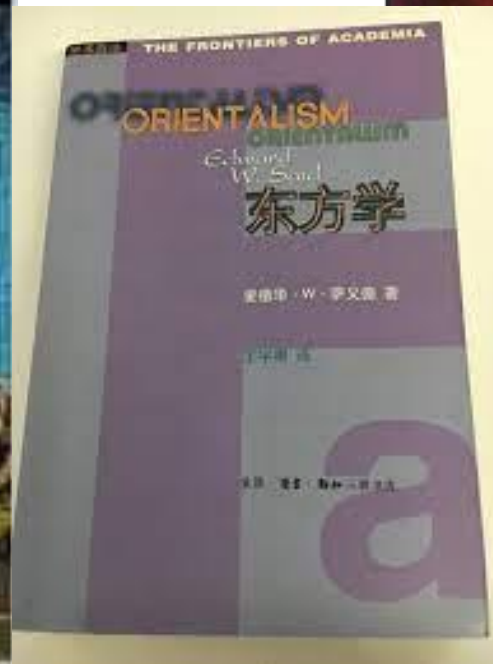
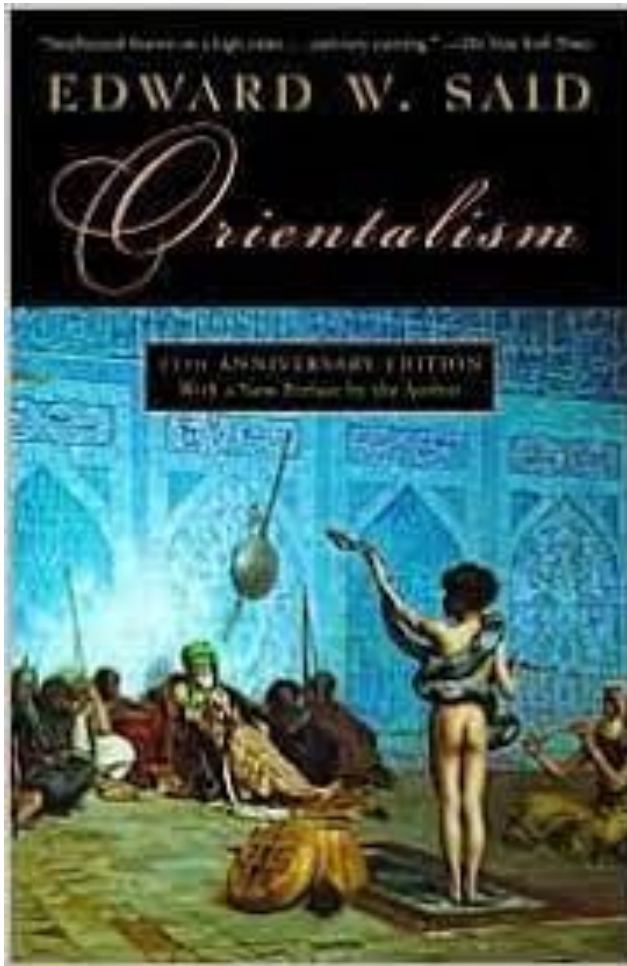
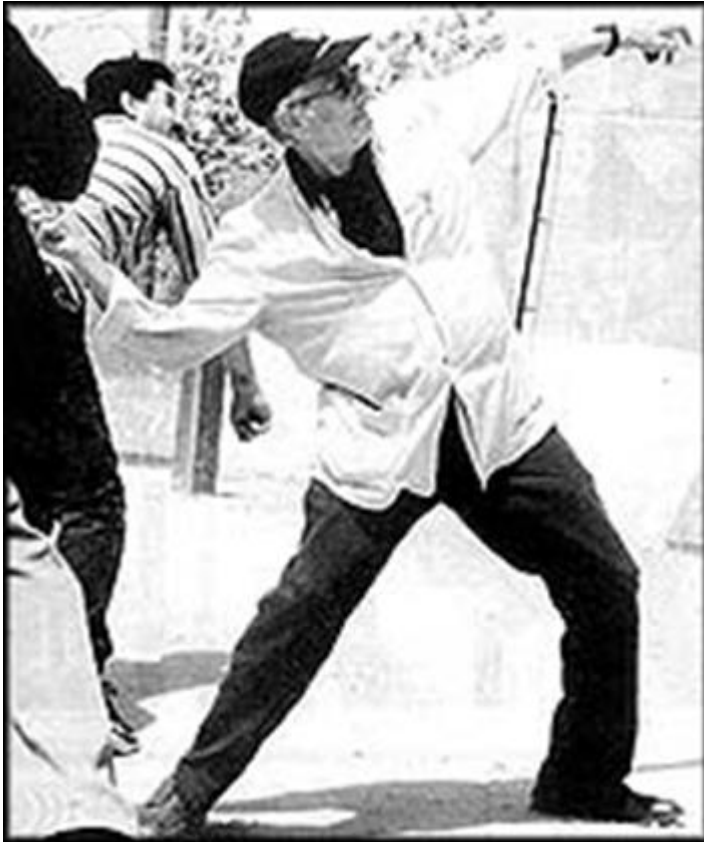


Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978)



Edward Said (1935-2003)



“AN UNFORGETTABLE GESTURE: At the Fatma Gate, in 2000, on Lebanon's southern frontier with Palestine, Edward Said's arm stretched out, throwing a rock in a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which enters its fourth year this week, and the children of Palestine challenging the military might of Israel with rocks. This act of defiance, during a family visit to the Lebanese south in celebration of total Israeli withdrawal from the country, caused an uproar in Zionist circles, leading to the cancellation of a lecture he was to give at the Vienna Freud Society, and calls for his dismissal from Columbia University. ...

Edward Said (1935-2003)



... Zionist campaigns against him notwithstanding, Said never succumbed to threats. Until his death last Thursday, he remained a Palestinian activist, focussed but always open-minded enough to distinguish between the Zionist enemy and the Jewish or Israeli human being -- and that is what unsettled his enemies most.”
<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/658/index.htm>

Edward Said (1935-2003)



“DEAD AT LAST!

EDWARD SAID

Palestinian "Revisionist" and
Rock-Thrower at Jews.

The man who fabricated his entire personal history, claiming for half a century to be a dispossessed Palestinian, when in fact he was a member of a wealthy Egyptian family, and neither he nor his family suffered any expulsion from Palestine.”

<http://www.masada2000.org/said.html>

Edward Said (1935-2003)

Born in Jerusalem in a wealthy Christian Palestinian family with Egyptian connections (his family history has been the subject of controversy). Educated in Jerusalem and, after the creation of Israel in 1948, at an elite school in Cairo. Later attended Princeton and Harvard in the US. Joined the Comparative Literature department at Columbia University (New York) in 1963, becoming a Professor in 1977. President of the MLA in 1999. Also an outspoken commentator on Middle Eastern issues, a piano player, music critic and co-founder of the 'West-East Divan' orchestra with Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim.



Selected publications

Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography (1966)

Beginnings: Intention and Method (1975)

Orientalism (1978), later translated in over 30 languages.

The Question of Palestine (1979)

The World, the Text and the Critic (1983)

Culture and Imperialism (1993)

Representations of the Intellectual (1994)

Out of Place (personal memoir, 1999)

The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After (2000)

On Late Style. Music and Literature Against the Grain (2006, posthumous)

NB: *The Edward Said Reader* (2000)

Orientalism: one of the most influential and controversial books in the humanities in the second half of the 20th century.

Contexts:

Political: Israeli-Arab wars (1967,1973); the 'Palestinian question', oil shock.

Intellectual:

- (post)structuralist / (post)Saussurean redefinition of the relation between sign and meaning: attention to difference as constitutive of meaning, critique of binary thinking.
- Foucault's poststructuralist and posthumanist critique of knowledge as a form of power, Nietzschean genealogy of science and of the humanities in particular, the "archaeology of knowledge" (see also Clifford's review below).
- emergence of the notion of discourse, which breaks down the boundaries between literature and other forms of writing.

