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## “An Imperialism of the Imagination”: Muslim Characters and Western Authors in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

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# “An Imperialism of the Imagination”: Muslim Characters and Western Authors in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

## **Abstract**

This paper specifically discusses the cultural attitudes that made writing fully realized Muslim characters problematic for Western authors during the 19th and 20th centuries and also how, through their writing, certain authors perpetuated these attitudes. The discussed authors and works include William Beckford's *Vathek*, Lord Byron's poem “The Giaour,” multiple short stories from the periodical collection *Oriental Stories*, one of Hergé's installments of *The Adventures of Tintin*, and E.M. Hull's novel *The Sheik*. Three “types” of Muslim characters emerge in these works: the good, the bad, and the white. All three reflect Western attitudes towards the East as a place full of indolence, luxury, and childish vice. This paper draws heavily on Edward Said's notions of Orientalism but focuses more specifically on how Western authors wield their power and how readers can be more active in questioning stereotypes found in literature.

## **Keywords**

Orientalism, Muslim, Muslim Characters

## **Disciplines**

Comparative Literature | English Language and Literature | European Languages and Societies | Religion

## **Comments**

English Honors Thesis

**“An Imperialism of the Imagination”: Muslim Characters and  
Western Authors in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

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*Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent.* (Said 27)

*He [the Muslim] is like a man who opens his mouth to speak, but utters what he would not, and cannot utter what he would.* (Macdonald 8)

## **Introduction**

Those studying the humanities, and especially literature, are often told or themselves believe that by taking in cultural material, they are expanding their minds, learning about other cultures, and opening themselves to new experiences. However, as Edward Said points out, literature should not be presumed to be innocent or free of prejudiced, or even potentially harmful, themes and undercurrents. This is extremely apparent across genres, but especially in Orientalist literature. What is Orientalism? Said defines it as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’” When carried into philosophy, writing, economics, and beyond, Orientalists use “the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on” (Said 2-3). The basic problem here is that Orientalists harness the divide between East and West and construct binaries which inevitably leave the West in a privileged position; as Said aptly states, “The Orient was almost a European invention” (1). By reading Orientalist literature, the reader can get a better sense of the Orientalist attitudes of Western society than of the actual factual existence of “Oriental” people. Literature of this kind is still produced, but the focus of this discussion will be centered around the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

An argument is often made that works of fiction that express these prejudices against “Oriental people” are just that: fiction, and should not be seen as a serious problem in terms of how Western views are expressed and internalized. However, this point is moot. Most

Europeans, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had no direct knowledge of the Oriental world, and so their entire experience came through tales told by travelers, or more accessibly, books written about these distant lands. This is not altogether innocent, as Rana Kabani points out: “If it could be suggested that Eastern peoples were slothful, preoccupied with sex, violent, and incapable of self-government, then the imperialist would feel himself justified in stepping in and ruling” (Alwan 46). This is not to say that certain books caused the widespread European colonization, but by feeding the attitudes of superiority in the West, they allowed the process of colonization and imperialism to appear natural and positive for both the Orient and Occident. Orientalists also utilized the notion of overall societal decline as a justification for their attitudes and actions. As Bruce Lawrence explains, “‘Decline’ is an idea common to Western social science, to wit, that calculative reason promoted the rise of the West, and its absence—or diminished presence—elsewhere, including but not solely Muslim societies of Africa and Asia, ensured their backwardness” (247). These beliefs that Muslims are racially inferior and on the wrong side of history persists. To contend that this literature is not problematic is a mistake; these sentiments exist throughout Western channels of expression.

The Western university is not a place traditionally safe from these attitudes. Islam and Muslims were (and continue to be) very misunderstood, with Islam viewed as a “religion of resistance” (Said 268). For example, in a series of lectures on comparative religions given at the University of Chicago in 1906, Duncan Macdonald claims:

Once start, [sic] then, the idea that this man [Muhammad] is a messenger from God and that his words are the words of God, and the oriental mind would carry it out to its utmost limits. A theory of all things in heaven and earth would be developed from this single idea...*Inability*, then, to see life steadily, and see it whole, to understand that a theory of life must cover all the fact, and *liability* to be stampeded by a single idea and blinded to everything else—therein, I believe, is the difference between the East and West. (11)

Here we can clearly see both racial and religious bias. We see the “oriental mind,” which is suddenly analogous with the Muslim mind, defined as inherently inferior and susceptible to

superstition. Not only are the Muslims themselves inferior, but their prophet as well. Macdonald continues in this vein, saying that “Muhammad, a figure now strangely sympathetic and attractive, now repellently weak...was not of the goodly fellowship of the Hebrew prophets” (Macdonald 14). So we have a group of racially inferior people following a worldly and, although Macdonald shies from saying it directly, false prophet. Because of Muhammad’s “revolting sensuality” (Said 69), he is “always the imposter (familiar, because he pretends to be like the Jesus we know) and always the Oriental (alien...)” (Said 72). This notion of the false prophet is important to understanding how Islam and Christianity are measured against each other in Macdonald’s view. The ultimate irony here lies in the obvious similarity to Christianity, in that both involve a man construed as a messenger from God who, as a central religious figure, is carried “to [his] utmost limits.” This tension is diffused by Macdonald’s claim that Christianity, unlike Islam “cover[s] all the fact” and is a complete system. Muhammad’s inherent inferiority as a religious figure only furthers the opinion of Islam as a “fraudulent new version” of Christianity (Said 59) which is followed by a dissolute, inherently lesser race. These beliefs were disseminated through lectures of this kind, but this is not the extent of their existence.

Past literature and education, these understandings of the East have long existed in the political realm, to reiterate Said’s earlier point. An article in *The Review of Reviews*, published in 1909, outlines the personality of the “ex-sultan” Abdul Hamid II:

At the beginning of his reign he played most successfully the part of a humble and honest man and pretended to be as innocent as a child. He was a great flatterer and was extremely polite and amiable...He was very tyrannical in his dealings with his family and arbitrary in dismissing his Ministers...He was a fanatical hater of Great Britain, and it was impossible to alter his views or mitigate his rancour. (“Gossip...” 55)

The article continues on in this vein. This, as you will soon come to see, is the very portrait of a “bad Muslim” figure. Depicted as childish, passionate, unswayable, and manipulative, Abdul Hamid is treated, not as a human individual, but as a caricature of a Muslim figure. By

introducing examples like this into political discussions, a reader may begin to conflate Muslim figures in literature and the millions of living and diverse people who make up that tradition. As we can see, the problems of Orientalism go far past literature. However, if a reader is able to understand the problem of Orientalism, he/she can make educated decisions about what they read and how they interpret it.

This resistance to and belittling of Islam and Muslims stem from a historical parallel between Christianity and Islam. Said addresses this issue at length:

Doubtless Islam was a real provocation in many ways. It lay uneasily close to Christianity, geographically and culturally. It drew on the Judeo-Hellenic traditions, it borrowed creatively from Christianity, it could boast of unrivaled military and political successes. Nor was this all. The Islamic lands sit adjacent to and even on top of the Biblical lands; moreover, the heart of the Islamic domain has always been the region closest to Europe...From the end of the seventh century until the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Islam in either its Arab, Ottoman, or North African and Spanish form dominated or effectively threatened European Christianity. (74)

Clearly, Islam has been a convenient other for centuries. The West recognized in Islam a true and very visible threat, as Muslims look and act differently from Westerners, and yet are uncannily similar. The religions are both monotheistic and center around a central and (more-or-less) human figure. They are both like and unlike, and so the West, threatened, constructed a dividing line between East and West. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim countries were less of a threat and Western attitudes shifted to a Darwinist view of Muslims as “degraded remnants of a former greatness” (Said 233). This is the reigning attitude in the works we will later be exploring.

However, as the East acted as a foil for the West, it began to contrast the West’s flaws as well as its perceived advantages. Edward Said asserts that “[m]any of the earliest Oriental amateurs began by welcoming the Orient as a salutary *dérangement* [disturbance] of their European habits of mind and spirit. The Orient was overvalued for...its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitivity, and so forth” (150). The West began to explore its fantasies through

this carnivalesque arena where the rules of polite Western society no longer applied. As Juliet Byington comments, this led to the Orient's association with "lush landscapes, eroticism, mystery, rich costume, and fierce military campaigns" (Byington 149). Therefore, although these depictions of the Oriental world are not necessarily wholly negative, they are created in opposition to the West, and not represented with any specificity.

These beliefs shape the way Western authors during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries wrote about traditionally Muslim spaces and Muslim characters. Whether composing high romantic poetry, novels, comic books, popular short stories, or even college lectures, these authors affirm, spread, and perpetuate the belief in certain "types" of Muslims. The figures I will focus on will be the "bad Muslim," the "good Muslim," and the "white Muslim." The "bad Muslim" is perhaps the most obvious figure to come out of these beliefs; he is gluttonous, sensuous, lazy, and violent. The "good Muslim" is often shown in relation to a European or white character. He is simple, kind, and doesn't question authority, regardless of whether that authority belongs to a "bad Muslim" or a European or white figure. Finally, the "white Muslim" is a hybrid figure, he is often cruel, but an effective leader, intelligent and power thirsty. These three figures all betray the tensions inherent in the East-West binary created by Orientalists, including both the romanticism of the perceived former greatness of traditionally Islamic territories and the mindless dismissal of Muslim individuals and their unique experiences, which lead to an inability of Western authors to depict Muslims as fully realized characters. As Frederick Garber comments, "...this is a gratuitous and self-serving distortion - what one might call an imperialism of the imagination" (Al-Awan 50).

