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# قراءة الشخصيات المشرقية والمسلمة في قصيدة هيرمان ميلفل: كلاريل، في ضوء أفكار إدوارد سعيد عن التمثيلات الاستشراقية

**يارا عمار[1] ، د. نايف الياسين[2]**

[1] طالبة ماجستير، قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية الآداب والعلوم الانسانية، جامعة دمشق.
yara.amar@damascus university.edu.sy

[2] أستاذ مساعد، قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية الآداب والعلوم الانسانية، جامعة دمشق.

**الملخص:**

في حين ركزت أبحاث عدة على دراسة كيفية تصوير الإسلام في قصيدة كلاريل لهيرمان ميلفل، لا نجد تركيزًا محددًا على الشخصيات الإسلامية. لهذا السبب ينظر هذا البحث عن كثب إلى بعض الشخصيات المسلمة وكيف يقدم ميلفل بعض الصور التفكيكية ولا يتبع التمثيلات النمطية. يمكن لشخصيات ميلفل أن تتماشى مع محاولة سعيد لتفكيك التمثيلات الاستشراقية. ما يشغل إدوارد سعيد بشكل رئيسي هو ثنائية الشرق والغرب وزيف التمثيلات التي قدمها المستشرقون في كتاباتهم في القرن التاسع عشر عن الآخر. في قصيدة ميلفل الملحمية، يجد المرء تمثيلات للآخر لا تندرج بشكل حتمي ضمن الصور النمطية. إنها ليست في سياق التصوير الجنسي أو العنيف للمسلمين أو المشرقيين. على العكس من ذلك، ينسب بعض سمات الحكمة والقوة والتفاني إلى الشخصيات الإسلامية، ولكنه يسلط الضوء، أيضًا، على جوانب أخرى من النفاق واللامبالاة لبعض الشخصيات. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يكشف عن الذرائع الدينية للصليبيين لغزو الأراضي المقدسة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المشرق، المشرقيون، المسلمون، الصور النمطية، الاستشراقية.

حقوق النشر: جامعة دمشق – سورية، يحتفظ المؤلفون بحقوق النشر بموجب الترخيص
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# Approaching Oriental and Muslim Characters in Herman Melville's Poem Clarel in Light of Edward Said's Insights on Orientalist Representations

**Yara Ammar[3] , Dr. Nayef al-Yasin[4]**
[3] Master's student, Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Damascus University.
[4] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Damascus University

**Abstract**
In the several studies that examined how Islam is depicted in Herman Melville's Clarel, specific emphasis on the Muslim characters is almost absent. This is why this paper looks closely at some Muslim characters, how Melville presents some deconstructive portrayals and how he does not follow stereotypical representations. Melville's characters lend themselves to Edward Said's attempt to deconstruct Orientalist representations. Said's main concern is the binary of East and West and the façade of representations of the Other, which most Orientalist writings in the 19th century provide. In Melville's epic poem Clarel, one finds representations of the Other which do not inevitably fall into stereotypes. They are not in the context of the erotic or violent portrayals of Muslims or Orientals. On the contrary, he attributes some characteristics of wisdom, power and devotion to Muslim characters. However, he also highlights other aspects of hypocrisy and carelessness in some characters. Additionally, he unveils the religious pretexts of the Crusaders to invade the Holy Lands.

**Keywords:** Orient, Orientals, Muslims, Stereotypes, Orientalist.

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In his 1876 work Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, Herman Melville subtly probes the lives of his characters, giving the reader an insight into them and details about the geographical areas included in the pilgrimage. Melville examines their lives, going through the troubles and hardships, trying to strengthen their belief in God and searching for the meaning of religion in the cradle of Christianity, Christ's native land. Clarel concentrates essentially on a student's pilgrimage to the Oriental lands from the United States, revealing through the poem the details in life and religion that have a significant influence on humans' lives. The story shows the quest to discover the Orient either as an escape or as an exile. Melville brings many characters together en route, attempting to reach the same destination. He introduces Orientals and Islam by portraying some characters who come from multiple ethnicities and religious sects. One may assume that highlighting such characters may summon up Edward Said's thesis on Western representations of Orientals. Therefore, this paper attempts to investigate some representations of Orientals and Muslims in Melville's poem highlighting such depictions which do not necessarily give in to the influence of the Orientalist perception, which was dominating art and literature at the time.

