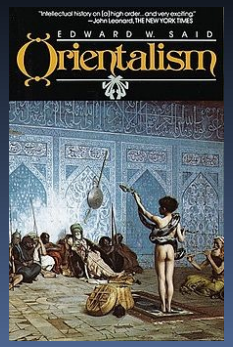
Orientalism videos

On Orientalism-Edward Said
http://youtu.be/xwCOSkXR_Cw

On Orientalism-Edward Said (2/4)
http://youtu.be/n0HYX9JVH8o

On Orientalism-Edward Said (3/4)
http://youtu.be/tIF5ED-gE5Y

On Orientalism-Edward Said (4/4)
http://youtu.be/tZLA-mwOdSs

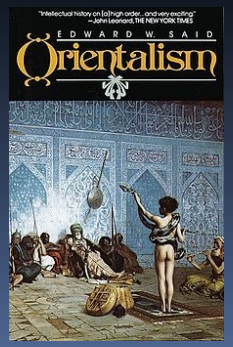


Imagining the Other

Orientalism – Lecture 2

Interpreting Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* – critical approaches

Gary R. Bunt



‘Orientalism’ (the book) is as much about a theory as about the critical reaction it generated

‘Orientalism’ allows us to reflect on how we perceive ‘the Other’

This is relevant within approaches to religious studies (i.e. In reading sources and interpretations, and in making one’s own approaches to sources)

Provides a language for engaging in discourse.

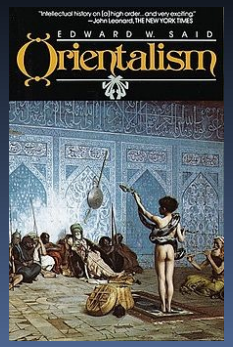
Allows us to review critical discourse and its ‘evolution’ over a 30 year period, in relation to a book that has relevance across several disciplines

Criticism of Edward Said

•factual, methodological and conceptual errors

•ignores genuine contributions to the study of Eastern cultures

•does not explain why the French and English studied Islam in the 16th and 17th centuries, before possessing any control in the Middle East.



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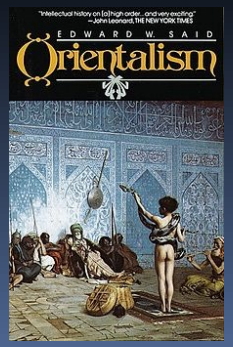
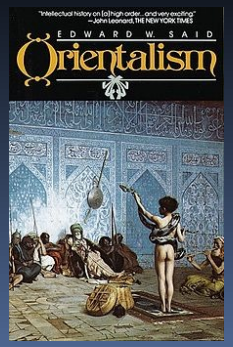


Criticism of Said

•Targets a broad range of ‘orientalism’, but leaves some sectors alone

•Attitudes to separate cultures varied

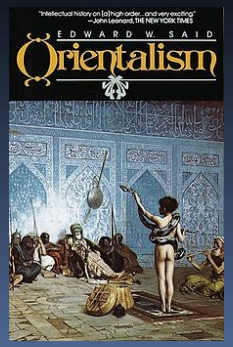
•Said is stereotypical in his own approaches to ‘orientalism’



Types of orientalism (according to critics)

Genuine: scholarly intention

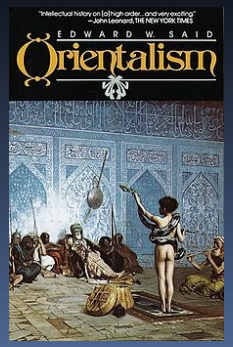
False: motivated by religious and other convictions



Malcolm Kerr

“The book contains many excellent sections and scores many telling points, but it is spoiled by overzealous prosecutorial argument in which Professor Said, in his eagerness to spin too large a web, leaps at conclusions and tries to throw everything but the kitchen sink into a preconceived frame of analysis. In charging the entire tradition of European and American Oriental studies with the sins of reductionism and caricature, he commits precisely the same error. “

International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 12 (December 1980)

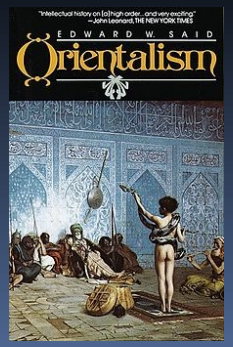


Bernard Lewis:

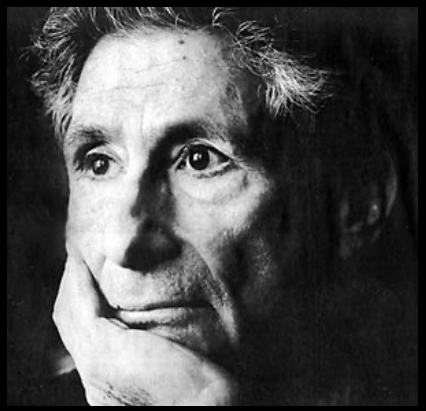
•Lewis states: Orientalism arose from humanism, distinct from Imperialist ideology, and sometimes in opposition to it.

