In the Eyes of Others: The Middle Eastern Response and Reaction to Western Scholarship

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Astérix le Gaulois, the hero of the well-known French comic, finds himself in one of his adventures in the Egypt of Cleopatra. At the end of the story, Cleopatra thanks the Gauls for their help. Astérix replies that they are always at her service, and adds: "Et si un jour vous avez envie de construire autre chose en Égypte, un canal entre la Mer Rouge et la Méditerranée, par exemple, eh bien, faites appel à quelqu’un de chez nous." This “offer” is, of course, an allusion to the building of the Suez Canal. In the Arabic translation of the text, this passage is omitted altogether. Instead, Astérix, after replying that they are always at Cleopatra’s service, adds that they were happy to have been in Egypt and that they will return another time.

This literary incident is not without significance. In fact, it could be said to be indicative of a certain ambivalence towards the West: at once, there is the attraction, seen in the borrowing of the comic text, as well as the rejection, seen in the elimination of the critical passage altogether.

But this incident can also be seen to have a still greater significance. Besides testifying to the clash of French and Egyptian nationalism, it is, in a way, exemplary of the problems inherent in modern cultural contacts between the Middle East and the West. The editors of Dār al-Ma'ārif, who sponsored this translation, did so as part of the translation of an entire series of Astérix comics. Most of these take place in Europe and have little to do with the Middle East. By promoting the series, however, the publishers acquired a text which, on at least one level, was more than a frivolous exotic import. They were faced with a text which described them, and which was, therefore, altered to conform to Arab sensibilities, that is, it was reacted to. Would it not be possible to see in this a
paradigm of the Middle Eastern reaction to Western scholarship on the Middle East? In recent centuries, the Middle East has been increasingly exposed to Western culture. As purely exotic imports, most aspects of this foreign culture can be deemed useful or harmful, welcome or unwelcome. One aspect, however, possesses a more intimate relation to the importing society, Western scholarship on the Middle East. In judging this product, Middle Easterners are doing more than making an abstract assessment: they are weighing a picture of themselves, and reacting to it.

Of course, when one speaks of a response and a reaction, one is implying the existence of something (or someone) to which (or to whom) one responds and reacts. In this case, we are faced with a phenomenon called Orientalism (al-istishrāq) and its proponents, the Orientalists (al-mustashriqūn). The derivation of these two words is not devoid of significance: the verbal form meaning at once “to become an Oriental, adopt oriental manners” and “to study the Orient.” However, words can never be detached from their affective signification which can transcend the strictly lexicographical domain. This, indeed, has become the case with the words Orientalism and Orientalist, not only in their Western forms but in their Arabic equivalents as well. Although this is not the proper forum for a history of the two words, an intellectual task of the greatest interest, a few remarks are in order, since much of the literature under discussion deals with “Orientalism” and “Orientalists.” First, and most important, is the fact that the very use of the word Orientalist/mustashriq today is itself a negative judgment. This, however, has not always been the case. In a study of Arabs in America, the author speaks of an Iraqi scholar, Father Hanna al-awsanī as one of the first Orientalists (min awā’il al-mustashriqūn) in America, and who was not only an Orientalist but a leading Catholic thinker as well. It is clear from the context that the word mustashriq must here be understood as positive.

The complexities of the definition of Orientalism and Orientalist and the uses to which the terms are put could be considered, in fact, as a type of reaction, one which operates on a more psychological, and perhaps unconscious, level than the manifest reactions to the scholarly study of the Near East. When we speak of the reactions to Western scholarship, we are, in effect, dealing with a complex phenomenon which it could be argued is closely linked to the history of Orientalism itself. Since, as I have pointed out elsewhere, Orientalism has long been recognized as “a complex movement whose roots were intertwined with Western historical and mental structures,” we should not underestimate the fact that reactions to Orientalism will, of necessity, be intertwined in the historical and mental structures not only of Orientalism itself but of the subject of study of Orientalism, that is, the Orient.

The delimitation of the reactions depends, naturally, on the delimitation of the object being reacted to. For our purposes, this means that we are faced with the problem of how to define Orientalism. Unfortunately, an easy circumscription such as “the study of the Orient” or “the study of the Near East,” which might, under other circumstances, be adequate, will not suffice in this instance: the definition used will necessarily affect the resulting reactions. For example, in his account of the history of Orientalism, the Turkish scholar, Abdülhak Adnan-
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Adivar, speaks of the appearance of the first Orientalists in the middle of the tenth century. While there might be justification for this periodization, Adnan-Adivar himself feels compelled to qualify it by making a distinction between "old-style" Orientalists and "orientalists in the modern sense." At exactly what point a scholar of the Near East becomes an "Orientalist" is not clear. Certainly, the movement of translations and foundations of chairs for Oriental studies is well documented. Perhaps the most efficacious way of determining at exactly what point one should start is by looking at the Orientalists themselves and seeing when they define themselves as such. In other words, at what point are we dealing with a tradition defining itself? It could be argued that the first manifestation of this international movement was the first Congrès International des Orientalistes which took place in Paris in 1873. While various scholarly societies had been founded earlier, the movement of international collaboration was manifest in this first Congrès. It is significant that many "Orientals" participated in this enterprise, as can be seen by a glance at the lists of the members and committees of the Congress.

