

## University of Groningen

### Multiple Personae

Molendijk, Arie

*Published in:*  
Scholarly Personae in the History of Orientalism, 1870-1930

*DOI:*  
[10.1163/9789004406315\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004406315_004)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Molendijk, A. (2019). Multiple Personae: Friedrich Max Müller and the Persona of the Oriental Scholar. In C. Engberts, & H. Paul (Eds.), *Scholarly Personae in the History of Orientalism, 1870-1930* (pp. 45-63). Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004406315\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004406315_004)

#### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

#### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*

# Multiple Personae

## *Friedrich Max Müller and the Persona of the Oriental Scholar*

Arie L. Molendijk

### 1 Introduction

The concept of the “scientific persona” or “scholarly persona” has been introduced to open a new field of research in the study of the history of the sciences and humanities.<sup>1</sup> The persona is located between the individual biography and the social institution. In a pioneering volume, Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum defined it as “a cultural entity that simultaneously shapes the individual in body and mind and creates a collective with a shared and recognizable physiognomy.”<sup>2</sup> Daston and Sibum mentioned various “bases” for the persona: a social role (e.g., the mother), a profession (the physician), an anti-profession (the flâneur), a calling (the priest). Personae are to be viewed as historically conditioned: they emerge and disappear within specific contexts. Daston and Sibum focused on the emergence of distinct types of scholars: “A nascent [scientific] persona indicates the creation of a new kind of individual, whose distinctive traits mark a recognized social species.”<sup>3</sup> Daston and Sibum also pointed in this respect to the role that a coming-of-age ritual may play, such as the induction into certain religious orders or – an example they don’t give – the defence of a PhD thesis and the acceptance of the concomitant rights and obligations of the new doctor, who recently also has to take an oath in the Netherlands.

To be seen as a scholar, one has to meet certain requirements, perform according to a template. Scientific statements must be verifiable and backed-up by experiments and statistical evidence. Historical treatises must provide precise information about which archives and other sources were consulted, whereas cultural anthropologists define themselves by their fieldwork and notebooks, in which they keep track of their conversations and observations.

1 This paper draws on Arie L. Molendijk, *Friedrich Max Müller and the Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Quoted with permission of Oxford University Press.

2 Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum, “Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories,” *Science in Context* 16 (2003), 1-8, at 2.

3 *Ibid.*, 3.

The criteria that define scholarship may be disputed, especially in times of transition. On the level of theory and paradigms this point is nicely illustrated by the insight of the German physicist Max Planck, who famously said: “A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”<sup>4</sup> Young scholars are socialized into the new approach and techniques.

Much research, therefore, focuses on the history of influential scientists and scholars, on new approaches, techniques and instruments, and also on the new discoveries, innovative theories and paradigm shifts. Historians of the history of scholarship also have a predilection for the study of institutions such as the Royal Society and “grand projects” such as the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. The scholarly persona, however, has only recently been “discovered” and put on the research agenda. And, of course, it makes good sense to study models of scholarship and the ethos of this once rare, but nowadays widespread species. It is evident that there may be competing types of scholarly personae, for instance the allegedly “detached” philologist versus the Orientalist who travels and studies contemporary issues. A new generation denounces the previous generation as “arm-chair” scholars. Notwithstanding its creative potential it is not always easy to apply the concept of a persona in historical research. At which level of abstraction can it be meaningfully used? The “scientist” is a useful concept, whereas the “cook” or the “biological chemist” are not according to Daston and Sibum. Is the “Oriental scholar” really a distinct type? Another tricky aspect of the notion of the persona is that it tends to focus on ideals and to overlook the work on the ground where practical circumstances, such as a shortage of time combined with the imperative to come quickly to results, may be as influential as the norms and values of the profession.

In this chapter I will follow the angle suggested by Herman Paul. He has defined scholarly personae as “models, either past or present, inherited or invented, of what it takes to be a scholar.”<sup>5</sup> Which are the pursued goods, which are the guiding values and skills, what are the rewards? Also helpful is Paul’s suggestion that the individual scholars find themselves confronted with a variety of models, which they accept, reject, revise, and merge to fit their own situation.<sup>6</sup> Of course, it is wise to say that personae have to be seen as ideal-types

4 Max Planck, *Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers* (1948), trans. F. Gaynor (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1950), 33.

5 Herman Paul, “What Is a Scholarly Persona? Ten Theses on Virtues, Skills, and Desires,” *History and Theory* 53 (2014), 348–371.

6 Herman Paul, “The Virtues and Vices of Albert Naudé: Toward a History of Scholarly Personae,” *History of Humanities* 1 (2016), 327–338.

that don't exist in pure forms in reality. On the other hand, Paul's inclination to give ample space for "individualizing"<sup>7</sup> comparisons between scholarly personae may lead to problems of demarcation, if every single scholar in the end moulds his or her own way of being a scholar. In that case it will also be difficult to detect major historical transitions in the ways the scholarly persona has been perceived and constructed. I will take the case of Max Müller (1823-1900) to see how far the new tool brings us.

