ROBERT BROWNING AS AN ORIENTALIST IN *FERISHTAH'S FANCIES*[*]

FERISHTAH'S FANCIES ("FERİŞTAH'IN TAHAYYÜLLERİ")
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Abstract

Orientalism, according to Edward Said, is a Western fantasy which is not based on observation but on dreams, fantasies and assumptions of the West; and this makes it a fabricated construct. As Said argues in the introduction of Orientalism (1978), "[t]he Orient [is] almost a European invention, and ha[s] been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences"(1). "Victorian Orientalism" marks the contemporary taste of the English. Publications of Richard F. Burton's successful translation of the Arabian Nights in 1884 and Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's Rubáiyát can be seen as two examples of Victorian Orientalism. Because of this interest in the Orient, literature has become one of the major areas in which Orientalism is directly represented. Thus, Robert Browning's Ferishtah's Fancies (1884) can be considered as another example of Victorian Orientalist literature since he probably wrote it under the influence of these Orientalist works.

Browning's book of poetry was published in 1884, and it sold very well due to this fashion of Orientalism. Although considered to be a minor work of Browning, this work is significant in illustrating the interest in the East. This book consists of didactic tales which are told by a Persian "dervish-to-be." Ferishtah of the title is an imaginary sage interpreting the world by "reading the signs of the physical universe, finding the moral meaning of events, and then making stories that teach spiritual truth" (Mermin). This stereotypical "dervish" figure shows how Browning constructed this fictional Orientalist world.

Öz

Edward Said'e göre Şarkiyatçılık, gözleme dayalı değil, Batı'nın hayallerine, düş gücüne ve varsayımlarına dayalı bir Batı fantezisidir ve bu, Şarkiyatçılığı uydurma bir kurgu yapar. Said'in Orientalism'in (1978, Şarkiyatçılık) girişinde belirttiği gibi, "Doğu neredeyse bir Avrupa icadıdır ve eski çağlardan beri romansın, egzotik varlıkların, akıldan çıkmayan hatıraların ve manzaraların, kayda değer tecrübelerin mekânı olagelmiştir" (1). "Viktorya Çağı Şarkiyatçılığı" İngilizler'in o çağdaki beğeni ve meraklarına damgasını vurmuştur. Binbir Gece Masalları'nın Burton tarafından yapılan başarılı çevirisinin 1884'te basılması ve Edward Fitzgerald'ın Ömer Hayyam'ın Rubaiyat'ını çevirmesi Viktorya Çağı Şarkiyatçılığına iki örnek olarak düşünülebilir. Doğu'ya duyulan bu ilgi sebebiyle edebiyat doğrudan Şarkiyatçılığın kurgulandığı başlıca alanlardan biri hâline gelmiştir. Böylece, Browning'in Ferishtah's Fancies (1884, "Feriştah'ın Tahayyülleri") adlı eseri muhtemelen dönemin Şarkiyatçı eserlerinin etkisi altında kalınarak yazıldığı için Viktorya Çağı Şarkiyatçı edebiyatına bir diğer örnek olarak düşünülebilir.

Browning'in şiir kitabı 1884'te yayımlanmış ve söz konusu Şarkiyatçılık furyasından ötürü çok iyi satmıştır. Bu eser, Browning'in ikincil eserlerinden biri sayılsa da, Doğu'ya duyulan ilgiyi göstermek açısından önem taşımaktadır. Bu şiir kitabı "derviş olma yolunda ilerleyen" bir Acem tarafından anlatılan didaktik öykülerden oluşmaktadır. Başlıkta adı geçen Feriştah, "fiziksel dünyanın alametlerini yorumlayarak olayların ahlaki anlamlarını bularak ve daha sonra ruhani doğruları öğreten hikâyeler uydurarak" (Mermin) dünyanın anlamını tefsir eden, hayal ürünü bir bilgedir. Bu basmakalıp "derviş" figürü Browning'in kurgusal Şarkiyatçı dünyayı nasıl yapılandırdığını göstermektedir.

