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FADDISH ORIENTALISMS: A Study of Hidden Assumptions in the Study of Orientalism

ABSTRACT

This essay argues that there is a family of terms that scholars have long used to describe outbreaks of “enthusiasm for the Orient,” which includes the nouns, craze, fad, mania, rage, and vogue in combination with the adjectives Oriental, Orientalist, and faddish. This family is divided into two generations, one dating from before Edward W. Said’s Orientalism (1978) and the other after. Pre-Saidian scholars and other writers used the first generation to stereotype and trivialize such enthusiasms by associating them pejoratively with “the Orient”. Post-Saidian scholars continue to use them in an ostensibly more critical framework, but they actually continue to use faddish terminology to trivialize and stereotype the subjects of their study as being typical of classical Orientalist thinking. Pre-Saidian scholars, that is, used the faddish family to stigmatize Orientals while post-Saidian scholars use it to stigmatize the Orientalists. This continuity of usage impacts the ways scholars understand aesthetic Orientalisms and also underscores the insidious nature of Orientalist prejudices themselves.

INTRODUCTION

In 1896, the Chinese envoy, Li Hung Chang (1823-1901), conducted a widely publicized tour of Europe and North America that sparked “an Oriental fad” for jade, by which all manner of things jade from jewel-boxes to daggers to clasps sporting jade stones became the rage in American fashion along with such other things as Chinese wall hangings and Japanese hair styles (see Gunby, 1897). Such “enthusiasm for things Oriental” was in no way unique to the 1890s but rather had a long history going well back in European history, and it seems that from the 19th century onward there is almost always one Oriental fad or another occurring somewhere in the West. From the publication of *1001 Nights* in the 1790s in France to Disney’s release of its latest cinematic version of *Mulan* (2020), enthusiasms for the Orient of one sort or another are a recurring part of Western society, impacting nearly all walks of life including the academic world, the arts, literature, religion, commerce, popular culture, and fashion.

These enthusiasms, when labeled as “fads,” are easy to dismiss. The word, “fad,” itself suggests something superficial and fleeting, a mere blip on the screen of daily life. In actual fact, however, the term, “Oriental fad,” brings together two surprisingly complex notions rooted in the historical currents of the West’s vexed relationship with the peoples and cultures of Asia. There is, it turns out, a family of terms that scholars, critics, and other writers have long used to describe Western enthusiasms for the Orient which family includes the notions of “craze,” “fad,” “mania,” “rage” (as in “the latest rage”), and “vogue” combined with the adjectives “Oriental,” “Orientalist,” and “faddish”. Scholarly usage of various members of this terminological family goes back into the early nineteenth century, and scholars have continued to use them down to the present. Few terms that modern-day Western scholars and other writers use to describe the complex and contradictory ways peoples of European descent imagine and construct real-life Asians to be “Oriental” have such a long history of continuous use.

It is the purpose of this essay to explore implications in the ways in which scholars and others have used and continue to use the terms in the faddish family of Orientalisms both historically and in the present.

A TALE OF TWO NOTIONS

As notions, both “fads” and “Orientalisms” are first and foremost products of the human imagination neither of which is grounded in the real world as such. They reflect, rather, ways of imagining, constructing, and categorizing particular historical socio-cultural events and trends. They have to do, that is, not with Asian realities but with Western ideologies and their stereotypes, which is why these two notions merge so easily and meaningfully in both academic discourse and popular thinking.

ORIENTALISM

Well into the 20th century, the term, “Orientalism,” had basically three meanings in the West: *first*, it was an academic field of study having to do with “the Orient”; *second*, it was a certain aesthetic style that was exotic, alluring, and often mystical-like; and, *third*, Orientalism was a catch-all notion for the state of being of what it meant to be “Oriental”. The notion of Orientalism, thus, had a long history, and it was seen as an entirely honorable and eminently useful word that encapsulated the West’s ambivalent fascination with “things Oriental”. By the 1960s, some scholars were feeling increasingly unhappy with the word, but the world at large paid scant attention to their seemingly squeamish sensitivities.

