

Early Orientalism

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The history of western notions about Islam is of obvious scholarly as well as popular interest today. This book investigates Christian images of the Muslim Middle East, focusing on the period from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, when the nature of divine as well as human power was under particularly intense debate in the West.

Ivan Kalmar explores how the controversial notion of submission to ultimate authority has in the western world been discussed with reference to Islam's alleged recommendation to obey, unquestioningly, a merciless Allah in heaven and a despotic government on earth. He discusses how Abrahamic faiths – Christianity and Judaism as much as Islam – demand devotion to a sublime power, with the faith that this power loves and cares for us, a concept that brings with it the fear that, on the contrary, this power only toys with us for its own enjoyment. For such a power, Kalmar borrows Slavoj Žižek's term "obscene father". He discusses how this describes exactly the western image of the Oriental despot - Allah in heaven, and the various sultans, emirs and ayatollahs on earth – and how these despotic personalities of imagined Muslim society function as a projection, from the West on to the Muslim Orient, of an existential anxiety about sublime power.

Making accessible academic debates on the history of Christian perceptions of Islam and on Islam and the West, this book is an important addition to the existing literature in the areas of Islamic studies, religious history and philosophy.

Ivan Kalmar is a professor at the University of Toronto. His main work has addressed parallels in the image of Muslims and Jews in western Christian history.

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Imagined Islam and the Notion of Sublime Power
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Early Orientalism

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of Sublime Power

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To Diane:

I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.

Anne Bradstreet, 1612–1672

Gottes ist der Orient!
Gottes ist der Occident!
Nord- und südliches Gelände
Ruht im Frieden seiner Hände.

God's is the East!
God's is the West!
Northerly and southerly lands
Rest peacefully in His hands.
Goethe, *West-Eastern Divan*

The Other holds a secret – the secret of what I am.
Jean-Paul Sartre*

* Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness: a phenomenological essay on ontology*, ed. Hazel Estella Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), 475.

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Introduction

The Lord: God, King, Father

O King, most high and wise Lord; How incomprehensible are thy judgments, and inscrutable thy ways!

Romans 11:24

The history of western notions about Islam is of obvious interest today. Central among such notions is the idea that the Muslim East is predisposed to undemocratic government. This idea has a pedigree of many centuries, and the classic term for what it refers to is “oriental despotism.” A number of excellent works have been written on oriental despotism,¹ but I believe that the full significance of this idea still needs to be uncovered, and uncovering it is my goal in this book. I see the political issue of despotic government as grounded in deep-reaching anxieties that go beyond politics and even beyond the East–West relationship. Oriental despotism was, and to some extent still is, a notion (whether factual or not) that helps to ground western, Christian theological concerns about divine power and unconditional faith, and indeed existential concerns about the relationship between the human self and the universe.

All Abrahamic faiths – Christianity and Judaism as much as Islam – demand devotion to a sublime power broaching no opposition and needing no counselors. But they couple obedience to that power with faith in its benevolence: we would like to believe that it not only rules us but also loves and cares for us. Submission to a good God is the Abrahamic way to express confidence that the universe has a special place for every human being. There is, of course, no real evidence that this is so. The conception of a sublime power ruling the universe (or the state) brings with it the anxiety that this power is, in fact, unloving and uncaring, and that its only goal is its own pleasure. Such a power is exactly what Freud identified as the “primal father.” Without necessarily any commitment to the scientific validity of psychoanalysis, I suggest that *as a trope* the primal father describes exactly the western image of the oriental despot: Allah in heaven, or the various sultans, emirs, and ayatollahs on earth. These despotic personalities of imagined Muslim society function as a projection, from the West onto the Muslim Orient, of an existential anxiety about sublime power.

What if the King, but especially what if God, are not like the loving Father of religion, but like the “obscene” (to use Žižek’s term) primal father of

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psychoanalysis, demanding total obedience from us not for our own good, but purely for his own unlimited enjoyment? Or, to put it less mystically and mystifyingly, what if the universe is there not for Man and Woman, but to serve some crushingly great, incomprehensibly selfish power that cares not a bit for you or me? Abrahamic religion introduces the idea of a good and improving world tending to a glorious finish. But it also produces this nightmare of humanity as a laughable, powerless plaything of an unfeeling transcendence. Christians who vilify Muslims (which is most but not all Christians throughout most but not all of history) are afraid to recognize this monster as a common Abrahamic invention. My thesis is that they project it – have always projected it – onto the Muslims as if it were the downside of Islam alone (and may be of Judaism as well) and not of Christianity as well.

This perverse process of projection, I argue, explains – more than the relevant facts – the persistent picture in the Christian West of Muslims as slaves, soldiers, and terrorists of Allah: fanatical devotees of a remote and terrifying sublime power. My book is about the formative centuries of this process. It starts from roughly the moment in the European Renaissance when Muslim Ottoman forces captured the ancient Christian capital, Constantinople, concentrating the political power of Christianity in that religion's European exile. It ends, more or less, in the Enlightenment, when the Ottomans no longer pose a realistic threat to western Christian power, and East and West begin to feel the impact of the rising North European imperialism. This first phase of orientalism is what I call "early orientalism" in this book, as opposed to the "imperialist" second phase. (Arguably there were even earlier orientalisms as well, but I start with the Ottoman ascendancy for reasons I explain later.) For the most part, I wait until the Epilogue with a discussion about how the two phases are related. But to anticipate: The deep, three-part complex of sublime power that I label with the terms "God," "King," and "Father" retains its power over the transition. In trying to comprehend its historical formation I am, I believe, also making steps towards understanding its remarkable persistence.

We can think here of "God," "King," and "Father" as varieties of a more general concept of sublime power, to which I would like to give the more general label, "Lord" (this will make it possible to speak about the Lord with deliberate ambiguity, not specifying which of the three personae is meant specifically). "God, King, Father" as names of the Lord should not be taken literally. Not all real fathers have exercised the kind of sublime power over us that has occupied Freud and the later psychoanalysts. Not all or even most real kings have possessed sublime power: even the so-called absolute kings were less so in practice than in theory. And God may not even exist. In this book God, King, and Father are of interest not necessarily as objectively existing entities but rather as tropes. What interests us is how an *imagined* God, how the *imagined* King, how the *imagined* Father relate to the "Islamic world" – also *imagined*. It is important to add, however, that "imagined" does not mean "imaginary": I study God, King, Father, and the Islamic world in the western imagination, but I am not suggesting that they are mere figments of that imagination. The really interesting question is what realities these tropes reveal, transform, or hide.

The conception of the One sublime Lord set over the (ideally) submissive multitude in his care defines monotheism. It defines the Abrahamic faith and the Abrahamic imagination, and sets it apart from other major or minor traditions, be they Hinduism or shamanism, voodoo or Zen, no matter how much elements within those traditions might resemble it. So why then is there in both the Christian West and the Muslim East a deeply ingrained history of imagining one another as antipodal Other, the twain that shall never meet? The persistence of the notion of a radical opposition, of a fundamental difference, between East and West – read, in this context, between Islam and Christianity – in the face of obvious similarities might surprise a visitor from space, is explained by some very powerful earthly reasons. Christians and Muslims both utilized their respective proselytizing religions to support the expansion of their own states and empires. Christendom and “the Islamic world” functioned to some extent as political units with sovereignty over territory, and, over time, also as economic units, with policies to protect and stimulate their own markets. Such a practical base preserves and is preserved by the superstructure of an abstract opposition that acquires cosmic qualities, going beyond even the lofty disputes of religious dogma.

In my view, the purported East–West contrast was constructed in specific historical and geopolitical circumstances as a solution to the existential anxiety that I mentioned, about the goodness or otherwise of the external power we depend on: God, King, Father. It functions at all three of the levels denoted by these tropes: the theological, the political, and the third (the Father’s) dimension, which can be studied using psychoanalytical vocabulary, and which we may call phenomenological.

At the theological level, the contrast is expressed by the following, never quite uncontested, formula: 1) the western Christian God is a caring, loving God-the-Father (and for many, truly exists), while 2) Allah is a vengeful, selfish god (and for many in the West, an invention of manipulative mullahs). In *fact*, as anyone even slightly familiar with Islam knows, among the many names of God *ar-rahman*, the merciful, is uppermost. To describe him as a heartless purveyor of cruel punishment is simply false. The contrast between 1) and 2) is an invention, creating an East–West difference where there is little if any. The function of the invention is to reassure the western Christian that his Lord loves him back, and it projects his unacknowledged fear that it might be otherwise onto his fellow-monotheists in the Muslim Orient.

At the political level, things are a little more complicated, yet the exaggeration of the East–West difference does match to a large extent the theological. There is an inherent potential for sacredness in kingship,² which has much to do with the fact that the king’s power, being greater than anyone else’s on earth, can easily be imagined as unearthly. But the tendency of a king to divinize his rule is seldom without controversy. The ancient Greek notion of the oriental despot was revived from the seventeenth century on in the debates about political freedom and absolutism in the West. The “Sublime Porte” of the Ottoman Empire was built up, often quite falsely, as the seat of a sovereign with unlimited might. The Sultan would then be held out as the epitome of a selfish potentate. It was mostly the enemies of absolutism that used oriental despotism as the foil for their political

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philosophies. An observer like Paul Rycaut, the important seventeenth-century traveler whom we will encounter frequently in the pages that follow, had much understanding for the sultan's absolute powers, as long as he used them with discretion. He suggested that monarchs should follow the law of the land, and only "use the power of absolute dominion, which is to be applied like Physick, when the ordinary force of nature cannot remove the malignancy of some peccant humours."³ Rycaut was showing himself here a supporter of the restored monarchy in England, whose theoretical power was in practice well circumscribed by the parliamentary and legal system.⁴ He condemned Ottoman absolutism only in its perceived excesses, but not necessarily in principle. More radical advocates of the political freedoms that were emerging (with difficulty) in Europe were less understanding. They condemned tyranny as inherently an eastern style of government. They argued that unfreedom may be fine for the Turks, but does not become the West. Indeed they, from Montesquieu to Marx, appeared to have developed a blind spot for the tyrannical potential *within* what each might consider the guarantee of freedom – within the rule of law itself, within democracy, within socialism – while locating prototypical despotism outside the West, in the Orient. We had to wait for a Nazi political philosopher of the twentieth century such as Carl Schmitt to reply that *all* sovereign political power was potentially unlimited: that the essence of sovereignty was not the daily practice of executing the laws, but the right of suspending them in exceptional circumstances – the very right ascribed to the King by Rycaut.⁵

At the phenomenological level, the trope that is the equivalent of God and King is the Father, and here too, the fearsome features of the character are projected onto the Orient. When God or a King are called "father," the reference is to the benevolent use of their power for the benefit of their charges. It is revealing that once European absolutism was, in the nineteenth century, more or less gone or in difficult yet inevitable decline, the queen of England liked to be called a (white) mother, while the czar's soubriquet *batyushka* – dear father – as the Austrian emperor's *Landesvater* – father of the land – stressed that each was a parent who cared for his subjects as for his own children. The oriental despot – Allah as much as sultan or shah – on the other hand, was as we shall see in the next chapter, often imagined in western cultural history as a perversion of the father figure: a terrifying, cruel force that abuses his unlimited power for his own enjoyment, and against us.

Fundamentally, orientalism takes a deep-seated and universal existential question – the goodness or otherwise of the powers that control us – and tries to solve it by opposing a Christian West to a Muslim East. One way to understand this meta-physical character of orientalism might be by comparison to the tradition of representing gender. The metaphysics of gender makes not only the physical but also the social world out to be essentially dependent on the difference between male and female. From Hindu mythology to psychoanalysis, a male or active (phallic) principle is opposed to a female or passive one.⁶ There are many parallels between this essentializing of the gender difference, on the one hand, and orientalism's essentializing of the East–West difference, on the other. Both distinctions project onto the actual physical world some of the chief problems of the experience of

living in human society. The male–female difference is a projection of the difference between action and passivity, and the East–West difference is a projection of the tension between authority and obedience, Master and Slave. Moreover, representations of gender and of the East–West difference are closely related. In an obvious sense, the Master who commands is active and the Slave who follows orders is passive. Both distinctions are evidently “false,” due to their constitutive exaggeration of a physical difference (sex differentiation, geographic location), which they invest with metaphysical significance.

Orientalism assigns no less a problem than the place of humanity in the cosmic order (or disorder) to a language and an imaginary designed to deal with a specific region of the earth. East and West are conceived of not simply as locations to which the compass points, but as concrete examples of two contrasting types of being human, in relation to other humans and to the universe. No greater tragedy could possibly have befallen the Orient (“the Middle East”) than to have become, rather than an ordinary region like all others, a location of metaphysical fantasy mistaken for reality.

The metaphysical East–West distinction resembles the metaphysical gender distinction in one more important respect. In addition to the conviction that there is a fundamental male/female dichotomy, there is also the striving for bridging it. The union of male and female is invested, in western cultural history as elsewhere, with a sublime mystique that can be seen as one of the expressions of the Lacanian attraction to and repulsion by “the Real.” All oppositions are haunted by what deconstructionists call a “trace,” an unnamed or hard-to-name sense of commonality between opposites. The trace defines the functioning of the opposition, but it also has the potential to undermine it. Speaking of language in general, but in a way that can be applied specifically to language about Occident and Orient, Derrida notes that “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.”⁷

Orientalism has produced East and West as the most distressing example of the imaginative geography of division and opposition. But I believe that it has been, also, able to provide the mental stage on which to rehearse the overcoming of that same division and opposition. As the title of one of the best books on the subject, by Zachary Lockman, suggests, orientalism is characterized not by a single vision, but by several “contending visions of the Middle East.”⁸ Orientalism has the capacity to divide and contrast, but also to dream of East–West unity. In this it is truly Abrahamic, expressing the particular strength of the monotheistic imagination. That is to valorize unity that is greater than all divisions: a unity that comes from the willing subjection of all, without distinction, to the sublime One. In the depths of the process of treating the East as a surrogate self lies the potential for recognition and reconnection: this is so even if the longing for union never manages to free itself of the impulse to divide that has engendered its imaginative geography. Western Christian thought about the Muslim East is not entirely limited to the “othering,” the projection of fears and weakness onto the nearby neighbor, and with it the exaggeration of difference to the point of metaphysics. A second pattern – I call it “soft orientalism” – stresses the East–West difference only to suggest overcoming it at some “higher” level. A profound admiration for the Orient as a continuing source of spiritual inspiration is particularly

evident towards the end of the period. We will examine it in the writings of the so-called pre-romantics, especially in England, and their reading of the Bible as an oriental document. This soft-orientalist style of biblical scholarship was at the heart of the new biblical criticism of the nineteenth century, whose profound influence on western literature, philosophy, and anthropology remains sadly under-explored. The philo-orientalism of the biblical scholars was shared by a writer like Wolfgang Goethe, whom Edward Said held out as an example of someone who was able to bypass anti-oriental prejudice.⁹ Later, some of the giants of the academic orientalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Ignaz Goldziher, Louis Massignon, and Maxime Rodinson, saw it as their life's work to counter anti-Muslim prejudice. A history of soft orientalism, which remains to be written, would of course have to connect to the philo-Indianism explored by Raymond Schwab (who includes such characters as Tolstoy and Nietzsche).¹⁰ It would also need to pay serious attention to popular imagery, from the early Freemasons' mystic identification with ancient Israel and Egypt, through the immense popularity in the West of the "desert romance," best exemplified by the 1921 blockbuster, *The Sheik*, starring Rudolf Valentino, to the more recent success of Sufi *qawwali* and "fusion" forms of Islam-based music.

In most of this book, with its focus on the pre-imperialist period of orientalism, we rarely see as yet the direct and explicit acknowledgment of a desire for East–West union that we observe in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century West. Even Kipling's infamous "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" would be followed by "Till the Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat," preserving the Abrahamic vision of the end of days, when all are judged as equals by the majestic King. Such feverish passion was rare in early orientalisms, yet towards the end of the period from the Reformation to the Enlightenment it did become possible, already, to imagine the "higher" union of East and West. In 1731, Henri Boulainvilliers declared unreservedly that "All that Mahomet has said is true in terms of the essential dogmas of religion."¹¹ There are even much earlier examples of a guarded understanding for eastern ways – even Islam! – in the works of a Renaissance theologian like Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464),¹² or a visitor to the Orient like Paul Rycaut (1629–1700), who will reappear in these pages often.

Nevertheless, during the centuries between the successful Ottoman campaign to conquer Constantinople in 1453 and the unsuccessful one to capture Vienna in 1683, Christian unity in face of the Muslim threat seemed to demand hard orientalism as a motivational rhetoric essential to the Christian West's military tactics. While the Muslim Ottoman Empire posed a realistic threat of expanding further west, the thought of union between East and West did far more to frighten than to inspire. This makes it all the more significant that valuing East–West union was, even at this time, imaginable. Understandably so, because I believe that it is a demonstrable fact that the alleged radical opposition between the Christian West and the Muslim East is a superficial historical construct, conjured out of a fundamental unity.

In this way, I believe that my book enters current debates about the alleged clash between Islam and the West and the discredited but still powerful emphasis

on the radical divide between them. I show that not only does one find no such divide when studying the facts of religion, politics, and culture in general, but that even as it did exist in a decisive way in western Christian *thought*, it did so in a nuanced way.

To recap, my specific purpose is to show how, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, the imagined Muslim East came to embody the downside of obedience to a supreme Power: the frightening possibility that such power is exercised not for the benefit of those who obey, but for the selfish enjoyment of that Power itself. Anxiously, in various periods and in various ways, the western Christian imagination tried to rid itself of the possibility that an uncaring Lord (God, King, Father) rules not only out there in the Orient, but in the universe at large, including home.

As for the structure of the book: In the next four chapters, I continue laying the general conceptual foundations for the more specific discussion of orientalism and sublime power that then follows: this part of the book may be considered as an extended introduction. In Chapter 1, I make some generalizations regarding the figure of the Lord as I have just outlined it, considering the relationships that obtain among its theological, political, and phenomenological aspects. In Chapter 2, I situate this book in the context of contemporary notions of orientalism based on Edward W. Said's now canonical work, noting the most important similarities and differences: a necessary exercise, as often my assumptions and terminology may differ from Said's, and even from those of the debates on orientalism engendered by Said. In Chapters 3 and 4, I give an overview of the historical phases through which orientalism has passed, identifying the beginning with the Ottoman ascendancy in Europe, become visible when the sultan's armies conquered Constantinople in 1452.

Chapters 5 to 7 are meant to characterize the view of the Orient and sublime power in various periods and locations in the West, and the case examples are, in turn, the anonymous decorators of a famous astronomical clock in Prague, the biblical canvases of Rembrandt, and a treatise on the sublime by the eighteenth-century orientalist and Bishop of London, Robert Lowth.

In Chapter 8, we see that what had been a vague and informal characterization of the despotic Orient and its slavishly obedient denizens was given unprecedented clarity and internal consistency in Hegel's philosophical system. But Hegel goes well beyond summing up the orientalism that preceded him, and establishes some of the parameters for discussing the Orient that have lasted into the modern period and our own age.

The lifeless automatism of oriental obedience to both Allah and the worldly despot, which Hegel characterized as a result of the Lord's majestic isolation from a world that he rules without excess compassion, is traced in the next two chapters (9 and 10) to what I suggest are its biblical sources in the "obedience to the letter" as opposed to the spirit as distinguished by Paul, and subsequent debate of this issue in various streams of Christianity. In Chapter 11, the experience of utter submission to a sublime power of this sort is briefly examined through the symbolism of a well-known image, particularly popular in the late eighteenth century: the All-Seeing-Eye.

8 *Introduction*

The concluding part of the book at last confronts quite directly the fear that underlies the projection/abjection of the Orient as it arises from the recesses of the western soul: the anxiety that the universe is governed not by a pastoral, fatherly Power but by its opposite: an oppressive and selfish one. Chapter 12 discusses the issue partly in terms of Foucault's conception of "government" as a pastoral power, whose development Foucault located in much the same period that we are focusing on. Finally, Chapter 13 examines the unlimited submission of the despot's subjects in terms of its ultimate active expression: suicide by the command of the despot.

No doubt, such a conclusion will be read with reference to terrorism as one of the prime "issues" in the public perception of Islam today. Indeed, it is more generally true, I am sure, that the image of sublime power in early orientalism cannot be contemplated without implicit reference to our own time. Yet I have tried to leave such reference implicit, wherever I could, for three reasons. First, though we know full well today that no one can write history uninfluenced by the present, I do believe that it is our obligation to at least try to control the temptation for anachronism. Second, the different phases of orientalism have been so different in character that any generalization over time is problematic even if not all comparison is invalid. Third, I believe that any explicit discussion of contemporary relevance is liable, given the emotional character of debates about Islam today, to hijack the reader's attention from history. For all these reasons, I have mostly resisted, though with difficulty and not without the occasional lapse, the temptation to foray into the present.

However, at the end of the book I have permitted myself a modest epilogue that serves as a moral conclusion, and which does take an explicitly contemporary view. I express there a certain nostalgia after the romantic sort of orientalism, which has today all but disappeared in favor of the hard orientalism of uncompromising Islamophobia. Whatever their limitations and unacknowledged foundations in western imperialism, romantic soft orientalists used to admire the Muslim Orient, even in the simplifying and essentializing version of it that they imagined. They admired it in part for what they knew of Islam's lessons of humility and submission to the sublime power of Providence. It is not pure prejudice, I suggest, that such values exist in Islam, and it remains as true as ever that there is something we can learn from them here in the West. The facts and analyses of the book, however, do not depend on the validity or otherwise of this purely personal conclusion.

1 The Obscene Father

Allah, Jehovah, and the oriental despot

The relation between Eros and Authority, or Love and the Law, is central to Jesus, to Paul, to Freud. But also it is crucial in Moses, in Socrates/Plato, and in *King Lear* and all Shakespeare ...

Harold Bloom, *Jesus and Yahweh: the names divine*¹

Hegel suggested that when we articulate the sublime we make an “attempt to express the infinite, without finding in the sphere of phenomena an object which proves adequate for this representation.”² This does not, however, mean that we give up trying. We find imperfect, partial representations: figures, personifications of the sublime. One of the most important of these is what I have referred to as “the Lord.” I will now examine in some detail the various aspects of sublime power personified as the Lord, exploring further how the theological aspect called “God” and the political aspect we have called “King” relate to the crucial phenomenological category of “Father.”

“God,” the omnipotent – all-powerful, mighty beyond comparison – is to some of the theologically sophisticated, a name for an abstract force. But to ordinary folks some version of the Old Man With the Long White Beard tends to function as the image of the sublime Lord. The *worldly* figure of sublime Power, too, is an abstraction, and this, too, needs to be embodied in a concrete personality for the ordinary imagination. In this case, however, there is not a single, universal personification. Parents, teachers, the government are some of the examples. None of these has power that is objectively unlimited, but it may be *experienced* as such. In earlier times, a major and almost universal example was the King, which is why I have chosen “King” to be the general label for sublime power in its political personification. An absolute King is, in theory, limited only by the heavenly Ruler of the Universe. But in reality the King known to a western subject was seldom quite as mighty as the theory would have it. It was easier to imagine the figure of unfettered worldly power in the oriental mode: the so-called “oriental despot,” the absolute King in the imagined East.

God and King can both be thought of as a caring father, or as an uncaring authoritarian. To Christians, their own God is a caring one. Allah, on the other hand, is often seen (by Christians) as an irate disciplinarian who shows no mercy to those who break his Law. I will argue that this vision of Allah derives from

the “vengeful” “fire-and-brimstone” Old Testament God, “Jehovah,” whom Christianity believes to have left behind.

Much as the Christian God-the-Father contrasts with Allah, so the ideal western government contrasts with that of the oriental despot: the first is mindful of the governed; the second cares only for himself. Allah and the oriental despot are figures that project to the East what all of us fear, at least in the Abrahamic religious-cultural space: sublime Power that does not care.³

The Obscene Father

The strict, uncompromising, unresponsive, *cold* masculine Power of Allah and the oriental despot corresponds to what psychoanalysts label with the metaphor of the “primal,” or “archaic Father.”

In terms of the oedipal metaphor of psychoanalysis, the Father occupies the position of the author and administrator of the Law. He cuts the bond of identity between the Mother and Ego (who, in the more gender-biased original versions, may be specifically the Son, the Daughter requiring separate treatment). In fact, Ego is created by this cut. In subjecting Ego to the Law, the Father ensures Ego’s survival in society as an independent, active entity. But there are fathers, and then there are fathers.

In psychoanalysis the figure of the father refracts into two dialectically opposed aspects. One is the caring domestic father figure, who appears to occupy many analysts today, because they see problems in individuals who did not have such a father present in their childhood home.⁴ At the religious level, this is the Christian God the Father. This figure is the *Abba!* Jesus cries out to in Mark 14:36, as he contemplates his impending sacrificial death. Paul twice refers, obliquely, to this incident when he refers, in his epistles, to the believer as a son who calls on his *Abba*.⁵ This Aramaic term for “father” was felt to be more appropriate here, even though the New Testament is in Greek. It was Aramaic, not Greek (or Hebrew), that a first-century Jew would have used in a private, personal context. Paul’s intention in choosing Aramaic here was to stress the close familial relation Jesus bore to God. He meant to suggest that, through Jesus, Christians acquire his warm proximity to his and their heavenly Father. Jews who reject Jesus would not be given this opportunity. One of the modern preachers who caught Paul’s intent best was Martin Luther King. “Compare the early Hebrew’s statement,” King wrote, “‘Let not God speak with us, lest we die,’ with the words of Jesus, ‘When ye pray, say, Our Father.’”⁶ The Old Testament God, as King saw him (which is *not*, it must be said, how Jews see him), is not (yet) recognized as a father. He will become that only within the Christian Trinity.

The other, opposing aspect of the father emerges powerfully in the classic writings of Freud and his intellectual descendants. This “castrating” tyrant cuts the link between mother and son, not to enable his child to become an independent member of a functioning society, but rather in order to keep the mother and all *jouissance*, all pleasure and enjoyment, to himself. Freud, in one of his most delirious moments, imagined this father killed (and eaten) by his sons so that they could bond to found society.⁷ Lacan called him *le père jouissant* or *le père*

jouissance, which Žižek translates as Father-of-Enjoyment or Father Enjoyment. He describes him as the “obscene father.”⁸

The Obscene Father is a metaphor for a very general human experience: the experience of the world as a Power that does not care. Some of the most crucial theological and political concerns during the periods of early orientalism gave this universal fear an expression typical of the age. During the late fifteenth century, when (as I will suggest) early orientalism began, scholars of the *via moderna* compared the relationship between God and Christians to that of a king and his subjects, both of whom were bound by contractual obligation. In both cases, the Lord was to protect and his servants to obey: like Aristotle’s master and slave, they differed in their very nature. In the political arena, this idea defined the ideal relationship between the absolute monarch and his subjects. While the omnipotence of God was an ancient tenet inherent in monotheism and explicit in the Christian Bible,⁹ it became a very topical politico-theological issue at a time, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, when kings claimed – by the grace of God – unlimited and therefore rather godlike power over their subjects.

During this long period, soteriology or the theology of salvation tended to dominate theological debate within Christendom. The most powerfully controversial doctrine was that of “justification by faith,” which held that the believer is helpless to achieve salvation (which included eternal life in heaven) by his or her own acts or “works.” Not only was a human being incapable, without God’s help, to rise above sin and so merit salvation, but God was needed even to make a person *want* to defeat sin. This tenet, whose most important proponent was Martin Luther, had its roots in Augustine of Hippo (354–430), but lay more or less dormant until the Renaissance. It was revived in the mid to late fourteenth century – once again, a period that, I will argue, not coincidentally marks the beginning of the orientalist imaginary. Early, proto-Protestant versions of the idea of justification by faith were then formulated by theologians such as Gregory of Rimini (died 1358).

Now it was evident that some kings and other earthly lords (including bishops) did not keep their end of the contract, which required them to use their unlimited power to care like fathers for the bodies and souls of their subjects. Following the Aristotelian definition of a good king as opposed to a tyrant – one who cares for his subject as a father for his children and not as a master for his slaves¹⁰ – this meant that they were tyrants. Criticisms of tyranny became ever more common and ever louder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. But, for obvious reasons, an even more disturbing thought was much harder to articulate. What if God also failed his part, and also did not care to protect us?

We hear the unstated question as a subtext of the agonizing and interminable debates among Protestants and some Catholics regarding the nature of divine grace as the only means to salvation. Is grace granted only to a few, as the Calvinists, especially, insisted? And, once grace is granted, can one lose it through misdeeds or loss of faith (yes, according to the Lutherans and the Arminians; no according to the Calvinists)? Though the highest experience of a Christian, especially in the Protestant tradition, was to rejoice at the security of salvation, the truth is that salvation was actually never quite certain. And,

as far as the God of the Old Testament was concerned, before he begot Christ he offered no salvation at all. According to most Christian theology, certainly during the period in question, the Christian God before Christ denies salvation and all men and women are hopelessly sinful (this condition is called “total depravity”). In the chronological and theological sequence from the Old to the New Testament as understood by most traditional Christians, the “pre-Jesus” Jehovah is a god bent on terrible punishment. It is only in the New Testament that God reveals himself as “God the Father” and sacrifices his own son to himself to redeem the punishment due to sinful Man, so that the dead may through that sacrifice enter eternal life with God in heaven.

The Obscene Father had to remain for the most part an implicit characterization of the Old Testament God, an anxiously intuited possibility, for anything else would of course be sacrilege. Calvin, for example, insisted in *The Institutions* that all three persons of the Trinity were united in substance. When he described the difference in quality among them, he gave God the Father the rather anemic description of a prime mover: “the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things,” compared to the Son, to whom belonged “wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things.”¹¹ Yet Calvin does methodically raise the possibility, of course only to reject it, that God may, in spite of his doctrinal status as the source of all justice, in fact be unjust. To Calvin, punishing the third and fourth generation of the sinner, promised in Exodus 34:6–7, is punishment not for the ancestor’s sin but for the descendant’s own sinfulness.¹² Yet the argument, which can charitably be called rather complex, barely hides Calvin’s anxiety, and establishes clearly that the question of God’s possible injustice as a punisher of innocent generations did exercise his mind. The unjust form of Jehovah, the rejected obscene version of the Father in Heaven, is a powerfully implicit character, motivating the theological protestations of God’s justice in Christian theology. It is he I call “Jehovah” in the rest of this book: not the professed Jehovah of Calvin, Luther, and other classic Christian theologians, Protestant or Catholic, but rather the divine despot intuited and repressed by theological doctrine.

Allah was the means to imagine this frightening version of Jehovah more explicitly, by projecting him outward onto the Orient. The Obscene Father is a force that frightens. Pretending that he resides in a far-away region is part of the fundamental maneuver of orientalism that we noted earlier: exaggerating the East–West difference so that what we suspect may be true of “our” Lord is true only of “theirs.”

Jehovah and Allah

The imagined Allah is the Allah of imagined Islam; while obviously this figure is not entirely independent of the “real” Allah of “real” Islam, its origins are elsewhere, closer home: I am suggesting that they reside in a common and persistent Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible. We need to discuss further what Christians have thought of Jehovah, before we return to what they have thought of Allah.

Traditional Christian theology suggests that in the Old Testament, before it is “fulfilled” by the New, is located the Law, the Letter, and Death; as opposed to

the Love, the Spirit, and the Life brought by the New Testament. This is the theological expression of the deep-seated contrast in western civilization that Harold Bloom describes as the relation between “Eros and Authority, or Love and the Law.”¹³

A reading of the Bible that opposes a legalistic Jehovah to the loving God of the Christian Trinity goes back to the biblical epistles of Paul.¹⁴ It is consistent with the message of the Sermon on the Mount. It is closely related to what one might call, in Roy Rappaport’s terms, Christianity’s Ultimate Sacred Postulate:¹⁵ that Jesus is the Savior of Man. In western Christianity, more clearly than in its eastern variants, the sacrifice of Jesus is a saving act also in a legal sense: an act of saving Man from the just consequences of a crime. The crime is Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God. Many Christian theologians have insisted that we are born not with the guilt of the actual crime, but rather with the general sinful tendency to commit such crimes if not restrained by faith and cleansed by baptism.¹⁶ But sinfulness must be punished. Even God cannot annul the need for a punishment demanded by his own Law (we will see later how this applies to the oriental despot as well). But in the western Christian view, a loving God has taken on the punishment himself, as opposed to administering it to his wayward creation. He sacrifices his own son, who, on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, is a form (*persona*) of God himself.

On the typical Christian reading of the Old Testament, such self-sacrificing mercy is not necessarily in character for Jehovah, though it is in character for the God who begets, and is, Christ. The point is not that God improves his character over time, which would imply, heretically, that he was less than perfect before Christ, which, for a perfect Being, is impossible.¹⁷ Rather, the traditional teaching is that God himself does not change, but our perception of him does (as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus.) “When I was a child,” Paul writes in the famous passage in 1 Corinthians, “I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”¹⁸ The truth of God, Paul is saying, is timeless, but even his revelation through Christ uncovers it only “in part,” with final understanding coming only at the end of days.

The God of the Old Testament is, while not false, an incompletely understood version of God as a purveyor of a stern Law, but not yet as a Father whose chief characteristic is Love. Though remote and aloof, he has an overwhelming power over his worshippers, for he is the punitive enforcer, whose commandments must always be obeyed to the letter. When humans disobey him he is ruthlessly violent. He is the dispenser of death, who expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden lest they eat from the tree of eternal life. He is the jealous tribal God, helping his people’s armed forces to eradicate their enemy, but savagely chastising them when they turn to the gods of the Nations. “Jehovah” is the name for this figure, the form of God associated with the “unfulfilled” side of each of the oppositions between Letter and Spirit, Thanatos and Eros, Law and Love.

This Jehovah is not necessarily the character that actually emerges, on a more critical reading, from the biblical text. “Jehovah” is not in this context to be

confused with “Yahweh”: the first is a Pauline construction modified by the theological, moral, and political concerns of the Renaissance and the Reformation; the second, a figure we discover by applying scientific philological methods to the actual biblical text. Generally, the two do not coincide.

As Harold Bloom has shown among others, the Yahweh that is revealed by Scripture is, far from a remote legislator, a personable, fickle, hysterical, human-like God, scary and loving at the same time. It is *this* Yahweh – and not “Jehovah” – that Bloom is referring to when he points out that Yahweh is unlike both the Christian and the Muslim God.

The earliest strand of Torah centers upon Yahweh, who is a rather different personage from Christianity’s God the Father and from Islam’s Allah. The J Writer’s Yahweh is intimate with us, close by, while the Christian God the Father has retreated into the heavens. And Yahweh knows his limits (which may spur his irascibility), but Allah possesses total powers. [...] Yahweh walks and talks with men and with angels: he sits under the terebinth trees at Mamre, devouring a meal prepared by Sarah, and he picnics on Sinai with seventy-three elders of Israel. [...] Mischievous, inquisitive, jealous, and turbulent, Yahweh is fully as personal as a god can be. Allah’s dignity does not permit such descents into human vagaries.¹⁹

Yet at another point Bloom seems to forget the difference between Yahweh and Allah, referring to “Yahweh, called Allah by Islam.” Bloom proposes, too, that “Like Yahweh, Allah in the Qur’an is perpetually furious with us – a tightly regimented fury.” And he concludes that “Yahweh has not survived in Christianity, but only in the Allah of Islam.”²⁰ How can he consider Yahweh to be both different from, and the same as, Allah? The problem is simply that Bloom does not deliberately distinguish between the Yahweh that emerges from the Torah and the Jehovah that arises through its Christian readings. The latter are what Bloom calls a “strong misreading.”²¹ Yahweh, to put it differently, is the God of the Old Testament as projected by the text (what Umberto Eco called *intentio operis*), and Jehovah, the same as projected by the traditional Christian reader (*intentio lectoris*).²² A cunning trickster and nasty disciplinarian as well as a loving father, Yahweh is not like Allah (that is, the traditional Christian caricature of Allah). Jehovah, the remote, impersonal administrator of a strict but often incomprehensible legal code, is. Allah is not a belated Yahweh, but Jehovah is a precocious Allah.

To be sure, orientalist theology does make one very important difference between Jehovah and Allah. Allah does not have the potential to turn into a “higher” god. He is, so to speak, a stunted Jehovah: one who will never become a God the Father. Therefore, the Hebrew Scriptures can be read and interpreted to accord with the later New Testament message. The Qur’an must remain on the outside. Other than that, Christian orientalism’s Allah is for the most part more similar to Jehovah – that is, to Yahweh strongly misread – than he is different from him.

Allah and the oriental despot

The despotism of Jehovah/Allah in heaven is mirrored by that of the oriental despot on earth. The oriental despot is as central to orientalist political rhetoric as Allah/Jehovah is in the theological, and in much the same way.

In one of the first works devoted entirely to the origins of despotism, published in 1761, Nicolas Boulanger expressed quite clearly the characteristic contention that such despotism has deep roots in “Asia,” i.e. the Orient.

If we take a review of the histories and accounts of Asia, we shall be amazed to find, that for so many succeeding ages no other law hath been known in these climates but the will of their monarchs, who have been always revered as visible gods; and before whom the rest of the earth, in prostrate silence, was to shrink into annihilation.²³

For obvious reasons, the image of a worldly despot with the willful character of the despotic Allah took on popularity in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, when absolutism became a contested form of government, rather than a widely advocated panacea for disorder caused by wars and plagues, as it had been in the sixteenth. Absolutism may have quite successfully established the role of the State as the single source of sovereignty. But the question was whether the much greater authority assigned to the State at the expense of the traditional estates, cities, guilds, etc. should reside in a single person, with Louis XIV the proverbial example, or in “the law,” as in England after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. True, this conception of the law saw it only in part at most as immutable and given by God, and the gist of it as the expression of the popular will through Parliament as the legislative power of the State. Nevertheless, it did deliberately limit the notion that the sovereign, like the Lord in heaven, gives and takes away at will, and indeed placed power in the hands of his subjects instead. Absolutism took the opposite approach, and a frightening one to those who feared the “Turk,” for there was a strong resemblance in form between any kind of absolute government and the unlimited power of the Sultan.

The oriental despot as a pure imagined form is a sovereign who takes everything from his subjects and gives them nothing. The economy of oriental despotism exists essentially only to nourish him like a beehive nourishes its queen. To this, Alain Grosrichard has shown, corresponds a homologous libidinal economy. All *jouissance* flows in the direction of the despot.²⁴ In the sexual sphere, the sign of this one-way adulation is the harem, into which a steady and in principle infinite flow of beautiful virgins enter. Many come from beyond the confines of the realm, thus affirming the imperial, universal importance of the ruler as the sublime One. Young boys, too, are continuously brought in, to replenish his army but also to supply his homosexual appetites, for the Lord of all enjoys all.

The erotic despotism of the oriental potentate would have particular resonance during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the formative phase of Northwest European imperialism, when unlimited male power became a common fantasy. Typically, the fantasy had a more or less sexual character. The Marquis

de Sade explored the limits of the privileged male's power to command all *jouissance* for himself, without any regard to those who are ordered to provide it. Less radical were other versions of the *homme fatal*, such as the boastful Casanova or the fictional figure of Don Juan/Don Giovanni, inherited from the Renaissance. In Byron's *Don Juan* (1818–1824) the hero experiences some of his youthful adventures in the harems of the Orient.²⁵ Another of Byron's works, the play *Sardanapalus* (1821), inspired one of the most striking works of romantic sadism, Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827, Figure 1.1). In Delacroix's monumental canvas, the turbaned king watches with an almost bored expression as his numerous concubines, stark nude and in various poses of desperate contrition, are stabbed on his orders by his guards. The "gothic" gloom of such sadistic scenes recalls William Thomas Beckford's *Vathek* (also known as *The History of the Caliph Vathek*, completed in 1786), the story of a murderous, bisexual libertine who wishes to acquire supernatural powers but is instead, like Don Giovanni, doomed to hell. *Vathek* is also an early example – some say the earliest – of an orientalist novel.

Such sadistic fantasies provoke the worst in the erotic imagination, but they do not celebrate the erotic. Like the crime of rape, they reduce it completely to a relation between the all-powerful and the completely powerless. They do not, to return to Harold Bloom's oppositions, celebrate Eros, but its total submission to Authority. In the European context, they are perhaps a perverted response to the ascendant ideal of the bourgeois love marriage and its conjoining of *eros* and *agape*. Sadistic *eros* is not a high form of loving another, or even a low form; it is not love at all, but its dark parody.

Authority unrestrained by Love is, in fact, the specter that haunts early orientalism at all levels (as it does some of the later forms as well). The subjects of the imagined Allah and the imagined oriental despot embody what we fear we ourselves might be: puny slaves of aloof, unloving powers far greater than we. Only faith assures a Christian that when she calls "Father!" it is the loving God the Father and not the fearsome Jehovah that responds. But unfortunately, the Christian construction of God the Father never really succeeds in eliminating all the traces of the old God the Despot. (As one atheist web site put it perhaps a bit too harshly, yet with a power of perception that becomes available only from the historical remove of an ostensibly secular age: "Calling somebody father doesn't mean he's not a psychopath."²⁶ It is this despotic 'Old Testament God' character of the Christian tradition that has often been targeted by atheists. Witness Richard Dawkins' description of God as "arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it, a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."²⁷)

At the political level, it is oriental despotism that represents the dread of abandonment by the Father. From perhaps the turn of the fifteenth century (when orientalism as I have described it began), increasing government power has been accompanied by the ideal of what Foucault called "pastoral" or "paternal" care for populations.²⁸ Sovereign power is meant to be used for the benefit of the people



Figure 1.1 Eugène Delacroix, *The Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827. Oil on canvas, 392 × 496 cm. Louvre, Paris. Photo Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.

– whether by a benevolent sovereign or by a representative government, where “the people” themselves replace the King as the personification of Power. (Those who executed Charles I, Louis XVI and Nicolai II meant to replace uncaring kings with a more pastoral popular government, while the unconvinced decried political patricide.) But while fatherly government is the political dream of the modern age, despotism is its nightmare.

As mentioned earlier, Aristotle taught that the good king ruled like a father, but the tyrant as the owner of slaves. Psychoanalytical language captures the difference between the two when it labels the tyrant, too, as “father” – the primal, archaic, *obscene* father. Orientalism locates the prototype of tyranny in oriental despotism, in the worldly realms ruled by sultans and sheiks, but also in a false heaven ruled by Jehovah/Allah, the oriental God.

2 Orientalism

What has and what has not been said

It is time that the issues raised in *Orientalism* move beyond a referendum on Edward Said.

Daniel M. Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*¹

There is no better example than orientalism for Mikhail Bakhtin's postulate that using language means to "appropriate the words of others and populate them with one's own intention."² When I write the word "orientalism," my reader will no doubt hear the voice of Edward Said, the author of the eponymous book (*Orientalism*, first published in 1978). The main purpose of this chapter is to acknowledge what I have appropriated from Said's and others' voices, and how I mean to populate the result with my own intention. The comparison will clarify some of the assumptions, concepts, and theories on which the rest of my book is built, so they are not automatically equated with Said's.³ Readers who have little interest in orientalism as such, and wish to focus more singularly on notions of sublime power in the imagined Orient, may wish to skip this intermezzo. However, they might find later that my presentation of orientalism does not accord with what they expected, and if so I ask them to return here and read on.

Whether or not one accepts all of what Said set forth, no one can escape the force of his declaration that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."⁴ In many ways, my book is merely an elaboration of that statement. I present the Orient as an imagined "surrogate" realm of malign power: power that the West anxiously recognizes but wishes to disavow in the West itself. Beyond this fundamental agreement with one of Said's major propositions, there are also differences, of both nuance and principle, between my approach and Said's.

First of all, it may be suggested that Said's work is irrelevant to mine, since the historical period I investigate ends before his. That, however, would place too much emphasis on history as a positive fact rather than one where positive facts constantly emerge and re-emerge with a character altered by not only our current understanding of the present, but also our current understanding of the human past as a whole. Said's view of the western image of the Orient cannot but influence anyone's perception of that image from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,

even if those periods were outside of Said's focus. Besides, Said himself was often clear that he thought of orientalism as a defining feature of the "West" going back all the way to antiquity.⁵

Orientalism: the term

I start with the term "orientalism" itself, which has, due to Said's influence, become so common that I, as some others before me,⁶ prefer no longer to write it with a capital "O". As Said recognized, the term is loaded with many different meanings. I have no more desire than did – in my opinion – Said to formulate a precise and exclusive definition. Many of the really interesting facts about orientalism have to do with its ambiguous character and vague borders. I am quite comfortable with allowing the term to cover any assumption of radical difference between "East" and "West," a.k.a. "Orient" and "Occident."⁷ Though the same assumption has also often been made in the East, my focus, like Said's, is almost exclusively on orientalism as it occurs in the Occident.

In my accounting, the first writer to use the term "orientalism" in English was the eighteenth-century literary critic Joseph Spence. At least so he says himself in his *Essay on Pope's Odyssey*, published in 1726, where he calls "orientalism" a "new word." The context is a comment on Homer:

... now you repeat it in *English*, I seem to want something of the strong pleasure it used to afford me, where the Greek speaks "*Of the sun being perished out of Heaven, and of darkness rushing over the Earth!*" I cannot express the fullness of the words – But you know the original; and, I fear, will never see a translation equal to it. This whole prophetic vision ... is the *True Sublime*; and in particular, gives us an higher *Orientalism* than we meet with in any other part of Homer's writings. You will pardon me a new word, where we have no old one to my purpose: You know what I mean, that *Eastern way of expressing Revolutions in Government, by a confusion or extinction of light in the Heavens*.⁸

Spence's reference is to a typically oriental, as he saw it, turn of phrase in Homer: an example to which we will return. Clearly his attitude is one of admiration for the "true sublime" of the Orient: soft orientalism. And it is clear, too, that he, in this first use of the term "orientalism," already recognized how it can refer in one breath to worldly government and to heaven.

