

Orientalism and Three British Dames:

De-essentialization of the Other in the Work of Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, and E.S. Drower

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the School of Communication  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English

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April 2012

Liberty University  
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Master of Arts in English

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## Abstract

Although postcolonial criticism has run its course for thirty years, a fresh look at Edward Said's *Orientalism* offers insight into how Orientalism functions in the writings of three British dames. Gertrude Bell in *The Desert and the Sown*, Freya Stark in *The Southern Gates of Arabia*, and E.S. Drower in *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, however, challenge Said's theory. Their writing raises questions about how gender alters the discourse about the Other, and whether Said essentializes the Occident. Bell, Stark, and Drower serve as case studies in which to analyze the politically and rhetorically complex interactions between the West and the East at the end of the Colonial period. Over time, these women moved from approaching the Other with superior attitudes and a focus on otherness to developing a sympathetic understanding and greater appreciation of the similarities between the West and the East.

Key Words: Said, Bell, Stark, Drower, Orientalism, Other, Postcolonialism

### Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to share my appreciation for the following people who helped me in this thesis process. I want to thank Dr. Charles Häberl for suggesting the British dames for my thesis topic. Secondly, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the thesis committee: for my thesis chair, Dr. Emily Heady, who both encouraged and provided the scaffolding that enabled me to take one step at a time instead of becoming overwhelmed by the final product; for Dr. Brenda Ayres, who pushed for excellence and motivated me to continue writing, even after turning in this completed thesis; and for Dr. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi for introducing me to postcolonial literature and for exciting an interest in literary criticism during my first semester. Thank you, professors, for teaching this old student how to close read and to write academically.

Finally, I want to recognize my coworkers, friends, and family who have helped me to persevere when juggling the thesis, work, home, and church became overwhelming. I especially want to remember my parents, Bethel and Powell; and my children, Beth, Matt, Sam, Bri, and Peter. Thank you for your support in so many ways. I love you all dearly.

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## Abbreviated Titles

<i>Ancient</i>	<i>The Mandaean: Ancient Texts and Modern People</i>
<i>Desert</i>	<i>The Desert and the Sown</i>
“Elijah”	“Evergreen Elijah: Ritual Scenes from Jewish Life in the Middle East”
<i>Gates</i>	<i>The Southern Gates of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut</i>
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of Gertrude Bell</i>
<i>Mandaeans</i>	<i>The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic Legends, And Folklore</i>
“Polemic”	“Mandaean Polemic”
<i>Queen</i>	<i>Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell</i>
<i>Wine</i>	<i>Water into Wine: A Study of Ritual Idiom in the Middle East</i>

## Chapter One:

## Introduction: Said and Three British Dames

Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, the debunking of ethnographic texts written by authors belonging to the imperialistic West from both the past and the present has become a favorite critical exercise. In his seminal work which articulates a postcolonial theoretical framework, Said analyzes the texts of *Orientalists* – politicians, travel writers, anthropologists, or academics who write about the Orient. Said, a Palestinian immigrant to the United States, sardonically defines the *Orient* as the West sees it, the half of the globe that is not the West. He limits his own analysis to the Anglo, French, and American relations with the Arabs and Islam. In *Orientalism*, Said criticizes imperialistic *hegemony*, or cultural leadership, that homogenizes the Orient's entire population and vast territories into one amalgamation labeled *Oriental*. In addition to this classifying of many people into one, Said identifies the further trend in Orientalism: the stereotypical defining of the East and redefining of the West through a binary relationship. Said describes Orientalism as the comparative negative study between the weak Orient and the powerful West. In *Orientalism*, Said provides an illuminating and revolutionary check to the racism inherent within this Western intellectual and political thought. His argument rightly identifies the need to guard against such insidious prejudice and provides a platform from which the postcolonial can speak, but Said and other postcolonialist critics err when they reduce the issues within Orientalist writings to an exercise of contrast between *them (Other)* of the East against *us* of the West. This simplification narrows these texts to political analysis, thus eliminating a second look at the intricacies involved within the discourse between two cultures.

Three extraordinary women – Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, and Ethel Stefana Drower – serve as interesting case studies in which to explore the politically and rhetorically complex relationships between the West and the Middle East at the end of the Colonial period. Bell, Stark, and Drower used what Said would later call Orientalism to overcome the obstacle of their gender and to forge a career for themselves. All three achieved the rank of British Dame because of their Orientalist accomplishments – statesmanship for Bell, literature for Stark, and anthropology for Drower. These women wrote about their experiences among various people-groups within the Arabian Peninsula who warmly welcomed them because of their British citizenship. However, in the course of making their observations, Bell, Stark, and Drower wrote judgments that occasionally demeaned the Eastern culture whose hospitality they were, ironically, enjoying. Drower, unlike Bell and Stark, wrote scientific observations in the form of ethnography with in-depth descriptions and the careful objective prose of a transparent reporter. Even though Drower conducted more of an anthropological field-study as opposed to the travel writing of Bell and Stark, all three women have provided an opportunity to explore the complicated nature of the relationship between Britain and the Middle East beginning with the turn of the twentieth century and progressing into the period between the two world wars.

These three women are interesting boundary cases because they combine some *Orientalist* sensibilities with real insight and compassion into the situation of the Eastern lands they visited. Despite their differences in purpose, Bell, Stark, and Drower use three narrative voices: the third-person that objectively reports observations with occasional “present tense” statements that register as an Orientalist response; the first-person that establishes credibility, reflects respect and liking for the Eastern Other; and the third voice that belongs to the Other for whom all three speak, thus presenting the nationals as those who cannot speak for themselves.



Critics often dismiss imperialist writing such as we see in Bell, Stark, and Drower because of its racism, or because its usefulness seems to fade in the current postcolonial period where Western nations no longer govern colonial acquisitions around the world. Said would disagree and claim that a new form of Orientalism exists between North America and developing countries through her political diplomacy, economic incentives, and her “policing” of unstable nations through military intervention and economic sanctions. However, with their multi-layered use of narrative voice, shifting subjects and speakers, and strategic use of first- and third-person narration, Bell, Stark, and Drower show that Orientalist writing in fact involves a complex interchange between self and other that moves beyond racism toward acceptance. In tracing the fluctuating sympathies and judgments of Bell and Stark, whose writings progress over time and increasing familiarity from *otherness toward sameness*, and in identifying the occasional authorial intrusion that reflects an Orientalist response in the writings of Drower, modern-day readers and critics can learn not only to avoid their errors, but also to appreciate the otherness that these women came to embrace as valuable.

### **Orientalism and Edward Said**

Before proceeding to the next three chapters in which the lives and writings of Bell, Stark, and Drower challenge Said’s theory, a summary of the principles found in *Orientalism*, is necessary. Said explains that Orientalism was a created body of theory and practice through which the Occident of the West established power, domination, and hegemony over the Other of the East (5-6). With imperialistic expansion that advanced European influence over many different peoples in the Orient, colonial governments established a class system that placed the Occident over the Other in a new social order, a situation that Said labels as a *positional superiority* (7). Because of this hegemony, the Western Subject treated the Eastern Other like an

*object* to be studied, analyzed and classified. Thus knowledge about the East became a source of power to be used by the West in its cultural, political, and economic domination.

In tracing the growth of Orientalism from the late 1700s to the mid 1900s, Said explains that both intertextuality and the reciprocal influence of Orientalists within various arts and sciences established a system of beliefs which impacted both the West and the East. Over two centuries, Orientalism developed into a network of interests or a corporate institution of anything having to do with the Orient (3). In this system the Western intellectuals focused on the difference between their own culture and that of the East, one that included the feminizing of the passive East by the masculine aggressive West. This philosophy enabled Europe to gain politically in strength and identity through a negative comparative study of the Orient, which became “a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). The West became everything positive in contrast to the East, its binary opposite with a view that elevated the European to a rational, modern, and efficient Self as opposed to the Eastern illogical, primitive, and impractical Other (49). Orientalism increasingly portrayed the West as superior to the East in every way, a condescension that permeated European literature, arts, and academic sciences. Said points out that even the scientific writings were representations of the Other rather than reports with objective truth (21). Thus the Western intellectuals spoke for and made generalizations about the Other based on personal judgments influenced by other Orientalists’ texts. Furthermore, over a couple of centuries, this intertextuality created an Orient that became a fantastical, exotic, and dangerous land that captured the imagination of a Western audience.

Said cautions that even the best of the Orientalists were incapable of giving an unbiased report. He convincingly argues that no individual from one society can separate himself from their class, belief systems, and culture in order to be truly objective (10). Therefore the writing

and study of the Orient became an academic body of learning founded upon a consistent set of misperceptions by Western observers. In addition, regardless of good intentions, the European subject always approached the East with an awareness of belonging to a powerful government with a vested interest in the Orient (11). This cultural and political advantage provided the European the freedom to enter and leave the East while the Other had little say in the matter. In *Orientalism*, Said identifies the way that European hegemony works in the Middle East in order to suggest a new way for the West to deal with the East, which includes an attempt to eliminate the idea of Oriental and Occident (28). The argument set forth in this thesis is that Bell, Stark, and Drower moved toward this improved relationship with the Other as they befriended individuals of the East and recognized their common humanity.

### **Chapter Two on Gertrude Bell**

Said specifically analyzes Bell in *Orientalism*, so chapter two on Bell looks at the context of the biographical information and her writings to answer the direct criticism that Bell used Orientalism to politically manipulate the British-Arabian relationships during the first half of the twentieth century. According to Said, Bell's background knowledge of academic Orientalist writings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries helped her to apply the prevailing Western ideology of the East in order to advance the political and economic power of Great Britain. He criticizes her in several areas, including Bell's act of belittling the Other by making broad generalizations and by comparing, unfavorably, the people of the East to those of the West. Said also takes exception to Bell's practice of cementing the Orient in the past with her descriptions of a culture that remained as a mere shadow of its former glorious civilization. Said sees Bell as a transitional figure in Orientalism, one who used hegemony to maneuver the Arabian people into

accepting a British-influenced, Iraqi government – one that Bell helped to create by drawing the political borders of countries and by placing King Faisal on the throne.

The chapter on Bell puts forth the argument that even though Said gives valid judgments about Bell, the quintessential British Orientalist, he ignores the complexity of a threefold relationship that existed between Bell, other British citizens, and the Arabian nationals. Because she belonged to the privileged and moneyed class of Great Britain, Said ignores the fact that Bell struggled to overcome obstacles due to her gender. In fact, when one looks at her biographical information, it becomes apparent that Bell would have fit into modern-day culture much better than in her own of the early twentieth century. As she matured, Bell found herself to be increasingly an outsider, one who never truly belonged in either the West or East. By the end of her life, Bell actually felt more accepted by the Other than by most of her countrymen, and more comfortable in her adopted home of Iraq than in her native Great Britain.

Furthermore, chapter two argues that even though Said validates his analysis by identifying Bell's racist judgments of the Other, he sometimes takes her statements out of context. Bell's sympathetic comments and recognition of the similarities between the Arabian and the European often framed her prejudicial statements and served to make her point of view a more balanced one than Said presents. He also ignores the fact that Bell formed quick judgments and sometimes harsh criticisms about her British compatriots as well as the Other. This thesis agrees that Bell wrote prejudicial statements but argues that she did this indiscriminately, which indicates that she was occasionally intolerant rather than racist.

Whereas Said judges Bell for using Orientalism to redefine herself in order to become a political official in the Middle East, this paper recognizes her accomplishments and argues that she viewed the Arabian as a neighbor and friend, and not only as a way to advance her career as

an Arabist. Bell became the only woman to hold an official position with the British Diplomatic Corp in Iraq in the 1920s, and many admire her accomplishments in overcoming the prejudice she faced because of her gender. Additionally, the writings of Bell show that she changed from one who took advantage of the power of her British citizenship to carve a position of respect from both the national and the British colonial, to one who recognized the good in the East, and who became more comfortable with the Other than with her own countrymen.

Several sources for the chapter on Bell need to be mentioned. *The Desert and the Sown*, written and published by Bell in 1907, is the main text with which to apply Said's theoretical framework found in *Orientalism*. In this book, Bell writes about her travels in and around Syria and shares stories about her interactions with the Arabian people. After this highly acclaimed publication, Bell increasingly traveled the Middle East, and began her political career as an Arabist with the onset of World War I. A brief look at Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" raises the question of whether Bell could ethically quote the Other in her travel writing. Spivak, who does not refer to Bell specifically, discusses the dilemma of the marginalized nationals, who remain silent because they cannot speak for themselves unless they are represented. Since Spivak chooses to speak for the Other and justifies this by doing so with responsibility and with visibility, the conclusion reached in chapter two is that Bell is able to do the same. Spivak also raises the possibility, however, that an intellectual, like Bell, actually speaks for herself when she claims to speak for the Other. Most of the biographical information for Bell comes from Janet Wallach's *Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell*. Chapter two also includes several literary critics, who offer a defense of Bell. In *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran*, Nima Naghibi discusses Bell's early publication, *Persian Pictures*. Naghibi agrees with Said that Bell succumbs to Orientalist

tendencies but argues that Bell recognizes the way that Orientalism has incorrectly influenced her thinking about the East. Naghibi describes Bell as amused by her own naiveté in expecting Persia to be the same as portrayed in *Arabian Nights*. Another critic, Nancy Workman, in “Gertrude Bell and the Poetics of Translation,” discusses Bell’s sympathetic reading of the Arabian poet Hafiz, whom Bell compares favorably to Dante. Workman characterizes Bell as subversive in her disagreement with the prevailing British Orientalists. In *Gertrude Bell: An Orientalist in Context*, Andrea Elizabeth Schnell agrees, somewhat, with Said about Bell, but she identifies the ways that Said takes some of Bell’s statements out of context. Schnell explores the circumstances around the quotes that Said finds offensive, and also identifies instances when Bell’s words reflect her sympathy and liking for the Other. Schnell also considers the context of Bell’s life and work in arguing that Bell sympathized with the Other. The conclusion reached in chapter two is that Said is right to a certain extent about Bell, but that he ignores factors that cause a more complex relationship with the Other than one simply founded upon Orientalism.

### **Chapter Three on Freya Stark**

In chapter three, Said’s analysis of Stark is inferred since he does not specifically refer to her writings in *Orientalism*. The foremost of Said’s objections would be that Stark used Orientalism to redefine herself as a travel writer who published approximately thirty books, mostly about the Arabian Peninsula. Said would also point to Stark’s positional superiority as a British citizen, which provided her the freedom to visit the nationals when and wherever she pleased. Additionally, Said would link Stark to Bell because of their remarkably similar careers, and he would, therefore, criticize her the way he did Bell. Stark, who denied modeling herself after Bell, both began her travel in Arabia by taking the route described in Bell’s book, *Desert*, and moved to Baghdad, Bell’s adoptive home. Like Bell, whose excellent reputation as an

Arabist and officer for the British government during WWI paved the way for a woman appointee, Stark held a position with the British Military Intelligence Department as a spy and propagandist during World War II. For Said, Stark ultimately would qualify as an Orientalist because she explored the Orient and studied the Other, first by reading Orientalist texts, and then by visiting and observing the Arabian citizens in their homes. Additionally, with her successful early publications, Stark became a protégé of several British Orientalist societies, a position which included their financial backing of her exploration of the Orient in order that she help the British government fill in what was missing on their incomplete maps of the Arabian Peninsula.

This paper, however, puts forth the argument that Stark more closely qualifies as a marginalized Other than as an Orientalist. Stark, who did not have the privileges of wealth and class that Bell enjoyed, lived until her mid-thirties in an Italian village where she, her mother, and sister worked to support themselves financially. Additionally, Stark suffered an accident when she was thirteen that disfigured her face and scalp. Despite cosmetic surgery, she experienced, throughout her life, both the physical pain caused by the scars and self-consciousness over her marred looks. Furthermore, because she carried little money when traveling in the Arabian Peninsula, Stark depended on the hospitality of the locals with whom she stayed, resulting in her assimilation into the lifestyle of the Other. Moreover, the British colonials marginalized Stark by not accepting her into their social circle because she did not belong to the same economic class. Stark's status changed, however, as she became successful in her travel writing, cartography, and speechmaking to the Orientalist societies in London. With her fame, Stark began to write more Orientalist statements, but she continued to surreptitiously both favor the national with her sympathy and criticize the British colonials for their

condescension toward the Other. For these reasons, Stark does not fit Said's definition of the archetypal Orientalist.

In the chapter on Stark, several important sources are used to support the thesis that in many ways, Stark does not fit Said's description of an Orientalist. Malise Ruthven, Stark's godson, does a close reading of several of Stark's writings in "A Subversive Imperialist: Reappraising Freya Stark." In his analysis, he agrees that on the surface Stark advances the Orientalist agenda, but in her artistic writing she often covertly judges the West for its snobbery and prejudice toward the Other. Jamal En-Nehas agrees that Stark avoids the condescension toward the Other often found in Orientalist writing in his essay, "The Exploratory Journey and the Representation of the Cultural Other in Freya Stark's *The Valleys of the Assassins and Other Persian Travels*." According to En-Nehas, Stark adheres to the Orientalist tropes of humor and exoticism, but she also laughs at the West for its morality and ethical system. John Hawley provides both biographical information and criticism in his chapter entitled "Freya Stark (31 January 1893 – 9 May 1993)" in *British Travel Writers, 1910-1939*. He recognizes Stark's ability to empathize with the Other but finds that in her early writing she adheres to some of the Orientalist tropes such as cementing the Other in the past and in attempting to preserve the ancient ways that are threatened by British modernization. Most of the biographical information comes from Jane Fletcher Geniesse's book, *Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark*. A close reading of Stark's text, *The Southern Gates of Arabia*, a popular book, published in 1936, that tells the stories of Stark's interactions with the Other while she travels into the Hadhramaut, challenges Said's theories. Another critic, Syrine Hout, explores Stark's consciousness of the race-class-gender nexus in "Critical Encounters: Feminism, Exoticism, and Orientalism in Freya Stark's *The Southern Gates of Arabia*." Hout, who supports the idea that women interacted with



the Other in more complex ways than Said's theory indicates, finds that oftentimes Stark couches her criticism of the West in the words that she has the Other speak for her, which is a reversal of the Orientalist trope of the travel writer who speaks for the Other. Ben Cockling explains that *Gates* is a transitional work because it is one of the last of the colonial travel writings before the World War II in "Writing the End: Wilfred Thesiger, Freya Stark and the 'Arabist Tradition.'" Cockling notes that Stark, who over time, became uncomfortable with the Orientalist objectivity and classification of the Other, changes from the beginning of *Gates* when she was somewhat detached, to the end when she had become a friend who had assimilated into the culture of the Hadhramaut. The final question raised in chapter three is why Stark, who enjoyed great acclaim during her prolific travel-writing career, has remained largely ignored by literary critics. Chapter three proposes that Stark has been marginalized by postcolonial critics because she does not fit Said's reductive definition of an Orientalist.

#### **Chapter Four Ethel Stefana Drower**

The last chapter in the thesis focuses on E.S. Drower, an anthropologist who both met Bell socially in Iraq and enjoyed a lasting friendship with Stark. Drower, who studied minority religious sects in Iraq and Iran and published writings that greatly interest today's anthropologists and students of religions, has received minimal attention from literary critics. Chapter four, therefore, applies both the traditional postcolonial literary criticism lens based on the principles of Said's *Orientalism* and others who hold similar points of view, and the less traditional lens of other critics who question the tenets of traditional postcolonial theory. In this chapter that synthesizes these opposing approaches to literary criticism, a close reading of two of Drower's works provide a real-world test case, *The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran: Their Cults*,

*Customs, Magic Legends, And Folklore*, published in 1937, and “Mandaean Polemic,” published in 1962.

If Said analyzed Drower and her work, his irrefutable criticism would be her positional superiority over the Other, based on the rank and power of her husband, who was the legal advisor to the Ministry of Justice in Iraq. This position, according to Said, would therefore have provided Drower the freedom to enter and leave the Mandaean villages and homes at will, without much choice on the part of the nationals. Said would also object to Drower’s purchases of manuscripts, which she translated, studied, published, and later donated to the Bodleian Library in London at the end of her life. For Said, then, Drower made the locals the object of her study, which in turn contributed to the corpus of Orientalism and Western hegemony over the Arabian people. The premise of chapter four rests on the fact that Drower did not exhibit the condescension implied by such a relationship, but instead, established a friendly relationship with the Other based on their mutual respect and liking.

Other postcolonial critics would add to Said’s analysis of Drower. Spivak, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” would question Drower’s position as the transparent reporter who speaks for the Other. For Spivak this transparency marks the place of desire and power, which for Drower would be the opportunity to use knowledge about the Other to establish herself as a credible scientist in the field of anthropology. In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Michel Foucault discusses the greatest problem with ethnology, which is its dependency on representation. As a result of the need for the scientist to represent the Other, Foucault would say that Drower resorts to interpretations of her observations about the Mandaean and thereby reports the *possible* meaning of this information. Christopher Herbert, in *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, looks at the

problematic term *complex whole*, an idea that causes ethnographers to search for generalized meanings for the actions of the Other. He raises the question of whether Drower follows the practice of these scientists, who reduce the culture of the Other to a generalization. Chapter four proposes that Drower avoids the problems inherent in representing the Other because she verifies her information through multiple interviews with the locals, and she translates and reads native manuscripts, both of which enable her to speak for the Other with accuracy.

Other scholars, who question the premises of Said, contribute to the analysis of Drower's writing. Elizabeth Lowe, who discusses the positive results of translations in "Premises of a New Translation Pedagogy: Changing the Paradigm of Cultural Studies," would argue that Drower, through her translations of Mandaean texts, contributes to transcultural interactions that lead to better understandings among different peoples. In *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality Religion, and Work*, Billie Melman contrasts the colonial European woman's alternate discourse with the Other to that of the European male, who possessed the authority described in Said's *Orientalism*. Melman would classify Drower's interaction with the Mandaean as an alternate discourse with the Other because of the gender issues that denied her a position of political authority. Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, who discusses Said's act of essentializing the Occident in "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," believes that Said cements the difference between individuals from the West and the East. This undermines Said's stated purpose in *Orientalism* – to explore the way to study another culture without reducing each participant to an Occident or an Other. Al-'Azm, therefore, would consider Drower to have overcome the distinctions that separate the West and East because of the genuine friendship based on mutual trust that she enjoyed with the Mandaeans. Additionally, al-'Azm identifies Said's anti-scientific bias that assumes racism when someone such as Drower studies the Other.

For al-'Azm, Drower would fit the description of a responsible scientist who objectively reports her findings after having them verified by the Mandaeans, themselves.

In addition to literary critics, chapter four refers to anthropologists who offer insight into Drower's writing, most notably Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley. Buckley continues Drower's translation work with the Drower Collection, located in the Bodleian Library, and enjoys friendships among the Mandaean people, many of whom have migrated to the United States in the aftermath of the wars fought in the Middle East. Buckley, who met Drower before she died in 1972, has talked to Mandaeans in both Iraq and the United States, who remember Drower and her work with respect. In fact, Buckley enjoys a friendship with the granddaughter of one of the sheikhs, whom Drower writes about in *Mandaeans*. These Mandaeans have responded positively to Drower's work – even to the point of one individual who keeps Drower's publications on a bookshelf in his living room. Through her follow-up with the Mandaean people, Buckley verifies the premise of chapter four that Drower cannot be reduced to Said's archetypal Orientalist who uses the Other to advance Western hegemony over the East.

