

**A DIALOGIC ENLIGHTENMENT PERSPECTIVE;
APPROACH TO THE OTTOMAN AND EUROPEAN
RELATIONS IN PSEUDO-ORIENTAL LETTERS**

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“The spirit of Enlightenment has been more fully realized in Marana’s Turkish Spy than in the writings of Bayle and Locke” (Weitzman, vii).

ÖZET

On yedinci yüzyıl sonu ve on sekizinci yüzyıl başlarında Avrupa edebiyatında oldukça popüler olan sözde-doğu mektupları Aydınlanma Dönemi eleştirel bakış açısının bir yansıması olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Bu mektuplarda Osmanlı-Doğu dünyasının Avrupa toplumunu ve politik durumunu eleştirmek için bir araç olduğunu ve bu yüzden de sözde-doğu mektuplarının doğu dünyasını ele alan eserler olarak görülemeyeceği gibi yanlış bir yargı vardır. Öncelikle bu mektuplardaki kahraman Osmanlı-Doğusundan gelen bir kişidir. Avrupa toplumunu ve değerlerini bir doğulu bakış açısıyla gözlemler ve özgürce eleştirir. Doğulu gözlemci Doğulular ile Batılıları sürekli karşılaştırır. Bu karşılaştırma ve eleştiriler sözde-doğu mektuplarındaki doğulu karakterlerin doğu ve batı dünyasını yakından tanıdığını ve bu iki dünya arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıkları çarpıcı bir şekilde irdelediklerini göz önüne alırsak bu eserlerde çok güçlü bir doğu imgesi ve doğu-batı etkileşimi vardır. Özellikle Jean Paulo Marana'nın Türk Casusu (1684) ve Montesquieu'nun İran Mektupları'ndaki doğulu gözlemciler Doğu ve Batı'nın kültürel ve ideolojik olarak bir diğerini algılama sürecinin nasıl değiştiğini gösteren önemli metaforlardır. Bu dönüşüm her iki dünyanın bir diğeri hakkındaki ön yargılarına, tarihten gelen düşmanlıklarına meydan okuyan ve Osmanlı-doğusu ile Avrupa dünyası arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları etkileşim içinde değerlendiren eleştirel bir bakış açısı ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu makalenin amacı Osmanlı-doğusu ve Avrupa dünyasının sözde-doğu mektuplarında nasıl bir etkileşim içinde olduklarını incelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı-Doğu Dünyası, Sözde-Doğu Mektupları, Etkileşim, Doğulu Gözlemci

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and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/4 Summer 2008*

ABSTRACT

It is commonly held that pseudo-oriental letters used an Oriental mask to comment on contemporary European society and manners; Eastern contexts, proverbs, customs and culture were thought to be supplementary to the central theme. Therefore, the representation of the Ottoman Orient in the letters was taken as of mostly illustrative (Conant, 157-61). However, it is not illuminating to argue that pseudo-oriental letters were mainly concerned with the discussion of contemporary social and political issues. We can find more than illusion in the letters in terms of the representation of the Ottoman Orient. We will survey the historical process can disclose the interaction between Europe and the Orient and unravel the consistent spirit which reinforced the negotiation between East and West. The critical perspectives in the Turkish Spy and Persian Letters blended the positive and negative aspects of the two worlds; the pseudo-oriental letters amalgamated the familiar and unfamiliar, ridiculous and serious facets of the Eastern and Western cultures. The use of Oriental narrators worked as a metaphor for the intellectual and cultural transformation of Eastern and Western perceptions of each other. This transformation created a critical narrative tradition where Eastern and Western values had contact, clashed, and found a way to get rid of religious prejudice. Using Bakhtin's concept of dialogy, the present paper aims to discuss how the two continents interanimated each other by disclosing the serious and absurd aspects of the two cultures.

Keywords: Ottoman-Orient, Pseudo-oriental Letters, Dialogy, Oriental Observer

I. Introduction

East and West relation has already transformed itself into a metaphysical question through number of debates on the theoretical and historical nature of East and West interactions. Edward Said, a preliminary critic of European Orientalism, excavates how writers from ancient Greece to the present age have created the image of the Orient as the "deepest and recurring image of the Other" (Said 1). Said in *Orientalism* (1978), though he makes valuable contribution to the subject, circumscribes the Orientalist interest in the notion of a presumed continuity of actual Europe vs. fictional Orient. On the contrary, the representation of the Ottoman Orient in 18th century