Sincere if patronizing admiration – what I have called soft orientalism – was, as I have noted earlier, characteristic of much orientalism in all of its phases, and it persisted into later orientalism during the age of high imperialism, Said's focal period. Said's enormous merit was to unmask much of the professed veneration of the Orient as a veiled apology for western imperialism (for example, because it assumed that the Orient was a timeless repository of ossified ancient values, and therefore incapable, on its own, of western-style progress). To be sure, Said was not the first to see this. Even his critique of orientalism as a scholarly discipline (now largely renamed "Middle Eastern" or "Near Eastern Studies") as a tool of

western imperialism was not entirely new in 1978.⁹ Where Said was indeed first was, as Robert Young noted, in his understanding of orientalism as an example of “discourse,” using this term from Michel Foucault in a novel context (and thus helping to introduce Foucault to English-speaking audiences). Said advocated clearly, and from the authoritative space of a prestigious professorship (at Columbia University), the “idea that colonialism operated not only as a form of military rule but also simultaneously as a *discourse* of domination.”¹⁰ “Without examining Orientalism as a discourse,” Said suggested, “one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient.”¹¹ The practice of colonial oppression cannot be separated from orientalist “discourse.” I will return to that term in a moment. But let us note even now that to state that orientalism is a discourse is more than the comparatively trivial suggestion that western ways of talking about and imagining the East *justify* colonialism. It states instead that they are an inseparable, “systematic,” and productive element of colonialism itself.

For Foucault, discourse has a function similar to the media for McLuhan: it is the discourse, not its content, that is the message. Soft orientalism, though it is thought of, and thinks of itself, as pro-Orient, functions in the same discursive space as hard orientalism. Said unmasked even soft orientalism as largely a habit of speaking and imagining that supports and produces, or at best is in dialogue with, western domination. Said, a Palestinian-American, was writing on the heels of the political and intellectual phenomena known in their time as “Black power” and “women’s liberation.” Among many other things, what he did was write a manifesto, though he never called it that, for Arab liberation in the same sense: a liberation from oppression by others, along with a change in the oppressive language and imagery that those others have used. Romantic orientalism did not appear any more appealing from this point of view to Said than gentlemen opening doors for ladies did to “first-wave” feminists. It merely put a patronizing gloss, all the more inexcusable for its hypocrisy, on the oppression that open enemies addressed to the oppressed. It did not serve to benefit the patronized, but merely to soothe the conscience of the patronizers.

Orientalism is written clearly, but not in a popular style. Most of the book is hardly accessible to people unfamiliar with academic language and with the many, mostly nineteenth-century, British and French authors referred to by Said, a literary critic with a passion for Joseph Conrad. Even so, Said’s work found an enormously wide response. In their preface to their *Edward Said Reader*, Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin were quite right in suggesting that

For some scholars and intellectuals, the book was read as a defense of Islam. Others found in the work the possibility of “writing back,” of giving voice to their experiences silenced by the cultural hegemony of the West. Native Americans, Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, and other colonized peoples and oppressed groups located in *Orientalism* a method to challenge a chronic tendency of the West to deny, suppress, and distort their cultures and histories. In the academy, this challenge has come to be known as postcolonial studies. *Orientalism* was seditious in its effects.¹²

It was seditious, not because of its moderately arcane survey of orientalist scholarship and literature, but because of the general point that Said demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt: colonialism and orientalism depended on each other.

Beyond that, the enthusiasm that greeted *Orientalism* did some harm as well. It did so mainly in two ways. First, it eliminated Said's specific focus on the Arab Orient until "orientalism" came to be synonymous with "Eurocentrism," which is a far more general thing and as such a rather blunt tool of analysis. And second, it lost the nuances of Said's writing until "orientalism" came to be mistaken for an unambiguously hard form of hatred. This meant ignoring soft orientalism and the capacity of some orientalist texts and images to undermine the very Eurocentric assumptions that produced them.

I call this reductive, nuance-free view of orientalism "vulgar Saidism," and would like to briefly address it next, in order to clarify where, hopefully, my use of the term "orientalism" differs from its oversimplifications.

Against vulgar Saidism

That Said was not very concerned with anything beyond the Arab world (the same plus Turkey and Iran would soon be more often called the "Muslim world")¹³ may well surprise the uninitiated. What we think of first today when someone says "Orient" is China, Korea, or Japan. Said reverts to the older usage, defined in part by the range of reasonable European travel from the age of the galleon to that of the steam boat and early railway links. "Orient" used to conjure first of all the shores of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, certainly and centrally including the Holy Land. "Orient" and "Islam" were terms that recalled one another. This is the reason why Muslim-majority North Africa, situated south but not east of Europe, was included (and remains included by Said) in the scope of what is meant by "the Orient." To the French, who would come to dominate the shores across the sea from Marseille, it was even the *most* familiar part of the Orient. We are not dealing with a precise science here but with the fuzzy semantics of what Said called "imaginative geography." China, Japan, even Eastern and Southern Europe have been imagined, and to some extent also dominated in fact, in ways similar to the Muslim Middle East and North Africa. Yet orientalism in Said's, and my own, usage of the term is far more about the Jews, who even while living in the West were imagined as an oriental implant, and whose religious text, the Bible, is fundamental to the discourse of orientalism,¹⁴ than about the Chinese or Japanese, who find themselves in terms of both region and religion outside the "East" that is focal to Said's investigation. That the regional focus of "Orient" eventually expanded eastward in popular language reflects such factors as improvements in the technology of travel and the rise of the United States, a Pacific as well as an Atlantic power. But it does not cancel the fact, to which I believe Said was implicitly sensitive, that the "old," that is the essentially Muslim, Orient has had a meaning for the western imagination that did *not* quite expand to include the Far East. This distinctiveness justifies Said's choice of focus for his study of orientalism. For the area comprised of the mainly Muslim lands of North Africa and the Middle East, including, crucially, Said's homeland, the Holy Land, is not just any

part of Asia, and even less just any example of the non-West. *This* Orient is where God revealed himself to Man, and where, according to Christianity, the West's defining religion, Man rejected him.

Let me make myself clear. I do not in any way object to the use of the term "orientalism" as such, to refer to any part of the world that is or has been called "the Orient," if it suits the writer's purposes. It suits mine to restrict the focus to Said's, though more explicitly so. What I do suggest is that there was a specific focus on the Islamic worlds of North Africa and West Asia in Said's book, and that in this book I maintain that focus. Even more than for Said's, for my purposes the focus is justified because it is only *this* Orient that is imagined both as the homeland of Christianity and of the figures of unlimited sublime power: Jehovah/Allah in heaven and the oriental despot on earth.

Moreover, I suggest that the qualitative difference between western Christian (and later post-Christian) views of the rest of the world continues to justify making a distinction in both the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periods studied by Said, and to our own day. This distinction was expressed in and through a distinctive verbal and visual vocabulary and syntax, with its own specific history: a *discourse*. Foucault was in fact never quite consistent about what he meant by this term, and he might at times have preferred, for "orientalism," the term *langue* (an open-ended system that produces subjects and texts) to *discours* (a finite corpus of historically located texts).¹⁵ Nevertheless, "discourse" has stuck, certainly in North America and largely through Said's offices, as a term for both a productive system stemming from common, historically conditioned assumptions *and* a set of texts produced by those assumptions. I am using it in that sense here as well.

I believe that what was said and imagined about the Muslim Orient was, as a *discourse*, substantially different from what was said about sub-Saharan Africa or about native America. Orientalist vocabulary, to use a crudely popular example, conjures the land of camels and palm trees, of turbaned potentates and dancing harem girls: the "dream of the Orient." In different periods, some or all of this vocabulary combined in different ways to convey different representations, but always it was recognized as presenting a region different from that of the "natives" of Africa and America. For the purposes of this book, the most important distinction is that the Orient was always, in one way or another, imagined as the locus of sublime, unlimited despotic power, while Africa and America were seen as governed by a far less complex system; in other words, the Orient was seen as the prototypical locus of unbridled Empire, while Africa and America were the home of the tribe. Empire and tribe were not unrelated in the western image, as we will see when we study the ancient Greek notion of Persia as a barbarian empire. But they were emphatically not the same thing, either. Only the Orient was understood as the homeland of sublime Power.

Representations of the Muslim Orient generally have *something* in common with representations of the Christian West's other Others, but they remain distinct. It is quite useful here to employ the terms of "prototype semantics" pioneered by Eleanor Rosch and presaged by Ludwig Wittgenstein. That form of semantics holds among other things that terms have a focal ("prototypical") referent as well

as others that are less central. In Rosch's original study, subjects chose "robin" more often than other birds as an example of a bird.¹⁶ "Robin" is a prototypical bird, while "duck" is not. In this sense, fuzzy rather than categorical, "Turk" was the prototypical Muslim during the period under investigation here; in fact, the term regularly substituted for "Muslim," even though more marginal (in terms of prototype semantics) expressions like "Persian" and "Moor" also existed. (Later, for various geopolitical reasons, "Arab" replaced "Turk" in this role.) In early orientalism as I study it here, the prototypical "Orient" was the realm of the prototypical "Turk:" the Ottoman Empire.

The closest "oriental" to the prototypical Middle Eastern and North African Muslim was, until well into the twentieth century, the Jew.¹⁷ We will see that oriental Christians were also, from the Renaissance on, imagined as *somewhat* oriental. Though this is not the place to argue the point, I would suggest that the western image of eastern Christendom used a vocabulary that would later be reused to imagine Eastern Europe as a marginal region between Occident and Orient, a status that was well captured by the contemptuous term used in twentieth-century German to describe the region: *halb-Asien* or semi-Asia.¹⁸ To understand the meaning and function of such "other," more marginal orientalisms, however, it is not helpful to completely conflate them with orientalism as it relates to its core region of the Muslim Orient. It is far more instructive to consider how the western imagination relates these marginal Orients to the core imagined region of Islam.

If, when western discourses are considered, the distinction between the Islamic Orient and the rest needs to be maintained, in spite of its fuzzy semantics, so must be the distinction between the Orient and the rest of the non-West. Though the focus of what is popularly meant by "Orient" may shift, it would *never* be the case that western attitudes to the rest of the world would become qualitatively the same, and "orientalism" would be grossly interchangeable with "Eurocentrism" in general. The construct of race, which emerged towards the end of the period under discussion, for example, was in all cases used in a discourse of inferiority that separated those marked by their racial identity (the "colored," those who were not "white") from those who were defined by their humanity. For example, "blacks" were defined as the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa, in contrast to North Africans (many of whom have very dark skin as well) who were talked about as Arabs and Berbers. This distinction correlated perfectly with the slave trade, as, with a few exceptions, only sub-Saharan people were enslaved and transported to the Americas. In the rhetoric of the slave traders and slave owners, "blacks" were savages and as such beyond the application of the emerging concept of human rights. Arabs and other Muslim (or Jewish) "orientals" were not kidnapped into slavery.

Orientalism must therefore never be confused with Eurocentric assessments of black Africans and "red" Indians. Africa south of the Sahara and America – like Oceania – traditionally represent to the West the ultimate point of origin, the state of nature. They are *not* part of the Orient of orientalism, which stands for both the imagined origin of Religion and the imagined origin of Empire. They represent neither. To overgeneralize "orientalism" so that it applies *without qualification* to

colonial ideology aimed at these regions is to defang the whole concept until it has nothing specific to contribute to a general theory of imperialism, and loses its power to explain the specific relations between the Muslim East and the Christian West, during our period, during the heyday of western imperialism, and beyond.

An even worse vulgar misinterpretation of Said is the claim that all orientalism is *openly, simply, and straightforwardly* anti-Orient, advocating the supremacy of the West over the East, and the rule of the one over the other; in other words, that it is always hard orientalism. Just as Bryan Cheyette would demonstrate that philo-Semitism presumed and in subtle ways reinforced anti-Semitism¹⁹ (and both of these are versions of orientalism), Said did insist that soft orientalism functioned in the same space as hard orientalism. But that does not mean that to him, orientalism is always or even often overt hate speech. He suggested that, read against the grain, orientalism and other colonial literature can reveal a potential to destroy the very prejudice and oppressive structures that enable it to depict the Orient from a position of privilege. Said is aware of this, as in his readings of Conrad and Goethe,²⁰ but the vulgar Saidians are not.

On this count, Said's best enemies join his worst friends. Some of his most vociferous critics see Said as deeply hostile to the Occident and its values, a champion of anti-western, or even, possibly, Islamist fanaticism. Perhaps the best-known exponent of such nonsense is Martin Kramer, whose *Ivory Towers on Sand* was part and parcel of a broader, misguided neoconservative campaign to place any criticism of America, Israel, or the western legacy beyond the pale of not only reason but also morality.²¹ But as a fighter for western values, Kramer was chasing a windmill rather than a real enemy. Stephen Howe is far more faithful to the real Said, as opposed to the vulgar Saidists, when he states that "There's no need, in the end, to 'defend the West' against Edward Said's posthumous influence: he was himself a defender of the best Western values."²² (Said combined two of the most important of such values when he called himself a "secular humanist."²³)

On my reading, Said's statement that "Orientalism is a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" is meant not as a *definition*, but rather as a provocative, hyperbolic half-truth, like Frantz Fanon's remark that the white man who adores blacks in fact hates them, or Andrea Dworkin's that sexual penetration is violence.²⁴ If not, then we would simply have to exclude from the purview of orientalism the enormous quantity of western representations of the Orient that were meant to be complimentary. Now it is true that we could define away anything that does *not* obviously advocate for western domination as *not* orientalism. In that way, most of what I write about in this book would not be orientalism, since I am focusing on a period during much of which western domination was not yet even a possibility. That way of proceeding, by giving a *functionalist* definition of orientalism, has, however, all the pitfalls of functionalism. It fails to *demonstrate* a function (in this case, the function of orientalism as an imperialist tool), resorting instead to the lazy device of *assuming* it at the start, and in that way weakens the force of its own contention. It is one thing to try to show, as Said did, that even orientalism that appears to praise the Orient is a perverse guise for justifying western domination, and quite another, as the vulgar Saidists do, to simply exclude everything that is not overtly derogatory from the purview

of orientalism. But such a terminological sleight of hand cannot prestidigitate out of existence the huge body of what has been said, pictured, or performed in the West about the Orient, most of which may show latent deprecatory *content*, but in fact often functioned not to enforce but to challenge (within the possibilities of the period of course, and often ambiguously) western domination.

Maxime Rodinson mused that the Orient repelled and attracted the West in equal measure.²⁵ It is clear, I think, that what is of interest is the *relationship* between the revulsion and the attraction. The justifiable – given *his* historical context – focus by Said on the revulsion emphatically does not mean that he was unaware of such dialectics. Certainly, in the period I cover, which precedes the heyday of Northwest European imperialism, the emotional ambiguity of orientalism cannot be overlooked.

Said and Islam

There are other places where I frankly diverge from Said, either because my historical focus is different, or as a matter of principle.

For one thing, although Said did suggest here and there that his ultimate concern was with Islamophobia,²⁶ he ultimately did not pay much attention to Islam. In the relatively unreligious atmosphere of the late 1970s, before the resurgence of Islamism in the East and Christian fundamentalism in America, it might have seemed inappropriate for someone with contemporary concerns, like Said, to make too much of religion. As Johann Fück had shown, traditional western discourses on the Orient were once explicitly religious,²⁷ but in Said's time it may have appeared that religion played much less of a role. The anti-western element in the Orient was then commonly identified as "Arab" rather than "Muslim." Possibly, too, a personal blind spot caused an Anglican Palestinian-American to minimize what can no longer be minimized today: the passions raised on both sides of the East–West divide by politically radical Islam.

In any event, Said wrote *Orientalism* before the "theological turn" in our thinking about world history in the West, which set in towards the end of the past century. The opposition between the secular and the religious has since been decidedly relativized by the work of scholars such as Talal Asad, to mention one among countless examples.²⁸ The art theorist and semiotician W. J. T. Mitchell speaks of a "double belief," whereby we reject what we don't believe literally, yet continue to be emotionally affected and constrained in our actions by the power of inherited myth. Such thinking is easily related to the earlier theories, such as Northrop Frye's,²⁹ about the tremendous power of the religious tradition on even the imaginations of atheists. I subscribe to Jean-Luc Nancy's view that "The only current atheism is one that contemplates its Christian roots," as well as to his "axiom" that "Christianity is coextensive with the West."³⁰ Accordingly, I make the assumption – evident also from the emotional force of the early twenty-first century's Middle East conflicts – that the affective impact of religious concepts is relatively independent of literal belief. Regarding earlier times, when literal belief in religion was stronger, the assumption can be made with even more confidence.

Words get “rehistoricized,” as Homi Bhabha showed in a reprise of Bakhtin’s thought, “changing continuously yet in ways that betray their origin and the historical circumstances of the change.”³¹ This is as true of “Orient” as it is of “Islam.” Each carries its own baggage of accrued meanings. “Islam” has not meant nearly the same thing in the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the late twentieth century – or the twenty-first, which began with the spectacular destruction of “Nine Eleven” and continued through the “Arab spring.” But in each period, “Islam” in whatever range of meanings was also a politically laden word. Said’s choice of “Orient” as the focal term, rather than “Islam,” was strategically justifiable in his time and place, given his laudable political aims. Yet it was probably at least slightly detrimental to a scholarly assessment of the *long durée* of the East–West contrast as it functions in western cultural history, for it is one that is firmly centered on religion – when the term “religion” is understood broadly as holding even non-believers in its grip.³²

As for myself, I will quite frankly and deliberately speak of the “*Christian* West” and the “*Muslim* East.” Whether Said recognized it or not, these are the prime objects (along with Judaism in between) of the western style of imagination that he called “orientalist.”

Words and images

There is, also, in Said’s work and in much of its aftermath, a difficulty of method: too much emphasis on texts at the expense of images. A literary scholar, Said gives most of his attention to philologists and novelists. He has very little to say about orientalist art or architecture, for example, and next to nothing about music,³³ even though they are all-important as vehicles for imagining the Orient. Yet, I would suggest, lumping together indiscriminately verbal and non-verbal representations, even under an analytically productive single label such as “discourse,” prevents us from recognizing the important *difference* between language and non-language, and with it the important difference between thinking and imagining. This is particularly so in orientalism, where, I would like to claim with reference to both early and mature orientalism, the visual (and perhaps the auditory) imagination dominates.

Even textual orientalism – books, scholarly articles, popular magazines – tends to be extremely visual. In Edward Lane’s *Account of the Customs and Manners of the Modern Egyptians*,³⁴ a classic mid-nineteenth-century ethnography that Said counts among the formative influences on orientalism during imperialism’s high period, the following passage quoted in part by Said is most typical:

When the seyyid ‘Omar the Nakeeb el-Ashráf (or chief of the descendants of the Prophet), who was the main instrument of advancing Moḥammad ‘Alee to the dignity of Báshà of Egypt, married a daughter, about forty-five years since, there walked before the procession a young man who had made an incision in his abdomen, and drawn out a large portion of his intestines, which he carried before him on a silver tray. After the procession, he restored them to their proper place, and remained in bed many days before he recovered from the effects of this foolish and disgusting act.³⁵

I should add, however, that Lane was hardly one of the most typical *academic* orientalists of his period. He was a popular writer and translator, with marginal university affiliations. Many of the orientalists who were real academics did produce pedantic, plodding volumes about details of oriental philology, theology, and jurisprudence, instead of or in addition to the visually exciting, film-script-like depictions such as the one quoted above. (It may be reasonable to investigate the proposition that the philological type of orientalism, which dominated the academy, dealt – to use Lacanian terms – with the symbolic, and the more popular scholarship represented by Lane or Ernest Renan, the imaginary.³⁶) Lane, certainly, was an illustrator as well as a writer. His depiction of a Muslim man praying, for example, is a perfectly executed visual guide that anyone can follow to reproduce exactly the motions of the *raka'ah* (Figure 2.1).

The more detailed such visual representation gets, the more it combines a hallucinatory effect with its realism. The subject matter is exotic, strange, and set in an unfamiliar context, producing an experience that has more to do with having a vision than with witnessing a reality. This quality is captured by the common-language intuition that inhabits the phrase “Dream of the Orient.” To describe it we need here a word that is common in the Romance languages but rare in English, *oniric*, meaning essentially “dreamlike” but with an emphasis on how dreams come from the active ferment of the unconscious mind. If we neglect the visual and auditory vehicles of orientalism, we end up ignoring the deep-seated oniric aspects that are central to its phenomenology, and are in danger of getting the mistaken impression that orientalism is primarily a rational, intellectual exercise. Certainly my argument, that sublime power in the Orient is related to largely unexpressed existential anxieties about the goodness or otherwise of the universe, requires a focus on the imaginary at least as much as the symbolic.

The “imagined Orient” (Said’s phrase) is often more a vision than a text, more conjured than “read” – a specter that haunts and a dream that inspires. When I use the phrase “image of the Orient,” the “image” part is not merely an informal turn of phrase. In orientalism, the Orient is indeed more of an image than a symbol. This was, to be fair to Said, even more so in early orientalism than later. The Renaissance was perhaps more interested in visual representation than in linguistic expression. The visual equation of the Turk with the biblical Israelite, for example, expressed by the ubiquitous Turkish turban seen in Christian religious art on the heads of biblical characters, had scarce equivalent in written texts.³⁷

W. J. T. Mitchell suggests that it is at the level of the imaginary, not the symbolic, that we typically experience our individual Self in relation to the Other.³⁸ If we project this to the level of collective identity (obviously a problematic extension, but I believe my examples will prove it to be permissible in this case), then it follows that the Christian West experiences its identity vis-à-vis the Muslim Orient at the level not, or not as much, of what is *said* about the Orient but of what is *imagined*, and *imaged*, about it. Psychoanalysis as the study of the imagining self, and art history as the study of images, have, in my opinion, at least as much to say about orientalism as do philosophy and literary criticism. My case studies in this book involve all of these.

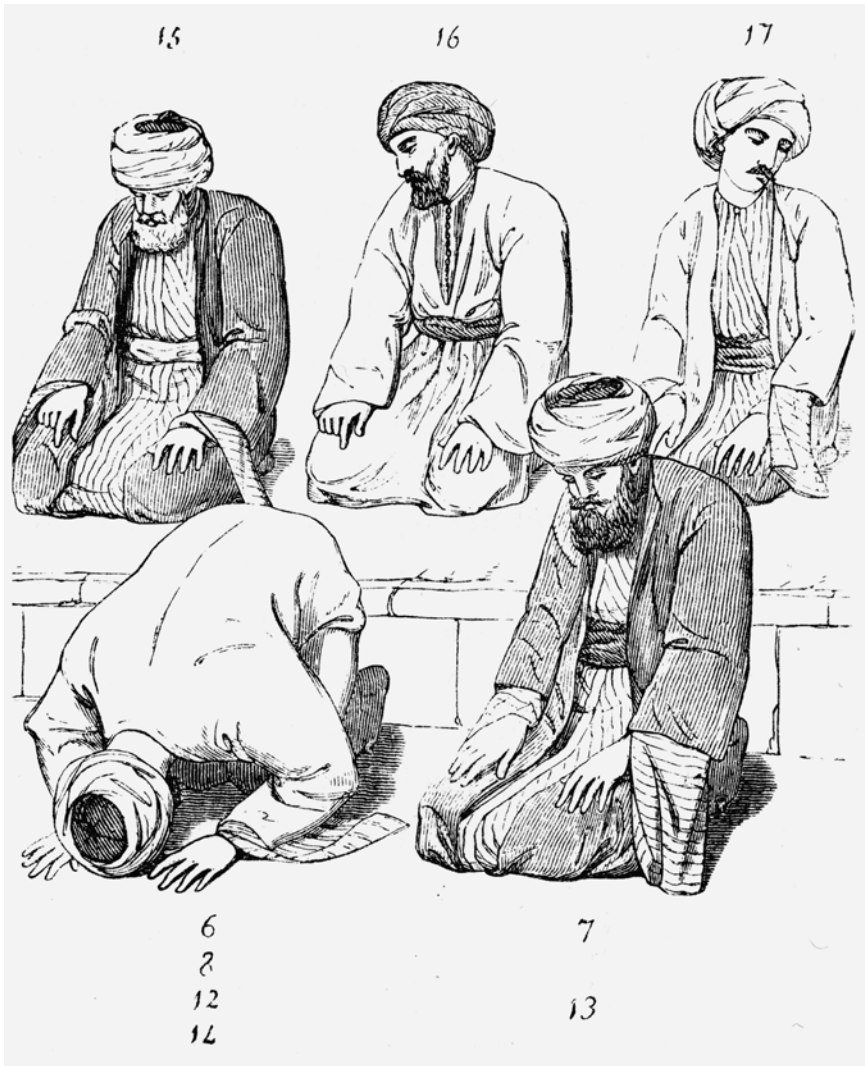


Figure 2.1 *Postures of Prayer (Part II.)*. Illustration by the author from Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Nattali, 1846), 110.

In sum, I adopt or adapt many of Edward Said's insights, and especially the existence of a political subtext in orientalism, though I believe that the political aspects of orientalism must always be treated along with the theological and the phenomenological. I reject the *vulgar* Saidism that has made "orientalism" the complete equivalent of "Eurocentrism," and which ignores the often subtle orientalist perceptions of the East, to see only crudely obvious anti-oriental hate

speech. I have some trouble with Said's nearly exclusive focus on writing and speech. And I reject a notion of orientalism that *defines* it as a discourse of domination at the start, precluding any possibility of *demonstrating* its imperialist functions. I favor a broader usage which simply qualifies any notion or image as orientalist if it distinguishes, using a distinctive verbal and visual language, the Christian (or, later, post-Christian) West and the Muslim East conceived of as essential opposites.

I hope it need not be restated too often that such an essentialized opposition is not my position, but it is, I believe, the position of the western Christian scholars, philosophers, and artists from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment that I examine, and I think it is the position of the general public during that time (as it would remain well beyond). In this book, we see that the imagined East–West opposition was then intimately related to the imagined relationship between the sacred and the profane – between God and Man, Heaven and Earth. It was in the East, in the Christian imagination, that Man first met God, but the worldly and the heavenly remained radically separated in the oriental mind. Their sublime union would only be recognized by the followers of the incarnated God, who was fully a man as well. Western Christians understood that the institutions, the leaders, and in general the creative communal and spiritual center of Christianity reside in the West, for by the beginning of this period they had been forced to write off the loss of the Eastern Church that, after several centuries of schism, at last fell definitively under the political domination of Muslims.

3 Proto-orientalism

Ancient and medieval views of the East

The idea that the West is Christian and that the East is Muslim has a beginning in western history. In the last chapter, I suggested that the radical cleavage between East and West that defines orientalism has been conveyed in a specific language with a distinctive vocabulary. Like all language, orientalism has a vocabulary and syntax that evolve through radical changes yet remain recognizably the same. When, and how, did this language arise? When, to put it another way, did orientalism begin?

An unequivocal, uncontroversial answer cannot be given. What for the purposes of this book is full-fledged orientalism, that is, a radical opposition between an Orient imagined as Muslim and a West imagined as Christian, does not arise before the late fourteenth century. But much of the vocabulary of Renaissance orientalism is inherited and transformed from the proto-orientalism of the ancient Greeks, which left a lasting impression on the European mind through the classic texts that were part of the European Christian education (especially following the introduction to Europe of long-lost ancient texts retranslated from Arabic, along with Arabic commentaries). Later, there was medieval proto-orientalism. The western Christians of the Middle Ages sometimes imagined especially the more remote corners of the Orient in eschatological terms as an almost supernatural location where not only the biblical events occurred but where the Garden of Eden was located and where messianic kingdoms like that of Prester John arose.¹

Ancient Greek proto-orientalism

The oldest roots of orientalism are in the image of the Persian Empire held by the ancient Greeks. Here, already, the concern with sublime power is evident. The Greeks believed that the natural home of tyranny and slavery lay to the east. The Persian enemy who invaded Greece in 490 and 480–479 BCE was portrayed as a bearer of an alien, barbarian civilization, characterized above all by its soulless subservience to a divinized emperor. This depiction of the Persians was extended, afterwards, to all the peoples of Asia. Before the middle of the fifth century BCE, Greek vase painting represents oriental characters such as the Phrygian King Midas or the Trojan King Priam and Prince Paris looking like Greeks. Afterwards, they are shown wearing Persian attire.² Then, the eastern neighbors of the Greeks came to be visualized as no longer belonging to the same civilization. The image

of Asia as radically different from Greece was present in the plays of Aeschylus (525–456 BCE), a contemporary of the wars. It is palpable in the historiography of Herodotus (484–425 BCE), and explicit in the political thought of Plato (429?–348? BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE). To all these, the East was the land of god-like despots served by an undifferentiated mass of slaves, while Greece, or more specifically Athens, was a country run by assemblies of free men. The contrast between Greece and the East was the difference between responsible government and universal slavery.

To be sure, some of the classic Greek writers were a little more restrained about this distinction than others. Plato was more subtle than Aristotle. When Plato opposed monarchy to democracy, he suggested that Persian government was an extreme form of monarchy, just as the government of Athens was the extreme form of democracy. In *The Laws*, “the Athenian” exclaims:

Hear me, then: there are two mother forms of states from which the rest may be truly said to be derived; and one of them may be called monarchy and the other democracy: the Persians have the highest form of the one, and we of the other; almost all the rest, as I was saying, are variations of these.³

But Plato was not simply condemning the Persian form of government in order to exalt the Athenian. Democracy and monarchy existed *in extremis* in Athens and Persia, but gradations were possible in both places. In fact, Plato counseled including at least a measure of monarchy in any ideal political arrangement: “Now, if you are to have liberty and the combination of friendship with wisdom, you must have both these forms of government in a measure; the argument emphatically declares that no city can be well governed which is not made up of both.”⁴

Although Aristotle, a teacher of Alexander the Great, was less sympathetic to what he saw as Persian tyranny, he too at least recognized that tyranny could also be found in Greece. The ideal nature of Man, he believed, was to be free. Although the nature of Man was nowhere fully manifested in the real world, full as it was of “corruption,” still the ideal freedom of Man was far less corrupted in the Greeks than in the barbarians. If the Greeks were free and the barbarians were slaves, then this was an expression of their respective characters. The difference between natural masters and natural slaves corresponded to that between Greeks and barbarians: “Wherefore the poets say, It is meet that Hellenes should rule over barbarians; as if they thought that the barbarian and the slave were by nature one.”⁵

Aristotle thought that in a more perfect society, men’s nature to be free would make tyranny impossible. In order to assert their nature, men would eventually rebel against it. But barbarian society was too corrupt to be called normal in this sense. Servitude was in the barbarians’ nature. So while in Greece tyrannies were bound to be overthrown, among the barbarians they lasted indefinitely:

for as the barbarians are by nature more prone to slavery than the Greeks, and those in Asia more than those in Europe, they endure without murmuring a despotic government; for this reason their governments are tyrannies; but yet not liable to be overthrown, as being customary and according to law.⁶

In other words, among the barbarians custom and law, which among the Greeks protect the freedom of the citizens, are themselves the guarantee of tyranny. For in despotic states, the one basic law is that the sovereign is above the law. Among barbarians, being treated like slaves is completely in accordance with both their natural character and their established traditions. In essence, the tyrant respects their most deeply ingrained custom: the unconditional surrender of the slave to his master. (This view of the barbarians of Asia survived into the Middle Ages in the Christian West, and, we will see, was taken up later by canonical political philosophers like Machiavelli and Montesquieu.)

All this, however, results in a problem: In a land where all are slaves, how does anyone become a master? Even the barbarian ruler, whom historical accident propelled to the top, is essentially a slave, which is why he is treated as such when captured by the Greeks.

... for we must acknowledge that there are some persons who, wherever they are, must necessarily be slaves, but others in no situation; thus also it is with those of noble descent: it is not only in their own country that they are esteemed as such, but everywhere, but the barbarians are respected on this account at home only; as if nobility and freedom were of two sorts, the one universal, the other not so.⁷

Though Aristotle does not quite say so, this makes it look like a very “natural” arrangement when a Greek invader steps in to rule the Asians. They, who naturally desire to be slaves, will be better governed when they get as their Master one who was meant by Nature to govern, rather than to serve.

Greek imperialism frees Nature of its corruption: “... now if we would know what is natural, we ought to search for it in those subjects in which nature appears most perfect, and not in those which are corrupted.”⁸ Those whose soul is in command of their body (Greeks) should, it follows, rule the others.

Aristotle seems to have anticipated an idea that Foucault located in the “governmentality” of the modern state: those who have disciplined their own bodies are entitled to discipline the bodies of others. In fact, readers of Said’s *Orientalism* will recognize in this outline of the relationship between Greek and barbarian an almost exact blueprint for the orientalist imperialism of the modern age. In some way, this makes ancient proto-orientalism conform better than the real thing to the vulgar-Saidist conception, which reduces all of orientalism to a form of propaganda for western domination. The attitude of the Greeks to the Persians was generally derisive and aggressive, with little that one could compare to the soft orientalism later on.

Nevertheless, Greek proto-orientalism lacked the metaphysical depth that comes from mature orientalism’s connection to issues about the nature of God and associated phenomenological questions about whether or not we live in a caring universe. On the whole, it was not about any ultimate questions, but strictly about practical politics.

Greek proto-orientalism may also have lacked the fundamental quasi-geographic foundation of real orientalism. To the Greeks, the East may have

appeared as an inferior Other, but it is not very likely that the collective Self facing this Other was imagined as a “West,” rather than just “Greece”. It is true that Herodotus interprets the perpetual conflict between Greeks and Persians in terms of a cycle of invasions of Asia and Europe, from one continent to the other. But the clash, or rather clashes, of civilizations were between Greeks and barbarians, not Europeans and barbarians. Geography did matter: to Aristotle, the barbarians of Europe were full of spirit but lacked intelligence and skill (quite the opposite of modern orientalism), while those of Asia lacked spirit but were brighter and more capable. But the Greeks differed from both. Aristotle located the Greeks in between the races of Europe and Asia; for example, he claimed on this basis that the Greeks were both high-spirited like Europeans and intelligent like Asians.⁹

On the Greek mental map, “Europe” and “Asia” were the names of the land masses that, along with “Africa” indicated directions away from the sea and the Greek islands. The Greeks did not identify their islands with any continent. Herodotus, who was himself apparently born in Asia, did obviously consider the European shore to be the Greeks’ homeland. Yet Denise Guénoun cannot be too far away from the truth when he suggests that on the whole the Greeks regarded themselves culturally as living not in the West but in the Center, on their islands and the adjacent coasts of both Europe and Asia.¹⁰

Finally, when thinking about ancient proto-orientalism we need to note that it is not even certain (though it is likely) that Herodotus’, Plato’s, and Aristotle’s prejudices about the Persians were shared throughout Greece. The citizens of Greek states allied with the Persians might have thought quite differently. What we are dealing with was, perhaps, an Athenian rather than a Greek proto-orientalism.

Nevertheless, though the Greeks may not have divided the world quite like later Europeans did, those Europeans did read the Greek texts as those of their own intellectual ancestors. Thus the Greek view of the Persian East would constitute a foundation on which orientalism in the Renaissance would be built.

The Middle Ages

Even the rise of Islam in the seventh century CE did not bring with it right away a clear-cut imaginative division of the world into a Christian West and a Muslim East. It is true that, in spite of considerable trade, mutual cultural influences, and even some political alliances that cut across the divide, each religion was associated with a separate, loosely organized yet real network of political, economic, and military relations, and regarded the other with considerable mistrust. Yet the contrast between Christianity and Islam could not yet be described as orientalist, if only because neither religion had as yet developed a solid geographic presence: the Orient was not necessarily Muslim. There were Christian states in Asia as there were Muslim realms in Europe (and Africa). The two competing religions had not yet created a neat division of the “known world.”

In fact, the typical image of the Orient as the location of despotism made less sense in the Middle Ages, which was a time when the ideal of universal Empire (if not the practice) characterized Christian religious and political thought. There would be nothing objectionable seen in the Muslim pursuit of the same goal.

Consequently, our discussion of medieval proto-orientalism takes us away temporarily from the issue of sublime power. It is, however, necessary, in order to establish, in the next chapter, the circumstances in which modern orientalism was born during the late Renaissance and with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.

The imaginative space of the medieval Christian West owed more to the Romans than to the Greeks. For the Greeks, the barbarian lands lay to the east, but also to the north and west. Alexander the Great, the Macedonian conqueror, who was arguably not truly Greek, blurred the difference between Greek and eastern barbarian somewhat, by not only extending Greek styles of living to the East but also adopting some eastern ways. Plutarch narrates that Alexander received considerable criticism for this from some of his compatriots. One of them, Kleitos, taunted Alexander that “he should spend his days with Asiatics and slaves, who would fall obediently on their faces at the sight of his Persian sash and his snow-white tunic.”¹¹ Undeterred, Alexander did succeed in sowing the seeds of a Hellenistic civilization that would dominate the culture of a space ranging from Southeastern Europe all the way to China. Centuries later, this Hellenistic space would become the heartland of Islam. But first it came under the political and cultural sway of Rome. It was this entire Hellenized East, which *included* Greece, that the Romans regarded as their “East.” Far from imagining the Hellenized Orient as inferior, the Romans thought of it as a kind of classic model for their own civilization. The Greek language, associated with the entire Orient, also enjoyed great prestige in Rome itself.¹² Places like Judea and Egypt were for the Romans somewhat exotic but fairly well-known countries, unlike the murky, magic lands much farther east, beyond the regions that Alexander was able to subjugate. The Orient did not and could not mean an alien civilization.¹³

In the Middle Ages, the Hellenist Orient was a largely Christian region, and it continued to be so for a time even in areas taken over by Muslim powers. In fact, the territories of medieval Christianity extended very deep into Asia, well beyond the former Roman borders. It is true that much of Asian Christendom (including, probably, the Christians around the Prophet Muhammad) followed a movement from which the main body of western Christianity disassociated itself. Probably most Asian Christians were “Nestorians,” who either followed or were said by others to follow the teachings of Nestor, Archbishop of Constantinople, condemned as a heretic by the First Congress of Ephesus (in Asia) in 431. Nestor’s excommunication sealed the first important East–West schism in the Christian church. But although the “Nestorian churches” were located in Asia, the Latin and Greek churches were not limited to Europe. They continued to include important – perhaps the most important – congregations in the Middle East and North Africa. The borders of Nestorianism did not coincide with continental boundaries: this division was still not orientalist.

When medieval Christians created maps of the world, a contrast between an unequivocally Christian Europe and a Muslim Asia was not what they saw. To the Spanish monk Isidore of Seville (560–636), the world was a flat disk with Asia on top. His native city, in the far southwest of Europe, not far from Africa, was somewhere at the bottom. Isidore added a newer, Christian interpretation. He superimposed on the geography of the world a biblical ethnography whose fateful consequences

in the remote nineteenth and twentieth centuries he could not have imagined. He labeled Asia as the land Sem, the son of Noah whose name would much later be given to an imagined race called “Semites” (Figure 3.1). Europe became the land of Japhet (Iafeth), another of the three sons, whose descendants would eventually be equated with the Indo-Europeans or “Aryans.” Following the then customary interpretation, the Africans were to Isidore descendants of Ham (Cham). The Bible tells that one day Noah passed out drunk in his tent and when Ham entered he discovered Noah with his body uncovered. He ran to tell his brothers. Sem and Japhet were shocked by his indiscretion and immediately proceeded to do what Ham should have done. They lifted a blanket between them and walked backwards into the tent to avoid seeing their fathers “nakedness.” Then they dropped the blanket on him. Ham’s son, Canaan, and all his descendants were condemned by God in punishment to become the servants of the descendants of Sem and Japhet. It would someday be used to justify African slavery, although to Isidore the Bible probably spoke not of inequality but of symmetry among the continents and their peoples.¹⁴

The kind of map that appeared in Isidore’s work is known as a “T-O map” because of the T-shaped border among the three continents and the O-shaped border of the world, and also as an acronym for *terrae orbis*, the “orb of the world.” This was a representation of the Earth that survived for almost a thousand years, into the Renaissance period.

Like the three kings of Christian art gathered with their presents around the infant Jesus, who also were in the later Middle Ages used to represent the three continents, Isidore’s Europe, Asia, and Africa gather around a sacred location. We have seen that the ancient Greeks imagined the center of the world, at the conjunction of the three continents, to be Greece itself. In T-O maps, Greece is replaced

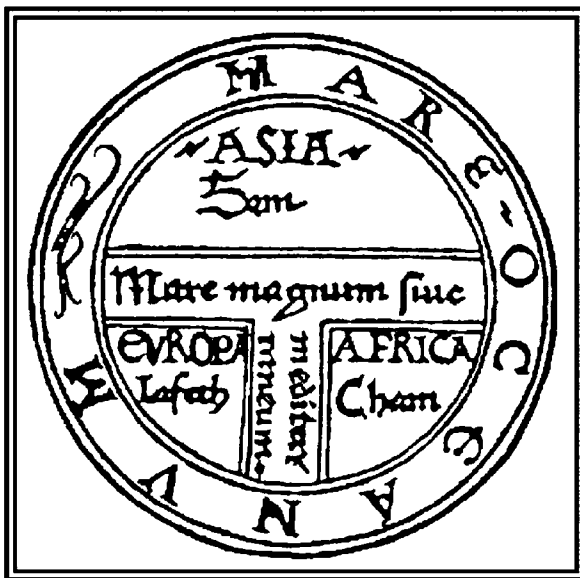


Figure 3.1
Isidore of Seville, *Map of the World*. Illustration attributed to the author, from the printed edition of *Etymologiae*, (Augsburg: E. Zainer, 1472), Book XIV, Section 3.

by the Holy City, for on many T-O maps Jerusalem is shown in Asia but as close as possible to the center of the world.¹⁵

Medieval travelers and scholars knew full well that the city was near the Asian coast between Europe and Africa. But the truth that map makers drew was not a purely geographic one. To them, what mattered most about the planet was that it was the site of revelation and incarnation as recorded in Holy Scripture. The events that happened in and around Jerusalem were at the center of the space where heaven met earth. Isidore's world map was not a map of the world alone, but of its heavenly destiny. To picture a worldly "reality" divorced from heaven was not yet either desirable or possible.

For our discussion, the significant fact about the T-O map is that, with Jerusalem in the middle, it makes no mental division of the world into an East and a West. Into the fifteenth century, the "Roman Empire of the East," better known as the "Byzantine Empire," continued as the heir of ancient Rome, ruling from its capital at Constantinople (Istanbul) territories both in Europe and Asia. Christian ambitions in the East were, however, blocked by the old enemy of the Greeks and the Romans: the Persians. Fragile truces and stalemated battles between them and the rump-Roman Empire of Byzantium followed one another, with the effect of keeping the border at the great river Euphrates. At one point, in the early seventh century, the Persians broke out and came close to scaling the walls of Constantinople, only to be beaten back and eventually defeated by the emperor, Heraclius. Now Heraclius hoped to expand his Christian and Christianizing empire into Persia and the vast Asian landscape beyond. Having conquered Jerusalem, in 630 Heraclius walked barefoot to the Holy City, to restore the legendary "True Cross" to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.¹⁶

Unfortunately for Heraclius, it was just at this moment that an equally ambitious force, just as much bent on spreading its own version of the true faith in One God by holy war, arose between himself and the enervated Persians. Muhammad ibn Abdullah (c. 570–632), the Prophet of Islam, was rapidly bringing Arabia under his sway. Following his death, the forces of the first Muslim Caliphate expanded far beyond the Arabian Peninsula. In 634, Jerusalem fell into their hands. It was clear that henceforth Christianity would be matched, in its drive for becoming the universal religion of a universal empire, by an opposite force from the Orient.

Yet even now, if there was a geographical divide associated with religion, it was within Christendom itself, between Latin Christianity in the West and the Greek variety in the East. Tensions came to a head when Charlemagne established, in the ninth century a *western* Christian empire that might be seen as the rival of the "Roman" empire at Byzantium. Two centuries later the Great Schism of 1054 sealed the split as the Pope in Rome and much of the leadership of the Greek-speaking churches officially denied each other's authority.

It would, however, be easy to exaggerate the degree to which Eastern and Western Christians considered the other to belong to an alien religious civilization. The Crusades, which pitted Christian against Muslim, did, it is true, also lead to conflict between Eastern and Western Christians, as the sacking of Constantinople by Latin crusaders in 1203 demonstrates most notably. But in spite of appearances this incident did not necessarily signify anything approaching a perceived

clash of civilizations. While there was certainly serious mistrust between the Latin invaders and the mostly Greek defenders, this conflict was enmeshed with Venetian commercial designs and local Byzantine dynastic disputes. After all, the Crusaders had shown that they were willing to attack and plunder a Latin Christian city as well, when they invaded the Mediterranean port of Zara (now Zadar, Croatia), a serious commercial rival of Venice.

Though, as I have stated earlier, all Christians and all Muslims were imagined as inhabiting the same cultural space, Muslims were understood as representing a demonic force within that space. In Christian art, Muslims were sometimes pictured as devils. So were each of the other outsiders that defined medieval Christian identity, according to Jeremy Cohen: pagans, Jews, and heretics.¹⁷ But not the Christians of the Orient.