## 2 Max Müller as an Oriental Scholar

Friedrich Max Müller's long career spanned various branches of learning. First, he gained fame as a Sanskritist, who edited and translated the *Rig-Veda*. At Oxford he was appointed Tylorian Professor of Modern European Languages and Literature and became interested in comparative philology, which laid the ground for his famous and controversial studies in the "Science of Language." His 1861 lectures on language at the Royal Institution made him a star in England. The ensuing book went through fourteen editions during his lifetime and was translated into French, German, Italian, Russian, Swedish, and Dutch. He gave the Hibbert and Gifford Lectures and he is still seen as the founder of the comparative study of religion. His main biographer divides Müller's scholarly work into the areas of language and thought, comparative mythology, the "science of religion," missions, and philosophy of religion.<sup>8</sup>

Although Max Müller was at the cross-roads of several (emerging) disciplines, it also makes sense to see him as an Oriental scholar. Looking back at his arrival in Oxford in the 1840s, he casually ranked himself as a "young Oriental scholar."<sup>9</sup> The edition of the *Rig-Veda* in six volumes, and, especially, the series of the translations of the *Sacred Books of the East* (50 vols, 1879-1910) at the Clarendon Press added much to his prestige in this respect. "Famous Orientalist Passes Away at Oxford" was the subtitle of the obituary in the *New York Times*.<sup>10</sup> Müller spoke at Oriental Congresses and chaired sessions, and he was no doubt a respected and at the same time controversial authority in this field.

7 Paul, "What Is a Scholarly Persona?" 365.

8 Lourens P. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller: A Life Devoted to the Humanities* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

9 F. Max Müller, *My Autobiography: A Fragment* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1901), 279.

10 N. N., "Prof. Max Mueller Dead," *New York Times* (29 October 1900). One day before the *New York Times* had announced that Professor Max Müller "[was] sinking fast."

## 2.1 Assessments

Many assessments of Müller's work, however, are not very specific and address his importance in very general terms. In a memorial meeting at the University of Columbia right after he had died, Müller was called the greatest scholar of his generation, whereas his biggest American opponent, the Sanskritist and linguist William Dwight Whitney, thought him "one of the great humbugs of the century."<sup>11</sup> Müller's friend Moncure Conway disputed the impression given in a New York paper that Müller was "somewhat vainglorious." Conway admitted that Müller's appearance ("his erect mien, his handsome, courtly look") could perhaps lead to such an impression but argued that he actually was a very hospitable man with many friends from all over the world. Although much praise was lavished upon "one of the giants of learning," remarkably critical pieces appeared in the *New York Times* just after Müller's death. An unsigned column spoke of lack of sound judgment on the part of the deceased scholar.<sup>12</sup> Another piece in the same issue of the *New York Times* was similarly critical and spoke of the "triviality of many of his writings."<sup>13</sup>

This sort of critique is echoed in later appreciations. Typical is probably Ferdinand de Saussure's remark in his posthumously edited *Course in General Linguistics*: "Max Müller popularised the subject in a series of brilliant if somewhat superficial lectures (*Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1861), but it is not by too much conscience that he sinned."<sup>14</sup> Only in India Müller seems to be still held in high esteem. In his biography of Müller, the famous Bengali writer Nirad C. Chaudhuri tells his readers how as a child he came to know about him. He had learned from his father who "was not a highly educated man in the formal sense" how Müller had established "that our languages and the European languages belonged to the same family...; and that we Hindus and the

11 Moncure D. Conway, *Autobiography: Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1904), 2: 280; Stephen G. Alter, *William Dwight Whitney and the Science of Language* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 201. The controversy between Max Müller and his American opponent Whitney may explain some of the harsh comments about Müller in the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* of 1 November 1900 announced the memorial meeting at 7 November, 4.30 p.m., in the Schermerhorn Hall: <<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F50F12F93E5B1738DDDA80894D9415B808CF1D3>> (last accessed 29 January 2019).

12 N. N., "Max Mueller," *New York Times* (3 November 1900).

13 Montgomery Schuyler, Jr., "Max Muller's Service to Science," *New York Times* (3 November 1900).

14 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, [1916] 1980), 16; English version: *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983), 3. The second half of the sentence is missing in the translation; cf. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics*, trans. Simon Bouquet et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 186.

Europeans were both peoples descended from the same original stock.”<sup>15</sup> This “discovery” – as well as his edition of the *Rig-Veda* – gave a boost to Indian self-understanding, Hindus now seeing their country as the cradle of higher civilization *tout court*. Another example of Müller’s fame here is the fact that during her state visit to the German Democratic Republic in 1976 the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi proposed a toast to Max Müller (who was born in Dessau in Eastern Germany), which caused some embarrassment among her hosts, who were not aware of their famous, or infamous, compatriot.

Although it was Max Müller’s ambition to put an end to all amateurism, many of his colleagues were rather critical of him. Various things played a role here, but it stands out that his many popular expositions did his scholarly reputation no good. In 1872 the secretary of the London Philological Society wrote to Whitney:

As to M. M. [Max Müller], at our Society he is not set very high ... But M. has a nice style, and writes books that young ladies and easy-going people read with pleasure, fancying themselves thereby enlightened, and so they are, which results in M. M. being greatly glorified in society. But behind the scenes he’s not much thought of.<sup>16</sup>

Already in 1867, Müller’s friend Matthew Arnold had reported from Berlin to the British government department of education that Müller “was losing all scientific importance” in the German capital because of his focus on “secondary and popular aims.”<sup>17</sup> It is hard to say how popular Müller exactly was, but probably he was one of the most publicly visible intellectuals of his day. In this last respect he may even be compared to Richard Dawkins, who since the publication of the *Selfish Gene* in 1976 has moved away from his specialist scientific work. Max Müller, however, would have denied that his later work concerning mythology, religious studies, and philosophy was merely popular and not “scientific.”

