

PAPERBOUNDS

ORIENTALISM. By Edward W. Said. Vintage reprint, 1979. 368 pp. \$4.95

During recent months, many Americans have come to realize that they do not understand the Muslim peoples of the Middle East very well. In this examination of 19th-century British and French "orientalist" writers, Said, a Columbia professor of comparative literature, observes that analysts have long approached the Middle East, or the "Orient," as it was called 150 years ago, with closed eyes. Spurred by Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt, most European author-visitors echoed stereotypes dating back to the first Western contacts—that the Middle East was underdeveloped and therefore inferior to the rational and humane West; that it was "different" and hence to be feared. France's diplomat-historian François René de Châteaubriand and poet Gérard de Nerval and Britain's historians Edward Lane and Alexander Kinglake either sought out the region's exotic aspects or treated its people as objects, never as equals in human terms. Under the influence of Darwinism, they wrote with certainty: The Orient is only a doomed, degraded relic of its former greatness. Seldom challenged, these biases seeped into modern Western (including American) scholarship, influencing Western politicians, who repeatedly underestimated the complexity, strengths, and richness of the area's deep-rooted Islamic culture.

BIRDY. By William Wharton. Avon reprint, 1980. 343 pp. \$2.50

"I'm beginning to hear the difference in the things she says," young Birdy reports, referring to his favorite pet canary. Birdy, a daydreamer, and Al, a tough lad, were boyhood friends—growing up together in a small Pennsylvania town before World

War II. Birdy raised birds and dreamed of flying, of *becoming* a bird. (He even tried soaring off a roof, and survived.) Al's struggle with adolescence took a more pragmatic bent—he learned to wrestle so he could pin (defeat) his overbearing father. After the war, Al visits Birdy, diagnosed as shell shocked, in a VA hospital and finds him flopping and squatting. Psychiatrists are stymied. Al alone recognizes the recurrence of his friend's near-psychotic childhood struggle to fly. Wharton is convincing in his depiction of Birdy's fantasy bird-life. He deftly contrasts Birdy's surreal world with harshly realistic scenes of conflict—military and parental. This graceful first novel by an American artist living in Paris unhesitatingly explores the special province of boyhood imagination and camaraderie.

RUSSIAN THINKERS. By Isaiah Berlin. Penguin reprint, 1979. 312 pp. \$3.95

"The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing," wrote the poet Archilochus in the 7th-century B.C. Isaiah Berlin's most famous essay, "The Hedgehog and Fox" (1951), begins this collection of the British philosopher's writings. Hedgehogs (Plato, Dante, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche) "relate everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate." Foxes (Aristotle, Shakespeare, Goethe, Joyce) seize upon "the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects for what they are in themselves." Tolstoy, argues Berlin, "was by nature a fox, but believed in being a hedgehog." In his novels, he conveyed reality in its multiplicity and expressed a fox-like "lethal nihilism," yet he yearned for absolute moral values. The 19th-century Russian intelligentsia—including M. A. Bakunin, Alexander Herzen, and Vissarion Belinsky—forsook accepted