It was only as Muslim power grew and Byzantine influence decreased that the image of the Eastern Christian *was* slowly coming to resemble the image of the West Asian Muslim. The famous fourteenth-century Flemish-Burgundian manuscript *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* pictured the Roman Emperor Constantine with the typical scimitar associated with the Ottoman Turkish warrior, and with an exotic piece of headwear. Apparently the artists associated the ancient emperor with the reigning emperor at Constantinople (Figure 3.2).¹⁸ When, in 1439, the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos was in Florence to plead for help against the Ottomans threatening to take Constantinople, he found only measured enthusiasm for his cause. Instead, the Florentines amused themselves



Figure 3.2

Limbourg Brothers, *The Emperor*, c. 1412–16. Illumination on vellum, detail from folio 22 recto of the manuscript *Les Très Riches Heures de Jean de France, Duc de Berry*. Musée Condé, Chantilly.

by commenting on his and his large retinue's outlandish dress. Benozzo Gozzoli appears to have recorded some of it in his fresco, *Procession of the Magi*, where one of the "kings of the East" has the facial characteristics of John (Figure 3.3.) while another is a portrait of the Florentine ruler, Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Earlier, however, even the appearance of Islam itself did not immediately strike western Christians as the rise of an entirely "different," alien civilization beyond the borders of Europe. It does *not* seem to be the case that, as Said wrote, the "European encounter with the Orient, and especially with Islam ... turned Islam into the very epitome of an outsider against which the whole of European civilization from the Middle Ages on was founded."¹⁹ When Islam appeared on the scene, the Prophet Muhammad was widely regarded not as an alien but as an "impostor," a heretical Christian with pretensions of being a new Christ. His *haeresis Saracenorum* (as the twelfth-century Abbot Peter the Venerable called it), was at first often imagined as challenging the church tradition from within rather than from outside.²⁰

In Dante's *Inferno* (1308–1321) Muhammad is "split," "ripped open from chin to where we fart." A savage split also marks the face of Muhammad's lieutenant, Ali: his face is "cleft from his chin up to the crown."²¹ This emphasis on cleavage clearly refers to the idea that Muhammad was a divider. As Said himself notes, Muhammad is banished to the section of Hell reserved for *seminatori di scandalo e di scisma*. The full stanza is:



Figure 3.3
Benozzo Gozzoli, c.
1445–50. *Procession of
the Magi* (detail), 1459–
62, Fresco. La Capella dei
Magi, Palazzo Medici-
Ricci, Florence. Photo
Alinari / Art Resource,
New York.

The souls that you see passing in this ditch
 were all sowers of scandal and schism in life,
 and so in death you see them torn asunder.

The schism was not imagined as one between “European civilization” and its “outsiders”; but rather as a crack within a single, Christian–Muslim edifice. Dante writes that there were more than a hundred sinners interned in the ditch. Most of them were Europeans, “schismatics” condemned for splitting the church, not for facing it from outside.

Muhammad, having been known to Dante, had to be put somewhere in his *Inferno*, but why among the “sowers of schism”? It is only because Dante puts Muhammad in the same book as the Christian schismatics that he can have him address a message to Fra Dolcino, an Italian heretic, presenting his own punishment in hell as an example of what is in store for that rebellious advocate of the “communion of women.”²² Muhammad was frequently regarded as a Christian heretic. To Dante, the breach opened by Muhammad, as much as by his fellow hell mates, no doubt resembled the merciless quarrels, religious and political, that plagued Italy during his lifetime. These factional struggles were passionately felt, yet without question the fight was within a broader community of lifestyles and assumptions.

The difference between the medieval concept of the Orient such as Dante’s and modern orientalism was captured succinctly by the nineteenth-century historian Pierre Martino:

the medieval concept [of the Orient] had an entirely specific character. In a nutshell, the exotic is not an essential part of that concept; indeed one can state that it does not exist, while on the other hand the exotic seems today to be almost a synonym of the term “Orient,” and an author who wrote *exotic landscape* instead of *oriental landscape* would understand that he is making a permissible substitution, one that could not mislead the reader.²³

In the Middle Ages, the Orient was, in short, imagined neither as necessarily Muslim nor as particularly exotic, even if the aura of the supernatural and the magic did attach in a vague and unreflecting way, as perhaps in all cultures, to the general direction of the rising sun: the East is where the Garden of Eden was located (in T-O maps, often shown at the upper end of the map, at the far end of Asia), and, for some, the mysterious Christian realm of Prester John.²⁴ The Bible often describes the lands East of the Holy Land as fabulously rich, the location of sensuous luxuries.²⁵ This sense of “oriental splendor” was perhaps informed by knowledge of the various oriental empires that impacted on ancient Israel as they did on Greece.²⁶

When Christian artists in the Middle Ages, both the Byzantine and the more western, illustrated some of these passages, such as the story of Ruth, they liked to use exotic camels or known features of oriental attire. But there is no reason to imagine that “oriental” meant “Muslim” to them. It could not, since it *was* not – the Christian element in the Orient was still strong.

4 The abduction from Asia

The fall of Constantinople as the beginning of Christian orientalism

Europe is: an abduction from Asia.

Denise Guénoun, *Hypothèses sur l'Europe*¹

All of this would change with the ascent of the Muslim Ottoman Empire and its incursion into Europe. In 1453, the Ottomans took Constantinople, having first established Muslim rule in the surrounding areas of Europe and in Asia.

The Ottoman “Turks” were in fact a multiethnic force under the control of Turkic speakers, who in the fourteenth century established themselves as a major power in West Asia. By 1388 they also gained a significant foothold in Europe, which was confirmed that year by their victory in the Battle of Kosovo. When in 1453 the Ottoman ruler (known in the West mainly as “sultan”) Mehmet II laid siege to Constantinople, the “Roman Empire of the East” had already been reduced to not much more than that city. The local forces supplemented by too small a contingent of Genoese and Venetians were no match for the Ottoman army. In fact, there were “Latin” Christians in the employ of the Ottomans as well, such as the Magyar gunsmith Orban, who built for the sultan the largest cannon that had ever been seen: not a very precise instrument, but a boon for the Ottoman army’s fighting morale. When Orban died as the gun exploded, the sultan had already some replicas in place that continued to do the job.²

On May 29, after a siege of less than two months, the sultan entered Constantinople by a gate that had mysteriously not been locked by the defenders. He surprised the local population by the relatively, for the time, restrained behavior of his conquering troops. The great church of St. Sophia would soon be converted into a mosque, but many churches were left standing, their doors open to worshippers. In his own mind, it seems, the sultan was not the vanquisher of the West. Rather, his ambition was to rule, like Alexander, an empire of East and West. He chose Constantinople for his capital, and declared himself Emperor of Rome. For his forces, he adopted the major feature of Constantinople’s coat of arms – the crescent moon. In fact, it is important to note in our context that the Ottoman Empire never became Muslim in the same sense as the western realms became Christian. Much of its population was always Christian and Jewish, and Christians and Jews were often recruited to exercise power on behalf of what was

certainly a Muslim empire. That the Crescent would become the emblem of Islam could not yet be easily foreseen.

Yet the forming of Europe as we know it – as a continent with a distinctive religious and cultural tradition – does date to the decisive Muslim capture of Constantinople – in conjunction with its mirror image in the West, the *reconquista* of the entire Iberian peninsula by the “Catholic Monarchs,” Ferdinand and Isabella (followed by the ethnic cleansing of Spain and Portugal of its Muslims and Jews). The conquest of Constantinople and the *reconquista* assigned to both Christianity and Islam a distinct, continuous territory with few examples of a Muslim-ruled land surrounded by Christians, or a Christian-ruled land surrounded by Muslims. It was the absolute precondition for orientalism as the mental division of the world into East and West conceived of as civilizational opposites, with Africa and newly discovered America relegated to an imagined state of nature beyond civilization.³

The belief that a distinctive civilization, very different from that of Christian Europe, was discovered in America – the belief has been called “occidentalism” by Walter Mignolo⁴ – was also instrumental in the development of orientalism, for it shattered the conception that the world belonged to the same civilization. The greedy *conquistadores* of America treated the *indios* with even more disdain than the *reconquistadores* of Iberia showed to the infidel *judíos* and *moros*. None were shown the common chivalric courtesies that had been observed between Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages, including the Crusades. Then, savage raping and pillaging were certainly the rule rather than the exception, yet Christian and Muslim each showed the other much the same respect, or lack of respect, as to any enemy within their own religion. Now, the infidel and the savage were treated as a different kind of human. Like Aristotle’s barbarians, even the enemy’s nobility were treated without civility, judged on the basis not of their station in life but of their race.

It is debatable to what extent the similarities between the dehumanizing treatment of the native American and the orientalizing of the Muslim were causally related. What seems certain is that there was a close ideological connection between western conceptions of native Americans and Muslim orientals, explored among others by Nabil I. Matar.⁵

Certainly, the heritage of respect for Islam was never entirely erased in the West. Even the fall of Constantinople, which occurred at this distinctive historical juncture, did not always immediately excite orientalist feelings of absolute difference for all Christians. Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), for example, the Bishop of Bixen, who, as a papal official, would have had a good knowledge of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, wrote a year after the event that there was a difference between “religion” and “rite,” and imagined the possibility of a common religion expressed in many forms including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: *una religio in varietate rituum*.⁶

The general reaction, however, did resemble more that of Enea Piccolomini, the future Pius II (1405–1464), who in the same year exhorted Christians to resist the “Turk.” His use of the term *europæos* (“Europeans”) as a reference to a population was almost unprecedented. Even more astonishingly, Pius referred to Europe

as “the fatherland, our own home.”⁷ Ten years later George Podiebrad, king of Bohemia and Pius II’s *bête noire*, proposed a common defense mechanism against the Ottomans, which would unite Christian states in a supra-national organization with real executive and military power over its members.⁸ Neither project managed to materialize. But efforts like these do demonstrate that the Ottoman victories generated the first mental equation in the western world between Europe and Christianity and, conversely, between the Orient and Islam.

It was, then, Muslim expansionism, the mirror image of Christianity’s own claims to universal dominion, that finally forced Christianity to recoil upon its own continent. “Europe is one of the names of the universal turning back upon itself,” writes Denise Guénoun: *Europe est un des noms du retour sur soi de l’universel*.⁹

With the fall of Constantinople, a second symbolic move took place: Christianity was now forced back onto the European continent, leaving the holy places firmly behind in the now definitively Muslim-ruled Orient. The westward “abduction” of Christianity’s religious heritage was complete and appeared irreversible. This was marked by some symbolic legends and acts.

During the papacy of Pius II, a public ceremony was staged to receive the relics of the head of Saint Andrew, which had been brought from the East to Rome. Relics had always been imported to Rome and to the courts of Christian sovereigns eager to show off their piety and their prestige. But, in this context, importing a relic from the Orient may be read to signify that the home of Christianity was moving to the West. (The fact that the head was a gift from the Byzantine emperor underlined the shift in relative power that made this move possible.) T-O maps with Jerusalem at the center became rare by this period. In the western Christian imagination, Jerusalem moved off to the East, and Christianity moved to the West.

The same development is allegorized in the story of the Holy House of Nazareth, where Jesus lived with Joseph and Mary. It tells of angels lifting up the house and flying it to Europe. There, it landed in the Italian town of Loreto, after a stopover in Slovenia between Trieste and Rijeka, on the northeast Adriatic coast.¹⁰ Horatio Torsellini (1545–1599) provides what is probably by far the most extensive discussion of the legend. He mentions no earlier telling of it than about 1460, when a certain Pier Giorgi Proposto di Teramo is said to have published the story of the Holy House.¹¹ According to Torsellini, in 1489 the Carmelite poet Baptista Mantuanus (1447–1516) was divinely guided to find a tablet in the church that confirmed Teramo’s story. After Mantuanus then retold the narrative, writes Torsellini, the fame of Loreto grew greatly. The very same year the Voyvod Stephan Bathory of Transylvania donated to the shrine a precious statue of the Virgin, clad in silver and gold.¹²

The dates are important here. Referring to the “annals of Slovenia,” Torsellini suggests that the flight of the Holy House took place in 1291, a year remembered for the “total ruin and calamity of Palestine,” that is to say, the fall of the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem.¹³ It is only from the vantage point of the second half of the fifteenth century, however, that anyone could look back at that event and see it as the beginning of the definitive end of the Christian political domination of any part of the Holy Land, which would culminate in the debacle at Constantinople. The flight of the Holy House to Loreto represented the appearance of the founding

assumption of orientalism: that the Orient is irretrievably Muslim as the Occident is Christian. The meaning of the event is that the Muslim victors caused the removal to Europe not only of the Christian Crusaders, but along with them of the Holy House as the symbol of the privileged presence of God in the Orient. "God could not tolerate for long that his vestiges and those of his most holy Mother remain, abused, among barbarians," and "thus on the 6th of May of the same year (Nicholas IV then governing the Roman Church), the house of Mary was transported to Europe, thus mending the damage caused by the East with so much good from the West."¹⁴

The miracle of Loreto is a kind of mystic adoption: it removes to the West the place where Mary gave birth to the Son of God, a location that more than any symbolized Christian Love.¹⁵ And Christian Love is, in classic Christian theology, one that fulfills, by superseding it, the unforgiving Law of the Old Testament.¹⁶ The flight of the Holy House, recalling Zeus' abduction of the princess Europa, extracts Christian Love to the Occident. What does it leave behind in the Orient?

The adoption by Christendom of the oriental Jewish-Christian heritage, along with its notions of sublime theological and political power was, if one can use a word-processing analogy here, in part a copy operation and in part a move. What was copied westward, leaving the original copy intact in the East, was absolute rule, by God and Emperor. What (in the western Christian imagination) moved, that is, left no original copy in the East, was the moral character of this absolute power. Moral empire, both worldly and divine, was recognized only in the Christian world, later identified with Europe, that is, with the West. The non-Christian Orient was imagined as left with a form of sublime power with no moral legitimacy: tyrants exercising boundless power for their own good, and a purely authoritarian God (the Jews' Jehovah, the Muslim's Allah) who was all stern King and no kind Father. Copying the notion and practice of sublime power to the West seems to have extracted the caring qualities of such power from the non-Christian Orient, leaving the East in the throes of merciless despotism.

5 The Turks of Prague

The mundane and the sublime

The flight of the Holy House to Europe would have appeared to western Christians as a rescue operation. True religion, the religion of Love, did not leave Asia voluntarily; it was expelled. Its ejection by the Muslims is prefigured by its rejection by the Jews. The Orient was a region where God first spoke to Man, but where Man rejected God. It was construed, in Christian lore, as the land of blindness: the source of Light yet a place where the Light is not seen. It is the place where the presence of the sublime is most in evidence, and yet where it is not recognized, where Man continues to think of the sublime Lord as someone who is far removed beyond the confines of the ordinary world, rather than a force that infuses all. The paradox is that while it is the Orient where divinity was most immanent (through revelation and, later, incarnation), it is also the Orient where it was understood, by Jews and Muslims, to be radically transcendent, with the remote divinity separated from its creation.

The contrast between the mundane and the sublime and the possibilities of transcending it exercised western philosophy and theology during the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the wars of religion in Europe. The character of divine grace – the nature of divine intervention in human affairs – was an important, and perhaps the most important, theological issue. The parallels to political ideas about the relationship between king and subject were as important as they were complicated. When it comes to the Orient, however, philosophical and theological orientalism entered center stage in the West before the political. The aloof remoteness of the oriental God was discussed and represented extensively from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, while oriental despotism crystallized as a clear notion only at the end of that period, and especially afterwards, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Before turning to despotism, therefore, I discuss, in this and the following chapters, the notion that the Orient illustrates man's inability or unwillingness to recognize the presence of God in the world. This ignorance is underlined by the assumed fact that the Orient was the part of the world where God's presence should have been the most manifest. I examine seventeenth-century ideas about the mundane and the sublime through two examples. First, I look at the figures of "Turks" on Prague's famous astronomical clock, the *Orloj*, where we will see that the "departure" of true religion from the imagined Orient left its inhabitants with a keen eye for worldly knowledge, but blind to the presence of the divine.

Then, in the next chapter, I examine the far subtler and softer orientalism of Rembrandt, whose oriental types were only superficially an alien Other. To the Dutch painter they revealed, beneath their exotic appearance, a fundamental kinship with the western observer: for Rembrandt we were just as prone to be blind to God as they.

As we begin with the “Turks” of Prague, it is important to remember another difference between early and later orientalism that I have mentioned earlier. In the western imagination during and after the colonial period, the West appears as knowing and the Muslim East as ignorant; the West as rational and the East as not.¹ But before the late eighteenth century, when western hegemony began to assert itself across the Mediterranean, this was not so. The Muslim Orient was then respected as an important source of scientific knowledge. As is well known, science and philosophy were at the time more advanced in the East. The heritage of antiquity was appropriated by Renaissance Europe largely through Arabic and Hebrew translations of, and commentaries on, ancient Greek manuscripts that had disappeared in the West, but survived in the former heartland of Hellenism in the Orient.

Accordingly, one of the stereotypes of the scholar was the turbaned Islamic savant. (This included alchemists and astrologists, who would later be seen as magicians; in the seventeenth century their art was still considered to be a science.) Though it is true for most of the modern period that, as Gil Anidjar puts it, “Orientalism *is* secularism” and “religion is the Orient”² (I return to this issue in the Epilogue), the situation was once the opposite. To the extent that one can speak of “secular” during the period, secular knowledge was associated with the Orient, and religion with the West.

The scientific method as it was maturing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries insisted on observation, experiment, and quantification – none of which necessitates reference to God – and so made possible a radical separation between the mundane and the ultramundane.³ By studying the world *as if* there were no sign of the divine in it, scientists posed a typically unintended yet serious potential threat to Christianity by appearing to make theology irrelevant to worldly learning. A radical divorce of heaven and earth is the essence of what Hegel would later call the “religion of the sublime” (*Religion der Erhabenheit*): Judaism and Islam. This view of Muslim religion was compatible with, and may be inspired by, the Muslim scholar as an imagined prototype of the scientist who studies the world without resorting to religion.

It was a threatening figure. Because the worldliness of science was felt to be excessive, because it threatened to undermine the authority of Christian religion, there was a felt need to stress the limitations of science compared to the higher truth of faith. In an age of increasing yet hesitant confidence in Science and Reason, the figure of the oriental savant was used as a representation of Knowledge blind to Faith.

This rejection of knowledge without faith did not necessarily prevent western Christians from sincerely admiring oriental scholarship. Many artists and intellectuals were greatly influenced by their interest in Muslim and Jewish readings of both the Bible and the ancients. In the seventeenth century, which

saw the growth of European superiority in the sciences, such respect for the scientific Orient can be seen as the heritage of the Renaissance and even earlier periods, when oriental scholarship was a common source for understanding the ancients. In a fellowship of scholars and artists such as the Neoplatonic Academy in fifteenth-century Florence, we see the beginnings both of orientalist scholarship and of a spirit of relative respect and tolerance for non-Christians.⁴ In Rafael's fresco *School of Athens* (1510–11, The Vatican Museum, Figure 5.1), Averroes (Abū'l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd, 1126–1198), the famous interpreter of Aristotle, anachronistically takes his place with Pythagoras and the other revered ancient philosophers.⁵ The respectful bent pose of a humble student may be interpreted, from hindsight, as the self-abasement of an "oriental" before the greats of Greece. It is far more likely a posture that is meant to identify the Renaissance viewer with Averroes. For the "Renaissance man," just like that Muslim scholar, felt like a humble student imbibing the learning of antiquity, and saw Averroes, who mediated between him and the ancients, as his predecessor.

In the late Renaissance and the Age of Reason, the influence of Muslim scholarship was still palpable. It made an all-important contribution to the development of the scientific method in the West, conventionally associated with Francis Bacon (1561–1626). Bacon himself, however, felt a strong need to assert his faith.

For if we should believe only such things as are agreeable to our reason, we assent to the matter, and not to the author: which is no more than we do to a suspected witness. But the faith imputed to Abraham for righteousness consisted in a particular, laughed at by Sarah, who, in that respect, was an image of the natural reason. And, therefore, the more absurd and incredible any divine mystery is, the greater honor we do to God in believing it; and so much the more noble the victory of faith.⁶



Figure 5.1
Rafael, *The School of Athens*
(detail). Fresco. Stanza della
Segnatura, Stanze di Raffaello,
Museo di Vaticano. Photo Scala /
Art Resource, New York.

The Prague Orloj

The famous *Orloj* of Prague is a fine example of how Muslim scholars used to symbolize the futility of science without faith. It is a large astronomical clock whose origins are shrouded in mystery. Taking up most of one of the outside walls of the city's Old City Hall, it has two clock faces. The one on top shows time as well as complex astronomical models of the universe, while the clock face at the bottom shows the calendar. Although the *Orloj* probably dates to the fifteenth century, the figurines of the "Turks" (a synonym, in earlier times, for "Muslims") seen on the tourist attraction today date essentially to the restoration carried out in 1948, after extensive damage to the clock during World War II. Wooden statues exposed to the elements are naturally a relatively perishable form of art. In each successive restoration, the artist-craftsman carrying out the reparations uses a certain degree of creative freedom. We can no longer be certain what the *Orloj* looked like exactly in the seventeenth century, which is the period I am concerned with. However, as there is no mention in the sources of the statues being *changed* to resemble "Turks," it is reasonable to assume that whatever the original versions looked like, they were always representations of Muslims. This is all the more so as the "Turk" was a major presence in the imagination of the artists and the populace in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during an age when violent intra-Christian rivalries combined with the external Ottoman threat.

The nineteenth-century innovators who essentially determined the current appearance of the *Orloj* can hardly be expected to have invented *ex nihilo* "Turks" to place on an astronomical clock. Indeed, by that time the combination of Muslim and time-keeping technology had lost all significance. After centuries of relative neglect, the clock was ceremoniously restarted in 1866. Writing that year, the astronomer Josef Böhm confessed to have no idea about what the figurative decoration – a "frivolity for the people"⁷ – stood for. He recalled that the supervisor of the earlier renovation that took place between 1787 and 1791, Anton Strnad, was equally oblivious to these elements.⁸ Neither Böhm nor Strnad mentions the deliberate introduction of "Turks," though the figurines that appear in Strnad's illustrations wear turbans. Although the statues were frequently repaired and even replaced and added to,⁹ in the absence of evidence to the contrary one must assume that the original figurines, which by general consensus date to the 1659 renovation,¹⁰ already included "Turks," as would be consistent with the preoccupations of the time.

Currently, the upper clock face includes two turbaned "Turks" representing characters from the medieval list of Vices: Vanity (a form of Pride) holding a mirror, and Luxury holding a mandolin-like instrument (Figures 5.2 and 5.3).¹¹ Vanity flanks Avarice, represented immediately before the post-World-War II renovation by the hooked-nosed figure of a Jew, and Luxury keeps company to the skeleton representing Death. Bohuslaus Balbin mentions, in the seventeenth century already, that every hour on the hour, when the clock tolls, Death pulls on a string and rings a bell, also setting in motion a procession of Jesus' disciples.¹² Today at any rate, Death's action also makes Vanity, Avarice, and Luxury shake their heads, deliberately rejecting the message about the limits of Time.¹³



Figure 5.2 Vanity. Wood. *Orloj*, Old City Hall, Prague. Photo courtesy Stanislav Marušák.



Figure 5.3 Luxury. Wood. *Orloj*, Old City Hall, Prague. Photo courtesy Stanislav Marušák.

The lower clock face, the calendar, features four wooden figures. Two of these are, today, “Turks” wearing turbans. The so-called “Philosopher” stands on the left, and the “Astronomer” on the right. Next to the Philosopher stands the imposing, oversized figure of an angel. The angel holds a drawn sword in one hand and in the other (hidden behind a shield decorated with a cross) a pointer aimed at the calendar (Figure 5.4). No doubt it is the Archangel Michael, the heavenly warrior whom Christian tradition expects to appear on Judgment Day to lead our souls to judgment. He points to the calendar to remind us that *tempus fugit*. Prepare for the Day of Judgment! But the Turk is unaware of the archangel’s presence, ignorant of the limits of his knowledge.

The contemporary configuration, with vices at the top and scholars/scientists at the bottom, is a more logical, disciplined nineteenth-century arrangement, as opposed to the less sequentially pedantic allegorization of earlier times. Illustrations by Aloys Czermak and Wilhelm Kändler from 1837 probably show



Figure 5.4 The Philosopher and the Archangel Michael. Wood. Orloj, Old City Hall, Prague. Photo courtesy Stanislav Marušák.

a different order, one much closer if not identical to what must have existed since 1659. On the left of the upper clock were, as today, Vanity and Avarice, but on the right next to Death was – in place of today’s figure of Luxury – a figure with a crescent moon on his turban, who probably represented Astrology/Astronomy. To the left of the angel at the bottom, where today we see the “Philosopher,” was a “Turk” holding a pan: probably a Chemist/Alchemist. And to the right of the bottom clock face, rather than the Philosopher and the Chronicler, were two figures of disputing “Turks,” both evidently representing Philosophy (Figure 5.5).¹⁴

Regardless of their arrangement, however, what the “Turks” stood for remains the same. The “Turks” represented two aspects of worldliness in danger of forgetting godliness: the traditional danger of Vice and the new and more complex danger of Science. Of these it was Science, represented now by the “Turks” at the bottom, that we focus on here.

Clocks were a worldly achievement of what we now call technology and science, and one of the greatest inventions of the scientific spirit. They became the appropriate site to inscribe a message about the limits of science without faith. Clocks were a common “*vanitas* device.” The bourgeois interior design of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries quotes an earlier tradition quite appropriately when it places a skull and the inscription *tempus fugit* on the face of the ubiquitous upright chiming clock. In the case of the *Orloj*, a magnificent technological masterpiece is forced to pay obeisance to religion and so proclaims its own limitations.



Figure 5.5
Abbildung der auf dem Altsädter Rathhause zu Prag im Jr. 1490 von dem prager Astronomer und Lehrer der Mathematik Magister Hanusch verfertigten und in den Jahren 1552 bis 1557 durch Johann Táborský wieder hergestellten astronomischen Kunstuhr (detail). (Sketch of the astronomical and artistic clock at the Old City Hall, Prague, which had been constructed in the year 1490 by the Prague astronomer and mathematics professor, Master Hanusch, and was rebuilt between 1552 and 1557 by Johann Táborský.) Etching by Aloys Czermak and Wilhelm Kändler, Prague: I. Blatt, 1837. Courtesy Stanislav Marušák.

In painting, representing the futility of worldliness compared to saintliness had had its heyday in North European work of the sixteenth century. In the famous *Ambassadors* of Hans Holbein the Younger (1533, Figure 5.6), the two men's wealth may be considered an allegory of Avarice, the mirror of Vanity, and the considerable girth of the men perhaps as Gluttony. But the focus here is not on these medieval categories of Vice as such, as much as on worldly pleasures and worldly knowledge in general: both are condemned as futile in the face of religious truth. Worldly pleasure is symbolized, as it would be frequently also in the next century, by music: here, a lute and pipes.¹⁵ The carpets, like the rich garments of the men, stand for wealth and prestige, and they also bring in the sense of touch. (As *oriental* carpets, they may perhaps also refer to the privilege of travel and possibly of imperialist domination of the East by the West.) The most important signs of worldliness, however, are those of scientific knowledge. One of the men holds a telescope. There are globes, scientific instruments and an open book. But although the two men are obviously competent in science, they are completely unaware of the foreshortened skull that flies by, as if in a different dimension, at the bottom of the scene. It reminds us, but not them, that neither worldly knowledge nor pleasure will save us at the Day of Judgment approaches, and neither is worth much compared to Faith. That was and remains a standard interpretation of the opening verse of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes, which warns about all human endeavor being in vain: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," *vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*,¹⁶ – hence "vanity device," the name given to works with this message, applies well to Prague's astronomical clock.



Figure 5.6
Hans Holbein, Jr., *The Ambassadors*, 1533.
Oil on oak, 207 cm
× 209.5 cm. National
Gallery, London.
Photo © National
Gallery, London / Art
Resource, New York.

The vogue for vanity devices should not be misread as a reassertion of medieval faith, in which “this world,” the source of vice and repository of pain, was but a way-station to the other. Scientific and technological discoveries, and the intense interest in ancient pre-Christian thought that was aided by the importation of Arabic translations of and commentaries on Greek philosophy, had caused, during the Reformation, a reevaluation of the meaning and value of “the world,” that is, of the world conceived of independently of God. Hegel located in the Reformation “the recognition of the Secular as capable of being an embodiment of Truth; whereas it had been formerly regarded as evil only, as incapable of Good – the latter being considered essentially ultramundane.”¹⁷ The suggestion that before the Reformation the world was not thought of as capable of Good is strange, considering that at the very beginning of the Bible God surveys his creation and notes to his satisfaction that “it was good.” (Like many of his contemporaries, Hegel was generally apt to read the Old Testament with a selective focus on its legal passages, found principally in the book of Deuteronomy.) But even if Hegel exaggerates (as I think he does), it is indeed the case that in the Reformation the possible goodness and truth of this world became a topic of intense debate and contemplation.

The point is not that the scientific interests of the *Orloj*’s Turks, like those of Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, represent evil or falsehood. The artists of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, as much as the scholars, felt that researching the world was morally and religiously not only justifiable but deeply desirable. It is just that they were advised to pursue worldly knowledge not for its own sake alone, but in order to discover in it the imprint of Divine Providence. This is true both of the Protestant Reformation and of the Catholic Reformation or “Counter-Reformation.”

Turks, Catholics and Protestants

Both Protestants and Catholics liked to liken the other to the Turks. Counter-Reformation Prague is a good example of Catholics aiming their criticism at Muslims, but hoping to strike Protestants as well.

Prague is the capital of Bohemia, a region that, in spite of its ancestral Czech tongue, was an electoral state of the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation,” and an important center in the religious ferment that pitted Catholics and Protestants against each other in Germany and beyond. In 1620, the Catholic party won a decisive victory in the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620, a few decades before the *Orloj* “Turks” were installed. The Catholic Habsburgs, who thus secured their power in Bohemia (against the Protestant forces, some of whom were vaguely allied with the Turks¹⁸), gave full rein to the Catholic nobles and bishops to rebuild Prague, under the guidance of the Jesuits, with the architectural and artistic pomp that was fostered by the Catholic Reformation in its battle for Europe’s souls. Howard Louthan has shown how the artistic program of the Reformation that had been discussed at the Council of Trent (1545–1563) was discussed and applied in seventeenth-century Bohemia.¹⁹

In this urban renewal, dominated by the Baroque style, the figure of the “Turk” would play a role beyond the *Orloj*. On Charles Bridge, another famous tourist

attraction constructed in the last decades of the seventeenth and the first decades of the eighteenth centuries, one limestone composition celebrates a hero who converted thousands of “Jews” and “Turks” (presumably by force); another bemoans the fate of Christian captives in Syria. In the Church of St. Nicholas, the statuary of the nave is dominated by the figures of Christian saints active in the Orient.

Not far off, at the Church of Loreto, there is a statue of a crucified woman in oriental costume and wearing an oriental woman’s slippers, and sporting a rich, bushy beard. The work, bordering on the ludicrous, represents the martyr St. Wilgefortis (Figure 5.7). She was a legendary Christian woman promised to a Muslim by her father, some say in Portugal, others in Syria. Wilgefortis prayed to God to disfigure her appearance so the Muslim would not marry her, especially since she had vowed chastity as a bride of Christ. Her wishes were granted: she grew a beard (a very bushy one if her Prague statue is to be trusted), which scared off her fiancé. In retribution, her father had her crucified “like Him you adore.”²⁰ With a naïve ignorance of its psychoanalytical and gender-political complexity, the story was meant to praise the heroism of a Christian girl who would rather die than be possessed by a Muslim.



Figure 5.7
St. Wilgefortis, 17th
century. Loreto Prague,
Chapel of Our Lady of
Sorrows. Photo courtesy
Loreto Prague.

The Prague Loreto was one of the many elements in the aggressive propagation of the cult of Mary in the city as part of the Counter-Reformation agenda.²¹ Wilgefortis can be seen in this context as a personage that recalls Mary, in that her virginity is a means to venerate the designs of God. But at the same time, placing St. Wilgefortis in a chapel of a church recalling the miraculous flight of the family home of Jesus from Asia to Europe is another example that shows how attacking Muslims was a means of attacking Protestants, too.

There was more to the imagined link between the “Turk” and the Protestant than that they had both been defeated by true Christians in war. The idea of the Muslim scholar who has knowledge without faith was matched with one aspect of the Protestant believer that was deeply disturbing to official Catholicism. This was the trust that Protestants placed in the individual’s own ability to read the Bible, without the necessary interposition of Church authority. The daily reading of Scripture in private or in a family setting was an important feature of religious practice for many Protestant movements. To call religious practice “secular” is certainly a contradiction in terms. However, individual, relatively independent reading and interpretation of the Bible represented a kind of trust in individual, innate human mental ability. Like Reason, the ability to read and interpret the founding oriental document of Christianity²² was a this-worldly endowment, and as such was an example of how “the recognition of the Secular was capable of being an embodiment of Truth.” The ability to interpret the word of God was, it must be added, understood to be a gift of God; of this world but originating in the Divine. But then, so was Reason for most early modern thinkers in the West. And so, in the “Turks” of the *Orloj*, we see a complex cautionary parody that does not condemn worldly, scientific knowledge, but condemns it if it forgets its divine origin by sacrilegiously offering its own authority in place of the authority of God. To Catholics, that meant ignoring the authority of the Church. Protestants, in bypassing the Church were, in this context, equated with the “blind” Muslim savants.

God and the world

The effect of the emergence of “this world” as the possible site of the True and the Good caused a crisis in the way that the world’s relationship to God was imagined. The elevation of the world and of worldly knowledge to a worthy object of thought and investigation went hand in hand with changes in the social structure of the West: it indexed the appearance of capitalist modernity. Modern advances in human knowledge and ingenuity that began in the Renaissance produced a sense of achievement, at least among the rich burghers who sponsored them. But the pursuit of prosperity gained from earthly wisdom and labor did not fit in easily with the values inherited from feudal society, and least of all with the values of the Christian church. So the affirmation that the science of the world confirmed the religion of God was plagued by doubt. We see this in the agonized, ecstatic affirmation of the divine over the mundane in the preaching and writing from early on in the Reformations both Protestant and the Catholic, from Savonarola to Calvin. Martin Luther, far from being an advocate of the Secular as the locus of the true

or the good, frequently used the phrase “prince of this world” (John 12.31) to refer to Satan. The Reformers’ near-pathological fear of “the world” can still be heard reverberating awesomely in Bach’s cantatas. His music for Luther’s famous poem *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (“A Mighty Fortress is Our God”) exhorts us to fight for Jesus “in the war against Satan’s host, and against the world and sin.”²³ Such affirmations of God over “the world” do not hide, but rather express, an evident insecurity as to what the relationship between God and the world really was. Does the world really show evidence of being created by God? Do the affairs of the world show that it is ruled by God? Is the structure of the physical universe and of the body, of which the western world was learning so much that was new, a reflection of the mind of God? The unspeakable and therefore unspoken dread was that the world was actually not connected to God. The loss of a naïve faith in the divine government of the world as taught by the Church led to the possibility that the world was either completely random, or ruled by a God who was neither good nor rational but simply a capricious tyrant. As opposed to this nightmare scenario (which was always raised, if at all, only to be rejected), the fervent hope was that the world did make sense, that it was still the site of divine revelation and divine care.

In Protestantism especially, the distrust of “this world” was coupled with a longing for divine grace, for a recovery of the sublime. “This world” was, of course, experienced as the familiar, western world. Christianity’s “abduction from Asia,” paradoxically, left the imagined Orient outside both familiar space and time. It was there, the Bible taught, in that exotic region, half imagined and half real, that God had proven his willingness to enter a godless world. The Orient inspired as the imagined place where the mundane met the sublime, though, as the “Turks” of the *Orloj* were meant to show, its inhabitants were blind to the fact.

In the next chapter, we will see these patterns of the imagination developed in perhaps the greatest Protestant artist of the “long seventeenth century,” Rembrandt van Rijn.

6 Rembrandt's Orient

Where Earth met Heaven

Rembrandt (1606–1669) lived in a very different world from conservative Prague. He was just as interested as the decorators of the *Orloj* in the theme of the mundane and the ultramundane, but had managed to free himself completely from the heritage of the *vanitas* painting; he had no interest in contrasting skulls with musical instruments. What makes him of particular interest to us here (and connects his work to the “Turks” of Prague) is that he, too, explored the limitations of the mundane by presenting oriental characters, and they, too, are blind to the divine revelation around them. Rembrandt's subject matter was the Orient not of his time but of the Bible; however, Rembrandt revived an earlier convention of representing the biblical Israelites on the pattern of contemporary “Turks”.¹ More than any other artist, Rembrandt was able to transfer to art the Protestant predilection for trying to understand the Bible in what was considered its true oriental setting. A collector of exotic artifacts,² he studied the detail of oriental life in order to attempt an ethnographically correct portrait of the concrete, that is the worldly, environment where God spoke to, and met with, Man.

Rembrandt's turbans

In Rembrandt's *Saul and David* (Figure 6.1), Saul's turban takes up a large part of the composition. It is bathed in a direct golden light, more intense than anywhere else in the darkened scene. It is as if the turban were the central message of the piece, the key to what the picture is about. And perhaps it is. To Rembrandt, the turban and other oriental attire and decoration (draperies, daggers, carpets) is much more than an excuse for displaying virtuosity in evoking the sensuous qualities of intricately folded fabric.³ Rembrandt's turbans symbolize power and wealth. Saul's magnificent turban represents the oriental splendor of his court. It represents, too, the worldly arrogance of privilege and wealth, and its moral inferiority compared to simple piety. “And it came to pass,” says the First Book of Samuel, “when the [evil] spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.”⁴ The tears that the king seems to be wiping come from the relief from “the evil spirit” (mental illness?) that David's music gave him. They seem, also, to foreshadow the tears of thankfulness he would weep later. (In a future battle, Saul would wrongfully pursue David in order to kill him. The

younger man would capture him yet spare his life.⁵) Note that although David is also wearing what seems like a splendid outfit, he does not sport a turban. Saul's turban indicates that Saul is the real oriental here, in contrast with (the more spiritual) David, ancestor of Christ. Of the two men, it is clearly Saul who is more exotic, more "Old Testament." The shame of the Orient, as of the Jews, is to espouse the material world, in spite of being the chosen target of divine revelation. This picture, like many others, gives Christian content to the ancient theme of the arrogant materialism encoded by the wealth and power of the oriental despot.

The practice of depicting personalities in biblical Palestine dressed as if they were contemporary Muslims began in Italy and in the Low Countries with the approval of, and in response to commissions from, the Church. It declined, however, among the Catholic party after the Council of Trent (1545–1563), for reasons to be discussed soon. Some of the major Italian artists, such as Rafael, Leonardo, Michelangelo, or Caravaggio, had hardly ever resorted to oriental models in their biblical compositions anyway. But the orientalization of the Bible continued among some important Protestant artists, including Rembrandt's teacher, Pieter Lastman (1583–1633). In *Abraham Casting out Hagar and Ishmael*, Lastman depicted Abraham's turban and cloak with considerable relish of the oriental detail (Figure 6.2). Perhaps to better show off such exotica, Abraham is turned from the viewer and looking at Hagar (who, too, wears a turban, though her dress appears European). Rembrandt was apparently more inspired by Lastman's orientalism than were other students at the Lastman studio. This is evident in



Figure 6.1 Rembrandt, *Saul and David*, 1655–60. Oil on canvas, 130.5 × 164 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague. Photo Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 6.2 Pieter Lastman, *Abraham Casting Out Hagar and Ishmael*, 1612. Oil on panel, 48 × 71 cm. Kunsthalle, Hamburg. Photo bpk, Berlin / Kunsthalle, Hamburg / Elke Walford / Art Resource, New York.

the portrayal of *The Raising of Lazarus* that he and fellow student Jan Lievens produced, evidently in playful competition, in 1630 and 1631. Lievens' *Raising* (Royal Pavilion, Brighton) limits its oriental references to fabric shimmering with gold and brown hues (a favorite of Rembrandt's as well), which at the time suggested sensuous "oriental splendor." In Rembrandt's painting (Figure 6.3), one man sports rich gold brocade, but there is also one with a turban and a long beard. On the wall there are a sword, bow, quiver, and turban – all in an "oriental" style.

Rembrandt's magnificent turbans and oriental scenes exceeded anything done before. Even more than his technical expertise, however, what makes Rembrandt's orientalist Bible scenes stand out is their deeply spiritual Protestant character.

Catholics and Protestants sought to bring the believer into closer contact with the Bible, to make the Bible what we would now call "more real." But the Catholics preferred a visceral, physical approach, which translated the events of the Bible into religious experiences to be had directly here and now. One thinks of how the medieval phenomenon of receiving *stigma* increased during the Renaissance and after. Wounds (known as stigmata) appeared miraculously on the believer, in places where Christ was wounded during his passion. The first stigmatic, it seems, was Francis of Assisi (1121 or 1122–1226). The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that "The saint's right side is described as bearing on open wound which looked as if made by a lance, while through his hands and feet were black nails of flesh, the points of which were bent backward."⁶ In subsequent centuries, during the age of



Figure 6.3 Rembrandt, *The Raising of Lazarus*, c. 1630. Oil on panel, 96.2 × 81.5 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photo: Digital Image © 2009 Museum Associates / LACMA / Art Resource, New York.

the Reformation, the number of stigmatics officially recognized by the Church increased greatly.⁷

This increase in stigmatics, as well as in personal visions of the Virgin and other sacred personalities, can be read as a symptom of capitalist modernity, with its emphasis on the individual.⁸ Francis's famous relationship with birds and nature, too, probably indexed a concern with modern urbanizing trends, evident in his native Umbria, then one of the most advanced locations of incipient mercantile capitalism. It is therefore a mistake, indicative of our privileging of written text over physical experience, to suggest, as is so often done, that the Protestant Reformation necessarily placed a greater emphasis on the individual Christian's relationship to the Bible. This was a goal of the Catholic Reformation or "Counter-Reformation" as well.⁹

Still, though there were many exceptions, it was true on the whole that the Catholics were less interested in the Bible as a literary *text*, more prone to encourage the public to *feel* the drama of the Bible than to *read* it. The Protestants preferred the symbolic to the imaginary, a narrative/textual rather than a sensual,

dramatic/performative approach to scripture. And since they were more serious about the *literal*, i.e. the lettered, written truth of the Bible as the foundation of Christian faith, they were more interested in its location in the Orient.

Rembrandt and Rubens: Protestant and Catholic

It is not surprising, then, that on the Catholic side of the religious conflict dividing the Low Countries, artists had much less use for turbans or other signs of the Orient. The mostly Catholic Dutch artists known as “the Utrecht Caravaggists” followed Caravaggio’s own disdain for orientalizing biblical subjects. In Flanders, this difference between Protestants and Catholics in terms of their interest in the orient is evident in Pieter-Paul Rubens, Rembrandt’s older contemporary. Like other Flemish artists at the time, such as Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), Rubens avoided nearly all orientalist depiction. While another artist might have taken *The Conquest of Tunis by Charles V in 1535* (1638/39, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) as an opportunity to display oriental exotica, Rubens’ painting restricts turbans to a few vaguely intimated background characters. His disinclination for orientalism may also have caused him to change the head-cover of one of the personages in his much-admired *Descent from the Cross*. A preparatory drawing from about 1612 (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg¹⁰) shows one of the personages mounting the Cross wearing what is almost certainly a turban. In the famous painting at the Antwerp Cathedral, Rubens substituted a red cap.

Rubens was as interested as Rembrandt in bringing the biblical story to life for the Christian viewer. Like Rembrandt (who too had adopted the sensualist character of baroque art), he aimed to capture the sensuous qualities of the flesh and of material, in order to portray his subjects as part of a convincing “reality.” Both used light as a symbol of the divine presence in the everyday life of ordinary people, who become transformed by its effects. Yet the Catholic Rubens, though he knew Rembrandt’s work very well, refused the Protestant’s orientalist inclinations. There is nothing in Rubens’ canvases to mark his biblical characters visually as Israelites. His emphasis on bare flesh, effective in making us understand biblical characters as sensuously human, also helps to free his scenes of a historical identity, since clothes are an indicator of place and time.

Religion did not, fortunately, prevent artists from admiring and competing with each other, or from finding clients in the opposing camp. Rubens – whose father, it must be said, had been a prominent Calvinist – was quite successful in Protestant England. It helped Rubens’ contacts that he was also a high-ranking diplomat. As a Spanish subject (Flanders remained in Spanish hands) he helped to establish the truce between England and Spain in 1629, and presented Charles I with his large painting *Minerva Protects Pax from Mars (Peace and War)* (The National Gallery, London). It was probably during his diplomatic activity that James I awarded him the most prestigious commission within his powers: He asked Rubens to paint the ceiling of the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall Palace. Whitehall was the chief royal residence then, and the Banqueting Hall was where the king officially received and entertained his guests. James died in 1625; so it was under his successor, the ill-fated Charles I, that Rubens fulfilled his contract.

When the visitors arrived, the first thing they saw was *The Apotheosis of James I*. James had been proverbially fond of comparing himself to King Solomon of the Bible, and liked to be flattered by the sobriquet "The New Solomon."¹¹ Even so, Rubens did not give in to the temptation to surround the king with markers of oriental splendor. Instead, his oriental reference is limited to the soaring Solomonic columns that surround the composition.

It is as though Rubens and the Catholic painters wished to take the Orient out of the Bible, and to place the Holy Scriptures in a generic, ahistorical setting. This would allow the viewer to imagine biblical events as if they happened here and now, at home. On the contrary, Rembrandt the Protestant adopted the sensuous *chiaroscuro* techniques of the great Catholic artists to represent all the more believably the specific *oriental* setting of the Bible. Rembrandt does not bring the Bible to us but takes us to the Bible. He invites us to insert ourselves, in our imagination, into the world of the biblical Orient. And this is possible only because, in a moral sense, our own world is already the equivalent of the biblical Orient. *It* is a location that is visited by, and rejects, God.