Ultimately Bell, Stark, and Drower pose a challenge to Said's reductive practice of considering writings such as theirs to be racist and self-aggrandizing. The value in studying both Said's theory and their works, however, lies in testing for the racism that Said finds in some colonial texts. Thus, in identifying prejudice, one learns to both recognize and delete insidious thinking from one's own writing. This thesis also works to prove that Stark and Drower, especially, show how someone of one culture can write about another culture without a focus on difference. In their writing, Bell, Stark, and Drower, whose encounter with the Other developed into friendships, reveal how their interactions helped them both to recognize their likenesses with the Other and to celebrate the richness of their differences.

## Chapter Two:

### Gertrude Bell: Between Two Cultures

The story of Gertrude Bell interests the twenty-first-century reader because of the gender issues that she overcame in order to forge a position for herself as political advisor both to the British government and to King Faisal of Iraq. Socio-economic class and family support, coupled with Gertrude's strong personality and intelligence, provided the springboard from which Bell launched her career at a time when women more often married, raised children, and stayed home. Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell, born July 14, 1868 into a prestigious and wealthy British family, enjoyed more freedom than most women of her era. The Bells, progressive thinkers, recognized Gertrude's superior intellect and sent her to Queens College in London when she was sixteen years old, providing Gertrude the opportunity of higher education denied most women at the time. In 1886, Gertrude entered Oxford where she, one of a few girls among hundreds of men, became the first woman to receive a First in Modern History. Then Gertrude unsuccessfully entered the London social season to find an eligible husband – possibly because she spoke in a way that some described as tactless, intimidating, and arrogant (Wallach, *Queen* 25). Gertrude escaped the restricted life she faced in England by traveling, pursuing hobbies such as mountain climbing, language study, and archaeology, and socializing among the elite in various countries.

Bell began her career as an Arabist by publishing travel-writing about the Arabian Peninsula and later by working with the British government to influence the politics of former Mesopotamia. Between the years 1894-1914, Bell published seven articles for various journals and six books based on her travels in the Middle East. With the onset of WWI in 1914 and at the request of the British government, Bell began to provide reports and advice about the Middle East to the director of the military operations in Cairo (Wallach, *Queen* 134). Four of Bell's later

publications, including *The Arab War: Confidential Information for GHQ Cairo from Gertrude L. Bell Being Dispatches Reprinted from the Secret "Arab Bulletin,"* published after her death in 1940, reveal the extent of Bell's work to promote the British influence in the Middle East. Bell clearly fits the profile of an Orientalist. Wallach describes her as an atheist whose belief system rested in family and in the destiny of the British Empire to lead the world (*Queen* 45). One cannot dispute some of the postcolonial criticism raised against Bell, but present day theorists do not dismiss her writings either.

Despite the racism implied by Bell's worldview, scholars continue to debate how Orientalism functions in her writings. A close look at the early publications by Bell indicates an occasional internal debate in which she struggles to reconcile her British citizenship and its accompanying sense of superiority with her growing love of Arabia and its people. In her writing, Bell uses three narrative voices: the third-person that objectively reports observations with frequent "present tense" statements that register as an Orientalist response; the first-person that establishes credibility, reflects respect and liking for the Eastern Other; and the third voice that belongs to the Other for whom she speaks, thus presenting the nationals as those who cannot speak for themselves. Nonetheless, over time her writings progress in increasing familiarity from otherness towards sameness.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I will respond to Edward Said's general criticism of Bell. The second section will summarize other critics' sympathetic response to Bell in two of her earliest publications, *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures* and *Poems from the Divan of*

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term *otherness* indicates a focus on difference between two cultures, while the term *sameness* indicates an awareness of the similarities between the different people groups. The term *towards* indicates the progression that took place as Bell, Stark, and Drower established friendships with the Other. The term *friendship* indicates the genuine relationship of liking and warmth based on mutual trust and good will between individuals.

*Hafiz*. In the last section, other critics and I will respond to Said's criticism of Bell's text, *The Desert and the Sown*. Throughout the chapter, I will provide biographical information in order to establish the context of Bell's writings.

### **Bell as Orientalist**

Bell's political career in the Middle East spanned the years of 1914 to 1926, beginning in Egypt as adviser during WWI and continuing in Iraq under the British Mandate as Oriental Secretary to Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner of Mesopotamia. Bell's official work began when the Director of Naval Intelligence recruited Bell to be a spy because of her analysis of the Middle East for the British government in 1914 and because Bell's friend, David Hogarth, the Military Intelligence Director of the Cairo office requested her help (Wallach, *Queen* 145). Bell and Hogarth admired each other's writing – Hogarth published *The Penetration of Arabia* in 1904, one of two books taken by Bell on her journey described in *Desert*. Hogarth described Bell's book, *Desert* as one of the twelve best books about travel in the Middle East, and he placed Bell's book on the same level of importance as *Arabia Deserta* written by Charles Doughty (Wallach, *Queen* 79). In addition to joining David Hogarth, Bell reconnected with her friend, T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) in Cairo where she was appointed as a staff officer on the Military Intelligence team, renamed the Arab Bureau. Wallach describes Bell as the most knowledgeable European concerning the peoples and politics of northern and central Arabia (*Queen* 149). Therefore, Bell took over the analysis of the tribal clans and their sheikhs in order to assess political alliances, which led to her appointment as the sole female British officer on Percy Cox's political staff in 1916 when she traveled to Basrah in order to convince Arab tribes to work with the British. Wallach believes that Bell's duties as the liaison between Cox and the Arabs provided work that Bell found most personally satisfying (*Queen* 184). Thus, Bell had

found her lifelong career, and therefore turned her writing to political papers that influenced British policy during the British Mandate in Iraq. When Winston Churchill summoned forty Orientalist experts on the Middle East to Egypt in order to determine the fates of Mesopotamia, TransJordan, and Palestine, Bell was the only woman invited (Wallach, *Queen* 294). Bell also played an important role in determining the boundary lines for new political Arab states, and in helping to establish King Faisal as leader of the new country of Iraq. At the end of her life, as her influence began to wane in politics, Bell devoted her energy to creating the Baghdad Archaeological Museum. On July 11, 1926, Bell died from an overdose of sleeping pills. Becker describes Bell as “an intrepid traveler, gifted writer, linguist fluent in Persian and Arabic, archaeologist, and expert on Turkish Arabia ... who broke down the barriers of gender and class of Victorian England to reach fame in the Middle East and to become the most powerful woman in the British Empire after World War I” (147). These attributes of Bell, while admirable in a woman who overcame the limits placed upon her gender during the Victorian era, raise the issue of the right for Bell to gain her own freedom by subjugating the Other.

bell hooks addresses this tendency for the oppressed to, in turn, become the oppressor when encountering a marginalized group with less power. According to hooks, white women, who are oppressed by sexism, favor their own interests and, therefore, support the continued exploitation of the Other. She states, “As long as ... any group, defines liberation as gaining social equality with ruling-class white men, they have a vested interest in the continued exploitation and oppression of others” (16). One can argue that Bell qualifies as an example of a white academic woman who, through cultural domination over the Other, rose in prestige through her own form of exploitation. For, in the act of writing about and speaking for the



Arabian national, Bell situated herself as an expert, which in turn qualified her for a position as an Arabist with the British government.

In *Orientalism*, Said criticizes Gertrude Bell for her imperialism and labels her as an Orientalist who stereotypes the Other and uses her knowledge of the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula to influence British policy in former Mesopotamia. For Said, Bell belongs to the group of imperial agents and policy makers who represent a major shift in Orientalism from an academic to an instrumental attitude where the individual Orientalist becomes a representative of Western culture who speaks in vast generalities, and “who seeks to convert each aspect of Oriental or Occidental life into an unmediated sign of one or the other geographical half” (246-47). Said describes Bell’s role as an advocate of the Empire, who by way of political maneuvering, formulated policy under the guise of friendship to the Other. Bell, Hogarth, Lawrence, and Philby serve as examples of the final European form of Orientalism – the agents of the British colonial government who effectively applied Orientalism to govern the Middle East (Said 224). Bell and these friends participated in the power struggle between Britain and France for control of Arabia during the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the upheaval from World War I. According to Said, the French were outclassed by the brilliant tactical maneuvering of Bell, Lawrence, and Sykes (225). The analysis to this point in his criticism of Bell’s interference and manipulation of political events in Arabia can be validated by her writings.

Said, then, resorts to making his own generalizations and reductive statements about Bell and her friends. The following analyses (to which I will respond in the next four paragraphs) refer to a group of British citizens lumped together by Said: “Each – Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Doughty, Lawrence, Bell, Hogarth, Philby, Sykes, Storrs – believed his vision of things Oriental was individual, self-created out of some intensely personal encounter with the Orient, Islam, or

the Arabs; each expressed general contempt for official knowledge held about the East” (237). Said stereotypes Bell as an uncaring imperial agent who used her political position of authority in order to subjugate the Other for purposes of the British Empire.

Although Said correctly describes Bell as working to promote British influence in the Middle East, he wrongly assumes that she worked to establish imperial rule over the Arab nations. Said includes Bell in the following statement: “The main issue for them was preserving the Orient and Islam under the control of the White Man” (238). Bell actually disagreed and fell out of favor with her colleagues, who held the traditional view that the British should govern the Middle East. In fact, Bell and A.T. Wilson, her boss in Iraq, bitterly argued over Bell’s belief in an Arab State and the right for Arab self-rule (Wallach, *Queen* 245). This conflict occurred after Bell, who until this point in her career agreed with Wilson about the need for British rule over the Other, observed the successful Arabian government in Syria. Ellis states that in Bell’s Syrian report of 1919, Bell had a change of heart over the Other’s ability to govern after visiting Damascus and observing Faisal’s administration of Syria. As a result, Bell wrote in her report that the Arabs must rule themselves (34). Nevertheless, because of France’s refusal to give up its control over Syria; the government under Faisal fell. In response to this European interference, Bell expressed her belief that the Western powers were unable to govern the Arab state successfully. Wallach quotes Bell on this matter in a letter written to her stepmother, Florence, on August 23, 1920: “I suppose we have underestimated the fact that this country is really an inchoate mass of tribes that can’t as yet be reduced to a system. The Turks didn’t govern and we have tried to govern – and failed” (*Queen* 276). Even though Bell believed that the best scenario for a successful government included a close Arab-British friendly relationship, she worked to advance self-rule by the Arabian people. In a letter to her father Bell wrote, “Long Life to the

Arab Government. Give them responsibility and make them settle their own affairs and they'll do it every time a thousand times better than we can" (Wallach, *Queen* 286). Bell's actions did support her hopes that Britain would continue to influence Iraq, but her words do not support Said's accusation that she wanted the white man to control the Orient.

In addition to this, Said inaccurately identifies Bell's response to Arabia as contemptuous. Said does not provide evidence to support the following judgment: "In the instances of Doughty, Lawrence, Hogarth, and Bell, their professional involvement with the East... did not prevent them from despising it thoroughly" (238). In her writing, Bell does arrogantly judge the Other at times, but she expresses criticism across the lines of gender and race. Florence Bell described Gertrude's arbitrariness, "When she came into contact with human beings, whether chiefs of the desert or men and women of her own western world, she would label them, after her first meeting with them, in a sentence" (*Letters* 24). Throughout her life Bell criticized British women and colonial diplomats as well as Arabian men and the women of the harem whenever she found them to be incompetent or narrow-minded. Bell's anti-suffrage stance stemmed from her lack of respect for most women's intellectual ability, which reflects her disregard for women in general. This may be due to the death of her mother when Bell was very young, along with the fact that her father remained single for her early years. For whatever reason, Bell seemed most comfortable throughout her life among men, and her opinion about women did not change in her later years. According to Wallach, Gertrude did little to befriend the officers' wives in Baghdad: "She resented their preoccupation with Anglo ways and registered her annoyance over their lack of interest in anything Arabic. At parties for Arab and British officials, she sniffed at their low-cut dresses ... and was often blatantly rude" ("Daughter of the Dessert" 5). She also differed with European men who held positions of authority over her

– even as a young college student Gertrude showed little restraint in criticizing a male professor in Oxford. Florence Bell repeats a story from Mr. Arthur Hassall in which he remembers Gertrude’s “viva voce” (oral examination at Oxford). Gertrude replied to the first question of the famous historian Professor S.R. Gardiner that she must choose to differ with his estimation of Charles I. The appalled professor asked the examiner next to him to continue the “viva voce” (*Letters* 12). This pattern of speaking her mind also included the diplomatic circuit. After relating a story about Gertrude’s rude response to a foreign statesman in Bucharest, Florence Bell observed: “There is no doubt that according to the ordinary canons of demeanour it was a mistake for Gertrude to proffer, as we have been shown on more occasions than one, her opinions, let alone her criticisms, to her superiors in age and experience” (*Letters* 13). Nonetheless, Florence tempers her censure of her stepdaughter by attributing Gertrude’s criticisms to her honest and independent nature.

Thirdly, Said inaccurately claims that Bell feared the Other, which he supports with three passages written by Bell during the time she wrote *Desert*.<sup>2</sup> Said does not provide evidence to support the following sweeping statement: “Yet in the final analysis they all (except Blunt) expressed the traditional western hostility to and fear of the Orient” (237). Bell, whose writing does not support that she feared anything but loneliness, actually responded aggressively instead of fearfully to threats. O’Brien attributes Bell’s excursion to Hayyil in 1913 as motivated by a need for Bell to escape the loneliness she felt because of her doomed love affair with a married man, Charles Doughty-Wylie (the nephew of Charles Doughty, the author of *Arabia Deserta*). O’Brien describes the relationship between Bell and Doughty-Wylie, “They were quickly drawn together by a shared sense of loneliness and her belief that he would have been her perfect mate”

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<sup>2</sup> I will respond to his critique of these three passages at the end of this chapter.

(15). Bell, attempting to escape her loneliness, traveled into the Nejd, the interior desert of Arabia, where two warring tribes, the Rashids and the Sauds, constantly fought for power (O'Brien 16). Against the sanction of the Turkish and British authorities (and without the fear ascribed to her by Said), Bell traveled into the desert with only a team of Arab men hired to escort her. While on this trip, Bell was robbed by a bandit who wanted to kill her. Wallach says that Bell was furious with the robber when he stole her gun and binoculars, and insulted him as he left her ("Daughter of the Desert 4). As she continued her journey into the Nejd, Bell was held captive in the city of Hayyil. When she was invited into the men's tent on the ninth night of her captivity, Bell, demanding her possessions and freedom, defiantly stood to leave the tent despite decorum that demanded that she remain seated. Because of her boldness, she was given her possessions and allowed to leave (Wallach, "Daughter of the Desert" 4). Bell does not admit to feelings of fear, only anger when threatened on her journey.

Finally, I disagree with Said's judgment that it is ironical that Bell's western compatriots consider her to be more Middle Eastern than British. He describes Bell and her comrades in the following statement: "They acted, they promised, they recommended public policy on the basis of such generalizations; and, by a remarkable irony, they acquired the identity of White Orientals in their natal cultures" (238). I contend that Bell's Western audience recognized in her writing the transition from otherness to sameness over the years as the Middle East became her home, both physically and culturally. In fact Bell, who never fit into her own culture comfortably because of her rebellion against the strictures of Victorian England, escaped the early 1900s limitations of her gender by living in Iraq. Several circumstances also contributed to her preference for Iraq over England, including Bell's desire to marry Ken Cornwallis, her third unrequited love. Another motivation was due to her family's decrease in fortune. According to

Ellis, when Bell returned to England for a short visit in 1925, after the loss of her family estate, she stated, “I don’t care to be in London much ... I like Baghdad, and I like Iraq” (36). Bell’s work to promote an independent Iraqi government influenced by Great Britain reflects the merging of her loyalties for both countries, but Said ignores the change in Bell – over time, Iraq became more of her home than England.

The next section of this chapter will include some recent critical analysis that acknowledges Bell’s participation with imperialistic colonial discourse but provides a more sympathetic reading of Bell than does Said. These critics recognize Bell’s struggle to reconcile her Orientalist preconceptions with her growing respect and enjoyment of the places and people of the East.

### **Other Critics’ Response to Bell**

Several critics have responded sympathetically to Bell’s early publication, *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures*, the product of her earliest of three ill-fated love affairs. Bell’s fascination with the Arabian Peninsula began in her early twenties (after the social seasons in London resulted in no marital prospects) as she traveled with her Aunt Mary Lascelles to Persia in 1892. In Teheran, Bell became close friends with the Oriental Scholar, Dr. Friedrich Rosen, and his wife, Nina, who taught her about Persian culture and stirred her interest in Arabs (Wallach, *Queen* 33). While studying the Persian language, Bell met and became engaged to marry Henry Cadogen after they spent many hours exploring the desert and translating and discussing the Persian poets together. According to Workman, Cadogen and Bell shared a literary courtship with both sharing a love of poetry, Persia, literature, and philosophy (189). Gertrude’s father and stepmother, however, did not approve of the socioeconomic status of Cadogen and forbade the marriage. Hoping to change their minds, Gertrude dutifully returned home, but before she could gain

parental approval for the marriage, Henry died from pneumonia in August of 1893. Heartbroken, Bell immersed herself in travel, further language study, and writing. Bell published in 1894 *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures*, a collection of essays about her travels with Cadogen.

In *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran*, Nima Naghibi, who uses a close reading of *Persian Pictures* to analyze Bell's response to the Middle East, identifies the Orientalist trope of desire and disappointment at work in Bell's attempt to reconcile the real Persia to the exotic place of her imagination (20). Naghibi, though, observes that Bell expresses her disillusionment by light-heartedly poking fun at the British traveler. In *Persian Pictures* she quotes Bell:

Many, many years have passed since the ingenious Shahrzad beguiled the sleepless hours of the Sultan Shahriyar with her deftly woven stories, and still for us they are as entrancing, as delightful, as they were for him when they first flowed from her lips. Still those exciting volumes keep generations of English children on wakeful pillows, still they throw the first glamour of mystery and wonder over the unknown East ... The supply of bottled magicians seems, indeed, to be exhausted, and the carpets have, for the most part, lost their migratory qualities – travelers must look nowadays to more commonplace modes of progression, but they will be hard put to it from time to time if they do not consent to resign themselves so far to the traditions of their childhood as to seek refuge under a palace roof. (22)

Throughout *Persian Pictures*, Naghibi notes that Bell conveys her disappointment (though it is a playful wistfulness) that Persia does not conform to the Orient of her childhood reading. The following quotation illustrates what Naghibi describes as Bell's "self-ironizing moment during

which she recognizes the fantasies produced by the Orientalist intertext” (22). Naghibi quotes Bell from *Persian Pictures*:

On our way home we stopped before a confectioner’s shop and invited him to let us taste of his preserves. He did not, like the confectioner in the Arabian Nights, prepare for us a delicious dish of pomegranate-seeds, but he gave us Rahat Lakoum, and slices of sugared oranges, and a jelly of rose-leaves (for which cold cream is a good European substitute), and many other delicacies, ending with some round white objects, which I take to have been sugared onions, floating in syrup –after we had tasted them we had small desire to continue our experimental repast. (23)

Even when Bell communicates this disappointment in numerous passages, she provides her audience with a view of Persia as quaint, primitive, and fascinating (23). A large part of this strangeness for Bell and other Western women rests in the cultural subjugation of the Eastern woman. Naghibi, who foregrounds Bell’s assessment of the Arabic women with Bell’s disdain for Englishwomen, categorizes her with other European women who participated in colonial discourse that positioned the Arabian woman as the exotic, oppressed, and passive Other (20). Furthermore, this difference between the Western and Eastern women’s role in their respective societies causes tension between the two groups. On the whole, however, when analyzing *Persian Pictures*, Naghibi finds Bell willing to make fun of herself and other Orientalists who discover that their childhood fantasies are not true.

In *Great Women Travel Writers*, Lucille Becker cites passages in *Persian Pictures* to praise Bell’s ability to describe the East with clarity. Becker perceives Bell as thrilled by the East and supports this opinion by quoting the same passage as Naghibi quoted earlier in this paper



from *Persian Pictures* concerning Bell's response to Shaharazad and the Sultan Shahriyar:

"Everything about the East excited her, bringing back the magic of her childhood reading of the *Arabian Nights*" (148). Becker, who also admires Bell's acute observations and gift for vivid descriptions, quotes Bell in the essay "In Praise of Gardens" from *Persian Pictures*:

There was, indeed a part of his domain where even his hospitality would not have bidden us enter. Behind the house in which we were received lay the women's dwelling, a long, low, verandaed building standing round a deep tank, on whose edge solemn children carry on their dignified games, and veiled women flit backwards and forwards ... So in the wilderness, behind high walls, the secret, mysterious life of the East flows on – a life in which no European can penetrate. (149-50)

For Becker, the description provides a lively and clear picture of the East in which Bell shows an exceptional ability to portray both the land and the people who fascinate her.

In "Gertrude Bell and the Poetics of Translation," Nancy Workman discusses Bell's creative translation in *The Divan of Hafiz* (Hafiz), published in 1897. Along with her accompanying essay, in which she compares the thirteenth-century Arabian poet Hafiz to western poets of the same era, Bell's publication received excellent reviews, especially from the noted scholar A. J. Arberry (Wallach, *Queen* 39). Workman argues that Bell's translation of *The Divan of Hafiz* deserves more scholarly attention, especially among the translation theorists since critics have neglected the production history and lyric expression found in Bell's translation (184). Translation theorists look for how the translator (in this case, Bell) becomes a co-creator along with the original author or poet through the translator's interpretations and word choice. According to Workman, translations like Bell's *Divan of Hafiz* serve as important sites of

intercultural exchange where a reading public in a dominant culture may experience a transformed sense of identity through its exposure to the writings of a non-dominant culture (184). Where Said sees this transformation as comparative and fuel for racism, Workman sees this change as positive for both cultures. She and other translation theorists state that works, such as Bell's, provide an opportunity for the reading public to replace stereotypes and negative feelings with sympathetic ones toward the Other in the non-dominant culture (184). In her analysis of the impact of the circumstances in Bell's life upon her translation of *The Divan*, Workman includes the feminist scholars' consideration of the way translations provided a means for women like Bell to enter the academic world denied them because of gender (184). In addition to giving Bell a platform from which to enter the scholarly domain of men, Workman explains that Bell's translation also provided a way to indirectly express her grief over the death of Henry Cadogan through her selection of passionate poems by Hafiz. In fact, Workman believes "...her translation serves as an indirect rebellion against family strictures – also against British colonial prejudice. Just as her later life in exploration and diplomacy challenged traditional gender roles, this early work established her credibility as a linguist and interpreter of Middle-Eastern culture" (185). Because of her alternate approach to the literature of the Other, Bell differs in her translation of Hafiz from the earlier western translators. Workman indicates, "Bell was quite aware of the dominant points of view regarding Hafez and *The Divan*, but she undercuts their authority by offering the possibility that the verses mean something very different. In her own work she subverts the hegemonic discourse of her English predecessors and peers" (194). Unlike the earlier translators, whom she believes undervalue his poems, Bell claims that Hafiz was a better poet than Dante. In her aesthetic view of the poetry by Hafiz, Bell claims that his verses are universal, timeless, and insightful (197). Additionally, Bell recognizes that

cultural bias affects her struggle in reconciling the East that differs from the West when she states: “I am very conscious that my appreciation of the poet is that of the western” (Workman 198). Unlike earlier translators who disparage Hafiz, Bell establishes parallels between the writings of Hafiz with St. Francis of Assisi and Dante by emphasizing the similarity in the traditions (198). According to Workman, Bell found that she shared the points of view about life in the writings of Hafiz, a man she described as spiritual and wise. As a result of her respect for the wisdom of the Other, Bell’s translations reflect her genuine enthusiasm for Persia, the people, and the poetry – not because of the political necessity to know the Oriental through the study of the poems as expressions of cultural facts (200). Workman describes Bell as a young translator who was unique in many ways, which began with her visit to Persia and a love affair with Henry Cadogen (200):

The best reason for the vitality of Bell’s poetry can be found in the interpretive situation itself. Bell possessed an affinity for both the Persian culture and the poet himself ... Bell caught the spirit of the verse because she was not concerned with its literalness. Instead, having lived in circumstances akin to those the poet was describing, she captured the landscape he described, the attitudes he held, and most importantly, the feeling he expressed, because she engaged with his work with her mind, body, and soul...As a woman initially silenced by family and British colonialism, she nonetheless provided her readers with a superior translation of a demanding mystical poet, one who offered his readers insight into loss and suffering, but also into the joys of sensuality and abiding love. For Bell the translation project of the *The Divan* that she undertook as a young woman laid the foundations of her later independent voice. (201)

Workman sees Bell's individuality, her nonconformity to Orientalist expectations, which allowed her to embrace the Other and to appreciate the difference that engaged her intellectually. Thus, Bell escaped Orientalist tendencies to consider anything non-Western as inferior, in part because she chose not to fit in with her own culture. Ultimately Bell, who struggled to reconcile pride in her British race with her increasing recognition of good also found in Arabia, recognized individual worth versus preconceived ideas about types or kinds of people.