- 
- 15 Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller P. C.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974), 5. Actually this discovery had been made earlier by William Jones (1746-1794), but is attributed here to Müller, which testifies again to Müller’s prestige in India.
- 16 Frederick J. Furnivall to Whitney, 27 December 1872, quoted in Alter, *Whitney*, 177, 303, note 13.
- 17 Matthew Arnold, *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, 6 vols., ed. Cecil Y. Lang (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996-2001), 3: 125 (19 March 1867 to Henry John Roby).

What further harmed his reputation were his “often wild and fantastic”<sup>18</sup> theories about the origins of myth and language. Müller famously located the origin of languages in a limited number of roots, technically “phonetic types.” These are “simply ultimate facts,” compared by Müller with the Platonic ideas. If he had left it at this, he would not have been ridiculed as much as has been the case. However, he engaged in speculations about how these roots had come into existence. He explained this by the analogy that each metal – if struck – has a particular sound. In a similar way primitive man must have responded to impressions from the outside by forming “vocal expressions.”<sup>19</sup> Müller spoke of “the creative faculty,” which gave to each general concept, “as it thrilled for the first time through the brain, a phonetic expression.”<sup>20</sup> This idea was mockingly called the “Ding Dong Theory.”

With the exception of his edition of the *Rig-Veda*, the history of Sanskrit Literature and some more technical studies, Max Müller’s work was overall deemed popular and, thus, unscientific by many of his Oriental colleagues around 1900. “He had catered to the public so long that scholarly work had become of only secondary importance.”<sup>21</sup> Many reviewers thought his theories absurd. He “pushed out frail structures of theory far beyond the safe realm of facts.”<sup>22</sup> The criticism was that he did not respect the facts and lacked self-criticism. Put in a slightly ironical fashion: “[h]e always aided his chosen science by his poetic insight and suggestiveness.”<sup>23</sup> The verdict was that Müller’s imagination took over and was insufficiently checked by reason and facts.<sup>24</sup> In this way Oriental scholars and comparative linguists framed Müller’s deficiencies. His Germanic upbringing in circles of Romanticists may have contributed to this “perception,” especially among Anglo-Saxon colleagues. One obituary attributed this flaw in Müller to “defects of mental constitution.”<sup>25</sup> Some opponents – impressed by the bitter battle between Müller and Whitney – described Müller’s character in defiant, dishonest, and even “insultingly unfair” terms.<sup>26</sup>

18 Schuyler, Jr., “Max Muller’s Service to Science.”

19 F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 2 vols., 7th ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1873), 440, note 57.

20 *Ibid.*, 441.

21 E. W. Hopkins, “Max Müller,” *The Nation* 71 (1900), 343-344, reprinted in *Portraits of Linguists: A Biographical Source Book for the History of Western Linguistics, 1746-1963*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, [1966] 1976), 1: 395-399, at 397; Schuyler, “Max Muller’s Service.”

22 N. N., “Max Mueller.”

23 Hopkins, “Max Müller,” 396.

24 N. N., “Max Mueller.”

25 *Ibid.*

26 Schuyler, “Max Muller’s Service,” and Hopkins, “Max Müller,” 397.



The quotations above no doubt give a one-sided impression (many contemporaries saw Müller as a high-ranking scholar), but they clearly show a trait of the “scholarly persona” as favoured by his Orientalists and linguists at the time. Müller’s prestige as a serious and outstanding scholar was damaged by his speculative and popular work. He may have attracted broad audiences of uninformed “young ladies,” but this was a sign that he did not any longer belong predominantly to the scholarly guild, who define themselves by serious work that sticks to the facts. His publications and lectures for broad audiences, especially, as well as his popularity in general, harmed Müller’s scholarly prestige. His reputation as a “scientist” – here used in the most general sense – was at stake.

## 2.2 *How Did Max Müller Define His Scholarly Work?*

The *first* thing to be noted here is that Friedrich Max Müller spent most of his working life reading, editing, translating and interpreting ancient texts. It was his strong conviction that without such texts, we cannot understand ancient civilizations and religions. In a similar way as fieldwork nowadays defines the modern cultural anthropologist, the study and mastery of languages defined in the nineteenth century textual scholars such as Müller. *Secondly*, although the edition of ancient texts was important in itself, for Müller it finally served a higher goal: the understanding of ancient (religious) history. The discovery of old manuscripts in the recent past and their critical edition provided the basis for the scholarly study of history, especially of religious history, as these texts primarily concerned religious practices and ideas.<sup>27</sup> One could even claim that these very texts made the new “science of religion,” as Müller termed the comparative study of religions, possible. Müller described the new task of the scholarly study of religions in an almost reverential way:

It [is] the duty of those who have devoted their life to the study of the principal religions of the world in their original documents, and who value religion and reverence it in whatever form it may present itself, to take possession of this new territory in the name of true science, and thus to protect its sacred precincts from the inroads of those who think that they have a right to speak on the ancient religions of mankind, whether those of the Brahmans, the Zoroastrians, or Buddhists, or those of the

<sup>27</sup> F. Max Müller, “Buddhism” in F. Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1867), 182-231, at 186-187 about the necessity to study religions on the basis of their “original documents” and the fact that these texts were only recently discovered.