Institutional: redefinitions of comparative literature in the light of challenges to the canon, to the idea of Europe / the West; student activism on American campuses and politicization; democratization of higher education.

Orientalism: early reviews.

- Cf. Word document with questions

The influence of *Orientalism*

- caused major debates within Oriental studies.
- served as a model for similar critiques of (Western) representations of other areas/continents (Africa, Latin America, the Far East...), and thus became one of the seminal texts of postcolonial studies. Also provided models for critiques of representations of other 'Others' than racially / geographically defined ones (e.g. women). 'To orientalize' has become a verb in literary/cultural studies, the term 'orientalism' has found its way into the media.

The influence of *Orientalism*

- a) Said critically reviews a selective sample of Orientalist works, but sometimes simplifies them and disregards work by other Oriental scholars who are closer / more sympathetic to their subject matter. He also plays down the importance of German, Dutch, Italian, ... (as opposed to French or British) Oriental studies (cf. Manzalaoui).
- b) Said denounces misrepresentations without providing any idea of what an accurate representation might be (cf. Said's partial answer on p. xiv), and remains silent about the Orientalized other's self-representation.
- c) Orientalism is guilty of Occidentalism: despite Said's stated intention to focus on British and French varieties of Orientalism (since Britain and France were Imperial powers in the Middle East), he ends up incriminating a whole Western tradition that includes writers from many European nations and many periods (from Aeschylus to Karl Marx, p. 3). Orientalism is therefore guilty of the kind of essentialist, binary thinking it sets out to deconstruct.

The influence of *Orientalism*

d) Said fails to either properly theorize or empirically investigate the links between an Orientalist imagination that he traces back to antiquity and the form of power/knowledge that prevailed with 19th- and 20th-century Western interventions in the Middle East. He too often relies on analogy, coincidence, or guilt by association.

e) Said is an imperfect poststructuralist: although his analysis owes much to Foucault, he retains a humanist faith in the possibility of true knowledge as enlightenment, not as a form of power. He believes in “humanist fables of suppressed authenticity” (cf. Clifford).

f) Said remains committed to the canon of comparative literature which he criticizes for Orientalist attitudes, he “denounces with Foucaultian vitriol what he loves with Auerbachian passion” (Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory*, p. 168).

Questions

1. Are the objections to *Orientalism* listed in the reviews by Beckingham and Manzalaoui and/or under points a) to f) justified in view of the chapters you have read? Or do Said's texts contain their own defence against those objections?
2. Does Said's faith in the "human agency" of interpreters of cultures (preface to *Orientalism*, xxii) also extend to a belief in the agency of the (literary) authors he analyses, or are those authors all – even unconsciously – Orientalists? Is he 'kinder' to some (literary) authors than to others, and why?
3. "The over-interpretation of selected works from [the] canon went nowhere in particular. Our attention has been misdirected ... It is a foolish piece of academic snobbery to go hunting for faint hints of Orientalism in the classics of English and French literature, while neglecting the immensely popular novels of Sax Rohmer, Dennis Wheatley and Daniel Easternman." (Irwin). Do you agree? Is Orientalism still noticeable in current high and/or popular culture? Has it remained the same?

Questions

4. A new Dutch translation of Dante's *Inferno* recently suppressed references to the Prophet Mohammed in the account of his tortures in hell that Said discusses in *Orientalism* (pp. 68-69). Does this decision do justice to Said's purpose in writing *Orientalism*?

https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20210322_98057472

<https://www.demorgen.be/tv-cultuur/mohammed-niet-in-nieuwe-vertaling-van-dantes-goddelijke-komedie~bed335ef/>

<https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2021/03/27/new-dutch-translation-dante-censor-mention-mohammed/>

+ Any question you want to raise.

“Blackface and Fu Manchu moustaches: does ballet have a race problem?”

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/nov/20/fu-manchu-moustaches-blackface-does-ballet-have-a-race-problem>



Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Seattle opera, 1999



Verdi's *Aida*. Seattle opera, 2008





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