First, a brief introduction to the poem and its structure is necessary. Melville divides Clarel into four books: Jerusalem, The Wilderness, Mar Saba, and Bethlehem, subsequently subdivided into more than thirty cantos each. The poem is in irregular iambic tetrameter. Melville uses imagery and biblical allusions in many instances. It requires a well-rounded reader to perceive the metaphors and hints at biblical places: "Clarel, we must frankly confess, is something of a puzzle, both in design and execution" (Stedman 1876). It is quite interesting and amusing to capture what the Western eye sees in the East. Melville's "travels in Palestine and the Levant in the years 1856-57 begot this narrative and philosophical poem" (Wells 1943: 478). He produced this long poem after his travels. It had a role in discussing the conflict between two schools of thought. The Norton Anthology of American Literature considers it "America's most thoughtful contribution to the conflict of religious faith and Darwinian skepticism," which obsessed some contemporaries (Baym 2003: 1085). When Darwin's theory emerged, it influenced a lot of people, and many suffered a spiritual dilemma. Some were skeptical as to whether accept or reject inherited religious doctrines. It was like a theological crisis[1] . Clarel, the titular character, is a student from America. He comes to the Holy Land in a state of conflict and despair, hoping to restore his faith. He meets many characters, including Muslims, whom he accompanies on his journey and experiences. Melville presents the Orient, some Orientals, Islam and some Muslims, not with the eye of an obstinate Orientalist; on the contrary, in some instances, his view is of someone with experience. From such experience, he derives his knowledge of the places, religions and other details.

Similarly, in an attempt to subvert the hypothetical image of Orientals and Muslims, Edward Said examines their representations in his book Orientalism. The main concern in it is the binary opposition of East and West and the stereotypical portrayal of the Other. Knowing the Oriental, as the book shows, plays an important role in the mission of Western administrators. The East becomes a space on which the Western Orientalists project their desires, fantasies and obsessions. For example, there is an exaggerated perception of the Orientals as being lustful, seductive and sensual. Some writers rely on such stereotypes and present portrayals imbued with exoticism and eroticism. Said believes that the Orient is dealt with using generalizations and is viewed as eccentric. He quotes some of Flaubert's writings in which the latter is "describing the spectacle of the Orient" (Said 1979: 102). The first three incidents, Said mentions, are strewn with exaggerated pulses of exotic sexuality. The first is about coupling in a public place to "amuse the crowd" (Said 1979: 103). The second is about a young man having himself "publicly buggered by a large monkey" (Said 1979: 103). The third includes a story about a marabout,[2] that died due to his excessive masturbation done by Muslim women (Said 1979: 103).

The aforementioned examples are a few of the prevailing Orientalist stereotypes which were imaginative, created and perpetuated as Orientalist themes and tropes. Such works in the 19th century included many portrayals of Muslims and Orientals, either as sensual men or seductive women. Therefore, when Orientalist writers present Muslims and Orientals as objectified, dehumanized or sexualized, it is not only an exaggeration but a form of silencing and erasure of accurate portrayals. Said's critique of the façade of representations of the Other deconstructs the Orientalist canon of representation. One may look at Melville's depiction of some Muslim characters in his poem as a similar attempt that does not follow the Orientalist

[1] For more on Darwinism, see Loewenberg's "Darwinism Comes to America, 1859-1900."
[2] It is "a Muslim religious leader or teacher" (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.).

representation stream. In what follows, I shall attempt a close reading of the text and look at certain quotations which illustrate this in the light of Orientalism.