Jews and Christians, without ever having taken the trouble of learning the languages in which their sacred books are written.<sup>28</sup>

Amateurs without proper linguistic skills are to be kept away from the new “territory,” as Müller preferred to call it, which was laid bare by the “discovery” of these ancient texts. True scholars who have to be respectful of their subject of study must claim this field and protect it from intruders who are not entitled to go there, because they don’t know the original languages of the documents.

*Thirdly*, Müller saw this type of scholarship as a “science,” which was basically defined by the use of the comparative method. Famously, he said that “all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison, and rests on comparison.”<sup>29</sup> Comparison as such has an older history, but here it is more than just comparing similar things. It is defined as a strict method of comparing, as it stands for an evidence-based way of investigation *tout court*. The comparative approach “really means that our researches are based on the widest evidence that can be obtained, on the broadest inductions that can be grasped by the human mind.”<sup>30</sup> The introduction of the comparative approach was seen in the 1850s and 1860s as a break-through in the study of man.<sup>31</sup> Finally disciplines such as linguistics, history, law, political economy, ethnology and the study of religions – sometimes referred to simply by the term “comparative religion” – got a firm “scientific” basis. In the study of language, the comparative approach put an end, according to Müller, to the “philological somnambulism” of previous times.<sup>32</sup> He himself polemicized against theory and abstract reasoning.<sup>33</sup> This self-understanding and self-modelling as a fact-based scholar explains at least to some extent why Müller had great difficulties understanding his opponent’s criticism of his own allegedly overly fantastic theories.

28 F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1873), 35.

29 F. Max Müller, *op cit.*, 12. Max Müller was a serious and important scholar and is treated as such in major histories of linguistics and the study of religion. The term ‘science’ is put between quotation marks, because it refers to Müller’s own understanding of his work, which was in his view similar to the ‘natural sciences’ (for instance, formulating laws of development).

30 *Ibid.*

31 Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 209.

32 Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 12.

33 F. Max Müller, *Natural Religion*, Gifford Lectures Glasgow 1888 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1889), 196.

### 2.3 *Mixed Categories?*

A major challenge in analysing the work of Max Müller as an Oriental scholar is the fact that he clearly transgressed the domain of scholarship or science properly spoken. On the one hand, he posed as a detached scholar, mastering Oriental languages, and critically editing texts, but he wanted more than “just” scholarly recognition. His work had to make a practical impact as well. One way to achieve this aim was to frame Müller in his capacity of editor of the *Rig-Veda* as a scholarly sage. In the biography of her deceased husband, Georgina wrote that at the end of the 1850s “the natives of India” began to speak of Max Müller as “Moksha Mûlara,” “which was thus explained by one of their Pundits: ‘He who by publishing the *Veda* for the first time in a printed form gave (*ra*) the root, (*mûla*) the foundation, the knowledge of final beatitude (*moksha*), he is called Moksha Mûlara.’”<sup>34</sup> His biographer Nirad Chaudhuri, however, tells another story. He recalled the fact that Müller was often named this way in Bengali magazines and books and assumed that this had been done in India by Indians, until he learned that in the first volume of the edition of the *Rig-Veda* Müller himself had Sanskritized his name as “Moksha Mûlara.”<sup>35</sup> Müller prided himself in his role of providing the East with – purified – editions of their own religious traditions, which may even define a nation or civilization.<sup>36</sup>

Müller was consulted by Indians about religious matters that were subject to controversy. It would be inaccurate to say that they asked Müller for advice solely in his capacity as an Oriental scholar and expert in Sanskrit, although his expertise in these fields was deemed important. In my view it points to another important role that Müller fulfilled – his role as a what I would call a sage. One could speak here about a mixed *persona* of scholar and sage (or authoritative religious expert). Although the precise term was not used, it makes sense to argue that Müller was explicitly staged as a sage. In the *Thoughts on Life and Religion* published a few years after Müller’s death, for instance, his wife Georgina collected sayings from his published work and private letters and diaries that could console readers.<sup>37</sup> She clearly wanted to provide consolation and wisdom.

- 34 F. Max Müller, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2 vols., ed. [Georgina Müller] (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1902), 1: 225. Cf. *ibid.*, 2: 91, Müller to Emerson, 19 April 1880: “The translator of the *Upanishads*, Moksha Mulara, sends greetings and best wishes to his American Guru, Amarasunu, on his seventy-seventh birthday.”
- 35 Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, 140. The interpretation by the pundits is according to Chaudhuri “an etymological flight.”
- 36 Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 119 and *passim*.
- 37 F. Max Müller, *Thoughts on Life and Religion*, ed. [Georgina Müller] (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1906), vi: “My earnest desire is that this little book may prove a

This genre is later termed “sage writing,” a concept forged by John Holloway to re-evaluate the work of Victorian writers such as Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin.<sup>38</sup> The work of contemporary American writers such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson is also captured under this heading. Müller was familiar with the work of these writers and entertained many of them at his house, as they visited Oxford. Other “sages” from India (*yogins*, *samnyasins*, as Müller referred to them) frequently visited his house. In the second series of *Auld Lang Syne* he recollected memories of his many Indian friends,<sup>39</sup> and shortly before his death he edited a small volume with sayings of the “Indian Saint,” the mystic Ramakrishna (1836-1886), which had to show the high level of Indian spirituality and philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