### **The "bad Muslim"**

These figures represent the most dangerous traits assigned to Muslims by Western authors. Bad Muslims are violent, lazy, and concerned, before anything else, with their own sensual pleasure. Prime examples of this figure can be found throughout literature and specifically in E. M. Hull's *The Sheik*.



*The Sheik*, published in 1919, is the story of Diana Mayo, a British heiress who was raised “as a boy” and had a “cold nature” (Hull 4). She travels without European accompaniment in the deserts of North Africa, where she is kidnapped, raped, and eventually falls in love with her captor, a secretly half-British half-Spanish Sheik. The Sheik himself will fall under the category of “white Muslim,” but many of his men and the rival Sheik who kidnaps Diana later in the story are perfect examples of the “bad Muslim” figure.

When the Sheik’s men come to capture her and begin shooting her escorts, she is shocked rather than frightened. “Until they started shooting the thought that the Arabs could be hostile had not crossed her mind. She imagined that they were merely showing off with the childish love of display which she knew was characteristic.” Even after she realizes her guide has been shot from the saddle, she considers the incident, “only a ‘hold-up.’ She did not suppose the Arabs had even really meant to hurt any one, but they were excited and some one’s shot, aimed wide, had found an unexpected billet” (Hull 24). These passages serve, not only to characterize Diana’s naivety, but also to show that these “Arabs” are a completely different type of man than the ones timidly asking Diana to dance the night before. It is ironic that Diana considered the men kidnapping her childish, and not the British men she could so easily control.

Another point worth noting here is Diana’s calling the men “Arabs” regardless of the fact that they are North African, on which Hsu-Ming Teo comments: “Hull’s novel perpetuates the equivalence between African and Arab men” (246). This dismissal of the character’s actual heritage is yet another indication of a Western author’s dividing the world between East and West, effectively “us” and “everyone else.” Hull makes a similar gesture earlier in the novel: “[w]ith the vague orientalism that conflates diverse cultures [she] assigns Ahmed an Indian love song,” with which to serenade Diana before he makes a physical appearance in the story (Gargano 177). As the story continues, the divide between Eastern and Western characters becomes even more apparent.

Later in the story, several of the men attempt to break a colt, and one of the men falls heavily and nearly dies as a result:

A little crowd were gathered [sic] around him, and her heart beat faster as she thought that he was dead. Dead so quickly...Death meant nothing to these savages, she thought bitterly, as she watched the limp body being carried away by three or four men, who argued violently over their burden. (49)

This incident not only increases the violent atmosphere in which these characters live, but shows them as immune to it. Hull's description of the men carrying the injured man's body reminds the reader of children fighting over chores. Both Diana and the reader are shocked. The "bad Muslims" are childish in their inability to take this moment seriously, as the Western reader undoubtedly is. They do not respect death the way that the godly civilized man should. This sets up an odd tension in the "Bad Muslim" figure: a lack of religious feeling.

"Bad Muslims" are often portrayed as not very religious. Because these "bad Muslim" figures are drawn out of a European imagination, they can be used to express those vices which Europeans see as outside their own collective tradition: in this case ungodliness. Only one of the Sheik's followers is described as performing *salat*, or the five times daily ritual prayer commonly held as one of the pillars of Islam (Hull 87); later Saint Hubert, the Sheik's French friend, comments on

[t]he singular absence among them of the strict religious practices that hold among other Mohammedans. Ahmed Ben Hassan's tribe worship first and foremost their Sheik, then the famous horses for which they are renowned, and then and then only—Allah. (88)

This hierarchy of priorities confirms the European view of the Muslim characters. First, they give a sort of mindless loyalty to a leader, then their horses, which can represent both material wealth and violent power, and finally they are interested in their religion and, as Western Christians understand it, their moral and spiritual well-being. As Duncan Macdonald says in his lectures:

The Arabs show themselves not as especially easy of belief, but as hardheaded, materialistic, questioning, doubting, scoffing at their own superstitions and usages, fond of tests of the supernatural—tempting God, in a word—and all this in a curiously light-

minded, almost childish fashion. (4)

This portrayal of Muslims as irreligious serves the purpose of pushing them beyond moral boundaries. The characters can act in ways a Western character would be condemned for. To a Western audience, these figures are completely mistaken in their priorities and their way of life, but fascinating in their ability to go outside the morality established by Western values.

The most striking example of the “bad Muslim” in *The Sheik* is Ibraheim Omai, who serves as a foil for the educated and secretly European Ahmed.

This was indeed, the Arab of her imaginings, this gross, unwieldy figure lying among the tawdry cushions, his swollen, ferocious face seamed and lined with every mark of vice, his full, sensual lips parted and showing broken, blackened teeth, his deep-set, bloodshot eyes with a look in them that it took all her resolution to sustain, a look of such bestial evilness that the horror of it bathed her in perspiration. His appearance was slovenly, his robes, originally rich, were stained and tumbled, the fat hands lying spread out on his knees were engrained with dirt, showing even against his dark skin. (105)

We move from the violent, childlike, and generally godless followers of Ahmed to Ibraheim, who is a representation of all of these stereotypes and pieces thrown into one body. Here we also get a sense of the sensuality and indulgence that is so often a marker of the bad Muslim. He is surrounded by and dressed in riches but treats them abominably, just as he does his body, which is described as foul, dirty, and unappealing in every possible way. Additionally, the first line quoted reveals the author’s intention. Hull clearly did not set out to paint an accurate character, but instead took pains to create those shocking attributes understood to be Oriental, and specifically Muslim in nature, and brought them together into Ibraheim, the Arab of the West’s imaginings. Ibraheim is used as a foil to elevate Ahmed, and in that purpose is successful. If all a European person knew of the East at this time came from *The Sheik*, he/she would come to the understanding that Europeans were inherently superior to these dirty, nearly godless people.

Ibraheim, in addition to Ahmed, is captivated by a white woman. The fact that this story is, in fact, written by a white woman should not be forgotten. Hull describes the preliminary

steps in Ibraheim's attempted rape of Diana, almost immediately after killing a member of his harem:

Ibraheim Omair kept his hold upon her, and presently, with a horrible loathing, she felt his hand passing over her arm, her neck, and down the soft curves of her slim young body, then with a muttered ejaculation he forced her to face him.

“What are you listening for?...There are plenty more white women in Algiers and Oran that [Ahmed] can buy with his gold and his devil face.” (107)

This Eastern sensuous man is portrayed as unable to keep away from the “exotic” appearances and customs of white women. However, the opposite appears to be true; “she [Hull] had constructed and celebrated the Middle Eastern desert as a space of specifically female sexual fantasies” (Teo 243). By creating white female characters (her target audience for these romances) who elicit strong romantic interest from Muslim characters, Hull allows her readers to experience the illicit and forbidden “titillation of miscegenation and the underlying horror of hybridity” (Teo 248), while laying the fault flatly at the door of the Eastern character. This adds to the enduring popularity of the genre of “desert romance” which persists to this day.<sup>1</sup> However, we do not get a sense of hidden desire for the utterly stereotyped and animal-like Ibraheim. That desire is channeled by Hull towards a more acceptable figure, the “white Muslim.”

The “bad Muslim” then is a conglomeration of authorial choices. He is able to push moral boundaries to keep a story interesting and the audience fascinated, as “who knows what he's capable of?” His indolence, violence, and childishness separate him comfortably from whatever Western figure he is being measured against. He also is sexually fascinated by white women, which allows the Western reader an outlet into the story, often as the blameless victim. This is a pattern we can clearly trace in Hull's work, but the trend continues throughout other

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<sup>1</sup> Fifty-one million desert romances were sold worldwide in 2005, the largest market being North America (Teo 241).

publications.

Hull's work left a huge cultural impact in both Europe and the United States; soon other books and magazines appeared, heavily featuring Muslim or Arab characters. One of these magazines was a publication called *Oriental Stories: Fascinating Tales of the East*. Here we can see the continuation of the "bad Muslim" figure in several stories, including "The White Queen" published in 1930 in the United States. This story, written by Francis Hard, deals with yet another Sheik sexually fascinated by a white woman. The story opens with a chess game between a bishop and a young man named Fenworth on a yacht near the Arabian shore. If Fenworth defeats the bishop, he will win permission to marry his daughter Constance. Once the chess match is over, with Fenworth victorious, all three are summarily kidnapped by a group of Muslim tribesmen, and taken to the camp of Sheik Ferhan ibn Hedebe, who treats them as guests for several days, is captivated by Constance, and asks her to join his harem. When she refuses, he initiates another chess game, this time with higher stakes and with people as the pieces. Fenworth is about to lose and have himself, the crew, Constance, and her father sold into slavery when one of the Sheik's men kills him for acting dishonorably.

