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# Manifestations Of The Image Of The Arab Other In European Perspectives And Writings

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## Abstract:

Imagery, or imageology, is a significant area of inquiry within comparative literature that focuses on the examination of diverse literatures and the exploration of their points of influence and impact. Investigating the literature of another nation necessitates a thorough reading that enables the reader to discern various aspects of life, including the factors that shape it and the surrounding circumstances. This process leads to an understanding of the elements and components of literature itself, as represented and articulated by its writer or author. Ultimately, this culminates in the formation of an image of a foreign society, distinct in language, affiliation, history, and customs, as depicted in a book, collection, or journey. This endeavor aims to elucidate the relationship between the duality of the self and the other, particularly in the context of its two facets: the East and the West. In this research paper, the evaluation of the image is directed from the Western self towards the Eastern other, irrespective of its origins.

**Keywords:** Representation of the Other, Arab, Writings (Literature), Europeans.

## I. Introduction:

Research in the field of imagery necessitates a meticulous and objective investigator who is adept at navigating the data encountered throughout the research process. Rather than accepting these data as immutable facts, the researcher should regard them as positions and representations that are subject to discussion and modification, shaped by a confluence of various factors, including psychological, social, and historical influences. The key concern here is to avoid forming preconceived judgments or conclusions based on subjectivity or any form of bias, as the researcher may occasionally exhibit partiality or reveal deep-seated animosity that could compromise the integrity of the imagery and the outcomes of the study.

## II. The principles of image formation in Europeans:

The European, as a participant in the duality of self and other, was characterized by a fascination with all things Eastern or Arab, driven by comparison, admiration, or an endeavor to challenge the culture of Arab Muslims to fulfill political, religious, and historical objectives. This occurred within the context of a cultural and civilizational dialogue deemed positive,

irrespective of its outcomes, particularly as manifested in the Western Orientalist movement. "Literary images formed in this manner are, in any case, seldom honest and faithful in their representation of the country and the psyche of its inhabitants. Instead, facts are frequently intertwined with unfounded claims or exaggerated interpretations, thus transcending the boundaries of reality" (Abdul Majeed Hanoun, p. 422). This leads to a deceptive illusion shaped by the writer's subjectivity and the various judgments stemming from that mythical perspective of the depicted peoples, based on transmitted narratives, regardless of their veracity or falsehood (**Daraq, Dt., p. 43**).

In his examination of this domain, the European's research was not devoid of subjectivity and the imposition of preconceived notions regarding the Arab other, for whom numerous representations were constructed based on a prevailing perspective "entrenched in the collective Western memory of narratives, and on what the popular imagination fabricated in terms of perceptions that shaped the foundation for all Western ideas and served as a tool of pressure from which these thinkers found it difficult to liberate themselves. Consequently, they perceived more of what their subconscious projected than what they discerned through their insight." (**Al-Hallaq, 1967, p. 1**)

This observation pertains to the French writer Montesquieu, who, despite never having visited the East or knowing its inhabitants, crafted numerous depictions of Arabs based on the accounts of travelers and their observations during their journeys. This is particularly evident in his 1721 work, "Persian Letters" (Des Lettres Persanes), where the Islamic world is portrayed in Montesquieu's imagination as a perilous realm, governed by a fatalistic religion and ruled by tyrannical despots whose excessive indulgence in polygamy rendered them foolish, ignorant, and indolent, ultimately leading to an irreparable decline. This perspective was noted by researcher Dr. Badr al-Din Qasim al-Rifai in a lecture discussing the representation of Arabs in Montesquieu's writings, which we have summarized in the preceding paragraph.

« Des Lettres Persanes (1721) le monde musulman a déjà pris dans l'imagination de Montesquieu. Son visage définitif. C'est un monde redoutable. Dominé, PAR UNE RELIGION fataliste, Gouverné par des despotes que la débauche des femmes rend imbéciles, ignorant et paresseux traversé d'incessantes secousses spasmodiques et voué à une irrémédiable décadence.») (**Kassem El-Rifai, 1983, pp. 57-58**).