The concept of the Victorian sage is used by John Holloway to point to the value of their “moralizing” and “prophetic” discourse and to overcome a blatantly negative appreciation of their work, as had been given by the Modernists. Many of the Victorian sages drew on the Old Testament prophets, whereas Müller tried to warm his readers to Indian traditions as well. The persona of the sage is defined by his orientation towards wisdom and his wish to share ancient sayings and proverbs with his readers and even followers. Müller is not the prototypical Victorian “sage,” as most of his work was “scientific.” He did much more to cultivate his scholarly persona, by stressing the importance of methodologically sound research and reasoning. Scholarly and edifying work were not as sharply separated in the Victorian age as they are supposed to be nowadays. At the Chicago Parliament of World Religions in 1893 the two roles were not yet clearly differentiated.<sup>41</sup> Still Müller was aware of the difference between his scholarly persona and his persona as a sage, teacher or religious

---

help and comfort to many exposed to like trials, and strengthen those whose path now stretches before them as a sunny avenue, to meet the sorrows that almost surely await them as life advances.”

- 38 John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London: MacMillan, 1953).
- 39 F. Max Müller, *Auld Lang Syne*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans & Green, 1898-1899).
- 40 F. Max Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1898), v. See also Vivekananda's discussion of this booklet in “Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings,” in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973-1979), 4: 409-421. Cf. Thomas J. Green, *Religion for a Secular Age. Max Müller, Swami Vivekananda and Vedānta* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).
- 41 Arie L. Molendijk, “The First Conferences on the History of Religions: Religious Dialogue versus Scholarly Study,” *NTR: Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 72 (2018), 211-224. In this article I discuss the differentiation between scholars of religion and those interested in religious understanding and dialogue by analyzing the divergence of their respective milieu – i.e. conferences. Cf. Arie L. Molendijk, “‘To Unite Religion against all Irreligion’: The 1893 World Parliament of Religions,” *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 18 (2011), 228-50.

expert, but they could also be closely related, as his success as a speaker, for instance, depended on a mingling of the two. His lectures provided not only knowledge, but wisdom.

The tension here can be explained by the fact that Müller was deeply convinced that scientific work would and should have practical consequences. This is most evident in the “science” (the word is used to stress how rigid and trustworthy the new endeavour is) of religion. The most well-known quotation here is probably the following one: “The Science of Religion may be the last of the sciences which man is destined to elaborate; but when it is elaborated, it will change the aspect of the world, and give a new life to Christianity itself.”<sup>42</sup> Müller saw the tracing of the origins of religious thought as one of the most fascinating endeavours of science. “Science” is defined here predominantly by the comparative or historical method – terms that are used interchangeably by Müller.<sup>43</sup> It is stressed that real research is by no means a theoretical endeavour and has nothing to do with Hegelian laws of thought or Comtian epochs.<sup>44</sup> This type of investigation has to be done in “in a bold, but scholar like, careful, and reverent spirit.”<sup>45</sup> These formulations stem from 1873 and show Müller’s undiminished excitement about what was to be achieved. It also betrays the tension between bold and careful, scholarly and reverent. Hypotheses about historical developments have to be kept in check by textual evidence and scholars should treat these ancient texts respectfully. In these and similar formulations Müller went beyond the ideals of many of his Oriental colleagues who focused on texts and did not aim at presenting a more wide-ranging history of religions – let alone a normative ideal of what religion really is about. Certainly they did not publish extensive volumes on these topics.

The preliminary conclusion must be that Müller not only represented various personae, which is to be expected (he was also a father), but – more specifically – various professional personae. These are not neatly separated from each other but are related to one another. Sometimes, but not always, they clearly interfere with each other. In the *Thoughts on Life and Religion* it is clearly the sage who is speaking, whereas in other publications the voice of the scholar is dominant. Of course, it is possible to clearly distinguish between ideal types of personae, as I have tried to do above, but still this is not sufficient to analyse the way the persona of the “scholar” for instance is qualified by that of the “sage.” Most of the times they don’t have the same weight. One could

42 Müller, *Chips*, vol. 1, xix-xx.

43 Molendijk, *Friedrich Max Müller*, ch. 4.

44 Müller, *Chips*, vol. 1, ix.

45 Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, ix.

even argue against my tentative analysis above that the scholar who also presents a worldview is a special type of the scholarly persona. Do we really need the model of the “sage,” which has at least anachronistic aspects? In my own perception Müller’s performance has so many aspects of the “sage,” that it makes sense to introduce it here. Looking at Müller’s magnificent career, spanning such a long time and so many fields of research and interests, we could evoke other models and personae as well.

No doubt related here is the persona of the “public intellectual” – a term that became commonly used with the Dreyfus affair in the late nineteenth century<sup>46</sup> – who offers orientation for a broader public. As far as his presence in the media is concerned, Max Müller was doubtless one of the great Victorian intellectuals of his time. His articles could be found in journals all over Europe and the United States, and he spoke to audiences on a large range of topics, not only in the fields he was most well-known for, but also on themes such as “how to work?” and “why I am not an agnostic.” He was a regular contributor to the London *Times*, his trips and lecture tours were covered by the international media, and he also presented his views on educational, social, and political issues. His public correspondence with the famous German historian and Nobel Prize winner Theodor Mommsen on the Boer War stirred a lot of attention.<sup>47</sup>

Whereas the persona of the sage is related to wisdom and individual morality, the persona of the public intellectual suggests a more future-oriented, rational and critical analysis of issues of public concern. Is the “intellectual” the “secularized” counterpart of the “sage”? The sage having access to ancient, especially religious, traditions; the intellectual using his knowledge and cognitive powers to come to grips with political and societal issues? These deliberations show how various intellectual personae are part of a larger semantic field, which calls for reflection beyond the scholarly persona. The first lesson is that the scholarly persona has to be understood in a field of related concepts, models and personae. The second – related – lesson is that that conceptual histories of isolated personae (the sage, the intellectual) are insufficient, as categories may overlap and become confused and blurred – in the sense that they are not used ideal typically, but interchangeably in some contexts by some participants and observers.