Sheik Ferhan follows the basic pattern of the "bad Muslim" which we've already seen. He is violent and willing to ruin the Westerners' lives, and lose his wife Adooba, in order to satisfy his own desires. The description of the food he offers the Westerners suggests a kind of animal hunger: "Bones and meat were mangled together and boiled without seasoning. Lumps of butter and dough were ranged around the edge of the platter, and bits of liver surrounded the tail of the sheep" (Hard 40). The implications here seem to be a lack of finesse and patience, as well as overindulgence. During the chess match, the sheik goes after Constance rather childishly and single-mindedly; "the Arab's reckless attack upon Constance had overreached itself. It exposed the sheik to the loss of a piece, and with it the game" (Hard 46). So we already have a figure that fulfills several of the requirements of the bad Muslim: sensual, childish, and violent.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Religion is never actually mentioned in connection to Ferhan, besides a fleeting comment

There is an additional element in this story which resonates particularly with the Western attitude towards Islam. The Sheik hears that Fenworth won Constance's hand in a chess game and so takes this "Western" action and makes it his own, and by the same token, makes it more barbaric and inhuman. For the sake of this argument, we can ignore the barbarism of the initial chess game, during which Constance speaks only three times: "But Father—" "Father!" and "Father, you mustn't" (Hard 32-34). Carrying on, the "bad Muslim" takes a Western practice, which the audience is supposed to read as coming from a place of logic and rationalism, and cuts it off from its meaningful origins. A Western reader from the 1930s might see the initial chess game as a battle of wits or a test to see if Fenworth is worthy. In the hands of the Sheik, it is a tool of tyranny. This differentiation makes sense when coupled with the attitudes of the time. H.A.R. Gibb claims to find "the aversion of the Muslims from the thought-processes of rationalism" (7) and Islam's rejection of Hellenistic, and thus Western, modes of thought (19). Muslims therefore cannot grasp the rationalist and, by extension, civilized actions of the Western world. They can only dilute and lessen them.

It is important to note here that the reader does not see a realistic Muslim trajectory of life or belief; instead it is always compared with and subjugated to the Western way of life. In other words, we do not see the Sheik challenging Fenworth to an Arabic game; instead, the character tries to emulate "Western culture," which leaves the reader's understanding of their own culture as natural and superior intact. As Talal Asad aptly states, "the argument anyway, was not about *where* all [cultures] should end up. The common assumption was that there were several roads to Rome but there was, of course, only one Rome" (5). And only Westerners can ever truly reach it. The irony of this story is that chess has "oriental" roots. Originally an Indian war game called *Chatarung*, the game made its way into Europe by way of Persian traders in 1000 A.D. ("Chess History"). This absorbing of an "oriental" game into the narrative of Western rationalism is a very evident kind of cultural appropriation. The disputed ancestry of this rational

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on Mecca; therefore I will leave this criterion untouched in this instance.

and logic-based game perfectly displays the Western mindset which overturns historical facts to better fit its own cultural narratives.

Another story released in an issue of *Oriental Stories* is titled “Strange Bedfellows.” This story follows two spies, one Indian and one Russian, as they travel to Mecca for the *hajj*. The Indian spy, known as Bugs, recognizes the Russian man for a spy and decides to follow him on the journey to, and also while in, Mecca. The Russian, masquerading as a deaf-mute Muslim, goes to meet a Meccan named Abu Ali Al Hassen, a powerful Muslim leader who is arranging for the rise of a new *mahdí*, which, as Hassen says, “...is necessary. When he says to the Mohametan [sic] world that a Holy War is proclaimed—then the English will be driven out of India” (Hurst 57). Hassen then gives orders for the Russian spy to convey to Moscow, clarifying how and when the *mahdí* will start the revolution, which Bugs copies and intends to hand over to the English authorities. The story ends with the Russian spy’s death at the hands of camel thieves and Bugs’s escape into the desert.

First, we ought to clarify what a *mahdí* is. This figure is generally known as “‘the rightly guided one’ ...the restorer of religion and justice who, according to a widely held Muslim belief, will rule before the end of the world” (*al-Mahdí*). This term holds no messianic significance and many Muslims have either laid claim to the title, or been so named by others.

So, in this story Hassen is our “bad Muslim.” He is violent in that he supports a disruption of British colonial authority and allies with Russia. He is also clearly not very spiritual as he intends to use a *mahdí* figure for monetary and political gain, as the Russian says: “The spoils in India will be immense—far greater than ever before in history....Russia has always seen India as the weak link in the English chain” (Hurst 57). Additionally, the meeting between the Russian and Hassen takes place during the time reserved for morning prayers. His house is described as “a place of Arab luxury” (57) and he himself is referred to as “the ruler of Islam” (59). This is as outlandish as the claim that a single person is in control of all of Christianity including Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches. By makes this claim, the narrator asserts that Islam is an absolute and invariable religion which has been undermined by

some within its own community. Gibb corroborates this kind of Western thought:

It is not Islam that is petrified, but its orthodox formulations, its systematic theology, its social apologetic. It is here that the dislocation lies, that the dissatisfaction is felt among a large proportion of its most educated and intelligent adherents and that the danger for its future is most evident. (123)

According to both men, parts of Islam are frozen, and not responsive to the “good Muslims” who still exist within it. The “bad Muslims” on the other hand, are able to harness the supposed inflexibility of Islam and use the framework to guide the thinking of all Muslims. Thus Hassen is able to create “a Holy War—a *jehad* troublesome and perhaps dangerous” (Hurst 50). This theme of Islam as a frozen tradition continues most visibly in the narratives of “good Muslims.”

Moving past the figure of Hassen, the robber characters and the caravan leader who organize the attack on Bugs and the Russian as they attempted to leave Mecca also fulfill the “bad Muslim” character. The three men attempt to kill Bugs but do not expect him to have a gun, and are quickly overpowered. They are violent, yet cowardly as soon as their lives are in danger, showing them to be incapable of valor. All of the characters we have examined so far have stooped to treachery and these men are no exception. This is clear from the description of the encounter:

Bugs fired. One of the robbers dropped, dead. The other threw himself face down on the sand.

“Now,” growled Bugs...“tell me the truth! Why this?”

The prostrate robber was babbling in terror. “He said you were an Afghan and a big-mouthed fool. To attack an Afghan is bad, but our guns, which shoot evilly, seemed too much for thy knife.” (Hurst 59-60)

As soon as the fight shifts in Bugs’s favor, the men immediately surrender, and start making excuses for their behavior. Bugs decides to let the men go and they are shocked: “The driver stared at Bugs. He could not believe his ears. Was this Afghan an utter idiot? To let him and his accomplice go free! Did he not know that they would be revenged?” (60). This is an



important moment in the text. The narrator moves into the thoughts of the camel-driver and expresses through him the first doubt of Bugs's Muslim façade expressed in the whole story. He is never doubted until this moment, in which he spares the men's lives. This strikes the camel-driver as distinctly non-"Afghan." There is a cultural aspect at play here, and I do not mean to suggest that this representation is problematic because Muslims are portrayed as unforgiving in this instance. What is more troubling is that at no other point is he suspected. By picking this one moment for Bugs to be seen as a non-Muslim, the author is putting an emphasis on the supposed unforgiving and cruel nature of Muslims through the figures of the camel-driver and his hired robbers.

An additional text that also highlights this "bad Muslim" figure is the beloved comic *The Adventures of Tintin*, by Hergé. In one particular comic titled "The Red Sea Sharks," published in 1960, Muslim characters feature prominently. The plot of this particular episode revolves around a coup in Khemed, a fictional Arabic country. Tintin and Captain Haddock realize their ally, the former Emir of the country, had been driven out by Sheik Bab El Her, a man who has amassed much of his wealth by selling African Muslims into slavery while pretending to arrange their pilgrimage to Mecca. *Tintin* provides a slightly different expression of characters because the reader also experiences visual representations which add an extra dimension to the text.

Again, just as in "Strange Bedfellows," the soldiers who pursue Tintin and Captain Haddock display a mix of cruelty and childish fear. For example, a man in the Sheik's headquarters orders an air strike on the protagonists as they ride through the desert. The air strike is accidentally carried out on their own armored cars. The two Muslim figures talk back and forth congratulating each other until one realizes the mistake. The men are drawn with an emphasis on the sweat and massive amounts of exertion and emotion in this conversation. In one of the panels, the first man looks as though he is almost crying with lines and sweat droplets all around his head, making him look like an infant. This adds to the general sense of childishness that is compounded when viewed alongside the dialogue:



The character's mistake betrays both violence and childishness in the same act. The violence of the Muslim characters is ultimately ineffective. What is even more striking is that the men simply end the conversation. They do not attempt to make a second strike on the correct targets, but bicker among themselves, betraying their inability to remain on task or take responsibility for their actions.

Earlier in the story, Abdullah, the son of the Emir, plays multiple tricks on both Tintin and Captain Haddock when he is entrusted to their care in England. Abdullah is a child and a trickster, and doesn't really fit into the mold of the "bad Muslim," but in one instance he takes over a room in the house and the result is a perfect example of the "Muslim luxury" so often alluded to in the other sources examined so far.



Abdullah, the young boy, sits among four other Muslims. Three are Arabic Muslims, all of whom stare at the intruding Captain Haddock through furrowed brows, have visible weapons, and are dressed identically. The African Muslim is the only figure standing, and he appears to be prepared to serve the other four individuals. The room itself is clearly grand, but different artifacts have been stacked against the wall to make room for the tent that was erected in the center. Food is strewn around, and a knife is thrust into the ground. A chicken roasts over a fire and a large golden hookah is at the center of the scene (6). The stereotypes in this scene are extreme. It also brings into play another Western belief: that Muslims are so foreign in their mannerisms, beliefs, and attitudes, that they can never be fit within a Western context. The “riches” of the West, lamps, busts, suits of armor, etc, are pushed to the side of the room; they have been rejected out of hand. This portrayal of Muslims as unable to be flexible or to accept any Western culture is reflective of Gibb’s earlier quoted point about the “petrified” nature of certain facets of Islam. Macdonald also touches on this: “He [the prophet] is not a voice preaching righteousness and proclaiming God, but the militant head of a community claiming, as

a right, absolute sovereignty” (49). If Muhammad, as Macdonald asserts, lays out a way of life and requires strict obedience, then there is no way that the religion can have progressed at all since its inception.<sup>3</sup> Here we see the idea of a petrified Islam. In this way, Western authors can portray Muslims as rigid, unchanging, and unquestioning of their faith.