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English literature –namely in pseudo-oriental letters relies on familiarity and actual knowledge due to a long process of actual interactions. The epistolary narrative, as Bakhtin suggests in the *Epic and Novel*, was born into a new and creative polyglot world in which the national perspective was replaced by dialogic ones. The dialogic perspective of the letters had a peaceful co-existence with local and universal languages (12). The dialogy and co-existence of the alien and national worlds mediated a particular perspective in which the temporal model of the world is replaced by an unconcluded historical process (Bakhtin 30). 18th century pseudo-oriental letters, similarly, mixed the national and alien worlds by replacing the historical image of the Ottoman with the negotiating and dialogic spirit of the age of Enlightenment in which English people’s view of themselves coincided to a certain extent with their view of the Orient. This new perspective established a particular creative dimension based on negotiation. This paper aims to discuss the dialogic aspects of East-West interactions in 18th century pseudo-oriental letters.

II. Origin of Pseudo-oriental Letters

Roosbroeck in the *Persian Letters before Montesquieu* (1972) traces the historical background of the foreign mask in French literature. He argues that the mask was first used in the fourteenth century by Honore Bonet in the satirical poem *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*. The poet supposes that a Saracen is traveling through the Christian states as a spy, and he is sending his impressions of the Christian Western world to his Mohammedan overlord (Roosbroeck 23). Roosbroeck thinks that Ibn Tofail’s the *Original Man* [published in the 16th century in Spain] and Baltasar Gracian’s [Spanish writer], *El Criticon* (1650) are the earlier examples of the form. The foreign masks in the *Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun*, *Original Man*, and in the *El Criticon* “represented the critical intellect confronted with the diversity of human life, with social stupidities and ineradicable animality, - and in the ironical laughter of both, there sounds an undertone of hidden bitterness” (Roosbroeck 32.). It is Ferrante Pallavicino who first reconciles the foreign mask in the pamphlets. He uses an Armenian character as the foreign observer and criticizes the Roman church (35).

Pseudo-oriental letters became popular with the publication of *Letters Written by A Turkish Spy* (1684). The *Turkish Spy* has an interesting and extraordinary history. Jean Paulo Marana, writer of the *Spy*, was a journalist in Italy before he moved to France. He fled to Paris as a political refugee after taking part in the conspiracy against Spanish hegemony in 1649 in Genoa. Marana wrote the *Turkish Spy* in

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Paris. The editor writes in the preface to the *Letters* that he found the documents of 'Arabic Letters' in his lodging in Paris. He found someone and had the letters translated into French. He understood that they had been written by a Turkish spy, Mahmut, between 1637 and 1688 to inform the Ottoman Divan about the condition of French and European society.

Marana's Genoese background is significant. Genoa had established an early colony in the Galata district of Constantinople at the beginning of the 15th century. After the fall of Constantinople, the Genoese settlement in Galata was not interrupted. The Genoese merchants had privileges in the Ottoman open seas and became allies with the Ottomans against Spain and Venice. Alliance and active interactions between the Ottoman Empire and Genoa continued until the invasion of Genoa by France in 1805 (Özkan 8-10). Although Marana did not during his life-time visit the Ottoman Empire, it seems from the letters that as a Genoese he must have had a great deal of information about and sympathy for the Ottomans. McBurney also argues that the bulk of Oriental knowledge in the *Turkish Spy* indicates that Marana must have been engaged in reading about the Ottoman culture; McBurney says that Marana probably ripened "the idea of having a Turk visit Paris and write his observation" out of his readings (925). In addition, Marana's own experiences and adventures as a political agent of Count Rafaello must have contributed to the framing of the *Spy*².

Marana creates an oriental character, Mahmut, in the *Spy*. Mahmut's journey and experience become an opportunity for him not only to realize the follies of French society, but also in this way to get to know certain aspects of his oriental identity which he would otherwise not have realized. He speaks, judges, criticizes other people. Yet his learning and his ongoing encounter with the other [French people] cause disturbing changes in his life and opinions. He attains a higher awareness by meeting the otherness of French society but this awareness is reciprocal. The more he learns about the other the more ambivalent he becomes. He says: "Why was I made a man to endure these cruel agonies?" (*T.S.* 178). In Letter XVII of Volume-VI Book

² Marana before the age of thirty endured a four-year imprisonment because he was accused of either being involved in or at least failing to expose Count Rafaello Della Torre's plot to give the Duke of Savoy control of Savona. After the imprisonment he left Genoa for Spain and received patronage to write about the Della Torre conspiracy but could not complete it due to the war against France. He took refuge in Monaco and with royal patronage wrote the political history of Louis XIV. The initial segment of the *Turkish Spy* was the first project of this history. (McBurney 925-26)

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IV he complains about the “surly rugged looks of proud and wealthy infidels” (*T.S.* 177). He feels that he is “forced to imitate the fox” to pass undiscovered in Paris (*T.S.* 140). He seems unhappy, to “have a veil upon veil” and “to have a mask with a natural face outside” (*T.S.* 74). He peeps into the life of the ‘infidels’ and freely observes their ‘inveterate hatred’ against each other. In time, he realizes that he is in between two worlds (*T.S.* 67).