•Orientalist study of Islam arose from the *rejection* of religious dogma, and was an important spur to discovery of alternative cultures.

•criticised as "intellectual protectionism" the argument that only those within a culture could usefully discuss it.



Said v. Lewis

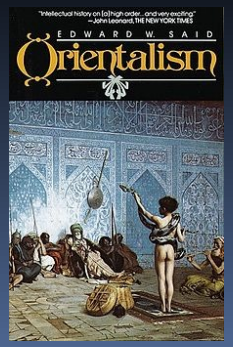


Said responds that Lewis has own political agenda.

Lewis was a target of Said in the book – suggests that Lewis interpreted Islam as a monolithic entity and an anti-Semitic ideology

Claims that Lewis believes that Islam never changes

Argues that Lewis has pro-Israeli bias.

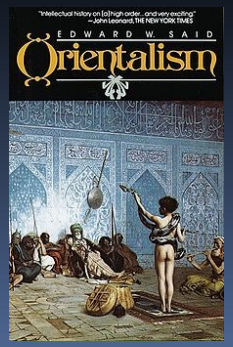


Robert Irwin

•criticizes what he claims to be Said's thesis that throughout Europe's history, "every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric."

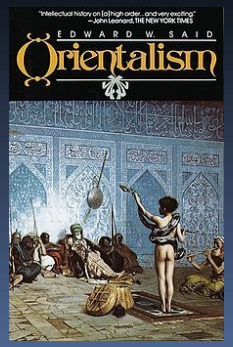
•suggests many Orientalists were committed advocates for Arab and Islamic political causes.

•"Orientalism amounts to a sustained libel on the past."



Robert Irwin cont/d

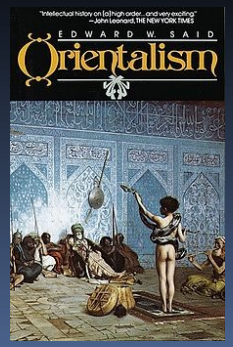
“Said's Orientalism has misdirected our attention. Who doubts that there is such a thing as orientalism in the pejorative sense – a presentation of the orient or more specifically Arab Muslims as corrupt, lazy, decadent and so forth? One would have to be insane to deny such thing.”



Robert Irwin cont/d

"There was and is plenty of racism with respect to Arabs and Muslims in western culture, but the best places to go looking for it are in government departments, army barracks, police stations, Hollywood film studios, and the editorial rooms of trash newspapers."

"By misdirecting hostile attention to intellectuals, artists and, above all, academics, Said was indicting those who were mostly the good guys and he turned what should be a serious socio-cultural issue into a campus dog fight."



Guardian, Shooting at the wrong targets
guardian.co.uk, Saturday 14 June 2008

Robert Irwin cont/d

"Said suffered from a *déformation professionelle* — from an academic's tendency to overestimate the importance of universities and elite literary coteries. Similarly, he overvalued difficulty, ambiguity, and subtexts. Things were not always and necessarily so ambiguous."

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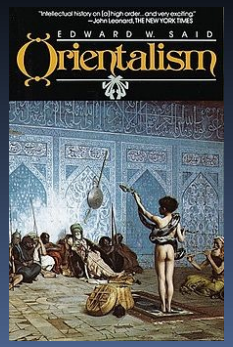
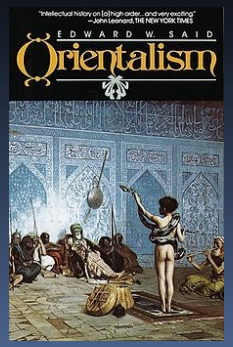


Robert Irwin cont/d

"The book Orientalism took no account of pulp fiction, doggerel, cinema, theater, music hall, popular sing-songs, pantomime, postcards, science fiction, and cartoons. Said has been followed in his focus on the elite and high culture by his followers and allies, who write about Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Delacroix, E.M Forster and so on. But it is unsafe to assume that wider attitudes to the Orient were shaped by the intellectual elite in some kind of trickle-down effect."