To begin with, Melville portrays a wise and humble Oriental who then appears to have certain good traits that occasionally may be depicted differently by Orientalist writers in other works.[3] In the second book of the poem, The Wilderness, Melville mentions in the seventh canto titled "Guide and Guard," the guide of the group leading the pilgrims in their journey. He puts an effort in specifying his personal background, which may be difficult for the common reader to understand without research. Melville depicts the character without overshadowing it by other characters. It is not marginalized as some writers deliberately exclude such characters. They either do not mention the character or leave it unnamed. In the poem, the guide has a name and Melville describes it and attributes certain characteristics to it. "The guide, a Druze of Lebanon, / Was rumored for an Emir's son," (Melville 1991: 154). He is a Druze Muslim named Djalea descending from a respective ancestor, an Emir, which means "a prince or chieftain" in the Druze sect.[4] (Rollyson *et al.* 2007: 53) Despite the privileged background of Djalea, he works as a guide and uses his knowledge of the places in the Holy Land, as the poem shows, to guarantee the pilgrims an enjoyable and safe journey. In the Critical Companion to Herman Melville, the writers lay interest in this character, Djalea. One can find an analysis of it in the summary of the cantos and in other parts of the book. They consider his religion a combination of two cultures. "He has a dignity and self-contained quality that make him a fascinating figure, the representative of a religion that combines Eastern and Western elements but that is little understood by the pilgrims." (Rollyson *et al.*, 2007: 53) It suggests that the quality of being worthy of honor which Melville hints at in his depiction of Djalea, is a Western trait. One may claim that this explanatory attempt falls under the labeling of Muslims by Orientalist perception, which entails that the traits of honor, dignity and so on are exclusively Western. It summons to mind Edward Said's comments on Cromer's personal canon of Orientalist wisdom.[5] Said analyzes Westerners' understanding of Orientals and finds that they show that Orientals "oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race" (2003: 39). Thus, Westerners hold alone the traits of honor and the noble origin and Orientals who have such traits, according to the Orientalist view, have some Western qualities.

However, the poem suggests that the Druze gives an impression of a dignified man who has an unshakable feeling of pride even though he earns money by working as a guide.

The Druze maintained an air sedate;
"Without the sacrifice of pride,
Sagacious still he earned his bread,
E'en managed to maintain the head,
Yes, lead men still, if but as guide
To pilgrims". (Melville 1991: 154)

Djalea is a humble man and the head of the group. He leads them through their spiritual pilgrimage after their state of religious doubt or uncertainty. The portrayal of Djalea offers a counter-image to the lazy or ignorant Muslim, which many Western writers replicate in their works.

Moreover, in the ninth canto, "The Shepherds Dale," of the fourth book, Bethlehem, the depiction of the Crusaders does the same. It deconstructs the notion mentioned earlier in Said's book, about the Anglo-Saxon race, which is described as clear, direct, and noble. (2003: 39) They are unfavored conquests. Ungar, one of the poem's characters, expresses his disinclination towards them because they came to the Holy Land and tarnished it.

"The Anglo-Saxons--lacking grace
To win the love of any race;

[3] Said, in his book *Orientalism,* thinks that Flaubert, Vigny, Nerval, Kinglake, Disraeli, Burton "undertook their pilgrimages in order to dispel the mustiness of the pre-existing Orientalist archive," however, although their writings were a fresh start of a "new repository of Oriental experience" they fell into the same end (2003: 169). The attempt to produce their experiences in the Orient through a new set of writings "resolved itself into the reductionism of the Orientalistic" (Said 1979: 169). Reducing the Orient to eccentric representations imbued with eroticism, exoticism and dangerous barbarism seems a reliance once again on stereotypes.

[4] It is a "small Middle Eastern religious sect characterized by an eclectic system of doctrines and by a cohesion and loyalty among its members" (Britannica 2021).

