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Ernest Renan and the Question of Race.

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ERNEST RENAN AND THE QUESTION OF RACE

A Dissertation

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Louisiana State University and
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requirements for the degree of
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in

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by

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ABSTRACT

Racism in France can be traced back to the 1560's when the nobles claimed to be of a separate race in order to obtain special rights and privileges. Soon after in the seventeenth century, scientists started to classify humans according to physical features. With the increase in travel, the slave trade, the fear of the unknown and the fear of contamination, these factors along with physiognomy and phrenology encouraged "biological racism."

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Ernest Renan (1823-1892) denounces biological racism and the existence of the so-called "pure races." He is also the first dramatist to write a sequel to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). However, the works of this French philosopher, philologist, historian, scholar of Semitic languages, and theologian have fallen into relative obscurity.

The goal of this dissertation is to provide a balanced view of Renan's works and to provide grounds for revising the image of Renan constructed by such critics as Edward Said and Tzvetan Todorov. This dissertation also attempts to show that some of Renan's writings contain elements that deconstruct the discourse of the obvious ethnocentricism in some of his other writings. The following texts by Renan's are analyzed: *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, *l'Avenir de la science*, *Vie de Jésus*, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" and *Caliban*. 

iv

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

During his lifetime, Ernest Renan (1823-1892) was an author highly renowned throughout Europe who started to write seriously soon after he left the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in 1845. Renan is primarily known for Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques (1855), the highly criticized l'Avenir de la science (originally written in 1848-1849 but not published until 1890), and the highly controversial Vie de Jésus (1863).

In Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques, Renan is the first to classify and to retrace the history of the Semitic people and the origins of their language as well as to undertake a comparative study of the Semitic and Indo-European languages.

When Renan wrote l'Avenir de la science (between 1848 and 1849), he strongly believed in the importance and the advancements made in science during this time. He writes primarily about the role of science as well as the role of philosophy, history and what he refers to as the history of the human spirit. In the preface written in 1890, some forty years after it was originally written, Renan acknowledges the lacunae in this work. He reluctantly agreed to have this text published with minimal revisions made to his original manuscript.

In 1863, Renan became a best-selling author. In six months, sixty thousand copies of Vie de Jésus were sold.
(Robertson 1924, 39). Also by this time, this text had already been translated into German, Dutch, Italian, and an English version in progress (Blanshard 1984, 107). This book is very controversial due to the fact that Renan depicts Jesus Christ as merely human. Renan also questions the validity of the supernatural events surrounding the life of Christ, since the Gospels were not written until more than sixty years after the death of Christ.

Today the contributions of this French philosopher, philologist, scholar of Semitic languages and theologian have fallen into relative obscurity. If the works of Ernest Renan are known at all today, it is possibly due to the harsh criticism by Edward Said, Tzvetan Todorov and Laura B. O’Connor (the latter two have both, incidentally, worked either indirectly or directly with Said: Said was the general editor for the English version of Todorov’s book: On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought (1993) and he was O’Connor’s dissertation director at Columbia University [Return of the Repressed Celt] in 1997). Said, Todorov and O’Connor all accuse Renan of being a racist in their respective works.

In several of Said’s works: Beginnings: Intention and Method (1975); “Renan’s Philological Laboratory” (1977); Orientalism (1978); and The World, The Text, and The Critic (1983), Renan’s name is often synonymous with the European oppressor during the colonial era. Said also criticizes
Renan’s association with philology and often attacks the same three texts by Renan: Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques; Vie de Jésus; and l’Avenir de la science. Said criticizes primarily Renan’s essay on Semitic languages and remarks that:

[Renan’s] Semitic opus was proposed as a philological breakthrough, from which in later years he was always to draw retrospective authority for his positions (almost always bad ones) on religion, race, and nationalism. 

[...] Lastly, Semitic was Renan’s first creation, a fiction invented by him in the philological laboratory to satisfy his sense of public place and mission. It should by no means be lost on us that Semitic was for Renan’s ego the symbol of European (and consequently his) dominion over the Orient and over his own era (Said 1979, 141).

In the following chapters, this criticism will be examined further.

As for Todorov’s argument, Renan is considered to be racist because this French philosopher relied on cultural aspects (language) and scientific factors to portray the Semites as being inferior. Todorov argues that according to Renan, the Semitic and Semitic races are not physical races but linguistic races, a notion that then allows Renan to determine that the Semitic races are inferior due to their languages. To portray Renan as a racist who uses scientific means in order to illustrate that Europeans are superior, Todorov quotes selected passages from the infamous letter (dated 26 June 1856 that Renan wrote to Arthur de Gobineau) where Renan opposes Gobineau’s denunciation of miscegenation.
In her dissertation, Laura B. O’Connor uses Edward Said’s notion of “Orientalism” and then applies it to what she calls “Celticism.” Like Said, O’Connor believes that philology is devised so that the European colonialists can legitimize their claim on other regions (for Said, the Orient; for O’Connor, the Celtic regions) and thus, these “European oppressors” can also claim their so-called “natural” superiority over these inhabitants of the aforementioned regions (O’Connor 1997, 5). According to O’Connor, the only difference between “Orientalism” and what she calls “Celticism” is that the former consisted of describing the Orient to fellow Europeans whereas the latter, as she defines it, includes Cymric and Gaelic perspectives on the British multilingual culture (O’Connor 1997, 6). Also in her dissertation, O’Connor criticizes Renan’s La poésie des races celtiques (1854). O’Connor accuses Renan of writing about “domestic exoticism,” which she considers to be a contradiction in terms. O’Connor attacks Renan’s essay for being what she calls “depersonalized” and finds no indications that Renan actually evokes his nostalgic journey to his homeland (i.e., his childhood home) (O’Connor 1997, 7).

Besides these aforementioned critics, some other contemporary critics rely on other texts where Renan is branded as a racist. For example, Ania Loomba cites a passage from Aimé Césaire’s Discours sur le colonialisme where Césaire makes an analogy to Adolf Hitler after quoting from
Renan’s *Réforme intellectuelle et morale* (1871). It is not certain whether or not Loomba actually has read this text by Renan, or if she is merely influenced by Césaire’s opinion.

Despite all this negative criticism, Ernest Renan actually refutes the elitist and racist mentality shared by his contemporaries and even writes about how one often confuses the notion of race with nation in his essay “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” (1882). It is noteworthy to mention that in 1878, Renan is the first playwright to write a sequel to William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611), where the character Caliban first appears and represents the struggle of the oppressed slave. In contemporary academic cultural studies, Caliban has often become the symbol of the victimization of the Third World (Vaughan & Vaughan 1991, 3) as seen in Aimé Césaire’s adaptation, *Une Tempête* (1969). In Renan’s *Caliban*, the main character is enslaved by Propsero’s magic, rebels against his oppressor, initiates a revolt against the aristocratic government, establishes democracy and then becomes the new ruler.

In order to illustrate the significance of “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” and *Caliban*, two texts that explicitly promote the equality of all mankind, it is necessary to examine how the notion of race was perceived by intellectuals (or pseudo-intellectuals) and scientists (or pseudo-scientists) of the nineteenth century in France as well as in Europe. To better understand the concept of racism in France, it is necessary to begin with its origin as well as to
examine some beliefs and writings of the eighteenth century that had an impact on the opinions regarding "race" during the nineteenth century.

Racism in France has been traced back to the 1560's with the disputes among the social classes. To sustain their rights and privileges, the nobles fabricated a story that they all "racially" shared a common origin. These nobles deduced that since their ancestors fought on behalf of France and the king, their blood line thus entitled them to certain rights (Cohen 1980, 96). This aristocratic elitist mentality became known as the droit de sang.

This notion of droit de sang reappears again in the late sixteenth century when a French historian and philosopher, Henri de Boulainviller (or comte de Boulainvilliers) (1658-1722), defended the rights of the noblesse d'épée over those of the noblesse de robe. In his various essays, Boulainviller encouraged the noblesse d'épée to no longer acknowledge their lineage with France, since the Gauls resided there longer than the Franks. He considered the Franks to be strangers and barbarians (Arendt 1968, 42). Boulainviller strongly believed that these two types of nobility should never share the same rights, since they had no genealogical bond. He referred to this as a conscience généalogique. In the following passage, Boulainviller depicts the old established nobility in a very nostalgic manner:

[Le]s beaux jours de la noblesse sont passés parce qu'elle a été très mauvaise économie et trop peu soigneuse de la gloire de ses prédécesseurs, quand
l'espérance d'une fortune présente lui a fait embrasser les fantômes de la cour et de la faveur et oublier sa propre dignité (Boulainviller cited in Simon 1941, 85; originally cited from Essais sur la Noblesse de France, Amsterdam: J.-F. de Tabary, 1732, 221).

[The golden age of the nobility passed by as it [the nobility] was not very thrifty and too little concerned with the glory of its predecessors; the hope of present fortune caused it to embrace the phantoms of the court and of favor and forget its proper dignity.]

Boulainviller blamed the greed of the royal court for the decadence of this new nobility who were often associated with those who, according to him, truly had the inheritable right to be called "noble."

This elitist mentality also became prevalent with the attitudes towards the inhabitants of Africa. This new form of elitism or racism relies on physical differences between Europeans and Non-Europeans. Europeans consider their light skin color to be the norm, whereas Africans with a darker complexion are believed to be abnormal (L.-F. Hoffmann 1973, 47). Compared to Europeans, Africans were also considered to be "primitive" and "savage" (Cohen 1980, 85). Soon science and pseudo-sciences, like physiognomy and phrenology, became a means to explain various physical differences as well as a way to justify the racist mentality by classifying mankind in a hierarchy according to the superiority of one race over others.

With the increase in travel, the slave trade, the fear of the unknown, the fear of contamination, the fear of people who appear different, and the elitist mentality of the
Europeans, racism became even more prevalent with the categorization of all mankind based on physical features. It seems as if science perpetuated or reinforced the superior attitude of certain members of the white race.

The first attempt in history to classify all human races was in 1684 by a French doctor, François Bernier (1620-1688). In his article "Nouvelle Division de la Terre, par les differentes [sic] Especes [sic] ou Races d'hommes qui l'habitent, envoyée par un fameux Voyageur à M. l'Abbé de la **** a [sic] peu près en ces termes," Bernier classified man according to four general characteristics (or "races"): Europeans; Far Eastern; blacks; and Lapps. To make this distinction, Bernier relied on the geography of the time and his own observations, made while traveling, of various peoples' physical appearance and facial characteristics (Gossett 1997, 32).

In the eighteenth century, anthropologists made a distinction between "species" and "varieties." Species were the "immutable prototype" that were designed for their role in nature, whereas varieties were a single species whose appearance was altered due to geography and climate (Gossett 1997, 35). As for the scientists of the eighteenth century, they believed that climate affected the color of the skin. For example, the French naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707-1788) states in his book, Histoire naturelle (1749-1804, published in 44 volumes, later finished by his assistant), that the white race was considered to be
the norm and that all other races were exotic variations. He truly believed that excessive cold caused the skin to darken and thus this explained the darker skin color of the Laplanders and Greenlanders. If differences could not be explained by the temperature, Buffon postulated that they were probably due to the altitude, proximity to the sea, diet and social customs. According to Buffon, race was not a constant: it only existed if the environment remained constant and would only disappear when the environment changed (Gossett 1997, 36).

Influenced by Buffon, John Hunter, an English surgeon, also believed that climate had an impact on race, but he remarked that the skin color of Europeans living in the tropics did not change even after several generations. He also noticed that the skin color of blacks who traveled to Europe did not change if they reproduced amongst themselves. Hunter deduced that if a blister or burn on a black person was white, their ancestors were originally white (Gossett 1997, 36-37).

Contrary to Hunter, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), a German naturalist as well as the father of modern anthropology and "craniology," believed that climate was not the only factor that affected skin color. He speculated that carbon caused the skin to become darker. According to his rationale, when carbon came in contact with oxygen, it became embedded in the skin and then the skin became darker. Despite this somewhat absurd notion, Blumenbach, in his book Generis
Humani Varietate Nativa (1775), did divide man into five varieties (or "races"): Caucasian, Mongolian; Ethiopian; American; and Malay. Instead of referring to Blumenbach's terms for these five "varieties," colors are often used to differentiate between the various races: white; yellow; black; red; and brown. Blumenbach strongly believed that blacks, Indians and Mongolians were all important members of society and that they were not biologically inferior. To prove this point, he collected various books written by blacks (Gossett 1997, 37).

Another method of classification of different human races and animals was invented by Dutch anatomist Pieter Camper (1722-1789), who classified them according to the size of their cranium. This method was later known as the "facial angle." This is an angle that is formed from two imaginary lines. Both lines start from the base of the nostrils: one line is drawn to the top of the forehead and the other to the opening of the ear (Baker 1974, 28-29). Camper's method was originally invented as a means for artists to differentiate the heads and faces of people from various nations. This system also allows artists to understand the physical traits of the so-called "ideal beauty." Unfortunately, this system became a means to represent various types of races instead of individual traits (Cowlings 1989, 96). In the nineteenth century, this method was adopted by the phrenologists to determine intelligence, worth and temperament.
Motivated by the combination of the fear of the unknown and the fear of contamination, several French philosophers, such as the Abbott Guillaume Thomas François Raynal (1713-1796) and Voltaire (1694-1778), expressed their apprehensiveness towards blacks in their writings. In his book *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770), Raynal feared that if the blood of a black person mixed with that of any member of the white race, it would alter, corrupt and even destroy the population:

Laissez en Amérique vos nègres dont la condition afflige nos regards et dont le sang se mêle peut-être à tous les levains qui altèrent, corrompent et détruisent notre population (Raynal 1951, 278).

[Leave in America your Negroes, whose condition distresses us and whose blood, perhaps, is mingled in all those ferments which alter, corrupt, and destroy our population (Raynal Volume V 1783, 348).]

Motivated by the fear of contamination, Raynal believed that all races have their place in the world with a specific function. Like many of the philosophers from the eighteenth century, Raynal justified the use of blacks for slavery. He truly believed that blacks are born to be slaves. He also considered them to be narrow-minded, deceitful, and evil. He believed that slaves acknowledged that members of the white race were more intelligent as well as superior to other races:

Mais les nègres sont une espèce d'hommes nés pour l'esclavage. Ils sont bornés, fourbes, méchants. Ils conviennent eux-mêmes de la supériorité de notre intelligence et reconnaissent presque la justice de notre empire. [...] Ils reconnaissent la
superiorité de notre esprit, parce que nous avons perpétué leur ignorance; la justice de notre empire, parce que nous avons abusé de leur faiblesse (Raynal 1951, 248).

[But these Negroes, say they, are a race of men born for slavery, their dispositions are narrow, treacherous, and wicked; they themselves allow the superiority of our understandings, and almost acknowledge the justice of our authority. [...] They acknowledge the superiority of our understandings, because we have perpetuated their ignorance; they allow the justice of our authority, because we have abused their weakness (Raynal Volume V 1783, 298).]

Similar to the early scientists who classified man according to his physical features and race, Raynal also categorized man according to his race, which then became a means to measure worth, character and intellect.

Like the Abbott Raynal, Voltaire (1694-1778) shared this same sentiment concerning blacks. In his "Des différentes races d'hommes, the second chapter of Philosophie de l'histoire (1765), Voltaire used the pseudonym "Abbé Bazin," to express his opinion about blacks:

Leurs yeux ronds, leur nez épâté, leurs lèvres toujours grosses, leurs oreilles différemment figurées, la laine de leur tête, la mesure même de leur intelligence, mettent entr'eux & les autres espèces d'hommes des différences prodigieuses; & ce qui démontre qu'ils ne doivent point cette différence à leur climat, c'est que des nègres & des nègres transportés dans les pays les plus froids, y produisent toujours des animaux de leur espèces, & que les mulâtres ne sont qu'une race bâtarde d'un noir & d'une blanche, ou d'un blanc & d'une noire, comme les ânes [sic] spécifiquement différents des chevaux produisent des mulets par l'accouplement avec des cavales (Voltaire 1963, 90).

[Their round eyes, squat noses, and invariable thick lips, the different configuration of their ears, their woolly heads, and the measure of their intellects, make a prodigious difference between
them and other species of men; and what demonstrates, that they are not indebted for this difference to their climates, is that the [N]egro men and women, being transported into the coldest countries, constantly produce animals of their own species; and that mulattoes are only a bastard race of black men and white women, or white men and black women, as asses, specifically different from horses, produce mules by copulating with mares (Voltaire 1965, 5-6).

Unlike his contemporaries Buffon and Hunter, Voltaire did not believe that the climate affected the color of the skin; however, Voltaire did believe that blacks were a separate species from Europeans. This was due not only to their different physical features, but also to their inferior intelligence and culture. Voltaire justified this way of thinking in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), stating that inequality is not "un malheur réel, c’est la dépendance (Voltaire 1994, 43-44)" [[a] real grievance, but dependence (Voltaire circa 1850, 449)]. It seems as if man needs to be in control of and have dominance over others; thus, racism and inequality can be justified by this reasoning.

Contrary to Voltaire’s belief, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) encouraged the equality among people of different races in an epigraph he wrote for a book about Ethiopia (originally written in the late seventeenth century) as well as in his second discourse, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755).

In the epigraph published in a reprinted edition of *Nouvelle histoire d’Absinnie, ou d’Ethopie* (originally published in 1682) by Hiob Ludolf (1624-1704), Rousseau addresses the question of race:
De-là est venu ce bel adage de morale, si rebattu par la tourbe Philosophesque, que les hommes sont par tout les mêmes, qu’ayant par tout les mêmes passions & les mêmes vices, il est assés inutile de chercher à caractérer les différents Peuples; ce qui est à peu près aussi bien raisonné que si l'on disoit qu'on ne sauroit distinguer Pierre d’avec Jaques [sic], parce qu’ils ont tous deux un nés [sic], une bouche & des yeux.

Ne verra-t-on jamais renaitre ces tems heureux où les Peuples ne se mêloient point de Philosopher, mais où les Platons, les Thalés & les Pythagores épris d’un ardent desir de savoir, entreprenoient les plus grands voyages uniquement pour s'instruire, & alloient au loin secouer le joug des préjugés Nationaux, apprendre à connaitre les hommes par leurs conformités & par leurs différences...? (Rousseau cited in Baker 1974, Epigraph).

[From this lack of knowledge there has arisen that fine dictum of morality so much bandied about by the philosophical crowd, that men are everywhere the same, and that having everywhere the same passions and the same vices, it is rather useless to attempt to characterize the different races; which is just about as reasonable as if one were to say that one could not distinguish Peter from James, because each of them has a nose, a mouth, and eyes.

Will one never see the return of those happy times when people did not concern themselves with philosophy, but when such men as Plato, Thales, or Pythagoras, smitten with an eager desire for knowledge, undertook the longest journeys solely to obtain information, and went far away to shake off the yoke of national prejudices, to learn to know men by their conformities and by their differences...? (Rousseau cited in Baker 1974, 16)]

Compared to other philosophers from his century, Rousseau was quite open minded regarding the treatment and acceptance of ethnic groups. He also believed that the environment had an impact on human beings and that it caused the diversity amongst them. In his second discourse, Rousseau proposes two reasons why inequality exists:

Je conçois dans l’espèce humaine deux sortes d’inégalités: l’une, que j’appelle naturelle ou

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physique, parce qu’elle est établie par la nature, et qui consiste dans la différence des âges, de la santé, des forces du corps et des qualités de l’esprit ou de l’ame [sic]; l’autre qu’on peut appeler inégalité morale ou politique parce qu’elle dépend d’une sorte de convention, et qu’elle est établie ou du moins autorisée par le consentement des hommes. Celle-ci consiste dans les différents privilèges [sic] dont quelques-uns jouissent au préjudice des autres, comme d’être plus riches, plus honorés, plus puissants qu’eux, ou même de s’en faire obéir (Rousseau Tome I 1823, 223-224).

[I conceive of two sorts of inequality in the human species: one, which I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature and consists in the difference of ages, health, bodily strengths, and qualities of mind or soul; the other, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends upon a sort of convention and is established, or at least authorized, by the consent of men. The latter consists in the different privileges that some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as to be richer, more honored, more powerful than they, or even to make themselves obeyed by them (Rousseau 1964, 101).]

According to Rousseau, the “natural” or “physical” type of inequality among mankind was inevitable since it is an aspect of human nature. Rousseau did acknowledge that as long as there were conventions in society, the “political” type of inequality would always exist. However, if these conventions did not exist, all mankind would be considered equal. Rousseau examined this aspect in the second part of this same discourse when he remarked that the primitive man, with his simple and solitary life, never really knew of inequality or even racism. It appears as if man became a victim of his own conventions, after which no one would then ever really be considered equal or be free from racism.
During the French Revolution, there were debates concerning the rights of man and whether or not blacks were considered property or if they should have the same rights as Europeans. Some feared that emancipation would bring chaos to the colonies and others feared retaliation by the slaves toward their former owners (Cohen 1980, 152). The abolitionists upheld the humanity of blacks but did not think that an immediate emancipation was the answer (Cohen 1980, 153). In 1794, slaves were finally freed in France and in the French colonies; however, in 1802 Napoleon re-established slavery in the French colonies (Cohen 1980, 181).

In the nineteenth century, "science" became a means to justify racist attitudes based on a sense of hereditary superiority. Before the publication of Darwin's *Origins of Species* in 1859, the views regarding the origin of race were often associated with the polygenist and monogenist debates. The polygenists believed in a separate origin of human races, whereas the monogenists claimed that man had a single origin; however, human races were manifested differently, so there must have been an evolutionary change (Baker 1974, 38). The most popular debate took place in 1830 between two French naturalists, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844), polygenist, and Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), monogenist, zoologist and paleontologist. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire argued that all living organisms were related in some way or another and that higher forms all came from lower ones. He sought to prove that there was a structural similarity between the
cuttlefish and the vertebrates. Cuvier, a well respected scientist, also known as the "dictator of biology," believed that organisms originally came from ancestors with identical structures. According to Cuvier, the cuttlefish was a result of other animals that were not from an animal higher than themselves. Due to Cuvier’s knowledge of anatomy, he was able to convince others of the immutability of species. Following this debate, the polygenist view of race was rejected since it was associated with an aspect of the argument made by Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire even though his theory was a precursor to Darwin’s. In 1859, after the publication of Charles Darwin’s _The Origin of Species_, the polygenist and monogenist debates ceased (Gossett 1997, 57-58).

Similar to the methods used in science, the pseudo-sciences, such as physiognomy and phrenology, classified man according to his physical features and race. In order to add credibility to these "fads," the pseudo-scientists borrowed and manipulated data from reputable and well-known scientists, such as Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon and Pieter Camper.

According to physiognomists, lighter skin denoted a noble personality whereas darker skin was associated with depravity (Cohen 1980, 90). A well-known physiognomist, Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), relied on data from Buffon’s studies regarding physical traits of people from various African nations. In Alexandre Divid’s French translation, _Le petit Lavater ou les secrets de la_
physiognomonie dévoilés, published around 1854, the inhabitants of several African countries were analyzed and compared:

Il y a autant de variétés dans la race des noirs que dans celle des blancs. Ceux de Guinée sont extrêmement laids et ont une odeur insupportable. Ceux de Sofala et de Mozambique sont beaux et n’ont aucune mauvaise odeur. Il est donc nécessaire de diviser les noirs en différentes races, et on peut les réduire à deux principales: les Nègres et les Caffres. Ces deux espèces d’hommes noirs se ressemblent plus par la couleur que par les traits du visage; leurs cheveux, leur peau, l’odeur de leur corps, leurs mœurs et leur naturel sont aussi très-différents [sic]. En examinant les peuples qui composent chacune de ces races noires, on y voit autant de variétés que dans les races blanches, et on y rencontre toutes les nuances du brun au noir, comme l’on trouve, dans les races blanches, toutes les nuances du brun au blanc. On préfère les Nègres d’Angola à ceux du Cap-Vert pour la force du corps, mais les derniers n’ont pas une odeur aussi mauvaise, à beaucoup près que les premiers, et ils ont aussi la peau plus belle et plus noire, le corps mieux fait, les traits du visage moins dur, le naturel plus doux et la taille plus avantageuse. Les Sénégalais sont, de tous les Nègres, les mieux faits, les plus aisés à discipliner et les plus propres au service domestique. Les Nagos sont les plus humains, les Mondongos les plus cruels, les Mimes les plus résolus, les plus capricieux et les plus sujets à se désespérer. Les Nègres de Guinée ont l’esprit extrêmement borné; il y en a même plusieurs qui paraissent être tout à fait stupides, mais ils ne laissent pas d’avoir beaucoup de sentiment, un bon cœur et le germe de toutes les vertus (Divid circa 1854, 31-32).

[[...] There are as many varieties among the race of Negroes as the whites. [...] The Blacks on the coast of Guinea are extremely ugly, and emit an insufferable scent. Those of Sofala and Mozambique are handsome, and have no ill smell. These two species of Negroes resemble each other rather in colour than features. Their hair, skin, the odour of their bodies, their manners and propensities, are exceedingly different. Those of Cape Verd have by no means so disagreeable a smell as the natives of Angola. Their skin also is more smooth and black, their body better made, their features less
hard, their tempers more mild, and their shape better. The Negroes of Senegal are the best formed, and best receive instruction. The Nagos are the most humane, the Mondongos the most cruel, the Mimes the most resolute, capricious, and subject to despair.

The Guinea Negroes are extremely limited in their capacities. Many of them appear to be wholly stupid; or, [...]² remain in a thoughtless state if not acted upon, and have no memory; yet, bounded as is their understanding, they have much feeling, have good hearts, and the seeds of all virtue (Lavater 1827, 115-116).

Compared to other studies on blacks, Lavater actually did recognize various differences amongst the black Africans; however, he did not have a very high opinion of them. Unfortunately, this negative view only aided in perpetuating the ill-feelings and the sense of superiority towards blacks.

Similar to the physiognomical studies on blacks, the phrenological ones had similar results. According to a well-known phrenologist, Samuel R. Wells, the cranium of a Negro is long and narrow, whereas "[t]he facial angle is about 70°, the jaw being large and projecting, and forming what is called the prognathous type." Wells explained further that "[...] the animal feelings predominate over both the intellect and the moral sentiments (Wells 1896, 390-391)."

Phrenologists like Wells used the measurements from Camper’s facial angle to determine intelligence. The larger the angle, the smarter the individual. Thus, blacks were not considered very bright since their facial angle was 70°; that of an orangutan was 60°, whereas the European was 80° and the bust of the ancient philosophers was closer to 100°, thus
exemplifying perfection. Since the facial angle of blacks was closer to that of an orangutan, this explained their animal-like tendencies, according to many phrenologists.

In his book *New Physiognomy, or, Signs of Character as Manifested Through Temperament and External Forms, and Especially in "The Human Face Divine"* (1896), Wells combined physiognomy and phrenology when he studied various human races. Wells relied on the physical characteristics to determine the temperament of what he refers to as the "Ethiopian race:"

The Ethiopian race is characterized physiognomically by a comparatively narrow face; cheekbones projecting forward; a flat nose, with wide nostrils; thick lips; projecting jaws; deep-seated black eyes; black woolly hair and beard; and a black skin.

The Ethiopian race, as we have said, is made up of a great many sub-races and tribes, varying widely in configuration and character; but we may say of the typical negro, that from temperament he is slow and indolent, but persistent and capable of great endurance; and from cerebral development sensuous, passionate, affectionate, benevolent, docile, imitative, devotional, superstitious, excitable, impulsive, vain, improvident, cunning, politic, and unprincipled. He lives in the real rather than the ideal, and enjoys the present without thinking much of either the past or the future. He is a child in mental development, has the virtues and faults of a child, and like the child is capable of being controlled, disciplined, educated, and developed (Wells 1896, 391).