Based on the above, the followers of the Messenger Muhammad - In the author's view - prioritize the acquisition of numerous wives over their engagement with state affairs, which are frequently governed by a grand Sultan characterized by rudeness, sensuality, and a lack of culture."

Le grand Sultan est butal.Sensuel et inculte », (**Kassem El-Rifai, 1983, P 60**).

Thus, the author Montesquieu may be at liberty to render these judgments and portrayals; however, his failure to visit the East and his limited experience with its inhabitants may inherently compromise objectivity.

These images were not confined to a singular aspect; rather, they were disseminated and varied according to the perspectives of scholars (photographers) and the diverse contexts of interaction, particularly during the Crusades, continuing to the present day. Despite the extensive discourse surrounding this topic, we will endeavor-albeit to a limited extent-to highlight the most significant and noteworthy elements. The portrayal of the Arab is frequently depicted in European narratives as an individual whose existence is intertwined with the tent, whose social life is rooted in tribal and familial connections, and who employs the camel as a mode of transportation across arid and desolate landscapes. **(Labib, 1999, p. 546).**

This is the image that the poet Lamartine described, shaped by his readings and interests in the pre-Islamic era and its poets, particularly Antarah ibn Shaddad. He perceived in the Arab individual a strong affinity for Bedouin life and a passion for travel. In his work, featured in a series titled "Great Men of Humanity," he addressed Bedouinism and civilization in the section dedicated to Antarah, stating: "Bedouins love freedom and movement; thus, they do not settle in one place, despising constructed homes, and they reside under tents or the open sky... for them, every house is a prison, and residing in cities signifies a relinquishment of freedom and sovereignty" **(Al-Juwayni, Dt., p. 180).**

These must be vivid images that were indelibly etched in the mind of the writer Lamartine during his journey to the East, which he chronicled in a book capturing his impressions of the Arabs, their characteristics, customs, and traditions, entitled "Voyage en Orient" (Journey to the East).

The German traveler Max Freiherr von Oppenheim authored a book titled "The Bedouins," which serves as an encyclopedia addressing the historical, social, and literary dimensions of Arab culture.

Bedouinism is a defining characteristic of Arabs that has captivated Western interest, prompting many writers to explore the East and document their experiences. One such writer, Flaubert, conveyed his impressions of the Bedouin Arab in a letter to Louise Colet, stating: "The Arab, while napping in the shade of his camel in the desert, mocks our civilization that trembles with anger." **(Al-Arabi, 1986, p. 119).**

The isolated Arab desert environment influenced his personality, leading the European perspective to perceive him as a tribalist closely connected to his animals. Conversely, this environment fostered attitudes that diverged from previous admiration, as it was deemed that the harshness of the surroundings contributed to his portrayal as a savage, barbaric being. This perception began with Count de Boulainvilliers' depiction of the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, in his work "The Life of Muhammad" (*La vie de Mahomet*), translated into English as (*The Life of Mahomet*), which characterized him with cruelty and corruption, ultimately generalizing this view to encompass all Arabs, given that Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, is one of them and symbolizes their essence. **(Naji, 1981, pp. 92, 93).**

In response to the requirements of conscientious research and the necessity of reviewing presented material, we must-regardless of our Arab identity-critique the prevailing image that has been shaped by feelings of animosity and buried grievances, leading to exaggerated preconceived judgments and extremism in presenting unreliable ideas and opinions. These notions stem from the efforts of a group of spiteful, non-specialized individuals who have intruded into the research domain despite their lack of proficiency in the Arabic language and their ignorance of numerous relevant suspicions and facts. Their reliance on foreign texts without consulting original sources has contributed to the proliferation of interpretations hostile to Arabs and Muslims, attributing many Western myths and narratives to a misunderstanding that has been distorted to serve specific agendas.

The Arabs also ascribed to them numerous depictions primarily inspired by the tales of the Nights (One Thousand and One Nights), which portrayed an alternative perspective on Arab society, characterized by a realm of harems and brothels, eunuchs and dancing concubines, as well as slave markets and the slave trade.