In the last section of this chapter, I will join other critics in responding to Bell in *Desert*. In addition to discussing how Said misreads Bell in *Desert*, I will apply a close reading for the narrative voices used by Bell to trace her move from otherness to sameness.

### **The Desert and the Sown**

In *Desert*, Bell uses three narrative voices: the third-person that objectively reports observations with frequent "present tense" statements that register as an Orientalist response; the first-person that establishes credibility, reflects respect and liking for the Eastern Other; and the third voice that belongs to the Arabian national for whom she speaks, thus presenting the Other as those who cannot speak for themselves. However, over time her writings progress in increasing familiarity from otherness towards sameness.

Bell first gained international prestige through her travel writing and archaeological exploration. In 1899, Bell made her first trek into the Arabian Desert on her own, which she retraced in 1905 in order to write a book that would inform the West about the East and to gain recognition as both an author and a scholar (Wallach, *Queen* 70). She started her trek by horse and mule team from Jerusalem, crossed Jordan, and explored the Syrian interior. In *Desert*, published in 1907, Bell narrates her interactions with different peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and explores ancient ruins of the Romans and Greeks. *Desert* was well received and reviews

made much over the fact of Bell's being the first woman, not native to the land, to penetrate the Syrian interior. Critics lauded Bell's eye for detail and description, her use of many photographs, and the valuable information about the East brought to light for the western reader (Wallach, *Queen* 79). The publication of *Desert* marks the turning point for Bell in her travels as she increasingly focused on the Middle East, and went on to publish *The Thousand and One Churches* with Sir William Ramsay in 1909, *Amurath to Amurath* in 1911, and *Palace and Mosque at Ukhaidir* in 1914.

Said quotes Bell in *Desert* to illustrate her Orientalist response to the people of the Arabian Peninsula. In addition to the generalization found in the following statement, Said objects to Bell's definiteness and authority with which she describes the Other (229). Bell uses the third-person with a "present tense" statement that registers as an Orientalist response: "How many thousand years this state of things has lasted, those who shall read earliest records of the inner desert will tell us, for it goes back to the first of them, but in all the centuries the Arab has bought no wisdom from experience. He, is never safe, and yet he behaves as though security were his daily bread" (*Desert* 66). According to Said, Bell's Arab, after centuries of experience and no wisdom, remains the same. Bell reduces him to a type that allows for no differences among individuals (230). In addition to the broad generalization, Bell implies that the British, in contrast to the Arab, would have intervened to provide security for its citizens.

Although she agrees that this passage does reflect Bell's ethnocentric and condescending Orientalist response, Andrea Schnell, in *Gertrude Bell: An Orientalist in Context*, argues that Said takes the passage out of context. Schnell points out that earlier in the passage quoted by Said, Bell conveys her surprise over the Arab's ability to live under the threat of raiding tribes (34). The passage to which she refers comes from *Desert*, in which Bell writes: "The day before,

the very day before, while we had been journeying peacefully from Tneib, four hundred horsemen of the Sukhur and the Howeitat, leagued in evil, had swept these plains, surprised an outlying group of the Beni Hassan and carried off the tents, together with two thousand head of cattle” (Bell, *Desert* 65). In addition to surprise, Bell’s words imply her sympathy for the suffering of both the man and his tribe: “There was sorrow in the tents of the children of Hassan. We saw a man weeping by the tent pole, with his head bowed in his hands, everything he possessed having swept from him” (Bell, *Desert* 65). By using the first person narrative, Bell places herself within the group of Arabs who experience and grieve over their loss.

One can also argue that in this passage Bell recognizes the sameness between the Other and the Brit. Bell draws a parallel between the losses of the group of the Beni Hassan to those of the speculators in the Stock Exchange of London – both gamble and sometimes lose everything, with the exception that the stock trader often gambles with other people’s money: “As we rode, we talked much of ghazu (raid) and the rules that govern it. The fortunes of the Arab are as varied as those of a gambler on the Stock Exchange. One day he is the richest man in the desert, and next morning he may not have a single camel foal to his name” (Bell, *Desert* 65). Here, Bell makes the connection between her own culture and that of the tribes in the Middle East, therefore focusing on the similarities – not the differences – between the West and the East.

Said uses Bell’s letter to her parents in *From Her Personal Papers, 1889-1914* in order to illustrate Bell’s appreciation of the hegemonic relationship of Great Britain to the Middle East. Schnell identifies this as a letter written by Bell during her travel and writing *Desert* (34). Said objects to Bell’s imperialistic perspective when she writes: “We [Britain] have gone up in the world since five years ago. The difference is very marked. I think it is due to the success of our government in Egypt to a great extent ... The defeat of Russia stands for a great deal, and my

impression is that the vigorous policy of Lord Curzon in the Persian Gulf and on the India frontier stands for a great deal more” (229). In this letter, Bell provides an example of Orientalism, the theory and practice in which the Occident of the West maintains power, domination, and hegemony or cultural dominance through positional superiority over the Other of the East. Said not only identifies Bell’s common agenda with other Orientalists, but also criticizes her belief that she can know the Other: “No one who does not know the East can realize how it all hangs together. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that if the English mission had been turned back from the gates of Kabul, the English tourist would be frowned upon in the streets of Damascus” (229). Bell’s words represent the agenda of the Orientalist to study the Other, to understand and know them.

Schnell again criticizes Said for taking this passage out of the context of Bell’s letter, which describes the people, politicians, the role of the government, and the rivalries among different tribal and ethnic groups in Damascus. Schnell agrees that the wording reflects an Orientalist response, but argues that Bell writes to explain the intricacies of life in Damascus – not to reduce its citizens to a simple explanation (35). In addition to Schnell’s argument, one can infer from Bell’s words that she struggles to understand the people who have shown her hospitality: “I begin to see dimly what the civilization of a great Eastern city means, how they live, what they think; and I have got on to terms with them” (Said 229). Open communication between Bell and the citizens of Damascus contribute to her beginning to know the people of the East. Schnell also defends Bell’s statement, “I believe the fact of my being English is a great help” (Said 229). This is a simple observation based on the positive response of the people of Damascus once they learned Bell’s nationality. Schnell argues that since Bell had been to Damascus five years earlier, she can make a legitimate comparison when observing that the

public viewed the British more positively than before (35). For Schnell, Bell simply writes home about her enjoyment in the friendliness of the people in Damascus.

Even though Said correctly criticizes Bell for her imperialistic hegemony and the homogenization of the Other, he eliminates a second look at the intricacies involved within the discourse she conducts between the two cultures. Bell indisputably makes Orientalist statements – blatant racist generalizations, but she periodically exhibits an understanding of this fact in her writing. A close reading for the times that Bell wavers in her Orientalist response reveals an inconsistency in her thinking about the Other.

In the Preface of *Desert*, Bell anticipates modern day postcolonial criticism when she recognizes that the Arab should be allowed to speak for himself. Bell, nevertheless, working under the assumption that the Other cannot tell his own story to the western audience for whom she writes, attempts to reconstruct the dialogue between the Arab and herself as indicated in her preface: “I desired to write not so much a book of travel as an account of the people whom I met or who accompanied me on my way, and to show what the world is like in which they live and how it appears to them” (*Desert* ix). Even though Bell speaks for the Other, she recognizes that the best scenario is for the Arabs to articulate for themselves: “*And since it was better that they should, as far as possible, tell their own tale*, I have strung their words upon the thread of the road, relating as I heard them” (emphasis added, *Desert* ix). In addition, her words reflect a mood of nostalgia and liking for the people as she reflects on their conversation: “The stories with which shepherd and man-at-arms beguiled the hours of the march, the talk that passed from lip to lip round the camp-fire, in the black tent of the Arab and the guest-chamber of the Druze, as well as the more cautious utterances of Turkish and Syrian officials” (*Desert* ix). Bell recognizes the value of the discourse in which she was fortunate enough to participate: “I have been at some



pains to relate the actual political conditions of unimportant persons. They do not appear so unimportant to one who is in their midst, and for my part I have always been grateful to those who have provided me with a clue to their relations with one another” (*Desert* xi). In the Preface, Bell introduces her purpose to share the rich experience of visiting Syria with her western audience.

Spivak addresses the dilemma over whether the Other can speak for herself. Echoing Bell’s unspoken question, Spivak asks, “With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?” (80). As she explores the problem of the European Subject constituting the Other by choosing what to say about and for the subaltern, Spivak answers her own question, “The subaltern cannot speak ... Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish” (104). In this statement Spivak, who takes the responsibility to speak for the Other, expects that her position as an Indian nationalist makes her speaking for the subaltern to be more acceptable than someone like Bell. Conversely, one can argue that because Bell was marginalized due to her gender in the early 1900s, she also speaks for the subaltern with empathy. Furthermore, Spivak’s position as an intellectual, who resides and teaches in the West, brings up the question of whether she, too, constructs the subaltern. In fact, by choosing to describe the Other as subaltern, Spivak ironically uses the British military term for one of inferior rank or the subordinate. Despite the condescension implied, both intellectuals, Bell and Spivak, choose to speak for the Other rather than to allow people with whom they both relate to remain mute.

In the Preface, immediately following Bell’s plan to speak for the Other, Bell uses a “present tense” statement that registers as an Orientalist racist statement that reflects an ethnocentric superior attitude toward the Other: “Their statecraft consists of guesses, often

shrewd enough, at the results that may spring from the clash of unknown forces, of which the strength and the aim are but dimly apprehended” (Bell, *Desert* ix). In this generalization, Bell uses the third person narrative to categorize the Other as a type who cannot understand cause and effect relationships. Next, Bell defines the Other with a comparative statement: “Their wisdom is that of men whose channels of information and standards for comparison are different from ours, and who bring a different set of preconceptions to bear upon the problems laid before them” (*Desert* ix). In Bell’s next statement, she reflects Orientalism at its worst: “The Oriental is like a very old child. He is unacquainted with many branches of knowledge which we have come to regard as of elementary necessity; frequently, but not always, his mind is little pre-occupied with the need of acquiring them” (ix). According to Bell, the Other, unlike the Brit, does not possess knowledge or the ambition to learn. Furthermore, Bell describes the Arab as inefficient: “He [the Other] concerns himself scarcely at all with what we call practical utility. He is not practical in our acceptance of the word, any more than a child is practical, and his utility is not ours” (ix). Bell then harkens back to the glorious past in which the Arab remains locked without the desire or impetus to change with modern times: “On the other hand, his action is guided by traditions of conduct and morality that go back to the beginnings of civilization, traditions unmodified as yet by any important change in the manner of life to which they apply and out of which they arose” (ix). In this portion of the Preface, Bell speaks to other Orientalists with the condescension directed at the Other that Said so strenuously refutes. Graham-Brown also criticizes Bell, who exercises her freedom as a European by entering and leaving the Arabian Peninsula at will, and who makes judgments about the Other’s culture as she exerts her power as a British imperial citizen (xv). Bell focuses on the binary relationship between the East and the West – the impractical Other guesses but the practical Brit knows.

In addition to the superior attitude, Bell exhibits the Orientalist disappointment that the East is past its golden era. In a different context, Foucault artistically conveys this emotion when describing the end of the Classic age, "... at the moment of its decline. It is no longer the ironic triumph of representation over resemblance; it is the obscure and repeated violence of desire battering at the limits of representation" (210). Orientalists express this same aggressive response to the reality of the East that is not what it has been represented to be in their texts. Graham-Brown indicates that Bell's metaphor of the Other as a very old child reflects the commonly held belief by the West that the eastern culture had sunk into decadence (xv-xvi). Bell's words hint at the Orientalist trope of disappointment and desire for the East to be what she imagines it. Throughout *Desert*, Bell carries on the theme of the loss of past glory with her descriptions and photographs of the archaeological sites and ancient ruins.

In the Preface, immediately following the words that denigrate the Other, Bell reverses her position as she begins to compare the European to the Arab in a way that shows her preference for the East over the West. She transitions to this point of view by first acknowledging that the Arab and the Brit share similarities. Even with this move toward sameness, Bell's words sound condescending: "These things apart, he [the Other] is as we are, human nature does not undergo a complete change east of Suez, nor is it impossible to be on terms of friendship and sympathy with the dwellers in those regions" (*Desert* x). Yet, as she reflects on her interactions with the people of the Arabian Peninsula, Bell recognizes that the Other allows for more freedom of discourse and tolerance of differences than does the Occident: "In some respects it is even easier than in Europe. You will find in the East habits of intercourse less fettered by artificial chains, and a wider tolerance born of greater diversity" (x). Here, Bell's Orientalist response ends with the recognition that the conventions in the East allow for more

genuine discourse than in the West. This sense of freedom from the restrictions of her own culture may reflect the fact that Bell, an early twentieth-century European woman, felt less discriminated against because of gender in Arabia than in Britain. According to Graham-Brown, the East provided Bell an escape from the frustrations of English life (xviii). While in Europe, Bell adhered to the social conventions that expected women to act circumspectly and differently from men. When visiting the Arabian Peninsula, on the other hand, Bell traveled alone and socialized among the men without a chaperone – behavior frowned upon in London. Graham-Brown describes Bell's treatment in the East as that of a male guest, enabling Bell to eat and talk with the men (ix). Nonetheless, the liberation that Bell experienced did not extend to the Arabian women, who did not enjoy this same freedom of discourse with the men. Wallach reports that Abdul Aziz (Ibn Saud), amazed by Bell because she was the first European woman he had met, and because she wore no veil, allowed her to participate in all discussions of Arabian politics as well as the social functions enjoyed by the men (*Queen* 187). So Bell's freedom in the East depended upon her position as an English female, liberty that did not extend to Arabian women.

In Arabia, Bell's gender allowed her to visit the harems of the women – something that no European male would ever have the opportunity to experience. Occasionally in *Desert*, Bell briefly mentions her social calls with wives in their private quarters. One time, she describes a visit to the fifth wife of Sheikh Hassan, who kept a separate household for each of his different spouses – something Bell judges to be a wise move in order to keep the peace among his wives. After mentioning this time spent with the new wife, Bell makes an Orientalist generalization and describes harems as untidy and women as unkempt unless they have advance notice of a visit (*Desert* 157). During another social call, Bell describes the beautiful women who lived in an old castle with a flea infestation that caused her to cut short her visit. As two of the younger women

led her to the outer gate of the castle, Bell quotes one of the ladies as saying, “Allah! You go forth to travel through the whole world, and we have never been to Hamah!” (237). In choosing to speak, here, for the feminine Other (something that Bell rarely does in her writing), Bell demonstrates sympathy for women of the harem who live restricted lives. For the most part, though, Bell does not discuss her time spent with other females. Probably her most extensive interaction with the ladies of Arabia occurred on a different excursion into the Nejd when Bell actually stayed in a harem for over a week. O’Brien reports that during Bell’s captivity at Hayyil while on a later trip in Arabia (recorded in *Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914*), Bell remained in the harem for eleven days. One of the women, Turkiyyeh, became Bell’s friend and helped her gain freedom to leave the town (27-28). Even though Bell felt disillusioned with the women’s rule within the harem, the experience provided her with a unique look at life from the Arabian feminine perspective. While she remained cloistered within the confines of the women’s quarters, Bell had the opportunity to observe the female hierarchy of power based on age and rank. Despite this experience in Hayyil when Bell was treated as a woman of the harem, she was mostly given the status of belonging to a third gender – not female or male but something in between.

As an “honorary man,” Bell enjoyed hospitality from her Arabian hosts and hostesses that she sometimes did not receive among her British contemporaries in the East. Early in her travels in Arabia, Bell enjoyed the reputation of being a noble English lady and was given the accompanying title, “Your Excellency” (*Desert*, Bell 150). Bell never lost this distinction while in the Middle East, and when she became Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner, Percy Cox, her status among the Arabians continued to rise. Wallach says that Bell’s gender disappeared when she discussed politics knowledgeably with the Other and that Bell’s high rank

in the British government confirmed her position as honorary man among the Arabians who named her, “El Khatum, the lady of the Court, who keeps an open eye or ear for the benefit of the state” (*Queen* 196). Ironically, Bell struggled more with English expatriates because of her gender. Schnell suggests that the Other accepted Bell better than did some of her colleagues in the Diplomatic Corps (46). Whether from jealousy or from the fact that she was a lone female working among men, Bell often faced resistance from the British colonials with whom she worked. While in Arabia, Bell enjoyed roles not afforded other women – curator of antiquities, Oriental Secretary, Intelligence expert, and chief advisor on Arab affairs (Wallach, *Queen* 195). Another reason for her lack of acceptance may have come from Bell’s freely expressed criticism of her colleagues. She disagreed sharply with Sykes who held the Arabs in contempt (Wallach, *Queen* 72), described Colonel Ramsay, the British Consul at Baghdad, as lazy and ignorant (126), and disputed sharply with her superior, A.T. Wilson, over her belief that the Arab State should have self-rule (245). Because of her aggressive personality, Bell enjoyed friendships with Arabian males but made enemies among her co-workers and their wives.

In describing her experiences in *Desert*, Bell most often writes detailed observations in the third-person narrative. Even when attempting to report objectively, though, Bell creates the Other based on what she chooses to tell. This also holds true for what she chooses not to report. Spivak discusses measuring silences and looking for what the ideologue refuses to say about the subaltern (82). In other words, what Bell leaves out of her detailed observations can skew the truth as much as her Orientalist generalizations. Spivak also raises the concern that the intellectual persistently constitutes the Other as the Self’s shadow (75). In describing the Other, Bell superimposes herself into the picture, to the point that one cannot separate the two. Bell unconsciously creates the national when she objectively describes or speaks for the Other.

When Bell uses the first-person narrative, on the other hand, she establishes credibility with a non-Orientalist audience because she becomes less of the transparent intellectual and more of the fellow traveler who respects and likes the Eastern Other. In *Desert*, Bell shows her joy in conversing with an Arabian guest at her campsite: “From Mabuk we heard the first gossip of the desert ... For two years I had heard no news of Nejd” (*Desert* 14-15). Taking delight in catching up on what she had missed while away in England, Bell also helps her reader understand the nuance of the gossip as she speaks for the Arab: “Mabuk had heard many rumours; men did say that Ibn er Rashid was in great straits, perhaps the Redifs were bound for Nejd and not for Yemen ... and had we heard that a sheikh of the Sukhur had been murdered” (14). Bell enables the reader to share in the lively exchange between herself and the Other as well as her excitement in hearing the intrigue between the tribes: “So the tale ran on through the familiar stages of blood feud and camel lifting, the gossip of the desert – I could have wept for joy at listening to it again” (14-15). Bell clearly enjoys the romance and adventure of being in the desert as well as the man with whom she can discuss politics.

Bell also reveals strong friendships in her first person narrative. Toward the end of *Desert*, Bell describes her enjoyment of her companion and his unnamed business partner: “But the expedition was chiefly memorable on account of the conversation of my two companions. With Musa I had contracted, during the three days we had passed together, a firm friendship, based on my side on gratitude for the services he had rendered me, coupled with a warm appreciation of the beaming smile that accompanied them” (*Desert* 292). Because she carefully followed the mores of the Arabian people, Bell hesitated to broach the subject of Musa’s religious sect until she felt she had become his friend: “We had reached a point of familiarity where I thought I might fairly expect him to enlighten me on the Yezldi doctrines, for whatever

may be the custom in Europe, in Asia it is not polite to ask a man what he believes unless he regards you as an intimate” (292-93). Bell discusses other friendships with her guides and hosts along the way, but this passage reveals some of her simplest and most straightforward expressions of liking for and enjoyment of her conversations with her friend, who incidentally was Arabian.

At the end of *Desert*, Bell meets a friend of a Druze with whom she had enjoyed so much at the start of her journey. Again, Bell uses the first-person narrative and simply shares her thoughts and liking for her companion: “So we separated, and my heart was warm with an affection for his people which it is never difficult to rekindle” (309). Bell contrasts her opinion with those of other Orientalists: “Cruel in battle they [the Druze] may be – the evidence against them is overwhelming; some have pronounced them treacherous, others have found them grasping” (309). Despite the judgments of her British compatriots and consistent with her individualistic nature, Bell reserves the right to make her own decision about the merits of the Arabic tribe: “But when I meet a Druze, I do not hesitate to greet a friend, nor shall I until my confidence has proved to have been misplaced” (309). Thus, in *Desert*, Bell ends her story with individual Arabs, beloved friends.

If we overlook her Orientalist generalizations, Bell’s writing indicates that she progresses from British Imperialist to friend<sup>3</sup> of the Other. By twenty-first century standards, she breaks the rules of what we consider to be politically correct, but when we look closely at her writing, evidence exists that the discourse in which she participates between the culture of her birth and the culture where she ultimately chooses to live and die increasingly narrows the gap between otherness and sameness.

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<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the term *friend* means a companion in an unselfish relationship based on genuine affection.



## Chapter Three:

## Freya Stark: A Flamboyant Traveler

People often compare Freya Stark to Gertrude Bell because both traveled the Middle East, overcame gender issues in order to establish themselves as honored guests among the people of Arabia, and worked for the British government to promote a colonial empire agenda. Both were travel-writers, but whereas Bell moved into politics and writing reports for the government, Stark's accomplishments were mostly literary – she traveled and wrote for publication into her late eighties. In addition to their similar career paths, Bell and Stark also shared the same talents and interests: both became skilled Alpine climbers, gifted writers, and fascinated enthusiasts of archaeology (Geniesse 82). Stark's name became linked to Bell's by the time she had published several books about her travels into the Arabian Peninsula beginning in 1928. The two, however, never met because Stark arrived in the Middle East a year after Bell's death in Baghdad.