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" 'Friend,' quoth Ferishtah, 'all I seem to know
Is – I know nothing save that love I can
Boundlessly, endlessly. My curls were crowned
In youth with knowledge, - off, alas, crown slipped
Next moment, pushed by better knowledge still
Which nowise proved more constant: gain, today,
Was toppling loss to-morrow, lay at last
-Knowledge, the golden? – lacquered ignorance!
As gain – mistrust it!
(Robert Browning, "A Pillar at Sebzevah" 8- 16)

It is a frequent practice among the theorists and scholars of Orientalism to argue about the nature of Orientalism, whether it is a representation of reality or a mere fiction and fantasy. In other words, whether Orientalists present the East as it actually exists or represent it in the way it serves their ends or in the way they see it, has frequently been a point of discussion. The question "To what extent fact and fiction are blended in the works that are assumed to have been written by an Orientalist?" has even been used as a marker either of a negative representation or of a more realistic depiction of the Orient. Authors of works in which the Eastern culture, places, and people are portrayed as ignorant, uncivilised, or somehow lesser have been arguably categorised as "Orientalists" with a negative sense of the term. This assumption became so common that the names of the other authors who dealt with the same Oriental subject matter in their literary works with little or no underestimation or criticism of the Eastern world were rarely mentioned in the unwritten list of Orientalist writers. Several English Romantic poets such as George Gordon Lord Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and a number of the eminent Victorian figures from the literary circle of the time such as Joseph Conrad, William Thackeray, Edward Fitzgerald, Rudyard Kipling, and Charles Dickens were classified as authors in whose works Orientalism was prominent. Nevertheless, Robert Browning has seldom been in the foreground as an Orientalist literary figure. Nonetheless, as Adams argues, *"Orientalist ideology is inescapable, although not invulnerable to criticism"* (108). Proceeding from this assumption, if Browning's name is to be included under the heading of Orientalist writers, it is also necessary to underline that his inclusion in this category is always open to potential criticism. However, at this point, Edward Said's qualification of anyone who refers to the Orient in his or her work as an Orientalist strengthens the

possibility of Browning's rank as an Orientalist. This study relies on the definitions of the terms "Orientalism" and "Orientalist" offered by Edward Said in order to discuss Robert Browning's classification as an Orientalist writer with an analysis of his use of Oriental subject matter in his late work *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884).

According to Said, Orientalism is a Western fantasy which is not based on observation but on the West's dreams, fantasies and assumptions; and this makes it a fabricated construct. The reflections of Orientalist ideas during the Victorian period in Robert Browning's *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884) can be explained in Said's words; therefore, this study is going to take Said's arguments about the employment of Orientalism in a literary work as the starting point and use his definitions of Orientalism. It is also going to discuss how Browning uses "raw" Oriental materials such as the Eastern people, the Eastern lands, Oriental tales, and thus creates an exotic and mystic Oriental atmosphere to serve him as a means to convey his opinions about "moral and religious elements of human life" (Jones 143). As a work of fiction that was written in the late period of the writer's poetic career, *Ferishtah's Fancies* is often considered to be one of the examples of Browning's mature literary works. Therefore, it is usually studied for the philosophical, moral, or religious ideas and messages it contains. However, when its setting, characters, and even style are taken into consideration, this work is evidently an appropriate literary work to be analysed and qualified as an Orientalist text. The fact that it was written in the Victorian age also strengthens the possibility of it to be counted among Orientalist works since the age is well-known for its Orientalist literary products.

Ferishtah's Fancies was published in 1884, five years before Browning's death, in his comparatively "mature" years. This work sold very well not only due to the fashion of Orientalism at the time, but also due to the poet's career and fame which had long reached their climax. The work consists of a prologue, twelve poems, and an epilogue that reflect an Eastern panorama: "The Eagle," "The Melon-Seller," "Shah Abbas," "The Family," "The Sun," "Mihrab Shah," "A Camel Driver," "Two Camels," "Cherries," "Plot-Culture," "A Pillar at Sebzevah," "A Bean-Stripe: Also Apple-Eating" and the "Epilogue." As the titles of the poems indicate, the setting, the characters, and the style in this work are notably associated with the East. The protagonist whose name is given in the title is Dervish Ferishtah. His walks, trips, and travels are marked by his careful and reflective observations on physical nature and by his spiritual and philosophical questionings. He

contemplates what he sees, hears, tastes, touches, and senses as a very sensitive human being. He is also characterised by his religious understanding of life, almost always making every effort to learn new lessons and to become a better person to help others who are in need. However, he discovers this aim of his only after he cautiously reads the signs and examples that are hidden in nature and in life itself. His curious character makes him look for the secret messages of his God, and he progresses towards becoming a dervish throughout the work.