Although the pseudo-oriental letter writing and foreign mask became popular with the *Turkish Spy*, the genre achieved great popularity with the publication of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1717) in French language. Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* is written with the same spirit and in the same form as Marana’s *Turkish Spy*. Montesquieu imitates the preface to the *Turkish Spy* in the *Persian Letters*. Like the editor of the *Spy*, the editor of the *Persian Letters* claims in the preface that he discovered manuscripts of letters left by two Persian visitors³. But unlike the editor of the *Turkish Spy*, the editor of the *Persian Letters* claims a personal acquaintance with the Persian visitors, Usbek and Rica; and unlike Mahmut, Rica and Usbek do not conceal their Oriental identities. But like Mahmut, the Persian observers are gradually enlightened, and have a dialogic relation with Europeans. Rica, like Mahmut, questions certain oriental values. For instance, in Letter LXXXIX Rica argues that freedom and glory are more abundant in France than in Persia. They openly declare their Persian identity to the Parisians and walk in the streets in their native Persian clothes⁴. Rica admits that it was fascinating for the French public to see him in the Persian habit. The oriental clothes locate him, in the eyes of the native people, in another order of existence. In Letter XXX Usbek says: “when I arrived they looked at me as though I had been sent from Heaven; old men and young, women and children, they all wanted to see me. If I went out, everyone perched at the windows: If I was in the Tuileris, I experienced immediately a circle gathering around me” (*P.L.* 41). As the editor admits in the preface to the work, the oriental visitors will not only introduce oriental society to the contemporary readers but they will also re-present those aspects of French society which escape the natives’ point of view.

³ The editor of the *Turkish Spy* claimed that he discovered the manuscripts of letters in his room after he moved to his new pension in Paris. But the editor of the *Persian Letters* admits that he knew the Persians by sight. They were his neighbors. The Persians sometimes shared letters with the editor.

⁴ It can be argued that Montesquieu’s transformation of the Oriental spy of Marana into the Oriental observer and his use of the Persian clothes to reinforce the Oriental identity indicate that the French public recognized distinct Oriental [here Persian] customs and evaluates the Orient with respect to its cultural symbols.

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Through the letters of the oriental visitors, Rica and Usbek, the contemporary public is given access to a diversity of thoughts and beliefs, to the historical conflicts and interaction between East and West, to religious convictions and superstitions. Spatial distance from the Oriental Persia provides Rica and Usbek with freedom to re-evaluate and question the Orient; intellectual and cultural distance from the contemporary French society enables Rica and Usbek to obtain a new dialogic perspective to criticize the absurdities and vices of Parisians. As Roosboeck states, the oriental observers present the junction of East and West “with the critical spirit of the eighteenth century [enlightenment]” (21). Bayle argues that the oriental machinery in the *Turkish Spy* and *Persian Letters*:

gives a greater flexibility in the presentation than any other form of expression. In particular, letters could be added (and substituted if necessary) quickly, so as to enhance the work’s scope and degree of contemporary relevance and spontaneity. Furthermore, this could be done right up to the month of publication, without fundamentally altering the rest of narrative. [this narrative form [also] gives particular ease to Marana and Montesquieu for dating the letters according to Muslim chronology ...] take for example CXL, which refers, albeit obliquely, to the financial ruin which beset many people in the week of 21st-28th May 1720, when John Law’s Compagnie des Indes collapsed in panic of speculation. This event did not occur until three or four months before Montesquieu carried his manuscripts to Paris. Only through the epistolary form could Montesquieu [and certainly Marana and others who used pseudo-letters] have integrated such a contemporaneous event with such ease. Montesquieu carried out commentary on current events –victories over Turks, The Cellamore Conspiracy, the death of Charles XII. The pseudo-letter genre again made it easy to deal with such events separately. (38-39)

In the eighteenth century extension of and commerce between the European and oriental countries, European imperialism and long-existing historical relations changed the nature and aspects of the interaction between East and West. Public of the age could read about social and historical events which took place in Oriental countries. Political and commercial alliances of ambassadors, merchants and scholars from Europe and the Middle East mediated and carried forward the ongoing interactions between Oriental and European countries.

