Orientalist, as interpreter, exhibitor, personality, mediator, representative (and representing) expert. In a remarkable way, Gibb and Masson produced pages that recapitulate the history of Orientalist writing in the West as that history has been embodied in a varied generic and topographical style, reduced finally to a scholarly, monographic uniformity. The Oriental specimen; the Oriental excess; the Oriental lexicographic unit; the Oriental series; the Oriental exemplum: all these have been subordinated in Gibb and Masson to the linear prose authority of discursive analysis, presented in essay, short article, scholarly book. In their time, from the end of World War I till the early sixties, three principal forms of Orientalist writing were radically transformed: the encyclopedia, the anthology, the personal record. Their authority was redistributed or dispersed or dissipated: to a committee of experts (The Encyclopedia of Islam, The Cambridge History of Islam), to a lower order of service (elementary instruction in language, which would prepare one not for diplomacy, as was the case with Sac's Chrestomathie, but for the study of sociology, economics, or history), to the realm of sensational revelation (having more to do with personalities or governments—Lawrence is the obvious example—than with knowledge). Gibb, with his quietly heedless but profoundly sequential prose; Masson, with the flair of an artist for whom no reference is too extravagant so long as it is governed by an eccentric interpretative gift: the two scholars took the essentially ecumenical authority of European Orientalism as far as it could go. After them, the new reality—the new specialized style—was, broadly speaking, Anglo-American, and more narrowly speaking, it was American Social Scientese. In it, the old Orientalism was broken into many parts; yet all of them still served the traditional Orientalist dogmas.

IV
The Latest Phase

Since World War II, and more noticeably after each of the Arab-Israeli wars, the Arab Muslim has become a figure in American popular culture, even as in the academic world, in the policy planner's world, and in the world of business very serious attention is being paid the Arab. This symbolizes a major change in the international configuration of forces. France and Britain no longer occupy center stage in world politics; the American imperium has displaced them. A vast web of interests now links all parts of the former colonial world to the United States, just as a proliferation of academic subspecialties divides (and yet connects) all the former philological and European-based disciplines like Orientalism. The area specialist, as he is now called, lays claims to regional expertise, which is put at the service of government or business or both. The massive, quasi-material knowledge stored in the annals of modern European Orientalism—as recorded, for example, in Jules Mohl's nineteenth-century logbook of the field—has been dissolved and released into new forms. A wide variety of hybrid representations of the Orient now roam the culture. Japan, Indochina, China, India, Pakistan: their representations have had, and continue to have, wide repercussions, and they have been discussed in many places for obvious reasons. Islam and the Arabs have their own representations, too, and we shall treat them here as they occur in that fragmentary—yet powerfully and ideologically coherent—persistence, a far less frequently discussed one, into which, in the United States, traditional European Orientalism disbursed itself.

1. Popular images and social science representations. Here are a few examples of how the Arab is often represented today. Note how readily "the Arab" seems to accommodate the transformations and reductions—all of a simply tendentious kind—into which he is continually being forced. The costume for Princeton's tenth-reunion class in 1967 had been planned before the June War. The motif—for it would be wrong to describe the costume as more than crudely suggestive—was to have been Arab: robes, headgear, sandals. Immediately after the war, when it had become clear that the Arab motif was an embarrassment, a change in the reunion plans was decreed. Wearing the costume as had been originally planned, the class was now to walk in procession, hands above heads in a gesture of abject defeat. This was what the Arab had become. From a faintly outlined stereotype as a camel-riding nomad to an accepted caricature as the embodiment of incompetence and easy defeat: that was all the scope given the Arab.

Yet after the 1973 war the Arab appeared everywhere as something more menacing. Cartoons depicting an Arab sheik standing behind a gasoline pump turned up consistently. These Arabs, how-
ever, were clearly "Semitic": their sharply hooked noses, the evil mustachioed leer on their faces, were obvious reminders (to a largely non-Semitic population) that "Semites" were at the bottom of all "our" troubles, which in this case was principally a gasoline shortage. The transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same.

Thus if the Arab occupies space enough for attention, it is as a negative value. He is seen as the disrupter of Israel's and the West's existence, or in another view of the same thing, as a surmountable obstacle to Israel's creation in 1948. Insofar as this Arab has any history, it is part of the history given him (or taken from him: the difference is slight) by the Orientalist tradition, and later, the Zionist tradition. Palestine was seen—by Lamartine and the early Zionists—as an empty desert waiting to burst into bloom; such inhabitants as it had were supposed to be inconsequential nomads possessing no real claim on the land and therefore no cultural or national reality. Thus the Arab is conceived of now as a shadow that dogs the Jew. In that shadow—because Arabs and Jews are Oriental Semites—can be placed whatever traditional, latent mistrust a Westerner feels towards the Oriental. For the Jew of pre-Nazi Europe has bifurcated: what we have now is a Jewish hero, constructed out of a reconstructed cult of the adventurer-pioneer-Orientalist (Burton, Lane, Renan), and his creeping, mysteriously fearsome shadow, the Arab Oriental. Isolated from everything except the past created for him by Orientalist polemic, the Arab is chained to a destiny that fixes him and dooms him to a series of reactions periodically chastised by what Barbara Tuchman gives the theological name "Israel's terrible swift sword."

Aside from his anti-Zionism, the Arab is an oil supplier. This is another negative characteristic, since most accounts of Arab oil equate the oil boycott of 1973–1974 (which principally benefitted Western oil companies and a small ruling Arab elite) with the absence of any Arab moral qualifications for owning such vast oil reserves. Without the usual euphemisms, the question most often being asked is why such people as the Arabs are entitled to keep the developed (free, democratic, moral) world threatened. From such questions comes the frequent suggestion that the Arab oil fields be invaded by the marines.

In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed de-
were recorded in a book called the Koran. It became the holy book of Islam.\textsuperscript{103}

These crude ideas are supported, not contradicted, by the academic whose business is the study of the Arab Near East. (It is worth noting incidentally that the Princeton event I referred to above took place in a university that prides itself on its department of Near Eastern Studies founded in 1927, the oldest such department in the country.) Take as an instance the report produced in 1967 by Morroe Berger, a professor of sociology and Near Eastern studies at Princeton, at the behest of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; he was then president of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), the professional association of scholars concerned with all aspects of the Near East, "primarily since the rise of Islam and from the viewpoint of the social science and humanistic disciplines,"\textsuperscript{104} and founded in 1967. He called his paper "Middle Eastern and North African Studies: Developments and Needs," and had it published in the second issue of the \textit{MESA Bulletin}. After surveying the strategic, economic, and political importance of the region to the United States, and after endorsing the various United States government and private foundation projects to support programs in universities—the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (a directly Sputnik-inspired initiative), the establishing of links between the Social Science Research Council and Middle Eastern studies, and so on—Berger came to the following conclusions:

The modern Middle East and North Africa is not a center of great cultural achievement, nor is it likely to become one in the near future. The study of the region or its languages, therefore, does not constitute its own reward so far as modern culture is concerned.

\ldots Our region is not a center of great political power nor does it have the potential to become one. \ldots The Middle East (less so North Africa) has been receding in immediate political importance to the U.S. (and even in "headline" or "nuisance" value) relative to Africa, Latin America and the Far East.

\ldots The contemporary Middle East, thus, has only in small degree the kinds of traits that seem to be important in attracting scholarly attention. This does not diminish the validity and intellectual value of studying the area or affect the quality of work scholars do on it. It does, however, put limits, of which we should be aware, on the field's capacity for growth in the numbers who study and teach.\textsuperscript{105}

As a prophecy, of course, this is fairly lamentable; what makes it even more unfortunate is that Berger was commissioned not only because he was an expert on the modern Near East but also—as is clear from the report's conclusion—because he was expected to be in a good position to predict its future, and the future of policy. His failure to see that the Middle East was of great political significance, and potentially of great political power, was no chance aberration of judgment, I think. Both of Berger's main mistakes derive from the first and last paragraphs, whose genealogy is the history of Orientalism as we have been studying it. In what Berger has to say about the absence of great cultural achievement, and in what he concludes about future study—that the Middle East does not attract scholarly attention because of its intrinsic weaknesses—we have an almost exact duplication of the canonical Orientalist opinion that the Semites never produced a great culture and that, as Renan frequently said, the Semitic world was too impoverished ever to attract universal attention. Moreover, in making such time-honored judgments and in being totally blind to what is before his eyes—after all, Berger was not writing fifty years ago, but during a period when the United States was already importing about 10 percent of its oil from the Middle East and when its strategic and economic investments in the area were unimaginable huge—Berger was ensuring the centrality of his own position as Orientalist. For what he says, in effect, is that without people such as he the Middle East would be neglected; and that without his mediating, interpretative role the place would not be understood, partly because what little there is to understand is fairly peculiar, and partly because only the Orientalist can interpret the Orient, the Orient being radically incapable of interpreting itself.

The fact that Berger was not so much a classical Orientalist when he wrote (he wasn't and isn't) as he was a professional sociologist does not minimize the extent of his indebtedness to Orientalism and its ideas. Among those ideas is the specially legitimated antipathy towards and downgrading of the material forming the main basis of his study. So strong is this in Berger that it obscures the actualities before his eyes. And more impressively still, it makes it unnecessary for him to ask himself why, if the Middle East "is not a center of great cultural achievement," he should recommend that anyone devote his life, as he has, to the study of its culture. Scholars—more than, say, doctors—study what they like and what interests them; only an exaggerated sense of cultural duty drives a scholar
to the study of what he does not think well of. Yet it is just such a sense of duty Orientalism has fostered, because for generations the culture at large put the Orientalist at the barricades, where in his professional work he confronted the East—its barbarities, its eccentricities, its unruliness—and held it at bay on behalf of the West.

I mention Berger as an instance of the academic attitude towards the Islamic Orient, as an instance of how a learned perspective can support the caricatures propagated in the popular culture. Yet Berger stands also for the most current transformation overtaking Orientalism: its conversion from a fundamentally philological discipline and a vaguely general apprehension of the Orient into a social science specialty. No longer does an Orientalist try first to master the esoteric languages of the Orient; he begins instead as a trained social scientist and "applies" his science to the Orient, or anywhere else. This is the specifically American contribution to the history of Orientalism, and it can be dated roughly from the period immediately following World War II, when the United States found itself in the position recently vacated by Britain and France. The American experience of the Orient prior to that exceptional moment was limited. Cultural isolatos like Melville were interested in it; cynics like Mark Twain visited and wrote about it; the American Transcendentalists saw affinities between Indian thought and their own; a few theologians and Biblical students studied the Biblical Oriental languages; there were occasional diplomatic and military encounters with Barbary pirates and the like, the odd naval expedition to the Far Orient, and of course the ubiquitous missionary to the Orient. But there was no deeply invested tradition of Orientalism, and consequently in the United States knowledge of the Orient never passed through the refining and reticulating and reconstructing processes, whose beginning was in philological study, that it went through in Europe. Furthermore, the imaginative investment was never made either, perhaps because the American frontier, the one that counted, was the westward one. Immediately after World War II, then, the Orient became, not a broad catholic issue as it had been for centuries in Europe, but an administrative one, a matter for policy. Enter the social scientist and the new expert, on whose somewhat narrower shoulders was to fall the mantle of Orientalism. In their turn, as we shall see, they made such changes in it that it became scarcely recognizable. In any event, the new Orientalist took over the attitudes of cultural hostility and kept them.