According to Said, *"Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West"* (20-21). In *Ferishtah's Fancies*, the Orient does speak and reveal the Orient's mysteries to the Western world. Ferishtah of the title is an imaginary sage interpreting the world by *"reading the signs of the physical universe, finding the moral meaning of events, and then making stories that teach spiritual truth"* (Mermin 236). A "dervish," according to *OED*, is a "Muslim friar, who has taken vows of poverty and austere life. Of these there are various orders, some of whom are known from their fantastic practices as dancing or whirling, and as howling dervishes" ("dervish"). In addition to this, within the Muslim world, a dervish is also known to be a wise man who tells people stories with moral messages. Throughout the work, which consists of twelve poems, Dervish Ferishtah is a remarkably exotic figure in that he is highly sensitive. He has a deeply mystical and reflective voice as he tells stories and teaches youngsters lessons. This stereotypical figure of "dervish" shows how Browning constructed this fictional Orientalist world and placed himself in it under the mask of an Eastern character. This image serves Browning's aim of conveying his own ideas on certain philosophical and spiritual issues.

The poet also sets a contrast to the characteristically rational social structure of the West by representing the mystic East in this work. In Said's opinion, the East in the Orientalist works is often represented as mystic and exotic. Similarly, in *Ferishtah's Fancies*, the main character is a "dervish," and this title is used for the members of the sufi tradition in Islam that values mysticism. Furthermore, the location of these tales that Ferishtah tells about are exotic to the English audience, who are not familiar with the contextual existence of the East. The "strangeness," "difference," exotic sensuousness" (Said 72) and mysticism of the Orient drawn in the work provide an appropriate platform or background for the poet to wear his dervish costume and perform his immensely contemplative thoughts and

philosophical interpretations, deductions, and assumptions. As Dowden states,

> [t]hroughout the series of poems it is not a Persian Dervish who is the speaker and teacher; we hear the authentic voice of the Dervish born in Camberwell in the year 1812--Ferishtah-Browning. The doctrine set forth is the doctrine of Browning; the manner of speech is the manner of the poet. The illustrations and imagery are often Oriental; the ideas are those of a Western thinker; yet no sense of discordance is produced (Dowden 203).

Browning constructs his ideology by using the Oriental materials and conveys his personal messages under the disguise of this Persian sage in the Oriental setting of Ispahan and Nishapur. In the second and third poems of the book "The Melon-Seller" and "Shah Abbas," the Oriental elements of the exotic setting are evident:

> To school Ferishtah went ;
> And, schooling ended, passed from Ispahan
> To Nishapur, that Elburz looks above
> —Where they dig turquoise ("The Melon-Seller" 33-36).

> Anyhow, once full Dervish, youngsters came
> To gather up his own words, 'neath a rock
> Or else a palm, by pleasant Nishapur ("Shah Abbas" 1-3).

The stereotypical images of palms, turquoise, Eastern exotic cities, and groups of young children gathering around a man to hear a story are frequently used in Orientalist literature. The interpretation of these representations as exotic by the Western cultures is mainly interrelated with these images' nonexistence in the West. These objects or places are simply different, alien, or new for the Western cultures, and thus they raise the feeling of curiosity in those who are unfamiliar with them. It is probable that Browning chose to create such a setting in his work partly because Orientalism was almost a trend in nineteenth-century British society, and even in Europe. As a highly intellectual literary figure, the poet must have realised the fact that a fictional travel account of an imaginary dervish's travels within the Islamic world could provide a fascinating, mysterious taste to the nineteenth-century reader who was barely knowledgeable about the places described in this work. This exotic embellishment would certainly help Browning attract the attention of his potential reader more easily. Nevertheless, the literary interest in Orientalism and the aim of attaining literary recognition were not the

only goals he wanted to achieve. Browning's one major aim was to manifest his spiritual, philosophical, and moral opinions as a poet in the mature years of his poetic career. In this context, it was practical and functional for Browning to reveal this aspect of his character in a work in which a mystical atmosphere is dominant and the protagonist is identified with religious aspects.