Robert Irwin cont/d

"The relentlessly tragic tone in which Said pitched his Orientalism prevented him from noticing the degree to which Arabs and Muslims are belittled, travestied and patronized in the West by jokes — jokes about burkas, haggling, harems, Arab-style flowery rhetoric, the Muslim afterlife, oil-rich vulgarity, and camels.

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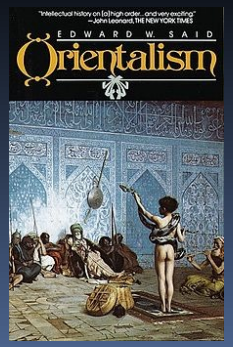
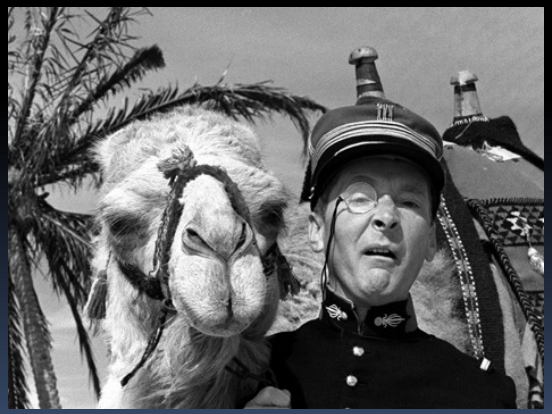


Robert Irwin

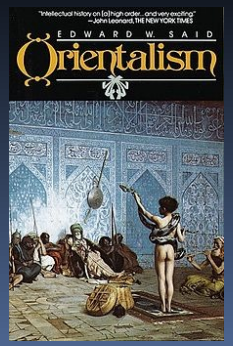
"It is likely that songs such as "The Old Bazaar in Cairo," as belted out by Charley Chester, and films such as The Road to Morocco, Carry On, Follow That Camel, and Disney's Aladdin have played a larger part in shaping a disparaging view of the Middle East than the writings of Silvestre de Sacy and Flaubert"



George P. Landow

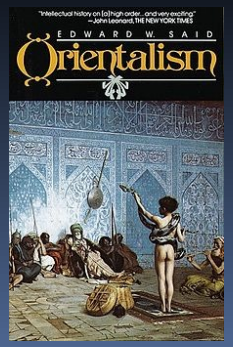
US academic of English

Said ignores the non-Arab Asian countries, non-Western imperialism, the occidentalist ideas that abound in East towards the Western, and gender issues.



George P. Landow cont/d

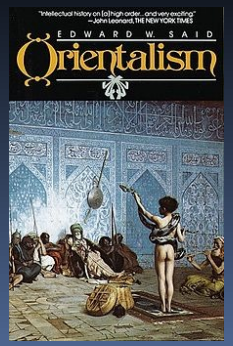
Orientalism assumes that Western imperialism, Western psychological projection, "and its harmful political consequences are something that only the West does to the East rather than something all societies do to one another."



George P. Landow

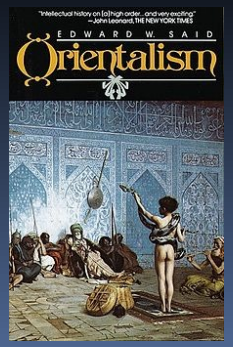
Said ignores China, Japan, and South East Asia, in talking of "the East," but then goes on to criticise the West's homogenisation of the East.

Said overlooks important works by Egyptian and Arabic scholars.



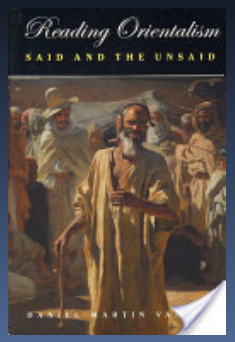
Challenges Said "dramatic assertion that no European or American scholar could `know` the Orient."