Rembrandt and the philosophers

Philosophically and theologically, Rembrandt's interest in the human experience of the divine as manifested in this world matches well with (without necessarily reproducing literally) the spirit of the period. In Protestant Holland, perhaps even more than elsewhere, artists such as Rembrandt represented, though in their own way, the same preoccupations as the theologians. Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), for example, was one of the earliest writers in Europe to combine orientalist scholarship – especially the study of Hebrew – with an eagerness to ground Christianity as much as possible in the concrete oriental reality he believed to be revealed in the biblical text.¹² In the next generation, the unorthodox Sephardic Jew of Rembrandt's own Amsterdam, Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677), was even more radical. In his *Ethics* (1677) he declared that "God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things."¹³ "Indwelling" is a perfect characterization of Rembrandt's God. Rembrandt was not fond of painting angels; in his work the divine presence is explored in the faces and places that it has touched, in his own day or in the days of the Bible in the Orient. God appears in concrete space and at concrete times. Such a negation of the aloof sublimity of God prefigures Hegel's objection to Judaism and Islam as the "religion of the sublime." Like Hegel would two centuries later, Rembrandt sought to find the divine spark working within the profane world.

Philosophers and theologians as much as artists struggled with the same questions about the relationship between the divine and the mundane. Does the same principle govern Divine Providence and Nature? And if so, can we hope to understand what that principle is? In the "Age of Reason" and of absolutism, one had to put the question in the following form: Does God exercise his dominion according to the same rules of reason that philosophers were discovering as underlying the organization (or at least the understanding) of the world? Or does he act according to a will that is unlimited by any principle known to Man?

René Descartes (1596–1650) wished to lead us out of uncertainty by suggesting that the character of all existence is accessible to reason. The world is not governed by the unpredictable will of a despotic, arbitrary, whimsical sublime power – an Obscene Father.¹⁴ Could God, Descartes asked, play a perverse game with us, could he make us believe in a world that does not exist the way we experience it ... could he be a *deceiver*? Descartes' answer recalls the convoluted twists and turns of the medieval proofs for the existence of God. He rejects the idea that God might be a deceiver by first “demonstrating” that God is an infinite, supremely perfect being. The next step is to recognize that a perfect being could not be a deceiver. The most relevant passage is paragraph 38 of Meditation 3:

And the whole strength of the argument which I have here made use of to prove the existence of God consists in this, that I recognise that it is not possible that my nature should be what it is, and indeed that I should have in myself the idea of God, if God did not veritably exist – A God, I say, whose idea is in me, i.e. who possesses all those supreme perfections of which our mind may indeed have some idea but without understanding them all, who is liable to no errors of defect [and who has none of all those marks which denote imperfection]. From this it is manifest that He cannot be a deceiver, since the *light of nature* teaches us that fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect.¹⁵

Descartes' reliance here on “the light of nature” as the ultimate revealer of infallible certainty has been attacked by commentators through the centuries. What is it? And if we doubt everything – which was Descartes' method – then how can we not doubt the light of nature? In a fine article on this subject Samuel Rickless suggests that in fact Descartes does *not* advise us to doubt everything. He only requires that we doubt information that we receive through the senses. To Descartes, Rickless proposes, “the natural light” is not something in the physical world that we know through sensory experience. Rather, it is no more and no less than the faculty of understanding itself. If the natural light is the faculty of understanding, then what it reveals is not sensory information, and as such Descartes' method does not require that it be doubted.¹⁶

What should interest us here, however, is not the merit of Descartes' argument on purely philosophical grounds, nor even whether he convinces us that God won't deceive us. Rather, what is worth taking up in a chapter that focuses on a Dutch painter who was Descartes' contemporary is this: Why did the philosopher choose the painter's vocabulary? Why, to represent the non-sensory “faculty of understanding,” did Descartes choose a metaphor of light?

There is a similarity between the structure of Descartes' argument and that of Rembrandt's images. In both, light is an abstract force whose existence is apparent only in the concrete objects that it illumines. In the Rembrandt canvas mentioned earlier, Saul's huge turban derives its impact from the light that enters the obscurity of the space, but the light is literally visible only in the form of the turban and the other objects that emerge from the dark (see Figure 6.1). In Descartes' argument, too, “the light of nature” is discerned as something that enters from

outside but functions within. Like light, the “faculty of understanding” cannot really be defined independently of the material given to it, that is, apart from “what is understood,” any more than objects can be discerned in the dark.

I do not mean to deny the difference between light as the faculty of understanding for the philosopher, and light as a sign of the divine presence for the theologically inspired artist. The light of nature of the philosopher reveals first of all the structures of reason. In contrast, the light of the religiously inspired baroque artist represents directly what the *theologians*, not the philosophers, considered to be the source of ultimate knowledge: not Reason but Grace. In this as in other respects, artists like Rembrandt were with the theologians rather than the philosophers.

In traditional Christian theology, divine grace can be conceptualized as conveyed to Man by the Holy Spirit. In the Renaissance it had been customary to represent the Holy Spirit as a dove descending from heaven. The Holy Spirit is the part of the Trinity that communicates between the divine and the profane; according to 1 Corinthians 3:16 the Spirit dwells in every human being. In baroque work the dove as an allegory of the Holy Spirit is often replaced by intensified light as an expression of an indwelling transcendence, not located in any object as such, yet strikingly present in the scene. This use of light to invoke the indwelling divine presence remained common in subsequent periods. “Light” is the root of the term “Enlightenment.” Though many important Enlightenment thinkers were lukewarm about Christianity, they often had a fondness for esoteric (including quasi-Islamic) mysticism and, within that context, of light as a metaphor of transcendence. Examples are the Masonic motto *ex oriente lux*, “from the East comes the Light,” and even the bizarre sun-worship of Robespierre’s rituals in honor of the Supreme Being. For good measure, we might add an example from twentieth-century popular culture: the sword of light that expresses the creative energy of the universe known as “the Force” in George Lukas’ *Star Wars*.

The Light standing for the presence of God contrasts with the blindness of those who fail to see it. To Rembrandt, the Orient represented the origin of *human society in its blindness to the divine presence*. The richer the visible detail of Israelite life, the more obvious the unseen; unseen, that is, to the Israelites in the painting, but revealed to the viewer. Like the *chiaroscuro* technique that reveals light through deepening the darkness of the shade, Rembrandt’s biblical canvases bring out the divine by researching the extreme profanity of the mundane. He must have upset even some of his Protestant contemporaries by the lengths to which he went in picturing the biblical Orient as a this-worldly, real place. His *St. John the Baptist Preaching* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, 1634/36, Figure 6.4) features not only the standard Pharisees in turbans (and wearing realistic Jewish prayer shawls) and a camel, but also crying babies and, in an obscure corner, barely discernible, a pair of dogs copulating (Figure 6.5). The obscurity of the scene may have reserved it perhaps as a bit of a private joke for Rembrandt and the owner of the image. But its unpolished humor is well within the spirit of contemporary Dutch work on the rude pleasures of country folk. Like Jan Steen or Pieter Brueghel the Younger, Rembrandt means to amuse the viewer with a picture of the crudeness of Man. Yet the point of the work is that it is in such a very profane environment that the



Figure 6.4 Rembrandt, *St. John the Baptist Preaching*, 1634/35. Oil on canvas, laid down on oak, 62.7 × 81.1 cm. Gemäldegalerie Berlin. Photo bpk, Berlin / Gemäldegalerie / Joerg P. Anders / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 6.5
Rembrandt, *St. John the Baptist Preaching*, 1634/35.
Detail: dogs copulating. Oil on canvas, laid down on oak, 62.7 x 81.1 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. Photo bpk, Berlin / Gemäldegalerie / Joerg P. Anders / Art Resource, New York. Brightness adjusted.

Baptist preaches, undeterred. The crude world is no longer the *opposite* of heaven and “evil only,” but the location where Divine Providence does its work.

A mysterious figure frequently appeared in the background of scenes of Christ's suffering, such as the Road to Golgotha or the Crucifixion: a richly clad turbaned male on a white horse who surveys the proceedings with a cool, detached eye. The horseman could be read as a Pharisee High Priest, or as Pilate or Herod; in each he represents a version of oriental Authority. Such a horseman is highlighted also in Rembrandt's *Raising of the Cross* (Figure 6.6). But here Rembrandt leads the eye to two rather than just one person taking a major role in the deicidal gathering.



Figure 6.6 Rembrandt, *Raising of the Cross*, 1633. Oil on canvas, 96.2 × 72.2 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Photo Foto Marburg / Art Resource, New York.

While the horseman calmly oversees the proceedings from a safe distance, the main highlight falls on another man, the one raising the cross on which the Savior will be killed. This executioner is unmistakably Rembrandt himself.

Other artists, starting perhaps with Lorenzo Ghiberti and his 1420 northern door of the Florence baptistery, have shown themselves in oriental garb, either in jest or to represent themselves as an Old Testament Prophet, recipient of divine inspiration. Rembrandt has several portraits of himself as a turbaned Prophet as well. In *The Raising of the Cross* he shows more moral courage. He is not a righteous vehicle of the Lord here. He, like any oriental, like any Jew, ignores the incarnate presence of God. He, too, is crucifying Christ. A moving expression of Christian humility, but also of empathy for the Other. Rembrandt's *Raising* demonstrates that the assumption of a metaphysical difference between East and West (an assumption that Rembrandt certainly did share with his contemporaries) can contain in itself the possibility of its own cancellation.

7 The Sublime East

The soft orientalism of Bishop Lowth

Rembrandt uses oriental settings and oriental dress as a sign of our blindness to divine grace. The Orient is, to him, more a moral than a geographic location: it is the site of Man rejecting God. And since we all reject God, we are all orientals. But there were sunnier souls who, equally aware of the biblical message that divine grace manifested itself first in the Orient, focused not on the oriental rejection of Christ but on the oriental ability to receive divine grace in the first place. They saw reflections of that ability in oriental literature, whose major example was, in their minds, the Bible. This attitude was evident in Rembrandt's lifetime, more than anywhere in England, among orientalist scholars such as the Oxford Arabist and Hebraist, Edward Pocock (1604–1691). Pocock examined what was known of overall oriental literature and history in order to make conclusions about the biblical text.¹ He thus sowed the seeds of what was to become the “new biblical criticism.” This immensely influential movement is now known mainly for its heyday in nineteenth-century Germany. That, however, did not come until after a number of brilliant biblical orientalists had followed in Pocock's footsteps in England. One of these, to whom modern biblical scholarship is particularly indebted, is the main character of this chapter.

Robert Lowth (1710–1787) had a cozy, optimistic, simple personality compared to the stereotype of the cantankerous, pale pedant that would later attach itself to the practitioners of the allegedly dry study of philology. Born in 1710, he was educated at Oxford, and became a professor of poetry at the same institution. In 1762 he authored what might be the first prescriptive book on correct English grammar.² The gently didactic attitude of that work was appropriate for a man who was not only a scholar but also a clergyman.

The intent to betterment is evident also in Lowth's *On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, as celebrated in its day as it is neglected today. It appeared first in Latin as *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum*, and was Lowth's doctoral thesis.³ The publication date was 1753, although the lectures it was based on had been delivered, also in Latin, between 1740 and 1750. This work demonstrates that the understanding of the Bible as sacred poetry, which Talal Asad identified as in the early nineteenth century, needs to be pushed back by about a hundred years.⁴ It may have been the first full-fledged treatise that discussed “the Bible as literature.” It was a major influence on later English and German biblical scholars, including the much better known and much more polished Johann Gottfried Herder, who

began his famous *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* by acknowledging that Lowth's work was something "known to everyone."⁵ According to his biography by Brian Hepworth, Lowth was "the leading Orientalist of the eighteenth century."⁶ Quite the man of the world, he was a talented theologian who rose to the position of Bishop of London. A friend of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Cavendish, he was even offered the highest ecclesiastical office of the Anglican Church, the Archbishopric of Canterbury, in 1783. That was thirty years after the first version of *Sacred Poetry* was published, and Lowth, no longer a young man, had to decline the honor for reasons of health.

We have seen, in the Introduction, that the first time the term "orientalism" was used in English was in Joseph Spence's treatise on Pope, which had appeared in 1726.⁷ Spence meant a turn of phrase that, although he found it in Homer, was also characteristic of the Bible. Both Homer and the Bible were, then already, imagined as expressions of a wider oriental genius. The idea that the ancient Greeks, and especially Homer, had a largely oriental imagination was common among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English literary scholars and authors, starting perhaps with Milton. It allowed, among other things, for decreasing the tensions inherent in the prevalent use of both Greek and biblical sources in the philosophical and theological debates of the period.⁸

A major, perhaps the main, objective of orientalist research was to understand the Bible better by studying it as an oriental document. If important advances were made in Arabic, it was largely because, increasingly, as we shall see, Arabic was imagined as expressing the same kind of oriental imagination as biblical Hebrew. For this reason, Arabic could fill in whenever questions of biblical criticism could not be sufficiently clarified by reference to the Hebrew.

English scholars often believed, however, that English has a special affinity with Hebrew as well. G. Gregory, who translated Lowth into English, believed that the native tongue he and the author shared had a privileged relationship to Hebrew:

So happily does the simple genius of the Hebrew language accord with our own; and so excellent a transcript of the original (notwithstanding a few errors) is our common translation of the Scriptures; so completely, so minutely, I might say, does it represent the style and character of the Hebrew writings, that no person who is conversant with it can be at all at a loss in applying all the criticisms of our Author. On this account I will venture to assert, that ... these Lectures in our own language would exhibit the subject in a much fairer and more advantageous light than in the original [Latin] form. The English idiom, indeed, has so much greater analogy to the Hebrew, that the advantages which it possesses over the Latin must be obvious to any reader who compares the literal translations of each of these languages.⁹

Gregory's words do accord with a tradition of belief in a special connection between England and the biblical Hebrews. Karl Marx wrote that "Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution."¹⁰ Even that time depth is too shallow,

for the special relationship of the English people with the Bible did not begin or end with the Puritan revolt that cost Charles I his head in 1649. Charles's father, James I, "the new Solomon," had ordered the translation known as the King James Bible, as a national project. And when the monarchy was restored in 1660, Old Testament theology continued to flourish as much, and likely more, than under the Republic or the earlier royal regime.

The English predilection for the Bible, and in particular the Hebrew scriptures, may have been an aspect of the independence of the Church of England, which established for Anglicans the right to their own interpretation of the Bible without relying on the Church of Rome.¹¹ But there were other reasons for the British to want to consider the Bible their own.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, just as Ottoman power declined as a threat to the Christian West, the North of Europe was taking over from the continent's south as the leading pioneer of capitalist class society, and of the associated expansion of European power outside the continent. The enterprise was far from a monolithic project. Each imperialist country claimed to act on behalf of Christendom and civilization, convinced that *it* had a singular role in shouldering what Kipling would later call the white man's burden. Earlier, the leading imperialists were without question Spain and Portugal, not in concert but in competition, often brutal towards each other as well as to the "natives." But now it was the North that was in ascendancy. By the eighteenth century Britain, the Netherlands, and France had replaced Spain, Portugal, and Italy as the economic engine of Europe and the locus of its major capital concentrations.¹² In addition, many of the German states, though handicapped by their political and religious disunity, took part in this northward migration of power as well. (Their imperial policies had little success until the nineteenth century – except for Austria, which, already in the eighteenth century, was expanding its empire to the east and south.) Sweden and Denmark's power flared up only briefly, but Russia did become an important imperial power. Little by little it added, mainly at the expense of the Ottomans, its Asian possessions to what would become the world's vastest contiguous empire.

It was in Britain that the capitalist economy was most advanced and imperial power was greatest, and the British ability to win and retain colonies in competition with France and the Netherlands was becoming clear. Like all *nouveaux-riches*, the British upper classes wished to legitimize their leadership of the West by acquiring cultural capital to match the economic. In the eighteenth century they habitually sent their young on tours of the Continent. The mostly male travelers asserted their ascendant power by injecting funds in equal measure into the tourist economy and the sex trade. But they also acquired first-hand knowledge of the antiquities on which western civilization was based. The most important destination was Italy. As young Britons familiarized themselves with the art of the Renaissance, they made their own the cultural fruits of a land that once pioneered the money and market economy the way Britain did now. The Grand Tour was an assertion of British intellectual and cultural hegemony in the West, through the acquisition of the sources of western learning.¹³ For the most adventurous, it continued beyond Italy to Turkish-ruled Greece, to Jerusalem, and even Egypt,

asserting a proto-colonial hegemony stemming from the possession of biblical and ancient oriental knowledge.

Back home, the seriousness with which the English elite schools regarded Latin and Greek, at a time when these were actually declining as a *lingua franca*, was probably unmatched in the southern countries, though it recalled similar developments in Germany and to a large extent in France. It was reported in 1756 that at the elite Winchester boarding school the boys, who composed a Latin poem every day, were forbidden to speak English, presumably even at play.¹⁴

If the knowledge of Latin certified Britain's mastery of the ancient pagan heritage of Europe, knowledge of Hebrew could express its mastery of the Christian source of western civilization. And Hebrew learning may have had the added attractiveness that it did not come from Europe's south. Like the interest in the Gothic and the upsurge of research on Nordic mythology, Hebrew scholarship allowed north Europeans to usurp Southern Europe's traditional status as the locus of learning and refinement. So for the romantics and their eighteenth-century predecessors in England, orientalist studies represented a means to acquire the prestige not only of intellectual domination over the Orient itself, but also of intellectual preeminence over other, especially southern, Europeans.

Some English and other north-European writers, including Lowth, went so far in countering the imagined hegemony of Southern Europe as to assert that Hebrew was superior to the language of Homer. Considering that it was the language of the New Testament, as compared with the Hebrew of the Old, this is quite astonishing. "It is a worthy observation," Lowth wrote, "that as some of these [Hebrew] writings exceed in antiquity the fabulous ages of Greece, in sublimity they are superior to the most finished productions of that polished people." The Dutch scholar Gerardus Vossius had suggested in *De artis poeticae natura, ac constitutione* (1647) that Homer's antecedents were Phoenician, which to him axiomatically meant that they were oriental and therefore akin to Hebrew. Joseph Trapp (1670–1747), the first professor of poetry at Oxford, expanded Vossius' notion to suggest that the Israelites "taught the Greeks the use of letters."¹⁵ William Blake (1757–1827) put it with his usual exclamatory vehemence: "The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid: of Plato & Cicero, which all Men ought to condemn: are set up by artifice against the sublime of the Bible."¹⁶ It may well be that he was influenced by Lowth, though the idea of Hebrew superiority over Greek was so common that direct transmission is impossible to prove.¹⁷

Lowth's *De sacra poesi*, rooted as it was in English biblical and literary studies, traveled well. It took on international importance with its reception in Germany, where a new style of biblical philology, of great importance for the future not only of Protestant theology and Bible studies, but also of orientalism, was being developed. Conventionally, the new biblical "higher criticism" is often said to have originated with Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753–1827). But Eichhorn was the student of the leading German biblical scholar and orientalist of the previous generation, Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) of the University of Göttingen, and Michaelis had been a careful reader of Lowth. In fact, Michaelis' notes were included in the first and subsequent English translations of Lowth's *Sacred Poetry*.

Michaelis, who like Eichhorn was an Arabist as well as a Hebraist, considered the Hebrew poetry of the Bible as the product of not only a Jewish but a more generalized oriental genius. The great advances in historical, literary, and archeological scholarship represented by nineteenth-century biblical criticism were based on this essential orientalist premise, which saw the Orient as a unit about which anthropological and literary generalizations could be made, and which therefore included the Bible as only one of its many sites.¹⁸

But although Michaelis' commentary makes much more use of the Orient, and in particular of Arabic, as the context of biblical Hebrew, Lowth too commutes effortlessly from Hebrew to Arabic (and Greek) as equally valid oriental sources for his commentary. The following note on Job 16:10 is a good example of both his linguistic flexibility and his pedantic concern, typical for the time, with minute philological detail:

Jilmaleon, according to the Sept. ὁμαθυμαδου δε κατεδραμον: R.L.B. Gershom, *They were gathered together*: and the Arabic verb *Mala* denotes in vi. Conjugation, *They assisted one another, and were unanimous*, (as if a great multitude were collected together;) and it is construed with the preposition *gnale*, as in this passage.¹⁹

Lowth uses Arabic here as a key to interpreting the Bible. He may have benefited from the efforts of the great Dutch Arabist and Hebraist, Albert Schultens (1686–1750).²⁰ Like Schultens, Lowth argues repeatedly that the Book of Job is “the most ancient of all the sacred books.”²¹ This, he writes “seems to have little connexion with the other writings of the Hebrews, and no relation whatever to the affairs of the Israelites” (355). Its characters are “Idumaeans, or at least Arabians of the adjacent country, all originally of the race of Abraham” (356–7). The book of Job was written “before Moses, and [is] probably contemporary with the patriarchs” (359.) From this it might be deduced that the “Idumaeans, or at least Arabians” are orientals who seem to have actually been more connected originally with the Bible than the Israelites. Lowth notes, too, that Adam was not yet a Hebrew, nor was Abraham, though he believes that they spoke the Hebrew language.

Lowth's goal was not merely to write a book about Hebrew poetry. More generally, he wished to elaborate a theory of the sublime.

The word *sublimity* I wish, in this place, to be understood in its most extensive sense: I speak not merely of that sublimity which exhibits great objects with a magnificent display of imagery and diction; but that force of composition, whatever it be, which strikes and overpowers the mind, which excites the passions, and which expresses ideas at once with perspicuity and elevation; not solicitous whether the language be plain or ornamented, refined or familiar. In this use of the word I copy Longinus, the most accomplished author on this subject, whether we consider his precepts or his example.

The sublime consists either in language or sentiment, or more frequently in an union of both, since they reciprocally assist each other, and since there is a necessary and indissoluble connexion between them ... (155)

This passage, along with many others, establishes sublimity as a matter of the “passions,” or, to use a more modern term, of affect. Lowth shows himself here to be fully qualified to be called a romantic. He stresses *individual experience*, a concept that is central to the romantic sensibility, reflecting as it did the focus in a capitalist economy on individual labor and accumulation, and the decrease of traditional group rights and obligations.

The most important type (“species”) of sublimity is the kind that mimics the passions:

Hence that sublimity which arises from the vehement agitation of the passions, and the imitation of them, possesses a superior influence over the human mind; whatever is exhibited to it from without, may well be supposed to move and agitate it less than what it internally perceives, of the magnitude and force of which it is previously conscious. (184–5)

Here Lowth, considered a “pre-romantic,”²² joins the debate about the significance of reason versus passion that characterizes the entire period of development of modern, individualist philosophies of the mind, from rationalism to romanticism and beyond. He values emotion, and by direct implication, poetry, over reason. There was nothing new in that. Rembrandt, in his canvas *Aristotle before the Bust of Homer* (1653, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), shows the philosopher resting his hand pensively on the poet’s sculpted head, as if to literally draw his inspiration from him. The preference for feeling over thinking did not start with the romantics. It makes sense, in fact, to regard it as a secularized form of the classic *vanitas* sentiment, setting the limits of Reason as a border where something higher begins. But what Lowth seems to have added was the association of the Orient with poetry and the passions, leaving the West as the region of Reason. This makes his an early formulation of the concept of “Eastern spirituality,” the foundation of soft orientalism. Lowth suggests that “reason speaks literally, the passions poetically,” and that in Hebrew poetry the

free spirit is hurried along, and has neither leisure or inclination to descend to those minute and frigid attentions [i.e. the activity of Reason]. Frequently, instead of disguising the secret feelings of the author, it lays them quite open to public view; and the veil being, as it were, suddenly removed, all the affections and emotions of the soul, its sudden impulses, its hasty sallies and irregularities, are conspicuously displayed.²³

This passage is remarkable for its richness, probably unintended, of allusions. The veil may evoke the stereotypical Orient. But also its removal recalls Paul, who spoke of the “flesh” as the veil of spirituality.²⁴ Here it is Hebrew, the language of the Old and not of the New Testament, that is capable of removing the veil that, to Paul, is lifted only with the message of Christ. Even more remarkably perhaps, Lowth cancels the Pauline association of the Hebrew Bible with the dead letter as opposed to the living spirit – an important tradition to which I will return – and instead praises Hebrew for its ability to liberate itself from literality.

For Lowth the Bible was the product of a whole world of the imagination that was radically different from the current European one, and which, characteristically for the Orient, was capable of reaching beyond the rather sterile rationality of the West. In this, as in many other respects, Lowth was, once again, a romantic before his time. William Keach understands one of the chief preoccupations of the romantic mind to be a quest to transcend the arbitrariness of representation, of language and of reason; or, in other words, of the means of understanding that are expressed by what modern thinkers would call the sign. The notion of the sign as arbitrary is typically attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure and his *Cours de la linguistique générale* (1907).²⁵ However, Keach crucially identifies it as far back as the philosophy of John Locke. When Locke discussed together the arbitrary character of language and of government, he was expressing a widespread concern of the Enlightenment period. Later in the romantic period, writes Keach, poets sought to transcend the arbitrariness of language, and so to discover a means to penetrate truths that are normally obscured rather than revealed by language, due to its arbitrary conventions. But this was the exact sentiment of Lowth, who admired oriental poetry because, as the Bible proved, it was capable of representing, or better, intimating, the divine. Because it has embodied the divine voice, oriental poetry could break out of the this-worldly bounds of arbitrary representation, and point towards the sacred world beyond. To Lowth, studying an oriental language helped one to free oneself from the limits not only of western linguistic form, but also of western habits of thinking and feeling. This process of linguistic and cultural transcendence is akin to what Isaiah Berlin identified in Johann Gottfried Herder's thought as *Einfühlung*, or "feeling-one's-way-in."²⁶ Through *Einfühlung*, the historian is able to reconstruct the experience of living in past ages, but also in other cultural environments.

As Lowth put it, in studying "almost every work of literature, and particularly poetry," one has to beware of "rashly estimating all things by our own standard." He continues,

Of this kind of mistake we are to be always aware, and these inconveniences are to be counteracted by all possible diligence: nor is it enough to be acquainted with the language of this people, their manners, discipline, rites, and ceremonies; we must even investigate their inmost sentiments, the manner and connexion of their thoughts; in one word, we must see all things with their eyes, estimate all things by their opinions; we must endeavour as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it. We must act as the astronomers with regard to that branch of their science which is called comparative, who, in order to form a more perfect idea of the general system and its different parts, conceive themselves as passing through and surveying the whole universe, migrating from one planet to another, and becoming for a short time inhabitants of each. [...] In like manner, he who would perceive and feel the peculiar and interior elegances of the Hebrew poetry, must imagine himself exactly situated as the persons for whom it was written, or even as the writers themselves: he must not attend to the ideas which, on a cursory reading, certain words would obtrude upon his mind; he

is to feel them as a Hebrew hearing or delivering the same words, at the same time, and in the same country.

The reader of poetry is here invited to do the same as the poet does in creating the poem: to take another's emotion ("passion") and to feel it as one's own.

When, therefore, a poet is able, by the force of genius, or rather of imagination, to conceive any emotion of the mind so perfectly as to transfer to his own feelings the instinctive passion of another, and, agreeably to the nature of the subject, to express it in all its vigour, such a one, according to a common mode of speaking, may be said to possess the true poetic enthusiasm, or as the ancients would have expressed it, "to be inspired; full of the god;" not, however, implying that their ardour of mind was imparted by the gods, but that this ecstatic impulse became the god of the moment.²⁷

For Lowth and the English pre-romantics, the power of Hebrew sacred poetry to reach the sublime was a primitive power, but primitive *not* in the sense of simple and undeveloped. Rather, it was primitive in the sense of pristine and unspoiled, a model of lost perfection. (In this the pre-romantics differed radically from many of the leading German biblical critics, including Herder.) The characteristics of Hebrew were those of a language given to Man by God:

Here we may contemplate poetry in its very beginning – not so much the offspring of human genius, as an emanation from heaven; not gradually increasing by small accessions, but from its birth possessing a certain maturity both of beauty and strength; not administering to trifling passions, and offering its delicious incense at the shrine of vanity, but the priestess of divine truth, the internunciate between earth and heaven.²⁸

No problem, then, of alienation from the Lord; on the contrary, Hebrew poetry is where one looked, if one was a sensible Englishman, for the True sublime, for the genuine echo of the voice of the Lord, as it had been heard loud and clear, in Hebrew, by unfallen Woman and Man.

Not everyone was so kind. Edmund Burke's *Essay on the sublime and the beautiful* was first published in 1757, four years after *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum*. It was a major advance in the philosophy of the sublime, but what interests us more specifically was Burke's "hard" stance on the Orient.

Burke shares with Lowth the conviction that the oriental mind is more sublime than the western Christian mind. He also partakes with him of the conviction that the oriental mind was evident in Homer. However, none of this is a compliment for Burke, for whom oriental sublimity is but the effect of the fuzziness of oriental thought.

And it is upon this principle, that the most ignorant and barbarous nations have frequently excelled in similitudes, comparisons, metaphors, and allegories, who have been weak and backward in distinguishing and sorting their

ideas. And it is for a reason of this kind, that Homer and the Oriental writers though very fond of similitudes, and though they often strike out such as are truly admirable, seldom take care to have them exact; that is, they are taken with the general resemblance, they paint it strongly, and they take no notice of the difference which may be found between the things compared.²⁹

Burke assimilates the notion of the oriental ability to recognize the Sublime to the Christian supersessionist thesis, according to which Old Testament Jews recognized the great majesty of God, but failed to advance from there to understanding how God wishes to offer his love. The sublime God of the Hebrews is the loveless Lord we identified earlier as “Jehovah” and suggested that he was revived in the Muslim conception of “Allah.” “Before the Christian religion had, as it were, humanized the idea of the Divinity,” Burke writes, “and brought it somewhat nearer to us, there was very little said of the love of God.”³⁰ Rather than loving us, the pre-Christian God [read Jehovah] intimidates us: “whilst we contemplate so vast an object [the world as his creation], under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him.”³¹ We are back at the hard orientalist conception of sublime power. This God, whose worship calls forth the masochistic self-effacement typical of the despot’s subjects, is defined by his difference from his creation, i.e. from this world, from nature and society. In the next chapter, we see how this character of the oriental, Jewish and Muslim, Lord as distant despot is taken up by Hegel.

8 The sublime is not enough

The hard orientalism of G. F. W. Hegel

If Kant invented Jewish law as sublime, and if Montesquieu invented despotism, theirs was undoubtedly a paving and a partaking of the ways. After them, though, it is no less undoubtedly Hegel who invented the Muslim.

Gil Anidjar¹

Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* was published in 1764, eleven years after Lowth's *De sacra poesi*, and eight after Burke's *Essay*. Anidjar's reference is to the 1790 *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. There, Kant writes:

Perhaps there is no sublimer passage in the Jewish law than the command, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything which is in heaven or in the earth or under the earth," etc. This command alone can explain the enthusiasm that the Jewish people in their moral period felt for their religion, when they compared themselves with other peoples, or explain the pride which Mohammedanism inspires.²

Kant's is a complicated point, not too different perhaps from Lowth's suggestion that the Hebrew/oriental mind is able to get directly to the primordial character of things, without the need to symbolize them. What concerns us here is not the niceties of Kant's argument, but rather the fact that he clearly associated not only "the Jewish people in their moral period" (i.e. the Old Testament Jews) but also the "Mohammedans" with a predilection for sublimity, in keeping with the soft orientalist tradition explored in the previous chapter. Anidjar is not literally correct that Kant first associated sublimity with Jewish Law and then, Montesquieu having added despotism to the mix, Hegel "invented" the Muslim. Sublimity had been associated with both Jews and Muslims, and despotism with sublimity, well before Hegel (for example, by Lowth). Nevertheless, Anidjar is right that it was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) who brought together at last, in a systematic and clearly thought-out manner, these long-standing associations.

Like the English pre-romantics, and like Herder, who forms a link between them and the German idealists, Hegel thought of Judaism and Islam as two of a kind. He shared with the pre-romantics, too, the belief that both religions, and

both peoples who professed them, were especially predisposed to recognize and express the sublime. But like Burke, Hegel did not celebrate sublimity, and certainly not as an achievement of the oriental mind. The exaltation of the sublime was, in Hegel's view, a rather barbarous enthusiasm. It was but a milestone to greater religious and philosophical understanding, which would only become possible in Christianity. Hegel reformulated the old supersessionist faith *and* the traditional conflation of Jew and Muslim, in the language of his new grand narrative of history as the progressive self-revelation of the Spirit or *Geist*.

Judaism and Islam are, in Hegel's view, typical religions of the western Orient, forming a transition from the more purely oriental religions of India and China, to the Christian West. While Hegel treats Judaism in great detail and in a number of contexts, he deals with Islam only sporadically. It is therefore no reproach to scholars writing on Hegel and Judaism that they make next to no reference to Islam.³ But if Hegel's views on Judaism do not in any way hinge on his understanding of Islam, the reverse is not true. Hegel's conception of Islam depends crucially on how he perceives Judaism. To him, the Jewish mission was exhausted with the incarnation of Christ. Judaism should have disappeared at that point. But not only did it not disappear; its religious principle even produced a delayed reaction, an anomalous upsurge of *Begeisterung*, a belated swan-song of energy – and that was Islam. It is because he thought of Islam as Judaism-come-late that Hegel failed to consider it more fully in his overarching history of peoples and religions.

When the ancient Jewish spirit emerged again – as Hegel saw it – in the form of Islam, it did so in a historical context different from ancient Israel. Islam rose in a dialectical relation with a new force: that of western, Germanic Christianity. Hegel considered the political organization and (what we would now call) culture of medieval Germany to be barbaric. In comparison, he suggested, Islam during the same period produced a brilliant civilization. Moreover, he noted that, like Christianity, Islam threw off Jewish particularism: the insistence that God has chosen one nation over the rest. For these reasons, some Muslim writers suggest that Hegel was an admirer of Islam. In *Europe and Islam*, Hichem Djaït describes Hegel's "profoundly true and remarkably poetic" vision of Islam as transcending the "particularity of the Jewish God, instantly taking the high ground of universality, thereby purifying and liberating human intelligence."⁴

Those are Djaït's words, not Hegel's. For while it is true that Hegel thought Jewish particularism to be a defect of Judaism, he thought that universalism in its Muslim form was not something better, but something much worse.

There is no agreement in the literature about the degree to which Hegel's views on Judaism were consistent. Emmanuel Levinas suggests that "with a few modifications," the young Hegel's not very complimentary thoughts on Judaism while he was in Frankfurt "were destined to be integrated into the system which Hegel fully grasped at Jena."⁵ Emil Fackenheim, on the other hand, suggests that as a young man Hegel thought of Judaism as essentially false; in his "mature thought," on the other hand, "Judaism is drawn into the sphere of religious truth."⁶ And that is not to get into the many changes Hegel made in his relative valuation of Judaism compared to other religions, like that of pagan Greece or Hindu India. However that may be, those aspects of his thought that concern the nature of Judaism *and*

Islam, and the relationship of both to Christianity, were almost entirely formulated in his mature period in Berlin, and remained quite stable throughout the many revisions of Hegel's lectures and writing.

As with all of Hegel's dialectical thought, his work on Judaism and Islam rests on a set of contrasts. I would like to focus on two. The first contrast is that of the *abstract* Spirit versus the *concrete*. The second contrast differentiates the Spirit as existing in a universal form valid for all peoples (*Weltgeist*), with specific forms associated with particular peoples or regions (*Volkgeist*).

The Spirit concrete and abstract

In terms of the first contrast, historical development leads from the abstract to the concrete. In Hegel's philosophical "grand narrative," human history is identical to the history of the Spirit. When humanity lives in its most primitive stage, it is not yet able to discern the Spirit at all (which in the Hegelian scheme means that the Spirit has not yet begun to realize itself). The "spiritual" is then murkily fathomed as part of the "natural." Later, in its "abstract" form, the Spirit appears to humans *in contrast with* the concrete world. Then at last, in its final, "concrete" form, the Spirit is known (knows itself) as *interpenetrating* the concrete world. Superficially, *Geist* then seems to return to its primitive identification with Nature, but nothing could be further from the truth. In the primitive stage there was no awareness of the abstract Spirit at all. But at the most advanced stage of the "concrete Spirit," the abstract Spirit, that is, the Spirit as it contrasts with the concrete world, is also still present. While enmeshed with the concrete world, the Spirit in its advanced stage remains discernibly separate from it. The appearance of the concrete *Geist*, in other words, does not cancel out the abstract. Rather than eliminating the abstract, the concrete Spirit sublates or supersedes, sublimates (*hebt auf*) the abstract-concrete opposition itself, uniting both as aspects of *Geist*. The historical process here follows a pattern that Robert M. Wallace has recognized as typical for Hegel: abstracting first, then particularizing, and finally "maintaining identity through the particularizing."⁷

The first step in this process, abstracting the Spirit from concrete Nature, Hegel considered, in the 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, to be the unique achievement of Judaism within the broader religious landscape of the Orient:

While among the Phoenician people the Spiritual was still limited by Nature, in the case of the Jews we find it entirely purified; – the pure product of Thought. Self-conception appears in the field of consciousness, and the Spiritual develops itself in sharp contrast to Nature and to union with it.⁸

Judaism prepared Man (and the world and *Geist*) for the next step – manifested in Christianity in the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ representing the beginning of the Spirit's becoming concrete. The concretization process then still had to undergo a lengthy third step culminating in Protestant Christianity (or perhaps, as some readers of Hegel suggest, the process is still going on). At last then the Spiritual would truly develop not only in contrast to Nature but also in "union with

it.” But the primitive potential for this achievement is found in ancient Judaism already.

Hegel suggests that this achievement separated Judaism from the other religions of the Orient; but since, as I show elsewhere in this chapter, he identifies Jewish with Arab-Muslim religion, he might have included Islam here as well.

In the Jewish stage of religion, thought Hegel, the *Geist* is apprehended in the form of a majestic, all-powerful God who is, however, entirely separated from the world: the One compared to whom the world is Nothing. Even Spinoza, who could surely be read as imagining a God who dwells within the world, was still, according to Hegel, thinking “as a Jew”⁹ in this respect. Spinoza’s philosophy of religion, Hegel said, was an “Oriental theory,” an “echo from Eastern lands.”¹⁰ For to Spinoza, “God alone is the positive, the affirmative, and consequently the one substance; all other things, on the contrary, are only modifications of this substance,” and essentially Nothing.¹¹ This conception of God coincided, on Hegel’s understanding, with the idea of the “sublime.” In Hegel’s version, the concept of sublimity expresses “the attempt to express the infinite, without finding in the sphere of phenomena an object which proves adequate for this representation.”¹² With that definition in mind, he termed Judaism a “Religion of the Sublime” (*Religion der Erhabenheit*).

The smallness of Man and the World compared to the Creator engenders in the follower of the Religion of the Sublime the attitudes of a slave towards his master. Hegel was a critical reader of Kant on this as on other subjects. He, as did Kant, understood the emotion that accompanies our contemplation of the Sublime as a feeling of total resignation. Kant wrote that the experience of the Sublime went with “a feeling of the deprivation of the freedom of the imagination by itself.”¹³ Anidjar suggests that this passage in Kant has a political character: the deprivation of freedom is the position of those subjected to, not exercising, “violence or dominion (*Gewalt*)” and “might and power” (*Macht*).¹⁴ To Anidjar, Kant lays the foundations for Hegel, who saw the theological subjection of the Jew to the divine One as “sublime” in a sense that is analogous to the political subjection of the Muslim to both Allah and the oriental despot.

That Anidjar misses a difference between Kant and Hegel here only strengthens his ultimate conclusion that it was Hegel who “invented the Muslim.” Kant’s view of the sublime experience consists essentially of two steps. The first is the feeling of abject humility towards an object that we cannot represent. What Anidjar does not consider is a second step that restores the contemplator’s confidence. This happens when the mind recognizes that because it is able to contemplate the unrepresentable (and therefore sublime) object it – the mind – is actually greater than that object.

The astonishment bordering on terror, the horror and the awesome shudder, which grip the spectator in viewing mountain ranges towering to the heavens, deep ravines and the raging torrents in them, deeply shadowed wastelands inducing melancholy reflection, etc., is, in view of the safety in which he knows himself to be, not actual fear, but only an attempt to involve ourselves in it by means of the imagination, in order to feel the power of that very

faculty, to combine the movement of the mind thereby aroused with its calmness, and so to be superior to nature within us, and thus also that outside us, insofar as it can have an influence on our feeling of well-being.¹⁵

In this second step, calm and confidence return. We feel not abject humility, but almost a sort of arrogance, a feeling that we are not after all inferior to nature. No equation in Kant, then, of sublimity with ultimate subjection. If a religion of the sublime is a religion of utter self-abasement in the face of a greater One, then it is not a religion of the sublime as the sublime was conceived by Kant.¹⁶

It is so, as conceived by Hegel. According to him, the Jewish and Muslim worshipper does not recognize (unlike the observer of a sublime mountain in Kant) that the external Sublimity is but an index of the internal greatness of Man. In Hegel's view (which reverts in some ways to Burke's),¹⁷ the Sublime completely effaces us by its external greatness. Faced with it, we are internally very small. For in the Religion of the Sublime the Spirit does not yet recognize itself as concrete, as indwelling in the World. It is entirely outside of it; it is the Spirit in the abstract – abstracted from any concrete existence, including our own, in the material world.

The parallels between the Hegelian history of the *Geist* and the Christian history of revelation are clear. The incarnation of God in Christ is also a divine penetration of the world that God had heretofore ruled entirely from the outside.¹⁸

Hegel and the Orient

Ultimately, Hegel turned to the Orient with the same goal as his friend the poet Hölderlin, or the English poet Coleridge. These poets' objective was, Emily Shaffer showed, to reinvent Protestant Christianity in the face of the challenge posed to it by the discovery of oriental scriptures.¹⁹ Many of the moral precepts and many of the tales told in the Bible were now known to exist also in the documents of other traditions. The challenge was to distill what was unique to Christianity, and to find a way to maintain its superiority even while giving the others a measure of what was felt to be due respect (though it may seem as nothing but crude prejudice from hindsight). Coleridge's and Hölderlin's was, Shaffer writes, "a new apologetics of free-thinking theism which was to salvage Christianity until very nearly the end of the Victorian era."²⁰ In such apologetics, the Orient and not only its Jewish version served as the Mother of true religiosity – true for its time and preparing the truer still.

The manner in which Hegel was able to give to Jews (and "Mohammedans") with one hand what he took back with the other is evident in his defense of Spinoza against the accusation of atheism:

we must reject it as ungrounded, because not only is God not denied in this philosophy, but, on the contrary, he is recognized as what alone truly *is*. Nor can it be maintained that, although Spinoza certainly speaks of God as the uniquely true, still this God of his is not the true one, and is therefore as good as no God at all. For in that case, if they remained at a subordinate stage

of the Idea in their philosophizing, we would have to charge all the other philosophers with atheism as well; and we should have to charge not only the Jews and the Mohammedans, because they know of God only as the *Lord*, but all the many Christians, too, who regard God only as the unknowable, the supreme and otherworldly Essence.²¹

Clearly, Hegel was considering Spinoza, though rejected by his Jewish contemporaries, to be beholden in his philosophy to a Judaic and oriental spirit: Hegel's definition of "Jew" was the popular, racial one. What he was saying about Spinoza he would say about Judaism, and Islam, in general. In the *Encyclopedia* he declares that

When we just regard God purely and simply as the essence and stop at that, then we know him only as the universal, irresistible Might, or to put it another way, as the *Lord*. Well, of course, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but it is only the beginning of it.

It was first in the Jewish and then later in the Mohammedan religions that God was interpreted as the Lord and essentially *only* as the Lord.²²

Similarly, in the *Philosophy of Religion* Hegel speaks of "Jewish and Mohammedan religion, where God is comprehended only under the abstract category of the one ..."²³

Hegel was as supersessionist as any Protestant. He considered the Jewish Bible to be the theater where "Jehovah" appears mainly as a jealous Master, contrasting with the humble, compassionate character of Christ. However, he expands this notion to apply not only to Jewish but also to what he calls "Arab" religion. In his view, the proposition that there is only one God and "he is a jealous God who will have no other gods before him" is "the great thesis of the Jewish, of overall Arab religion of the western Orient and Africa."²⁴

Notice that Hegel speaks here of "Arab," not "Mohammedan" religion. Like to his contemporaries, to him these terms were more or less synonymous. "Arab" was, here, most likely the same thing that others were beginning to call "Semitic" (a usage that occurs most notably, though some decades later, in Benjamin Disraeli's fiction).²⁵ Certainly, Hegel believed that Islam owed its character to the Arabs, and that as far as religious principle was concerned "Arab" and "Mohammedan" were one and the same thing.

Let us now take a little deeper look at what Hegel has said specifically about Islam. Writers have puzzled about the location of the only extant passage where Hegel deals with Islam in more than just a few paragraphs. In the *Philosophy of History* there is a whole section on Islam, and it is placed in the part dealing with the "Germanic World." At first this seems odd. Yet in terms of Hegel's goal this placement is quite logical. Hegel wanted to contrast the brutish Germanic world and its medieval quasi-empire with the splendid Oriental empire of Islam. As noted above, the *Germanen* were a crude lot in the early Middle Ages. Hegel says that "Their religion had no profundity; and the same may be said of their *ideas of law*. Murder was not regarded or punished as a crime ..."²⁶ But this "extravagance

of passion” and “barbarous harshness and cruelty” of medieval Europe, which contrasts so spectacularly with the much more civilized world of Islam at the time, should not be misread as a permanent defect. On the contrary, the vulgar medieval stage of *manentum* was merely a training period for Germanic Europe’s last-stage leadership in the torch relay of the *Geist*. It was a phase of germination, an exertion of slow, patient labor, the *Arbeit* that would eventually lead to genuine human freedom. We see in this period, says Hegel, “the *European* world forming itself anew – the nations taking firm root there, to produce a world of free reality expanded and developed in every direction. We behold them beginning their work by bringing all social relations under the form of *particularity* ...”²⁷ The “particularity” Hegel is referring to is the development of distinct national spirits. Europe was engaged in a long-term process, the work of developing specific localized versions of the *Geist* in the form of *Volksgeist*, which was the group spirit associated with each specific population or *Volk*.