Based solely on observation of the physical features, Wells concluded that blacks are primarily lazy, slow, not very bright and easily dominated. All through the physiognomical and phrenological manuals, this same image of blacks was presented. This negative attitude towards blacks only
perpetuated the notion of superiority of one race over another.

Even with all the ideas that perpetuate biological racism, such as the classifications of man and the often distorted image of the African in novels and other writings, not everyone supported or agreed with this notion of superiority. Among the few who were against racial discrimination in the nineteenth century was the French writer and politician Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). In *De la démocratie en Amérique* (published in two volumes 1835; 1840), Tocqueville wrote about the question of inferiority and superiority of race:

Il y a un préjugé naturel qui porte l'homme à mépriser celui qui a été son inférieur, longtemps encore après qu'il est devenu son égal; à l'inégalité réelle que produit la fortune ou la loi, succède toujours une inégalité imaginaire qui a ses racines dans les mœurs; mais chez les anciens, cet effet secondaire de l'esclavage avait un terme. L'affranchi ressemblait si fort aux hommes d'origine libre, qu'il devenait bientôt impossible de le distinguer au milieu d'eux (Tocqueville Tome I:i 1959, 357).

[A natural prejudice leads a man to scorn anybody who has been his inferior, long after he has become his equal; the real inequality, due to fortune or the law, is always followed by an imagined inequality rooted in mores; but with the ancients this secondary effect of slavery had a time limit, for the freedman was so completely like the man born free that it was soon impossible to distinguish between them (Tocqueville 1969, 341).]

Tocqueville admits that discrimination was prevalent among the aristocracy, who believed that inequality among mankind was essential and an aspect of their inheritable rights. Tocqueville, from an aristocratic family, renounced the title
of "Count" [Comte] (Jardin 1988, 377). Apparently Tocqueville could never speak to anyone without being consciously aware of the "original equality of species" (Jardin 1988, 376). With this in mind, it is not at all surprising that Tocqueville was horrified by Gobineau’s book about inequality amongst the human races, as seen in a letter dated 17 November 1853 to Gobineau:

Ainsi, vous parlez sans cesse de races qui se règènèrent ou [se] détériorent, qui prennent ou quittent des capacités sociales qu’elles n’avaient pas par une infusion de sang différent, je crois que ce sont vos propres expressions. Cette prédestination-là me paraît, je vous l’avouerai, cousine du pur matérialisme et soyez convaincu que si la foule, qui suit toujours les grands chemins battus en fait de raisonnement, admettait votre doctrine, cela la conduirait tout droit de la race à l’individu et des facultés sociales à toutes sortes de facultés. Du reste, que la fatalité soit mise directement dans une certaine organisation de la matière ou dans la volonté de Dieu qui a voulu faire plusieurs espèces humaines dans le genre humain et imposer à certains hommes l’obligation, en vertu de la race à laquelle ils appartiennent, de n’avoir pas certains sentiments, certaines pensées, certaines conduites, certaines qualités qu’ils connaissent sans pouvoir les acquérir, cela importe peu au point de vue où je me place qui est celui de la conséquence pratique des différentes doctrines philosophiques. Les deux théories aboutissent à un très grand resserrement sinon à une abolition complète de la liberté humaine. Or, je vous confesse qu’après vous avoir lu aussi bien qu’avant, je reste placé à l’extrémité opposée de ces doctrines. Je les crois très vraisemblablement fausses et très certainement pernicieuses (Tocqueville’s emphasis) (Tocqueville Tome IX 1959, 202).

[Thus, you speak unceasingly of races that are regenerating or deteriorating, which take up or lay aside social capacities by an infusion of different blood (I believe that these are your own terms). Such a predestination seems to me, I will confess, a cousin of pure materialism and be sure that if the crowd, which always takes the great beaten tracks in matters of reasoning, were to accept your]
doctrine, that would lead it straight from the race to the individual and from social capacities to all kinds of capacities. Besides, whether fatality is placed directly in a certain organization of matter or in the will of God, who wished to make several human species in the human genus and to impose on certain men the obligation, by virtue of the race to which they belong, of not having certain sentiments, certain thoughts, certain behavior, certain qualities that they know about without being able to acquire them; that would be of little importance from the point of view in which I place myself, which is the practical consequences of different philosophical doctrines. The two theories result in a very great contraction, if not a complete abolition, of human liberty. Well, I confess to you that after having read you, as well as before, I remain situated at the opposite extreme of those doctrines. I believe them to be very probably wrong and very certainly pernicious (Tocqueville’s emphasis) (Tocqueville 1985, 297-298).

Tocqueville feared that Gobineau’s theory would cause undue harm to members of other races if the masses accepted this theory. Tocqueville’s main concern was that civil liberties of all races would be jeopardized since Gobineau associated race with social stature that also included temperament and intelligence. It is noteworthy to mention that phrenologists and physiognomists used this same criteria to portray a certain race as either inferior or superior.

Like Abbott Raynal and Voltaire, Gobineau wrote against the intermixing of different races. In the same letter to Gobineau, Tocqueville questioned how one can determine which person is a member of a so-called mixed race:

Lorsqu’encore il s’agit de families huamines qui, différent entre elles d’une manière profonde et permanente par l’aspect extérieur, peuvent se faire reconnaître à des traits distinctifs dans toute la suite des temps et être ramenées à une sorte de création différente, la doctrine, sans être à mon avis plus certaine, devient moins invraisemblable
et plus facile à établir. Mais quand on se place dans l’intérieur d’une de ces grandes familles, comme celle de la race blanche par exemple, le fil du raisonnement disparaît et échappe à chaque pas. Qu’y a-t-il de plus incertain au monde, quoi qu’on fasse, que la question de savoir par l’histoire ou la tradition quand, comment, dans quelles proportions se sont mêlés des hommes qui ne gardent aucune trace visible de leur origine? Ces événements ont tous eu lieu dans des temps reculés, barbares, qui n’ont laissé que de vagues traditions ou des doctrines écrits incomplets. Croyez-vous qu’en prenant cette voie pour expliquer la destinée des différents peuples vous ayez beaucoup éclairci l’histoire et que la science de l’homme ait gagné en certitude pour avoir quitté le chemin parcouru, depuis le commencement du monde, par tant de grands esprits qui ont cherché les causes des événements de ce monde dans l’influence de certains hommes, de certains sentiments, de certaines idées, de certaines croyances? Encore, si votre doctrine, sans être mieux établie que la leur, était plus utile à l’humanité! Mais c’est évidemment le contraire. Quel intérêt peut-il y avoir à persuader à des peuples lâches qui vivent dans la barbarie, dans la mollesse ou dans la servitude, qu’étant tels de par la nature de leur race il n’y a rien à faire pour améliorer leur condition, changer leurs mœurs ou modifier leur gouvernement? Ne voyez-vous pas que de votre doctrine sortent naturellement tous les maux que l’inégalité permanente enfante, l’orgueil, la violence, le mépris du semblable, la tyrannie et l’abjection sous toutes ses formes? Que me parlez-vous, mon cher ami, de distinctions à faire entre les qualités qui font pratiquer les vérités morales et ce que vous appelez l’aptitude sociale? Est-ce que ces choses sont différentes? (Tocqueville’s emphasis) (Tocqueville Tome IX 1959, 202-203)

[When it is only a matter of human families that, differing among themselves in a profound and permanent manner by external appearance, can make themselves known by distinctive traits in the whole course of time and be related back to a kind of different creation, the doctrine, without being in my opinion more certain, becomes less improbable and easier to establish. But when one places oneself in the interior of one of these great families, such as that of the white race for example, the thread of reasoning disappears and escapes at each step. Is there anything in the world more uncertain, no matter what one does, than the questioning of knowing by history or tradition]
when, how, and in what proportions men who do not preserve any visible trace of their origin are mixed? These events all took place in remote barbarous times, which have left only vague traditions or incomplete written documents. Do you believe that in taking this route to explain the destiny of different peoples you have greatly illuminated history and that the science of man has gained in certitude for having left the road traveled, since the beginning of the world, by so many great minds who sought the causes of the events of this world in the influence of certain men, of certain sentiments, of certain ideas, of certain beliefs? Again, if only your doctrine, without being better established than theirs, were more useful to humanity! But it is evidently the contrary. What interest can there be in persuading the base people who live in barbarism, in indolence, or in servitude, that since they exist in such a state by virtue of the nature of their race, there is nothing to do to ameliorate their condition, change their mores, or modify their government? Do you not see that your doctrine brings out naturally all the evils that permanent inequality creates—pride, violence, the contempt of fellow men, tyranny, and abjectness under all its forms? What are you saying to me, my dear friend, about making distinctions between the qualities that make moral truths be practiced and what you call social aptitude? Are these things different? (Tocqueville’s emphasis) (Tocqueville 1985, 298-299).

In his letter to Gobineau, Tocqueville noted that it was not always easy to determine which races were mixed due to either poorly kept records or the inability to ascertain by visible means. It is important to remember that during the barbarian invasions, the borders were constantly changing, and the barbarians were notorious for raping and pillaging from one village to the next. Tocqueville believed that it was unjust to decide man’s fate according to what happened more than several hundred years ago. According to Gobineau, man was a victim of his heredity, since this determined his destiny.¹³
Tocqueville disagreed with this fatalistic view, according to which man then became his own bourreau, since he could not change or alter his own destiny in any way. Gobineau's view of man allowed the elitists to promote their so-called genetic superiority.

When Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) wrote his Essai sur l'inégalité des races (1853-1855), he was inspired by Henri de Boulainviller (Biddiss 1970, 19). Like Boulainviller, Gobineau was also concerned with race. The former was concerned with the plight of the nobility, whereas the latter was more concerned with nationalities and the physical traits of mankind. Gobineau believed that intelligence was determined by genes, and he strongly opposed miscegenation.

In the following passage, Gobineau depicted the superiority of the white race and what were the results when a so-called "superior" race reproduced with a so-called "inferior" one:

À mesure que toutes ces races s'éloignent trop du type blanc, leurs traits et leurs membres subissent des incorrections de formes, des défauts de proportion qui, en s'amplifiant, de plus en plus, chez celles qui nous sont devenues étrangères, finissent par produire cette excessive laideur, partage antique, caractère ineffaçable du plus grand nombre des branches humaines (Gobineau Tome I 1933, 155-156).

[As these races recede from the white type, their features and limbs become incorrect in form; they acquire defects of proportion which, in the races that are completely foreign to us, end by producing an extreme ugliness. This is the ancient heritage and indelible mark of the greater number of human groups (Gobineau 1915, 151).]

According to Gobineau, there were superior and inferior races; the Caucasian race was, naturally, considered to be
the norm. Gobineau believed that if the ethnic races mix, the
gene pool would then becomes contaminated and decadent. He
also strongly believed that civilizations fell due to the
offspring of these so-called mixed races, who absorbed these
"inferior" genes, thus leaving the "original pure race"
altered in some way or another. To illustrate that
miscegenation caused problems and conflicts in history,
Gobineau used the plight of the Aryans as an example.

In order to avoid confusion regarding the term "Aryan,"
it is essential that this term be briefly defined and put in
context of its usage in the nineteenth century. In a speech
given 2 February 1786, Sir William Jones, a judge in India,
noted that Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Persian, Celtic and
Germanic languages all come from the same linguistic family,
Aryan, also known as Indo-European. He postulated that this
linguistic family must then conform to a specific race of
people. Soon after, scholars studied the history and
evolution of the Aryan race. In the nineteenth century,
several comparative grammar manuals were published by noted
philologists. Among these scholars was Franz Bopp, who would
later influence Ernest Renan (cf. Chapter Two of this
dissertation).

When Gobineau mentions the Aryan race in his essay, he
uses this group of people as an example to denounce
miscegenation. According to Gobineau, when members of
different races married and reproduced, this only led to
mediocrity regarding physical strength, beauty, and
intellectual capacity. He pleaded that the noble blood must be saved from any impurities. Ironically, Gobineau's so-called noble roots are questionable, since his paternal ancestors were unable to establish themselves as noblesse de robe and his maternal grandfather may have been the illegitimate son of Louis XV (Levi 1992, 276).

It seems that ever since the 1560's, certain members of society used their lineage and their genetic composition to proclaim certain rights and privileges at the expense of those who are thus considered to be genetically "inferior," different and thus, in no way compatible with those with the so-called "superior" genes. Fear of the unknown mixed with the need of the scientific community to classify and categorize people according to skin pigmentation, as well as physical features, only encouraged "biological racism" and discrimination. The elitist could then justify his attitude towards others.

Despite all these negative views of human beings who are considered "different" from those who consider themselves the norm, there are a few who do not share this perception. Among them is Ernest Renan, whose views on race are often contradictory and who has been accused of being racist by some twentieth-century literary critics.

This dissertation is significant in that no other writings have been located that provide a balanced view of Renan's works and that provide grounds for revising the image of Renan constructed by such critics as Edward Said and
Tzvetan Todorov. This criticism by Said of Renan has been mentioned in an article, "The Letter and The Spirit: Deconstructing Renan's Life of Jesus and the Assumption of Modernity," by Terence R. Wright. In his article, Wright suggests that the stature of Renan has been debased somewhat due to Edward Said:

Renan's reputation now, of course, is much diminished, partly as a result of Said’s exposure of his ethnocentric and antisemitic tendencies as an Orientalist in two senses, one who wrote about the Orient and to do so invented a discourse which imposed his own western preconceptions upon the east. Renan is perceived as a bad modernist, someone who aimed at the characteristic goal of modernity, a unified, scientific narrative of the origins of Christianity, but who failed. Said quotes some of the many passages in L'Avenir de la Science which equate philology with modernity in a story of rationalism, criticism and liberalism driving out superstition in the name of science (Said [1979], 132-133). There is, of course, some truth in this portrait but it is partial (in both senses): Said selects only a part of Renan's writings in order to tell his own story. What he omits is the recognition on Renan's own part as "a man of letters", a title Said himself awards him, of the limitations of modernity, the impossibility of telling the whole story of The Origins of Christianity even in seven volumes in which the Vie de Jésus was only the first (Wright 1994, 56).

In this passage, Wright asserts that Said's criticism has had an effect on Ernest Renan's reputation. He also alludes to the fact that Said uses the "cut and paste" method of quoting in order to fit his argument. This argument relies on the preconceived notion that all Europeans are oppressors and eager to dominate the colonized nations. Said assumes that since Renan is of European decent, he is ethnocentric, that Renan is a racist, especially towards Semites, and that
Renan’s association with philology is synonymous with intolerance towards non-Europeans. Other critics accuse Renan of promoting nationalism in his works. In a note about the author published in a reprinted version of Renan’s speech, "Identité originelle et séparation graduelle du judaïsme et du christianisme" (1883), an unidentified editor from the "Tradition française" series, Rand School of Social Sciences, mentions this misrepresentation about Renan:

Ernest Renan [...] est un des auteurs les plus revendiqués par le nationalisme français contemporain. Cela n’est possible qu’à force de falsifier les textes et d’altérer l’esprit qui les inspire (A note about the author published in Renan 1943, 4 of Editor’s Note).

[Ernest Renan ... is one of the authors most frequently invoked in contemporary French nationalism. This is only possible if his texts are falsified and the spirit which inspired them is misrepresented (English translation cited in Boyarin 1994, 46).]

It seems as if Renan’s intentions and methods are misunderstood by his critics. These allegations will be further analyzed throughout this dissertation.

Throughout this dissertation, the views of Ernest Renan as well as some of his contemporaries will be presented in a balanced manner in order to clarify the recent misconceptions about this French philosopher. It will be demonstrated that, although there is certainly justification for considering some of Renan’s writings ethnocentric, much of Renan’s writings work to deconstruct the discourse of racism.

END NOTES

3. In Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Ernest Renan is hardly ever mentioned.

4. In a footnote, O’Connor stated that speakers of Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic refer to themselves as “Cymyr” or “Gael” and not “Celtic” (O’Connor 1997, 1).


6. In order to raise money to support his lavish court, Louis XIV established the “noblesse de robe.”

7. All English translations are done by Stephen Shimanek unless otherwise indicated.

8. Blumenbach invented the term “Caucasian” to describe the white race. He had a skull in his collection that came from the Caucasian mountains of the former Soviet Union and he noticed similarities between this skull and that of a German one. Thus, he believed that the Caucasian region might have originally been the homeland of the Europeans.

9. Camper did not refer to his method as the “facial angle”; however, he did record the measurement of the angle (Baker 1974, 29).

10. Rousseau sent Voltaire a copy of his second discourse. In the infamous letter dated 30 August 1755, Voltaire made fun of Rousseau as well as the reference to the “primitive man”:


   [You will please those to whom you reveal the truth, and you will not improve them. You paint in most faithful colours the horrors of human society, from which ignorance and weakness expect much pleasure. So much intelligence has never been used to seek to make us stupid. One is tempted to walk on all fours after reading your book (Voltaire 1961, 148-149)].

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11. During the nineteenth century the French term "physiognomonie" was used to denote the science of judging character by means of observing the physical features, whereas the French term "physionomie" only referred to facial features. In English, this distinction is not made.

12. In this English translation of Lavater's text, the following phrase was added about the Guinea Negroes who were: "never capable of counting more than three (Lavater 1827, 115)."

13. It is important to remember that during the nineteenth century that this fatalist view of mankind being a victim of his heredity, milieu, education was not uncommon. This view was also seen in the works of Émile Zola who was influenced by Dr. Prosper Lucas' work on heredity: Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle dans les états de santé et de maladie du système nerveux, avec l'application méthodique des lois de la procréation au traitement général des affections dont elle est le principe. Ouvrage où la question est considérée dans ses rapports avec les lois primordiales, les théories de la génération, les causes déterminantes de la sexualité, les modifications acquises de la nature originelle des êtres, et les diverses formes de névropathie et d'aliénation mentale (1847-1850).


15. This article by Wright was published in Religion & Literature. 26:2 (summer 1994): 55-71.
CHAPTER 2
RENAN, THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES AND EDWARD SAID

In 1847, Ernest Renan submitted an award winning outline, in which he proposed to write an essay entitled Histoire des langues sémitiques, to the Volney Hebrew Prize committee sponsored by the Académie des Inscriptions. In 1855 this essay was published with a different title: Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques.¹ In his essay, Renan theoretically analyzes the role of the Semitic languages in regards to the history of the human spirit.

It is important to realize that when Renan wrote this essay he believed that language reflected the human spirit. This notion is based on Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz’s theory that "languages are the best mirrors of the human mind" as well as "the most ancient monuments of people (Leibniz cited in Olender 1992, 5)." It is evident that Renan was influenced by Leibniz since they both referred to language as "monuments," and Leibniz’s notion of language coincided with one of Renan’s definitions of "philology": "[...] une science exacte des choses de l’esprit (O.C., III, 847)² [...] an exact science of things intellectual (Renan 1893, 137)].

In this same essay, Renan places the Semitic languages in historical context, traces their decline and defines the Semitic people according to their traits. This essay is divided into five books. In the first book, Renan describes the characteristics of the Semitic people as well as the Semitic languages; in the second book he places the Hebrew
people in the context of their history and defines them as being the "peuple de Dieu." In the third book, he deals with the Armenian period; in the fourth book, he analyzes the Arab period; and finally, in the fifth book, he does a comparative study of the Semitic and Indo-European languages. Throughout this essay, when referring to the Indo-European languages, Renan uses this term interchangeably with "Aryan" and he occasionally uses the term "Indo-Germanic." When Renan first started to write this essay, he intended to compare the grammatical systems of all Semitic languages, a task similar to what the German philologist Franz Bopp (1791-1867) had done for the Indo-European languages in his book entitled Vergleichende Grammatik des Sanskrit, Send, Armenischen, Griechischen, Altslavischen, Gothischen und Deutschen (1813).

In his essay, Renan justifies his use of the word "Semitic" when referring to a language as well as to the people. Renan points out that when the term "Semitic" was first coined, it was based primarily on geography and not on ethnography. Renan used the Elamites as an example, since they were grouped together and referred to as a "Semitic" people; however, they do not speak a Semitic language. Renan only agreed to use the term "Semitic" because it was considered the convention during the nineteenth century (O.C., VIII, 144).

In order to understand the philological approach of Renan in his essay, it is essential that the term "ethnography" (or ethnographie) be put in the context of
1847, when this text was initially written. According to Le Grand Robert de la langue française, during the first half of the nineteenth century, "ethnographie" was defined as follows: "classement des peuples d'après leurs langues (Tome IV 1985, 189)" [classification of people according to their language (My translation)]. During the second half of the nineteenth century the meaning changes and becomes: "étude descriptive des divers groupes humains, notamment des ethnies vivant dans une civilisation pré-industrielle, de leurs caractères anthropologiques, sociaux, etc. (Ibid., 189)" [A descriptive study of diverse groups of humans, particularly ethnic groups living in a pre-industrial civilization, who share anthropological, social characteristics, etc. (My translation)]. With this definition in mind, it is evident that Renan attempts to write about the Semitic people in relation to their language. In other words, Renan does not use the term "Semitic" to name a real, biological race but rather as a convenient way to refer to peoples of various cultures whose languages are related. Here as elsewhere, for Renan, "race" is a term for a community of people that is culturally, but not biologically, unified.

This first definition of "ethnographie" coincides with "philologie" as it was defined in France during the nineteenth century. According to the Trésor de la langue française: Dictionnaire de la langue du XIXe et du XXe siècle (1789-1960), "philologie" was defined as: "étude, tant en ce qui concerne le contenu que l'expression, de documents,
surtout écrits, utilisant telle ou telle langue (Tome XIII 1988, 249)” [a study that deals with the contents of expression, documents, especially writings in such-and-such language (My translation)]. In l’Avenir de la science, Renan describes the difficulty in defining precisely this term:5

La philologie, en effet, semble au premier coup d’œil ne présenter qu’un ensemble d’études sans aucune unité scientifique. Tout ce qui sert à la restauration ou à l’illustration du passé a droit d’y trouver place. Entendue dans son sens étymologique, elle ne comprendrait que la grammaire, l’exégèse et la critique des textes; les travaux d’érudition, d’archéologie, de critique esthétique en seraient distraits. Une telle exclusion serait pourtant peu naturelle. Car ces travaux ont entre eux les rapports les plus étroits; d’ordinaire, ils sont réunis dans les études d’un même individu, souvent dans le même ouvrage. En éliminer quelques-uns de l’ensemble des travaux philologiques serait opérer une scission artificielle et arbitraire dans un groupe naturel (O.C., III, 831).

[Philology, in fact, seems at the first glance only to offer an ensemble of studies without any scientific unity. Everything that contributes to restore or to illustrate the past has the right to a place in it. Understood in its etymological meaning it should only include grammar, exegesis and criticism of texts. Works of pure learning, of archaeology, of aesthetic criticism should be excluded from it. But such exclusion would, however, not be natural at all. For there is the closest connection between these labours, they form, as a rule, part of the studies of the same individual, very often of the same work. To eliminate some of these from the ensemble of philological labours, would be to make an artificial and arbitrary scission in a natural group (Renan’s emphasis) (Renan 1893, 119)].

Compared to the definition of his time, Renan elaborates by stressing the importance of the past because it plays a role in the evolution of a particular language and in the evolution of the human spirit. This is the basis for his
essay Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques. Renan broadens the scope of philology by dealing, not exclusively with language, but also with the people, their history and how this is reflected in their language. For him, the philologist has a specific function that incorporates many fields of study:

Le champ du philologue ne peut donc être plus défini que celui du philosophe, parce qu’en effet l’un et l’autre s’occupent non d’un objet distinct, mais de toutes choses à un point de vue spécial. Le vrai philologue doit être à la fois linguiste, historien, archéologue, artiste, philosophe. Tout prend à ses yeux un sens et une valeur, en vue du but important qu’ils se propose, lequel rend sérieuses les choses les plus frivoles qui de près ou de loin s’y rattachent. [...] La philologie n’a point son but en elle-même: elle a sa valeur comme condition nécessaire de l’histoire de l’esprit humain et de l’étude du passé (O.C., III, 832).

[Therefore, the field of philology can no more be defined than that of the philosopher, for both in fact are occupied not with a distinct object, but with all things from a special standpoint. The true philologist must be at once a linguist, a historian, an archaeologist, an artist and a philosopher. Everything assumes to him a meaning and a value, in view of the object he sets himself, and which renders serious the most frivolous things distantly or closely connected with it. [...] The aim of philology does not lie within itself; it has its value as a necessary condition of the human intellect and the study of the past (Renan 1893, 120).]

In order to have a better understanding of a particular language, Renan thinks that it is necessary to examine other aspects of that culture such as the literature and the history. This is the method that Renan uses throughout Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques. In this essay, Renan goes beyond studying just the grammar
and syntax of the language; he also is interested in the
culture, history and religion of the people whose texts he
analyzed.

Renan takes the role of being a philologist very
seriously. He strongly believes in this branch of science as
well as its impact. In the following passage from l’Avenir de
la science, Renan describes the effect philology has had on
modern society:

La philologie [...]; c’est une science organisée,
ayant un but sérieux et élevé; c’est la science des
produits de l’esprit humain. Je ne crains pas
d’exagérer en disant que la philologie,
inséparablement liée à la critique, est un des
éléments les plus essentiels de l’esprit moderne,
que, sans la philologie, le monde moderne ne serait
pas ce qu’il est, que la philologie constitue la
grande différence entre le moyen âge et les temps
modernes. Si nous surpassons le moyen âge en
netteté, en précision, en critique, nous le devons
uniquement à l’éducation philologique (Renan’s
emphasis) (O.C., III, 839).

[Philology [...]; it is an organized science having
a lofty and serious aim; it is the science of the
productions of the human intellect. I am not afraid
of exaggeration in saying that philology
inseparably bound up with criticism is one of the
most essential elements of the modern spirit, that
without philology the modern world would not be
what it is, and that philology constituted the vast
difference between the Middle Ages and modern
times. If we surpass the Middle Ages in clearness,
in precision, in criticism, it is due solely to
philological education (Renan’s emphasis) (Renan
1893, 128)].

For Renan, philology is like a key that allows him to examine
the human intellect through texts.6 He feels indebted to this
field of “science” because it allows him as well as others to
fully understand and appreciate various writings from other
cultures and centuries.
In the following passage, Renan briefly mentions the relation between criticism and philology. Once again in *l'Avenir de la science*, he describes in further detail the symbiotic relationship between philology and criticism:

La critique, telle est donc la forme sous laquelle, dans toutes les voies, l'esprit humain tend à s'exercer; or, si la critique et la philologie ne sont pas identiques, elles sont au moins inséparables. Critiquer, c'est se poser en spectateur et en juge, au milieu de la variété des choses; or la philologie est l'interprète des choses, le moyen d'entrer en communication avec elles et d'entendre leur langage. Le jour où la philologie périrait, la critique périrait avec elle, la barbarie renaîtrait, la crédulité serait de nouveau maîtresse du monde (Renan’s emphasis) (O.C., III, 844-845).

[Criticism, then, is the form, in which in every field, the human intellect tends to exercise its faculties; and if criticism and philology are not identical, they are at least inseparable. To criticize is to assume the position of a spectator and a judge amidst the variety of things; and philology is the interpreter of things, the means of entering into communication with them and of understanding their language. The day philology should perish, criticism would perish with it, barbarism would be born again, credulity would be once more the mistress of the world (Renan’s emphasis) (Renan 1893, 134-135)].

Renan was a little overzealous (this text was written when he was only twenty-five years old) when he predicted utter chaos and violence if philology disappeared along with criticism. For Renan, criticism along with philology became a means to witness and to interpret another language through various texts from a different culture and century.