46 *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter, vol. 4 (Basel: Schwabe, 1976), 454-458.

47 *The Question of Right between England and the Transvaal: Letters by the Right Hon. F. Max Müller with Rejoinders by Professor Theodor Mommsen* (Westminster: Imperial South African Association, 1900). Cf. Van den Bosch, *Müller*, 170-171 and Johannes H. Voigt, “Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Theodor Mommsen und Max Müller über den Burenkrieg [The Discussion between Mommsen and Max Müller about the Boer War],” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 17 (1966), 65-77.

### 3 The Rise of “Big Science” and the Persona of the Entrepreneur

Grand editorial projects such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the Migne edition of the church fathers, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, and the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (under the supervision of the famous Old Testament scholar William Robertson Smith), are important objects of study. They signalled the emergence of large-scale scholarship in the humanities as well as the importance of entrepreneurship and stamina of individual leaders, who initiated and conducted these cooperative ventures with great personal effort and dedication. Not all editors had the commercial genius of the abbé Jacques Paul Migne, who published according to his biographer a book every ten days for thirty years,<sup>48</sup> but a solid financial basis was crucial for success. Just like big industry, big science (*Großwissenschaft*) needs working capital.<sup>49</sup>

With some caution, Müller's editions of the *Rig-Veda* and the *Sacred Books of the East* can be studied in the context of the rise of “big science.”<sup>50</sup> The edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* was funded by both the private money of Oxford University Press and the India Office of the British Empire. The – often distinguished – scholars were paid a small amount per page, which bore no relation to their time-consuming work. Only Müller as editor-in-chief received a substantial emolument from the Press. Scholars from different nations were recruited by Müller, and in this respect the series was a token of the ongoing internationalization of – Oriental – scholarship. Internationalization is in my view an important, but not in itself distinguishing, element of the emergence of big science. The contributors all worked in their own studies or libraries and did not cooperate closely. Of course, there were all kinds of relationships – they met at conferences, and corresponded with each other, and, of course, even more frequently with the editor-in-chief –, but they did it all on an individual basis and did not meet as a team. There was no local concentration of work, nor staff members who managed the edition. Yet the series remained a collective effort by an international group of scholars, funded by extra financial means, and involving a steady flow of publications. In these respects, the

48 R. Howard Bloch, *God's Plagiarist: Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

49 Adolf von Harnack, “Antrittsrede in der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften [Inaugural Address in the Prussian Academy of Sciences],” in *Adolf von Harnack als Zeitgenosse*, ed. Kurt Nowak, 2 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 1: 976-982, at 982.

50 The classical book on this subject, Derek J. de Solla Price, *Little Science, Big Science ... and Beyond* (New York, NY: Columbia Press, [1963] 1986), does not take any notice of the humanities, and overlooks the importance of the huge editions of classical scholarship.



series is an important step in the establishment of big science, which emerged in full shape around 1900.

These grand projects required new skills of the editors involved, such as fundraising and organizing (“people management”) and convincing colleagues to invest their time in translating texts. Max Müller, of course, was aware of the fact that these editions required extra money and manpower. In his autobiography, prefaces, and dedications he honoured the influential men who provided the funds. He was also very much aware of the need to cooperate. In his address to the Second Congress of Orientalists, held at the Royal Institution in London in 1874, Müller had pointed to the necessity “to carry out great works” by joint effort (*viribus unitis*).<sup>51</sup> His organizational skills were acknowledged by his contemporaries, but not without criticism. Müller was said to be “pushful”<sup>52</sup> and one colleague even spoke of Müller’s “inability for real attachment.” “We all knew that he only valued us so far as we could be of use to him.”<sup>53</sup> All the credit went to Müller, whereas – according to some of his critics – he did only a small part of the actual work.<sup>54</sup> Another appraisal, however, stated that “every page [passed] through his hands for revision before final publication.”<sup>55</sup>

Here it is not my goal to assess these – often contrary – judgments, but to see according to which standards and ideals Müller’s editorial work has been evaluated. His “faculty of making others work with him”<sup>56</sup> implies a tight-rope walk. Pushing for results and correcting their work – including the English of the non-native speakers – was “often taken in bad part by the translator.”<sup>57</sup> Müller has been accused of more or less exploiting young scholars, in particular his “assistants,” and claiming the credit of their editorial work for himself.<sup>58</sup>

51 F. Max Müller, “Address [to the Aryan Section],” in *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists*, London, September 1874, (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, [1876] 1968), 177-204.

