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| Orientalism |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Orientalism is the sociological, historical, cultural, and anthropological study of the Orient, with ‘the Orient’ constituting countries East of ‘the Occident’ (Western Europe), and includes lands spanning from Morocco to Japan. The term Orientalism, however, is primarily used to describe the incorporation of Eastern culture in Western art, literature, and design during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Artists whose work largely focused on Oriental subjects are often referred to as the Orientalists, and include Eugène Delacroix, Alphonse Etienne Dinet, Jean-Léon Gérôme, William Holman-Hunt, John Frederick Lewis, and the photographers Lehnert and Landrock. Traces of Oriental themes can also be found in the work of twentieth century artists including Henri Matisse, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Wassily Kandinsky. Orientalist artists predominantly depicted scenes of the Arabian Desert, portraits of natives with Oriental artefacts and clothing, the harem, odalisques, and Oriental architecture. Broadly speaking, the Orientalists represented the Orient as primitive yet opulent, and in stark contrast to the ‘rational’ and enlightened West. Much of the scholarship around (and the very definition) of Orientalism in the twentieth century is indebted to Said’s *Orientalism* (1977), which discusses why the West has preconceived notions of the Orient (and primarily the peoples of the Middle East). |
| Orientalism is the sociological, historical, cultural, and anthropological study of the Orient, with ‘the Orient’ constituting countries East of ‘the Occident’ (Western Europe), and includes lands spanning from Morocco to Japan. The term Orientalism, however, is primarily used to describe the incorporation of Eastern culture in Western art, literature, and design during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Artists whose work largely focused on Oriental subjects are often referred to as the Orientalists, and include Eugène Delacroix, Alphonse Etienne Dinet, Jean-Léon Gérôme, William Holman-Hunt, John Frederick Lewis, and the photographers Lehnert and Landrock. Traces of Oriental themes can also be found in the work of twentieth century artists including Henri Matisse, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Wassily Kandinsky. Orientalist artists predominantly depicted scenes of the Arabian Desert, portraits of natives with Oriental artefacts and clothing, the harem, odalisques, and Oriental architecture. Broadly speaking, the Orientalists represented the Orient as primitive yet opulent, and in stark contrast to the ‘rational’ and enlightened West. Much of the scholarship around (and the very definition) of Orientalism in the twentieth century is indebted to Said’s *Orientalism* (1977), which discusses why the West has preconceived notions of the Orient (and primarily the peoples of the Middle East).  Western interest in the Orient began as the French and British colonial empires made contact with Eastern countries. Rumours of the ‘Other’ flooded the West and, as Victor Hugo stated in the preface to Les Orientales (1818), ‘tout le continent penche à l’Orient’ (trans: ‘the whole continent is gravitating towards the Orient’). A spectrum of ideas about these ‘Other’ cultures began to form, which soon began to characterise and stand-in for these countries and the Orient itself. Napoleon Bonaparte’s documentation of the Orient in 1809-1822 set an assumed example for travellers to follow, and was considered an accurate account of his experiences there. However, Said argues that ‘at most, the ‘real’ Orient provoked a writer to his vision; it very rarely guided it.’ Fantastical ideas of the Oriental Other quickly weaved into Europe, and developed into stereotypes that became deeply ingrained in Western thought (many of which, it should be noted, remain in the present). Said maintains that celebrated writers of the nineteenth century, such as Hugo, ‘restructured the Orient by their art and made its colours, lights, people visible through their images, rhythms, and motifs.’  Said sees Orientalism as the style of thought polarizing ‘The East’ from ‘The West,’ and asserts that these places are not an inert fact of nature. Rather, he suggests, they are mere constructs both from and for the West. The construct of the Orient in the nineteenth century, however, stimulated many theories, works of literature, art, and music commenting on the social and cultural observations between these distinct binary opposites. Said further defines Orientalism as ‘a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience.’  [Image: TheSnakeChamer.jpg]  Figure Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *The Snake Charmer* (1870)  http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/jean-leon-gerome/the-snake-charmer |
| Further reading:  (Lewis)  (Beaulieu and Roberts)  (Said)  (Nochlin)  (Orientales)  (Thornton)  (Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Art) |