III. Dialogy in Pseudo-oriental Letters

The question must be ‘what is the relation of all this argument to the dialogy between the Ottoman Orient and 18th century Europe?’

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The question of dialogy between the Ottoman Orient and Europe in the pseudo-oriental letters, and the use of the Oriental observers should be transferred into a different context to maintain the priority of the moving spirit which inspired pseudo-oriental letters and the emergence of the oriental observer. Bakhtin's idea of cultural interanimation is illuminating in that he states that the representation of the world changes from genre to genre and from era to era as literature develops (Bakhtin 849). There appears a 'cultural interanimation' and an ideological interaction in the combination of a national monolithic world with the alien world. The native world comes near the alien world by means of dialogy between foreign and local characters (850-51). Bakhtin states that the Menippean satire was used by Xenophon, the ancient Greek writer, in order to discuss the contemporary relations between the ancient Greeks and the Oriental world. According to Bakhtin, the epic genre dealt with the glory and depiction of the past, therefore, Xenophon could not express the immediate relations between the Greeks and Orientals through epic. Xenophon replaced the monolithic and historical discourse of the epic with the ironic discourse of the Menippean satire to renovate Greek political structure in a spirit close to Oriental autocracy. This transformation made it possible for Xenophon to unmask the Greek ideology and to create a flexible space in Greek discourse to integrate Eastern sociopolitical norms. This reconciliation of the Eastern and Greek contemporary world within the Menippean satire anticipated the power of dialogic discourse to "interanimate" different cultures (Bakhtin 28-9). The outside, alien, even hostile perspective maintained an essential frame to view and interpret the intersections, similarities and differences of the Greek and Oriental worlds.

Evincing Bakhtin's argument, it can be argued that pseudo-oriental letter-writing manifested a particular form of cultural interanimation between the Ottoman Orient and Europe. It was obvious that the relation between the Ottomans and Europe was not as antagonistic after the end of the 17th century as it was before. Once the physical threat of the Ottomans was withdrawn after the siege of Vienna, the hostility against the Ottomans was transformed in Europe into a more liberal ground which broke away from the traditional image of the Ottoman Orient in English literature. In particular, the pseudo-oriental letters, very much like the Menippean satire of Xenophon, transformed the otherness of the Ottoman Empire. The Oriental visitors were transformed into Europe and this transformation laid the groundwork of the dialogic attitude. The Ottoman and the Oriental customs, previously seen as vulgar and threatening, became an essential correlating factor and powerful evidence in the

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verification or rejection of certain political, social and philosophical European propositions. The oriental gesture of the observer and the desire to alienate oneself from one's own community, to imagine Europe and European community through an Oriental point of view became an illuminating gesture which decentered the dominant concepts. This gesture took one's national identity as something detachable; as something one can step out of and view with foreign eyes. Such a transformation communicated a desire to negotiate with and acknowledge the usefulness of the Oriental perspective and culture. It was a movement from traditional stereotypes to the critical distance, which suggested a primacy of interactive, mutual and justifiable human experience.

A critical foreign-oriental observer is given a central role in 18th century pseudo-oriental letters. The foreign Oriental observer relocates the Ottomans into a contemporary European social context; he renders and deciphers the familiar and unfamiliar aspects of the Oriental and European worlds by means of transformation. He represents the contemporary European thought from the perspective of the Oriental Ottoman characters. This relocation and transformation made the two worlds more intelligible and recognizable than ever before. For instance, in the *Persian Letters* the Orient is used to elevate the concept of 'noble savage'. Here, Rousseau's metaphysical utopia is first made real by the story of Troglodytes, and then it is refuted. The Troglodytes are a small tribe in Arabia. They kill the rulers to get rid of governmental restrictions. Then, they create a specific notion of justice and equality: "the natural savage instinct" determines "what is right and wrong" among the Troglodytes (*P.L.* 23). However, this change does not bring peace and justice. People become more selfish and begin thinking that "Why should I kill myself with works for those in whom I have no interest ... it is no concern of mine though all the other Troglodytes live in misery" (*P.L.* 23). In the agricultural lands the highlanders die of hunger during the season of draught; the lowlanders die of famine due to the rainy season. People do not pay attention to others' misery. In the end, there is no food and no government to rule, thus no security. People begin to kill one another: "a man killed his neighbor" because his neighbor had an affair with his wife. It becomes common in this tribe to kill one another for a piece of land: "the Troglodytes perished in their sins' and became victims of 'their own righteousness'" (*P.L.* 26). General welfare and security are forgotten. Usbek argues that men are not born with "natural wisdom" but with "natural wickedness" (28). When they are left without law and government, each person will be after his own interest and will kill the other. The story implies that natural instincts do not provide justice

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but cause natural wickedness. In the story Europe is a *sjuzet* and the Orient is *fabula*. The Western idea of the ‘noble savage’ expresses itself through an Eastern voice. Thus, Eastern and Western contexts are used interchangeably to provide further counterargument rather than to identify the East as the other⁵. Usbek, the oriental observer, challenges the enlightenment idea of natural justice, honesty, freedom and respect in the context of the Troglodytes society. Pseudo-oriental letters, in this respect, have a particular discourse which recognizes, allows, transforms and integrates the Oriental world.