It is common knowledge that during the Middle Ages, especially with pilgrimages, crusades, and commerce, a close encounter with the East occurred. Oriental tales were carried to Europe with the exaggerated accounts of the braggart soldiers; religious stories were brought by the pilgrims; and interesting incidents were told by the merchants who had been there. In the sixteenth century, as Conant argues, *"an entirely new line of intercourse between England and the East was established by the voyages of exploration, discovery, and commerce, characteristic of the Renaissance"* (xx). An interest in the Orient in the seventeenth-century literary works is also apparent. Journals, magazines, newspapers and novels appeared in the eighteenth century, and these media surely formed certain trends and points of interests for the people as well as causing a quick spread of these fashions. And in 1884, particularly with *"[t]he sudden advent of the Arabian Nights, full of the life, the colour, and the glamour of the East ... naturally opened a new chapter in the history of oriental fiction in England"* (Conant xxii). All these that had been going on about the Orient for a long period of time provided the Victorian people with information and stories, and turned their eyes to the Orient. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Oriental studies were carried on since an intensive increase had occurred in the reading public and this public's demand was taken into consideration by the literary circles of the time. The Oriental interest in Browning's time, the nineteenth-century Britain, was a result of England's imperialist and colonialist policies, and other matters such as wars, travels, explorations, discoveries, and commerce. With this great treasure of the knowledge and experience of the Orient, it was inescapable for the Victorian literature and Robert Browning not to take their shares from the Oriental fashion.

As Said maintains in the introduction to *Orientalism* (1978), *"[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences"* (1). The Western people were fascinated with the mystical atmosphere, philosophies and riches of the East. It was also the social, cultural, and historical differences between the two groups that drew their attention. Due to this interest, "Victorian

Orientalism" left its mark on the English literature of the period. Publications of Richard Burton's successful translation of the *Arabian Nights* in 1884 and Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubáiyát* are two significant examples of the Victorian Oriental literature. With this fashion of Orientalism, literature became a proper medium where writers could combine reality and fiction, and express their moral and social concerns in a real but at the same time an exotic and imaginary realm. It is within this context that Browning's *Ferishtah's Fancies* can be considered as an example of the Victorian writers' interest in the Orient.

As Said asserts, *"[e]very writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies"* (20). In accordance with this argument, as a very well-read poet, Browning must have read and used the earlier works on the Orient as a guide. As a man of letters, he certainly had the knowledge of the previous and contemporary works on the Orient. Even in the first reading, the influence of other Orientalist works in *Ferishtah's Fancies* can certainly be detected. The editor of Browning's complete works, Horace E. Scudder, noted, *"[t]here is a loose connection between this group of poems and certain forms of Oriental literature, notably The Fables of Bidpai or Pilpay, Firdausi's Sháh-Námeh, and the Book of Job; specific instances may easily be noted"* (929). *Sháh-Námeh*, as the major Eastern literary product which has been a great influence on many Eastern writers who wrote on the Orient, also affected many Western writers. The traces of this major work can be found in *Ferishtah's Fancies*, too. To illustrate, a similar religious and didactic tone exists in *Ferishtah*, especially in the fourth poem, "The Family":

> No, be man and nothing more--
> Man who, as man conceiving, hopes and fears,
> And craves and deprecates, and loves and loathes,
> And bids God help him, till death touch his eyes
> And show God granted most, denying all (73-77).

There is a similar preaching voice trying to guide humanity to the right way in *Sháh-Námeh*, first making God's ways known to man, and then within a logical frame, leading man to the right path. Moreover, there are shahs in both works, and the names of some of the characters, such as Zal and Rustem, are the same.

Despite this evidence of Browning's use of Oriental elements in his poetry, he has seldom been considered an "Orientalist" because unlike the other Victorian Orientalist authors, who continuously and intensely used Oriental materials in

their works, Browning has only a few works in which he employs Orientalist components. Khattab offers the explanation that Browning is not generally regarded as an Orientalist although he was obviously influenced by the Orientalist ideas that were common during the Victorian Age:

> For the student of Victorian literature in general and Victorian poetry in particular, Browning is not usually thought of as a poet particularly interested in the history, the religions, the literature, and the peoples of what we call today the Arab Middle East, in the same way as we think of a Romantic like Byron or Victorians like Tennyson and Thackeray. This is not surprising, because his main preoccupation, his celebration of the Italian Renaissance and his deep psychological insights into its personalities, overshadow his other interests. Among the latter, however, is his interest in the Orient (45).

