

# Orientalisms & (World) Literature<sup>1</sup>

MELC 590A | Winter 2026 | DEN 210

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Office Hours: By appointment only



In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there emerged a constellation of concepts such as literature, civilization, and history that played a vital role in the formation of modernity in all of its geo-cultural and linguistic diversity. In the colonial geography called the “Middle East,” these modern concepts took form through a set of

shared methodologies and presuppositions that constitute Orientalism as a discipline. This seminar explores the relationships between philology, knowledge, and power and their integration as parts of the modern disciplines of Orientalism and literature.

To critically understand this historical phenomenon, we will read and discuss key critiques of modern knowledge, primarily Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and Foucault’s *Order of Things* as points of departure. We will also look at how Said’s critique has itself been deployed, and extended, and problematized by others. In the latter part of the seminar, our focus will be on recent debates in comparative literature on the formation and function of the modern category of literature.

## Why Is The Course Good for Your Life?

One of our objectives in this class is to build a community of hearts and minds who strive toward creating a set of shared analytical tools and cultural sensibilities with which to make sense of and critique our world. An academic study of Orientalism as a discipline is particularly equipped to provide us with such tools, but it requires us to

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Adam Benkato who has generously allowed me to draw on his seminar on Orientalism, offered at U.C. Berkeley. Image: “The Gate of the Great Umayyad Mosque,” (1890) by Gustav Bauernfeind (d. 1904).

be patient, incisive, and imaginative. To face our current planetary challenges, we urgently need to replenish our collective imagination and critical thinking.

Your final grade will depend on the following two criteria:

**1) Presentation (30%)**

Everyone will lead discussion once over the course of the quarter. The forty-minute long presentation entails three core components: 1) summary 2) contextualization, and 3) analysis. You may sign up for a week of your choosing [here](#).

**1. Summary**

The presenter will briefly summarize the text(s) for the week and their main arguments. I invite you to prepare a one-page handout that captures key ideas and terms and an introduction to the author's background, discipline, institutions, and well-known works.

**2. Contextualization**

This section addresses the following questions: Who is the author responding to? How do they critique earlier discourses or historiographies?

**3. Analysis**

Craft a number of questions that will open and stimulate class discussion ([This is a helpful handout](#) about reading theory and raising generative questions).

**2) Assignments (70%)**

In this seminar, you will produce weekly responses, a book review, and a creative project of your choosing (in consultation with moi).

**A. Weekly responses (20%)**

Every week, you will write a response on Canvas to the readings due that week (please post them *prior* to class). In your responses (450–500 words), I encourage you to reflect on the readings and raise questions for discussion. You are exempt for the week when you are presenting.

**B. Book review (25%)**

A scholarly evaluation of a recently published monograph on a topic related to this seminar. The review should be 1,000 (undergraduates) and 1,500 (graduates) words in length and submitted to Canvas. Instead of merely summarizing the

author's arguments, the review should use the monograph as an entryway into the larger debates, concerns, and structures of its field. Your chosen book should be something not on the syllabus but closely related to the themes of the course and in particular the critique of Orientalism and/or World Literature. I encourage you to read a number of relevant book reviews in scholarly journals. See Canvas for samples.

### C. Creative project (25%)

This research-based project could take various forms such as an analytical paper, an extended commentary on a primary source, the translation of a critical essay composed on a topic related to this seminar, a chapbook of poetry, a song or musical performance, an interview with a relevant scholar, a painting, or a video. I am open to all ideas as long as you are passionate about it and that it concerns critiques of Orientalism broadly.

A = 4.0-3.9 | A- = 3.8-3.5 | B+ = 3.4-3.2 | B = 3.1-2.9 | B- = 2.8-2.5 | C+ = 2.4-2.2  
C = 2.1-1.9 | C- = 1.8-1.5 | D+ = 1.4-1.2 | D = 1.1-0.9 | D- = 0.8-0.7 | E = 0.0



Orientalism this, orientalism that, but can Edward Saïd paint like this?



### ~Policies~

**Incomplete Policy:** Incomplete grades may only be awarded if a student is doing satisfactory work up until the last two weeks of the quarter. For more, see [here](#).

**Technology in Class:** It is fine to use your laptops in class for note taking and for referencing class readings. Surfing the web, checking emails, checking Facebook, online shopping (particularly at Amazon!) are prohibited. Please turn off your cellphones before coming to class; the use of cellphones is prohibited for any reason. If it is an emergency, just let me know in advance.

**Disability Resources for Students:** If you need any type of accommodation, please contact the [Office of Disability Resources for Students](#). I will be more than happy to work with Disability Resources to provide appropriate accommodations for you.

**Self-Care:** It is important to care for our body, mind, and spirit while we are in school. Toward that end, there are many different kinds of support services on campus, including the Counseling Center, Hall Health, and the IMA. If you are concerned about yourself or a friend who is struggling, Safecampus, at 1-800-685-7233, is a very helpful resource to learn more about how to access campus-based support services. Ultimately, the best type of self-care is community care.

**Religious Accommodation:** Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy is available at Religious Accommodations Policy (click [here](#) to read more). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form ([here](#)).

**Academic Honesty:** Students are expected to treat their fellow classmates and instructors with honesty and respect throughout the course. All assignments must reflect your own work. The following [link](#) has information on academic honesty, plagiarism, and consequences. Students are expected to adhere to the UW Code of Student Conduct which can be found at the following [link](#).

**Civility for All:** I am committed to creating a space that is inclusive to all. Disruption of classroom discussions can prohibit other students from fully engaging and participating. Please read more [here](#).