The Arabic Muslim figures are drawn with either a sinister or benign personality in mind. Hergé’s “bad Muslims” have pointy beards, sharp noses, dark complexions, darker clothes, and barely visible eyes throughout the story:



(Hergé 14)

This touches uncomfortably on social Darwinism, the idea that some races are more highly evolved than others. By uniting the “bad Muslims” with specific facial features, Hergé identifies their actions with their heritage. This linkage between race and certain characteristics is not a new one. We’ve seen it throughout *The Oriental Stories* and *The Sheik*; however in *Tintin*, the illustrations add a new layer to the problem. Children reading these stories would be able to identify the “bad guys” simply by looking at their physical traits and skin color.

<sup>3</sup> A similar idea of frozen societies is expressed in another story from *Oriental Stories* entitled “The Voice of El-Lil.” A lost Mesopotamian society is uncovered by two Europeans. One comments “...they’re no tribe but the tag-end of a civilization that lasted longer than any has lasted since. They passed the peak of their progress thousands of years ago,” (122).

The “bad Muslim” is a figure that is widely used in Orientalist literature. The character is childish, violent, immature, and bends to his own sensual pleasure. He lusts after white women and is often irreligious. This figure is so popular for use by Western authors because it allows them freedom to escape the confines of a “civilized” Western antagonist. Had Diana Mayo been kidnapped by another European man instead of Ibraheim, where would the story have led? Would the kidnapping have had the same effect if she was confined by an English gentleman without the threats of violence or further rape hanging over her?

This is not to say that individual Muslims never have characteristics which typically are displayed by the “bad Muslim.” Or even that any Muslim character portrayed with some of these traits is to be rejected. The real problem with these depictions is that the characters are never treated as full human beings. They are simply assigned racial qualities, they do not have interests, hobbies, or even families the way that Western characters do. As Said points out, Muslim characters are provided with “[n]o individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational...gestures” (287). Even the more powerful figures, such as Abu Ali Al Hassen, in “Strange Bedfellows,” are not given motivation. The reader understands that he wants to take down the British government in India, but is it because his family has been affected? Is it because he thinks colonialism is ruining the ruled countries? Or perhaps because he seeks personal gain? The reader does not know. All he/she knows is that the “bad Muslim” is bad. The authors do not require the reader to process the characters further. This shelving of human motivation maintains the status quo of the East-West divide.

### **The “good Muslim”**

The “bad Muslim” is a clearly problematic figure. It invites scorn to be heaped openly on these sinister yet simple figures. They appear to be dangerous, yet are often ultimately incapable of actually harming Western characters. On the other hand, the “good Muslim” provides a

completely different context. This figure shares several traits with the “bad Muslim.” He is childish; almost always laughable and naïve. He is also still hardened to violence, although he may not be violent himself. This remains as a barrier between the Western and Muslim characters. What makes this figure “good” if it is so similar to the “bad Muslim?” The easiest determinant is what role the character plays. Those working for the interests of the Western character are “good”; those working for their own interests (or against the interests of the Westerners) are “bad.” These figures are often servants or slaves, and often serve as a foil for the more intelligent and rational Western characters. They also bow unflinchingly to authority, either secular or religious. These characters are often religious almost to a fault. Western authors freely offer their critiques of Islam as a religion by depicting the actions of these characters as anti-intellectual and superstitious. While these figures are different from “bad Muslims” they still maintain the boundaries between East and West intact through stereotype and poorly, if at all, developed characters.

One early novel that has examples of this kind of figure is *Vathek*, published in 1786. Caliph Vathek, a “white Muslim” leader sets out to gain wealth and power by literally striking a deal with the devil. He begins by sacrificing fifty children of his own people to please the demon and then goes on a journey with his servants and attendants until he ultimately finds himself in the Devil’s palace, which he quickly realizes is hell itself. Over the course of this journey, there are many “good Muslims” who continue to aid Vathek, refuse to stand up to him, and ultimately allow his destruction and that of many of those around him.<sup>4</sup>

The followers of Vathek, those who lived under his rule at the beginning of the story are very recognizable examples of “good Muslims”. As “good Mussulmans,” they hold “the sciences and systems” of Greece in “abhorrence” (Beckford 13). Later, when Vathek is taking

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<sup>4</sup> This story was published originally at the very end of the 18th century, so technically a bit outside the scope of this paper. However, this story so influenced many following writers that it seemed to be an oversight to omit it.

his anger out on the Giaour, or the mouthpiece of the devil, the entire community cannot help but come along and attempt to harm this man they have never met:

the sight of this fatal ball [the giaour] was alone sufficient to draw after it every beholder...scarce an inhabitant was left in Samarah except the aged, the sick confined to their beds, and infants at the breast, whose nurses could run more nimbly without them.  
(24)

The implication here is that these people will follow Vathek unquestioningly, even leaving the most vulnerable of their community in harm's way. Indeed, their intent is to injure, but the reader does not hold them responsible due to their overriding loyalty to Vathek. This childish devotion and susceptibility to a crowd mentality is a definite trait of the "good Muslim." It becomes even more apparent as the story continues.

As was previously mentioned, "good Muslims" are often portrayed as blindly following authority, both religious and secular. Vathek's title is the "Commander of the Faith" and this identity does not waver in the minds of his followers even when he makes his scorn for Islam plain. Several men return from a trip to Mecca, and bring back with them a sacred broom used in Mecca as a religious relic for the community.<sup>5</sup> When they present their "Commander of the Faith" with the broom,

Vathek, bursting out into a villainous laugh, snatched the besom from his trembling hand, and, fixing upon some cobwebs that hung suspended from the ceiling, gravely brushed away till not a single one remained. The old men, overpowered with amazement, were unable to life their beards from the ground...the two most infirm [ambassadors] expired on the spot; the rest were carried to their beds, from whence, being heart-broken with sorrow and shame, they never arose. (43-44)

These men do not challenge their leader; they are overcome with sadness at the desecration of

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<sup>5</sup> The sacred broom was not entirely an invention of the author; pieces of a particular sacred broom from Mecca are still occasionally displayed (Badseshi).

the sacred relic, and feel “shame” which seems like an odd response considering their role in the incident. Does the shame stem from their leader’s actions? From their own actions that caused such an event? Regardless, the men do not challenge Vathek’s increasingly reckless and irreverent behavior. Al-Alwan observes:

the utter subservience of the subjects in general, and the emirs, vizirs and religious dignitaries in particular, who are portrayed as naïve, easily manipulated and controlled and who remain faithful to Vathek and his mother to the very end in spite of their suffering and the cruel injustices done to them, reinforces Said’s vision of the Orientalist’s well-orchestrated designs to “demonize” and “dehumanize” the East, and thus pave the way for the imperialist powers to step in and rule. (49)

Here we can clearly see the popular representation of an easily dominated Eastern people. As Al-Alwan points out, this allows for imperialistic powers to justify colonialism. If these characters unquestioningly obey and remain dedicated to such an obviously corrupt leader, then Westerners can feel empowered to substitute their own leaders who, free from these Eastern vices, will benefit not only European countries, but also the poor inhabitants of the country that don’t know better.

In addition to a blind obedience to authority, the characters are depicted as religious to a point past rationality. Al-Alwan comments on this phenomenon as well:

Even piety is derided. Pious Muslims...are deliberately made to look ludicrous, always humiliated and insulted. The dwarfs are the most devoted creatures and the truest most helpless followers of “Mahomat.” (44)

The dwarves alluded to by Al-Alwan are ascetics who live on a mountain to aid travelers and sing the praises of Allah day and night. They also are faithful to Vathek, despite their never having met him before. However, Beckford makes sure the reader knows these characters are to be derided:

They clambered up the sides of the Caliph’s seat, and, placing themselves each on one of his shoulders, began to whisper prayers in his ears...they instantly set about their



ablutions, and began to repeat the Bismillah. (Beckford 55)

Later, they are forced to dance against their will and then “returned to their old occupation, and for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time in their lives, were reading over the Koran” (57). These figures are clearly caricatures and represent extreme Muslim piety. The image of dwarves whispering prayers in a completely corrupt man’s ears is clearly an attempt at humor and is intended to make the reader write off Islam as a religion incapable of empowering its followers and instead leaves them dancing for others’ amusement and following the orders of a corrupt ruler. There is no theology present here; the dwarves simply read and re-read the Qur’an, repeat prayers and help others. This perception of a lack of substance is also found in Macdonald’s lectures:

From the earliest times there was an element in the Muslim church which was repelled equally by traditional teaching and by intellectual reasoning. It felt that the essence of religion lay elsewhere; that the seat and organ of religion was in the heart. (159)

If then, religion for Muslims lay in their passionate, over-sensuous hearts, nothing could control it. Even these good Muslims fall prey to crowd mentality and cruelty.

In an introduction written for a 2013 edition of *Vathek*, Henry Morley dismisses many of these objections, saying:

We must have an eye for the vein of caricature that now and then comes to the surface, and invites a laugh without disturbing the sense of Eastern extravagance bent upon the elaboration of a tale crowded with incidents and action. Taken altogether seriously, the book has faults of construction. But the faults turn into beauties when we catch the twinkle in the writer’s eye. (6)

This kind of attitude is one that a reader should try to avoid. It is not that works with Orientalist themes should be condemned but that readers should be more aware and critical of two dimensional portrayals of any type of character, Muslim, female, African, African-American, queer, etc. By being more critical of faults like these in past works, current authors may feel pressure to spend the time and resources to fully realize their characters. The twinkle in the

writer's eye should not turn these "faults into beauties." The perception in the reader's eye should enable them to detect underlying prejudices in the author and the author's world.