Persistency of the Oriental voice and transformation of characters also indicate that the Orient is identifiable and familiar to the Europeans. The more the Persian observer participates in European society the more he realizes that he exists in every shop, on every mantelpiece: “one thing struck me: I found my portraits everywhere-in all the shops, on every mantelpiece. They were fearful if they should not see enough of me” (*P.L.* 41). Weight states:

In many respects, the Orient was known, identifiable, and coherent to Europeans, as evidenced by the rapid popularity and production of Oriental tales following the *Turkish Spy*: it should therefore come as no surprise that many authors could create the same Orient. (42)

However, Weight also admits that Europe’s view of the Orient is “a view full of contradictions and ambivalence” (43). The ambivalence is an obvious aspect of the cultural interanimation which discloses itself through oriental observers in the pseudo-oriental letters. There is an on-going fluctuation between the Eastern and Western identity. This fluctuation becomes apparent in the characters’ decisions to change their names, and dresses in the European manner. Mahmut hides his identity behind French manners. He says:

I shall better conceal myself. Instead of my name, Mahmut the Arabian, I have taken on me that of Titus the Moldavian; and with a little cassock of black serge, which is the habit I have chosen, I make two figures, being at heart what I ought to be, but outwardly and in appearance what I never intend. (*T.S.* 1)

⁵ During the Middle Ages the human body had a negative association. It was repressed and represented as the undesirable part of existence. The soul was given a superior position to represent human existence. After the Renaissance and in the age of Enlightenment the body was given an essential position. Likewise, the Ottoman Orient, which was suppressed in the Middle Ages, was given an essential position in the 18th century.

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Rica was more conservative at the beginning. He took great pleasure from the Parisian interest in his Persian manners. When he first introduced himself to the Parisian community, people were fascinated by his oriental dress and manners: “The inhabitants of Paris carry their curiosity almost to excess, When I arrived they looked at me as though I had been sent from Heaven ... they all wanted to see me” (*P.L.* 83). They thought that he really looked Persian. But he soon decided to ‘free’ himself “from all foreign adornments” to be exactly assessed (83). Mark Currie states that we are more likely to sympathize and be fascinated with people when we have a lot of information about their inner lives, motivations and fears; or we like people when they do not let us judge them incorrectly (Currie 19). Parisians were not unfamiliar with Persian qualities but Rica did not want to allow them to judge him by his appearance. Therefore, eventually he decided to change his Persian clothes to French ones, which created ambivalence. This transformation was taken as a challenge to the already established quintessential Oriental identity by Parisians. Whenever he introduced himself to a Frenchman or to a Parisian in his French manner, they asked him: “how can one be Persian?” (*P.L.* 20). The geographical connection to Persia and his physiognomic Persian identity did not convince the Parisian of his origin. This change of dress made his identity ambivalent: “The experiment” surprised Parisians. He began to hear a ‘buzz’ around him: “Oh! Oh! is he Persian? What a Most extraordinary thing! How can one be Persian?” (*P.L.* 21) The early response ‘he really looks Persian’ was replaced by ‘how can one be Persian?’ When cultural symbols, since they were replaceable, disappeared, it became impossible for Parisians to recognize the otherness of Orientals. The earlier assumption that he could be truly assessed by Parisians was challenged and his clothes became a signifier for and referent to the ambivalent identity; he was born as Persian and identified as Parisian. This transformation can also be considered as an attack on artificial marks which distinguish one’s identity.

There is a continual fluctuation between Oriental and European cultures in the letters. While the oriental machinery dislocates the observers from the European social context, the articulate European voice relocates them in Europe. On the one hand, the characterization of the oriental observers illuminates the persistent Oriental machinery; on the other hand, the Oriental machinery cannot subjugate the rational and articulate European voice. This dichotomy is consistent throughout the works. Prefaces to the *Turkish Spy* and *Persian Letters* reveal this fluctuation with respect to the contingency and correlation between the style of the letters and the author:

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“throughout the letters there is a quaintness of expression, peculiar to the Arabians” (qtd. in Weight 49). The letters are full of Oriental expressions, veracity and proverbs. But it is emphasized in the prefaces to the letters that the articulateness of the observers and the strength of thought have truly European traces. Mahmut and Rica retained oriental commodities, jewelries and rarities but they also dressed in a Western manner (51). The European calendar was used together with the Oriental one. Oriental characters expressed themselves in the context of contradictions. This unstable and indeterminate position of the characters and the complexity of the style decentered the dominance of one world over the other.