The killing, raping, and pillaging of the medieval Germans was, it turns out, only the superficial manifestation of a deeper process whereby the hard-working spirit would become concrete at long last, in Hegel’s nineteenth century. The philosopher is making here a familiar association between Germany and hard work. Unlike the plain but industrious Germans, the flighty orientals took the easy path and created a brilliant empire almost instantaneously. One may detect here a typical *Biedermeier* disdain for ostentatious display. Muslim civilization was a splendid product but its glitter hid shoddy workmanship: it would not *last*. The result of such hasty work was not the ultimate realization of the Spirit in the concrete, but rather the more easily concocted oriental product, the familiar “Spirit in the abstract.” The Islamic version of the Spirit was “produced rapidly, even suddenly, in the first half of the seventh century.”²⁸ It bypassed the necessary labor of developing particular *Volksgeister*. And this takes us to the second important concept I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter: Hegel’s contrast between the universal Spirit and its particular, national varieties. That contrast is related to the first concept, of an abstract versus a concrete *Geist*.

The term *Volksgeist* was one of Hegel’s contributions to the vocabulary of political thought, especially in German. *Volksgeist* condenses in a precise, technical term the far less formal musings on national character by a Montesquieu or a Hume.²⁹ The expression combines *Geist* or Spirit with *Volk*, which could mean “people,” “nation,” or ethnic group. *Volksgeist* is related to *Weltgeist* or “world spirit” in somewhat the same manner as the concrete Spirit is related to the abstract.

The Orient did not have a *Volksgeist* in the Hegelian scheme. It could not, because the *Geist* in the oriental conception was an undifferentiated, abstract One. *Volksgeist* strictly speaking exists only where the World Spirit has particularized into ethnic or national Spirits. Different oriental peoples had a somewhat different understanding of *Geist*, it is true, but none of them saw it differentiated into particular ethnic-national varieties. It was this necessary particularization that Islam skipped in its rush; but not the Christian Germans, with their patient if barbaric *Arbeit*.

Islam was, to Hegel, essentially a reaction to the medieval West's labors. His dialectical method takes a characteristic twist here. The development of nations and related historical events in the West were a move towards the Particular; so, Hegel suggests, "a movement in the opposite direction had to appear for the integration of the Whole" (*mußte zur Integration der Ganzen die entgegengesetzte Richtung auftreten*).³⁰ The travails of medieval Europe, in other words, sparked a reaction in its neighbor, the "Mohammedan" Orient. The chief *Volk* of "Mohammedanism" were the Arabs, the oriental relatives of the Jews. Naturally, they would draw on their inherent, Jewish-oriental predilection for the undifferentiated abstract Spirit.

Still, in one important aspect Islam was, to Hegel, radically different from Judaism. While Judaism was a religion of a particular *Volk*, Islam was universalist: Hegel writes that their universalism enabled Muslims to dream, like Christians, of universal Empire.³¹ This Islamic universalism is the result of taking Judaism to its logical extreme. The radical separation of the abstract Spirit or God from the mundane existence of nature, society, and the subjective mind becomes more complete when its association to a concrete in-the-world people is weakened or eliminated. The fact that Islam got rid of "Jewish" particularism only purified the Jewish separation of abstract and concrete, which remained at Islam's core: Islam became more, not less, Jewish than the Jews.

Hegel thought that the end of Jewish particularism was necessary for the Spirit's rise to its higher, Christian phase. He considered the destruction of the Temple and the Judean commonwealth to be an act that liberated, in Michel Hulin's words, "the Jewish principle from its attachment to Locality and made possible the advent of Christianity."³² But where universalism in its *Muslim* form was concerned, it was to Hegel no liberation. For if Christianity was the fruitful and lasting sequel to Judaism, Islam was its sterile and temporary resurgence, a brief burst of brilliance followed by centuries of dark decay. Ultimately, as far as Hegel was concerned, Islam developed not the promising aspects of Judaism but rather its nightmarish, destructive potential, inherent in the "fact" that Judaism imagined its world as devoid of the concrete presence of God.

Jewish particularism is actually a "hamper,"³³ in Hegel's mind, on the worst consequences of universalism when universalism appears *prematurely*, in the context of the Religion of the Sublime. Without the safety feature of Jewish particularism, Islam was able to rush headlong into the fanaticism that is the logical conclusion of a religion that opposes the divine One to all that is in the world. In Islam, "inasmuch as only this One has value and becomes realized, it follows that all differences are destroyed, and that is what constitutes fanaticism."³⁴ "*Allah* has not [has no longer – *hat nicht mehr*] the affirmative, limited aim of the Judaic God." In fact, since in Islam the "worship of the One" is the only fixed thing in the world and "all national and caste distinctions vanish,"³⁵ Hegel writes that Islam frees itself not just of the national particularism of Judaism but also of the caste particularism of Hinduism. The Muslim wants to remove himself from all particularity and destroy any barriers between himself and the Infinite. The Muslim even goes so far as to desire to end the separation from the Infinite that arises from "corporeal limitation." He offers to his God his own corporeal demise:

“the highest merit is to die for the Faith. He who perishes for it in battle, is sure of Paradise.”³⁶ (To complete the familiar ring that such Islamophobic passages have to us today, let us note that the topic of terror is not absent in Hegel, though it appears in a very different political context. “*La religion est la terreur*,” Hegel proposes, “is the principle in this case, as with Robespierre [it was] *la liberté est la terreur*.”)³⁷

How much the Arab-Islamic spirit is isomorphic with the Jewish (meaning to Hegel, the Old Testament) one, even with respect to not only theology but politics,³⁸ is shown in the way Hegel discusses the opposition in the Orient between the State and the Family. Here, as elsewhere, Islam evidences the “Jewish” principle taken to the extreme. Edward Said wrote that in the western conception the Arab is seen as having no politics, only family. He associated that prejudice with the modern view of the Arab family as a human breeding ground.³⁹ But the prejudice is of great antiquity, and about the Orient in general rather than just about the Arabs. Alain Grosrichard traces it back to Aristotle, who wrote about the East “as if the Asiatic peoples were unfit to accede to a *political* regime, and had to be confined eternally to domestic relationships.” Grosrichard then proceeds to show how profoundly long-eighteenth-century readings of Aristotle influenced the modern western image of oriental political organization. In the Enlightenment period, Montesquieu wrote that in oriental despotism “Everything comes down to reconciling political and civil government with domestic government, the officers of the state with those of the seraglio.”⁴⁰

Hegel follows in the same vein. Even oriental nationality, such as it is, Hegel says, is really family-like (*familienhaftig*): “The Oriental has family-like nationality at its foundations.”⁴¹ In Hegel’s rhetoric, the Greek pedigree of this idea disappears, however, and he bases himself instead on his understanding of Judaism, where, he writes,

the *Family* has inherent value; for the worship of Jehovah is attached to the Family, and it is consequently viewed as a substantial existence. But the State is an Institution not consonant with the Judaistic principle. [...] The Family became a great nation; through the conquest of Canaan, it took a whole country into possession; and erected a Temple for the entire people, in Jerusalem. But properly speaking no *political* union existed.⁴²

In Hegel, this perception is part of an assessment of oriental society whose class basis is today painfully evident. He suggests that in the Orient even “family connections” are ephemeral, along with all other group membership: “although nationality, natural associations, family connections, homeland, etc., remain (limited connections, stable relationships are permitted), the service of the One logically involves the unlimitedness and instability of all substance.”⁴³ Crucially, the list of unstable groups includes not only “nation” but also “caste” and “all political claim of birth or *possession*.”

The leading features of Mahometanism involve this – that in actual existence nothing can become fixed, but that everything is destined to expand itself in

activity and life in the boundless amplitude of the world, so that the worship of the One remains the only bond by which the whole is capable of uniting. In this expansion, this active energy, all limits, all national and caste distinctions vanish; no particular race, political claim of birth or possession is regarded – only *man as believer*.⁴⁴

Among Muslims, Hegel believes, political community is replaced by an unstable “union of individuals”:

conquest leads to sovereignty and wealth, and to a union of individuals. But all this is only contingent and built on sand; it is to-day, and to-morrow is not. With all the passionate interest he shows, the Mahometan is really indifferent to this social fabric, and rushes on in the ceaseless whirl of fortune.⁴⁵

There is, however, a worldly, and at least in some sense political, parallel to the relationship between the One Allah and his worshippers. That is the relationship between the despot and his subjects. In the *Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu established the Enlightenment assessment of “oriental despotism” that would influence generations of political thinkers to come.

Republican government is that in which the people as a body [in democratic government] or only a part of the people [such as the aristocracy], have sovereign power; monarchical government is that in which one alone governs, but by fixed and established laws; whereas, in despotic government, one alone, without law and without rule, draws everything along by his will and his caprices.⁴⁶

The lack of solid “claims of property” is the expression of “despotic government.” The slavish equality of the masses was much commented on in travel reports, a genre read as avidly by Montesquieu as it would be by Hegel.⁴⁷ One of the authors Montesquieu read (in French translation) was Paul Rycaut. Rycaut wrote of an empire where neither pedigree nor profits provide permanent protection from the despot’s equalizing whim.

I consider what little rewards there are for vertue, and no punishment for profitable and thriving vice; how men are raised at once by adulation, chance, and the sole favour of the Prince, without any title of noble blood [...] to the weightiest, the richest, and most honourable charges of the Empire; [...] I consider how short their continuance is in them, how with one frown of their Prince they are cut off; with what greediness above all people in the world, they thirst and haste to be rich, and yet know their treasure is but their snare; what they labour for is but as slaves as their great Patron and Master, and what will inevitably effect their ruine and destruction [when they lose the Master’s favor], though they have all the arguments of faithfulness, virtue, and moral honesty (which are rare in a *Turk*) to be their advocates, and plead for them ...⁴⁸

Rycaut explicitly held out Ottoman despotism to be a warning for what might happen in Europe when an absolute ruler ignores the traditional rights of the nobles.⁴⁹ Montesquieu wrote that in despotic government a lord “can be stripped of his lands and his slaves at any moment” by the sovereign.⁵⁰ As a baron living under Louis XV, he was most suspicious of a government that ignored traditional aristocratic privileges. Indeed, his belief in the stability of privilege did extend to the royal family. He derided the despotic system, where “they abuse in the same measure honors, posts, and ranks, they make without distinction a prince out of a bum, and a bum out of a prince.”⁵¹

A century later, Hegel’s very different class interests brought him to a similar equation of despotism with classless tyranny. Hegel was not an aristocrat. But by his time much of the bourgeoisie, who had supported absolutism as a means of removing those same privileges that were mourned by Montesquieu, championed a liberal state where the ruler’s whims are not be allowed to interfere with the logic of the market.

Hegel brings the fickleness of oriental social arrangements back to his philosophical scheme, contrasting the abstract to the concrete Spirit. We have seen that he described the transnational character of Islam unfavorably in comparison with medieval Germany, where the population was developing concrete, *Volksgeist* varieties of the universal *Geist*. Islamic realms were unstable because “on the basis presented by Universality nothing is firm.”⁵² In everyday life, the instability of despotism translated into bizarre stories such as the ruler “who loves his slave [and] glorifies the object of his love by laying at his feet all his magnificence; but on the other hand he will sacrifice him just as recklessly.”⁵³ At this point the great German idealist reveals himself as a typical bourgeois thinker. For here the sublime sovereign’s capricious character and the matching volatility of a society “built on sand” distill to a quality that is the liberal market economy’s greatest dread: *instability*.

But there is an even deeper, more far-reaching fear called forth by the image of a slave who, having grown accustomed to his lord’s love and attentions, is told all of a sudden that he is to be sacrificed. From the Renaissance on, state power grew to resemble the inevitable, all-encompassing, almighty power of God, and this political setting was an ideal hothouse for germinating the spirit of anxiety that I have identified earlier as a principal theme of early orientalism. Did Power resemble a caring father, or a rapacious despot? If there is one early modern thinker in whom the all-pervasive uncertainty that appeared with modernity was absolutely explicit, it was Descartes. In *The Passions of the Soul*, he muses on the ambiguities of veneration. Descartes states that “we have Veneration only for free causes which we judge capable of doing us good or evil, without our knowing which of the two they will do. For we have Love and Devotion, rather than a simple Veneration, for those from which we expect only good, and we have Hatred for those from which we expect only evil ...”⁵⁴ The sublime Lord, in heaven or on earth, is just such a “free cause” who is “capable of doing us good or evil,” yet we do not know which he will do.

It seems that Robert Lowth was not worried: to him the Lord, even in his Hebrew-speaking, oriental revelation, can only do us good. No doubt Love and Devotion

were Lowth's predominant attitudes to God, rather than anxious Veneration. Hegel's is a darker assessment. Underneath his dispassionate recounting of the history of the soul lies the classic anxiety about our place in the cosmic design. His solution is no less classic. The Christian "absolute religion" assures us of the caring entry of the Spirit into our worldly midst. It allows us to leave behind in the Judeo-Muslim Orient the image of a remote, fearsome Lord ruling by the spiritless Letter of the Law.

9 Letter and Spirit

... we can affirm that obedience to the orders of the despot appears essentially as obedience “to the letter.” [...] This is why the Mahommedan religion is so well suited to despotic regimes. It effectively teaches one thing only: obedience to the letter, with neither understanding nor demur.

Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court*¹

The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

Paul of Tarsus, Letter to the Corinthians²

When Alain Grosrichard describes the essence of the oriental subject's relationship to the despot, he uses the phrase “obedience to the letter,” but he does so without explicit acknowledgment of the long Christian debate about Letter and Spirit, going back to Paul's biblical epistles. Grosrichard's *The Sultan's Court*, a widely underrated work that appeared (in French) almost simultaneously with Said's *Orientalism*, has at least one important thing in common with the latter. Grosrichard, like Said, pays much less attention to theology than now seems justified. In this chapter, I take up Grosrichard's insight and reconnect it to the Christian tradition of contrasting the Letter with the Spirit. A society that obeys to the Letter – such as a society governed by the imagined oriental despot – is, I will argue, imbued with the imagined character of the Old Testament Pharisees. These effete “scribes” were as blind as the “Turks” of Prague's *Orloj* were, and in much the same way: obsessed with the worldly effect (laws, natural or legal), they do not see the divine cause. As we uncover the imagined relationship between biblical legalism and oriental despotism, we once again encounter the deep-seated kinship in western cultural history between imagined Islam and imagined biblical Judaism: the kinship of Jehovah and Allah.

Orient: Letter without Spirit

The oriental's obedience to the letter as opposed to the spirit functions at a number of levels. The simplest is where the letter as a physical object (such as a message written on a piece of paper) is literally taken to have the properties

of a command that must be obeyed unconditionally, that is, even if it is not understood. At this level, the oriental suffers from a delusion described in a Renaissance story about an Indian slave, retold by Umberto Eco. His master sends the slave to a friend's estate, with a gift of twenty-four figs in a basket. He includes a letter that tells his friend to whip the slave, should the number of the figs he delivers be anything less than twenty-four. On the way the slave, who is illiterate, takes a break. Seduced by the enticing appearance of the figs, he eats two or three before moving on. When he arrives, his master's friend takes the basket and reads the note. After reading it, he counts the figs, and immediately orders the slave to be flogged. Sometime later, the slave's master once again sends twenty-four figs to his friend, with the same letter in the same basket. This time the illiterate slave, on his break, covers the letter with a rock first, and eats the figs next. He is quite certain that since the letter could not see his misdemeanor, it will not be able to tell on him. Nevertheless, upon his arrival the master's friend once again reads the letter, counts the figs, and has the slave whipped. The next time around, convinced of the supernatural abilities of the letter, the slave obeys its command and, most importantly for our discussion, worships it as if it were divine.

To the inhabitants of the imaginary Orient, the laws and decrees of the despot appear somewhat like the letter in Eco's story finally appears to the slave: to be obeyed unconditionally but without understanding. The Lord's commands are executed without any need to seek a deeper meaning or a motivating spirit.

In obeying the Qur'an, Muslims respect not only its content but also the paper that it is written on. Travelers reported that all paper and writing utensils were held in extraordinary respect. Even today one of the obligatory stories told to travelers to the Orient is how the locals do not use paper to wipe themselves after a bowel movement. The tourists may be told that this is to avoid accidentally dishonoring the Qur'an. It is an explanation that is mentioned as far back as Tournefort's *Relation d'un voyage du Levant*, of 1717.³

Another traveler, P. Michel Nau, wrote that Turks considered offending the Qur'an to be the same as breaking the Law that is contained in it. It is "like a sin" of infidelity for Turks to make a mistake reading the Qur'an. When children make a mistake reading it, they are rebuked the same way as if they had "sinned against the Law."⁴ The sign of the Law – the writing on a piece of paper – is the Law. Tavernier writes that once a year the sultan sends around pieces of paper with Muhammad's name written on them. It is an honor to receive one of these, to put it in a bottle with water, and to swallow the contents.⁵

It is not only the *written* text of the Law that is taken literally, the signifier confused with the signified. So is the spoken text. Nau gives us an early example of another common travelers' tale. A Frenchman is challenged by some Turks to say "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet." Thinking that this is a joke, the European obliges. But since this is the legal formula for announcing one's Muslim faith, the Frenchman is considered a convert, and is subsequently forced to obey Muslim law.⁶ It matters not that for him what he said was just "empty words." In the imagined Orient, sacred words are not a container of the sacred; they *are* the sacred.

Mistrust of representation

The period when early orientalism held sway is marked in western Christian thought by an agonizing concern with signification. As we have seen, Edmund Keach has shown how Saussure's theory of arbitrary signification has a pedigree going back to the long eighteenth century: it was a major demon haunting the imagination of the period, and was intimately connected to its political philosophy, dominated by the problem of arbitrary power. Locke examined ideas about the arbitrariness of language along with and in the same context as arbitrary government. In general, the goal of long-eighteenth-century thought on arbitrary signification and arbitrary power was first, to see them as related and second, to find ways to eliminate both. This culminated at the end of the period with the romantic search for a language that has a "natural" as opposed to arbitrary connection to what it represents.⁷ I would suggest that this desire to bypass the tricks of signification goes back to the beginning of our period. Then, theological debates about Letter and Spirit were argued in part by using the imagined Orient as a metaphor of obedience to the arbitrary sign.

In the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, medieval practices that identified signifiers with a holy signified seemed, at least to their critics, to have only intensified. These included both the cult of relics and the use of indulgences, prime targets for attacks by Martin Luther and other reformers.⁸ Relics ranging from the foreskin of Christ to the teeth of deceased saints were a testimony to the belief in magical metonymy, with a part conjuring the mystic presence of a whole. They were believed to have other magical properties as well. Thus, in the late Middle Ages the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV (1346–1378), exhibited his collection of relics at a square in his capital, Prague, in the hope that it would attract Jesus to appear there, and the Day of Judgment to take place.⁹ In the period closer to the Reformation, relics were offered for a fee by church authorities, with the promise that their presence could guarantee safe conduct to heaven. The same profitable use was made of indulgences, which certified posthumous salvation for the bearer. In the case of indulgences even more than in that of relics, the signifier was taken in magical ways to stand for the signified. The letters on paper were identical with the message: what was written on paper was the guaranteed and effective truth.

In a severe reaction to the Church's apparent confusion of the signifier, many other Reformers would turn to iconoclasm, emptying churches and cathedrals of statues and pictures.¹⁰ In a sense, Protestants substituted the holy text of the Bible for the holy images of the Catholics, but this should not blind us to the fact that even Protestant "fundamentalism" is far less invested in the value of the signifier than was the medieval cult of holy objects. Medieval and Renaissance Christianity had faith in the mystical power of allegory. A reliquary practice like the worship of Christ's foreskin becomes much less amusing if we realize that such an item had both *represented* Christ through the metonymy of a part standing for the whole mystic body; and *allegorized* Christ as capable, as a man, of worldly procreation, and as a god, of the transcendental creation of the world *ex nihilo*. In contrast, Protestant fundamentalists reject allegory, insisting that they are reading the Bible "as is." They mean not that they valorize the signifying text as such,

but on the contrary that to them the text is *nothing* more than a totally transparent vehicle for a signified. To them, the Bible as letters on paper has no value of its own, but instead is a window through which its “meaning” can be observed directly, without the linguistic tricks of allegory or metaphor. It is therefore perfectly understandable that little veneration of the physical Bible as an object exists among even the most radical Protestant fundamentalists.¹¹ Some Protestant movements would express their fear that *any* representation might slip away from the direct path to the divine, in services where nothing is shown or said and people gather only to silently contemplate the Lord.

The parallel between the medieval Catholic and the imagined Muslim oriental attitude is, I believe, clear. Once again, orientalism served to project a vice being disavowed in the Christian (this time Protestant) West onto the Muslim Orient. Eventually, most Catholics would also criticize and abandon the practices that were being refused by the Protestants, and join them in imagining literalism as alien to the Christian faith, but characteristic of Islam.

The imagined oriental system and the Protestant one each tend to erase one side of the signifier–signified pair. The Protestant system mistrusts signifiers and emphasizes the signified; the oriental one adulates signifiers and loses sight of the signified. Quakers pray without signifiers. Orientals obey without signifieds. Oriental laws have no “meaning.”¹²

The point is not that Muslim obedience is unconditional and Christian obedience is not. On the contrary, unconditional obedience to a God whose ways are inscrutable is also a Christian value. No one expressed this more clearly than Luther in his passionate espousal of the value of “grace” over “works”: divine grace was freely given, and often in ways that were not transparent to Man. The Protestant, like the imagined Muslim, accepts all and any divine decree, but *not* without a further thought. To the imagined Muslim, like the imagined Pharisee, it is enough to obey the law just because it was issued by the Lord. The Protestant will also obey it, but she will do so because she trusts that the Lord’s will is the will of a Father who cares, even if his love may not be apparent within the limits of human reason. Central to our topic is, as I have repeated, the fear that the Lord is not our-father-in-heaven but, instead, the Obscene Father who rules not for our sake but his own. This fear is obviated by projecting it onto the Muslim Orient. Muslim faith, like Old Testament faith, is taken to see no further than the letter of the Law, with no guarantee that there is a divine Spirit that justifies that Law. But Christian faith understands, if only “through a glass darkly,”¹³ that there is something, however unfathomable, beyond the Letter – “fulfilling” the Letter – and this is the Spirit. We are returning to the “fact” that it is knowledge of the Spirit that the imagined Muslim, like Paul’s Pharisee, lacks.

Letter and Spirit in Christianity

Daniel Boyarin describes Paul’s teaching on Letter and Spirit as follows:

What he meant is that there is an outer aspect to the Law, the “doing” of the Law, which was special to the Jewish People alone and which has been

abrogated in Christ, and an inner, spiritual aspect of the Law which is for everyone and which has been fulfilled in Christ and is thus entirely appropriately styled as “the Law of Christ” (6:2).¹⁴

Boyarin argues here that the letter/spirit contrast opposes Jew and Christian. I argue that it opposes Muslim and Christian as well.

Paul’s teaching concerned the Old Testament Law as a whole, and he gave few examples of particular laws. If the Letter gave death, it was because the Law declared punishment, and the punishment for Man’s original sin in the Garden of Eden was, as the letter of the Bible made clear, mortality. Christ did not come to abolish the law, and the punishment of death will continue for Man until the end of days. But Christ did come to “fulfill” the law.¹⁵ While physical death could not be avoided, the Spirit revealed through Christ ensures an outcome that assures the believer of God’s love: physical death is actually “fulfilled” by its cancellation through a higher form of life in Paradise. (The Christian concept of fulfillment is related, in form and perhaps also historically, to Hegel’s notion of *Aufhebung* or sublimation.)

The most familiar illustration of how New Testament spirituality opposes the literalism of the Old comes not from Paul’s writing, but from Jesus’ own “beatitudes,” pronounced in his Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus singles out a number of injunctions that he presents with a formula such as “Ye have heard it said that ...” These injunctions are considered to be Old Testament laws. They are followed by Jesus’ own addition, introduced by a formula like “But I say unto you ...,” which alters or even seemingly contradicts the force of the Old Testament decree.

The best-known example is the so-called *lex talionis* or “Law of the Talion”: “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”¹⁶ Although this was a “law” commanded by God, Jesus preached what seemed like its abrogation:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have [thy] cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.¹⁷

It has long been known among Christians that the law of talion exists, albeit in a slightly different form, in Islam as well.¹⁸ Some of the early reports recognized the fact that the talion was never meant literally, and merely called for the punishment to be commensurate with the crime. Chardin, in 1686, makes it clear that the law of talion never led to violent retribution unless the parties were unable to agree to a more peaceful resolution.¹⁹ In 1734, George Sale likewise states that the “eye for an eye” law was never meant, either in Judaism or Islam, to be enforced literally.²⁰ On the contrary, Edward Ryan states in 1788 that the law of talion is an expression of a spirit of vengeance.

The Koran encourages revenge, and expressly enjoins a retaliation of injuries. “We have ordained the talio,” says Mahomet, “a man for a man, an

eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, a wound for a wound.” In another passage he thus expresses the same idea, in general terms – “Offend them that offend you, in the same manner that they shall have offended you.” In consequence of those precepts, the Turks are vindictive beyond expression; parents remind their children of any injury they received, and excite them to revenge ...²¹

At any rate, Christ’s point is not that the law of talion is unfair. It is, rather, than even if the law of talion merely demands punishment that is commensurate with the crime, that demand is excessive for Christ. He demands not fair punishment, but *no punishment*. To him, even exacting punishment commensurate with the crime is an act of vengeance, and vengeance, though it may be justified by the old Law, must be vanquished by the higher standard of Love. The idea is related to his admonition to “love thine enemy”:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.²²

Thus a commandment to hate (which cannot in fact be located in the Hebrew Bible) is fulfilled by an injunction to love.

Theologians have discussed extensively what “fulfill” might mean. One standard answer is that the “new covenant” fulfills the old as a prophecy that has come true. This is the “typological” view, according to which everything, or almost, in the Old Testament foretells something that gets fulfilled – comes true – in the New. More relevant here is the idea that fulfilling the Law means giving positive content to the empty authority of the Letter. (The Greek verb translated as “fulfill,” *plēroō*, also means “to fill” or “fill up.”) And the content of law fulfilled is: love. In *Romans*, Paul declares quite plainly that “love is the fulfilling of the law.” This follows from his suggestion that “if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”²³

Fair or unfair to Judaism,²⁴ this Pauline reading is deeply ingrained in traditional Christian thought. In the next chapter, we see how the political and juridical system of the imagined Orient is one of unquestioning compliance to the letter of the law, but in complete ignorance of the spirit of Love. The Love that Christ brought had flown, as we have seen, to the imagined West. It is the absence of Love that most frightens in oriental despotism, a nightmare transformed, by the dreamwork of orientalism, from the deepest anxieties of its dreamers in the West. In the next chapter, we examine the soulless, mechanical obedience of imagined oriental society, where the unloved give their unquestioning obedience to their unloving Lord.

10 The Lord's command is greater than the Lord

In Persia, when the king has condemned someone, no one may speak to him further about it or ask for a pardon. If he were drunken or mad, the decree would have to be carried out just the same; if it were not, he would be inconsistent, and the law cannot be inconsistent.

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*¹

Montesquieu's interpretation – that the despot fails to reverse his command because “he would be inconsistent, and the law cannot be inconsistent” – has a serious problem. Montesquieu himself states, after all, in the same famous work, *The Spirit of the Laws*, that the despot governs as “one alone, without law and without rule, [and] draws everything along by his will and his caprices.” The laws or decrees issued by him or in his name spring from no general principle; their source is his unlimited whim. Consistency is hardly the issue; caprice, not consistency, characterizes despotic rule. So why can the despot not annul a command once he has proclaimed it?

Charles de Secondat, the Baron of La Brède and Montesquieu, (1689–1755) does not name the drunken king of his example. He illustrates his point, instead, with another Persian personality, taken neither from the travelogues he read, nor from the ancient Greeks, but from the Bible. The biblical Book of Esther recounts that in the city of Susa, an evil counselor swayed the King Ahasuerus (frequently identified with Xerxes, including in Montesquieu's time) to order the genocide of the Jews throughout his vast empire. In response, Esther, a beautiful Jewish woman, charms him, first into marrying her and then, revealing that she is Jewish, into saving the Jews. There is, however, a problem, for the Book of Esther states that “the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.” “This has always been their way of thinking,” Montesquieu says of all Persian kings, equating, in typical orientalist fashion, the biblical past with the oriental present. How, then, can Ahasuerus reverse his license for the killing? Montesquieu states that “the order given by Ahasuerus to exterminate the Jews could not be revoked.”² Fortunately, Ahasuerus had ordered the genocide not for right away, but at a date in the near future: the 13th of the Hebrew month of Adar. Now he issues another decree, which allows the Jews throughout his empire to *immediately*

murder all of their enemies, before *they* could carry out the order to kill the Jews. This legal sophistry allows him to avoid the consequences of his own command, without annulling the command itself.

We observe here a principle, as strange as it is important: perhaps even the first principle of despotism, from which all others are derived. This might be expressed as follows: "The sovereign's command is greater than the sovereign."

In one sense, the oriental despot of the period travelogues is the author of all the laws. Yet there is something even greater in the imagined Orient's system of command and obedience than the despot himself. The ultimate source of the oriental command structure, as that of the universal gaze that we examine in a later chapter, lies beyond and above the despot's splendid court. It is an almighty, *invisible* Authority.

The imagined oriental society can, in early orientalism, be compared to a beehive. There, the workers and the drones exhaust themselves unwaveringly in the service of the queen. She luxuriates idly in the middle of the hive, an immobile prisoner of her own privilege, her only function being to perpetuate the servile activities of her subjects. True, the beehive produces a product – honey – while the oriental empire's end is only its own survival. But even in the beehive, making honey is not the efficient cause of the bees' behavior. Nor is it really the queen's power as such. Bees obey their queen out of *instinct*, simply because they are, to use Rycout's words about the Turks, "fitted and disposed for servitude."³ In the despotic Orient, servility is servility for servility's sake: pure, aiming to produce nothing but itself. Just like an insect, each person obeys rigidly the dictates of an ancient impersonal code that manipulates his or her ritualistic actions, without any semblance of a free will: a dark parody of the Christian will to renunciation and sacrifice.

The impression of ritual automatism that pervades all of oriental behavior is enhanced by the way writers use an impersonal present tense to describe it. In western accounts of the Orient (as in western ethnographies generally), it is often not specific individuals that act in specific circumstances but types of persons in types of places at types of times. This is particularly evident in the ever-present descriptions of oriental sexuality. Though later orientalism would image an even more lustful Orient than that of our period, the imagined harem was already an extremely popular subject, linking the despot's power to have his way with any woman of the realm to his (also often sexual) command of every man.⁴ But the impression of oriental sex is, in early orientalism, seldom of lascivious abandon, and more of an impersonal mating; more ritual than *jouissance*, even for the male. In describing the wedding between a man of distinction and a female relative of the Great Lord, Rycout writes,

her Serving-maids bring in a low Table, on which are set a pair of Pigeons roasted, and a plate of Sugar-candy; the Bridegroom then invites his coy Spouse to the Collation, which she refuses until other Presents are brought her, which lie prepared in the outward room; with which her modesty being overcome and her stomach brought down, she is persuaded to the Table, and sitting down, receives a Leg of a Pigeon from the hand of her Bridegroom;

tastes a little, and then puts a piece of the Sugar-candy in his mouth; and so rising up returns to her place ...⁵

The bridegroom and bride are not named. This is not really one specific wedding, but a wedding ritual performed as faithfully as pigeons perform their mating dance, by *every* couple of the specified status. Orientalist descriptions of the Orient in the seventeenth and eighteenth century – not to speak of today – show beings who are compelled by some invisible force (would we call it nature? culture?) to mimic acts that in more rational beings would be motivated by love, hate, fear, or greed.

That even sexual relations are performed in an automatic and unemotional manner supports the overall picture of life in the imagined Orient as completely determined by ritual. Yet here ritual does not do what anthropologists perceive it to do in all normal human societies. It does not rehearse and cope with social conflict, as it does in the writings of Victor Turner.⁶ It hardly produces the “numinous” of Rudolph Otto’s conception, which Roy Rappaport considers a product of ritual, and describes as an experience when “discursive reason may not disappear entirely but metaphoric representation, primary process thought, and strong emotion become increasingly important as ... simple everyday rationality recedes.”⁷ Here the ritualistic, formulaic behavior produces little apparent emotion, unless fatalistic submission can be considered as such. The ritualism of imagined Islam does produce the sublime, but without any rapture, and as something that elicits obsessively automatic, unreflecting obedience.

As always, the Orient was here the imagined place for rehearsing western concerns. In the West, advances in technological innovation were harnessed to produce a toy that enjoyed immense popularity at the time: the automaton. An automaton is an early version of the robot, a mechanical toy that performs apparently intelligent actions without possessing any intelligence. One very famous automaton of the end of the eighteenth century was a contraption called “the Turk.” It was a mechanical figure with a large turban that played chess and beat even expert opponents. Apparently Napoleon was among the rich and famous who played it. In fact, the “Turk” was not a real automaton, as it had two enterprising chess players hidden inside it. But it was taken for one!⁸ A more pedestrian example of the automaton was the *singerie*, a porcelain orchestra where all the musicians were monkeys. These ceramic figurines, which bowed and banged enthusiastically without producing audible music, enjoyed great popularity everywhere in Europe during our period. So did the puppet theater.⁹ The marionette is a lifeless object whose actions resemble willful behavior, but who is completely controlled by the will of the puppet master. In the seventeenth century, the general apprehension about being unfree is palpable in Descartes, who in his *Meditations* expresses the anxious fear that the people he sees outside his window are not real humans, but automata. The fear was particularly resonant in an age when both the absolute monarchy and the “catholic” church were under severe challenge. But the mechanical action of an automaton, of a puppet, and of an imagined real-life Turk also represented the *Schreckbild*¹⁰ of a more

general, phenomenological sort: the fear that though we like to think that we are living under the authority of a caring government both in heaven and on earth, our destiny is instead – to use the famous formula from the *Thousand and One Nights* – simply to hear and obey.

Automata do not talk back. The most striking feature of how the despot's command functions is that it is obeyed instantly. Orders are brief, quick, and effective. The Lord sends the message; his subjects do not talk back, they act. The system functions in one direction.

To illustrate the automatism of oriental obedience, Grosrichard borrows from Montesquieu a simile from the pool hall.¹¹ The despot's command works like a ball that, once released, sets into effect other balls until the final aim is found. The Lord may issue an order of execution. It is passed on to his subordinates, who pass it on to others, until the victim is reached. The sequence of actions as it descends down this command chain is put into instant effect at each stage by the magic of the letter. Each person, as the order passes down the hierarchy of enforcers, acts in the name of the despot on top.

Rycaut describes the steps leading to the assassination in 1651 of Kösem Sultan, the grandmother of “Mahomet Han the present Emperour of the Turks” (Mehmed IV, 1642–1693), who had exercised power in his infancy. Mehmed's mother, Turhan Hatice, allied herself with some of the court officers to stop a plot that would depose, and may be murder, the young sovereign. Kösem stood accused as the instigator, and the defenders of the sultan now vehemently demanded her head.

So that after some pause and Consultation with the other chief Ministers, it was resolved to supplicate His Majesty for his consent; which was done in these words; *Sir, The will of God is, that you consign your Grand-Mother into the hands of Justice, if you would have these Mutinies appeased; a little mischief is better than a great one; there is no other Remedy; God willing, the end shall be prosperous.* Pen and Ink being brought, the *Mufti* wrote the sentence, and the Grand Signior subscribed it, which was that the Old Queen should be strangled, but neither cut with sword, nor bruised with blows.

We have seen the magic that letters on paper had over the imagined Muslim. The written decree now took on such power that the Old Queen's guard, who would otherwise have obeyed her every whim, obediently submitted when shown the letter, making Kösem's demise inevitable.

The *Ichoglans* advancing the *Royal Command* on high with their hands, went out of the Presence with a great shout, crying, *Allah, Allah*, to the door of the Womens Lodgings, where they met some Black Eunuchs keeping Guard, who upon the sight of the *Imperial Firme*, and the command of *Solyman Aga*, gave them admittance, upon condition that twenty persons only should enter the Chambers.¹²

The gruesome task of murder now proceeded unimpeded.

Thévenot describes an incident involving a vizier whose enemies are emboldened by his departure for a journey, and obtain a patent of execution from the ruler.

They send to him right away a *capidgi* who, having reached him, shows him the order he has for his head. The other takes the order of the Great Lord, kisses it and puts it on his head as a sign of respect he has for this order. Then he does his ablution and his prayer, after which he meekly offers his head. The *capidgi*, having strangled him or having him strangled by his valets, cuts off his head and carries it to Constantinople. Thus they obey blindly the orders of the Great Lord, without their valets feeling obliged to prevent the execution, albeit the *capidgis* come with scant or no company at all. For they believe that he dies happy who dies by the order of the prince, and think themselves martyrs like those who die battling the enemies of their law.¹³

It is true that the vizier's enemies have taken their own initiative to obtain his end, just as with the murder of Kösem it was the sultan's counselors who first came up with the idea. Such contradictions to the apparent servility of the Orient are not rare. But the impact is reduced by the fact that the conspirators are not named: they appear here (like the copulating couple mentioned earlier) as locations in the social automaton rather than people with their own will. The point is that once the ruler is convinced by whatever means to issue a document that objectifies his will, that document is obeyed without question, as if it were magic.

Sign language

The letter from the despot is, as we can see, far more powerful than a mere vessel for content. For the letter signifies not only the actual order ("strangle him!") but also the power and majesty of the entire despotic system. *Whatever* the letter contains would be obeyed. The really important function of the letter is to signify not a specific command, but the commanding power of the despot in general. Since words do not matter as much as the ability to represent sublime power, it should not be surprising that often communication takes place by means of visual signs: not only written letters but also images, and especially, gestures. A further (and equally unpremeditated) reason for the widespread use of visual communication in the imagined Orient is that this enhances its irrational, oniric quality: the world of dreams, too, is one where the visual sign is often more powerful than the spoken word. Here, to use Lacan's terms, communication relies more than in the West on the Imaginary as opposed to the Symbolic.

There is a certain nobility in the use of visual signs in many of the reports. Rycaut comments on Abdul Kadir Ghilan, the founder of the dervish "order" (sect) of Kadris:

Amongst the many Miracles that the followers of this Order recount of their Master, one is this, That coming once to *Babylon* to inhabit amongst the other

superstitious persons and *Santonos* of that City, they hearing of his approach went forth to meet him, one of them carrying in his hand a dish filled with water; from whence they would infer, that as that dish was full to the brim so as to be capable of containing no more, so their City was so replenished with Learned and Religious persons, that there was no place to receive him: Whereupon this subtle Sophister studying to confute this Hieroglyphick, whereby they would excuse the courtesie of due Hospitality, stretching his arms first towards Heaven, and then bowed down and gathered a Rose leafe which he laid on the water, which before had filled the dish: by which piece of ingenuity, he not only confuted the parable of the Churlish *Babylonians*, but also so took with them, that they registered it as a Miracle of wisdom, and bringing him into their City with triumph, made him the Superior of all their Orders.¹⁴

Elsewhere we read that “those who of riper years become *Mahometans*, in some places are carryed about the Town on horse-back, with a Dart in their left hand pointing towards their heart, signifying that they will rather suffer themselves to be passed through with that instrument, than renounce that faith they then profess.”¹⁵

Perhaps most examples of non-linguistic communication have to do with sexual desire. The custom of throwing a handkerchief to the woman the sultan wishes to sleep with has frequently been reported.¹⁶ Here is Rycaut’s version (note again, the impersonal automatism of the behavior):

When the Grand Signior resolves to choose himself a Bed-fellow, he retires into the Lodgings of his Women, where (according to the story in every place reported, when the Turkish *seraglio* falls into discourse) the Damsels being ranged in order by the Mother of the Maids, he throws his handkerchief to her where his eye and fancy best directs, it being a token of her election to bed. The surprised Virgin snatches at this prize and good fortune with that eagerness, that she is ravished with the joy before she is defloured by the *Sultan*, and kneeling down first kisses the handkerchief, and then puts it in her bosom, when immediately she is congratulated by all the Ladies of the Court, for the great honour and favour she hath received.¹⁷

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who traveled in the Ottoman Empire from 1716 to 1718, and who, unlike the male writers of such reports, was able to actually visit the imperial and other harems, vehemently denied this handkerchief custom.¹⁸ But we are dealing with a historically and politically significant pseudo-fact: the admixture of truth, half-truth, and untruth that is the *imagined* Orient.

Thévenot reports that there are only a limited number of cases when a woman may ask for a marriage to end, but when she does, she too has recourse to sign language. When a man “wants to enjoy her contrary to normal usage, then she goes before the *cadi* and turns her slipper upside down, without saying any other thing; the *cadi* having understood this language sends to summon the husband, who if unable to furnish a satisfactory defense against this accusation is caned, and the woman is granted the divorce.”¹⁹

The most powerful examples of non-verbal communication, however, are those that directly attest to the despot's unlimited power by demonstrating his ability to order a subject's death. Joseph de la Porte describes what may happen when the leader of the janissaries makes his report to his master. If the King is not pleased, he wastes no words: he stamps his foot instead and "three mutes throw themselves upon the poor Aga and strangle him without there being any other kind of trial."²⁰

The *Encyclopédie* edited by Diderot reports, based on the reportage of Tournefort, that the lord of the seraglio has people put to death by "gangs of mutilated mutes."

They herald their execution with hooting sounds akin to those of an owl, immediately advancing on the wretched man or woman who is condemned, carrying their silken cords, the lethal signs of a quick and certain death. The simplicity of this device; which makes it all the more sinister; the ensuing sudden mortal attack; nightfall, the time usually prescribed for execution; the silence of these demi-monsters who can give voice only with a sharp, doom-laden yelping which they wrench from their gullets as they seize the victim – all this, I say, makes the hair stand on end and the blood run cold even in those who know these horrors only by hearsay.²¹

The prevalence of non-verbal expression may be what causes the overall silence that reigns in the imagined East of early orientalism. Contrary to the more recent depiction of oriental cities as noisy with the chaotic hustle and bustle of traffic and the shouts of haggling buyers and sellers, what impressed travelers of the period was the silence. "Noise is an obstacle," writes Grosrichard, "to the power of the signifier, which can circulate well – without interference – only in silence."²² Rycaut suggests that "it is the custom in the Grand Signiors Court to speak in signs, to prevent noise, and as if there were some point in it of Majesty and decency, they have practiced this mute language so fully, that they are able to recount stories in it."²³ Most courtiers, in fact, seem to have learned the sign language of the deaf: "But this language of the *Mutes* is so much fashion in the *Ottoman* Court, that none almost but can deliver his sense in it, and is of much use to those who attend the Presence of the Grand Signior, before whom it is not reverent or seemly so much as to whisper."²⁴

The master signifier

The medium was never as much the message as in this imagined empire of the sign. We see that the *content* of the command is immaterial when it comes to eliciting obedience. Rather, the primary cause of automatic compliance is that the letter is invested with the despot's approval. In fact, even an empty letter purported to be from the despot can be devastating:

During a revolt of the ispahis at Adrinopolis, Du Vignau records, Suleiman Aga, chief of the janissaries, "went in the midst of the rebels, escorted only by ten janissaries, with a paper in his hand, on which nothing was written.

Seizing the leader of the rebels by the neck, and showing him the paper, he said: 'The Emperor commands.'"²⁵

And that, apparently, was the end of the revolt.

The sign of the despot's power is akin to what the anthropologist Roy Rappaport called "Ultimate Sacred Postulates." These are predicates that are shared by a large group of people (such as the followers of a religion) without dispute. They are usually devoid of "material significata," are typically expressed in ritual rather than daily life, and are "either devoid of explicit social content or very vague in this regard." A good example is the *Shahada*, "I testify that there is no god but One God, and I testify that Muhammad is his prophet."²⁶ From Rappaport's social-anthropological point of view, such Ultimate Sacred Postulates allow a society to cope with contention. As long these relatively meaningless, nearly empty signifiers are unchallenged, disputing parties may continue to believe that they belong to the same community, however bitterly divided. Thus, almost all who subscribe to the *Shahada* accept each other as Muslims. By the same token, respect for the Ultimate Sacred Postulates must be maintained in order to prevent secession. It is essential that the Ultimate Sacred Postulates have as little content as possible for them to be able to fulfill this function.

A way to understand the function of Ultimate Sacred Postulates may be to see them as a form very nearly devoid of any content other than the power to maintain the cohesion of the imagined community. They are not really postulates, i.e. propositions, as much as signs. Michael Lambek has suggested that the function of Ultimate Sacred Postulates can be invested in material objects.²⁷ It seems that the same role is played not only by the insignia of despotic power, but by the person of the despot himself. The function of the despot as he who is *always* and unquestioningly obeyed requires bleeding the office of the despot of as much concrete substance as possible. The unpredictability of the despot's will is one thing that serves to prevent the institution of despotism from acquiring too much content: a legal system, or "worse," a constitution. But ultimately even the very person, the only seemingly omnipotent individual on the throne, is insignificant as such, compared to the abstract office whose power he exercises.

It is the *sign* of despotic power that elicits automatic obedience, not the despot as such. "There is no doubt," Grosrichard writes, that the master "merges with the signifier."²⁸ Moving down the great chain of obedience, each person becomes invested with the impersonal power of the despotic sign. A letter in the hands of the captain of the janissaries turns that captain himself into a full-fledged despot (until someone comes by with another signifier sent to effect the captain's death). This explains why the despot's unlimited power tolerates, at least for a while, a vizier who appears to hold the reins of power in his hands. As long as he carries the insignia of the despot's authority, the vizier's commands are obeyed. But all his power evaporates if, for whatever reason, he loses his master's favor.