Despite the similarities between the two adventuresses, Stark never publically acknowledged that Bell inspired her travels into the Middle East. Nonetheless, Geniesse speculates that Stark privately viewed Bell as a rival and herself a successor to Bell (81). Early in her travels, Stark began by retracing Bell's steps through Syria. After carefully reading Bell's book, *Desert*, and planning her trip using Bell's information (81), Stark took a similar route, including a trip to visit the Druze, Bell's friends who lived in isolation both by their choice and by those of the ruling governments whose laws the Druze refused to obey. Middleton also traces the similarity between Bell and Stark in their travel pattern: "By way of Lebanon and Syria, with sidesteps to Jerusalem and Cairo, Freya arrived in 1929 at Baghdad, which was to become her own city as it was Gertrude Bell's. Freya (not above a little explorer's jealousy) did not care to be compared with Miss Bell" (368). In private, Stark seemed to compete and contrast herself

with Bell by claiming that her own travel was more arduous. Geniesse quotes Stark, who bitterly named Bell her 'Siamese twin': "I am re-reading Gertrude Bell's *Syria* and comparing her route with ours. She, however, travelled with three servants; so I consider we were the more adventurous. She also says that the water in the Jebel Druze is 'undrinkable by European standards,' so I suppose our standard cannot be European" (82). Ultimately Stark, who explored more of Arabia than Bell, sought to build relationships with the people by staying in one place longer than Bell, and by accepting lodging within the homes of her hosts and hostesses, whereas Bell lodged in her own tents.

In their writings, both Stark and Bell exhibit pride in their citizenship to the powerful British Empire and reveal their sympathy for the people they visited. In contrast to Bell, however, Stark often criticizes European arrogance. She uses three narrative voices: the third-person that objectively reports observations with statements that register as an Orientalist response; the first-person that establishes credibility, reflects respect and liking for the Eastern Other; and the third voice that belongs to the Other for whom she speaks. Nonetheless, throughout her narrative Stark's writings exhibit an awareness of sameness more than otherness when comparing the West and the East.

This chapter is divided into six sections. First, I will briefly review Edward Said's general criticism of Orientalists, since he never critiques Stark specifically. Next, I discuss how Stark can be classified as a marginalized Other. The third section will summarize Stark's participation in the Orientalist discourse, especially with her rising fame as author and explorer. Then I will identify instances where Stark criticized Europeans. After this, I will summarize critics' responses to Stark. In the last section, critics and I will respond to Stark's text, *The Southern*

*Gates of Arabia: A Journey in the Hadhramaut*. Throughout the chapter, I will provide biographical information in order to establish the context of Stark's writings.

### **Said's Theory of Orientalism and Stark**

Said does not directly analyze the writings of Freya Stark, but she fits his definition of an Orientalist – a travel writer who depicts the Orient. In much of her writing, Stark portrays Arabian Muslims to an audience predominantly consisting of European Christians. Said believes that in the process of representing the Other, the Orientalist imbeds her own western culture, institutions, and political ideas upon what she reports as truth about the people for whom she speaks (272). Therefore, when applying Said's theory to Stark's writing, the postcolonial analyst claims that Stark reports subjective judgments shaped by other Orientalists' texts. Furthermore, Said describes a three-way relationship in his theory of Orientalism: The Orient corrected and punished for lying outside of European society becomes the province of the Orientalist, who forces the uninformed western reader to accept the Orientalist codifications as the true Orient (67). When applying this theory to Stark, the critic recognizes that she exercises her power as a British citizen to travel without impunity throughout the Arabian Peninsula, and therefore, uses her superior position as a British citizen in order to represent the Other to advance knowledge for the West about the East. In so doing, Stark also promotes herself to the West as an expert and learned observer of the Arabian people. Even though Stark fits Said's definition of an Orientalist, I argue in the next section that Stark actually qualifies as a marginalized Other.

### **Stark as Other**

Stark, who did not enjoy the same privileges of wealth and social status as Bell, was a marginalized female and Other instead of a powerful Western Occident. Born two months premature in 1893 (twenty-five years after Bell), Stark faced many obstacles that limited her

options, including poor health at different times of her life that dramatically altered her plans. One of these instances was an interrupted engagement to be married, when at the age of twenty-two Stark developed typhoid, pleurisy, and pneumonia. Shortly after this, the doctors discovered that she had a gastric ulcer. Later, in her travels within the Arabian Peninsula, Stark also suffered from dysentery, malaria, measles, a weakened heart, dengue fever, and appendicitis (Hawley 326). In addition to a natural propensity to get sick, Stark often suffered illnesses that other British travelers avoided through exposure to conditions that threatened her health. She lived and ate with the Arabs, and the measles came from direct contact with a sick child while Stark visited a harem. Complications caused by the measles, including a weakened heart, caused her to need to be evacuated from Yemen instead of completing her journey to Shabwa in the Hadhramaut.

Another definitive change that altered Stark's status from privileged to Other came with Stark's move away from England to continental Europe at an early age. Even though Stark considered herself to be a British citizen, she lived most of her life in Italy. Until the age of ten years old, Stark was a child of genteel and wealthy parents, but her family became ostracized when her mother left Freya's father, Robert Stark, and moved to Italy where she began to work in a factory in which she had invested her money (Geniesse 26). This violated the Victorian conventions, and caused Stark's small family consisting of mother, younger sister, Vera, and herself to face loneliness and financial hardship. Moorehead writes, "There was little money for wood and rarely butter or jam for breakfast. More painfully, a haze of scandal was building up over their heads: Flora had become increasingly involved in Mario Roascio's factory and people now assumed that he had become her lover" (21-22). Freya hated Mario who eventually married her sister, Vera. Furthermore Robert, her father with whom Freya shared a close bond, remained in England so they had to maintain their long-distant relationship by letters as well as occasional

visits. Geniesse speculates that all of her life, Stark carried both a rage that stemmed from internalizing the conflicts in her home, and a fear of becoming lost and abandoned (23). Because of the separation between her parents, Stark seldom felt secure, and she had to work all of her life to meet her financial needs. When she was in her mid-thirties and after Vera died, Stark escaped this unhappy home in Italy in order to follow her dream of traveling to an exotic Middle East, one that she had read about in Orientalist texts.

A disfiguring injury at the age of thirteen also caused Freya to become marginalized. Stark suffered the trauma of a painful and life-threatening accident when she walked through Mario's factory and her long hair caught in the steel shaft of a giant loom, which in turn lifted her by her hair and carried her around with her feet hitting the wall before she was pulled from the wheel. She lost half of her scalp and was in the hospital for four months as she underwent skin grafts that left one side of her face slightly disfigured (Moorehead 23). Throughout her life, Stark felt self-conscious about her looks and wore hats to hide the scars, which possibly explains the jealousy Stark exhibited around pretty women. Geniesse writes, "Stories merged into Freya's legend of the way she treated young female assistants, especially the pretty ones who were, 'like slaves,' made to do personal errands" (296). Stark overcame the obstacle of her marred looks by dressing sharply and by developing a charming personality that attracted men through her vivacious and witty conversation. Geniesse also believes that Stark's strong desire to gain approval contributed to her great charm (22). With success, fame, and a resulting increase in self-confidence, Stark became attractive through careful dressing, a flamboyant wardrobe, and her intelligent repartee.

Stark, like most women during the early 1900s, was also marginalized because of her limited educational opportunities. For the most part, Freya taught herself through her avid and

eclectic reading, assisted by friends of the Stark family including Herbert Young, who read aloud Sir Walter Scott's novels and Shakespeare's works when she and her sister were young. Other friends of the family sent the girls stories by Kipling, FitzGerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, as well as poetry by Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron (Geniesse 28). Additionally, frequent visits to London that began when Stark was around fifteen years old provided her with some formal educational opportunities. When in London, she lived with mother's friend, Viva Jeyes, and enjoyed discussions about politics and books with Viva's husband, Harry, an assistant editor to the *Standard*, one of London's evening newspaper. Stark met W.P. Ker, who later became the Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and she began to attend his lectures at the London University where he taught English literature and corrected her essays. In 1912, Stark began a degree course at Bedford College and attended some literary soirees, one with Yeats in attendance (Moorehead 24). Stark's college years in London ended in 1914 when WWI began.

Another cause for Stark's marginalization was that she did not have a husband at a time in history when women were expected to marry and to take care of a home. Stark wanted to marry, and during WWI while nursing in a hospital in Bologna she fell in love with a doctor, Quirino Ruata. Guido, Freya's name for the doctor, asked her to marry him and she accepted. Then, Stark became seriously ill and left Bologna in order to recuperate at her home for an extended stay. Meanwhile, Guido's former girlfriend returned to Italy to renew the relationship that she had broken off with the doctor. Guido visited Stark briefly, responded to her letters sporadically, and eventually ended the engagement (Geniesse 39-40). This not only caused heartbreak but also made Stark feel like a failure since society at that time placed such high importance on women to marry (140-41). Finally, in addition to women's limited occupational

options and their need to marry in order to fit into society, women's intelligence was often demeaned. Stark writes a very telling statement that sums up the condescension that women faced: "The great and almost only comfort about being a woman is that one can always pretend to be more stupid than one is and no one is surprised" (Geniesse 136). When totaling the obstacles faced by Stark until the age of thirty-four, before she ventured into Arabia, we can classify her an Other: a woman marginalized by gender, disfigurement, poverty, limited education, and social ostracism.

After a review of Said, I concluded that Stark can be labeled an *Orientalist*.

Paradoxically, I have also defined Stark as an Other. In this third section, I will chart Stark's ascendancy from her position of Other to Orientalist. In the fourth section of this chapter, I will show how Stark often identifies with the Other in her travels, which results in her criticism of Europeans.

### **Stark as Orientalist**

Orientalism provided Stark a platform from which to rise above her marginalized status. Her early reading in Italy glamorized Orientalism and deeply impressed Stark (Geniesse 29). Then in her twenties while living with Viva Jeyes, an honorary secretary for the Women's Anti-Suffrage League, Stark met women who ascribed to imperialism like Mrs. Humphrey Ward, an opponent to women's right to vote who influenced Stark's position about women's suffrage (36-37). Similar to Bell, a co-founder of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League, Stark never showed an interest in the women's political debate about suffrage and considered most women to be intellectually inferior. In her biography on Stark, which sheds some light on why Freya would subjugate other women, Moorehead concludes that Stark preferred to travel with men and found most women to be irritating. When she explains the unhappy relationship between Stark and

Gertrude Caton Thompson during the trip that Freya described in *A Winter in Arabia*, Moorehead quotes Stark, “I shall emerge from this winter an anti-feminist, because really women might be a little nicer to each other: they practice none of the graces of life” (62). In addition to both Stark’s and Bell’s dislike for most women, they both shared a Victorian upbringing in which they were taught to believe in the supremacy of the imperial British male.

Stark found acceptance and support from powerful British men. She became the honorary goddaughter of William Paton Ker, a Fellow of all Souls, Oxford, to whom Stark later dedicated her book, *Valley of the Assassins* (38). This book, published in May 1934, was called “a travel classic” by the critics and helped establish Stark in both literary and exploration circles. Shortly after the publication of her first article in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1928, Stark attracted the attention of Arnaud Robin Grey, who eventually adopted the name John Murray and became the leader of a distinguished publishing firm. Stark and Murray established a close working relationship that remained profitable for both for many years (Geniesse 84-85). When Stark was thirty-three and preparing to travel to the Middle East, Herbert Young, the Starks’ family friend, gave Freya his Asolo house in Italy. He wrote to ask if she would like both his house and furniture as a place to live, not to sell. Stark accepted and this house became *Casa Freia*, the permanent home to which she returned at the end of her journeys (Moorehead 35). With a few good investments, a permanent home run by her mother, and a publishing firm interested in more of her stories, Stark had the means to travel to make her living.

Stark’s interest in cartography, in addition to her travel writing, helped to launch her career as an explorer. In her first exploratory journey into Luristan, present-day Iran, Stark attempted, somewhat unsuccessfully, to visit the castles of the Assassins (Hawley 328). The outcome of this endeavor, however, resulted in Stark gaining the favor of the Royal



Geographical Society for two reasons: her vivid descriptions and meticulous observations, and more importantly, her help in filling in the empty spaces and correcting mistakes on the British maps by locating new mountains and unmarked villages (Geniesse 107). In addition to receiving approval from the British authorities, Stark also found status among her Arabian hosts and hostesses, who treated her as an important person because she represented a distant European power. Stark's exploration of the Middle East and her careful work with maps provided her introduction into the Royal Geographical Society, which served as a turning point in her career (121). From this time forward, Stark found Orientalists willing to financially back future ventures into the Middle East.

Stark, a marginalized citizen, who spoke English with an accent because of her upbringing in Italy, enjoyed the benefits of becoming an Arabist. Geniesse reports that at this point in her career, Stark became tenaciously British as she adopted as many British mannerisms as she could (134). Back in London, Stark, who had become accepted into the upper British society, began to entertain fellow Orientalists by giving lectures in the auditorium of the Royal Asiatic Society. Geniesse describes her as a mesmerizingly gifted speaker (149). By this time, Stark was fully admitted into the circle of prominent Orientalists, a position in which she would enjoy fully until the end of British Colonialism. Geniesse states that one by one, Stark met the men who had shaped the post-WWI Arabian Peninsula, the men who were the "kingmakers" (150). Stark charmed these Orientalists with her ability to describe the Arabian people and the land, which in turn brought her the acceptance that she had sought all of her life. Stark's popularity as a lecturer grew, and by the winter of 1933, she spoke about her observations of the Middle East to the Royal Central Asian Society, the Forum, and the BBC (158). Throughout her

life, Stark enjoyed this renown into her eighties when she took part in travelogues aired on television.

In the 1930s, Stark became very useful to the intelligence community in the Middle East. In her biography on Stark, Izzard explains that Stark “came in under the cloak of the Royal Geographical Society’s scientific interests ... but her real use was as a humble intelligence gatherer travelling and observing at a low level, and picking up gossip and news where it was difficult for an official to penetrate” (76). In 1939, Stark, who became an assistant information officer stationed in Aden, Yemen, began to enjoy a regular salary that was to alleviate most of her financial worries during WWII. This began with the Colonial Office, which hired Freya (the only woman in the group) with a salary of 600 pounds, and gave her the title of “South Arab” expert (Geniesse 241). Like Bell, Stark worked to promote British influence in the Arabian Peninsula. During this time, Stark discussed with Malcom MacDonald, the colonial secretary, the need for establishing national support for a democratic Arabia that would reinforce British commercialism as well as an Arabian school developed by the British (241-42). The British leaders, including Stark, worried that the Arabs would join the Axis Powers because of the Allied support for a Jewish immigration to Palestine. Yemen, particularly, held a strategic position that could provide Italian fighter pilots and bombers airbases from which enemy airplanes could easily cross the Red Sea and launch an attack on the Allied forces located in Northwest Africa. Stark held a key position as a propagandist working to convince the Arabs to either support the Allies or to remain neutral (245). On February 1940, British Intelligence leaders sent Stark to the capital city of Sana’a, Yemen, on the grounds that she was traveling for her health. The Yemeni people, who were used to seeing European missionaries in their schools and hospitals, accepted her as a tourist because she looked like their stereotype of a

schoolteacher (Izzard 141). Her job was to counter the propaganda provided to the Yemeni people by the Italian government under Mussolini's control. In order to persuade the Arabs to view the Allies with respect, Stark carried a hidden movie projector with three films, each included newsreels of British warships, booming artillery, and fighter planes taking off from airfields (Geniesse 250-51). At first, Stark secretly played the movies for groups of women. As word spread, Stark gained opportunities to show the films to members of the court, and eventually to the leading imam in control of the country. When the Yemeni leaders chose to stay neutral during WWII, the British government, who attributed this success to Stark's innovative plan, adopted her policy of sending propaganda films with traveling British officials (253). In addition to showing films while in Yemen, Stark gathered information and sent reports to Aden about arsenals, garrisons, armaments, and the number of troops in the Yemeni army (252). Stark's success in Sana'a greatly enhanced her reputation among Orientalists; Izzard writes, "The skill and panache with which she [Stark] brought off this adventure redounded greatly to her credit in official circles on her return to Aden, and enhanced her reputation in the world of political warfare" (143). Stark's ability to befriend and to communicate in Arabic with the Other led to the success of this mission, and she continued her work in propaganda throughout the war in the Middle East.

Next, Stark moved into Egypt in order to build national support for the Allies by creating secret societies consisting of liberal Arabs hopeful for economic opportunities in the future Arab world. In Cairo, Stark began a secret society called the Brotherhood of Freedom, an organization to create pro-British sentiments (Geniesse 261). This organization quickly grew in popularity, and British officials requested that Stark begin similar societies in Iraq. When Cornwallis asked for Stark's transfer to Iraq, Lampan sent a telegram to the Foreign Office, July 7, 1941: "Miss

Stark's organization in Egypt cannot be left without guidance ... Miss Stark may spend some time in Baghdad, but I cannot relinquish Miss Stark for permanent attachment to your staff' (288). Nevertheless, Stark remained in Iraq to promote the secret societies in the Arabian Peninsula and by February 1942, Stark worked for the Baghdad embassy as the second secretary (292). Stark's idea became widely popular with Arabs, who hoped to profit in a postwar democratic government. By the end of WWII, the brotherhood known as the Iqwan al-Hurriyah consisted of 40,000 members, one of the many footnotes by historians in the effort of the Allies to stop the Axis ambitions for the East (305). At the end of this work, Stark traveled to the United States to lecture for British officials about the Palestinian issue from the Arab perspective.

Ultimately, Stark ranked as highly as Bell among the Orientalists. Hawley summarizes Stark's lifelong accomplishments by first listing the languages that she spoke fluently: French, Latin, German, Italian, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. She received many awards: a Royal Geographical Society Back Grant in 1933; the Burton Memorial Medal of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1934; the Royal Geographic Society Founders Medal in 1942; the Mazzoti Prize for books of exploration; and an honorary doctorate from Glasgow University. In 1972, Stark was named Dame of the British Empire, and in 1984 she was given the keys to her hometown, Asolo, Italy (326). Orientalism provided the means for Stark to make a name for herself among the politically important British imperialists and a subject for postcolonial criticism.

I have discussed Stark's rise in popularity and her subsequent position as a notable Arabist and Orientalist. In this next section, I will identify instances where Stark expresses criticism of European colonialists and their arrogance toward the Middle Eastern nationals. After this next section, I will summarize other critics' responses to Stark, some of which also addresses

Stark's subversive statements against the European colonials. In the last section, other critics and I will respond to Stark's text, *Gates*. This section will also include instances where Stark's sympathy with the Other results in her criticism of the West.

### **Stark as Critic of the Europeans**

Although Stark hobnobbed with Orientalists and became a renowned Arabist, she rebelled against the British superior attitude and questioned its imperial control over the people of Arabia. Stark concluded that even though the British governed others better than anyone else, it was better not to do good for people who did not want their interference (Geniesse 140). Stark enjoyed friendships with British intelligence officers, who served in the Middle East, and agreed partially with their imperialistic view point. Captain Vyvyan Holt, the Oriental Secretary who filled Gertrude Bell's position after she died, became a close friend to Stark. (Freya wished for a romantic alliance.) He persuaded her to ignore her natural sympathy for the native people in order to adopt his ideas about the need for an imperial British government to protect the routes to India (98). Nevertheless, Stark often disagreed with the arrogance that she recognized in the British imperial view.

Many European diplomats and their wives, who lived in Arabia before WWII, marginalized Stark. Geniesse describes Stark as often depressed by their cold attitude toward her: "It makes me feel like a kind of pariah from my own kind, and awfully disgusted, because after all I really have done nothing ... beyond wishing to talk as much Arabic as I can, and regretting that we [the British] can't be less superior and more polite" (100-01). Possibly, Stark remained too independent and unorthodox in her friendships with the Other to be socially acceptable to the majority of the Orientalists living in the Middle East. In response to their criticism, Stark protested that she remained "as much an imperialist as anybody," but in the same statement

encouraged the British to adopt a more open attitude toward the Other (101). Because she found herself to be an outsider among the Europeans in the Arabian Peninsula, Stark sought acceptance with the people of Arabia.

Due to her British citizenship, Stark found that she had to work to overcome the Arabian people's reluctance to trust her. She expressed frustration over the stereotyping that she faced because she was a European: "What I find trying in a country which you do not understand and where you cannot speak, is that you can never be *yourself*. You are English, or Christian, or Protestant, or anything but your individual you: and whatever you say or do is fitted to the label and burdened with whatever misdeeds (or good deeds) your predecessors may have committed" (9). Thus, Stark sought ways to break down barriers between herself and her hosts and hostesses whom she visited, one which included her study of the Koran in order to better understand the Arabic people: "The thing about the literature of any country is that it is a sort of climate that one breathes" (102). Additionally, Stark sought to make connections between the Old Testament Bible and the teachings of the Koran. Once she understood that the Arabian women defended their right to wear the veil, which they felt gave them freedom and dignity, Stark came to accept the custom of the Other. This cultural veil, which she personally did not wear, was made less alien to Stark when she connected the practice both to Rebecca in the Bible, who veiled herself when she first met Isaac, and to the teachings of the Apostle Paul, who taught that women should cover their head when praying (103). Because the nationals felt comfortable with Stark, they discussed with her their resentment over the European attitude toward themselves. While she lived in Baghdad in 1921, Stark, who heard many complaints by the Other against the snobbery and arrogance of the British, criticized the Christian Europeans for their hypocrisy, and the European powers for their artificially laid borders that divided the new nation of Iraq (94). Thus,

Stark became a sounding board for the Arab, and she diplomatically spoke for the Other when she criticized the European treatment of the people of the Arabian Peninsula.

In this chapter, I have discussed Stark's position as both Other and Orientalist. The former provided a site from which she could empathize with the Arabian nationals, and the latter gave her power to criticize the European colonials. In this next section, I will summarize other critics' responses to Stark, some who also identify her tendency to support the Other at the expense of the Occident.

### **Other Critics' Responses to Stark**

Hawley analyzes Stark's travel writing that spanned five decades and identifies the common thread throughout her career – her ability to view the world through the eyes of the national. He also points to her willingness to criticize the European: “Stark's greatest gifts as a travel writer were her capacity to empathize with the people she visited and view her own culture from ‘within’ that of another and to offer the harsh criticism that her hosts might have felt but might not have found the words to express” (328). In her early books, Stark resisted the modernization brought to Arabia by the British. In *Baghdad Sketches*, Hawley identifies Stark's typical European's delight in an eastern culture that she mournfully predicts will be changed by its contact with the West: “This cementing of the past served as a principal function of her early writing, a function that she later criticized in others” (329). This theme can be found in *Seen in the Hadhramaut*, published in 1938. Hawley explains that Stark intended for this book of pictures “to keep the remembrance of something very complete, very ancient, very remote, and very beautiful, which may pass for ever from our world” (330-31). In words that Hawley describes as those of a proud Englishwoman, Stark analyzes the culture of the Other:

The civilization they show was never, I believe, a great civilization. Its literature, if it had any, has perished; its art, such as we know of it, was bad; the potteries, the small household objects found among its ruins ancient or medieval or still in use to-day, are unimaginative and clumsy ... And yet one thing has come down to us in strange perfection out of the darkness of the Arabian past – an architecture as lovely, austere, and delicate as ever found expression in the dwelling-houses of men. (331)

Based on her reading of nineteenth-century travel writing, Stark sees little evidence of change in the people of the Hadhramaut in the 1930s. She implies that modernization will come from outside and not from within the culture (Hawley 331). Even though Stark did not question the right for the British Empire to bring about this change through administrative control, she regretted the passing of the old way of life in the Hadhramaut. Hawley explains Stark's criticism of colonial entrepreneurs: "Without using the word *neocolonialism*, she clearly condemned the exploitation of local talent and, more pointedly, the willingness of Western businessmen to leave the scene before the local population had been sufficiently trained to assume responsible positions" (332). For Stark, the British colonialist brought unwanted modernization and then left after profiting from the exchange.