The co-existence of the Oriental and European elements challenges radical distinctions between the East and West. The Oriental observers remain in the borderline of the two cultures and use this in-betweenness to direct the attention of the readers to the absurdities and contradictions of the two worlds. This in-betweenness becomes a kind of free zone to criticize ridiculous and irrational beliefs and customs and long held notions: “What are the conquests of Alexander compared with those of Zenghis Khan?” (*P.L.* 82). Mahmut writes: “European thinks that Turks do not travel in Europe. But Turks conformed to the fashions and manner of people in Europe and became the masters of Christians” (*T.S.* 165). Mahmut considers the act of dueling as ridiculous. He states that dueling, which seems honorable to French, is ridiculous to Orientals. Mahmut criticizes the European notion of Oriental barbarism with reference to the act of dueling. He writes: “They call us Barbarians, when they are not the only people to teach us, and all other nations, the art of single combat, which is the most pernicious custom that can be introduced among men, who cut one another’s throats oftentimes on slight occasions” (*T.S.* 43).

He finds certain things, which render the paradigms of the civilization absurd. For instance, he argues that literacy and freedom of print culture, which seemed to provide a more civilized position to the Europeans, leads to corruption. He says: “the lowest sorts of people who can read have the privilege to become as knowing as their superiors” (*T.S.* 87). But European scholars use books to abuse and to deliver lies. Polygamy and adultery are similarly used to compare and contrast the moral corruptions. Mahmut says:

Although they ‘accuse Mussulmans for having more wives than one ... they lie with every wench that comes to their way. Adultery passes them as good breeding, and fornication is esteemed as innocent an action as eating and drinking’. (*T.S.* 87)

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Usbek, like Mahmut, also compares the French King Louis XIV to Ottoman Sultans in terms of the absolute power of the king. He writes that when Louis XIV was sixteen years old, nobles and courtiers related the Sultan's absolute power to him. He was so impressed by the Sultan's power that Louis XIV was often heard to say that of all existing governments, that of the Turks pleased him most (*P.L.* 46). Rica, the Persian observer, finds it ridiculous that the French king sells titles. He is "a great magician" and makes people think what he wishes ... "so great is the power and influence he has over their minds" that although the king has "no mines of gold like his neighbor, the king of Spain; he is much wealthier than that prince; because his riches are drawn from a more inexhaustible source, the vanity of his subjects". This policy 'fortified towns' and 'equipped the troops' (*P.L.* 34-6).

The Oriental observers find Eastern and Western cultures similarly corrupted and absurd in certain aspects. Rica asks: "Must we be for ever blind to our own folly; is it blessing to find consolation in the absurdities of others?" (*P.L.* 59). "Like us also, they have appointed fasts, and times of mortification, by which they hope to move the divine clemency ... They recognize, as we do, their own unworthiness, and the need they have for an intercessor with God" (*P.L.* 44). When a misfortune happens, the French public reads Seneca, but the Asians take infusion which cheers the heart and cleans the memory from its sufferings (*P.L.* 42). Women in France are not like women in the Orient. It seems as inevitable as fate for men in France to accept the infidelities of their wives (*P.L.* 62). While prohibition of divorce makes marriage intolerable for Christian countries, polygamy provides Mohammedans with an opportunity to increase their population and power (*P.L.* 122). Rica thinks that the caprices of the military class and lack of consent between the subject and the ruler has made the Ottomans weaker. As a result towns have been dismantled, cities deserted, the country desolated, agriculture and commerce neglected; during this time the Europeans flourished in commerce and industry (*P.L.* 30-1).