Then, things changed dramatically. In 1978, Dr. Edward W. Said published his book, *Orientalism*, which treated the notion pejoratively as being a set of ideological stereotypes that profoundly affect the ways in which peoples of European descent (“the West”) imagine and construct Asians as being backward “Orientals”.¹ Said focused particularly on Western attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims as seen primarily in British and French scholarly and literary texts. In those works, he found an offensive treatment of Asia that was used to justify European colonial domination even though the stereotypes involved had little or nothing to do with the real Asia of their day. Western Orientalisms, rather, portrayed a fanciful, exotic Orient filled with minarets, harems, camels, nomads, wailing music, and the like; and Western Orientalists imagined Oriental cultures as being alluring and off-putting all at the same time. In it all, Said shed penetrating light on the ideological roots of the vast, deeply hurtful system of injustice that Western colonialism and imperialism has long imposed on Asia.

While some scholars fought a rearguard action defending especially the old-fashioned academic use of “Orientalism,” most agreed to one degree or another with Said’s fundamental reorientation of the meaning of the term and entered into ongoing debates over the ramifications of that reorientation. To be clear, then, Orientalisms, today, are understood to be a class of Western ideologies, which imagine and construct “Orientals” as sharing a common, essential, enduring, and alien identity that is the mirror image opposite of that of the West. These Orientalisms find expression in almost every facet of Western life and have been a fundamental element of historical European colonialism and Western imperialism. They are primarily about the exercise of power, intellectual as well as political and military, over Asians, defining and controlling them in ways advantageous to the West.

FAD

In theory, the term fad is relatively easy to define. A fad for something is marked by intense, even exaggerated enthusiasm for that thing (e.g. the hula hoop), which enthusiasm lasts for a short period of time. Fads usually spring up unexpectedly and dissipate nearly as quickly as they begin. They are popular, impulsive, and based on imitative behavior.² Scholarly studies of the nature of fads suggest, however, that there is a good deal more to them than first meets the eye. *First*, the notion itself is remarkably vague. There is no objective, generally recognized standard measure for the actual

¹ See Herbert R. Swanson, “Orientalism as an Ideology: The Utility of Said’s Notion of Ideology for the Study of Orientalism,” 19 June 2020. At [Orientalism Studies \(www.orientalismstudies.com\)](http://www.orientalismstudies.com).

² See “Fad,” n.d. At *Lexico (powered by Oxford)* (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/fad>), accessed 23 September 2020; “Fad,” n.d. At *Merriam-Webster* (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fad), accessed 23 September 2020; and, “Fad,” 22 September 2020. At *Wikipedia* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fad>), accessed 23 September 2020.

duration of fads. As scholars use the term, fads sometimes last for only a few months but sometimes they are said to last for years and even decades. In fact, scholars and other writers use this word interchangeably with such terms as, “trend,” which suggests an event of a longer duration, and they can describe events that last for ten or twenty years, as being “fads”.

Second, fads are a significant and complex phenomenon that is still little understood. While individual fads come and go, the larger phenomenon is apparently a permanent and perhaps even a biological element of human behavior to the extent that virtually every facet of social behavior is susceptible to fads. They are happening all the time. They can be local, regional, national, or global. It is in the nature of particular fads, furthermore, to endure through cycles of boom and bust. The hula-hoop craze that first broke out in the late 1950s has seen a number of outbreaks since, only to recede again in each instance. Hoffman and Bailey (2018) go so far as to argue that fads actually evolve, a single fad thus taking on new but related forms in a series of waves over time. They also note that fads can have a significant social and cultural impact. Hendricks (2018) points out that both the automobile and television began in the 1890s and late 1940s respectively as fads. Aguirre, Quarantelli, and Mendoza (1988) argue that fads are complex, organized, and socially structured patterns of social behavior. They are not simply random acts of individuals, but rather involve mixtures of enthusiasm and impulse with thought and planning. Their findings suggest that faddish behavior is “meaningful and consequential to those enacting it.” Fads, then, are not “just” passing, insignificant fancies even if writers use the word to mean no more than that.

Third, while they may be significant in the larger frame of things, however, there is something implicitly negative about the term “fad” itself. To call something a fad trivializes it as being a passing fancy that is illogical, inexplicable, uncontrollable, superficial, and of little lasting concern or merit. Fads are very often commercial in nature, involving a product the sale of which suddenly brings in large profits for no apparent reason, which suggests that there is something manipulative or aggrandizing about fads that gives them the smell of get rich quick schemes.