Hawley describes the way that Stark's ambivalent views on women's rights surfaces in *A Winter in Arabia*, published in 1940. On the one hand, Stark amusedly quotes a 'liberal' sayyid, afraid that his modern tendencies may be carrying him too far: "I am not averse to women's education so long as it is not *excessive*. If it is carried on to the age of nine and then stops, I do not think it can do any harm" (Hawley 332). While at the same time she privately laughs at the sayyid's concern about being too progressive, Stark offers her own form of caution in words that



Hawley describes as “conservative essentialist distinctions between the sexes and in a traditionalist feminizing of ‘the Orient’”:

The Orient does not get much done: it looks upon work as a part only ... of its varied existence ... The Occident, busily building, has its eyes rigidly fixed on the future: being and Doing ... There is too little of the compromise now. Too much machinery in the West, too little in the East ... a gap between the active and contemplative; they drift ever more apart. Woman hitherto has inclined to the eastern idea – the stress being laid on what she *is* rather than on what she does; and if we are going to change this, taking for our sole pattern the active energies of men, we are in danger of destroying a principle which contains one-half the ingredients of civilization. Before ceasing to *be*, it is to be hoped that our sex will at least make sure that what it *does* is worth the sacrifice. (332-33)

Thus, Stark treasures the eastern and feminine contemplation rather than the western and masculine production. She takes pleasure in watching the business of others, but would label this trait Arabic instead of feminine. Stark warned the British:

To the Arab, manners are everything; he will forgive any amount of extortion so long as “your speech is good.” To us, since the end of the eighteenth century, they [manners] have become dangerously unimportant ... It is in this heart of our philosophy that we amateurs disagree with your unmitigated expert, whose object is so supremely important that he cannot count, or at any rate notice, the jostling and hurting of others ... However important the appointment, one does not run over human bodies to catch one’s trains. If this were merely individual it would

not matter, but it appears as the very core of difficulty in present dealings with the East, now flooded with experts, of commerce, of science, or oil. (333)

Clearly, Stark values the Arabic emphasis on relationships over the British focus on business.

Ruthven, godson to Stark, explores the inconsistency between Stark's acceptance of British Imperialism and Orientalism versus her empathy with the Arabian national. According to Ruthven, Stark's success, which provided her social contact with imperial agents and colonial authorities, led to her compliance with the colonial agenda (152). On the other hand, Stark's poverty helped her identify with the ordinary people in Arabia. In her writing, Stark openly despised the snobbery and racism that kept the British officials from socializing with the Iraqis (152). In *Baghdad Sketches*, Stark writes within a socially acceptable genre for colonial women, but her sketches become a subversive form of writing. She expresses both sympathy with the Other in their resentment of imperial agents and her own frustrations with the British officials, which stemmed from her exclusion from the imperial club (153). In the following sketch, "The Making of a Nationalist," Ruthven describes Stark's words as dangerously political:

The greengrocer came up to me in the street one day and ... told me a wealthy householder, having heard of my interest in the Arabic language, asked permission to call ... After his first visit, he came nearly every afternoon ... Having climbed to my room, smoked a cigarette, drunk a cup of coffee and exchanged news of the day, he would open the [Arabic] paper out upon my table and lead me, with many halts and interruptions, through the Baghdad journalists' flowers of invective, chiefly directed against our British crimes. (153)

For Ruthven, Stark espouses imperialism at a formal level, but her human instincts and art contradict such an advocacy. Ruthven discusses the English Romanticism that influenced Stark's

artistic instincts. Professor Ker used Keats and Wordsworth to define imagination – the act of reasoning which discovers the truth or the reality of what one contemplates (157). In one passage that describes the month of Ramadan in *Baghdad Sketches*, Ruthven describes Stark’s sense of the sublime; the expansiveness, timelessness, heightened intensity, and the mysterious:

It is always strange and like a dream to walk in starlight among the narrower ways ... but now in Ramadan it is fantastic. The whole city rustles and moves and whispers in its labyrinthine alleys like a beehive swarming in the dark. One cannot distinguish faces: the murmuring figures glide by like flowing water, paying scant attention to the anomaly of a European in their midst at this late hour. The extraordinary unity of Islam comes over me. These crowds are moving through all the cities of the East: from Morocco to Afghanistan, from Turkey to India and Java, they walk abroad through the nights of the Fast. In their shadows they are dim and unreal, less clear to the eye of the imagination than the Arabian Merchant who first set them in motion twelve centuries ago. How firmly he pressed his finger into the clay of the world! (157-58)

Ruthven admires Stark’s deceptively transparent language that moves from the actual to the global to the historical. Her measured control reflects the influence of both Virgil and Jane Austen, both of whose writings Ruthven, who toured with Stark in her later years, can testify that she carried in her travels. Stark strove to emulate Austen, whom she admired: “Her [Austen’s] language is so good that you’re not aware of it. A bit like having good clothes: if they’re really well tailored and fit, rather than cheap and outrageous, you don’t pay particular attention to them except to be aware of a sense of excellence” (158). Furthermore, Ruthven discusses Austen’s influence on Stark’s writing in *A Winter in Arabia*, a book about a trip that Stark took with two

British scientists: Caton Thompson (the archeologist) and Elinor Gardner (the geologist). During this archaeological dig, in which Freya's job was to manage the travel arrangements and the relations with the Arabian people, a major conflict between Stark and Thompson arose over Stark's attitude toward the people of the Hadhramaut (154). This disagreement began with Thompson's criticism over Stark's lack of organization and indifference to timetables. Stark disapproved of Thompson's single-minded pursuit of knowledge, which privileged scientific inquiry over human relations, thus exploiting the people. For Stark, the ultimate investigative goal was less important than interactions with the people. As an aside, Ruthven suggests that Stark's lack of focus on meeting this objective sets her apart from Bell and her male contemporaries (155). In *A Winter in Arabia*, Stark takes a literary jab at Thompson in a delightfully written passage full of Austenian resonance:

Qasim is falling in love.

The sayyids next door lend us their maidservant, a pretty round creature from Rakhiya in the next valley. Her name is Ne'ma (the same name as Naomi) and her face is like a very cheerful diminutive moon. Her voice has a lilt in it, a petulant little note of song ... Ne'ma has a husband somewhere or other, but I think he is going to divorce her, and anyway he does not count; and her pretty sing-song voice goes on in the shed with Qasim long after the rooms are swept. She is not allowed in the Archaeologist's room, which is locked with a European key, but she tidies Alinur upstairs, and Qasim usually helps her, and the whole proceeding takes a very long time. (qtd. in Ruthven 158-59)

Ruthven compares "Qasim is falling in love," to Austen's, "Harriet Smith was the natural daughter of somebody," and "Mr. Collins was not a sensible man." All three deceptively simple

statements convey both affection and an ironic distancing. (Whereas one, with surprised delight at his revelatory comparison, can agree with both Ruthven's recognition of the influence of Austen's style as well as her playful and ironic distancing upon Stark's passage, one questions whether either Austen or Stark meant for the reader to feel affection for Mr. Collins or Qasim. More accurately, both authors set the antagonists up for ridicule, Austen for Collins and Stark for Thompson. In both instances, Austen and Stark create for the reader the feeling of participating, with sinful enjoyment, in their gossip.) Additionally, in this passage, Ruthven points out Stark's subtle inversion of "the conventions of nomenclature that characterize most western travel-writing where European is named while the native loses his or her distinct identity in an alien human landscape" (159). Stark gives Elinor Gardiner an Arabic sounding name, Alinur, a combination of two widely used Muslim names, which when pronounced together, sound the way that the nationals would have said the geologist's name. Most ironically, "The archaeologist – Gertrude Caton Thompson – is never named in the book, because 'like her room, she remains locked with a 'European key ... incapable of dissolving the barriers of race and acknowledging the humanity that she shares with Ne'ma and Qasim'" (159). Stark within this apparently simple passage, accomplishes two critiques: one against her enemy, Thompson; and the other against the western Orientalists guilty of the Eurocentric "Othering" of the Arab. Ruthven suggests that "anticipating Said's critique by four decades, Stark turns his argument on its head. Her Austenesque critique of the Archaeologist is located within the fabled 'Orient' itself" (161). Thus, Stark's ironically "Others" the Orientalist.

Another critic, En-Nehas, labels Stark's passion for the exotic as her motivation to explore the Arabian Peninsula. He proposes that Stark traveled to the Arabian Peninsula in order to learn, investigate, and understand the culture and the tribal system of the "exotic Orient" as

portrayed by adventuresses like Lady Anne Blunt and Gertrude Lowthian Bell (47). Throughout her second book, *The Valleys of the Assassins*, published in 1934, Stark searches for a valid reason for exploring the land in present-day Iran. In the Preface, she states that one important reason she travels into strange and different lands is to escape the “frustrations of a mundane reality” (48). Despite the hardship caused by her failing health, Stark revels in the adventure and takes pleasure in overcoming resistance: “She succeeds in ‘taming’ her subjects by exploring and containing their whims, playing on their gullibility; or simply by appreciating their paradoxes, enjoying the flavor of their tea, sharing their esoteric traditions, finding shelter in their tents, or – if all else fails – paying them off” (49). Additionally, Stark avoids offending her hosts and hostesses because she refuses to make judgments and chooses, instead, to satirize western morality and its ethical system. As she travels, Stark ignores any restrictions placed upon her that would spoil her fun, the ultimate reason for her travel (49). The nationals admire her ability to fit in, especially because of her position as a foreign woman: “Her hosts interpret this cultural immersion as an act of integration and rapprochement between two diametrically opposed cultures, for which Stark ultimately serves as a link. She is, therefore, nearly always welcomed by the communities she visits” (49-50). When comparing her narrative of hardships and character transformation to fictional stories, En-Nehas recognizes the elements of departure, trial, and return in the heroic adventure. For Stark, the trial becomes crucial to the journey because she responds with perseverance to the end, which brings feelings of both relief and fulfillment. En-Nehas also points to how Stark relies extensively, like all exploratory travel writers, on themes of Otherness, along with the practice of ascribing to the Other features that are exotic, grotesque, or different (52). Unlike the traditionally Eurocentric writer, however, Stark does not resort to one standard for judging the Other. Instead, she uses a myriad of impressions: “Stark cautiously

avoids fantasizing and romanticizing. And even when she does so she does not do it excessively, or in a way that makes her narrative fall from the sublime to the ridiculous. There are instances in which she uses humour, a frequently used device in the Literature of Travel to achieve a satirical effect, but without being condescending” (53). Stark does not idealize the Persian people but portrays both their weaknesses and strengths, often in the form of paradoxes. Additionally, she frequently questions the idea of European cultural superiority, and she predicts that the western civilization will weaken and disintegrate because of its emphasis on individualism and materialism (54). When Stark is arrested on suspicion of espionage, she resorts to an eastern response as opposed to western arrogance: “She placates her interrogator by praising Pusht-i-kuh ... describing it as a safe and wonderful place while having previously branded it as a stronghold of pillage and violence. This acquired manner can be considered as either an act of assimilation, in that she has taken her cue from the natives’ behavioral pattern or a willingness to integrate into this society” (En-Nehas 56). Despite Stark’s enjoyment of the exotic, she experienced moments of solitude, introversion, and alienation. These times became opportunities for her to meditate on the meaning of her existence, which in turn enabled Stark “to take the reader beyond the mundane world of a casual traveler to a transcendental or ethereal world imbued with an absorbing fascination for the East and its glammers” (57). In the process of seeking the mysterious and unusual, Stark, too, became exotic.

Both Geniesse and Ruthven praise Stark’s accomplishments and her attempts to treat the people she wrote about fairly. Geniesse describes Stark as “Willful, determined, charismatic, and exploitive, she ... stood against the ignorance that she knew existed equally in East and West. Her writing documented nearly a century of extraordinary change in the Islamic world, and while she had not been able to affect British policy in a direct way, she had kept the flag aloft for

decency, civility, and compassionate understanding” (161-62). Ruthven believes that in the best of her books, Stark established conventions that influence today’s successful travel writers:

“Writers ... more interested in learning from the people and countries they visit than displaying their (perhaps unconscious) attitudes of social or intellectual superiority ” (163). One wonders if postcolonial criticism has ignored the writing of Stark because she does not fit Said’s archetypical Orientalist.

In this chapter, I have portrayed Stark as both an Orientalist and a marginalized Other who speaks against European arrogance. In this last section, I join other critics in a close reading of *Gates* to explore the different narrative voices used by Stark, which reflect instances of adherence to Orientalism, criticism of the European, respect for the Arabian, representation of the Other, and recognition of sameness rather than otherness.

### **The Southern Gates of Arabia**

In *Gates*, published in 1936, Freya Stark describes her travel into the Hadhramaut, one hundred miles from the nearest Europeans. She followed the incense road where, in ancient times, the frankincense and myrrh trade had made the people of the area rich for centuries. With the rise of Christianity and Islam, which eliminated the polytheism that required the burning of the incense as a sacrifice of worship to many gods, the region had slipped into obscurity and poverty. In *Gates*, Stark begins her journey from Aden, the port city on the Indian Ocean controlled by the British, with the goals of traveling the road to the capitals of four ancient empires in an attempt to reach Shabwa, sixty miles west of Shibam, or to explore the area around Shabwa and to return by way of the ancient port of Cana. Even though Stark writes that *Gates* is mainly a record of her failure to meet these goals because of her declining health due to the measles which she contracted on the journey, she successfully recreates for her readers an in-



depth and artistic account of her meetings with many peoples of the Hadhramaut area and provides rich descriptions of the places she visited. Stark ends the book with flair by recounting the story of her dramatic rescue by the Royal Air Force in which a bomber airlifted her from the ancient city of Shibam in order to rush her to the British hospital in Aden to save her life. Even before the publication of *Gates*, the story of this rescue helped to establish Stark as a worldwide celebrity – she received a standing ovation from passengers and the crew as she was carried on a stretcher to board the *USS Orontes* on the way to her home in Italy. Stark also enjoyed great acclaim throughout the western world as the news of her near escape from death raised both praise over her daring and criticism over whether the tax dollars of the British Kingdom rightly paid for her evacuation. In *Gates*, Stark focuses on her cultural interactions with the people she met along the way.

Hout reads *Gates* to explore these cultural interactions in order to identify instances of Stark's cultural self-criticism as well as her consciousness as the traveling subject situated within the race-class-gender nexus. Hout, who believes postcolonial critics have marginalized Stark, finds this lack of attention puzzling when she considers that travel literature in the 1930s became the appropriate genre for writers who questioned traditional beliefs and looked for new allegiances (58). Therefore, a paradox exists between critical disinterest in Stark, and her productive writing career which resulted in her fully-documented life. One possibility for the scholarly inattention may be because of Stark's flamboyance, charm, and success as a public figure (57), while another reason may rest in the fact that both Stark's widespread appeal across the political spectrum and her interdisciplinary approach make her writing hard to classify. Hout also considers two other possible explanations for Stark's "double invisibility" – male historians, who remain interested in male actors/achievers; and feminist critics, who select "sympathetic"

women travelers to analyze (56). In the close reading of *Gates*, Hout begins to fill in the gap for this scholarly disregard of Stark, who appears to follow the conventions set in place by earlier women travel writers but, in actuality, whose language and rhetoric often hide criticism of the Western society. Regardless of her marginalization by the critics, the writing of Stark, which weaves an interesting discourse that spans the variables of race, class, and gender, deserves a second look by the scholars.

In *Gates*, Stark expresses criticism against European arrogance, and she uses three narrative voices: the third-person that objectively reports observations with statements that register as an Orientalist response; the first-person that establishes credibility, reflects respect and liking for the Eastern Other; and the third voice that belongs to the Other for whom she speaks. Nonetheless, throughout her narrative Stark's writings exhibit an awareness of sameness more than otherness when comparing the West and the East.

In *Gates*, Hout identifies instances where Stark makes hidden or implicit statements that reflect cultural self-criticism. Stark, unlike her male contemporaries who flee from European civilization to seek a utopian space in the Middle East, escapes into her own travel writings, which often hide her non-conformist skepticism of Western ideology (58). Because her audience comprises other Orientalists, Stark scatters criticisms guardedly and sparingly throughout her narrative. While Stark adheres to the trappings of the canon of travel literature, her reticence surfaces within the Preface in *Gates* (60). When reading her opening statements literally, one recognizes that Stark gives the traditional woman travel writer's denial that her book has scientific or literary merit, and she admits that her physical weakness, namely her illness, causes her to fail in reaching her goal. Therefore, Stark concludes that since she did not reach Shabwa, *Gates* simply becomes her description of the strangeness of the Valleys of the Hadhramaut that

lead to Shabwa – “even if it is mostly a record of failure” (Stark 8). Nonetheless, even though Stark expresses humility and disappointment over her frailty, the liveliness of her introduction exudes confidence in her ability to tell a good story about her travel. Additionally, Hout explains that Stark’s emphasis on her female vulnerability “actually draws attention to two traditionally male traits that she possesses: sincerity and high, albeit frustrated, ambition” (61). Altogether, Stark’s words exude feminine modesty but hint at a sardonic tone.

In *Gates*, Stark expresses her criticism of European arrogance with subtlety. While she visited a school of boys in Makalla, Stark listened with misgiving to the assembled class sing “God Save the King” in both English and in Arabic. She wondered “if this might not be misinterpreted as one of these subtle British arts of propaganda,” but later learned that the people of the town were proud of the accomplishment and that the song had no territorial implications (Stark 46-47). Stark’s concern shows her feelings of unease – even guilt – over the British colonialism that sought to expand its influence and control into Southern Arabia. She “came away from these oases of western influence a little sadly, feeling as some indifferent lover may feel who sees the poverty of his own second-rate sentiments being taken for pure gold and can do nothing about it” (47). Later, when visiting the Ba Surras’ decorative and dignified houses, Stark expressed dismay that they planned to replace beautifully carved old doors with the European mass-produced “brown-varnished impostures just ordered from the West ... only the absence of transport keeps our hygienic vulgarity at bay” (118). These sentiments convey more than a desire to keep the Hadhramaut untouched by the West. Stark, who repeatedly expressed her admiration for the eastern architecture, grieves over the replacement of skilled handcrafted doors for western manufactured ones. In another instance, Stark criticizes other Orientalist writers: “I always think that the compliments we often pay the East are in rather doubtful taste, when we praise only what

they have copied from ourselves!” (196). Stark carefully disperses these comments that show her reservations about the Orientalist belief in a superior Western culture when compared to an Eastern one.

Regardless of her criticism of the European culture, Stark also gives Orientalist statements in *Gates*. Geniesse describes Stark as an Englishwoman, despite her years spent in Italy, who believed in the British Empire (6). In the Preface, Stark dedicates her book to the Royal Air Force and acknowledges colonial officers, Arab dignitaries, and the Royal Geographical Society. At the beginning of each chapter, Stark pays tribute, in the form of citations, to male authors and works written from classical to modern times, including six selections of Arabic verse. Additionally, Stark mentions many travelers throughout her book, and two ancients, Herodotus and Pliny, as well as two Arab historians, Hamdani, and Yaqut, who provide authoritative sources (Hout 60). Stark writes to a readership also immersed in Orientalist reading, and she follows the conventions that make her acceptable to a British Imperialistic audience.

Stark often uses a third-person narrative voice in *Gates* that objectively reports observations with statements that sometimes register as an Orientalist response. Before she begins her journey into the interior of the Hadhramaut, Stark describes a nighttime Makalla as she looks from the deck of the boat over the harbor: “Below, in deep shadow, lights glimmered here and there; not the open welcoming lights of our cities, but furtive things, half hidden, one could see, by shutters and high walls; their diversity gave the city its mystery” (25). The land of Arabia looks alien and unapproachable in its darkness, and even though Stark enjoys the idea of decoding its mystery, at this moment in her journey, she is afraid of the unknown. Stark describes two gardeners who follow her into the Sultan’s garden “like ghosts still plying their

prehistoric craft, which the earliest dwellers in this land must have practiced probably in the exact same way” (42). Not only does Stark focus on the glorious unchanging past, but she also homogenizes the gardeners into one type, the invisible servant of the East who remains immutable through all the ages. When she prepared to leave for the coast for the interior of the Hadhramaut, Stark describes her escort: “Two wild little men of some earlier world than ours had been brought to me the day before as guides and carriers. They looked caged, like creatures that might beat themselves against the furniture to get out” (52). Stark focuses on the exotic, the strange, and the difference between the Occident and the Other: the civilized Subject of the modern world versus the animal-like ancients who must flee the room full of western furniture. In a similar vein but with a “present-tense” statement, Stark philosophizes: “The world being so vast, it is very remarkable, and constantly surprises me, that the human brain should be vast enough to comprehend it: and perhaps our most important occupation is that of thinking. The beduin, living as unconsciously almost as the stones, belong to inarticulate Nature, but we in our uncomfortable awareness, have the future on our hands (101). Stark makes the generalization and comparison between the literate western intellectual who understands the world and controls the future, versus the silent eastern Other who does not think about his surroundings and who belongs to the unchanging prehistoric past.

Stark’s contradictory practice of “othering” the Arab while at the same time criticizing the European creates a paradox for the postcolonial critic. Thus, Hout reads *Gates* to expose “both Stark’s complicity with and her resistance to the British imperialist enterprise” (59). Hout, supports the argument that women’s gendered and differential access to sites in the imperial-powered system resulted in a more flexible view of the colonized Other than indicated in Said’s theory of Orientalism. Therefore, in her reading of Stark’s descriptions, Hout seeks to illuminate

the points at which articulations of gender and nationalist identities meet, which bring about small but important fissures in the institution of Orientalism (59). For instance, when Stark visits Tarim, a stronghold of Islam with 360 mosques, she expresses frustration over not being allowed to enter the school of Robat because she is a woman. At this point in her narrative, Hout proposes that Stark finds herself at the intersection of two discourses, colonialism and feminism: “As a fair critic of both East and West” Stark volunteers to contradict a German travel writer who has made false statements in his book about the school, the religious center of the town (60). Because she is a woman and in spite of Stark’s ability to contradict this bad report in her own travel writing, the religious conservative sayyids refuse to allow her to visit the school. Hout explains, “The tenuous relationship between Orientalist and feminist allegiances is literalised when, due to her ‘inferior sex’, she is not allowed to ‘overstep [this] threshold of learning. Had the ‘uncompromising’ religious party in charge ... permitted her to enter the premises, she would have exploded Helfritz’s Orientalist stereotypes literally from within” (62). This situation occurs during Stark’s stay in the town with the al-Kaf Sayyids, who are broadminded and progressive locals who must deal with the sayyids, who are “narrow and uncompromising religious party” (Stark 210). Thus, Stark finds herself accepted among the liberals in the town, but rejected by the narrow-minded sayyids, who carefully hold their white thobes against their body to prevent accidental contact with her garments as they pass her in the narrow streets. Hout points out that when Stark names her gender “the impediment on her way to ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’, she raises a finger to accuse the patriarchal, religious authorities of discriminating against inquisitive women, European or otherwise” (62). When Stark draws the line between the progressive and reactionary forces within the town, Hout claims Stark “draws a parallel one between open-minded and insular currents among Westerners at large and orientalists in particular ... the

traditional, binary logic separating the ‘enlightened’ West from the ‘backward’ East collapses in favour of perceiving ideological and attitudinal boundaries as lying within as opposed to across national and racial entities” (62-63). For Stark, the ideological stand to support becomes the liberal and open-minded one versus the conservative and narrow-minded one, a universal divide. Hout concludes from her reading that the textual indeterminacy in *Gates* undercuts ideologically fixed statements and reveals that definitions of *Orientalism* should be relational and flexible (70). Perhaps the postcolonial critic neglects Stark because she does not fit the Orientalist mold.