Would it not be tempting to see in this collaboration between Easterners and Westerners, in this positive reaction, a sign of the times? Does it reflect a happier phase of East/West contact before the conquest of the Central Islamic lands by the West and when intercourse was more peaceful, commercial, and cultural? Does not the currently negative implication of the term Orientalist, discussed above, argue for the same interpretation? Such a diachronic view, while clearly tempting, would be extremely misleading. In fact, collaboration has continued to the present day in the same international congresses. Furthermore, Najib al-"Aqqiqi, who is a contemporary defender of Orientalism, notes that earlier intellectuals, like the nineteenth century Ahmad Faris ash-Shidyaq and the early twentieth century al-Amir Shakib Arslan, vigorously opposed it. Among contemporary Arab writers on Orientalism, Leila Ahmed specifically praised Edward Lane for his sympathetic and accurate portrayal of the East and for correcting the all-too-frequent miscomprehensions of travel writers.

For these reasons, it does not seem fruitful to relate different types of reaction to the different phases of European imperialism: cultural and commercial contact, conquest and colonization, and the post World War II period which can be labelled decolonization, post-imperialism, or neo-colonialism. Thus, an essentially synchronic approach will be used, based on the position that, for the reactions to Orientalism, the significant aspect of East/West confrontation (or imperialism, if one wishes too call it that) is not any political or economic development so much as it is the coming to terms with the view of your own culture formulated by a powerful alien one. This is not to say, of course, that the political and economic penetration by the West did not set the stage for both the cultural penetration by the West and the Eastern desire to know more about the West.

This Eastern desire to learn about the West was reflected in intellectual expeditions to Europe. As was noted above, some of these involved attendance at the first international Orientalist congress. And again, this collaboration should not be seen as an isolated incident. Rather, it signalled the beginning of a trend.
At the Eighth International Congress of Orientalists in Stockholm in 1889, there was, also, an Egyptian delegation. One of the members, Muhammad Amin Fikri Bey, on his return composed an account not only of the proceedings of the meeting but of an extended trip to Europe which took him to Paris and London, among other cities. Not only is his admiration for the event evident in his account but the basic sympathy that he felt for the "Orientalists" is clear as well. He speaks, for example, of Ignaz Goldziher with great respect, even calling him by a nickname al-Azhari, an appellation he earned by studying at al-Azhar.15

This "reaction" by Fikri Bey is important because it is indicative of a type of response of Orientalism. In fact, when we speak of a reaction, we are, in effect, speaking of a continuum, which moves from emulation to complete denial. The positive end of the continuum, that of emulation, must be included in any discussion of response and reaction. To mention only those who chose to write specifically about Orientalism would tend to make the Middle Eastern response to Western scholarship seem more negative than, in fact, it was, since a large number of those moved to write on the subject were motivated by hostility. The emulators, those who saw nothing important to criticize or condemn, and who simply collaborated in the common enterprise were, by their nature, a less vocal group. Furthermore, these scholars, who, were it not for ethnic origin, would most likely be labeled Orientalists,16 hold positions not only in the West17 but in the Middle East as well.18 It might be worth noting at this juncture that those Arabs (especially Christian) well integrated into the Western scholarly community have recently been branded "tame Arabs."19

Aside from this group, we have many positive reactions or evaluations of Orientalists and Orientalism as such. This, of course, has to be seen as different from the phenomenon of emulation, as it entails an actual judgment, which, however, happens to be positive. Examples of this type of response would include the aforementioned Najib al-'Aqiqi, who, in his recent study of Orientalists, aptly titled al-Mustashriqun, has a lengthy discussion of Orientalist writings following the elaborate biographies of Orientalists which constitute the bulk of his work. Al-'Aqiqi is well aware of the criticisms which have been levelled at the Orientalists, but he concludes that they are people "like us" who can be right but who can also make mistakes.20 Mustafa Bek Bayram at-Tunisi, who attended an international conference on Oriental languages held in Hamburg in 1902, spoke well of the learning of the Orientalists he met, though noting that their spoken Arabic was poor, a limitation which he said was already being remedied by their students.21 In addition to level-headed assessments such as these, we have the positive judgments of innumerable contemporary thinkers and literary figures, like Ahmad Amin and Taha Husayn, who studied with the Orientalists not only in Europe but also in the Middle East when these scholars came there to teach.22

Nor are positive assessments or images limited to scholars and writers. The sophisticated Egyptian cineaste, Shadi 'Abd as-Salim, began his award-winning film, al-Mumiya', with a sympathetic portrayal of the French Egyptologist, Maspero, a portrayal which clearly reflects the gratitude Shadi 'Abd as-Salim felt to Egyptologists like Lichtheim, who helped him rediscover his roots.23