One of the striking aspects of the new American social-science attention to the Orient is its singular avoidance of literature. You can read through reams of expert writing on the modern Near East and never encounter a single reference to literature. What seem to matter far more to the regional expert are "facts," of which a literary text is perhaps a disturber. The net effect of this remarkable omission in modern American awareness of the Arab or Islamic Orient is to keep the region and its people conceptually emasculated, reduced to "attitudes," "trends," statistics: in short, dehumanized. Since an Arab poet or novelist—and there are many—writes of his experiences, of his values, of his humanity (however strange that may be), he effectively disrupts the various patterns (images, clichés, abstractions) by which the Orient is represented. A literary text speaks more or less directly of a living reality. Its force is not that it is Arab, or French, or English; its force is in the power and vitality of words that, to mix in Flaubert's metaphor from La Tentation de Saint Antoine, tip the idols out of the Orientalists' arms and make them drop those great paralytic children—which are their ideas of the Orient—that attempt to pass for the Orient.

The absence of literature and the relatively weak position of philology in contemporary American studies of the Near East are illustrations of a new eccentricity in Orientalism, where indeed my use of the word itself is anomalous. For there is very little in what academic experts on the Near East do now that resembles traditional Orientalism of the sort that ended with Gibb and Masson; the main things that are reproduced are, as I said, a certain cultural hostility and a sense based not so much on philology as on "expertise." Genealogically speaking, modern American Orientalism derives from such things as the army language schools established during and after the war, sudden government and corporate interest in the non-Western world during the postwar period, Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, and a residual missionary attitude towards Orientals who are considered ripe for reform and re-education. The nonphilological study of esoteric Oriental languages is useful for obvious rudimentary strategic reasons; but it is also useful for giving a cachet of authority, almost a mystique, to the "expert" who appears able to deal with hopelessly obscure material with firsthand skill.

In the social-science order of things, language study is a mere tool for higher aims, certainly not for reading literary texts. In 1958, for example, the Middle East Institute—a quasi-govern-
mental body founded to oversee and sponsor research interest in the Middle East—produced a Report on Current Research. The contribution “Present State of Arabic Studies in the United States” (done, interestingly enough, by a professor of Hebrew) is prefaced by an epigraph announcing that “no longer is knowledge of foreign languages, for instance, the sole province of the scholars in the humanities. It is a working tool of the engineer, the economist, the social scientist, and many other specialists.” The whole report stresses the importance of Arabic to oil-company executives, technicans, and military personnel. But the report’s main talking point is this trio of sentences: “Russian universities are now producing fluent Arabic speakers. Russia has realized the importance of appealing to men through their minds, by using their own language. The United States need wait no longer in developing its foreign language program.” Thus Oriental languages are part of some policy objective—as to a certain extent they have always been—or part of a sustained propaganda effort. In both these aims the study of Oriental languages becomes the instrument carrying out Harold Lasswell’s theses about propaganda, in which what counts is not what people are or think but what they can be made to be and think.

The propagandist outlook in fact combines respect for individuality with indifference to formal democracy. The respect for individuality arises from the dependence of large scale operations upon the support of the mass and upon experience with the variability of human preferences. . . . This regard for men in the mass rests upon no democratic dogmas of the men being the best judges of their own interests. The modern propagandist, like the modern psychologist, recognizes that men are often poor judges of their own interests, flitting from one alternative to the next without solid reason or clinging timorously to the fragments of some mossy rock of ages. Calculating the prospect of securing a permanent change in habits and values involves much more than the estimation of the preferences of men in general. It means taking account of the tissue of relations in which men are webbed, searching for signs of preference which may reflect no deliberation and directing a program towards a solution which fits in fact. . . . With respect to those adjustments which do require mass action the task of the propagandist is that of inventing goal symbols which serve the double function of facilitating adoption and adaptation. The symbols must induce acceptance spontaneously. . . . It follows that the management ideal is control of a situation not by imposition but by divination. . . . The propagandist takes

Orientalism Now

it for granted that the world is completely caused but that it is only partly predictable. . . .

The acquired foreign language is therefore made part of a subtle assault upon populations, just as the study of a foreign region like the Orient is turned into a program for control by divination.

Yet such programs must always have a liberal veneer, and usually this is left to scholars, men of good will, enthusiasts to attend to. The idea encouraged is that in studying Orientals, Muslims, or Arabs “we” can get to know another people, their way of life and thought, and so on. To this end it is always better to let them speak for themselves, to represent themselves (even though underlying this fiction stands Marx’s phrase—with which Lasswell is in agreement—for Louis Napoleon: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”). But only up to a point, and in a special way. In 1973, during the anxious days of the October Arab-Israeli War, the New York Times Magazine commissioned two articles, one representing the Israeli side and one the Arab side of the conflict. The Israeli side was presented by an Israeli lawyer; the Arab side, by an American former ambassador to an Arab country who had no formal training in Oriental studies. Lest we jump immediately to the simple conclusion that the Arabs were believed incapable of representing themselves, we would do well to remember that both Arabs and Jews in this instance were Semites (in the broad cultural designation I have been discussing) and that both were being made to be represented for a Western audience. It is worthwhile here to remember this passage from Proust, in which the sudden appearance of a Jew into an aristocratic salon is described as follows:

The Rumanians, the Egyptians, the Turks may hate the Jews. But in a French drawing-room the differences between those people are not so apparent, and an Israelite making his entry as though he were emerging from the heart of the desert, his body crouching like a hyaena’s, his neck thrust obliquely forward, spreading himself in proud “salams,” completely satisfies a certain taste for the oriental [un goût pour l’orientalisme].

2. Cultural relations policy. While it is true to say that the United States did not in fact become a world empire until the twentieth century, it is also true that during the nineteenth century the United States was concerned with the Orient in ways that prepared for its later, overtly imperial concern. Leaving aside the
campaigns against the Barbary pirates in 1801 and 1815, let us consider the founding of the American Oriental Society in 1842. At its first annual meeting in 1843 its president, John Pickering, made the very clear point that America proposed for itself the study of the Orient in order to follow the example of the imperial European powers. Pickering’s message was that the framework of Oriental studies—then as now—was political, not simply scholarly. Note in the following summary how the lines of argument for Orientalism leave little room for doubt as to their intention:

At the first annual meeting of the American Society in 1843, President Pickering began a remarkable sketch of the field it was proposed to cultivate by calling attention to the especially favorable circumstances of the time, the peace that reigned everywhere, the freer access to Oriental countries, and the greater facilities for communication. The earth seemed quiet in the days of Metternich and Louis Philippe. The treaty of Nanking had opened Chinese ports. The screw-propeller had been adopted in oceangoing vessels; Morse had completed his telegraph and he had already suggested the laying of a trans-Atlantic cable. The objects of the Society were to cultivate learning in Asiatic, African, and Polynesian language, and in everything concerning the Orient, to create a taste for Oriental Studies in this country, to publish texts, translations and communications, and to collect a library and cabinet. Most of the work has been done in the Asiatic field, and particularly in Sanskrit and the Semitic languages.¹⁰⁹

Metternich, Louis-Philippe, the Treaty of Nanking, the screw propeller: all suggest the imperial constellation facilitating Euro-American penetration of the Orient. This has never stopped. Even the legendary American missionaries to the Near East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took their role as set not so much by God as by their God, their culture, and their destiny.¹¹⁰ The early missionary institutions—printing presses, schools, universities, hospitals, and the like—contributed of course to the area’s well-being, but in their specifically imperial character and their support by the United States government, these institutions were no different from their French and British counterparts in the Orient. During the First World War, what was to become a major United States policy interest in Zionism and the colonization of Palestine played an estimable role in getting the United States into the war; British discussions prior to and after the Balfour Declaration (November 1917) reflect the seriousness with which the declaration was taken by the United States.¹¹¹ During and after the Second World War, the escalation in United States interest in the Middle East was remarkable. Cairo, Teheran, and North Africa were important arenas of war, and in that setting, with the exploitation of its oil, strategic, and human resources pioneered by Britain and France, the United States prepared for its new postwar imperial role.

Not the least aspect of this role was “a cultural relations policy,” as it was defined by Mortimer Graves in 1950. Part of this policy was, he said, the attempt to acquire “every significant publication in every important Near Eastern language published since 1900,” an attempt “which our Congress ought to recognize as a measure of our national security.” For what was clearly at stake, Graves argued (to very receptive ears, by the way), was the need for “much better American understanding of the forces which are contending with the American idea for acceptance by the Near East. The principal of these are, of course, communism and Islam.”¹¹² Out of such a concern, and as a contemporary adjunct to the more backward-looking American Oriental Society, was born the entire vast apparatus for research on the Middle East. The model, both in its frankly strategic attitude and in its sensitivity to public security and policy (not, as is often postured, to pure scholarship), was the Middle East Institute, founded May 1946 in Washington under the aegis of, if not entirely within or by, the federal government.¹¹³ Out of such organizations grew the Middle East Studies Association, the powerful support of the Ford and other foundations, the various federal programs of support to universities, the various federal research projects, research projects carried out by such entities as the Defense Department, the RAND Corporation, and the Hudson Institute, and the consultative and lobbying efforts of banks, oil companies, multinationals, and the like. It is no reduction to say of all this that it retains, in most of its general as well as its detailed functioning, the traditional Orientalist outlook which had been developed in Europe.

The parallel between European and American imperial designs on the Orient (Near and Far) is obvious. What is perhaps less obvious is (a) the extent to which the European tradition of Orientalist scholarship was, if not taken over, then accommodated, normalized, domesticated, and popularized and fed into the postwar efflorescence of Near Eastern studies in the United States; and (b) the extent to which the European tradition has given rise in the United States to a coherent attitude among most scholars, institu-
administrating, giving grants to a large network of scholars in the field.