Fourth, Brown and Patterson (2006) observe that fads incite not only enthusiastic acceptance but also active resistance. Fads are greeted by many with disgust and disdain, which resistance only serves to reinforce the enthusiastic commitment of the “true believers” in what they term, “the dialectical character of consumer crazes.” (p. 159). Their observation makes it clear that the notion of fad and other related terms (which we will deal with directly) suggests that they can be used as ideological stereotypes that people “believe in”.

In one sense, then, a fad is an objective event involving the verifiable enthusiasm of an identifiable group of people for a known commodity, style, program, personality, or idea. In another sense, however, a fad has the qualities of an ideology. It implies something negative or deficient that lacks substance: fads are insignificant, here today and gone tomorrow. Objectively, fads are complex and meaningful, but ideologically they are just the opposite: simple and trivial. The problem is that the sense of triviality doesn’t appear in the formal definitions of the term and is, thus, somewhat subterranean. Like the notion of Orientalism, then the notion of fads can be used to create impressions of faddish events that have little to do with the actual phenomena in question.

THE SYNONYMS OF FAD

As we just saw, the notion of fad, superficially, means a short-lived enthusiasm for some passing fancy, but in reality it is more complex than that. The definitions for the other nouns in this family fit this same profile, although the notion of “vogue” is something of an outlier. Thus, Google defines “craze” as being “an enthusiasm for a particular activity or object which appears suddenly and achieves widespread but short-lived popularity.” Mania is defined as, “an excessive enthusiasm or desire; and obsession.” The *Cambridge Dictionary* online defines “to be all the rage” as, “to be very popular or fashionable.” Scholars of Orientalism habitually use these terms as synonyms for faddish Orientalisms so that they have virtually the same meaning. And while it is true that the definitions for “mania,” “rage,” and “vogue” are not tied to enthusiasms of sudden, short duration, in usage it is generally understood that manias and rages are faddishly short and unexpected in nature and that a vogue can be such as well.

However, these additional terms are not merely carbon-copy synonyms. Three of them (craze, mania, and rage) reinforce and, in a sense, expand on the negative connotations inherent in the notion of fad discussed above. The word “craze,” implies something “crazed” or “crazy,” that is, something nonsensical and involving an extreme mental aberration of one sort or another.³ This is to say that characterizing something as a “craze” brings with it baggage that implies the sense that a craze is “crazy” or, perhaps, even “crazed”. To describe such things as being a “mania” or “all the rage” also amplifies the negative associations and images of faddish enthusiasms. These terms, thus, are not neutral ones. They have a certain feel to them that is pejorative, sometimes obviously so but often as an almost subterranean implication or nuance.

The notion of “vogue” is somewhat more difficult to pin down because, unlike its companion terms, it does not contain in and of itself a sense of overt negativity or pejorative stereotypes. That being said, it does seem to suffer from “guilt by association” to a degree in that prior to Said scholars and others used it to describe the same sets of enthusiasms in the same way they also described them as fads or crazes. The practice seems to have continued since Said. For this reason, we include the terms “Oriental vogue” and “Orientalist vogue” here but with the realization that they can also be used in a more neutral, value-free way.

In any event, these other terms in the faddish family share the dual nature of the notion of fads. They can be used both to describe an actual, real-world event and to trivialize that event in ways that have more to do with ideology than reality. Their use implies meanings whatever the intention of the author.

ORIENTALISM’S FADDISH FAMILY

The question before us is this: what happens when we bring these notions of Orientalism and fad into proximity with each other? The answer begins with an appreciation for the historical and contemporary significance of the faddish family of Orientalisms itself. It must be said at the outset that scholars of Orientalism seem to be entirely unaware that the family even exists as such and that its terms have long been in use as synonyms for each other. This failure serves to reinforce the generally nonchalant way in which they usually use the various members of the family in passing and without definition.

Also as noted above, the faddish family includes a total of eleven terms divided into two generations based on the adjective in each term. The *first generation* combines synonyms of “fad” with the adjective, “Oriental,” and includes: Oriental craze, Oriental fad, Oriental mania, and Oriental rage, and Oriental vogue. The *second generation*, with one exception, combines the synonyms of “fad” with the adjective, “Orientalist,” and includes: Orientalist fad, Orientalist craze, Orientalist mania, Orientalist rage, and Orientalist vogue. The exception is the term, “faddish Orientalism”.