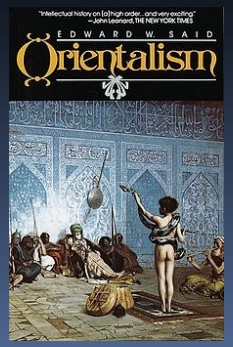
Said did not allow the views of other scholars to feature in his analysis; therefore, he committed “the greatest single scholarly sin” in *Orientalism*



Daniel Varisco
(author of 'Reading Orientalism' and academic at Hofstra University, NY)

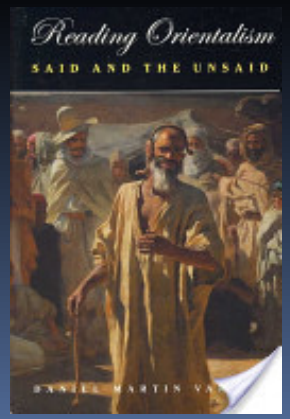
" … the debate over Said's Orientalism thesis is far from over. In part this is due to the ethnocentric prejudice and political bias that continue to fuel depictions of the real Orient in the media and popular culture, especially after the 9/11 tragedy and subsequent global War on Terror. But, as three decades of criticism shows, the historical errors, methodological flaws and palpable polemical rhetoric in the text burden its thesis for current and future readers."

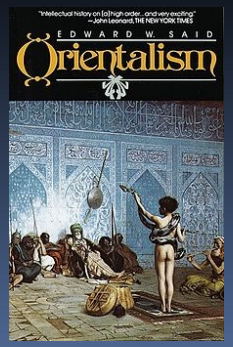




Daniel Varisco cont/d

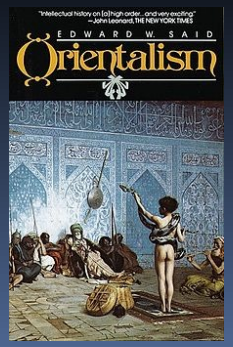
"Said's contribution was not unique. Establishment thinking had already become the target of critics within several disciplines…. Yet it was Said's text, by far the most widely distributed and read, that fostered the emergence of what came to be called the post-colonial critique. By the mid-1980s the formerly colonized subaltern could indeed speak in academic halls, even if such major fetishized icons as Homi Baba and Gayatri Spivak seemed to have little interest in writing readable prose."





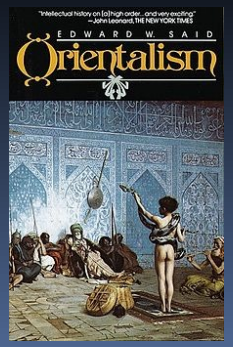
Daniel Varisco Cont/d

Critics from many fields have accused Said of redefining the term "Orientalism" to include virtually anyone who wrote about the "Orient," thus reducing the sympathetic historian Louis Massignon to the same discursively driven level as the libertine novelist Gustave Flaubert. While scholars have never been immune to ethnocentric and racial bias, it is counterproductive to blur genres and assume that trained historians and social scientists, even those who write for the seminal Encyclopaedia of Islam, ultimately must share the same latent agenda. Polemical fervor resulted in an almost total lack of nuance …



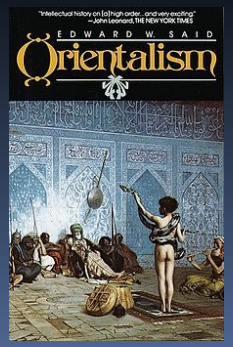
Daniel Varisco cont/d

After three decades, it is time to move beyond PhD thesis cataloguing of what the West did to the East and self-unfulfilling political punditry about what real individuals in the East say they want to do to the West. Edward Said brought us a long way in this process, but the politics of polemics can only go so far, as he himself acknowledged in his later years.



Daniel Varisco cont/d

Said's Orientalism helped emerging scholars come to terms with the baggage of past Orientalism, but as a polemic his text needs to be re-read in the context of the profound changes it helped foster. Serious academic study will always be subject to the limitations and inevitable prejudices of individual scholars. But the contributions of scholars should no longer be summarily dismissed as hostage to a latent hegemonic discourse that Said mislabeled "Orientalism."