It is essential to realize that Muslim civilization is a cultural entity that does not share our primary aspirations. It is not vitally interested in the structured study of other cultures, either as an end in itself or as a means towards clearer understanding of its own character and history. If this observation were to be valid merely for contemporary Islam, one might be inclined to connect it with the profoundly disturbed state of Islam, which does not permit it to look beyond itself unless forced to do so. But as it is valid for the past as well, one may perhaps seek to connect it with the basic anti-humanism of this [Islamic] civilization, that is, the determined refusal to accept man to any extent whatever as the arbiter or the measure of things, and the tendency to be satisfied with the truth as the description of mental structures, or in other words, with psychological truth.

[Arab or Islamic nationalism] lacks, in spite of its occasional use as a catchword, the concept of the divine right of a nation, it lacks a formative ethic, it also lacks, it would seem, the later nineteenth century belief in mechanistic progress; above all it lacks the intellectual vigor of a primary phenomenon. Both power and the will to power are ends in themselves. [This sentence seems to serve no purpose in the argument; yet it doubtless gives von Grunebaum the security of a philosophical-sounding nonsentence, as if to assure himself that he speaks wisely, not disparagingly, of Islam.] The resentment of political slights [felt by Islam] engenders impatience and impèdes long-range analysis and planning in the intellectual sphere.

In most other contexts such writing would politely be called polemical. For Orientalism, of course, it is relatively orthodox, and it passed for canonical wisdom in American study of the Middle East after World War II, mainly because of the cultural prestige associated with European scholars. The point is, however, that von Grunebaum’s work is accepted uncritically by the field, even though the field itself today cannot reproduce people like him. Yet only one scholar has undertaken a serious critique of von Grunebaum’s views: Abdullah Laroui, a Moroccan historian and political theorist.

Using the motif of reductive repetition in von Grunebaum’s work as a practical tool of critical anti-Orientalist study, Laroui manages his case impressively on the whole. He asks himself what it is that
caused von Grunebaum's work, despite the enormous mass of its detail and its apparent range, to remain reductive. As Laroui says, "the adjectives that von Grunebaum affixes to the word Islam (medieval, classical, modern) are neutral or even superfluous: there is no difference between classical Islam and medieval Islam or Islam plain and simple. . . . There is therefore [for von Grunebaum] only one Islam that changes within itself." Modern Islam, according to von Grunebaum, has turned away from the West because it remains faithful to its original sense of itself; and yet Islam can modernize itself only by a self-reinterpretation from a Western point of view—which, of course, von Grunebaum shows is impossible. In describing von Grunebaum's conclusions, which add up to a portrait of Islam as a culture incapable of innovation, Laroui does not mention that the need for Islam to use Western methods to improve itself has, as an idea, perhaps because of von Grunebaum's wide influence, become almost a truism in Middle Eastern studies. (For example, David Gordon, in *Self-Determination and History in the Third World*, urges "maturity" on Arabs, Africans, and Asians; he argues that this can be gained only by learning from Western objectivity.)

Laroui's analysis shows also how von Grunebaum employed A. L. Kroeber's culturalist theory to understand Islam, and how this tool necessarily entailed a series of reductions and eliminations by which Islam could be represented as a closed system of exclusions. Thus, each of the many diverse aspects of Islamic culture could be seen by von Grunebaum as a direct reflection of an unvarying matrix, a particular theory of God, that compels them all into meaning and order: development, history, tradition, reality in Islam are therefore interchangeable. Laroui rightly maintains that history as a complex order of events, temporalities, and meanings cannot be reduced to such a notion of culture, in the same way that culture cannot be reduced to ideology, nor ideology to theology. Von Grunebaum has fallen prey both to the Orientalist dogmas he inherited and to a particular feature of Islam which he has chosen to interpret as a shortcoming: that there is to be found in Islam a highly articulated theory of religion and yet very few accounts of religious experience, highly articulate political theory and few precise political documents, a theory of social structure and very few individualized actions, a theory of history and very few dated events, an articulated theory of economics and very few quantified series, and so on. The net result is a historical vision of Islam entirely hobbled by the theory of a culture incapable of doing justice to, or even examining, its existential reality in the experience of its adherents. Von Grunebaum's Islam, after all, is the Islam of the earlier European Orientalists—monolithic, scornful of ordinary human experience, gross, reductive, unchanging.

At bottom such a view of Islam is political, not even euphemistically impartial. The strength of its hold on the new Orientalist (younger, that is, than von Grunebaum) is due in part to its traditional authority, and in part to its use-value as a handle for grasping a vast region of the world and proclaiming it an entirely coherent phenomenon. Since Islam has never easily been encompassed by the West politically—and certainly since World War II Arab nationalism has been a movement openly declaring its hostility to Western imperialism—the desire to assert intellectually satisfying things about Islam in retaliation increases. One authority has said of Islam (without specifying which Islam or aspect of Islam he means) that it is "one prototype of closed traditional societies." Note here the edifying use of the word *Islam* to signify all at once a society, a religion, a prototype, and an actuality. But all this will be subordinated by the same scholar to the notion that, unlike normal ("our") societies, Islam and Middle Eastern societies are totally "political," an adjective meant as a reproach to Islam for not being "liberal," for not being able to separate (as "we" do) politics from culture. The result is an invidiously ideological portrait of "us" and "them":

To understand Middle Eastern society as a whole must remain our great aim. Only a society [like "ours"] that has already achieved a dynamic stability can afford to think of politics, economics, or culture as genuinely autonomous realms of existence and not merely convenient divisions for study. In a traditional society that does not separate the things of Caesar from those of God, or that is entirely in flux, the connection between, say, politics and all other aspects of life is the heart of the issue. Today, for example, whether a man is to marry four wives or one, fast or eat, gain or lose land, rely on revelation or reason, have all become political issues in the Middle East. . . . No less than the Moslem himself, the new Orientalist must inquire anew what the significant structures and relationships of Islamic society may be.

The triviality of most of the examples (marrying four wives, fasting or eating, etc.) is meant as evidence of Islam's all-inclusiveness, and its tyranny. As to where this is supposed to be happening, we
are not told. But we are reminded of the doubtless nonpolitical fact that Orientalists “are largely responsible for having given Middle Easterners themselves an accurate appreciation of their past,” just in case we might forget that Orientalists know things by definition that Orientals cannot know on their own.

If this sums up the “hard” school of the new American Orientalism, the “soft” school emphasizes the fact that traditional Orientalists have given us the basic outlines of Islamic history, religion, and society but have been “all too often content to sum up the meaning of a civilization on the basis of a few manuscripts.” Against the traditional Orientalist, therefore, the new area-studies specialist argues philosophically:

Research methodology and disciplinary paradigms are not to determine what is selected for study, and they are not to limit observation. Area studies, from this perspective, hold that true knowledge is only possible of things that exist, while methods and theories are abstractions, which order observations and offer explanations according to non-empirical criteria.

Good. But how does one know the “things that exist,” and to what extent are the “things that exist” constituted by the knower? This is left moot, as the new value-free apprehension of the Orient as something that exists is institutionalized in area-studies programs. Without tendentious theorizing, Islam is rarely studied, rarely researched, rarely known: the naiveté of this conception scarcely conceals what ideologically it means, the absurd theses that man plays no part in setting up both the material and the processes of knowledge, that the Oriental reality is static and “exists,” that only a messianic revolutionary (in Dr. Kissinger’s vocabulary) will not admit the difference between reality out there and in his head.

Between the hard and soft schools, however, more or less diluted versions of the old Orientalism flourish—in the new academic jargons in some cases, in the old ones in others. But the principal dogmas of Orientalism exist in their purest form today in studies of the Arabs and Islam. Let us recapitulate them here: one is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a “classical” Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically “objective.” A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible).

The extraordinary thing is that these notions persist without significant challenge in the academic and governmental study of the modern Near Orient. Lamentably, there has been no demonstrable effect—if there has been a challenging gesture at all—made by Islamic or Arab scholars’ work disputing the dogmas of Orientalism; an isolated article here or there, while important for its time and place, cannot possibly affect the course of an imposing research consensus maintained by all sorts of agencies, institutions, and traditions. The point of this is that Islamic Orientalism has led a contemporary life quite different from that of the other Orientalist subdisciplines. The Committee of Concerned Asia Scholars (who are primarily Americans) led a revolution during the 1960s in the ranks of East Asia specialists; the African studies specialists were similarly challenged by revisionists; so too were other Third World area specialists. Only the Arabists and Islamologists still function unrevised. For them there are still such things as an Islamic society, an Arab mind, an Oriental psyche. Even the ones whose specialty is the modern Islamic world anachronistically use texts like the Koran to read into every facet of contemporary Egyptian or Algerian society. Islam, or a seventh-century ideal of it constituted by the Orientalist, is assumed to possess the unity that eludes the more recent and important influences of colonialism, imperialism, and even ordinary politics. Clichés about how Muslims “(or Mohammedans, as they are still sometimes called) behave are banded about with a nonchalance no one would risk in talking about blacks or Jews. At best, the Muslim is a “native informant” for the Orientalist. Secretly, however, he remains a despised heretic who for his sins must additionally endure the entirely thankless position of being known—negatively, that is—as an anti-Zionist.

There is of course a Middle East studies establishment, a pool of interests, “old boy” or “expert” networks linking corporate business, the foundations, the oil companies, the missions, the military, the foreign service, the intelligence community together
with the academic world. There are grants and other rewards, there are organizations, there are hierarchies, there are institutes, centers, faculties, departments, all devoted to legitimizing and maintaining the authority of a handful of basic, basically unchanging ideas about Islam, the Orient, and the Arabs. A recent critical analysis of the Middle East studies operation in the United States shows, not that the field is “monolithic,” but that it is complex, that it contains old-style Orientalists, deliberately marginal specialists, counterinsurgency specialists, policymakers, as well as “a small minority . . . of academic power brokers.”123 In any event, the core of Orientalist dogma persists.

As an instance of what, in its highest and most intellectually prestigious form, the field now produces, let us consider briefly the two-volume *Cambridge History of Islam*, which was first published in England in 1970 and is a regular summa of Orientalist orthodoxy. To say of this work by numerous luminaries that it is an intellectual failure by any standards other than those of Orientalism is to say that it could have been a different and better history of Islam. In fact, as several more thoughtful scholars have noted,124 this kind of history was already doomed when first planned and could not have been different or better in execution; too many ideas were uncritically accepted by its editors; there was too much reliance on vague concepts; little emphasis was placed on methodological issues (which were left as they have been standing in Orientalist discourse for almost two centuries); and no effort was put forth to make even the idea of Islam seem interesting. Moreover, not only does *The Cambridge History of Islam* radically misconceive and misrepresent Islam as a religion; it also has no corporate idea of itself as a history. Of few such enormous enterprises can it be true, as it is of this one, that ideas and methodological intelligence are almost entirely absent from it.