The distinction between the two generations is historical. Prior to Said’s publication of *Orientalism* in 1978, scholars and other writers used the first generation of terms, which were honorable members of a larger vocabulary dedicated to imagining and constructing the peoples of Asia as “Orientals” and their place of habitation as the “Orient”. In the aftermath of Said’s work, however, scholars and others much prefer “Orientalist” so that the first generation represents the vocabulary of classical Orientalism while the second represents the vocabulary of Saidian analysis.

We should note at the outset that the faddish family is unusual in two regards: *first*, it is a *family* of Orientalist terms that scholars and other writers have used and continue to use since the nineteenth century to describe periodic enthusiasms for things supposedly Asian. That is, scholars and other writers have long used these terms in their various combinations as synonyms describing the same phenomenon but sometimes with different ramifications or emphasizing different aspects. In this collective sense, the faddish family is not unique as there are other such families, the most prominent

³ See Liz Potter, “Words in the News: Craze,” n.d. At *macmillan dictionary blog* (<https://www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/craze>), accessed 21 October 2020.

of which is the “False Orientalism” family, which contains at least 14 distinct terms.⁴ While not unique, however, it is unusual as the great majority of terms used by scholars of Orientalism are not part of such a large and relatively well-defined and long-used family. *Second*, this family is also unusual because it can be divided into two identifiable generations, one before Said and the other after him. It contains thus terms that were part of classical Orientalist vocabulary, which have since become part of the vocabulary of the critical study of Orientalism.

THE FIRST GENERATION

Includes: **Oriental craze, Oriental fad, Oriental mania, and Oriental rage, and Oriental vogue.**

In the 19th and earlier 20th centuries, scholars and other writers used these terms as part of the vocabulary of classical Orientalism. They appear in the popular as well as academic literature of the time, and it was in that era that they took on meanings that still adhere to them today. One of the earliest examples is found in a book written by Charles E. Trevelyan with three co-authors (1834) advocating the transcription of colonial Indian languages into the Roman alphabet, which was part of a larger, highly contentious debate over the use of indigenous languages or English in colonial education. Trevelyan brands the idea that Indian languages should be used as betraying an “Oriental mania” (p. 21) and “Oriental rage” (p. 6), which he considered to be without merit. Later in the century, in an 1881 article entitled, “The Oriental Craze,” the author claims that the latest “decorative mania” for things Oriental reveals that, “To be fashionable at the present time people must have Oriental goods, Oriental bric-a-brac, and Oriental this, that and the other.” The author goes on to describe the lengths to which Americans doted on Oriental goods and concluded, sarcastically, “If this mania continues, before it has run its course we shall doubtless have restored the wooden plow of Palestine.”⁵ In 1905, John K. Mumford, writing on the subject of Oriental rugs, claims that a growing demand for certain Oriental fabrics was, “a demand born of the growing artistic tendency—or, possibly, the ‘Oriental fad’—of Western peoples.” Some years later, G. K. Chesterton (1925) characterized ancient Mithraism as an “Oriental fad” and expressed surprise that such a superstition, which seemed well-suited to the fourth or fifth centuries, could still be going strong in the 20th century. As late as 1974, Charles C. Knipp describes the outskirts of Oriental fads as being the meeting place of “all sorts of exotica” where “Gothic, picturesque, and chinoiserie blended in a vague romantic haze.” There was a time, he notes, when Gothic and Oriental themes were seen as “a joint threat to reason and order.” These authors and others of the era of classical Orientalism, in sum, used notions of enthusiasm for the Orient to stigmatize and trivialize the arguments of their own opponents on important issues. They did the same regarding an ancient, “weird” Roman mystery religion. They used these notions to trivialize fashion trends that they found amusing, and even the suggestion by Mumford that the growing demand for Oriental fabrics might be better called an “Oriental fad” rather than a tendency suggests that the term “tendency” might be too weighty—or too neutral.

