Discourses of Islam in British Romantic Poetry

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For all of my teachers, but especially Donna Landry.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Islamicate discourses are structurally integral – not incidental – to the metaphysics, poetics, and political imagination of British Romanticism. Against a critical tradition that has treated Islam as a symbolic "East" external to European thought, the project reconstructs the long intellectual genealogy through which Islamicate philosophy, theology, and scientific method entered European Enlightenment discourse and, through it, the Romantic imagination. Chapter 1 establishes the historical and conceptual background, tracing how Andalusi traditions of Aristotelian rationalism and the Active Intellect, transmitted through figures such as Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd, and Spinoza, shaped the epistemological conditions inherited by the Romantics. Chapter 2 offers a close reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley, arguing that his metaphysics of imagination and prophecy emerges from these Islamicate legacies even as he critiques Orientalism. Chapter 3 turns to Lord Byron, demonstrating how his sustained encounter with Islamic cultures reconfigures the heroic form and generates the Byronic hero as a figure shaped by Islamicate ethics, history, and metaphysics. Chapter 4 examines the afterlives of these discourses in the colonial authoring of the Middle East, showing how Romantic constructions of the 'Arab' and 'Arabia' informed the ideological foundations of British imperial policy in the Mashriq. Taken together, the thesis reveals a continuous genealogy from the Islamicate to Romanticism to empire, showing that Islam was not merely represented by the Romantics but actively constituted the metaphysical and political frameworks through which they imagined the modern world.

Why, therefore, do you insist that things illuminated by the divine light should become necessary, when not even men make things necessary when they see them? Does your gaze add any necessity to the things you see present?

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*

Introduction

The Necessity of Islam

To tell a story about the origins of the 'Western tradition' we need to go east. From where did Pythagoras – the man Bertrand Russell calls the most influential (Western) philosopher of all time – learn geometry? Egypt, or Persia, from the Magi, or perhaps from Zoroaster himself.[1] It is surely not too hard, once we start looking, to see that all the tribes touched by the Abrahamic faiths still bear the imprint of the Babylonians.

There are many shared ancestors, not just Abraham, and the most significant for the study and comprehension of Islam in Romanticism is Aristotle. It could be argued that only the Islamic philosophers, along with Spinoza and perhaps Maimonides, have properly understood Aristotle's Active Intellect, as described in *De Anima*, book III, chapter 5. And it is here that this elision – or division? – of God/Nature/Man, returns to the West, smuggled, as it were, through Maimonides – the great Jewish philosopher and court physician of Saladin of the crusades – to Spinoza, and fed upon by Goethe and Shelley in their Romantic response to 'Enlightenment'. Yet there is another Aristotle, the Aristotle of logic, of empiricism, of reasoning and certainty, who is also rehabilitated in Western philosophy: the Aristotle of syllogisms, a paradigm which eventually eats itself up with Kant, bringing an end to the great tradition of Aristotelean ambivalence on that most Romantic of symbols – the soul.

To deal with Islam and Romanticism, then, is to deal with Man, God, Nature, and a very strange paradox: that the climax of 'Enlightenment' philosophy is built on Islamicate discourses, especially those of the sciences, and that the return of the repressed that comes in the form of the Romantic rejection of that Enlightenment uses Islam as a symbol to reinscribe the potency of God, Nature, the Soul, and Imagination.[2] It is this paradox – where Islam is

[1] Christoph Riedweg, Pythagoras: His Life, Teaching, and Influence, trans. Steven Rendall, in collaboration with Cristoph Riedweg and Andreas Schatzmann (Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 7.
[2] The term Islamicate was first coined by Marshall Hodgson in The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization (University of Chicago Press, 1974). He introduces the term to refer to more broadly cultural or social aspects that flourished under a broadly Islamic context, but were not specifically 'Islamic', a term he wished to reserve for 'the proper, the religious sense' (his italics). Although there has been some debate over the use of the term

both Modernity and God-enchanted Other – which this thesis will continually explore. In doing so, we encounter the roots of the entanglement of which we have been at the centre for the last two hundred years, up until and beyond the attacks of 11 September 2001.

This thesis makes the case for the necessity of Islam, as a symbol, source, set of discourses, and inheritance in Romanticism, just as M. H. Abrams made the case for the inheritance of the 'traditional concepts' in Natural Supernaturalism (1971).[3] If there is a partner work to this labour, it is that one, and the debt of this thesis to the insights of Abrams cannot be overstated.

What are the contexts and the terrains of the space occupied by Islam, or what space has Islam been allowed to occupy in British Romanticism, and indeed scholarship on British Romanticism? Why, for example, does Shelley refer to himself and his family as 'like Wahabees' to describe their peripatetic movements? Why is the apparently despotic 'East' of Byron's 'Turkish Tales' so compulsively realised? Why is it an Arab Bedouin who holds the shell which sounds the 'prophetic blast of harmony' in Wordsworth's dream in Book 5 of The Prelude (1805)?

An approach to these questions, and an exploration of the smuggled-in heritage of Islamicate discourses in Romantic thought, soon touches upon some of the paradigms that we have long used to analyse Romanticism – what is the nature of the individual vs society? Where does knowledge come from – are there some forms of knowledge that are of greater worth than others? From what is poetry inspired? What is imagination – what, indeed, is inspiration – without God nor muse? What is God, and upon what can be bestowed Godhead?[4]

(see Shahab Ahmad, What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic (Princeton University Press, 2016) as an elegant example), the term has an undeniable utility, and I employ it throughout.

[3] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (Norton, 1971), p. 13.

[4] It is worth noting that the framework is precisely that articulated by Kant in the *Critique* – 'Metaphysics has as the proper object of its enquiries three ideas only—God, freedom, and immortality; and it aims at showing that the principles of pure reason suffice to the conception of the possibility of that which its object comprehends' (B395-6), and 'advanced from the knowledge of self (the doctrine of the soul), through the knowledge of the world (the doctrine

Whilst these questions draw us into an engagement with chains of philosophy reaching back through both West and East, they also alert us to a more urgent and pressing matter – the concreteness of the Islamicate as a culture, a territory, and a co-incident history.

In this thesis, we will have to keep shifting between the textual and the material, and whilst those two epistemes interact and collide, they do so no more comprehensively and confusingly than through the practice of Orientalism. It is not the case, at least in the early nineteenth century, that the Orient depended on Orientalism for its existence. Whether that would continue to be possible into the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is a question beyond the reach of this thesis, although the final chapter gives an indication of some of the structural forces at work between these two epistemes at the critical historical moment of the twentieth century. However, it was entirely possible for the Ottoman empire, for example, to survive by itself, without Orientalism, just as Romantic poetry existed independently of the later scholarship that defined and interpreted it as 'Romanticism'. Romantic poets were especially alert to both the actuality of the Islamicate without their commentary, and the radical potentiality of the Islamicate for what they wished to convey. At the heart of the encounter with the Islamicate for Romantic poets, at least initially, is the possibility of the radical difference of a set of epistemological and metaphysical certainties in a culture that could, at the same time, share certain ancestors. Within this encounter, then, there are a number of different approaches that may be adopted.

In the first approach we can recognise the most basic form of Othering, where the Western writer positions Islam as an absolute difference, necessarily in binary opposition to a Western Self. Thus, 'Western' = 'Modern', 'Islam' = 'Medieval'. One can see quite quickly that

of the world), to the knowledge of God (theology)' (B32). Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Macmillan & Co., 1929), p. 518 and p. 14.

this is not particularly interesting since it aims constantly for a certitude that is resolved to utter simplicity. Whatever we want to be, they must not be; whatever we admire in ourselves, they must have the antithesis of, and hence we dislike it. This is the most classically 'Orientalist' position and can be seen embedded in the poetry of Robert Southey, whose voluminous notes seek to render unfamiliar religious and cultural material comprehensible within the categories of his own Christian framework.[5]

Another approach is an attempt to retrieve a shared foundation. This is where the resonances of the classically Romantic symbols of the Islamicate – the Bedouin Arab, the desert – find their fullest poetic expression. Wordsworth's 'dream of the Arab' in Book V of The Prelude is perhaps the most archetypal expression of this, which becomes the ur-structure of the Romantic discourse of the Islamicate. But it is Shelley who goes furthest in an exploration of the edges and valences of this archetype. Shelley is struck by Islam as a symbol whose possibilities exceed the categories through which he initially approaches it – it reaches out beyond containment or category, so that we have to dance around it as it is a 'fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness'.[6] Shelley's metaphysicality takes him right into the philosophy of the Islamicate Aristotelians, and his philosophy traces the thread of the Active Intellect through Classical, Islamicate, Jewish and European philosophy. Here the Other is neither fully separate nor same but intermixed. Yet, the limits of this approach are most fully expressed in Alastor, where the continual enmeshing of self with other leads only to a search for 'an intelligence similar to itself', ultimately 'in vain', since rather than finding 'its communities', 'the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself

[5] There is an anxiety here, articulated most famously by Derrida in his discussion of the supplementary in *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), where 'the supplement supplements', and 'adds only to replace', so that it 'insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*', so that, in fact, 'it produces no relief' (p. 145). I use Derrida's notion of the supplement here to describe the relationship between Southey's poetry and its explanatory notes: the notes promise to make the unfamiliar comprehensible, yet their apparent necessity also reveals that the poetry cannot fully secure the meaning of what it represents.

[6] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 674-701 (pp. 696-7).

felt'.[7]

But there is a third approach, where difference and the Other are recognised and accepted. This is the approach of the historian, and it is exemplified by Byron, who of all the Romantic poets, is the most humane in his understanding of difference when and where it occurs, because underneath any difference is a complete acceptance of the universal nature of the human being – whatever epistemological structures of feeling may be layered as superstructure of that being, almost reminiscent of Emmanuel Levinas's 'first philosophy' of 'the face of the other'.[8] As we shall see, Byron psychologically 'works through' a lot of anxiety about the Other (and the Other in himself) in his 'Turkish Tales', so the acceptance of cultural difference we see in Don Juan is hard won.

All these approaches are intermingled and made manifest in the colonial authoring of the Middle East that comes during and after the First World War. Here, Romantic discourses on Arabia and the 'Arab' combined with the archetypal figure of the Byronic hero in the writings and actions of key twentieth-century figures including Mark Sykes and T. E. Lawrence. Noting that the First World War has been described as the British 'Arabists' moment in history', I outline influences born out of the multivalent discourses on Islam during the Romantic period.[9]

This thesis then explores Islam and the Islamicate as a symbol, as a set of discourses, and at times, as an analytic, in Romantic thought. My argument is that Islamicate discourses are necessary to Romanticism just as those of the Judeo-Christian or Classical heritage are, although they have been hidden, elided, and at times quietly absorbed into traditions in which their origins are no longer readily apparent.

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[7] Shelley, 'Preface' to *Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude* in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, pp. 92-111 (p. 93).
[8] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press, 1969), see Section III, 'Exteriority and the Face'.
[9] By Kathryn Tidrick in *Heart Beguiling Araby: The English Romance with Arabia* (I. B. Tauris, 1990), p. 163.

The intellectual-historical reconstruction sketched above does not simply provide background; it discloses the structural paradox at the heart of the Romantic encounter with Islam. Romanticism inherits from the Islamicate some of its most fundamental intellectual and metaphysical resources, yet it apprehends those resources as though they belonged to a cultural and historical outside. By 'Islamicate', I mean the wider cultural and intellectual traditions associated with historically Islamic societies, rather than exclusively Islamic religious belief (see footnote 2). These traditions are not wholly external to the European intellectual history traced here, because that history already incorporates elements of their philosophical and scientific inheritance. So, inheritance appears as estrangement; continuity returns under the sign of difference. It is from within this paradox that Romantic metaphysics unfolds.

There is, then, a structural tension that sits – often unremarked – at the foundations of British Romanticism. The movement retrospectively understood as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment draws, in some of its most ambitious metaphysical formulations, upon the very discourses that enabled Enlightenment rationality in the first place. The scientific revolution that underwrote post-Reformation epistemology drew upon intellectual resources shaped by centuries of Islamicate philosophical and mathematical thought, as Chapter 1 demonstrates. Yet when Romantic writers sought alternative metaphysical and imaginative models, they did not generally recognise these resources as part of a shared intellectual inheritance. They figured them instead as emanating from an imagined cultural and historical Other – 'the East', and, in particular, Islam.

This perceived exteriority is not incidental. For when Romantic writers reached for older modes of metaphysical and imaginative relation, the resources they encountered were frequently Islamicate, even as they understood themselves to be turning toward an outside. The return to a shared intellectual history was experienced and represented as both an encounter with the foreign *and* an original discovery – *as if for the first time*. Islam thus becomes, in

Romantic writing, the figure through which proximity and distance are negotiated at once: a locus of metaphysical possibility that appears both intimately connected and radically elsewhere. This dynamic is not confined to metaphysical structures; it also governs Romantic representations of cultural encounter, most notably in Byron, whose work turns upon the tension between inherited forms of imagining the Islamicate world and the immediacy of actual historical contact.

To see what is at stake in this double movement, we must clarify the conceptual ground on which it occurs. Central to this conceptual terrain is the Aristotelian Active Intellect (*nous poietikos* in Greek, *al-'aql al-fa'al* in Arabic), which, in the medieval Islamicate philosophical tradition, operates as the intermediary between the eternal and the human: the faculty through which intelligible forms become available to finite minds. In the work of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and subsequently through Maimonides and Spinoza, imagination is not the locus of subjective fancy, but the modality through which the human intellect participates in a shared field of intelligibility. In this tradition, imagination is not subordinated to reason, but functions as the medium of metaphysical apprehension.

This genealogy matters for Romanticism not only historically but conceptually because the Romantic imagination emerges precisely when Enlightenment rationality has fractured the relation between mind and world. If rationalist epistemology constructs a division between the observing subject and the external field of reality, Romanticism is the attempt to heal that division. Canonical accounts – from René Wellek's emphasis on the overcoming of subject-object separation to Abrams's 'natural supernaturalism' – trace this effort as an internal development of European thought.[10] Yet the very vocabulary through which Romanticism imagines imagination as metaphysical mediation had previously been elaborated in the

[10] See René Wellek, 'The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History II. The Unity of European Romanticism', *Comparative Literature* 1.2 (1949), and M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (Norton, 1973).

Islamicate philosophical tradition. Romanticism inherits a conceptual structure whose provenance it only partially recognises, and often only under the sign of cultural difference.

For the Romantic poets, imagination is not merely a psychological faculty; it is the condition of the world's meaningful appearance. Coleridge's 'one life within us and abroad', and Shelley's 'fading coal' touched into brightness by an unseen influence, are not simply poetic metaphors.[11] They register an intuition that the mind participates in a universal medium of intelligibility greater than itself. The Romantics believed they were inventing a metaphysics of imagination capable of performing the re-enchantment they felt necessary after the rational coolness of the Enlightenment. Yet this supposed invention is, in part, a rediscovery – an unwitting re-engagement with the long philosophical and poetic discourses of the Islamicate world, where imagination (khayāl) had already been conceived as the mediating power between intellect and sense, spirit and form. Encountered under the sign of the 'East', this inheritance returns as Otherness rather than as shared descent. Romanticism reaches toward Islam not incidentally, but because its metaphysical project is already shaped by what it misrecognises as external.

This thesis therefore argues that Islamicate discourses are not ancillary to Romanticism but structurally necessary to it, and that those structures are unwittingly rediscovered in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron. Islamicate discourses are not merely thematic decor or symbolic exoticism; they are amongst the conditions of Romantic thought. Chapter 1 reconstructs the genealogy of imagination as a metaphysical faculty by tracing the transmission of the Aristotelian Active Intellect through its Islamicate elaborations and into Romantic thought. Reframing Abrams's and Wellek's accounts of Romantic metaphysics, it shows that the imagination – central to Romanticism's attempt to heal the Enlightenment split between subject and object – emerges from a lineage shaped by al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd. This

[11] The phrase is from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Eolian Harp' (1795), and Shelley's 'fading coal' from his 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821).

Islamicate inheritance, transmitted through Spinoza and the Enlightenment 'Republic of Arabic Letters', provides a hidden scaffolding of Romanticism's so-called 'natural supernaturalism'. Because imagination functions as the medium of metaphysical mediation, Romantic theories of language become central to Romantic metaphysics: language is the outward expression of the same imaginative faculty that mediates between mind and world.

The chapter then turns to Romantic theories of language and expression to argue that Romantic poetry restores language's metaphysical potency as the medium through which divinity and humanity communicate. This conceptual framework prepares the ground for Shelley, whose metaphysics of imagination depends on this same Islamicate genealogy of mediation and expression. In parallel, Byron's historicism transforms curiosity and exoticism into a mode of encountering the Other, rediscovering in the Islamicate past the chivalric and epic genealogies that underwrite Western literary identity. Together, these strands define the Romantic imagination as both metaphysical faculty and historical method, the site where Islamicate, Enlightenment, and Romantic discourses converge.

Chapter 2 restores the Islamic dimension of Shelley's metaphysics, tracing how his poetry transforms the Aristotelian and Islamicate concept of the Active Intellect into a Romantic theory of imagination and prophecy. It begins by contrasting Shelley's political Hellenism in Hellas (1822) with the deeper philosophical inheritance that his thought owes to Hebraic and Islamic traditions, showing that his ideal of liberation depends on the very cultures his politics excludes. Through early works such as Zeinab and Kathema (written around 1811-1813) and Alastor (1816), the chapter reveals how Shelley's imaginative metaphysics emerges from an encounter with the East as both moral critique and site of esoteric knowledge. Engaging Jacques Derrida and Salman Sayyid, it argues that Shelley's 'immanent critique' of Orientalism turns Islam from an object of representation into a philosophical interlocutor that exposes the violence of Western metaphysics. In The Revolt of Islam (1818) and 'Ozymandias' (1818), Shelley converts this critique into poetic form: the desert becomes the scene of metaphysical renewal, and Islam,

through its iconoclastic impulses, becomes the medium by which Romanticism reimagines the unity of thought, language, and revolutionary power.

Chapter 3 examines Byron's engagement with the Islamicate world as a historical and poetic framework for reimagining heroism in the age of secular modernity. Through Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-18) and the 'Turkish Tales' (1813-16), Byron discovers in Islamic metaphysical and social structures a bounded frame through which modern heroism can be reconstituted. The Byronic hero emerges not as a mere Romantic rebel but as a figure shaped by the ethical and metaphysical coherence of the Islamicate world, in contrast to the fragmented secularism of Europe. Byron's historicism transforms exoticism into a form of anthropological inquiry, allowing him to inhabit alternative 'forms of life' where faith remains integral to existence. The chapter traces how this engagement leads Byron to rediscover, within Islamic contexts, the genealogies of chivalry that underpin Western literature itself. Through the dialectic of action and word, Byron's poetry moves from costume to historicity, translating the Islamicate encounter into a critique of Western modernity's disenchanted temporality and uncovering a plural, synchronous vision of history where Islam and Romanticism converge as parallel – rather than oppositional – civilisational discourses.

Chapter 4 traces the Romantic construction of 'Arabia' from poetic symbol to colonial ideology, showing how the imaginative tropes forged by Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron became the epistemological foundations of British policy in the Middle East. It begins with Mark Sykes's Romanticised praise of the Bedouin and situates his language within a genealogy that originates in Wordsworth's 'Arab Dream', where the Bedouin embodies lost prophetic knowledge. Through Shelley's revolutionary reimagining of the Bedouin as a utopian and iconoclastic force, and Byron's revival of the chivalric hero within Islamic moral frameworks, Romanticism produced a discourse that idealised 'true Arabs' while denigrating the urban and cosmopolitan Levantine. This symbolic hierarchy was later mapped onto imperial geography, shaping the racialised logic of Sykes-Picot and the political erasure of Palestine. The chapter thus uncovers how Romanticism's

mythopoeic visions of the East evolved into the colonial cartographies of the twentieth century: where Romantic discourses of the 'Arab' and 'Arabia' become a pretext for modern empire and dispossession.

Together, these chapters chart a continuous genealogy from the metaphysical to the geopolitical, revealing how Romanticism's imagination of the Islamicate was never merely aesthetic but constitutive of modernity's self-understanding. If Shelley translates the legacy of the Active Intellect into a metaphysical vision of imagination and prophecy, Byron gives that inheritance historical form, rediscovering in Arab and Islamicate poetics the forgotten origins of the Western epic and the archetypes of chivalric heroism. His recovery of these poetic genealogies enables the emergence of a new kind of hero – one grounded in historical encounter rather than transcendental abstraction. The Romantic Islamicate imaginary thus joins metaphysics to history: it retrieves the shared intellectual and poetic inheritance of Europe and Islam even as it reveals the colonial distortions through which that inheritance was later recast. In tracing this double movement from imagination to empire, the project redefines Romanticism as a trans-Mediterranean discourse whose philosophical, poetic, and political legacies continue to shape the moral and imaginative contours of modernity. Ultimately, it argues that Islam is not incidental but necessary to Romanticism – both as a historical interlocutor and as the metaphysical tradition through which Romantic thought could imagine the recovery of metaphysical unity, meaning, and divine immanence in a disenchanted world.

Chapter 1

Enlightenment, the Islamicate, Disenchantment, Romanticism

1. Romanticism and poetical metaphysics, or, 'Natural Supernaturalism'

> 'Post-medieval literature records, among other things, the gradual withdrawal of God from the world'
>
> J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God*[12]

> 'my concern […] will be with the secularisation of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking'
>
> M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*[13]

We cannot begin to discuss Romanticism and Islam without an understanding of the place of religion for Romantic thinkers. And the place of religion within Romanticism is a terrain of particular complexity. The central critical text on religion and Romanticism, which inevitably deals with the underlying structural metaphysics of Romanticism, is of course, M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971). He elaborates a version of the secularisation thesis – the hypothesis that the scientific revolution, with the changing religious context after the sixteenth-century Reformation and culmination of new modes of thought within the European Enlightenment, led to a gradual but complete exhaustion of the former religious modality of cultural cohesion. Abrams notes that:

> It is easy to mistake the way in which that process took place. Secular thinkers have no more been able to work free of the centuries old Judeo-Christian culture than Christian theologians were able to work free of their inheritance of classical and pagan thought. The

[12] J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 1.
[13] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (Norton, 1973), p. 12.

> process – outside the exact sciences at any rate – has not been the deletion and replacement of religious ideas but rather the assimilation and reinterpretation of religious ideas, as constitutive elements in a world view founded on secular premises.[14]

Abrams's great text of twentieth-century Romantic criticism also delineates how certain 'Judeo-Christian' structures are embedded into the topoi of Romantic thought and literature. Not only is this a noticeable phenomenon in Romantic literature, but Abrams hints also that there is something integral to Romanticism as a movement that it does this:

> Much of what distinguishes writers I call 'Romantic' derives from the fact that they undertook, whatever their religious creed, or lack of creed, to save traditional concepts, schemes, and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation, but to reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature.[15]

It is this refinement of what Romanticism is, or what Romanticism does, which becomes an important paradigm of critical literature on Romanticism and religion. My engagement with this paradigm centres on British Romantic poetry, but does not treat British Romanticism as synonymous with Romanticism as a whole. The philosophical and literary relationships traced here cross national boundaries, particularly through German thought and Goethe, as well as the wider Islamicate intellectual inheritance. The exact timing and location of 'Romanticism' was, in the twentieth century, up for debate, and much of that debate centred on an idea that Romanticism might be a counter-current to the overarching secularisation thesis that runs through the more hegemonic 'Enlightenment'. In 1924, A. O. Lovejoy published a paper querying the coherence of 'Romanticism' and instead arguing that 'any study of the subject should begin with a recognition of the *prima facie* plurality of Romanticisms'.[16] Abrams's 'distinguishing' in the context of religion,

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[14] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 13.
[15] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 13.
[16] Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', *PMLA* 39. 2 (1924), pp. 235-6.

then, is an indication that whatever 'Romanticism' is, a metaphysical apparatus will be one of the main defining criteria. We can then note a number of important points at this stage. Firstly, Romanticism's metaphysics is central to the ontology of 'Romanticism' itself; secondly, metaphysics is a multifarious blend of 'inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking'; and thirdly, Romantic literature above all 'saves' and reformulates 'traditional concepts' within a new 'two-term system of subject and object'. After the rationalism and decorum of the Enlightenment, Abrams writes, Romanticism represents a 'reversion to the stark drama and suprarational mysteries of the Christian story and doctrines […] turning on the extremes of destruction and creation, hell and heaven, exile and reunion, death and rebirth'.[17] Yet, living after the Enlightenment, the Romantics 'revived these ancient matters with a difference,' reconstituting their religious inheritance 'in a way that would make [it] intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being'.[18] Yet, as Abrams makes clear, this Romantic 'saving' of inherited theological structures does not amount to simple preservation. Rather, it entails their translation into a new metaphysical idiom appropriate to a post-Enlightenment age. His thesis of 'natural supernaturalism', using a term from the Victorian writer Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1834), is, then, framed as an argument that 'the general tendency was, in diverse degrees and ways, to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine'.[19] It was René Wellek who had made possible metatheories of Romanticism after Lovejoy's assertion that Romanticism was a diverse and disunified phenomenon. Lovejoy's article begins with notice of a centenary anniversary of an 'enterprise of discovering what Romanticism is […] by eminent authorities' in 1824: 'twelve years of suffering' by their account.[20] Lovejoy's review of this scholarship, and his own assessment of the topoi of Romanticism one hundred years later, is that 'the "Romanticism" of one country may have little in common with that of another'.[21] Lovejoy stresses the variety and plurality of

[17] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 66.
[18] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 66.
[19] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 68.
[20] Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', p. 229.
[21] Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', p. 235.

European Romanticisms across the continent, and finally notes as a concession, that '[t]here may be some least common denominator of them all; but if so, it has never yet been clearly exhibited, and its presence is not to be assumed *a priori*'.[22]

It was Wellek who took up the challenge of Lovejoy's 'common denominator' and made a case for a coherent underlying structure to Romanticism. For Wellek,

> there is a fundamental unity in the whole of German literature from roughly the middle of the eighteenth century to the death of Goethe. It is an attempt to create a new art different from that of the French seventeenth century; it is an attempt at a new philosophy which is neither orthodox Christianity nor the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.[23]

This brings added texture to Abrams's formulation of Romantic writers' undertaking to 'save' and 'reformulate' traditional concepts within the prevailing framework of Enlightenment discourse, and in particular, the Kantian split between subject and object central to the Enlightenment paradigm shift. By the Kantian 'split', I refer here to the limits Kant places upon knowledge of things as they are in themselves, and to the distinction between the knowing subject and the world as it appears under the conditions of human cognition. Following Abrams and Wellek, I use 'split' to describe the problem that Romantic imagination seeks to overcome through its mediation of subject and object. For Wellek, at the heart of this 'fundamental unity' is the role of imagination in an 'endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object' and to see:

> the implication of imagination, symbol, myth and organic nature, and see it as part of the great endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious. This is the central creed of the great Romantic poets in England, Germany and France. It is a closely coherent body of thought and feeling.[24]

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[22] Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', p. 236.
[23] René Wellek, 'The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History II. The Unity of European Romanticism', *Comparative Literature* 1.2 (1949), p. 150.
[24] Wellek, quoted in Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 7.

This argument, that there is a 'closely coherent body of thought and feeling' which one can call 'Romanticism' carries the critical interpretation and assessment of literary Romanticism through the twentieth century, especially in the works of the great Romantic scholars Abrams, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller.[25] All investigate this 'coherent body of thought and feeling' with one eye on the underlying metaphysical structures of feeling at play, until Jerome McGann makes his critical intervention on the underlying assumptions of Romantic criticism in *The Romantic Ideology* in 1983.[26]

Is it possible that we can 'see' Romanticism more clearly with greater historical distance? And if that is true, could it also be the case that dimensions of Romanticism, sometimes barely explicitly acknowledged in the primary sources, are now more ripe for dissection and bringing into the light? If 'The Revolt of Islam' was perceived as a curious accidental title emerging out of one of Shelley's side-interests in the Arabian Peninsula and its discontents, it suddenly becomes more pertinent, more visible, and its valences more subject for dissection after 9/11.[27] Not only that, but recent interest in secularism as an analytic category has enabled a reconsideration of how Romantic literature participates in the formation, negotiation, and contestation of what later comes to be called the secular. Colin Jager has shown that Romantic writing does not record a straightforward movement from belief to unbelief, but rather reveals secularism itself as historically contingent and affectively uneven.[28] Tilottama Rajan, working at the intersection of Romantic literature and post-

[25] The cornerstone aspect of Romanticism as 'an attempt to overcome […] the cleavage between subject and object' is also central to Abrams's other major work of Romantic scholarship, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Norton, 1958), p. 65.
[26] For 'structures of feeling', see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 128–35. Williams's formulation joins thought and feeling as aspects of lived social experience. I draw on this emphasis to describe historically situated ways in which metaphysical relationships – between God, humanity and nature – are felt and imaginatively articulated in Romantic writing, rather than understood only as explicit philosophical doctrines.
[27] See, as an example of this, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (Picador, 2007), where a postcard picturing a first edition of *The Revolt of Islam* sent 'a week or two' prior to the cataclysm of 9/11 is indicative of the uncanniness of the rupture in the symbolism of Islam in the West which haunts Shelley's poem (p. 8).
[28] Colin Jager, *Unquiet Things: Secularism in the Romantic Age* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

Kantian philosophy, demonstrates how Romantic texts articulate and test the conceptual tensions that modernity subsequently codifies, particularly those surrounding metaphysical grounding and the limits of rational explanation.[29] David Collings has argued that Romanticism confronts the collapse of Enlightenment assurances and returns to questions of theodicy, suffering, and finitude at precisely the moments when such concerns seem most displaced.[30] Ian Balfour's work on prophecy and the sublime further suggests that Romantic forms retain modes of anticipation and interpretive openness that do not fully conform to secular rationalisation.[31]

My intervention builds upon this body of scholarship while redirecting its emphasis. The post-secular turn has clarified how Romanticism mediates the relationship between religious and secular modes of thought, yet it has largely done so within a Christian and post-Christian intellectual horizon. I argue that the secular tensions identified by Jager, Rajan, Collings, and Balfour cannot be fully understood without attending to Islam as a conceptual and imaginative horizon within Romantic writing. Rather than treating references to Islam as incidental, exotic, or merely symbolic, this study reads them as points at which Romanticism encounters and negotiates religious plurality under conditions shaped by imperialism. Texts such as *The Revolt of Islam* become newly legible when approached not as anomalous engagements with an external cultural field, but as sites in which Romanticism's understanding of the secular is actively formed. In foregrounding Islam as a constitutive presence rather than a peripheral one, the project broadens the scope of the post-secular conversation in Romantic studies and resituates Romanticism within a more genuinely global history of religious and political thought.

[29] Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Cornell University Press, 1980) and *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Cornell University Press, 1990).
[30] David Collings, *Disastrous Subjectivities: Romanticism, Modernity, and the Real* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).
[31] Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford University Press, 2002).

We will return to post-McGann Romantic scholarship shortly, but it is essential to understand the scholarly refinement of 'high Romanticism' into a structural form that privileges imagination as a tool to repair the violence of Enlightenment's subject/object division. And since the greater story I am trying to tell here about Islam and Romanticism is indeed about a certain Islamic interpretation of Aristotle's Active Intellect, and the Shelleyan interpretation of 'Imagination' as a metaphysical tool which I argue is part of the tradition of commentary and interpretation of this Active Intellect, I emphasise this revelation in twentieth-century scholarship. Just as Abrams builds the thesis of Natural Supernaturalism as the admixture of the old inherited ways of thinking with the new structural 'system' of Enlightenment, so too will my argument take the foundational tenets of Romantic scholarship and show how within this 'closely coherent body of thought and feeling' can be found the threads of Islamicate influence, as well as that of the better known inherited Judeo-Christian, pagan and Classical schools of thought.