Grosrichard suggests that the absolute rule of the signifier is at the heart of the equality of slaves that the despot's subjects "enjoy." No one is permanently in charge, and thus "intermediary bodies" in the form of privileged classes or castes do not develop.

But if this power can thus be transmitted entire, without loss or friction, without the resistance of “intermediary bodies” (like the nobility in a monarchical regime), it is because it resides always and entirely within a signifier which passes silently from hand to hand. “The Vizier himself is the despotic prince; and each particular officer is the Vizier.”²⁹

“The despot’s name [i.e. the sign signifying his power] is itself the despot,” Grosrichard adds, and “The essential feature of despotic power is a name as efficient cause – this is how we might characterize it at its most schematic if we were to rely on the travellers’ accounts.”³⁰ (Grosrichard attributes to Montesquieu the observation that “The inhabitants of those countries need only the name of the prince to govern them.”³¹)

Ultimately, then, it is not really the despot that rules, but the master signifier, the Ultimate Sacred Predicate abbreviated as the despot’s “name.” At first sight, political power is held by a single individual who is above the laws, and everyone is equally the slave of the exalted One. Reading many of the reports I mentioned, Montesquieu noted that the despot is a “man whose five senses constantly tell him that he is everything and that others are nothing.”³² On second inspection, however, this turns out to be merely a delusion caused by his sheltered upbringing, pampered as he has always been by the women and eunuchs of the harem. The traveler Jean Chardin (1643–1713), whom Montesquieu frequently relies on, reports that

The Muslim sovereigns, having been brought up in seraglios with Women and Eunuchs, are so incapable of governing, that for the good of the people and the security of the State, there needs to be set beneath them someone to rule in their stead ...; and since these Kings of the Orient have seldom a thought for anything but the pleasures of the senses, it is all the more necessary that there be someone to consider the preservation and the glory of the Empire. These are the principal reasons for the extreme power of the Grand Viziers, and if we go further back in Islam, as far as its earliest times, we will find that the Kings of the Orient all had their Grand Viziers just as the Kings of Egypt had their Joseph and those of Assyria their Daniel.³³

Apart from being a further example of how the imagined despot was projected back to the image of the biblical Orient, this passage shows that often the oriental despot is in reality an insignificant, pitiful personage – not at all the Everything of the empire, but just another Nothing, like everyone else.

Even the proverbial lustfulness of the Turkish Great Lord turns out on closer inspection to be the failing of a silly pleasure seeker rather than the sign of manly dominion. Baudier suggests that he has somehow been able to find out what the sultan does when he encounters with his chosen bedmate for the night:

The particularities of his entertainment are unknown unto us: for the rigour which he observes against those which would see him, forbids to reveale the secret: Only wee know that in the effeminate delights wherewith the women

charme him, hee is pleased with the ridiculous encounters of his Iesters and Dwarfes, and shewes that Love is an entertainment of Men that are Birds.³⁴

Such a "Bird" offers a ridiculous contrast with the "gravitie" of his office. There is a contrast between the insignificance of the sultan's person and the greatness of its signifier: his "name."

The vizier, extreme as his power may be while he holds it, can, as we have seen, be removed at any time. But so can the despot himself! The eternal strife that characterizes the oriental empire as a realm of no politics but much bloody, family-level (the modern words are "tribal," "clan") feuding does often result in the despot being deposed. As we have seen, Rycaut was well aware of the murder of Kösem Sultan, the most notable behind-the-scenes ruler of the period known as the "Sultanate of Women." This was an era in Ottoman history when competing mothers caused a number of palace revolutions, installing and deposing their favorite sons as sultan. Mehmed IV, who had been compelled to order his grandmother's execution, ruled during Rycaut's visit. He himself had to face powerful challenges to his rule, and (after Rycaut left) ended up imprisoned by order of the restive janissaries. How does one explain the obvious fact that the supposed despot could not control his supposed slavish subjects? Only by distinguishing the real despot from the "name," the despot's insignia, which could be usurped by another person but whose power remained supreme.

Ultimately then, the oriental despot is nothing as an individual. He exists only to fill the *position* of despot, on which, rather than on its dispensable holder, despotism depends. Anyone at all could be given that position. Baudier writes that "When Osman, the Turkish emperor, was deposed, ... a voice which was never identified came by chance from the crowd, the name of Mustafa was uttered, and suddenly Mustafa was emperor."³⁵ Commenting, Grosrichard notes that "Within this schema, despotism, the 'personal' regime *par excellence*, emerges in reality as the most *impersonal* of regimes. Power, which seems to reside in the hands of a single man, effectively belongs to no one."³⁶ This essential impersonality is, it too, connected to the radical lack of permanent and heritable distinctions of power. "Mustafa," the generic Muslim male, can become the sultan at any time; but the sultan, too, can at any time become equal with his subjects, who are all slaves.

This is one way in which it becomes possible for despotism to overcome an essential contradiction, much commented on by Montesquieu scholars: while the nature of despotism is the rule of one man over all others, its principle is slavery, meaning that in a despotic state all have the character of slaves. But if all have the character of slaves, then how can even one powerful ruler arise among them? I have alluded already to Aristotle's *Politics*, where he writes that the Persian despot himself was essentially a slave, and if captured would be treated by the Greeks as such. Now we see that this is because the despot is chosen, not on the strength of his qualifications, but by pure accident.³⁷

This, however, begs an even more fundamental question. The narcissistic, cruel absolutism in oriental despotism is not so much of the despot as of the "name" that signifies it. But is there something beyond the name, the master signifier, something other than the despot, something or someone else, someone standing even

higher than he? What is the ultimate source of this pervasive chain of authority, in which the despot is only one, dispensable, peg?

On the first approximation, the answer is that it is a higher power: Allah, God. Among Muslims, God's will must be unconditionally obeyed. It is an authority that even the despot cannot break.

Montesquieu writes:

There is, however, one thing with which one can sometimes counter the prince's will; that is religion. One will forsake one's father, even kill him, if the prince orders it, but one will not drink wine if the prince wants it and orders it. The laws of religion are part of a higher precept, because they apply to the prince as well as to the subjects.³⁸

The despot has, to use Giorgio Agamben's terms, no *potestas* but only *auctoritas*,³⁹ no personal power but only the power granted to him by the One. Without the support of Allah, he is as much Nothing as any of his subjects.⁴⁰

But can even Allah go back on his own command? In the Islamic as in the biblical texts, God does so in the famous incident of Abraham/Ibrahim and his son. The patriarch is ready to kill his own son as a sacrifice when God asks him to; later, however, God issues a reprieve, and allows Abraham/Ibrahim to substitute a lamb. The story is told almost identically by the followers of Jehovah (as the Jews are said to be in the traditional Christian assessment) and Allah, though the former identify the son as Isaac and the latter as Isma'il (Ishmael). Most of the faithful believe that God never intended for Abraham's son to die, and was only testing the patriarch, who in this case turned out to be a properly obedient servant of the Lord. But the point is that God was able to make ineffective a former order, which no earthly Lord can do. And that is because he, and not the despot, is the ultimate source of all that must be obeyed. The Ultimate Sacred Predicate is God's omnipotence, not the despot's; the latter needs to be propped up by the former.

However, what is true of the Allah of real Islam is not necessarily, and in this case is not, true of the *imagined* Allah. This is one of the cases where the imagined Allah does differ from the imagined Jehovah, and not in a complimentary way. It was not widely known to the western Christian public of the period (and probably still is not that widely known today) that a biblical story such as the sacrifice of Abraham's son also exists in Islam. Allah as reported then and now does not come across as very flexible when it comes to administering punishment. The chopping off of heads and hands, the stoning and the whipping ordered by Islamic authorities is never contradicted by Allah, who is invoked as the author of the harsh decree. Combing through the long eighteenth century's oriental travelogues does not produce any ready examples where Allah is induced to annul any of the commands issued in his name. On close examination, it appears that even Allah, at the top of the pyramid, may be unable to stop the effects of his commands. The Muslim God himself has to obey the ghost of the politico-theological machine: abstract, absolute Authority, independent of any person or object. In the imagined Orient, obedience is the master signifier; the ghastly emptiness of despotism is rooted in the absence of a signified. Those familiar with Lacanian allegory will

recognize here the "Name-of-the-Father" that governs our lives, once the mythic primordial father has been murdered and is gone. Even the sovereign, whether of Heaven or of Earth, is bound by the commands given in Allah's or any earthly authority's *name*.

From this perspective, Carl Schmitt's dictum, "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception,"⁴¹ appears to describe a rather desirable state of affairs. As the story of King Lear shows, it is better to have a bad king in power than no one. But in the nightmare of oriental despotism, it seems that ultimately no one is in charge. Here power transcends *any* human or human-like control, even by an anthropomorphic God. It is truly sublime power: great beyond comparison and understanding. And it is not benign.

As for the pitiful "drunk or mad" monarch whom we encountered at the beginning of this chapter: how could he even think of altering a command once he invested it with the awesome force of pure power, a power over which even Allah has no more control than the meanest of his subjects?

11 The All-seeing Eye

When this gaze is held, it becomes one with death. The despot's gaze is an object of love and a source of desire, concealing and disclosing the abyss where everything in the Empire that can be deemed to be enjoyed is swallowed up, down to the very last shred.

Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court*¹

The pervasive presence of pure, sublime, abstract Authority in the imagined Orient elicits a concrete physical experience: being watched. In the Abrahamic space at least, the source of this experience, which is probably universal, is experienced as the Lord (God, King, Father). But one never sees, only feels the Lord watching. His gaze envelopes all existence.

Being watched is specifically the phenomenological condition of a theology of sublimity, in the “Arab and Jewish” religion of the sublime as conceived by Hegel. Recall that in this type of (imagined) religion, the Lord is separate from the world, yet in complete charge of it; as opposed to in absolute religion, where the Lord's presence is “indwelling” in the world and its inhabitants. And there is no more faithful reflection of the relationship between an all-powerful active force and an all-dependent passive one than that between watcher and watched. He who watches but is not watched is in complete control.²

Doubling up Allah's gaze over the inhabitants of the oriental realm is the gaze of the despot. At his court, people live under his or his minions' constant surveillance. At meetings, he may be looking, unseen, from behind a curtain. In his harem, a black eunuch sleeps between each two beauties, watching that nothing untoward happens.³ The children's chambers are lit up at night, to facilitate regular quick inspections.⁴

An eerie description of the despot's gaze was provided in 1835 (at the very end of our period, but still entirely in the spirit of the earlier travelogues) by François-René, the Viscount de Chateaubriand, a noted diplomat, traveler, and author.

Amidst prisons and bagnios rises a seraglio, the Capitol of slavery: 'tis here that a consecrated keeper carefully preserves the germs of pestilence and the primitive laws of tyranny. Pallid votaries are incessantly hovering about this temple, and thronging to offer their heads to the idol. Hurried on by a fatal power, nothing

can divert them from this sacrifice; the eyes of the despot attract the slaves, as the looks of the serpent are said to fascinate the birds on which he preys.⁵

Like the serpent's victims, the despot's subjects are fatally attracted to his gaze, but unlike the former, they do not actually *see* the despot's eyes. The oriental despot wants to monopolize his power of sight: blinding is one of his favorite punishments. The historically attested fact that Muslim rulers have often blinded their brothers to get rid of potential rivals receives prominent mention in all of the major travelogues. But brothers were hardly the only victims. A particularly gruesome incident from Persia is reported by Chardin:

The King gives a written order for a certain child to be blinded and this order is given to the first chance comer, for in Persia there is no official executioner. [...] Once the order is carried into the seraglio, it is quickly understood, provoking cries and weeping; but at last the child must be released. The eunuchs take him to the cruel messenger, who throws them the order, or as you would call it, the *lettre de cachet*, and then squatting down, he seizes the child, puts him across his knees with his face upturned and grips his head with his left arm. Then with one hand he opens his eyelids, and with the other takes his dagger by the tip, and rips out the pupils one after the other, still whole, and undamaged, as one does with an unripe walnut. He puts them in his handkerchief and takes them off to the King.⁶

The despot who blinds is an inversion of the fatherly Lord of Heaven who, both in Christian and Muslim religion and lore, gives the gift of extraordinary sight to his worshippers. The visions of the prophets and other inspired faithful are caused by God *augmenting* their ordinary visual perception, so that they can see not only this, ultimately illusory, world, but also the truer world that is God's. In contrast, the person blinded by the despotic lord of the Orient has even his ordinary vision taken away. The right to see all is only the despot's. And he must see all, for he is a jealous Lord.

There is something quintessentially twentieth-century about the experience of being constantly watched *as a topic*. Its phenomenology has only been developed in that period. Lacan writes:

I can feel myself under the gaze of someone whose eyes I do not see, not even discern. All that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others there. This window, if it gets a bit dark, and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straight-away a gaze.⁷

To Lacan, we *always* feel that someone hidden is watching us in this way. Heidegger makes a similar point:

Being is what it is not because Man sees [*anschaut*] it in the manner of subjective perception. Rather, Man is that which is watched by Being [*der vom Seienden Angeschaut*].⁸

In fiction, Kafka's recurrent nightmare of being judged by an unknown judge for unknown crimes is not exactly about being watched, but the experience he describes feels similar. A more direct representation is George Orwell's Big Brother, who is "watching you" in *1984*. And one encounters the theme everywhere in twentieth-century popular culture, from the grotesque objects with popping eyes in the early hallucinations of Hollywood animation, to the Eye of Sauron in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, to the *Police* lyrics: "Every move you make / Every step you take / I'll be watching you."⁹

That this concern with being watched took on particular force in the twentieth century probably reflects the intensified governmental control that citizens experienced, if to different degrees, under the totalitarian as well as the democratic regimes of the period. In the early period of orientalism, especially towards its end, there was no theoretical *awareness* of a system of surveillance as part of modern politics, but although the phenomenon would only be observed later, it was germinating then already. It was not evident to contemporaries that what was being formed was a new system of governance. But twentieth-century historiography, true to its own period, did discover in the germ the unreflected practice of surveillance and the unreflected experience of being watched, in early modernity.

I am, of course, describing what Michel Foucault called "pastoral" government, and its practice of surveillance that he termed "panoptic." The term comes from the "Panopticon," a prison designed so that the guards are stationed within a central shaft of a round building, with the prison cells arranged along the walls. In this arrangement, which is still essentially in use today, the guards can see the prisoners (because the cells have appropriately placed windows) but the prisoners cannot see them, although it is essential for the efficacy of the panopticon that they should know they are being watched. The Panopticon was invented by Jeremy Bentham, the English utilitarian philosopher, in 1791. In the following century it became common practice to build not only prisons but schools and hospitals, too, in a way that their inmates could be seen but not see those in charge of them. Foucault speaks of lights on in boarding-school dormitories, recalling the same technique as was reported from the sultan's court.

This new system of control is located by Foucault roughly at the end of the *ancien régime* in France at the end of the eighteenth century. In one of his most famous books, he distinguishes between "punishment" (physical restraint and torture) and "discipline" (regimes for inculcating self-restraint) as techniques for eliciting obedience: the one classic, the other more modern. *Discipline and Punish* is the name of the English translation, but the French original was called *Surveiller et punir*. The English translation was approved by Foucault, probably because, as his work developed, he recognized the importance of *self-surveillance* in modern governmental control: we learn to "watch ourselves." *Discipline* requires people to internalize a code of behavior; *surveillance*, not yet. Unfortunately, what was lost in the "improvement" from the French original to the English translation is that there was not a direct transition from medieval "punishment" to modern "discipline," but that the process passed through a long intermediate period, during which external surveillance techniques developed but internal discipline was not yet as fully developed, as it would later be as a means of political control.

And this was, I suggest, the period of contested absolutism, and especially its latter part, in the eighteenth century.

Absolute monarchy was a transitional stage between medieval and fully modern government. It introduced surveillance as a form of exercising power, though it did not yet fully rely on modern techniques of discipline as “self-government” (*le gouvernement de soi*).¹⁰ (It is worth investigating if the first targets of surveillance were the sovereign’s rivals, the nobility. Absolute monarchs attempted to restrict the independence of the aristocracy by keeping them in their sight. Louis XIV ordered many of the nobles to be present regularly at his court at Versailles. Similar policies were pursued by autocrats and would-be autocrats throughout the continent, including by the Tsar.) Self-surveillance (i.e. discipline), however, is the ultimate goal of all surveillance, when people are not only watched, but watch themselves.

The slow development of a disciplinary form of governmental control was accompanied, and perhaps even preceded, by the development of a disciplinary form of religious morality. Self-flagellation, literal or symbolic, becomes an act of discipline when its aim is no longer to expel a demon that travels from individual to individual, but the evil that is resident, always, in all of us, and therefore can be watched but not banished. To some degree, the moral hygiene of self-surveillance has always been part of Christianity, as it is of all religion; but it probably received a boost in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and continued to grow along with the rise of what Foucault called govern-mentality.

The graphic symbol of this new form of self-surveillance is the so-called Eye of Providence, or All-Seeing Eye. Known in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance already, it became a popular symbol in the eighteenth century. Since 1782 it has been on the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States, which has in recent times been featured on American currency (Figure 11.1). The Eye of Providence is an invisible source of control that sees the sins unseen by anyone else: the sins hidden in the soul of the transgressor. It is, really, the individual’s conscience,



Figure 11.1
Modern one-dollar note. Detail:
the Great Seal of the United States
including the Eye of Providence.

or the super-ego, imaged as emanating from God. But it is also a model of an external power that rules the individual by policing her self-discipline. The Founding Fathers certainly meant to eliminate absolutism, and were suspicious of despotic interference in private affairs, but intuited perhaps that they were founding a political system that would not only fail to eliminate surveillance, but take it to an unprecedented level.

Many of the American, and of the French, revolutionaries who established the “free world” were freemasons. They included many more than Washington, Franklin, Mirabeau, Lafayette.¹¹ The Masons claimed an ancient pedigree as a brotherhood descended from the builders of the pyramids and the Israelite Temple (as well as the Gothic cathedrals). The Eye of Providence became a very popular Masonic symbol, along with other Egyptian and ancient Israelite, oriental, motives. King Solomon, builder of the Second Temple and a benevolent despot *par excellence* in all the Abrahamic religions, was a particularly valued character in Masonic lore. Some Masonic lodges, such as the Asiatic Brethren of Vienna, expressed their soft-orientalist fantasies by adopting secret Arabic and Hebrew names.¹²

It seems that in this case, too, the oriental court was conceived as a sort of antipodal parody of the western experience. Occasionally, the oriental despot, who generally represented the fearsome visage of sublime power as an effacer of human liberty, even surfaced as an example of the benevolent ideal of pastoral government. In the German lands, where benevolent despotism rather than revolution held sway, Lessing’s Saladin and Mozart’s Sarastro and Pasha Selim were freemasonry-inspired figures of rulers that many in the West wished for themselves. For there was a deep-seated tradition in the Christian West of desire for complete obedience to a sublime power, in the hope of receiving pastoral care in return.

12 The bad shepherd

Pastoral government and its oriental discontents

European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.

Edward Said, *Orientalism*¹

This form of power so typical of the West, and unique, I think, in the entire history of civilizations, was born, or at least took its model from the fold, from politics seen as a matter of the sheep-fold.

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*²

Total submission to a benevolent, almighty power is as deep a desire in the western Christian psyche as in any other. It is a universal longing, no doubt: a consequence of the traumatic separation of ego from parent that we know from its staging in the psychoanalytical drama. But what accompanies that desire, and what cautions us against giving in to it, is the deep-down fear that total submission will not be met by total care, that we will lose ourselves in the authority of a sublime power that will then use us only for its own, selfish ends. Orientalism, at least in its early period, does not divide the world into a West that is religiously and politically assertive, and an East that is submissive. Obedience to authority is a value in East and West. The imagined difference is in how authority responds. The Christian ideal is of a paternal authority in heaven matched by a pastoral government on earth. Both respond to obedience with solicitousness. The orientalist's imagined society of the Muslim Orient, in contrast, puts its blind trust in a God who does not protect, and offers its blind obedience to a despot who does not care. This imagined dichotomy is never a confident assertion of complete difference, but an anxious projection onto the Orient of fears that one has about power in the West itself. Life surely challenges even the best Christian to deal with doubts about the benevolence of *her* God as well. And even the apparently best-intentioned of governments is suspected, sometimes just as subconsciously, of betraying our faith. In this chapter, I focus on orientalist projections of this political anxiety about modern governmentality. I will argue that, in the Christian West, faith in pastoral government (along with the anxieties it generates) recalls faith in divine grace. Here again, the political parallels the theological. And here again the Orient functions, to use Said's words, as the West's surrogate self.

The worldly pastorate, according to Foucault, begins in the Christian world in about the second or third century of the Common Era. For many centuries, it was not yet the worldly sovereign and his government, but the Church that took on the role of shepherd ("pastoral" means "shepherding," and "pastor" a shepherd). The Church was the first to institutionalize pastoral care, and it became a foundation of its power over the faithful. It is worth quoting Foucault at length to show that the Church's pastorate insisted on absolute obedience.

The Christian pastorate has, I think, organized something completely different that seems to me to be foreign to Greek practice, and this is what we would call the insistence on "pure obedience," that is to say, on obedience as a unitary, highly valued type of conduct in which the essence of its *raison d'être* is in itself. [...] The relationship of submission of one individual to another individual, correlating an individual who directs and an individual who is directed, is not only a condition of Christian obedience, it is its very principle. [...] The perfection of obedience consists in obeying an order, not because it is reasonable or because it entrusts you with an important task, but because it is absurd. [...] One obeys in order to be obedient, in order to arrive at a state of obedience. [...] The end point towards which the practice of obedience aims is what is called humility, which consists in feeling oneself the least of men, in taking orders from anyone, thus continually renewing the relationship of obedience, and above all in renouncing one's will. [...] So if there is an end to obedience, it is a state of obedience defined by the definitive and complete renunciation of one's own will. [...] And this is how Saint Benedict defines good monks, in chapter 5 of his *Rule*: "They no longer live by their free will, *ambulantes alieno judicio et imperio*, in marching under the judgment and *imperium* of another, they always desire that someone command them."³

For Protestants, in particular, the unquestioning acceptance of God's will, and the surrender of one's own will, is at the heart of the faith. Nietzsche, who declaimed that the "slave morality" of Christianity "understood nothing but the tyrannous," specifically ridiculed as a "slave-faith" the Christianity of a Luther, a Cromwell, or "any other northern barbarian." Here Nietzsche recognized the same alleged affinity between Northern European and Oriental religion that we have seen the English pre-romantics affirm so proudly. But Nietzsche derided it instead, as a corruption of the free, "southern" spirit of Greece and Rome, a corruption caused by transplanting an oriental faith onto unsuitable European terrain. Slave morality represented to him "the Orient, the *profound* Orient." Imposing an oriental religion and morality on the West was the work of "the oriental slave ... who thus took revenge on Rome and its noble, light-minded toleration, on the Roman "Catholicism" of faith ..."⁴

One can see where Nietzsche is coming from. Luther's famous doctrine of salvation by God's grace alone (and not by Man's works) was explicitly formulated against the notion that Man can be saved by his own will: "The world advances free will, the rational and natural approach of good works, as the

means of obtaining the forgiveness of sin. But it is impossible to gain peace of conscience by the methods and means of the world,” wrote Luther in his commentary on Corinthians. This critique of the ways of “the world” assumes, of course, a sublime source of truth beyond the world: one that is beyond a “rational and natural approach” in worldly terms. It is beyond ordinary comprehension, and requires the unreflecting yet unconditional acceptance of the other-worldly through faith. “It is a principle of the Bible that we are not to inquire curiously into the nature of God.” Luther quotes the Old Testament: “‘There shall no man see me, and live,’ Exodus 33:20,” and he adds:

All who trust in their own merits to save them disregard this principle and lose sight of the Mediator, Jesus Christ. [...] True Christian theology does not inquire into the nature of God, but into God’s purpose and will in Christ, whom God incorporated in our flesh to live and to die for our sins. [...] Begin with Christ. He came down to earth, lived among men, suffered, was crucified, and then He died, standing clearly before us, so that our hearts and eyes may fasten upon Him. Thus we shall be kept from climbing into heaven in a curious and futile search after the nature of God.⁵

Christ, to Luther, demands total obedience to God’s will as opposed to one’s own free will, a passive obedience regardless of whether or not God chooses for his own reasons to favor us with his grace. This is identical to the unconditional obedience of the stereotypical (and indeed, typical) Muslim worshipper to Allah: one common translation of *islam* is “submission.”

Neither is the parallel made between divine and earthly government unique to the imagined, or real, Orient. As Foucault points out, it also characterized the medieval and early modern conception of the Christian sovereign’s government. “Insofar as he governs,” Foucault writes (without any particular attention to the oriental analogy), “the [Christian] sovereign does nothing other than reproduce a model [that] is quite simply that of God’s government on Earth.”⁶ Elsewhere, he states that

God is the shepherd (*berger*) of men. In a word, this metaphor of the shepherd, this reference to pastorship allows a type of relationship between God and the sovereign to be designated, in that if God is the shepherd of men, and if the king is also the shepherd of men, then the king is, as it were, the subaltern shepherd to whom God has entrusted the flock of men and who, at the end of the day and the end of his reign, must restore the flock he has been entrusted with to God. Pastorship is a fundamental type of relationship between God and men and the king participates, as it were, in this pastoral structure of the relationship between God and men.⁷

Obviously, total submission to both God and his designated earthly ruler is made possible by ultimate faith in the Lord’s goodness: I give myself over to you completely, without questioning what you wish to do with me, but I trust you and know you will not hurt me. The difference between the sovereignty of

the Christian God and of the Christian sovereign, as compared to Allah (and Jehovah) and the oriental despot, is, from the traditional Christian point of view, simply that the first is real and trustworthy, and the second imaginary and treacherous. The Christian and the Muslim both obey their Lord unconditionally. But, as far as the Christian sees it, her faith in the goodness of the Lord is justified, while the Muslim's is deluded. Neither the Muslim's false god nor her selfish despot cares at all for her. He whom the Muslim hears and obeys with such, often touching, devotion, is not her friend. In the most nightmarish scenarios, he is indeed her enemy. This perverse Lord ensures his slaves' submission not by loving them but by robbing them of all vitality. The life-giving Love of the Christian God is matched in the negative by the death-giving tyranny of the oriental Master, whether Allah, sultan, or another form of earthly ruler.

In the terms of psychoanalytical mythology, the oriental despot, who rules through a coterie of eunuchs, administers to all his subjects a symbolic castration. In the imagery, created by seventeenth-century travelers and scholars, and developed in the eighteenth not only by essayists and philosophers but also by Gothic writers such as Samuel Beckford, the despot's court has a deathly glow of a witch's Sabbath: a splendid ruler is served by a zombie-like army of castrated guards, cooks, and servers, and seeks the embraces of pallid harem girls.

The pastoral ruler can be compared not only to God the Father of the Christian Holy Trinity but also to Aristotle's head of the family, the father whose love for his family sets the example for a good king's love for his people. Foucault describes the "good shepherd" of government in terms almost identical to Aristotle's description of the "rightly established and strictly just" ruler, which we had encountered earlier:⁸

This is precisely the difference between the good and the bad shepherd. The bad shepherd only thinks of good pasture for his own profit, for fattening the flock that he will be able to sell and scatter, whereas the good shepherd thinks only of his flock and of nothing else.⁹

The notion of governmentality and the Orient

This notion of "the pastorate" is related to Foucault's concept of "governmentality" (*gouvernementalité*), the modern form of governing people that conceives of its target as a "population" to be surveyed and managed, ostensibly at least, for the population's own benefit.¹⁰ Such a governmentality only begins to characterize the West in the mid-seventeenth century, when for the first time Europeans debate the art of governing as a distinctive practice. However, governmentality does grow out of the pastorate. Modern government does not replace the pastorate; rather, it develops it.

The two concepts – of the pastorate and of governmentality – were developed together by Foucault in his lectures to the Collège de France during the term of 1977–78.¹¹ One of the notions that Foucault no more than outlined, but which we

have an opportunity to develop a little further here, is the oriental origin of the pastoral relationship, and indeed the oriental origin of the notion of “governing men.” Foucault did not think that “the idea that one could govern men, or that one did govern men, was a Greek idea.” Rather, the origin of this idea “should be sought in the East, in a pre-Christian East first of all, and then in the Christian East, and in two forms: first, in the idea and organization of a pastoral type of power, and second, in the practice of spiritual direction, the direction of souls” (123). And again, “You never find the Greeks having the idea that the gods lead men like a pastor, a shepherd, leads his flock” (125). In short, the western Christian pastorate comes from an oriental idea.

However, Foucault suggests that the transfer of the pastoral ideal from the divine government of God to the earthly government of a man or men *was* something unique to the Christian West. Among the Hebrews, Foucault writes, “there was no pastoral institution strictly speaking. Within Hebrew society, no one occupied the position of pastor in relation to the others” (152). Except for David (an exception Foucault, surprisingly, seems to simply dismiss), “In the Hebrews the king is never designated positively, directly, or immediately as a shepherd. There is no shepherd outside of God” (152).

What I would now like to show is that the Christian pastorate, institutionalized, developed, and reflected from around the third century, is actually completely different from a pure and simple revival, transposition, or continuation of what we have been able to identify as an above all Hebraic and Eastern theme. I think that the Christian pastorate is absolutely, profoundly, I would almost say essentially different from the pastoral theme we have already identified. (164)

It is different, Foucault suggests, because 1) the pastoral theme in Christianity acquired new, specifically Christian content, 2) in Christianity the pastorate gave rise “to an immense institutional network that we find nowhere else and [which] was certainly not present in Hebraic civilization,” and 3) especially because only in Christianity did the pastorate engender “an art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men, an art of monitoring them and urging them on step by step, an art with the function of taking charge of men collectively and individually throughout their life and at every moment of their existence” (164–165). In short, only the Christian version of the pastorate generated the notion and practice of what in its full-fledged form would be “governmentality.”

It would take us too far afield from our stated path to argue in detail what I think is obvious: Foucault is showing himself quite ignorant here of both Jewish and Muslim history (and even of the Jewish and Muslim present). It is, of course, beyond dispute that the pastoral theme acquired a new content in Christianity, but this in itself does not demonstrate its “absolute” and “profound” difference from the Hebrew case. The immense institutional network of the Christian pastorate may or may not have had an equivalent in Old Testament Judaism, and certainly did not have one in the medieval Jewish diaspora, but it is arguably comparable

to the situation in Islam, during the Caliphates and after. The art of conducting and manipulating men at every moment of their existence was and is, probably, more developed in Jewish and Muslim jurisprudence, with its rulings on every detail down to ways to make love and to maintain personal hygiene, than in any form of Christianity. Here Foucault was simply wrong, and strangely exhibits the same supersessionist desire as those traditional Christian exegetes who struggle at all costs to find a radically new message in Christianity, to be contrasted with its Hebrew-oriental antecedents.

Nevertheless, what we must deal with here is not facts, including facts of the history of theology, but perceptions. And there is in fact a difference between the practice of governmentality and that of *imagined* oriental despotism. If we focus only on the phenomenological nature of the difference – how obedience to political power is experienced – then we encounter quite a fundamental contrast. Total submission is a value in both modern western governmentality and oriental despotism. But the western Christian subject keeps within an *internalized* set of limits and prohibitions, while the oriental one obeys a set of external commands. Only the western Christian subject is truly disciplined, practicing *gouvernement de soi*. A disciplined self is essential to the western form of obedience. The eastern subject simply, one might say robotically, obeys external commands. The western self *wills* its subjection. The eastern self, if there even is such a thing, has no will at all, having exchanged it for the will of a sublime power.

Governmentality, instead of substituting its will for that of the population, controls the population by far more complex and subtle means.

These mechanisms [of control] do not attempt, at least not primarily or in a fundamental way, to make use of a relationship of obedience between a higher will, of the sovereign, and the wills of those subjected to his will. In other words, the mechanism of security does not function on the axis of the sovereign–subject relationship, ensuring the total and as it were passive obedience of individuals to their sovereign. They are connected to what the physiocrats called physical processes, which could be called natural processes, and which we could also call elements of reality. These mechanisms do not tend to a nullification of phenomena in the form of the prohibition, “you will not do this,” nor even, “this will not happen,” but in the form of a progressive self-cancellation of phenomena by the phenomena themselves. In a way, they involve the delimitation of phenomena within acceptable limits, rather than the imposition of a law that says no to them. So mechanisms of security are not put to work on the sovereign–subjects axis or in the form of the prohibition. (66–67)

An accompanying change is the disappearance of the radical gap between the ruler who does all the commanding and the “multiplicity” who does all the obeying. In the premodern, pre-governmental system there were also separate levels at which power was exercised: the state, the church, the estate, the family, for example. But now they are all harmonized into one whole throughout which

power is exercised in a relatively homologous manner, and one where each level of power harmonizes with others above and next to it. Foucault illustrates the change by comparing the notion of the sovereign in Machiavelli's *Prince*¹² with the extensive "anti-Machiavellian" literature – which is where, he believes, governmentality first received its mature articulation.

Machiavelli's Prince, or how he is represented in this literature, is by definition, in terms of what was seen as the book's fundamental principle, unique in his principality and in a position of externality and transcendence in relation to it. However, in these authors we see that governing, the people who govern, and the practice of government, are multifarious since many people govern – the father of a family, the superior in a convent, the teacher, the master in relation to the child or disciple – so that there are many governments in relation to which the Prince governing his state is only one particular mode. On the other hand, all these governments are internal to society itself, or to the state. It is within the state that the father governs his family, the superior governs the convent, and so on. There is then both a plurality of forms of government and the immanence of practices of government to the state, a multiplicity and immanence of this activity that radically distinguishes it from the transcendent singularity of Machiavelli's Prince. (93)

Foucault goes as far as to say that, during the process he is describing, "government" replaces "sovereignty," so that "it will be possible one day to say, 'the king reigns, but he does not govern.'" (76)¹³ Note that this situation is the absolute opposite of the sublime power we discussed earlier, and especially as formulated by Hegel in his concept of oriental religion and oriental despotism. There, the mechanism that maintains the Lord in power does definitely, and in "a primarily or in a fundamental way, ... make use of a relationship of obedience between a higher will, of the sovereign, and the wills of those subjected to his will." For once, Foucault is being quite Hegelian. Indeed, if we substituted the "mechanism" of rule for Hegel's idea of God, we would see that before governmentality the sovereign (of both heaven and earth) is separated from his charges as the sublime One facing the many; while with governmentality we come to the stage that resembles Hegel's "absolute religion" and his ideal of the state where Power is no longer sublime in the sense of completely transcending the world, but rather acts with and within it.

During the transition in the West from "pure" sovereignty to governmentality, the Orient functioned in two ways.

First, it supplied a comparative example for the more conscious exercise of political power that characterizes governmentality. Especially during the incipient period of governmentality, which Foucault identifies as between 1550 and 1680, a number of classic reports by western observers appeared which established the reputation of Ottoman government for many generations to come. For most of the period, the Ottoman Empire appeared to be at least as well organized, and certainly as powerful, as any state in the West. Many of the canonical travelogues

were taken up by a description, sometimes meticulous, of the oriental manner of governing.

Paul Rycaut's *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, for example, is divided into three parts, one on politics ("politie"), one on religion, and one on the militia. Here and there more or less violent and erotic stories are, it is true, offered to break the monotony of what is, nevertheless, essentially a rather bureaucratic catalogue of foreign policies. Even the part on religion is at least as interested in the worldly organization of religious bodies and the performance of public rituals as in the Muslim conception of heaven. The third part, on the military, is even more clearly related to the empire's political life (see Rycaut's table of contents in the Appendix). Rycaut frequently passes judgment on which features of the Ottoman government are beneficial, and which are not, for its subjects, with an eye to what England could learn from it.¹⁴

However, while the travelers recommended some policies to their home governments, their works also added to the reputation of the oriental court as despotic, arbitrary, arrogant, and remote; in short, as the opposite of governmental. Montesquieu and Hegel (and Hegel in part perhaps via Montesquieu) distilled from the travelogues a picture of oriental despotism that would warn of the consequences of a government that rules for its own benefit and not that of its subjects.

I believe it is best to read the travellers' descriptions of oriental despotism, especially in the seventeenth century, as addressing in part fears about the potential of the new form of government that was taking shape at home. They address the nagging fear that this new form of government is not a minder of sheep but a wolf in lamb's clothing. What I am suggesting is that oriental despotism is also, among the many other related things we have already discussed, a parody of governmentality. Like all successful parody, the oriental anti-pastorate is not the *opposite* of its target (western governmentality) but, on the contrary, a means to unmask and expose shaky ground under lofty edifice.¹⁵ The imagined Orient provided a warning about the worms of tyranny within the body politic of modern, pastoral, governmental society (though there was then no Foucault to make this function of orientalism explicit). This is the sense in which the West feared in the Orient, to repeat Said once more, its hidden, "underground self."

Orientalism is a process for generating a radical difference where we fear similarity. Both the West and the imagined (and real) Orient value total submission to authority. The difference is that in the western ideal this arrangement functions is for the benefit of those whose obedience it seeks. It expresses Love: the providential care of God for Man in the theological sphere, and the pastoral concern of government in the political. In the imagined oriental version, on the other hand, the system functions purely for its own sake. It is a hollow mechanism of aloof, sublime Power that cares not for those that it commands.

What frightens most about the imagined Orient is that this unemotional machinery manages to produce impassioned devotees, ready to die and to kill. Rycaut writes that "it is reported by those who are Souldiers, and have experienced the Valour of the Turks in Fight, that their Victories are obtained by multitudes of Men, rather than by art, or Military Discipline."¹⁶ Evidently, though they

may have lacked the discipline that comes with formal military training, they lacked nothing when it came to obedience. Otherwise, how would it be possible to send the “multitudes” to their death, without the slightest sign of protest from them?

If the fighters of imagined Islam go to their deaths willingly, it is because they have no will of their own, having turned it over to their Lord.

13 Sex in Paradise

What suicide fighters die for

Sex in preference to life – that is the secret of the Mahommedans’ blind obedience to their Law, and the explanation of their famed courage!

Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan’s Court*¹

The self-sacrifice of Muslim fighters is what, above all, marks the image of the fanatical Muslim today. It was also important in early orientalism. As we approach the end of book, we will face a little more explicitly the connections between then and now that our imagination cannot help but build, no matter how much we wish to guard against anachronism.

Needless to say, the Islamists’ suicide attacks occur today in social and geopolitical conditions that are very unlike the historical clashes between “Turks” and Christians. Yet, at least in the imagination if not in reality, there *is* a timeless quality to fanaticism and the action of the suicide attacker. It is this generalizable quality of fanaticism that allowed the German idealists to study it as a *form*. Students of contemporary Islamist suicide bombing, on both the left and the right, still grant, we will see, this destructive activity the status of a form of behavior that spans geographical locations and historical periods and widely different kinds of political *content*. Talal Asad, for example, denies that Muslim suicide attackers are motivated by some timeless, ingrained violent tendency *in their religion*. Yet he does locate a psychological and sociological complex – the decision to destroy everything, even oneself, for the creation of a desirable world – in suicide attacks, whether committed by Muslims or not. He thus contributes to what we might call a “philosophy of fanaticism” in the tradition of Kant and Hegel, a tradition that is willing to consider terror as something that, although in its actual manifestations prompted by historical circumstance, can be studied comparatively throughout history, on philosophical and psychological grounds.² In this chapter, I use some contemporary thinking about Islamic suicide fighters to reflect on Islamic self-sacrifice and violence as seen or imagined in the period of early orientalism. There will also be obvious implications in the other direction, from our study of suicide attacks then to our own time, but these I will leave more or less implicit.

One thing that remains constant, from the orientalist (especially the “hard orientalist”) point of view, is the need to explain or, better, to explain *away*, the

Muslim suicide attacker's motivation. How does the follower of a despised religion become capable of offering himself up in his Lord's cause? Even if from an orientalist point of view the cause is vile and the Lord is a fake, the act of self-sacrifice as such remains something noble and worthy of admiration. Sacrificing oneself for a cause one believes in does, after all, suggest the commendable quality of courage, as much in the West as in the East.

Certainly from a western and Christian point of view, self-sacrifice in the name of a higher Master and a higher Good – martyrdom – is not only a demonstration of personal honor but even more so an act of sanctification, of increasing the presence of the Holy in this world. Even in Greco-Roman antiquity, the acceptance of death as a penalty for remaining moral was a common theme: Socrates meekly accepted the death sentences passed by the Athenian court; Cato chose to die rather than surrender to Caesar. Christ's self-sacrifice to redeem humanity from its sins is less political. (In fact, Christ was happy to render to Caesar what Caesar thought was Caesar's.) When, like Socrates and Cato, Jesus accepted his own death, his goal was not to spite an evil worldly Lord but rather, to obey the true Lord of Heavens.

It is important, of course, that Jesus (like Socrates or Cato) did not kill anyone, which makes him something other than a suicide attacker. But the same cannot be said of the thousands of Christian soldiers throughout the ages who were willing to die fighting for him. It is quite well recognized that although the Crusades offered material rewards, they did not logically justify the undertaking in which most fighters suffered unbearably or died. The motivation of the early Crusaders, at least, was spiritual: at a time of intense preoccupation with sin and the afterlife, fighters saw their quest as a ticket to Paradise. The honorable reputation, too, that is left behind in the world when someone dies for the Lord, was a prime value in the Christian tradition.³ The penitence of some of the Roman executioners and of the treacherous Judas demonstrates, in the New Testament, the effects of an honorable death. That their Savior had "died well" by submitting without cowardice to torture and execution, has always been felt to be valuable symbolic capital wielded by Christians in the effort to gain converts.

In sum, self-sacrifice is the ultimate act of mastery of sublime faith over the worldly defenses of the body; and it is a value shared by Muslims and Christians. It is absolutely imperative from the point of view of anti-Muslim Christian apologetics, therefore, to explain Muslim self-sacrifice away as something else. The act of explaining away must, first, show how what seems to be Muslim honor is not. Next, it must clarify what desire, if not the quest for honor, motivates Muslims' self-sacrifice. The solution was often, as it still is, to imagine the Muslim suicide attacker as seeking not spiritual fulfillment, but bodily pleasures in an intensely sensuous Paradise.

Muslim honor?

To be fair, not all western writers were entirely reluctant to recognize honorable self-sacrifice among Muslims. Concerning a major Ottoman general, Rycaut writes that

Kara Mustapha Passaw after he had been so successful in all matters of his charge, and proved so excellent an Instrument of victories and services to his Master, that he was applauded by all to be a most happy and fortunate Minister, was so sensible of his own condition, and the favour of his Prince, that he confessed he was now arrived to the greatest glory and perfection he could in this life aspire to, and only wanted the holy Martyrdom, to die by the order and sentence of the Grand Signior as the reward of his faithfulness, and the consummation of all his Honours.⁴

This is probably the same Kara Mustafa who would lead the Ottomans to defeat in 1683 at Vienna. His wishes would come true at the end of the same year, when he was executed at Belgrade, his head placed in a velvet bag for delivery to the sultan. Legend says that Kara Mustafa had urged the executioners to “tie the knot hard.”

Rycaut offers no explicit explanation for Kara Mustapha’s death wish, except that its aim is to increase his “Honours.” His description of Kara Mustafa’s desire to offer his head to the sultan is possibly meant to be slightly amusing, but even so one detects in it an unmistakable tone of respect. This is quite in keeping with a traditional image in the West of a brave and honorable Muslim warrior-lord. The image of a noble Muslim was formed around the figure of “Saladin” in the Middle Ages, and never disappeared entirely. I have already mentioned Lessing’s Saladin in *Nathan the Wise*, and also in other characters such as the sultan Selim in Mozart’s *Abduction from the Seraglio*.⁵ Eventually, an entire pulp fiction industry would grow up portraying the unflinching heroism of desert Bedouin raiders, often making explicit references to the chivalry of Muslim fighters recognized in medieval epics like the *Song of Roland*.

Yet for those who had a harsher assessment of the Muslims – and a harsher assessment was demanded by a simple faith in Christian superiority – Muslim self-sacrifice had to be attributed to something other than honor. In this respect, writers like Rycaut who have actually been to the Orient were far more understanding of Muslims than the thinkers who, from their armchairs, processed their travel reports as a support for making philosophical arguments. Montesquieu, for example, asserts that “*Honor* is not the principle of despotic states [as it is of monarchies]: as the men in them are all equal, one cannot prefer oneself to others; as men in them are all slaves, one can prefer oneself to nothing.”⁶ In Montesquieu’s scheme of political systems, it is aristocratic government that is based on the principle of honor, while tyranny, which is typical of the Orient, is based on fear. For Montesquieu, this poses a dilemma. If tyrannical government is based in fear, then how does it in reality stimulate acts that appear like the ultimate example of courage? How can one explain the Muslim fighter who, like the legendary defenders of Sparta against the Persian hordes, fights valiantly, knowing that the fight will lead to his death? Is that not the epitome of honorable conduct?

Montesquieu attempts to rescue his prejudice through a complicated argument. He appeals to a universal process that he has observed in most human passions and behavior. Mental or physical qualities may become “corrupted,” and in that way change their character to something quite distinct from the initial state. In

Europe, the basic physical sense of self-preservation (*amour de soi*, a principle of despotism), for example, tends to become “corrupted” (we would say “sublimated”) by turning into a concern with honor (*amour propre*, the principle of monarchy). This is because *amour de soi* (selfishness) in the West always contains a bit of *amour propre* (self-respect). Similarly, in Europe, physical sexual desire contains an element of spiritual love, and can turn into it.

Neither process takes place in Asia. Selfishness remains that, never turning into self-respect – or else people would not as easily accept being slaves. Sexual desire does not lead to the “corruption” resulting in “true love” within the couple, but to its own logical conclusion in ever-increasing promiscuity, resulting at first in polygamy and then – when the plenitude of women no longer satisfies – in homosexuality.