Pre-Saidian scholars particularly reflected this general pattern in their studies of the Anglo-Irish wordsmith, Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774). Ernest A. Baker (1929), for example, writes that in Goldsmith’s era, “The Oriental craze was still at its height among readers, and the taste for Chinese temples, furniture, and the bibelots which Goldsmith scoffed at in his fourteenth letter.” (p. 71). W. F. Gallaway, Jr. (1933) concurs, observing that Goldsmith ridiculed the “Oriental vogue” of his day as being a perversion of good taste. In 1965, Lucille P. Harper described the way in which Goldsmith uses satire to add a humorous slant to all of the different expressions of England’s 18th century infatuation with its Oriental fad. These scholars all assumed that terms like Oriental craze, Oriental vogue, and Oriental fad were apt descriptors for the supposed perversions and infatuations that Goldsmith scorned, ridiculed, and satirized.

The terms in this first generation, in sum, represent a set of stereotypes regarding “things Oriental” that was part of the larger vocabulary and stereotypes of classical Orientalism, which collectively

⁴ See the “Glossary of Orientalisms,” *Orientalism Studies* (<https://www.orientalismstudies.com>).

⁵ “The Oriental Craze.” *Carpentry and Building: A Monthly Journal* 3, 9 (September 1881): 168.

represented the East as being both essentially exotic and inferior (or, sometimes, as being essentially superior in select ways usually having to do with religion). Pre-Saidian scholars, critics, and other writers thus used the terms in this first generation of the faddish family as stereotypes. They imagined and constructed them to be simple, singular, and sufficient descriptions of Western what they took to be strange and trivial enthusiasms for the Orient.

THE SECOND GENERATION

Includes: **Orientalist craze, Orientalist fad, Orientalist mania, Orientalist rage, Orientalist vogue, and faddish Orientalism.**

Scholars since Said sometimes continue to use the adjective, "Oriental," to describe various enthusiasms for the Orient, but normally they do so in the context of studying historical episodes of such enthusiasms in the era of classical Orientalism. They use it, that is, as more of a descriptive rather than analytical term. For analysis, scholars today usually use the more Saidian adjective, "Orientalist," in their studies of periods of enthusiasm, giving their studies a more critical cast. Not all scholars consciously set their studies in a Saidian context, and the use of the adjective, "Orientalist," can't be assumed to link directly back to Said; but at the very least one may presume that its usage reflects modern, widely-used conventions in the study of Orientalism.

Roger Benjamin (2003) is an example of a scholar who sets his study of French North African colonial Orientalist aesthetics in the context of Said and goes on to argue that the "Orientalist fad" of the period under study held a central place in Paris' Place Clichy shops and emporiums and that most contemporaneous critics considered the fad to be inauthentic, illusory, dubious, and nothing more than a fake exoticism. Joan DelPlato (2002) likewise identifies her study of the 19th century notion of the harem with Said as she argues that representations of the harem were inventions that called on the Western treasury of stereotypes to imagine Oriental women as virtually prisoners trapped in horrific conditions. She tied these images to "faddish Orientalism," which she sees as being another name for "turquerie". Kristin Hoganson (2002), in her article on "cosmopolitan domesticity," does not cite Said as such as she describes an "Orientalist craze" that swept the United States from the later 19th century and the resistance to it in some quarters; and she observes that this craze involved fashionable households and "fanciful creations" that were supposedly Oriental. She, however, specifically links the craze to an affinity to Western imperialism, which is a "Saidian-like" observation.

It is notable that these post-Saidian scholars and others continue to use the members of the faddish family in negative ways similar to the way their pre-Saidian predecessors used them. Orientalist fads are thus still used to describe false, questionable, and even illusory events that demeaned women and were implicated in Western imperialism. And like their predecessors, modern-day scholars continue to use the various terms of the faddish family as if they have a given, fixed meaning easily understood by author and reader alike. They do not seem to realize or take into account the fact that pre-Saidian scholars and others used the terms in the faddish family as Orientalist stereotypes in ways that tended to trivialize and essentialize episodic enthusiasms for the Orient. Given this uncritical, superficial usage of faddish Orientalist terms, we cannot help but wonder if modern-day scholars are using them in the same way as their predecessors. For example, Hoganson describes the "Orientalist craze" in cosmopolitan domesticity as lasting from the 1870s into the early 20th century, more than 30 years. The dictionary definition of a craze, however, is that it is of short duration. Three-plus decades is hardly short by any reasonable reckoning, and it seems that other terms, such as "style" or "trend," would be more fitting. So, why does she use the term "Orientalist craze," which is freighted with pejorative implications?