Erfan Shahid’s chapter on pre-Islamic Arabia, which opens the history, intelligently sketches the fruitful consonance between topography and human economy out of which Islam appeared in the seventh century. But what can one fairly say of a history of Islam, defined by P. M. Holt’s introduction rather airily as a “cultural synthesis,”125 that proceeds directly from pre-Islamic Arabia to a chapter on Mohammed, then to a chapter on the Patriarchal and Umayyad caliphates, and entirely bypasses any account of Islam as a system of belief, faith, or doctrine? For hundreds of pages in volume 1, Islam is understood to mean an unrelieved chronology of battles, reigns, and deaths, rises and heydays, comings and passings, written for the most part in a ghastly monotone.

Take the Abbasid period from the eighth to the eleventh century as an instance. Anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with Arab or Islamic history will know that it was a high point of Islamic civilization, as brilliant a period of cultural history as the High Renaissance in Italy. Yet nowhere in the forty pages of description does one get an inkling of any richness; what is found instead is sentences like this: “Once master of the caliphate, [al-Ma’mun] seemed henceforth to shrink from contact with Baghdad society and remained settled at Merv, entrusting the government of Iraq to one of his trusted men, al-Hasan b. Sahl, the brother of al-Fadl, who was faced almost at once with a serious Shi’i revolt, that of Abu’l-Saraya, who in Jumada II 199/January 815 sent out a call to arms from Kufa in support of the Hasanid Ibn Tabataba.”126 A non-Islamist will not know at this point what a Shi’i or a Hasanid is. He will have no idea what Jumada II is, except that it clearly designates a date of some sort. And of course he will believe that the Abbasids, including Harun al-Rashid, were an incorrigibly dull and murderous lot, as they sat sulking in Merv.

The Central Islamic lands are defined as excluding North Africa and Andalusia, and their history is an orderly march from the past till modern times. In volume 1, therefore, Islam is a geographical designation applied chronologically and selectively as it suits the experts. But nowhere in the chapters on classical Islam is there an adequate preparation for the disappointments in store for us when we come to “recent times,” as they are called. The chapter on the modern Arab lands is written without the slightest understanding of the revolutionary developments in the area. The author takes a schoolmarmish, openly reactionary attitude towards the Arabs (“it must be said that during this period the educated and uneducated youth of the Arab countries, with their enthusiasm and idealism, became a fertile soil for political exploitation and, at times, perhaps without realizing it, the tools of unscrupulous extremists and agitators”),127 tempered by occasional praise of Lebanese nationalism (although we are never told that the appeal of fascism to a small number of Arabs during the thirties also infected the Lebanese Maronites, who in 1936 founded the Falanges libanaises as a copy of Mussolini’s Black Shirts). “Unrest and agitation” are ascribed to 1936 without a mention of Zionism, and the very notions of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism are never allowed to violate the
serenity of the narrative. As for the chapters on “the political impact of the West” and “economic and social change”—ideas left no more specific than that—they are tackled on as reluctant concessions to Islam as having something to do with “our” world in general. Change is unilaterally equated with modernization, even though it is nowhere made clear why other kinds of change need be so imperiously dismissed. Since it is assumed that Islam’s only worthwhile relations have been with the West, the importance of Bandung or of Africa or of the Third World generally is ignored; this blithe indifference to a good three-quarters of reality somewhat explains the amazingly cheerful statement that “the historical ground has been cleared [by whom, for what, in what way?] for a new relationship between the West and Islam . . . based on equality and cooperation.”

If by the end of volume 1 we are mired in a number of contradictions and difficulties about what Islam really is, there is no help to be had in volume 2. Half the book is devoted to covering the tenth to the twentieth centuries in India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Spain, North Africa, and Sicily; there is more distinction in the chapters on North Africa, although the same combination of professional Orientalist jargon with unguided historical detail prevails pretty much everywhere. So far, after approximately twelve hundred pages of dense prose, “Islam” appears to be no more a cultural synthesis than any other roll call of kings, battles, and dynasties. But in the last half of volume 2, the great synthesis completes itself with articles on “The Geographical Setting,” “Sources of Islamic Civilization,” “Religion and Culture,” and “Warfare.”

Now one’s legitimate questions and objections seem more justified. Why is a chapter commissioned on Islamic warfare when what is really discussed (interestingly, by the way) is the sociology of some Islamic armies? Is one to assume that there is an Islamic mode of war different, say, from Christian warfare? Communist war versus capitalist war proposes itself as a suitably analogous topic. Of what use for the understanding of Islam—except as a display of Gustave von Grunebaum’s indiscriminate erudition—are the opaque quotations from Leopold von Ranke which, along with other equally ponderous and irrelevant material, dot his pages on Islamic civilization? Is it not mendacious thus to disguise the real Grunebaumian thesis, that Islamic civilization rests on an unprincipled borrowing by Muslims from the Judeo-Christian, Hellenistic, and Austro-Germanic civilizations? Compare with this idea—

that Islam is by definition a plagiaristic culture—the one put forward in volume 1 that “so-called Arabic literature” was written by Persians (no proof offered, no names cited). When Louis Gardet treats “Religion and Culture,” we are told summarily that only the first five centuries of Islam are to be discussed; does this mean that religion and culture in “modern times” cannot be “synthesized,” or does it mean that Islam achieved its final form in the twelfth century? Is there really such a thing as “Islamic geography,” which seems to include the “planned anarchy” of Muslim cities, or is it mainly an invented subject to demonstrate a rigid theory of geographical-racial determinism? As a hint we are reminded of “the Ramadan fast with its active nights,” from which we are expected to conclude that Islam is a religion “designed for town dwellers.” This is explanation in need of explanation.

The sections on economic and social institutions, on law and justice, mysticism, art and architecture, science, and the various Islamic literatures are on an altogether higher level than most of the History. Yet nowhere is there evidence that their authors have much in common with modern humanists or social scientists in other disciplines: the techniques of the conventional history of ideas, of Marxist analysis, of the New History, are noticeably absent. Islam, in short, seems to its historians to be best-suited to a rather Platonic and antiquarian bias. To some writers of the History Islam is a politics and a religion; to others it is a style of being; to others it is “distinguishable from Muslim society”; to still others it is a mysteriously known essence; to all the authors Islam is a remote, tensionless thing, without much to teach us about the complexities of today’s Muslims. Hanging over the whole disjointed enterprise which is The Cambridge History of Islam is the old Orientalist truism that Islam is about texts, not about people.

The fundamental question raised by such contemporary Orientalist texts as The Cambridge History is whether ethnic origins and religion are the best, or at least the most useful, basic, and clear, definitions of human experience. Does it matter more in understanding contemporary politics to know that X and Y are disadvantaged in certain very concrete ways, or that they are Muslims or Jews? This is of course a debatable question, and we are very likely in rational terms to insist on both the religious-ethnic and the socio-economic descriptions; Orientalism, however, clearly posits the Islamic category as the dominant one, and this is the main consideration about its retrograde intellectual tactics.
3. Merely Islam. So deeply entrenched is the theory of Semitic simplicity as it is to be found in modern Orientalism that it operates with little differentiation in such well-known anti-Semitic European writings as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and in remarks such as these by Chaim Weizmann to Arthur Balfour on May 30, 1918:

The Arabs, who are superficially clever and quick witted, worship one thing, and one thing only—power and success. . . . The British authorities . . . knowing as they do the treacherous nature of the Arabs . . . have to watch carefully and constantly. . . . The fairer the English regime tries to be, the more arrogant the Arab becomes. . . . The present state of affairs would necessarily tend toward the creation of an Arab Palestine, if there were an Arab people in Palestine. It will not in fact produce that result because the fellah is at least four centuries behind the times, and the effendi. . . . is dishonest, uneducated, greedy, and as unpatriotic as he is inefficient.129

The common denominator between Weizmann and the European anti-Semite is the Orientalist perspective, seeing Semites (or subdivisions thereof) as by nature lacking the desirable qualities of Occidentals. Yet the difference between Renan and Weizmann is that the latter had already gathered behind his rhetoric the solidity of institutions whereas the former had not. Is there not in twentieth-century Orientalism that same unaging “gracious childhood”—heedlessly allied now with scholarship, now with a state and all its institutions—that Renan saw as the Semites’ unchanging mode of being?

Yet with what greater harm has the twentieth-century version of the myth been maintained. It has produced a picture of the Arab as seen by an “advanced” quasi-Occidental society. In his resistance to foreign colonialists the Palestinian was either a stupid savage, or a negligible quantity, morally and even existentially. According to Israeli law only a Jew has full civic rights and unqualified immigration privileges; even though they are the land’s inhabitants, Arabs are given less, more simple rights: they cannot immigrate, and if they seem not to have the same rights, it is because they are “less developed.” Orientalism governs Israeli policy towards the Arabs throughout, as the recently published Koenig Report amply proves. There are good Arabs (the ones who do as they are told) and bad Arabs (who do not, and are therefore terrorists). Most of all there are all those Arabs who, once defeated, can be expected to sit obediently behind an infallibly fortified line, manned by the

smallest possible number of men, on the theory that Arabs have had to accept the myth of Israeli superiority and will never dare attack. One need only glance through the pages of General Yehoshafat Harkabi’s Arab Attitudes to Israel to see how—as Robert Alter put it in admiring language in Commentary130—the Arab mind, depraved, anti-Semitic to the core, violent, unbalanced, could produce only rhetoric and little more. One myth supports and produces another. They answer each other, tending towards symmetries and patterns of the sort that as Orientals the Arabs themselves can be expected to produce, but that as a human being no Arab can truly sustain.

Of itself, in itself, as a set of beliefs, as a method of analysis, Orientalism cannot develop. Indeed, it is the doctrinal antithesis of development. Its central argument is the myth of the arrested development of the Semites. From this matrix other myths pour forth, each of them showing the Semite to be the opposite of the Westerner and irremediably the victim of his own weaknesses. By a concatenation of events and circumstances the Semitic myth bifurcated in the Zionist movement; one Semite went the way of Orientalism, the other, the Arab, was forced to go the way of the Oriental. Each time tent and tribe are solicited, the myth is being employed; each time the concept of Arab national character is evoked, the myth is being employed. The hold these instruments have on the mind is increased by the institutions built around them. For every Orientalist, quite literally, there is a support system of staggering power, considering the ephemerality of the myths that Orientalism propagates. This system now culminates in the very institutions of the state. To write about the Arab Oriental world, therefore, is to write with the authority of a nation, and not with the affirmation of a strident ideology but with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force.