When describing the continuum of possible responses from the fully positive
(of which emulation is a variant) to the fully negative, a distinction must be made between what can be considered criticism, on the one hand, and condemnation, on the other. Condemnation clearly is the more negative, while criticism stretches through the mildly positive to the moderately negative. Criticism usually takes place within the scholarly tradition of both the critic and the person criticized, and, again, its proponents could easily be Orientalists themselves. This response should, in theory, lead to positive results and to profitable scholarly exchange. Condemnation, on the other hand, is a blanket judgment without appeal which rejects the entire tradition and appears not to leave open the possibility of auto-criticism and self-improvement. It is also capable of becoming personal and strident. An excellent example of a critic would be Mohammed Arkoun, an outstanding and creative scholar who has authored a trenchant critique of von Grunebaum.24 An earlier example would be Muhammad Kurd cAli who, while he took vigorous exception to the positions of some Orientalists (and expressed himself at Orientalist congresses), had excellent relations with others and respected the group as a whole.25 Occupying a slightly more negative position on the continuum would be A. L. Tibawi, who has written on English-speaking Orientalists.26 Good examples of those who have condemned Orientalism would be Edward Said, Talal Asad, and Muhammad al-Bahi, whose works will be referred to in the discussion which follows. Anouar Abdel-Malek and Abdallah Laroui are more difficult to categorize, since they seem to hesitate between criticism and condemnation.

Of course, to state that one merely evaluates the works of the Orientalists and then forms a judgment, which happens to be at times positive and at other times negative, would be a gross oversimplification. The issue is infinitely more complicated, and entails a problem of East/West confrontation, one could venture to say, on the deepest possible level. This is, in fact, a problem in which the East feels that it is achieving knowledge of itself through the West and Western scholarship, a problem in which the Self arrives at itself through the Other.

The extent of this process has been expressed by the internationally known Iranian scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr: “In most Muslim countries where the knowledge of a European language is widespread, it is becoming more and more common for Muslims themselves to learn about Islam from European sources. At the same time, of all the religions of the world none has been studied in the West with more bias and been more misunderstood than Islam. As a result it is difficult for a Westerner to understand why a Muslim believes in Islam, and a Muslim who reads Western sources on his own religion begins, to a certain extent, to wonder why he believes in it himself.”27 In Ahmad Abū Zayd’s terms, Easterners “began to look at themselves with the eyes of others.”28

One of the important results of this is that the definition of the Self becomes embedded in, and refracted through, the Other. In addition, the Self, precisely because it achieves knowledge of itself through the Other, feels dominated by the Other. This intertwined and agonizing situation can, however, help us to understand many of the criticisms and condemnations directed at the Orientalists, who, as Westerners, represent the Other.

It could be argued that the nature of the *modus vivendi* of the Self with the
Other affects the reaction of the Self to the Other. In other words, the level of the involvement between the two affects the resulting reaction. One, for example, can have the Self be completely outside the Other; and eliminate all manifestations of the Other. This is the case with Muhammad al-Bahi’s reaction to the Orientalists. He, writing in Arabic (a significant point to which we will return), in effect discards all Western writings on Islam, be they by Arabs or by non-Arabs. In this schema, Philip Hitti, a Lebanese Christian, is dubbed one of the most vehement enemies of Islam. Aziz Atiya fares no better. Both of the scholars, furthermore, figure in the list of dangerous Orientalists. There is no need here to duplicate al-Bahi’s list. Suffice it to say that whether or not one is in agreement, al-Bahi displays an intellectual consistency quite rare in these writings. In effect, all scholars outside of Islam are condemned, and this is done from an essentially Islamic, that is, religious, perspective.

In this regard, one could mention that in an investigation of Oriental studies undertaken by a committee of the Libyan Islamic Youth Congress, the author(s) speak repeatedly of an alliance between Lebanese Christians (the “tame Arabs” alluded to earlier) and Jews in the field of Middle Eastern studies. One would, therefore, expect Philip Hitti to be among the guilty. He, however, escapes unscathed and is even called the “leader in Arabic (not Islamic) studies.” His one error seems to be that “he did not train any replacements to take his chair at Princeton.” Before returning to the discussion of the involvement of the Self with the Other, it should be pointed out that the example of Hitti serves to demonstrate the difficulty of classifying the reactions if attention is only directed to the scholars who are or who are not attacked.

Al-Bahi’s ability to detach himself completely from the Other; and condemn all of the Other’s scholarship represents only one possibility for the interaction of the two. In fact, it could be said that al-Bahi’s interaction represents one end of yet another continuum. At the other end, one could conceivably place Muhammad Amin Fikri Bey, discussed above. Fikri Bey, by calling the Other (in this case, Goldziher) by his Arabic nickname, Al-Azhari, is endowing him with an onomastic attribute characteristic of the Self, and, thereby, accepting him fully. Al-Aqiql’s remark that the Orientalists are “like us” can be understood both as representing the same position and as attempting to bridge the gap he sensed among his compatriots, to get them to see the Other as like the Self. It is when one is in the middle segment of this particular continuum that the agonizing problems of identity become evident: to what extent is the Other assimilated into the Self and to what extent is there confusion between the Self and the Other? This confusion is complicated by another distinction: between different parts of aspects of the Other. One can be integrated into Western culture and even Western scholarship without necessarily being fully integrated into Orientalism, and, indeed, while being vigorously hostile to Orientalism. Like the translators of Astérix et Cléopatre, one can accept certain aspects of Western cultural products and reject others. Again, as was the case with the altered comic, this process tends to reflect a high level of ambivalence.