Wellek's description of imagination, indeed, his refinement of what Romantic imagination is, is compelling:

> This new view emphasizes the totality of man's forces, not reason alone, nor sentiment alone, but rather intuition, 'intellectual intuition', imagination. It is a revival of Neoplatonism, a pantheism (whatever its concessions to orthodoxy), a monism which arrived at identification of God and the world, soul and body, subject and object.[32]

Here we note the resonances of what will become familiar references: Neoplatonism and pantheism next to 'a monism which arrived at identification of God and the world'. Later we will see how the shadow of Spinoza falls across so much of the connective tissue in the Romantic rearrangement of the structure of God. But here Wellek's description of imagination as 'intellectual intuition' sounds close indeed to that curious and ambivalent Aristotelian phenomenon of the *nous*

[32] Wellek, 'The Concept of 'Romanticism'', p. 150.

poiêtikos, or Active Intellect. What links these accounts is the mediating role of thought: making intelligible reality accessible to the human mind, and bringing subject and object into relation.

It is worth recalling Aristotle's description of the Active Intellect (*nous poietikos*) from *De Anima* III.5, which medieval Islamic and Christian philosophers alike took to be the faculty that renders intelligible forms graspable to the human mind. In Aristotelian and later Avicennian thought, the Active Intellect is the intermediary between the divine and human cognition, the bridge that allows finite beings to participate in eternal truths. This notion became central to Neoplatonic, Islamic (especially Avicennian and Averroist), and scholastic elaborations, and it left traces in early modern mysticism and poetics. Recalling it here matters because the valence of curiosity that runs through Romanticism's encounter with the Islamicate often presumes such a mediating faculty: a power that makes the unknown graspable without collapsing it into sameness. Byron's attraction to Islamicate metaphysics and poetry resonates with this legacy, where curiosity is not mere exoticism but a mode of intellectual and imaginative participation in a broader metaphysical order. This was not a single doctrine transmitted unchanged. Medieval thinkers, including al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd and Maimonides, offered differing accounts of the Active Intellect and its relationship to human understanding. The argument pursued here concerns the subsequent reworking of this inheritance, particularly the relationship between intellect, imagination and prophecy traced through Maimonides and Spinoza in Chapter 2. There is, however, another aspect of the 'closely coherent body of thought and feeling', which is Romanticism's curiosity regarding the exotic:

> Exoticism of many kinds is part of the reaction against the eighteenth century and its self-complacency; the suppressed forces of the soul seek their analogies and models in prehistory, in the Orient, in the Middle Ages, and finally in India, as well as in the unconscious and in dreams.[33]

[33] Wellek, 'The Concept of 'Romanticism'', p. 150.

We have, so far, alighted on the relations of God, Man, and Nature, and on the role of imagination in perceiving those relations – the structural framework for this thesis's engagement with Shelley. With Wellek's turn to exoticism, however, we can shift from Shelley to Byron, since exoticism constitutes another crucial mode of Romantic imaginative expansion, one that relocates the play of imagination from the metaphysical to the cultural and geographical sphere: whereas Shelley's imagination tends toward the universal and metaphysical, Byron's is rooted in the particular and historical. That is: Shelley is a metaphysical thinker, but Byron is a historical one. Both use the imagination, Shelley as key sustainer of the Aristotelian Active Intellect, heir to Spinoza and Maimonides (and Ibn Rushd), and Byron as a shapeshifter, roaming through various modes, geographies, ages, to explore differing worldly forms of life. Both engage with Islamic discourses, Shelley through a metaphysical poetics which is interested in re-establishing a connection with the sacred ('the infinite, the One') *and* describing a new set of (Islamically- inspired) political relations, and Byron through travel and an embodied response to Islamic communities, Islamic histories, and Islamic beliefs.

Returning to Abrams's 'natural supernaturalism' – the tendency to 'naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine' – we can note the incorporation of the very Christian drive to pull the singularity of God into the world (through Christ, 'humaniz[ing] the divine'), in the same mechanism as the Enlightenment-oriented 'naturaliz[ing] the supernatural', a useful alternative descriptor of the Enlightenment modalities of rationalism and empiricism as a way of understanding and describing the universe. These modalities are not interchangeable: the rationalism of Descartes and Spinoza, the empiricism of Locke and Hume, and Kant's critical philosophy offer differing accounts of the relationship between thought and world. 'Enlightenment' therefore names here a contested intellectual field, rather than a single philosophical position. Against this varied background, the mechanism Abrams identifies can

appear deeply antagonistic: Romanticism's attempt to 'humanize the divine' sits uneasily both with certain Enlightenment accounts of reason and with the insistence on God's unity that this thesis explores through Islamic thought. If Abrams's natural supernaturalism thesis holds, it does so alongside what J. Hillis Miller has described as 'the disappearance of God'. Miller notes of the Romantics that they

> still believe in God, and they find his absence intolerable. At all costs they must attempt to re-establish communication. They too begin in destitution, abandoned by God. All the traditional means of mediation have broken down, and romanticism therefore defines the artist as the creator or discoverer of hitherto unapprehended symbols, symbols which establish a new relation, across the gap, between man and God.[34]

The 'artist as creator or discoverer of hitherto unapprehended symbols' is directly conversant with Shelley's poetical metaphysics, wherein poets discover the 'before unapprehended relations between things'.[35] It also provides the ground for understanding how Romantic writers utilised Islamicate symbols and discourses as a novel way of crossing this gap, and realigning the relations between man and God, through new symbols.

But Miller's exploration of 'the disappearance of God' in literature delineates the shifting structure of Godhead from the Middle Ages:

> In the High Renaissance, God is both transcendent and immanent, and in many writers there is an intuition of nature as everywhere inhabited by God. There is a turn toward panpsychism, even to pantheism, as in Giordano Bruno. But the God within nature and the God beyond nature gradually separate from one another, and by the eighteenth century we have the watchmaker God, maker of a universe which is a perfect machine, and therefore no longer needs his presence.[36]

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[34] Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 13.
[35] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose: or, the trumpet of a prophecy*, ed. by David Lee Clark (Fourth Estate, 1988), p. 278.
[36] Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 7.

The relation between divine transcendence and immanence was a recurrent problem within Christian theology. The fourth-century Arian controversy concerned the status of the Son in relation to the Father: Arius held that the Son derived his existence from the Father and was not co-eternal with him. The Council of Nicaea in 325 rejected this position and affirmed that the Son was consubstantial, or 'of the same substance', with the Father. The controversy therefore concerned how Christ's divinity could be understood without compromising the unity of God. Related questions about the Trinity and the unity of God re-emerge in post-Reformation theological debates, including among Deists and anti-Trinitarian thinkers who influence Romantic writers and engage with Islamic tawḥīd, the complete Oneness of God. Miller describes how the figure of Christ defines a paradoxical complex at the heart of this monotheistic religion, and how the ritual of the sacrament 'was only the most manifest form of the presence of God throughout the world', in a structure where

> Nature and human history were full of symbols and types of divine truth. Each page of the book of nature was written by God and was another revelation of God by God. Created things were not merely signs pointing to something which remained off at a distance, separated from them. The Eucharist was the archetype of the divine analogy whereby created things participated in the supernatural reality they signified.[37]

The figure of the Christ in this picture is to complicate the idea of the ultimate transcendence of God by bringing 'God back to earth':

> [E]ven though the central tradition of Western civilization, in later Judaism, in Platonism, and in Christianity, defines God as transcending his creation, the miracle of the Incarnation brought God back to earth, so that once more he walked among us as he had before the fall, when history had not yet begun. Christ was the mediator joining a fallen world and a distant God.[…] God, man, nature, and language participated in each other and were at

[37] Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 3.

> one in the Eucharist. The words of the sacrament brought about the transubstantiation of the natural elements into the body and blood of Christ, and in partaking of these the members of the Christian community were assimilated to one another and to God.[38]

For Miller, this aspect of Christianity differentiates it from other traditions of the Western heritage and complicates the very principle of God 'transcending his creation'. But it also differentiates this account of Christianity from Islamic tawḥīd, where God's absolute unity is affirmed without incarnation. Divine presence and the relationship between God and creation therefore take a different form. Within the Christian framework Miller describes, it is the 'Reformation [that] if not immediately, certainly in its ultimate effects, meant a weakening of belief in the sacrament of communion'.[39] The effect of this weakening is how the Reformation becomes 'an engine of disenchantment'.[40] To the reformers, the apparatus of the eucharist, 'bread and wine are mere signs commemorating the historical fact that Christ was once, long ago, on the earth', so that in this way, communion 'becomes the expression of an absence', rather than its initial form of 'sharing in the immediate presence of Christ'.[41] This 'engine of disenchantment' runs along the familiar lines of the secularisation thesis, the shifting attitude that Charles Taylor defines as a historical change 'from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others'.[42]

If the mid-twentieth century saw a call toward a unified theory of Romanticism, one which contained something akin to a set of articles of faith about what Romanticism is and what Romanticism does, the publication of McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* launched a direct critique of

[38] Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 3.
[39] Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 6.
[40] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 77.
[41] Miller, *The Disappearance of God* p. 6.
[42] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 3.

scholarship's 'uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations'.[43] It is this revisionary reading of Romanticism that creates an opening for new interpretations of religion and Romanticism that emphasise plurality and complications.

Along these lines, Martin Priestman in *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1790–1830* (1999) reiterates McGann's critique of the critical heritage for being in thrall to Romantic epistemologies that foreclose the possibility of critique:

> As a topic, the full-bodied presence of atheism in Romantic literature has been seen either as barely conceivable or as somehow crudely beside the point, in a context where 'Romantic poetry' itself still constitutes a kind of religion.[44]

The religion-ness of Romanticism is an interesting additional note, and it is a point that ultimately Priestman (and other scholars) fail to escape. Whether one is in thrall to Romanticism's 'own self-representations' or not, the fact is that there very much are the co-ordinates of a set of self-representations in Romantic literature. There are such things as Romantic symbols, discourse patterns, ideologies, structures of feeling. One can read Romanticism *within* or *without* these structures of feeling – but it would be a near hopeless task to build a critique of Romanticism without acknowledging that they are there. One might make an analogy to anthropology – it could in some contexts be useful to read a set of cultural behaviours without trying to understand the structures of feeling that ground them, but that would have a very different kind of utility to reading cultural behaviours *within* an embodied attempt to understand structures of feeling that ground them. This demonstrates the limit of McGann's critique – yes, it is possible to critique Romantic scholarship's 'absorption', but scholarship cannot go so far as to deny that 'Romanticism's own self-representations' are there. Priestman's 'thumbnail sketch' of the scholarly consensus on Romanticism and religion is revealing:

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[43] Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 1.
[44] Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1790–1830* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.

> To give a very rough thumbnail sketch of an old but widely prevalent picture, the eighteenth century was an 'age of prose and reason', from which we were saved in the nick of time by the 'renaissance of wonder' which constituted Romanticism. It was, of course, a single ism, so that whatever its more loquacious theorizers (especially Wordsworth or Coleridge) had to say about it was true all round. This generally had to do with rediscovering the truths of religion through Nature or the Imagination, or else a particular fusion of the two, to understand which was to be admitted to the inner mysteries of 'Romanticism'. Whether this reborn sense of enchantment simply supplemented older forms of religion or re-placed them with new ones was not always clear, but it was often presented as an issue which would not even have occurred to the poets themselves, rapt as they were in contemplating the wonders of nature and the imaginative forays of their own minds.[45]

Priestman's critique of this scholarship does not preclude him from lauding what he calls the 'clarity' of Abrams's idea of 'natural supernaturalism', which for him implies

> that many 'Romantic' writers use religious, 'supernatural' terminology to describe objects, experiences and ideas which they know to be purely 'natural', thus turning the language of religion against itself by directing the feelings of reverence and attachment it has traditionally demanded towards the 'world' it has traditionally downgraded.[46]

However, Priestman's conception of *natural supernaturalism* differs markedly from that of Abrams, such that Abrams himself ultimately falls to the now well-established critique that 'Romanticism becomes the religion it has ousted,' since 'all the interest is on […] "The Redemptive Imagination"'.[47] This kind of reading – one that treats Romanticism as a self-enclosed symbolic system rather than as a set of historically contingent structures of feeling – is precisely what I wish to avoid.

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[45] Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, pp. 1-2.
[46] Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, p. 3.
[47] Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, p. 4.

Priestman's delineation of 'Romantic atheism' is useful because it historicises disbelief rather than positing atheism as a coherent doctrine. As he clarifies, he does not mean to suggest a 'belief system' of Romantic atheism, but that Romantic poets were 'acutely aware of positive, unapologetic atheism as a phenomenon of the time […] and that some did indeed participate in aspects of atheist discourse'.[48] Yet even this historically grounded framework risks narrowing the field of Romantic metaphysics to a single interpretive lens. Atheism was certainly one current in the Romantic period, but it was one among many – alongside Deism, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Illuminism, Spinozism, pantheism, materialism, and unorthodox forms of Christianity. Romanticism, in other words, operated within a plural metaphysical landscape – a 'secular age' in Taylor's sense – in which belief and unbelief were simultaneously available, intelligible, and often intertwined.

From this perspective, atheism should be read not *against* Romanticism but *within* its broader plurality of metaphysical possibilities. My aim, then, is not to restore Romanticism to a purely 'religious' essence – such essence never existed – but to understand how various forms of belief, doubt, and metaphysical speculation coexisted and interacted. Reading *with* Romanticism, rather than through any single theological or anti-theological prism, allows for an account of how these competing structures of the divine, the material, and the soul operate in tension, rather than in exclusion. By 'reading with', I mean attending to the relations between thought, feeling and imaginative form through which Romantic texts make their claims intelligible. This requires taking their metaphysical possibilities seriously as part of the reading, without either accepting those claims as true or suspending historical and political critique.

In my own reading of Romanticism and Islam, I adopt this approach while remaining cognisant of the possibility of an 'uncritical absorption' in Romanticism's 'own self-representations'. Therefore, I am not applying Islam to Romanticism – I am not interested in this,

[48] Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, p. 7.

although I am sure it could be valuable. Rather I am reading Islam *in* Romanticism, noting, like Abrams, the structures of feeling that are borrowed, repressed, utilised, exploited from the Islamicate within the very complex metaphysics and genealogies of Romanticism itself. The scope of 'Islam' in these readings is established through the particular theological propositions, philosophical traditions and historical encounters under discussion.

Abrams could never fall foul of being 'narrow-visioned', no matter what other complaints might be thrown his way, and in spite of my own critique that Abrams's focus on the 'Judeo-Christian heritage' elides the Islamic heritage (although I don't doubt that Abrams would be well aware of the scholarship of Harry Austryn Wolfson, and would be grateful for the assist).[49] It is hard not to note the decline in ambition amongst literary scholarship from an age in which the grand intellectual histories of the great metaphysics were widely written and debated in the period of Abrams, Bloom, Hartman, Miller, to our more contemporary concerns with interventions on much narrower fields. My concern here is to recover the scale of these foundational questions while revising the intellectual genealogies through which they have been understood.

Amongst this later criticism there is a significant political turn – the focus of McGann's reading of the 'Romantic ideology', an interest on the political valences of Romanticism. Robert M. Ryan makes a powerful contribution to the history of Romantic scholarship on religious attitudes and beliefs in the period by bringing political interests to bear. The frontispiece blurb to *The Romantic Reformation: Religious politics in English literature 1789–1824* (1997) states that the text is 'the

[49] It is necessary to note some of the problems of the term 'Judeo-Christian'. Emerging in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a rhetorical tool to shore up a notion of "Western" identity – often in opposition to Islam or secularism – the term 'Judeo-Christian' obscures the real theological and historical discontinuities between Judaism and Christianity, imposing unity onto two markedly different histories and traditions. See Susannah Heschel, "The Political Theology of the 'Judeo-Christian' Concept," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 3 (2006), pp. 452–465. For the remarkable work of the great historian of philosophy Harry Austryn Wolfson, perhaps best known as a Spinoza scholar, see *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, 2 vols. (Harvard University Press, 1934) and *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Harvard University Press, 1976).

first book to examine the literature of the romantic period as a conscious attempt to influence the religious life of society'.[50] Ryan argues that 'all the [Romantic] poets committed themselves resolutely to this work of cultural critique and rehabilitation', as a very elegant counter to McGann's contention that:

> the poetry of Romanticism is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities.[51]

Ryan makes use of a brilliant quotation from Shelley's critique of the trial for blasphemous libel of Richard Carlile, the publisher of Paine's *The Age of Reason* (1819), from which he can read relations between religion and politics:

> They know that the Established Church is based upon the belief in certain events of a supernatural character having occurred in Judaea eighteen centuries ago; that but for this belief the farmer would refuse to pay the tenth of the produce of his labours to maintain its numbers in idleness; that this class of persons if not maintained in idleness would have something else to do than to divert the attention of the people from obtaining a Reform in their oppressive government, & that consequently the government would be reformed, & that the people would receive a just price for their labours, a consummation incompatible with the luxurious idleness in which their rulers esteem it their interest to live.[52]

Ryan's analysis makes the case that Romantic revolutionary optimism 'found a satisfying outlet in the sphere of religion', counter to Abrams's reading that there is a Romantic tendency for 'revolutionary disillusionment or despair'.[53] Ryan's argument is that '[r]eligion was the crucial

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[50] Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious politics in English literature 1789–1824* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), blurb.
[51] McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 1
[52] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford, 1964), I, p. 143, this quoted in Ryan, p. 3-4.
[53] Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation*, p. 5, and quoting Abrams in "English Romanticism, The Spirit of the Age" in *Romanticism Reconsidered: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Northrop Frye (Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 53.

mediator between the cultural and the political-economic spheres in England', and that Romantic writers 'directed their creative energies toward intervention in that arena'.[54] Whilst the 'individual prescriptions' of different writers varied, 'all adopted as a goal the spiritual and moral rehabilitation of their society, a renovation that presupposed an alteration in the national religious consciousness.'[55]

Reading religion and the political valences of Romantic writing has a historical appropriateness, especially through an interest in the structures of the historical Reformation, and Ryan's analysis feels more sensitive and embodied than other scholarship in this arena. As the delineation of secularity is theorised (much of it through the work of Taylor) in various ways through the twentieth century, so scholarship on religion and Romanticism responds to the changing framework of the secularisation thesis.[56] In this vein, Mark Canuel focuses, in a 2003 publication, on religion and 'toleration' in *Religion, Toleration and British Writing 1790–1830*, to argue that Romantic critique of orthodox religious conformity at the same time more positively advocates for 'a new way in which different beliefs could be governed under the auspices of tolerant institutions'.[57] His reading is illuminating, particularly in tracing the political and institutional dimensions of religious difference in the Romantic period. What is less emphasised, however, is that the very *structuring* of toleration rests on the relation between subject and object, which I take as a central dynamic of Romantic metaphysics, building on the accounts of Abrams and Wellek. My concern is not that Canuel is anachronistic – toleration is, after all, a deeply early modern concept shaped by the Reformation and the English civil wars – but that his analysis remains within the register of political philosophy, reading toleration primarily as a mode of governance. By contrast, I am interested in how the logic of toleration, as it re-emerges in

[54] Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation*, p. 4.
[55] Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation*, p. 4.
[56] See Taylor, A Secular Age, p. 3, quoted above, on the shift from belief in God as virtually unavoidable to belief as one possibility among others.
[57] Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790–1830* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2.

Romantic thought, also encodes an epistemological structure: one that translates the theological problem of coexistence into the post-Kantian grammar of subject and Other.

This is followed in a similar vein by Kir Kuiken's *Imagined Sovereignties: Toward a New Political Romanticism* (2014) which more specifically takes up the central tenet of the 'Romantic Religion' as Priestman described it (as critique), and what Wellek had identified as the unifying thread of Romantic discourse: imagination. Kuiken argues that 'motifs of creation, composition, and production around which romantic theories of the imagination are organized become analogies for the formations of politics'.[58] Kuiken's intervention is worth noting as it again highlights the significance of imagination as a Romantic metaphysical tool, and his analysis does read with an attempt at an embodied understanding of the delicate structures of feeling that ground this tool. Because imagination is not only central to the 'High Romantic' poetry and its metaphysical curiosity but also related to the thread of concern over Aristotle's Active Intellect and its discourse history that I want to argue runs through Hellenic, Islamic, Jewish and finally, via Spinoza, Shelleyan metaphysics, this is of interest.

A number of scholars have already begun to examine the presence of Islam in Romantic literature, though their projects have tended to frame this encounter primarily in cultural or representational terms. Mohammed Sharafuddin's *Islam and Romantic Orientalism* (1994) remains an important early study, tracing the emergence of what he calls a 'realistic Orientalism' in works such as *Gebir* (1798), *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), *Lalla Rookh* (1817), and the 'Turkish Tales', where sympathy with Islamicate cultures is taken to signal a departure from the complacencies of British imperial nationalism.[59] Jeffrey Einboden's *Islam and Romanticism: Muslim Currents from Goethe to Emerson* (2014) broadens this field by following textual transmission across languages and

[58] Kir Kuiken, *Imagined Sovereignties: Toward a New Political Romanticism* (Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 25.
[59] Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (I. B. Tauris, 1994), pp. xxxv.

confessional boundaries, while Emily A. Haddad's *Orientalist Poetics* (2002) argues that Romantic poetry's formal innovations draw in part on an encounter with Islamicate literary traditions.[60] Haddad's insight that Orientalism functions as a 'diffuse avant-garde' in a matrix through which poetic conventions are re-examined, is particularly valuable, although Haddad's approach frames the 'Islamic' part of her study as a placeholder for a specific form of Orientalism, rather than as a constitutive interlocutor with the poetry itself. In each of these accounts, Islam tends to remain an *object* of Romantic attention – a cultural or aesthetic resource – rather than a constitutive metaphysical horizon in which poetry reflects upon its own conditions of possibility. It is precisely this shift in emphasis that the present study seeks to foreground.

To understand the stakes of this shift, we must turn from Orientalism as discourse to the question of how Islamicate poetics informs the Romantic conception of imagination itself. The gospel of this is, of course, Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry' (written 1821, unfinished).

One finds in Shelley mingled the materialism of Baron d'Holbach with the numinous potency of the 'the eternal, the infinite, and the one', the strange admixture resulting in a realisation that poetry is metaphysical, beholding an 'electric life', and poets,

> measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations; for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age.[61]

This mix of Lucretianism and Neoplatonism cannot be properly understood without taking account of the Islamicate philosophies that participated in the histories of these discourses. Of particular relevance to the genealogy pursued here are al-Fārābī's accounts of imagination and prophecy and the Aristotelian traditions developed by Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd. And at the heart of this correspondence is the imagination, the metaphysical tool *ne plus ultra* of the poet, who

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[60] Jeffrey Einboden, *Islam and Romanticism: Muslim Currents from Goethe to Emerson* (Oneworld, 2014), and Emily A. Haddad, *Orientalist Poetics: The Islamic Middle East in nineteenth-century English and French poetry* (Ashgate, 2002).
[61] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 297.

> not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time.[62]

It is remarkable that Shelley prefaces this description of the poet's insight into the 'future in the present' with the argument that the 'Poets […] were called in the earlier epochs of the world legislators or prophets' – the very image then, of Mohammed, who is the archetype of the Prophet-Legislator.[63] This is different from the Prophet-King archetype, exemplified by Solomon: the emphasis falls on establishing the laws through which a community is ordered, rather than on kingship. It is the archetype that Islam gifts the Western tradition, Renaissance onwards. Here Shelley is, as usual, saliently connecting disparate, yet connected things – the Prophet-Legislator (Islam/Mohammed), with the philosophical tradition of the Active Intellect that is refracted through the Islamicate and returned to Europe via Spinoza.[64]

We can't separate these questions from the question of how poetic language gives form to metaphysical thought – we are not dealing with content alone. What is more, this issue of the metaphysical aspect of language is front and centre of Romanticism's onto-epistemology. This is elided by scholarship that wants to comment on the Object of Romantic poetry without an embodied response to what that poetry does or is trying to do. My concern with the political and institutional approaches discussed above is that their emphasis can leave poetry's own claim to metaphysical and transformative agency insufficiently examined. There is a major oversight in the way that recent scholarship has approached religion and Romanticism, related in a way to the sense of Romanticism as a religion, and the significance of imagination as the metaphysical tool for reconstructing the relations between God/Man/Nature. This is that Romantic poetry itself is

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[62] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 279.
[63] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 279.
[64] The archetype of Mohammed as prophet-legislator is, of course, delineated and described by the (deeply Romantic) Victorian writer Thomas Carlyle in 'The Hero as Prophet' in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (James Fraser, 1841).

premised on its own metaphysical potency. One of Romanticism's self-representations is a metaphysical premise that poetry can change the reader, and perhaps society itself.

To try and understand this, we need a grounding in language philosophy that has also been of particular relevance to anthropology in the twentieth century. In *Human Agency and Language* (1985), Taylor describes the essential potency of Romantic poetry whilst elucidating how a 'community is not simply an aggregation of individuals' in an era that considers 'the individual as metaphysically independent of society'.[65] The very point of Romantic art is that it retains a metaphysical potency denied by a century of previous thinkers who assumed that language was a kind of supplementary artifice to be used for all kinds of games, without recognising that language itself participates in constituting the forms of life it articulates – that is, language was seen as a tool, rather than an organic web inside which one might, to understand its meanings, have to reside. Indeed, the relevancy of this to Romanticism is that as the metaphysical structures of feeling relating to God/Man/World begin to shift and become realigned, the very issue of language becomes a field of interest. This is something that Miller catches sight of, although without fully realising the significance of the vibrancy between the relations of God, religion and Romanticism, and Romantic poetry's own metaphysical ambitions:

> Poetry in turn was, in one way or another, modelled on sacramental or scriptural language. The words of the poem incarnated the things they named, just as the words of the Mass shared in the transformation they evoked. The symbols and metaphors of poetry were no mere inventions of the poets. They were borrowed from the divine analogies of nature. Poetry was meaningful in the same way as nature itself - by a communion of the verbal symbols with the reality they named.
>
> The history of modern literature is in part the history of the splitting apart of this communion. This splitting apart has been matched by a similar dispersal of the cultural

[65] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.8.

> unity of man, God, nature, and language. It is not possible to explain why this fragmentation has come about.[66]

Miller echoes the despondent sense of loss in Romanticism of something that was unified that has become mechanical and broken down into disparate parts. This is a familiar response to the weight of disenchantment, that touches not only the loss of God, but the sense that something that was whole has become broken apart. It also highlights the integral part of language in this splitting.

The transcendence of the Word is the copula of the Abrahamic. It is integral to Abrahamic cultures, from the Middle East to Western Europe. It is revealed in the letters that name YHWH in the Judaic tradition, to the Logos of Christ, and the eternity of the Qur'an.[67] Taylor gives a brief historical overview of the nature of the Logos in European culture:

> The originator of meaning, God, is an expressivist. This sets the framework for the theories of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, what one could call the semiological ontologies, which pictured the world as a meaningful order, or a text. This kind of view of the world is dominant right up to the seventeenth century, when it was pulverized in the scientific revolution.[68]

It is then the nominalism of language in the seventeenth century, in the course of the scientific revolution, which 'involved a polemical rejection of the vision of the world as meaningful order, and its replacement by a conception of the world as objective process'.[69] This shift is 'associate[d] with […] Descartes, Bacon and Hobbes', and inculcates the 'method of thought' which 'break[s] things in our ideas into their component elements', where '[t]hinking is mental discourse […] no longer the articulating and making evident of the ancients, but a kind of inner disassembly and

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[66] Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 3.
[67] Note Kafka's intimation of this, as well as the sense that the Word is slipping out of reach: 'the Word was there, was very near at least, on the tip of everybody's tongue, anyone might have hit upon it', quoted in Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 1.
[68] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 223.
[69] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 223.

reassembly.'[70] If the empirical stresses the *ends* of objects and their relations, an examination of language complicates the utilities of that process by emphasising a textuality of relations that problematise the notion of ends through play and interconnection. Taylor notes that 'earlier views, those of Hobbes or Locke for instance, saw language as an instrument, and saw meaning in terms of designation.'[71] One can see how when metaphysical relations are secure through religious belief, ritual, and society, language could have this appearance. As soon as those fundamental relations are disrupted, the most fundamental link between man/God/world – faith – becomes, in Taylor's words, 'one human possibility among others'. There is an integral connection between epistemology and hermeneutics as soon as epistemological orthodoxy is disrupted and challenged.

A Romantic response to this was inevitable, and came with two German thinkers, Johann Herder (b. 1744, d. 1803) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (b. 1767, d. 1835), who began to articulate a kind of linguistic exploration far before the usual dating of the 'linguistic turn' of the twentieth century. Their explorations of language brought to it a primacy and sublimity previously denied by the grand material triumph of the empirical. It is no wonder that, after dominant Enlightenment thought challenged epistemological orthodoxy, Romantic thought wanted to delve into a hermeneutics of epistemological frameworks and explore those hermeneutics through the play of poetry. It is Herder who takes up one of the 'origin stories of eighteenth-century designative theory', Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746), whose imagined account of human development recalls Ibn Ṭufayl's twelfth-century novel Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, here redirected toward the origins of language. Herder rejects Condillac's idea that two children in the desert would come to slowly invent language. Herder resists this possibility by arguing that 'language is not just a set of words which designate things', but it is also participant in a 'reflective awareness' which 'we only realize in speech'.[72] Taylor notes that this is another 'expressive theory', but 'this

[70] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 224-5.
[71] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 9.
[72] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 228-9.

time it is an expressive theory of language, rather than an expressive theory of the cosmos'.[73] This explains why the 'Romantic period sees a revolution in our conception of art':

> The traditional view understood art in terms of mimesis. Art imitates the real. […] The Romantics gave us quite a different conception, by which, in one formulation, the artist strives to imitate not nature, but the author of nature […] The work of art does not refer beyond itself to what it imitates; rather it manifests something; it is the locus in which the meaning becomes manifest.[74]

This description is immediately recognisable to anyone who has come across Shelley's 'Defence' and read what Shelley understands poetry's potency to be. In Herder's terms, 'the artist is become a creator God', and for Novalis, another German Romantic whose concept of the magischer Idealist (magical idealist) gets very close to Shelley's poetic prophetics: 'God reveals himself in the poet as he gives himself corporeal form in the visible universe.'[75] As Samuel Taylor Coleridge, always the most dynamically and immediately poetic with his metaphysics, puts it as, 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.'[76]

Taylor describes Herder's insight being the recognition of the 'holism' of language: 'we need the whole of language as the background for the introduction of any of its parts'.[77] This is followed by the later theory of Humboldt, who describes language as a *Gewebe*, a web: '[i]n touching one part of language (a word), the whole is present.'[78] Following this line of thought, language becomes metaphysical: '[i]f in expressing our thoughts about things, we can come to have new thoughts; then in expressing our feelings, we can come to have new feelings.'[79] For Taylor, it is this aspect of language which is paramount in the Romantic period, where 'this constituting of the

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[73] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 229.
[74] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 230.
[75] Herder and Novalis, quoted in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 230.
[76] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Dent, 1956), p. 167.
[77] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 230.
[78] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 230.
[79] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 233.

emotions' is 'the most important function of language […] Man completes himself in expression'.[80] It is not hard to see why Taylor connects these theories of eighteenth-century German linguistic philosophers to Wittgenstein's expression of the concept of the 'form of life' to stress that we need 'a different theory of meaning' to understand how we as humans are also 'constituted by our self-understanding'.[81] This 'different theory of meaning' is:

> more in line with those developed in the Romantic period, which explore[s] how language not only depicts, but also articulates and makes things manifest, and in doing so helps shape our form of life.[82]

This view of language, as contributing to a form of life, is encoded in Romantic thought in the original theories of Herder, who describes the *Volk*, the community which is the 'primary locus' of the language. We will return (in Chapter 4) to the way in which German theories of a structural palimpsest of land, people, culture, and language inform discourses on Arabic and Arabia. But here we should note our first premises. Metaphysical 'truths' are reflected, even embodied, in different linguistic theories – not merely stated as propositions, but enacted through what language does. Romantic poetry is metaphysical, and thus analysing it as purely thematic content without understanding what metaphysical work it is trying to do has limited value. Two forms of imaginative work – through the metaphysical mediation traced here in relation to the Active Intellect, and through exoticism – are the primary tools that Romantic poetry uses to explore the metaphysical relations of God/Man/Nature. Islamicate philosophy informs the poetics and praxis of imagination, and Islamicate forms of life inform the embodiment of Byronic exotic play, Shelleyan ethics and poetic theory, and Wordsworthian formulations of the origins of poetic

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[80] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 233.
[81] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 10. The term 'form of life' is only used five times in the *Philosophical Investigations* (PI). In *PI* 23 Wittgenstein connects it with language games – 'the word 'language-game' is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life' (p. 15e). In spite of the absence of a full explanation of the term, it has become a valuable tool in anthropological and sociological writing to describe the myriad participatory network of culture, semiotics, context, history in a way that is more organic and web-like than an implicitly structural framework. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell, 2009).
[82] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 10.

imagination. Thus, discourses of Islam are very much metaphysically as well as historically and textually present in British Romantic poetry.