With this definition of philologie and of criticism in mind, it is not at all surprising that Renan attempts to correlate every aspect of the Semitic languages with their
history, religion, culture and literature. In his preface, he stresses the necessity to present historical facts in their many facets, even if they are contradictory in nature:

Nous n'avons pas le droit d'effacer les contradictions de l'histoire, et le progrès des sciences critiques n'est possible qu'à la condition d'une rigoureuse bonne foi, uniquement attentive à découvrir la signification des faits, sans en rien dissimuler (O.C., VIII, 139).

[We do not have the right to gloss over historical contradictions, the progress of critical sciences is only possible provided that a rigorous good faith is observed, singularly attentive to discovering the significance of facts, without concealing any of them.]

While emphasizing the importance of using an "objective approach," Renan argues that historians have a right to make conjectures when presenting historical facts.

If one compares Renan's essay on the Semitic languages to prior studies done by other eighteenth or nineteenth-century philologists, Renan's may be considered to be not as biased. Most of these philologists used the Indo-European languages as a point of reference (which was quite a common practice) for their studies on Semitic languages. For the most part, they believed that any practice or belief different from their point of reference could then be considered to be deceitful or faulty and thus have no real value or merit. Unfortunately this manner of thinking was quite prevalent at the time and many of the philological studies were quite similar. For example, in 1855 the Baron d'Eckstein published his essay in the Journal asiatique on the Brahman legends, "De quelques légendes brahmaniques qui
se rapportent au berceau de l’espèce humaine.” In this essay, the Baron d’Eckstein noted the literary and biological superiority of the Aryan race:

Comme la race sémitique était, en son principe, exclusivement nomade, la tradition se formulait naturellement chez elle dans la généalogie des pères et c’était là le grand legs de la famille pastorale. Le reste de ses idées et de ses sentiments s’exprimait au moyen d’un parallélisme constant entre les affections du cœur ou les élévations de l’esprit humain, et la majesté des phénomènes du monde sensible. Il n’y avait pas là, comme chez les Aryas, d’identification complète de l’idée ou de l’affection avec le phénomène de la nature, ce qui est propre de la donnée mythique de l’esprit humain. Le culte de la race sémitique pure est une adoration en permanence du Dieu suprême; mais elle ne sort pas de la sphère d’une sublimité qui nous paraît monotone; elle ne croît pas en étendue et ne s’étend pas, par ses racines, dans la profondeur de son sujet même. C’est ainsi que les rapports les plus intimes de l’âme humaine y font souvent défaut, que l’horizon intellectuel ne s’y fraye pas de nouvelles avenues, qu’il y a absence de ce riche développement de la pensée, du cœur et de l’esprit, qui caractérise les races aryennes et européennes, lesquelles, mises en contact avec le christianisme, devaient déployer toutes les facultés du génie humain, le poussant vers la domination du globe (Baron d’Eckstein’s emphasis) (Baron d’Eckstein cited in the Journal asiatique (aout-septembre 1855): 213-214).

[As the Semitic race was, in its very principle, exclusively nomadic, its tradition was naturally established following a patriarchal genealogy—this was the legacy of the pastoral family. The rest of its sentiments and ideas were expressed by means of a constant parallelism between heartfelt affection or the human intellect’s loftiness, and the the majesty of phenomena in the physical word. There was not a complete identification, as in the case of the Aryans, of the idea or affection with the natural phenomenon, as would be appropriate to a notion of the mythical immediacy of the human intellect. The true religion of the Semitic race is a continual worship of the supreme God; it does not go beyond the sphere of a sublimity which would strike us as monotonous: it does not grow in scope and does not stretch, through its roots, into the depth of its own questions. It is for this reason]
that often the human soul’s most intimate bonds are lacking in the Semites, that new paths are not forged on their intellectual horizon, and that one fails to see the rich development of thought, from the heart and the intellect, that characterizes the Aryans and European races, which, brought into contact with Christianity, had to make use of all of the faculties of the human spirit, in order to push it towards global domination.]

In his essay, the Baron d’Eckstein divides the races into two major groups: Aryan (Europeans) and Semitic (Middle Easterners). After separating the races into two major groups, the Baron d’Eckstein concludes right away that the Semites are inferior and the Aryans are superior. It is important to mention that during the 1840’s and particularly during the 1850’s, Orientalists often presented the Semitic languages as the antithesis of the Aryan languages. Similar to the other studies done on the Semitic races during the first half of the nineteenth century, the Baron d’Eckstein used the Aryan race as a point of reference and often boasted of their superiority. According to the Baron d’Eckstein, it was the Aryan race that established the literary standard for the rest of the world as well as exemplified perfection in genetic composition. He also attacked several cultural aspects of the Semites, especially their religion. According to the Baron d’Eckstein, the Semites’ link with the Supreme God and their inability to go beyond this link stunted their intellectual growth or development. For him, their religious beliefs caused the Semites to be closed off and isolated from other cultures and races. Also, according to the Baron
d'Eckstein, it was thanks to Christianity that the Aryan race has been able to and continue to dominate the world.

Compared to the Baron d'Eckstein, Renan is somewhat more "objective" in his approach. For Renan,8 "race" has nothing to do with blood, genetics, or biology; it is a term designating a people who, for historical reasons, share a common culture, language, or religious perspective. At a conference presented on 27 January 1883 (at Cercle Saint-Simon), "Le judaïsme comme race et comme religion," Renan analyzes the question of race and of religion regarding Judaism:

Il est donc hors de doute que le judaïsme représente d'abord la tradition d'une race particulière. Il est hors de doute aussi qu'il y a eu dans le phénomène de la formation de la race israélite actuelle un apport de sang palestinien primitif; mais, en même temps, j'ai la conviction qu'il y a dans l'ensemble de la population juive, telle qu'elle existe de nos jours, une part considérable de sang non sémite; si bien que cette race, que l'on considère comme l'idéal de l'ethnos pur, se conservant à travers les siècles par l'interdiction des mariages mixtes, a été fortement pénétrée d'infusions étrangères, un peu comme cela a lieu pour toutes les autres races. En d'autres termes, le judaïsme à l'origine fut une religion fermée; mais, dans l'intervalle, pendant de longs siècles, le judaïsme a été ouvert; des masses très considérables de populations non israélites de sang ont embrassé le judaïsme; en sorte que la signification de ce mot, au point de vue de l'ethnographie, est devenue fort douteuse (Renan's emphasis) (O.C., I, 941).

[Doubtless, then, at first, Judaism represented the tradition of a particular race. Doubtless too, in the [phenomenon of the] formation of the present Israeliite race there was a [steady] contribution of primitive Palestinian blood; but, at the same time, I am convinced that in the Jewish population as a whole, such as it is nowadays, there is a sizable share of non-Semitic blood, so much so [in fact] that this race, [commonly] considered the ideal of ethnic purity, having preserved itself through the
centuries by banning mixed marriages, has witnessed a steady foreign infusion, a little like what happened with all of the other races. In other words, Judaism was originally a closed religion; but, in the meantime, through long centuries, Judaism was opened up; large non-Israelite populations embraced Judaism, in such a way that the meaning of this word, from an ethnographic point of view, became open to question.

As Renan states in his essay "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," there is no such thing as a "pure race," not even a Jewish one, despite Jewish efforts to maintain an "ethnic purity" by forbidding mixed marriages. Renan also states in "Le judaïsme comme race et comme religion" his belief that "(...) il n'y a pas un type juif unique, mais qu'il y en a plusieurs, lesquels sont absolument irréductibles les uns aux autres (O.C., I, 941)" [there is not a sole Jewish type but several types that are absolutely irreducible from one another (My translation)]. In order to illustrate this point, Renan explains that this is the case for everyone and every race. (In "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," Renan notes that there is no longer a "pure race" in Europe: "[l]a conscience instinctive qui a présidé à la confection de la carte d'Europe n'a tenu aucun compte de la race, et les premières nations de l'Europe sont des nations de sang essentiellement mélangé (O.C., I, 898)" [The instinctive consciousness which presided over the construction of the map of Europe took no account of race; and the greatest European nations are nations of essentially mixed blood (Renan 1970, 74)].

Renan illustrates in "Le judaïsme comme race et comme religion" the confusion caused in part by ethnography being:
"[...] une science fort obscure; car on ne peut pas y faire d'expérience, et il n'y a de certain que ce qu'on peut expérimenter (O.C., I, 942)" [...] a very obscure science; because one cannot experience it and only things that can be experienced are certain (My translation)]. To reinforce this, Renan points out in "Le judaïsme comme race et comme religion" that:

On allègue aussi en faveur de l'unité ethnique des juifs la similitude des mœurs, des habitudes. Toutes les fois que vous mettrez ensemble des personnes de n'importe quelle race et que vous les astreindrez à une vie de ghetto, vous aurez les mêmes résultats. Il y a, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, une psychologie des minorités religieuses, et cette psychologie est indépendante de la race. La position des protestants, dans un pays où, comme en France, le protestantisme est en minorité, a beaucoup d'analogie avec celle des juifs, parce que les protestants, pendant fort longtemps, ont été obligés de vivre entre eux et qu'une foule de choses leur ont été interdites, comme aux juifs. Il se crée ainsi des similitudes qui ne viennent pas de la race, mais qui sont le résultat de certaines analogies de situation. Les habitudes d'une vie concentrée, gênée, pleine d'interdictions, séquestrée en quelque sorte, se retrouvent partout les mêmes, quelle que soit la race. Les calomnies répandues dans les parties peu éclairées de la population contre les protestants et contre les juifs sont les mêmes. [...] Comme les juifs, les protestants n'ont ni peuple ni paysans; on les a empêchés d'en avoir. Quant à la similitude d'esprit dans le sein d'une même secte, elle s'explique suffisamment par la similitude d'éducation, de lectures, de pratiques religieuses (O.C., I, 942-943).

[The similarity of manners and customs is also put forward as a proof of the ethnic unity of Jews. Every time that one puts together people of whatever race and limits them to a ghetto life, the same result will be obtained. There is, if one may put it this way, a psychology of religious minorities, and this psychology is independent of race. The position of the Protestants in a country where, as in France, Protestantism was in the minority, has plenty of analogy with that of the
Jews, as the Protestants were obliged to live among themselves for a very long time, and a whole host of things were forbidden to them, as to the Jews. Similarities build up, then, that do not come from race, but that are the result of analogous situations. The habits of a concentrated, harassed life full of prohibitions and, so to speak, of sequestration, turn out to be the same everywhere, whichever race is concerned. The slanders spread through the little-enlightened parts of the population against Protestants and Jews are the same. [...] Like the Jews, the Protestants had neither common folk nor country folk; they were prevented from having them. The similarity in spirit within the same sect is sufficiently explained by the similarity in education, reading and religious practice.]

In this passage, Renan remarks that one often associates certain groups of people with others due to their similar beliefs and customs, but this can also be determined by socio-economic factors. This group then becomes known as a race or a “type” who are also then linked together due to historical and socio-economic factors. The similarities amongst this “ethnic type” are the result of their similar traditions, customs and socio-economic factors. For Renan, these similarities are not factors of race but of social necessity:

De même, chez les juifs, la physionomie parti-culière et les habitudes de vie sont bien plus le résultat de nécessités sociales qui ont pesé sur eux pendant des siècles, qu’elles ne sont un phénomène de race (O.C., I, 943).

[Likewise in the case of the Jews, individual physiognomy and customs were much more the result of social necessities which had weighed on them through the centuries, than they were only a racial phenomenon.]

In this passage, Renan notes that race does not determine characteristics of a certain group of people. Here, Renan
uses the term "race" to refer to cultural aspects, such as customs, as well as physical traits, the more common definition used during the nineteenth century.

In the following passage from *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, Renan characterizes a certain world as being "Semitic."

"Ce serait pousser outre mesure le panthéisme en histoire que de mettre toutes les races sur un pied d'égalité, et, sous prétexte que la nature humaine est toujours belle, de chercher dans ses diverses combinaisons la même plénitude et la même richesse. Je suis donc le premier à reconnaître que la race sémitique, comparée à la race indo-européenne, représente réellement une combinaison inférieure de la nature humaine. Elle n'a ni cette hauteur de spiritualisme que l'Inde et la Germanie seules ont connue, ni ce sentiment de la mesure et de la parfaite beauté que la Grèce a légué aux nations néo-latines, ni cette sensibilité délicate et profonde qui est le trait dominant des peuples celtiques. La conscience sémitique est claire, mais peu étendue; elle comprend merveilleusement l'unité, elle ne sait pas atteindre la multiplicité. Le MONOTHEISME en résume et en explique tous les caractères (O.C., VIII, 145-146)."

[It would be to push to excess the pantheism in history to place all the races on an equal footing, and on the pretext of the habitual excellence of human nature, to seek in its various combinations the same plenitude and wealth. I am, thus the first to acknowledge that the Semitic race, compared to the Indo-European race, truly represents an inferior combination of human nature. It has attained neither the spiritual heights that India or Germania alone knew, nor the sense of measure and of perfect beauty that Greece bequeathed to the neo-Latin nations, nor the delicate and profound sensibility which is the dominant characteristic of Celtic peoples. The Semitic conscience is clear, but not very expansive; it understands unity marvelously, but does not know how to reach multiplicity. MONOTHEISM summarizes and explains every idea of character.]

Renan is against close-mindedness and considers Islam as being the opposite of liberal tolerance for diversity, since
cultures that are founded on monotheism and monologic have, according to Renan, a tendency to be intolerant. Renan comes to this assumption because he believes historically that intolerance comes from monotheism and he mistakenly interpreted the essence of Islam as being intolerant. However, there is a contradiction in Renan's reading of history by presenting Islam as being intolerant. If one is tolerant to everything except that which one takes to be intolerant, how can one consider oneself to be tolerant? Renan wants to perceive himself as being tolerant; however, he will not tolerate intolerance. The other problem with this passage is that Renan states that the Semitic race is an inferior combination when compared to the Indo-European race. If Renan considered himself to be open-minded, how can he label the Semitic race as being inferior in regards to their religion?

Besides the association of monotheism with intolerance, Renan makes another assumption about monotheism when he states that "le désert est monothéiste (O.C., VIII, 147)" [the desert is monotheistic (My translation)]. This conjecture is often criticized and quoted by his critics. Here is this controversial theory in context:

La nature, d'un autre côté, tient peu de place dans les religions sémitiques: le désert est monothéiste; sublime dans son immense uniformité, il révéla tout d'abord à l'homme l'idée de l'infini, mais non le sentiment de cette vie incessamment créatrice qu'une nature plus féconde a inspiré à d'autres races. Voilà pourquoi l'Arabie a toujours été le boulevard du monothéisme le plus exalté (O.C., VIII, 147).
[Little place is held, in some respects, for nature in Semitic religions: the desert is monotheistic; sublime in its immense uniformity, above all it revealed to man the idea of the infinite, but not the sense of this incessantly creative life that a more fertile nature had inspired in other races. This is why Arabia has always been the most exalted monotheistic avenue.]

It is uncertain exactly what Renan means by the association made between the desert and monotheism. One can only postulate that perhaps Renan is attempting to use the image of the vastness and even desolate areas of the desert to evoke a sense of singularity or monotony.

Renan emphasized monotheism once again, but this time he used it to explain certain aspects of the Semites' personality. Renan argues that the Semites are considered intolerant due to their religion:

L'intolérance des peuples sémitiques est la conséquence nécessaire de leur monothéisme. Les peuples indo-européens avant leur conversion aux idées sémítiques, n'ayant jamais pris leur religion comme la vérité absolue, mais comme une sorte d'héritage de famille ou de caste, devaient rester étrangers à l'intolérance et au prosélytisme: voilà pourquoi on ne trouve que chez ces derniers peuples la liberté de penser, l'esprit d'examen et de recherche individuelle. Les Sémites, au contraire, aspirant à fonder un culte indépendant des variétés provinciales, devaient déclarer mauvaises toutes les religions différentes de la leur. L'intolérance est bien réellement en ce sens une partie des legs bons et mauvais que la race sémitique a fait au monde (My emphasis) (O.C., VIII, 148).

[The Semitic people’s intolerance is the necessary consequence of their monotheism. Before their conversion to Semitic ideas, the Indo-European people, having never taken their religion as the absolute truth, but as a sort of familial or caste heritage, must have remained a stranger to intolerance and to proselytism; this is why freedom of thought, and the inquisitive spirit of individual searching are unique to the Indo-]
European peoples. The Semites, on the contrary, aspiring to found a form of worship independent of provincial varieties, had to declare that all the religions different from their own were bad or wrong. In this sense, intolerance really is a part of the good and bad legacy that the Semitic race gave to the world (My emphasis).}

Throughout this essay, Renan concludes that Semites are intolerant because historically there is a correlation between monotheism and intolerance. Renan also notes that Europeans have been, in fact, Semitic since the Indo-Europeans were, centuries ago, "Semitized" by their conversion to Christianity.9 However, according to Renan's logic, if Europeans are Semitic then they are potentially monotheistic and intolerant.

Besides the difference in the Semites' temperament, Renan remarks that due to their lack of philosophical and scientific knowledge, the Semites thus have no mythology:10

L'absence de culture philosophique et scientifique chez les Sémites tient, ce me semble, au manque d'étendue, de variété et, par conséquent, d'esprit analytique, qui les distingue. Les facultés qui engendrent la mythologie sont les mêmes que celles qui engendrent la philosophie, et ce n'est pas sans raison que l'Inde et la Grèce nous présentent le phénomène de la plus riche mythologie à côté de la plus profonde métaphysique. Exclusivement frappés de l'unité de gouvernement qui éclate dans le monde, les Sémites n'ont vu dans le développement des choses que l'accomplissement inflexible de la volonté d'un être supérieur; ils n'ont jamais compris la multiplicité dans l'univers. Or la conception de la multiplicité dans l'univers, c'est le polythéisme chez les peuples enfants; c'est la science chez les peuples arrivés à l'âge mûr. Voilà pourquoi la sagesse sémitique n'a jamais dépassé le proverbe et la parabole, à peu près comme si la philosophie grecque eût pris son point d'arrêt aux maximes de sept sages de la Grèce. Le Livre de Job et le Cohéleth, qui nous représentent le plus haut degré de la philosophie sémitique, ne font que
retourner les problèmes sous toutes les formes, sans jamais avancer d’un pas vers la réponse; la dialectique, l’esprit serré et pressant de Socrate y font complètement défaut (O.C., VIII, 149-150). [The absence of a Semitic philosophical and scientific culture has to do, it seems to me, with their characteristic lack of scope, of variety and, as a result, of analytic spirit. The faculties which engender mythology are the same as those which give rise to philosophy, and it is not without reason that India and Greece present us with the phenomenon of the richest mythology alongside the most profound metaphysics. Exclusively struck by the governmental unity which was breaking out across the world, the Semites saw in this development of things only the inflexible accomplishment of a superior being’s will; they never understood the multiplicity in the universe. Now the conception of multiplicity in the universe is polytheism for young peoples; it is science for people who have reached a mature age. This is why Semitic wisdom has never surpassed the proverb and the parable, as if Greek Philosophy had taken the maxims of the seven Greek sages as the stopping point. The Book of Job and Coheleth, which represent for us the acme of Semitic philosophy, do no more than turn problems upside down through each of their forms, without ever taking a step towards responding to them; dialectic, the sharp and pressing spirit of Socrates is completely lacking.]

Once again Renan relies on history to justify portraying the Semites as lacking scientific culture, since in the thirteenth century Islamic authorities destroyed and banned all scientific and philosophical manuals. For Renan, monotheism implies unity, homogeneity and simplicity.

Despite the Semites’ so-called lack of mythology or lack of variety and lack of diversity, Renan does consider them to be intelligent and acknowledged their contributions to society: "[...] [on] peut, sans exagération, leur [les Sémites] attribuer au moins une moitié de l’œuvre intellectuelle de l’humanité (O.C., VIII, 144)” [without
exaggeration one can attribute to the Semites at least half of humanity’s intellectual works (My translation)].

After examining the intellectual attributes of the Semites, Renan examines the physical traits of the Semitic races. Unlike his contemporaries, Renan does not find any biological differences between the Semites and the Indo-Europeans:

La race sémitique, en effet, et la race indo-européenne, examinées au point de vue de la physiologie ne montrent aucune différence essentielle; elles possèdent en commun et à elles seules le souverain caractère de la beauté. Sans doute la race sémitique présente un type très prononcé, qui fait que l’Arabe et le juif sont partout reconnaissables; mais ce caractère différentiel est beaucoup moins profond que celui qui sépare un Brahmane d’un Russe ou d’un Suédois: et pourtant les peuples brahmaniques, slaves et scandinaves appartiennent certainement à la même race. Il n’y a donc aucune raison pour établir, au point de vue de la physiologie, entre les Sémites et les Indo-Européens, une distinction de l’ordre de celles qu’on établit entre les Caucasiens, les Mongols et les nègres. Aussi les physiologistes n’ont-ils pas été amenés à reconnaître l’existence de la race sémitique et l’ont-ils confondue, sous le nom commun et d’ailleurs si défectueux de Caucasiens, avec la race indo-européenne. L’étude des langues, des littératures et des religions devait seule amener à reconnaître ici une distinction que l’étude du corps ne révélait pas (Renan’s emphasis) (O.C., VIII, 576-577).

[Indeed, the Semitic and Indo-European races show no essential difference when examined from a physiological point of view; together they (and only they) possess the sovereign character of beauty. Without doubt, the Semitic race have a pronounced look which makes it such that the Arab or the Jew is recognizable anywhere; but the character-differential is much less profound than the one which separates a Brahminic from a Russian from a Swede: and yet the Brahminic, Slavic and Scandinavian people certainly belong to the same race. Thus, from a physiological point of view, there is no reason to establish a distinction between Semites and Indo-Europeans on the order of
the one established between Caucasians, Mongols and blacks. So physiologists were not led to recognize the existence of the Semitic race and confused it, under the common, and, moreover, quite defective name—Caucasians. The study of languages, literature and religions must alone have lead to the recognition of a distinction here that the study of the body did not reveal.]

For Renan, there is no Semitic "race" in the biological sense, but there is a Semitic "culture" or ideology. Renan examines this further in another essay, "Le judaïsme comme race ou comme religion," where Renan wondered when and where Indo-Europeans may have converted to Judaism:

[...] [D’]où venaient ces juifs d’Orléans et de Paris? Poupons-nous supposer que tous fussent les descendants d’Orientaux venus de Palestine à une certaine époque, et qui auraient fondé des espèces de colonies dans certaines villes? Je ne le crois pas. Il y eut sans doute, en Gaule, des émigrés juifs, qui remontèrent le Rhône et la Saône, et servirent en quelque sorte de levain; mais il y eut aussi une foule de gens qui se rattachèrent au judaïsme par conversion et qui n’avaient pas un seul ancêtre en Palestine. Et quand on pense que les juiveries d’Allemagne et d’Angleterre sont venues de France, on se prend à regretter de n’avoir pas plus de données sur les origines du judaïsme dans notre pays. On verrait probablement que le juif des Gaules du temps de Gontran et de Chilpéric n’était, le plus souvent, qu’un Gaulois professant la religion israélite (O.C., I, 939-940).

[Where do the Jews of Orleans and Paris come from? Are we able to suppose that all were descendants of Orientals who came from Palestine at a certain time, and would have founded some kind of colonies in certain cities? I do not believe so. There were in Gaul, without a doubt, some Jewish émigrés who came back up the Rhone and the Saône and who served in a way as leavening; but there was also a crowd of people who linked themselves with Judaism by conversion and who did not have a single Palestinian ancestor. And when one thinks that the Jewish people from Germany and from England came from France, one begins to regret not having more data on the origin of Judaism in our country. One would probably find that the Gaulish Jew from the]
time of Gontran or Chilpéric was, most often, simply a Gaul professing the Israelite religion.] Renan postulates that not all the Jews in Gaul have emigrated there and that some of the inhabitants have converted to Judaism. This illustrates Renan's theory that the Semites cannot be considered a "biological race" but a "cultural" one.

It is important to emphasize that Renan's use of the term "race" to denote culture was not a common practice by his contemporaries, who used "race" to signify a classification of man according to his physical attributes. For example, Martin Tupper, a British poet, used the term "race" to refer to the Anglo-Saxons in one of his poems, "The Anglo-Saxon Race," in 1850. Tupper, like most Victorians, believed that humans were defined by their race because all members of a race shared certain biological, moral and intellectual aspects (Appiah 1995, 276).

The main difference between Renan and Tupper is that in the case of the Semites, Renan did not rely on biology to define them. During the nineteenth century, it was common to define ethnic groups as having superior or inferior physical and intellectual qualities. In fact, Renan defines inferior races as those that cease to exist:

Races inférieures, n'ayant pas de souvenirs, couvrant le sol dès une époque qu'il est impossible de rechercher historiquement et dont la dé extinction appartient au géologue. En général, ces races ont disparu dans les parties du monde où se sont portées les grandes races civilisées (O.C., VIII, 585).

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Inferior races have left no trace of their existence and it is up to the geologists to determine their existence. Generally speaking, these races disappeared from parts of the world where the great civilized races lived (My translation).

In this passage, Renan uses the term "race" to refer to cultures that no longer exist and in "Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?," he expands on this notion by defining "race" as not being constant and always changing (cf. O.C., I, 898; Renan 1970, 74). However, Renan states earlier that the Semites, a cultural race, are considered to be inferior when compared to the Indo-European race due to their lack of mythology and diversity.

Nonetheless, Renan is so concerned about using the term "race" throughout his essay that in the preface he warned other historians about the risks of hastily drawing conclusions when using this term:

Les jugements sur les races doivent toujours être entendus avec beaucoup de restrictions: l'influence primordiale de la race, quelque immense part qu'il convienne de lui attribuer dans le mouvement des choses humaines, est balancée par une foule d'autres influences, qui parfois semblent dominer ou même étouffer entièrement celle du sang (O.C., VIII, 139).

[Judgments on race must always be dealt with many restrictions: the primordial influence of race, in part is due to the movement of human things, and the other part is balanced by other influences that sometimes seem to dominate or even entirely stifle those aspects of blood (My translation).]

In this passage, Renan insists on not judging races without taking into consideration influences other than physical traits, such as culture, literature and religion. It seems as
if Renan is alluding to his contemporaries, such as Gobineau, who rely only on physical characteristics or genetic lineage to determine the rights and privileges of certain individuals.

Also throughout this essay, Renan attempts to use philology as a means to understand other languages as well as their civilizations; however, he is severely criticized for this association by Edward Said. In several of Said’s works, a philologist is portrayed as a biased “judge” of other cultures and religions:

[...] Renan is the philologist as judge, the French scholar surveying lesser religions like Islam with disdain, speaking with the authority not only of a scientific European but of a great cultural institution (Said 1983, 288).

[...H]is Semitic opus was proposed as a philological breakthrough, from which in later years he was always to draw retrospective authority for his positions (almost always bad ones) on religion, race, and nationalism.

[...L]astly, Semitic was Renan’s first creation, a fiction invented by him in the philological laboratory to satisfy his sense of public place and mission. It should by no means be lost on us that Semitic was for Renan’s ego the symbol of European (and consequently his) dominion over the Orient and over his own era (Said 1979, 141).