### ~ Extra Resources ~

#### On Edward Said

- Bibliography ([here](#))
- Films:
  - *In Search of Palestine: Edward Said's Return Home* (BBC, 1998; [here](#) or [here](#))
  - *The Shadow of the West* (1983; [here](#))

#### Critiques of Said's *Orientalism*

##### Books

- E. Natalie Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance: Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism* (Cornell, 2020)
- Daniel Varisco, *Said and the Unsaid* (University of Washington Press, 2007)
- Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010)
- Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: British and French Orientalisms* (Cornell, 1991)
- Ursula Woköck, *German Orientalism* (Routledge, 2009)
- Henning Trüper, *Orientalism, Philology, and the Illegibility of the Modern World* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020)

- Zeynep Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing about the Orient A Critical Discourse (1872-1932)* (Chicago, 2021)

## Articles

- Khaled Furani, "Said and the Religious Other," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:3 (2010), 604-625.
- Ella Shohat, "The Postcolonial' in Translation: Reading Said in Hebrew," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33:3 (2004), 55-75.
- Aron Kamugisha, "Reading Said and Wynter on Liberation," in Anthony Bogues, ed., *After Man, Towards the Human: Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2006), 131-156.
- Mahdi Amel, "Is the Heart for the East and Reason for the West?: On Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism." translated by Ziad Kiblawi, *Critical Times* 4:3 (2021), 481-500.
- Manfred Sing and Miriam Younes, "The Spectres of Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism?" *Die Welt Des Islams* 53.2 (2013), 149-191.
- Aamir Mufti. "Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture," *Critical Inquiry* 25:1 (1998), 95-125

## Critique of Foucault

- Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014)

## Critique of Postcolonial Thinkers

- Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Duke University Press, 2018)

## COURSE SCHEDULE

*This schedule like life itself is tentative*



\* All readings will be posted to Canvas (unless online access provided in syllabus); please read assigned readings in advance of our class meeting as dated in Canvas.

| # | Date                    | Reading                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Due                                                                   |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Wednesday,<br>January 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Meet &amp; Greet</li><li>- Going over syllabus</li><li>- Vivek Chibber, "Edward Said's Orientalism and Its Afterlives," <i>Jacobin</i> (<a href="#">here</a>)</li></ul>                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Nada</li></ul>                |
| 2 | January 14              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i> (1978), pp. 1–49. (On Canvas)</li><li>- Browse "Everyday Orientalism" (<a href="#">here</a>)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Everyone pick a blog to discuss in class</li></ul></li></ul>                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Week 2 response due</li></ul> |
| 3 | January 21              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Said, <i>Orientalism</i>, pp. 49–110</li><li>- Michel Foucault, <i>The Order of Things</i>, Chapter 3 "Representing", pp. 46–77. (On Canvas)</li></ul> <p>* See handout on Canvas</p>                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Week 3 response due</li></ul> |
| 4 | January 28              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Said, <i>Orientalism</i>, pp. 112–197</li><li>- Foucault, <i>The Order of Things</i>, Chapter 7 "The Limits of Representation", pp. 217–249<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Useful source <a href="#">here</a>.</li></ul></li></ul> <p>* See handout on Canvas</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Week 4 response due</li></ul> |

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|---|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | February 4  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Said, <i>Orientalism</i>, pp. 201–328 (i.e. the rest of the book)</li> <li>- Michel Foucault, <i>The Archaeology of Knowledge</i>, “Part II: The Discursive Regularities”, pp. 21–76</li> </ul> <p>* See handout on Canvas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Guest speaker</b> on German Orientalism: Dr. Mohammad Rafi, Lecturer in European Studies, U.C. Irvine</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week 5 response due</li> </ul>                                                           |
| 6 | February 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, <a href="#">“Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse”</a>, <i>Khamsin</i> (an online text version is <a href="#">here</a>)</li> <li>- Said and al-Azm’s exchanges (<a href="#">here</a>)</li> <li>- <b>Guest speaker</b> on Spanish Orientalism: Dr. Leyla Rouhi, Mary A. and William Wirt Warren Professor of Romance Languages, Williams College</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week 6 response due</li> <li>- Book review due (Submit to Canvas by midnight)</li> </ul> |
| 7 | February 18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hallaq, <i>Restating Orientalism A Critique of Modern Knowledge</i> (On Canvas <a href="#">and here</a>)</li> </ul> <p>* Read: Introduction, chapters 1 (“Putting Orientalism in Its Place”) &amp; 5 (“Refashioning Orientalism, Refashioning the Subject”).</p>                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week 7 response due</li> <li>- Workshop ideas for creative project</li> </ul>            |
| 8 | February 25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Michael Allan, <i>In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt</i> (On Canvas)</li> </ul> <p>* Read: Intro., chapters 1, 2, &amp; 4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aamir Mufti, <i>Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literature</i> (On Canvas)</li> </ul> <p>* Read Chapters 1 &amp; 4</p>                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week 8 response due</li> </ul>                                                           |

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| 9  | March 4  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maryam Wasif Khan, <i>Who Is a Muslim? Orientalism and Literary Populisms</i> (On Canvas)</li> <li>* Read Intro., Chapters 1, 2, &amp; 3.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week 9 response due</li> </ul>                                                                                    |
| 10 | March 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of creative projects + snacks &amp; cookies</li> </ul>                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creative project due in class*</li> <li>* Submission to Canvas necessary depending on type of project)</li> </ul> |

### Bibliography

(In alphabetical order)

- Allan, Michael. *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt*. Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Al-Azm, Sadiq Jalal, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse", *Khamsin* 8 (1981): 5-26.
- Chibber, Vivek. "Edward Said's Orientalism and Its Afterlives," *Jacobin*. December 24, 2021. Accessed September 26, 2022.
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