[5] Said, in his book *Orientalism,* analyzes the relation between the East and the West and how Balfour and Cromer used several terms to describe Orientals and Westerners. He also discusses other related issues and how domination manifests itself in art, literature and media outlets.

Hated by myriads dispossessed
Of rights--the Indians East and West". (Melville 1991: 413)

In Ungar's view, the Crusaders are deprived of the mercy of God and the cordiality of the Orientals because they disempowered the Orientals and stripped them of their rights. They occupied Jerusalem and governed its indigenous people. This depiction also invites Said's notion that the West dominates the Oriental lands under religious pretexts. "Europe was always in a position of strength, not to say domination. … the relationship of strong to weak … on political, cultural, and even religious grounds" (Said 1979: 40). They took advantage of the land they occupied to serve their own interests. They pretend that their occupation of the Holy Land is in the name of the Cross and aims at spreading the Christian faith, whereas their interest is in trade and the strategic location of Jerusalem. This depiction leads the reader to understand the West's plea to dominate the Oriental lands as Ungar sees the Crusaders to be robbers who go after ships and graves. In the following lines, Ungar speaks of the Crusaders and says:
These pirates of the sphere! grave looters--
Grave, canting, Mammonite freebooters,
Who in the name of Christ and Trade
(Oh, bucklered forehead of the brass!)
Deflower the world's last sylvan glade!" (Melville 1991: 413)
According to Ungar's opinion, the Crusaders are raiders and they rob people and places to gain wealth. For that, he considers them "canting" hypocrites who use religion for their personal gain. Therefore, their relationship with the East is a relationship of interest represented in looting and theft to obtain wealth. Said describes the assumed relationship between Orientals and Westerners as one between a dominant partner and a weaker one. He suggests that this relationship includes exploitation on many levels. What the West does to Orientals and its unfair treatment of them is manifested through the Western domination of the Oriental lands (Said 1979: 36). The Orientalist perception entails that Westerners, being supposedly the dominant power, take advantage of the property of Orientals. They consider the land they occupy as their own and that they have the right to benefit from it.
Domination resulted from many elements that contributed to the relationship between Westerners and Orientals. Initially, of course, the relation between the East and the West was a long time in the making as Said refers; it "had been years, even centuries, in the making" (Said 1979: 39). It resulted from "innumerable voyages of discovery; [and] contacts through trade and war" (Said 1979: 39). This relationship had two principal elements since the middle of the 18th century. "One was a growing systematic knowledge in Europe about the Orient" (Said 1979: 39). The colonial encounter between the two, reinforced that kind of knowledge. The second element added to that knowledge was "a sizable body of literature produced by novelists, poets, translators, and gifted travelers" (Said 1979: 40). Knowledge was the right and most important tool to dominate the Other. Having knowledge of Orientals makes managing them easy and profitable because "knowledge gives power" (Said 1979: 36). Thus, knowledge of others is a key aspect that contributes to the dominant-dominated relationship and leads Orientals to the situation in which they are under the management of Westerners. Said reduces the Orientalist conception of the relationship based on domination to a clear and straightforward argument.
There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power. (Said 1979: 36)
Being the dominant power entails exploiting the other politically, economically and culturally. Orientals, on the other hand, being the dominated party in this kind of relationship, are subject to manipulation and being benefited from on many levels.
The position of the weak partner puts the Orientals under a specific label. The West considers Orientals as people who do not have enough courage to fight or defend their lands. Orientals, according to the Orientalist view, are "lethargic" and "'devoid of energy and initiative'" (Said 1979: 38-39). Melville's description of the courageous Muslim escorts of the group of pilgrims contrasts the previously mentioned perception. Firstly, Melville introduces the character of Belex. "The leader of six Arabs from Bethlehem, he is a Turk and a tough old warrior" (Rollyson et al. 2007: 63). Belex and his men are under the leadership of Djalea, the guide. Thus, the head and the protectors of the group of pilgrims are powerful Muslim men, warriors who defend the group to ensure their safety on the road. The pilgrims' need for the protection of Orientals during their religious and spiritual pilgrimage reflects another counter-image to the representations of the Oriental

character. The Orientals are not weak or naïve. They are courageous, and the group can depend on them because their presence is a source of comfort and safety for the pilgrims. Thus the process of labeling Orientals as weak and as savages who use violence is mere stereotyping. Paradoxically, portrayals of the Other as civilized and powerful presents a deconstructive image. Thus, Melville's portrayal of Belex and his men serves as a deconstructive image of the Muslim.