When looked at from this perspective, it is useless to claim superiority for one culture over the other one. It is written in the *Persian Letters* that one's imagination inevitably adapts itself to the customs of the country. The regulations, justice, and equity are not better observed in Turkey, in Persia, or in the dominions of the Mogul, than in the Republics of Holland, and of Venice, and even in England: "it does not appear that fewer crimes are committed there, and that men, intimidated by the greatness of punishments, are more obedient to the laws" (*P.L.* 87). The absolute power of Sultans and the injustice of European princes produce similar monstrosities, and the princes of

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East and West bribe African chiefs and kings to depopulate their country and to sell their subjects as slaves. They similarly think of peopling large countries by means of colonies; they do not believe in divine justice, which destroys the destroyers (*P.L.* 125). Rica emphasizes that false notions and prejudice blind us to see our follies. For instance, he thinks that the intolerance of Christians, Jews, Muslims and ancient Egyptians creates hostility: “Proselytism, with its intolerance, its affliction of the consciences of the others, its wars and inquisitions, is an epidemic disease which the Jews caught from Egyptians, and which passed from them to the Christians and Mohammedans” (*P.L.* 90). According to Rica, it is not the multiplicity of religions which causes wars but it is the intolerant spirit of proselytism. The letters condemn the prejudice and challenge long-held false beliefs; Eastern and Western cultures are presented as interwoven, and inconsistent beliefs are parodied. It is emphasized that religion is intended for man’s happiness and prejudice is a cultural invention, thus artificial. It is suggested that the long-held European prejudice and false notions of the Oriental world should be questioned. The critical distance unraveled, betrayed and reconciled the historical conflict and dialog, harmony and dissonance between Europe and the Orient. Thus, the Eastern and Western idea of supremacy was eliminated and cultures were presented as equally corrupted and valuable in different ways.

The critical and interanimating spirit of the letters is dialogic in the sense that letters are presented as a cooperative work between the Persian visitors and the European editor. The Editor emphasizes the trustworthiness and reliability of the Persians. Although the editor and the Persians are men of two different worlds, they do not conceal any secret from each other. The oriental visitors interpret society from a critical distance; the editor translates their comments into the European language by copying, refining the prejudice and re-appropriating the letters to the European taste. This cooperation becomes a metaphor for self-respect and virtue; they are sincere, men of moral dignity and learning. Readers are also made to rely on this cooperation. This argument also sheds light on the dialogic nature of the letters; the letters are a product of co-operation and interaction between Oriental and European points of view. The critical Oriental perspective and articulate European voice collide in the context of the letters to judge the two worlds. Richard argues that the “indigenous eye [native citizen] knows everything” but “sees nothing, whereas foreign eye sees everything, but knows nothing” (*P.L.* 222). If we can see with foreign and indigenous eyes, we can maintain an imperial view and render culture as a spectacle. The editor states that Persian

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observers were ‘communicative’ and they comprehended European [French] customs and manner in a year. The editor also admits that he learnt from the observers the Persian customs. Thus, the letters brought together indigenous and foreign eyes, and this collaboration provided a particular critical vision and ‘intimate spectacle’ to view culture in its ‘minutest particulars’.

It is significant for the purpose of the study to emphasize the fact that the use of a critical oriental narrator provided an opportunity to look at the world in the 18th century from a more critical, global, sophisticated and universal perspective. This influence becomes apparent when we trace the transformation of the foreign observer into the local observer. That is, the critical relation between contemporary society and foreign observers was influential on the development of the periodical persona. We have already discussed how Ward, Addison and Steel transformed the foreign observer into the local observer. They also located the local observer in the coffeehouses and made it a critical voice of their periodicals. Habermas states that the modern public-sphere and public ideas developed in the coffee-houses⁶: “the physical site of the public sphere ... was the coffee-houses in which aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals could meet on equal terms” (qtd. in Richetti 52). Keeping in mind the role of the coffeehouses for the circulation of the public ideas and the transformation of the foreign observer into the local observer to discuss contemporary public issues, it can be stated that the Orient was a consistent interanimating spirit in 18th century English literature. The critical spirit of the Oriental observer and coffeehouses co-mingled⁷. The observer inspired the development of public voice and the coffeehouses the development of a liberal public space. Characterizations of the oriental observers, periodical observers and the coffeehouses were similar in the sense that they had a critical role in 18th century England.

The critical distance of the Oriental observer is imminent and strategic; the critical distance of the periodical persona [observer] is intentional. The oriental observer is a foreign body in the European world. The Periodical persona is a local character. The union of the

⁶ Usbek parodies coffee-houses as follows: ‘coffee is very much used in Paris; there are a great many public houses where it may be had. In some of these they meet to gossip, in others to play at chess. There is one where the coffee is prepared in such a way that it makes those who drink it witty: at least there is not a single soul who on quitting the house does not believe himself four times wittier than when he entered it’ (Letter XXXVI).

⁷ As we have discussed in the first chapter, coffeehouses were first introduced to English society by an Ottoman citizen.