2. The Encounter: Islamicate and Enlightenment discourses.

> [T]he Enlightenment possibilities in Europe were themselves the consequence of a Renaissance humanism which was triggered not by an internal European or Christian logic, but by the encounter with Islamic thought, and particularly the Islamised version of Aristotle which, via Ibn Rushd, took fourteenth-century Italy by storm. The stress on the individual, the reluctance to establish clerical hierarchies which hold sway over earthly kingdoms, the generalised dislike of superstition, the slowness to persecute for the sake of credal difference: all these may well be European transformations that were eased, or even enabled, by the transfusion of a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain.
> Abdul Hakim Murad, 'Faith in the Future: Islam after Enlightenment'[83]

For some time, there has been a growing scholarly consensus on the significance of the relationship between Islamicate discourses and the European Enlightenment. This recent scholarship, comprising Alexander Bevilacqua's *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (2018), Ziad Elmarsafy's *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam* (2009), and Humberto Garcia's *Islam and the English Enlightenment:*

[83] Abdal Hakim Murad, 'Faith in the Future: Islam after the Enlightenment,' First Annual Altaf Gauhar Memorial Lecture, Islamabad, 23 December 2002, <http://masud.co.uk/faith-in-the-future-islam-after-the-enlightenment/> [accessed 20 May 2025]. It is worth noting that Abdal Hakim Murad is another name of the scholar Timothy Winter. I refer to Winter only in the text, even when later citing this speech.

1670–1840 (2012), provides serious academic weight for developing and revising the more general accounts of European–Islamic relations offered by twentieth-century historians such as Marshall Hodgson, who introduced the term 'Islamicate', Maxime Rodinson, and Albert Hourani. These three publications not only outline the significance of Islamic thought for the European Enlightenment but also provide the necessary scholarly research on the intellectual history of the translation, reception, and afterlives of Islamicate materials in European culture during the period.

In *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (2018), Alexander Bevilacqua argues that the impact of Islamicate material on the Enlightenment began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which 'saw a transformation in European knowledge of Islam and Islamic traditions'.[84] Within this transformation, the earlier 'imprecise and often incorrect body of notions' about Islam and Muslims that had been present through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were subsumed by 'a vast and diverse set of translations, insights, and interpretations'.[85] This informed new attitudes, so that, Muslim cultures came to be 'appreciated, not just for their religious piety and military prowess', but moreover for their cultural and social discourses, including for the Qur'an.[86]

Bevilacqua argues that the seventeenth and eighteenth century 'scholars of Arabic' George Sale, Simon Ockley and d'Herbelot 'form an Enlightenment, now largely lost from view, in which Europeans learned Arabic and read Islamic manuscripts'.[87] These heavy-weight Arabists were part of an even broader group of Arabic scholars that 'can be called a Republic of Arabic Letters: a working community of scholars of different languages, political affiliations, and traditions of belief'.[88] This community, 'the thinkers who most intensively interacted with the

[84] Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), p. 1.
[85] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 1.
[86] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 1.
[87] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 1.
[88] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 3.

written traditions of Islam', were neither 'the famous philosophes' nor 'the radical underground', but it was they who developed 'Enlightenment understanding of Islam and Islamic culture'.[89] Bevilacqua notes that this scholarship was built on the 'perception of analogy between Western Christian and Islamic traditions', thinking through the Islamic and the Muslim as a comparison with the "'good pagans" of classical antiquity', as well Christianity and Judaism.[90] Comparisons were not new, but the intellectual interest in Islam in the seventeenth century had a very new outcome:

> Scholars argued that the God of the Qur'an was the same God of the Christian Bible, and Islam came to seem to many a more intellectually sound version of Christianity because it did not require belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. The study of Islam became normatively decontaminated: Muhammad the impostor became Muhammad the legislator.[91]

Bevilacqua highlights that the fallout from this Arabic Enlightenment, which included the critique of organised religion, was 'an unintended consequence' of the original scholars, who 'did not seek to overturn Christianity through their study of Islam'.[92]

That may well be the case; yet by the period that concerns us – the early nineteenth century – the European discourses on Islam had already been shaped by a century of development. And crucially, as I argue in this chapter, that engagement was not external or ancillary: Islamicate discourses were woven into the fabric of Enlightenment thought itself. Bevilacqua emphasises that this Enlightenment engagement with Islam was marked by a certain naiveté: European scholars and writers 'trusted information in Islamic sources,' so that a new body of knowledge was fashioned out of the very materials of the Islamic intellectual tradition.[93]

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[89] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 4.
[90] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 3.
[91] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 3
[92] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 4.
[93] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 4

Zeroing-in on the most impactful source of Islamic culture, Ziad Elmarsafy concentrates on the history of the European translations of the Qur'an. *The Enlightenment Qur'an* is an examination of the translation history of the Qur'an into Western languages during the long eighteenth century, noting that this focus is 'deliberate […] because the Enlightenment holds a privileged position in the making of modernity writ large.'[94] Elmarsafy argues that the eighteenth-century shaping of 'disciplines that organize the process of cultural exchange into the precursors of the modern social sciences – anthropology, sociology, psychology and modern political […] centre on the question of understanding the Other,' and that it is Islam, especially during this period of fertile cross-culturation and translation, that is the Other 'with which Europe was most familiar.'[95] This translation history includes André du Ryer's French *L'Alcoran de Mahomet* (1647), subsequently rendered into English in the translation attributed to Alexander Ross (1649), alongside Ludovico Marracci's Latin translation (1698), George Sale's English translation (1734), and Claude Savary's French translation (1782–3). These translations formed part of a wider, developing network of European writing on Islam, including d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697), Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), and Henry Stubbe's *Account of the Rise and Progress of Mohammed*, completed in 1671. These translations, and their influence on a growing body of European material on Islam, support Elmarsafy's central contention, that 'the engagement with Islam […] enables a radical break with past traditions and the conception of something entirely new'.[96] As we shall also see with the Romantic poets, although the significance of Islam in the oeuvre of figures such as Montesquieu and Voltaire 'might be dismissed as accidents of reception, what is beyond doubt is the lasting mark left by the engagement with Islam and its central text, the Qur'an.'[97] Taken together, these translations illustrate that the Enlightenment's engagement with Islam was not peripheral but formative: Islamicate texts helped shape the very disciplines, vocabularies, and

[94] Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The politics of translation and the construction of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), p. ix
[95] Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, p. 30.
[96] Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, p. 31.
[97] Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, p. 31.

conceptual grids through which the Enlightenment imagined the human, the Other, and the modern.

Finally, Humberto Garcia's *Islam and the English Enlightenment: 1670-1840*, brings us closest to the impact of this history, and scholarship, on Romantic poetry by taking a reader through the religious history of Deism in the eighteenth century persuasively to demonstrate 'how radical Protestants in eighteenth-century England self-consciously recast Islam in constitutional-nationalist terms', and to argue that the consequential 'Islamic republicanism' was 'central to the English Enlightenment'.[98]

This research sits alongside Samar Attar's tireless, and underappreciated, exposition of the Islamic source material in seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature in both *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (2007) and *Borrowed Imagination: The British Romantic Poets and their Arabic-Islamic Sources* (2014).[99] Attar's work has focused most specifically on the story *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (known also in its Latin title, *Philosophus Autodidactus*, and as *The Improvement of Human Reason*), by Ibn Ṭufayl, written in the twelfth century, but 'discovered' by the seventeenth-century Oxford orientalist Edward Pococke, and translated into Latin by his son in 1671, as well as the *One Thousand and One Nights*, known more familiarly from the English edition of *The Arabian Nights Entertainment*, which was published between c.1706 and 1721.[100]

This new scholarly material develops (Western) understanding of the relations between Islamicate discourses and Enlightenment, just as had previously occurred in scholarship on the

[98] Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment: 1670-1840* (John Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 1, 2.
[99] Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (Lexington Books, 2007); and *Borrowed Imagination: The British Romantic Poets and Their Arabic-Islamic Sources* (Lexington Books, 2014).
[100] For more on the profound influence of 'Oriental tales' on British literature, see Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, eds. Felicity Nussbaum and Saree Makdisi, (Oxford University Press, 2008), and Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

relations between Islamicate thought and European science, Scholasticism, and Humanism, which had been explored with substantive interest in the 1990s. This includes George Makdisi's *The Rise of Humanism: Classical Islam and the Christian West: With special reference to Scholasticism* (1990), which argues that 'the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the reception of both movements, scholasticism and humanism, from classical Islam by the Christian Latin West,' as well as scholarship on the reception history of Islamic discourses on seventeenth-century natural philosophers in G. A. Russell's edited volume *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers of Seventeenth Century England* (1994).[101] Russell argues in the introduction to this volume that a 'generally accepted point of view' in the twentieth century – that '[a]s Christendom gradually moved into the Age of Scientific Revolution, there was no longer any need or grounds for Arabic to be of interest to the West' – is a false hypothesis.[102] Instead, as the papers in the volume make apparent, 'there was a remarkably widespread interest in Arabic' that 'was not an isolated phenomenon, unique to England, but emerged against the backdrop of similar developments on the Continent, particularly in the Netherlands'.[103] This interest Russell terms a 'second wave', after the initial 'medieval transmission from Arabic into Latin [which] helped transform European intellectual and scientific development'.[104] What Russell describes as a 'second wave' of Arabist scholarship is, in fact, evidence of something deeper: that Islamicate discourses continued to structure European intellectual life even as Europe defined itself as increasingly modern, autonomous, and secular. This 'second wave', more surprising given the historical shift of power from Islamicate empires to European, in which 'Islam appeared progressively less and less relevant', can only be understood, Russell argues, by recognising that 'the very movements which seemed to rule out any possible basis for its existence: the Protestant Reformation, the Humanist

[101] George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism: Classical Islam and the Christian West: With special reference to Scholasticism* (Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. xx.
[102] G. A. Russell, 'The Seventeenth Century: The age of 'Arabick'', in *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth Century England*, ed G A Russell (Brill, 1994), p. 1.
[103] Russell, 'The Seventeenth Century', p. 1.
[104] Russell, 'The Seventeenth Century', p. 3.

classical revival, and the "expansion" of Europe' in fact provide the motivating factors for the renewed interest in Arabic material. Russell makes a fascinating note in this intellectual history: in the seventeenth century there was 'the idea that Arabic is essential to scriptural study', since 'Arabic could help elucidate difficult passages not only in the Old Testament but also in the Rabbinical commentaries which in turn were being used for the interpretation of the New Testament.'[105] Here, as elsewhere, we see the twin function of Islam, and Islamicate discourses, as the brother, or Other, that helps us to understand ourselves. As Bevilacqua notes:

> The problem of how to classify Islam—as heresy, paganism, or alien religion—would continue into the Renaissance and after. This ambiguity, however, made the religion an interesting intellectual resource for thinking about foreign faiths and their relationship to Christianity.[106]

What emerges from this scholarship is clear academic consensus that Islamicate material had a profound impact on European thought through the seventeenth and eighteenth century, such that one can trace a genealogy of Islamicate discourses in European Enlightenment thought. What this chapter demonstrates is that the Enlightenment did not merely study Islam; it was, in part, made by Islam – conceptually, philologically, scientifically, and politically. One can group the influence of Islamicate thought in this period to four inter-related areas: Deism, philosophy, science, and politics. By 'made', I mean that engagement with Islamic texts and Islamicate intellectual traditions helped constitute these dimensions of Enlightenment thought, rather than merely supplying objects for its study.

The first and most profoundly impactful discourse that emerges from the 'Republic of Arabic Letters', to use Bevilacqua's term, is that of Deism. Bevilacqua neatly describes how the

[105] Russell, 'The Seventeenth Century', p. 4.
[106] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 10.

central Islamic principle of *tawḥīd* raised old ghosts in the history of the Christian empire:

> Islam's central theological dogma, the unity of God, was a direct contradiction of the Trinitarian form of Christianity established at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. […] Although ancient unitarian heresies (such as Arianism) had been defeated, Islam represented the obdurate persistence of a belief that the Nicene Council had already sought to quash in the fourth century. […] This feature of Islam – its greater appeal to human reason in comparison to Trinitarian Christianity – would become salient once more in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[107]

Two aspects of Bevilacqua's account are particularly important for my argument: firstly, the feeling that it is more rational to believe in a single, unified God rather than the Trinity, and secondly, the persistence of old forms of belief (Arianism in particular) which had been supposedly extinguished at the Council of Nicaea. Both aspects come into play in Enlightenment thought across Europe and provide a significant motive for Romanticism's interest in Islam. Far from being an incidental resemblance, the rationalist appeal of tawḥīd became one of the conceptual engines of the Enlightenment critique of Christian dogma. Islamicate theology offered a model for rethinking divine unity, reason, and moral order at precisely the moment when Europe sought alternatives to its own inherited structures of belief.

The profound effect of the translations of Islamicate scientific discourse into European languages has perhaps been the most long-held understanding of the influence of Islamicate culture on 'modernity' or the European mind. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, John Herman Randall Jr describes the impact of 'Hellenistic science that came with Aristotle from the Arabs' in his *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age* (1926):

[107] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 8

> Unlike the Greeks, they [the Arabs] did not disdain the laboratory and patient experimentation; and in medicine, mechanics, and indeed all the arts, they seem naturally to have bent science to the immediate service of human life, instead of preserving it as an end in itself. From them Europe easily inherited what we like to call the 'Baconian' spirit of 'enlarging the bounds of human empire' over nature.[108]

The effect of the translation of Islamicate scientific discourses into European languages certainly was a profound one that contributed to an epistemological shift between the medieval and 'modern' European mind. Randall also alights on a central aspect within such discourses: the relationship with Aristotle. We will return to Aristotle repeatedly because in many ways, the Romantics' engagement with the modern world is mediated through their contemporary age's Aristotelean empiricism *and* the strange history of the Active Intellect, which forms a central thread of this thesis. The mediation of Aristotelian thought by Islamic and Jewish philosophers, including through twelfth-century al-Andalus, is central to the Islamicate genealogy I seek to recover for Romantic studies, particularly through the figure of Spinoza.

It is also this strand of thought, where science and philosophy meet, which indicates the other area of influence, that of philosophy. It was not just the translations of Aristotle which had such an impact on Europe from the thirteenth century onwards: it was also his commentators and interpreters, especially Avicenna (a latinised form of the Arabic name Ibn Sīnā), al-Fārābī, and perhaps most notoriously, Averroes (Ibn Rushd). Notoriously, since it is indeed Ibn Rushd/Averroes, who spawned not only a 'school' in the European middle-ages, the 'Averroists', but also a great deal of commentary in the nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first centuries from both European and Islamicate scholars, beginning with Ernest Renan's Averroès et l'averroïsme (1852).[109] Quite what is so salient about Ibn Rushd's philosophy (rather than that of any other

[108] John Herman Randall Jr, *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age*, rev. edn (The Riverside Press, 1940), p. 208.

[109] Renan is a huge figure in the history of Oriental scholarship, and certainly earns his place as a key figure in Edward Said's critique of the discipline (no matter how little Renan Said actually read). His *Averroès et l'averroïsm* is however an underappreciated text in the West, where most Renan scholars only 'note that it was based on his doctoral study and

Islamicate philosophy, such as Avicenna's) is neither immediately apparent nor straightforward, except for his distinguishing feature as the foremost commentator on Aristotle – and it is indeed this that is specifically of interest to medieval scholasticism. However, it is Ibn Rushd's interventions in the areas of reason and intellect which later come to the fore in the debates and fallouts of Enlightenment philosophy, to which we shall return. In the Enlightenment, as in the Middle Ages, Ibn Rushd's insistence on the autonomy of reason, the universality of intelligible truth, and the layered structure of interpretation (ẓāhir/bāṭin) became resources for thinkers seeking to disentangle rational inquiry from ecclesiastical authority.

From these areas we are left with politics. As Bevilacqua suggests, the discourses that were spawned by the translations and works of the European Arabists of the seventeenth century had unintended consequences. One of these was that 'antireligious readers ended up using the new knowledge of Islam to critique organized religion,' and this same vein of critique was also levelled against European modes of political power.[110] In *City of the Sun*, an early utopian philosophical story written in Italian in 1602 by Tommaso Campanella, there are peculiar resonances with Islamic – and specifically Ottoman – political practices, and Mohammed is referred to as having 'great intelligence'.[111] It is peculiar indeed that a utopian tract of the seventeenth century displays such openness to Islamic religion. Nearly two hundred years later, another utopian tract would similarly outline a society where different religions have epistemologically similar values – and this work would prove highly influential in the Romantic period: Volney's *Ruins* (1791). If some of the political cultures of Islamicate societies were being positively regarded in the seventeenth century, it was Henri de Boulainvilliers' *Histoire des Arabes avec la Vie de Mahomet* (1731) which gave voice to an explicit appreciation of Islam and its political system (we should note here that Boulainvilliers

earned him a name as a scholar' (Steven Harvey, "On the Nature and Extent of Jewish Averroism: Renan's Averroès et l'averroïsme Revisited." *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 7.2 (2000), p. 101.) The book however does have a very significant afterlife in Islamicate intellectual histories due to the influence of its Arabic translation. See note 120.

[110] Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters*, p. 4

[111] c.f. Noel Malcolm, 'The Crescent and the City of the Sun: Islam and the Renaissance Utopia of Tommaso Campanella', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 125 (2005), pp. 41–67, which outlines the Islamic influences on Campanella.

was Spinoza's French translator).[112] Boulainvilliers's positive portrayal of Mohammed and his 'system' bears perhaps the influence of an older text which was yet more radical – Henry Stubbe's *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism, with the Life of Mahomet, and a Vindication of him and his Religion from the Calumnies of the Christians*. Writing at the end of the seventeenth century (Stubbe began work on the text in 1671), the full text did not enter print publication until 1911. However, parts of the text were published in 1693 and 1695, and manuscripts in circulation meant the text was influential enough to likely prompt Humphrey Prideaux's (quite contrary) *The True Nature of Imposture fully display'd in the Life of Mahomet* (1697).[113] Prideaux was a former Oxford colleague of Stubbe, and Stubbe himself was at the centre of a network of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers, some of whom shared his radical, Deist-informed views, that included Thomas Hobbes and the Earl of Rochester. Rather than recounting the familiar story of the rise of Islam and the life of 'the Imposter' Mohammed, as Prideaux did, Stubbe instead uses the sources gathered in Bevilacqua's 'republic of Arabic letters' to write a 'vindication' of Mohammed and of Islam that is in Nabil Matar's words a 'Copernican revolution' in thinking about Islam.[114] Stubbe's work has another aim – to critique Trinitarianism and promote Deism, or more specifically, Arianism, a doctrine which rejects the Trinity and considers Jesus a separate (not consubstantial) being from the Father, and which was condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325CE.[115]

Stubbe's linking of a critique of the Trinity, a promotion of the 'more rational' position of Deism, advocating the formerly condemned heresy of Arianism, to a vindication of Islam, Mohammed as a Prophet, and Islamic society's positive cultural values of toleration and social order became extremely influential.[116] It is in the late seventeenth century, and continuing into the

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[112] For an excellent commentary on the attitude of Boulainvilliers towards Islam and Muhammed, see Minou Reeves, *Muhammed in Europe: A thousand years of western myth-making*, (New York University Press, 2003), pp. 147-159.
[113] See *Henry Stubbe and the Beginnings of Islam: The Originall and Progress of Mahometanism*, ed. Nabil Matar (Columbia University Press, 2013), especially its excellent Introduction, by Nabil Matar, pp. 1-48.
[114] Nabil Matar, 'Introduction' to *Henry Stubbe and the Beginnings of Islam: The Originall and Progress of Mahometanism*, p. 1.
[115] See Matar, 'Introduction', pp. 12-16.
[116] James R. Jacob, *Henry Stubbe, Radical Protestantism and the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. chapter 8, 'Civil Religion and Radical Politics: Stubbe to Toland', pp. 139–161.

eighteenth century, that 'Islam […] appears as a sort of seventh century Reformation, and must therefore be reckoned as a precursor of the Enlightenment, particularly since its reforming urges veered toward the most radical dissent.'[117] It is precisely this vein of thinking that Humberto Garcia picks up to bring readers through the English Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, into the nineteenth-century thought of the Romantic period. Islam was not simply a mirror for European political anxieties; it became a conceptual toolkit through which Enlightenment thinkers reimagined sovereignty, tolerance, and the relationship between religion and state.

This is a wealth of Western scholarly interest in the cultural debt owed to Islamicate cultures, but the relationship of European Enlightenment and Islam has been described before, by twentieth-century Islamicate thinkers. Looking from a perspective embedded in Islamic thought, at a world that is relentlessly European, these thinkers point to deeper structures of feeling relayed between Islamicate discourses and those of the Enlightenment. One of them is Samar Attar, whose exposition of the significance of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan points precisely to a structure of feeling that becomes a tenet of Enlightenment discourse, but others are Ḥasan Ḥanafī, and Muḥammad al-Jabri, both of whom point to the significance of Ibn Rushd's thought as instrumental in the unfolding of the European Enlightenment. Both Ḥanafī and al-Jabri are influenced here by Farah Antun, a Lebanese Christian intellectual likewise engaged with this Islamicate philosophical inheritance, who gained renown for a debate with the far more famous and influential Muḥammad ʿAbduh regarding Ibn Rushd. Antun is described by Saud Tamamy as 'one of the first and most influential thinkers to interpret Averroes as an early advocate of an

[117] Timothy Winter, 'Ishmael and the Enlightenment's *Crise De Coeur*', in, *Scripture, Reason, and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter: Studying the 'other', understanding the 'self'*, ed. by Basit Bilal Koshul and Steven Kepnes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 151

enlightenment', a view that became only more pertinent through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[118]

The significance of Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd, as partners to an Islamicate heritage within Enlightenment thought, points to what Timothy Winter describes, in the quotation that serves as an epigraph to this section, as 'a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain'.[119] What indeed, is this certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain? The two key figures emerging from this are the twelfth-century thinkers, both polymaths within the Almohad caliphate of Andalusia, Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd.

Whilst the European scholars cited above have produced outstanding accounts of the textual relations between Islamicate culture and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, it is in the work of Islamicate thinkers – viewing Europe from within an intellectually colonised world, and grounded both in Islamic thought and in the pervasive realities of European modernity – that we find the deeper structures of feeling that help explain the distinctive vitality of Islamic influence in these centuries. For there are indeed factors that drive the germination of certain discourses of Islam in European Enlightenment thought, rather than the episode being wholly accidental, which would have certainly kept 'the republic of Arabic letters' discreetly within the academy, without having such a profound impact on European Romantic thought and distilled into the poetry, nay, philosophy of Romanticism. By these factors, I mean the relevance of Islamicate debates to the

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[118] Saud M. S. Tamamy, *Averroes, Kant and the Origins of the Enlightenment: Reason and revelation in Arab Thought* (I B Tauris, 2014), p. 22.

[119] As Tamamy notes, 'If Averroes represents the beginnings of what might have been an Arab enlightenment, as is often suggested, then Ghazali represents its failure' (Tamamy, *Averroes, Kant and the Origins of the Enlightenment*, p. 8). Elsewhere, there is the view that Islamicate orthodoxy effectively crushed the influence of Ibn Rushd, a view made extremely popular from Renan's *Averroès et l'averroïsme*, the translation into Arabic of which has had a profound influence on Arabic and Islamic scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth century, particularly during the Nahda, many of whom have echoed the thesis of Renan that 'the philosophical studies of the Arabs came to an end with Ibn Rushd. Ibn Rushd's philosophy was transferred to Europe where it was taken up' (a translation into English of the Arabic translation of *Averroès et l'averroïsme* by Adil Zuaytir published in Cairo in 1957), see Stefan Wild, 'Islamic Enlightenment and the Paradox of Averroes', *Die Welt des Islams*, 36.3 (1996), pp. 379–90 (p. 388).

questions of reason, the intellect and political reform that were becoming central to European Enlightenment thought. These thinkers recognise that the Enlightenment's conceptual architecture – its theories of reason, the intellect, political reform, and even the humanist subject – draws on Islamicate debates that Europe later absorbed, translated, and naturalised as its own. And, as Timothy Winter suggests, that germination is dependent on 'a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain'.

In spite of its obscure title, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* has a claim to be one of the most influential texts of Islamicate culture in Europe. It was, for a long period, the most translated work of Arabic into English, after the Qur'an and the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Samar Attar gives an excellent summary of the translation history of the story which is worth quoting in full:

> It was first translated into Hebrew by Moses of Narbonne in 1349, and into Latin by Pico della Mirandola in the second half of the fifteenth century. Another Latin edition appeared in 1671, made from the Arabic by Edward Pococke, son of the well-known orientalist professor at Oxford. The translation was reprinted in 1700. The work then saw several translations into English: by George Keith, a Scotsman and a prominent Quaker, in 1674, by George Ashwell, the Catholic vicar of Banbury, well known for his naturalist theology, in 1686, and by Simon Ockley, a professor of Arabic at Cambridge, in 1708. Ockley's translation was reprinted in London in 1711. Alexander Pope was familiar with the story of Hayy and owned a copy of the English translation. Dutch versions of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan also appeared in Amsterdam in 1672 and 1701, prior to the publication of Robinson Crusoe in 1719. It was reported that Spinoza […] had either translated the Arabic novel or recommended it to be translated into Dutch.[120]

[120] Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (Lexington books, 2007), p. 20.

This history reads as a 'who's who' of radical thought from the Renaissance hermeticist Pico della Mirandola to the grand germinator of Enlightenment himself, Spinoza. Elsewhere in the seventeenth century, Leibniz 'regarded it as an illustration of the excellent philosophical tradition in Arabic'.[121] The strange title of the book translates as 'the living son of the wakeful', and its Latin title, *Philosophus Autodidactus*, is perhaps better known. The story describes a boy, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, who grows up on an Indian island without other human interference. The baby is nursed by a doe, and as a boy begins to invent tools, gradually learning to hunt and farm, and to tame animals. He aspires 'to see no Animal or Plant to want thing, or to have any hurt or damage, or impediment that he could remove from them, but to remove it'.[122] Hayy's practical advances turn him into a natural philosopher: he begins to examine the natural world around him, to categorise and differentiate by qualities. He becomes, in turn, what would be familiar nineteenth century terms: a zoologist, a botanist, a physicist, a chemist, and a geologist.

After his practical advancements, and the ordering of his life on this island, Hayy begins to develop more philosophical lines of enquiry. He is a natural Aristotelian, noting that 'every action must be produced by a cause', and beyond that, that there must be a cause which exists which 'has no physical body'. This, he infers, is the Creator, 'the existence of one true being without the help of prophets or religious institutions and succeeds in having glimpses of the divine world'.[123] After reaching 'a state of highest perfection', at age fifty, Hayy is joined on the island by a hermit, Absal, who comes to the island to lead a life of asceticism. They journey to Absal's native land, where Hayy attempts to teach the society there 'and explain some of his profound wisdom to them'.[124] However, he finds 'their inborn infirmity simply would not allow them to seek Him as Hayy did, to

[121] Letter of Leibniz to M. l'Abbe Nicaise (1697) in *Opera omnia*, ed. L Dutens, 4 vols (Geneva: Apud Fratres de Tournes, 1768) II, p. 245, and quoted in G. A. Russell, 'The Impact of the *Philosophus Autodidactus*: Pocockes, John Locke and the Society of Friends', in *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers*, p. 228.
[122] From *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, quoted in Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment*, p. 24.
[123] Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment*, p. 39.
[124] *Ibn Tufayl's 'Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, ed. and trans. by L. E. Goodman (University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 163.

grasp the true essence of His being'.[125] Hayy begins to observe mankind, finding that they 'had made their passions their god, and desire the object of their worship'. This conclusion informs Hayy's view that 'all but very few of them adhered to their religion only for the sake of this world'. The last conclusion is that '[t]he sole benefit most people could derive from religion was for this world, in that it helped them lead decent lives without others encroaching on what belonged to them.'[126]

It is this aspect of the story, coupled with its faith in the twin revelations of reason coupled with empiricism, which lent the text an air of 'dangerous influence' in the eighteenth century.[127] The appendix to the translation by Simon Ockley warns readers not only that the text 'contains several things co-incident with the Errors of some Enthusiasts of these present Times', but also that 'there has been a bad Use of this book made before'[*sic*].[128] Attar notes, and she is surely right, that Ockley is keen not to 'associate himself with the views of dissenters', particularly Quakers. However, the danger of the text is not just in its relevance just for Quakers, but rather for a much larger group of radical thinkers who may later be termed 'freethinkers'. The kinds of thinkers, indeed, that would include Spinoza and his seventeenth-century adherents, the Spinozists.

Ibn Rushd had also argued that the minds of the masses would not be able to understand deeper philosophical truths, and that in such cases, it would be better for them to follow in the observance of their religion through instruction and ritual. This old idea is found at times through all the Abrahamic religions and has a place in Judaism and Christianity as well as in Islam. However, when expressed explicitly it has apparently dangerous connotations, suggesting not only that most of mankind is not able to comprehend the 'truth', but also that there is a 'truth' that is being withheld by a religious elite – a feeling that became more and more pertinent with the

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125 *Ibn Tufayl's 'Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, p. 163
126 Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment*, p. 164.
127 Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment*, p. 37.
128 From Simon Ockley's appendix to his translation of Ibn Ṭufayl's *The Improvement of Human Reason Exhibited in the life of Hai Ebn Yokdhan* (London, 1708), pp. 167 and 168, and quoted in Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment,* p. 37.

Protestant Reformation. It is precisely for this reason that *Hayy Ibn Yaqẓan* is picked up by Dissenters, as well as by those thinkers who, like the character of Hayy, have used the faculty of reason to establish the truths of God and the Universe – and it is precisely for this reason that the text is so salient for those Enlightenment thinkers who will attempt to know God through reason, of whom Spinoza is the most significant.