In its February 1974 issue Commentary gave its readers an article by Professor Gil Carl Alroy entitled “Do the Arabs Want Peace?” Alroy is a professor of political science and is the author of two works, Attitudes Towards Jewish Statehood in the Arab World and Images of Middle East Conflict; he is a man who professes to “know” the Arabs, and is obviously an expert on image making. His argument is quite predictable: that the Arabs want to destroy Israel, that the Arabs really say what they mean (and Alroy makes ostentatious use of his ability to cite evidence from Egyptian newspapers, evidence he everywhere identifies with “Arabs” as if the
two, Arabs and Egyptian newspapers, were one), and so on and on, with unflagging, one-eyed zeal. Quite the center of his article, as it is the center of previous work by other "Arabists" (synonymous with "Orientalists"), like General Harkabi, whose province is the "Arab mind," is a working hypothesis on what Arabs, if one peels off all the outer nonsense, are really like. In other words, Alroy must prove that because Arabs are, first of all, as one in their bent for bloody vengeance, second, psychologically incapable of peace, and third, congenitally tied to a concept of justice that means the opposite of that, they are not to be trusted and must be fought interminably as one fights any other fatal disease. For evidence Alroy's principal exhibit is a quotation taken from Harold W. Glidden's essay "The Arab World" (to which I referred in Chapter One). Alroy finds Glidden able to have "captured the cultural differences between the Western and the Arab view" of things "very well." Alroy's argument is clinched, therefore—the Arabs are unregenerate savages—and thus an authority on the Arab mind has told a wide audience of presumably concerned Jews that they must continue to watch out. And he has done it academically, dispassionately, fairly, using evidence taken from the Arabs themselves—who, he says with Olympian assurance, have "emphatically ruled out . . . real peace"—and from psychoanalysis.131

One can explain such statements by recognizing that a still more implicit and powerful difference posited by the Orientalist as against the Oriental is that the former writes about, whereas the latter is written about. For the latter, passivity is the presumed role; for the former, the power to observe, study; and so forth; as Roland Barthes has said, a myth (and its perpetrators) can invent itself (themselves) ceaselessly.132 The Oriental is given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, in need even of knowledge about himself. No dialectic is either desired or allowed. There is a source of information (the Oriental) and a source of knowledge (the Orientalist), in short, a writer and a subject matter otherwise inert. The relationship between the two is radically a matter of power, for which there are numerous images. Here is an instance taken from Raphael Patai's *Golden River to Golden Road*:

In order properly to evaluate what Middle Eastern culture will willingly accept from the embarrassingly rich storehouses of Western civilization, a better and sounder understanding of Middle Eastern culture must first be acquired. The same prerequisite is necessary in order to gauge the probable effects of newly intro-

duced traits on the cultural context of tradition directed peoples. Also, the ways and means in which new cultural offerings can be made palatable must be studied much more thoroughly than was hitherto the case. In brief, the only way in which the Gordian knot of resistance to Westernization in the Middle East can be unraveled is that of studying the Middle East, of obtaining a fuller picture of its traditional culture, a better understanding of the processes of change taking place in it at present, and a deeper insight into the psychology of human groups brought up in Middle Eastern culture. The task is taxing, but the prize, harmony between the West and a neighboring world area of crucial importance, is well worth it.133

The metaphorical figures propping up this passage (I have indicated them by italics) come from a variety of human activities, some commercial, some horticultural, some religious, some veterinary, some historical. Yet in each case the relation between the Middle East and the West is really defined as sexual: as I said earlier in discussing Flaubert, the association between the Orient and sex is remarkably persistent. The Middle East is resistant, as any virgin would be, but the male scholar wins the prize by bursting open, penetrating through the Gordian knot despite "the taxing task." "Harmony" is the result of the conquest of maidenly coyness; it is not by any means the coexistence of equals. The underlying power relation between scholar and subject matter is never once altered: it is uniformly favorable to the Orientalist. Study, understanding, knowledge, evaluation, masked as blandishments to "harmony," are instruments of conquest.

The verbal operations in such writing as Patai's (who has outstripped even his previous work in his recent *The Arab Mind*) aim at a very particular sort of compression and reduction. Much of his paraphernalia is anthropological—he describes the Middle East as a "culture area"—but the result is to eradicate the plurality of differences among the Arabs (whoever they may be in fact) in the interest of one difference, that one setting Arabs off from everyone else. As a subject matter for study and analysis, they can be controlled more readily. Moreover, thus reduced they can be made to permit, legitimate, and valorize general nonsense of the sort one finds in works such as Sania Hamady's *Temperament and Character of the Arabs*. Item:

The Arabs so far have demonstrated an incapacity for disciplined and abiding unity. They experience collective outbursts
of enthusiasm but do not pursue patiently collective endeavors, which are usually embraced half-heartedly. They show lack of coordination and harmony in organization and function, nor have they revealed an ability for cooperation. Any collective action for common benefit or mutual profit is alien to them.

The style of this prose tells more perhaps than Hamady intends. Verbs like “demonstrate,” “reveal,” “show,” are used without an indirect object: to whom are the Arabs revealing, demonstrating, showing? To no one in particular, obviously, but to everyone in general. This is another way of saying that these truths are self-evident only to a privileged or initiated observer, since nowhere does Hamady cite generally available evidence for her observations. Besides, given the inanity of the observations, what sort of evidence could there be? As her prose moves along, her tone increases in confidence: “Any collective action . . . is alien to them.” The categories harden, the assertions are more unyielding, and the Arabs have been totally transformed from people into no more than the putative subject of Hamady’s style. The Arabs exist only as an occasion for the tyrannical observer: “The world is my idea.”

And so it is throughout the work of the contemporary Orientalist: assertions of the most bizarre sort dot his or her pages, whether it is a Manfred Halpern arguing that even though all human thought processes can be reduced to eight, the Islamic mind is capable of only four, or a Monroe Berger presuming that since the Arabic language is much given to rhetoric Arabs are consequently incapable of true thought. One can call these assertions myths in their function and structure, and yet one must try to understand what other imperatives govern their use. Here one is speculating, of course. Orientalist generalizations about the Arabs are very detailed when it comes to itemizing Arab characteristics critically, far less so when it comes to analyzing Arab strengths. The Arab family, Arab rhetoric, the Arab character, despite copious descriptions by the Orientalist, appear de-natured, without human potency, even as these same descriptions possess a fullness and depth in their sweeping power over the subject matter. Hamady again:

Thus, the Arab lives in a hard and frustrating environment. He has little chance to develop his potentialities and define his position in society, holds little belief in progress and change, and finds salvation only in the hereafter.

Orientalism Now

What the Arab cannot achieve himself is to be found in the writing about him. The Orientalist is supremely certain of his potential, is not a pessimist, is able to define his position, his own and the Arab's. The picture of the Arab Oriental that emerges is determinedly negative; yet, we ask, why this endless series of works on him? What grips the Orientalist, if it is not—as it certainly is not—love of Arab science, mind, society, achievement? In other words, what is the nature of Arab presence in mythic discourse about him?

Two things: number and generative power. Both qualities are reducible to each other ultimately, but we ought to separate them for the purposes of analysis. Almost without exception, every contemporary work of Orientalist scholarship (especially in the social sciences) has a great deal to say about the family, its male-dominated structure, its all-pervasive influence in the society. Patai's work is a typical example. A silent paradox immediately presents itself, for if the family is an institution for whose general failures the only remedy is the placebo of "modernization," we must acknowledge that the family continues to produce itself, is fertile, and is the source of Arab existence in the world, such as it is. What Berger refers to as "the great value men place upon their own sexual prowess" suggests the lurking power behind Arab presence in the world. If Arab society is represented in almost completely negative and generally passive terms, to be ravished and won by the Orientalist hero, we can assume that such a representation is a way of dealing with the great variety and potency of Arab diversity, whose source is, if not intellectual and social, then sexual and biological. Yet the absolutely inviolable taboo in Orientalist discourse is that that very sexuality must never be taken seriously. It can never be explicitly blamed for the absence of achievement and "real" rational sophistication the Orientalist everywhere discovers among the Arabs. And yet this is, I think, the missing link in arguments whose main object is criticism of "traditional" Arab society, such as Hamady's, Berger's, and Lerner's. They recognize the power of the family, note the weaknesses of the Arab mind, remark the "importance" of the Oriental world to the West, but never say what their discourse implies, that what is really left to the Arab after all is said and done is an undifferentiated sexual drive. On rare occasions—as in the work of Leon Mugnier—we do find the implicit made clear: that there is a "powerful sexual appetite . . . characteristic of those hot-blooded southerners." Most of the time, how-
ever, the belittlement of Arab society and its reduction of platitudes inconceivable for any except the racially inferior are carried on over an undercurrent of sexual exaggeration: the Arab produces himself, endlessly, sexually, and little else. The Orientalist says nothing about this, although his argument depends on it: "But co-operation in the Near East is still largely a family affair and little of it is found outside the blood group or village." Which is to say that the only way in which Arabs count is as mere biological beings; institutionally, politically, culturally they are nil, or next to nil. Numerically and as the producers of families, Arabs are actual.

The difficulty with this view is that it complicates the passivity amongst Arabs assumed by Orientalists like Patai and even Hamady and the others. But it is in the logic of myths, like dreams, exactly to welcome radical antitheses. For a myth does not analyze or solve problems. It represents them as already analyzed and solved; that is, it presents them as already assembled images, in the way a scarecrow is assembled from bric-a-brac and then made to stand for a man. Since the image uses all material to its own end, and since by definition the myth displaces life, the antithesis between an overfertile Arab and a passive doll is not functional. The discourse papers over the antithesis. An Arab Oriental is that impossible creature whose libidinal energy drives him to paroxysms of over-stimulation—and yet, he is as a puppet in the eyes of the world, staring vacantly out at a modern landscape he can neither understand nor cope with.

It is in recent discussions of Oriental political behavior that such an image of the Arab seems to be relevant, and it is often occasioned by scholarly discussion of those two recent favorites of Orientalist expertise, revolution and modernization. Under the auspices of the School of Oriental and African Studies there appeared in 1972 a volume entitled Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies, edited by P. J. Vatikiotis. The title is overtly medical, for we are expected to think of Orientalists as finally being given the benefit of what "traditional" Orientalism usually avoided: psychoclinical attention. Vatikiotis sets the tone of the collection with a quasi-medical definition of revolution, but since Arab revolution is in his mind and in his readers', the hostility of the definition seems acceptable. There is a very clever irony here about which I shall speak later. Vatikiotis's theoretical support is Camus—whose colonial mentality was no friend of revolution or of the Arabs, as Conor Cruise O'Brien has recently shown—but the phrase "revolu-

Orientalism Now  

Orientalism Now  

... all revolutionary ideology is in direct conflict with (actually, is a head-on attack upon) man's rational, biological and psychological make-up.