In *Gates*, Stark uses the first-person narrative that establishes credibility, and reflects respect and liking for the Eastern Other. On the last day of Stark’s stay at Tarim, she was invited to a club and was the subject of a speech “to welcome me as the first woman to travel by myself from Europe to the Hadhramaut, for the love of its learning alone ... I was touched by the well-chosen kindness of the words, but too appalled to think of anything except the fact that I myself would have to speak next ... I rose and murdered the Arabic language as shortly as I could” (Stark 160). While Stark enjoys and appreciates the honor afforded her, she humbly realizes that her speech is inadequate because of her limited knowledge. Unlike Said’s Orientalist who seeks knowledge to gain power, Stark wants to learn from the locals for two reasons: to improve her own skills and to enjoy knowing about Arabia. Later, Stark visits with the Sultan, his brother, and three Sayyids of the Al-Kaf family “whose kindness had brought me so far. They sat in a half circle, and talked with easy hospitality, which never let one imagine that it may be tiresome to entertain all European strangers who appear” (192). Stark expresses her gratefulness and liking for her hosts, while at the same time recognizing that they would never make her feel unwelcome because of their graciousness. As Stark lays seriously ill in the home of one of the wealthy locals, a beduin comes to see her. When Stark told him that she could not come with

them to Qatn, he gave her his blessing: “Allah heal you; Allah restore you and bestow good upon you. No good comes but from Allah, may he be praised and exalted” (272). As she thought about the comfort he brought she wrote, “The magic of Arabia, which so many have felt, is due perhaps less to the sun-wrinkled arid land itself than to the innate peculiar nobility and charm of its people” (273). Stark’s reference to the national as peculiar exhibits an Orientalist focus on “otherness,” but nevertheless, her love of the people comes through in this sentiment.

Stark, who uses the third-person narrative voice that belongs to the Other for whom she speaks, interestingly reverses the Orientalist trope by having the Other speak for her. Hout identifies instances when Stark inverts the formulaic marketing of self in women’s travel writing by inserting this “woman traveling alone” reference into indigenous documents which confirm her status as the first “woman of Western race” to visit the Hadhramaut unattended (61). During a visit to a school in Huraidha, in a ceremony to honor Stark, a young student read a Qasida: “Her spirit and firm courage are shown to us inasmuch as she is the first woman to visit the province of Hadhramaut alone, without any companion of her own sex or associate of her people, and ... she travels entirely by herself. We are not told by history that since Hadhramaut became a land any woman of Western race has come to it in this manner” (Stark 246). At the conclusion of the ceremony, the teacher declared a half day school holiday to celebrate the special occasion. Hout finds another conversation with a young Javanese man in which Stark inserts her opinion of institutionalized knowledge (61). Stark humorously speaks for the Javanese, who wants to exhibit his “knowledge of European ways,” and asks her to show her non-existent diplomas: “Diplomas ... are whatever Ferangi has who studies – and do you not study history?” To which, Stark replies, “They are not talismans ... One does not have to carry them about. They are merely bits of paper to show that you have lived in a university.” In



response to this, the young man replies, “I have studied the English language ... for six weeks; and the word university I have never heard” (Stark 159). These instances, in which Stark uses the voice of the Other to criticize the Western culture, provide her a way to speak without offending Orientalist supporters in Britain. Hout explains, “To ensure her acceptance as a female itinerant generalist, not so much by the locals as by the patriarchal social order back home, her criticism of the latter has to be offered piecemeal and further deflected by carefully chosen types of interlocutors. But unlike diplomas, these ‘bits’ of critique can be pieced together and are meaningful” (61). Stark does not present the Other who cannot speak, but creates for herself a third voice with which she can safely express her own opinions.

In *Gates*, Stark’s writings exhibit an awareness of sameness more than otherness when comparing the West and the East. Hout recognizes this characteristic when she argues that critics need to scrutinize Stark’s works: “Of paramount significance is her relentless effort in her travel literature to underscore essential similarities despite obvious differences between European and non-European peoples ... [Stark’s] systematic attempt to understand foreign cultures and find some kind of universal unity and peace across national and religious borders remains meaningful” (56). For Hout, this sameness coincides with exoticism that often blurs the Orientalist lines between the Self and the Other. Stark, in the first chapter of *Gates*, travels by boat to Yemen where she encounters an Arabic aunt, hidden in a stateroom. When the aunt meets Stark, she welcomes her “presence as that of a sister” and the exoticism of this nameless woman “is slowly diluted, allowing for a geographically and semantically extended definition of ‘female oppression.’ The specificity of this exotic practice and locale transforms into a universal condition, ‘differing here and there [only] in degree’” (64). This occurs when Stark philosophizes about the similarities between the restrictive life of the Arabic aunt and the

western woman: “Mrs. X, afraid to step for one moment out of her own circle, which comprises less than the tenth of a millionth part of the fascinating population of our globe, really acts on the very same principle as the Arabian aunt alone in her dark and stuffy cabin” (Stark 14). Thus, Stark recognizes the strictures placed upon women that blur cultural and political boundaries.

During her visits in the towns and cities, Stark slept in the harems, which allowed her to come to an understanding of the similarities among all women, even the Arabic female, the most exotic Other for the Western reader . The Arabic people treated European women as a third sex, a practice which allowed Stark to socialize with the men, but to sleep among the ladies (Geniesse 100). Hout identifies the exotic nature of the harem because of “the outdated mode of existence of its inhabitants” which provides Stark the opportunity to offer a “critique of patriarchal dominance” (64). Stark expresses her sympathy for the women’s illiteracy and their abandonment by husbands, who work and live abroad for years with other wives. Hout sees in Stark’s writing her recognition of woman’s common history of victimization, as well as the sameness based on biological unity (64). Stark moves from the exotic to the universal in her description of a wedding that she attends: “... a dense female parterre, glittering and gorgeous ... The dresses were brocade or tinsel, stiff with embroidered silver breastplates and necklaces in rows; and heavy anklets, bracelets and girdles, and five or six ear-rings in each ear ... a terrifying, uncompromising embodiment of woman, primeval, and unchanging (48). Stark feels isolated and uncomfortable with the strangeness that surrounds her during this celebration, so she leaves the wedding feeling oppressed “with a mystery so ancient and fundamental, so far more tenacious in its dim, universal roots than the transitory efforts of that incurably educational creature, Man (49). When Stark philosophizes about the Other, she often moves from difference (the exotic) to the sameness (the universal) between the Eastern and the Western man (and woman).

Ben Cockling, who provides a concise analysis of *Gates*, which touches on points already covered in this section, reads Stark's book to examine the Arabist tradition at a point of transition. Due to the modernization of the Arabian Peninsula at the end of WWII and the resulting end to British colonization, *Gates* is one of the last of its kind (2). Even though she adhered to the representational motifs of the Arabist tradition (desert landscape and Bedouin people), Stark casts them differently and attempts to authenticate the Bedouin by giving them a voice. Additionally, both the classification and objectivity of official Orientalism make Stark uneasy (4). A change occurs in her narrative and Stark progresses from a position of relative detachment in the beginning of the book to greater assimilation toward the end of the narrative: at the beginning Stark explores the city of Makalla from the safety of the car, but as her journey progresses, her interaction and integration with the people increases. The later chapters of *Gates* are important in revealing social mores and the position of women (6). Additionally, these later chapters "signal a break with the representational registers of the Arabist tradition ... the impact of modernity on Arabia as a means of introducing a disconnection with the past ... the loss of the undiscovered: the object of her journey, Shabwa, has now – like much of Arabia been discovered by another traveler" (9). As she is airlifted out from the Hadhramaut, Stark realizes that the era of exploration has come to an end – her exit by jet from the desert region signals that the area is not so remote after all.

In this chapter, I have proposed that Stark does not fit the archetypal Orientalist label. As a marginalized citizen of the British Empire, she never fit in with other colonists because of her gender, class, and unconventional upbringing in Italy. She has also, consequently, been ignored by literary history. With success, Stark, who became more imperialistic on the surface, continued to look for commonalities between herself and the Other, thus valuing her relationships with

individuals and avoiding stereotyping. Therefore Stark represents a transitional figure who bridges the gap to the modern-day travel writer.

## Chapter Four

## E. S. Drower: The Transparent Scientist

The paths of Bell and Stark meet with E. S. Drower, who knew both of them personally. Drower's contact with Gertrude Bell can be inferred from the fact that both lived in Baghdad and socialized within a small British diplomatic circle in the 1920s. Drower's husband, Sir Edwin Mortimer Drower, who under the British Mandate in Iraq acted as a legal adviser to the Ministry of Justice, must have had professional contact with Bell, who acted as an advisor to both King Faisal and to Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner in Iraq. Additional evidence points to their having known each other in the fact that both Drower and Bell served as honorary members of the Women's Awakening Club, the first Iraqi women's organization founded in November of 1923 (Efrati 451). Neither Bell nor Drower mentions the other, but this can be explained by Bell's private letters sent home, which indicate her impatience with the British wives of the Diplomatic Corps.

Drower and Stark, on the other hand, became life-long friends because they shared a passionate interest in the indigenous people of the Middle East. Their mutual affection for the nationals (uncommon among the colonial wives), along with their ability to speak Arabic fluently (Drower better than Stark) provided both women companionship in their visits with the locals (Geniesse 96). By the time the two met, Drower was already documenting the religious beliefs and rites of several obscure sects, including the Yezidi and the Mandaeans. Geniesse reports that Drower's husband, who respected her scholarly leanings, was the only British husband to allow his wife to attend a falcon hunt with Stark. This occasion caused much irritation among the British because Stark had accepted the invitation from Sheikh Ajil al Yawer of the Shammar tribe. These Bedouin, who had dominated the Syrian Desert for centuries,

continued to resist the efforts of the British to stop their plundering of the trade routes. The Colonial Office had a hard enough time trying to “enjoin this independent nomad to obey British law without having British ladies stirring up trouble by nonsanctioned visits” (100). Drower and Stark went to the falcon hunt, despite the censure of the British community, and were both “deeply moved by the peace and grave dignity of nomadic life. The nomad treated the British women as if they were a third sex, welcoming them into the main tent ... to lounge against silken cushions in the company of keen-eyed tribal chieftains, then sent them back to the women’s tent to sleep among the ladies of the tribe” (100). Drower and Stark returned home and told the Brits “rich tales of ancient customs witnessed firsthand in the desert” (100). The friendship between the two continued by mail when Stark left Baghdad. Drower and Stark also had in common a successful writing career centered in their interactions with the people of the Middle East, but whereas Stark predominantly published travel writing, Drower moved to more scholarly works such as ethnography and translations involving minority religious sects located in Iraq.

Drower mainly wrote about and translated texts of the Mandaeans, or Muslim Subbas, who can be traced back to Jordan and Palestine. This Gnostic cult that migrated during the early Christian times to the rivers and marshes of southern Iraq and southwestern Iran, came under the rulers of Islam from the seventh century on (Buckley, *Ancient* 3). The Mandaeans, a minority group in Arabia, remained segregated and maintained their religious practices over the centuries, which Drower documents in her ethnography, *Mandaeans*.

In this paper, I apply postcolonial theory to the writings of Drower, which continue to interest today’s students of anthropology and religion. Even though literary analyses of Drower are limited, one finds that reading Drower through both traditional literary criticisms lenses and through others that, by contrast, question tenets of Orientalism, yields surprisingly fruitful

results, not the least of which is using the writings of Drower to serve as a real-world test case for Said's assumptions. In this process, I will use the ideas of Said, Spivak, Brettell, Foucault, and Herbert to critique Drower's scholarship. I will then answer their analysis by referring to Lowe, Melman, al-'Azm, Horodecka, and Venkovits who question basic principles of Orientalism. I will also include a few scholarly comments from those who specifically address the writings of Drower as I transition to my own close-reading of *Mandaeans*. I choose to critique Drower because her acceptance into a Middle-Eastern culture group appears to be more long-lasting and in-depth than the social interactions enjoyed by Bell and Stark. The fact that the Mandaean priests allowed Drower to observe secret rituals closed to women of their sect raises the question of how Drower, an outsider by race, gender, and religion, was allowed inside the Manda Hut, the place of their most secret religious worship. In exploring Drower's writing, I hope to find whether Orientalism actually factors into the relationship between Drower, the scientist, and Mandaeans, the Other.

In her scholarly publications, Drower acts as a transparent reporter. When she writes, Drower uses three narrative voices: a frequent third-person that objectively reports her observations and gives a few "present-tense" statements that register as an Orientalist response; a rare first-person that establishes credibility, reflects respect and liking for Mandaeans; and an occasional third voice that belongs to the Mandaeans for whom Drower speaks. Drower's work, thus presents a tension between representing the Mandaean as the Other who cannot speak for himself progressing through increasing familiarity from otherness towards sameness.

This chapter is divided into four sections: the first will include Drower's biographical and publication history in order to establish the platform on which Drower represents the Mandaean through a sympathetic lens. In the next section, I will apply Said's theory of Orientalism to

Drower. The third section will contain a summary of literary criticism that addresses both Said's theory and others that pertain to ethnography. At the end of this third section and in the last section, I will include comments given by scholars who knew Drower that shed light on her work and relationship with the Mandaeans. In the last section I will also critique Drower's text, *Mandaeans*.

### **Biographical and Publication History**

Little biographical information has been published about Drower, so the following information is mostly gathered from various introductory materials in Drower's and Buckley's publications. Drower, who was born an English citizen in 1879 and died in 1972, became interested in marginalized people early in her life when she befriended gypsies in England and began to assemble a dictionary of their language (Buckley, *Mandaeans* ii). At the beginning of her career as an author, Drower produced a series of popular romance novels and travel writing; sixteen books were published under her maiden name, E.S. Stevens. In 1909, Drower published the first of a series of novels set in the Orient, some of which became bestsellers. Travel accounts of countries including Iraq, Syria, and Sudan by Drower also sold well (Buckley, "Elijah" 3). Drower's interest became more scholarly as she began to encounter various religious sects in and around Baghdad, and most of her serious work is published under her married name. Drower turned her skills to ethnography in *Mandaeans*, first published by Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1937, followed by a second edition in 1962 by Brill in Leiden.

Thirty years after Drower's death, Gorgias Press released in 2002 a reprint of the Oxford edition of 1937 with a new introduction written by Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley, a historian of religions specializing in Gnosticism and Mandaism. Buckley continues the work begun by Drower with the Mandaean people and translates religious Subba texts, many of which Drower



purchased in her lifetime and donated to the Oxford Bodleian Library, known as the Drower Collection (Macuch iv). Buckley, who published her own ethnography, *The Mandaean: Ancient Texts and Modern People* also released in 2002, refers to Drower throughout her book. These references highlight Drower as an important figure among the Mandaeans. For instance, in her Preface, Buckley describes a visit to Iran when she met ninety- five year-old, Sheikh Abdullah Khaffagi, head of Mandaeans of Iran. They both spoke of Drower, with whom the sheikh had met many times, and whom Buckley had visited only once when she was ninety-one, the year that Drower passed away (Buckley, *Ancient* ix). Buckley also names Drower and her daughter, Margaret (“Peggy”) Hackforth-Jones in her Acknowledgement pages. Buckley describes Drower as “the tireless worker in the Mandaean field” and thanks Hackforth-Jones, whom she names a friend, for giving her Drower’s scholarly papers and correspondence in 1988 (*Ancient* xii). In the Introduction, Buckley eulogizes Drower who “broke the traditional scholarly mold ... a successful author and an experienced Near Eastern traveler ... an autodidact who dwelled intermittently in Iraq and befriended Mandaeans there during four decades after the First World War ... the primary fieldworker on Mandaeanism ... the chief collector of the Mandaeans’ manuscripts” (*Ancient* 17). Drower’s widespread influence is again noted in the body of Buckley’s book. When Buckley visits the home of Nasser Sobbi, a Mandaean immigrant to the US in 1970, she found Drower’s works in his living room. He told Buckley that when he was a young boy, he once saw Drower when she came to visit Iran (Buckley, *Ancient* 113-14). Interestingly, Drower remains a famous and respected person among the Mandaeans as well as students of anthropology and religion.

Drower, whose fieldwork and translations laid the foundational groundwork for further study by scholars, published eleven additional books after *Mandaeans*, mostly translations of

Mandaean documents or books that further the knowledge of religious practices. From the 1930s through the rest of her career, Drower bought over fifty Mandaean manuscripts (Buckley, *Ancient*154). Buckley explains that without the help of Drower's long-time close friend, Sheikh Negm, who acted as the middleman in the negotiations between Drower and the sellers (mostly in Persia), the Drower Collection in the Bodleian Library would not exist. In exchange for his assistance, Drower gave him and his community money gifts for the rest of her life (Buckley, *Ancient*156-57). At the end of her seventy-five years of work with the Mandaeans, Drower donated these manuscripts that make up the largest collection of Mandaean texts in the Oxford Bodleian Library. Because of her highly respected work, Drower was named an Honorary Fellow for the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London; awarded a Doctor of Letters in Oxford University and Doctor of Divinity in Uppsala University; and appointed a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. *Mandaeans* and other texts by Drower appear in most bibliographies of Mandaean studies.

British scholars, however, did not accept Drower's fieldwork on Jewish life in the Middle East that she witnessed between the two world wars. Buckley explains that Drower had to omit the Jewish section from *Water into Wine, A Study of a Ritual Idiom in the Middle East*, published in 1956, "because her accounts did not fit with ... the West-ward oriented national ideology of Israel after its establishment in 1948" (Buckley *Mandaeans* iii). This material became public in 1989, when Buckley published Drower's "Evergreen Elijah: Ritual Scenes from Jewish Life in the Middle East" in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*. In the introductory material of this publication, Buckley explains that Jewish families, who lived in both Palestine and Iraq, invited Drower to ritual feasts as well as the Passover and the New Year celebrations (3). They answered

Drower's questions and allowed her to document their religious practices, which offended some of the Orthodox Jews. When one critic objected to her research and claimed that she chronicled old Babylonian Jewish rites that were practiced in Drower's day, she responded acerbically, "Yes, that happened to be its value" (5). Buckley adds that the critic revealed his real objection when he stated, "She [Drower] has been poking into Jewish synagogues where strictly speaking she has no right to be present and into Jewish households in search of data" (5). Drower, who believed that the critic's biggest problem was her data concerning the Babylonian Jewish beliefs and practices concerning the transmission of souls, wrote in her letter to Marmorstein, "The reader is obviously *furiosus* that I should have been invited to view these ceremonies, at the same time, he hopes that all these heretical and backward manifestations of differences should have been *by now* eradicated! I am afraid that I laughed joyfully over his unconscious self-revelation" (5). Buckley adds that Drower's offense was that she witnessed and wrote about Oriental forms of Judaism that the critic wished were not practiced. Additionally, the critic also objected to Drower, an outsider, being allowed inside to view the Jewish rites (7). The British authorities who forced Drower to omit her eye-witness accounts provide an example of how Orientalists censored her scientific data.

Despite this instance of Orientalists working against Drower, in the next section, I will take the role of Said to argue that she contributes to Orientalism. Even though Drower does not fit the stereotypical Orientalist that Said portrays, I will take his position in critiquing her. The following reading, therefore, views Drower through the traditional literary criticism lens of the postcolonialist.

### **Said's Theory of Orientalism and Drower**

Said, who does not refer to Drower specifically, would define her as an *Orientalist*. His strongest piece of evidence would be Drower's position of power over the Other because her husband was a British legal advisor to the Ministry of Justice. Thus, her rank gave Drower the freedom to visit the Mandaeans because she wished to, and the Mandaeans had little say in her making them an object of her interest. Said describes this ability: "Orientalism depends ... on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand ... The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in ... the Orient because he *could be there* ... with very little resistance on the Orient's part" (7). Another of Said's reasons would be that Drower contributed to Orientalism through the purchase of manuscripts, and her translations of the most important of these, which added considerably to the western body of knowledge about the Mandaean religious sect. For Said, the Orientalist contributes new information about the Other to the large corpus of Orientalism (42). Said would also point to the way that Drower visited homes and villages in order to document and photograph various ceremonial rituals. She extensively interviewed laymen and priests in order to represent the religious beliefs of the sect to the Western student. In the Introduction of *Mandaeans*, Drower explains her methodology: "I found it necessary not only to witness cults and ceremonies several times before arriving at a relatively proper estimate or accurate observation, but to learn from priests the ritual used ... Some ceremonies ... I have been unable to witness, but wherever this is the case, I have asked so many persons about the procedure that I hope a ... correct impression has resulted" (xxii). Thus, Drower kept the Oriental in the position of *the object to be studied* (Said 228). Additionally, Said would argue that Drower qualifies as an Orientalist because she was a writer who used her residence in the Orient in order to provide Orientalism with scientific material (157-58).

Furthermore Drower, an early-twentieth century woman with limited educational opportunities, reconstructed herself by publishing her knowledge about the Mandaean gained through both her field study and reading translations of ancient manuscripts. Thus, Drower literally meets Said's criteria that the Occident's identity becomes defined by the Oriental whom she describes (3). If Said had critiqued Drower, he would have defined her as a Subject who, through the hegemony inherent in the British presence in Iraq, contributed to Orientalism by representing the Other, whom she made an object of study.

In this next section, I will use other critics' responses to Said's theory of Orientalism. Again, because of the lack of literary critical approaches to the writings of Drower, I will join the critics to argue their point of view, which varies from those who support Said to those who argue that his is a reductive reading of the Occident. In order to do this, I will use both "Polemic" and *Mandaeans*. As I do this, I will move in order from critics who support Said to those who hold my position, that even though Drower does fit Said's definition of Orientalist, she avoids the condescension implied by his theory of Orientalism. I will end the next section with some information given by scholars who knew Drower personally.