This perception characterized the Arab, in the eyes of Europeans, as indulgent in his relationships with women, transcending societal taboos, celebrating physical pleasure, and attaining enjoyment devoid of remorse **(Sharifi, 2010, p. 2)**.

This image was reflected in the works of numerous European authors who emulated the Scheherazade style, as demonstrated in Miss De La Roche's novel, "The Sicilian and Salima." In this work, she utilized Arab characters to advance the narrative, set against an Arab backdrop (Tunisia), which she deemed the most suitable locale for orchestrating such dubious encounters and scandalous situations among the protagonists, suggesting that only an Eastern individual in an Eastern setting could fulfill these roles.

In addition to the novelist LaMolieré's adeptness at portraying love in its sensual and physical manifestations in his renowned novel "Angola," he draws inspiration from the tales of "Badr and Jawhara" and "Saif and Zain" found in One Thousand and One Nights **(Sharifi, 2010, p. 2)**.

It can be asserted that Europeans envisioned Arab life, as depicted in the tales of "The Nights," as a tangible reality, which solidified a negative perception of the Arab individual in their minds. Nevertheless, this did not preclude the existence of an alternative image, as Arabs were also associated with pure, platonic love that transcended the desires of the sensual soul. This notion is supported by the writer Brivot, who stated: "The Arabs, contrary to popular belief, were not ignorant of pure love infused with the spirit of chivalry, and their poetry reflected the introspection of Sufism, achieving a level of emotional sublimity that Provençal poetry did not attain." **(Al-Shobashi, Dt., p. 171)**.

This stance does not negate or invalidate the preceding image; rather, it affirms that the perception of one group by another varies based on the sources from which it is derived.

The European has perceived the Arab as an individual who subscribes to magic, superstitions, and the supernatural, expressing a fascination with this enigmatic realm, particularly evident in the tales of “The Nights” (Les contes des nuits). This intrigue prompted the novelist La Molière to reassess the information he had gathered regarding Eastern magic, encompassing talismans, metamorphoses, problem-solving, and dream interpretation in his aforementioned novel, *Angola*. Similarly, the writer Vaniane drew upon the constructs of the East and supernatural elements in her work, “The Lives of Oriental Princesses.” (Sharifi 2010, p 3).

This reflects the East's remarkable ability to stimulate the imagination and incorporate magical elements, rendering it, in the perspective of Europeans, a realm of myth and dreams. The English writer T. Dolly portrayed its inhabitants as “devils and madmen with copper-colored faces and iron features, devoid of any pity or mercy for their Christian slaves” (Al-Arabi, 1986, p. 76) in his play “The Fall of Algiers,” published in 1825 AD.

However, the preceding images are not the sole representations derived from the Arab East, as they possessed characteristics and attributes that garnered the admiration of European travelers. These travelers drew inspiration from them for themes and materials in their literary works, in which they depicted the values and virtues that characterized the Arab individual, such as pride, honor, dignity, courage, hospitality, modesty, and kindness.

This sentiment is echoed by the poet Lamartine in his work “Journey to the East,” where he observes: “We spent three days traversing a rugged path, fording streams that flowed down from the mountain peaks, and passing the tents of Arabs dispersed throughout the landscape, resembling white stones glimmering through the foliage. As night descends, we are welcomed as esteemed guests by the farming tribes, for the East bestows honor upon its visitors, regardless of their identity.” (Fattouh, 1980 AD, p. 174).

The reception and hospitality afforded to the poet Lamartine were likely unmatched in any other nation, as noted by the Englishwoman Sophia Bernard, who visited Algeria in 1811 AD. She was struck by the Algerians' attire, their graciousness towards foreigners, and their exceptional courtesy and hospitality, which she lauded by stating: “I believe that it is impossible for a person to find anywhere else in the world greater politeness, politeness and care than he finds in Algeria.” (Al-Arabi, 1986, p. 78).