*The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale* was composed by Lord Byron and a finished version was produced in 1813. The poem centers on the murder of Hassan by a Giaour, a European non-Muslim, due to the murder of one of Hassan's wives with whom the Giaour was having an affair. Hassan, surprisingly, is cast as the "good Muslim" in the poem and is shown to be hospitable and brave.

Many readers of Byron's work praise it as an attempt to show Islam and Muslim characters in a better light than many works both predating and published after the poem. He traveled the "Orient" as a young man, and, according to his estranged wife, "[h]e often spoke of a mysterious necessity for his return to the East, and vindicated the Turks with a spirit of Nationality...He would say 'The East - ah, there it is'" (Cochran 199). Clearly, Byron admired Oriental lands, and wrote about them fairly often in a positive light.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, according to Kim Fortuny, Byron "frequently challenges the biases of his readership by usurping fundamental western iconography" (60). After Hassan's death, his now abandoned hall is described thus:

Alike must Wealth and Poverty  
 Pass heedless and unheeded by,  
 For Courtesy and Pity died  
 With Hassan on the mountain side.  
 His roof, that refuge unto men,  
 Is Desolation's hungry den.  
 The guest flies the hall, and the vassal from labour,  
 Since his turban was cleft by the infidel's sabre! (ln. 344-351)

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<sup>6</sup> It may be that his good opinion was partially based on the sexual freedom he found while abroad in Turkey. Himself queer, he refers to Turkish bathhouses in a letter to a friend as "marble paradise[s] of sherbet and sodomy," (Marchand 206).

Not only is Hassan presented as a generous host who aided both wealthy and poor alike, we see that his death upsets the natural order of his society; the vassal leaves his labor, the guest is no longer safe. Additionally, by using “infidel” to identify a non-Muslim, the speaker is subverting the traditional Western understanding of the word, and forcing the reader to see the Giaour as an intruder and a desecrator of both a religious individual and space.

Byron also overturns certain expectations by lamenting the fall and destruction of Greece in the introduction to his poem:

Each step from splendour to disgrace;  
 Enough—no foreign foe could quell  
 Thy, soul, till from itself it fell;  
 ...  
 Stain'd with each evil that pollutes  
 Mankind, where least above the brutes;  
 Without even savage virtue blest,  
 Without one free or valiant breast,  
 Still to the neighboring ports they waft  
 Proverbial wiles and ancient craft;  
 In this the subtle Greek is found... (ln. 137-159)

While we as readers are used to hearing of Islamic cultures as fallen and stagnant, Byron turns around this trope and instead casts what many consider the birthplace of western civilization in this light. However, when this poem was composed, Greece was under the power of the Ottoman empire which limits the possible irony in his introduction. The “brutes;/Without even savage virtue blest” are either Muslims or those under their control. Fortuny is correct in her assessment of Byron’s attempts to invert Western language and tropes, but this only goes so far.

While Byron does invite the reader to “admire rather than abhor” certain Eastern characters and settings, and certainly “appears interested rather than disdainful,” this does not mean he is free of Orientalist ideas and habits (Fortuny 59). Instead of demonizing the East, he

“exploit[s it] for sensational effect” (Cochran 205). As Seyed Mohammed Marandi comments, “Byron, with his limited knowledge and ideological baggage, cannot possibly present a truthful and fully authentic representation of the Orient or a typical Oriental point of view” (Cochran 205). While Byron does attempt to cast Hassan in a more positive light, he still ascribes to the same stereotypes as less benevolent Western authors. For example, his speaker presupposes hospitality to be a crucial Muslim virtue. Hospitality was most important in ancient Greece and other antiquated societies, but Byron ascribes it to Muslims in his time as well. Said comments on this phenomenon: “[t]he modern Orientals were degraded remnants of a former greatness; the ancient, or ‘classical’ civilizations of the Orient were perceivable through the disorders of present decadence” (233). While Byron attempts to portray positive qualities of Muslims, he conflates Islam with ancient societies to which it is certainly related, but distinguishes it enough from them that he can again be seen as falling again into the East-West binary.

Hassan is also portrayed as sensuous and violent. We get a sense of this in the early stages of the poem when he still trusts Leila, his wife:

Somewhat of this had Hassan deem'd  
 But still so fond, so fair she seem'd,  
 Too well he trusted to the slave  
 Whose treachery deserved a grave:  
 And on that eve had gone to mosque,  
 And thence to feast in his kiosk. (ln. 459-464)

Hassan's violent nature is simply taken in stride by Byron's Muslim narrator, who does not seem to question Leila's punishment, but instead portrays Hassan as the wronged party, stating in no unclear terms that she deserved her death by drowning. This adds the characteristic of being unfazed by violence, which we have already seen, to both Hassan and the “everyman” Muslim narrator provided by Byron. Additionally, what distracts Hassan from discovering Leila's treachery is a visit to the mosque, (over-religious) and a feast (overindulgent). Despite Byron's attempt to frame Hassan in a different way, he still relies on the same stereotypes as other

Western authors, despite his good intentions.

Later in the story, the Giaour gives his account of the action to the friar in a monastery where he has retreated. The character goes on a tangent discussing the virtues of monogamy, and implicating Hassan's harem as overindulgent and childish.

And let the fool still prone to range  
 And sneer on all who cannot change,  
 Partake his jest with boasting boys;  
 I envy not his varied joys,  
 But deem such feeble, heartless man  
 Less than yon solitary swan;  
 Far, far beneath the shallow maid  
 He left believing and betray'd (ln. 1172-179)

The Giaour clearly directs an accusation of spousal neglect and childlike selfishness at Hassan for in living a polygamous life by comparing him directly to “boasting boys” and calling him “feeble,” “heartless,” and a “fool.” While we should not make the error of assuming that the Giaour is Byron's mouthpiece, we can still acknowledge the pervasive Western voice criticizing the Muslim individual's foreign ways. Additionally, the Western voice assumes that all Muslims support the harem system, which favored the rich and often turned young women into commodities. While Byron may be attempting to portray a more sympathetic and complex Muslim character, he falls short by relying on stereotypes even as he subverts some of them. Subverting a stereotype acknowledges the power and established nature of that false belief. Ignoring a stereotype can take away its power, which Byron fails to do. Instead, Hassan is left as the best a Muslim can be, while still under the restrictions of attributes ascribed to the East.

One of these stereotypes that Byron subverts is the understanding that a typical “good Muslim” will be assisting or actively friendly towards an authority or Western figure. In *The Giaour*, the Western figure and Hassan are set up as antagonists and the Giaour slays Hassan, which directly counteracts this requirement. However, later in the story, the Giaour foils himself

with Hassan. In one section, he describes Hassan's dying moments:

He felt not half that now I feel.  
 I search'd, but vainly search'd, to find  
 The workings of a wounded mind;  
 Each feature of that sullen corse  
 Betray'd his rage, but no remorse. (1088-1092)

The Giaour admires Hassan's ferocity in battle and his lack of remorse for dying in this manner. On the other hand, he also describes himself as dealing with twice as much emotion as Hassan. Here, the Giaour simultaneously glorifies Hassan, yet still establishes his moral superiority over him. Byron does more to celebrate Hassan after his death than does the Giaour, who goes on to call him an "ungrateful fool" (ln. 1042). However, the Giaour does move into a monastery in constant mourning for Leila and as penance for the death of her murderer, and it is hinted that he commits suicide at the close of the poem.

While clearly not a figure beloved by the Giaour, Hassan manages to be a "good Muslim" due to Byron's sympathetic efforts on his behalf. For example, one narrator's statement on the murder: "For Courtesy and Pity died/With Hassan on the mountain side" (ln. 346-7). A figure to be admired and respected despite his Muslim and Eastern limitations, Hassan is portrayed as sympathetic to the Western reader, despite his violent crimes.

Another story with a central "good Muslim" figure is another narrative out of *The Oriental Stories*. The story, titled "The Man Who Limped" by Otis Kline, is narrated by a Muslim man explaining the origin of his physical deformity. He tells a Western traveler about how he fell in love with a woman he believed to be wealthy and who was already expected to marry a Sheik. The narrator was at the time was a druggist. He brings her multiple gifts until she agrees to run away with him. The night they leave, a man enters their camp and accuses the narrator of stealing his slave girl. The narrator's money is taken in payment and part of his foot is struck off for stealing. This story gives the reader more opportunity to see Western views on a foreign religion than any we have seen so far.

To begin, our narrator has the general characteristics that Byron sought to subvert. Hamed offers to tell the Western traveler his story and buys him coffee and tobacco to imbibe during his narration (Kline 20). He is a friendly and non-threatening figure, and after the action of his story becomes a guide for those visiting Jerusalem. He is also a slave to his sensual passions and extremely childish, as in his interaction with Selah, the disguised slave girl:

“Wilt vouchsafe me but a moment to say that which I have come to say?”

I was more than ever affected by the beauty and modesty of this maiden, and the secret love she bore me, and desired her above all my possessions and above all the wealth which it had been my hope to acquire...

“Wait,” I pleaded, whipping my *jambiyah* from its sheath and poisoning its keen, curved blade above my heart, “or you leave only the corpse of Hamed your Slave behind you.”

(23)

Here we see Hamed’s overdramatic threat of suicide and the author specifically signifies that this is due to his sensuality. He is controlled by his own sexuality, and this leads him to his downfall.