In fact, it is this relationship between the Self and the Other which contributes to the creation of the ambivalence quite prevalent in much of the writing at
hand. There is at the same time a need for positive judgments of the Self by the Other as well as a necessity to counter the harsh judgments of the Other. This is clearly the case with a thinker like Farīd Wajdī, whose contributions have been well analyzed by W. C. Smith. Summarizing Wajdī’s writings on Islam, Smith writes: “It is important to note how strikingly the spirit of the defence is Westernizing. Islam is defended not only against Western disparagement. It is defended also by means of Western approval.” One could also mention in this context ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Bazzāz who, on the one hand, feels it necessary to vigorously condemn the Orientalists for certain of their opinions concerning the Qurān and the Shurʿuḥiyya, but who, on the other hand, uses the works of both Nöldeke and Johann Fuck when these confirm his ideas about nationalism.

Of course, the argument is not whether the work of the Orientalists should be used but rather the question should be: why when this work runs counter to certain opinions is it not simply ignored? This last matter is, of course, related to this intricate relationship which we have been discussing: if the Self were not completely intertwined with the Other, it would find it easier to put aside the harsh evaluations of the Other, which would not after all reflect on the Self’s understanding of itself.

The phenomenon of complete enmeshing of the Self with the Other can be seen more easily when the Self finds itself using not only the Other’s language but his philosophical systems as well. This is the case with intellectuals such as Abdallah Laroui and Anouar Abdel-Malek. Both write their discussions of Orientalism in French, and both profess a Marxist faith. These two elements are important in and of themselves. The question of language is, as Frantz Fanon has shown, a very substantial one, the linguistic choice not only affecting the feeling of dependence of the Self on the Other but, perhaps more importantly, raising the entire issue of the audience for these works. Al-Bahl, writing in Arabic in the Arab world, is, thereby, addressing himself to an audience primarily of his compatriots, that is, of the Self. On the other hand, Laroui and Abdel-Malek are not only writing in French but publishing their work in Europe, Abdel-Malek, for the work in question, in the noted review Diogènes/Diogenes, and Laroui at Maspéro. Both of these elements make the involvement of the Self with the Other even more acute, since the Other will form the primary audience for the works. In addition, both of these thinkers are relying on an intellectual system developed in the West, namely Marxism. The problem created by the use of a Western system are shown by Laroui himself in his discussion of this system. The reader is tempted to interpret Laroui’s argument as a defense (conscious or not) of his choice when he argues that Marxism (which is the logical answer to the exigencies of Arab thought) is not a Western philosophical system among others. Rather, Laroui argues that “il prend l’aspect d’un système des systèmes.”

Of course, both Laroui and Abdel-Malek have attained considerable academic success with works based on the study of the Self, using Western techniques. The effective involvement of both these scholars with Western scholarship on the Middle East is reflected in a certain ambiguity in their positions. While both take vigorous exception to what they see as some of the dominant mental structures of Orientalism, they both seem to believe that a renewal is possible, provided that
certain Western techniques are substituted for others. Their involvement is shown not only by the fact that their criticisms of Orientalism and specific Orientalists are sophisticated and frequently telling but also by favorable references, on the part of Laroui, to both Massignon and Bernard Lewis.\textsuperscript{39}

Another variant in the interpenetration of the Self and the Other is to have an anti-Orientalist writing in the language and the scholarly tradition of the Other, but completely outside the academic discipline of Orientalism. In this case, one can find a level of condemnation which, in its absoluteness, is similar to that of al-Bahi, but which is its polar opposite in terms of the interpenetration of the Self and the Other.

This, of course, is the situation with Edward W. Said. Said, a highly successful scholar in the field of Comparative Literature, has based his career on a study not of Arabic but of European literature. He has, however, written on several occasions what can most easily be labelled condemnations of Orientalism.\textsuperscript{40} In fact, the intertwining of the Self with the Other in this case has reached a level which transcends in its vehemence both other criticisms and even condemnations. One could posit the notion that this particular reaction is the product to a great extent of an absence of knowledge about the Orientalist Other, be it on a personal or a scholarly level. Yet, at the same time, there is the need for the Self to condemn the Other, perhaps because the Self has not been involved in the study of its own traditions. It would, therefore, be intertwined with the Other on one level but resent the presence of the Other on another level. Is it accidental that Said has, in fact, made his literary critical contributions by working on the novel, a form the desire for, or even the possibility of, which, to quote him, "is inimical to the Islamic world-view?" In other words, we are faced with a phenomenon in which the Self is intellectually investigating something which it considers alien to its own worldview, something which its own tradition lacks.\textsuperscript{41}

The absence of knowledge by the Self of the Other can lead to a situation in which the Self mythologizes the Other. As Roland Barthes has aptly shown, myths are constructed every day and can cover a multitude of subjects and areas.\textsuperscript{42} In fact, in many of the critical writings, Orientalism has indeed become a myth. Of course, part of this mythologizing is the creation of a mythical person. Abdel-Malek argues that Western scholars have forged a number of Latin-named characters among whom is the homo orientalis. He characterizes this process in the following way: "Thus one ends with a typology—based on a real specificity, but detached from history, and, consequently, conceived as being intangible, essential—which makes of the studied 'object' another being, with regard to whom the studying subject is transcendent."\textsuperscript{43} One can ask, however, whether this process has not been reversed: whether in their zeal to displace the homo orientalis, the objectors to Orientalism have not replaced him with what we, asking indulgence of classicists for the creation of a barbarism, might call a homo orientalisticus.

