral responsibility attaches to what
we do as scholars and intellectuals. Certainly I think it is incumbent
upon us to complicate and/or dismantle the reductive f o r m u l a e and
the abstract but potent kind of t h o u g h t that leads the mind away
from concrete h u m a n history and experience and into the realms

of ideological fiction, metaphysical confrontation and collective passion. This is not to say that we cannot speak about issues of injustice and suffering, but that we need to do so always within a context that is amply situated in history, culture and socio-economic

reality. Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits in accord with the prevailing authority. I have spent a great deal of my life during the past thirty-five years advocating the rights of the Palestinian people to national self-determination, but I have always tried to do that with full attention paid to the reality of the Jewish people and what they suffered by way of persecution and genocide.

The paramount thing is that the struggle for equality in Palestine/Israel should be directed toward a humane goal, that is, co-existence, and not further suppression and denial. Not accidentally, I indicate that Orientalism and modern anti-Semitism have common roots.

Therefore it would seem to be a vital necessity for independent intellectuals always to provide alternative models to the reductively simplifying and confining ones, based on mutual hostility, that have prevailed in the Middle East and elsewhere for so long.

Let me now speak about a different alternative model that has been extremely important to me in my work. As a humanist whose

field is literature, I am old enough to have been trained forty years ago in the field of comparative literature, whose leading ideas go back to Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Before that I must mention the supremely creative contribution of Giambattista Vico, the Neapolitan philosopher and philologist whose ideas anticipate and later infiltrate the line of German thinkers I am about to cite. They belong to the era of Herder and Wolf, later to be followed by Goethe, Humboldt, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Gadamer, and finally the great Twentieth Century Romance philologists Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer and Ernst Robert Curtius. To young people of the current generation the very idea of philology suggests something impossibly antiquarian and musty, but philology in fact is the most basic and creative of the interpretive arts. It is exemplified for me most admirably in Goethe's interest in Islam generally, and Hafiz in particular, a consuming passion which led to the composition of the *West-Ostlicher Diwan*, and it inflected Goethe's later ideas about *Weltliteratur*, the study of all the literatures of the world as a symphonic whole which could be apprehended theoretically as having preserved the individuality of each work without losing sight of the whole.

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There is a considerable irony to the realization, then, that, as today's globalized world draws together in some of the lamentable ways I have been talking about here, we may be approaching the kind of standardization and homogeneity that Goethe's ideas were specifically formulated to prevent. In an essay published in 1951 entitled "Philologie der Weltliteratur", Erich Auerbach made exactly that point at the outset of the postwar period, which was also the beginning of the Cold War. His great book *Mimesis*, published in Berne in 1946 but written while Auerbach was a wartime exile teaching Romance languages in Istanbul, was meant to be a testament to the diversity and concreteness of the reality represented in Western literature from Homer to Virginia Woolf; but reading the 1951 essay one senses that for Auerbach the great book he wrote was an elegy for a period when people could interpret texts philologically, concretely, sensitively and intuitively, using erudition and an excellent command of several languages to support the kind of understanding that Goethe advocated for his understanding of Islamic literature. Positive knowledge of languages and history was necessary, but

it was never enough, any more than the mechanical gathering of facts would constitute an adequate method of grasping what an author like Dante, for example, was all about. The main requirement for the kind of philological understanding Auerbach and his predecessors were talking about and tried to practice was one that sympathetically and subjectively entered into the life of a written text as seen from the perspective of its time and its author (*eingefühling*).

Rather than alienation and hostility to another time and different culture, philology as applied to *Weltliteratur* involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other. And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter's philological mission.

All this was obviously undermined and destroyed in Germany by National Socialism. After the war, Auerbach notes mournfully, the standardization of ideas, and greater and greater specialization of knowledge, gradually narrowed the opportunities for the kind of investigative and everlastingly inquiring kind of philological work that he had represented, and, alas, it's an even more depressing fact

that since A u e r b a c h ' s death in 1957 both the idea and practice of humanistic research have shrunk in scope as well as in centrality. T h e
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b o o k culture based on archival research as well as general principles of mind that once sustained h u m a n i s m as a historical discipline have almost disappeared. Instead of reading in the real sense of the word, our students today are often distracted by the f r a g m e n t e d k n o w l e d g e available on the internet and in the m a s s media.