Melville introduces another Muslim character in the eleventh canto, entitled "The Beaker," of the third book Mar Saba, in which he subverts the stereotypes about apathetic and weak Muslims through the depiction of the character of Arnaut. The pilgrims ask Arnaut to escort them during their journey when they encounter him on the road. Arnaut is "a massive Albanian who serves as their escort." (Rollyson et al. 2007: 57) His bravery is that of a lion, and he fights in wars and battles. He accompanies the group because they need protection on the road.

"A lion of war, and drew descent
Through dames heroic, from the tent
Of Pyrrhus and those Epirot clans"
Which routed Rome. (Melville, 1991: 299)

Arnaut is not of humble ancestry but "from ancient nobility," because he inherited his prowess and gallantry from his ancestors who defeated the Romans. (Rollyson *et al.* 2007: 63) Melville mentions Arnaut's heroic deeds as he fought in many battles. Arnaut's bravery manifests through his actions on battlefields, where he fights fiercely to win for his king. This description further refines the notion above about deconstructing stereotypes and the Western view of Orientals and Muslims. Melville's portrayal of Muslim characters is different from stereotypical depictions and characterizations of Muslims, which are sometimes described with exaggeration and reduced to fit a certain structure in other works by Orientalist writers. Said lays forward the claim that every traveler coming from Europe to the Orient or residing in it had to "protect himself from its unsettling influences" (Said 1979: 166). He took Edward Lane as an example who "rescheduled and resituated the Orient" when he attempted to write about it (Said 1979: 166). Many details of the Orient were reduced when they were presented in "a normative European prose style" (Said 1979: 167). His writing had to fit certain standards. Lane extracted from the Orient the details that did not ruffle "the European sensibility" (Said 1979: 167). The Orient or what Said called Lane's "Orient-in-Egypt" had "offended sexual propriety" (Said 1979: 167). It emanated with "dangerous sex" (Said 1979: 167). It seemed like the Oriental was depicted as highly lustful to the extent he/she was dangerous. The aforementioned adds up to the efforts of Orientalist writers writing about the Orient, Egypt in Lane's case, and offering stereotypical erotic portrayals of the Oriental Other.

Melville invests his knowledge of the Orient in his depiction of the characters in the poem. In Jerusalem, canto 15 titled, "Under the Minaret," Clarel and Celio glance at each other at daybreak; they "pass each other under a minaret near Mt. Olivet, yet they still do not meet, although again they exchange meaningful glances;" and they hear the muezzin's call for morning prayer. (Rollyson et al. 2007: 48) Melville describes the muezzin's manner and demeanor when he calls Muslims for the prayer.

Each turban at that summons shrill,
Which should have called ere perfect light,
Bowed--hands on chest, or arms upright;
While over all those fields of loss
Where now the Crescent rides the Cross,
Sole at the marble mast-head stands
The Islam herald, his two hands
Upon the rail, and sightless eyes
Turned upward reverent toward the skies. (Melville 1991: 48)