The existence of the homo orientalisticus as a distinctive type of human being, as an essence or nature, and not as a scholar who happens to study the Orient, can be seen both by ideas and by turns of phrase which appear in
discussions of Orientalism. Edward Said probably gives the clearest formulations of this categorization. Not only does he speak of the “Orientalist ego” but he also explains that “anyone who, like Macdonald and Gibb, consciously entered a profession called Orientalism did so on the basis of a decision made: that the Orient was the Orient, that it was different, and so forth.” What is significant here is not the idea that the Orient is conceived as Other, but the fact that a particular form of consciousness seems to precede (at least logically) the professional activity. And the author makes the same claim when he argues that “most often an individual entered the profession as a way of reckoning with the Orient’s claim on him.” Finally, that this psychological disposition, this “Orientalist ego,” is fundamentally unhealthy Said indicates by characterizing it as a “form of paranoia.”

It could be argued that it is, in effect, echoes of this type of thinking which are responsible for the tendency of anti-Orientalists like Talal Asad and Abdelkebir Khatibi to employ determinative vocabulary. (The Orientalist “must stress,” “is led,” or is possessed by a “nécessité intérieure”).

But what are the characteristics of this homo orientalisticus? Khatibi says that his dream is to be bilingual. Madani Salih claims that the Orientalist has a special mentality (dhihiyya khāssa) which is neither Eastern nor Western. Is it not possible that these two formulations also describe the position of the Westernizing Arab intellectual?

Perhaps one of the most important elements in the discussion concerning Orientalists is the attribute of incredible power which is given them by their critics. Thus, to quote Said, “popular stereotypes about niggers, wogs, Semites, Ay-rabs, babus, gooks and the Oriental mentality have derived not from uninformed lower middle-class Occidental red-necks but from Orientalists’ dogmas.” What Said is really doing in the passage quoted above is blaming Orientalism for Western racism. Rather than seeing racism and Orientalism as having influenced each other (and who would deny today that on occasion they have done so), this vision turns Orientalism into some sort of evil intellectual substrate. Further, once negative qualities have become inherent in the term Orientalist, the word itself can be used for polemical purposes without the author being obliged to specify its negativity. A recent example can be found in a brochure for a new Middle Eastern studies program. “The Arab dimension of world history,” one reads, “is distorted by orientalist perspectives or buried in countless archives.”

The sense that Orientalism is an already negative concept obliges certain writers to make a very problematical distinction between bad Middle Eastern scholars who are Orientalists and good scholars who in some sense are not. In Said’s Orientalism, for example, a few scholars are placed outside the Orientalist web. Laroui himself first describes Massignon as the “poète de l’orientalisme,” but then goes on to say that scholars like Massignon were never considered by the Arabs to be “vrais orientalistes.” Said, of course, selected Massignon as exemplary of a particular phase of Orientalism. The point is not merely, as was noted above, that there is no consistent distinction between those scholars who are
attacked and those who are excused. Jacques Berque who is singled out for praise by Edward Said is equally singled out for blame by Khatibi. What has happened is that the implicit negativity of “Orientalism” means that the question of who is an Orientalist (and, thus, in a sense, of what is Orientalism) has become bound up with the questions of who is and who is not a good scholar. Often, one man’s scholar is another man’s Orientalist.

It would be a mistake to suppose that all Middle Eastern writers have fallen into this trap. Responding to generalizations about Orientalists, Mansour Khalid stated: “My only comment is that Mr. Boullata’s statement decries generalizations, but it contains a gross generalization about Orientalists. I mentioned in my speech that many of those Orientalists are responsible for the misconstruction and distortion of Arab culture and of Arab history. I referred to many of the contemporary Arab historians and to some of the traditional historians. At the same time, there are schools of Orientalists who had some very piercing insights into Arab culture. I mentioned people like Jacques Berque and Maxime Rodinson. Those people are Orientalists, if we can use that term, and I think they understand the Arab culture perhaps much better than many of the so-called insiders.”

The point is that implicitly negative definitions of Orientalism, unless they take a position, like that of al-Bahi, completely outside the Western scholarly tradition, become tangled in the problematic distinction between bad Orientalist and good Western scholar. Nor does this distinction become any less problematic when it is extended to scholars of Middle Eastern origin who are deemed to be contaminated by Orientalism, whether they are referred to as “tame Arabs” or Muslim Orientalists. Some of the most vigorous contemporary critics of Orientalism, like Anouar Abdel-Malek and Fazlur Rahman, have been accused of having supped with the devil too long while using too short a methodological spoon.

As has become evident from the preceding discussion, criticisms or condemnations of Orientalists can manifest themselves on different levels. On the one hand, we can have discussions of specific Orientalists: Khatibi on Berque, Laroui on von Grunebaum, Husayn Munis on Gaston Wiet, or Zakī Muhammad Hasan on H. Lammens, to cite a few. These discussions can be considered to be on a micro level. On the other hand, we have discussions of Orientalism in general, like those of Tibawi, Sāliḥ, Said, Muhammad Tawfīq Husayn, Hamid Enayat, and Abdel-Malek. These discussions can be considered to be on the macro level. However, when a specific Orientalist is isolated for a micro analysis, the criticisms are most often generalized so that one can easily apply them on the macro level. Yet, the selection of individual scholars for specific criticisms could also lend authority to the distinction between a good and a bad scholar, or between the individual and the group.