In the first passage, Said does not state explicitly which religion is considered “superior” compared to Islam. Said implies that Renan believes that “Christianity” is “greater,” which seems unlikely since Renan severely criticizes Christianity. (This will, in part, be examined in chapter five.) Said also makes the assumption that European is synonymous with Christianity, which is not always the case, especially for Renan.
In "Islamisme et la science," Renan defines the French as not being, in terms of religious mentality, Christians but rather Jews:

Ce qui cause presque toujours les malentendus en histoire, c'est le manque de précision dans l'emploi des mots qui désignaient les nations et les races. On parle des Grecs, des Romains, des Arabes comme si ces mots désignent des groupes humains toujours identiques à eux-mêmes, sans tenir compte des changements produits par les conquêtes militaires, religieuses, linguistiques, par la mode et les grands courants de toute sorte qui traversent l'histoire de l'humanité. La réalité ne se gouverne pas selon des catégories aussi simples. Nous autres, Français, par exemple, nous sommes romains par la langue, grecs par la civilisation, juifs par la religion. Le fait de la race, capital à l'origine, va toujours perdant de son importance à mesure que les grands faits universels qui s'appellent civilisation grecque, conquête romaine, conquête germanique, christianisme, islamisme, Renaissance, philosophie, Révolution, passent comme des rouleaux broyeurs sur les primitives variétés de la famille humaine et les forcent à se confondre en masses plus ou moins homogènes (My emphasis) (O.C., I, 945).

[The causes of historical errors are nearly always to be found in a failure of precision in the use of words denoting nations and races. We speak of the Greeks, of the Romans, of the Arabs, as though these words designated human groups ever identical with themselves, without taking into account the changes due to military, religious, and linguistic conquests, to fashion, and to the great currents of every description which traverse the history of humanity. Reality does not govern itself in accordance with such simple categories. We French, for instance, are Roman by language, Greek by civilisation, and Jewish by religion. The matter of race, of capital importance in the beginning, has a constant tendency to lose that importance, when the great universal facts, known as Greek civilisation, Roman conquest, Teutonic conquest, Christianity, Islamism, the Renaissance, philosophy, and revolution pass, like grinding mill-stones, over the primitive varieties of the human family, and force them to mingle themselves in more or less homogeneous masses (My emphasis) (Renan 1970, 84)].
In this passage, Renan stresses the need to avoid stereotyping races and nations, and he notes that one falls into this trap by attempting to label and categorize a group of people according to their race, nation and religion. Concerning the question of religion, Renan does not consider European as synonymous with Christian and Middle Eastern with Semitic, but Renan sees Europeans as being Semitic. Thus to a certain extent, Said's attribution to Renan of an ethnocentric sense of religious superiority is not justifiable. Renan sees Christianity as a movement within Judaism. These religions are Semitic in origin and are basically influenced by monotheism. Renan also notes in this same passage that “pure races” no longer exist. He reiterates these points in another essay, "Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?," where he examines these notions in further detail (cf. Chapter Three of this dissertation).

There seems to be a misconception about the intentions of other nineteenth-century philologists and Renan. In a footnote in Imperialism: Part Two of the Origins of Totalitarianism (1968), Hannah Arendt explains this point:

As for the philologists of the early nineteenth century, whose concept of "Aryanism" has seduced almost every student of racism to count them among the propagandists or even inventors of race-thinking, they are as innocent as innocent can be. When they overstepped the limits of pure research it was because they wanted to include in the same cultural brotherhood as many nations as possible. In the words of Ernest Seillière, La Philosophie de l’Impérialisme, 4 vols., 1903-1906: "There was a kind of intoxication: modern civilization believed it had recovered its pedigree... and an organism was born which embraced in one and the same fraternity all nations whose language showed some
affinity with Sanskrit.” (Préface, Tome I, p. xxxv.) In other words, these men were still in the humanistic tradition of the eighteenth century and shared its enthusiasm about strange people and exotic cultures (Arendt 1968, 40, note 6).

According to Arendt, the early nineteenth-century philologists are innocent in the sense that they are merely trying to unite all cultures in Europe as one. Renan is trying to do the same thing for the Semitic races as had been done for the Indo-Europeans by his predecessors. Renan attempts to unite the Semites by breaking down the conflicts between the Arabs and the Jews. Furthermore, he states that the Semites and the Indo-Europeans are blended together and brings these two groups together in an attempt to be more inclusive.

Despite Renan’s attempt to establish a link between the Indo-Europeans and Semites, Said accuses Renan of parricide:

Not only did Renan kill off the extratextual validity of the great Semitic sacred texts; he confined them as objects of European study to a scholarly field thereafter to be known as Oriental [...].

[...] [T]he old hierarchy of sacred Semitic texts has been destroyed as if by an act of parricide; the passing of divine authority enables the appearance of European ethnocentrism, by which the methods of discourse of Western scholarship confine inferior non-European cultures to a position of subordination (Said 1983, 47).

To a certain extent, by criticizing the Semites, with whom Renan shares a genealogical bond, Renan is attacking his own race and metaphorically killing members of his “family.” Also according to Said, Renan destroys the validity of these sacred Semitic texts by reducing them to objects of European
study. Said states that the purpose of *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*

[...] was scientifically to describe the inferiority of Semitic languages, principally Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, the medium of three purportedly sacred texts that had been spoken or at least informed by God - the Torah, the Koran, and, later, the derivative Gospels. Thus in the *Vie de Jésus* Renan would be able to insinuate that so-called sacred texts, delivered by Moses, Jesus or Mohammed, could not have anything divine in them if the very medium of their supposed divinity, as well as the body of their message to and in the world, was made up of such comparatively poor worldly stuff. Renan argued that, even if these texts were prior to all others in the West, they held no theologically dominant position (Said 1983, 46).

To a certain extent this accusation is true in that Renan did use his essay in order to scientifically portray the Semitic languages as being inferior. However, it seems unlikely that Renan used his essay on the Semitic languages as a precursor to *Vie de Jésus* so that he could denounce other divine texts and deny their "theologically dominant postion." It is important to remember that Renan wrote *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* a few years after he had left the seminary.

Said also notes that the use of one language has been used to deem another inferior when he states:

> Read almost any page by Renan on Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, or proto-Semitic and you read a fact of power, by which the Orientalist philologist's authority summons out of the library at will examples of man's speech, and ranges them there surrounded by a suave European prose that points out defects, virtues, barbarisms, and shortcomings in the language, the people, and the civilization. (Said 1979, 142).
Said assumes that Renan must have considered French to be noble, sophisticated and "suave." Ironically, in his essay "Les origines de la langue française" (1853), Renan points out that French is fundamentally "vulgar" or "popular," since it was originally spoken by illiterates, soldiers and people from the provinces:

Ainsi une langue d'extraction plebienne, martelée ensuite durant des siècles, par des gosiers barbares, à demi dévorée par des mangeurs de syllabes, voilà notre langue; ce qui n'empêche pas que longtemps encore, quand l'étranger voudra dire de fines et gracieuses choses, il se croira obligé de les dire en français. L'humilité des origines n'humilie personne; le monde n'est plein que de ces ennoblissemens et de ces passages de la rusticité à la plus exquise politesse (O.C., II, 468).

[Thus a language of plebeian extraction was next pounded out through the centuries by barbarous gullets, half devoured by those who swallow syllables; this is our language, which, for a long time now, has not prevented foreigners wishing to say fine and gracious things from feeling obligated to say them in French. No one is humiliated by their humble origins; the world is only full of these ennoblements and these transitions from rustic simplicity to the most exquisite politeness.]

Renan is in fact demystifying the idea that French is a "suave" or "noble language." However, in another essay Renan encourages the use of French, and he believes that French is a language of liberal tolerance, as he states in "Conférence faite à l'alliance pour la propagcation de la langue française" (1888): "[la langue française] dira des choses assez diverses, mais toujours des choses libérales (O.C., II, 1090)" [It [the French language] will say tolerably diverse, but always liberal things (Renan 1892, 190)]. Some critics
would find Renan’s admission about the French language to be self-serving and ethnocentric. It is uncertain what Renan’s intentions were since in 1853 he wrote an essay demystifying the idea of the French language being noble and suave, but thirty-five years later he praised and he encouraged the use of French. It is this kind of contradiction that makes Renan an enigma and it invites criticism of him.

Besides questioning Renan’s intentions, Said also attacks Renan for his association with philology and accuses Renan of trying to foster the destruction of Islam:

The paradox at the heart of Renan’s view of Islam is resolved only when we understand him to be keeping Islam alive so that, in his philological writing, he might set about destroying it, treating it as a religion only to show the fundamental aridity of its religious spirit, reminding us that, even if all religions are essentially postscripts to permanently disappeared revelations, Islam was interesting to a philologist as the postscript to a postscript, the trace of a trace (Said 1983, 281).

Said’s criticism of Renan’s attitude toward Islam is quite justified. On the other hand, some of Said’s claims can only be made by ignoring Renan’s insistence on Islamic autonomy. In his Études d’histoire religieuse (1857), Renan demonstrates respect for Islam and even encourages Europeans not to alter Islamic beliefs:

Il est superflu d’ajouter que, si jamais un mouvement de réforme se manifestait dans l’islamisme, l’Europe ne devrait y participer que par son influence la plus générale. Elle aurait mauvaise grâce à vouloir régler la foi des autres. Tout en poursuivant activement la propagation de son dogme, qui est la civilisation, elle doit laisser aux peuples la tâche infiniment délicate d’accommoder leurs traditions religieuses avec leurs besoins nouveaux, et respecter le droit le plus imprescriptible des nations comme des

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individus, celui de présider soi-même dans la plus parfaite liberté aux révolutions de sa conscience (Renan 1992, 220).

[It is superfluous to add, that if ever a movement of reform were manifest in Islamism, Europe could participate in it only through its most general influence. It would, with a very ill grace, think of regulating the faith of other people. While pursuing actively the propagation of its creed, which is civilization, it must leave to the nations the delicate task of accommodating their religious traditions to their new needs; and must respect the most absolute right of nations, as of individuals,—the right of presiding themselves, in the most perfect freedom, over the changes in their own interior being (Renan 1864, 284).]

In this excerpt, Renan argues against European nations forcing their beliefs on other nations, such as Islamic ones. It seems ironic that Renan opposed the very thing, European cultural imperialism, that Said accuses him of propagating.

It is important to point out that despite this proclamation in favor of Islamic autonomy, a few years later, between 1860-1861, during an archaeological mission to Phoenicia (Syria), Renan describes how much he loathes Islam. Here is a passage from one of his black leather notebooks (currently at the Bibliothèque Nationale; 11485, f°3):


[I, the most moderate of men, who blames himself for not hating evil enough, for indulging it — I am without pity for Islam. I wish Islamism an ignominious death. I would like to slap it down.}
Yes, the East must be Christianized, for the benefit not of the Christians of the East but of the Christians of the West (English translation cited in Olender 1992, 170, note 32).

Unfortunately, neither the context of this journal nor the date when it was actually written could be verified. It seems quite odd that Renan would have been so vehemently opposed to Islam and encourage Christianization without some kind of explanation or justification, since three to four years prior he denounced this very thing in his essay, *Études d’histoire religieuse*. It is this sort of contradiction that makes Renan a troubling figure. This dissertation attempts to show that some of Renan’s writings contain elements that deconstruct the discourse of the obvious ethnocentrism of some of his other writings.

During the same period in which Renan was still in the Holy Land, he wrote in a letter, to his best friend Marcelin Berthelot dated 19 April 1861, that he disliked certain aspects about Islam:

Un parti frénétique, cantonné dans la mosquée et dans le bazar, règne par la menace de mort et d’incendie, réduit à néant le pouvoir turc et maintient une haine farouche contre tout ce qui n’est pas l’esprit exalté de l’Islam. C est là qu’on comprend quel malheur a été l’islamisme, quel levain de haine, d’exclusivisme il a semé dans le monde, combien le monotheisme exalté est contraire à toute science, à toute vie civile, à toute idée large. Ce que l’islamisme a fait de la vie humaine est chose à peine croyable; l’ascétisme du moyen âge n’est rien en comparaison. L’Espagne n’a jamais inventé une terreur religieuse qui approche de cela (Renan et Berthelot 1898, 266-267).

[A frenzied party established in the mosque and in the bazaar reigns by threats of fire and death. It has reduced to nothing the Turkish power, and maintains a ferocious hatred against everything]
that is not of the exalted spirit of Islam. It is here that one understands what a misfortune Islamism has been, what a leaven of hate and exclusiveness it has sown in the world, how exaggerated monotheism is opposed to all science, to all civil life, to every great idea. The effect which Islamism has had upon human life is something incredible; the asceticism of the middle ages [sic] is nothing in comparison. Spain has never invented a religious terror which approaches that (Renan and Berthelot 1904, 170).

Renan notes the division that Islam created by rejecting or separating itself from everything that was not an aspect of Islam or Islamism. Renan resents their exclusiveness, since part of Renan’s aim was to bring the Semites and Indo-Europeans together. He assumes that, historically, monotheism is synonymous with intolerance. As for his stance on Islam in regards to science, this would be developed further in a lecture given at the Sorbonne approximately twenty years after his initial visit to the Holy Land. This lecture, “L’islamisme et la science” (29 March 1883), is often criticized by contemporary critics (cf. Abet 1996, 279-282; Said 1983, 281; Todorov 1989, 172; 1994, 122-123).

In this same speech on Islamism and science, Renan states his admiration for certain aspects of Islamism:

Loin de moi des paroles d’amertume contre aucun des symboles dans lesquels la conscience humaine a cherché le repos au milieu des insolubles problèmes que lui présentent l’univers et sa destinée! L’islamisme a de belles parties comme religion; je ne suis jamais entré dans une mosquée sans une vive émotion, le dirai-je? sans un certain regret de n’être pas musulman. Mais, pour la raison humaine, l’islamisme n’a été que nuisible (O.C., I, 957).

[Far from me be it to speak, with words of bitterness, against any of the symbols in which the human conscience has sought for rest, amongst the insoluble problems presented to it by the universe]
and its destiny. Islamism has its beauties as a religion; I have never entered a mosque without a vivid emotion—shall I even say without a certain regret in not being a Mussulman [sic]? But to the human reason Islamism has only been injurious (Renan 1970, 99).

In this passage, Renan illustrates a troubling mixture of respect and disrespect for Islam. For Renan, reason signifies openness to diversity and once again he, who considers himself to be open-minded, is contradictory due to his inability to tolerate what he views as intolerance.

After examining certain aspects of the history of Islam, Renan concludes that:

L’islam, en traitant la science comme son ennemie, n’est que conséquent; mais il est dangereux d’être trop conséquent. L’islam a réussi pour son malheur. En tuant la science, il s’est tué lui-même, et s’est condamné dans le monde à une complète infériorité (O.C., I, 958).

[Islam, in treating science as an enemy, is only consistent; but it is a dangerous thing to be too consistent. To its own misfortune, Islam has been successful. By slaying science it has slain itself; and is condemned in the world to a complete inferiority (Renan 1970, 100)].

Renan postulates that, perhaps, Islam is perceived as being inferior by the rest of the world due to the fact that it is its own bourreau. By denying its people access to scientific and philosophical thinking, Islam in fact perpetuates ignorance, when it distances itself, on an intellectual level, from the rest of the world.

Throughout this essay, Ernest Renan does not use the term "race" to signify blood, genetics or biology, but to designate a people who, for historical reasons, share a common culture. He also tries to create unity among the
Semites by breaking down the conflicts between Jews and Arabs; acknowledges that historically the Semites and Indo-Europeans are blended together, and unifies these two groups in an attempt to be more inclusive.

Historically monotheism is associated with intolerance. Since, for Renan, Semites are monotheistic and are united with Indo-Europeans; thus the latter are potentially monotheistic and intolerant. The paradox is that Renan wants to think that he is open to diversity; however, he is not tolerant towards monotheism. Since Renan is unable to be tolerant towards his own people, Said perceives this criticism of the Semites as an act of parricide.

Besides his inability to be tolerant towards monotheism, Renan’s view on Islam is also contradictory. Before Renan went to the Holy Land, he was against European dominion and while there he encouraged Christianization without any justification. This sort of contradiction on Renan’s part makes him a very troubling figure. This dissertation attempts to illustrate the elements that promote or denounce ethnocentrism in some of his writings.

END NOTES

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2. All references to the works by Ernest Renan are from Œuvre complètes, Tomes I-X, ed. Henriette Psichari, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947-1961; unless otherwise indicated. When referring to this edition, the letters O.C., followed by the volume number in Roman numerals and the page number in parenthesis will be used after each passage cited.

3. In Twelve Lectures on the Connection Between Science and Revealed Religion (1837), Nicholas Wiseman defined "ethnography" as "the classifications of nations from the comparative study of languages, a science born, I may say, almost within our memory" and also noted that the French called it "Linguistique, or the study of language; and it is also known by the name of comparative philology (13)."

4. Todorov believes that Renan’s theories on cultural differences are, for the most part, based on Renan’s own "prejudices" (1989, 201; 1995, 145).

5. Part of this passage is also quoted in the French dictionary Trésor de la langue française (cf. Tome XIII, 249).


9. In "Le judaïsme comme race ou comme religion," Renan examines that this conversion may have taken place in Gaul, cf. O.C., I, 939-940.
10. In a letter dated 8 May 1860, Renan states that he no longer considers the Semites to be monotheisitic and he also admits that the Semites do have a mythology, cf. Renan's article "Nouvelles considérations sur le caractère général des peuples sémitiques et en particulaier leur tendance au monothéisme." *Journal asiatique.* 5:13 (avril-mai 1859): 418; and his letter to Max Müller in *O.C.*, X, 270-271.

11. In "Islamisme et la science" (1883), Renan traces the history of Islam and examines further how the lack of science affected the Semites, cf. *O.C.*, I, 945-965.

12. Here is Tupper's poem, "The Anglo-Saxon Race":

Stretch forth! stretch forth! from the south to the north,
From the east to the west,-stretch forth! stretch forth!
Strength thy stakes and lengthen thy cords,-
The world is a tent for the world's true lords!
Break forth and spread over every place
The world is a world for the Saxon race! (Tupper cited in Appiah 1995, 276).

13. This speech was also published in *Journal des Débats* (3 février 1888).

14. Since there was a rift between the French government and the philosophers, in an attempt to appease this feud, in May 1860 Emperor Louis-Napoléon offered to send Renan on an archaeological dig to Phoenicia. Henriette encouraged her brother to accept this position, since there were no political strings attached (Darmester 1898, 131).

Todorov considers Renan to be racist towards Semitic peoples, because, according to Todorov, Renan used biology and language as a basis for his racism. Todorov’s criticism will be examined in further detail, but in order to have a better understanding of Renan’s position on "race," it is essential to briefly examine this term. In nineteenth-century France, the term “race” is defined as a: “Groupe naturel d’hommes qui ont des caractères semblables (physiques, psychologiques, sociaux, linguistiques ou culturels) provenant d’un passé commun (Le Grand Robert de la langue française Tome VII, 1985, 990)” [A natural group of men who have similar characteristics (i.e. physical, psychological, social, linguistic or cultural) and who also share a common past (My translation)]. It is noteworthy to mention that nineteenth-century scholars were unable to agree on a definition concerning the notion of race. This term was so often used that it achieved a “normative status” (Olender 1992, 57).

As for the twentieth century, the definition of “race” has changed and no longer included similar linguistic traits. It now appears to be a term with purely “biological"
connotations. With this in mind, along with the nineteenth-century definition of philology and ethnography, it is not surprising that Renan emphasizes language. Renan’s emphasis on linguistics is evident in *De l’origine du langage: "La division des Sémites et des Indo-Européens, par exemple, a été créée par la philologie et non par la physiologie (O.C., VIII, 102)"* [The division among the Semites and Indo-Europeans was created by philology and not by physiology (My translation)]. For Renan, language plays a role in determining the “essence” of a human community.¹ Unlike other scientists, phrenologist and physiognomists of the nineteenth century, Renan does not categorize mankind according to genetic makeup; rather he notes the difference in linguistic families and he links language with race. For example, in *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, Renan argues that the main factor for identifying the Semitic race is their language:

L’individualité de la race sémitique ne nous ayant été révélée que par l’analyse du langage, analyse singulièrement confirmée, il est vrai, par l’étude des mœurs, des littératures, des religions, cette race étant, en quelque sorte, créée par la philologie, il n’y a réellement qu’un seul critérium pour reconnaître les Sémites: c’est le langage (My emphasis) (O.C., VIII, 180).

[The individuality of the Semitic race having been revealed to us through the analysis of the language, an analysis singularly confirmed, it is true, by the study of customs, of literature, and of religions, this race having been, so to speak, created by philology, there is really but a single criterion for recognizing the Semites: the language (My emphasis).]
In this passage, Renan recognizes that philology plays some sort of role in creating or perpetuating the idea of a Semitic race. There is a suggestion that, to some degree, the notion of a Semitic race is a fiction.

To prove that Renan is a racist, Todorov uses passages from a letter dated 26 June 1856 that Renan wrote to Gobineau. Out of context, the following sentence appears inflammatory and extremely racist: "En mettant à part les races tout à fait inférieures dont l'immixtion aux grandes races ne ferait qu'empoisonner l'espèce humaine [...] (O.C., X, 204)" [By setting aside all together inferior races, whose blending with the major races would only poison the human species [...] (My translation).] However, if the second part of this sentence is cited as well as the sentences that follow, the meaning changes drastically:

[...] [J]e conçois pour l'avenir une humanité homogène, où tous les ruisseaux originaires se fondront en un grand fleuve, et où tout souvenir des provenances diverses sera perdu. La civilisation qui correspondra à un tel état de l'humanité sera inférieure sans doute en noblesse et en distinction à celle des âges aristocratiques; mais sera-t-elle inférieure d'une manière absolue? c'est sur quoi j'hésite à me prononcer. Mais quel service vous avez rendu en exprimant votre point de vue avec une force, une hauteur, une logique, que je n'hésite pas à qualifier d'admirables! (O.C., X, 204-205).

[In the future, I foresee a homogeneous humanity, where all of the original streams merge into a large river, and where all memory of diverse origins will be lost. The civilization that will correspond to such a state of humanity, to be sure, will be inferior in nobility and in distinction to that of the aristocratic ages; but will it be inferior in every way? It is on this point that I hesitate to deliver a verdict. But what service you have performed in expressing your point of view]
with a vigor, a nobility and a logic that I cannot hesitate but to call admirable!

It is evident that Renan is opposing Gobineau and his book *Essai sur l'inégalité des races* (1853-1855). Gobineau insists that miscegenation inevitably entails the degradation of a race. Here, Renan argues in favor of a complete miscegenation that would obscure the original racial diversity of humankind. This is the exact antithesis of Gobineau’s theory, according to which miscegenation is the problem, not the cure. Todorov attempts to portray Renan as supporting Gobineau, when in fact Renan is diametrically opposed to him.

Gobineau wrote at least eleven letters to Renan from 1854-1868 (cf. Béziau 1988, 101-121). In two of these letters, Gobineau attempts to profit from Renan’s position as a writer for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and requests that Renan write a review of Gobineau’s essay. Renan never did write this review; and he wrote at least two letters to Gobineau: dated 19 August 1854 and 26 June 1856 (cf. O.C., X, 159-161; 203-205). In the first letter to Gobineau, Renan explained that he could not write a critique of Gobineau’s book because it was not part of the theme for a particular issue as deemed by the editor. Renan also stated that he was too busy to write a review because at that time he was still finishing his essay on the Semitic languages.

As for the second letter sent to Gobineau, Renan is blatantly sarcastic towards Gobineau, who like other scientists, phrenologists and physiognomists of the
nineteenth century emphasized the genetic differences in races. In his essay, Gobineau blames these so-called inferior races for all the blights in history and the decay of civilization. Gobineau believes that this decay is caused by the mixing of races since, according to him, physiology determines intelligence as well as morality. Contrary to this belief, Renan does not think in terms of superior or inferior race based on biology and does not believe in the existence of this so-called "pure race." This so-called pure race no longer exists due to the various wars and the constantly changing borders. Renan later elaborates on this notion when he writes: "[l]es plus nobles pays, l'Angleterre, la France, l'Italie, sont ceux où le sang est le plus mêlé (O.C., I, 896)" [The most noble countries, England, France, Italy, are those where the blood is most mingled (Renan 1970, 72)]. According to Todorov, this passage is from this same infamous letter to Gobineau; in fact it is from "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" (cf. Todorov 1989, 195-196; 1993, 140). Todorov uses this passage to portray Renan as an European elitist because in this context Renan uses the term "noble" to refer to certain European nations (Todorov 1989, 195-196; 1993, 140). Contrary to the interpretation made by Todorov, Renan actually is trying to demystify the idea of the "racial purity" of Europeans:

La vérité est qu'il n'y a pas de race pure et que faire reposer la politique sur l'analyse ethnographique, c'est la faire porter sur une chimère (O.C., I, 896).
(The truth is that there is no pure race; and that making politics depend upon ethnographical
analysis, is allowing it to be borne upon a chimera (Renan 1970, 72).]

In fact, Renan is mocking the aristocracy and Gobineau who are so proud to consider themselves descendants of this so-called pure race that allowed them to have certain rights and privileges. It is a well known fact that Gobineau came from a family of social climbers preoccupied with their so-called noble lineage. Gobineau traces his family tree to try to prove that he is really from the nobility, so that he can use the title of Comte [Count].

The theme of the inheritable right is also examined in a dissertation by Laura B. O’Connor [directed by Edward Said], *The Return of the Repressed Celt* (1997), which criticizes Renan’s *La poésie des races celtiques* (1854). In her dissertation, O’Connor bases her theory on Said’s “Orientalism” and applies it to what she calls “Celticism.” According to Said, Orientalists rely on certain social sciences, like philology, to establish a field of study on the Orient that allow them to legitimate their right to a certain region (an Eurocentric notion established by the colonizer) where they consider themselves superior (based on the inheritable right) to those from the Orient (O’Connor 1997, 5).

O’Connor notes that Said’s “Orientalism” is a reference point for the European domination:

> Said’s thesis that Orientalism is a script for European hegemony, not a veridic discourse about actual Arab culture, is attested by the ease with which Orientalism can be transposed into Celticism simply by dubbing “Orientalism”, “Semitic” and
“Semite” or “Arab” with “Celticism”, “Celtic” and "Celt" (O'Connor 1997, 6).

According to O'Connor, the only difference between "Orientalism" and what she calls "Celticism" is that the former consists of describing the Orient to Europeans whereas the latter deals with the Cymric and Gaelic perspective on the multiple languages of the British culture (O'Connor 1997, 6). According to O'Connor, the basis of "Celticism" in Renan’s *La poésie des races celtiques* is a type of "domestic exoticism"; however, for her this is a contradiction in terms. This "Celticism" has two meanings: the discourse of "otherness": "[...] the aberrant Celts who defined Anglo-Saxon or French norm--and a discourse of the origins for sanctioning on one hand, Welsh, Irish, Scottish and Breton separatist identities and on the other hand composite British or Gaulish-French identities (O'Connor 1997, 7)."

At the beginning of *La poésie des races celtiques*, this "domestic exoticism" is evident to O'Connor:

Lorsqu’en voyageant dans la presqu’île armoricaine on dépasse la région, plus rapprochée du continent, où se prolonge la physionomie gaie, mais commune, de la Normandie et du Maine, et qu’on entre dans la véritable Bretagne, dans celle qui mérite ce nom par la langue et la race, le plus brusque changement se fait sentir tout à coup. Un vent froid, plein de vague et de tristesse, s’élève et transporte l’âme vers d’autres pensées; le sommet des arbres se dépouille et se tord; la bruyère étend au loin sa teinte uniforme; le granit perce à chaque pas un sol trop maigre pour le revêtir; une mer presque toujours sombre forme à l’horizon un cercle d’éternels gémissements. Même contraste dans les hommes: à la vulgarité normande, à une population grasse et plantureuse, contente de vivre, pleine de ses intérêts, égoïste comme tous ceux dont l’habitude est de jouir, succède une race timide, réservée, vivant toute au dedans, pesante
en apparence, mais sentant profondément et portant dans ses instincts religieux une adorable délicatesse. Le même contraste frappe, dit-on, quand on passe de l'Angleterre au pays de Galles, de la basse Écosse, anglaise de langage et de mœurs, au pays des Gaëls du Nord, et aussi, avec une nuance sensiblement différente, quand on s'enfonce dans les parties de l'Irlande où la race est restée pure de tout mélange avec l'étranger. Il semble que l'on entre dans les couches souterraines d'un autre âge, et l'on ressent quelque chose des impressions que Dante nous fait éprouver quand il nous conduit d'un cercle à un autre de son enfer (O.C., II, 252).

