

Views and Comments

“Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive and the Barbary Orient*”

The first problem is constant quotations of distorted Islamic image portrayals, and a one and a half page dialogue without evaluation. If the dialogue does anything, it increases hostility between Muslim and non-Muslim without providing a critical Islamic evaluation. Options are: examination of sources, Orientalist roots, Tyler’s erroneous characterization, all with enhancement of Islamic values, correcting the thought process. One option the paper misses is captivity due to piracy—a Western coinage invented to cover up the West’s illegitimate attack of Muslim shores. Historically, the Muslims were on the defensive from the previous century, when Spain and Portugal raided their shores and persecuted Moriscos, Moroccans, and Islamic North Africa. America joined later, assuming the Muslims’ guilt. That captivity brings out an awareness of the despotic American slavery system is not the sole value of Underhill’s experience. That he continues forming erroneous judgements based on racial biases is more important. The entire experience provides a stroke of Islamic irony. While a Christian fails to judge Islam, Islam’s system of equality in the eyes of God renders Underhill’s awareness stale, captivity a legend, and blindness of war purpose ignorance. Of course the issue could be discussed in more profundity and length. If the Islamic perspective is not brought out, then, the casual non-Muslim reader may read the paper as an adventure of a romantic nationalist when war was a romantic enterprise. In this way, the Islamic thesis is lost. There has to be a definite awareness of the historical context of such Orientalist writings. This issue is extremely crucial for Muslim scholars and sheds light on the purpose of Orientalist works with a political goal. We will not go so far as researching who has created racism, or who has created slavery in the American system, which are equally valid points for this paper, but we should see the historical milieu of this work. Placement in context helps Muslims understand academic endeavors at misrepresenting Islam at this point in history.

The author’s paper entitled “In Search of the Orient: The Muslim East on the Contemporary American Literary Scene,” published by the International Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies is of much higher quality because of covering new ground, although it does not mention an important work by a Muslim scholar, Dr. Layla al-Farsy; “Washington Irving’s Mahomet: A Study of the Sources.”

Reference to al-Farsy's work indicates an urgent need for awareness of what Muslim scholars and researchers have achieved so far. Calling attention to such works creates a standard for scholars, elevates the level of research, acquaints readers with Muslim scholarly achievement and unifies Muslim academicians against the academic dishonesty of Orientalist or propaganda novelists. These writers have an unmistakable unified goal and it is our job to bring out Muslim achievement in the face of it, at least for the benefit of Muslims if not for calling the non-Muslims' attention to them.

Secondly, there is a problem with the Notes: they do not mention the 1977 edition of Byron Porter Smith's work, edited by two Muslim scholars, but rather the 1939, older edition. It recommends, without reservation, Metlizki's work, which includes extremely offensive pictures of the Prophet (SAAS) and misinformation on Muslims in general. No evaluation of Tibawi's and Finnie's works is mentioned with relevance to Tyler.

Notes are a guide to the reader. Mentioning an old edition of Smith, while a new one edited by Muslim scholars is neglected does not invite readers to Muslim achievement nor clarify the Muslim perspective. It is regrettable that the author does not understand that he himself mentions Metlizki in his notes. Paradoxically, the reference contains abusive pictures of the Prophet (SAAS) and the Muslims. Is he guiding the reader to such a reference? Why is he calling attention to it? Smith's older edition should be replaced and Metlizki's reference dropped or commented upon adequately. The same applies to Tabawi and Finnie. There is a difference between both perspectives. If there is a need to clarify that, explanation should be given in a footnote. Or else, why is he using that reference?

Some other points should be noted: If the article is indebted to any source, be it another of the author's works, another Dissertation or the available scholarship pertinent to the topic, this source should be indicated in a footnote. As Muslim researchers, we hate that any of us be charged with the slightest doubt of plagiarism or academic inaccuracy.

In another article by Dr. Obeidat, namely "In Search of the Orient: The Muslim East on the Contemporary American Literary Scene," we can see his innovation, insight and originality very well demonstrated because the article is indebted only to Dr. Obeidat. Such qualities are missed in the "Royall Tyler" article. In view of the fact that articles should provide a further incentive for research, and that they should promote scholarship, scholars can clearly see that "In Search of the Orient" fulfills these expectations while "Royall Tyler" does not.

Dr. Obeidat should not discard these comments. They are provided for the benefit of the Muslim academician specialized in the field. Propaganda literature will not cease to exist and unified principles on confronting it should be agreed upon. The points made are not meant to divide, but unite views.