### **Relevant Criticism of Said and Ethnography**

Spivak adds her critique of the transparent intellectuals who *attempt* to report objectively about the Other to Said's analysis of the Orientalists who participate in hegemony in the representation of the Other. Due to the reporters' important role in representing the Other, Spivak, who questions their ability to be objective, believes that the motivation of the transparent intellectuals should be made visible. Because Drower acts as a transparent reporter, one can apply Spivak's points in an analysis of the writings of Drower. Spivak suggests the transparency of the intellectual marks "the surreptitious subject of power and desire" (75). When applying

Spivak's idea, one recognizes that Drower uses transparency to denote her scientific expertise for the purpose of adding credibility to her scholarship. Spivak describes the intellectuals who represent themselves as transparent "for they merely report on the nonrepresented subject and analyze (without analyzing) the workings of ... power and desire" (74). Spivak's description fits the "Polemic" where Drower defines the religious sect: "The Mandaean, or Nasoraean religion is a system with no definite theology. It is, and apparently was from the first, an elaborate system of symbolical rites, meticulously preserved and performed by an hereditary priesthood" (438). Drower, relying both upon her translation of religious texts and extensive interviews with priests and lay people, summarizes what she has witnessed, read, or been told. Spivak suggests that in actuality, an intellectual's "'transparency' marks the place of 'interest'; it is maintained by vehement denegation: 'Now this role of referee, judge, and universal witness is one which I *absolutely refuse* to adopt'" (74-75). Drower's transparency does exist at her point of interest, which is the *difference* – the Mandaeans are unique because they are the last surviving Gnostic religious sect. Drower analyzes and judges based on her extensive research: "These priests, to judge by scrolls reserved for priests only, appear to have concealed gnostic conceptions in symbolical myths, personifying abstract conceptions and so veiling, even in priestly texts, high and metaphysical truths which only the especially endued could perceive if fitted to understand" ("Polemic" 438). In her transparency, Drower does not respond personally to what she describes, but she professionally reports for the sake of adding to the body of knowledge of Orientalism. Spivak moves her discussion from transparency to the intellectual's responsibility to represent the true subalterns (Others), whose identity is both their difference and inability to speak. Spivak qualifies the correct type of intellectual – one who makes visible the motivation behind the representation (80). When looking to Drower, who is the transparent intellectual who represents

the Mandaeans to other scientists, one can discern her motivation, which is her desire to know, to make known, and to be known in the Western world.

Like Said and Spivak, Caroline Brettell believes that the transparent intellectual often presents an evaluative criticism regardless of an attempt to objectivity. Brettell warns that even though the ethnographer tries to write from the native point of view and to eliminate the notion of the contact, he or she often presents a moral judgment (133-34). Drower does present herself as the transparent scientist, and when she expresses her consciousness through authorial intrusion, she carefully chooses her words to avoid giving offense to the Mandaeans. Sometimes Drower judges the individual: “A dove of the *khirrah* species, whole, male, perfect, and especially bred for the purpose, was being held by a small boy outside the consecrated areas, and I found myself obliged to reprimand him for teasing the bird” (*Mandaeans* 134). Even though Drower censures behavior that she considers immoral, Drower corrects a young boy who misbehaves – much as she would a British child who would tease a cat or dog.

Foucault, whose writings about the power-knowledge nexus influenced Said, describes the essence of ethnology and identifies the problem caused by its dependence on representation. One can apply his analysis to the writing of Drower, who represents the Mandaean. Foucault identifies three categories of knowledge in the human sciences: biology, economics, and the study of language. In the category of language “man’s behavior appears as an attempt to say something; his slightest gestures, even their involuntary mechanisms and their failures, have a *meaning*; and everything he arranges around him by way of objects, rites, customs, discourse, all the traces he leaves behind him, constitute a coherent whole and a *system* of signs” (357). When applying Foucault’s observation to Drower, one sees that she identifies both the priestly rites as the defining factor of the Mandaean community, and the ordinance of baptism as the individual

behavior “that purified ... with crowning and anointing ... repeated constantly during life, and dying rites also include immersion, anointing, and crowning” (“Polemic” 448). This system of rites celebrated the sect’s belief-system founded upon purity, light, and eternal life. Next in his discussion of ethnology, Foucault shifts his discussion to the primacy of representation, the problematic basis that makes the field of ethnology possible. The difficulty with representation is its dependency on the process of uncovering and clarifying the Truth about the Other. Thus the product of such scientific findings becomes the *possible* explanation for what is reported (363-64). Drower, in part, bypasses this dependency on representation by relying on the written texts of the Mandaean which explain the sect’s rites and behavior. Through analysis of the texts, Drower can reach conclusions based on evidence from the written words. In the following quote she gives an example of her analysis of manuscripts: “The left side of the *Ginza rba*, which contains, I believe, the oldest part of that book, is chiefly composed of hymns for the departed soul, sixty-two in number ... The left side of the *Ginza rba*, however, includes a prose section of four fragments in which there is propaganda against monasticism and Christianity” (“Polemic” 443). Drower cross-references information with other texts as well as with the priests, whom she interviews. Therefore, Drower, in part, holds to the Foucauldian premise that the ethnographer looks to rituals and customs to define the culture because she puts so much emphasis on these to explain the Mandaean. On the other hand, Drower does not rely heavily upon the Foucauldian representation of the Other, with its accompanying problem of having to explain the *possible* reasons for the rites and customs, because she uses the Mandaean writings and the interviews of the Other to explain the religious practices.

Next, Foucault links this study of other cultures to the European position of dominance. He sees ethnology “situated within the particular relation that the Western *ratio* establishes with



all other cultures; and from that starting-point it avoids the representations that men in any civilization may give themselves of themselves, of their life, of their needs, of the significations laid down in their language” (378). In part, Drower fits this description. She writes to the British, the dominant culture in control of Iraq, and therefore represents the Mandaean, the minority sect as without power. Drower departs from Foucault’s description, however, because in the process of speaking for the Other, she uses the words of the Mandaeans, written in their texts. In “Polemic,” Drower discusses the Mandaean words that express their antagonism toward the Jewish people: “Words especially connected with the Jewish religion such as Adonai (my Lord), Sbaboth, and others, become derisive or used in magic, usually black magic” (441). Drower recognized the importance of careful research when exploring the language of the Other to understand their culture.

Another analyst, Christopher Herbert, joins Said in his discussion of the problematic nature of ethnography and the scientists who seek to represent a people group in its entirety. One can apply his analysis to the ethnographic writing of Drower to test whether she succumbs to the scientists’ tendency to reduce the Mandaean culture to a generalization. Herbert critiques the twentieth-century idea and exploitation of the term, *culture*, and the underlying problem that is the “crux of the definition, the locus, both of its radical modernity and of its inescapable instability, lies in the phrase “complex whole” (4). The weakness of ethnography rests in the idea that a people can be defined by adding together its various social elements in order to make a generalization about the culture (4-5). Drower does this when she describes the Gnostic conceptions found in the religious texts as ideas that the majority of Mandaeans could not grasp, with the exception of a few especially intelligent and knowledgeable priests: “Such truths were high above the heads of the laity, ‘the multitude.’ For these simple believers, the extroverts,

everything must be conveyed in parable” (“Polemic” 438). Drower’s generalization, however, does not come from adding together personal observations to draw her own conclusion, but reflects the information gained from knowledgeable priests.

Herbert also questions that the ethnographer can know what anything means to the individuals within the closed society under study. Because of their limited understanding, the analysts must resort to comparing what is observed to something outside the culture under study (8). When applying Herbert’s question to Drower, one can answer that the society was not closed to her – the proof rests in the manuscripts that she read, the ceremonies she was invited to attend, and the interviews she conducted with many of the Mandaean. In response to Herbert’s second observation, however, one does find Drower making comparisons to outside religious groups. She compares and contrasts the Mandaean or Nasoraean religion to both the Jewish and Christian theologies: “For the Jews the Anointed One was originally an earthly king ... in later Judaism an eschatological and spiritual saviour. For Christians ... a man into whom the Highest had descended, the only son of God. For the Nasoraean the Anointed One was a purely metaphysical conception, the symbol of Man as he first appeared in the Mind ... of the Great Life” (“Polemic” 448). Herbert’s critique of ethnography – both in the idea of adding the elements of a society together in order to come up with a complex whole, and the need for analysts (who cannot understand the society under scrutiny) to make comparisons to outside groups – does partially apply to Drower. Nonetheless, her reports remain credible because her scholarship was grounded in the open sharing of information by the Madaeans themselves.

In contrast to Said’s negative view of the role of translators, Elizabeth Lowe discusses the relatively new field in literary analysis that identifies the positive role of translations in cultural exchanges. Lowe discusses the importance of such interpretations that become the point of

contact between cultures. Because Drower publishes many translations of Mandaean texts, Lowe would classify Drower as one who enables positive cultural interactions between people of this Eastern sect and the others who read the texts. According to Lowe, translation theory is changing cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and comparative literature fields because “transculturation” allows for a dynamic cultural exchange: “a very fluid, and, ineluctably, destabilizing arrangement in which both the dominant and the non-dominant culture find their own senses of identity transformed, along with their attitudes and stereotypes regarding the other” (19). Both Drower and the Mandaean people profited from their cultural interaction. Drower, a marginalized early-twentieth-century woman who did not receive a formal education, was transformed by her rise in prestige with both the Mandaeans and the Orientalists due to her translations and fieldwork. Additionally, the Mandaeans, who befriended Drower and later Buckley, continue to benefit from the scholarly attention which currently provides them with some advocacy, especially helpful with the increase in emigration to the West as conflicts between Iraq and Iran escalate (Buckley, *Ancient* 6). Another of Lowe’s points, that translations can combat stereotyping can be seen in Drower’s translations of Mandaean texts that serve as a point of contact for people who hold different worldviews. In the “Polemic,” Drower refers to a translation of a text that probably dated back to the third century A.D. in which she identifies a variety of religious sects protected from persecution under the early Sasanian kings including Jews, Christians, Manichees, Mandaeans, Buddhists, and Brahmans (446). Discourse between different people groups leads to understanding, if not acceptance of each other’s worldview. In Lowe’s discussion about the rise of translation studies within academia, she identifies problems that need to be addressed by both translation and reception theorists. Critics need to explore how

the meaning of the text can be changed by both the influence of a translator and the interpretation of the reader from another culture.

Additionally, Lowe warns that misunderstandings can occur between people from different cultures because of the difficulty in translating ideas from one language to another. No matter how carefully translated, the reader does not experience the text with the same understanding as when reading the work in its original language (19). In the "Polemic," Drower refers to a misunderstanding caused by a faulty translation. She explains that Professor Burkitt mistakenly identified the Mandaeans as an early Christian Gnostic offshoot of the Nestorian Christians because his research was limited to an inaccurate translation by Lidzbarski, who did not discern that the Mandaeans accused Jesus of falsifying his Messiahship (442-43). Lowe believes that the likelihood of mistakes in interpretation increases with translations of texts that come from very different or little-known cultures (19). With Drower and other translators who developed their understanding of the Mandaean language and culture, translations improved which led to modern theologians changing their views from those held by Burkitt and Lietzmann, who were influenced by the inaccurate interpretation by Lidzbarski (443). In Lowe's opinion, translations work to overcome prejudice and to make available knowledge that enables people to understand others and themselves with a point of view that emphasizes our common experiences but helps us to celebrate our differences (21). As mentioned in the section earlier in this paper on the biographical history of Drower, Buckley interviewed older Mandaeans, one in Iran who remembered Drower with fondness, and another in New York City who remembered her with respect. Drower bridged the gap caused by difference in order to enjoy the Mandaeans, who remained her friends throughout her long life.

Many analysts who consider gender in cultural studies disagree with Said's practice of including women, such as Drower, to be participants in the hegemonic discourse of the West. They claim that women, because of their marginalized status, both identified with and wrote sympathetically of the Other. One such feminist critic, Billie Melman, argues that the nineteenth and early-twentieth century European women, who traveled in the Orient, differed from the European male in their conception of the Other. Melman criticizes theorists of Orientalism who disregard in their analysis of European writers those who have different levels of authority due to factors such as gender and class, and therefore reduce the Western voices to ones of political and cultural authority (5-6). Melman asserts that instead of a unified Eurocentric view of the Middle East proposed by Orientalism, an alternative view emerged during the eighteenth century. Therefore, the estimation of the Other was more complex than Orientalism claims, and this alternative view can be found in the large inventory of writings by women travelers and residents in the Middle East, manuscripts that remain largely ignored (7). Melman's argument applies to Drower, who entered the Orientalist discourse in the 1920s. Drower, a middle-class British woman without the political authority enjoyed by men, overcame the cultural limits placed upon her because of her gender and class. Buckley supports this estimation: "Being no traditional scholar, Drower had to labor diligently in order to establish her credentials among academics" (*Mandaeans* ii). Through her reading of Mandaean texts as well as her interactions with the Other, Drower educated herself and rose in rank among Oriental scholars. Said would reduce Drower to one who enjoyed the fruits of British hegemony, but Melman would claim that Drower participated in the alternative discourse, more complex than just one based on dominance because of her British citizenship.

Melman also argues that postcolonial critics miss the positive exchange that resulted when people from two cultures met, such as the fruitful interaction enjoyed by both Drower and the Mandaean. These analysts reduce the Orientalist discourse to one of hegemony: “It has recently become the fashion to look at travel as a form of domination. The occidental traveller’s gaze ... has been made an emblem of the unequal relations between Europe and the Orient. So much so that another aspect of exploration is forgotten: the comparison between self and ‘other’, between societies and between cultures, that travel makes possible” (9). Such interactions between the West and the East began to diffuse the Eurocentric view of the world as British travelers began to recognize the value of difference that they found in Arabian societies. The resulting broadening of the European worldview led to an understanding and appreciation of diversity (9). Drower, who valued the difference between herself and the Other, experienced the benefits described by Melman. Over time, Drower’s interactions with the Mandaean developed into friendships. As these relationships matured into ones of mutual trust, the Mandaean opened their closed society to allow Drower into their homes and villages. They increasingly explained their religious rites to her, and ultimately allowed her to document and publish their practices for the world to see. The results have been positive for both the modern-day West and the Mandaean, especially in the aftermath of recent instances of political unrest involving both Iraq and Iran. Current estimates of the Mandaean population range between 100,000 to 140,000, with the majority still living in southern Iraq (Buckley, *Mandaean* i). Buckley reports, “The majority of Mandaean now living in emigration left their homelands only very recently... Iranian Mandaean are hoping that their protected status as “People of the Book,” in force during the Shah’s reign but removed when Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, will be reinstated ... Today, an increasing number of Web sites keep Mandaean connected” (*Ancient* 6). Additionally,

Buckley reports a renaissance in Mandaean studies with the first international conference held at Harvard University in 1995 under ARAM, the Society for Syrian and Mesopotamia Studies, and a second convention of ARAM held in 2002 at Oxford University. Thus, because their sect has been “made known” among scholars, the persecution of the Mandaeans would result in an outcry against human rights violations.

In his critique of Said and *Orientalism*, Sadik Jalal al-'Azm addresses two areas that I will apply to my discussion of Drower: Said's essentializing of the Occident and his anti-scientific bias. First, al-'Azm disagrees with both Said's placing the origins of Orientalism back to Homer, Marx, and Gibb, as well as the implication that “the ‘European mind’ ... is inherently bent on distorting all human realities other than its own and for the sake of its own aggrandizement ... this manner of construing the origins of Orientalism simply lends strength to the essentialistic categories of the ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident,’ representing the ineradicable distinction between East and West” (219). In the process of reducing the Occident to one who seeks to dominate and exploit the Other, Said cements the differences between the two. Per al-'Azm, when Said does this, he undermines his own purpose in *Orientalism*, which is to lay the groundwork for answering the question of how the intellectual can study another culture fairly without using ontological categories with implications of superiority and inferiority (219). When applying al-'Azm's assessment of Said to Drower, one sees that Said would automatically consider Drower selfish and condescending simply because of her British citizenship. Thus, Said would practice his own form of essentialism toward Drower. The other issue raised by al-'Azm concerns Said's anti-scientific bias: “This fact comes out most clearly in his [Said's] constant inveighing against ... Orientalism for having categorized, classified, tabulated, codified, indexed, schematized, reduced, dissected the Orient ... as if such operations were somehow evil in

themselves and unfit for the proper understanding of human societies, cultures, languages etc” (221). Where Said sees this as dehumanizing for the Other, al-'Azm recognizes that, in and of itself, the scientific method does not imply racism. When applying al-'Azm's observation of Said's anti-science bias to Drower, one sees that Said would identify her use of the scientific method as a racist act, whereas al-'Azm would qualify her observations as objective and professionally verifiable with the Mandaeans and their texts. When speaking about the present-day Mandaeans, Buckley admits the danger in following the scientific process condemned by Said, but takes a moderate view by recommending that the Other be allowed to take part in the discourse: “Alone among the ancient Gnostic religions, Mandaism is alive, and its constituents must be reckoned with as interlocutors with scholars. It is not possible to cling to outdated models of ‘objective’ scholarship in which the scrutinized subject remains mute and unable to interact with scholars who might adhere to stereotypical ideas about Gnosticism” (*Ancient7*). As I discuss below, Drower keeps open the dialogue between Self and Other in order to speak accurately for the Mandaean to the Western reader.

Unlike Said, Magdalena Horodecka and Balazs Venkovits would argue that Drower represents the Mandaeans in a respectful and balanced way. Horodecka questions the commonly held belief among scholars that the ethnographer needs to avoid expressing his or her opinion. She states that there should be a combination of respect and appreciation for the other with the right of the ethnographer to express his or her critical thought (205-06). In *Mandaeans*, Drower meets Horodecka's criteria of respect and appreciation when she gives her opinion: “They [Mandaean women] are hard-working, and on the whole healthy and good-looking, though the men are the better-looking, and the old men are often actually beautiful” (54) Drower's occasional expressions of criticism help to present the Mandaeans as real people – not idealized



natives. In describing one ceremony, she writes the words given by the priest but does not give an explanation of what the words mean: “As I [Drower] doubt the correctness of this text, which the priest wrote from memory, I prefer not to venture a translation” (*Mandaeans* 88). For Venkovits, the photography included in Drower’s ethnography adds to the credibility of her reporting. He discusses the important development of photos introduced as evidence which preserves the exceptional, unique, and strange – another way to take notes for the ethnographer (110). In addition to extensive descriptions and carefully drawn diagrams, Drower uses photographs to support her information. In one such instance Drower, who was invited to a wedding writes: “I was sitting in the mandi enclosure when the bride approached, heralded by drums, joy-cries, and clapping. I went to meet the procession, and the crowd parted to allow me to photograph the bride” (*Mandaeans* 61). The fact that the Mandaean priests allow Drower to photograph these ceremonies and religious rites not only points to a relationship of trust and mutual friendship, but provides visual proof that adds to the validity of the ethnography. Additionally, in 1954 Drower and her friend, Liz Shearman, produced a film entitled *Mandaean Ceremony*, which was shot in the village of Qalat Saleh under the leadership of the priest, “Drower’s trusted Mandaean ‘brother-in-Truth,’ Sheikh Negm” (Buckley, *Mandaeans* ii). This film is currently in the public domain in video format.

Several scholars, who knew Drower personally, write in the front matter of her publications and provide information about Drower’s position as an ethnographer. S.H. Hooke, who writes the foreword for Drower’s scholarly work *Wine*, states that Drower met the requirements of a successful ethnographer because she was an intellectual who conducted a patient study of ritual, an extensive reading of scholarly works, and used sound judgment in her conclusions (Hooke vii). Rudolf Macuch writes about Drower’s important contribution to the

genre of Mandaean literature in the Preface for Drower's publication, *The Scroll of Exalted Kingship: Diwan Malkuta Laita*. He states that Mandaean rituals were almost unknown in Europe until Drower discovered and began investigating the complete treasury of secret, priestly, Nasoraean scrolls (iii). In the Preface of another of Drower's publications, "Elijah," Emile Marmorstein writes about Drower's graciousness toward people of all communities in Baghdad. He knew Drower when he held the position of headmaster of the Shamash Secondary School in Baghdad and describes her in a way that supports the idea that she enjoyed a position of rank as a British wife of a diplomat: "As a result of personal experience of the kindness and hospitality which she dispensed to members of all communities, I began to appreciate the extent of her influence on the social and intellectual life of the city where ... she represented the standards of Western civilization so worthily" (8). Marmorstein's words support the idea of an Orientalist relationship, but his words indicate that she offered genuine hospitality to the Other in the city as well as to the people of the West.

In this last section, I will begin with a critical comment given by Buckley that indicates a change over time from otherness to sameness in Drower's relationship with the Mandaeans. Then, I will analyze *Mandaeans* to look for how Drower often remains a transparent reporter. When she writes, Drower uses three narrative voices: the third-person which allows her to objectively report observations, the first-person which helps to establish her as an eyewitness, who in all honesty cannot be completely objective, and the third-person which allows her to speak for the Mandaean, sometimes in a way that registers as an Orientalist response. Despite her occasional judgments, Drower establishes herself as a friend who likes and writes sympathetically about the Other.

### **The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran**

In *Mandaeans*, Drower describes the rituals, customs, legends, and folklore that date back to the first century. She gives in-depth information about the religious beliefs that she supports both with her translations of ancient texts and the explanations of the Mandaean priesthood. Additionally, Drower gives detailed observations, supplemented by photographs in her on-site visits. Buckley states that in this ethnography, Drower brings the people to life. Furthermore, Buckley names Drower a singular figure in the studies of the Mandaeans because she is the only anthropologist to conduct field work among the people of the sect (*Mandaeans* i). The longevity of the relationship between Drower and her Mandaean friends, which they maintained by mail once she became too old to travel to Iraq, adds to the credibility of the writings of Drower.

Drower's relationship with the Other changed over time from otherness to sameness. Buckley relates a story that she heard from her Mandaean friend, Lamea Abbas Amara, (a well-known poet living in San Diego), who heard it from her family. This incident illustrates that Drower did not always enjoy the trust of the Mandaeans, and that Drower's position as Occident sometimes caused unease among the Mandaeans: "Mostly, it is outsiders, not insiders, who may present dangers to the Mandaeans. When Lady Drower tried to make contact with Lamea's grandfather, Sheikh Jawdat, and his family he warned them, 'Don't tell your secrets to the stranger!' Drower, somewhat naively, felt that the Mandaeans should claim their own territory ... 'Very dangerous,' says Lamea" (Buckley, *Ancient* 32). Drower does not mention the sheikh's reticence toward her in *Mandaeans*, but she writes about the same visit and describes "a Subbiyah mother [Lamea's grandmother] and child [Lamea's aunt] that looked like a Madonna and her holy babe" (54, [*Ancient* 176]). Over time, however, the relationship underwent a change as Drower became less of an outsider. Buckley discusses a photograph in Drower's ethnography that indicates a growing trust and friendship between Lamea's family and Drower. In one

photograph, Drower pictures “Amara (Lamea Abbas Amara’s grandfather on her father’s side ... *Sheikh Jawdat* (whom Drower befriended; he is Lamea Abbas Amara’s grandfather on her mother’s side)” (Buckley, *Mandaeans* iv, italics added). From this change in relationship, one can infer that for Sheikh Jawdat, Drower moved from a position of otherness, the Occident who was dangerous, to one of sameness, the friend who took his photograph.

In *Mandaeans*, Drower predominantly uses the third-person narrative, in which she records observations with transparency – with the objectivity and close attention to detail that one would expect in a trained scientist. By referencing original Mandaean manuscripts which she translates, Drower expertly weaves an argument that the Mandaeans migrated from the north in Iran to the lower marshes of Iraq as she attempts to reconstruct the history of the Mandaean origins (9-10). In the ethnography, Drower’s focus stems from her belief in the importance in preserving the ancient set of core religious practices through the rituals still practiced by the Mandaean priests today. Drower states that her description of the different Mandaean ritual meals is the most important information in *Mandaeans*. Drower uses the third-person narrative to report the priests’ most secret practices that she cannot personally observe but has been granted access to through interviews with the priests and lay people.