The text of Hayy is also reminiscent of two other major texts of interest. The first is most immediately apparent – Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which Attar argues was influenced by Hayy – and the second similarly groundbreaking, John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), which G. A. Russell argues was also influenced by Hayy. Locke's idea of the tabula rasa of the human mind and its development through empirical understanding is remarkably similar to the story of Hayy's mental development through empirical means. Russell hypothesises that it is indeed the publication of *Philosophus autodidactus* in Latin in 1671 which is the influential factor in the 'dramatic shift in Locke's thought' from his 'social, political and practical' concerns to 'the kind of epistemological issues which characterise his *Essay'*.[129]

If we can trace the influence of *Hayy Ibn Yaqẓan* in the seventeenth century, we can also identify why a text combining empirical and rationalist tendencies in humanity's pursuit of a moral ideal – knowledge of God – proved so salient. Although Ibn Ṭufayl uses the Qur'an to identify the text requiring comprehension, seventeenth-century attention increasingly turned from sacred texts toward something less esoteric: the workings of nature. No thinker exemplifies this shift better than Spinoza, who, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) – the book 'forged in Hell' – undermines the Bible's sacred authority on multiple fronts, describing it as 'in parts imperfect, corrupt, erroneous, and inconsistent with itself' and arguing that 'we possess but fragments of it'. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza's elusive *Deus sive Natura* makes explicit where one might look to understand God: not in sacred texts, but in nature and the world. This led 'Spinozist' to become nearly

[129] Russell, 'The impact of *The Philosophus Autodidactus'*, pp. 224-265 (p. 224).

synonymous with 'atheist' in the eighteenth century. In this respect, Spinozism replaced the late-medieval label 'Averroist', coined by Thomas Aquinas for thinkers associated with Averroes's theory of the unity of the intellect. Ibn Rushd's theory, a distinctive descendant of Aristotle's Active Intellect and developed in his commentary on *De Anima*, is particularly salient here. It reminds us that the influence of Islamic discourses – perhaps that 'certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain' – is closely bound to the intellectual history of Aristotle's Active Intellect. It is for this reason that Saud Tamamy describes how 'Averroes has been re-employed by the different intellectual discourses in order to provide answers to the question of Arab enlightenment'.

What this intellectual history makes apparent is that the 'high' Enlightenment philosophy of Spinoza did not draw on Islamicate thought in general, but on a particular current shaped in al-Andalus – that 'certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain', to borrow Winter's phrase. Through Ibn Ṭufayl and, above all, Ibn Rushd, this Andalusi tradition formed one of the conduits by which Aristotelian rationalism, the theory of the Active Intellect, and the ideal of a unified, intelligible order entered European philosophy. Spinoza absorbed and transformed this inheritance, translating its immanentist logic into the conceptual grammar of modernity. And it is precisely this Andalusi-Spinozist thread of Enlightenment thought that Romanticism later reacts against, reconfigures, and ultimately redeploys in its own metaphysics of imagination. In other words, the very Enlightenment rationalism that the Romantics sought to transcend was already marked by an Islamicate genealogy.

That 'atheism', then, became synonymous with the names of Averroes and Spinoza is another thread in the long, tangled history of the discourses with which we are dealing. This thesis traces a line through medieval to Enlightenment philosophy in the West, attending to the epistemological limits of Christianity's accommodation of Aristotelian thought. Yet what Christianity could not fully absorb – the immanentising logic of the Active Intellect, as it passed from *De Anima* through Ibn Rushd to Spinoza – continued to shape the conditions under which 'atheism' became thinkable at all. In this sense, atheism is not excluded from the trajectory I am

describing, but emerges as one of its possible culminations: the moment when metaphysical vitality becomes detached from its theological guarantees. It is for this reason – this thread of thought, this 'kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain' – that the Aristotelian inheritance remains so vital for Romanticism, as it, too, seeks to revive 'the soul' and make 'imagination' its animating principle. The Enlightenment's rationalist vocabulary, transmitted through Spinoza, was already shaped by an Andalusi Islamicate inheritance that Romanticism would later reconfigure in its metaphysics of imagination.

Winter has noted that certain modern thinkers attempt to reinvent Ibn Rushd as a patron saint of secular rationalism, lamenting the loss of an imagined "Averroist" tradition that could safeguard reason while preserving religious order. For those Islamicate scholars who argue that Averroes helped pioneer Enlightenment thought, 'Averroes' account of the relationship between revelation and reason, when presented in the context of Averroes' closeness to Islamic dogma, demonstrates that Islam contains the basis of modernity itself'.[130] Yet, as Winter cautions, the Enlightenments of eighteenth-century Christianity and Judaism did not move Europe toward a religiously inflected rationalism – still less toward anything recognisably Islamic. Instead, they moved away from the Moorish paradigm, preparing the ground for a world increasingly defined by disenchantment and secularisation:

> It is clear that the Christian and Jewish Enlightenments of the eighteenth century did not move Europe in a religious, still less an Islamic direction. Instead, they moved outside the Moorish paradigm to produce a disenchantment, a desacralising of the world which opened the gates for two enormous transformations in human experience.[131]

The Egyptian scholar Ḥasan Ḥanafī offers a striking counter-reading of this history from within an Islamicate intellectual horizon. His reading belongs to a wider project of Islamic renewal, shaped by his commitment to the 'Islamic Left' and his critique of Western intellectual dominance through

[130] Winter, 'Ishmael and the Enlightenment's *Crise De Coeur*,' p. 165.
[131] Murad, 'Faith in the Future: Islam after the Enlightenment.'

'Occidentalism'. Recovering the Islamicate inheritance of European thought is therefore also, for him, a means of challenging intellectual dependency. He insists that Europe's eventual disenchantment cannot be understood apart from the Andalusi legacy itself. As Islamic philosophy moved from Arabic to Hebrew to Latin, Ḥanafī argues, scholastic thought 'learned the lesson given by Islamic philosophy: Reason and faith are identical.'[132] In his view, it is this very inheritance of Andalusi rationalism that set European thought on its later trajectory.

Ḥanafī develops a vivid account of how Islamic ideas underwrite some of the foundational moves of early modern philosophy. Descartes's *cogito* becomes, in this reading, a secularised form of Avicenna's 'Flying Man', and Spinoza represents the moment when this rational method is applied comprehensively to human life. In Spinoza's hands, the personal, commanding God of the biblical tradition gives way to a transfigured unity – *Deus sive Natura* – whose immanent order can be understood but not supplicated. As Ḥanafī suggests, there is a structural resonance between Islam's uncompromising monotheism (tawḥīd) and Spinoza's monism: both offer a deterministic universe in which understanding reality – whether as God or Nature – becomes the path to human flourishing. Ḥanafī's conclusion flies in the face of Renan's thesis that Islamic orthodoxy was responsible for burying Ibn Rushd and presents an interesting alternative viewpoint of the traditional Nahḍa thinkers. There is something golden in Ḥanafī's dynamic, unscholarly prose, and it is worth quoting some of his characterful insight in full:

> Modern rationalists, Descartes and the Cartesians, continued the struggle already begun. The famous, Cogito is a new form of the 'Flying Man' of Avicenna. The man, despite the severing of his members, still exists as Awareness. If Descartes has extracted the Bible, the Church, the customs and the political regimes from his method, leaving them to his

[132] Hasan Hanafi, *Religious Dialogue and Revolution: Essays on Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Anglo- Egyptian Books, 1977) p. 61.

temporary ethics, Spinoza came and applied the method in every aspect of life. God as Person disappeared as conjecture; the Transcendence of God reappeared as certainty.[133]

Again, Spinoza is a key figure here, who enables a shift in the vision of God from a father, an awe-inspiring figure, the God who asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, the God who is in the name Israel, Jacob's name after wrestling the angel.[134] The meaning of the name Israel is 'contend with God'. In another glimpse of one of the structural similarities between Spinoza's Ethics and Islam, contending with God is not possible in Islam, which means 'submission'.

Similarly, Spinoza notes in his theorising of active and passive emotions that it is when we are in the grip of passive emotions – emotions which have external cause – that we experience distress. Spinoza, like Islam, argues that to find any contentment, one should submit and know God/Nature. Though Spinoza's God would more likely be described as immanent, rather than transcendent, Ḥanafī has a point – there is strangely enough a structural similarity between Islam's 'only God is God', and Spinoza's 'God or Nature'. Both systems are deterministic, both describe the same universe – and in both reality (the world/God) trumps any story we can tell about it. And if the Judeo-Christian world uses mystery, enchantment, stories about God, as a figure with whom we can be angry, fearful, even as a father who has forsaken his Son, Islam and Spinoza regard such emotion as immature, a sign of the distress that results from lack of understanding about the nature of the world, or God. Ḥanafī writes that, for Spinoza, '[t]he transcendence of God is a prolegomenon to the determinism of Nature. The identity between Spirit and Nature, between the holy and the profane, made experimental science possible.'[135] It is certainly the case that in Islamic thought the singularity of God could be said to be, structurally, a 'prolegomenon to the determinism of Nature'. It is curious then that Spinoza's God/Nature provides a similar structural end – where understanding of the world/God/Nature is the prolegomenon to the potential of

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133 Hanafi, *Religious Dialogue and Revolution*, pp. 61-2.
134 The story of Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac is Genesis 22, that of Jacob wrestling the angel is Genesis 32: 22-32.
135 Hanafi, *Religious Dialogue and Revolution*, pp. 62.

salvation – the undertaking of the *Ethics* (1677). It is experimental science that Ḥanafī sees as emerging from the influence of Islamic thought.

For Ḥanafī, this intellectual trajectory is inseparable from the scientific inheritance Europe gained from the Islamicate world. Medieval Islamic thinkers treated the natural sciences – chemistry, astronomy, botany, medicine – as empirical disciplines grounded in observation and experiment. Figures such as Roger Bacon and Francis Bacon, he argues, systematised this Islamic empirical legacy into what would become the modern scientific method. In this process, alchemy became chemistry, astrology became astronomy, and the cosmos was progressively stripped of symbolic meaning in favour of observable law. Such a shift, Ḥanafī notes, was compatible with Islam's theological commitments but proved destabilising for European Christianity, where the disjoining of Nature from transcendence threatened the metaphysical coherence of the tradition:

> The translation of Islamic culture into Latin began with the translation of science even before the translation of philosophy. Al-Kindi was known first in Medieval Europe as a chemist before being known as a scientist. In Islamic culture, natural sciences such as chemistry, physics, astronomy or biological sciences such as botany, anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology, medicine and even human sciences like psychology, psychophysics, physiognomy, geography, history and jurisprudence were experimental sciences based on observation and experimentation. Nature, although created by its events, occurs under the natural laws. Knowing these laws is a part of the Divine Knowledge […] Roger Bacon in the fourteenth century [*sic*] and under the influence of Islamic scientific thought made from experience the foundation of science. Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century, accumulating all Islamic scientific thought with his own rational evidence and observation, systematized the experimental method in his Novum Organum, which became the point of departure of all modern sciences.

> Therefore, Alchemy became chemistry, astrology became astronomy, occult sciences became exact sciences.[136]

Ḥanafī echoes much of the research referred to above on the impact of Islamicate scientific discourses on European thought. That he locates the epistemological value shift of alchemy to chemistry, and astrology to astronomy as part of that inheritance takes us toward the figure of disenchantment which we will take up in the next chapter. Whilst in the Islamic tradition, this value shift is not a threat to the authority (or singularity) of God – since only God is God, and to understand His universe in no way undermines Him – in the European tradition, this de-coupling of Nature and *meaning* had profound consequences for God. Ḥanafī makes a fascinating conclusion: citing Kant's famous line 'I had to destroy knowledge in order to make room for belief', Ḥanafī argues that 'the system returned to the medieval pattern'. This entailed a 'breakable synthesis which leads to positivism on one side and to mysticism on the other', after which the 'absolute idealism' of Hegel 'forgot the individual conscience as the core of this process'. Ḥanafī elaborates that '[f]rom this gap came all contemporary trends making the individual the centre of the universe'.[137]

It is Kant's project (perhaps specifically transcendental idealism) that Ḥanafī blames for this 'breakable synthesis' of the divided sides of positivism and mysticism, a separation in reverse of Spinoza's God/Nature, and Islam's tawḥīd. In the midst of this division, Ḥanafī sees Hegel's absolute idealism as forgetting the 'individual conscience', a neglect which, in his account, helps explain the subsequent emergence of 'contemporary trends' that emphasise the individual ego's centrality to the universe. It is a hugely pertinent and interesting reading of the Western tradition, and despite its brevity holds great salience.

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136 Hanafi, *Religious Dialogue and Revolution*, pp. 62.

137 Hanafi, *Religious Dialogue and Revolution*, p. 67. Very similar is the conclusion of Timothy Winter: 'Enlightenment leads to sensualism and to rationality. Walter Benjamin has already seen that it cannot guarantee that these principles will secure a moral consensus, or protect the weak. It also […] yields its own destruction.' (Winter, 'Ishmael and the Enlightenment's *Crise De Coeur*', p. 154).

In this light, Winter's claim appears with renewed force, although the intellectual exchanges traced here should not be taken to imply a uniformly pluralist society: under the Almohads, philosophical activity coexisted with coercive religious policies.[138] The disappearance of frameworks such as the Active Intellect – long preserved in Islamic philosophy – helped produce a modernity increasingly certain of its own cultural superiority and increasingly detached from metaphysical meaning:

> Westerners, unlike the Moors of Cordova, proved less able to tolerate diversity or fecundation by the Other, and their own Renaissance and Enlightenment only added to the European's absolute sense of superiority over other cultures, a prejudice that was augmented further by an escalating positivism that finally dethroned God.[139]

It is this loss of the Andalusi synthesis – of a worldview in which reason, revelation, and nature remained unified – that Romanticism will attempt to reimagine, even as it inherits the very Enlightenment rationalism already shaped by that Islamicate tradition.

3. Disenchantment, or, Dialectics of Enlightenment

> In the thirteenth century the key words would no doubt be God, sin, grace, salvation, heaven and the like; in the nineteenth century, matter, fact, matter-of-fact, evolution, progress; in the twentieth century, relativity, process, adjustment, function, complex. In the eighteenth century the words without which no enlightened person could reach a

[138] Maribel Fierro, 'The Religious Policy of the Almohads', in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology,* (Oxford Handbooks, 2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 3 Mar. 2014), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.013.018, accessed 7 Oct. 2026.
[139] Winter, 'Ishmael and the Enlightenment's *Crise De Coeur*', p. 154.

> restful conclusion were nature, natural law, first cause, reason, sentiment, humanity, perfectibility....
>
> Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-century Philosophers*[140]

Prior to a discussion of 'Enlightenment', it is worth recalling Anthony Grafton's commentary on the scholarly turn away from the grand-narratives of another historical favourite, the 'Renaissance', toward more localised, pluralised scholarship:

> Few scholars any longer believe in Jacob Burckhardt's construction of the Renaissance as the origin of modernity – or in the constructions that succeeded it, from Hans Baron's effort to show that the core of Renaissance thought was a new, civic version of humanism that took shape in early fifteenth-century Florence, to Paul Oskar Kristeller's effort to show that the core of Renaissance thought was an effort to revive a set of ancient literary disciplines. Few join Theodor Mommsen and Erwin Panofsky in tracing the origins of historicism to humanist students of the ancient world, or Max Weber in tracing the origins of capitalism to the Protestant Reformation. Their books remain and continue to be read, but the larger assumptions that inspired them have lost credibility over time. The revisionist works of Natalie Zemon Davis and Carlo Ginzburg, Robert Darnton and Stephen Greenblatt, Michael Baxandall and Lisa Jardine have revealed an early modern Europe far too complex and rich in local variations to be subsumed under the great theses of earlier generations, and they in turn have inspired newer generations of scholars. Current ways of studying the early modern period—many of them represented, as well as described, by these chapters—yield complicated, colorful mosaics rather than the dramatic frescoes

[140] Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (Yale University Press, 1932), p. 47.

> and portraits produced by earlier generations. Yet they have a richness, and even a drama, of their own.[141]

Modern histories of Europe have complicated the grand narratives of secularisation and disenchantment, much as Anthony Grafton describes the recent turn away from monolithic categories such as 'the Renaissance' toward localised, plural, and historically situated accounts. The sweeping syntheses offered by twentieth-century interpreters of the Enlightenment – Isaiah Berlin, Peter Gay, Ernst Cassirer, or even Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer – have given way to a more differentiated landscape of 'Enlightenments', each inflected by its own regional, political, and intellectual conditions: the Dutch Republic, Britain, France, and beyond.

This impulse to break open the unity of 'the Enlightenment' has itself become the subject of critical scrutiny. J. C. D. Clark's *The Enlightenment: An Idea and Its History* (2024) argues that 'Enlightenment' is less a single historical formation than a retrospective construct, mobilised especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to underwrite a triumphalist narrative of liberal modernity.[142] Clark's thesis would be even more compelling were it not for Kant's own self-designation – his decisive 'What is Enlightenment?' – but his broader point remains: we must be alert to the historiographical uses to which 'the Enlightenment' has been put.

Recognising the plurality, inconsistency, and internal tensions of the Enlightenment is therefore essential for any genealogical approach. Indeed, when tracing intellectual lineages, we must acknowledge from the outset that we are dealing with a tapestry of staggering complexity. To tug a single thread risks unravelling the pattern – or mistaking one motif for the whole. And yet, in this thesis we must attend not to one tapestry but to several: Enlightenment, Islam, Romanticism. My argument is that a continuous thread runs through them, however difficult it may be to isolate: a conceptual and historical strand that links Islamicate thought to Enlightenment rationality, and Enlightenment rationality to the metaphysical and poetic ambitions of Romanticism.

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[141] Anthony Grafton, 'Where the Reasoning Beings Were' in *New Horizons for Early Modern European Scholarship* ed. by Ann Blair and Nicholas Popper (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), p. 206.
[142] See J. C. D. Clark, *The Enlightenment: An Idea and its History* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

At the philosophical threshold of the movement from a sacramental to a disenchanted world stands Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), where this transformation is rendered as the progressive impoverishment of Spirit:

> Formerly, they had a heaven adorned with a vast wealth of thoughts and imagery. The meaning of all that is, hung on the thread of light by which it was linked to that heaven. Instead of dwelling in this world's presence, men looked beyond it, following this thread to an other-worldly presence, so to speak. The eye of the Spirit had to be forcibly turned and held fast to the things of this world; and it has taken a long time before the lucidity which only heavenly beings used to have could penetrate the dullness and confusion in which the sense of worldly things was enveloped, and so make attention to the here and now as such, attention to what has been called 'experience', an interesting and valid enterprise. Now, we seem to need just the opposite: sense is so fast rooted in earthly things that it requires just as much force to raise it. The Spirit shows itself so impoverished that, like a wanderer in the desert craving for a mouthful of water, it seems to crave for its refreshment only the bare feeling of the divine in general. By the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss.[143]

Hegel's description of Spirit's impoverishment in the *Phenomenology* captures a decisive shift in the intellectual life of Europe: a world once saturated with divine meaning now experienced as opaque, immanent, and resistant to transcendence. What had once been a cosmos bound to heaven by a 'thread of light' had become, for many, a merely empirical world demanding attention to what was now called 'experience'. The longing for divine presence, Hegel suggests, persists only in attenuated form: 'by the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss.'

[143] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 5.

It was by no means inevitable that the epistemic turn toward scientific taxonomy and away from metaphysics would lead to a disenchanted or unbelieving Europe. Isaac Newton stands as the most vivid example here. Far from embodying the rationalist sobriety associated with the Enlightenment, he remained deeply invested in alchemy, biblical chronology, and eschatology. Keynes famously described him as 'the last of the magicians,' the heir not of modernity but of Babylonian and Sumerian cosmologies:

> Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians, the last of the Babylonians and Sumerians, the last great mind which looked out on the visible and intellectual world with the same eyes as those who began to build our intellectual inheritance rather less than 10,000 years ago. Isaac Newton, a posthumous child born with no father on Christmas Day, 1642, was the last wonderchild to whom the Magi could do sincere and appropriate homage.[144]

Newton's scientific method coexisted easily with belief in God, creation, and the hidden forces of nature. It would be perfectly possible, intellectually, to use scientific discourses as a mechanism for describing worldly probabilities, and to maintain a belief in the first principles – God, the unmoved mover, the Active Intellect. Newton with his *Principia* maintained unshakable belief in God. Leibniz, his continental contemporary – fellow founder of the calculus – animated matter in a complex (and enchanted?) theory of monadology. Scientific discourse does not, as a foregone conclusion, undermine belief in God.

Indeed, within the Islamicate world, such coexistence had been unremarkable for centuries. The great scientific innovations that Europe later claimed as its own – advances in optics, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemistry – were themselves continuations of Islamicate natural philosophy. Empirical inquiry need not conflict with tawḥīd, the unity of God. Science unfolded within a metaphysical order that took divine unity as its premise rather than its rival.

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[144] John Maynard Keynes, 'Newton, the Man', in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Elizabeth Johnson and Donald Moggridge (Royal Economic Society, 1978), pp. 363-364.

Why, then, did scientific rationality and religious faith come to seem mutually exclusive in Christian Europe, even as Islamic societies had long held them in productive tension? The answers are necessarily broad and approximate, but the question itself sits at the centre of the conceptual terrain this thesis must navigate: Enlightenment, Romanticism, modernity, science, reason, faith, singularity, plurality. To understand Romanticism's desire to re-enchant, we must first understand why disenchantment occurred – why Europe alone experienced the epistemic rupture that Weber, Hegel, and later theorists take as paradigmatic.

Newton was not disenchanted. This suggests that disenchantment does not arise simply from the shift from God/metaphysics to science/categorisation. Rather, it emerges from a shift in values: from metaphysical meaning to calculability, from first principles to utility. This is the argument developed by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for whom the logic of Enlightenment culminates not in reason's triumph but in its reduction to instrumental calculation. They isolate Spinoza's '*conatus sese conservandi primum et unicum virtutis est fundamentum* [the endeavour to preserve oneself is the first and only basis of virtue]' as the 'true maxim of all Western civilization' (for which we may take to mean modernity), and as the ethical kernel of modernity.[145]

Yet Adorno and Horkheimer locate a number of threads that bear significance to this project – not only the logic of 'computation and utility', but of individualism. Actually, much of what Adorno and Horkheimer critique in Enlightenment was not Enlightenment as such, but the high watermark of a certain discursive process of Enlightenment thought – positivism. For our purposes, it would be anachronistic to read eighteenth-century thought through the teleological lens of nineteenth- and twentieth-century critiques. The challenge is to read Romantic poetry – and the Spinozist inheritance that informs it – together with the Islamicate discourses central to Enlightenment thought, without distorting either through the retrospective shadows of Friedrich

[145] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (Verso, 1997), p. 29. Their reference is from Spinoza's *Ethics* IV, xxii ['the endeavour of preserving oneself is the first and only basis of virtue'].

Nietzsche, Max Weber, or the Frankfurt School. Many further assessments of Enlightenment fall into a similar pattern. Whilst it is certainly possible to read Kant as a teleological narrative that ends with positivism, for our purposes, it would be ahistorical, and problematic. The problem, indeed, is to read Romantic poetry, and its Spinozism, as well as the encounter with Islamicate thought so vitally dynamic in Enlightenment thought, without using the very well-focused lens, and occasional beautiful kaleidoscope, of later nineteenth- and twentieth-century theory or philosophy. The problem is how to read Romantic poetry, and its Enlightenment influences, without the shadow of Nietzsche.[146]

If positivism casts one long shadow over the terrain we are entering, secularity casts another. However, whilst Auguste Comte lived contemporaneously with Romanticism, *The Course in Positive Philosophy* appeared between 1830-1842, beyond the period of our analysis. Secularism is quite different. The French Revolution provided an opportunity to test a new model of state-authority without recourse to religion. There is evidence enough in the grand texts of (especially continental) Enlightenment political thought to suggest that, whilst the term 'secularism' was not used in its modern sense until 1851, by George Holyoake, himself much influenced by Comte,

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[146] Why Nietzsche, since he is another critic of Enlightenment rationalism, and a 'Romantic' one at that? But Nietzsche's conclusions, and his pervasive *mood* can cloud over earlier Romantic thought, leading us to see Nietzsche in earlier Romantic productions. Few have come close to making so profound an impact by articulating a certain teleology of Spinoza's *conatus sese conservandi* as he did in *Thus Spoke Zarathrustra*:

> "We have contrived happiness"-say the last humans and they blink.
> 'They have left the regions where the living was hard, for one needs the warmth. One still loves one's neighbour and rubs up against him: for one needs the warmth.
> 'To fall ill and harbour mistrust is in their eyes sinful: one must proceed with care. A fool, whoever still stumbles over stones or humans!
> 'A little poison now and then: that makes for agreeable dreams. And a lot of poison at the end, for an agreeable dying.
> 'One continues to work, for work is entertainment. But one takes care lest the entertainment become a strain.
> 'One no longer becomes poor or rich: both are too burdensome. Who wants to rule any more? Who wants to obey? Both are too burdensome.
> 'No herdsman and one herd! Everyone wants the same thing, everyone is the same: whoever feels differently goes voluntarily into the madhouse.
> "Formerly the entire world was mad"-say their finest and they blink.
> 'One is clever and knows all that has happened: so there is no end to their mockery. One still quarrels, but one soon makes up-else it is bad for the stomach.
> 'One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one honours good health.
> "We have invented happiness" say the last humans and they blink.-'

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A book for everyone and nobody*, trans. by Graham Parkes (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9-10.)

secularity is very much immanent in Romantic as well as Enlightenment thought. The issue is what exactly we mean by secularism – and here we note that it is not just a model of state relations, but an entire shift in the epistemological value of different forms of knowledge. Secularism, in its modern sense, refers not only to the institutional separation of church and state but to a deeper revaluation of forms of knowledge: a redistribution of epistemic authority that privileges empirical fact over metaphysical meaning. It is this epistemic secularisation – not merely political secularism – that marks the decisive break with earlier worldviews.

For our purposes, then, the question is not simply when or how religion became separated from the state. Rather, it is how the hierarchy of knowledge changed – how the world became available for scientific description but not metaphysical participation, and how this revaluation set the conditions for Romanticism's metaphysical ambitions.

And it is in this context that the Islamicate inheritance becomes indispensable. For what Europe experienced as a rupture was, in the Islamicate intellectual tradition, a long-standing synthesis: a worldview in which reason, revelation, science, and metaphysics remained interwoven. The disappearance of this synthesis from European thought is one of the preconditions for Romanticism's project of re-enchantment.

Arguing that secularisation emerged 'from the seventeenth century on', when the 'new conception of social life came gradually to be defined in which the "secular" was all there was', Taylor suggests that there emerged a division between "'this world," or the immanent, from the transcendent'.[147] Taylor suggests that 'this very clear-cut distinction is itself a product of the development of Latin Christendom and has become part of our way of seeing things in the

[147] Charles Taylor, 'Can Secularism Travel?', in *Beyond the Secular West*, ed. by Akeel Bilgrami (Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 2-3.

West'.[148] Secularism, Taylor argues, is a phenomenon of 'Latin Christendom' which had separated the spiritual and temporal, or immanent/transcendent realms, which led as a consequence to the 'position' that 'the "lower", immanent or secular order is all there is'.[149] Taylor uses the same formulation in his major thesis, *A Secular Age* (2007), in which he grounds his definition as religion 'in terms of the distinction between immanent/transcendent', 'a move tailor-made for our culture'.[150] Though Taylor's writing on secularism is full of fascinating insight, his perspective is so immersed in the 'Judeo-Christian', European (by which I mean a framework drawing just as much from Paganism and Hellenism) perspective that his understanding of secularism is from within a secular society. It is much easier to see the phenomenon of secularism more clearly when looking from an external – for example, an Islamic – perspective. In this case, regarding Western secularism from an Islamic perspective, it soon becomes clear that secularism develops in Europe precisely because Christianity had not done enough to indicate a division between the immanent and the transcendent world, but had mixed the two, so that when scientific thought began to give new reasons for natural phenomena that did not seem related to a deeper symbolic order, the whole edifice of Christian religious thought began to collapse. This comparative vantage point is essential, because Taylor frames secularisation as an internal development of Latin Christendom, whereas the contrast with Islam reveals it as a *reaction* to Christianity's specific metaphysical structure – one in which divine presence is materially mediated in ways that make it uniquely vulnerable to disenchantment. As Miller notes about the centrality of communion: 'The Eucharist was the archetype of the divine analogy whereby created things participated in the supernatural reality they signified'.[151] In Christianity, metaphysical participation is built into the fabric of ritual life; in Islam, metaphysical unity is guaranteed by divine transcendence itself.

[148] Taylor, 'Can Secularism Travel?', p. 3.
[149] Taylor, 'Can Secularism Travel?', p. 4.
[150] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 16.
[151] Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, p. 3.

Although Taylor is right that the immanent/transcendent split became sharply articulated in the very period he identifies, distinguishing these orders is different from treating the immanent world as self-sufficient. The former is a theological distinction; the latter, I argue, emerged historically in reaction to pressures – including the intellectual encounter with Islam – that destabilised Christianity's inherited metaphysical synthesis. The distinction I am drawing here is theological rather than a claim that Islamicate societies have always been secular. Nor does it depend on philosophical inquiry ending with Ibn Rushd: my concern is with the compatibility of inquiry into nature and belief in the absolute unity of God. Taylor's statement that '[t]he clear separation of an immanent from a transcendent order is one of the inventions (for better or worse) of Latin Christendom' is, in a different sense, equally true of Islam. In the theological account developed here, the oneness of God is so absolute that scientific inquiry need not trouble it: understanding the workings of creation need not undermine belief in its Creator. If alchemy gave way to chemistry, nothing essential was lost – since only God is God. Many Muslim thinkers would argue that to understand the laws of nature is already to begin to understand their Creator; scientific lucidity and metaphysical commitment are mutually reinforcing, not in tension. In this respect, Islam and Spinozism are structurally similar: to comprehend the world is to comprehend its divine ground – its Creator in the Islamic account discussed here, God/Nature in Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*. Islam is structurally incapable of disenchantment in this sense: it is always already disenchanted, since only God is God, and nothing in creation can rival or condition His singularity.[152] By the same logic, it is also incapable of becoming 'modern' if modernity is defined by disenchantment. This structural immunity has often been misread in the West – sometimes with condescension, sometimes with a barely concealed envy that will become apparent as we turn to Romantic encounters with the Islamic tradition.

[152] By 'disenchanted' here I mean ontologically non-sacramental: creation does not participate in the being of God, and therefore cannot 'lose' a sacrality understood in those terms. My argument is that disenchantment, understood in this sense, cannot simply be exported as a universal account of modernity: it emerges from the particular theological history of Latin Christendom.

What Taylor describes, then, as a 'separation' is not the primary cause of secularisation but the secondary effect of a deeper metaphysical crisis: once Christianity's symbolic integration of matter and divinity is ruptured, the transcendent can no longer be experienced as structurally intrinsic to the world. Yet, in the case of 'Latin Christendom' the advance of the separation of immanent/transcendent, so argues Taylor, had utterly disastrous consequences for religion. If the separation of immanent and transcendent operates within Islam as clearly as within Christianity – but with radically different consequences – then the decisive question becomes: what other factors could have produced such divergent cultural outcomes? Again, Taylor's argument is that what counts here is that it then becomes that 'the "lower," immanent or secular order is all there is.'[153]

Firstly, we must return to the encounter with Islam as one of the pressures through which this 'split' between transcendent and immanent becomes newly consequential in European thought. Islamic monotheism supplied an important point of reference for European anti-Trinitarian thought. Newton was an Anti-Trinitarian Christian, but he was no subscriber to the Athanasian Creed. The seventeenth-century surge of interest in Islamic monotheism – through Arabic sources, Qur'an translations, and Hebraic scholarship – supplied further intellectual resources for rejecting Trinitarian metaphysics. Christianity, prior to the unbuckling effect of a critique that began with Luther, had always sought to pull singularity into the world. What could be more indicative of the complicity between God, transcendent, and Christ, man-God, and Holy Spirit, immanent, than the trinity? And how else could an attempt to locate in one holy being – a scapegoat for the sins of man – be understood, except as enmeshing completely the Divine and this temporal world? It was the rationalising pietism of the Protestant Reformation that curtailed the capacity for connection between the transcendent and the immanent, undermining the potentiality of the 'Bride of Christ' – His Church. By situating the possibility of communion between humanity and God squarely in the relationship between the individual and the divine

[153] Taylor, 'Can Secularism Travel?', p. 4.