The muezzin stands on the minaret of the mosque, and he puts his hands either on his chest or upright, looking towards the sky. One may suggest that this description and the significant details are of an observer watching all the actions and activities of his surroundings. He describes the minaret of the mosque upon which is a Crescent above a Cross, which may suggest that Islam is the eminent religion in the place where Muslims perform their ritual prayers. One perceives from Melville's description that mosques hold Islam as the dominant religion, which reflects Islam's position among other religions. Describing the worshippers, the method of the call to prayer, and the timing of prayer are based on knowledge. Melville's acquaintance with

the Muslim prayer and his ability to narrate a scene like this, without doubt, show that he is describing a scene he witnessed in one of the mosques during his journey.
Melville, in the poem, does not hint only at the hypocrisy of the Crusaders who use religion to gain wealth and dominance, but also at some Muslim characters' hypocrisy through portraying their manners during the Holy Month of Ramadan. These characters' behavior may be considered disrespectful. Fasting during the month of Ramadan is obligatory for Muslims every day from dawn to sunset until the end of the month. Melville does not portray the powerful Muslims, Arnaut and Belex, as religiously committed. He depicts the two characters in Mar Saba, canto 14, as seemingly not devout Muslims. The Critical Companion to Herman Melville mentions that Derwent is an Anglican priest and one of the pilgrims. (Rollyson *et al.* 2007: 52) He seems to have knowledge of the prohibitions during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Derwent remarks to the Arnaut and Belex that they have been drinking and smoking even though Islam forbids to do so in times of the Ramadan, to which observation they respond carelessly yet blessing Allah in front of Clarel, who laments the death of faith and the hypocrisy of those who claim themselves devout. (Peña 2013: 435)
As shown above, Clarel reaches a conclusion that leads him to lament the death of faith. In his search for the true faith, he finds that not only the believers of a certain religion can be hypocrites, but people of any belief can use religion to gain certain advantages. One can assume that "[lamenting] the death of faith" serves as an objective opinion that is unbiased towards unreligious or devoted people of a given religion. When the pilgrims spend time singing and drinking, the two Muslims join them and start to drink, which is a violation of one of the Islamic laws. Even though in the Islamic tradition, drinking wine is forbidden because it is an alcoholic drink, Arnaut does it in Ramadan. Additionally, Belex smokes before sunset with the pilgrims in the Holy month.

Derwent here wheeled him: "But for sake
Of conscience, noble Arnaut, tell;
When now I as from dream awake
It just dawns on me: how is this?
Wine-bibbing? No! that kind of bliss
Your Koran bars. And Belex, man,
Thou'st smoked before the sun low fell;
And this month's what? your Ramadan?
May true believers thus rebel?" (Melville 1991: 315-16)

It is evident that Derwent knows a lot about the Islamic faith and its rituals. He displays his knowledge of the Koran and its principles about drinking alcohol and smoking in Ramadan. Some argue that the element of knowledge is quite essential for Westerners. As mentioned previously, knowledge is an important factor in the management of Orientals (Said 1979: 36) For that reason, Westerners' interest is not only in Orientals' religious rituals but also in "their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities." (Said 1979: 38) Moreover, it is easy for a Westerner like Clarel to understand the behavior of some Muslims who do not hold themselves to strict religious rituals and norms. The Christian Crusaders who use religious pretexts to conquer and control possessions or gain money also represent one of the manifestations of this loose grip of religion and its principles.
In conclusion, Melville's depiction of Clarel's pilgrimage to discover the Orient is a journey infused with many details about the norms and religious rituals of the people he meets along the way. In addition, the formation of the characters, which delivers some counter-images to what the reader perceives of Orientalist stereotypes, is present through Melville's portrayals. Melville subverts the fixed perceptions and views about Orientals and Muslims. He does this by portraying many characters like Arnaut, Belex and Djalea and depicting their characteristics of bravery and wisdom. However, he does not leave the negative aspects aside but rather gives a genuine depiction of the characters, which reflects the hypocrisy associated with some of them. Many reflections and perceptions in the poem reverberate in Said's Orientalism. Said investigates in his book through deep scrutiny Westerners' comprehension of Orientals and Muslims. One can consider Melville's work a pioneering attempt to give truthful and honest representations of Orientals and Muslims in literary works. Both Melville and Said provide images of Orientals and the Orient according to their knowledge which deconstructs the stereotypical image of Westerners and Orientals.

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