Fear, too, is pure in Asia; free of any admixtures that might corrupt it. Again *amour de soi*, the impulse of self-preservation, which gives rise to the fear of the almighty Lord, does not here get “corrupted” and does not become *amour propre* (self-respect, the foundation of the search for honor). Instead, obedience to the Lord, which to start with was the result of the desire for self-preservation in the face of a fearsome power, continues to work its own logic until it forgets its origins and becomes *obedience for its own sake*.

What could be the explanation for such unusual, one must say abnormal, behavior? Why do orientals behave differently from Europeans? The answer is: the climate. Like horses, people in hot countries easily lose their will to resist a power they fear: in the case of a horse, the trainer; in the case of the despot’s subject, the despot. Once trained to obey at the cost of their own desire, they are prepared to obey to the death. Thus it is that selfish cowardice becomes apparent heroism – but only *apparent* heroism. The oriental does not acquire a disciplined heroic self, but rather gives up his self altogether. There is no real honor in that.⁷

According to Montesquieu, the empire of climate is “the first, the most powerful, of all empires.”⁸ And in hot climates

Nature, which has given these peoples a weakness that makes them timid, has also given them such a lively imagination that everything strikes them to excess. The same delicacy of organs that makes them fear death serves also to make them dread a thousand things more than death. The same sensibility makes the Indians both flee all perils and brave them all.⁹

The climate provides a nature-given reinforcement for one of the chief imagined characteristics of all fanatics in all climates: a surfeit of imagination in comparison with judgment and reason.

Montesquieu’s peculiar explanation of Muslim courage as a sign of deep-seated fear must have sounded as painfully artificial in his own time as it does today. It is hard to believe that the Muslim fighter’s apparent daring is the expression, even at some level that is completely hidden and invisible, of fear. It is just intuitively too obvious that someone who is able to sacrifice his life is *not* more, but less afraid than someone who can’t. In fact the suicide attacker is obviously not motivated by fear, or by riches; the suicide attacker cannot be bribed with worldly

possessions, since he is prepared to give up the greatest worldly value: life itself. What he in fact aims for is of course honor and justice, even if his sense of honor and/or justice is, from the outsider's point of view, mistaken or perverted. But honor and justice are not motivations that one ascribes to one's enemies, lest one's own cause appear less than honorable and just. Concerning the Palestinian suicide bomber today, Hage speaks of "exigophobia," a reluctance to explain.¹⁰ Perhaps in the early period there was, already, a similar refusal to attribute understandable, more or less "normal" motivations to Muslim attackers, and so to portray them as fighting for legitimate or at least intelligible goals. And so because the suicide attacker ostensibly has no discernible end for which his violence is the means, it appears that he is willing to risk his life, and to destroy other people's lives, for no reason at all, except that he is told to do so by a despotic system that itself represents, as we have seen, nothing but raw domination. From this point of view, the suicide attacker is not motivated by any desire, perhaps not even a desire to serve his Master, but simply puts into effect his Master's command. He appears as but a peg in the gigantic, impersonal machine of pure power that is imagined oriental despotism.

The suicide attacker seems in this way to resemble the killer cyborgs and zombies of twentieth- and twenty-first-century popular fiction, whom Slavoj Žižek describes as possessing drive but no desire. The programmed killing machine played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in James Cameron's film classic *The Terminator* cannot be deterred from its destructive goal, because it has been constructed for that goal alone.¹¹ It cannot be bribed by an offer to fulfill a cherished desire, since it has no desires at all. Desire can perhaps be appeased, but not the relentless drive of a killing machine.

The psychological profile of a person with total dedication but no desire fits well the individual who emerges from some recent discussions of how the sublime is experienced. John Milbank writes that the power of the sublime causes indifference to desire and the things of this world.¹² Thomas Weiskel suggests in psychoanalytical terms that the attachment to the sublime favors the Father as the source of Law, against the Mother as the object of desire.¹³ In discussing mostly contemporary Islamist and, especially, Palestinian terrorism, Bruno Étienne proposes that, in the terrorist, subjecthood is completely extinguished through the disappearance of desire and its replacement by the will of an Other.¹⁴

The black-eyed

And yet, the imagined Muslim suicide fighter resembles a killing robot only in part. Like the cyborg, he has no desire for the things of this world, but he does very much have a desire for the rewards of Paradise. For this reason, the image of the fighter without desire does not really fit the Islamist terrorist. Lack of desire seems generally to mean lack of emotion. But we have seen that, on the contrary, the fanatic is characterized by a surfeit of affect. In Hegel's view, in fact, his emotional charge tends to the infinite.

The trope of the Muslim suicide fighter anxious to enter Paradise has long been familiar in the Christian West. As Hegel explains it, the oriental mind is, just

because it separates a sublime One from mundane existence, by nature potentially suicidal. He who wishes to erase the separation between this world and the Beyond (yet considers the two to be absolutely incompatible) will desire to end his “corporeal limitation” (in plain language: to kill his body to liberate his soul). He therefore offers to his God his own corporeal demise. Among Muslims, “the highest merit is to die for the Faith. He who perishes for it in battle, is sure of Paradise.”¹⁵

Some of the quranic passages about Paradise are among the most familiar to western Christians, and have been so for centuries. On a literal reading, the Paradise of the Qur’an is sensuous, surprisingly rich in what one might think of as earthly delights. The Qur’an and subsequent Muslim sources often describe Paradise as a garden, *al-jannah*, with rivers and fountains.¹⁶ Of all this imagery, what filtered into the western consciousness above all are the “companions” that the deceased will meet in heaven, known as “houris” (*hūrīyah*). The word etymologically means something like “white-eyed,” referring to the luster of these celestial beings’ eyeballs, but they have widely been described in the West as “black-eyed virgins,”¹⁷ presumably echoing Muslim lore, which asserts that the whiteness of their pupils is accentuated by the deep black of their pupils. Islamic interpretations of the union between the righteous deceased and the *houris* range from spiritual communion to endless sex. (Note how a similar interpretation is possible for some of the most famous classic Islamic poets – Hafiz, Rumi – who expressed the love between God and humans in obviously sexual metaphors.¹⁸) Yet predictably, the western stereotype seizes only on the most lascivious interpretation. According to that, arrivals in Paradise are treated to a sexual experience with the *houris* that far exceeds anything on earth. Accordingly, the desire of the Muslim fighter to enter Paradise comes across as a wish to have sex with the *houris*.

In the Middle Ages already, lust after the heavenly virgins was ascribed to one of the most enduring examples of the fanatical Muslim fighter: the famed sect of “Assassins.” More faithfully described as *hashshashin*, these were reputed killers who murdered anyone upon the command of their leader. The factual basis here is in the rebellion of the Nizari branch of Isma’ili Islam against the Abassid Caliphate, under the leadership of Hassan i-Sabbah, who lived from the mid-eleventh to the mid-twelfth century. (The name *hashshashin* is probably derived from “Hassan” and not, as the orientalist Sylvestre de Sacy had thought, from the “hashish” that, allegedly, the assassins were given before leaving for a kill.¹⁹) The commander of the Hashshashin is often referred to as the “Old Man of the Mountain.” The term occurs in Marco Polo’s *Travels*. Polo (1254–1324) was, however, merely retelling a story that was already well known, having been reported by other travelers.²⁰ It is quite possible that it relies on an original Arabic account. Legend has it that the label “Old Man of the Mountain” was worn in the late twelfth century by the Nizari leader Rashid ad-Din Sinan in Syria.²¹

In Polo’s version,

The Old Man was called in their language Aloadin. He had caused a certain valley between two mountains to be enclosed, and had turned it into a

garden, the largest and most beautiful that ever was seen, filled with every variety of fruit. In it were erected pavilions and palaces the most elegant that can be imagined, all covered with gilding and exquisite painting. And there were runnels too, flowing freely with wine and milk and honey and water; and numbers of ladies and of the most beautiful damsels in the world, who could play on all manner of instruments, and sung most sweetly, and danced in a manner that it was charming to behold. For the Old Man desired to make his people believe that this was actually Paradise. So he had fashioned it after the description that Mahommet gave of his Paradise, to wit, that it should be a beautiful garden running with conduits of wine and milk and honey and water, and full of lovely women for the delectation of all its inmates. And sure enough the Saracens of those parts believed that it was Paradise!²²

The Old Man of the Mountain would allow eager youths in small groups into his valley,

some four, or six, or ten at a time, having first made them drink a certain potion which cast them into a deep sleep, and then causing them to be lifted and carried in. [...] When therefore they awoke, and found themselves in a place SO charming, they deemed that it was Paradise in very truth. And the ladies and damsels dallied with them to their hearts' content, so that they had what young men would have; and with their own good will they never would have quitted the place.²³

After the youths fall asleep in the valley they are brought to the Old Man's palace, who asks them in the company of other visitors where they had been. When they say that they had been in Paradise and that it looks just like the Qur'an says it does, they impress all those present with a great desire to go there. They themselves, securely convinced of the existence of Paradise and its pleasures, will do anything for the Man who had shown them the way there. All he had to do was to say,

"Go thou and slay So and So; and when thou returnest my Angels shall bear thee into Paradise. And shouldst thou die, natheless even so will I send my Angels to carry thee back into Paradise." So he caused them to believe; and thus there was no order of his that they would not affront any peril to execute, for the great desire they had to get back into that Paradise of his.²⁴

What Polo explicitly calls a "desire" for Paradise is a desire for sensual delight. Apparently, the future *hashshashin* are driven by testosterone. But the sexual object of their drive is, uncannily, located in the world beyond. Certainly, we know very well that the object of desire can change without decreasing the strength of the passion.²⁵ In this case, the assassins move the object of their desire beyond this world, into Paradise.

Rycaut, too, makes mention of the *houris*, but not in his case as motivating suicidal combat. Rather, to him the big-eyed beauties are a fiction designed to trick the gullible into becoming Muslims. Rycaut says of Muhammad:

what knots of Argument he could not unty, he cut, and made his spiritual power as large as his temporal; made his precepts easie and pleasant, and acceptable to the fancy and appetite, as well as to the capacity of the vulgar: representing heaven to them, not in a spiritual manner, or with delights unexpressible, and ravishments known only in part to illuminated souls; but with gross conceptions of the beauty of Women with great eyes, of the duration of one act of carnal copulation for the space of sixty years, and of the beastly satisfaction of gluttonous palate; things absurd and ridiculous to wise and knowing men; but yet capable to draw multitudes of professors, and carnal defenders of its verity.²⁶

Rycaut's Muhammad repeats the medieval trope of the Prophet as the crafty manipulator who lies about spiritual matters to his impressionable followers in order to bind them to himself and his religion. (The Old Man in Polo's story is also a trickster of this type.) The *houri* is an imaginary character in a conspiracy that employs cynical sexploitation in order to entrap gullible young Muslims, like Greek sailors trapped by the Sirens. It is the fatal attraction of the beautiful, black-eyed virgins that motivates a Muslim to become a violent, mindless, and self-destructive follower of fanatical Islam. Thus the irresistible draw of the purely abstract One is concretized (and feminized²⁷) as the force of a strange desire, a perverse longing for bodily pleasure that needs to be purchased by killing the body.

As noted earlier, Thomas Weiskel suggests that in the sublime, one identifies with a higher authority in order to resist the temptation of sensual excess.²⁸ In the case of the imagined Muslim suicide killer, however, the temptation gets strangely sublimated, seeking a superior substitute in an even more sensuous other-worldly existence. The archive of the orientalist imagination contains few if any examples of a suicide killer who is dissuaded from his task by the offer of sex with beautiful women here, on this earth. This rejection of bodily pleasure in this world for a holier union in Paradise is in line with Kant's conception of what the fanatic wants – a union with the Sublime. The *houri* as the object of desire definitively brands the Muslim suicide fighter as a fanatic rather than a mere enthusiast. For the fanatic (unlike the enthusiast) is someone who cannot contemplate the purely abstract nature of sublimity. He succumbs, instead, to the illusion that the Sublime manifests itself *embodied* in a concrete entity (here, the *houri*).

He does so in a grotesque way. In truth, no one can be expected to *seriously* believe that a suicide fighter offers up his life in order to have heavenly sex. Such a thing does indeed belong, as Rycaut put it, to "things absurd and ridiculous to wise and knowing men." The suggestion has always been a joke, a contemptuous insult in the same category as medieval Christian propaganda about the sexually perverse character of the Prophet Muhammad. It belongs to the carnivalesque register of orientalism, whose fascinating history has not yet been sufficiently

told, but which ranges from mock combat by late-medieval Hungarian knights dressed in fake Turkish armor, to the fat Turk of the *commedia dell'arte*, to the turbaned magicians of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fair grounds, and to modernist manifestations like Stravinsky's bearded Muslim woman in *The Rake's Progress*. All such spectacle turns the Orient into the land of the abnormal curio, in order to cope with the tensions raised by the realization that what one fears or dislikes there is very much familiar back home as well.

The Muslim fanatic is not the opposite of a good Christian, but rather represents the underground pathological potential of what the Christian himself values in obedience to a sublime power. When the Lord of Heaven becomes Allah instead of God the Father, divine grace becomes despotic oppression, and obedience to the Lord becomes a suicidal and murderous self-delusion.

Epilogue on the value of submission

A eulogy for soft orientalism

... a human world – that is a world of reciprocal recognitions.

Franz Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*¹

It is tempting to end, in the didactic style of writing during the period I have covered, with a moral conclusion. Does all that has been said mean that we should abandon belief in any difference between the Christian West and the Muslim East? And, to keep closer to our specific subject matter, must we reject all suggestion that the East is the homeland of sublime power and limitless submission? I do not believe so. The imagined division between East and West need be overcome not by denying all difference between them, but rather by resolutely affirming the presence of one in the other.

I am not certain that anyone could come up with objective criteria for deciding if the Orient has *really* been more despotic than the West, and I rather doubt that it was. Nevertheless, the association of the Muslim Orient with the *positive* value of submission to the unpredictable power of the Other – “Divine Providence” in the language of Christianity – is asserted not only in the West but also in the East. “Submission” is a common translation of “Islam.” More precisely, “Islam” is faith in the goodness of the sublime power that we submit to, or in other words, just the kind of faith that, we have seen, the *Christian* aspires to. Paradoxically, it is the fear that this aspiration arouses – the fear that the Lord is *not* our friend and protector – that the western imagination has, as I believe I have shown, projected onto the Orient. In the hard orientalist imagination, Islam is the exact opposite of a faith in a good Lord: it is instead a fanatical but meaningless submission to an evil One.

Yet it is with deliberate reason that I have insisted on distinguishing between hard and soft orientalism. There has also been in the West a long tradition of soft-orientalist regard for the value of Muslim faith and submission to Providence. Hard and soft orientalism have never been mutually exclusive. They have always been in a dialectical relation to one another. Admiration for Eastern spirituality is almost always tinted with racist condescension. This is very true. And yet, it is patently obvious that *within* the limits of the discourses that have been possible in the history of the West, soft orientalism frequently provided the most productive self-criticism. Eventually, it contributed not only

to western support for ending the colonial regimes, but even to the discourses of liberation in the Orient itself.

The question I am raising in this Epilogue is this: Is there not in the concept of submission as admired by *soft* orientalism something of moral value: a lesson about the universal human condition taught through the fable of an imagined Orient?

In soft orientalism, the East is both the lost Mother and the wise Other. In the period we have studied, we have seen touches of it in places like fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence, seventeenth-century Prague, or eighteenth-century England, even though a hard-orientalist attitude, as seen in Montesquieu and much more so in Hegel, was, however, more common.

It was the romantic period and its aftermath that saw soft orientalism reach its pinnacle. From Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan* and Hugo's *Orientalia* to Rudolf Valentino's *The Sheik* and the essays of Louis Massignon,² this period was also the heyday of western imperialism. There is no doubt that their authors intended such works to be in praise of the Orient. But there is also no doubt that most of them did not advocate for a total withdrawal of western power from the East. Is soft orientalism, then, but hard orientalism in sheep's clothing? Probably, to some or even a large extent. And yet, I believe that it is an unjustifiably harsh view of the West to suggest that romantic orientalism had nothing to do with undermining western imperialism in the end. Louis Massignon, one of the greatest French orientalist scholars, dreamed for much of his life of Europeans and Christians learning from Islam but *within* western empire, yet when the liberation movements took a more radical view he became an outspoken supporter of Algerian independence, and even found himself arrested when he took part in a non-violent pro-Algerian demonstration.³

Today we are, it seems, witnessing a third phase of orientalism, beyond the early that ended around 1830 and the romantic-imperialist, completed around the middle of the twentieth century. Soft orientalism is now in decline. Its *kitsch* version, the harem girls and its camels plying the endless desert, is still found here and there in music videos and perfume commercials; but an admiration for Islamic spirituality and, specifically, for Islam's faith in Providence, is rare. On the other hand, the hard-orientalist stereotype of meaningless and violent Islamic fanaticism is around more than ever. This makes one almost nostalgic for the old, romantic vision of soft orientalism. Is any of it worth reviving?

Even romantic orientalism insists on a radical contrast between East and West, and it is this that makes it suspect as a means to liberate us from anti-oriental prejudice. The simple solution is to overcome soft along with hard orientalism. But this may not work, first because there are in fact verifiable differences between the Christian West and the Muslim East (as fuzzy sets), and second because the power of the orientalist tradition on the imagination both in the West and in the East is so great that it may be more productive to create mutual appreciation on a positive valuation of difference than on denying any difference whatsoever.

The historical existence of despotism in the Orient is not a figment of the imagination. There were, famously, tyrants in ancient Greece, but no little dictator of a Greek *polis* matched in power and splendor the Persian Emperor, regarded as

a divinized king of kings. This was true even if the Persian ruler's power and its abuse were exaggerated by the Greek observers in order to make a cautionary point about tyranny. Not to be outdone, however, western empires, including Alexander's and that of Rome, would imitate and surpass the Persian example.

In early orientalism, oriental potentates were probably again objectively more powerful than western rulers. As for the Ottoman Empire, the nearest and most influential Muslim neighbor, some of its despotic features discussed by western commentators were demonstrably true, including the theoretical possession of all real property by the sultan, and his ability to disregard distinctions of birth in granting favors and appointing powerful officers. Even the vast overgeneralizations, from Karl Marx to Karl Wittfogel, about the Asiatic mode of production and, for example, its reliance on centralized, top-down management of irrigation systems in areas where water is scarce, have at least a grain of truth in them.⁴ The countless reports of the humble obedience with which the subjects of the oriental despot meet his decree of death, too, may have been exaggerated, but it is unlikely that all are a simple figment of the imagination.

In the West the absolute monarchy laid claim on powers that were similar to, and sometimes even inspired by, oriental despotism. The obedience demanded by an absolute ruler from his European subjects, not to speak of the land-owning lord from his serfs where serfdom survived, was no different in kind from that of the oriental despot. Moreover, while absolute rule in Europe perhaps fell short of the "ideal" of oriental despotism, the tyranny of unlimited power was far more pronounced in the European colonies than in the Orient. The cruel rule of Spain and Portugal over their overseas territories was mercilessly self-serving. When, later, the northern powers took over the West's imperialist leadership, things hardly got better. The power given to colonial companies like the Hudson's Bay or the East India, or later to the Belgian King Leopold II, who "legally" administered the incongruously named "Congo Free State" as his personal property, was easily as total as that of the sultan in the West's worst orientalist nightmare. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* succeeds in conjuring a horror at least as dreadful as Beckford's Gothic *Vathek*, and, sadly, far more in keeping with observed fact. Nor was the abject self-abasement practiced by humble Turks or Persians less total than the submission forced out of the "natives" in the colonies, or when they were transported as slaves to America.

Neither arbitrary tyranny nor forced submission has, then, been exclusive at all to either East or West.

Yet there is a difference. The difference is not in the objective degree of oppression and forced submission, but a difference, probably in degree rather than kind, in the value placed, East and West, on voluntary submission to a sublime power accepted on faith as a fatherly protector. We have seen that the Reformation in the Christian West placed great value on unquestioning faith in divine grace, which God dispenses according to a form of justice that is comprehensible only to him but not to humans. This, I have argued, is very similar to the faith in a heavenly despot ascribed to Islam. In hard orientalism, such faith in Islam is a delusion, but in soft versions it may be an example for the Christian. What makes the difference between East and West, however, is linked to the fact that the Christian faith of

the Reformation was accompanied by the humanist ideology of the Renaissance and its idealization of the individual and his capacity for understanding, particularly through the principles of Reason. In the subsequent periods, conventionally labeled the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, emphasis on the individual's ability to understand came into predictable conflict with unquestioning faith in Divine Providence. In the Orient, such a conflict was far more subdued, as viewed from the West and to a large extent in fact.⁵ Because it was, or appeared, less challenged by individualist rationalism, the oriental, Islamic version of submission to Providence acquired an exemplary, prototypical character.

In the romantic orientalism of the subsequent period, the fatalism not only of the oriental but of all who now were thought of as "subject races" becomes an example not only of the invincible resistance of the subaltern colonial subject, but also of the moral stand required by true *Christians* facing the universal constraints of human existence. It is to submit to our limitations, rather than to fight them in a damnable struggle that combines pagan sacrilege with capitalist individualism. Such is the moral of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, where a fanatical Captain Ahab risks everything to conquer a great white whale that neither he nor any other man can in fact defeat. "All visible objects," Ahab reasons,

are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event – in the living act, the undoubted deed – there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike though the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate ...⁶

There is hardly a better description of the Obscene Father whose feared presence haunts, as I have argued, all orientalist conceptions of sublime power. And opposed to the arrogant occidental Ahab is the admirably fatalistic Polynesian, Queeku, a "native" who sits down on the deck when the time comes, and patiently awaits his death. Appropriately, though Queeku is a "savage" cannibal, he calls his ritual periods of "fasting and humiliation" by the name of the Muslim holy month: "Ramadan."⁷

I am not advocating for such dark and now slightly ridiculous stereotypes of the fatalistic native. But surely there is as much need today as ever for moral restraint on rapacious individualism. And for that, it may be that contemporary Islamic faith and practice can provide us with some serious models.

Saba Mahmood, in parts of *The Politics of Piety*, focuses on Egyptian women following an Islamic pietist orientation. They engage in practices that set them apart from the majority in an officially, even if at times ambiguously, "secularist" society, into which they are nevertheless integrated, by choice or necessity, as workers and as citizens. These women appreciate, and strive to put into practice, the Islamic value of "subordination to a transcendent will (and thus, in many instances, to a male authority) as its coveted goal."⁸ This value is one

recommended, indeed required, of all Muslims, but Saba Mahmood points out that seeking it is particularly incumbent upon women. This can be, with some reason, considered along with the famous Islamic requirement that women be “modest” in dress, so often interpreted as an example of patriarchal oppression. The voluntary participation of Muslim women in the pietist movement raises the same question as the obvious desire of many to cover up even when they are not forced to do so, and indeed face pressures to unveil. Saba Mahmood examines the practice of the Egyptian group as a form not of subjection but of subjectivization, of a process of forming a self that asserts its desires rather than simply obeying an external power; in other words, a form of *agency*.

Mahmood objects to the argument that only resisting societal norms can be a form of agency in a situation of unequal power, so that one who accepts such norms is necessarily a passive accomplice in her own oppression. In this she links up with a long list of scholars who, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, began to consider forms of resistance *within* the oppressive regimes of everyday life, *l'art de faire*, to use de Certeau's phrase: the art or manner of making do within the limits imposed by a power that cannot be overthrown.⁹

Mahmood goes beyond this tradition, however. She shows that women who are Islamic believers refer to standard Islamic values of obedience when asserting their personal desires, but they do not do this simply because they have to “make do” with Islam in the absence of usable “secular” alternatives. Rather, Islam provides them with a positive empowerment in its own terms. One of the women observed by Mahmood suggested that a woman should seek a divorce after she tried everything else yet failed to correct her husband's impious behavior. In the concrete case discussed, the husband not only refused to pray regularly, but also engaged in illicit sexual activity and drank alcohol. Divorce initiated by a woman is not an easy matter in Egypt, and may put in question the petitioner's character as a good wife. But this woman was able to articulate her refusal to submit to her husband as submission to the authority of Allah. To proceed in this way was, according to the pietist group, worthy of a “slave of God.”¹⁰ (As we have seen with the imagined despot of early orientalism, worldly subjects can disobey him if they are able to use obedience to God as their justification.) The women belonging to this “mosque movement” do not merely feign obedience to Islamic law and practice. There is no division, Mahmood claims, between what they say and do, and what they “really” believe. Such a modern western-liberal conception of agency belittles these women, who are not simply trying to manage in an oppressive society that they see as an inevitable evil removed from their own interests. Rather, the members of the mosque movement “buy into” traditional Islam as their own source of moral conduct. They live their pietism not as a compromise but as a choice.

Here Mahmood continues Talal Asad's investigation of what might be called “submissive agency.”¹¹ Asad insists that “agency need not be conceptualized in terms of individual self-empowerment and resistance.” Rather, “moral agency” is people's “habitual engagement with the world in which they live ...”¹² Through a pursuit of modesty (which, as we have seen, does not, however, necessarily tolerate abuse) it is possible for the women of the mosque movement to actualize

an everyday practice (Mahmood employs Bourdieu's term *habitus*) that is a positive and active expression of a moral personality.

Examples like Saba Mahmood's may point the way to retaining aspects of Islamic faith as a particular example for the universal lesson of *humility* for a world that is much in need of the same. Beyond the hard orientalist clichés of violent fanaticism, Islam once also represented for the West the necessary, and universal, lesson of human limitations. It is lamentable that such soft orientalism is now in demise. For in a world of local conflicts fought for global domination, and beset by the transcendental threat of environmental destruction, respecting the boundaries of human control is now more necessary than ever. We will never escape the fundamental human experience that is expressed in the notion of a sublime power controlling us from above and beyond this world.¹³

I am skeptic enough to deny that the world gives objective evidence of being ruled by a benign power. Yet I am also optimist enough to believe that faith in the possibility of a good world is desirable, and that the most powerful vehicle of that faith in our Abrahamic tradition is the vision of a Lord who is *ar-rahmān*, *ar-rahīm*, *al-malik* benevolent, merciful, sovereign, *meleh ha-rahamim* king of mercy, *hēmōn patēr ho en ouranos* our Father that is in Heaven. The soft orientalist pre-romantics, romantics, and post-romantics have certainly believed this, which is what makes the complexities of old-fashioned orientalism preferable, in comparison, to the crude Islamophobia of today.

Appendix

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Notes

Introduction

- 1 An impressive example is Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European thinkers on Oriental despotism in the Middle East and India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). It is rich in fact and erudite interpretation, even if one may disagree with some of Curtis's positions.
- 2 For a history of the "sacrality" of kingship, see Francis Oakley, *Kingship: the politics of enchantment* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006).
- 3 Paul Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire, containing the maxims of the Turkish politie, the most material points of the Mahometan religion, their sects and heresies, their convents and religious votaries, their military discipline with an exact computation of their forces, both by land and sea: Illustrated with divers pieces of sculpture, representing the variety of habits amongst the Turks*. London, J. Starkey and H. Brome, 1668 (Westmead, Eng.: Gregg International Publishers, 1972), 6.
- 4 Sonia P. Anderson, *An English consul in Turkey: Paul Rycaut at Smyrna, 1667–1678* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 5 Carl Schmitt, *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 5.
- 6 Whether such readings are purely metaphorical and so do or do not apply to living men and women is a controversial issue that I do not believe needs to detain us here.
- 7 See Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, Preface to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xviii.
- 8 Zachary Lockman, *Contending visions of the Middle East: the history and politics of Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 316. This is a very sober, clearly written guide to the facts, with a long historical perspective but an emphasis on the same period as was covered by Said.
- 9 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 29.
- 10 Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental renaissance: Europe's rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
- 11 *Tout ce que Mahomet a dit est vrai par rapport aux dogmes essentiels de la religion*. Henri Boulainvilliers, *La Vie de Mahomed, avec des réflexions sur la religion mahométane et les coutumes des musulmans*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: F. Changuion, 1731), 267.
- 12 Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio Alkorani: translation and analysis* (Minneapolis: A.J. Banning Press, 1990), 252.

Chapter 1

- 1 Harold Bloom, *Jesus and Yahweh: the names divine* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 13.
- 2 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: lectures on fine art*, trans. T. H. Knox. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 363.

- 3 A positive valuation of both Allah and the oriental despot characterize some of soft orientalism, but here my focus is on the hard version.
- 4 As a reaction to the earlier predominance in the psychoanalytical literature of the strict oedipal father, most recent psychoanalytic thinking focuses on a good and vital early father, addressing the importance of his presence and his provision of developmental resources, as well as the traumatogenic impact of his absence. The relevant literature is critically examined by Ruth Stein, "Father regression: clinical narratives and theoretical reflections," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 87, no. 4 (2006): 1005–1027. One could say that this benevolent fatherly figure is a developmentally normative, down-sized, "secular" version of the internalized archaic object I will discuss here. Contemporary psychoanalytic literature places emphasis on a domestic attachment-father, rather than the mythopoetic figure endowed with quasi-divine qualities, who looms large in the individual's inner world as well as socially and culturally. In part this development in the psychoanalytical literature reflects the slow and steady growth in importance of the role of the domestic father, from the Renaissance and through the Enlightenment to our own period.
- 5 Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6.
- 6 Martin Luther King, Jr., "How to use the Bible in modern theological construction," in *The papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, eds. Clayborne Carson, Penny A. Russell and Ralph Luker. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 255, quoting from Exodus 20:19 and Luke 11:2.
- 7 Sigmund Freud, "An autobiographical study," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953–1976), 68. See also Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *Totem and taboo: some points of agreement between the mental lives of savages and neurotics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 140 ff.
- 8 This is a common usage in Žižek. See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, "You may!" *London Review of Books*, March 18, 1999.
- 9 Revelation 19:6.
- 10 Aristotle, *Politics: A treatise on government*, eds. William Ellis and A. D. Lindsay (London: Dent, 1928), 91.
- 11 The Spirit's domain was "the power and efficacy of that activity." Jean Calvin, *Calvin's Institutes: A New Compend*, ed. John T. MacNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press), 39.
- 12 Jean Calvin, *Calvin's Institutes: A New Compend*, ed. John T. MacNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press), 406–10.
- 13 Bloom, *Jesus and Yahweh*, 13.
- 14 Among the most relevant passages in the Pauline epistles are Rom 2:29, 7:6, 8:2, 8:4. Daniel Boyarin also sees in this tradition of contrasts one between universalist (Christian) and particularist (Jewish) religious ethics. D. Boyarin, *A radical Jew: Paul and the politics of identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 366.
- 15 Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53.
- 16 The intricacies of the debate about Adam and Eve and "original sin" go back beyond Augustine. I am ignoring them here as I believe that the general statement I am making holds for most if not all versions. In general, the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic views may be seen as less legalistic perhaps than the Protestant ones, which originated during the period covered by this book. For some discussion of the topic, see Kathleen M. Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Ian A. McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: a meditation on the Christian doctrine of original sin* (Maldon, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
- 17 A highly intelligent treatment of how the image of God has changed over time is, however, the well-known book by Karen Armstrong, *A history of God: the 4000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 1st Ballantine Books ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994).

- 18 1 Cor 13:11–12. Compare to “And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] the light shall not be clear, [nor] dark” (Zec 14:6) and “in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one” (Zec 14:9). Neither the Old Testament nor even modern Judaism is free of the notion of one’s own religion representing a later, more advanced, and more spiritual stage than earlier versions.
- 19 Bloom, *Jesus and Yahweh*, 13.
- 20 *ibid*, 13.
- 21 Harold Bloom, *Agon* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 285; cf. *Jesus and Yahweh: the names divine*, 14 and *passim*.
- 22 Umberto Eco and Stefan Collini, *Interpretation and overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 151. Or possibly, both characters, Yahweh and Jehovah, emerge from the text, but only the second is taken into account by traditional Christian readers. (I am ignoring the fact here that there are some differences between the Jewish and the Christian canonical versions of the Torah/Pentateuch, as these have no bearing on the argument here.)
- 23 N. A. Boulanger, *The origin and progress of despotism. In the oriental, and other empires, of Africa, Europe, and America* (Amsterdam [i.e. London?]: 1764), 2.
- 24 Alain Grosrichard, *The sultan’s court: European fantasies of the East* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), 80.
- 25 George Gordon Byron Byron, *Don Juan*, eds. T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan and Willis Winslow Pratt ([Harmondsworth, Eng.]: Penguin Books, 1973), Cantos 4–8.
- 26 Martin Wilett, “The Old Testament God,” <http://www.mwillett.org/atheism/old-testament.htm> (May 30, 2008).
- 27 Richard Dawkins, *The God delusion*, 1st Mariner Books ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2008), 31.
- 28 Michel Foucault, *Security, territory, population: lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (Basingstoke England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 417. Lectures from February 8 through 22, 1978.

Chapter 2

- 1 Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading orientalism: Said and the unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), xv–xvi.
- 2 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293.
- 3 Critiques, reviews, and biographies of Said continue to appear with great frequency. Among them are Mathieu Courville, *Edward Said’s rhetoric of the secular* (New York: Continuum, 2010); H. Aram Veaser, *Edward Said: the charisma of criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2010); *Edward Said and the literary, social, and political world*, ed. Ranjan Ghosh (New York: Routledge, 2009); William V. Spanos, *The legacy of Edward W. Said* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Bill Ashcroft, *Edward Said*, ed. D. P. S. Ahluwalia (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2008); Varisco, *Reading orientalism*, 501.
- 4 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
- 5 See, for example, Said, *Orientalism*, 56–57.
- 6 For example, Alexander Lyon Macfie, *Orientalism* (London: Longman, 2002), 242.
- 7 Hence, my base-line definition agrees roughly with the second of those discussed by Edward Said at the beginning of the introduction to *Orientalism*: “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (Said, *Orientalism*, 2.). However, if “ontological” is taken to mean that “Orient” and “Occident” exist outside the *epistemological* categories of the western mind, then Said’s phrasing must be taken with some skepticism. See Varisco, *Reading orientalism*, 47–48.
- 8 J. Spence, *An essay on Mr. Pope’s Odyssey, in five dialogues* (London: Wilmot, 1737), 214–215; Brian Hepworth, *Robert Lowth* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 26, 58–69, 68. See *ibid*, 58–69.

- 9 James Renton, "Changing languages of empire and the orient: Britain and the invention of the Middle East, 1917–1918," *The Historical Journal* 50 (2007): 645–667. An influential article by Anouar Abdel-Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," for example, was published in *Diogenes* in 1963 (Anouar Abdel-Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," *Diogenes*, no. 44 (1963): 104–112.; reprinted in Macfie, *Orientalism*, 47–56.
- 10 Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction* (Oxford, UK; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 383.
- 11 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
- 12 Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin eds., *The Edward Said reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 67.
- 13 We will see in a moment that Muslim lands in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia were of next to no interest to Said.
- 14 See, for example, Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, "Orientalism and the Jews: an introduction," in *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2005); Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: a history of the enemy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), xxv, 261 p; Gil Anidjar, *Semites: race, religion, literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), xii, 139 p.
- 15 This distinction is explored in Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge* (London, Tavistock, 1972), 27.
- 16 Eleanor Rosch, "Cognitive Representation of Semantic Categories," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 104, no. 3 (1975):192–233.
- 17 Kalmar and Penslar, "Orientalism and the Jews: an introduction"; cf. Edward Said, "Arabs, Islam and the dogmas of the West," *The New York Times Book Review*, 31, October 1976: "I for one am fully certain that Western anti-Semitism has always included both the Jews and the Muslims."
- 18 The term, which became very common in ordinary German parlance, seems to have originated in a best-selling series of books by Karl Emil Franzos, beginning with *Aus halb-Asien, Land und Leute des östlichen Europa* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1901). Originally published in Leipzig in 1876. Fred Sommer, "Halb-Asien:" *German Nationalism and the Eastern European Works of Emil Franzos* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1984).
- 19 See, for example, Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of the "Jew" in English literature and society: racial representations 1875–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 20 Said, *Orientalism*, xxiv–xxv; Edward W. Said, *Freud and the non-European*, eds. Christopher Bollas, Jacqueline Rose and England) Freud Museum (London (New York: Verso, 2003).
- 21 Martin S. Kramer, *Ivory towers on sand: the failure of Middle Eastern studies in America* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001), 137.
- 22 Stephen Howe, "Dangerous mind?" *New Humanist* 123, no. 6 (2008). URL: <http://newhumanist.org.uk/1908/dangerous-mind>. Accessed August 17, 2011.
- 23 Said stated explicitly that there was a necessary connection between secularism and humanism, in Edward W. Said, *Humanism and democratic criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 11. See also Courville, *Edward Said's rhetoric of the secular*; Stathis Gourgouris, "Detranscendentalizing the Secular," *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008): 437–445; Kaylin Goldstein, "Secular Sublime: Edward Said at the Israel Museum," *Public Culture* 17, no. 1 (2005): 27–53; W. J. Thomas Mitchell, "Secular Division: Edward Said's Humanism," in *Edward Said: continuing the conversation*, ed. Homi Bhabha and W. J. T. Mitchell. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 171.
- 24 Frantz Fanon, *Black skin, white masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 8–9; Andrea Dworkin and Ariel Levy, *Intercourse*, 20th anniversary, 1st Basic Books ed. (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2007), 315.
- 25 Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the mystique of Islam* (Seattle: Distributed by University of Washington Press, 1987)

- 26 For example, he speaks of orientalism as anti-Semitism “in its Islamic branch.” Said, *Orientalism*, 27–28.
- 27 Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: O. Harrasowitz, 1955).
- 28 Talal Asad, *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 269.
- 29 Northrop Frye, *The great code: the Bible and literature* (Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1983).
- 30 Jean-Luc Nancy, “The deconstruction of Christianity,” in *Religion and Media*, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 113, 115.
- 31 Homi Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” *The post-colonial studies reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, 209.
- 32 Gil Anidjar’s notion that Said was speaking about religion without saying so is interesting in this respect, as well. (Anidjar, *Semites*, 52.)
- 33 For an exception, see E. W. Said, “The empire at work: Verdi’s Aida,” in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 111–132.
- 34 E. W. Lane and J. Thompson, *An account of the manners and of the customs of the modern Egyptians: the definitive 1860 edition* (Cairo; New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2003).
- 35 Edward William Lane, *An account of the manners and customs of the modern Egyptians, written in Egypt during the years 1833, -34, and -35*, 5th ed. (John Murray: London, 1871), 213; Said, *Orientalism*, 111.
- 36 Regarding Renan, this is true only of the parts of his work that have been most discussed. In fact, his *General history and comparative system of the Semitic languages* is mostly a “dry” linguistic analysis, with the exception of the preface, where he alleges the limited imagination of the Semites, just about the only segment that is still discussed. Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques: 1. ptie. Histoire générale des langues sémitiques*, 4e ed. (Paris: Lévy, 1963)
- 37 Ivan Davidson Kalmar, “Jesus did not wear a turban: Orientalism, the Jews, and Christian art,” in *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005).
- 38 Mitchell, “Secular division,” 104.

Chapter 3

- 1 Nicholas Jubber, *The Prester quest* (London: Doubleday, 2005).
- 2 Keith De Vries, “The nearly other: the Attic vision of Phrygians and Lydians,” in *Not the classical ideal: Athens and the construction of the other in Greek art* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 338–363.
- 3 Plato, *The laws*, ed. A. E. Taylor (London: Dent, 1960), 79.
- 4 Plato, Benjamin Jowett, and NetLibrary Inc, *Laws* (Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg), 221.
- 5 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett. (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 26–27.
- 6 Aristotle, *Politics: A treatise on government*, 75.
- 7 Ibid., 22.
- 8 Ibid., 17.
- 9 Aristotle, *Politics*, 270–271.
- 10 Denise Guénoun, *Hypothèses sur l’Europe: un essai de philosophie* (Belfort: Circé, 2000), 373.
- 11 Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* ([Auckland]: Auckland University Press, 1971), 58.
- 12 Jorma Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek language* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1979).
- 13 This is also the conclusion of Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

- 2004), though some of her historical overview differs from mine: on her reading “Europe” to the ancient Greeks referred to Greece.
- 14 Originally, the curse was no doubt used to justify subjugating the aboriginal population of Canaan to the Israelites, descendants of Sem. It is unlikely that the African origin of Ham was “known” then.
 - 15 One of many examples, the so-called “Turin Beatus,” named after the eighth-century Spanish priest and map maker (and the current Italian location of the map), is Plate IX of Manuel Francisco de Barros e Sousa Santarém, *Atlas du Vicomte de Santarém: édition fac-similée des cartes définitives*, ed. Martim de Albuquerque (Lisboa: Administração do Porto de Lisboa, 1989)
 - 16 Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius: emperor of Byzantium* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
 - 17 Jeremy Cohen, *Living letters of the law: ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Debrah Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons and Jews: making monsters in medieval art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).
 - 18 The same figure seems to be the eastern magus in the Meeting of the Magi, folio 51v, and perhaps the Adoration of the Magi, folio 39r. It may be John VIII Palaiologos.
 - 19 Said, *Orientalism*, 70.
 - 20 See James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1964); John Victor Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European eyes in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 231.
 - 21 Dante, *The Divine Comedy. Volume I, Inferno*, transl. Mark Musa (New York, Penguin, 1984), canto 28.
 - 22 Similarly, in the “circle of lust” of the *Inferno* the oriental strongwomen Dido, Semiramis and Cleopatra – “oriental” from a later point of view only, as in fact Dido and Cleopatra were African – are used to prepare the poet’s encounter with Francesca of Rimini, whose inability to control her lust differed from theirs perhaps in degree, but not in kind: Dante, *The Divine Comedy. Volume I, Inferno*, canto 5.
 - 23 Pierre Martino, *L’orient dans la littérature française au 17^e et au 18^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1906), 6.
 - 24 Prester John’s kingdom was imagined by some in India, and by others in Ethiopia. Jubber, *The Prester quest*; Manuel João Ramos, *Essays in Christian mythology: the metamorphosis of Prester John* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2006))
 - 25 Giuseppe Veltri, “The East in the story of the lost tribes: creation of geographical and political Utopias,” in *Creation and re-creation in Jewish thought*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Rachel Elior (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005): 249–69 and *Renaissance philosophy in Jewish garb: foundations and challenges in Jewish thought on the eve of modernity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), Chapter 7, “Creating Geographical and Political Utopias: The Ten Lost Tribes and the East.”
 - 26 I would like to acknowledge some informative conversations I have had on this topic with Giuseppe Veltri.

Chapter 4

- 1 *L’Europe c’est: l’arrachement à l’Asie*. (Denise Guénoun, *Hypothèses sur l’Europe*, 42.) To Guénoun, “Europe” has the connotation of a kidnapping, a movement towards an unknown destination, a westward progress from Asia into unknown areas.
- 2 David Stacton, *The world on the last day: the sack of Constantinople by the Turks, May 29, 1453, its causes and consequences* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 91. Steven Runciman, *The fall of Constantinople, 1453* (London: Readers Union, 1966); David Nicolle, *The fall of Constantinople: the Ottoman conquest of Byzantium*, eds. John F. Haldon and Stephen R. Turnbull (New York: Osprey, 2007).

- 3 I believe this to be the case in spite of the fact that in time the trope of the uncivilized savage would contaminate the image of the Muslim as well, as Nabil I. Matar, for example, has shown (Nabil I. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the age of discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 268.). But the distinction between an infidel Orient and a savage Africa/America is historically important enough to recommend caution in conflating orientalism with other western imperial ideologies, as is all too often done in colonial studies today. The distinction was not without serious political and economic consequences: the development of African slavery was intimately related to it.
- 4 Walter Mignolo, *Local histories/global designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges, and border thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- 5 Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the age of discovery*, 268.
- 6 Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio Alkorani*, 252.
- 7 "... in Europa, id est in patria, in domo propria. Enea Piccolomini, "Constantinopolitana Clades," *Pii II orationes politicae et ecclesiasticae* (Lucca: Johannes Dominicus Mansi, 1755), 263.
- 8 It is a slight exaggeration, however, to suggest as Jacques Le Goff and Colette Beaune have done that George's proposal was for a kind of European Union *avant la lettre*. The word "Europe" does not appear in the text of his proposed treaty. Nor does he suggest that Russia would ever join this union of "Christian" states: the initial organization would unite France, Italy, and Germany (including, then, Bohemia), and the Hispanic powers might join it later. (England is not mentioned either.) It seems, rather, than George wanted to unite Latin Christendom. While his declared goal was defense against the "Turk," he was particularly interested in ending the hostility between himself and the papal party, which threatened him both outside and inside Bohemia. Jacques Le Goff, *The birth of Europe* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005). Colette Beaune, "Chrétienté et Europe: le projet de Georges de Podiebrad au xve siècle," in *Chrétiens et sociétés* 1, 1994, 35–56. URL: <http://chretienssocietes.revues.org/index68.html>, accessed October, 2008.
- 9 Denise Guénoun, *Hypothèses sur l'Europe*, 23. This is not in any way to deny flourishing economic and cultural exchanges between Muslims and Christians in the Middle Ages and well beyond, or even military marriages of convenience. The many examples include the tacit accommodations between France and the Ottoman Empire during the period of Suleiman the Magnificent also known as The Lawgiver (1494–1566), and the direct involvement of Hungarian Calvinists on the Ottoman side during the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683. But such arrangements were always felt to be special accommodations with people or realms that were essentially outsiders.
- 10 Horatio Torsellini, *De l'istoria della Santissima Casa della B.V. Maria di Loreto* (Venice: Domenico Imberti, 1604), 10. This is an Italian translation of the same author's Latin original: *Laurentanae historiae libri quinque* (Rome: Aloysius Zanetti, 1597). The ideological importance of the removal of the Holy House to Italy may have something to do with the religious strife of the time of Torsellini's writing. He speculates that Mary may have wished to move her House to Italy, "truly a fortress of the Christian religion" (*veramente rocca de la Christiana religion*, 24). This may have been simply patriotism, but we will see that anti-"Turk" rhetoric often overlapped, if sometimes only implicitly, with anti-Protestant propaganda. Italy (which to Torsellini did not include Trieste or Rijeka-Fiume) was the bedrock of Catholicism. The promotion of Loreto was part of the Roman church sponsoring, in the face of Protestant opposition, intensive worship of the Virgin Mary.
- 11 Torsellini, *De l'istoria*, 93. Teramo's work cannot be located.
- 12 Torsellini, *De l'istoria*, 109–11. Mantuanus is said to have published a full account of the Loretan legend, but I have not been able to locate it.
- 13 Torsellini, *De l'istoria*, 9. For good measure, Torsellini mentions the fall to the Muslims, in the same year, of Ptolemais in Lybia and Soria in Iberia.
- 14 ... così ristorando i danni de l'Oriente con tanto bene dell'Occidente. Torsellini, *De l'istoria*, 9.