(perhaps drawing some inspiration from Islam), Lutheranism posited a form of freedom for the individual at the centre of a framework in which human agency begins to take precedence over mystery.

The protection – and necessary isolation – of the atomised subject has its roots in Lutheran thought and echoes throughout Enlightenment discourses. A comprehensive argument for the Reformation as a foundational driver of secularisation has been made persuasively by historian Brad S. Gregory in *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (2012).[154] From this vantage point, we can begin to understand the structures of feeling underlying the very idea of 'disenchantment', as analysed by thinkers attuned to the Protestant ethic. Weber's concept of disenchantment emerges from a uniquely European collapse of hierarchical cosmologies, in which the sacred order no longer mediates the world, leaving a rationalised, human-centred framework in its place.

In this sense, Taylor's notion of the construction story illuminates the broader significance of these transformations: modern secularity did not simply subtract belief from European life, but actively constructed a new moral and experiential order – the immanent frame – in which transcendence, mystery, and spiritual plurality are marginalised, and human agency assumes primacy. The Reformation's emphasis on individual communion with God, combined with Enlightenment rationalisation, can therefore be seen as a key historical step in this construction, shaping a world in which alternative forms of being, knowledge, and devotion become intelligible only as optional possibilities rather than embedded, default realities.

As the Protestant revolution sought to disentangle the relationship between man and God from the entrapment of the priesthood, an unintended consequence of this happened also to be the emergence of a new political order that could stand outside of a relationship with the Divine. This marks the beginning of the modern 'immanent frame': a world in which political legitimacy no

[154] Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

longer depends on divine ontologies, and in which human agency acquires unprecedented ontological weight. In this way, we come back full circle to the idea that at its heart, secularism proposes a separation between transcendental power – God – and secular (temporal realm) power – the State. However, this should be understood as a manoeuvre that occurs within an epistemic shift away from instrumental power to power as a series of checks and balances. As Talal Asad notes: 'The secular as disenchantment is not to be seen simply as part of the move toward religious separation from political authority but as a vision of rational and therefore justified hierarchy.'[155]

Out of the collapse of an organic, inter-connected, web emerged, in the late eighteenth century, the modern notion of the 'subject'. The philosopher Simon Critchley, in a beautifully insightful essay on subjectivity, remarks that Heidegger 'points out, during the Middle Ages the meaning of the words *subjectum* and *objectum* was precisely the reverse of their modern signification'.[156] Critchley notes that

> The modern philosophical use of the word *subject* as the conscious or thinking subject, as self or ego, as that to which representations are attributed or predicated (the subject as the subject of representation) first appears in the English language as late as 1796.[157]

It is then, 'in Kantian terms, the turn towards the subject [which] is the Copernican turn'.[158] It is this notion of the individual as subject, and the division of subject/object, that is really at the heart of the 'disenchantment of the world' – the possibility that one can be delimited, concrete, and that one can choose action or passivity in a matrix of possibilities.[159] This affects an understanding of objects – which is why so much Enlightenment philosophy deals with the nature of Sentimental Affect, Substance, and Modes. As Asad notes: 'secularization doesn't merely enable human beings

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[155] Talal Asad, *Secular Translations: Nation State, Modern Self and Calculative Reason* (Columbia University Press, 2018), p.21. It is also possible to see, at this stage, that monotheism and the secular state lead to a collapse in the value of the transcendent. Paganism, however, is not incompatible with a secular state, and pagan belief can work very well within a secularised society.

[156] Simon Critchley, 'Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity?', in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (Verso, 2009), p. 51.

[157] Critchley, 'Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity?', p. 51.

[158] Critchley, 'Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity?', p. 53.

[159] Recall Hanafi's argument – that it was indeed Kant's project which led to the 'breakable synthesis with positivism on the one side and mysticism on the other'. *Religious Dialogue and Revolution*, p. 67.

to see the world as it really is; it does this by establishing a distance between self and external reality, something that primitives (so Europeans believe) can't do.'[160]

That this 'distance', in other terms, this 'agency', is at the centre of Enlightenment philosophy is declared explicitly by Kant in his 1784 essay, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?':

> Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! "Have courage to use your own understanding!"--that is the motto of enlightenment.[161]

The Enlightenment as a paradigm shift from discourses of meaning or symbolism to discourses of utility has been oft described, no more notably than in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. By 'utility' here I mean the instrumental valuation of knowledge, rather than the pursuit of understanding itself. As suggested earlier, however, Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis is less appropriate to the historical phenomenon of 'Enlightenment', but rather to a certain teleology of Enlightenment that finds its end in nineteenth-century positivism. Curiously, there is a remark of Saint-Simon, the great teacher of Comte, that the Middle Ages ended 'once Arab science was transmitted to the West.'[162] This is the same Saint-Simon who proposed a 'Newtonian' utopia, based on the principles of reason, order and universal law. His appeal to science belongs, then, to a political project for reorganising society: the significance lies not simply in scientific understanding, but in the social authority assigned to it. The thread is there – and Saint-Simon raises his hand to point us in the very direction we have already been looking. Following Kant, we recall that Enlightenment rests not just on discourses of utility, but rather on an entirely new structure of the

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[160] Talal Asad, *Secular Translations*, p. 16. Asad notes he is partly paraphrasing Hans Blumenberg here.
[161] Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', 1784, trans. Ted Humphrey, (Hackett Publishing, 1992), par 1, www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/kant_whatisenlightenment.pdf, 27/10/2025.
[162] Quoted in Frederick Copleston, *History of Philosophy Vol 9: Maine de Biran to Sartre, Burns and Oates*, (Search Press, 1975), p. 60.

subject/object relations. Subject/object relations that are exemplified by Kant's 'emergence from self-imposed immaturity,' and also by Spinoza's '*conatus sese conservandi primum et unicum virtutis est fundamentum*'. Here we find a root of modernity, and above all capitalist modernity's (economic) individualism. It is also where we see the significant difference between the teleology and utilities of scientific discourses in Islam and Europe. Islam posits a very moderate and cautious line through self-determination, and at times veers closer to (a sometimes fatalistic) determinism. The notion of self-preservation is important, but God trumps everything – there is no need to question whether one need protect oneself to be virtuous, question instead whether one has truly submitted to (the Will) of God: do not ask whether one should preserve oneself – ask only that God may preserve you. This is the decisive break with both medieval Christianity and Islamicate metaphysics: knowledge becomes self-grounding, the subject becomes the locus of reason, and the world becomes object rather than sign. Kant's Sapere Aude then sounds suspiciously bold – and his rejoinder that he must 'deny knowledge in order to make room for faith' rings with the question – in what?

The problem with scientific discourses, for the purposes of this genealogy, is that they shift the locus of reasoning from metaphysical principles to probabilistic mechanisms. If the mechanisms of the world and the universe can be unlocked through slow data-aggregating, endlessly alterable, iterative hypotheses, which draft up probability, rather than any clear categorical answer, why ask any other question at all? Scientific discourses in the West did not logically require the abandonment of the Aristotelian tradition of the Active Intellect, but historically they displaced it; because why would anyone need to think about the unmoved mover, first principles, or the nature of Being and entanglement, when science could tell you to suspend belief, in the trust that

we might inch yet closer to an indeterminate utility-truth at some unknown point in the future?[163] Indeed, Hegel asked: 'when all prejudice and superstition has been vanished, the question arises: Now what? What is the truth which the Enlightenment has disseminated in place of these prejudices and superstitions?'[164] Hegel's challenge identifies precisely the vacuum that opened when metaphysical participation dissolved: if the world is no longer symbolically saturated, what norm or *telos* remains to orient human action?

To which we might answer – following the new order of subject/object – that the operative verb is not to be but to consume. Within this new epistemic order, the Enlightenment increasingly centred the autonomous individual as the primary bearer of rational authority. To call the Subject 'the new divinity' is to name this relocation of authority and agency, developed below through Abrams's account of the assimilation of powers formerly attributed to God. Since the Enlightenment posited a Subject (the new divinity), and that Subject should not have need of a priest (the Other becomes an alterity, and obsolete) and even his virtue should be that which emerges from self-preservation, it became the case that this subject needed – not other Subjects, or Other[s] – but objects.[165] In this way, the Subject could elide the complexity and mysteriousness of an encounter with the Other, and instead measure need, measure want, just by looking at the price of things. As Asad concludes: 'There are no mysterious, incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted.'[166] Here disenchantment is not simply the erosion of belief but the foreclosure of relational metaphysics: the Subject confronts a world of objects rather than a cosmos of signs.

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163 Pascal had the foresight to see this: "I cannot forgive Descartes; in all his philosophy, Descartes did his best to dispense with God. But Descartes could not avoid prodding God to set the world in motion with a snap of his lordly fingers; after that, he had no more use for God" quoted in *Mathematics and the Divine: A Historical Study*, ed. by Luc Bergmans and T Koetsier (Elsevier, 2004) p. 402.

164 Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 333.

165 For the next three to four hundred years, as Europe developed a new model of a nation state, instrumental power became a thing of the past. This had its own mixed blessings.

166 Asad*, Secular Translations,* p. 21.

To finish Asad's paraphrasing of Blumenberg, and to bring us back to the centrality of our concern, the full quotation is:

> In other words, secularization doesn't merely enable human beings to see the world as it really is; it does this by establishing a distance between self and external reality, something that primitives (so Europeans believe) can't do. One result of this separation, according to Blumenberg, is the sense of loss and pessimism about the advent of modernity found in Romanticism.[167]

We can read this against Abrams's delineation of the shifting weighting of God/Nature/Soul from Christian tradition to 'innovative Romantic thought', where we find something that is not always a pessimism, but the creative potency of the creative artist:

> In its central tradition Christian thought had posited three primary elements: God, nature, and the soul; with God of course utterly prepotent, as the creator and controller of the two others and as the end, the telos, of all natural process and human endeavour. The tendency in innovative Romantic thought (manifested in proportion as the thinker is or is not a Christian theist) is greatly to diminish, and at the extreme to eliminate, the role of God, leaving as the prime agencies man and the world, mind and nature, the ego and the non-ego, the self and the not-self, spirit and the other, or (in the favorite antithesis of post-Kantian philosophers) subject and object.[168]

Romanticism thus diagnoses not only the loss of God but the loss of a participatory ontology in which mind and world co-inhabit a meaningful order. Abrams notes that 'this metaphysical process does not delete but simply assimilates the traditional powers and actions of God'.[169] In this sense, potency was transferred from God to the creative individual – the pessimism, perhaps, comes later (Nietzsche again). So here we arrive at a paradox central to this thesis: Islamicate discourses help

[167] Asad, *Secular Translations*, p. 21.
[168] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 91.
[169] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 91.

enable the conditions for European disenchantment, while Islam itself remains structurally resistant to disenchantment in the theological sense outlined above. And if modernity is defined by disenchantment, then Islam is, by definition, structurally excluded from becoming 'modern'. It is instead the union of Islamic discourses, both scientific (empirical) and rational (Aristotelian), in a European crucible that takes on a particular teleology in the genealogy traced here, culminating (with Kant) in the differentiation of Subject/Object (rendering the Other an object of knowledge rather than a participant in a metaphysical relation) and leading to disenchantment. We become disenchanted, ultimately, because the Other became object: once relational ontologies collapse, the world no longer discloses itself through encounter but through calculation.

4. Islam, Arabic and Romanticism: a multivalent symbolic engagement

Mohammed was immediate, like a river bursting through a mountain range; he breaks through to the One God with whom you can talk so wonderfully, every morning, without the telephone called 'Christ' into which people constantly shout, 'Hallo, is anyone there,' and no-one replies

Rilke, letter to Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis, December 17, 1912[170]

Who knows himself and others well

No longer may ignore:

[170] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe* (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1980), pp. 379-80.

Occident and Orient dwell

Separately no more.

'Twixt two worlds I love the way

Back and forth a man may sway;

So between the East and West

Moving to and fro's the best.

Goethe, poem written on the draft page of *Faust: Part Two*[171]

To understand the beginnings of the lure of Arabia and of Islamicate exoticism in Romantic thought, we must begin in Germany, with the writers, poets, and thinkers who comprised the intellectual context in which German Romanticism developed. I have already referred to Herder and Humboldt, two important figures in this context, whom Taylor cites in articulating a theory of language capable of reinscribing metaphysical meaning into discourse. More than the other German thinkers discussed here, however, Goethe developed and promoted an appreciation of, and attraction to, Arabia and Islamicate discourses. It is important to note that this section deals with pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The topic is necessary because the links between pre-Islamic poetry and the model of love poetry – indeed, Romantic lyric poetry – are found there, entwined with the influence of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry within Islamicate culture itself. Here, as with Abraham, we find a common discursive ancestor, one as important as Abraham to the connection between Islamicate influence and Romantic poetry. Katharina Mommsen's outstanding *Goethe und die arabische Welt* (1988), published in English as *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, gives an impressive overview of what can only be described as Goethe's enormous imaginative investment in Arabic and Islamic culture. Goethe's short poem, which serves as an epigraph to this section,

[171] Quoted in Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, trans. Michael Metzger (Camden House, 2014), p. 4.

demonstrates precisely the structures of feeling at work in the East–West relations with which Goethe would play. Mommsen's study emerges from her scholarship on the genesis of the *West-Eastern Divan*, Goethe's collection of poetry inspired by the Persian Islamic poetry of Ḥāfiẓ and by Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*. Her work, which seeks to represent Goethe's relationship to Arabian culture as comprehensively as possible, focuses specifically on Arabic rather than Islamicate culture and therefore does not centre the Persian poetry of Ḥāfiẓ. Nevertheless, the significance of Islamicate material to Goethe is overwhelmingly evident.

At this juncture, Ziad Elmarsafy's work on Goethe enables us to make a further clarification. Whereas Mommsen's study gives us the scope and texture of Goethe's sustained engagement with Arabic and Persian literary culture, Elmarsafy attends to the conceptual stakes of that engagement. In *The Enlightenment Qur'an*, Elmarsafy demonstrates that Goethe's encounter with Islamicate texts – most notably the Qur'an and the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ – was not merely a matter of poetic influence or imaginative ornamentation, but shaped Goethe's thinking about language, revelation, and the relation between word and world. Elmarsafy shows how Goethe came to understand poetic expression as a mode in which meaning is not simply described but disclosed, such that poetic language participates in, rather than merely represents, the reality it evokes. This insight is foundational to the *West-östlicher Divan* (1819), where poetic form and Islamicate thought are brought into a shared field of reflection. Elmarsafy's intervention therefore allows us to see Goethe as engaging Islam not as an 'elsewhere' to Europe, but as a tradition through which the very possibilities of Romantic poetic knowledge come to be articulated.

Seen from this angle, the broader pattern described by scholars such as Samar Attar comes into clearer focus. The *Thousand and One Nights*, the poetry of 'the immortal Hafez,' (to use Byron's words), the pre-Islamic qaṣīda tradition of the Muʿallaqāt as rendered into European philology through William Jones, as well as the Qur'an itself, circulate not simply as aesthetic material but as formative components in the poetic imagination of the Romantic period. These texts run through Romantic poetry in German, and – arriving later in England – enter a literary field already shaped

by the symbolic resonances of Romantic engagements with Arabic and Persian literary cultures in German and French contexts.[172] Mommsen describes the *Thousand and One Nights* as influencing Goethe 'enormously', where '[m]otifs, figures, and narrative strategies in many of his works were rooted in Sheherazade's tales'.[173]

Mommsen notes the influence on a young Goethe of the Danish Arabia expedition of 1761-1767. This was the expedition that made Carsten Niebuhr famous. Later, Goethe used illustrations from Niebuhr's *Travels through Arabia* (published in English in 1792) as 'ideas for costumes and scenery' for the production of his translation of Voltaire's *Mahomet* in 1800.

Mommsen notes that it was Herder who introduced Goethe to Arabic. Herder's theory of language was influenced by his own theory of Arabic, in which he found a language that was perfectly formed to express the landscape and culture of the people who spoke it. Herder describes the 'Arabs' as 'poets from their very beginnings; their language and customs were formed by and for poetry'.[174] For Herder, the introduction of Islamic religion did not diminish poetry, but shaped the very form of poetry which Arabs displayed, since Mohammed 'persuaded them to accept his poetic religion, and his masterpiece of poetry in which he summoned all poets to a contest, namely, the Qur'an, born of poetic power and a faith in poetry, he influenced their lives as well as their poetry'.[175]

This burgeoning sense of Arabs as a poetic people, combined with the influence of Herder's theory of language, no doubt contributed to Goethe's extraordinary assertion that: '[i]n Arabic, as in no other language, *Geist*, the spirit, the mind that forms the ideas behind words, the words of the language themselves, and the signs with which they are written were constituted as a

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[172] There is a major interest in Islamicate materials in Romantic literature in French, as well as in the works of thinkers and *philosophes* who would not be categorised as 'Romantic', such as Voltaire. The most important mentionable case would of course be Chateaubriand, whose *René* (1802) was equivalent in impact to Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) in British Romanticism. Chateaubriand, like Byron later, also travelled in the Ottoman Empire, going much further than Byron, as far as Palestine, Egypt and Tunisia.

[173] Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 1.

[174] Johann Gottfried Herder, quoted in Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 8-9.

[175] Herder, quoted in Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 8-9.

single entity from the language's very origin.'[176] Goethe followed Herder in suggesting that Arabic speakers 'are already born and brought up as poets', since, as Mommsen explains, 'Arabic language is characterized by word roots derived from the Bedouins' earliest impressions of nature and their lives'.[177] Goethe's theory argues that 'the Middle Eastern peoples find meanings everywhere', and their words are connected in *spirit* (Geist) to 'the remaining visible universe: mountains and deserts, promontories and plains, trees, plants, flowers, rivers and the sea and starry heavens'.[178] For Goethe, this allows Arabs to 'associate the most apparently disparate ideas with one another, not to hesitate to resolve contradictory meanings through the slightest changes in letters or syllables', so that 'language itself is productive: rhetorical in response to ideas, poetic in speaking for the imagination.'[179] The calligraphic form of Arabic, then, allowed for the very spirit of the word, fully expressive of the material world of Arabia, to be imbued in the picture of the word itself. Mommsen suggests that, for Goethe, '[t]he calligraphic form of the Arabic manuscripts he perused transported him, as if by magic, into the depths of the past, letting him experience it with great immediacy'.[180] For Goethe, Arabic calligraphy is but the highest expression of Herder's structural palimpsest of place, people, language, culture, poetry, where each level perfectly reflects and expresses the structure of the form beneath it. Thus, reading calligraphic work, 'readers are brought closer to the moment of creation, to that magical spell in which idea, word, and script are "essentially united".'[181] This 'essential unity' of form and meaning, of the spirit and the letter, lends a structure of feeling that is essential to understanding the symbolism of Arabia and of Arabs for Romantic poets. For Goethe then, 'it is not the poet alone who enjoys these merits: the entire nation is ingenious.'[182]

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[176] Goethe, quoted in Mommsen, p. 15.
[177] Goethe, quoted in Mommsen, p. 15, and Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 15.
[178] Goethe, quoted in Mommsen, p. 15.
[179] Goethe, from 'Basic Elements of Oriental Poetry', in *Notes and Essays for a Better Understanding of the* West-East Divan, quoted in Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 15.
[180] Mommsen, p. 15.
[181] Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 15.
[182] Goethe, from 'Broadest Observations' in *Notes and Essays*, quoted in Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p.

When these materials enter the English literary sphere, however, they do so under markedly different conditions. While Goethe approaches the Islamicate world as a site of poetic reflection and metaphysical inquiry, English Romantic writers encounter it through the mediating pressures of imperial expansion, philological classification, and the Orientalist structures of knowledge that accompanied Britain's global reach at the turn of the nineteenth century. The circulation of Arabic and Persian poetry in England therefore bears the imprint of power in ways that are less pronounced in the German context. Yet, this is not to say that English Romantic engagements with Islamicate material are reducible to Orientalist appropriation. Rather, as I will argue in the chapters that follow, English Romantic poetry often registers an unsettled and searching encounter with Islam as a religious, poetic, and philosophical horizon – an encounter that is at times anxious, at times fascinated, and frequently conceptually generative. It is in this space, where imaginative attraction and imperial mediation converge, that we must locate the afterlives of Islamicate poetics in the English Romantic lyric.

This dynamic becomes sharply visible in the so-called 'Arab Dream' episode in *The Prelude* (1805, Book V), where Wordsworth recounts a dream of meeting a robed Arab in the desert, bearing a stone and a shell, what he refers to as 'two books'. The episode has often been read as an allegory for poetic vocation or as a psychological parable about imaginative authority. Yet when considered within the transnational literary horizon sketched above, the dream reveals itself as an encounter with an Islamicate figure of textual revelation. The Arab appears not merely as an exotic emblem but as the bearer of a tradition in which the preservation, recitation, and transmission of the text constitute the very life of the community. The shell in the dream thus becomes a figure for the poetic word as entrusted, vulnerable, and transmissible across cultural and historical boundaries.

16. It is worth noting another observation, that Goethe describes 'the chief property of oriental literature is what we Germans call 'Geist', the predominance of a supreme guiding principle', in the same place. How familiar this sounds when we recall the Active Intellect, or Shelley's 'imagination'.

Wordsworth's dream registers an ambivalent awareness of a poetic inheritance that does not belong to Europe alone: it is an inheritance in which the origin of poetry is imagined elsewhere, carried by another, and capable of slipping from one world into another. The dream, in this light, is not a fantasy of Oriental otherness but a moment of recognition that the foundations of Romantic poetic authority may lie, in part, in Islamicate forms of textual imagination.

This imaginative re-enchantment does not arise in isolation. It is made possible by a broader conceptual transformation in the late eighteenth century in which 'nature' becomes not only an aesthetic ideal but an ethical norm, as A. O. Lovejoy has demonstrated.[183] At the same time, Enlightenment thought develops increasingly intricate systems of classification and comparison – what Michel Foucault identifies as the taxonomic ordering of knowledge – through which cultures, religions, and poetic traditions are rendered as distinct and knowable entities.[184] These classificatory structures do not neutrally describe difference; they constitute it. Moreover, as Asad has argued, the category of the secular does not emerge as a departure from religion but as a reorganisation of specifically Christian conceptual frameworks.[185] As Asad's genealogy makes clear, 'religion' and 'the secular' are themselves historically contingent categories shaped by Christian conceptual and political formations.[186] When Romantic poets turn toward Islamicate worlds, they do so through this epistemological matrix: Islam appears both intimately thinkable and reassuringly distant, other and yet available as a site for imaginative and affective projection. The East becomes a space onto which enchantment may be reactivated precisely because it has already been conceptually formed as a legible and differentiated domain. These conditions shape not only how the Islamicate world becomes thinkable within English Romanticism, but also the particular imaginative work it is able to perform. Once Islamicate textual and poetic traditions are rendered

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[183] A. O. Lovejoy, "Nature as an Aesthetic Norm', in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), pp. 69–77.
[184] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Vintage Books, 1970), especially chapters 1-3.
[185] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003).
[186] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

legible through Enlightenment classification, and once the secular has reconsolidated itself within a Christian conceptual frame, the 'East' becomes available as a site through which new forms of wonder, visionary capacity, and metaphysical possibility may be projected. It is at this juncture that Romantic poetry begins to turn toward Islam not merely as a source of exotic imagery, but as a domain through which the secular world may be re-enchanted.

Romantic poets from Southey and Coleridge to Byron and Shelley deal in an esoteric world of myth, sorcery and enchantment inspired by the East, and, very often, Islam. Whereas Catholicism often serves as the symbolic repertoire of the Gothic genre, Islamicate symbols and discourses form a complex network of multivalent relations with Romantic poetry. This is not just the leftover remnants of the pre-secular surviving in the secular, disenchanted world; this is a re-enchantment of the secular world using what, by appearance, seems to be a foreign discourse, thus allowing the safety of distance.

As we have already seen in the curious intellectual history of Aristotle's Active Intellect that runs through Islamicate and Jewish philosophy to Spinoza, to be reinterpreted as a theory of imagination, artistic production and social order, it is not just the poetic engagement in Islamic symbols that we should notice. There is a deeper connecting thread between Romanticism and the Islamicate, which is a literary one. The Muʿallaqāt are a collection of seven long, pre-Islamic poems. Their name means the 'hanging ones', as their renown was so great that they were suspended on the Kaaba in Mecca. It is in this poetry that we find the tradition of passion on which Western lyric is modelled.

The Muʿallaqāt were translated in 1782 by William Jones. However, it is not only that their appearance in translation influenced and inspired the Romantic generations in their appreciation of Arabic poetry – it is also that Arabic pre-Islamic poetry provides the structures of feeling that

underlie the Western structures of feeling of love and passion themselves. The collection of the 'Moallakat' in Jones's 1782 edition include seven poems, by Imruʾ al-Qays, Ṭarafa, Zuhayr, Labīd, ʿAntara ibn Shaddād, ʿAmr ibn Kulthūm, and al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza. Goethe produced partial renderings of several odes, after the translations of Jones.[187]

There is a long scholarly history on the origins of troubadour poetry, and the structure of the love sentiment that exists in it – generally known, with some debate, as courtly love. In Denis de Rougemont's argument from *L'Amour et l'Occident* (1939), published in English as *Passion and Society*, 'our language of passion comes down to us from the rhetoric of the troubadours'.[188] This line of thought is itself an old one: 'all our Modern Poetry' says Thomas Rymer in 1693, comes from Provence.[189] If the case of 'modern poetry', indeed, European lyric poetry, coming from Provence, and the sentiment of passion which is expressed by that poetry being also an influence on later lyric is not too contentious, the influence of Arabic literatures on the poetry of the troubadours, certainly is. We can start with Renan's counter to the claim that there is a shared feeling between this Arabic poetry and Romance poetry, writing, in 1863, '[a]n abyss separates the form and spirit of Romance poetry from the form and spirit of Arabic poetry'.[190] But instead of being a confident refutation, his words land on a sense that there may indeed be a connection in some form or spirit between this copula. To say that there is scholarly agreement here would be incorrect, and the subject veers into the academic history of courtly love, where there is little consensus. Indeed, there has been a long running scholarly debate about the historicity of the phenomenon of courtly love, which culminated in a 1967 conference in which courtly love was claimed to be merely the conception of Gaston Paris, the scholar who first used the term 'courtly love' in an 1883 paper 'Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde: Lancelot'.[191] However, courtly

[187] Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 17.
[188] Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, p. 165.
[189] Thomas Rymer, quoted in Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, p. 1-2.
[190] Renan, quoted in Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, trans. by Montgomery Belgion (Faber and Faber, 1956) p. 106.
[191] See Gaston Paris, 'Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde: Lancelot du Lac: II 'Le Conte de la Charrette',' *Romania* 12.48 (1883), pp. 459–534, and *The Meaning of Courtly Love: Papers of the First Annual Conference of the Center for*

love, as a framework as much as a historical phenomenon, has survived, and there are more recent studies of courtly love interpreted through the frame of cognitive science, or via the history of sexuality.[192] What is certain, is that there exists within the medieval poetry of twelfth-century France, which was of such influence to the flourishing of lyric in Europe, a set of relations between the lover and the beloved, between obligation and desire, indeed, subject object, that have had profound influence as a European literary structure of feeling. De Rougemont echoes the sentiments of Gaston Paris in his 1883 interpretation of 'l'amour chevaleresque et courtois' [courtly and chivalric love] in Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charrette* (late 12th cent.), who describes 'Cet amour est une sorte de fascination et en même temps d'idolâtrie qui ne laisse maître' [this love is a sort of fascination and at the same time idolatry which is never mastered]. This is love as passion:

> Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself. What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its *passion*. And passion means suffering.[193]

We can see this love as fascination, as rupture between lover and beloved echoing certain structures of feeling that come into play in Romantic poetry through the ruptured relations of Man/God/World, of subject and object. And it is here that Islamicate discourses again come into play. There has long been a contention that the courtly love structures of medieval poetry were influenced by the confluence of Neoplatonic structures of feeling interacting with Christian ones, which shows up in the theory that troubadour poetry emerged out of the influence of Catharism, the Christian gnostic heresy which flourished in the Languedoc between the twelfth

Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, SUNY-Binghamton. March 17-18, 1967, ed. by F. X. Newman (State University of New York Press, 1968).

[192] See Don A Monson, *Eros and Noesis: A Cognitive Approach to the Courtly Love Literature of Medieval France* (Brill, 2022), and James A Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[193] de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, p. 15.

and fourteenth centuries. This is seconded in the theory that it is Sufi poetics (also influenced by Neoplatonic structures of feeling) that is a latent influence, and that Hispano-Arabic poetry present in Spain prior to the twelfth century is a key influence of troubadour lyric.

Roger Boase's *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, published in 1977, provides a good overview of various scholarly arguments regarding the origin and the meaning of 'courtly love'. Boase groups seven different theories of origin: Hispano-Arabic, Chivalric-Matriarchal, Crypto-Cathar, Neoplatonic, Bernardine-Marianist, Spring Folk Ritual, Feudal-Sociological, further noting that '[t]he controversy over the question of popular and learned (or literary) influences is linked with another polarising issue: the theory of Arabic origins'.[194] Citing Menéndez Pidal, this theory, that 'the strophic Arabic *zajal* […] was an expression of the popular genius of Andalusia', is used to give credence to the claim that: 'Hispanic Arabic culture contributed to the formation, in southern France, of Courtly Love.'[195] It would be hard to resist acknowledging the familiarity between the structures of feeling of love and longing in Hispano-Arabic poetry, and those in troubadour lyric. In an authoritative review of the Hispano-Arabic literature in English, A. R. Nykl includes a lyrical *gazal* from Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, a poet writing around the turn of the tenth century in al-Andalus, who did much to introduce Arabic poetry to the region. In spite of being written over two centuries before the courtly love poetry of the twelfth century, the lyric shows a remarkable similarity to the structures of feeling that become a mainstay of the passionate troubadour lyric:

> You are my illness, in your power lies my remedy;
> You can cure me of my pain and suffering:
> My heart is in love with the one it does not name
> Suffers a pain, the greatest of all pains!
> What else could it be? How can I enjoy life
> With all my patience gone, my consolation dead?

[194] Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love* (Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 2.
[195] Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, p. 2.

Oh you who blame me, what matters it if you

Remain alive, and I die of my pain?

He who dies and finds relief is not really dead,

Dead forsooth is he who, though dead, remains alive![196]

Here we can see, as Nykl notes, many of Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's 'ideas concerning love which we later find codified in the *Ṭawq*, were current in his days.'[197] This is a reference to the later Andalusian jurist and poet Ibn Ḥazm's *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* (*The Ring of the Dove*, 1022). *The Ring of the Dove* is a treatise on love which proved influential in the Iberian peninsula and has been argued to be one of the most influential texts for the framework of courtly love presented in Troubadour lyric.[198] Both Ibn 'Abd Rabbih and Ibn Ḥazm are influenced significantly by Platonic thought, so that the confluence of Platonic influences, both through the Cathars, and through Arabic poetry, can be properly understood as historical varieties of an influence as old as the *Phaedrus*.