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oriental observer and the distant local observer liberated the English perception of the world and led to the development of a cosmopolitan perspective. This new perception is celebrated by Mr. Spectator in the visit to the Royal Exchange. Mr. Spectator visits the Royal Exchange and he feels that he is a citizen of the world (*The Spectator*, 1710: No: 69). He symbolically moves in between the multi-layered world of the Exchange and the monolithic world of London with a cosmopolitan spirit: "This grand scene ... give[s] him a spectacle to observe infinite variety of solid and substantial entertainments" (3). Mr. Spectator re-introduces himself in the Royal Exchange as a great 'lover of mankind' and takes great pleasure from the sight of the happy multitude. He says:

Nature seems to have taken particular care to disseminate her blessings among the different regions of the world, with an eye to this mutual intercourse and traffic among mankind, that the natives of the several parts of the globe might have a kind of dependence upon one another and be united by their common interest. (4)

There is an interactive and interanimating relation between Mr. Spectator and the Royal Exchange. The commerce and the shared ground of material exchange between people create unions in the Exchange. Mr. Spectator re-introduces this interactive intercourse and traffic among mankind with an eye which similarly unites the different regions of the world. This cosmopolitan view implies the consistent interactions and co-existence of the world in a contact-zone where Oriental and Occidental cultures may preserve their unity but where long-held divisions appear rather unnecessary and artificial.

18th century English public was so fascinated with the Oriental observer that some individuals disguised themselves as such. Contrary to the oriental observers, this time we had European citizens who were dressed in Oriental manners. Weight argues that George Psalmanazar disguised himself in an Oriental manner and introduced himself to London society as a native Formosan. He wrote about the history and language of his so-called native country, Formosa. It was fascinating for English people to read from Psalmanazar about cannibalism and polygamy in Formosa. What was even more interesting about him was that he was a light-haired, fair-skinned and well- educated man. Towards the end of his life, it was discovered that he was a Frenchman and confidant of Samuel Johnson (Weight 2). Brown thinks that the idea of oriental observer inspired Daniel Defoe to write a continuation of the letters to reform the English "Central Intelligence Agency". She writes that the *Turkish Spy* has assisted Defoe in his political project. In his *Continuation of Letters Written by Turkish Spy* (1718) he

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emphasizes the component of the *Turkish Spy*. Defoe suggests to Harley to use a spy in the English Intelligence Service in much the same way as done by Marana in the *Turkish Spy*. Defoe thinks that the implementation of the plan will allow Harley to know what is happening all over the world. Defoe says: “The Secretary of State would be informed in advance of the political and social events” (qtd. in Brown 105). Defoe’s success as an agent for Harley was, therefore, built upon his capacity to play roles and argue from a number of perspectives (120).

Conclusion

The evidence discussed above indicates that the emergence, development and transformation of the oriental observer contradict Said’s argument in *Orientalism* (1978). He argues that there is a coherent discourse of *Orientalism* which treats everything as evidence to back up the division between East and West (Said 3). However, the letters indicate that ‘East and West’ have no “advantage over one another except that which virtue gives” (*P.L.* 142). The letters also argue that the power of intellect arises from a variety of spiritual lights in Greek logic, and the scholastic theology of Avicenna and Averreos and Plotinus (*P.L.* 150). The oriental observers fixed their thoughts and concerns upon great changes which made the ages so different from one another, and the earth so unlike itself (*P.L.* 116). It is also argued that the Ottoman experience in the ancient territories of Babylon, Greece, Egypt, Persia and Constantinople is considered as significant for the developing European imperialism. Mahmut admits in the letters that one can find all ancient civilizations swallowed up in the universal empire of the Ottomans (qtd. in Aksan 210). Thus, the Oriental Ottoman history is presented in the letters as an implicit model for the expansion of European imperialism. Interaction between the Ottoman Orient and Europe developed in this context of dialogy.

In many respects, the Orient is known, identifiable, and coherent to Europeans. It is not surprising that many authors could create similar epistolary narratives to write pseudo-oriental letters. It would be impossible for Marana to create the *Turkish Spy* without understanding. Similarly, it would be more difficult for the 18th century writers to frame their oriental tales and travelogues without the interanimating spirit of the pseudo-oriental letters. This critical attitude anticipated the dialogic, interanimating and cosmopolitan worldview of the oriental tales and oriental travelogues. While the letters move in between the East and West, they overthrow long-held orthodoxy and construct a particular intimacy between the values of Western and

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Eastern communities. In particular, the interconnectedness of the East and West is unmasked. The Oriental observer could learn about, have intimacy with, and adopt the world of the other. This made the Ottoman Orient closer and more familiar to the Europeans than ever before. Then, it can be argued that the pseudo-oriental letters promote a more dialogic, comparative and reflective and less orientalist representation of the Ottoman Orient.

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