Committed as it is to a methodical metastasis, revolutionary ideology demands fanaticism from its adherents. Politics for the revolutionary is not only a question of belief, or a substitute for religious belief. It must stop being what it has always been, namely, an adaptive activity in time for survival. Metastatic, soteriological politics abhors adaptiveness, for how else can it eschew the difficulties, ignore and bypass the obstacles of the complex biological-psychological dimension of man, or mesmerize his subtle though limited and vulnerable rationality? It fears and shuns the concrete and discrete nature of human problems and the preoccupations of political life: it thrives on the abstract and the Promethean. It subordinates all tangible values to the one supreme value: the harnessing of man and history in a grand design of human liberation. It is not satisfied with human politics, which has so many irritating limitations. It wishes instead to create a new world, not adaptively, precariously, delicately, that is, humbly, but by a terrifying act of Olympian pseudo-divine creation. Politics in the service of man is a formula that is unacceptable to the revolutionary ideologue. Rather man exists to serve a politically contrived and brutally decreed order. Whatever else this passage says—purple writing of the most extreme sort, counterrevolutionary zealotry—it is saying nothing less than that revolution is a bad kind of sexuality (pseudo-divine act of creation), and also a cancerous disease. Whatever is done by the "human," according to Vatikiotis, is rational, right, subtle, discrete, concrete; whatever the revolutionary proclaims is brutal, irrational, mesmeric, cancerous. Procreation, change, and continuity are identified not only with sexuality and with madness but, a little paradoxically, with abstraction.

Vatikiotis's terms are weighted and colored emotionally by appeals (from the right) to humanity and decency and by appeals (against the left) safeguarding humanity from sexuality, cancer, madness, irrational violence, revolution. Since it is Arab revolution that is in question, we are to read the passage as follows: This is what revolution is, and if the Arabs want it, then that is a fairly telling comment on them, on the kind of inferior race they are. They are only capable of sexual incitement and not of Olympian (West-
ern, modern) reason. The irony of which I spoke earlier now comes into play, for a few pages later we find that the Arabs are so inept that they cannot even aspire to, let alone consummate, the ambitions of revolution. By implication, Arab sexuality need not be feared for itself but for its failure. In short, Vatikiotis asks his reader to believe that revolution in the Middle East is a threat precisely because revolution cannot be attained.

The major source of political conflict and potential revolution in many countries of the Middle East, as well as Africa and Asia today, is the inability of so-called radical nationalist regimes and movements to manage, let alone resolve, the social, economic and political problems of independence. . . . Until the states in the Middle East can control their economic activity and create or produce their own technology, their access to revolutionary experience will remain limited. The very political categories essential to a revolution will be lacking.143

Damned if you do, and damned if you don't. In this series of dissolving definitions revolutions emerge as figments of sexually crazed minds which on closer analysis turn out not to be capable even of the craziness Vatikiotis truly respects—which is human, not Arab, concrete, not abstract, asexual, not sexual.

The scholarly centerpiece of Vatikiotis's collection is Bernard Lewis's essay "Islamic Concepts of Revolution." The strategy here appears refined. Many readers will know that for Arabic speakers today the word thawra and its immediate cognates mean revolution; they will know this also from Vatikiotis's introduction. Yet Lewis does not describe the meaning of thawra until the very end of his article, after he has discussed concepts such as dawla, fitna, and bughat in their historical and mostly religious context. The point there is mainly that "the Western doctrine of the right to resist bad government is alien to Islamic thought," which leads to "defeatism" and "quietism" as political attitudes. At no point in the essay is one sure where all these terms are supposed to be taking place except somewhere in the history of words. Then near the end of the essay we have this:

In the Arabic-speaking countries a different word was used for [revolution] thawra. The root th-w-r in classical Arabic meant to rise up (e.g. of a camel), to be stirred or excited, and hence, especially in Maghribi usage, to rebel. It is often used in the context of establishing a petty, independent sovereignty; thus, for example, the so-called party kings who ruled in eleventh century Spain after the break-up of the Caliphate of Cordova are called thuwwar (sing. thu'ir). The noun thawra at first means excitement, as in the phrase, cited in the Sihah, a standard medieval Arabic dictionary, intaqir hatta taskun hadhithi 'l thawra, wait till this excitement dies down—a very apt recommendation. The verb is used by al-Iji, in the form of thawaran or itharat fitna, stirring up sedition, as one of the dangers which should discourage a man from practising the duty of resistance to bad government. Thawra is the term used by Arabic writers in the nineteenth century for the French Revolution, and by their successors for the approved revolutions, domestic and foreign, of our own time.144

The entire passage is full of condescension and bad faith. Why introduce the idea of a camel rising as an etymological root for modern Arab revolution except as a clever way of discrediting the modern? Lewis's reason is patently to bring down revolution from its contemporary valuation to nothing more noble (or beautiful) than a camel about to raise itself from the ground. Revolution is excitement, sedition, setting up a petty sovereignty—nothing more; the best counsel (which presumably only a Western scholar and gentleman can give) is "wait till the excitement dies down." One wouldn't know from this slighting account of thawra that innumerable people have an active commitment to it, in ways too complex for even Lewis's sarcastic scholarship to comprehend. But it is this kind of essentialized description that is natural for students and policymakers concerned with the Middle East: that revolutionary stirrings among "the Arabs" are about as consequential as a camel's getting up, as worthy of attention as the babblings of yokels. All the canonical Orientalist literature will for the same ideological reason be unable to explain or prepare one for the confirming revolutionary upheaval in the Arab world in the twentieth century.

Lewis's association of thawra with a camel rising and generally with excitement (and not with a struggle on behalf of values) hints much more broadly than is usual for him that the Arab is scarcely more than a neurotic sexual being. Each of the words or phrases he uses to describe revolution is tinged with sexuality: stirred, excited, rising up. But for the most part it is a "bad" sexuality he ascribes to the Arab. In the end, since Arabs are really not equipped for serious action, their sexual excitement is no more noble than a camel's rising up. Instead of revolution there is sedition, setting up a petty sovereignty, and more excitement, which is as much as saying that
instead of copulation the Arab can only achieve foreplay, masturbation, coitus interruptus. These, I think, are Lewis's implications, no matter how innocent his air of learning, or parlorlike his language. For since he is so sensitive to the nuances of words, he must be aware that his words have nuances as well.

Lewis is an interesting case to examine further because his standing in the political world of the Anglo-American Middle Eastern Establishment is that of the learned Orientalist, and everything he writes is steeped in the “authority” of the field. Yet for at least a decade and a half his work in the main has been aggressively ideological, despite his various attempts at subtlety and irony. I mention his recent writing as a perfect exemplification of the academic whose work purports to be liberal objective scholarship but is in reality very close to being propaganda against his subject material. But this should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the history of Orientalism; it is only the latest—and in the West, the most uncriticed—of the scandals of “scholarship.”

So intent has Lewis become upon his project to debunk, to whittle down, and to discredit the Arabs and Islam that even his energies as a scholar and historian seem to have failed him. He will, for example, publish a chapter called “The Revolt of Islam” in a book in 1964, then republish much of the same material twelve years later, slightly altered to suit the new place of publication (in this case Commentary) and retitled “The Return of Islam.” From “Revolt” to “Return” is of course a change for the worse, a change intended by Lewis to explain to his latest public why it is that the Muslims (or Arabs) still will not settle down and accept Israeli hegemony over the Near East.

Let us look more closely at how he does this. In both of his pieces he mentions an anti-imperialist riot in Cairo in 1945, which in both cases he describes as anti-Jewish. Yet in neither instance does he tell us how it was anti-Jewish; in fact, as his material evidence for anti-Jewishness, he produces the somewhat surprising intelligence that “several churches, Catholic, Armenian and Greek Orthodox, were attacked and damaged.” Consider the first version, done in 1964:

On November 2, 1945 political leaders in Egypt called for demonstrations on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. These rapidly developed into anti-Jewish riots, in the course of which a Catholic, an Armenian, and a Greek Orthodox church were attacked and damaged. What, it may be asked, had Catholics, Armenians and Greeks to do with the Balfour Declaration?245

And now the Commentary version, done in 1976:

As the nationalist movement has become genuinely popular, so it has become less national and more religious—in other words less Arab and more Islamic. In moments of crisis—and these have been many in recent decades—it is the instinctive communal loyalty which outweighs all others. A few examples may suffice. On November 2, 1945, demonstrations were held in Egypt [note here how the phrase “demonstrations were held” is an attempt to show instinctive loyalties; in the previous version “political leaders” were responsible for the deed] on the anniversary of the issue by the British Government of the Balfour Declaration. Though this was certainly not the intention of the political leaders who sponsored it, the demonstration soon developed into an anti-Jewish riot and the anti-Jewish riot into a more general outbreak in the course of which several churches, Catholic, Armenian, and Greek Orthodox [another instructive change: the impression here is that many churches, of three kinds, were attacked; the earlier version is specific about three churches], were attacked and damaged.246

Lewis's polemical, not scholarly, purpose is to show, here and elsewhere, that Islam is an anti-Semitic ideology, not merely a religion. He has a little logical difficulty in trying to assert that Islam is a fearful mass phenomenon and at the same time “not genuinely popular,” but this problem does not detain him long. As the second version of his tendentious anecdote shows, he goes on to proclaim that Islam is an irrational herd or mass phenomenon, ruling Muslims by passions, instincts, and unreflecting hatreds. The whole point of his exposition is to frighten his audience, to make it never yield an inch to Islam. According to Lewis, Islam does not develop, and neither do Muslims; they merely are, and they are to be watched, on account of that pure essence of theirs (according to Lewis), which happens to include a long-standing hatred of Christians and Jews. Lewis everywhere restrains himself from making such inflammatory statements flat out; he always takes care to say that of course the Muslims are not anti-Semitic the way the Nazis were, but their religion can too easily accommodate itself to anti-Semitism and has done so. Similarly with regard to Islam and racism, slavery, and other more or less “Western” evils. The core of Lewis's ideology about Islam is that it never changes, and his
whole mission is now to inform conservative segments of the Jewish reading public, and anyone else who cares to listen, that any political, historical, and scholarly account of Muslims must begin and end with the fact that Muslims are Muslims.

For to admit that an entire civilization can have religion as its primary loyalty is too much. Even to suggest such a thing is regarded as offensive by liberal opinion, always ready to take protective umbrage on behalf of those whom it regards as its wards. This is reflected in the present inability, political, journalistic, and scholarly alike, to recognize the importance of the factor of religion in the current affairs of the Muslim world and in the consequent recourse to the language of left-wing and right-wing, progressive and conservative, and the rest of the Western terminology, the use of which in explaining Muslim political phenomena is about as accurate and as enlightening as an account of a cricket match by a baseball correspondent. [Lewis is so fond of this last simile that he quotes it verbatim from his 1964 polemic.]