If we explore the possibility that European lyric – and in particular the language of passion that is embedded in Romance (and very often Romantic) poetry – may have been influenced by writing that was not Latin, or Greek, but indeed, Arabic, whole worlds of connection open up which have received little scholarly interest. As Nykl notes in *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, '[t]he objection that Christians would not understand or imitate the ways of their deadly enemies is the least valid' objection to the idea that speakers of Romance languages in medieval Spain and

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[196] Ibn Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd* (The Necklace), quoted in an English translation in Alois Richard Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its Relations with the Old Provencal Troubadours* (J. H. Furst Company, 1946), pp. 38-9.

[197] Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 37.

[198] See Nykl, as well as Abdulla al-Dabbagh, 'The Oriental Sources of Courtly Love', *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 3.1, pp. 21–32. The influence of *The Ring of the Dove* is also stressed by John Jay Parry in his edition of his translation of Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*, a twelfth century text that to many scholars, including Gaston Paris in his paper that founded the concept of 'courtly love', is noted as the primary text of the phenomenon. Parry notes that though much of *De amore* is from Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, '[t]he source of the other modifications of Ovid's doctrine is not so easy to discover. The matter is still in dispute, but of the various possibilities that have been suggested the most reasonable seems to be that the troubadours were influenced by the culture of Muslim Spain, where many of these elements can be found before they appear among the Christians'. In a note to this, Parry adds that much of the 'opposition' to the Arab influence theory 'seems […] due to the reluctance of […] French scholars to admit that French literature is indebted to any source outside its own country and ancient Rome'. (John Jay Parry, *The Art of Courtly Love* (Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 7.)

France would simply be at a linguistic impasse when it came to Arabic sources. It is worth noting again that the Muʿallaqāt are pre-Islamic poems, but their influence runs through Arabic literature, and is blended in Hispano-Arabic literature with strains of Sufism. There is a chronological complication here: the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ and the philosophy of Ibn al-ʿArabī are later than the emergence of troubadour lyric, and therefore cannot themselves account for its beginnings. This does not exclude the influence of earlier Sufi traditions; it requires us to distinguish that possible influence from the similarities apparent in these later works. What scholars notice is the obvious similarity between Sufi verse and troubadour poetry. The Sufi relationship between man/God, and the longing expressed for the beloved that is often used to dramatise, or to embody this desire for union, is exemplified in the poetry of Rūmī and Ḥāfiẓ. This kind of poetry shares the same complicated problematic of desire for the unattainable beloved, agony of not being united, and spiritual desire for oneness with God as that of much European love poetry, which shared a Platonic unease with the question of whether such union would be physical or spiritual. As with the Muʿallaqāt, the first translations of Ḥāfiẓ were by William Jones, who noted a similarity to Petrarch. What scholars see then, when they refer to the 'Sufi' influence, is a remarkable overlap between the subject/God, lover/beloved relations in Sufi poetry and troubadour lyric exemplifying courtly love. The reasons for this may well be that there is a confluence of very similar influences – Platonism, Neoplatonism, Manichaeism, and Arabic love poetry, as well as older Persian influences – that are present in both the later Sufi works discussed here and in the Hispano-Arabic poetry of al-Andalus. The further issue underlying much of the courtly love debate is the very form of chivalry itself, where again, the Arab influence is yet another contentious source of scholarly debate. Nowhere are these relations more significant than in the poetry of Byron, as we shall see.

There are three Islamicate symbols that run most strikingly through Romantic poetry:

Mohammed, the Bedouin, and the desert. The connection with Islam begins at the nascence of British Romanticism. In 1799, Coleridge returned from Germany and entered into a fertile period of collaboration with Southey. Southey was already writing *Thalaba the Destroyer*, and Coleridge 'Kubla Khan'. Tim Fulford argues that both of these works were 'changed by the meeting [between Coleridge and Southey in 1799]; as a result, each alludes to the other'.[199] This meeting involved the project of a co-authored epic: 'The Flight and Return of Mohammed'. This poem was never finished, Coleridge only completing an opening of 14 lines, and Southey completing over a hundred lines of a projected second book; it was effectively abandoned by 1800. Fulford argues, however, that not only did 'the project [show] the two poets more clearly their respective strengths and interests; it clarified what kinds of Orientalist poet Southey and Coleridge were'.[200] Southey is very much a narrative poet, for Coleridge the failure of the narrative epic 'Mahomet' led to the 'new, internalised Orientalism of the imagination' in 'Kubla Khan'.[201] The material for the poem was the same source material that Southey was using for *Thalaba*, which was finally published in 1801, most notably d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* and the Sale translation of the Qur'an. Southey and Coleridge both dabbled in Deism – Coleridge becoming a Unitarian minister during the 1790s – and in part this explains their interest in Islam. Nigel Leask describes Southey as presenting 'Islam as a rational Unitarian religion', while for Daniel E. White, in *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2007), Southey's Islam is 'a Unitarian religion that is intuitive'.[202] But the idea of an epic tracing the life of Mohammed is more than a curiosity about *tawḥid* – it demonstrates the significance and potency of the symbol of Mohammed in Romantic discourse. Coleridge's literary interest in Islam reaches no further expression – he remains one of Wellek's Romantic exoticists, an opium eater. Southey's

[199] Tim Fulford, 'Brothers in Lore: *Thalaba*, 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan'', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 50.1, p. 5.
[200] Fulford, 'Brothers in Lore', p. 4
[201] Fulford, 'Brothers in Lore', p. 5.
[202] See Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 26 and Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 227, note 60.

engagement with Islam is more thorough – *Thalaba* is, as Fulford notes, the Orientalist poem *ne plus ultra*: 'a western construction of the East taken from old books.'[203] Ultimately, Southey's engagement with Islam, in the mish-mash of influences that produced *Thalaba*, and in the mish-mash of meaning that *Thalaba* propounds, makes the engagement a less potent one than that between Islamicate discourses and the writing of Byron and Shelley.[204] The text does serve, however, as a significant influence for Romantic orientalism, and is of particular influence for Shelley, who, I think, is intoxicated by the smell of the narcissism of Southey's Orientalism and transmutes it into something far more complicated, and far more useful than an Oriental entertainment, in *Alastor*.[205]

Wordsworth's 'dream of the Arab', from The Prelude, figures crucially in chapter four, and is important to mention here, since the valence of the figure of the Bedouin Arab, and the kind of knowledge that he holds, is nowhere more apparent. It also exemplifies the valences of the desert as a Romantic space. For Boulainvilliers, it is the desert which saved Arabs from superstition and priestcraft.[206]

However, among the Romantic poets, none engage so deeply or sustainedly with Islam as Byron and Shelley. If Shelley's poetry takes the intellectual thread of Aristotle's Active Intellect that runs through Islamicate and Jewish philosophers up to Spinoza and reinscribes it through a theory of the imagination and poetry, Byron's poetry picks up on Islamicate (and pre-Islamic) poetry that models various historical forms of agency – as lover and as warrior. Byron is a historical thinker,

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[203] Fulford, 'Brothers in Lore', p. 7.

[204] As has been noted by other scholars. Caroline Franklin suggests that Byron 'has proved a trickier writer to fit into the binary model of Said's thesis than government polemicists like . . . Southey', in '"Some samples of the finest Orientalism": Byronic Philhellenism and Proto-Zionism at the Time of the Congress of Vienna', *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780–1830*, ed. by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 221.

[205] For readings of Southey, his *Thalaba the Destroyer*, and his engagement with Islam, see Carol Bolton '*Thalaba the Destroyer*: Southey's Nationalist "Romance"', *Romanticism on the Net* no. 32-33 (2003), Stuart Andrews, 'Southey, Coleridge and Islam', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 46.2, (2015), pp. 109--116, and chapter 6, '"A Saracenic mosque, not a Quaker meeting-house": Southey's Thalaba, Islam, and Religious Nonconformity' of White's *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent,* pp. 152—181. The mentions of Southey in Leask's *British Romantic Writers and the East* are also instructive.

[206] Reeves, *Muhammed in Europe*, p. 148.

and as such he does more than any other Romantic poet to engage with Arab/Islamicate history, as we shall see.

5. Orientalism, or, Speaking about Islam

> In other days I think I'd have avoided words like heroes, martyrs, struggle, revolution, liberation, resistance, courage and suchlike. I probably have avoided the words homeland and fraternity, which still repel me. But there's no doubt that the Palestinians caused a kind of collapse in my vocabulary.
>
> Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*.[207]

We cannot discuss Islam and Romanticism without first addressing Edward Said's thesis in *Orientalism* (1978) and the broader discourse it examines. Said begins his introduction quoting a French journalist describing parts of Beirut that 'had once seemed to belong to […] the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval.'[208] Said describes 'the Orient' as 'almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.'[209] It is immediately apparent, for our concerns, that Said's 'Orient' is then, in many ways, a 'Romantic' phenomenon, one that appears with the early Romantic writers such as François-René de Chateaubriand, and 'is disappearing' amidst the bombs of Beirut in the late twentieth century.[210] Said does not mention, however, that it was this 'Orient' which gifted some of

[207] Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York Review Books, 2003), pp. 312-3.
[208] Thierry Desjardins, *Le Martyre du Liban* (Plon, 1976), quoted in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin, 2003), p. 1.
[209] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1.
[210] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1.

the key ingredients for the emergence of romance in twelfth-century Europe. This exemplifies a fundamental challenge in the framework of Orientalism, which is that, whilst the power relations of Europe/Orient began in the nineteenth century to include the colonisation, as well as cultural hegemony of Europe over this 'Orient', and whilst this precluded the possibility of an authentic 'Oriental' voice or discourse, those relations were not always so. This challenge has become built into Orientalism as a theoretical framework, where strongly argued refutations against Orientalism being 'a hegemonic discourse of imperialism' in which 'it is only possible to talk of representations of the Orient, as the Orient has no objective reality', from where scholars who have no interest in imperial designs on the Orient, and have long been interested in the Orient in the Kantian sense, as a *thing in itself*, have led a counter-charge.[211] Said describes '*Orientalism*', as 'a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience'.[212] This is an Orient that is always refracted through Western experience, that not only does not represent itself, but *cannot* represent itself in Western discourse.

Important work over the last several decades has also illuminated how the East functions within the imaginative and cultural life of the Romantic period. Ros Ballaster's *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (2005) shows how the 'Orient' operates as a site of narrative projection in the long eighteenth century, a stage on which desire, anxiety and aesthetic experimentation converge, already reflecting on the act of representing cultural difference.[213] Gerald MacLean, tracing an earlier genealogy still operative in the Romantic era, describes English and British engagements with the Ottoman empire as shaped by what he terms 'imperial envy': a structure of feeling in which admiration and fascination are inseparable from fear, resentment, and

[211] Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (Penguin, 2007), p. 5.
[212] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1.
[213] Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients*, pp. 3-8.

a desire to master what is perceived as both proximate and irreducibly other.[214] It is this envy which characterises Nigel Leask's foundational *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (1992), where Romantic fascination with the Orient opens a space for anxiously imagining alternative cultural and moral horizons even as it remains entangled with the desire to classify, possess, or subsume what appears different.[215] Andrew Warren's seminal *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (2014) brings these insights into sharp relief by arguing that the early Romantics do not simply participate in Orientalism as Said would later describe it, but actively interrogate the representational assumptions that make 'the Orient' legible at all.[216] In Warren's account, the young Romantics not only employ Orientalist materials but *pre-empt* the critique of Orientalism by exposing the instability of the very tropes and epistemic structures through which the East is figured.[217]

Taken together, these studies make clear that the East is not peripheral to Romanticism, nor simply a backdrop against which the European self reflects itself; rather, it is constitutive of the imaginative field in which Romantic poetry works. My concern, however, departs from the primarily representational emphasis of this scholarship and turns instead toward the conceptual and metaphysical stakes of this encounter, as Warren does with the poetic stakes of Orientalism. Instead of treating 'Islam' as a cultural object within Orientalism, I understand Islamicate histories, disciplines and discourses as an *interlocutor*: a body of literary, philosophical, and devotional forms through which Romantic writers articulate, test, and at times recover modes of imagination and meaning that had become attenuated within their own intellectual inheritance. In this respect, the Romantic turn to Islam is not only a movement outward but also a return — a re-encounter with submerged genealogies of metaphysical and poetic thought that Europe had forgotten it possessed.

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[214] Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 245.
[215] Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[216] Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[217] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, 'Introduction: from solipsism to Orientalism', pp. 6-51.

To speak of return is therefore also to clarify the terms of approach. The Romantic engagement with Islam does not fit neatly within the legacy of imperial representation that *Orientalism* describes, not least because Said himself allows for forms of encounter grounded in philology, sympathy, and a willingness to let the text speak from within its own world. This dimension of Said's work has too often been overshadowed by the polemical uses of his thesis.

However, Said has made clear, elsewhere if not explicitly in the 1978 publication, that his argument does not proscribe the humanistic tradition which includes philology, which is:

> exemplified for me most admirably in Goethe's interest in Islam generally, and Hafiz in particular, a consuming passion which led to the composition of the *West-Ostlicher Diwan*, and it inflected Goethe's later ideas about *Weltliteratur*, the study of all the literatures of the world as a symphonic whole which could be apprehended theoretically as having preserved the individuality of each work without losing sight of the whole.[218]

This is not a comprehensive account of German Orientalism, but it does show Said's appreciation of the kind of encounter with Islam exemplified by Goethe. Here, Said does not stand guilty as accused by Irwin's critique. Indeed, alongside 'the Orient of Chateaubriand and [Gérard de] Nerval', there is also Goethe's Orientalism, for which Said laments.

Donna Landry cuts through the accumulated confusion surrounding 'Orientalism', by proposing that:

> The Orientalism which principally interested Said is the set of attitudes and practices engendered by British and French imperialism after Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798 that coalesced in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948. Said suggests this origin and focus plainly enough, and yet he has often been misunderstood. He did not attempt

[218] Said, 'Preface (2003)' in *Orientalism*, p. xviii

> to write a history of European Orientalist scholarship in all its heterogeneity, but to trace a specific legacy.[219]

The 'set of attitudes and practices' that 'coalesced in the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948' is indeed notable in Romantic poetry. However, we should not read backwards rather than reading from within the moment of production: if some discourses on Arabia and Islamic peoples later helped to establish the foundations for hegemonic imperial discourses in the twentieth century, it does not follow that those original discourses were themselves necessarily imperialist. This mistake has generated considerable confusion about Orientalism and Romanticism, as well as about other forms of literature. I have elsewhere referred to the problem of reading backwards, or of applying modern frameworks to historical texts, instead of, as Said advocates, 'sympathetically and subjectively enter[ing] into the life of a written text as seen from the perspective of its time and its author'. Said treats philology as more than the study of language: it is closer to a moral humanistic enquiry in which the language of the Other must be known before one can speak on the subject at all. Describing the scholarship of Erich Auerbach, Said notes elegiacally that:

> [Auerbach wrote during] a period when people could interpret texts philologically, concretely, sensitively and intuitively, using erudition and an excellent command of several languages to support the kind of understanding that Goethe advocated for his understanding of Islamic literature.[220]

The difference between the Orientalist discourses of hegemonic violence, and of 'the kind of understanding of Islamic literature' that Goethe exemplified, is a sensitive one. For Said, this difference is rooted in 'knowledge of languages and history' as 'necessary', but 'never enough, any more than the mechanical gathering of facts would constitute an adequate method of

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[219] Donna Landry, 'Said before Said', in *Debating Orientalism*, ed. by Ziad Elmarsafy, Anna Bernard, and David Attwell (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.56.
[220] Said, 'Preface (2003), p. xix.

grasping what an author like Dante, for example, was all about'.[221] Rather:

> The main requirement for the kind of philological understanding Auerbach and his predecessors were talking about and tried to practice was one that sympathetically and subjectively entered into the life of a written text as seen from the perspective of its time and its author (*eingefühling*). Rather than alienation and hostility to another time and different culture, philology as applied to *Weltliteratur* involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other. And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter's philological mission.[222]

The use of the word 'hospitality' invokes – consciously or not – Derrida, and it is in Derrida's theorising of deconstruction that we might meet a theory of making moral place for the guest, indeed, the Other.[223] There is, as well, a deeper problem with the Orientalism framework which has been identified by Salman Sayyid, who notes that Said chooses a Foucauldian as opposed to a Derridean framework for his thesis. Speaking about the Other comes, in a Derridean framework, with an inevitable violence, far deeper and more intangible than in Foucault's structuralist model. Whatever structural problems there may still be in many applications of Said's work, it is in the *spirit* of Said's attitude to Goethe, and indeed to historical and cultural enquiry that I base my investigation, and the possibility of writing on Romanticism, and Romantic poets and Islam.

However, this commitment does not deny a deeper, Derridean problem about speaking about

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[221] Said, 'Preface (2003), p. xix.
[222] Said, 'Preface (2003), p. xix.
[223] See Jacques Derrida, *Hospitality*, 2 vols, ed Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf, translated by E S Burt and Peggy Kamuf, (University of Chicago Press, 2024), and *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (Routledge, 2002). See also Judith Still, *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

the Other – the underlying ambivalence of the representation becoming the phenomenon spoken about.[224] The greater part of my project here is to investigate the way the poets respond to this difficulty. To behave as if Islam can be objectively understood is to commit a very Enlightenment fallacy of projecting the pragmatics of politics over a genuine metaphysical enquiry into an important strand of epistemology. The twentieth-century thinker Gabriel Marcel distinguished between a problem and a mystery – a problem being solvable, indeed, always already reaching toward a solution or resolution, whilst a mystery suspends resolution and makes space for that suspension.

> A problem is something which I meet, which I find completely before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity.[225]

In the gap between what Islam is, and what can be spoken about it, it is useful to use Marcel's epistemological distinction – epistemological in the sense that a problem can be known, is always reaching toward the status of being known by being resolved, whereas a mystery can be apprehended only, rather than ever being comprehended. What we are dealing with then, and what Byron and Shelley are dealing with, is a mystery.

It is in such instances that Western figures have noted that the 'East', and Islamic forms of life in particular, strain the vocabulary through which they are approached. Wittgenstein's concepts of forms of life and language-games offer a way of understanding this difficulty: what can be said depends upon the practices within which language has its meaning. For Derrida, the difficulty of speaking on the Other is inseparable from the violence of representation, and

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[224] The Derridean problem is how to speak about the Other, but we should note that one aspect of the problem of Orientalism, and its discontents, can be framed in Kantian terms – the thing in itself and its representations. Derrida's work seeks to forge a way through this philosophical inheritance. It is no coincidence that Derrida's investigation of hospitality is so much in dialogue with Kant.

[225] Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans, Katharine Farrer (Dacre Press, 1949), p. 117.

hospitality becomes one way of confronting that difficulty. This is not a reversion to silence: his engagement with Massignon in the hospitality seminars, and his dialogue with Abdelkebir Khatibi in *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998), complicate any claim that Islam or the Arabic-speaking world lies wholly outside his philosophical horizon.[226] My concern, following Almond, is rather with the terms on which that encounter takes place.[227] His marginality is bound up with his belonging – to France, and in particular, to French. The question is how far the philosophical vocabulary through which that marginality becomes intelligible can accommodate Islamic forms of life on their own terms. 'There is no outside-text' does not mean that nothing exists beyond written texts, but that there is no access to an unmediated meaning outside the relations through which it becomes intelligible.[228] The concern I take from Asad is whether an emphasis on textuality gives sufficient attention to the practices through which people inhabit a heterogeneous world.[229] Absence can also be exclusion, and exclusion can be violent. This is where we need Wittgenstein's concepts of 'forms of life' and 'language-games', and perhaps the most important tool, the ability that 'is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to'.[230]

Drawing upon this set of Derridean problematics, then, I would rather take up the framework in which Asad has analysed Western discourses on Islam, and Westernised Islamicate discourses, through the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein – in particular his position on language games and forms of life in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953):

> Using a language, so Ludwig Wittgenstein proposed, is like playing a game, not like using

[226] See Jacques Derrida, *Hospitality*, II, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (University of Chicago Press, 2024); and Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford University Press, 1998).
[227] See Ian Almond, 'Derrida's Islam and the peoples of the book', in *The New Orientalists: Postmodern Representations of Islam from Foucault to Baudrillard*, (I. B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 42—64.
[228] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 158.
[229] See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 35–36, 43–44.
[230] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell, 2009), p. 57e. [133]

> a calculus. Understanding a language game is understanding a form of life. No appeal to rules guarantees that a statement has been uttered correctly, if only because it is possible to interpret and apply a rule incorrectly. To understand a way of life presupposes that one understands how its language is embedded in and articulates practices, that one can recognise a correct statement in a particular context, and that one can sometimes recognise different interpretations of that statement as obvious in a given situation.[231]

If reading can be then a form of anthropology, an attempt to find not the rule, but the emergent form of life within the work, then this is closest to the spirit of Said's appreciation of Goethe's interest in Islam, and to his original appreciation of philology.

Each poet accommodates a different epistemology of Islam. Southey, with all his footnotes, aspires to comprehension, even when his notes belie the supplementary nature of his framework, pulling the rug from beneath him as it were. Wordsworth's 'dream of the Arab' has a Bedouin holding the sound of 'prophetic harmony'. There are moments with Shelley where his pragmatism seems to push him to (mis)represent Islam, as if it would be useful for him to be able to claim that (mis)representation, nowhere more so than in *The Revolt of Islam*, where the Islamic state serves as the *beau ideal* of revolution. I will argue that Shelley displays a supremely ambivalent epistemology (in general, as well as in relation to Islam) which on at least one occasion allows him to co-opt the mystery to solve the problem, before the centrality of mystery at the centre of the problem entails an inevitable collapse of the structure that sustains the problem. With Shelley, however, one can never say that he desired to enter the realm of ordinary speech, and thus, of all our poets, he is the most knowingly slippery in meaning, always aspiring to the climax of 'vacancy'. Through this positing of vacancy as in a sense supreme, Shelley is able to establish a radical epistemology of meaning in which revolution is always already in process

[231] Asad, *Secular Translations*, p. 8-9.

through a constancy of 'before unapprehended relations of things'.[232]

Byron, then, is the poet with whom I must state my own moral sympathy, since we share the same epistemological framework regarding the issue of whether Islam can be known objectively. The issue of his nearly having 'turn'd Turk' being the node around which this realness is realised, aspires most of the time to ordinary speech, and the closest we come to an acknowledgement of this lacuna is in Byron's depiction of the Muslim girl in *Don Juan*. This is neither stereotypical nor essentialist but deeply humane. Of all Byron's characters, more stability is afforded to her than to any other, a girl with strength of character, whose beliefs give her a knowledge of the world which holds more assurance than we have seen in any other poetry of the period, all the more explicit by its absence. Byron may have been an exoticist, but he was also a historian, and as such – seeing reality as a series of related events, often without an attempt to construct those relations into a meaningful order – he naturally accepts some of the necessary anthropological premises that would ground sensitive appreciation, if not understanding, of the Other. In this way, Byron's poetry does not ultimately seek to utilise the Other to construct a meaning for Self (although there are moments of this, as is our way), but rather to acknowledge and hail the Other, and in acknowledging difference, also acknowledge Otherness.

As for the more concrete hard *Orientalist* (that is, imperialist) concerns of this thesis, and in particular, the traditional Foucauldian elements of power and imperialism, we will return, in the fourth chapter, to examine the parts of Romantic discourse that laid the foundations for the imperial construction of Arabia.

[232] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 278.

Chapter 2.

Imaginative Metaphysics and the Active Intellect: Shelley's Islamic Inheritance, A Restoration

1. Introduction

We can trace a line through Shelley's politics, and we can trace a line through Shelley's metaphysics, and the two are not always compatible. In Shelley's last publication, *Hellas* (1822), Shelley makes a case for supporting a Greek war of independence against the Ottoman Empire. In the Preface, he writes: 'We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece.'[233] What I will demonstrate, however, is that although this is certainly the narrative Shelley tells himself about his relation to the past, and its present, it is not always the case. In fact, Shelley's Hellenism is impossible without the overlapping Hebraic and Islamic traditions. Shelley's *Hellas* might be a good place to start with the idea of Islam in Shelley's poetry: after all, it is set in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, its main characters are Muslims, and it is modelled on the Ur-text of Western Orientalism – Aeschylus's *The Persians* (472 BC). As with other 'Oriental' literary texts, Shelley's Ottoman Empire is lazily stereotyped as a despotic colonial power, upon which the nascent crescent of nationalism will enact a revolution that brings a politics of equality and self-determination to its people. The conception of the despotism of the Turk speaks more about an anxiety over the changing nature of government (and Empire) in Europe than about Ottoman society. Let me finish Shelley's 'We are all Greeks' quotation:

> We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece. But for Greece, Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have been savages and idolaters; or, what is worse, might have arrived at such a stagnant and miserable state of social institution as China and Japan possess.[234]

[233] Percy Bysshe Shelley 'Preface to *Hellas*', in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 548-51, this p. 549.
[234] Shelley 'Preface to *Hellas*', p. 549.

I want to keep this in mind, as we look through Shelley's metaphysics, as a reminder that Shelley's politics is not always the ethical ideal of the Shelley myth. Indeed, in spite of any recent turn to Shelley's foregrounding of ethics, I want to keep in mind the unethical in Shelley, particularly in the light of his ideas about the relative worth of other cultures.[235] Likewise, Shelley is capable of utilising the East as the testing ground for personal and intellectual development, sexual fantasy, a model revolution, or even perfect society – indeed, the utility value of the Orient is a large part of Shelley's engagement with it. However, the story of Shelley's engagement with Islam has not been told. In fact, I will argue, it has been excluded from scholarly narratives about Shelley. In this chapter, I will look at Shelley's politics and his metaphysics to find an Islamic context in both. For his politics, Shelley looks to the nascent Wahabi rebellion against the Ottoman empire as a force of iconoclasm which might just have the power to undo and break the hypocrisies of tyranny. In his metaphysics, Shelley develops a model of an ideal state using concepts of imagination and prophecy found in Islamic philosophy. For Shelley, then, the significance of Islam is worth investigating, and I will return later to the proto-Greek nationalism of *Hellas*, after telling a much broader story about Shelley's political and metaphysical engagement with Islam.

2. Zeinab and Kathema

Shelley began his engagement with the East in his youth, writing, in 1810-11, the brief epic *Zeinab and Kathema*. The poem is in many respects the storehouse of ideas, conflicts, motifs, and characters which Shelley builds upon in his later poetry. It is worth engaging with the poem to discover what we might think of as the primary drivers in Shelley's representation of the East, and its specifically

[235] Andrew Warren notes that *Alastor* foregrounds Shelley's ethics (in the chapter on Shelley's *Alastor* in *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014) pp. 137-157). I am not so sure. I will describe in more detail Shelley's ambiguous ethics of finding oneself in the Other in the course of this essay. One only needs to read Shelley's letters on Italian women to be reminded of his especially un-'Enlightened' views.

Muslim inhabitants and environments. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill note that the name of Zeinab, a princess of 'Cashmire' in the poem, was probably taken from Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and Kathema from *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), making Southey's poetry the most significant influence for further poetic exploits in the East before the publication of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) and his 'Turkish Tales' (1813).

Foreshadowing the image of Byron's Selim wounded and dying upon the beach in *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), we meet Shelley's male protagonist injured '[u]pon the lonely beach' (l.1).[236] The poem then turns to the sequence of events that had led to Kathema's precarious situation. We discover that '[t]he Christian murderers over-ran the plain, / Ravaging, burning, polluting all' (ll. 33-4). Kathema's 'betrothed' (l .19), Zeinab, 'was reft to grace the robber's land / Each drop of kindred blood stained the invaders hand' (ll. 35-6). Kathema therefore takes passage with sailors 'to far England's shore' (l. 67), where we suppose he will enact a search for Zeinab or a form of revenge in the country of his invaders. Once there, however, one night in 'dark December' (l. 122), he sees a hanged 'naked female form' (l. 131) which he recognises to be Zeinab; her 'orbs once bright with life and love / Now full fed worms bask in unnatural light' (ll. 145-6). Kathema then hangs himself and, with a short conclusion on the immorality of man, the poem ends.

The poem, brief in its tale, provides Shelley with a first poetic working out of the East/West relations that will dominate his articulations of Islam. Shelley frames the conflict between the two lands of 'Cashmire' and 'Albion' as a straightforward account of good versus bad – the inhabitants of Cashmire peaceful and their land bountiful ('There flowers and fruits are ever fair and ripe'(l. 97)), whilst the 'invaders' are notably un-Christian ('But rapine, war and treachery rushed before / Their hosts' (ll. 41-2)). Shelley is particularly interested in the cultural difference

[236] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Zeinab and Kathema', in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 5 vols., ed. by Donald H Reiman and Neil Fraistat, (John Hopkins University Press, 2000 - 2021), II, (2005), pp. 135-143. Henceforth cited parenthetically by line number.

between the two societies, and how those differences are implicit even in the physical environment of each country:

> Yet Albion's changeful skies and chilling wind,
> The change from Cashmire's vale might well denote.
> There Heaven and Earth are ever bright and kind,
> Here blights and storms and damp forever float,
> Whose hearts are more ungenial than the zone,
> Gross, spiritless, alive to no pangs but their own.
>
> (ll. 91-6)

We should note that a primary drive in Shelley's projection and utilisation of the East is to provide an antithesis of all that Shelley sees and loathes in his own culture. England, 'Albion' here, is not only blighted by 'storms and damp', but also inhabited by humans whose own 'hearts are more ungenial than' the weather. Such inhabitants are at core selfish – 'alive to no pangs' but their own. The importance of empathy for Shelley is thus foregrounded here, as he describes his own culture as a society which has failed in the basic requirement of empathy. The failure of empathy is important for Shelley, who will return to the need for empathy in later poetry and prose, right up to 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (written 1819-20) and 'A Defence of Poetry' (written 1821). What is interesting about the articulation of this particular failure in *Zeinab and Kathema* is that before the narrative comes to describe England, it depicts the violence of a colonial ideology that is founded by lack of empathy and symptomatic selfishness:

> … they had come their holy book to bring
> Which God's own son's apostles had compiled,
> That charity and peace might spring
> Within a world by God's blind ire defiled,
> But rapine, war and treachery rushed before
> Their hosts, and murder dyed Kathema's bower in gore.

(ll. 37-42)

This is a world in which 'woe on all but wealth has set its foot' (l. 101) – stunningly bleak and morally corrupt. It should be noted that for Shelley the violence of the invasion is predicated on the Christian mission, so that instead of the 'charity and peace' meant to be brought by the 'hosts' of the invasion, it is 'rapine, war and treachery' that come first. The effects of such violence are that Kathema's 'soul was widowed', and we see this in the poem; that, more than just suffering the loss of a loved one, Kathema himself becomes a half-person or a ghost, leaving his home to haunt the site which is the heart of the invasive power, England, where he will engage with no one. Shelley is explicit in articulating the violence of invasion in both the act itself and its effects: the 'Christian rapine tore /All ties and stained thy hopes in a dear mother's gore' (ll. 53-4) leaving Kathema both friendless and motherless. Such an archetype is that of the ghost, although Shelley is not clear on how such a figure may haunt the perpetrator. In the poem, after Kathema discovers Zeinab, he kills himself, and, significantly, is not seen, although the poet states 'An iron-souled son of Europe might have wept / To witness such a noble being's doom' (ll. 160-1). This is an important paradox – of the unseen, unheard, mute, and invisible action which is nevertheless given voice and image in poetry. Although it is suggested that no European was there to witness Kathema's death, the poet himself not only saw it, but was able to give voice to Kathema's narrative. This idealistically locates the poet or speaker outside of the definition of 'iron-souled son of Europe', which is where Shelley undoubtedly wishes to place himself – as apart and separate from the entity that perpetuates such violence. At this stage in his career, such a move allows Shelley to reject in entirety his own society, projecting onto the East an idealised vision of peace and tranquillity. The ethics of such a move become more complicated as Shelley travels deeper into foreign territory, in his later poems *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam*, where Shelley jettisons the assumed naivety of his idealised East for an East upon which he wishes to act out his political and ideological fantasies. In *Zeinab and Kathema*, the narrative achieves a neat end in a violent, cruel

doubling of death for both Zeinab and Kathema, each a victim of the West.[237] However, the paradoxical question of the onlooker at the end of the poem reflects attention back to the poet/speaker, and it is this that Shelley investigates in *Alastor*.