[Everyone who travels through the Armorican peninsula experiences a change of the most abrupt description, as soon as he leaves behind the district most closely bordering upon the continent, in which the cheerful but commonplace type of face of Normandy and Maine is continually in evidence, and passes into the true Brittany, that which merits its name by language and race. A cold wind arises full of vague sadness, and carries the soul to other thoughts; the tree-tops are bare and twisted; the heath with its monotony of tint stretches away into the distance; at every step the granite protrudes from a soil too scanty to cover it; a sea that is almost always somber girdles the horizon with eternal moaning. The same contrast is manifest in the people: to Norman vulgarity, to a plump and prosperous population, happy to live, full of its own interests, egotistical as are all those who make a habit of enjoyment, succeeds a timid and reserved race living altogether within itself, heavy in appearance but capable of profound feeling, and of an adorable delicacy in its religious instincts. A like change is apparent, I am told, in passing from England into Wales, from the Lowlands of Scotland, English by language and manners into the Gaelic Highlands; and too, though with a perceptible difference, when one buries oneself in the districts of Ireland where the race has remained pure from all admixture of alien blood. It seems like entering on the subterranean strata of another world, and one experiences in some measure the impression given us by Dante, when he leads us from one circle of his Inferno to another (Renan 1970, 1-2)].

O'Connor perceives this essay to be "depersonalized" and finds no reference to the fact that Renan is returning to his
childhood home (O’Connor 1997, 7). One possible reason why Renan makes this essay less autobiographical is to evoke the universality of the voyage. Thus anyone could have made this magnificent journey as well as experience these same impressions. As for the “domestic exoticism,” it appears that Renan uses poetic license to evoke, in his imagination, a so-called “exotic” voyage to his ancestral roots that just so happens to be in his country of origin, France. Renan uses this exotic voyage to illustrate how the Bretons (i.e. the people of Brittany and the British belonging to the Celtic race) are isolated, even within France, and he feels that their culture is doomed to disappear. He may have used this same first paragraph to evoke the fantastical voyage one can take when one reads the Celtic mythology or literature.

In his preface, Renan describes this essay as having: “une valeur esthétique et morale bien plutôt qu’un but d’érudition (O.C., II, 22)” [an esthetic and moral value rather than the aim of scholarship (My translation)]. The aim of Renan is to introduce the Celtic poetic tradition to the reader. At the same time, he expresses his appreciation for his ancestors:

Les vieux souvenirs de cette race sont pour moi plus qu’un curieux sujet d’étude; c’est la région où mon imagination s’est toujours plu à errer, et où j’aime à me réfugier comme dans une idéale patrie... (O.C., II, 22).

[The old souvenirs of this race are for me the most curious subject of study; it is the region where my imagination always likes to wander, and where I love to seek refuge in an ideal homeland (My translation).]
In this context, by the use of the term "race," Renan is referring to the ethnic sense of the word instead of the "biological" meaning of it (Chadbourne 1968, 89); "race" here means a group of people who share similar cultural, social and linguistic characteristics. Despite Renan’s efforts to justify the use of the term "race" in a non-elitist manner, O’Connor describes Renan’s essay as being:

[...] a work whose title racializes Celts as "poetic" and whose hierarchical pyramid of substrative Celtic "poetic childhood" places Celts low on the intellectual evolutionary ladder, concludes with the hope that Celts might evolve into reflective criticism (O’Connor 1997, 66).

It appears that Renan chooses this title for his essay in order to capture the spirit of a group of people who have a common bond due to their language and their literature, and cultural aspects. It appears that Renan uses the term "race" to refer to "culture" and not to physical attributes. If Renan had used the term "culture" instead of "race," he may have prevented this confusion.

As Renan has stated in his preface, this essay is not intended to be a scholarly account of the Celtic people. It is one of the few times that Renan expresses his nationalistic pride and appreciation of his heritage. Subsequently, O’Connor finds his pride to be quite excessive and manages to link it to European dominion when she states that: "Renan’s obsessive focus on Breton continence and shamefastness [sic] serves the dual purpose of allaying colonialist anxiety and assuaging native pride (O’Connor 1997, 25)." Granted, Renan may have been a little overzealous
when revealing his feelings for his ancestral roots, but he admits in the preface that he seeks refuge in his ideal homeland. However, Renan does not place the Celts “low on the evolutionary ladder” as O’Connor stated earlier. In fact, in the last paragraph of this essay, Renan expresses hope that the Celtics might transform European thought:

En présence des progrès de plus en plus envahissants d’une civilisation qui n’est d’aucun pays, et ne peut recevoir d’autre nom que celui de moderne ou européenne, il serait pueril d’espérer que la race celtique arrive dans l’avenir à une expression isolée de son originalité. Et pourtant nous sommes loin de croire que cette race ait dit son dernier mot. Après avoir usé toutes les chevaleries dévotes et mondaines, couru avec Pémédur le Saint-Graal et les belles, rêvé avec saint Brandan de mystique Atlantides, qui sait ce qu’elle produirait dans le domaine de l’intelligence, si elle s’enhardissait à faire son entrée dans le monde, et si elle assujettissait aux conditions de la pensée moderne sa riche et profonde nature? Il me semble que de cette combinaison sortiraient des produits fort originaux, une manière fine et discrète de prendre la vie, un mélangé singulier de force et de faiblesse, de rudesse et de douceur. Peu de races ont eu une enfance poétique aussi complète que les races celtiques: mythologie, lyrisme, épopée, imagination romanesque, enthousiasme religieux, rien ne leur a manqué; pourquoi la réflexion leur manquerait-elle? L’Allemagne, qui avait commencé par la science et la critique, a fini par la poésie; pourquoi les races celtiques, qui ont commencé par la poésie, ne finiraient-elles pas par la critique? De l’une à l’autre, il n’y a pas si loin qu’on le suppose; les races poétiques sont les races philosophiques, et la philosophie n’est au fond qu’une manière de poésie comme une autre.

Quand on songe que l’Allemagne a trouvé, il y a moins d’un siècle, la révélation de son génie, qu’une foule d’individualités nationales qui semblaient effacées se sont relevées tout à coup de nos jours, plus vivantes que jamais, on se persuade qu’il est téméraire de poser une loi aux intermit­tences et au réveil des races, et que la civilisation moderne, qui semblait faite pour les
absorber, ne serait peut-être que leur commun épanouissement (My emphasis) (O.C., II, 300-301).

[In presence of the ever-encroaching progress of a civilisation which is of no country, and can receive no name, other than that of modern or European, it would be puerile to hope that the Celtic race is in the future to succeed in obtaining isolated expression of its originality. And yet we are far from believing that this race has said its last word. After having put in practice all chivalries, devout and worldly, gone with Peredur in quest of the Holy Grail and fair ladies, and dreamed with St. Brandan of mystical Atlantides, who knows what it would produce in the domain of intellect, if it hardened itself to an entrance into the world, and subjected its rich and profound nature to the conditions of modern thought? It appears to me that there would result from this combination, productions of high originality, a subtle and discreet manner of taking life, a singular union of strength and weakness, of rude simplicity and mildness. Few races have had so complete a poetic childhood as the Celtic; mythology, lyric poetry, epic, romantic imagination, religious enthusiasm—none of these failed them; why should reflection fail them? Germany, which commenced with science and criticism, has come to poetry; why should not the Celtic races, which began with poetry, finish with criticism? There is not so great a distance from one to the other as is supposed; the poetical races are the philosophical races, and at bottom philosophy is only a matter of poetry. When one considers how Germany, less than a century ago, had her genius revealed to her, how a multitude of national individualities, to all appearance effaced, have suddenly risen again in our own days, more instinct with life than ever, one feels persuaded that it is a rash thing to lay down any law on the intermitence and awakening of nations; and that modern civilisation, which appeared to be made to absorb them, may perhaps be nothing more than their united fruition (My emphasis) (Renan 1970, 59-60).]

In this last part of La poésie des races celtiques, Renan more than hoping that Celtic culture becomes more European, hopes that European culture may one day be more Celtic. His aim is far less to assimilate the Celtic into Europe than to
improve Europe by opening it up to a conversation with Celtic intellectual voices. In her dissertation, O’Connor does not cite the sentence where Renan clearly states that the poetic races are in fact philosophical ones (cf. O’Connor 1997, 66).³ O’Connor argues that there is a hierarchy between poetic and philosophical races. Contrary to O’Connor’s statement, Renan does not promote this hierarchy and destroys the link between the poetic races and philosophical races. This is a blatant omission on O’Connor’s part seemingly to strengthen her argument against Renan.

Besides criticizing Renan for his excessive pride, O’Connor, like Todorov, accuses Renan of being a racist towards certain linguistic families, such as the Semitic language. She states that Renan’s life work consists of defining "Semitic philologically-based ‘races’" (O’Connor 1997, 17). In fact, Renan tries to unify the races not differentiate them as his critics imply. Like Said, O’Connor criticizes Renan for his association with philology. They both reiterate throughout their respective works that philology is synonymous with an imperialist attitude and that this field of study legitimizes European domination, particularly in regards to colonization.

Renan mentions colonization in an essay entitled Réforme intellectuelle et morale (1871). This essay was written shortly after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) when France lost the Alsace-Lorraine region and areas of Paris were in ruins. Renan is devastated by what had happened. He blamed
the French leaders, the political system, the French Revolution, democracy and even Catholicism. During this same period, many people feared another attack. As for Renan, he feared that France would become a "second-rate America," i.e., a nation without culture that relied heavily on commerce (Chadbourne 1968, 93).

This essay is divided into two parts: "La réforme" and "Les remèdes." In "La réforme" Renan analyzes events throughout history that lead to corruption and the downfall of the French, such as the Revolution and aristocracy. In this first part, Renan is very critical of democracy and of the Catholic Church. In "Les remèdes", Renan proposes solutions or justifications for these problems in history.

Several Renan scholars, like Richard Chadbourne, find this essay to be the least organized, thought out and least developed of all of the political essays written by Renan. Chadbourne also notes that this essay is full of contradictions, more so than usual. As for other Renan scholars, for the most part, they only refer to this essay when analyzing Renan's strong dislike for democracy (cf. Chadbourne 1957, 124-129; 1968, 93-97; Wardman 1964, 128-130). With this in mind, it is no wonder that Renan's critics use this essay to portray Renan as a racist.

The following passage from Réforme intellectuelle et morale is often partially quoted; as seen in Aimé Césaire's Discours sur le colonialisme (1950) (cf. Césaire 1962, 14-15) where it is used to illustrate the racist attitude of
colonists. This same passage is partially quoted again by Ania Loomba in her book, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1997) (cf. Loomba 1997, 125-126) to evoke an attitude of racial superiority and to show how this attitude is similar to that of the class system. Here is that passage in its entirety:

La colonisation en grand est une nécessité politique tout à fait de premier ordre. Une nation qui ne colonise pas est irrévocablement vouée au socialisme, à la guerre du riche et du pauvre. La conquête d'un pays de race inférieure par une race supérieure, qui s'y établit pour le gouverner, n'a rien de choquant. L'Angleterre pratique ce genre de colonisation dans l'Inde, au grand avantage de l'Inde, de l'humanité en général, et à son propre avantage. La conquête germanique du V° et du VI° siècle est devenue en Europe la base de toute conservation et de toute légitimité. Autant les conquêtes entre races égales doivent être blâmées, autant la régénération des races inférieures ou abâtardies par les races supérieures est dans l'ordre providentiel de l'humanité. L'homme du peuple est presque toujours chez nous un noble déclassé; sa lourde main est bien mieux faite pour manier l'épée que l'outil servile. Plutôt que de travailler, il choisit de se battre, c'est-à-dire qu'il revient à son premier état. *Regere imperio populos*, voilà notre vocation. Versez cette dévorante activité sur des pays qui, comme la Chine, appellent la conquête étrangère. Des aventuriers qui troublent la société européenne faites un ver sacrum, un essaim comme ceux des Francs, des Lombards, des Normands; chacun sera dans son rôle. La nature a fait une race d'ouvriers, c'est la race chinoise, d'une dextérité de main merveilleuse sans presque aucun sentiment d'honneur; gouvernez-la avec justice, en prélevant d'elle pour le bienfait d'un tel gouvernement un ample douaire au profit de la race conquérante, elle sera satisfaite; -une race de travailleurs de la terre, c'est le nègre; soyez pour lui bon et humain, et tout sera dans l'ordre; -une race de maîtres et de soldats, c'est la race européenne. Réduisez cette noble race à travailler dans l'ergastule comme des nègres et des Chinois, elle se révolte. Tout révolté est chez nous, plus ou moins, un soldat qui a manqué sa vocation, un être fait pour la vie héroïque, et que vous appliquez à une besogne contraire à sa race, mais ouvrier, trop bon soldat. Or la vie qui révolte nos travailleurs

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rendrait heureux un Chinois, un fellah, êtres qui ne sont nullement militaires. Que chacun fasse ce pour quoi il est fait, et tout ira bien. Les économistes se trompent en considérant le travail comme l'origine de la propriété. L'origine de la propriété, c'est la conquête et la garantie donnée par le conquérant aux fruits du travail autour de lui. Les Normands ont été en Europe les créateurs de la propriété; car le lendemain du jour où ces bandits eurent des terres, ils établirent pour eux et pour tous les gens de leur domaine un ordre social et une sécurité qu'on n'avait pas vus jusque-là (O.C., I, 390-391).

[On the whole, colonization is a political necessity. A nation that does not colonize is irrevocably destined to socialism, the war of the rich and of the poor. The conquest of a country with an inferior race by a superior race that established themselves there and govern is nothing shocking. England practiced this type of colonization in India; it was advantageous for India, humanity in general as well as for England. The Germanic conquest of the 5th and 6th century has become, in Europe, the basis of all conservation and legitimacy. As much as the conquests between equal races must be blamed as much as *the regeneration of the inferior or degenerate races by the superior races [which] is part of the provincial order of things for humanity. With us, the common man is nearly always a déclassé nobleman, his heavy hand is better suited to handling the sword than the menial tool. Rather than work, he chooses to fight, that is, he returns to his first estate. Regere imperio populos, that is our vocation. Pour forth this all-consuming activity onto countries which, like China, are crying aloud for foreign conquest. Turn the adventurers who disturb European society into a vers sacrum, a horde like those of the Franks, the Lombards, or the Normans; and every man will be in his right role. Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honor; govern them with justice, levying from them, in return for the blessing of such a government, an ample allowance for the conquering race, and they will be satisfied; a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race. Reduce this noble race to working the ergastulum like Negroes and Chinese, and they rebel. In Europe, every rebel is, more or less, a soldier who has missed his calling, a
creature made for the heroic life, before whom you are setting a task that is contrary to his race— a poor worker, too good a soldier. But the life at which our workers rebel would make a Chinese or a fellah happy, as they are not military creatures in the least. Let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well. *Economists are wrong when considering work as the origins of property and ownership. The origins of property and ownership are conquests and guarantee given by the conqueror, the fruits of labor all around him. The Normans, creators of ownership, were in Europe because the day before these bandits wandered the earth, they established for them as well as for others of this domain, a social order and security that one had not seen until then. (The first fourteen lines before the first asterisk and the ten lines after the second asterisk are my translation. In-between the asterisk is a translation quoted from Césaire 1972, 16).]

Although one cannot deny the extreme offensiveness of the passage, one can at least point out that it is explicitly contradicted by Renan himself. It seems as if Renan was relying on history to explain or justify the perception of different races as being fighters or workers. If Europeans are colonizers, this is for two reasons: first, because capitalism depends on the exploitation of the poor; a nation is less endangered when it exploits others’ poor than when it exploits its own; second, Europeans are still fundamentally “barbarians,” more likely than others to resort to physical force. Throughout history, colonization has primarily been politically and economically motivated. Granted both nations could profit financially from colonization, whereas it could also create an incredibly oppressive environment. It seems strange that Renan would promote colonization and predict civil unrest if a nation did not colonize, since eight years prior, in Vie de Jésus, Renan mentions the political, social
and financial problems that have occurred in the attempt to take over other nations so as to "liberate" these other nations (cf. O.C., IV, 163; Renan 1991, 82-83).

After partially quoting this passage, Césaire writes: "Hitler? Rosenberg? Non, Renan. (Césaire 1962, 15)." More than likely, Césaire refers to Hitler and Rosenberg for shock value or to grab the reader's attention since these names are synonymous with promoting the so-called "Master race." To a certain extent Césaire is right, since in Réforme intellectuelle et morale, Renan is quite racist towards certain races. However, in some of his other essays, like "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," Renan does not promote the so-called "Master race" and denounces classification of man according to his biology, race, religion and language. Renan warns precisely against the "politics of race" that would later be enacted by Hitler. In a letter (also included in Réforme intellectuelle et morale) dated 15 September 1871 to the German scholar David Strauss, Renan wrote:

Notre politique, c'est la politique du droit des nations; la vôtre, c'est la politique des races: nous croyons que la nôtre vaut mieux. La division trop accusée de l'humanité en races, outre qu'elle repose sur une erreur scientifique, très peu de pays possédant une race vraiment pure, ne peut mener qu'à des guerres d'extermination, à des guerres "zooologiques", permettez-moi de le dire, analogues à celles que les diverses espèces de rongeurs ou de carnassiers se livrent pour la vie. Ce serait la fin de ce mélange fécond, composé d'éléments nombreux et tous nécessaires, qui s'appelle l'humanité. Vous avez levé dans le monde le drapeau de la politique ethnographique et archéologique en place de la politique libérale; cette politique vous sera fatale (O.C., I, 456).
[Our politics is the policy of the rights of nations; yours is a politics of race: we believe that ours is better. The over-emphasized division of humanity into races, besides the fact that this division rests on a scientific error—very few countries possess a truly pure race, can lead only to wars of extermination, to zoological wars, if you will permit me to say so, analogous to those which various species of rodents and carnivores engage in throughout life. This would be the end of this fertile mixture, composed of numerous elements each of which necessary, called humanity. You have raised the curtain on, [and raised the flag for], an archaeological and ethnographic politics to replace a liberal politics; this policy will be fatal to you.]

Renan wrote this letter and made a prediction approximately sixty years before Hitler came into power and enacted the "final solution." This letter illustrates that Renan was well aware of scientific racism during the nineteenth century and also denounced it. In this same letter, Renan promoted rights for all nations, a topic that he would later examine in further detail approximately ten years later, in "Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?.”

In his lecture on "Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?, given at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882, Renan remarks that one often makes rash judgments and that one is also mistaken by associating the idea of nation with that of race. To illustrate this point, Renan satirically refers to the theories from the previous centuries as well as those of his contemporaries regarding "race." In the following passage, Renan implicitly alludes to Boulainviller’s opinion about the inheritable right of the nobility:

I. De la race, disent plusieurs avec assurance. Les divisions artificielles, résultant de la féodalité, des mariages princiers, des congrès de
diplomates, sont caduques. Ce qui reste ferme et fixe, c'est la race des populations. Voilà ce qui constitue un droit, une légitimité. La famille germanique, par exemple, selon la théorie que j'expose, a le droit de reprendre les membres épars du germanisme, même quand ces membres ne demandent pas à se rejoindre. Le droit du germanisme sur telle province est plus fort que le droit des habitants de cette province sur eux-mêmes. On crée ainsi une sorte de droit primordial analogue à celui des rois de droit divin; au principe des nations on substitue celui de l'éthnographie. C'est là une très grande erreur, qui, si elle devenait dominante, perdrait la civilisation européenne. Autant le principe des nations est juste et légitime, autant celui du droit primordial des races est étroit et plein de danger pour le véritable progrès (O.C., I, 895).

[(I.)From race, say several with assurance. Artificial divisions resulting from feudality, royal marriages, or diplomatic congresses, are unstable. What does remain firm and fixed is the race of populations. That it is which constitutes right and legitimacy. The Teutonic family, for example, according to this theory, has the right of reclaiming such of its members as are beyond the pale of Teutonism—even when these members do not seek reunion. The right of Teutonism over such a province is greater than the right of the inhabitants of the province over themselves. Thus is created a kind of primordial right, analogous to that of the divine right of kings; for the principle of nations is substituted that of ethnography. This is a very grave error, which, if it became dominant, would cause the ruin of the European civilisation. So far as the national principle is just and legitimate, so far is the primordial right of races narrow, and full of danger for true progress (Renan 1970, 70-71).]

For Renan, this elitist mentality of the nobility prevented humanity from progressing. Renan denounced the elitist mentality of the members of the so-called "noble race" who relied on their droit de sang to obtain rights and privileges, even land. What Renan means in this context is that the nobles relied on their "superior race" status to obtain special rights. It is the nationalistic pride of the
nobles, who used their ancestors as a means to acquire these special privileges. Renan even predicted that if this elitist mentality persists, it would eventually cause the decline of European civilization.

In Réforme intellectuelle et morale, Renan examines these nobles in further detail:

C’est également par le procédé historique, je veux dire en profitant habilement des pans de murs qui nous restent d’une plus vieille construction, et en développant ce qui existe, que l’on pourrait former quelque chose pour remplacer les anciennes traditions de famille. Pas de royauté sans noblesse; ces deux choses reposent au fond sur le même principe, une sélection créant artificiellement, pour le bien de la société, une sorte de race à part. La noblesse n’a plus chez nous aucune signification de race. Elle résulte d’une cooptation presque fortuite, où l’usurpation des titres, les malentendus, les petites fraudes, et surtout l’idée puerile qui consiste à croire que la préposition de est une marque de noblesse, tiennent presque autant de place que la naissance et l’anoblissement légal (Renan’s emphasis) (O.C., I, 380-381).

[Likewise, it is through the historical process, I mean in ably profiting from the pieces of walls left to us from a most ancient construction, and in developing that which remains, that one could mold something to replace the former family traditions. No royalty without nobility; these two things are fundamentally based on the same principle, a selection artificially creating, for the good of society, a sort of race apart. Our nobility no longer has any racial signification. It is the result of a fortuitous co-optation when the usurpation of titles, misunderstandings, petty frauds, and, above all, the puerile idea that consists in believing that the preposition "de" is a mark of nobility hold nearly as much place as birth and legal ennoblement.]

Similar to the previous passage, Renan is against the nobility claiming to be a separate race due to their blood lines. As seen in "Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?,” Renan considers
the family to be continual and can not fathom why the nobles would create a fictional family in order to have a sense of superiority. He also mocks social climbers who rely on the preposition “de” to prove their noble lineage that then allows them to acquire certain privileges and maintain a certain social status. Renan is probably referring to people like Gobineau who claim to be a member of this elite and so-called “pure race.”

As was mentioned earlier in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Renan stated that there are no “pure races,” and that European blood is entirely “mixed”:

La considération ethnographique n’a donc été pour rien dans la constitution des nations modernes. La France est celtique, ibérique, germanique. L’Allemagne est germanique, celtique et slave. L’Italie est le le pays où l’ethnographie est la plus embarrassée. Gaulois, Étrusques, Pélasges, Grecs, sans parler de bien d’autres éléments, s’y croisent dans un indéchiffrable mélange. Les iles Britanniques, dans leur ensemble, offrent un mélange de sang celtique et germanique dont les proportions sont singulièrement difficiles à définir (My emphasis) (O.C., I, 896).

[Racial considerations have then been for nothing in the constitution of modern nations. France is Celtic, Iberian, Teutonic. Germany is Teutonic, Celtic, and Slavonic. Italy is the country where ethnography is most confused. Gauls, Etruscans, Pelasgians, and Greeks, to say nothing of many other elements, are crossed in an indecipherable medley. The British Isles, as a whole, exhibit a mixture of Celtic and Teutonic blood, the relative proportions of which it is singularly difficult to define (My emphasis) (Renan 1970, 72).]

By listing the various races in several European countries, Renan reinforces his argument that this so-called “pure race” no longer exists. This notion is the opposite of the one made
by some of Renan’s contemporaries, like Gobineau, who rally to preserve this nonexistent "pure race." In this same passage, Renan notes that France, Germany and the British Isles all have Celtic roots. It also illustrates his point that ethnic groups are united and not separated, as O’Connor accuses Renan of asserting.

To illustrate the various definitions of “race” during the nineteenth century, Renan presents this term as defined by philologists and anthropologists:

Les discussions sur les races sont interminables, parce que le mot race est pris par les historiens philologues et par les anthropologistes [sic] physiologistes dans deux sens tout à fait différents. Pour les anthropologistes [sic], la race a le même sens qu’en zoologie; elle indique une descendance réelle, une parenté par le sang. Or l’étude des langues et de l’histoire ne conduit pas aux mêmes divisions que la physiologie. Les mots de brachycéphales, de dolichocéphales n’ont pas de place en histoire ni en philologie. Dans le groupe humain qui créa les langues et la discipline aryennes, il y avait déjà des brachycéphales et des dolichocéphales. Il en faut dire autant du groupe primitif qui créa les langues et l’institution dites sémitiques. En d’autres termes, les origines zoologiques de l’humanité sont énormément antérieures aux origines de la culture, de la civilisation, du langage (O.C., I, 897).

[Discussions upon race are interminable, because the word “race” is taken by the philological historians and by physiological anthropologists in two totally different senses. For the anthropologists race has the same meaning as it has in zoology; it indicates a real descent, a relationship by blood. But the study of languages and history does not lead to the same classification as physiology. The words Brachycephalus and Dolichocephalus have no place in history or philology. In the human group, that created the Aryan languages and customs, there were already Brachycephali and Dolichocephali. The same must be said of the primitive group, that created the languages and institutions known as Semitic. In other words, the zoological origins of humanity are enormously]
anterior to the origins of culture, civilisation, and language (Renan 1970, 72-73).

In this excerpt, Renan describes the complexity and the numerous interpretations of the term "race" from two completely different fields of study during his century. This same passage is partially quoted by Todorov to portray Renan as being a racist who is influenced by science (cf. Todorov 1989, 197; 1993, 142). As stated earlier, Renan is well aware of biological racism and strongly opposes it as seen in his letter to Strauss dated 15 September 1871. When Renan states that the terms *Brachycephalus* and *Dolichocephalus* do not have a place in history or in philology, he qualifies this statement by explaining that these zoological terms are already in use and thus should not be applied to philology.

For historians the term "race" has another significance, Renan notes that:

*La race, comme nous l’entendons, nous autres, historiens, est donc quelque chose qui se fait et se défait. L’étude de la race est capitale pour le savant qui s’occupe de l’histoire de l’humanité. Elle n’a pas d’application en politique. La conscience instinctive qui a présidé à la confection de la carte d’Europe n’a tenu aucun compte de la race, et les premières nations de l’Europe sont des nations de sang essentiellement mélangé (My emphasis) (O.C.,I, 898).*

[Race, as we historians understand it, is then something that makes and unmakes itself. The study of race is of capital importance to the student who occupies himself with the history of mankind. It has no application in politics. The instinctive consciousness which presided over the construction of the map of Europe took no account of race; and the greatest European nations are nations of essentially mixed blood (My emphasis) (Renan 1970, 74).]
Here, Renan reiterates his point that "pure races" no longer exist. He also notes that "race" is ever changing and never constant. Moreover, Renan's view is contrary to that which was believed by certain nineteenth-century politicians who used race as a means to determine rights, social stature and worth.4 For Renan, "race" is entirely historical, not a matter of eternal or unchanging traits. Perhaps another term for this notion would be "culture." As Todorov himself intimates, Renan may have saved himself some later grief if he had said "culture" instead of "race."