Indeed, the poems he wrote with Oriental aspects have not been counted among his major works by Browning critics or scholars. The poet has mostly been in the foreground with his interesting dramatic monologues, his realistic portrayal of psychopathic characters, and his mastery in reflecting human nature and psychology. However, Said's definition of the word "Orientalist" provides an alternative perspective for Browning's classification as an Orientalist writer. Said says, *"[a]nyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient ... either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist"* (2). In the light of this definition, Browning counts as an Orientalist, too. Moreover, the Orient he creates in his poetry is a fancy. It is not a hundred-per cent-true representation of the East. As Browning himself explains in one of his letters, the poems are all constructed and the characters in them are fictional:

> I hope and believe that one or two careful readings of the Poem will make its sense clear enough. Above all, pray allow for the Poet's inventiveness in any case, and do not suppose there is more than a thin disguise of a few Persian names and allusions. There was no such person as Ferishtah – the stories are all inventions (qtd. in Scudder 929).

The phrase Browning uses, "the Poet's inventiveness," should be underlined here since it draws attention to the importance he attaches to artistic creativity. This is also an indication that he is trying to justify his efforts as a poet. Under the thin disguise of this Oriental veil Browning attempts to convey many other

messages to his readers and to share with them the lessons he drew from his philosophising processes. It is an undeniable fact that poetic creativity is one of Browning's major concerns in poetry. However, according to certain definitions that have been stated previously, what Browning does in this book of poetry is called Orientalism.

In Browning's poems which contain Oriental material such as "An Epistle, Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, The Arab Physician," "Through The Metidja to Abd-El-Kadr," and especially *Ferishtah's Fancies*, it is the "illustrations" and "imagery" (Dowden 203) that are often Oriental, not Browning himself. Another feature that marks those poems as Oriental is that the atmosphere is "purely oriental" (Khattab 45). It is the setting, Ispahan, and later Nishapur, and also the stereotypical characters, as well as the objects that mark the atmosphere of *Ferishtah* as Oriental. Mihrab Shah, Shah Abbas, Dervish Ferishtah, and a melon-seller as a fervent Eastern tradesman are examples of the stereotypical Oriental figures in the work. The titles of the poems evoke the Orient, too. "The Sun," "The Melon-Seller," "Two Camels" and "A Camel- Driver" are only four of them which create images of the East in the reader's mind. The Orient of the Orientalist texts is usually depicted as a sunny, hot place; melon is an exotic fruit which grows in warm weather, and therefore it can be assumed to be an Oriental fruit; camels bring to mind the deserts of the Eastern lands. These symbols represent the Orient from the Western point of view.

Accordingly, Browning differs significantly from his contemporaries who wrote Oriental works in that it is not the Oriental ideology of the Western mind what is dominant in his works that can be categorised as Oriental. What is dominant in *Ferishtah's Fancies*, for instance, is rather the individual, spiritual, and philosophical arguments depending on Browning's subjective interpretations of the world. Life, death, belief, knowledge, truth, beauty, illness, prayer, joy, sorrow, that is to say, a number of humanly matters are at the centre of the poet's concern throughout the book. In the third poem, "Shah Abbas," some of these issues are projected by Browning:

> 'Master, explain this incongruity!
> When I dared question 'It is beautiful,
> But is it true? —thy answer was 'In truth
> Lives beauty.' I persisting— 'Beauty—yes,
> In thy mind and in my mind, every mind
> That apprehends: but outside—so to speak—

Did beauty live in deed as well as word,
Was this life lived, was this death died—not dreamed?' (7-14).

In this poem a Romantic and contemplative type of questioning of human apprehension and perception of the world is evident. Therefore, in a seemingly Orientalist poem what Browning actually does is to discuss human nature in a philosophical dimension, from a spiritual perspective. Apart from the Oriental objects and the Oriental setting, there is another Oriental aspect that Browning employs in the work. It is the love lyrics that he adds to the end of each poem which can also be associated with Sufi literature, representing Browning's ideas about love as a medium between God and man. Jones argues in line with this issue that, for Browning, *"[t]he meeting point of God and man is love. Love ... is, for the poet, the supreme principle both of morality and religion"* (143). Sufism as a concept combining love and religion as "the love of God" is of an Eastern origin. Browning's personal opinions were overlapping with the Sufist philosophy at the time he was writing this work. Therefore, he chose this Oriental concept as a means to explain himself. Dowden comments on this issue as follows:

> The discourses of the Dervish are in the main theological or philosophical; the lyrics, which are interposed between the discourses or discussions, are amatory. In Persian Poetry much that at first sight might be taken for amatory has in its inner meaning a mystical theological sense. Browning reverses the order of such poetry; he gives us first his doctrine concerning life or God, and gives it clothed in a parable; then in a lyric the subject is retracted into the sphere of human affections, and the truth of theology condenses itself into a corresponding truth respecting the love of man and woman (203).

