



postScriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies

Online – Open Access – Peer Reviewed ISSN: 2456-7507

postscriptum.co.in

Volume II Number i (January 2017)

Islam, Md. Monirul. Book Review pp. 96-100

Book Review

***Orientalism in English Literature: Perception of Islam and Muslims* By Abdur Raheem Kidwai. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2016; Rs.1395**

Md. Monirul Islam

Assistant Professor in English, Asannagar Madan Mohan Tarkalankar College,
Nadia

The reviewer is an assistant professor in the Department English, Asannagar Madan Mohan Tarkalankar College, Nadia, India. He also teaches, as Guest Faculty, in the Department of English, University of Kalyani, India. He has published a number of papers in national and international journals. His areas of interest are posthumanist discourses, travel writing and British Romanticism. His most recent publication is the book chapter, "Posthumanism: Through the Postcolonial Lens" in *Critical Posthumanism and Planetary Futures* (Springer 2016. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-81-322-3637-5_7)

Abdur Raheem Kidwai of the Aligarh Muslim University perhaps is the only Indian academic who has been working on the issue of Orientalism in English Literature over a sustained period of time. He has written numerous articles and published a number of books that especially focus on representation of Islam/Muslims in English literature. Kidwai's significant contributions to the study of literary Orientalism include *Orientalism in Lord Byron's Turkish Tales* (Lewiston/Lampeter: Mellen University Press, 1995); *The Crescent and the Cross: Image of the Orient in English Literature* (Aligarh: AMU Press, 1997); *Literary Orientalism: A Companion* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2009). *Orientalism in English Literature: Perceptions of Islam and Muslims* is the latest addition to the list. The book contains some in-depth analysis of literary Orientalism, not only in English literature but also in literatures in English. It includes four sections that centre on non-British writers. Variety is the essence of the book. It is a collection of articles, book reviews and notes that the author published in different journals and books in the last two and a half decade. All the entries in the book, however, as the author himself puts it in the "Preface," are bound together by the theme of (mis)representation of Islam and its followers. The book is divided into two main sections. Section I (chapters 1-19) contains his articles, notes, bibliographical information on Orientalism in English literature. Section II (chapters 20-45) is a collection of his reviews of books concerned with the politics of representation of Islam and Muslims. These were originally published in *Muslim World Book Review*.

The first section starts with a brief historical survey of (mis)representation of Islam/Muslims in English literature up to the Romantic period. The section shows Kidwai's range of reading and research and the chapter is very enlightening for anybody interested in the history of the Western perception of the Orient and Islam/Muslims. It must be pointed out, however, that the author has treated the same issue in a more sustained, though different manner, in his earlier book, *The Crescent and the Cross: Image of the Orient in English Literature*. The second chapter on the image of Islam in William Wordsworth's poetic output briefly comments on the poem "The Armenian Lady's Love," the crusading sonnets and the fifth book of *The Prelude*. Kidwai notes that Wordsworth like Robert Southey and Percy Bysshe Shelley had portrayed Islam and Muslims pejoratively in much of his writings, but the image of the Arab as the preserver of scientific knowledge in *The Prelude* is commendable, since it is the Arabs who upheld the scientific and poetic traditions during the Middle Ages. The image of the Arab stands in stark contrast to the polemical attitude found elsewhere in Wordsworth. Kidwai observes that the "Arab stands out as a culture-hero" in