The most popular race theories at this time are proposed by phrenologists and archaeologists. In the following passage, Renan examines some of the theories prevalent among his contemporaries:

Le fait de la race, capitale à l'origine, va donc toujours perdant de son importance. L'histoire humaine diffère essentiellement de la zoologie. La race n'y est pas tout, comme chez les rongeurs ou les félins, et on n'a pas le droit d'aller par le monde tâter le crâne des gens, puis les prendre à la gorge en leur lisant: "Tu es notre sang; tu nous appartiens! En dehors des caractères anthropologiques, il y a la raison, le vrai, le beau, qui sont les mêmes pour tous (My emphasis) (O.C., I, 898).

[Racial facts then, important as they are in the beginning, have a constant tendency to lose their importance. Human history is essentially different from zoology. Race is not everything, as it is in the case of the rodents and felines; and we have no right to go about the world feeling the heads of people, then taking them by the throat, and saying, "You are of our blood; you belong to us!" Beyond anthropological characteristics there are reason, justice, truth, and beauty; and these are the same in all (My emphasis) (Renan 1970, 74).]
Satirically, Renan criticizes the popular methods of the nineteenth century, developed and used by scientists and pseudo-scientists, such as Blumenbach as well as the infamous phrenologist Franz Gall (1758-1828) and his followers. Renan finds it absurd to determine the race of an individual or even his intelligence based on the size of his skull.

In order to portray Renan as a racist influenced by biology, Todorov partially quotes this same passage from "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?:"

C'est là que se situe la grande rupture entre animaux et hommes (hommes blancs, en tous les cas): ceux-ci échappent au déterminisme biologique. "L'histoire humaine diffère essentiellement de la zoologie. La race n'y est pas tout, comme chez les rongeurs ou les félin ("Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?", p. 898) (Todorov 1989, 196).

[The principal gulf between animals and men (white men, at least) is located here: the latter are exempt from biological determinism. "Human history is essentially different from zoology. Race is not everything, as it is in the case of the rodents and felines" ("What Is a Nation?", p. 74) (Todorov 1993, 141).]

When Renan states that race is not everything in the case of humans, compared to that of rodents and felines, he is pointing out that in the animal kingdom different species of animals belonging to the same "family" can determine the size, strength, ferocity, etc. of a particular animal. For example, in the feline family, there is a major difference between the size and strength of a domestic cat and a tiger. Renan probably made this analogy to make the point that human beings should not be judged based on their race but on their merit.
After refuting the other race theories, Renan takes into consideration language, religion and geographical location to define the term "nation." Renan thinks it is erroneous to link politics to whether or not a certain language or race is considered "superior": "[l']importance politique qu'on attache aux langues vient de ce qu'on les regarde comme des signes de race. Rien de plus faux (O.C., I, 900)" [The political importance attached to languages results from the way in which they are regarded as signs of race. Nothing can be more incorrect (Renan 1970, 76)]. For Renan, race does not define a nation; instead "nationhood" has to do with other factors. In the next excerpt, Renan emphasizes the difference between language and "race:

Les langues sont des formations historiques, qui indiquent peu de choses sur le sang de ceux qui les parlent, et qui, en tout cas, ne sauraient enchainer la liberté humaine quand il s'agit de déterminer la famille avec laquelle on s'unit pour la vie pour la mort (O.C., I, 900).

[Languages are historical formations, which give but little indication of the blood of those who speak them; and, in any case, cannot enchain human liberty, when there is a question of determining the family with which we unite ourselves for life and death (Renan 1970, 76-77).]

Here, Renan illustrates that language (or a "cultural race") is not the same as a "biological race." For Renan, language is linked to the notion of a family or heritage that is not necessarily determined by blood but by a group that shares a common past. Renan does clarify that a nation is not defined by language when he states in "Des services rendus aux sciences historiques par la philologie (1878)" that:
Une nation, en d'autres termes, n'est pas constituée par le fait qu'on parle une même langue, mais par le sentiment qu'on a fait ensemble de grandes choses dans le passé et qu'on a la volonté d'en faire encore dans l'avenir (O.C., VIII, 1232).

[A nation, in other terms, is not formed by the fact that we speak the same language, but by the sentiment that we have done major things in the past and that we will do them in the future (My translation).]

For Renan, a nation is linked by a shared past and nationhood should not be defined by language. Once again, Renan sums this notion up when he notes in "Des services rendus aux sciences historiques par la philologie" that: "[l']homme, Messieurs, n'appartient ni à sa langue ni à sa race; il s'appartient à lui-même avant tout, car il est avant tout un être libre et un être moral (O.C., VIII, 1232)" [Gentlemen, man belongs neither to his language nor his race; before anything he belongs to himself, because before anything he is a free and moral being (My translation)]. However, according to Todorov, Renan does not separate language from "race" and he encourages the creation of "linguistic races" by his vague and often misleading use of the term "race" (Todorov 1989, 200; 1993, 144). To a certain extent Todorov is right, but in all fairness to Renan, it is important to remember that for Renan, just as the members of a nation are not united by "blood," nor are they united by language. Renan's ideal nation contains people who speak a multitude of languages.

As for land, Renan remarks that geography has played a major role in history, but "[...] ce n'est pas la terre plus que la race qui fait une nation (O.C., I, 903)" [[...] it is
no more the land than the race that makes a nation (Renan 1970, 80)]. Too often, one finds a sense of identity with land, an inert object, instead of with the sense of family or heritage. Renan reiterates this notion of heritage when he assimilates the notion of a nation with that of a soul that is linked by a shared past:

Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel. Deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n’en font qu’une, constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L’une est dans le passé, l’autre dans le présent. L’une est la possession en commun d’un riche legs de souvenirs; l’autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l’héritage qu’on a reçu indivis (My emphasis) (O.C., I, 903-904). Ce qui constitue une nation, ce n’est pas de parler la même langue ou d’appartenir au même groupe ethnographique, c’est d’avoir fait ensemble de grandes choses dans le passé et de vouloir en faire encore dans l’avenir (O.C., I, 720-721).

[A nation is a living soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other in the present. One is the common possession of a rich heritage of memories; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to preserve worthily the undivided inheritance which has been handed down (My emphasis) (Renan 1970, 80).] [What constitutes a nation is not speaking the same language or belonging to the same ethnographic group. It is to have done things together in the past and to be willing to still do them in the future (My translation).]

In other words, it is only history, the present-day radification of historical contingency, that makes a nation. There is nothing inevitable (naturally given) about the existence or the arrangements of nations. According to Renan, a nation has a moral conscience as well as a link between the past and the present. In order to depict the present, or more
precisely the existence of a nation, Renan uses the following metaphor: "l'existence d'une nation est [...] un plébiscite de tous les jours, comme l'existence de l'individu est une affirmation perpétuelle de vie (O.C., I, 904)" [A nation's existence is [...] a daily plebiscite, as the individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life (Renan, 1970, 81]. However, Renan is quick to note that this existence will not last forever and that nations will more than likely be replaced by what Renan refers to as the "confédération européenne" (O.C., I, 905) [European confederation (Renan 1970, 82)]. Interestingly, Renan's prediction will more than likely come true. For Renan, what makes a nation is simply the agreement of its people to be bound together for the sake of common principles. A "nation" is grounded neither in race nor language, but rather in a shared history and shared inspirations for the future.

As for the past or the history of a nation, there are some restrictions. Renan points out that an essential factor in creating a nation is the ability to forget, or what he refers to as the "erreur historique." Renan states that 

"[...] tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle (O.C., I, 892)" 

"[...] every French citizen ought have forgotten St. Bartholomew [where thousands of Huguenots were killed in 1572], and the massacres of the South in the thirteenth century (Renan 1970, 67)]. For Renan, the past is important in that it establishes a link between a group of people but
at the same time one must not dwell on it. This need or obligation to forget creates a problem for Homi K. Bhabha. In “Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” Bhabha believes that if someone is obligated to forget, this will cause an identification problem for that nation of people. He also points out that considering the past and present, the part and the whole identity will be altered and one’s understanding of the past will change. Thus, one would only have a partial identification with one’s nation. This is true to a certain point; however, not everyone chooses to forget the same “historical error.” This is what makes each individual unique. It appears that Renan encourages forgetting these “historical errors” so that as a nation, it can move on and not hold grudges. Renan may have been implicitly referring to the events that took place during the Franco-Prussian War. Even in his essay Réforme intellectuelle et morale, written shortly after this war, Renan realizes that it would take time for the wounds to heal between France and Germany. To a certain extent, time either heals old wounds or makes these old wounds fester. Renan does not encourage one to forget one’s heritage, which is part of the past, just certain aspects of this past that could possibly cause wars due to religion, race, language or land.

Renan summarizes the relationship mankind has in regards to his race, language, religion and geographical situation:

L’homme n’est esclave ni de sa race, ni de sa langue, ni de sa religion, ni du cours des fleuves,
ni de la direction des chaînes de montagnes (O.C., I, 905).

[...] Man is neither enslaved by his race, nor by his language, nor by his religion, nor by the course of the rivers, nor by the direction of mountain ranges (Renan 1970, 83).

Mankind should never be judged based on characteristics that cannot be changed (or altered to a certain extent), such as physical traits, mother tongue, place of birth, geography or religion. Mankind should not feel or be considered subordinate because of these factors.

In his book, Culture, Identity, and Politics (1987), Ernest Gellner nicely sums up Renan’s notion of nation as the product, not of nature, but of human artifice:

[Renan’s] main purpose is to deny any naturalistic determinism of the boundaries of nations: these are not dictated by language, geography, race, religion, or anything else. He clearly dislikes the spectacle of nineteenth-century ethnographers as advance guards of national claims and expansion. Nations are made by human will [...] (Gellner 1987, 8).

As stated earlier in this chapter as well as in this passage from Gellner, Renan rejected the nineteenth-century theories that promoted nationalistic ideas and that used "biological race" as a means to obtain special rights and privileges.

END NOTES

1. Todorov uses this same quote to assert that Renan is racist towards the Semitic languages (cf. Todorov 1989, 198; 1993, 142).

2. Between the 1860’s and the 1870’s, a third race, the Touranian, was discovered and the philologists concentrated more on this new race than on the Semitic race. For Renan’s views on the Touranian race cf. Journal asiatique (juillet 1873): 41-42.

3. In her dissertation, here is how O’Connor cites the passage about the Celtic races and purposely omits the
sentence where Renan acknowledges that poetic races are philosophical races:

Few races have had so complete a poetic childhood as the Celtic; mythology, lyric poetry, epic, romantic imagination, religious enthusiasm—none of these failed them; why should reflection fail them? Germany, which commenced with science and criticism, has come to poetry; why should not the Celtic races, which began with poetry, finish with criticism? ... When one considers how Germany, less than a century ago, had her genius revealed to her, how a multitude of national individualities, to all appearance effaced, have suddenly risen again in our own days, more instinct with life than ever, one feels persuaded that it is a rash thing to lay down any law on the intermittence and awakening of nations; and that modern civilisation, which appeared to be made to absorb them, may perhaps be nothing more than their united fruition (Renan 1970, 59-60).


5. In a speech given at "La Chambre" on 28 July 1885, Jules Ferry, Minister of Public Education, used "race" as a political ploy and justified colonization when he said: "[i]l faut dire ouvertement qu'en effet les races supérieures ont un droit sur les races inférieures. [...] Elles ont le devoir de civiliser les races inférieures (cited in Ragache 1993, 463)." [It is essential to overtly say that the superior races have the right over the inferior ones. [...] It is the duty of the superior races to civilize the inferior ones (My translation).]

During the nineteenth century, there were at least sixty thousand books written about the life of Jesus. One of the most influential and controversial was Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863), the first book of seven in the series, *Histoire des origines du christianisme* (1863-1881).\(^1\) When this text first appeared on 24 June 1863, Fête de Saint-Jean, it was a scandalous success. By the end of 1863, sixty thousand copies had been sold and ten editions already printed (Albalat 1933, 62). Between 1863 and 1864, Renan's text was translated into German, English, Danish, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, Hungarian, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish and Czech (Chadbourne 1968, 3 of Chronology). On 3 March 1864, an edited version retitled, *Jésus*, was published and often referred to as "l'édition populaire." By the thirteenth edition in 1867, it became the definitive edition and as of the thirty-second edition, the title was once again *Vie de Jésus*\(^2\) (Pholien 1983, 29).

Nonetheless, this was not the first time that Renan wrote about Jesus Christ. In 1845 while still in the seminary, Renan secretly wrote *Essai psychologique sur la vie de Jésus-Christ*, published posthumously in 1920 in the *Revue de Paris* (Albalat 1933, 24). In this essay written approximately fifteen years prior to *Vie de Jésus*, Renan already regarded Jesus as a fictional character, an idea which he would develop in his later work on the life of Christ:
La critique que j'entreprends de J. C. n'est pas une critique historique, mais psychologique. Je n'entreprends pas de critiquer les faits de son histoire, de la réduire à son expression la plus exacte. Bien plus, je ne prends pas J. C. comme un personnage ayant eu une existence réelle. [...] Ne serait-il qu'un mythe, que ma critique aurait encore sa valeur. —Je prends J. C. comme [...] la manifestation d'une idée qui a eu lieu incontestablement il y a dix-huit siècles, et dont les monuments les plus remarquables sont les quatre Évangiles. J. C., pour moi, c'est le caractère moral et philosophique qui résulte de l'Évangile. Supposez si vous voulez, que c'est un héros fabuleux auquel les auteurs de ces écrits ont attaché leurs conceptions, peu m'importe; il resterait toujours à expliquer comment ces conceptions ont pu surgir (Renan cited in Pommier 1964, 251).

The critique that I undertake of Jesus Christ is not a historical critique, but a psychological one. I did not undertake to review the facts surrounding his history, to reduce it to its most exact expression. All the more, I do not take Christ as a character having had a real existence. [...] Were he only a myth, then my critique would still have value. I take Christ to be the manifestation of an idea which incontestably took place eighteen centuries ago, the most remarkable monuments of which are the four Gospels. For me, Christ is the moral and philosophical character that results from the Gospel. Suppose if you will, that this is a fabulous hero to whom the authors of his writings ascribed their conceptions, none the less he would always remain to explain how these conceptions could suddenly appear.

By treating Jesus as a fictitious literary figure, Renan could then propose his own analysis of the formation and the evolution of Christ instead of relying on historical documents. Soon after, Renan becomes more and more interested in the historical aspects concerning the life of Jesus. He read several German critiques, and he wrote an article in 1849 about the historians’ critiques on the life of Jesus [Les Historiens critiques de la vie de Jésus”] (J. Hoffmann
1947, 36). One of these German writers was more than likely David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) who wrote Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet 1835-1836 in two volumes. Strauss was influenced by Hegel and concentrated more on the theological aspects, whereas the other versions examined whether the historical aspects surrounding the life of Jesus would endure as the basis for a religion (Schweitzer 1968, 79). In his life of Jesus, Strauss remarks that the Old Testament can be considered as myths. He classifies these myths into three categories: historical, philosophical and poetic. The historical myths are real events altered by supernatural elements. As for the philosophical myths, they are texts that expressed a particular idea and finally, the poetic myths include both the historical and philosophical myths (J. Hoffmann 1947, 7-8).

The life of Jesus by Strauss was a scandalous success in Germany; however, this was not the case in France. Some critics believed that Strauss' representation of Jesus was too complex for the French readers; subsequently, the portrayal of Jesus by Renan was not as complex and written in a much simpler language:

Toutefois, l'œuvre de Strauss était si pesante qu'elle parut illisible au lecteur français alors que l'œuvre de Renan était au contraire trop brillante, trop facile, trop poétique, trop empreinte de légèreté dans la tournure et la forme, pour ne pas paraître manquer de ce sérieux, inséparable de l'ennui qu'il distille, jugé l'atmosphère indispensable de toute œuvre scientifique, véritablement digne de ce nom au goût du lecteur allemand. Dans l'ensemble, le monde germanique n'a pas plus compris la Vie de Jésus de

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Renan que le monde latin n'avait compris celle de Strauss (J. Hoffmann 1947, 30).

However, Strauss' work was so weighty that it seemed unreadable to the French reader, while Renan's work was too brilliant, too easy, too poetic, too sprightly in its turn of phrase and in its form to not seem to lack this seriousness, inseparable from the dullness it exudes, judged by the German reader as the indispensable atmosphere of any scientific work worthy of its name. On the whole, the Germanic world did not understand Renan's *Life of Jesus* any more than that the Latin had understood Strauss'.

For some reason, Renan's Jesus was more popular throughout Europe than Strauss', even though neither version catered to all readers. Despite the lack of success in France, the life of Jesus by Strauss was still very successful in Germany and often reprinted during the nineteenth century.

Between 1838-1839, the third edition appeared and after re-examining some of the critiques, Strauss re-edited his book. In 1840, the fourth edition, Strauss reverted back to the first edition. During this same year, the original version of Strauss' work was translated into French by Littré (Schweitzer 1968, 72; 78). Soon after the initial success of Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, in 1864 Strauss re-edited his book once again but this time it was adapted more for the German audience and entitled: *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet* where he renounces some of his theories originally presented in the 1835-1836 edition. In this same edition, Strauss also mentions Renan in his preface (Schweitzer 1968, 95).

In 1860, Renan went to the Holy Land to do research for his new book about the life of Jesus. Actually, he was sent
there by the French government to oversee the archaeological excavations (Blanshard 1984, 120). *Vie de Jésus* was published three years after Renan’s trip to the Holy land and many critics accuse this French philosopher and theologian of being blasphemous and anti-Christian because he considers the Gospels to be “legendary biographies.” Renan questions the validity of the narratives surrounding the life of Jesus since these biographies were written more than sixty years after the death of Christ. Renan argues that even if the biographers had good intentions when they tried to glorify Jesus and his life, they in fact debased him:

> En somme, le caractère de Jésus, loin d’avoir été embellie par ses biographes, a été rapetissé par eux. La critique, pour le retrouver tel qu’il fut, a besoin d’écarter une série de méprises provenant de la médiocrité d’esprit des disciples. Ceux-ci l’ont peint comme ils le concevaient, et souvent, en croyant l’agrandir, l’ont en réalité amoindri (O.C., IV, 366).

> [On the whole, the character of Jesus, far from having been embellished by his biographers, has been lowered by them. Criticism, in order to find what he was, needs to discard a series of misconceptions, arising from the inferiority of the disciples. These painted him as they understood him, and often in thinking to raise him they have in reality lowered him (Renan 1991, 223).]

Besides the treatment of Jesus by the biographers, Renan also questions the miracles performed by Jesus, since they could not be proved scientifically. It is not surprising that Renan’s depiction of Jesus was considered to be quite scandalous. In 1864, he lost his professorship of Hebraic, Chaldean and Syrian languages at the Collège de France; however, he was appointed Assistant Director of the
Department of Manuscripts of the Imperial Library (now known as the Bibliothèque Nationale), but he refused to accept this new position. In 1871, his professorship was eventually reinstated (Chadboume 1968, 15).

Besides losing his job, several critiques were written about Renan’s depiction of Jesus, and his personal life was ruthlessly attacked by the critics who called him: "[...] infâme gredin, traître, moine défroqué, sois maudit, fils de Satan (cited in Albalat 1933, 65)" [[...] loathsome knave, traitor, ex-seminarian, damned, son of Satan.] Some critiques were written by French authors, such as Jules-Amédée Barbey d’Aurevilly (1808-1870), who wrote several articles condemning Renan’s book, whereas others like Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869), in his series Nouveaux Lundis (cf. Tome VI, 7 septembre 1863: 1-23) rallied behind Renan. For the most part, the majority of the criticism came from members of the Catholic Church. One of the more amusing critiques was written by a priest, Didon, who compared Renan to a snake:

Le scepticisme de Renan me suffoque [...] Oh! le mauvais serpent! Il est de la race des vipères envenimées. Il a leur souplesse et leur venin; et je sens dans son style même, si ondoyant et si bigarré, dans la pensée plus ondoyante et plus bigarrée que son style, le froid de la peau du serpent. Il n’a pas d’ailes, cet homme. Il siffle et il rampe. Je parle de sa forme, ne jugeant jamais ce qui est réservé à Dieu (Didion cited in Albalat 1933, 103; originally from Lettres du P. Didon à Mme Commanville Tome II s.d., 129).

[Renan’s skepticism staggers me [...] Oh! The evil snake! He is of the race of poisonous vipers. He has their liteness and their venom; and I sense
in his style, so supple and motley, in the thought more supple and motley than his style, the cold skin of the snake. He has no wings, that man. He hisses and he slithers. I speak of his form, never judging that which is reserved by God."

Obviously, Didon was quite offended by Renan’s portrayal of Jesus. It seems as if Didon was more upset that this blasphemous text was written by someone who left the seminary, thus the image of the snake mutating and attacking the very institution that educated him.

Renan’s choice not to continue his studies at the seminary was often criticized by others, especially members of the Catholic Church. Abbott Laillault dwelled on this fact in a song that he wrote about Renan. Here is an excerpt from this song as it appeared in the Petite Revue (20 March 1864):

Renan, fils d’Arius et Voltaire manqué, 
Séminariste ingrat, lévite débroqué, 
Déserteur de l’Église et des sacrés portiques, 
Professeur incompris des langues sémitiques, 
Quand te laisseras-tu, superbe novateur, 
De prodiguer l’outrage à ce libérateur, 
Qui mourut les deux mains ouvertes sur le Monde? 
(Abbott Laillaut cited in Albalat 1933, 73).

[Renan, child of Arius, flawed Voltarian, 
Defrocked Levite, ungrateful seminarian, 
Deserter of the Church’s sacred porticos, 
Misconstrued professor of Semitic lingos, 
When did you decide, o superb innovator, 
To lavish your insults on this liberator, 
Who died with His hands open to All?]

In this song, Renan is immediately associated with two people, Arius and Voltaire, notorious for being heretics and thus assumed to have had some kind of relationship with the devil. Abbott Laillault also mocked Renan for leaving the seminary to then write an essay on the Semitic languages that also caused some criticism. If it were not for Renan’s
education at the seminary, he probably would never have been formally introduced to the Semitic languages that, in turn, gained him notoriety and a prize for his essay about them.

To add insult to injury, the Catholic Church wanted to impose sanctions against Renan for being blasphemous. There was a law on the books established 25 March 1822 that stated that if an author offended or insulted religion in any way, this person would then be subjected to five years in prison and a fine of 6,000 French francs (Albalat 1933, 74). Renan contested the harsh criticism at first, but there were too many adversaries who viciously attacked him in various articles, books, pamphlets, etc., so he decided to keep quiet. Renan finally broke his silence in the preface of the thirteenth and definitive edition of *Vie de Jésus* that was published in 1867:

Pour me disculper en détail de toutes les accusations dont j'ai été l'objet, il m'eût fallu tripler ou quadrupler mon volume; il m'eût fallu répéter des choses qui ont déjà été bien dites, même en français; il eût fallu faire de la polémique religieuse, ce que je m'interdis absolument; il eût fallu parler de moi, ce que je ne fais jamais. J'écris pour proposer mes idées à ceux qui cherchent la vérité. Quant aux personnes qui ont besoin, dans l'intérêt de leur croyance, que je sois un ignorant, un esprit faux ou un homme de mauvaise foi, je n'ai pas la prétention de modifier leur avis. Si cette opinion est nécessaire au repos de quelques personnes pieuses, je me ferais un véritable scrupule de les désabuser (O.C., IV, 14).

[In order to exculpate myself in detail from all the accusations of which I have been the object, it would have been necessary for me to triple or quadruple my volume; I would have had to repeat things that had already been said, even in French; and I would have had to enter into a religious polemic, which I absolutely forbid myself to do. I am writing to propose my ideas to truth-seekers.]
With regard to those who need me, in the interest of their beliefs, to an ignoramus, a false spirit or a man of bad faith, I am not pretentious enough to change their minds. If this opinion is necessary to the peace of mind of some pious people, I have serious qualms about disabusing them of it.]

Renan realized that he could no longer keep silent but at the same time he knew that he could not convince or persuade his numerous opponents to accept or, at least, to understand why he wrote this book and portrayed Jesus in this manner. At the end of his essay, Renan describes the role Jesus would play throughout history:

Quelles que puissent être les transformations du dogme, Jésus restera en religion le créateur du serment pur; le Sermon sur la montagne ne sera pas dépassé. Aucune révolution ne fera que nous ne nous rattachions en religion à la grande famille intellectuelle et morale en tête de laquelle brille le nom de Jésus. En ce sens, nous sommes chrétiens, même quand nous nous séparons sur presque tous les points de la tradition chrétienne qui nous a précédés (O.C., IV, 364).

[Whatever may be the transformations of the dogma, Jesus will ever be the creator of the pure spirit of religion; the Sermon on the Mount will never be surpassed. Whatever revolution takes place will not prevent us attaching ourselves in religion to the grand intellectual and moral line at the head of which shines the name of Jesus. In this sense we are Christians, even when we separate ourselves on almost all points from the Christian tradition which has preceded us (Renan 1991, 221).]

Renan points out that even if one leaves or separates oneself from the Church, one can still be considered a Christian. Some critics believe that Renan hoped that by leaving the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, he would then be able to become a disciple of Christ, who also disassociated himself from the Pharisees.
Despite all the controversy that this text created during the nineteenth century, Renan attempts to put Jesus in a historical context and then examine his political position or lack thereof. It is his portrayal of the anti-nationalist politics of Jesus that is of the utmost interest to this dissertation, since it will permit one to question Edward Said’s opinion of Renan’s thoughts on nationalism (i.e., that Renan’s ideas concerning nationalism, race and religions are “mostly bad ones (Said 1978, 141)”.

Throughout Vie de Jésus, Renan describes certain events that occur before, during and after the lifetime of Christ before putting them in a historical context. As Renan has reiterated in his other essays, the so-called “pure races” no longer exist even in Galilee at this time:

La population de Galilée était fort mêlée, comme le nom même du pays [Gelil haggoym, “cercle des gentils”] l’indiquait. Cette province comptait parmi ses habitants, au temps de Jésus, beaucoup de non-juifs (Phéniciens, Syriens, Arabes et même Grecs). Les conversions au judaïsme n’étaient point rares dans ces sortes de pays mixtes. Il est donc impossible de soulever ici aucune question de race et de rechercher quel sang coulait dans les veines de celui qui a le plus contribué à effacer dans l’humanité les distinctions de sang (O.C., IV, 99).

[The population of Galilee was very mixed, as the very name of the country indicated. This province counted among its inhabitants, in the time of Jesus, many who were not Jews (Phœnicians, Syrians, Arabs, and even Greeks). The conversions to Judaism were not rare in these mixed countries. It is therefore impossible to raise here any question of race, and to seek to ascertain what blood flowed in the veins of him who has contributed most to efface the distinctions of blood in humanity (Renan 1991, 37).]
Here one sees, in a concrete formulation, the essence of Renan’s interpretation of Jesus: Christ is a great intellectual and world leader in so far as he persuades a substantial portion of the Jewish community no longer to think in terms of nation, blood, or race, but rather to expand the notion of salvation so as to include all humans. In this same passage, Renan notes once again that there were several mixed races at this time, even in the Jewish race, as Renan also points out in another essay written twenty years later, “Le judaïsme comme race et comme religion” (1883) (cf. O.C., I, 941). In the follow excerpt from Vie de Jésus, Renan reiterates his point about not thinking in terms of nation, race or blood when he proposes a new concept for a religion founded on “human brotherhood:”

Une idée absolument neuve, l’idée d’un culte fondé sur la pureté du cœur et sur la fraternité humaine, faisait par lui son entrée dans le monde; idée tellement élevée que l’Église chrétienne devait sur ce point trahir complètement les intentions de son chef, et que, même de nos jours, quelques âmes seulement sont capables de s’y prêter (O.C., IV, 142).