Bryan S Turner

“ … while Said’s account of Orientalism provided some valuable criticisms of Western scholarship, it did not provide — and probably did not set out to provide — a convincing or systematic alternative. What, if anything, comes after Said’s critique of Orientalism apart from more textual analysis and deconstructive investigation? “

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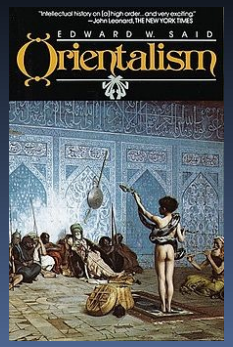
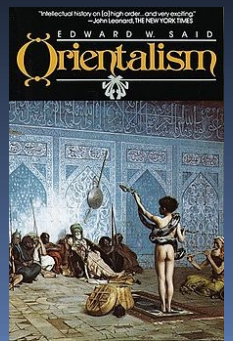


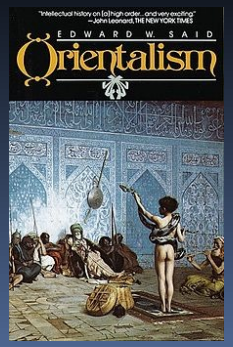
Bryan S Turner cont/d

" … the debate about Orientalism cannot be separated from Middle East politics; therefore, it is almost impossible to achieve anything like an objective assessment of the issues. Generally speaking, the critique of Orientalism has not seen the ironic connection between two forms of racism, namely against Arabs and against Jews. To his great credit, this had clearly not escaped Said. In the introduction to Orientalism, he wrote that in "addition and by an almost inescapable logic, I have found myself writing the history of a strange secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism, as I have discussed it in its Islamic branch Orientalism resemble each other is a historical, cultural and political truth that needs only be mentioned to an Arab Palestinian for its irony to be perfectly understood.""



Edward Said writing in Counterpunch, 2003

“Twenty-five years after my book’s 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 is only a way of evading responsibility in the present.”



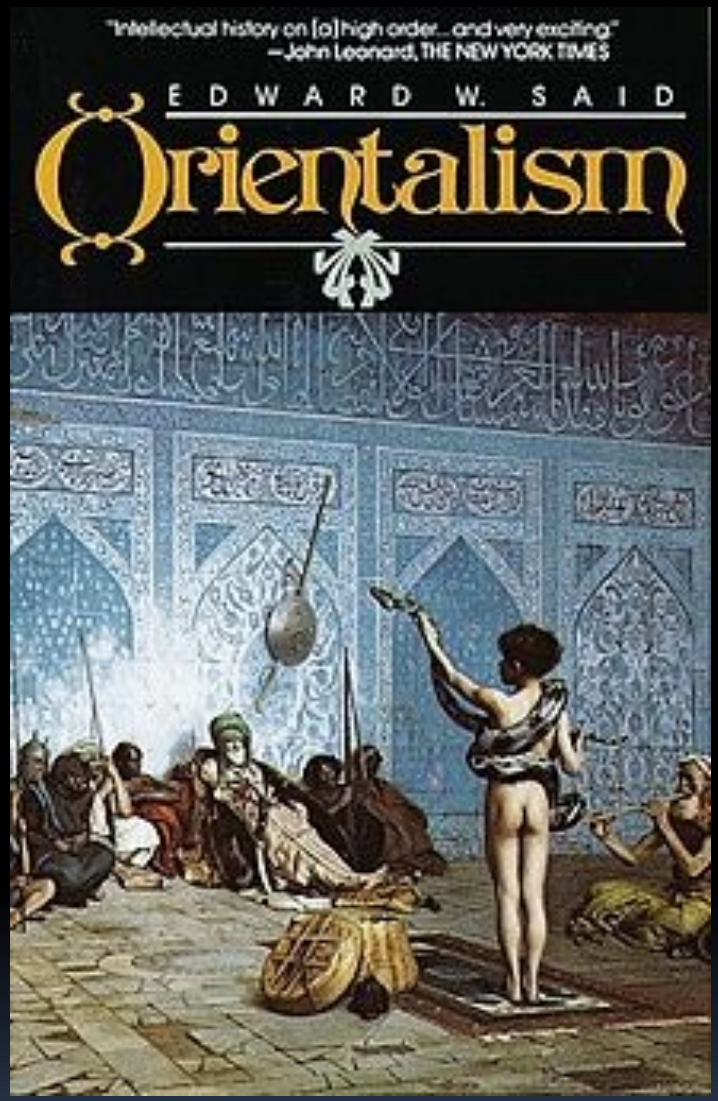
Orientalism Reconsidered

Pros

- Opened up the discussion
- Raised significant questions
- Synthesised broad sources in erudite fashion
- Gave a voice to 'the Other'
- Launched a range of critical discourses

Cons

- Flawed methodology
- Only engaged in intellectual sector
- Made generalisations on sources
- Focused on some sectors, not others
- Remains a contentious volume



More information on this subject can be found on Moodle