Perhaps one of the most frequent criticisms encountered is that directed to the tone of Orientalist writings. The three charges most usually made in this connection are those of contempt, sarcasm, and condescension. These charges are levelled not only against Lammens and Berque, for example, on the micro
level but against the general depiction of Islamic history in Western writings by Muhammad Tawfiq Husayn. Linked to this in conception is the complaint of fanaticism seen, for example, in the study on Lammens and that by Husayn.

Moreover, the majority of the criticisms, be they on the micro or on the macro level, can also be viewed according to the general positions of their writers. When we analyze the totality of the critical literature, certain major trends manifest themselves. One of these trends is the type of criticism emanating from traditional Islamic intellectuals, like al-Bahi, Afaf Sabra, Zahir Awwad al-Alma, and Abbás Mahmúd al-Aqqád, who not only condemn western scholarship but who do so from a point of view which can best be described as traditional or reactionary. This type of criticism tends to be written in Arabic for an audience in the Arab world. Such critics take particular exception to analyses of the Qur’án, of the Prophet, and of related religious problems, seeing the corpus of Orientalist writings on these areas as not only systematically hostile to Islam but also as an attempt to destroy the Islamic religion, and, hence, Islamic society. This type of criticism is well represented by Muhammad al-Bahi, who, in one recent work, al-Islám wa-Muwajahat al-Madháhib al-Haddáma, places Orientalism along with Free Masonry, International Zionism, Marxism, and other ism-s as being fundamentally destructive. In Zawját an-Nabi at-Tahirát, Muhammad Mahmúd as-Sawwáf is concerned with showing that the Prophet’s various marriages were undertaken for reasons related to the welfare of the religion and the community. The author condemns the Orientalists “for plotting against and wanting to harm” the Prophet.

Alongside such traditional opponents of Orientalism, one can also discern a second group made up more often of critics than of condemners, who, while they are also largely concerned with the portrayal of Islamic religion, examine the problem from a less traditional point of view. One can most easily find the writings of this group in Western language scholarly journals, like The Islamic Quarterly and Islamic Studies. In this category, one could place A. L. Tibawi, Khurshid Ahmed, A. S. B. Ansari, and, in its most sophisticated form, Fazlur Rahman. These thinkers also object to many of the discussions of the Qur’án, Muhammad’s prophecy, as well as to specific interpretations like the Judaeo-Christian “origins” of Islam. The reactions of a Muslim scholar to certain kinds of Qur’anic analyses can be seen in Isma'il R. al-Faruqi’s review of The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran by T. Izutsu. After an often searching critique both of Izutsu’s conclusions and of their relations to his methodology, the reviewer concludes: “there is nothing Japanese or even oriental in this work. . . . The Western reader may feel heartened by Mr. Izutsu’s work because it reassures him in his old prejudices by sharing them with him. On the other hand, the Muslim reader who understands the Arabic Qur’án intuitively, will find this book basically misconceived and full of the kind of offensive errors with which Western Orientalists have made him too well familiar.” What makes these discussions different from those of the Islamic traditionalists mentioned above and what keeps them more often on the level of criticism than of condemnation is the fact that Orientalism is not automatically associated with a negative view of
Westernization and modernization and the fact that these authors, rather than relying on religious or traditional arguments, seek to turn the Orientalists’ own scholarly tools against them.

A third group of thinkers can be characterized as leftist modernizers: scholars and intellectuals like Laroui, Abdel-Malek, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, and Said. The theses of these writers generally appear in Western languages and in Western secular publications, and are apparently aimed at Western or Westernized audiences.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of their anti-Orientalist critique is the sexual. Edward Said has devoted the greatest attention to the idea that Western scholars’ conceptions of the Orient can be understood in essentially sexual terms. One can observe in his earlier discussions the seeds which eventually receive fuller development in Orientalism. In two early essays, the writer argues that Western scholars have conceived of the Orient as a weak, sexual being who is to be conquered by the Orientalist “hero.”

What is interesting is that this particular mental structure, in fact, serves as a major focus in the book Orientalism. This emphasis can be seen not only by the picture on the cover but by the prevalence of sexual material and interpretations in the body of the work itself.

The male/female, active/passive dichotomies operate as a significant principle used to organize and order the materials.

The sexual is not, however, restricted to Said. Khatibi, in his analysis of Berque, calls him “un devin sensualiste,” and proceeds to elaborate on Berque’s ideas of a virile Orient. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this particular discussion is its contradiction of Said’s sexual interpretation. One seems to be faced with a sexually flexible Orient whose polarity depends on the critic and on his Orientalist.