3. Alastor

That Shelley's poem *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, composed in 1815, published 1816, is a work of introspection bordering on narcissism is evident to any reader who considers Shelley's lengthy Preface with its descriptions of 'youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe' with the epigraph from St Augustine '*Nondum amabam, et amare amabam, quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare*' (I was not in love as yet, yet I loved to be in love, I sought about for something to love, loving still to be in love). Yet, this narcissism is the crux and the point of the poem for all those who investigate it. Shelley describes the hero of the poem thus:

> So long as it is possible for his desires to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves.[238]

We can frame this interest in the individual and his will to a discussion about the nature of the

[237] We might also note a similarity here to Byron's violent conflicts of the 'Turkish Tales', although with a significant difference – for Byron it is always a zero-sum game; in the end, everybody loses something. What persists, however, in *Zeinab and Kathema* is the sense of the imperviousness of England to the tragedy it has caused and that takes place within its midst. There also remains the question of what happened to 'Cashmire' after its invasion – there is certainly the sense that it becomes a colonial possession of 'England' and is left to be exploited.

[238] Shelley, 'Preface' to *Alastor*, in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook (2012) pp. 5-6.

will and the infinite in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1820) that counters a certain tendency Hegel has detected in German romanticism:

> A will which resolves on nothing is no actual will; a characterless human being never reaches a decision. The reason for indecision may also lie in a tenderness of feeling which knows that, in willing something determinate, it is engaging with finitude, imposing a restriction on itself and sacrificing the infinite; yet it will not renounce the totality after which it hankers. However 'beautiful' such a disposition may be, it is nevertheless dead. As Goethe says: 'Whoever wills something great must be able to restrict himself.' Only by resolving can a human being step into actuality, however bitter this may be to him. Inertia lacks the will to abandon the inward brooding which allows it to retain everything as a possibility. But possibility is not yet actuality.[239]

Hegel's point is that the will must step outside of infinity into the finite to act or to become character. Quoting Goethe (incorrectly, the correct quotation should be: 'Whoever wills something great must first collect his energies: it is in restriction that the master first shows himself'), Hegel describes how it is actually in making decisions, and choices, thereby restricting oneself, and limiting oneself, that the will can become itself, become individualised. Without stepping into this limiting frame, the will might desire to 'retain everything as a possibility', remaining in the 'beautiful' disposition of not 'sacrificing the infinite'. These words have a significant resonance with Shelley's description of the youth of the poem, and they locate Shelley, rightly, within the phenomenon of European Romanticism.

To an extent, Shelley echoes Hegel's critique. Shelley's friend Thomas Love Peacock wrote that '[t]he poem treated the spirit of solitude as a spirit of evil.'[240] Indeed, solitude is a necessary

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[239] G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T M Knox, ed. by Stephen Houlgate (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 39. Houlgate notes that 'this is a reference to the "beautiful soul" described by Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) *On Grace and Dignity* [*Über Anmut und Würde*] (1793), but associated by Hegel more with Romantics such as Novalis', ibid. p. 333.

[240] Thomas Love Peacock, *Peacock's Memoirs of Shelley, with Shelley's Letters to Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith (Henry Frowde, 1909), p. 56.

condition of the individual who sustains such a position. In the Preface, Shelley sums up the narrative of his poem thus: 'The Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin'.[241] However, Shelley then delineates two types from those who refrain from self-restriction: the first,

> deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth, and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse. They languish, because none feel with them their common nature. They are morally dead.[242]

The second, however, comprises 'those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt.'[243] We might also imagine that these, unlike the former, 'morally dead' cohort, were perhaps 'deluded' by a 'sacred thirst' for 'knowledge', even if 'doubtful'; or that they may have been 'duped' by 'illustrious superstition'. We come close here to the driving force of Shelley's 'Poet' in *Alastor*, which is the interest in sacred knowledge – esotericism. Shelley can hardly state the case positively, and yet, here it is, requiring to be discovered by negative analogy.

This expression of the soul in infinity is, then, a contemporary European phenomenon which Shelley is investigating. It is interesting to note what such a position does to the individual who experiences it – which is to elevate the individual to the aspect of the sublime. From such a position God would be seen not as a higher figure, but rather as an equal. It is this, and Shelley's investigation of the ethics of such a position in *Alastor*, which I want here to analyse, especially through the Oriental lens that Shelley makes use of in his poem.

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[241] Shelley, 'Preface' to *Alastor*, p. 5.
[242] Shelley, 'Preface' to *Alastor*, p. 5-6.
[243] Shelley, 'Preface' to *Alastor*, p. 6.

Alastor has been perceptively read along these lines most recently by Andrew Warren, who develops Makdisi's reading of *Alastor* by using Wasserman's theory of the split between the poem's protagonist, 'the idealist Poet or Visionary' and the poem's 'Wordsworthian narrator'.[244] Wasserman argues that "Narrator (poet of nature) and Visionary (poet of the ideal) play ironically against one another."[245] It is from this ironic play that Warren is able to build a case that 'Orientalism's critique – successful or not – therefore becomes immanent to Shelley's poetics, a project that begins to work itself out in *Alastor*.'[246]

This moment of ambiguity is the immanent critique I am identifying in Shelley's poetics that corresponds to Derrida's critique of the metaphysical prioritising of the hegemonic binaries. Whilst Warren takes this critique in the direction of a reading of Shelley's immanent Orientalism, I want to develop the reading one step further by exhuming the Saidian failure to incorporate a potential line of Derridean thought to critique Orientalism which will then allow me to isolate the issue of Islam. Salman Sayyid has theorised that Said's critique of Orientalism 'flirts with two different forms'.[247] The first such form

> sees the orientalist enterprise from the perspective of a sociology of knowledge; that is, the critique tries to show how western scholarship was subverted by its complicity with western imperialism, and how the reality of the Orient was distorted by orientalism.[248]

Sayyid calls this 'weak orientalism', in which 'orientalism remains a discourse of power/knowledge informed by the historically specific conditions of European global expansion'.[249] We can see the Foucauldian origins of such a project.[250] However, such a project has its limits, in that the violence

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[244] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 139.
[245] Earl Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 11. Cited in Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 139.
[246] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 141.
[247] Salman Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (Zed Books, 2015), p. 72.
[248] Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, p. 72. Note that in the following quotations from Sayyid I maintain his capitalisation – using a capital for 'Orient', but not for 'orientalism'. Similarly, Sayyid regularly does not capitalise 'western', even when referring to what could be a political concept, as I do throughout the thesis, e.g. 'Western Europe'. I maintain my use of a capital for 'Orientalism' when referring to the discourse identified by Edward Said.
[249] Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, p. 72.
[250] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Pantheon Books, 1977), pp. 27–28.

of Orientalism is limited to the sphere of the political, rather than the philosophical, as Sayyid notes: 'orientalism remains a discursive possibility of imperialism'. In fact, we can also acknowledge that there is a deeper, more 'philosophical' violence perpetrated by orientalism, which is the abnegation of the content of the 'real' orient and its replacement with the discourse of orientalism. By 'violence' here I mean the reduction of the Other to the terms through which it is represented, so that those terms displace what they claim to describe. This is distinct from physical violence, although it can participate in the political relations that make physical domination possible. Calling this 'strong orientalism', Sayyid states:

In this discourse-theoretical approach, the problem with orientalism is not just that it distorts the 'real' Orient, but that the Orient itself becomes a creation of orientalism.[251]

It may be noted that we are now in the realm of Derrida, whose formulation of violence, and in particular, the violence perpetrated by naming, has a particular influence upon Sayyid's formulation. Indeed, Sayyid argues,

Said's relative scepticism about Derrida's enterprise prevents him from locating the violence of orientalism – not just in the relations of power, but in the logic of western metaphysics.[252]

Sayyid goes on to locate Derrida's articulation of western metaphysics' 'violent hierarchy' of binary opposition as the site at which the violence of Orientalism is enacted.[253] For Sayyid, drawing upon the work of Bryan Turner, 'orientalist narratives hinge upon a bifurcation between the West and Islam', and in this way they also 'function as a supplement to the origin of the West', such that the 'subordinate terms are guarantees of the existence of the hierarchy; they are outside the system but, none the less, the condition of its very possibility'.[254] Islam is thus positioned as

[251] Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, p. 72.
[252] Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, p. 72.
[253] Sayyid, A Fundamental Fear, p. 73; see also Jacques Derrida, Positions, trans. by Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 41–42.
[254] Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, p. 73.

external to the West, yet made necessary to the West's account of itself. The supplement exposes a dependence within the very identity that claims to exclude it.

It is within this framework that I wish to analyse Shelley's ventures into the realm of the East, and in particular his use of Islam as a motif, environment, un-censorable proxy for what he wants to criticise in Christianity or the West. More than this, I will argue that the move away from the Foucauldian framework and into a Derridean one is not only apt and useful, but indeed necessary to get to the heart of what Shelley projects onto Islam and how he is able to interrogate and critique that (his own) usage of Islam to articulate visions of himself and a society which domesticates *him*. This utilisation of Islam begins for Shelley with *Alastor*, even more than with *Zeinab and Kathema*, since it does more than articulate what is wrong with the West; it uses the East, and Islam in particular, to develop a utopian vision of *the West to come*. This move again underlines Derrida's articulation of the violent hierarchical binary – this time Islam functions as not only the supplement upon which the West is constituted and defined but flipped on its head by Shelley who appropriates an idealised Islam to reconfigure an idealised, utopian West. Before we can arrive at the full mechanism of that inverse binary which we will trace through Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*, we must underline the mechanisms of Shelley's *Alastor* which enable him psychically to explore the East.

Shelley's Poet, as we have said, is driven by a desire for esoteric knowledge. We have noted this already from the Preface, and we can see it articulated early in the poem when the youth, 'left / His cold fireside and alienated home /To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands' (ll. 75-7).[255] The 'cold' and 'alienated' homeland is at once recognisable as the England or Albion of *Zeinab and Kathema*, and it is in 'undiscovered lands' where he will find the 'strange truths' he so desires. The

[255] Shelley, 'Alastor', in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, pp. 5-30. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

narrative begins then with the colonialist 'truth seeker' one shade away from *Zeinab and Kathema*'s colonialist 'Christian murderers', that is, the beginning of *Alastor* firmly plants its roots in the paradox of the poet/speaker of *Zeinab and Kathema* – who is he who can see in the West, and see in the East, and narrate them both the same? Shelley wants to explore exactly this issue – what ethical position can he maintain if he is able to speak on both the West and the East? What are the costs of maintaining such a position, both spiritually and morally? The ethical question concerns the responsibility incurred in speaking for the Other; it is inseparable from the political question of whose voice is authorised, and whose world becomes available for appropriation.

The 'Poet' then, is set up within the same paradoxical framework as the speaker of *Zeinab and Kathema*: 'He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude' (l. 60). The question then stands of the relation between the Poet, and the narrator, who sees him in spite of his geographical and historical isolation. The Poet moves in a landscape which is depicted as 'wide waste', 'wilderness' (l. 78), within which 'he has bought / With his sweet voice and eyes, from savage men, / His rest and food' (ll. 79-81). It is important to acknowledge the violence of such a vision before we might discuss the extent to which it is ironised and thus critiqued (Warren argues it *is* ironised and contains an immanent critique of Orientalism). Before I enter that debate, I want to detail more of the poem, and state what the poem does *explicitly*. The Poet visits 'the awful ruins of the days of old' (l. 109):

> Athens, and Tyre and Balbec, and the waste
> Where stood Jerusalem, the fallen towers
> Of Babylon, the eternal pyramids,
> Memphis and Thebes, and whatsoe'er of strange
> Sculptured on alabaster obelisk,
> Or jasper tomb, or mutilated sphynx,
>
> Dark Ethiopia conceals.

(ll. 109-15)

It would seem, at first, that this list denotes a Classical and biblical history, but the inclusion of 'Dark Ethiopia', and in particular, the suggestion of 'whatsoe'er of strange … Ethiopia *conceals*' seems to suggest something far more sinister. Whilst Ethiopia and its people are described in the Bible as early as Genesis (as Shelley would know from his reading of the King James Bible), it seems that Shelley is doing more than just listing the biblical and Classical kingdoms.[256] Rather, it seems that the locations Shelley isolates form an axis within which the West wishes to expand.

Athens and Thebes within this period would, like Tyre, 'Balbec' (Baalbek) (both in modern-day Lebanon), Babylon (modern-day Iraq), Memphis (modern-day Egypt), have been within the territory of the Ottoman Empire. By articulating this vision of an axis beyond Europe in the year of Waterloo, is Shelley anticipating a post-Waterloo world, within which the beyond-Europe becomes the site of conflict? Shelley's *Alastor* reveals an appetite for an 'unknown' world beyond Europe, which can be read against the imperial conflicts that would increasingly reshape that world. This appetite is already here in the almost primal urge for exhuming the 'concealed' secrets and 'concealed' knowledge of the ancient world, all of which (except Ethiopia) was, in 1815, part of the Ottoman Empire.

The list of kingdoms and capitals which forms this axis of 'concealed' knowledge is both biblical and Classical, which is a framework that will become increasingly relevant to Shelley's eastern explorations. By linking the biblical world of Jerusalem and Ethiopia with Athens, Tyre and Baalbek, Shelley reaches back into the distant past of his own cultural tradition, albeit one which had become increasingly distant. It is here we must acknowledge, as before, the Romantic phenomenon of interest in the pre-Enlightenment world. Shelley is participating in precisely this discourse here, echoing the already influential poetry of Southey, but also Goethe and Byron. I will return to this framework of the biblical and the Classical world later in this chapter, to draw in the

[256] Often used interchangeably with the kingdom of Kush, and the Cushites, as well as ancient Nubia.

Islamic to the Hellenic and the Hebraic. But it is worth noting here that Islam is also present in this 1815 axis, through the contemporary Ottoman settings of many of these sites. This does not erase their Christian histories, nor make Ethiopia simply Muslim; it brings the Islamicate into a landscape whose Classical and biblical associations Shelley foregrounds. That this axis promises access to esoteric knowledge is a significant part of the attraction for Shelley.

Shelley is well known to have been an excellent classical scholar, frequently translating Plato amongst other ancient Greek writers and philosophers. Here, however, is a world that, although Classical, Shelley cannot access. It is worth questioning why, in spite of Shelley's Greek, and his Classical scholarship, access to this axis of knowledge is presented as requiring more than scholarly comprehension. The answer lies in the esoteric content of the geography – a religious discourse. If Shelley had no religion as an outspoken critic of Christianity and a confirmed 'Atheist', then the turn to the mysteries of a biblical, Hebraic, and Islamic, world is particularly noteworthy. It is within this discourse of the concealed mystery (in itself a definition of religion) that the Poet operates. It is within the 'ruined temples', 'where marble daemons watch / The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men / Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls' (ll. 118-20) that the Poet

> … ever gazed
> And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind
> Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw
> The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.
>
> (ll. 125-8)

What is interesting about this knowledge, that the Poet finds in the Zodiac and the movement of the moon, is that it was once known, and perhaps still is. Shelley locates this secret (esoteric) knowledge as accessible within a geographical landscape of contemporary Islam, overlaid with the historical landscape of the ancient and biblical worlds. What is remarkable about this juxtaposition of the secret, hidden past within a geographical location, is that it in fact also has its

contemporaneity – in the Ottoman (Islamic) empire. At this stage of the poem, the Islamic landscape is unspoken and ignored, overshadowed by the foregrounding of the Classical and biblical world. However, we might discover a clue as to the significance of the Islam within the landscape in the context of the poet's astrology. If '[t]he Zodiac's brazen mystery' is one of many strands of esoteric knowledge referred to in *Alastor*, then it is within the Islamic tradition that one can turn to discover a way of accessing that knowledge. Reading the stars is a specialism of Islamic scientists, one learnt from the ancient traditions of Babylon and Zoroastrianism, but taken up in earnest to help Muslims determine the movements of the sun in order to pray at the correct times of the day. If it were not for the need to determine the direction of the Qibla, as well as the precise location of the sun at different times of day, it is questionable whether the astrolabe would have found its function to be so significant in the everyday lives of non-scientists. Indeed, perhaps the astrolabe would have been lost after the classical period. As it is, it was Islamic astronomers who developed the astrolabe in the Middle Ages to a point of incredible sophistication.[257] Therefore, we can see, already in *Alastor*, that there is a secret, unrevealed function of Islam, which is to re-transmit a forgotten history or mystery back to the West, which in the midst of Enlightenment, has forgotten how to read the mysteries of its Hellenic and Hebraic inheritance.

However, rather than developing an interest in the Islamic transmission and reinterpretation of the Hellenic/Hebraic past, *Alastor* posits Islam as a device which simply functions as a key to re-reveal long forgotten histories. Indeed, in such a position, the contemporaneity of modern-day Athens, Tyre, Baalbek, Jerusalem, Babylon, Memphis, Thebes and Ethiopia is only articulated as a question of possession of power/knowledge – what can be taken to add to the store of our knowledge which will expand our power? There is, however, an immanent critique of this which Shelley begins to reveal immediately after line 128: 'Meanwhile an Arab maiden brought his food / Her daily portion, from her father's tent' (l. 129-30). Rather than

[257] See Donald R. Hill, *Islamic Science and Engineering* (Edinburgh University Press, 1993), and Toby Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

empty, 'ruined temples' being the only constituents of Shelley's eastern landscape, Shelley reveals a small desert community that interacts with the poet. The Arab maiden gives up her sleep as well as her food – at dawn, 'to her cold home / Wildered, and wan, and panting, she returned' (139-40). The poem moves swiftly on, with the 'Poet wandering on, through Arabie / And Persia, and the wild Carmanian waste, / […] / Till in the vale of Cashmire' (ll. 140-5). There 'He dreamed a veilèd maid / Sate near him' (ll. 151-2), 'Herself a poet' (l. 161). No longer the impoverished figure of the Arab maiden, this idealised 'veilèd maid' is a mirror of the Poet: 'Her voice was like the voice of his own soul' (l. 153). It is here that Shelley launches the severest critique of the narcissism of Western colonial self-obsession in *Alastor*. A real figure is eclipsed and replaced by an idealised figure who, though ideal, is not real, and therefore the downfall of the Poet. There is a kind of incest at work here, a doubling in which, within her revealed arms, 'their branching veins / The eloquent blood told an ineffable tale' (l. 167-8). Incest will return as an important theme in *Laon and Cythna*, being censored and edited out of *The Revolt of Islam*. The significance of the hint of incest here is to emphasise the narcissism of the Poet – that he can only desire a version of himself. In *Alastor*, I would argue that the unveiling of the 'veilèd maid' and subsequent intercourse enact a metaphorical rape: the Poet possesses a woman imagined within this Islamicate setting by making her body and voice the reflection of his own desire. Her concealment leaves space for his projections; what is revealed is not her difference, but his own image. To the eyes of the Western male, her difference gives way to the identity he projects upon her. It is here that we must note Shelley's participation in that recurring trope of travelling East which was so significant in Byron's attraction to the East: the possibility of withdrawing from the sexual economy of one's society and of entering that of another as an outsider. Such a position is inherently powerful, since it allows the individual to operate without the restraints of the normal mechanisms of the sexual economy. It is present almost always in travels in the East, during which the (usually male) individual finds a way of unburdening himself of the sexual constraints of the West, whatever they may be. For Shelley then, quite different to Byron's desire to have a kind of relationship proscribed by his home

culture, the sexual desire that he writes upon the East is to find a female analogue of himself in the Other. We can note straight away that the drive here is ambiguous – both narcissistic and self-effacing, combining the Self and the Other in one. This ambiguity, or antagonism, is threaded throughout Shelley's work and reappears in his mature poetry as urge toward 'the One' – the desire for wholeness in spite of difference. Such a force, Shelley seems to intuit, can be both positive and negative, and Shelley's 'one', as we shall see later, is used as both a negative entity (in *The Revolt* and *Prometheus Unbound*) as well as a positive (*Adonais*, *Hellas*, amongst others).

In *Alastor*, the consummation of the relationship between the Poet and the 'veilèd maid' leads to an abyss:

> Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night
> Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep,
> Like a dark flood suspended in its course,
> Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain
>
> (ll. 188-91)

Later, the crisis is more explicit: the Poet's 'wan eyes / Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly / As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven' (ll. 200-2) – that is, there is nothing really there, except for the reflection of something real. We return back to Hegel's criticism of the notion of the will that refuses to limit itself in German romanticism, as the Poet 'eagerly pursues / Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade; / He overleaps the bounds' (ll. 205-7). In Hegel's terms, the Will has not acted with resolution by which it would 'posit itself as the Will of a specific individual'.[258] And whatever 'tenderness of feeling' that underlies it must also come to terms with its own characterlessness. Indeed, paradoxically, the Poet becomes only able to apprehend 'The mystery and majesty of the Earth, / The joy, the exultation' (ll. 199-200) in sleep. It is such a figure who, although treated with kindness by adult humans, is looked upon with terror by infants, who

[258] Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 36

retain an ability to see horror in the face of the Poet.[259] I will return to the significance of inspiration in sleep later, but it is worth noting its occurrence here.

Central to the depiction of the Poet as the poem progresses is his rootlessness. Later, he looks at a bird (a swan) and recalls that it has a home – 'Thou hast a home, / Beautiful bird; thou voyagest to thine home' (ll. 280-1). That the Poet is rootless is depicted as symptomatic of his decision to retain an engagement with the infinite rather than the limiting effects of resolution. But there is more to it: it is also that the Poet never really engages with an actual culture; the Poet only engages with the culture as it exists within the discourse of his own culture – he allows the impression to exist in place of the actuality. *Alastor* as a poem critiques this refusal to live within a particular culture, whilst also seemingly acknowledging that to change one's home culture is also valid, provided it is genuine and entails a step into actuality rather than persisting in the infinitude of the intangible. If this is the case, Shelley's critique of the Romantic 'beautiful soul', engaged with the infinite and rejecting finitude and resolution, is also an ultimate rejection of a complete idealism, and a cautious return to a materialism which can posit an actual state, rather than an imagined one.

In *Alastor* then, we have seen how the Poet is engaged in a solipsistic quest for meaning that must always reflect himself. However, there are clear, explicit moments of critique of such a position inherent in the poem, and it is within these intimations that Shelley will build his critique of self-referential, solipsistic meaning. The temptations of esotericism will remain, but they must be tempered with the acknowledgement that only if knowledge is used outside the sphere of narcissism can its full potential be realised. As it is, the Poet of *Alastor* only discovers the deity of his own reflection, and love is only the loving to love that bears no relation to the relations of men:

[259] In all of this, of course, is an important question about significance and meaning of Wordsworth, important to note in that, although it does not bear intimacy with my own questions, holds a significance for the significancy and meaning of first and second generation English Romanticism, in the same way that the significance and meaning of European Romanticism is hinted at in the allusion to Schiller and Novalis. Ultimately, the question of the Romantics' treatment of the individual and society, as well as Islam and the Other is a matter for consideration elsewhere, although dealt with in part in Chapter 1.

… O, that the dream

Of dark magician in his visioned cave,

Raking the cinders of a crucible

For life and power, even when his feeble hand

Shakes in its last decay, were the true law

Of this so lovely world! But thou art fled

Like some frail exhalation; which the dawn

Robes in its Golden beams, - ah! thou hast fled!

(ll. 681-8)

Alchemy is not truth. No secret is truth – the search for the secret does not reveal truth. Rather truth is here, in the material world – between men – vitally present. Later, Shelley will criticise Byron's *Manfred* (1817) for its pessimistic solipsism; to read *Alastor* as a parallel narrative of incestuous narcissism is to mis-read Shelley's warnings that are part of his critique of the Poet of his poem. The lesson, then, of *Alastor*, is to engage in the tangible, contingent East, not only the esoteric traditions of its past. Only by engaging with the historical contemporaneity of the East would the Poet be able to get beyond his solipsism. In this way, I think, Shelley begins to show us a path which can lead us out of the Derridean formulation of the violence of the binary hierarchy, by positing a real (supra-textual or extra-textual), alive East as contingent with a historical, esotericised, textual East.[260] Such a view is not in contradiction with my earlier concurrence with

[260]It is worth noting here the limits of Derrida's encounter with Islam, which Ian Almond investigates in a perceptive essay on Derrida and Islam in *The New Orientalists: Postmodern Representations of Islam from Foucault to Baudrillard*, (I. B. Tauris, 2007). The limitation that I take from Almond's account lies in the problem of Derrida's insistence on 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte' in relation to another culture. Derrida was able to bring fascinating textuality to the marginality of his Arab/Jewish experience within the context of France – referring to the Arabic or the Jewish context on its own is something else. Talal Asad points to the problem more than once in *Genealogies of Religion*, for example, the statement: 'This reduction of a heterogeneous world to textuality transforms motive into a literary figure.' (*Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 139). Whilst Derrida and the figure of textuality are brilliant resources for marginality, the totality of any 'heterogeneous world' is much better accommodated by Wittgenstein's theory of form of life, which Asad uses throughout this work. I don't think such a conclusion means that Derrida, or his concepts of textuality, deconstruction, and hauntology, amongst others, cannot be useful, and I will certainly use them. I believe however, they have a limit and would need 'translating' (Asad's problematisation of such a concept withstanding) to be of use in the context of another 'heterogeneous world'.

Sayyid's account of 'strong orientalism', in which the textual orient (or Orientalism) begins to constitute the Orient itself; it is rather an acknowledgement of the unevenness of such a process. It is not, we must state with absolute clarity, total – there will always be aspects of the East which resist Orientalising, and I consider Islam to be one of them.

4. The Revolt of Islam

If Shelley's *Alastor* begins to articulate a tussle between the appetite for the mysteries of esotericism and a more basic materialism needed to construct a fair society, it is in *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) that Shelley more fully dramatises the crisis predicated on the antagonism between the experience of the sublime and the mundanity of a workable, just society. The poem is Shelley's longest and his most sustained attempt at a fully realised epic. As late as 1821 he continues to ask his publisher, Charles Ollier of the poem's success, and whether there is 'any chance of a second edition'.[261] It is well known that *The Revolt of Islam* does not start out as such; instead, it is a poem titled *Laon and Cythna; Or, The Revolution in the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*, in which the two main characters are brother and sister. After being initially published by Charles and James Ollier in December 1817, Shelley is forced to edit the poem to make it suitable for publication, after the Ollier brothers became aware of its anti-Christian sentiment. There are three main changes: the first is the title, the second the relationship between protagonists Laon and Cythna (Cythna is an orphan who grows up with Laon), and the third are what we may term the religious changes. Paul

[261] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L Jones, 2 vols (Clarendon Press, 1964), II, p.354.

Whickman has recently argued that the aesthetic purposes of the revisions to *Laon and Cythna* stage Shelley's transition from materialist to perhaps not idealist, but at least a Neoplatonic sympathiser, with a keen attraction to all the esoteric threads of that tradition.[262] I largely agree with Whickman here, and wish to develop his argument that the changes do signal a more significant shift in Shelley's philosophical thinking than simply evading government opprobrium and possible arrest. *The Revolt of Islam* has recently undergone a re-reading which has effected a restoration of its value after decades of languishing as a poorer poem of Shelley's oeuvre, of which Harold Bloom's comments were the general consensus: 'an abortive allegorical epic which I do not admire'.[263] The *Keats-Shelley Review* published an issue dedicated to the poem in 2018, and it has also been recently edited by Anahid Nersessian, who argues that *Laon and Cythna* is 'one of the three great epic poems of the Romantic period'.[264] Partly, the problem causing the poem to be overlooked has been the relative status of each of Shelley's compositions, which has pushed critics to choose either *Laon and Cythna*, or, *The Revolt of Islam*. In fact, the changes to the poem are not so great as to suggest that one poem should be considered substantially of more merit than the other, and the challenges of the poem exist in both editions – its length, its difficulty in reading, and its strangeness. The title of the poem – *The Revolt of Islam* – heralds part of that strangeness, and the question of how to interpret it is ongoing. Is it Islam that effects a revolt? Is a revolt effected upon Islam? And how to read the powerful discordance between a narrative that Shelley describes as the 'beau idéal' of the French Revolution and the Islamic setting of Constantinople? Is the golden city even Constantinople at all? In fact, I will argue that these complications, ambiguities, and discordances are an important aspect of a poem that tries to juxtapose East and West, effecting what I have already intimated is Shelley's inversion of the hierarchical binary between the two. The Derridean slippages the poem enacts – East is West, West is East, Islam enacts revolt, Islam is revolted

[262] Paul Whickman, 'Laon and Cythna and The Revolt of Islam: Revisions as Transition' in *The Keats-Shelley Review*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2018) pp. 102-112.
[263] Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, (Yale University Press, 1959), p. 8.
[264] Anahid Nersessian, 'Introduction' to Shelley's *Laon and Cythna* (Broadview Press, 2016), p. 9.

against – are a crucial part of the poem's undeniable dynamism, that must be acknowledged despite its lack of clarity. Whilst I will not explicitly enter the debate surrounding the relative worth of *The Revolt of Islam* next to both *Laon and Cythna* and Shelley's other work, I do hope that my reading, which foregrounds the poem's internal ideological collapse, marks a way forward in reading the poem in fellowship with the work of Nersessian, Warren, Paul Whickman and Joey S. Kim, whose work on the poetics of orientation I will build upon here.[265] In an important sense, this work is also a return to Derrida beyond deconstruction as it has often been appropriated for literary criticism, attending to the politics of *différance* through the hierarchies, exclusions and dependencies that the poem both constructs and unsettles.[266]

If Shelley's *Alastor* enables the poet psychically to investigate the Orient, solipsism, esotericism, and the constant contest between his Platonic idealism and political materialism, *The Revolt of Islam* is where Shelley's youthful materialism and plain-speaking atheism perform a complete collapse. The poem is imbued with not only religious but also esoteric symbolism which performs an important function for the poet who is not willing or even unable to consign his characters to a materialist fate. Their resurrection into their final 'Haven' at the 'Temple of the Spirit' (l .4815) is a symbolic reconfiguring of the resurrection of Christ, another failed revolutionary, without the baggage of religious 'frauds'.[267] For a work critical of Christianity, the narrative of the poem could hardly come closer to the Ur-Christian narrative of social and ethical revolt, persecution, death, and resurrection. The story of Laon and Cythna, who each perform a way of establishing social change in an unjust (and occupied) society, and whose mercy towards the Sultan leads to their persecution and martyrdom, is remarkably close to that of Jesus – there is even a wilderness section for each character in which they are forced to confront their individual

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[265] See Nersessian's edition of *Laon and Cythna*, previously cited, Chapter 4, ' "The great sandy desert of Politics": The Orient and solitude in *The Revolt of Islam*' of Andrew Warren's *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, Paul Whickman's 'Laon and Cythna and The Revolt of Islam: Revisions as Transition', and Joey S Kim's 'Disorienting 'Shapes' in Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*' in *The Keats-Shelley Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2018, pp. 134–147.
[266] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 41-42.
[267] Shelley, 'Laon and Cythna' in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, pp. 109–320. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

potential before establishing themselves as leaders. The significance of the poem lies in this deep contradiction and can only be read with a sensitivity toward it. It is an aporia so deep that Shelley himself seems to be somewhat unaware of it, writing to Ollier in October 1817 that '[t]he whole poem, with the exception of the first canto and part of the last, is a mere human story without the smallest intermixture of supernatural interference'.[268] The exceptions are significant: the heavenly scene in Canto 1 and the protagonists' passage into an eternal sphere in Canto 12 frame the 'mere human story' with a supernatural horizon. Here it will not do to try to argue either for Shelley's materialism, or his Neoplatonism – instead we must read Shelley's engagement with each of these as a 'pathway of despair', a dialectic.[269] Until now, I have used the terms 'materialism' and 'idealism' as many other Shelley scholars have – as a kind of antagonistic philosophical taxonomy within which Shelley is operating. I would like to construe these alternate metaphysical positions as a dialectic in Shelley, which propels him, and his metaphysics to what I think, and will argue, is a synthesis that can jettison each term as they become redundant within a new metaphysical framework. I will come to this later, with the help of Spinoza. At this stage however, in *The Revolt*, we can see that Shelley's philosophical idealism, and his political materialism, exist in full contradiction and disagreement with each other, and it is in the vital, creative work of poetry that Shelley is able to move toward a kind of synthesis which utilises a new vocabulary grounded on the metaphysical precepts of Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry'.