In a later work Lewis tells us what terminology is more accurate and useful, although the terminology seems no less “Western” (whatever “Western” means): Muslims, like, most other former colonial peoples, are incapable of telling the truth or even of seeing it. According to Lewis, they are addicted to mythology, along with “the so-called revisionist school in the United States, which look back to a golden age of American virtue and ascribe virtually all the sins and crimes of the world to the present establishment in their country.” Aside from being a mischievous and totally inaccurate account of revisionist history, this kind of remark is designed to put Lewis as a great historian above the petty underdevelopment of mere Muslims and revisionists.

Yet so far as being accurate is concerned, and so far as living up to his own rule that “the scholar, however, will not give way to his prejudices,” Lewis is cavalier with himself and with his cause. He will, for example, recite the Arab case against Zionism (using the “in” language of the Arab nationalist) without at the same time mentioning—anywhere, in any of his writings—that there was such a thing as a Zionist invasion and colonization of Palestine despite and in conflict with the native Arab inhabitants. No Israeli would deny this, but Lewis the Orientalist historian simply leaves it out.

He will speak of the absence of democracy in the Middle East, except for Israel, without ever mentioning the Emergency Defense Regulations used in Israel to rule the Arabs; nor has he anything to say about “preventive detention” of Arabs in Israel, nor about the dozens of illegal settlements on the militarily occupied West Bank of Gaza, nor about the absence of human rights for Arabs, principal among them the right of immigration, in former Palestine. Instead, Lewis allows himself the scholarly liberty to say that “imperialism and Zionism [so far as the Arabs are concerned were] long familiar under their older names as the Christians and Jews.” He quotes T. E. Lawrence on “the Semites” to bolster his case against Islam, he never discusses Zionism in parallel with Islam (as if Zionism were a French, not a religious, movement), and he tries everywhere to demonstrate that any revolution anywhere is at best a form of “secular millenarianism.”

One would find this kind of procedure less objectionable as political propaganda—which is what it is, of course—were it not accompanied by sermons on the objectivity, the fairness, the impartiality of a real historian, the implication always being that Muslims and Arabs cannot be objective but that Orientalists like Lewis writing about Muslims and Arabs are, by definition, by training, by the mere fact of their Westernness. This is the culmination of Orientalism as a dogma that not only degrades its subject matter but also blinds its practitioners. But let us listen finally to Lewis telling us how the historian ought to conduct himself. We may well ask whether it is only the Orientals who are subject to the prejudices he chastises.

[The historian’s] loyalties may well influence his choice of subject of research; they should not influence his treatment of it. If, in the course of his researches, he finds that the group with which he identifies himself is always right, and those other groups with which it is in conflict are always wrong, then he would be well advised to question his conclusions, and to reexamine the hypothesis on the basis of which he selected and interpreted his evidence; for it is not in the nature of human communities [presumably, also, the community of Orientalists] always to be right.

Finally the historian must be fair and honest in the way he presents his story. That is not to say that he must confine himself to a bare recital of definitely-established facts. At many stages in his work the historian must formulate hypotheses and make judgments. The important thing is that he should do so consciously
and explicitly, reviewing the evidence for and against his conclusions, examining the various possible interpretations, and stating explicitly what his decision is, and how and why he reached it.\footnote{151}

To look for a conscious, fair, and explicit judgment by Lewis of the Islam he has treated as he has treated it is to look in vain. He prefers to work, as we have seen, by suggestion and insinuation. One suspects, however, that he is unaware of doing this (except perhaps with regard to "political" matters like pro-Zionism, anti-Arab nationalism, and strident Cold Warriorism), since he would be certain to say that the whole history of Orientalism, of whom he is the beneficiary, has made these insinuations and hypotheses into indisputable truths.

Perhaps the most indisputable of these rock-bottom "truths," and the most peculiar (since it is hard to believe it could be maintained for any other language), is that Arabic as a language is a dangerous ideology. The contemporary \textit{locus classicus} for this view of Arabic is E. Shouby's essay "The Influence of the Arabic Language on the Psychology of the Arabs."\footnote{152} The author is described as "a psychologist with training in both Clinical and Social Psychology," and one presumes that a main reason his views have such wide currency is that he is an Arab himself (a self-incriminating one, at that). The argument he proposes is lamentably simple-minded, perhaps because he has no notion of what language is and how it operates. Nevertheless the subheadings of his essay tell a good deal of his story; Arabic is characterized by "General vagueness of Thought," "Overemphasis on Linguistic Signs," "Over-assertion and Exaggeration." Shouby is frequently quoted as an authority because he speaks like one and because what he hypothesizes is a sort of mute Arab who at the same time is a great word-master playing games without much seriousness or purpose. Muteness is an important part of what Shouby is talking about, since in his entire paper he never once quotes from the literature of which the Arab is so inordinately proud. Where, then, does Arabic influence the Arab mind? Exclusively within the mythological world created for the Arab by Orientalism. The Arab is a sign for dumberness combined with hopeless overarticulateness, poverty combined with excess. That such a result can be attained by philological means testifies to the sad end of a formerly complex philological tradition, exemplified today only in very rare individuals. The reliance of today's Orientalist on "philology" is the last infirmity of a scholarly discipline completely transformed into social-science ideological expertise.

In everything I have been discussing, the language of Orientalism plays the dominant role. It brings opposites together as "natural," it presents human types in scholarly idioms and methodologies, it ascribes reality and reference to objects (other words) of its own making. Mythic language is discourse, that is, it cannot be anything but systematic; one does not really make discourse at will, or statements in it, without first belonging—in some cases unconsciously, but at any rate involuntarily—to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence. These latter are always the institutions of an advanced society dealing with a less advanced society, a strong culture encountering a weak one. The principal feature of mythic discourse is that it conceals its own origins as well as those of what it describes. "Arabs" are presented in the imagery of static, almost ideal types, and neither as creatures with a potential in the process of being realized nor as history being made. The exaggerated value heaped upon Arabic as a language permits the Orientalist to make the language equivalent to mind, society, history, and nature. For the Orientalist the language \textit{speaks} the Arab Oriental, not vice versa.

4. Oriental Oriental Oriental Orientals. The system of ideological fic-
tions I have been calling Orientalism has serious implications not only because it is intellectually discreditable. For the United States today is heavily invested in the Middle East, more heavily than anywhere else on earth: the Middle East experts who advise policymakers are imbued with Orientalism almost to a person. Most of this investment, appropriately enough, is built on foundations of sand, since the experts instruct policy on the basis of such marketable abstractions as political elites, modernization, and stability, most of which are simply the old Orientalist stereotypes dressed up in policy jargon, and most of which have been completely inadequate to describe what took place recently in Lebanon or earlier in Palestinian popular resistance to Israel. The Orientalist now tries to see the Orient as an imitation West which, according to Bernard Lewis, can only improve itself when its nationalism "is prepared to come to terms with the West."\footnote{153} If in the meantime the Arabs, the Muslims, or the Third and Fourth Worlds go unexpected ways after all, we will not be surprised to have an Orientalist tell us that this testifies to the incorrigibility of Orientals and therefore proves that they are not to be trusted.
The methodological failures of Orientalism cannot be accounted for either by saying that the real Orient is different from Orientalist portraits of it, or by saying that since Orientalists are Westerners for the most part, they cannot be expected to have an inner sense of what the Orient is all about. Both of these propositions are false. It is not the thesis of this book to suggest that there is such a thing as a real or true Orient (Islam, Arab, or whatever); nor is it to make an assertion about the necessary privilege of an “insider” perspective over an “outsider” one, to use Robert K. Merton’s useful distinction. On the contrary, I have been arguing that “the Orient” is itself a constituted entity, and that the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically “different” inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea. I certainly do not believe the limited proposition that only a black can write about blacks, a Muslim about Muslims, and so forth.

And yet despite its failures, its lamentable jargon, its scarcely concealed racism, its paper-thin intellectual apparatus, Orientalism flourishes today in the forms I have tried to describe. Indeed, there is some reason for alarm in the fact that its influence has spread to “the Orient” itself: the pages of books and journals in Arabic (and doubtless in Japanese, various Indian dialects, and other Oriental languages) are filled with second-order analyses by Arabs of “the Arab mind,” “Islam,” and other myths. Orientalism has also spread in the United States now that Arab money and resources have added considerable glamour to the traditional “concern” felt for the strategically important Orient. The fact is that Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new imperialism, where its ruling paradigms do not contest, and even confirm, the continuing imperial design to dominate Asia.

In the one part of the Orient that I can speak about with some direct knowledge, the accommodation between the intellectual class and the new imperialism might very well be accounted one of the special triumphs of Orientalism. The Arab world today is an intellectual, political, and cultural satellite of the United States. This is not in itself something to be lamented; the specific form of the satellite relationship, however, is. Consider first of all that universities in the Arab world are generally run according to some pattern inherited from, or once directly imposed by, a former colonial power. New circumstances make the curricular actualities almost grotesque: classes populated with hundreds of students, badly trained, overworked, and underpaid faculty, political appointments, the almost total absence of advanced research and research facilities, and most important, the lack of a single decent library in the entire region. Whereas Britain and France once dominated intellectual horizons in the East by virtue of their prominence and wealth, it is now the United States that occupies that place, with the result that the few promising students who manage to make it through the system are encouraged to come to the United States to continue their advanced work. And while it is certainly true that some students from the Arab world continue to go to Europe to study, the sheer numerical preponderance comes to the United States; this is as true of students from so-called radical states as it is of students from conservative states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Besides, the patronage system in scholarship, business, and research makes the United States a virtual hegemonic commander of affairs; the source, however much it may not be a real source, is considered to be the United States.

Two factors make the situation even more obviously a triumph of Orientalism. Insofar as one can make a sweeping generalization, the felt tendencies of contemporary culture in the Near East are guided by European and American models. When Taha Hussein said of modern Arab culture in 1936 that it was European, not Eastern, he was registering the identity of the Egyptian cultural elite, of which he was so distinguished a member. The same is true of the Arab cultural elite today, although the powerful current of anti-imperialist Third World ideas that has gripped the region since the early 1950s has tempered the Western edge of the dominant culture. In addition, the Arab and Islamic world remains a second-order power in terms of the production of culture, knowledge, and scholarship. Here one must be completely realistic about the terminology of power politics to describe the situation that obtains. No Arab or Islamic scholar can afford to ignore what goes on in scholarly journals, institutes, and universities in the United States and Europe; the converse is not true. For example, there is no major journal of Arab studies published in the Arab world today, just as there is no Arab educational institution capable of challenging places like Oxford, Harvard, or UCLA in the study of the Arab world, much less in any non-Oriental subject matter. The predictable result of all this is that Oriental students (and Oriental professors) still want to come and sit at the feet of
American Orientalists, and later to repeat to their local audiences the clichés I have been characterizing as Orientalist dogmas. Such a system of reproduction makes it inevitable that the Oriental scholar will use his American training to feel superior to his own people because he is able to “manage” the Orientalist system; in his relations with his superiors, the European or American Orientalists, he will remain only a “native informant.” And indeed this is his role in the West, should he be fortunate enough to remain there after his advanced training. Most elementary courses in Oriental languages are taught by “native informants” in United States universities today; also, power in the system (in universities, foundations, and the like) is held almost exclusively by non-Orientals, although the numerical ratio of Oriental to non-Oriental resident professionals does not favor the latter so overwhelmingly.