W o r s e yet, education is threatened by nationalist and religious orthodoxies often disseminated by the m a s s m e d i a as they f o c u s ahistorically and sensationally on the distant electronic w a r s that give viewers the sense of surgical precision but that in fact obscure the terrible suffering and destruction produced by m o d e r n " c l e a n " warfare. In the demonization of an u n k n o w n e n e m y , for w h o m the label " t e r r o r i s t " serves the general p u r p o s e of keeping p e o p l e stirred

up and angry, media images c o m m a n d too m u c h attention and can be exploited at times of crisis and insecurity of the kind that the post-9/11 period has produced. Speaking both as an A m e r i c a n and

as an Arab I must ask my reader not to underestimate the kind of simplified view of the world that a relative handful of Pentagon civilian elites have formulated for US policy in the entire Arab and Islamic worlds, a view in which terror, pre-emptive war, and unilateral regime change — backed up by the most bloated military budget in history — are the main ideas debated endlessly and impoverishingly by a media that assigns itself the role of producing so-called "experts" who validate the government's general line. Reflection, debate, rational argument, moral principle based on a secular notion that human beings must create their own history, have been replaced by abstract ideas that celebrate American or Western exceptionalism, denigrate the relevance of context, and regard other cultures with derisive contempt. Perhaps you will say that I am making too many abrupt transitions between humanistic interpretation on the one hand and foreign policy on the other, and that a modern technological society which along with unprecedented power possesses the internet and F-16 fighter-jets must in the end be commanded by formidable technical-policy experts like Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Perle. But what has really been lost is a sense of the density and interdependence of human life, which can neither

be reduced to a formula nor be brushed aside as irrelevant. Even the

language of the war is dehumanizing in the extreme: "We'll go in there, take out Saddam, destroy his army with clean surgical strikes, and everyone will think it's great," said a congressman on national television. It seems to me entirely symptomatic of the Preface (2003)

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precarious moment we are living through that when Vice President **Cheney** made his hard-line speech on August 26, 2002, about the imperative to attack Iraq, he quoted as his single Middle east "expert" in support of military intervention against Iraq an Arab academic who as a paid consultant to the mass media on a nightly **basis** keeps repeating his hatred of his own people and the renunciation of his background. Such a *trahison des clercs* is a sign of how **genuine** humanism can degenerate into jingoism and false patriotism. That is one side of the global debate. In the Arab and Muslim countries the situation is scarcely better. As Roula Khalaf in an excellent *Financial Times* essay (September 4, 2002) argues, the region has slipped into an easy anti-Americanism that shows little understanding of what the US is really like as a society. Because the

g o v e r n m e n t s are relatively p o w e r l e s s to affect US policy t o w a
r d

them, they turn their energies to repressing and keeping d o w n their

o w n populations, which results in resentment, anger and helpless

imprecations that do nothing to o p e n up societies w h e r e secular

ideas about h u m a n history and d e v e l o p m e n t have been overtaken
by

failure and frustration, as well as by an Islamism built out of rote

learning, the obliteration of what are perceived to be other, c o m p e t i -

tive f o r m s of secular knowledge, and an inability to analyze and

exchange ideas within the generally discordant world of m o d e r n

discourse. T h e gradual disappearance of the extraordinary tradition

of Islamic *ijtihad* has been one of the m a j o r cultural disasters of our

time, with the result that critical thinking and individual wrestling

with the p r o b l e m s of the modern world h a v e simply dropped out of

sight. O r t h o d o x y and d o g m a rule instead.