- 15 There are replicas of or shrines recalling the House of Loreto outside of Italy, which themselves became places of veneration. Examples other than the one from Prague range all the way to Canada at the time of the “missions to the Indians” (André Sanfaçon, *A New Loreto in New France*: Pierre-Joseph-Marie Chaumonot, SJ, and the Holy House of Loreto, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 200–220; Massimo Bulgarelli, “The Holy House of Loreto: the sacred building and its copies.” *Lotus* 65 (1990): 78–89.). They appear to have had the same purpose of mystically localizing the presence of the biblical narrative.
- 16 It is true that the degree to which this statement applies to ancient and medieval Christian theology varies with the theologian or movement one is contemplating, though it is quite clearly there in the Beatitudes and in Paul. The contrast between old (Jewish) Law and new (Christian) Love became far more pronounced and central to Christian faith in the Reformation, and especially in its Lutheran form. Melancthon’s commentary on Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession (1531) states: “All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises. For in some places it presents the Law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel [in the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal.” (Project Gutenberg, *Melancthon’s Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6744>, accessed May 2011.)

Chapter 5

- 1 Said, *Orientalism*, 49.
- 2 Anidjar, *Semites*, 28, 51. Emphasis original.
- 3 Regarding the world for specific scientific purposes as if there were no God does not in any way demand that one become an atheist, or even that one be aware of ignoring God; it would be absurd to suggest that Isaac Newton, a devoted mystic, had no faith in a divinity. Nor does the distinction made between the mundane and ultramundane entail any political or social separation between the religious and the secular spheres. I am not writing here about the beginning of secularization, though certainly secularization had *something* to do with the advancement of modern science.
- 4 Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in iconology: humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); Arthur Field, *The origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- 5 Here Rafael was contradicting an artistic tradition expressed in numerous depictions of Thomas Aquinas’ alleged triumph over Averroes, such as Giovanni di Paolo’s “St. Thomas Confounding Averroes” (1445–50, St. Louis Museum of Art).
- 6 Francis Bacon, *Advancement of learning and Novum organum*, ed. James Edwin Creighton, Rev. ed. (New York: Colonial Press, 1899), 298.
- 7 “...für das Volk berechnete Tändelei.” Josef Georg Böhm, *Beschreibung der alterthümlichen prager Rathaus-Uhr* (Prague: K.k. böhmische Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften), 1866, 22.
- 8 Böhm, *Beschreibung*, 22–23; Anton Strnadt, *Beschreibung der berühmten Uhr- und Kunstwerke am Altstädter Rathause und auf der königl. Sternwarte zu Prag* (Prague and Dresden: Walther, 1791), 6–7.
- 9 Extensive documentation, including period photographs and drawings, appears on the web site <http://orloj.eu/> (accessed April 24, 2011).
- 10 See, for example, Z. Horský, *Pražský orloj* (Prague: Panorama, 1988), 108.
- 11 Tour guides often describe this figure as the “infidel Turk,” ignoring the fact that Vanity wears the same turban, and that the two scholars at the bottom part of the Orloj composition, who are to be mentioned shortly, are also “Turks.” The tour guides’ point is that Avarice is represented (to the right of Vanity) as a Jew, and this alleged “infidel Turk” is meant to join the Jew as representations of the people’s enemies. Among the failings

- of such a reading is that it ignores the instrument in the hands of the “infidel Turk,” and does not explain why the same line-up should also include Vanity.
- 12 Anton Strnadt, *Beschreibung der berühmten Uhr- und Kunstwerke am Altstädter Rathause und auf der königl. Sternwarte zu Prag* (Prague and Dresden: Walther, 1791), 6.
 - 13 The more popular interpretation is that Death announces to these characters that it is their time to die, and they refuse. However, as these figures are allegories rather than individuals, I prefer my interpretation.
 - 14 The “Chronicler” that now stands to the right of the “Astronomer” does not wear a turban and is not, without a great stretch of the imagination, recognizable as a “Turk.” Perhaps a patriotic renovator wished to give the clock a more Czech character at the time that the famed forgeries, the “Manuscripts” of Dvůr Králové and Zelená Hora, were taken as a genuine source detailing the great events of Bohemia’s history. (On the Manuscripts, see Andrew Lass, “Romantic documents and political monuments: the meaning-fulfillment of history in 19th-century Czech nationalism,” *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 3 (1988): 456–471.)
 - 15 Music, apart from being widely considered a particularly fleeting pleasure, helped to represent sensuality by invoking the sense of hearing. It also represented scientific/mathematical knowledge, since it was still believed that the universe consisted of celestial orbs whose motion produced music.
 - 16 Eccl 1:2.
 - 17 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The philosophy of history. With prefaces by Charles Hegel and the translator, J. Sibree, and a new introd. by C. J. Friedrich. [New Dover ed.]* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 422.
 - 18 The Ottomans had been aided in the battle by Magyar Protestant allies, whose leaders hoped to establish Calvinist rule in Transylvania, Hungary, Austria, and Bohemia with the support of the Turks.
 - 19 See Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: force and persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
 - 20 Eva March Tappan, ed., *The world’s story: a history of the world in story, song, and art* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1914). The cult of Wilgefortis usually represents her father and her intended as “pagan” rather than Muslim. But in Prague the crucified Wilgefortis wears clothes and golden slippers unambiguously recalling the Muslim Orient. The artist has understood “pagan” as “Muslim” (a frequent confusion then as before and, perhaps, a correction since a Portuguese ruler who knew Christianity could well have been a Muslim). See also I. E. Friesen, *The female crucifix: images of St. Wilgefortis since the Middle Ages* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001).
 - 21 Howard Louthan, “Religious art and the formation of a Catholic identity in baroque Prague, in *Embodiments of power: building baroque cities in Europe*, ed. Gary B. Cohen and Franz A. J. Szabo (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 56–58.
 - 22 For Christian theology, the Bible is an oriental document even though Christian theologians had made important use of the Septaguint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, in addition to the Hebrew original. Especially for Protestants, the definitive Christian version of the Old Testament since Luther has been the Hebrew text, though Christians order that text in the same sequence of its books as the Septaguint. But the Septaguint itself is no less an oriental document than the Hebrew text(s), and was in common use among Jews and later Christians in Egypt, Palestine, and elsewhere. As Rolf Rendtorff argues, the Old Testament was not “adopted” by Christianity, but was part of Christianity from the very beginning. (Rolf Rendtorff, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Ein kanonischer Entwurf, Band 2: Thematische Entfaltung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 310–311. That beginning was in the Orient.
 - 23 The libretto by Salomo Franck included direct quotes from Luther. Given here is Joshua Rifkin’s translation from his notes for *L’oiseau lyre* CD 417 250–2, a 1987 recording of *Ein feste Burg* and *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben*, with himself conducting the Bach Ensemble.

Chapter 6

- 1 See Kalmar, "Jesus did not wear a turban" and Debrah Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons and Jews*. "Turk" often meant Muslims in general.
- 2 When Rembrandt became insolvent (for reasons that are still not entirely clear), the court ordered an inventory of his possessions. These included a Turkish bow and powder horn and a number of items described as *Oostindisch* (literally, "East Indian"), which in the Dutch context are as likely to have been what we would now call Indonesian as Indian, but also American Indian (*indiaens*) weapons, fans, and costumes. (*The Rembrandt documents*, eds. Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 349–387. Document 1656/12: Amsterdam, Register of Inventories B, DBK 364, folios 33v, 35, 37v, and 38.)
- 3 In the Low Countries earlier artists such as Van Eyck and van der Weyden had painted themselves wearing an elaborate wrap-around head dress that is often described as a turban, though it was probably simply the distinctive headwear of Renaissance artisans, such as painters and carpenters.
- 4 1 Sam 16:23.
- 5 1 Sam 24.
- 6 *The Catholic encyclopedia: an international work of reference on the constitution, doctrine, discipline, and history of the Catholic church*, ed. Charles George Herbermann (New York: R. Appleton, 1907–1912) "Mystic Stigmata."
- 7 Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre, *La Stigmatisation, l'extase divine et les miracles de Lourdes, réponse aux libres-penseurs* (Clermont-Ferrand: L. Bellet, 1894). Recent comprehensive studies of stigmatism are rare.
- 8 Colin Morris, *The discovery of the individual, 1050–1200* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 70–77, 139–152. Karen Armstrong, *The case for God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 152–154.
- 9 The point of view I am criticizing is a popular one. Scholars of the Catholic church have certainly recognized the importance of the Bible to the Catholic party. See, for example, Allan K. Jenkins, *Biblical scholarship and the church: a sixteenth-century crisis of authority*, ed. Patrick Preston (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007)
- 10 The drawing is reproduced as plate 94 of Christina S. Corsiglia and Art Gallery of Ontario, *Rubens and his age: treasures from the Hermitage Museum, Russia* (London; Toronto, Ont.: Merrell; Art Gallery of Ontario, 2001), 256.
- 11 James Doelman, *King James I and the religious culture of England* (Rochester, N.Y.: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 76–77.
- 12 His "federal" theology determined the future direction of the Dutch Reformed church and continues to inspire Protestant thinkers even today; at the same time, he at one time held a chair of Hebrew studies at the University of Franeken. Henricus Cocceius, *Juris publici prudentia compendio exhibita: quo materiae ejus precipuaeque hactenus agitatae controversiae ab sua origine ac fonte ducuntur ...* (Francfurt ad Viadrum, 1705); W. J. van Asselt, *The federal theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)*, ed. Raymond Andrew Blacketer (Boston: Brill, 2001)
- 13 Part I, Prop. XVIII. (Benedictus de Spinoza, *On the improvement of the understanding: the ethics; correspondence* (New York: Dover Publications, 62.)
- 14 Jean Calvin, even, categorically rejected such a divine *potentia absoluta* Michael Horton, "Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and reformed theological method," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002): 322.
- 15 René Descartes, *Meditations on first philosophy in focus*, ed. Stanley Tweyman (London: Routledge, 1993), 72. Emphasis added. Others translate *lumière naturelle* as "natural light." See John Morris, "Descartes' natural light," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11 (1973): 169–187. André Robinet, *Descartes, la lumière naturelle: intuition, disposition, complexion* (Paris: Vrin, 1999).
- 16 Samuel C. Rickless, "The Cartesian Fallacy fallacy," *Nous* 39, no. 2 (2005): 309–336.

Chapter 7

- 1 Edward Pocock, *A commentary on the prophecy of Malachi* (Oxford: Printed at the Theater, 1692). Electronic resource, ProQuest. Pocock was not the first to use Arabic and other Semitic or oriental sources to elucidate the Bible. But his attitude differed radically from a scholar such as William Bedwell (1561–1632), who had much less respect for Islam and in fact used his expertise in Arabic to pamphleteer against the Qur'an (Alastair Hamilton, *William Bedwell: the Arabist, 1563–1632*, Leiden: E. J. Brill and Leiden University Press, 1985).
- 2 Robert Lowth, *A short introduction to English grammar, 1762*. (Menston, Yorks, UK: Scolar Press, 1967)
- 3 Robert Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicæ Oxonii Habitæ* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1753).
4. Asad, *Formations of the secular*, 38. Ann Deleahanty ("From judgment to sentiment: changing theories of the sublime, 1674–1710," *Modern Language Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2005): 158) suggests that it was in the long eighteenth century that a changing definition of the sublime reveals how the work of literature (and one might add the work of art), which was "once seen as a rule-bound object to be produced and fully appreciated only by an elite few (the poetics model), became viewed as the stimulus for an experience produced by the mysterious workings of genius and universally felt (an early aesthetics model)" The pseudo-Longinus (see below in the article) was popular because he was able to supply a classical precedent for this shift. His "On the sublime" included a very modern-sounding emphasis on the effects rather than just on the structure of sublime rhetoric, as well as an element of mystery that could never be captured by an emphasis on disciplined rules of form.
- 5 "Jedermann ist der Bischof Lowths schönes und allgepriesenes Buch de sacra poesi Hebraeorum bekannt." First line of "Vom Geist der ebraeischen Poesie." In *Werke*. Edited by Martin Bollacher. Frankfurt am Mein: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991.
- 6 Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 8.
- 7 Spence, *An essay on Mr. Pope's Odyssey*, 214–215; Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 26, 58–69, 68.
- 8 E. S. Shaffer, "Kubla Khan" and the fall of Jerusalem: the mythological school in biblical criticism and secular literature, 1770–1880, 1st paperback ed. (Cambridge, [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 67.
- 9 R. Lowth, *Lectures on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews* (London: S. Chadwick, 1847), Translator's Preface, iv.
- 10 Karl Marx, *The Karl Marx library*, ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 245–246.
- 11 On various aspects of this issue, see John S. Coolidge, *The Pauline renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Lisa M. Gordis, *Opening scripture: Bible reading and interpretive authority in Puritan New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Cameron A. MacKenzie, *The battle for the Bible in England, 1557–1582* (New York: P. Lang, 2002); Adam Nicolson, *Power and glory: Jacobean England and the making of the King James Bible* (London: HarperCollins, 2003); Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and reason: Anglicans and scripture in late seventeenth-century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Roland H. Worth, *Church, monarch, and Bible in sixteenth century England: the political context of biblical translation* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000).
- 12 Mignolo, *Local histories/global designs*, 202.
- 13 J. Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 255; C. Hornsby, *The impact of Italy: the Grand Tour and beyond* (London: British School at Rome, 2000), 260; Attilio Brilli, *Un paese di romantici briganti: gli italiani nell'immaginario del grand tour* (Bologna: Mulino, 2003); A. Wilton et al., *Grand Tour: the lure of Italy in the eighteenth century* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1996), 328.

- 14 Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 215. Hepworth's information comes from a report prepared for the Winchester College Usher by the Senior Prefect.
- 15 Joseph Trapp, *Lectures on poetry, 1742; [translated from the Latin, with additional notes]*, 1st ed. (Menston: Scholar Press, 1973), 28, 78.
- 16 William Blake, David V. Erdman, and Harold Bloom, *The complete poetry and prose of William Blake*, Newly rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 95.
- 17 Direct transmission from Lowth appears to be suggested by Morton D. Paley, *The continuing city: William Blake's Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 45–47 and by V. A. De Luca, *Words of eternity: Blake and the poetics of the sublime* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 86–88. For how widely Hebrew was considered more sublime than Greek, see David M. Baulch, "The sublime of the Bible," *Romanticism on the Net* 3 (1996). To put English philo-Hebraism in context, however, one should mention that the unknown author of the first-century CE Greek fragment *On the sublime*, which served as Lowth's acknowledged model, also referred to Moses as a more sublime poet than Homer. In Lowth's time the author of the fragment was believed to be Cassius Longinus (ca. 213–273).
- 18 An interesting article that restores the rightful place of biblical scholarship in orientalist studies is J. Pasto, "Islam's 'Strange Secret Sharer': Orientalism, Judaism, and the Jewish question," *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 40 (1998): 437–474.
- 19 Lowth, *Lectures on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews*, 191, n. The reference to R. L. B. Gershom is evidently to Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (1288–1344), a Jewish philosopher of Provence, whose familiarity with Averroes' Arabic commentaries on Aristotle made his work an important link between the Christian and Islamic heirs of Greek philosophy. Lowth's knowledge of this Jewish scholar (and his reference to him as "Gershom" rather than the commonly used Hellenization, "Gersonides") was typical of the advanced Christian scholar of the period, who knew Latin, Greek, and Hebrew-Aramaic, and was conversant with not only the ancient pagan, but also some of the medieval Jewish and Arabic sources.
- 20 Schultens not only used Arabic in his work on Job, but also presented general arguments in favor of using Arabic in the study of the Hebrew Bible (see, for example, *Liber Jobi: cum nova versione ad Hebræum fontem et commentario perpetuo: in quo veterum & recentiorum interpretum cogitat præcipua expenduntur: genuinus sensus ad priscum linguæ genium indagatur, atque ex filo, & nexu universo, argumenti nodus intricatissimus evolvitur*, ed. Albert Schultens (Lugduni Batavorum: Apud Johannem Luzac, 1737); Albert Schultens, *Oratio de linguæ Arabicæ antiquissima origine, intima ac sororia cum lingua Hebræa affinitate, nullisque seculis præflorata puritate: habita quum fasces academicos iterum deponeret Kal. Junii MDCCXXIX* (Franeker: Willem Coulon, 1729)).
- 21 R. Lowth, *Lectures on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews. [Translated from the Latin by G. Gregory with the notes of Professor Michaelis and others]* (New York: Garland Pub, 1971), 358. In the subsequent passages, I refer to the page numbers in this text in parentheses.
- 22 On English pre-romanticism, see e.g. Rolf P. Lessenich, *Aspects of English preromanticism* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1989); Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991)
- 23 Lowth, *Lectures*, 156–157.
- 24 Heb 10:20.
- 25 Ferdinand de Saussure et al., *Course in general linguistics* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1991; 1983), 236.
- 26 See, for example, *This too a philosophy of history for the formation of humanity*, in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Philosophical writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- 27 Lowth, *Lectures*, 156–157. The translator identified the source for Lowth's statement as Virgil's *Aeneid*, ix. 184.
- 28 Lowth, *Lectures*, 34–35.

- 29 Edmund Burke, "A philosophical inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful, with several other additions." In *Edmund Burke (Harvard Classics, Vol. 24)*, 18. New York: P. F. Collier, 1909.
- 30 Ibid., 60.
- 31 Ibid., 58.

Chapter 8

- 1 Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab*, 133.
- 2 Paul Guyer, *Kant's Critique of the power of judgment: critical essays* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 156. Cf. Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab*, 120.
- 3 Work on Hegel and the Jews includes Joseph D. Cohen, *Le spectre juif de Hegel* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), Yirmiahu Yovel, *Dark riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), Yirmiyahu Yovel, "Sublimity and ressentiment: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 3 (1997), Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult freedom: essays on Judaism; freedom on tablets of stone (Tractate of principles, 6.2)* (London: Athlone Press, 1990), Michael Mack, *German idealism and the Jew: the inner anti-semitism of philosophy and German Jewish responses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Pedro Fernández Liria, *Hegel y el judaísmo* (Barcelona: Riopiedras, 2000), Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and modern philosophy: a preface to future Jewish thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
- 4 Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 80–81.
- 5 Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult freedom*, 235.
- 6 Fackenheim, *Encounters*, 90.
- 7 Robert M. Wallace, *Hegel's philosophy of reality, freedom, and God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 276.
- 8 Hegel, *The philosophy of history*. [New Dover ed.], 195.
- 9 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The encyclopaedia logic, with the Zusätze: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of philosophical sciences with the Zusätze* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), Paragraph 151, 226.
- 10 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the history of philosophy. Translated from the German by E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 252.
- 11 Ibid., 286. On closer examination, however, even the One of the religion of the sublime turns out to be Nothing: Hegel, *History of philosophy*, 289. Similarly we will find that the oriental despot, all powerful at first sight, turns out in fact to be as empty of real power and real character as his subjects.
- 12 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 363.
- 13 Immanuel Kant and Paul Guyer, *Critique of the power of judgment* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 14 Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab*, 121.
- 15 Kant and Guyer, *Judgment*, 152.
- 16 On the difference between Kant's and Hegel's notions of sublimity, see Jean-Marie Breuvert, "Considérations intempestives sur le sublime (de Kant à Hegel et Retour)," *Mélange de sciences religieuses* 60, no. 1 (2003).
- 17 Edmund Burke, "A Philosophical Inquiry," 58.
- 18 One of the many elaborations on this theme in Christian history, discussed by Michel Foucault, is the theology of Joachim of Fiore (c.1132–1202), who speaks of three "ages" in the history of revelation: the Age of the Father (a time of the Law and slavish obedience), the Age of the Son (with the coming of Christ: a time of grace and loving obedience), and a future Age of the Spirit (a time of the divine spirit completely infusing everyone and everything rather, and a time of freedom). (Foucault, *Security, territory, population*, 225, n.72.)

- 19 On the effect of that discovery on western thought, see Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental renaissance*.
- 20 E. S. Shaffer, "Kubla Khan" and *The fall of Jerusalem: the mythological school in biblical criticism and secular literature, 1770–1880*, 1st paperback ed. (Cambridge, [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 63.
- 21 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia logic*, 226 (para. 151).
- 22 Ibid., para. 112, 77.
- 23 The quote is from the 1821 manuscript: *In aller Religion, jüdischen und mohamedanischen,* (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Walter Jaeschke, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, vol. 2 (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1993), 62.) Hodgson translates: "All religion, such as Judaism or Islam," Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the philosophy of religion*, ed. Peter Crafts Hodgson, 3 vols, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 156.
- 24 G. W. F. Hegel and G. Lasson, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*. Hrsg. von Georg Lasson. Mit einem bibliographischen Anhang. (Nachdruck der 1. Aufl. 1925–1927.) (Hamburg: Meiner, 1966), 18. Hegel ed. Hodgson, *Philosophy of Religion*, 129.
- 25 Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Benjamin Disraeli: romantic orientalist," *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 47, no. 2 (2005). A useful meditation on the meaning of "Semite" is Anidjar, *Semites*.
- 26 Hegel, *The philosophy of history*. [New Dover Ed.]. New York: Dover Publications, 1956, 352.
- 27 Ibid., 355.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Charles Secondat de Montesquieu, *The spirit of laws* (London: G. Bell, 1914), especially Book XIX; David Hume, "Of national characters," *Three essays, moral and political* (London: A. Millar and Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, 1748), Essay I.
- 30 Kurt Leese, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie Hegels. Auf Grund der neu erschlossenen Quellen untersucht und dargestellt* (Berlin: Furcht, 1922), 789.
- 31 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the philosophy of religion*, ed. Peter Crafts Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984–1987), 500.
- 32 Michel Hulin and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel et l'orient: suivi de la traduction annotée d'un essai de Hegel sur la Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1979), 133.
- 33 Hegel trans. Sibree, *The philosophy of history*, 356.
- 34 G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie Hegels. Auf Grund der neu erschlossenen Quellen untersucht und dargestellt*, trans. Kurt Leese (Berlin: Furcht, 1922), 790.
- 35 Hegel trans. Sibree, *Philosophy of History*, 359.
- 36 Ibid., 357.
- 37 Ibid., 358.
- 38 Gil Anidjar's thesis that the Jew is the theological enemy and the Arab the political, of western Christianity. Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab*, has its limitations.
- 39 Edward W. Said, "Shattered myths," in *Middle East Crucible: studies of the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973*, ed. Naseer Aruri (Wilmette, Ill.: Medina University Press, 1975), 410–427.
- 40 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Part I, Book 5, Chapter 14.
- 41 G. W. F. Hegel and G. Lasson, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 535.
- 42 Hegel trans. Sibree, *Philosophy of history*, 197. See also Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Dark riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (Oxford, UK.: Polity Press, 1998), 79–80.
- 43 G. W. F. Hegel and P. C. Hodgson, *Lectures on the philosophy of religion: the lectures of 1827* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 158.
- 44 Hegel trans. Sibree, *The philosophy of history*, 359.
- 45 Hegel and Hodgson, *Lectures on the philosophy of religion: the lectures of 1827*, 158.
- 46 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Part I, Book 2, Chapter 1, 10.
- 47 The hard orientalist association of classlessness and insecurity persisted beyond Hegel. "The Kurds and Arabs being complete democrats," writes the traveler Joseph Wolff in

- 1831, "anarchy and robbery prevail among them in a greater degree than under any monarchical government" (Joseph Wolff, *Researches and missionary labours among the Jews, Mohammedans, and other sects*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Nisbet, 1835), 91.
- 48 Paul Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 2.
- 49 Ibid, 78–79, 109. See Linda T. Darling, "Ottoman politics through British eyes: Paul Rycaut's The Present State of the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of World History* 5, no. 1 (1994): 71–98.
- 50 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Part II, Book 13, Chapter 6, 216.
- 51 *Dans les gouvernements despotiques, où l'on abuse également de l'honneur, des postes et des rangs, on fait indifféremment d'un prince un goujat, et d'un goujat un prince.* (Book 5, Chapter 19.)
- 52 Hegel, trans. Sibree, *Philosophy of History*, 360.
- 53 Hegel, trans. Sibree, *Philosophy of History*, 358.
- 54 René Descartes, *The passions of the soul* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1989), 109. "La vénération ou le respect est une inclination de l'âme non seulement à estimer l'objet qu'elle révère, mais aussi à se soumettre à lui avec quelque crainte, pour tâcher de se le rendre favorable."

Chapter 9

- 1 Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 95.
- 2 2 Cor 3:6.
- 3 Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un voyage du Levant, fait par ordre du roy: ...: enrichie de descriptions & de figures d'un grand nombre de plantes rares, de divers animaux; et de plusieurs observations touchant l'histoire naturelle*, ed. Gilbert Bagnani (A Paris: De l'Impr. royale, 1717), 35. Vol. II, letter 14. I owe this and most of the following references about obedience to the letter in Islam to Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 94–97.
- 4 P. Michel Nau, *L'état present de la religion musulmane* (Paris, 1684), 53, quoted in Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 94.
- 5 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Nouvelle relation de l'intérieur du serrail du Grand Seigneur, contenant plusieurs singularitez qui jusqu'icy n'ont point esté mises en lumière [micro-form]* (Paris: O. de Varennes, 1675), 519–521. Chapter 15.
- 6 Nau, *L'État present de la religion musulmane*, 61; Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 209, n. 47.
- 7 W. Keach, *Arbitrary power: romanticism, language, politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 191.
- 8 Luther could get quite sarcastic in lampooning the cult of relics, as when he joked that the Church was charging people for showing feathers and an egg laid by the Holy Spirit. Eric W. Gritsch, "Two feathers from the Holy Spirit?" *Christian History* 12, no. 3 (1993).
- 9 Jiří Fajt, *Charles IV: emperor by the grace of God: culture and art in the reign of the last days of the Luxembourgs 1347–1437: catalog of the exhibition, Prague Castle, 16 February–21 May 2006*, eds. Barbara Drake Boehm, Pražský hrad. and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), 1st ed. (Bamburg: ARTHIS, 2006)
- 10 See e.g. Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious idols and violent hands: iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Phyllis Mack Crew, *Calvinist preaching and iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1544–1569* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978); John Phillips, *The reformation of images: destruction of art in England, 1535–1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973)
- 11 There are some exceptions, such as the practice of swearing on a copy of the Bible.
- 12 I am using "meaning" here in the popular, and not the technical semiotic, sense.
- 13 1 Cor 13:12.
- 14 Daniel Boyarin, *A radical Jew*, Chapter 8.

- 15 Mat 5:17.
- 16 Ex 21:24.
- 17 Matt 5:38–41.
- 18 Surah 5, “The Repast” (*Al-Maidah*), 44–45.
- 19 Jean Chardin, *Journal du voyage du chevalier Chardin en Perse & aux Indes Orientales, par la Mer Noire & par la Colchide* (London: Moses Pitt, 1686. [Online: ProQuest (UMI)]), 299.
- 20 George Sale, *The Koran, commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammed, translated into English immediately from the original Arabic*, [1734] (Project Gutenberg electronic version, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/7440/pg7440.html> accessed on May 11, 2011), 141.
- 21 Edward Ryan, *The history of the effects of religion on mankind; in countries, ancient and modern, barbarous and civilized* (London: J. F. and C. Rivington, 1788)
- 22 Matt 5:43–44.
- 23 Rom 13:10 and 13:9.
- 24 Greco-Roman writers, too, had suggested that the law requires a moral context in addition to the literal text: *quid leges sine moribus vanae proficient*, asked Horace “of what avail are empty laws without morality?” (*Odes*, Book 3, Ode 24). But Paul’s source was Jewish. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” is from the Hebrew Bible. And Paul is doing little more than repeating the statement of the first-century BCE rabbi Hillel the Elder, one of the most important sages quoted in the Talmud, as recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Shabbat 31a). Hillel taught, “that which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor” is the essence of the Torah, and the rest is but “explanation.” In the traditional *Christian* understanding, which alone interests us here, however, the ordinary Jews of the Old Testament misunderstood that love is the indispensable spirit of God’s Law. In the *imagined* Old Testament view, God and Man have nothing more in common than the relationship between a master and a slave. It is only with Christ that the Law is “fulfilled” as Love.

Chapter 10

- 1 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Part I, Book 3, Chapter 10, 29.
- 2 Esther 8:8.
- 3 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 10.
- 4 Conversely, stories of harem inmates subverting the system and having sex with lovers from outside the harem, or with each other, may designate not only the silliness of the despot but also the ability of women to fight back against patriarchal authority.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 6 Victor Turner, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995).
- 7 Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 219.
- 8 Tom Standage, *The mechanical Turk: the true story of the chess-playing machine that fooled the world* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2002).
- 9 Gerd Taube, *Puppenspiel als kulturhistorisches Phänomen: Vorstudien zu einer “Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Puppenspiels”* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1995); Henryk Jurkowski, *A history of European puppetry*, ed. Penny Francis (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998); John McCormick, *Popular puppet theatre in Europe, 1800–1914*, ed. Bennie Pratasik (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 10 The German term, whose literal meaning is “frighten-image,” is used to describe a salient example that provides a warning to those who contemplate it.
- 11 Grosrichard, *The sultan’s court*, 60. In the following discussion, I am very much indebted to Grosrichard, although my interpretation differs from his in important respects.
- 12 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 19.

- 13 Jean de Thévenot, *The travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant. In three parts. Viz. into: I. Turkey. II. Persia. III. the East-Indies. Newly done out of French.* eds. Archibald Lovell and Walter Stennett (London: H. Clark, for H. Faithorne, J. Adamson, C. Skegnes, and T. Newborough, 1687), 177.
- 14 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 144. Possibly, the sage mentioned here is the fifteenth-century Indian-born scholar known as Eussuf al-Din Kadri.
- 15 Ibid., 157.
- 16 For example, in Michel Baudier, *The history of the imperial estate of the Grand Seigneurs: Their habitations, lives, titles, qualities, exercises, workes, revenewes, habit, dissent, ceremonies, magnificence, judgements, officers, favourites, religion, power, government and tyranny*, trans. Edward Grimeston (London: Richard Meighen, 1635), 51.
- 17 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 39.
- 18 Mary Wortley Montagu and Malcolm Jack, *Turkish embassy letters* (London: W. Pickering, 1993), 116.
- 19 Thévenot, *The travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant*, 157.
- 20 Joseph de La Porte, *Tableau de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris: Duchesne, 1757), 107–108; Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 139.
- 21 Quoted in ibid, 139–140.
- 22 Ibid., 61.
- 23 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 15.
- 24 Ibid., 35. The power of this and other long-eighteenth-century descriptions of the Ottoman court on the contemporary imagination is evident among other things in Orhan Pamuk's historical fiction. The silence of the sultan's court is an important feature in *Red*.
- 25 Sieur des Joannots de Vignau, *Le secretaire turc, contenant l'art d'exprimer ses pensées sans se voir, sans se parler et sans s'écrire,... par M. Du Vignau* (1688): 84. Translation: Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 64.
- 26 Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*, 264–265, 278.
- 27 Lambek writes that the ancestral relics of the Sakalava people of Northwestern Madagascar have the significance of an Ultimate Sacred Postulate. "Interminable disputes: sanctity, succession, and secession in Northwest Madagascar," *in preparation*.
- 28 Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 61.
- 29 Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 65.
- 30 Ibid., 66–67.
- 31 Ibid., 66; Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail: la fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 85. Grosrichard's apparent attribution of this quote to Montesquieu's *Spirit of laws*, Book V, Chapter 19, is mistaken.
- 32 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Part I, Book 2, Chapter 5. Montesquieu refers, in a note, to the travelogues of Jean Chardin, who says that Eastern kings always have viziers.
- 33 Chardin, *Journal du voyage du chevalier Chardin*, 75.
- 34 Baudier, *History of the imperial estate of the Grand Seigneurs*, 56.
- 35 Michel Baudier, *Histoire générale de la religion des Turcs* (Rouen: J. Berthelin, 1641), 330. Book III, Chapter 1. I am using the translation in Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, but have changed the spelling of "Mustafa" to the more common English one (from "Mustapha").
- 36 Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 81.
- 37 There are other ways in which the nature and principle of despotism are reconciled in Montesquieu. See Sharon Krause, "Despotism in the *Spirit of Laws*," in *Montesquieu's Science of Politics*, eds. David W. Carithers, Michael A. Mosher and Paul A. Rahe. (Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 231–271.
- 38 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Part I, Book 3, Chapter 9, 28–29.
- 39 Giorgio Agamben, *State of exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 95. Chapter 6 of this work is specifically devoted to the concepts of *auctoritas* and *potestas*.

- 40 In actual fact, Islamic jurisprudence does limit the powers of the sovereign and subjects him to the religious Law. The concept of the law having a higher authority than the state rests in this rule. Its formulation in Islam in all likelihood influenced the concept of legal authority in the West. John Makdisi believes that in England the legal system introduced by the Normans had important elements derived from the Normans' experience with Muslim law in Sicily and elsewhere. John Makdisi, *Islamic property law: cases and materials for comparative analysis with the common law* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).
- 41 Carl Schmitt, *Political theology*, 3.

Chapter 11

- 1 Alain Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 70.
- 2 This was the rationale behind late twentieth-century feminist theories of the "male gaze" as an exercise in total power. More recently, the ruses employed by the watched have become of interest. But orientalism is typically unsubtle. In the hard orientalist view, the Lord does indeed control his subjects totally by watching them.
- 3 de Vignau, *Le secretaire turc*. Byron describes this arrangement in *Don Juan*.
- 4 Tavernier, *Nouvelle relation de l'intérieur du serrail du Grand Seigneur*, Cf. Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 135.
- 5 Chateaubriand, *Travels to Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, trans. Frederic Shoberl, vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1835), 272. Quoted by Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 70.
- 6 Chardin, *Journal du voyage du chevalier Chardin*, translation as in Grosrichard, *The sultan's court*, 55.
- 7 Jacques Lacan, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 215.
- 8 Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977). In distinction from the argument presented here, Heidegger traces the experience of Being as a being that is watched much farther back in history: to ancient Greece.
- 9 Written by Sting and released on the *Police* album, *Synchronicity*, 1983.
- 10 Michel Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres: cours au collège de France, 1982–1983*, eds. Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana and Collège de France (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).
- 11 Mark A. Tabbert, *American freemasons: three centuries of building American communities* (Lexington, Mass.: National Heritage Museum and New York University Press, 2005).
- 12 Jacob Katz, *Jews and freemasons in Europe 1723–1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), Chapter 3.

Chapter 12

- 1 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
- 2 Foucault, *Security, territory, population*, 130.
- 3 Ibid., 94–95.
- 4 Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil: prelude to a philosophy of the future*, ed. Marion Faber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44. Emphasis original.
- 5 Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Galatians*, trans. Theodore Grabner (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1949), 16.
- 6 Foucault, *Security, territory, population*, 94–95.
- 7 Ibid., 124.
- 8 Aristotle, *Politics: A treatise on government*, 91.
- 9 Foucault, *Security, territory, population*, 128. Later Foucault speaks of Thomas Aquinas' thought on government. Thomas, too, compares the good king to both the shepherd and the father of a family. Ibid., 252–253.

- 10 Ibid., 108.
- 11 Ibid., 108. In the next few paragraphs, I refer to page numbers in this publication by enclosing them in parentheses.
- 12 Niccolò Machiavelli and Tim Parks, *The prince* (London; New York: Penguin, 2009), 124.
- 13 The phrase *le roi règne mais ne gouverne pas* comes from Adolphe Thiers, who included it in an anonymous text in 1830. In a published article in *Le National*, “Du gouvernement par les chambres” (February 4, 1830), it becomes *Le roi n’administre pas, ne gouverne pas, il règne*.
- 14 Anderson, *An English consul in Turkey*.
- 15 Foucault himself was an unmasker. The radical left activist that he was for most of his life, he is not likely to have wanted to sing the praises of the paradigmatic modern institution of pastoral governmental practice, the capitalist welfare state. To many readers, he unmasked liberal capitalist democracy as a relative of its declared nemesis, totalitarianism. He showed that the welfare state also, like the “socialisms” of a Stalin or a Hitler, exercised insidious control by “taking charge of men ... at every moment of their existence” (165). Foucault asks us to link the subtle paternalism of western-style, “democratic” governmentality with crudely obvious totalitarianism in such a way that the faults (or, depending on one’s political convictions, the potential faults) of the first are revealed in sharp contrast, ranging in effect from the carnivalesque to the nightmarish, in the second.
- 16 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 205. As is often the case, Rycaut states a prejudice like this as if to satisfy his readers’ expectations, and then follows by a concrete observation that contradicts it. In this case, he notes that in spite of their reputation for lack of military sophistication, the Turks win battles not necessarily because of their numbers but because of their discipline. And that he attributes, not to their fanatical devotion to Islam or the Sultan, but – to the prohibition in the Turkish camp on drinking wine. As a result, the Turks do NOT rape and plunder in victory!

Chapter 13

- 1 Grosrichard, *The sultan’s court*, 107. Cf. Bruno Étienne, *Les combattants suicidaires: essai sur la thanatocratie moderne (inédit); suivi de Les amants de l’apocalypse: clés pour comprendre le 11 septembre* (La Tour-d’Aigues: l’aube, 2005), 29–31.
- 2 Talal Asad, *On suicide bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). It should be added, though perhaps somewhat simplistically, that Kant and Hegel wrote about “real” fanaticism, while Asad writes about imagined fanaticism, as do I. But recall that *imagined* does not necessarily mean *imaginary*.
- 3 It was no doubt true in the long eighteenth century, as it is now, that, as Ghassan Hage puts it, self-destruction leaves behind an honorable reputation among the living. Hage studies Palestinian suicide bombers and suggests that, far from an act aimed at completely erasing one’s worldly existence, the act of self-sacrifice in their case is aimed in part at accumulating “personal status” and – if the expression can be used about the dead – “self-esteem” through the reputation that the act will create for the “martyr” among those he or she leaves behind. (Ghassan Hage, “Comes a time we are all enthusiasm”: understanding Palestinian suicide bombers in times of exiphobia,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 77.) Hage studies the video messages and other items the suicide attacker leaves behind, and the quasi-ritualistic mourning performances in which his or her act is recognized after the actual attack by relatives, friends, and comrades in struggle. This provides the deceased with the symbolic capital of which she was “dispossessed” in her life. “It is an astonishing manifestation of the capacity of the human imagination,” Hage comments, “to commit individuals along a path of an imagined enjoyable symbolic life following the cessation of their physical life. It is a swapping of physical existence with symbolic existence” (ibid., 77). Centuries earlier, when a Muslim fighter offered his life for his faith and his master, it is certain that

westerners telling the story must have had at least some appreciation for the symbolic capital that his sacrifice would gain him in his community.

- 4 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 7–8.
- 5 I am refraining here from a discussion of interesting similarities between reports of a stoic acceptance of death, including when ordered by a ruler, from the Muslim Orient and from other parts of the non-West, ranging from aboriginal America to Japan.
- 6 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Part I, Book 3, Chapter 8. In this specific note Montesquieu is thinking not of Muslim or Ottoman, but of Russian despotism. He is referring to *The state of Russia, under the present czar* by John Perry (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1716).
- 7 Montesquieu, *Spirit of laws*, Book 5 Chapter 14 (p. 62), Book 14 Chapter 3 (p. 242).
- 8 Ibid., Book 19, Chapter 14.
- 9 Ibid., Book 14, Chapter 3.
- 10 Hage, “Comes a time we are all enthusiasm,” 65–89.
- 11 Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture*, 1st MIT pbk ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 22.
- 12 John Milbank, “Sublimity: the modern transcendent,” in *Transcendence: Philosophy, literature, and theology approach the beyond*, ed. Regina Schwartz (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 218.
- 13 Thomas Weiskel, *The romantic sublime: studies in the structure and psychology of transcendence* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 93–94.
- 14 Étienne, *Les combattants suicidaires*, 21.
- 15 Hegel, trans. Sibree, *The philosophy of history*, 357.
- 16 Among the many examples: Surah 14 (“Ibrahim”) promises that the righteous will live among gardens and fountains. For Muslim conceptions of heaven and hell, see Nerina Rustomji, *The garden and the fire: heaven and hell in Islamic culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
- 17 Surah 56 (*Al-Waqi’a*, “The Event”): 35–36 does suggest that the houris are virgins, though it can be read to the deceased’s spouses, who have been resurrected with their virginity restored.
- 18 The biblical book *shir ha-shirim*, known to Christians as “The Song of Solomon,” uses the same approach, interpreting what seems at the literal level to be a sexual relationship between a man and a woman as one between Christ or God and the Christian’s soul.
- 19 Silvestre de Sacy, *Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins et sur l’origine de leur nom, par M. Silvestre de Sacy, lu à la séance publique de l’Institut, du 7 juillet 1809* (Paris: L’Institute 1809).
- 20 Among these: Friars William of Rubruck (traveled 1253–1255) and Odoric of Porderone (1318–1330), and even earlier, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (1160–1173). Manuel Komroff, *Contemporaries of Marco Polo; consisting of the travel records to the eastern parts of the world of William of Rubruck, 1253–1255; the journey of John of Pian de Carpin, 1245–1247; the journal of Friar Odoric, 1318–1330 & the oriental travels of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, 1160–1173* (London: Cape, 1928), 96, 168, 212, 268, 269, 300, 336, 343, 346, 351.
- 21 See the editor’s notes in Marco Polo, *The book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian, concerning the kingdoms and marvels of the East*, eds. Henry Yule, Henri Cordier and Amy Frances Yule, 3rd ed. (London: J. Murray, 1903), 143.
- 22 Ibid., 139–140.
- 23 Ibid., 142.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 My favorite illustration is Pushkin’s *Queen of Hearts*, whose protagonist moves seamlessly from the obsessive love of a woman, to an equally irresistible desire to get her grandmother, a successful gambler, to reveal a magic card combination. A theoretical assessment of this human quality is expressed, among other places, in Žižek’s writing on the “futile circular movement” of desire: “We can in this way also grasp the specificity of the Lacanian notion of anxiety: anxiety occurs not when the object-cause of

desire is lacking; it is not the lack of the object that gives rise to anxiety but, on the contrary, the danger of our getting too close to the object and thus losing the lack itself. Anxiety is brought on by the disappearance of desire.” (Žižek, *Looking awry*, 8.)

- 26 Rycaut, *The present state of the Ottoman Empire*, 104.
- 27 In this respect the imagined Muslims are somewhat reminiscent of the Jewish cabbalists who feminize the *shekhinah* or Divine Presence. See Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His beauty: feminine images of God from the Bible to the early Kabbala* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- 28 Weiskel, *The romantic sublime*, 93–94.

Epilogue

- 1 Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*, 218.
- 2 Louis Massignon and Herbert Mason, *Testimonies and reflections: essays of Louis Massignon* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), xviii, 178 p.
- 3 Mary Louise Gude, *Louis Massignon: the crucible of compassion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 231.
- 4 See e.g. Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental despotism; a comparative study of total power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).
- 5 See e.g. Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis: a debate on reason and authority in medieval Islam*, ed. Institute of Ismaili Studies (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2001).
- 6 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, eds. John Bryant and Haskell S. Springer (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), Chapter 36.
- 7 *Ibid.*, Chapter 17.
- 8 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of piety: the Islamic revival and the feminist subject*, ed. American Council of Learned Societies. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2–3.
- 9 A random selection: J. Fiske, *Reading the popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 228; J. Fiske, *Television culture* (London; New York: Methuen, 1987), 353; Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: analysing culture* (New York: Continuum, 2006); Janice A. Radway, *Reading the romance: women, patriarchy, and popular literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); C. Lee Harrington, *Soap fans: pursuing pleasure and making meaning in everyday life*, ed. Denise D. Bielby (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Iain Borden, Anthony Frank Kiendl, eds., *Godzilla vs. skateboarders: skateboarding as a critique of social spaces* (Regina, SK: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2003); Stuart Hall, *Resistance through rituals: youth sub-cultures in post-war Britain*, eds. Tony Jefferson and University of Birmingham (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1976). No doubt the failure of the communist regimes of Europe had much to do with left-wing intellectuals rallying from grand revolution to the modest goals of local subversion.
- 10 Mahmood, *Politics of piety*, 186.
- 11 The phrase recalls “passive aggressive,” a phrase coined chiefly to denigrate a mainly feminine form of behavior and refers to an insincere, manipulative use of mock passivity to one’s own aggressively selfish ends. It should be clear how the submissive agency Mahmood writes about is very different from this caricature.
- 12 Asad, *Formations of the secular*, 73.
- 13 I am not cluttering the text here with a declaration of what I think is a self-evident fact: that the representation of this experience as a relationship to a sublime power is at least to a large extent if not entirely metaphorical and anthropomorphic. Even if it is, it is the best way, given the limitations of human symbolic capacity, to describe a truth. “I do not believe in God,” a leading twentieth-century social critic is reputed to have said, “but it is still man’s best idea.”

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