52 Edmund Craster, *History of the Bodleian Library 1845-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 104.

53 Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, 218, without mentioning a source; the same passage is quoted in Peter Sutcliffe, *Oxford University Press: An Informal History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 47 and V. H. H. Green, *Oxford Common Room: A Study of Lincoln College and Mark Pattison* (London: Edward Arnold, 1957), 219. K. A. Manley, “Max Müller and the Bodleian Sub-Librarianship, 1865,” *Library History* 5 (1979), 33-47, at 34, note 4, refers to Bodleian Library, MS Pattison 130: Mark Pattison’s diary, 7 December 1860.

54 Schuyler, Jr., “Max Muller’s Service to Science.”

55 N. N., “Appreciation of Max Muller,” *New York Times* (1 December 1900) and Müller, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2: 12.

56 Ibid.

57 Müller, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2: 12.

58 Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary*, 261.



The entrepreneurial and supervising aspects of Müller's work were probably seen as violating collegial standards. The autonomy of the individual scholar was still highly appreciated. Theodor Mommsen recommended that one should free Hermann Oldenberg, one of the contributors to the *Sacred Books of the East*, from his *Lohnschreiberei* (the fact that he has to produce for his living). In this context Mommsen spoke also about the big Müllerian factory.<sup>59</sup> Being part of a production process and being corrected by the editor-in-chief did not fit the scholarly ideal of the independent professor. This does not alter the fact that in many big projects in which Mommsen himself was also deeply involved low-paid "assistants" were needed. The emergence of "big science" and "big humanities" shows the emergence of a new type of scholar as entrepreneur and manager.

#### 4 Conclusion

The above criticism of Müller shows that the persona of the scholar at the time implied an autonomous position as far as one's own work was concerned. Theodor Mommsen urged Friedrich Althoff – the highest ranking official in the Prussian Department of Education – to give Oldenberg a professorship in Germany. An academic of his standing should not be dependent on contractual work and be free to do his own research. Freedom and a certain degree of independence were seen as precious goods for a scholar. Especially in England, of course, some scholars had enough financial means to guarantee their independence and pursue their careers. In the obituary for his friend Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, Dean of Westminster, Müller wrote – with a slight touch of envy – that Stanley never had to make concessions, being financially independent. "He had not to push and to urge his claims himself or through others, and he thus remained a free man through life."<sup>60</sup>

The degree of independence of a British gentleman differed, of course, from that of a German professor, but both were able to pursue their academic interests – not bothered by the need for extra income. Scholars were also seen as owners of the outcomes of their work. They could take advice, no doubt, but they did not want their publications supervised and corrected by peers – let alone editors-in-chief. Scholars were ideally seen as colleagues. This changed

59 *Theodor Mommsen und Friedrich Althoff: Briefwechsel 1882-1903* [Correspondence Mommsen – Althoff 1882-1903], ed. Stefan Rebenich and Gisa Franke (Munich: Oldenburg, 2012), 200-201 and 207, letters of 23 January 1885 and 22 March 1885 ("grosse Müllersche Fabrikunternehmen"). I thank Bernhard Maier (Tübingen) for this reference.

60 F. Max Müller, *Biographical Essays* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1884), 131.

to a certain extent with the emergence of large-scale scholarship that called for more standardized procedures. Thus, the *Sacred Books of the East* marked a new stage in the emergence of structurally hierarchical relations within academia. Now “colleagues” had to be managed, and not only those in subordinate positions such as secretaries and other “assistants.” It is evident that Müller had to work here with extreme caution, but “to push and to urge” was part of his persona as an entrepreneur-scholar. Till the present day this is an extremely sensitive issue among colleagues – even within modern universities where standards of output, efficiency, and competition prevail.

The flip-side of the emergence of bigger projects that could not be undertaken by a single scholar in his study was the need for cooperation and fundraising. Many times, Müller’s charm, pleasant manners, hospitality, and even support were mentioned. Social qualities – if they can be summarized this way – became part of the ideal of the scholar. The “pushing and urging” could be experienced as manipulation and even exploitation, especially by younger aspiring scholars who needed money and a mentor and had not much of a position to negotiate. Here we can glimpse a sight of the modern manager-scholar who has to be able to raise funds and to “persuade” people.

What has disappeared – or at least is not that prominent any more – over the twentieth century is the combination of the persona of “the scholar” and that of what I have called the sage who provides moral guidance. Carl Sagan and some others may have had a certain amount of influence, but generally speaking the role of the sage seems to have been replaced by that of the intellectual who critically analyses societal and political issues. Scholarship as such has become a target of intellectual criticism. Concomitantly, we see the rise of alternative explanations of the world such as creationism and intelligent design, alternative procedures of healing, and even competing “science” that offers “counter-evidence” for the “alleged” process of global warming. Thus, the persona of the scholar is threatened because the authority of the professional as such is undermined in our mediatized world.

It is too early to jump to general conclusions about the usefulness of the concept of the scholarly persona. This chapter – just a rough sketch – has shown that it is not always easy to discern between various competing personae. One of the key issues here is how to link criticism of Müller to his various persona. Some critics detected moral flaws in his character, which are not clearly related to one particular persona. Other criticisms were directed to his scholarly work in general. Concerning Müller’s own perception of his work as a scholar, it is remarkable how fiercely he defined his work as a science, which reaches results which are not the result of mere speculation or association, whereas older linguists, for instance, in his view just connected words of

the basis of similarities without looking at the deeper roots of language families.