There are all kinds of other indications of how the cultural domination is maintained, as much by Oriental consent as by direct and crude economic pressure from the United States. It is sobering to find, for instance, that while there are dozens of organizations in the United States for studying the Arab and Islamic Orient, there are none in the Orient itself for studying the United States, by far the greatest economic and political influence in the region. Worse, there are scarcely any institutes of even modest stature in the Orient devoted to study of the Orient. But all this, I think, is small in comparison with the second factor contributing to the triumph of Orientalism: the fact of consumerism in the Orient. The Arab and Islamic world as a whole is hooked into the Western market system. No one needs to be reminded that oil, the region’s greatest resource, has been totally absorbed into the United States economy. By that I mean not only that the great oil companies are controlled by the American economic system; I mean also that Arab oil revenues, to say nothing of marketing, research, and industry management, are based in the United States. This has effectively made the oil-rich Arabs into huge customers of American exports: this is as true of states in the Persian Gulf as it is of Libya, Iraq, and Algeria—radical states all. My point is that the relationship is a one-sided one, with the United States a selective customer of a very few products (oil and cheap manpower, mainly), the Arabs highly diversified consumers of a vast range of United States products, material and ideological.

This has had many consequences. There is a vast standardization of taste in the region, symbolized not only by transistors, blue jeans, and Coca-Cola but also by cultural images of the Orient supplied by American mass media and consumed unthinkingly by the mass television audience. The paradox of an Arab regarding himself as an “Arab” of the sort put out by Hollywood is but the simplest result of what I am referring to. Another result is that the Western market economy and its consumer orientation have produced (and are producing at an accelerating rate) a class of educated people whose intellectual formation is directed to satisfying market needs. There is a heavy emphasis on engineering, business, and economics, obviously enough; but the intelligentsia itself is auxiliary to what it considers to be the main trends stamped out in the West. Its role has been prescribed and set for it as a “modernizing” one, which means that it gives legitimacy and authority to ideas about modernization, progress, and culture that it receives from the United States for the most part. Impressive evidence for this is found in the social sciences and, surprisingly enough, among radical intellectuals whose Marxism is taken wholesale from Marx’s own homogenizing view of the Third World, as I discussed it earlier in this book. So if all told there is an intellectual acquiescence in the images and doctrines of Orientalism, there is also a very powerful reinforcement of this in economic, political, and social exchange: the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing.

But in conclusion, what of some alternative to Orientalism? Is this book an argument only against something, and not for something positive? Here and there in the course of this book I have spoken about “decolonializing” new departures in the so-called area studies—the work of Anwar Abdel Malek, the studies published by members of the Hull group on Middle Eastern studies, the innovative analyses and proposals of various scholars in Europe, the United States, and the Near East—but I have not attempted to do more than mention them or allude to them quickly. My project has been to describe a particular system of ideas, not by any means to displace the system with a new one. In addition, I have attempted to raise a whole set of questions that are relevant in discussing the problems of human experience: How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one’s own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the “other”)? Do cultural, religious, and racial differences matter more than socio-economic categories, or politico-historical ones? How do ideas
acquire authority, “normality,” and even the status of “natural” truth? What is the role of the intellectual? Is he there to validate the culture and state of which he is a part? What importance must he give to an independent critical consciousness, an oppositional critical consciousness?

I hope that some of my answers to these questions have been implicit in the foregoing, but perhaps I can speak a little more explicitly about some of them here. As I have characterized it in this study, Orientalism calls in question not only the possibility of nonpolitical scholarship but also the advisability of too close a relationship between the scholar and the state. It is equally apparent, I think, that the circumstances making Orientalism a continuously persuasive type of thought will persist: a rather depressing matter on the whole. Nevertheless there is some rational expectation in my own mind that Orientalism need not always be so unchallenged, intellectually, ideologically, and politically, as it has been.

I would not have undertaken a book of this sort if I did not also believe that there is scholarship that is not as corrupt, or at least as blind to human reality, as the kind I have been mainly depicting. Today there are many individual scholars working in such fields as Islamic history, religion, civilization, sociology, and anthropology whose production is deeply valuable as scholarship. The trouble sets in when the guild tradition of Orientalism takes over the scholar who is not vigilant, whose individual consciousness as a scholar is not on guard against idées reçues all too easily handed down in the profession. Thus interesting work is most likely to be produced by scholars whose allegiance is to a discipline defined intellectually and not to a “field” like Orientalism defined either canonically, imperially, or geographically. An excellent recent instance is the anthropology of Clifford Geertz, whose interest in Islam is discrete and concrete enough to be animated by the specific societies and problems he studies and not by the rituals, preconceptions, and doctrines of Orientalism.

On the other hand, scholars and critics who are trained in the traditional Orientalist disciplines are perfectly capable of freeing themselves from the old ideological straitjacket. Jacques Berque’s and Maxime Rodinson’s training ranks with the most rigorous available, but what invigorates their investigations even of traditional problems is their methodological self-consciousness. For if Orientalism has historically been too smug, too insulated, too positivistically confident in its ways and its premises, then one way of opening oneself to what one studies in or about the Orient is reflexively to submit one’s method to critical scrutiny. This is what characterizes Berque and Rodinson, each in his own way. What one finds in their work is always, first of all, a direct sensitivity to the material before them, and then a continual self-examination of their method and practice, a constant attempt to keep their work responsive to the material and not to a doctrinal preconception. Certainly Berque and Rodinson, as well as Abdel Malek and Roger Owen, are aware too that the study of man and society—whether Oriental or not—is best conducted in the broad field of all the human sciences; therefore these scholars are critical readers, and students of what goes on in other fields. Berque’s attention to recent discoveries in structural anthropology, Rodinson’s to sociology and political theory, Owen’s to economic history: all these are instructive correctives brought from the contemporary human sciences to the study of so-called Oriental problems.

But there is no avoiding the fact that even if we disregard the Orientalist distinctions between “them” and “us,” a powerful series of political and ultimately ideological realities inform scholarship today. No one can escape dealing with, if not the East/West division, then the North/South one, the have/have-not one, the imperialist/anti-imperialist one, the white/colored one. We cannot get around them all by pretending they do not exist; on the contrary, contemporary Orientalism teaches us a great deal about the intellectual dishonesty of dissembling on that score, the result of which is to intensify the divisions and make them both vicious and permanent. Yet an openly polemical and right-minded “progressive” scholarship can very easily degenerate into dogmatic slumber, a prospect that is not edifying either.

My own sense of the problem is fairly shown by the kinds of questions I formulated above. Modern thought and experience have taught us to be sensitive to what is involved in representation, in studying the Other, in racial thinking, in unthinking and uncritical acceptance of authority and authoritative ideas, in the sociopolitical role of intellectuals, in the great value of a skeptical critical consciousness. Perhaps if we remember that the study of human experience usually has an ethical, to say nothing of a political, consequence in either the best or worst sense, we will not be indifferent to what we do as scholars. And what better norm for the scholar than human freedom and knowledge? Perhaps too we should remember that the study of man in society is based on concrete
human history and experience, not on donnish abstractions, or on obscure laws or arbitrary systems. The problem then is to make the study fit and in some way be shaped by the experience, which would be illuminated and perhaps changed by the study. At all costs, the goal of Orientalizing the Orient again and again is to be avoided, with consequences that cannot help but refine knowledge and reduce the scholar's conceit. Without "the Orient" there would be scholars, critics, intellectuals, human beings, for whom the racial, ethnic, and national distinctions were less important than the common enterprise of promoting human community.

Positively, I do believe—and in my other work have tried to show—that enough is being done today in the human sciences to provide the contemporary scholar with insights, methods, and ideas that could dispense with racial, ideological, and imperialist stereotypes of the sort provided during its historical ascendancy by Orientalism. I consider Orientalism's failure to have been a human as much as an intellectual one; for in having to take up a position of irreducible opposition to a region of the world it considered alien to its own, Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience. The worldwide hegemony of Orientalism and all it stands for can now be challenged, if we can benefit properly from the general twentieth-century rise to political and historical awareness of so many of the earth's peoples. If this book has any future use, it will be as a modest contribution to that challenge, and as a warning: that systems of thought like Orientalism, discourses of power, ideological fictions—mind-forg'd manacles—are all too easily made, applied, and guarded. Above all, I hope to have shown my reader that the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism. No former "Oriental" will be comforted by the thought that having been an Oriental himself he is likely— too likely—to study new "Orientals"—or "Occidentals"—of his own making. If the knowledge of Orientalism has any meaning, it is in being a reminder of the seductive degradation of knowledge, of any knowledge, anywhere, at any time. Now perhaps more than before.

Afterword

I

Orientalism was completed in the last part of 1977, and was published a year later. It was (and still is) the only book that I wrote as one continuous gesture, from research, to several drafts, to final version, each following the other without interruption or serious distraction. With the exception of a wonderfully civilized and relatively burdenless year spent as a Fellow at the Stanford Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (1975–6), I had very little in the way of support or interest from the outside world. I received encouragement from one or two friends and my immediate family, but it was far from clear whether such a study of the ways in which the power, scholarship, and imagination of a two-hundred-year-old tradition in Europe and America viewed the Middle East, the Arabs, and Islam, might interest a general audience. I recall, for instance, that it was very difficult at first to interest a serious publisher in the project. One academic press in particular very tentatively suggested a modest contract for a small monograph, so unpromising and slender did the whole enterprise seem at the outset. But luckily (as I describe my good fortune with my first publisher in Orientalism's original page of Acknowledgments) things changed for the better very quickly after I finished writing the book.

In both America and England (where a separate U.K. edition appeared in 1979) the book attracted a great deal of attention, some of it (as was to be expected) very hostile, some of it comprehending, but most of it positive and enthusiastic. Beginning in 1980 with the French edition, a whole series of translations started to appear, increasing in number to this day, many of which have generated controversies and discussions in languages that I am incompetent to