As Pearsall argues, *"[t]hough cast in an antique Oriental mode, Ferishtah's Fancies (1884) contains a higher proportion of modern and personal thinking than any earlier volume of Browning's"* (161). As a mature poet, Browning attempted to share his deep reflections on love, faith, beauty, truth, and life in general in *Ferishtah*. Furthermore, the diction and language in the twelve poems are quite personal in feeling and sincere in tone. The dervish functions as the religious, moral, and philosophical teacher with his parables and Browning shares some universal messages on several universal themes with his readers through the mouth of the dervish. In "The Eagle," he actually tries to tell the reader about the mission he wants to undertake and what he aims to do with this work. However, he

gives this message through some metaphors. In "The Eagle," Dervish Ferishtah walks the woods one evening. He realises that on a raven's nest younglings gape with "callow beak" (8). The mother bird is lying dead beneath the tree. Dervish pities the younglings and wonders how they shall escape destruction (11). All of a sudden, an eagle comes down and feeds the younglings with some flesh. Upon this, the dervish says *"'Ah, foolish, faithless me!'"* (17) and concludes that *"'Providence cares for every hungry mouth!'"* (19). After that, he goes home, sits musing, and falls asleep. In his dream, God talks to him and tells him to rise, work, eat, and then feed who lack. Finally, the dervish questions himself and acts as follows:

> Waking, "I have arisen, work I will,
> Eat, and so following. Which lacks food the more,
> Body or soul in me? I starve in soul:
> So may mankind: and since men congregate
> In towns, not woods,—to Ispahan forthwith!" (31-35).

In this poem, the eagle metaphorically represents Ferishtah-Browning. The younglings, the all-alone baby-birds represent the people who are in need of the help of a wise figure who is qualified in spiritual matters. Ferishtah-Browning feels the urge to get up and act, try and help people as much as he can. Towards the end of the last poem of the book, "A Bean-Stripe: Also Apple-Eating," he makes the below remark:

> Who works so for the world's sake—he complains
> With cause when hate, not love, rewards his pains.
> I looked beyond the world for truth and beauty:
> Sought, found and did my duty" (489-92).

Ideologically, Browning represents the East as a cradle of spirituality and mysticism. Actually, the East is not necessarily a highly spiritual or mystic place as Browning fantasised it to be. In that sense, what Browning does in this work is to represent the East as he fancies it in his poetic imagination. Even this fact makes him an Orientalist according to Said's understanding.

Moreover, as Said underlines, his book *Orientalism* is not inclusive of every single Oriental author who has produced Oriental material up to Said's time. To explain this failure, he suggests the existence of other events, texts, and figures that are related to Orientalism. Browning's almost non-existent fame as an Orientalist and the exclusion of his name from the lists of Orientalists can be understood with reference to Said's explanation:

> Yet even though it includes an ample selection of writers, this book is still far from a complete history or general account of Orientalism. Of this failing I am very conscious. The fabric as thick a discourse as Orientalism has survived and functioned in Western society because of its richness: all I have done is to describe parts of that fabric at certain moments, and merely to suggest the existence of a larger whole, detailed, interesting, dotted with fascinating figures, texts and events (Said 24).

Like Edward Said, other critics of Orientalism such as Bryan S. Turner and Abdellatif Tibawi—who discuss the economic and religious aspects of Orientalism respectively—endeavoured to cover different parts of the "fabric" of Orientalism, yet, they could not succeed in this attempt since it is a difficult task. In other words, as a large concept, Orientalism cannot be covered with all its aspects by a single scholar. Taking into consideration the extensiveness of this subject, it is normal that Robert Browning's name has not been mentioned frequently by the scholars of Orientalism.

Since Browning's "East" is associated with spirituality, his philosophical and moral questions could only be discussed behind an Oriental mask. As a Western literary figure, Browning's approach to the East in such a fanciful way introduces an Orientalist dimension to his poetry. Thus, although he mainly aimed to deliver certain personal ideas and universal messages on spiritual, philosophical, moral, and religious issues, Browning's employment of these imaginary and fantastic settings, characters, and images rendered *Feristah's Fancies* an example of fictional Orientalist literature. This work also shows how Browning, whose main interest as a poet lay in European settings, characters, and stories, was influenced by the cultural and literary trends of the Victorian age. As a work that reflects and represents the East, *Ferishtah's Fancies* is also one of Browning's few works in which he metaphorically steps outside the European world and visits the Muslim world as a literary figure.

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