the dream of the Arab episode in Book V of *The Prelude* (38). Another important aspect of this chapter is the extensive list that Kidwai provides of Wordsworth's reading on the Orient. The two chapters that follow (3 and 4) on Byron's Orientalism are very well researched: one deal with the image of the Orientals in the *Turkish Tales*, and the other is on the representation of Oriental women in these poems. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Kidwai argues, Byron overcomes the burden of Western polemics against Islam and is closer to the truth in representing the Muslim world. Byron's representation of the Muslim women is not stereotypical. Like Lady Wortley Montagu in *Turkish Embassy Letters* Byron is able to portray a 'true-to-life image' of the Muslim women in the *Turkish Tales*. Critics like Saree Makdisi in *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Sharafuddin Ahmed in *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1994) and Humberto Garcia in *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012) uphold similar views on Byron's Orientalism. Chapter 16 of the book can be read in conjunction with these two chapters on Byron as it provides a very comprehensive list of Byron's readings on the Orient. Chapter 5 deals with some of the British Romantic woman poets' representation of Orient, India in particular. Kidwai marks the variety of responses of these poets: Emma Roberts speaks of the plight of women both Indian and British; Anna Maria Jones, the wife of William Jones, is critical of the priest-ridden Indian society, but does not endorse the evangelical incursion; Dorothea Hemans approaches India as an exotic locale; Ann Chandler finds an escape into the Oriental world of magic represented by *The Arabian Nights*; Mary Robinson is very radical in portraying the suffering of an Indian lascar at the hands of Christians; and Caroline Norton's treatment of the Orient is very sentimental. Kidwai contends that though there is a tendency to exoticism in these poets, there is also a contrary pull for authenticity. In the next chapter there is a periodic shift. From early nineteenth century woman poets, the author suddenly moves on to late twentieth century pulp fiction of Jean P. Sasson. Kidwai is very critical of the anti-Islamic polemics of Sasson as it is seen in her two novels, *Princess* and *Princess Sultana's Daughter*. The demonization of Islam in these novels leads Kidwai to conclude that these are specimens of hate literature. Chapter 7 takes up a number of literary studies that deal with the representation of Islam/Muslim. It includes discussion on books on early representations of Islam (*Dante and Islam*) as well as studies on contemporary representations of the religion (*Islam and Its Reflections in Contemporary British Literature: A Course Book*). In this chapter Kidwai appreciates "the blossoming of the new form of the

Muslim presence in English literary studies” (122). In chapter 8 and 9, Kidwai turns inward to study the fictional representation of Muslim society in the novels of Pakistani writer Qaisra Shahraz. The nuanced discourse that is woven around the issue of Muslim society and the forces of modernity and globalization in Shahraz’s *The Holy Woman* and *Revolt* receives much appreciation from Kidwai. The next chapter is on the perception of Muslims in Balwant Gargi’s *Purple Moonlight*. Gargi’s facile engagement, as Kidwai reads it, stands in contrast to the deep understanding of the Muslim society shown by Shahraz. Kidwai points out similar lack of understanding of the complex practices of the Muslim society in many of the Indian writers whose short stories are anthologized in Mushirul Hasan’s and M. Asaduddin’s volume, *Image and Representation: Stories of Muslim lives in India* in chapter 11. A review article on this collection is also included in the second part of the book (chapter 28). It delves into issue of the formation of ‘orients’ within the Orient. Chapter 12 to 19 (excepting chapter 16) are reprints of research notes published in different reputed journals. The notes offer original insights and information and are very useful to any researcher/reader of British Romanticism.

The review articles included in Section II introduce a number of very important monographs on literary Orientalism and some edited volumes of critical and creative works. There are four important reviews of new editions of creative works related to Islam/Muslims and the Orient. Reviews of the edition of letters by Wortley Montagu (chapter 20), the edition of Robert Southey’s poems (chapter 32), the edition of Oriental Tales selected and edited by Ross Ballaster (chapter 35) and the volume, *English Poems on Prophet Mohammad* (chapter 44) familiarise the readers with the some contemporary scholars attempt to bring into light some of the neglected areas of English literature. Three of the books reviewed are exclusively on Romantic Orientalism, namely, Mohammad Sharafuddin’s *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (chapter 21) Nigel Leask’s *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (chapter 22), and Jeffrey Einboden’s *Islam and Romanticism: Muslim Currents form Goethe to Emerson* (chapter 45). Two other reviews are of the books are on the image of Prophet Muhammad (pbwh) in the West. Reviews of Ahmad Gunny’s *Prophet Muhammad in French and English Literature 1650 to the Present* (chapter 38) and Matthew Dimmock’s *Mythologies of Prophet Muhammad* (chapter 40) are good inclusions as it may open up new area of study to the future scholars of literary Orientalism. Chapter 42 is a review of *Historic Engagements with Occidental Cultures, Religions and Powers*, which talks of a reverse form of Orientalism.

This is another wise inclusion because the question of Occidentalism can be as important in some cases as that of Orientalism. The other books reviewed encompass different aspects of Western Orientalism in various historical periods and in spaces of the Orient. These reviews will immensely benefit the scholars who work on representational politics. The collection will also save a lot of labour and time of the future scholars and these well balanced reviews can be used as good scholarly leads.

There are one or two issues which the author must address if there is another edition of the book. The proof reading has not been up to the mark and the number of errors in punctuation or capitalization, (“...House of Industry’, Born into a working-class family...” (92); “ ...and the pony in the local Hindi language, What is more note worthy...”(93)) italicization (*Irene* is not put in italics (13)) etc. needs to be reduced. Such errors may cause problem to the uninitiated readers. I do also wonder whether the book could have a more coherent structure.