These morals, which the Arab regarded as inherent glories, were celebrated extensively since the pre-Islamic era as a testament to his pride. This pride is evident in his poetry, which served as a wellspring of inspiration for Europeans seeking to understand Arab wisdom and philosophy. For him, the East represented a sanctuary of sages, philosophers, poets, and lovers, whom he revered. He began to compose verses that extolled their nobility and chivalry, as well as the pure and chaste love that stirred within them. This sentiment is particularly reflected in the work of the Spanish poet Fernando Quiñones, notably in his renowned poem “Pure Love,” found in his collection titled “Andalusian News” (Sobh, 1983, p. 359).

In another context, we encounter the Arab, historically recognized as a tyrant, cruel and barbaric, yet acknowledged for his civilizational contributions to Spain and its populace. This recognition has led some Spaniards to reject the notion of Arab occupation, instead embracing the term "Arab presence," which they regard with pride, considering themselves descendants of the architects of Andalusian civilization. This sentiment is echoed by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. **(Sobh, 1983, p. 344).**

The German traveler Chimber's book, titled "Wilhelm Chimber's Journey to Algeria in 1831-1832," features numerous prominent images and characteristics of the Arab individual as represented by the Algerian person. It highlights the fraternal bonds that connect him with others in his community, the spirit of initiative for mutual cooperation, and the diligence and vigor evident in their daily endeavors. This traveler also conveyed his profound admiration for the Algerians, their character, and their morals, favoring them over the inhabitants of the European coast due to their greater religiosity and cultural depth, literacy, commitment to order, appreciation for cleanliness, and distance from fanaticism **(Dodo, 1975, p. 87).**

The Europeans exhibited a keen interest in the Arab woman, making her a prominent subject in their writings and compositions. They portrayed her and illustrated various facets of her life, drawing from both their readings of Arab antiquities and their firsthand observations during visits to Eastern countries, resulting in numerous depictions of her.

### **III. The Arab woman as perceived by the European:**

The tales of Arabian Nights present an exaggerated portrayal of women, establishing them as central to the narrative framework, beginning with the female narrator, Scheherazade, and culminating in the feminine elements within her stories. This prominent representation of women captured the attention of Europeans, inspiring them to construct an image reflective of the roles ascribed to them in the narratives of "One Thousand and One Nights." She is depicted as possessing a unique beauty; a captivating figure residing in opulent abodes of gold and silver. Her primary role is to manage men's affairs, entertain them, and fulfill their desires while catering to their whims. This theme is evident in the novel by de La Roche titled "The Sicilian and Salima," which explores the challenges faced by Eastern women and their psychological struggles **(Sharifi, 2010, p. 5).** The narrative emphasizes her body adorned with an array of jewels, ornaments, and precious stones, subjected to the oppression of the violent Eastern man who both enjoys and despises her. Their relationship is rooted in sexual objectives that he pursues with her and others, owing to his possession of multiple women, whether as wives or concubines, who are treated as commodities bought and sold in the market, with their value fluctuating based on selection criteria. This dynamic exemplifies the subjugation of women, a concept referenced by Montesquieu in his observations:

« Dans ce pays, Aucune famille qu'on veuille conserver et l'exclavage de tout le monde consacre l'exclavage de la femme Celle-ci n'a aucune propriété propre » **(Kassem El-Rifai, 1983, p. 61).**

Thus, the woman was depicted to him as a slave devoid of any property rights. However, the German traveler Schember portrayed the Arab (Algerian) woman as living in a state akin to imprisonment, not out of jealousy, but as a result of prevailing customs. This situation does not trouble the woman who is dedicated to serving her husband, honoring him, and loving him, as she understands the importance of fulfilling her responsibilities to ensure her family's happiness. In his book "Wilhelm Schember's Journey to Algeria," he states: "I had the opportunity to observe a family that lived next to me. When the man returned home, the wife would greet him with an embrace and a kiss, seating him beside her on the couch to engage in conversation... until he remarked: The woman lives almost like a prisoner, and this is not due to her husband's jealousy, but rather due to common custom." Thus, this traveler uncovered the values and customs through which women sustain familial bonds rooted in affection and respect.