Further credibility stems from Drower’s third-person narrative as she criticizes other scholarly works that do not follow the same ethical reporting to which she adheres in *Mandaeans*. Drower calls Peterman’s work superficial because he bases his findings on only three months’ experience with the Mandaeans, and she criticizes Siouff for using the reports of a renegade Subbi. Additionally, Drower states that many other writings about the Mandaeans are superficial and based on hearsay (xv). Drower, then, describes her methodology in order to support the validity of her ethnography. She states that her contact with the Mandaeans first

began in 1923, followed by her reading of translated holy books in 1931. After studying the language, she conversed with the Mandaeans using colloquial speech, and then progressed to the reading Subba manuscripts which she personally translated. When observing cults and ceremonies, Drower carefully wrote sentences as she heard them. She also copied the dictated legends verbatim with a mix of English and Arabic, when necessary (xxii). The extensive description Drower offers in the ethnography, and the carefully reported interviews that she often double-checks with more than one source add to the credibility of the work.

In *Mandaeans*, Drower uses the first-person narrative to establish her credibility as an outsider who has been allowed inside the culture. Drower's words also indicate a move from otherness to sameness. When criticizing the earlier scholars and their insufficient evidence, Drower speculates that the superficial reports may have been caused by the shyness and unwillingness of the Mandaeans to mingle with outsiders (xv). Drower explains that after years of friendship with the Mandaeans, the priests began to show her documents and to share secrets by slow degrees. In one instance, Drower states: "The priests would not tell me the name of Shishlam's father until I had given my word not to reveal the name" (65). With the use of first-person narrative, Drower places herself as an invited guest to wedding ceremonies – in one celebration when listening to a song: "Bystanders translated one for me, and as I have not the text, I must rely on their explanation" (70-71). At another time, Drower witnesses a young girl who heard that her brother had just died. Drower states "I shall not easily forget the figure of a young girl, who, having just heard of the death of a brother, cast herself repeatedly on the wet ground with shrill cries of grief, until with her hair, face, and clothes matted with mud, she looked like a living clay figure" (180-81). Drower describes baptismal services, funerals, and special rituals such as the consecration of priests and the eating for the dead. The Mandaeans

literally invite Drower inside the walls that enclose the *Manda* or cult-hut, the place of ritual separated from the outside world.

In some cases, Drower's first-person narrative voice expresses her respect and liking for the Mandaeans. In her discussion of the rules that a priest must follow, she says, "I have only given examples of the difficulties which hedge the path of a priest: to enumerate all would fill a book. It is small wonder that the Mandaeans say, 'Our religion is very difficult'" (176). She describes her friends as joyous mystics who practice ritual baptism that protects their health and offers cleanliness. According to Drower, the Mandaean considers life as pleasant and death as nonexistent because the living and the dead meet at the ritual meal (53). Drower takes delight in the Mandaeans' enjoyment of nature: "If I give a Mandaean a few flowers, he murmurs as he bends over them (I speak from experience) the beautiful formula 'Perfume of Life, joy of my Lord, Manda of Life!'" (53). Drower describes her good friend, Hirmiz bar Anhar, a clever silversmith, a poet, a lover of Nature, and one who exhibits genuine devotion to his religion. She also includes the information that he had never been to school, and could only read and write his own language (249). In Book Two of *Mandaeans*, Hirmiz bar Anhar dictates the majority of the Mandaean legends, magic, and folk-lore included in the ethnography.

In *Mandaeans*, Drower gives a few statements that register as an Orientalist response. When Hirmiz tells her the different Mandaean legends, gossip, and tradition that he heard as a little boy, Drower chooses to include all of them in the ethnography but with reservations: "It has seemed worthwhile to reproduce what is of doubtful value as legend with the rest, for, amongst dross and nonsense, there is usually treasure in the way of typical customs, magical rites, religious beliefs, and national character" (249-50). Additionally, Drower does not attempt to ignore the imperfections of the Mandaeans. Several times in the ethnography, Drower repeats a

concern about dirty homes, and the presence of vermin: “Their homes are often dirty ... Flies are unnoticed, and the older generation are not ashamed of lice, which they regard as a natural condition of the hair and body. Only schooling can change this habit of thought” (54). From her words, one can infer that Drower attempted to educate the Mandaeans and to convince them to follow her own habits of cleanliness. Drower also criticizes the Mandaeans when she describes them as dishonest: “The Subba have the faults of their neighbors [Arabs], and share with them a modified appreciation of the value of truth” (53). Even though Drower attempts to cushion her words in order to make them less severe, her words register as a moral judgment nonetheless. Another problem for Drower concerns her attempts to purchase Mandaean documents. She has to be careful, even when she conducts business among her friends: “When it comes to buying documents, or copying them, obstacles are many. Such transactions with the Gentile are looked upon as shameful, and trickery and evasion are resorted to in order to defeat the would-be purchaser, even in the case of an accepted friend, such as myself” (22). In this Orientalist response, however, Drower recognizes that the Mandaeans feel ambivalent about selling their documents to an outsider. Another criticism occurs when Drower believes that some priests care more about the fees they receive for conducting baptisms than they care about the Mandaeans they serve (53). Drower quickly modifies this criticism by recognizing that not all priests have this problem and then gives at least one instance when a priest conducts the baptisms for free. In addition, Drower explains that the priests need the fees they receive, and agrees with them when they say that they have to have money to live.

Drower uses the first-person narrative to list problems with Mandaeans influenced by the changing times in Iraq. Not surprisingly, the youth reflect the influence of modernization: the young no longer remain silent before their elders as in the past, and even though dancing, play-

acting, juggling, and music are forbidden, Drower has seen girls dance and attend the cinema (52). Drower also observes that some of the Mandaean women had begun to act and dress like the Iraqis around them: “I was invited lately to a Mandaean house for the feast of Dehwa Hnina. Contrary to religious precept, the women wore jewellery [sic] and were clad in silken raiment of bright hue. One or two of them danced to the clicking of ringers and rhythmical clapping of hands and the singing of dirge-like wedding songs in Persian” (89). Additionally, Drower also notices a lack of obedience to the daily ablutions. She says that many lay Madaeans excuse themselves from the baptism ritual during cold weather by saying that where the Madaeans once lived, the springs were hot in the winter and cool in the winter (102). Despite the critical nature of these observations, Drower’s concern stems from concern for the preservation of the Mandaean sect. She says that the religion has become weak as the Subbi conform to modern Iraq. The sons of priests cut their hair and shave, which makes them ineligible to become priests. With the priesthood becoming less popular, Drower worries that the sect will disappear (15-16). These observations reflect Drower’s concern for the continued existence of the Madaeans rather than a moral judgment of the Oriental. In addition, she very likely repeats the Mandaean priestly and lay concerns that have been shared with her. One wonders if Drower’s close friendship with the priests, along with her translations of the texts, may cause her to believe that the Mandaean culture will disappear if the priesthood fades. This relationship with the priesthood may also explain why Drower seems to define the culture by its religious rituals.

Drower also uses the first-person narrative to express some Orientalist responses to gender issues. She directs one of these criticisms toward the Madaeans’ neighbors, the Arabs. She states that Mandaean women found in adultery are not murdered as is often the case in Iraq among the Muslims (59). Drower’s use of the word *murder* represents a strong Orientalist



response to the Muslim law that legalizes the act of putting to death a woman caught in adultery. Drower also discusses how most Mandaean believe that monogamy is better than polygamy, but she observes that most priests have more than one wife (59). Drower infers that the men are more anxious to get married than the young girls, who marry soon after the first signs of puberty. Drower states that she supposes girls can choose not to marry a man who she finds repugnant (59-60). Drower also questions the fact that sex is not a bar to the priesthood. The *Ginza*, (Mandaean holy book) mentions a priestess, and Drower has been told that in the past Mandaean priestesses existed, but she states that she has never met or heard of one in actual existence. In addition, Drower quotes the *Alf Trisar Shiala* that states, "Beware lest ye consecrate a woman as priest" (147). Drower's narrative expresses concern about gender issues among the Madaeans.

The third voice in *Madaeans* belongs to the Other whom Drower quotes, therefore representing the Mandaean who cannot speak for himself. When she asks the priests about the flies on the sacrificial meat, they smiled: "We know, but how can we help it? What the air brings, willow-down ... dust, or flies, we cannot help. In any case, flies have no blood, and it is creatures which have blood which are unclean" (139). The response to Drower's question reflects both a tolerance and possibly an amusement over Drower's distaste for the flies, which considering earlier statements in her ethnography, may have been an obvious source of discomfort for Drower. In a different conversation, another priest explains the length of the year for the Mandaean is based on the time a child takes to mature in the mother's womb. He estimates nine months, nine days, nine hours, nine minutes, and nine and one-half seconds, together with the mother's forty-five days of purification, plus the "time that the seed was in the loins of the father" (92). Drower responds in the ethnography that this sounds to her like a typical Mandaean speculation, and she has not found anything to verify the information in any of the

holy books. Again, Drower gives an aside to her Western reader that could reflect either her Orientalist judgment or her frequent encounter with this detailed estimation of time among the priests. Drower expresses concern about the Panja feast slowly traveling backwards in time, and the need for the Mandaean to adjust the calendar. She states that this should be done in order to ensure that the baptisms, requisite during the feast, occur at the flood-time instead of before, when the water is bitterly cold: “But they seem ignorant of any method of correcting the calendar by such a system as that of the intercalary month after each 120 years employed by the Old Persians ... although one priest told me that in the past, when priests were wiser, such corrections had taken place” (89). Even though this sounds like an Orientalist response, the priest’s words verify that the Mandaean are aware of the problem and do not know how to adjust the calendar.

When Drower speaks for the Mandaean, she emphasizes the difference between the Other and the Occident. Drower discusses that weeping is forbidden when the Mandaean dies, and then relates the words of an acquaintance, an old man, who joyfully told her, “My brother died this morning! Splendid, splendid! I have forbidden the women to weep!” (181). Drower explains that he was especially joyful because his brother died at the sacred season of Panja, which meant his brother’s soul would “fly quickly to the worlds of light, and escape the dangers and tortures of the purgatories” (181). In these instances when Drower speaks for the Other, she highlights the difference between the Mandaean and the western reader, which indicates an Orientalist response. This sentiment is reflected in the introduction of *Wine*, when Drower says, “The everyday talk of Asian neighbors... are foreign to the Occidental and can be truly understood only after long and sympathetic residence amongst the people who utter them” (1). When

speaking for the Other, Drower seeks to capture for her audience the exoticism that makes the Mandaean foreign.

The strongest voices occur when both Drower and Hirmiz speak in *Mandaeans*. In her Prefatory Note, Drower acknowledges her Mandaean friend: “The tale of gratitude, however, would be incomplete were I to omit to set down my obligation to the Mandaeans themselves ... I thank my old and valued friend Hirmiz bar Anhar for many happy hours. May he live long to produce his beautiful engravings on silver and to enjoy the light of Shamish and the breath of Ayar Rba!” (viii). In addition to a deep affection, Drower’s words indicate a move on her part from otherness to sameness as she invokes a Mandaean blessing upon her friend. Drower calls Hirmiz a visionary and quotes him: “Just at the first dawn, there comes a sweet breath from the North Star, a pure breeze from the North ... It is then that I have seen a being of light standing before me ... When I came to myself, I took a pencil and tried to draw what I had seen” (249). Even though these words reflect the exoticism of the Other, they also show that Hirmiz and Drower share an open acceptance of their differences – not the Orientalist comparison that belittles the national. Hirmiz periodically addresses her as “lady” when he interrupts his dictation of the legends, magic, and folk-lore in Book Two: “See, lady, what power and knowledge they have!” (342). The use of the title, *Lady*, indicates Orientalism because of Hirmiz’s recognition of Drower’s class as a wife of a British knight, but the mutual affection that comes through in their dialogue indicates a friendship, not a relationship of an inferior addressing a superior.

Drower’s relationship with the Mandaeans spanned a half a century and survived the modernization of Iraq – with its change from colonialism to postcolonialism. Throughout these years, Drower retained her position as friend, observer, and objective reporter. Her involvement with the Mandaeans included mutual respect, and her scholarship became her lifelong work.

Regardless of the Orientalism debate, Drower writes a believable and predominantly impartial text that commands respect among the Mandaean community as well as the scholarly community. Even though Orientalism is present to some extent in *Mandaeans*, this paper presents Drower as one who avoids the condescension inherent in this kind of relationship by treating the Mandaeans as friends and as equals. Thus, one cannot essentialize Drower to a mere type – an Occident. Her relationship with the Other was much too complex for such a reduction.

## Chapter Five:

## Conclusion: Lessons for Today

Throughout this study, which includes close reading, biographical criticism, and historical analysis along with the voices of Bell, Stark, and Drower and their historical contexts, a full picture of their life in the Middle East emerges. Admittedly, the British citizenship of these women played an important role in providing the freedom and safety that enabled them to travel throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Without the economic and political strength of their native country, Bell, Stark, and Drower would not have had the opportunities to interact with the Other to the extent that their writings indicate. Said describes this situation as hegemony and positional superiority, a relationship with the European forced upon the Other, but he ignores the Eastern cultural hospitality with which the Other opened the doors and invited the visitors to come into their homes. Both the friendliness of the Other and the receptivity of Bell, Stark, and Drower resulted in positive transcultural relationships.

All three women recognized the graciousness of their Arabian hosts, who offered lodging, food, drink, and conversation to their guests. Bell, Stark, and Drower enjoyed these social exchanges and honored the Eastern mores by following the prescribed set of formalities expected by the Other in such interactions. Contrary to some European visitors to the East, these three neither rigidly adhered to the European cultural standards nor held the Eastern customs in contempt, but instead respected and enjoyed the difference between the two cultures. Thus, Bell, Stark, and Drower presented themselves as grateful visitors who enjoyed the Arabian way of doing things. Additionally, they recognized the importance of speaking the Arabic language so that they could better understand, communicate, and therefore present themselves as guests with

whom the Other could interact and enjoy, and over time and increasing familiarity, they became residents, neighbors, and close friends of the Arabian nationals.

This move by Bell, Stark, and Drower to the Middle East, made possible because of British colonialism, enabled them to escape the Victorian restrictions placed upon European women. When considering their obstacles due to gender – limited opportunities economically, politically, and educationally (with the exception of Bell, one of the first women to attend Oxford) – one concludes that they were exceptionally gifted, intelligent, creative, and determined to rise above the role placed upon women. All three reached a pinnacle of success in their professional lives among academics and politicians in the British Oriental societies that rivaled most European men – well before the women’s-rights movement leveled the field between the genders. Secondly, Bell and Stark enjoyed the acclaim of a Western readership that extended to the US, while Drower wrote to a smaller audience that continues into the twenty-first century among modern-day students of anthropology and religious studies.

Ambition played only a part in their travel to the Arabian Peninsula, for Bell, Stark, and Drower followed a passionate interest and desire to experience the culture of the Other for themselves, not merely through Orientalist texts like most other early-twentieth-century readers in the West. In the writings about their exploration of the Arabian Peninsula, one discerns a growing expansiveness in each woman toward the Middle Eastern culture and an increasing enjoyment of the Other. For Bell in *Desert* and Stark in *Gates*, the beginning chapters of their books adhere to the travel-writing and Orientalist conventions – the humility of the female journeyman who follows in the wake of the great Orientalist authorities, the joy in experiencing the glorious past of the ancient East that they hope to preserve from the modern Western influences, and the consciousness of belonging to a superior British nation that can help restore

the exotic and primitive Orient. In addition to the Orientalist foregrounding, Bell and Stark exhibit some discomfort in their early interactions with the Other and in their first encounter with an unfamiliar Eastern culture. As their narrative progresses, they become more familiar and comfortable in their transcultural interchanges with the Other, and by the end of the texts, their liking for Middle Eastern friends becomes evident in the happy recounting of their times spent with these nationals. To a lesser extent, this holds true for Drower in *Mandaeans*, who writes as an academic and adheres to the conventions followed by ethnographers. Through occasional authorial intrusions, Drower reveals some of her Orientalist sensibilities as well as personal comments that indicate the rapport she enjoyed with the Mandaeans.

Of the three, Bell, who began her explorations before the others at the turn of the twentieth century, most closely fits Said's definition of an *Orientalist*. She belonged to the upper-socio-economic class in England, and she exhibited an arrogance that expected deferential treatment. One agrees, partially, with Said's criticism of her writing and her political manipulation of the Other in the Middle East, but further study reveals Bell to be a more complex person than one who can simply be reduced to the essentialist label of *Occident*. Bell's unhappiness that displayed itself in aggression can be traced, in part, to the loss of important people in her life: her biological mother at an early age, the deaths of two men with whom she loved and shared hopes of marriage, and an unrequited love at the end of her life. She also struggled with the loneliness of an outsider, a person who never quite fit in with members of either gender or culture. Possibly, dissatisfaction underlies Bell's sometimes caustic judgments about both the Other and her fellow countrymen. Whereas Said considers Bell a racist, a careful look at the context of her life and writings shows her to be indiscriminate both in her dislikes and criticisms as well as in her likes and praises. Ultimately Bell, a passionate woman who made

quick judgments about many people, chose the Middle East to be her home where she enjoyed both Arabian and British companions, rather than her native England where she left behind old friends and family.

Stark, a British citizen who had to work to earn a living and whose home between the ages of thirteen and thirty-four was a village in Italy where her mother worked to manage a factory (at a time when genteel women stayed home), can be labeled an *Other* as easily as an *Orientalist*. Stark, who moved to the Arabian Peninsula after Bell had already died and when Drower had lived in Baghdad for several years, traveled to escape the drudgery of her life and the grief of her sister's death. Many believe that Stark patterned her life in the Middle East after Bell, but the two women had very different personalities: Whereas Bell was logical and analytical in her methods of both travel and work, Stark was impulsive and irresponsible. Stark, who followed her dream of an exotic life founded upon her reading of Orientalist texts, traveled into uncharted areas of the Arabian Peninsula with little of the resources she needed to survive and with no back-up plan if she ran into trouble. The result of her daring was that she depended upon others to meet her needs. This style of living, which does not fit the stereotypical Occident, worked for Stark and helped her to become assimilated into the Eastern culture. The Other, who offered her lodging, sustenance, and guidance, accepted her as a friend in contrast to the British colonials who considered her to be eccentric and socially beneath them. Stark, however, rose within the ranks of the Orientalists because she wrote beautiful prose and her literary travel books brought her fame as well as an income that provided for her until she died at the age of one-hundred years. Rather than whole-heartedly joining the Orientalists who accepted her, once she began to successfully publish books, Stark often – but tactfully to protect her good name among the Oriental societies that sponsored her journeys as well as her faithful Western



readership – positioned herself as an advocate for the Other and a critic of the European who treated them with arrogance.

Of the three, Drower lived the most conventional life for a woman in the early-twentieth century: She was both a wife and mother, who pursued a hobby that enabled her to study the minority religious sects in Iraq. All indications (in the limited biographical information that has been published) point to her acceptance by both the British colonials, who lived in Iraq, and the Mandaean people, who spoke well of her – even thirty years after her death. Circumstances provided her the chance to follow her scholarly passion, the study of both the language and religious practices of the Other, whom she encountered around her home in Baghdad. Her rise in prestige among the Orientalist societies followed incidentally, after her interest in the Mandaean and their manuscripts that she translated led her to publish her findings. Said would describe her as an Orientalist based on her making the Other the object to be studied, but Drower's continued friendship with individuals among the Mandaean people that lasted for over a half of a century until her death indicates a relationship that cannot be reduced to Said's essentialist one of *Occident and Oriental*.

The issue of otherness raised by Said in *Orientalism* and applied to the writings of Bell, Stark, and Drower, who interacted with the Arabian people at the end of British colonialism, continues into the twenty-first century with the increase in immigration, both to and from the East and West. Multiculturalism within the Western *Hemisphere* celebrates and highlights diversity among the ethnic groups and promotes an open-door immigration policy. Emigration to the East also encourages interaction among the cultures through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that send workers from the West to developing countries in order to share resources, skills, and knowledge. World Hope International, one example of an NGO, sends volunteers to

Central and South America, Africa, and Asia in order to help in the areas of education, health, and business development. Globalization advances contact among different nationalities through business partnerships in which workers provide goods and services from around the world. Employees for US companies, who live in India, work in call centers to answer questions from across the Atlantic Ocean. Technology connects individuals across the world and multiplies the conversations between people of different ethnic groups. For example, language students, who visit overseas and then return to the US, stay connected by internet calls, such as Skype, so they and their tutors can continue the lessons. Otherness, therefore, becomes an everyday issue through increasing interactions among people of the globe and oftentimes causes tension when worldviews differ.

The cultural encounter between East and West especially challenges Muslims and Christians, both of who believe in a fundamental *Truth* – but with major differences in doctrine. Oftentimes, followers of the two religions clash over matters of culture as well as precepts of belief. For Christians, the lessons learned from Bell, Stark, and Drower in their interactions with the Other stem from the importance of guarding against prejudice of which they may be totally unaware. In order to avoid the pitfalls of Orientalism, the Christian shares basic tenets of biblical doctrine – Jesus the Son of God, crucified on the cross, and risen from the dead, so that all who believe are saved – without imposing a Western worldview. Christians who work with other cultures, then, leave personal application of God’s Word to the work of the Holy Spirit. This study seeks to reveal Orientalism in the writings of Bell, Stark, and Drower in order to help Christians to recognize the same mistakes in their own words and actions and to learn from these three pioneer women who successfully found acceptance in the formal, open/closed societies of the Asian peninsula.

A second look at Bell, Stark, and Drower also provides the feminist critic with a very interesting case study of three women, marginalized by gender, who overcame the limits imposed upon them by a male dominated society – both in the West and the East. In fact, Wallach and Geniesse imply that both Bell and Stark exhibited masculine traits that helped them hurdle the obstacles of gender. Both women, who held romantic hopes for marriage with several men whom they loved, enjoyed some meaningful friendships with women. Ultimately, however, Bell and Stark, who preferred to travel and socialize with men, had very little to do with most women. Interestingly, both women served in anti-suffrage organizations and often verbalized their contempt for most women that they encountered in their lifetime. One wonders if, in applying hooks' theory to Bell and Stark, they might have unconsciously subjugated other white women in order to elevate themselves into a position of power alongside British men. Without a doubt, both enjoyed their unique position as women among the government officials of the British Diplomatic Corps. Regardless of their motivation, Bell and Stark overcame the prejudice they faced by using their exceptional charm and superior intellect. Drower, on the other hand, who enjoyed the support of her husband who respected her academic endeavors, became liberated through her autodidactic scholarship. According to Said, knowledge involves power relations that enable the Orientalist to study or examine the Other. The feminist can argue that these three women, marginalized by Western culture like the Other, used knowledge to gain power and an equal status among the men of the early-twentieth century. One can also suggest that even though these three women did not actively promote other women's equality, their example and sympathetic discourse with the Other did provide encouragement for women, both of the West and the East. For these three authors, knowledge provided entry into the elite academic world of the West and the formal social world of the East where Bell, Stark, and

Drower enjoyed the status of a third gender –equal and sometimes superior to the Arabian male; always superior in position to the Arabian woman, but also sympathetic because of their shared history of victimization by men. This thesis serves as one example of how scholarship in general, which has defined Orientalism narrowly, has rendered itself blind to the subtleties revealed in the writing of women such as Bell, Stark, and Drower.

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