Why, indeed? Scholars today, collectively, are apparently not aware that a faddish family exists. They do not seem to be aware of the ideological nature of the terms of that family or that they have a history of being used as stereotypes. They do not seem to be aware that notions such as "fad" are complex and contested ones. All of this sounds suspiciously familiar in the context of the study of Orientalisms because it is precisely under these types of conditions of ignorance that Orientalist stereotypes thrive across decades and generations.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The argument thus far has been that scholars and other writers in the Pre-Saidian era of classical Orientalism used a family of terms to describe periodic enthusiasms for things Oriental that amounted to ideological stereotypes. The terms they used—"craze," "fad," "mania," "rage," and "vogue"—were part of the classical Orientalist vocabulary of their day and perpetuated the image that "things Oriental" are somehow inferior, of a lesser quality, or lacking in substance. They reflected the fundamental way most Westerners, most of the time thought about the East as degenerate, pitiable, and potentially dangerous. We need always to keep in mind that these terms are not simple ones, but are freighted with the negative images, feelings, and attitudes that are the stuff of Orientalist stereotypes. The phrase, "just a fad," is not a neutral, descriptive one. It is a judgment. Scholars and others since 1978 have added a new set of seemingly more critical terms to the family, ostensibly to augment their analysis of Orientalisms, but in reality they seem to continue the pre-Saidian "tradition" of using faddish family terms in passing, simplistically, and without precision.

So, then, why does a modern-day scholar describe a given episode of enthusiasm for something Asian (real or imagined) as being, for example, an "Oriental fad" or an "Orientalist craze"? What are the consequences of doing so? We bring these questions into sharper focus by remembering that there are other terms that can be used. Google searches on the terms, "Oriental trend" and "Orientalist trend," suggest that many scholars use the largely value free notion of "trend" to describe enthusiasms for the East. In many cases, other terms such as "fashion" or "style" will do very nicely, again without recourse to terms that are laden with apparently pejorative implications. Indeed, the phrase we have used in this essay, "enthusiasms for the Orient," is still another alternative that lacks inbuilt negative stereotypes (or, positive ones, for that matter).

We can understand how pre-Saidian scholars and others could unhesitatingly stereotype enthusiasms for the East as fads or mania because those stereotypes fit very comfortably with their general attitudes toward the Orient. Post-Saidians, however, are not supposed to have those attitudes and, more particularly, are dedicated to critical, reasonably objective analysis of the nature and impact of ideological Orientalisms themselves. They seem not to realize, however, that when they describe particular enthusiasms for the Orient with such terms as "fad" or "craze" they are using the same notions that their pre-Saidian predecessors used and using them in the same way. The same semi-subterranean stereotypes adhere to them. It is hard to see how simply substituting the adjective "Orientalist" for "Oriental" makes any difference as if their meaning is clear instead of contested, simple rather than complex.

There is, of course, a difference between the pre- and post-Saidian scholars. The former used faddish stereotypes to trivialize enthusiasms for the East and by extension the East itself. Post-Saidian scholars are not in the habit of trivializing Asia. Instead, they seem to be redirecting that trivialization of the historical phenomena of enthusiasms by making a pejorative judgment on classical Orientalist thinking itself. That is, these fads in the past were not trivial because Asia is inferior but because they reflect the way the classical Orientalists were always belittling Orientals. In 1890, the Orientalists trivialized Orientals. Now, we trivialize the Orientalists. In both cases, the very real danger is that scholars fail to understand the complexity and the actual significance of the fad or rage they purport to be describing. They fix their attention on the adjectives rather than the nouns.

Now, contemporary scholars of Orientalism may immediately object that, in fact, classical Orientalist thinking is objectionable. In its day it was racist, sexist, and ethnocentric, and it played a key role in justifying European colonialism. So, what is the problem with calling an "Oriental fad" an "Orientalist fad"? The problem is that in the largest sense a scholars of Orientalism needs to be self-critical of their own assumptions, and the modern-day usages by scholars of the faddish family suggest little such awareness. Moreover, the uncritical usages of terms such as Orientalist fads ignore one of the most important and critical of debates concerning the study of Orientalism. Since 1978, scholars have engaged in an ongoing set of skirmishes over the impact of ideological Orientalist stereotypes on works of art and the crafts, especially in the world of women's fashions. The issue is a simple one: to what degree, if at all, are Orientalist works of art and craft infected by the pejorative stereotypes that so often mark Orientalist ideologies generally? The answer is devilishly difficult. It depends on

the art form or the craft being discussed. It depends on the particular artist or craftsperson. And it depends on who is doing the critical evaluation of the work or the style or the fashion involved.⁶ It is hard to see how the issue can ever be finally resolved, but the ongoing attempts to do so are important and helpful to our overall understanding of the notion of Orientalism.