Müller was an Oriental scholar, a linguist, a sage, and a pioneering editor of a big series. Do these roles all qualify as a persona? Do they supplement each other, or is it better to look at how these personae qualify each other? I would suggest looking at frictions. In which respects are scholars criticized, for instance? Here we often see moral judgments and judgments concerning (lack of) skills and practiced values. In this chapter I stumbled on multiple personae such as the scholar–entrepreneur or the scholar–sage, which were connected, but at the same time distinguished, without being completely differentiated from one another at the time. The unbiased scholar could still provide wisdom to his audience. Even at the time this double role (if it was a double role) could lead to frictions, and some colleagues of Max Müller were quick to point out that his popular success with “young ladies” actually disqualified him as a serious scholar.

### Bibliography

- Alter, Stephen G. *William Dwight Whitney and the Science of Language*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Arnold, Matthew. *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, 6 vols., edited by Cecil Y. Lang. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996–2001.
- Bloch, R. Howard. *God's Plagiarist: Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Chaudhuri, Nirad C. *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller P. C.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Collini, Stefan, Donald Winch, and John Burrow. *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Conway, Moncure D. *Autobiography: Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, 2 vols. London: Cassell, 1904.
- Craster, Edmund. *History of the Bodleian Library 1845–1945*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Daston, Lorraine and H. Otto Sibum. “Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories.” *Science in Context* 16 (2003): 1–8.
- de Solla Price, Derek J. *Little Science, Big Science ... and Beyond*. New York, NY: Columbia Press, [1963] 1986.
- de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot, [1916] 1980.

- de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Roy Harris. London: Duckworth, 1983.
- de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Writings in General Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Green, Thomas J. *Religion for a Secular Age: Max Müller, Swami Vivekananda and Vedānta*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2016.
- Green, V. H. H. *Oxford Common Room: A Study of Lincoln College and Mark Pattison*. London: Edward Arnold, 1957.
- Holloway, John. *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument*. London: MacMillan, 1953.
- Manley, K. A. "Max Müller and the Bodleian Sub-Librarianship, 1865." *Library History* 5 (1979): 33-47.
- Molendijk, Arie L. "'To Unite Religion against all Irreligion': The 1893 World Parliament of Religions." *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 18 (2011): 228-250.
- Molendijk, Arie L. *Friedrich Max Müller and the Sacred Books of the East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Molendijk, Arie L. "The First Conferences on the History of Religions: Religious Dialogue versus Scholarly Study." *NTT: Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 72 (2018): 211-224.
- Müller, F. Max. "Buddhism." In Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. 1, 182-231. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1867.
- Müller, F. Max. *Introduction to the Science of Religion*. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1873.
- Müller, F. Max. *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 2 vols., 7th ed. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1873.
- Müller, F. Max. *Biographical Essays*. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1884.
- Müller, F. Max. *Natural Religion*, Gifford Lectures Glasgow 1888. London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1889.
- Müller, F. Max. *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1898.
- Müller, F. Max. *Auld Lang Syne*, 2 vols. London: Longmans & Green, 1898-1899.
- Müller, F. Max. *The Question of Right between England and the Transvaal: Letters by the Right Hon. F. Max Müller with Rejoinders by Professor Theodor Mommsen*, Westminster: Imperial South African Association, 1900.
- Müller, F. Max. *My Autobiography: A Fragment*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1901.
- Müller, F. Max. *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Max Müller*, 2 vols., edited by [Georgina Müller]. London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1902.
- Müller, F. Max. *Thoughts on Life and Religion*, edited by [Georgina Müller]. London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1906.

- Müller, F. Max. "Address [to the Aryan Section]." In *Transactions of the Second Session of the International Congress of Orientalists*, London, September 1874. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, [1876] 1968.
- N. N. "Prof. Max Mueller Dead." *New York Times* (29 October 1900).
- N. N. "Max Mueller." *New York Times* (3 November 1900).
- N. N. "Appreciation of Max Muller." *New York Times* (1 December 1900).
- Paul, Herman. "What Is a Scholarly Persona? Ten Theses on Virtues, Skills, and Desires." *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 348-371.
- Paul, Herman. "The Virtues and Vices of Albert Naudé: Toward a History of Scholarly Personae." *History of Humanities* 1 (2016), 327-338.
- Planck, Max. *Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers* (1948). Translated by F. Gaynor. New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1950.
- Rebenich, Stefan and Gisa Franke, eds. *Theodor Mommsen und Friedrich Althoff: Briefwechsel 1882-1903*. Munich: Oldenburg, 2012.
- Ritter, J., ed. *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 4. Basel: Schwabe, 1976.
- Schuyler, Jr., Montgomery. "Max Muller's Service to Science." *New York Times* (3 November 1900).
- Sutcliffe, Peter. *Oxford University Press: An Informal History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
- Thomas A. Sebeok, ed. *Portraits of Linguists: A Biographical Source Book for the History of Western Linguistics, 1746-1963*, 2 vols. Westport: Greenwood Press, [1966] 1976.
- van den Bosch, Lourens P. *Friedrich Max Müller: A Life Devoted to the Humanities*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- van der Veer, Peter. *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Vivekananda, Swami. "Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings." In *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 vols., 4: 409-421. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973-1979.
- von Harnack, Adolf. "Antrittsrede in der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften." In *Adolf von Harnack als Zeitgenosse*, edited by Kurt Nowak, 2 vols, 1: 976-982. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996 .
- Voigt, Johannes H. "Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Theodor Mommsen und Max Müller über den Burenkrieg." *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 17 (1966), 65-77.