[An absolutely new idea, the idea of a worship founded on purity of heart, and on human brotherhood, through him entered into the world—an idea so elevated that the Christian Church ought to make it its distinguishing feature, but an idea which, in our days, only few minds are capable of embodying (Renan 1991, 66).]

Renan wants to avoid separating people in groups based on their genetic make up and wants others to see human beings as humans and not as people belonging to a specific race. Renan admits that not everyone would agree with this new concept of a religion but he illustrates how his thinking is different
from his contemporaries who seek to separate humanity and label them accordingly.

Renan also analyzes ancient Jewish politics, and he notes the sense of nationalism that marked Judaism before the time of Christ:

Un gigantesque rêve poursuivait depuis des siècles le peuple juif et le rajeunissait sans cesse dans sa décrépitude. Étrangère à la théorie des ré-compenses individuelles, que la Grèce a répandue sous le nom d’immoralité de l’âme, la Judée avait concentré sur son avenir national toute sa puissance d’amour et de désir. Elle crut avoir les promesses divines d’une destinée sans bornes, et, comme l’amère réalité qui, à partir du IXe siècle avant notre ère, donnait de plus en plus le royaume du monde à la force, refoulait brutalement ces aspirations, elle se rejeta sur les alliances d’idées les plus impossibles, essaya les volte-face les plus étranges (O.C., IV, 116).

[A gigantic dream haunted for centuries the Jewish people, constantly renewing its youth in its decrepitude. A stranger to the theory of individual recompense, which Greece diffused under the name of the immortality of the soul, Judea concentrated all its power of love and desire upon the national future. She thought she possessed divine promises of a boundless future; and as a bitter reality, from the ninth century before our era, gave more and more the dominion of the world to physical force, and brutally crushed these aspirations, she took refuge in the union of the most impossible ideas, and attempted the strangest gyrations (Renan, 1991, 49).]

According to Renan, Judaism always feels a sense of nationalistic pride no matter what the political outcome or ramifications are.

After examining the political atmosphere of the time, Renan uses political terms to describe the beginning of Christianity. For example, Renan describes the fundamental idea of Jesus as being a “radical revolution” (O.C., IV, 159;
Renan 1991, 79). The paradox in this statement made by Renan is that Jesus' idea is revolutionary, not political. In the nineteenth century, the term "revolutionary" had primarily a political connotation. Yet Renan portrays Jesus as being apolitical and as the antithesis to John the Baptist and to Judas the Gaulonite or Galilean. As for the former, John the Baptist, overtly preached against the established authorities as well as against the rich priests, doctors and the Pharisees. Whereas the latter, Judas the Gaulonite, the chief of the Galilean sect that later became a political movement, often preached against taxation. However, in being apolitical, by refusing to take sides in the political issues of his time, Jesus is actually being political: he is urging humans to place little value in nationalistic pride.

It is noteworthy to mention that Jesus never tried to start another political party because then he would be dividing humanity. Instead he is trying to get beyond the idea of "parties." At times, Jesus can be considered an anarchist because he perceives the government as an abuse of power as well as being quite trivial: "Jésus à quelques égards, est un anarchiste, car il n'a aucune idée du gouvernement civil. Ce gouvernement lui semble purement et simplement un abus (O.C., IV, 164)" [Jesus, in some respects was an anarchist, for he had no idea of civil government. That government seems to him purely and simply an abuse (Renan 1991, 83)]. However, Jesus never considered revolting against the Roman government, which he incidentally
recognized as the established power. Renan linked this notion of government with that of nationalism:

L’homme surtout préoccupé des devoirs de la vie publique ne pardonne pas aux autres hommes de mettre quelque chose au-dessus de ses querelles de partis. Il blâme ceux qui subordonnent aux questions sociales les questions politiques et professent pour celles-ci une sorte d’indifférence. Il a raison en un sens, car toute direction qui s’exerce à l’exclusion des autres est préjudiciable au bon gouvernement des choses humaines. Mais quel progrès les partis ont-ils fait faire à la moralité générale de notre espèce? Si Jésus, au lieu de fonder son royaume céleste, était parti pour Rome, s’était usé à conspirer contre Tibère, ou à regretter Germanicus, que serait devenu le monde? Républicain austère, patriote zélé, il n’eût pas arrêté le grand courant des affaires de son siècle, tandis qu’en déclarant la politique insignifiante il a révélé au monde cette vérité que la patrie n’est pas tout, et que l’homme est antérieur et supérieur au citoyen (My emphasis) (O.C., IV 162).

[The man who is especially preoccupied with the duties of public life does not readily forgive those who attach little importance to his party quarrels. He especially blames those who subordinate political to social questions, and profess a sort of indifference for the former. In one sense he is right, for exclusive power is prejudicial to the good government of human affairs. But what progress have “parties” been able to effect in the general morality of our species? If Jesus, instead of founding his heavenly kingdom had gone to Rome, had expended his energies in conspiring against Tiberius, or in regretting Germanicus, what would have become of the world? As an austere republican, or zealous patriot, he would not have arrested the great current of the affairs of his age; but, in declaring that politics are insignificant, he has revealed to the world that this truth, that one’s country is not everything, and that the man is before, and higher, than, the citizen (My emphasis) (Renan 1991, 81).]

Clearly, Jesus’ message for Renan is an anti-nationalist, anti-ethnocentric one. Similar to Renan’s stance in “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?,” Jesus is opposed to the glorification of
one’s link to one’s country or nation. The inferior or superior nature of a person is not at all determined by that person’s country or nation of origin. This opinion is contradictory to Edward Said’s attributing a nationalistic aspect to Renan’s thought.

Like Renan, Jesus also rejects the significance of blood. For Jesus, pride is often associated with one’s blood relations. He preaches total separation from all bonds of blood relations:

L’orgueil du sang lui paraît l’ennemi capital qu’il faut combattre. Jésus, en d’autres termes, n’est plus juif. Il est révolutionnaire au plus haut degré; il appelle tous les hommes à un culte fondé sur leur seule qualité d’enfants de Dieu. Il proclame les droits de l’homme, non les droits du juif; la religion de l’homme, non la religion du juif; la délivrance de l’homme, non la délivrance du juif. [...] La religion de l’humanité, établie non sur le sang, mais sur le cœur, est fondée (O.C., IV, 223).

[The pride of blood appeared to him the great enemy which was to be combated. In other words, Jesus was no longer a Jew. He was in the highest degree revolutionary; he called all men to worship founded solely on the fact of their being children of God. He proclaimed the rights of man, not the rights of the Jew; the religion of the man, not the religion of the Jew; the deliverance of man, not the deliverance of the Jew. [...] The religion of humanity, established, not upon blood, but upon the heart, was founded (Renan 1991, 124).]

Renan restates his theory that Jesus does not think in terms of blood, nation or race, but only perceives people as human beings and fights for the rights of all mankind. Both Jesus and Renan do not separate humanity into groups determined by race or nationalistic pride, because they want to unify mankind and not create a schism.
As stated before, both Jesus and Renan discourage nationalism and ethnocentricism. However, Christ's anti-nationalistic point of view is questioned when he encourages his followers to "pay tribute to Cæsar," i.e. pay their taxes. During this time, taxation is a way in which the established government could monitor the population, an early form of the census. Compared to Jesus, other people during this same time, such as the followers of Judas the Gaulonite, believed that taxation represented a lack of reverence. According to their logic, God is the sole "Master" who must be recognized by man as such, and if the former pays a tithe to the established power, man is in fact replacing the government with that of God. Thus the money collected is considered to have been stolen. It seems as if Christ's position is contradictory because he does not denounce the very thing, taxation, that is associated with a nation. However, Jesus asks his followers to: "Rendez à César ce qui est à César et à Dieu ce qui est à Dieu (O.C., IV, 161)" [Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God, the things which are God's (Renan 1991, 81)]. It seems as if Christ is asking his followers to choose for themselves concerning what is deemed acceptable or appropriate for God and for Cæsar.

In his controversial book, Vie de Jésus, Ernest Renan questions the validity of the facts surrounding the life of Jesus and treats him as a fictional character. Renan puts Christ in a historical context and examines the political
situation before and during Christ's lifetime. He depicts the "radical revolution" created by Christ, who is seen as a revolutionary figure but not as a political figure. Christ's apolitical stance can be perceived as being political: he urges humans to move beyond "us" versus "them" partisanship. He perceives the government as an abuse of power, but he recognizes the established power and he will not revolt against them, since to rebel would necessarily entail the establishment of a new party. Both Jesus and Renan share the same anti-nationalistic and anti-ethnocentric views. They are both against overzealous ties with one's country or nation. They do not believe in the division of mankind, by blood, race or nation. As for Jesus, he never forms a political party because he thinks that political parties create a division among humanity. Both Jesus and Renan aim to unify humanity, not separate them.

In the following chapter, the notion of nationalism will also be examined, this time as seen in Caliban, where the oppressed, part human and part monster, revolts against his oppressors, the aristocratic Europeans.

END NOTES
1. The following texts are part of the Histoire du christianisme: Vie de Jésus (1863), Les Apôtres (1866), Saint Paul (1869), L'Antéchrist (1873), Les Evangiles et la seconde génération chrétienne (1878), l'Église chrétienne (1879), and Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique (1881).

2. To avoid confusion between these two editions, when referring to the popular edition, the title Jésus will be used and Vie de Jésus for the definitive edition.

3. In the introduction to Vie de Jésus, Renan refers to and criticizes the French translation of Strauss' work about the life of Jesus (cf. O.C., IV, 24; Renan 1991, 3).
4. Hegel also wrote a book about the life of Jesus in 1795; however, it was published posthumously in 1907.

5. In French, Renan was literally called a “defrocked monk” (or “priest”), since the word “défroqué” can also mean to abandon something. Whereas in English, the word “defrocked” has another connotation and can be considered quite a severe punishment and expulsion from the priesthood. During the ordination ceremony, the ordaining bishop puts holy oil on the hands of the ordinand, thus signifying that his hands would forever do only holy things. During the “defrocking” ceremony, the defrockee’s hands would be scraped with a jagged piece of glass, thus symbolically scraping the oil from his hands.
The character and the image of Caliban have had a major impact throughout the literary and artistic domains. In 1611, the character "Caliban" first appeared in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in which he is associated with the destructive forces of rebellion. In contemporary academic cultural studies, the literary character Caliban has become very well-known and has been a recurring figure in other variations and retellings, where Caliban has become a symbol of the victimization in the Third World. In 1878, Ernest Renan was the first dramatist to write a sequel to Shakespeare's play. The sequel, entitled *Caliban, suite de la Tempête*, the first of four non-theatrical plays in the series titled *Drames philosophiques*.

It is presumed that William Shakespeare chose the name "Caliban" because it is an anagram of "can(n)ibal," since the letters "1," "n" and "r" are interchangeable in the "European transliteration" (Vaughan & Vaughan 1991, 26). Some critics believe that Shakespeare used this anagram to suggest the lack of morals often associated with the savage or that he may have used it to refer to "Carib" or "cannibal" or possibly both (Vaughan & Vaughan 1991, 28). Other critics note that the word is a derivative of a "gypsy" language. The word "Cauliban" or "Kaliban" means black or things associated with blackness (Vaughan & Vaughan 1991, 33-34). As seen in the introduction of this dissertation, in Europe in the
eighteenth century, the color black was often associated with evil and depravity (Cohen 1980, 13). In Arabic, "kalebôn" means a vile dog and some believe that this is where the name Caliban comes from (Vaughan & Vaughan 1991, 51). However, it is uncertain whether or not Shakespeare had any knowledge of these languages.

It is believed that when William Shakespeare wrote The Tempest he was influenced by Michel de Montaigne’s essay “Des Cannibales” (1580) (Frame 1984, 194). In his essay, Montaigne questions the traditional Renaissance belief that society (civilization) is good, whereas everything outside of society (wildness) is not. Evidence of this possible influence is seen in one of the prevalent themes throughout The Tempest: the clash between society and nature. In Shakespeare’s play, there is a notion of a hierarchical society where the ruler has divine rights. Everyone and everything outside of this restricted society is considered to be “uncivilized.” So, when a violent storm shipwrecks the King of Naples, other members of the court and their crew on a deserted island where Caliban lives, the half-monster is then subject to the laws and the rules of these passengers or new “colonizers.” Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, has already been on this island for the past twelve years. Since Prospero’s arrival, he has enslaved Caliban and teaches him to speak an Aryan language. Prospero manages to control Caliban through his magic. Caliban rebels and plots with two others to kill his captor. However, Prospero foils this plot when he learns
about it from his airy spirit, Ariel, who often spies on Caliban. At the end of this play, Prospero is restored his title of Duke of Milan. The others return to Milan and Caliban is left alone on this deserted island. Since Shakespeare ends his play with Caliban once again all by himself, critics speculate on whether Caliban would revert back to his monster-like behavior (original “savage-like” state when he was found on the island) and if he would forget the language that Prospero has taught him. With so many questions unanswered, it is not at all surprising that there have been so many sequels. The one thing that is certain is that throughout this play, Caliban is portrayed as the antithesis of the other characters. He is perceived as subhuman, a savage, a monster, a member of a “vile race” (Shakespeare 1964, I, ii, 358) who needs to be subdued because he is considered outside the norm, according to the European standards of the time.

Many critics believe that Ernest Renan had very limited knowledge of Shakespeare’s works and only knew of The Tempest second-hand. It is also believed that Renan never read the original English version but only read Émile Montégut’s translation that first appeared in 1867. Critics speculate that Renan had read this translation because Renan and Montégut knew each other and both often wrote for Revue des Deux Mondes (Renan 1954, 10-11). Some critics have questioned why Renan wrote a sequel and even questioned his “authenticity.” One such critic is Gabriel Séailles. In his
book, Ernest Renan: *Essai de biographie psychologique* (1895), Séailles compares William Shakespeare’s and Ernest Renan’s characters and is less favorable towards Renan’s portrayal:

Les personnages de Renan n’ont rien de vivant, de concret; ils n’ont que le nom de commun avec les héros de Shakespeare, dont les fictions les plus éthérées prennent un corps visible, chair et sang; ils ne sont, à vrai dire, que ses thèses habituelles, de pures abstractions dont les dialogues dissertent (Gabriel Séailles cited in Renan 1954, 11, note 3).

[Renan’s characters are not much alive or concrete, they have only their name in common with the heroes of Shakespeare, in whom the most ethereal fictions take up a visible body, flesh and blood; they are not, truth be told, but his habitual theses, pure abstraction on which the dialogues expatiate.]

According to Séailles, Renan may have used some of the same names as in Shakespeare’s play, but the French philosopher’s characters lack substance and become merely mouth-pieces for political rhetoric.

Contrary to this negative critique, some critics have been a little more favorable to Renan and to what he attempted to do in this sequel. In *Ernest Renan som Dramatiker* (1893), Georg Brandes compares Shakespeare’s version with that of Renan’s:

When one compares Renan’s drama with Shakespeare’s, to which after three hundred years Renan tried to provide a sequel, one perceives quite clearly that the superiority of the Renaissance is artistic, that of our own day scientific. Renan’s characters are mere shadows beside Shakespeare’s; but Shakespeare’s ideas are naïve compared with Renan’s (Brandes cited in Renan 1954, 11)

Stylistically, it is very difficult to compare the writings of Shakespeare with those of Renan, since Renan only wrote

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four non-theatrical plays and Shakespeare wrote approximately thirty-seven plays that have been translated into several languages and are still presented. Obviously, both of these authors lived during different centuries and both had completely different intentions for the main character and play. Renan may have had good ideas but he was uninterested in presenting them stylistically in a theatrical production. Brandes points out in an article published in 1904 that: "Renan is not a real dramatist and has never posed as such (Brandes 1904, 90)."

Another critic, Colin Smith, speculates that Renan is merely adapting what Smith refers to as "ready-made symbols," as done previously when he used "ready-made history" as a materials for his writings (Colin Smith in Renan 1954, 11). When Renan wrote the sequel to Shakespeare’s The Tempest, he was interested in modernizing the story. He did this by placing the three Shakespearean characters (Prospero, Caliban and Ariel) in a situation from the nineteenth century. It is difficult to determine whether or not Renan had known ahead of time the impact the character Caliban would have in literature as well as in the fine arts. When Renan wrote this play, only two sequels to The Tempest were known: in 1864 there was Robert Browning’s poem "Caliban Upon Setebos or, Natural Theology in the Island"; and in 1868 an essay inspired by the Bible entitled Caliban: A Sequel to Ariel, written by Prospero, an author using a pseudonym. It is uncertain whether or not Renan had prior knowledge of these
two sequels written in English or if he was only familiar with the French translation of Shakespeare's original version.

When Renan's Caliban was first published, critics accuse him of being too elitist and cynical (Vaughan & Vaughan 1991, 149). Renan responded by writing a sequel entitled L'Eau de Jouvence: Suite de Caliban, which deals with the problem of power through science. However, he was criticized once again for the same thing (cf. Fouillée 1878, 344-347).

Renan wrote Caliban a few years after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1875) and after the beginning of the Third Republic which lasted from 1875-1940. Many critics believe that this play is very political. Despite this claim, Renan explicitly denied that this play was political in the preface to Caliban:

Cher lecteur, voyez dans le jeu qui va suivre un divertissement d'idéologique, non une théorie; une fantaisie d'imagination, non une thèse de politique (O.C., III, 377).

[Dear reader, kindly see in the following play an idealist's fancy sketch, not a theory; a simple phantasy of the imagination, not a political thesis (Renan 1896, 11).]

Notwithstanding the fact that this play deals with political issues of the time, Renan contradicts himself in his own preface. Renan reinforces this contradictory nature in the preface to Drames philosophiques, where he justifies the use of the dialogue:

La forme du dialogue est, en l'état actuel de l'esprit humain, la seule qui, selon moi, puisse convenir à l'exposition des idées philosophiques. Les vérités de cet ordre ne doivent être ni
directement niées, ni directement affirmées; elles ne sauraient être l’objet de démonstrations. Ce qu’on peut, c’est de les présenter par leurs faces diverses, d’en montrer le fort, le faible, la nécessité, les équivalences. Tous les hauts problèmes de l’humanité sont dans ce cas (O.C., III, 371).

[I believe that the dialogue form is, in the current state of the human spirit, the only one which is suited to the exposition of philosophical ideas. Truths of this order should neither be directly denied nor directly affirmed; they cannot be made the object of demonstrations. What one can do with them, is present them in their various aspects, to show their strong points, weak points, necessity and equivalencies. All the great problems of humanity are [contained] in this case.]

Caliban presents a whole range of political positions and a wide variety of sometimes quite radical thoughts. The opinions of various characters allow Renan to present more than one point of view.

According to David Chadbourne, Renan explicitly writes about the future of democracy in Caliban. Renan was hesitant to accept the notion of democracy for two major reasons. The first reason was that Renan is familiar with democracy in the guise of a constitutional monarchy that elected Napoleon III and promoted the so-called "universal suffrage," when in fact only certain white males with money benefited. It is important to remember that in Renan’s adaptation, in the beginning of the play, Caliban represents the people, but when he comes into power he becomes an allegory for a constitutional democracy, which for Renan, was merely an illusion.

The other reason was Alexis de Tocqueville’s reports about America. Compared to the political system in France at
this time, the American concept of democracy seemed so "crudely experimental" (Chadbourne 1951, 301). It is important to mention that at this point and time in history, "Americanism" was often considered to be a vulgar term and often associated with "mediocrity." Renan feared that France would become a "second-rate America," where all inhabitants would lose everything except their superficial appetite for "equality" and their erratic search for wealth (Chadbourne 1951, 301-302). In his essay, Réforme intellectuelle et morale, Renan describes the American system of government:

[...][L]e type américain, fondé essentiellement sur la liberté et la propriété, sans privilèges de classes, sans institutions anciennes, sans histoire, sans société aristocratique, sans cour, sans pouvoir brillant, sans universités sérieuses ni fortes institutions scientifiques, sans service militaire obligatoire pour les citoyens. Dans ce système, l'individu, très peu protégé par l'État, est aussi très peu gêné par l'État. Jeté sans patron dans la bataille de la vie, il s'en tire comme il peut et s'enrichit, s'appauvrit, sans qu'il songe une seule fois à se plaindre du gouvernement, à le renverser, à lui demander quelque chose, à déclamer contre la liberté et la propriété. Le plaisir de déployer son activité à toute vapeur lui suffit, même quand les chances de la loterie ne lui ont pas été favorables. Ces sociétés manquent de distinction, de noblesse; elles ne font guère d'œuvres originales en fait d'art et de science; mais elles peuvent arriver à être très puissantes, et d'excellentes choses peuvent s'y produire (O.C., I, 402).

[The American type [of government] is essentially founded on liberty and property, without class privilege, without time-worn institutions, without a history, a court or dazzling power, without an aristocratic society, serious universities or strong scientific institutions, and without compulsory military service for its citizens. In the system, the individual, very little protected by the State, is also very little bothered by the State. Thrown, without a guide, into the battle of life, he gets out of it what he can and enriches
himself or impoverishes himself without ever thinking to complain of the government, of over­throwing it, of asking something of it, or of ranting against liberty and property. The pleasure of deploying his labor full steam ahead is sufficient, even when his chances in the lottery are slim. Such societies lack distinction and nobility; they rarely do original work by ways of art and of science; but, they can succeed in becoming very powerful and excellent things can happen in them.

Obviously, Renan was very skeptical of the new American system, since it did not have a previously established government or system of power, such as a monarchy or social classes. However, Renan did admit that even if these factors were lacking, this will not necessarily prevent this new government from becoming effective and a leading power.

In Renan's sequel, the character Caliban has become a drunkard and is living in Milan with Prospero, who has been reinstated as Duke. Prospero keeps promising to give Caliban his freedom, but Caliban is still treated like a slave and feels exploited. Caliban knows that all should be free and have absolute rights. He feels that the only way he can attain this freedom is through rebellion (I, i):

Un mortel n'a pas le droit d'en subalterniser un autre. La révolte, en pareil cas, est le plus saint des devoirs (O.C., III, 381).

[No mortal has the right to subjugate another and, wherever it happens, revolt is a most righteous duty (Renan 1896, 17).]

Caliban realizes that freedom is a fundamental right of all mankind and recognizes the lengths one must go to in order to maintain it. But he dreams of being in power; he no longer thinks of others, only of himself:
Si j’étais gouvernement, je m’en garderais bien. Ah! par exemple... s’imaginer que celui dont on agrandit la personne ne voudra pas exister pour son compte!... Tout être est ingrat.

[... ] Chacun selon sa force (O.C., III, 383)

[If I were in power I would first and mainly to my own welfare. Ah! For instance, I should not imagine that those whom one improves would not wish to live for themselves! Ingratitude is the stamp of humanity.

[... ] Each lives according to his character (Renan 1896, 18).

Caliban is supposed to represent the people and their needs, but he is only concerned with his own interests. Once again, democracy appears to be merely an illusion that does not include the public.

The notion of the public is perceived in another way by some nobles of Milan. In the following passage, Orlando, one of these nobles, explains how to maintain control of the masses (II, i):

Il faut conserver un vaste résevoir d’ignorance et de sottise, une masse de gens assez simples pour qu’on puisse leur faire croire que, s’ils sont tués, ils iront au ciel, ou que leur sort est digne d’envie. On fait un troupeau avec des bêtes; on n’en fait pas avec des gens d’esprit. Si tous les gens avaient de l’esprit, personne ne se sacrifierait, car chacun dirait: “Ma vie vaut celle d’un autre”. On n’est héroïque que par le fait de ne pas réfléchir. Il faut donc entretenir une masse de sots. Si les bêtes s’entendaient, les hommes seraient perdus. L’homme règne en employant une moitié des animaux à mater les autres (O.C., III, 396).

[It is, therefore, necessary to maintain a vast reserve of ignorance and stupidity, a mass of people so simple that they can be taught to believe that if they are killed they will either go to heaven or that their lot is to be envied by the living. They make their armies of such creatures as those and not out of the intelligent classes, for if all were people of sense, nobody would be sacrificed, as each would say, “My life is worth
more to me than anything else." As a rule, all heroism is due to lack of reflection and thus it is necessary to maintain a mass of imbeciles. If they once understand themselves, the ruling men will be lost. A man rules by employing one-half of these animals to conquer the other half (Renan 1896, 31).

According to Orlando's observations, it is necessary to control the masses with the illusion that they have an active role in helping humanity as well as themselves. This opinion reinforces the idea that democracy is merely an illusion.

Besides his views on the masses, Orlando also examines different races and nations in a discussion with Ruggiero, a fellow nobleman (II, i):

**Orlando:** L'attachement à la famille corrige ce que la destinée individuelle a de frivole.

**Ruggiero:** Oui, aux yeux des esprits peu philosopphiques. Pour se renfermer dans l'horizon de la famille, il faut être persuadé que la famille dont on fait partie est la meilleure de toutes. Or, les autres étant persuadés, de leur côté, de la même chose, il n'y a pas de chance pour que tous aient raison. Préjugé, vanité, voilà la base de la vie. La philosophie, qui détruit les préjugés, détruit la base de la vie.

**Orlando:** Le patriotisme a plus de solidité.

**Ruggiero:** Je ferai le même raisonnement que tout à l'heure. Pouvez-vous croire que votre patrie ait une excellence particulière, quand tous les patriotes du monde sont persuadés que leur pays a le même privilège? Vous appelez cela préjugé, fanatisme chez les autres portent le même jugement sur vous. Il faut être taupe pour ne pas voir que les autres portent le même jugement sur vous (O.C., III, 391).

[**Orlando:** Attachment to one's race corrects the individual tendency towards savage uselessness, I believe.]

[**Ruggiero:** Oh, yes, in the eyes of those who are not philosophical. In order to include himself in the]
confines of his own race he must be persuaded that his race is better than all others. But the others being equally positive on their side of the same fact, there is no possible chance that both can be right. Ah! prejudice and vanity are the foundations of life, and whatever philosophy destroys prejudice uproots the very basis of our being.

Orlando: Love of one’s country is more powerful than prejudice.

Ruggiero: I will answer your argument at once. Can you believe that your country has a particular excellence, when all the patriots of whatever nation in the world are just as blindly convinced that their country has the same advantage? But what is patriotism in you, you term prejudice and bigotry in the others. You must be blind as a mole to see that they will pass the same judgment upon you (Renan 1896, 26-27).

In this dialogue, the notion of superiority in regards to race and nation is questioned. Orlando is ethnocentric and nationalistic, whereas Ruggiero attempts to criticize this point of view. Ruggiero notes that people feel the need to elevate or promote their ethnic identity and nationalistic pride in order to feel superior. However, this creates a problem if everyone feels this way; then who is right?

The concept of nationalism is also discussed by another character in this play, who presents a very interesting perspective regarding the notion of one’s country and a sense of patriotism. According to Ercole, a nobleman, one should not fight for his nation, since the outcome will only benefit a few (II, i):

[...] La nation, de quelque manière que vous la conceviez, ne répondra jamais qu’aux intérêts du petit nombre. Le grand nombre sera sacrifié. Comment décider les gens à se faire tuer pour un état de choses qui ne profite qu’à un petit nombre de privilégiés? (O.C., III, 395).
The nation however you may conceive it, will only ever respond to the interests of a small number, as then the great majority will be sacrificed. Why make people fight and kill each other for a state of things, which would only benefit a few of the privileged classes (Renan 1896, 30).