When post-Saidian scholars describe a trend or a fashion with terms like “craze” or “rage,” they are in danger of resolving the debate over the ideological nature of aesthetic Orientalisms in a simplistic, dismissive way that ignores the debate entirely. Orientalist fads, that is, are unwittingly assumed to be ideological, reflecting the stereotyping of Asians as Orientals. The “fad” of wearing harem pants is thus treated as “just” another example how the West trivializes the East. It was not a fashion trend nor was it an important moment in the history of women’s fashions. It was a fad or a craze or a mania—that’s all.

Or again, some will surely object that it seems hardly fair to modern-day scholars, who use these terms in passing to accuse them of a covert Orientalism of sorts. After all, a book that uses a term such as “Orientalist fad,” probably does so only once or at most twice in three hundred or more pages. Similarly, the author of a learned article might use the term just once in twenty pages. The problem is that both before and after Said many scholars and writers over a period of some two centuries have appended the adjectives, “Oriental” and “Orientalist,” to these terms, usually in passing, usually without definition, and usually without any explanation as to why they do so. This is how ideological stereotypes function however frequently they are used in particular scholarly works. They are based on simplistic ideas that look fine on the surface but have implications, feelings, and inclinations embedded underneath, which is precisely how the racist vocabulary of classical Orientalism was used in its day. Words matter. They are individually minute elements of a vast pattern of ideological usage that can be repeated time and again across many works.

The deeper issue raised here, thus, has to do with the virus-like nature of ideological stereotypes, which are an important instance of what Richard Dawkins calls, “memes”.⁷ Stereotypes can spread widely through a population, be very difficult to eradicate, and their potency is in the fact that they are used off-handedly on the assumption that their meanings are simple and clear. Scholars working in the field of Orientalism studies are aware of this fundamental nature of memes and are aware that dealing with them requires a self-critical attitude. One of the favorite gotcha tactics of scholars of Orientalism, indeed, is to criticize another scholar for being ideological themselves, that is for thinking in dualistic terms and essential categories. Said has often been criticized on these very grounds, which only serves to underscore the point that scholars of Orientalism are aware that the temptation to deal in essences, in absolutes, and in moralizing categories—in memes—is a real one. When modern-day scholars and other writers use the terms of the faddish family of Orientalisms in passing in their analysis of historical enthusiasms for the Orient, it is very likely that they have fallen, if inadvertently, into the Orientalist habits that it is their calling to challenge.

We may conclude, then, that modern-day scholars of Orientalism will do well to stop using the terms in the faddish family of Orientalism analytically to describe the nature and meanings of episodic enthusiasms for the Orient. This is, admittedly, a modest conclusion as it appears from online searches that more scholars than not already prefer to use analytically neutral terms, such as “trend”. It is modest also in the recognition that the grand study of the notion of Orientalism does not teeter on brink of destruction when some scholars use faddish Orientalism family terms only once or twice and without definition. If, however, dispensing with the faddish family analytically is a minor adjustment, it is also a positive adjustment, making the study of Orientalism just that more critically refined and free of its own unrecognized Orientalist-like stereotypes and habits-of-mind.

The faddish family of Orientalist terms, in sum, serves as a reminder of the power of Orientalist stereotypes—of their insidious nature and the fact that, like an iceberg, the bulk and the dangers lie below the surface. Students of Orientalism are duty-bound to be self-aware, self-critical, and self-

⁶ See Swanson, “Orientalism as an Ideology.”

⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

deprecating sufficiently to ferret out and compensate for the hidden ways in which they themselves have been infected by ideological stereotypes. This study of the faddish family thus serves as an important reminder for modern day students of the notion of Orientalism that we have a pre-Saidian heritage that lurks in the shadows of our casual use of terms that carry their own Orientalist baggage, which is to say that even seemingly minor course corrections in the study of Orientalism are helpful and important. Amen.

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