Attitudes towards both Eastern and Western women are clearly expressed in this story. For years, Hamed avoided and hated women. He was disgusted by the “kohl-rimmed eyes that signed to me with signs of love” and “plain proposals from those who had wealthy lords but desired handsome lovers” (20). Muslim women are often portrayed in this manner; in Said’s words, they “are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing” (207). The Western reader comes away with the sense that Muslim women are generally unfaithful and promiscuous, despite the brief note about Hamed’s wife with whom he had a successful relationship until her death (31). Our narrator avoids these women out of religious motivation. Hamed’s father, an *imam*, or spiritual authority, had advised his son to “beware of women who sign with the eyes and hands—and avoid as thou wouldst the unclean...” (20). This also confirms the Western notion that Islam is inherently misogynistic. Therefore, the Western reader can feel confident both in his/her knowledge that his/her civilization is more “modern” in terms of attitudes towards

women, but also that Western women are superior. Even Hamed makes a note of this at the very end of the story. He comments on the “loose” women of the West, but then dives into praising a select few:

I am also informed that you have a few females whose becoming modesty forbids these things [make-up, revealing clothing, and flirtatious behavior], and who are, therefore, bright and shining examples of virtue in an otherwise vicious and depraved world.

If I were of your people, *effendi*...I would select a wife from among the others. (138)

Kline chooses to end his story with a reflection on Western female virtue. By ending with this positive reflection, the author attempts to leave Western readers confident in their own women as generally morally superior to Muslim women. Hamed’s closing comment, an expressed preference for the less “virtuous” western women, is used to demonstrate his underlying sensual passions and moreover seems to contradict his whole experience. As a man led astray by a woman considered less virtuous, he nevertheless ends up claiming he would be interested in such a woman again, showing that he has learned nothing. Therefore the author ends the story tidily, giving the Western reader leave to feel morally superior.

This story also brings to the forefront a particular image of Muslim law. After Hamed and Selah are apprehended by her master, part of Hamed’s foot is cut off, but not without much discussion. He buys off the punishments of having both his hands and his left foot removed for having stolen Selah, the other slave masquerading as her attendant, and a songbird that Selah was attached to. However, having run out of money, he still must face the charge of stealing the bird’s cage:

[Selah’s master continued] “Now the Koran explicitly commands that when a fourth offense of this nature is committed, the right foot shall be cut off. Who am I to disregard the commandments of Allah, the One and Most High God?”

“It is there you are in error,” I corrected him, for the *Sooneh* law expressly ordains that this punishment shall not be inflicted if the value of the stolen property be less than a



quarter of a *deenar*.”

“Unfortunately for your argument, and your foot,” he replied, “the cage cost me exactly twice that sum...” (30)

This whole conversation mocks Islamic law by applying it to a situation where Hamed is clearly the wronged party, yet even he acknowledges that “they had...the Koran and the law of the land on their side” (29). Here Islamic law and Muslims themselves are portrayed as rigid and inflexible. Hamed objects, not to the unfairness of this law being applied, but with another section of Muslim law which would have negated his punishment. This nonsensical application is both horrifying and fascinating to the Western reader. A way to understand this is provided by Said, who claims that “[o]rientalism can also express the strength of the West and the Orient’s weakness—as seen by the West” (45). If we as Western citizens pride ourselves on fair trials, necessity of evidence, and humane punishments, we can mock the petty and inflexible system of Muslims through this example and others like it.

Our final text to examine for “good Muslim” characters is “The Red Sea Sharks” which was already discussed in terms of its “bad Muslim” characters. In Tintin’s adventure, he encounters not only Arabic figures who scheme and deal in slaves, but the slaves themselves. These figures are have all the same “good Muslim” traits as those previously discussed, but with a new racial element complicating the matter.

When the captured African Muslims first make their appearance, they attack Captain Haddock en masse but do no damage, reiterating the harmless yet violent Muslim nature seen in other of our texts. In fact, one of the Africans is trampled underfoot as the others make their attack, again showing a misdirected and ineffective kind of violence.



(Hergé 46)

While attacking men the captives thought had kidnapped them is not necessarily a depiction to be criticized, the fact that this is the only depiction of the Africans' physical violence makes their anger seem trivial and laughable. Additionally, Haddock calls the Africans "visigoths" and "anacoluthons" which are interesting choices. The Visigoth cultural group was a Germanic one which did a fair amount of damage to Europe during certain periods of the middle ages. The "vague orientalism" which substitutes any non-Western cultural group for another rears its head in almost a humorous way in this example, as Haddock mislabels the Africans as a part of what we would now consider the West. An anacoluthon is defined as a "syntactical inconsistency or incoherence within a sentence" ("m-w"). This hearkens back to Macdonald's assertion that a Muslim "utters what he would not, and cannot utter what he would." Both are very specific choices, even though Haddock regularly spouts off seemingly random words to substitute for cursing.

When the Africans are faced with the actual slave trader a few pages later, they do not attack, but protect Captain Haddock from possible injury, while he gets the opportunity to berate the slave-trader. Here we see the "good Muslims" supporting the Western characters despite their immediate stake in the issue at hand. In fact, Hergé sets up two parallel panels set right above one another.



(Hergé 48)

In the top panel, an Arab holds power over an African, while in the second panel an American holds power over the Arab. By using this imagery Hergé establishes a hierarchy of races which runs throughout the entire comic. One thing worth noting is that there is always a white observer (Tintin replacing Captain Haddock in the second panel). This white observer allows for a Western interpretation of this hierarchy. This dispute between African and Arabic Muslims is not taken on the terms of the cultures which are involved. Instead, the European observer is immediately the *savoir* and therefore has the moral responsibility to intervene; this is the colonialist narrative.

These “good Muslims” are clearly differentiated from the other Muslims of the comic through race. Where the Arabs are sneaky and cowardly, the African Muslims are simple-minded and extremely trusting. Said points out the different physiological-moral classifications which have been popular with philosophers and historians alike:

The American is “red, choleric, erect,” the Asiatic is “yellow, melancholy, rigid,” the African is “black, phlegmatic, lax.” But such designations gather power when, later in the nineteenth century, they are allied with character as derivation, as genetic type... Thus

when an Oriental was referred to, it was in terms of such genetic universals as his “primitive” state, his primary characteristics, his particular spiritual background. (Said 119-120)

This racist portrayal is on full display in a scene in which Captain Haddock attempts to convince the African Muslims to switch their destination to avoid the slavery awaiting them in Mecca. The men continually repeat themselves with intentionally poor grammar, and huge, unfading smiles, citing only their desire to continue onward to Mecca. This mindless desire and continual reference to being “good Muslims” confirms the Western view of these individuals as simple and religious to a degree which endangers their lives.



(Hergé 50)

Possibly the most frustrating thing about this section is that it has no implications for the plot. The following page, the Africans decide to switch course on their own and the story continues without a hitch. This momentary setback serves only to slow down the action and provide a contrast between the foolish African Muslims and the two white men with their best interests in mind.

The “good Muslim” is quite simply equally, if not more, problematic than the familiar

“bad Muslim.” The “bad Muslim” at least gets a chance to resist the European characters while the “good Muslim” is trapped in a supportive and supporting role. Both figures are used to differentiate between the East and West by painting all Muslim characters as simplistic, violent, below logic and rational thought. While, as some have argued, some Western authors may be attempting a more positive portrayal, this does not free them from the Western attitudes towards Eastern people and culture which create a similarly inauthentic representation.

One of the key differences between the “good” and “bad Muslim” is the notion of being over-religious or religious to a point of nonsensical behavior. The “bad Muslim” figures often took advantage of the masses of “good Muslims.” However, we have yet to have a Muslim figure that is spiritually balanced. Macdonald discusses the perceived depth of Muslim devotion “in spite of the crass and, one might almost say, materialistic monotheism of Muhammad” as “one of the strangest developments in all the history of religion” (189). Macdonald effectively calls Muslim piety and devotion a result of an inherently inferior religion. So either Muslims will tap into the “materialistic monotheism” and become “bad Muslims” or they will be swept up in a faulty system and not question it as the “good Muslims” do. This inability to have a spiritually balanced life is an important part of Western thought as it allows them to remain safely within the context (generally) of Christianity without questioning the validity of their own tradition. Painted as inferior, Islam becomes only a tradition to exploit or to be exploited by, and is neutralized as a threat to Christianity.

### **The “White Muslim”**

While the “good” and “bad Muslims” are often basically similar characters, the “white Muslim” is a completely different type. While it may initially seem logical, this character is not a mix of Eastern and Western qualities. This would imply a blending of the Western rational essence that Western authors were uncomfortable with. Instead, the figure is a wholly Western one who has in some way been adapted to the Eastern environment. He may be violent, but is powerful and gets instant results, unlike the ineffectual violence of the other two figures. In the

same vein, the “white Muslim” rules over the childish hordes of “good” and “bad” Muslims due to his ability to attain authority and respect. The “white Muslim” has the capacity for rational thought and masters the Eastern world, which plays directly into the colonialist narrative. As one theorist asserts, “...the culturally hybrid [Western] figure, no matter what his upbringing, turns out to be a superlatively strong or culturally adept figure who moves with ease and natural superiority amongst the indigenous peoples of other countries” (Dannenberg 76). This figure is able to establish himself as a dominant figure within another culture, thus reasserting his superior Western attributes which are triumphant in any cultural context, breaking Western morality and desirable traits out of their own context and applying them universally across cultures. However, the strictly Western characters often come up short in comparison with the hybrid figure which may imply that the West can be even stronger when harnessing the power or cultural energy of an Eastern culture, again playing right into the colonialist narrative.