It seems quite ironic that a nobleman would not want to fight for his country since his ancestors did. It is important to remember that the nobles used their ancestors as a means to claim to be of their own "race" and to obtain special privileges. It also seems ironic that a member of the privileged social class who benefits the most would question this class system. One would think that the other classes would contest, but it seems that these other classes are not aware of what they are missing and settle for what they have. In the following passage, Ruggiero illustrates this concept (II, i):

Les États usés sortent des plus grands maux par la débilité de leur tempérament, de même que les gens affaiblis résistent à une atmosphère méphitique mieux que les hommes vigoureux, ayant déjà pris l'accoutumance de ne respirer qu'à moitié (O.C., III, 398).

[The exhausted systems will go safely through the greatest ills, owing to the debility of their constitution, just the same as enfeebled people resist a poisonous atmosphere better than more robust ones, from having already accustomed themselves to a partial respiration (Renan 1896, 33).]

It appears that one would rather settle for what one has at that moment than possibly risk it all for the "ideal" that could turn out to be worse. Once again, this point of view reinforces the notion that democracy is merely an illusion.
Contrary to this mentality, one sees the absurdity in how unbeknownst to himself, Caliban instigates a revolution and becomes the new Duke of Milan just by complaining in public about how poorly Prospero treats him. Caliban even instructs the crowd on how to defeat Prospero (III, i):

L’essentiel est de mettre d’abord la main sur ses livres [ceux de Prospero]. Ces livres d’enfer, ah! je les hais; ils ont été les instruments de mon esclavage. Il faut les prendre, les brûler. Un autre pourrait s’en servir. Guerre aux livres! Ce sont les pires ennemis du peuple. Ceux qui les possèdent ont des pouvoirs sur leurs semblables. L’homme qui sait le latin commande aux autres hommes. À bas le latin!

Donc, avant tout, prenez-lui ses livres. Là est le secret de sa force. C’est par là qu’il règne sur les esprits. Cassez-lui aussi ses cornues de verre et tout son outillage. Sans ses livres, il sera comme nous. Quand il sera comme nous, la besogne sera faite aux trois quarts. Il est vieux et faible de corps; sa garde ne compte pas. L’argent qu’il devait lui donner, il l’employait en livres et en cornues de verre. Vous pourrez très facilement ou l’étrangler, ou le mettre dans une cage pour mourir de faim, ou le forcer à se faire moine. Oh! quand vous aurez brûlé ses livres, vous pourrez être généreux. Mais, d’ici là, pas de pitié! (O.C., III, 408)

[But the most essential thing is to seize upon his [Prospero’s] books at once. Those books of hell-ugh! how I hate them. They have been the instrument of my slavery. We must snatch and burn them instantly. No other method will serve but this. War to books! They are our worst enemies, and those who possess them will have power over all their fellows. The man who knows Latin can control and command people to his service. Down with Latin! Therefore, first of all seize his books, for there lies the secret of his power. It is by them that he reigns over the inferior spirits. Break, also, the glass resorts and all the materials of his laboratory. Without his books and the tools of his craft he will be the same as we are. Then, when he has been made powerless through losing his force, the rest of the work will be easily accomplished. He is old and feeble and his guards will make no resistance, for the money which he should have given them he has spent for books and retorts to

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help on his deviltries. You can easily strangle him or shut him up in a cage to starve to death, or compel him to turn monk. I tell you that when you have burnt his books you can be generous; but thither, no further of compassion (Renan 1896, 42).]

By referring to Prospero’s laboratory, it seems as if Renan is satirizing other “scientific scholars,” like Prospero, who use their laboratories as a place to produce their ethnocentric ideas. Incidentally, Said attacks Renan for creating a “philological laboratory,” a locale of Renan’s “European ethnocentrism” (cf. Said 1977, 88; 1979, 141). It seems ironic that Renan is satirizing the very thing, “cultural imperialism,” that Said accuses him of doing.

In this same passage, Caliban recognizes books as being the source of Prospero’s power as well as a form of “cultural imperialism.” It is important to remember that in Shakespeare’s version, Caliban is taught an Aryan language by Prospero. In Renan’s adaptation, Caliban uses this language to defeat his oppressor: “Me donner le langage, c’était m’armer pour cela. Je n’ai pris de la langue des Aryas que l’ordure et le blasphème (O.C., III, 383)” [To give me a language was to equip me for that end. I have only learned that Aryan speech as a means to express foulness and blasphemy (Renan 1896, 18).] [It is important to remember that Latin is associated with the Church and Caliban is also indirectly attacking the Church. At the end of the play, Caliban is perceived as “anticlerical” (cf. O.C., III, 428; Renan 1896, 61).]
Contrary to Caliban’s reason for learning to speak an Aryan language, Prospero perceives this as a way to civilize the so-called “savage.” As seen in the beginning of this play, Ariel justifies the actions of this colonizer to Caliban (I,i):

Tu ne savais pas le nom de rien; tu ignorais ce que c’était que la raison. Ton langage inarticulé semblait le beuglement d’un chameau de mauvaise humeur. Les sons, s’étranglant dans ton gosier, étaient comme un effort infructueux pour vomir. Prospero t’apprit la langue des Aryas. Avec cette langue divine, la quantité de raison qui en est inséparable entra en toi. Peu à peu, grâce au langage et à la raison, tes traits difformes ont pris quelque harmonie; tes doigts palmés se sont détachés les uns des autres; de poisson fétide, tu es devenu homme et maintenant tu parles presque comme un fils des Aryas (O.C., III, 382).

[Thou wast a stranger to reason and thy inarticulate language resembled the bellowing of an angry camel more than any human speech. Those sounds which were strangled in thy throat were very like an ineffectual effort to vomit, but brute as thou wast, Prospero taught thee the Aryan language, and with that divine tongue the channel of reason has become inseparable from thee. Little by little, thanks to language and reason, thy deformed features have become harmonized, thy web-fingers have separated themselves one from the other, and from a poisonous fish thou hast become a man. Even now thou speaks almost like a son of Italy (Renan 1896, 17-18).]

Ariel portrays Prospero as someone who saves Caliban from his wretched “savage” existence by transforming him into a “human,” teaching him to reason and speak an Aryan language.

Due to this transformation by the “cultural imperialist” Prospero, the treatment of Caliban has changed, compared to how he was treated on the island. He is no longer considered or perceived as a monster; he is now one of the people of Milan. Now that he belongs, all are willing to join him to
fight for a common cause, Caliban’s freedom, even though they are not directly affected for the time being.

The crowd is so motivated by Caliban’s speech that they storm the palace on a search and destroy mission. After succeeding in their mission, members of the crowd discuss how things will change now that Caliban is in charge (III, ii):

*Homme du peuple:* Enfin, on va donc voir la suppression des abus!

*Autre homme du peuple:* Qu’est-ce qu’un abus?

*Premier homme du peuple:* C’est ce qui est injuste. Tous les hommes sont égaux; ce qu’on fait pour les uns au détriment des autres doit être interdit.

*Second homme du peuple:* Mais il y en a qui naissent plus forts et plus intelligents que les autres. Est-il juste de les mettre à la portion congrue?

*Premier homme du peuple:* Oui; tant pis pour eux.

*Autre:* Mais il y a les femmes, qui naissent plus faibles. N’est-il pas juste qu’elles soient protégées?

*Autre:* Non; tant pis pour elles. Le grand abus, c’est Dieu, qui fait tout pour les uns et si peu pour les autres. Il faut corriger ses préférences et réparer ses injustices (O.C., III, 409-410).

Another Plebeian: At last we are going to see the suppression of abuses.

Another Plebeian: What is an abuse?

First Plebeian: Whatever is an injustice is an abuse. All men are equal, and whatever is done to benefit one at an expense of another should be prohibited.

Second Plebeian: But are there not some who are born stronger and more intelligent than their fellows? Is it right to rank them with their inferiors?

First Plebeian: Yes, and so much the worse for them.
Another: But are not some women born feeble than others, and is it not just that they should be protected?

Another: No; so much the worse for them. But the greatest abuse of all is that God makes so much for some and so little for others. His preferences must be amended and reparation made for His injustices (Renan 1896, 43).

In this dialogue, the people of Milan express the need to end all injustices whether it is the treatment of mankind by others or due to the way in which God treats them. Once again, they discuss the debate on whether or not mankind should be classified according to inferior or superior traits and if mankind can be considered oppressed if he is unaware of it or has no knowledge of the concept of freedom. The most absurd request is to punish God or bring him to justice due to his favoritism towards some and not to all.

The absurdity continues when Caliban discusses his new position of power. Now that Caliban is a respected man of the people, he has changed his attitude towards Prospero, but he does not really like the new demands now placed on him (III, iii):

Non, je n’aurais pas cru qu’il fût si doux de régner. Je n’aurais pas cru surtout qu’on mûrit si vite en régnant. [...] J’étais injuste pour Prospero; l’esclavage m’avait aigri. Mais, maintenant que je couche dans son lit, je le juge comme on se juge entre confrères. Il avait du bon et, en beaucoup de choses, je suis disposé à l’imiter.

Quoi de plus odieux, par exemple, que ces inopportunes impatiences du peuple, ce défilé de pétitions impossibles dont ils viennent de m’accabler! Quelle avidité de jouir! Quelles prétentions subversives! Ce qu’ils me demandent, c’est de tirer d’un muid de blé la grasse
nourriture de dix mille hommes et de trouver dans un setier cinq cents pots de vin. À d'autres, camarades! Pour moi, mon parti est pris: je ne me laisserai pas envahir par des gens qui s'imaginent, en se plaçant au delà de moi, m'entraîner avec eux dans l'abîme. Un gouvernement doit résister, je résisterai. Après tout, les gens établis et moi, nous avons des intérêts communs. Je suis établi comme eux; il faut que cela dure. La propriété est le lest d'une société; je me sens de la sympathie pour les propriétaires (O.C., III, 413-414).

[I would not have believed it was so sweet to be in power, nor, above all, that one could so quickly mature in perception and feeling through sovereignty alone. [....] I was very unjust to Prospero, and I suppose my slavery embittered me, but now that I lie in his bed I can judge him as brothers judge between themselves. He has splendid qualities, and in many things I am disposed to imitate his example.

What could be more odious, for instance, than those inopportune frenzies of the people, with their defiles of impossible petitions in overwhelming numbers! What frantic eagerness for pleasure! What they asked of me was similar to deriving nourishment for ten thousand men from one hogshead of wheat, or to find in a gallon measure five hundred pots of wine. And the others—comrades! phew! As for me, my part is taken. I will not suffer myself to be invaded by those people who imagine that by demanding more than is in my power to give, they will drag me along with them to destruction. A government should be masterful—I will be. After all, the aristocrats and I have common interests. I am established like them, and it is necessary to be enduring. Property is really the ballast of society, and I already feel myself in strong sympathy with the landed classes (Renan 1896, 46-47).]

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Caliban is subjected to the laws of the shipwrecked passengers on the deserted island and now he is subjected to the demands of the people of Milan. In his former situation, Caliban opts for violence to cease his slavery, but his plan is foiled. It seems ironic that Caliban, now in a position of power and no longer a mere commoner, fears that the masses will resort to force and
possibly destruction to achieve their means. He now has a link to the aristocrats who once tried to subdue him and he is now the leader and in the position of being the oppressor to the "cultural imperialist" Prospero who created him.

It is also ironic how power can change people; in this case Caliban seems more docile and does not threaten physically to harm his former captor, Prospero, as he had prior to achieving his new position of power. The irony in this situation is that Caliban and Prospero change places so that Caliban can actually be Prospero's "bourreau" if he chooses to be.

Once Prospero hears that Caliban now has his former political position, Prospero feels duped and at first refuses to abdicate. Others try to persuade Prospero that it would be in his best interest to yield his position to Caliban. Prospero finally agrees but with one exception, as he explains to Bonaccorso who is acting as an advisor (V, iv):

Prospero: Je céderai tout, excepté le droit de rire.

Bonaccorso: Oh! gardez-le Monseigneur. Dès que les choses humaines tombent dans le peuple, le ridicule surabonde et le rire ne prouve plus rien. Le rire, en temps de démocratie, est un argument qui n'a plus de tranchant (O.C., III, 422-423).

[Prospero: I will yield everything except the right to laugh.

Bonaccorso: Oh! beware, my lord! Of all the human things fallen to the common people, that of ridicule superabounds very eminently, and, besides, laughter is no proof in an argument. In democratic times, too, it is reasoning which has entirely lost all its cutting edge (Renan 1896, 55).]
Out of all the things that Prospero is not willing to give up when he relinquished his political position to his former slave, he chooses laughter, probably, because he feels as if Caliban is mocking him by replacing him. Or, now that the situation is reversed, Prospero can ridicule Caliban. This response illustrates the absurdity of this entire situation between Prospero and Caliban. It is evident that once again, Renan is making fun of democracy in that like humor, once it has reached the "common people," like the ability to reason, it too has lost some of its desirability or uniqueness. Reason is also one of the things that Prospero taught Caliban, so it is with this same power of thought that leads Caliban to destroy Prospero's source of power and superiority, his books that also represent "cultural imperialism." Prospero feels betrayed because Caliban uses education as a weapon against his former master, an aristocrat now in a subordinate position. Towards the end of the play, Zitella, a girl who is described as having a gay character, lists all the accomplishments of the aristocrats and how they are not fully appreciated:

Oui, toute civilisation est l'oeuvre des aristocrates. C'est l'aristocratie qui a créé le langage grammatical (que de coups de bâton il a fallu pour rendre la grammaire obligatoire!), les lois, la morale, la raison. C'est elle qui a discipliné les races inférieures, soit en les assujettissant aux traitements les plus durs, soit en les terrorisant par des croyances superstitieuses. Les races inférieures, comme le nègre émancipé, montrent d'abord une monstrueuse ingratitude envers leurs civilisateurs. Quand elles réussissent à secouer leur joug, elles les traitent de tyrans, d'exploiteurs, d'imposteurs. Les conservateurs étrits rêvent des tentatives pour
ressaisir le pouvoir qui leur a échappé. Les hommes plus éclairés acceptent le nouveau régime, sans se réserver autre chose que le droit de quelque plaisanteries sans conséquence (O.C.,III, 433).

[Yes; all civilization is the work of aristocrats. They have created a grammatical language (how many blows it took to make grammar obligatory!), laws, morals and reason. It is they who discipline the inferior races, either restraining them by the severest treatment or terrorizing them by superstitious beliefs. The inferior races, however, such as the emancipated Negro, evidence at once monstrous ingratitude towards their civilizers. When they succeed in throwing off the yoke of slavery they treat them as tyrants, impostors and exploiters of mankind.

The narrow conservatives of the aristocrats dream of again seizing the power which has escaped them, while the more liberal accept the new régime without reserving any other right than that of making harmless pleasantries upon the situation (Renan 1896, 65-66).]

In this passage, Renan is being very sarcastic when he implies that if it were not for the aristocrats, civilizations would not exist at all. Sarcastically, Renan notes that one should be grateful for what the aristocrats have done for society, not only in the creation of civilizations, but for language, morals and reason. Subsequently, the "popular" or "vulgar" language is spoken by everyone except the nobility. As for morals, the nobles are notorious for lacking them, since they often have several mistresses and only are concerned with their own welfare and not of others. As for reason or the lack thereof, this is what the aristocrats rely on to convince themselves as well as their "servants" or "slaves" that oppression is the basis of society and their fundamental right. Ironically, Renan points out how indignant the nobles feel when their so-called
ungrateful slaves revolt and then accuse their captors of exploiting them. In a democracy, the aristocrats no longer have a place in society. All they have left is laughter, like Prospero who uses it to make fun of the newly established government.

Besides presenting several views regarding race and nation, Renan also criticizes Christianity. For example, at the beginning of the play (I,i), Ariel and Caliban discuss religion. Ariel explains that:

[Prospero] n’est pas Dieu; mais il travaille pour Dieu. Il croit que Dieu est raison et qu’il faut travailler à ce que Dieu, c’est-à-dire la raison, gouverne le monde de plus en plus. Il cherche des moyens pour que la raison soit armée et règne effectivement (O.C., III, 384).

[[Prospero] is not God, but he works for God. He believes that God is reason, and that one should work towards the means by which God, who is reason, governs the world more and more. Thus he seeks the power to most effectually arm reason for its just rule (Renan 1896, 20).]

According to Ariel, not only does Prospero work for God but they both seek to do everything in the name of reason. If this is true then Prospero’s actions can be justified by being done in the name of God. Caliban responds to this by comparing his mother’s god to the Christian God:

Balivernes! Sétébos, le dieu de ma mère, valait bien mieux que ce dieu intangible dont tu parles sans cesse. Sétébos, lui, montrait sa puissance par des effets visibles. Chaque matin, sa caverne était pleine de têtes fraîchement coupées, les joues percées d’un couteau. Quant au Dieu des chrétiens, c’est le Dieu des faibles et des femmes. Les faibles, on verra comme je les traiterai. Et les femmes! Eh! Mesdames, Sétébos tient une hache, et c’est un dieu galant (O.C., III, 384-385).
[Idle stories! Setebos, my mother’s god was a much more valorous being that the intangible God about whom thou art ceaselessly prating to me. Each morning his cave was full of freshly cut heads, each with a sharp knife thrust through its jaws. As for the God of the Christians, he is only the God of the feeble minded and of women. It should be seen how I would treat the feeble minded! and as to the women! ah! mesdames, Setebos kept himself in awe by a hatchet, and that is a gallant god (Renan 1896, 20-21).

For Caliban, a “gallant god” is visible and demonstrates his physical force, unlike the Christian God who does not reveal himself and must rely on someone else to preach his message. One of the problems with having someone else spread the word of God is that this message may be misguided, as in the case of Prospero who believes that:

C’est lui [Dieu] qui se réalisera pleinement quand la science ceindra la couronne monarchique et régnera sans rivale. Alors la raison rendra au monde sa beauté perdue (O.C., III, 387).

[It is He [God] who will have become most fully realized, when science will diadem the crowned monarch, and reign without a rival. Then, reason will restore the lost beauty of the world (Renan 1896, 23).

Prospero believes strongly in science and relies heavily on science in order to manipulate others. However, in the end, it is this misguided passion for science that utterly destroys him. Even Renan admits in l’Avenir de la science that one’s love for science does not necessarily make this person a scientific scholar [“Mais l’amour pour la science ne suffit pas à faire un savant (Renan cited in Petit 1993, 366).”]

As for Prospero’s views on religion, there are seen in his play within a play (mise en abyme) where other ideologies
are questioned (II, ii). In the opening scene, several gods are seated at a "table of feast" where Jupiter is at the center, an explicit reference to Jesus' last supper. In the following passage, Prospero acts as the mediator for a discussion regarding God amongst a crowd of mortals:

Voix qui sort de la foule: Il est juste d'adorer ce Dieu bon et miséricordieux. Il faut le prier.

Buttadeo, le juif éternel, s'élève de la foule, le front couvert d'un voile où se dessine le nom de Jéhovah: Erreur! erreur! Je proteste. Votre Dieu ne saurait être juste et miséricordieux. Le mien a fait le ciel et la terre; il fait tout dans le ciel et sur la terre; il est juste et bon.

Voix de la foule: S'il fait le monde tel qu'il est, comment est-il juste? Le monde n'est ni juste ni bon.

Buttadeo: Le mal vient de ce qu'on n'observe pas la Loi. Si la Loi était observée, le monde serait parfait.

Prospero: [...] La Loi est un essai pour réaliser une société juste. Essai imparfait; mais toutes les tentatives de réforme de la société au nom de la justice se grefferont sur cette tige-là (O.C., III, 402-403).

[Voice heard from the multitude: It is right to worship a good and [merciful] god. It is necessary to pray [to him].]

Buttadeo (The Wandering Jew, standing out from the host, his forehead covered with a wing stamped with the name of Jehovah): Error! Error! I protest. Your God can not know either justice or pity. Mine has made the heavens and the earth and everything in and upon them. He is righteous and merciful.

Voice of the Multitude: If He made the world such as it is, how is He just? The world is neither just nor good.

Buttadeo: [...] [E]vil comes to those who do not observe the law. If the law was obeyed the world would be perfect.
Prospero: [...] The law is an attempt to realize an upright society. The attempt, as you know, was imperfect, but all the efforts to reform for the world in the name of justice have grouped themselves about that idea (Renan 1896, 37-38).]

In this scene, Buttadeo argues with someone from the crowd about whose God, the Christian or the Jewish, is considered to be good and just. This debate is used to illustrate the notion of an idealistic society where justice will always prevail. However, this ideal society will never exist due to prejudices.

After this discussion, Prospero introduces the gods of the future where these new gods of steel destroy the other gods before attacking themselves.⁵ A voice from the crowd says: "Nous pensions que la science était la paix et que, le jour où le ciel n’aurait plus de dieux, ni la terre de rois, on ne se battrait plus (O.C., III, 404)" [We thought that science was peaceful, and that when the day came for the sky to have no god, or the earth a king, there would be no more fighting (Renan 1896, 38).] It seems as if Renan is making a social commentary about religion and science. In regards to religion, it is the battle between various ideologies reflect the fact that new religions are formed in order to counteract other ones. As for science, it appears as if one is relying on science (or technology) to be the cure all for all of society’s problems, instead of dealing with the problem directly. This scene reinforces the notion that some are misguided when it comes to science. The irony in this entire situation is that Jupiter, who is supposed to be partial to
justice, does nothing to stop the fight and justice does not prevail.

Throughout this political play, Ernest Renan uses dialogue to present various views on race, nation and religion. It is obvious through these dialogues that Renan is well aware of "scientific racism" and how certain "scientific scholars" produce and promote their ethnocentric opinions. Renan even recognizes the "cultural imperialism" imposed by the colonizers. It seems ironic that one of the things that Edward Said accuses Renan of doing, the creation of the "philological laboratory," Renan satirizes this promotion of ethnocentric ideas in his play and the destruction of this laboratory is instigated by the same person, Caliban, that is subjugated to this "cultural imperialism."

END NOTES

1. The other plays included in this same collection are L’eau de Jouvenance (1881); Le prêtre de Némi (1885); and L’Abbesse de Jouarre (1886).

2. There are some errors in the translation done by Eleanor Grant Vickery because she translated this passage as follows:

   [...] The nation however you may conceive it, will never respond to the interests of a small number, as then the great majority would be sacrificed. Why make people fight and kill each other for a state of things, which would only benefit a few of the privileged classes (Renan 1896, 30).

On page 133 of this dissertation, I changed the underlined words in order to make this passage more true to the original French version.

3. There is another error in the translation by Eleanor Grant Vickery. Here is the way she originally translated this passage:
Voice heard from the multitude: It is right to worship a good and pitiful god. It is necessary to pray (Renan 1896, 37).

I changed the underlined word ("pitiful") and added "to him" in order to make this passage more true to the original French version.

4. In an effort to make this passage sound better in English, I altered Vickery’s translation. Here is her original translation:

Buttado: The evil comes to those who do not observe the law. If the law was obeyed the world would be perfect (Renan 1896, 37).

5. Here’s the description of the battle between the gods of steel and the gods of flesh:


[A clumsy multitude of giants, with enormous legs and arms covered with polished steel, appears. Their joints move by the aid of powerful eccentric articulations. Over each joint is a cup of oil for lubricating it and arranged in such a way as never to spill its content; over that is an incandescent tube which is their soul. They appear to eat carbon. The gods of steel throw themselves upon the table of the gods of flesh, breaking, killing, and destroying. Most frightful disorder ensues; nymphs, dryads, and all the enchanted nature flee away terrified and distracted. [...] After having put the gods of flesh to flight, the gods of steel fight among themselves. The air is filled with a frightful din of ringing metal (Renan 1896, 38).]
Since the sixteenth century, some have relied on genetic traits to determine others' worth in society. For the aristocrats, their lineage became a means to obtain certain rights and privileges at the expense of the lower social classes.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, humans were classified according to their physical characteristics or "races." Soon after, new races were named or renamed and scientists proposed various theories about skin color and its cause. This need to classify and identify human beings eventually became a means for the elitist to justify their sense of superiority.

The slave trade, along with the increase in travel, combined with the fear of the unknown and the fear of contamination only encouraged discrimination and "biological racism."

During the nineteenth century, history and heredity played a major role. Some scholars relied on history to establish ethnic identities, whereas genetic traits were used to determine "race" which became synonymous with social stature as well as a means to determine intelligence and worth.

In several of Ernest Renan's works, he wrote about "race," language and politics. Renan lived during a time when the term "race" also included languages, but towards the end of the century it was primarily used to refer to physical
traits. This term was so often used and misused that it was common during the nineteenth century. For Renan, the term "race" was at times synonymous with a community of people who were culturally unified and at other times he used it to refer to other cultural aspects of race, like language and literature, as in the case of the Celts and the Semites. Renan also noted that "race" has a historical basis in that it was not a constant. The multiple uses of this word "race" often causes confusion with various twentieth-century critics.

Besides the confusion created by the term "race," Renan also lived during a time when "scientific scholars" attempted to understand, define and establish an identity of mankind. This classification of man created a division amongst the other "races," and it was these scientific findings that were often used to promote and justify ethnocentric ideas and nationalistic pride. Unlike his contemporary philologists, Renan united the Semitic and Indo-European races and he did not find any biological differences between them. He noted that there is a Semitic culture and he admits that philology may have created the Semites. It is through history and language that Renan examined the Semitic races. For Renan, language played an important role by determining the essence of a human community. Furthermore, Renan also examined their religion. It was this examination that caused controversy since Renan associated intolerance with monotheism. He will long be remembered for his conjecture that the desert is
monotheistic and his accusation that the Semitics have no mythology. [He recanted these statements some four years later in an article "Nouvelles considérations sur le caractère général des peuples sémitiques et en particulier sur leur tendance au monothéisme." 1859. *Journal asiatique* 5:13 (février-mars): 214-282; (avril-mai): 417-449 and in a letter to Max Müller dated 8 May 1860 (cf. O.C., X, 269-271).] Besides the critics’ objections to Renan’s treatment of the Semites’ religion, Renan also created controversy when *Vie de Jésus* was first published.

Renan saw Jesus as a political figure: an anarchist because he was anti-government and against the formation of political parties. Both Renan and Christ incorporated all humans together instead of separating them according to factors such as nation, “race” or religion. They both were anti-nationalistic and anti-ethnocentric since they denounced the over-glorification of one’s country or nation and they rejected the significance of blood.

These same notions of nation and “race” are also seen in *Caliban* where dialogue is used to present conflicting opinions. Caliban represents a man who is forced to integrate into an Aryan society. He rebels, becomes their new ruler and replaces his oppressor.

As seen in several of his works, Renan was well aware of what his contemporaries were doing and at times he criticized phrenologists and “cultural imperialism” through satire in some of his philosophical writings, “Qu’est-ce qu’une
nation?” and Caliban. He even warned against the “politics of race” that would later be enacted by Hitler.

Throughout his writings, Ernest Renan continually contradicted himself. Some critics use this contradiction to discredit Renan, and they portray him as a “cultural imperialist.” Others accept this contradiction, since Renan admitted that he perceived himself as a “tissue of contradiction” (Renan cited in Reardon 1985, 266). To this day Ernest Renan still is and probably will remain an enigma who continues to fascinate and even irritate his critics.
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VITA

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Major Field: French

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Approved:

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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