This is not to say that the cultural world has simply regressed on

one side to a belligerent neo-Orientalism and on the other to blanket

rejectionism. T h e recent United Nations W o r l d S u m m i t in Johannes-

burg, for all its limitations, did in fact reveal a vast area of c o m m o n

global concern w h o s e detailed w o r k i n g s on matters having to do with

the environment, famine, the gap b e t w e e n a d v a n c e d and developing countries, health and h u m a n rights, suggest the w e l c o m e e m e r g e n c e

of a n e w collective constituency that gives the often facile notion of

" o n e w o r l d " a new urgency. In all this, however, we m u s t admit

that no one can possibly know the extraordinarily c o m p l e x unity of

our globalized world, despite the reality that, as I said at the outset,

the world does have a real interdependence of parts that leaves no

genuine opportunity for isolation.

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T h e point I want to conclude with n o w is to insist that the terrible

reductive conflicts that herd p e o p l e under falsely u n i f y i n g rubrics

like " A m e r i c a , " " T h e W e s t " o r " I s l a m " and invent collective

identities for large n u m b e r s of individuals w h o are actually quite

diverse, cannot remain as potent as they are, and m u s t be opposed,

their m u r d e r o u s effectiveness vastly reduced in influence and mobil-

izing power. We still have at our disposal the rational interpretive

skills that are the legacy of humanistic education, not as a sentimental

piety enjoining us to return to traditional values or the classics but as the active practice of worldly secular rational discourse. The secular world is the world of history as made by human beings. Human agency is subject to investigation and analysis, which it is the mission of understanding to apprehend, criticize, influence and judge. Above all, critical thought does not submit to state power or to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another

approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations,

we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow. But for that kind of wider perception we need time and patient and skeptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction.

Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority. Texts have to be read as texts that were produced and live on in the historical realm in all sorts of what I have called worldly

ways. But this by no means excludes power, since on the contrary what I have tried to show in my book have been the insinuations, the imbrications of power into even the most recondite of studies.

And lastly, most important, humanism is the only, and, I would go as far as saying, the final, resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history. We are today abetted by the enormously encouraging democratic field of cyberspace, open to all users in ways undreamed of by earlier generations either of tyrants or of orthodoxies. The world-wide protests before

the war began in Iraq would not have been possible were it not for the existence of alternative communications across the globe, informed

by alternative news sources and keenly aware of the environmental, human rights, and libertarian impulses that bind us together in this

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tiny planet. The human, and humanistic, desire for enlightenment and emancipation is not easily deferred, despite the incredible strength of the opposition to it that comes from the Rumsfelds, Bin Ladens, Sharons and Bushes of this world. I would like to believe that

Orientalism has had a place in the long and often interrupted road
to h u m a n f r e e d o m .

E . W . S .

New York

May 2003

A cknowledgments

I have been reading about Orientalism for a number of years,
but most of this book was written during 1 9 7 5 - 1 9 7 6 , which I spent
as a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral
Sciences, Stanford, California. In this unique and generous insti-
tution, it was my good fortune not only to have benefitted agreeably
from several colleagues, but also from the help of Joan Warm-
brunn, Chris Hoth, Jane Kielsmeier, Preston Cutler, and the cen-
ter's director, Gardner Lindzey. T h e list of friends, colleagues, and
students who read, or listened to, parts or the whole of this manu-
script is so long as to embarrass me, and now that it has finally
appeared as a book, perhaps even them. Nevertheless I should
mention with gratitude the always helpful encouragement of Janet
and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Noam Chomsky, and Roger Owen, who
followed this project from its beginning to its conclusion. Likewise

I must gratefully acknowledge the helpful and critical interest of the colleagues, friends, and students in various places whose questions and discussion sharpened the text considerably. Andre Schiffrin and Jeanne Morton of Pantheon Books were ideal publisher and copy editor, respectively, and made the ordeal (f o r the author, at least) of preparing the manuscript an instructive and genuinely intelligent process. Mariam Said helped me a great deal with her research on the early modern history of Orientalist institutions. Apart from that, though, her loving support really made much of the work on this book not only enjoyable but possible.

September-October 1977

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They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

The East is a career.

—Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred*

Introduction

I

On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975 - 1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that "it had once seemed to belong to . . . the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval."¹ He was right about the place, of course, especially so far as a European was concerned. The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over. Perhaps it seemed irrelevant that Orientals themselves had something at stake in the process, that even in the time of Chateaubriand and Nerval Orientals had lived there, and that now it was they who were suffering; the main thing for the European visitor was a European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate, both of which had a privileged communal significance for the journalist and his French readers. Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly). Unlike the Americans, the French and the British—less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss—have had a long tradition of what

I shall be calling ***Orientalism***, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.

In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West)

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as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. In contrast, the American understanding of the Orient will seem considerably less dense, although our recent Japanese, Korean, and Indochinese adventures ought now to be creating a more sober, more realistic "Oriental" awareness. Moreover, the vastly expanded

American political and economic role in the Near East (the Middle East) makes great claims on our understanding of that Orient. It will be clear to the reader (and will become clearer still throughout the many pages that follow) that by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent. The most readily accepted designation 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. Nevertheless books are written and congresses held with "the Orient" as their main focus, with the Orientalist in his new or old guise as their main authority. The point is that even if it does not survive as it once did, Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about

the Orient and the Oriental.

Related to this academic tradition, whose fortunes, transmigrations, specializations, and transmissions are in part the subject of this study, is a more general meaning for Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the

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Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. *This* Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx. A little later in this introduction I shall deal with the methodological problems one encounters in so broadly construed a "field" as this.

The interchange between the academic and the more or less imaginative meanings of Orientalism is a constant one, and since

the late eighteenth century there has been a considerable, quite disciplined—perhaps even regulated—traffic between the two. Here I come to the third meaning of Orientalism, which is something more historically and materially defined than either of the other two. Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point 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, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, think-

ing, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question. How this happens is what this book tries to demonstrate. It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. Historically and culturally there is a quantitative as well as a qualitative difference between the Franco-British involvement in the Orient and—until the period of American ascendancy after

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World War II—the involvement of every other European and Atlantic power. To speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise, a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms

as the imagination itself, the whole of India and the Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, the spice trade, colonial armies and a long tradition of colonial administrators, a formidable scholarly corpus, innumerable Oriental "experts" and "hands," an Oriental professorate, a complex array of "Oriental" ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality), many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use—the list can be extended more or less indefinitely. My point is that Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient, which until the early nineteenth century had really meant only India and the Bible lands. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II France and Britain dominated the Orient and Orientalism; since World War II America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did. Out of that closeness, whose dynamic is enormously productive even if it always demonstrates the comparatively greater strength of the Occident (British, French, or American), comes the large body of texts I call Orientalist.

It should be said at once that even with the generous number

of books and authors that I examine, there is a much larger number that I simply have had to leave out. My argument, however, depends neither upon an exhaustive catalogue of texts dealing with the Orient nor upon a clearly delimited set of texts, authors, and ideas that together make up the Orientalist canon. I have depended instead upon a different methodological alternative—whose backbone in a sense is the set of historical generalizations I have so far been making in this Introduction—and it is these I want now to discuss in more analytical detail.

II

I have begun with the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either. We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the

Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.

Having said that, one must go on to state a number of reasonable qualifications. In the first place, it would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was *essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality. When Disraeli said in his novel *Tancred* that the East was a career, he meant that to be interested in the East was something bright young Westerners would find to be an all-consuming passion; he should not be interpreted as saying that the East was *only* a career for Westerners. There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West. About that fact this study of Orientalism has very little to contribute, except to acknowledge it tacitly. But the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite

or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient. My point is that Disraeli's statement about the East refers mainly to that created consistency, that regular constellation of ideas as the pre-eminent thing about the Orient, and not to its mere being, as Wallace Stevens's phrase has it.

A second qualification is that ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied. To believe that the Orient was created—or, as I call it, "Orientalized"—and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony, and is quite accurately indicated in the title of K. M. Panikkar's classic *Asia and Western Dominance*.² The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered common-

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place by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it *could be*—that is, submitted to being—*made* Oriental. There is