We can turn, once again, to *Vathek*, which upon first inspection, may seem to not fit our characterization of the “white Muslim.” As Al-Alwan points out:

In *Vathek*, the Orient is predominantly evil, representing all the seven deadly sins in the persons of the royal family of the Caliph and his mother. The tale opens with emphasis on Vathek’s pride and sensuality. He is a person bent totally on the gratification of the senses. His palaces, which are described in dazzling details, are dedicated to the five senses. (44)

This description is much more reminiscent of the “bad Muslim’s” sensuous nature than the “white Muslim’s” strength of cultural adeptness. However, our answer is in the first sentence of Al-Alwan’s analysis. “[T]he Orient is predominantly evil.” Vathek is culturally adept in that he is able to fully embody that evil more successfully than any ethnically Muslim character could. He goes beyond earthly means as he strikes deals with *Iblis* and sacrifices the children of his followers. His Western traits are tainted by his mystical and evil-charged environment, but he is still a superior leader and achieves his purpose more directly than any ethnic Muslim could.

Vathek’s mixed heritage is explained early on in the story. His mother, Carathis is a

Greek and her son's idol; "the Caliph not only loved her as a mother, but respected her as a person of superior genius" (Beckford 13). She is described as intensely and unquestionably evil; however, unlike her son, she is isolated and will not take advantage of the Muslim individuals who could help her achieve her ends:

From thence she resorted to a gallery where, under the guard of fifty female negroes, mute and blind of the right eye, were preserved the oil of the most venomous serpents, rhinoceros' horns, and woods of a subtle and penetrating odour procured from the interior of the Indies, together with a thousand other horrible rarities. This collection had been formed for a purpose like the present by Carathis herself, from a presentment that she might one day enjoy some intercourse with the infernal powers to whom she had ever been passionately attached, and to whose taste she was no stranger. (34)

She does not use the female negroes in any capacity besides as guards and disfigures them to establish her superiority. Were she also a hybrid figure, she would have been capable of enlisting those around her to help; instead, she relies on manipulating her son to achieve the sensual pleasure she so desires.

Vathek's most useful Western quality is the disillusionment with Islam as an institution. Because he ignores the clear religious duties he has towards those who consider him a "protector of the faith" he is able to use the "good Muslims" who follow him to achieve his own ends. For example, he accepts hospitality from the dwarves whom he ignores (57) and destroys the homes of the Santons to avoid being caught in a loophole in the Giaour's bargain (97); neither group insists on anything or attacks in response because of their slave-like obedience which allows Vathek to effectively do whatever he pleases.

The most striking example of this begins his journey towards hell. After Vathek sacrifices the fifty children to communicate with the Giaour, their parents are enraged and seek revenge. However:

At this rumour and these menaces, Carathis, full of consternation, hastened to Morakanabad, and said: "Vizir, you have lost two beautiful boys, and must necessarily be

the most afflicted of fathers, but you are virtuous; save your master.”

“I will brave every hazard,” replied the vizir, “to rescue him from his present danger, but afterwards will leave him to his fate.” (32)

Despite Vathek’s responsibility for the death of his two children, Morakanabad, an appointed official in Vathek’s regime continues to help Vathek and, despite his vow to leave Vathek “to his fate,” accompanies the group for the entirety of the text. Here we can see Vathek’s ability to completely control the “good Muslims” around him through his title of “protector of the faith” while completely disregarding all of Islam’s teachings and the responsibilities that ought to accompany such a title, including protecting and aiding the Muslims in his domain. Instead, they end up protecting and aiding him on a dangerous and foolhardy quest.

He is opposed once by an ordinary Muslim character when he attempts to marry the man’s daughter, Nouronihar, despite a previous engagement.

The irritated Emir drew forth his sabre, presented it to Vathek, and stretching out his neck, said in a firm tone of voice: “Strike your unhappy host, my lord! he [sic] has lived long enough, since he hath seen the Prophet’s Vicegerent violate the rites of hospitality.”

At his uttering these words Nouronihar...sank down in a swoon. Vathek, both terrified for her life and furious at an opposition to his will...withdrew, darting his terrible look at the unfortunate Emir. (74)

In this scene, the Emir is clearly implying that Vathek is failing in his duties as the “Prophet’s Vicegerent” by taking advantage of his hospitality by trying to steal away his daughter.

However, Vathek only absorbs certain Eastern traits and a respect for a host is not among them.

In another setting, this respect for a host would be a Western trait as well, but because this story takes place in a fundamentally evil world, the Western traits that Vathek retains seem to be ruthlessness in dealing with enemies and stubbornness in achieving his purpose. Therefore, Vathek feels no remorse at taking what he wants, even if it means disharmony within the community that supports him.

The hybrid figure is more than just a mixture of different cultures. The figure also tends



to elevate Western traits with certain aspects of Muslim ones. For example, Vathek's favorite wife "had imbibed from Vathek many of his extravagant fancies, and was fired with impatience to behold" the palace which the group travels towards (86). His "extravagant fancies" which surprise his Muslim wife who was raised "among the Magi" (86) do not stem from her culture. Nor do they appear in his mother's bloodthirsty isolated state. These fancies which drive the entire narrative are composed of both the supposed appetite of the East and the power-hungry ambition of the West. Vathek manages to take two separate elements from two cultures and make himself the most powerful character because of it.

Vathek's fate at the end of the novel is very fitting for his crimes. After wandering around the palace of Hell for several hours, Vathek and Nouronihar's hearts are set aflame and linger in eternal agony. Carathis attempts to organize "all the choirs of Genii, and all the Dives, to pay her homage" (113) before she too is consumed. Her punishment, a lack of recognition or audience seems to fit her attempts to steer those around her using her son rather than being able to actually do so herself. The couple has similarly fitting punishments:

Their hearts immediately took fire, and they at once lost the most precious of the gifts of Heaven—Hope. These unhappy beings recoiled with looks of the most furious distraction; Vathek beheld in the eyes of Nouronihar nothing but rage and vengeance, nor could she discern aught in his but aversion and despair. (114)

While they share the same fate, it is interesting to which individual Beckford assigns particular negative emotions. Nouronihar experiences rage, or a childish outpouring of emotion, and vengeance which, as Said asserts, is often attributed to Muslims; "a shame culture—and therefore Islam itself—makes a virtue of revenge" (48). Vathek is a bit different as he encounters "despair" and "aversion." Both are interesting choices. Despair implies that one believes that a situation can never improve. The "white Muslim" understands the issues facing him and the mistakes he has made, utilizing that rationality, while the true Muslim simply reverts to anger and vengeance and is unable to grasp the truly dire situation. Aversion is also interesting. The "white Muslim" is repulsed by the otherness of Nouronihar, and by extension

the Muslim part of himself. As Homi Bhabha explains, “otherness...is at once the object of desire and derision” (Al-Alwan 48). Suddenly, Vathek seems to be jolted out of his Muslim attributes and returned to Western reason and disgust with the “otherness” that has dictated his life. This separation is important and stresses yet again that the “white Muslim” is primarily Western but uses Eastern traits and attributes to become powerful in the Eastern world.

This trend continues in *The Sheik*. Just as Vathek originally appears to be indistinguishable from the Muslims under his control, the Sheik also appears to be a true Muslim to Diana at the beginning of the novel. He kidnaps a white woman with whom he is obsessed (a characteristic of the “bad Muslim”) and kills members of her entourage to accomplish it. Her first impression is not overwhelmingly favorable:

[He] was standing before her, tall and broad-shouldered, dressed in white flowing robes...from the top of which showed a revolver that was thrust into the folds.

...It was the handsomest and cruellest face that she had ever seen. Her gaze was drawn instinctively to his. He was looking at her with fierce burning eyes that swept her until she felt that the boyish clothes that covered her slender limbs were stripped from her.

“Why have you brought me here?” she asked...

“Bon Dieu! Are you not woman enough to know?” (Hull 27-28)

This passage introduces some of the “bad Muslim” characteristics to be toyed with as Ahmed’s character is developed. He is depicted as sensual and violent, although, unlike Vathek, we do not get a sense of Ahmed as childish. This is a trait that his Western roots seem to keep at bay.

As Diana looks around his chambers, she discovers that they are well furnished, with tasteful decorating that “made the tent seem even more spacious than it really was” and contain many books on various topics including travel, surgery, and sport (Hull 34).

The evidence of education and unlooked-for tastes in the man they belonged to troubled her. It was vaguely disquieting, for it suggested possibilities that would not have existed in a raw native, or one only superficially coated with a veneer of civilisation. He seemed

to become infinitely more sinister, infinitely more horrible. (Hull 34)

Ahmed is more frightening because he is beyond the “raw native” and therefore holds some of Western traits that make him a powerful hybrid figure. This makes him doubly dangerous for Diana.

An English heiress who spurns the men of her acquaintance, Diana is a character through which Hull subtly points out the deficiencies of British men. Arbuthnot, a young man interested in pursuing Diana, is compared to a “foolish moth” whose wings will be burnt off (3). He continues in his course, attempting to woo Diana but failing miserably. Hull emphasizes his effeminate gestures and subservient position:

His heart was pounding with unusual rapidity, and his eyes, that he kept fixed on his own clasped hands, had a hungry look to them...