Nevertheless, the dominant topos in the leftist critiques of Orientalism is one which, in a more traditional form, also appears among the Islamic opponents of Orientalism: the link of Orientalism in its inception with missionary activity, in its later development with imperialism. The major difference between the two groups, besides the opposition of conservative Muslim intellectuals to leftist ideas like atheism and Marxism, is the fact that the traditionalists speak more often of the missionaries and the leftists more often of the imperialists. The Libyan student pamphlet mentioned above explained that American Orientalism began with Protestant missionaries. The Pakistani Khurshid Ahmed links Orientalism to imperialism, as does Abdel-Malek. The Arab-American professor, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, writing in the Lebanese literary journal, al-Adab, interprets the history of Arabic studies in America largely in terms of missionary activity, political or economic imperialism, and Zionism. As with so many trends, the most elaborate manifestation of this approach can be found in Said’s Orientalism.

What is most interesting is that what we have, in effect, are historical or developmental interpretations which seek to show the connections between Orientalism and other historical phenomena. Strictly speaking, there is nothing necessarily negative about such associations. The critical implications of these
connections derive from two considerations. The first is an attempt to deny the Western scholar his claim of disinterested inquiry. Not only does knowledge serve power but power corrupts, even vitiates, knowledge. In this schema, the demonstration of the usefulness (some would prefer worldliness) of knowledge obviates any need for a critique of the validity of that knowledge. On a cruder level, of course, what we have is a form of guilt by association. Since for the anti-Orientalist and his intended audience, both missionary activity and imperialism are already accepted as negative, the mere association of Orientalism with them is in itself tainting.

This Orientalism/imperialism linkage, which, as we have seen, transcends the various groups of opponents, may be related to another interesting characteristic of the critiques of Orientalism: the national identities of the Orientalists selected for discussion. In the great majority of cases, whether of micro or macro criticism, attention is directed to the scholars and traditions of Britain, France, and the United States. Is this because of the association since World War I of these countries with imperialism in the Middle East? Is it because, also as a result of imperialism, English and French are the most important second languages in the Middle East? In any case, whatever the precise assessment of the relative importance of British, French, German, and American scholarship, there is no question that the Germans receive far less attention from the opponents of Orientalism than their contributions would warrant. The most important exception here is Muhammad Tawfiq Husayn, who gives due attention to German scholarship in his knowledgeable survey of major Western Islamicists.

Probably the most philosophically sophisticated general criticisms are those of Laroui and Abdel-Malek. Each, in his own way, seeks to show that the principles of periodization, the historical constructs used by the Orientalists, tend to generate negative views of Islam. Laroui demonstrates how von Grunebaum’s positions lead him to the conclusion that Islam is incapable of renewing itself, while Abdel-Malek argues that the reverence for the past and higher valorization of the Medieval period turn Islamic history into a history of decadence. Finally, Abdel-Malek objects both to the creation of an unchanging (and fundamentally Other) Oriental essence, and to the imposition of Western historical categories onto Middle Eastern history which tends to make this history seem truncated.

Without going into the whole matter of the history Orientalism itself, which is not the subject of this study, it is evident not only that these charges are not all devoid of truth but that the field of Middle East studies has already, at least partially, adjusted itself to them. The critics (and, in justice, it should be pointed out that not all of them are of Middle Eastern origin) have obviously played a large role in this process. But the critics, of course, whether they choose to admit it or not, are part of the ongoing development of Orientalism, or Middle Eastern studies as most would now prefer to call it.

If the word Orientalism is a victim of this process, and comes to represent a set of attitudes and methodologies associated with a particular phase of the
history of Middle Eastern studies, so be it. In this new situation, the inevitable prejudices, biases, and particular perspectives of scholars will be balanced in the best possible way, that is, by the careful criticism and the differing prejudices, biases, and perspectives of other scholars. 76
Notes

2. Jussim and Udirz, *Astiriks wa-Klyubatra* (Beirut: Där al-Ma'arif, n.d.), p. 45. In transliterating Arabic words and proper names, a standard transliteration system has been used. However, when an Arabic or Islamic name appears in a Western language, the spelling will be copied from the source.
10. The Société Asiatique, for example, was founded in 1822.
14. The dangers of diachronic schemas are well displayed in William G. Millward, "The Social Psychology of Anti-Iranology," *Iranian Studies*, VIII (1975), pp. 48-69. Not only does Millward argue that Arab anti-Orientalism developed in the nineteenth century, peaked in the early twentieth century, but has died down since, which is untenable, and contradicted by his own evidence but his attempt to show that Iranian developments have taken an opposite course is unconvincing. For these reasons, his attempts to explain anti-Iranology as a displacement on the psychological level of the early Islamic shucūbiyya are particularly open to question.
16. No insult intended!
17. One could name a multitude of such scholars. Suffice it here to cite the two highly successful scholars, George Makdisi, with his ground-breaking work on education, and Abdel Magid Turki, a prolific and excellent younger scholar who is also co-editor of *Studia Islamica*.
18. Here again, a plenitude of names exist. To cite but two, we have Taha al-Hajiri and Ihsan Abbas. See, also, Abdallah Laroui, L'Ideologie arabe contemporaine (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1973), p. 104, who mentions still more names.