Conversely, the traveler Gustave Flaubert was captivated by the oriental dance performed by Arab women adorned in distinctive attire. He documented these observations in his work "Journey to the East," where he states: "The oriental woman standing in this background was wearing pink trousers, and on her back and shoulders was nothing but a transparent scarlet silk shawl... Then a series of wonderful dances began to follow one another, each one more beautiful than the other, and the dancing continued until midnight" **(Al-Arabi, 1986, p. 123).**

The traveler Flaubert openly expressed his profound admiration for the beauty of the Arab woman, epitomized by the dancer "Sophia," with whom he fell in love and was captivated by her allure. Similarly, the poet Lamartine was entranced by the beauty of Arab women, articulating his sentiments in his work "Journey to the East." He remarked, "Whatever idea I had formed about the beauty of Syrian women and whatever notion was imprinted in my mind regarding the beauty of the women of Rome and Athens, the sight of Armenian women and girls in Damascus surpassed everything. Almost everywhere, we encountered faces that no European brush had ever depicted." **(Fattouh, 1980, p. 184).**

In their portrayal of the Arab East, these travelers began with the understanding that it is characterized by distinctiveness in all aspects, including its women, who possess a unique form of beauty that markedly differs from that of European women.

The portrayal of the Arab woman extended beyond European writings and compositions; it was also manifested in the artworks of various artists who depicted women in diverse forms inspired by these texts, particularly poetry. This is exemplified in Eugène Delacroix's 1827 painting "The Death of Sardanapale," which draws inspiration from Lord Byron's poem of the same name, illustrating naked women enduring violence and oppression at the hands of men. Additionally, other artworks depict a scene featuring a slave girl in a state of exchange, portrayed as semi-naked, evoking sympathy for her ignorance of her fate, as seen in John Fead's painting titled "A Bedouin Bartering a Slave Girl for a Weapon" **(Al-Mahdi, 1997, p. 104).**

Ultimately, we must acknowledge that we cannot confidently claim that all these inferred images are absolute, fixed, or comprehensive enough to provide an integrated perspective on the various facets of the studied Arab society. Such topics are inherently complex and cannot be fully encapsulated, and researchers may fall prey to the illusion of objectivity, which raises questions about the validity of the judgments and conclusions drawn. Nevertheless, this does not diminish their significance and value for communities striving to understand the mutual perceptions among them, as illustrated by some of the previously mentioned images supported by evidence from the artifacts, writings, or illustrations of their creators.

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

Upon concluding the examination of the depictions of Arabs in European literature, we find that both the East and the West signify a culmination of the duality between the self and the other. The existence of one necessitates the presence of the other, with each side striving to surpass the other and emphasize its own identity while marginalizing the opposite. Consequently, their relationship has consistently been marked by conflict, contradiction, and confrontation, albeit with some objective perspectives.

- The acculturation process is regarded as a beneficial facet of the relationship between the self and the other, occurring naturally and necessarily due to its pressing demand.
- Acculturation is a crucial factor that contributes to the development of a perception of a culture within the literature of another society.
- Translation, the Crusades, Orientalism, and travel are the primary avenues through which Arab culture permeated Europe, as evidenced in Arabic and Andalusian poetry, translations, and biographies.
- The narratives of “One Thousand and One Nights” serve as a conduit for literary exchange between the East and the West, significantly altering the trajectory of European literature while conveying various depictions of Arab society to Europe.
- The depictions of Arabs are diverse and varied, encompassing both positive and negative portrayals, reflecting the multitude of opinions and perspectives held by European authors in their works.
- The influence of Islam in capturing the interest of Europeans has shaped their perception of Arabs, largely through the character of the message bearer, Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace.
- Christian fanaticism and its influence play a significant role in shaping a distorted perception of the Arab individual, a perception primarily constructed on preconceived notions and entrenched animosities.
- European authors and Orientalists devoted considerable attention to Arab women, whether from a standpoint of admiration or disdain.
- French literature has shown a keen interest in portraying the Eastern world, influenced by elements derived from Arabic or Andalusian literature, owing to its historical proximity to Spain and Andalusia.

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