“Miss Mayo—Diana—put off this trip only for a little, and give me the right to go with you. I love you. I want you for my wife more than anything on earth. I shan’t always be a penniless subaltern. One of these days I shall be able to give you a position that is worthy of you; no, nothing could be that, but one at least that I am not ashamed to offer to you. We’ve been very good friends; you know all about me. I’ll give my whole life to make you happy. The world has been a different place to me since you came into it. I can’t get away from you. You are in my thoughts night and day. I love you; I want you. My God, Diana! Beauty like yours drives a man mad! (Hull 4-5)

Arbuthnot’s language is desperate and his most intense gesture is taking Diana’s hand which she quickly rejects (5). Dannenberg reads this moment as “a negative representation of English upper-class masculinity, and Diana’s attraction towards the figure of the Sheik can be interpreted as a rejection and critique of the style and culture of the stiffness and inhibitions of upper-class patriarchal culture” (75). English men seem foppish and over-proper when compared to Ahmed’s silent masculinity.

As this is a romance novel, Ahmed’s goal is winning Diana to him, instead of an attempted journey to Iblis’ palace. We have already seen that Englishmen are not to Diana’s

taste. Ahmed gets around this issue. For Ahmed, “putting on the clothes, the disguise of the Arab means also incorporating some of his alleged ‘wildness,’ his ‘primitive’ potency and power...[his] ‘Arab’ disguise transformed [him] into [an] icon of heterosexual masculinity” (Gargano 174). His Western properties of leadership and intelligence are maintained, but he accepts the ruthless and violent nature of “bad Muslims” into his persona. He rapes Diana repeatedly at the beginning of the story and demands obedience over which she initially is furious:

His hand slipped to her shoulder, his fingers gripping the delicate, rounded arm.  
 “How much longer are you going to fight? Would it not be wiser after what you have seen to-day to recognise that I am master?”

...her eyes [were] drawn back irresistibly to his in spite of all her effects.

“I mean that you must realise that my will is law.”

“And if I do not?” He guessed rather than heard the words.

“Then I will teach you, and I think that you will learn—soon.” (Hull 55)

Here, the Sheik enforces his will with few words and threatens physical violence lest Diana neglect his orders. When compared with Arbuthnot’s wooing style, the Sheik’s powerful confidence and complete control over Diana eventually leads to her falling in love with him.

While the Sheik’s dual traits are easily seen through his encounters with Diana, his heritage is eventually explained by his friend Saint Hubert. Ahmed is the child of an English peer and a Spanish noblewoman who ran away and gave birth to him among the people of the old Sheik, where he grew up. When he eventually discovered his heritage, he hated his father for having driven his mother away. Diana reacts to this information by casting him as a superior product of two cultures, but tied more strongly to the Arabic side:

He seemed to stand alone, outside the prescribed conventions that applied to ordinary men. The standards of common usage did not appear compatible with the wild desert man who was his own law and followed only his own precedent, defiant of social essentials and scornful of criticism. The proud, fierce nature and passionate temper that

he had inherited, the position of despotic leadership in which he had been reared, the adulation of his followers and savage life in the desert, free from all restraint, had combined to produce the haughty unconventionalism that would not submit to the ordinary rules of life. She could not think of him as an Englishman. The mere accident of his parentage was a factor that weighed nothing. He was and always would be an Arab of the wilderness. (Hull 122)

Here, Hull uses Diana to romanticize Ahmed's hybridity. The "white Muslim" can do what an ordinary Western or Muslim man cannot; he is outside the rules of "ordinary men" and works based on his "own law." Some may argue that this seems to indicate an equivalency between the two races producing Ahmed and that together they are capable of creating something more powerful than either of the originals. However, if we consider that on one side is the civilized if bashful Arbuthnot and on the other are the hordes of "wild tribesmen, with their primitive ways and savagery," it becomes clear that this is more of a critique of Western masculinity than an equalizing movement (Hull 69). As was stated earlier, Ahmed is formed by Hull to be a Western character "'gone native' and whose virility and masculinity, as a consequence, were revitalised by the primitive desert lifestyle" (Teo 248). Ahmed's traits are recharged Western ones due to the influence on him by his environment rather than anything inherent in his personality.

As the narrative continues, Hull actively counteracts Diana's refusal to accept Ahmed as an Englishman and instead uses him to reestablish Western dominance. As a "white Muslim" Ahmed is ideal. He fulfills the Western colonialist narrative perfectly:

Seen this way, Hassan is an idealised representation of empire as British colonial culture wanted to see itself, part of a myth in which the British were 'at home' wherever they went because, in their self-image, they were adaptable chameleons and adventurers—a mythology, which, was of course, designed to perpetuate their position as "natural" rulers of the world. (Dannenberg 76)

Clearly, Ahmed fits in this mold and as he and Diana realize their mutual love for one another, he begins to distance himself from some of his Muslim attributes. In fact, "[t]he new 'Anglicied'

Ahmed is now repelled by his previous ‘Arab’ behavior” (Gargano 183) and attempts to send Diana away saying:

Do you think I haven’t realised what an infinitely damned brute I’ve been? I didn’t love you when I took you, I only wanted you to satisfy the beast in me. And I was glad that you were English that I could make you suffer as an Englishman made my mother suffer, I so loathed the whole race. I have been mad all my life, I think—up till now. (Hull 135)

Here Ahmed casts aside “the beast” and his “mad”ness which have been a part of him until Diana comes into his life. Thus, as Gargano asserts, “*The Sheik* enacts an apparently transgressive erotic daydream, which first questions and then ultimately reaffirms the Englishman’s capacity for dominance” (174). Not only is the English Ahmed ruling over a group of Muslims, but the Western nature of Ahmed eventually triumphs over his Muslim upbringing.

*The Sheik* closes with Diana and Ahmed beginning their lives together in the desert after Diana attempts to kill herself when Ahmed tells her his intention to send her away. This picture of the “white Muslim” happily ruling over true Muslims and marrying an English heiress is the summation of the “white Muslim” figure. Ahmed is a figure who proves to readers that “an Englishman raised by Arabs makes a ‘better’ Arab than the Arabs” (Gargano 182). He is fully European, but also a chameleon who can blend into and simultaneously lead masses of Muslims. The plot of *The Sheik* initially toys with the idea of interracial marriage which would perhaps lead to a truer model of the “white Muslim,” but ultimately reaffirms the model of upper-class Western marriage which transforms Diana’s “initial longing for space, freedom and the otherness of the desert...into a romantic relationship with a man of English genealogy” (Dannenberg 77).

As Teo explains:

Readers of *The Sheik* were left with the satisfaction of knowing that the children resulting from Diana’s union with the sheikh would in fact be descended from European blood on both sides, a revitalised British aristocratic, patriarchal race of leaders imperialistically ruling over the Bedouin tribes of the Sahara desert. (248)

Ahmed is a clearly problematic example of the “white Muslim.”

Both he and Vathek impress the reader with their control over their particular group of Muslim followers. While Vathek’s belligerence may have shocked the reader, due to the fantasy aspects of the setting, it is nonetheless effective, which both he and the reader are aware of. Their Western attributes, chiefly pride and ambition, are enhanced by the “savage life” they lead, elevating them above Muslims and their less adventurous Western counterparts. These characters and the narratives that feature them inform their readers that Western men are the natural rulers of the world and that this fabricated “Western personality” of pride and ambition will translate as superior universally across cultures. What the “white Muslim” figure really attempts to create is an anachronistic argument for white supremacy. The message is that upper-class Western men are superior in their and all other cultures, which leaves no space for Hull or Beckford to write a Muslim character which moves beyond stereotype.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, this critique of Western Orientalist literature is not finished. Many other texts could be used to add to the conclusions above and discover other trends. Other categories beside “good,” “bad,” and “white Muslims” could also be applied to diversify the way these figures can be interpreted and viewed by critics. Female characters were almost entirely neglected. With the exception of women in large groups or Nouronihar, the characters examined were men. While this reflected the works sampled, a look at harem culture and fetishizing would have enlarged this paper considerably and so was left largely unaddressed.

One thing that can be explicitly stated is that literature is not innocent. It is shaped by the bias of its author, time, language, and country of origin. As Kwame Appiah states:

Ideas about race could, in principle, have developed without a commitment to the view that some races were superior to others; but they did not...[B]y the middle of the nineteenth century the notion that all races were equal in their capacities was a distinctly minority view. Even those who insisted that all human beings had the same rights largely

acknowledged that nonwhite people lacked either the intelligence or the vigor of the white races: among which the highest, it was widely agreed, was the Indo-European stock from which the Germanic peoples emerged. (280)

The notion of white or Western superiority is engrained in every text that has been examined in this paper. The reader's task is to identify and question this bias. These works do not need to be universally thrown out, but instead criticized and held to a higher standard, which will encourage modern writers to write fully human characters of all races, breaking free of the stereotypes that dominate so much of Western writing.

Orientalism affects more than just literature. It allows Western individuals to see themselves as superior to non-Westerners. It is present in history textbooks, news stories, and individuals around the world. It muffles and simplifies rich cultures for the convenience of the West. The East, and specifically Muslim inhabitants thereof, are measured and defined by Western standards. The West created a sense of the East and both enforces and diffuses it throughout the Western world. The "good Muslim" helps the benevolent Westerner with bumbling good intention; the "bad" hinders him with ineffectual violence, and the "white," more powerful than a true Muslim could ever be, dominates the Muslims around him. However, as Said states:

[I]t would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was *essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality...There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West. (5)

We must remember that there is a "corresponding reality," and that this reality produces its own stories, songs, cultures, and characters. By reading the narratives of good Muslim authors, one will be able to understand the intricacies and divisions within that tradition and understand its depth. Some characters may line up with stereotypes, but they all certainly won't. These narratives can help us as a global community come to a more empathetic understanding of other cultures, rather than further reinforcing stereotypes that alienate and disempower certain groups.



Yes, reading has the power to change us, but how we read and what aspects of a text we choose to critique will shape that change.

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