19. Committee on Oriental Studies of the Islamic Youth Congress, Tripoli, Libya, A Critical Analysis of Islamic Studies at North American Universities (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Unity Publishing Co., 1975), p. 23. This text is, in fact, both sophomoric and scurrilous. When the authors possess a piece of significant information, like the connection of a scholar to the Rand Corporation "think tank," this is given. Otherwise, scholars are dismissed with reference to their sartorial habits, or their ethnic origin. Among the more unintentionally humorous passages are the frequent errors, as when Amos Funkenstein is turned into Frankenstein, p. 9.


22. See, for example, Ahmad Amin, Hayati (Cairo: Matba'at Lajnat ath-Tarjama wan-Nashr, 1950), pp. 100, 140, 141-142, 166, among others. The treatment of the Orientalists in Taha Husayn's autobiography, al-Ayyam, is a veritable tribute to their knowledge and wisdom. See, for example, Taha Husayn, al-Ayyam, v. III (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'sar, 1973), pp. 8, 34, 37, 42-43, 54-55, 121. See, also, the account of Taha Husayn's intellectual odyssey in Pierre Cachia, Taha Husayn (London: Luzac & Company, 1956), p. 54ff.


27. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, review of Frithjof Schuon, Understanding Islam, Islamic Studies, III (1964), p. 106. See, also, Laroui, L'Ideologie arabe, in which work he speaks repeatedly of "le moi" and "l'autre.


41. Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 81. Said's discussion of Arabic literature is short but of considerable interest. Speaking about the novelistic tradition, Said writes: "it is significant that the desire to create an alternative world, to modify or augment the real world through the act of writing ... is inimical to the Islamic worldview. The Prophet is he who has completed a world-view... Islam views the world as a plenum, capable of neither diminishment nor amplification." (emphasis in original) Such a view has a tendency to reductionism and presents a static conception of Islamic civilization. In addition, it shows no awareness of the many works of Classical Arabic literature which do involve the creation of augmented or alternate worlds.

Furthermore, we are told, "consequently, stories like those in *The Arabian Nights* are ornamental, variations on the world, not completions of it; neither are they lessons, structures, extensions, or totalities designed to illustrate either the author's prowess in representation, the education of a character, or ways in which the world can be viewed and changed." This assessment is open to serious question, as can be seen, for example, in the works of Andras Hamori: *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 145-163, 164-180, and

Said seems to be unaware of the rich Arabic literary tradition: "Thus even autobiography as a genre scarcely exists in Arabic literature." This ignores not only al-Ghazali's famous spiritual autobiography but also autobiographical texts such as that of Usâma ibn Munqidh, or the numerous scholarly autobiographies.

This discussion helps to show the importance of the position of the speaker for the evaluation of a statement. Had these remarks been made by a European "Orientalist," they would have been open to charges of incomprehension, cultural arrogance, negativism, and reductionism.

42. Roland Barthes, Mythologies (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957), especially, pp. 193-247. The term myth has been chosen here not primarily as a signifier of falsehood, since myths may have elements of truth within them, but as a form of representation which serves collective goals, and which, like Barthes' myths, often seeks to conceal its mythic nature.


45. Said, Orientalism, p. 150.


50. Said, "Arabs, Islam," p. 4. The idea of the overwhelming power of the Orientalist also appears in Orientalism. See Malti-Douglas, "Re-Orienting," pp. 729-732. Cf. Khatibi's characterization of the Orientalist as an "oracle," Khatibi, "Berque," p. 2167. The general idea of the cultural power of the West is strikingly expressed by Madani Sâlih in the previously cited article, in which he presents an enormous list of Western cultural figures and explains that "these White European Christians said to culture: Be, and it was the culture of the Europeans."


52. Said, Orientalism, pp. 326-327.

53. Laroui, L'Idéologie arabe, pp. 121-122.


64. Muhammad Maḥmūd as-Ṣawwāf, *Zawjat an-Nabī at-Tahirat wa-Hikmat Ta‘ād-dudḥihāna* (Cairo: Dār al-Fīsām, 1979), and for the quote, p. 47.


67. Said, “October War,” p. 90, idem, “Shattered Myths,” p. 418; idem, *Orientalism*, p. 311. In addition, in these two essays, Said also presents the argument that the West fears what it perceives as the sexual generative power of the Orient.


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73. Of course, the writings of many of the anti-Orientalists serve "worldly" interests, nor do their authors pretend otherwise. There are two basic solutions to the contradiction that this creates. For the Marxists, it is only natural that dialectically true knowledge serves the cause of the historical process (and, thus, in the last analysis, humanity). Not, of course, that all Marxists accept this approach to scholarship. Maxime Rodinson, for one, accuses the anti-Orientalists (including Said) of Zhdanovism, or intellectual Stalinism. See Rodinson, Fascination, pp. 12-16; Didier Eribon, "Quand l'Ocident 'regarde' l'Orient: Entretien avec Maxime Rodinson," Libération, number 2079, October 21, 1980, p. 16. I would like to thank Professor Rodinson for bringing this interview to my attention.

Said's position, by contrast, is closer to that of Michel Foucault, who argues that the fundamental structures of the human sciences serve power, except that Said's sundering of Orientalism from even its closest relatives in the human sciences (classics and philology) hinders the development of a truly epistemic argument.


76. The subject of this study continues. Since this text was prepared in 1981, and given space limitations, I have not attempted to deal with developments after that date. They do not modify the conclusions presented herein.