It is worth beginning with the Orientalism of the poem, before considering the particular aspect of Islam and its relevance. Shelley wrote to Ollier:

> The scene is supposed to be laid in Constantinople and modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is, in fact, a tale illustrative of

[268] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, p. 563.
[269] 'The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of doubt, or more precisely as the way of despair; for what happens on it is not what is usually understood when we speak of doubt', G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A V Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 49. Cited in Chapter 1.

> such a revolution as might be supposed to take place in an European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously, as I think) the modern philosophy, and contending with ancient notions and the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them. It is a Revolution of this kind that is the beau idéal, as it were, of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius and out of general knowledge.[270]

By locating the poem in 'modern Greece', Shelley contextualises his poem with issues of empire and colonial occupation; however, the use is in part disingenuous – Shelley's revolution is not simply about national self-determination versus a powerful foreign oppressor. Rather, Shelley's revolution is the 'beau ideal […] of the French Revolution', and as such it is not so much about foreign tyranny but tyranny at home. We can perceive here that conflict between idealism and materialism when Shelley articulates that the revolution occurs under the influence of 'modern philosophy […] contending with ancient notions'. Shelley's poem frames his articulation of 'modern philosophy' within the context of an unwitting Christian symbolism, whilst utilising an eastern setting to stage a revolution that will be regarded sympathetically by his readers.

The notion of sympathy, and its necessity for enacting a revolution, is a significant one. Most recently, Alessandra Monorchio has argued that Shelley's poem articulates his own anxieties and hopes about 'sympathy's revolutionary potential'.[271] In this context, Shelley's own use of the East as a stage upon which social revolution can be enacted demonstrates the binary that Shelley (and others) assume when utilising the East: the East is a stand-in for the West's own tyranny. This has recently been given attention by Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud, who argues that: 'By portraying British statecraft as barbarously foreign, reformist writers in the Romantic period solicited public

[270] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, pp. 563-4.
[271] Alessandra Monorchio 'My Spirit sought/To Weave a Bondage of Such sympathy': Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 32.2, 2018, pp. 123-133.

support for changes to parliamentary representation, taxation, and the penal system, among other policy matters.'[272]

This is certainly the vein in which Shelley wants to articulate his opprobrium for tyranny. However, Shelley's *Revolt* goes further than simply utilising the East to stage a suppressed desire for the East, for, as in *Alastor*, the East bites back. Rather than simply standing-in for the West, the discordances of the poem disrupt the conventions of what Cohen-Vrignaud describes as 'radical orientalism'. Instead, the Orientalism of Shelley's poem performs multiple, often contradictory, functions and it bounds back and forth between denotations of East and West. It is the same complicating function that we see in the title, demanding of a reader a question of what we are to make of Shelley's entanglements. Andrew Warren argues that: 'In *The Revolt of Islam*, a political critique of Orientalism begins in the title; that critique is not merely ironic (as in *Alastor*) or self-reflexive (as in *Epipsychidion*), but seeks, successfully or not, to found a positive political program.'[273]

This is very much the case, and I am sympathetic to Warren's argument that is alert to the subtlety of Shelley's ideological construction in *The Revolt*. Warren states that:

> Shelley inherits, either directly or through later political thinkers such as Rousseau and Volney, at least three key notions from Montesquieu that he begins to explore in *The Revolt*: the postulate of the Oriental Despot; the idea that the political might be at root ideational and imagined; and the intensely problematic ramifications of the first two notions which led to, among other things, the modern systematization of Orientalism.[274]

I think Warren handles the figure of the despot particularly well through his framework of Montesquieu and Althusser's critique thereof. What I am more interested in here is the second complication, which Warren perhaps does not explore so thoroughly, which is 'the idea that the

[272] Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 10.
[273] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 172.
[274] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 194.

political might be […] ideational and imagined'. This is at the heart of the poem, and it is this contention that entails the ideational collapse as well as the failure of Laon and Cythna's revolution. A preoccupation with naming, and sympathy, runs through the poem, and it is the anxiety about naming that speaks to the fear that the political might be 'ideational and imagined'. In Canto 8, Cythna discusses opinion, of which 'every throne / Of Earth or Heaven, though shadow, rests thereon, / One shape of many names' (ll. 3274-6):

> "Its names are each a sign which maketh holy
> All power - aye, the ghost, the shade, the dream
> Of power - lust, falsehood, hate, and pride, and folly;
> The pattern whence all fraud and wrong is made,
> A law to which mankind has been betrayed;
> And human love is the name well known
> Of a dear mother, whom the murderer laid
> In a bloody grave
>
> (ll. 3280–4)

Naming is an operation of tyranny. And yet, it must also be an operation of revolution. It is a problem that Shelley contends with in the poem. Alessandra Monorchio notes that 'in Shelley's prose writing, sympathy is the principle through which poetry engages the reader's imagination, transforming the individual mind and, potentially, leading to the reformation of society.'[275] This is also the case in Shelley's poetry, and it is in the different linguistic styles of Laon and Cythna that we will see alternative pathways for sympathy for revolution enacted in the poem.

Monorchio argues that Laon uses a revolutionary language which could 'waken / The multitude' (ll. 784-5) whilst the 'effects of the sound of Cythna's voice are figured through imagery linked to mesmerism: Cythna enchants her public, which never establishes a reciprocal exchange

[275] Monorchio, 'Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna', p.124.

with her, and remains passive.'[276] Echoing David Duff's suggestion that 'there is too much self in Laon's confidence, an element even of self-glorification', Monorchio argues that 'Laon's rhetoric of affect presents ambiguous tendencies towards manipulation and control, which might recreate the hierarchies he purports to bring down.'[277] Indeed, as the Hermit claims in Canto 4, 'Laon's name' is 'to the tumultuous throng [. . .] like the stars whose beams the waves compel' (ll. 1563–4). Laon's name alone which exercises such a coercive force on the multitude reveals the transfiguration of Laon's role in the mob's psychology: not the diffuser of revolutionary values, but the 'father' (l. 1833).[278]

This problem, that Monorchio isolates, is central to the failure of Shelley's attempt, as Warren reads it, 'to found a political program'. We can, therefore, establish that Shelley's attempt to found a positive political program rests upon the language with which it will be constructed. Whilst both I, and Warren, as well as Monorchio, argue that Shelley fails in this venture in *The Revolt*, I will argue that Shelley does manage to establish a positive political program when he configures the metaphysical relationship between language, the imagination and revolution in his 'A Defence of Poetry' as I have already indicated.

The problems inherent in Laon's language are not mirrored by an ideal language in Laone/Cythna; 'although the version of enthusiasm she embodies is superior to Laon's', 'the poem reveals that the poetical voice is also liable to become a means to overwhelm and compel an audience.'[279] Monorchio describes Laone/Cythna's speeches as seeking 'less to teach truths, than to intimate, through their melody, an experience of suspension from language's 'bondages', which might in turn lead to a process of self-knowledge.'[280] Monorchio contrasts Laone's language with Asia's linguistic style in *Prometheus Unbound*, in which

[276] Monorchio, 'Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna', p. 126.
[277] Monorchio, 'Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna', p. 128, and David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.171.
[278] Monorchio, 'Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna', p. 129.
[279] Monorchio, 'Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna', p. 129.
[280] Monorchio, 'Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna', p. 130.

> revolution occurs when those who listen become in turn able to produce their own musical expression; here, instead, Cythna's public remains characteristically 'mute' (l. 2279), or is depicted through allusions to mesmeric imagery, as responding to her voice with a mere 'echo' (l. 3344)[281]

Monorchio's articulation of the pitfalls of sympathy and the centrality of language to revolution gets to the heart of the aporia in Shelley's poem, which returns again and again to the tyranny of naming, and the dependency of revolution on language and naming. It is also the case that Shelley's intimation of the violence in the act of naming must be acknowledged whilst utilising the very process to enact political change. If Warren contends that, for Shelley, the figure of the Despot signifies a deeper epistemological – or even ontological – crisis that precedes any specific cultural norms or practices of 'manners', I would extend this argument by proposing that *The Revolt* centres on a violent synthesis of materialism and idealism.[282] At the core of this unstable tension lies the question of secret knowledge.

It is in Canto 7 that Laone describes the genesis of her revolutionary language:

> And on the sand would I make signs to range
> These woofs, as they were woven, of my thought;
> Clear, elemental shapes, whose smallest change
> A subtler language within language wrought :
> The key of truths which once were dimly taught
> In old Crotona

(ll. 3109-3114)

'The key of truths which once were dimly taught / In old Crotona' is a reference to the Pythagoreans, and Pythagoras himself. If Shelley is casting back to an unfulfilled truth from Pythagoras, the allusion makes clear the (revolutionary) tradition which Laone wishes to inherit.

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[281] Monorchio, 'Sympathy, Enthusiasm and Revolution in Laon and Cythna', p. 131.
[282] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 208.

Pythagoras's name is still famous today, although known mostly for his theorem on triangles, but in the Romantic period was better known for his esoteric teachings, including metempsychosis, or the 'transmigration of souls', in which the immortal soul enters a new body at death, as well as vegetarianism. Timothy Morton has argued that Shelley's own vegetarianism was indebted to Pythagoras, and it is certain that Pythagoras had a significant presence in Shelley's thought, although this area of influence has been largely ignored by Shelley scholars, overly keen to outline Shelley's Neoplatonism, or conversely, his radical materialism.[283] Because of his influence upon Socrates, Pythagoras is often held to be as much the father of Western Philosophy as the traditional triptych of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. However, Pythagoras's teachings could be said to have influenced the European esoteric tradition more than the traditional canon of European philosophy. Pythagoras was also held to be an inheritor of ideas from the East, having allegedly been taught most of his knowledge in Ancient Egypt, the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and the Achaemenid Empire, including a legendary story in which Pythagoras learnt from the Persian Magi, or Zoroaster himself. The reference to Pythagoras is, then, consistent with an esoteric history in which eastern knowledge becomes available in the West. In this narrative, knowledge begins in the East, and, to a great extent, in the intimations of European esotericism; this secret knowledge always rightly belongs in the East, as part of older traditions including that of Ancient Egypt, Phoenicia, Chaldea, Judaism (Kabbalah), Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. Shelley participates in this depiction – Laone's 'signs' of her thought are not legible, recalling the woman on the rocks in Canto 1 who 'spake in a language whose strange melody / Might not belong to earth' (ll. 289-90). In *The Revolt* then, as in *Alastor*, the East does have a secret, and it is only by translating that secret that the West might be able to fulfil its revolutionary potential. Thus it is not only that Laone's revolution fails, but Shelley's revolution also must fail – he cannot yet articulate his utopia because he does not know how to translate his secret knowledge and imbue it with the

[283] See Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The body and the natural world* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 27 and 67.

sympathy it will need to be taken up in his own society. The effort to synthesise political materialism and philosophical idealism fails therefore on the basis of the failure of the poet, the people of the golden city, and the audience, to translate Laone's language. To synthesise materialism and idealism then, one needs to learn the language or languages of the East. Shelley does this later, I will argue, in inheriting a thread of Islamic and Jewish philosophy from Spinoza. Here, however, Laone's signs are illegible.

For Shelley, the West has lost touch with the tradition of its founders (Pythagoras). Any attempt to re-establish that connection with the past must be made through the East. In this way, the East is not only a stage which might have a European revolution enacted upon it; it is also the necessary medium for apprehending and acquiring any revolutionary potential at all. To have a successful revolution, one must re-engage with Pythagoras, and the lost tradition of Pythagorean philosophy, and therefore journey into the East to find a tradition which maintains contact with that knowledge. Shelley's engagement with such a journey is, as we shall see, not only a dialogue with an esoteric, classical, or historical tradition. It must also be made through contact with the living, contemporary tradition of the East: Islam.

Thus, we can begin to see several strands at work in Shelley's *Revolt*, building on those in *Alastor*, which enact what I have referred to as his 'pathway of doubt'. In *The Revolt*, we see that dynamic at play in two ways. The first is about how to deal with the reality/irreality of the East itself – is it the construct of a discourse? Can it only be a construct? And if so, how can its lack of concreteness affect the constructed world of a poetic narrative? The second issue regards language – how can language, with its birth in a violent restriction and delimitation of meaning, ever get beyond the terrible tyranny of fixing the meanings through which people and worlds are governed? For Shelley in *The Revolt*, it takes an exceptional individual to learn an esoteric (eastern) language to be able to achieve even a failed revolution. Its revolutionary potential lies in its resistance to translation into the very terms of authority it seeks to overturn. So, we can begin to trace a pathway toward a kind of synthesis that the 'pathway of doubt' will always push for – and that

synthesis will entail a fully worked out metaphysics of presence and a new vocabulary that can articulate such a metaphysics which Shelley will develop in the 'Defence'. What we have in *The Revolt* is the first analysis of that metaphysics of presence, and an establishing notion that the terrible binary at work in the West/East relationship is predicated on an untruth, as well as the realisation of just how slippery language can be.

But it is not only the case that Shelley achieves a working out of these central strands of his metaphysical epistemology in *The Revolt*; it is also the case that the editorial changes made in the transition from *Laon and Cythna* to *The Revolt of Islam* predicate a shift away from a conception of God as the Christian figure of the Father toward a ('Neoplatonic') realisation of a 'Supreme Being'. Paul Whickman describes how Shelley alters the word 'God' to 'Power' in the edits made to *Laon and Cythna*, a word that has increasing significance for Shelley as evidenced by his increasing usage of the word in two poems written in 1816: *Mont Blanc* and *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. At the same time, the editorial changes to the poem 'blunt', in Whickman's terms, the poem's assault on Christianity specifically.[284] Whereas *Laon and Cythna* refers to 'Oromaze, and Christ, and Mahomet, / Moses, and Buddh, Zerdusht, and Brahm, and Foh [*sic*]' (Laon and Cythna, ll. 4063–64), the same lines in *The Revolt of Islam* change the term 'Christ' for 'Joshua', which Leader and O'Neill note is 'the Hebrew for Jesus'.[285]

An important passage that signals the transition Shelley makes in his editorial changes is the following, which Paul Whickman cites:

> Men say they have seen God, and heard from God,
> Or known from others who have known such things,
> And that his will is all our law, a rod
> To scourge us into slaves – that Priests and Kings,

[284] Paul Whickman, 'Laon and Cythna and The Revolt of Islam: Revisions as Transition' in *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 32.2, (2018), p. 107.
[285] It's not quite so straight-forward; Jesus's name in Hebrew is Yeshua: יֵשׁוּעַ (Yēšūaʿ), an alternative spelling of the Hebrew for Joshua, יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, (Yəhōšūaʿ).

Custom, domestic sway, ay, all that brings

Man's free-born soul beneath the oppressor's heel,

Are his strong ministers, and that the stings

Of death will make the wise his vengeance feel,

Though truth and virtue arm their hearts with tenfold steel

(ll. 3253–61)

The verse becomes, in *The Revolt*:

Men say that they themselves have heard and seen,

Or known from others who have known such things,

A Shade, a Form, which Earth and Heaven between

Wields an invisible rod – that Priests and Kings,

Custom, domestic sway, ay, all that brings

Man's freeborn soul beneath the oppressor's heel,

Are his strong ministers, and that the stings

Of death will make the wise his vengeance feel,

Though truth and virtue arm their hearts with tenfold steel

(ll. 3253–61)

Here we can see Shelley shifting the identity of God from the Christian-specific to the general. The point I would like to make is that this shift moves Shelley from a critic of religion, and most specifically Christian/Catholic, to becoming a critic of religious belief, or faith, in general. And whilst that suits Shelley's anti-dogmatic approach which he sees as oppressive in all forms, the movement from God to Power takes him so far into a criticism of spirituality or mysticism that the groundwork of his attitude begins to collapse. The change from God to Power means that a central crux of the poem is undermined by the assault on 'Power'. However, as Whickman argues, this 'Power' is not here the 'Power' of *Mont Blanc* (1817) or *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* (1817); in those poems, 'Power' is a term for a 'generally positive sublime experience'. In fact, '[t]he 'Power'

of *Laon and Cythna* and *The Revolt of Islam* however is far less positive and more akin to the abstracted political 'Power' of the end of the later *Prometheus Unbound*'.[286] What this shift does, however, is open up an ideological space for a new vocabulary, in which Shelley will play with multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings. For any genuine synthesis to occur out of the 'pathway of doubt', it is necessary that a new (eastern) language must be learnt.

This is already at play in *The Revolt*, in which Andrew Warren notes that the particular linguistic moments of slippage in the poem depict a 'process […] not unlike the kind of reiterative dynamics described in The Defence of Poetry'.[287] I have already emphasised the significance of the 'Defence' as constructing the language that Shelley fails to articulate in *The Revolt*. However, it is important to note the genesis of this process as it occurs in *The Revolt*, as Warren also notes. What I want to build on at this point is Warren's theorising of Shelley's desert imagery, which, he suggests, simultaneously reproduces the Orientalist trope common to Romantic poetry and transforms it into something more abstract. The desert becomes, in his reading, a Lucretian void – a blank ground upon which change can occur. For Warren, Shelley reclaims these literalised political settings by reintegrating them into his poetic and philosophical imagination, thereby stripping them of the Orientalist assumptions that first gave them shape.

Shelley's deserts, often described as empty and desolate, might appear to reduce the East to a depopulated stage for Western moral allegory; yet, as Warren argues, their emptiness has a generative purpose. The desert is both a physical and conceptual interval – a space of unmaking and rethinking – where thought itself is renewed. In this sense, the desert becomes at once the image and the effect of poetry: it is created by poetic imagination even as it provides the condition for that imagination's activity. Warren describes this as an 'immanent critique' of Orientalism – a process by which Shelley appropriates and politicises eastern tropes until they lose their fixed geographical and cultural boundaries, noting that in *The Revolt* 'an Oriental(ized) trope is

[286] Whickman, 'Laon and Cythna and The Revolt of Islam: Revisions as Transition', p. 107.
[287] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 210.

appropriated, politicized and then rendered ambiguously (non)Eastern and (non)Western'.[288] Through this reading, the void of the desert is redeemed as a site of imaginative potential – a stage for the self's renewal and for poetry's own critique of its historical conditions.

I am more hesitant – rendering the textuality of the East as '(non)Eastern' is not I think the victory that Shelley desires. Rather, I point back to the need to make legible Laone's revolutionary language and interpret the esoteric knowledge concealed in the East as the grounds upon which Shelley's revolution can be enacted. More than the empty desert providing the landscape of solipsism, the empty deserts are also the particular abyss that one might tumble down if one refuses to acknowledge a material, historical, economic and social reality. They are, in Shelley, a warning of the effect of using the East as a construct alone, without acknowledging the historical contemporaneity of the Middle East. Such vacancy is at once the dangerous solipsism of the Poet of *Alastor*, as well as power inherent in the sublime; like the 'Power' at work in society, it is also a form of tyranny. Warren argues that in *The Revolt*, the 'one Power' that Whickman has argued becomes central to *The Revolt* as opposed to *Laon and Cythna*, is 'the singular source of oppression', rather than a single 'Tyrant':

> It is not the Tyrant who is the singular source of oppression, but rather that 'one Power' which enslaves Despot and multitude alike. Often in the poem it is not 'the Tyrant' imposing orders on the multitude, but a series of nameless 'tyrants', and those orders are carried out by miniature despots within families and communities. The 'one Power', obviously that exists at potentially all levels of culture and accepts whatever form it is given even as it works to alter that form.[289]

Tyrants are nameless, but their tyranny is in naming, which is the source of their violence. They perpetuate the pattern that must be undone, destroyed, and collapsed. I agree with both Warren and Whickman's reading of the negative capacity of (in Warren's terms) 'empty and plastic' One or

[288] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, pp. 210-1.
[289] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, pp. 208-9.

one Power. I think that we can bring together then both the trope of the 'one Power' and the vacant desert to read in Shelley's poem a warning of imperial conquest, that, due to its founding untruth – the 'vacancy' of the object – will collapse as soon as it can be assembled. Shelley is wise to the hypocrisy of such a project and ultimately enacts the collapse of the structural relations between vacant desert and one Power by performing the failure of the revolution in the 'golden city'. Moreover, Shelley does not simply collapse his ontology – the constructed discourse of the East as in *The Revolt*. In 'Ozymandias' (1818), Shelley invites the (real) East to haunt the construct in a very contemporary and material way. It is in 'Ozymandias' that *The Revolt* finally achieves the secondary, supplementary meaning of the title – the revolt of Islam. For it is Islam that provides a way of recovering the Hellenic/Hebraic past within which the Western tradition is suspended.

5. Ozymandias

'Ozymandias' is the companion poem of *The Revolt of Islam*; it was written at the same time, in the same notebook, at a right angle to *The Revolt*. The poem exists within a specific network of British colonial exploitation and appropriation; it was written as part of a competition with Shelley's friend Horace Smith after the British Museum acquired 'The Younger Memnon', an enormous statue of Ramesses II. Shelley's sonnet, I will argue, retaliates against this British expansion and emptying out of colonised spaces by using the sonnet to promote a 'Wahabee' iconoclasm which returns the empty, colonised space to its undermined and forgotten population.

'Ozymandias' provides another examination of what kind of knowledge (and power) can be discovered in ancient foreign lands, and is another examination of the desert. This time the poet meets 'a traveller from an antique land' (l. 1), who reproduces a scene, with little personal embellishment:

Who said – 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my Works, ye mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

(ll. 2-14)[290]

Ozymandias is the Greek name for Pharaoh Ramesses II, and Shelley had read in Diodorus Siculus's *Bibliotheca historica* of an inscription borne on a work of the reign of Ramesses II: 'If anyone wishes to know how mighty I am and where I lie, let him surpass any of my works'.[291] Contextualised by the recent acquisition of the British Museum's Ramesses statue, Shelley's sonnet returns the statue to its original habitat, undoing the work of colonial removal. However, unlike in *Alastor* and *Zeinab and Kathema*, the narrator of the poem is not an all-seeing observer of events across an eastern landscape; Shelley uses the distancing and literalising device of the traveller. In this case, Shelley produces a different model for foreign travel, engaging again in the issue of whether travel can ever be ethical or non-colonial by participating in a tangible culture in a way the

[290] Shelley, 'Ozymandias', in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, pp. 326-7.
[291] See the editorial commentary on 'Ozymandias' in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, p. 946.

Poet of *Alastor* could never. I indicated before that a commitment to another culture – in this case the Middle East – is a pathway out of the violence of Sayyid's 'strong orientalism', wherein the textual discourse on the East comes to constitute the East itself. In the case of 'Ozymandias', Shelley does not instrumentalise Islamic Wahabi violence, but he allows it to make its own case in much the same way that Sayyid describes the way Islamism emerges as a response to Western hegemony within the discourse of modernity. 'Ozymandias' is mostly read as a tale of the hubris of 'great' rulers – Shelley's point being that all supposedly great civilisations eventually decay and collapse. It is assumed that the ruin of the ancient civilisation is indicative of its internal contradiction – the contradiction evident in the juxtaposition of the statue's epigraph and its context as a ruin. But what if the natural cycle of civilisation and decay that we saw apparent in Byron and contextualised with Ibn Khaldūn could be sped up with the aid of a band of iconoclastic freethinkers? What if Shelley, in his constant quest for a utopia that he can construct in his poetry, populates his desert with Wahabis who are able to bring down the illusions and hypocrisies of the orthodox religion?[292]

The scene is the impression of the traveller, and this distancing of the poem's viewpoint from the traveller's viewpoint serves to underline the fallibility of a traveller's narrative. It is not that the poem does not wish to advocate for the traveller's vision – of course, it does – but it is rather that, unlike in his previous poems, Shelley produces a vision of the East which is for the first time specified historically through the use of the traveller's narrative. The 'I' of the first line reproduces in full the traveller's narrative, just as the traveller reproduces the scene – without embellishment. Thus Shelley makes a case for the reality of the East here in his use of a carefully established chain of narration.

[292] For the purposes of this chapter, I reproduce Shelley's term with modern spelling, since it demarcates a particular group of Muslims in a particular historical and political context.

The meaning of the scene in the poem, at first appears to echo Shelley's ruminations on ruins in *Queen Mab* (1813):

> Behold […] / Palmyra's ruined palaces! […]
> What now remains? – the memory
> Of senselessness and shame –
> What is immortal there?
> Nothing – it stands to tell
> A melancholy tale, to give
> An awful warning: soon
> Oblivion will steal silently
> The remnants of its fame
> (ll. 112-20)[293]

This is very much of a piece with Shelley's reading of Volney's *Ruins*, which has been previously acknowledged by other critics such as Humberto Garcia, who links the 'colossal Wreck' of 'Ozymandias' to Volney's 'colossus of power' 'symboliz[ing] Islamic despotism as a fragmented ruin that will buckle under its unbearable weight.'[294] In the vision of *Queen Mab*, only the natural sublime can endure; the human sublime will always meet an end: 'Nile shall pursue his changeless way: / Those pyramids shall fall' (ll. 128-9). However, I think in 'Ozymandias' Shelley is doing more than simply reproducing a Volneyan narrative. Indeed, the movement toward establishing a real or concrete East is established through his use of the chained narration which intimates toward questions which have been previously suppressed: who inhabits the desert?

The traveller's postcard narrative underlies a bigger and more interesting question about his further experience in the East. This question haunts the scene of 'Ozymandias', and is not answered by

[293] Shelley, 'Queen Mab' in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II (2005), pp. 160-312. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text by line number.
[294] Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment 1670-1840*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 204.

Shelley, I think, until 1819's 'A Philosophical View of Reform', in which he describes a historically real, and contemporary desert landscape:

> the Turkish Empire is in its last stage of ruin, and it cannot be doubted that the time is approaching when the desarts [*sic*] of Asia Minor and of Greece will be colonised by the overflowing population of countries less enslaved and debased, and that the climate and the scenery which was the birthplace of all that as wise and beautiful will not remain forever the spoil of wild beasts and unlettered Tartars. In Syria and Arabia the spirit of human intellect has roused a sect of people called Wahabees, who maintain the Unity of God, and the equality of man, and their enthusiasm must go on 'conquering and to conquer' even if it must be repressed in its present shape.[295]

It is then the 'Wahabees' who haunt the poem – they are the contemporaries of this age's 'traveller from an antique land' and they stage their iconoclastic revolt against the idols of the human sublime, just as Shelley performs an iconoclastic restoration of a ruin to its proper setting – removing it from the passive consumption of a colonial audience. So 'Ozymandias' is haunted by a double reality – the colonial removal of objects from their original habitat, and the beginning of a Wahabi revolt against the Ottoman Empire. For Shelley, 'Wahabees' were iconoclastic freethinkers – potentially able to destroy the perceived despotism of the Ottoman orthodoxy. It's a line of thinking about the idea of an Arab revolt that reaches far down into the twentieth century and first world war with T. E. Lawrence.[296] We can note Shelley's distinction between perceived Islamic orthodoxy and Wahabism in a comment from a long, argumentative letter Shelley wrote to Hunt, originally intended for publication, on the trial of Richard Carlile for blasphemous libel. Shelley's argument is that it is unfair to try Carlile on the basis that the Jury were not, as they should have

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[295] Shelley, 'A Philosophical View of Reform' in, *Shelley's Prose: or, the trumpet of a prophecy*, ed. by David Lee Clark (Fourth Estate, 1988), p. 239.

[296] One might argue that Lawrence himself was a Romantic, in the structure of his thoughts and feelings. He certainly inherits a great deal of the Romantic Orientalism I have been tracing here, including his childhood obsession with chivalry and medieval forms of honour. See Scott Anderson's *Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Vintage, 2014).

been, 'a Jury of his peers'.[297] Shelley suggests that 'Mr Carlile was a Deist accused of blaspheming the religion of his men professing themselves Christians', and therefore, that the Jury should be 'half Deists and half Christians'.[298] Shelley makes the analogy with what he considers the similar context in Islam: 'Suppose not a regular Mahometan but a Wahabee were in the question.'[299] The implication of the analogy is clear – Shelley perceives Wahabis as Deists and the historical orthodox Islam of the Ottoman empire as institutionally analogous to Christianity. The most obvious mistake here, which needs highlighting, is the issue of Islamic 'orthodoxy' under the Ottoman Empire, which, I would argue, did not exist in any way analogous to the orthodoxy of Christianity in both Catholic and Protestant Europe and Anglican Britain. Whilst Shelley makes an illuminating category mistake here, it is clear the extent to which the Wahabi context runs deep in Shelley. It is *on his mind* and makes appearances out of the blue. In a letter to Mary Shelley in August 1821, Shelley writes that 'people who lead the lives which we led until last winter are like a family of Wahabee Arabs pitching their tent in the midst of London'.[300] In this case, the analogy is between his own family and Wahabis – again, illuminating of the imaginative potency of the 'Wahabees' in Shelley's thought.

Shelley's 'Ozymandias' provides a key for unlocking a utopian vision of revolution in which Wahabee iconoclasm destroys the specious foundations of Western tradition – metaphysics included. I have already suggested that Shelley's politics (and his political materialism) is antagonistic to Shelley's more immersive, unifying metaphysics. Whilst Shelley's 'Wahabee' iconoclasm is not entirely compatible with Shelley's metaphysics, it is interesting that even when Shelley wants to give up metaphysics for good, and commit himself to revolution, and materialism, the Islamic context is there, haunting his utopia.

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[297] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, p. 137.
[298] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, pp. 138, 139.
[299] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, pp. 140.
[300] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, pp. 339.

6. Shelley's Epistemological Framework: God and Poetry

In 1818, Shelley writes to Peacock from Bagni di Lucca in Italy on the nature of 'poetic madness':

> 'What a wonderful passage there is in *Phaedrus* – the beginning, I think, of one of the speeches of Socrates – in praise of poetic madness, and in definition of what poetry is, and how a man becomes a poet. Every man who lives in this age and desires to write poetry, ought, as a preservative against the false and narrow systems of criticism which every poetical empire vents, to impress himself with this sentence, if he would be numbered among those to whom may apply this proud, thought sublime, expression of Tasso: *Non c'è in mondo chi merita nome di creatore, che Dio ed il Poeta*.'[301]

The quotation from Tasso might be translated as 'No one in the world merits the name of creator except for God and the Poet.' The passage Shelley refers to in Plato's *Phaedrus* is as follows:

> 'there are several kinds' says Socrates 'of divine madness […] he who, without this madness from the Muses, approaches the poetical gates, having persuaded himself that by art alone he may become sufficiently a poet, will find in the end his own imperfections, and see the poetry of his cold prudence vanish into nothingness before the light of that which has sprung from divine insanity.'[302]

He mentions Tasso again, and paraphrases the same quotation, in a letter to Hunt a year later:

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[301] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, pp. 29-30.
[302] Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Harold N Fowler (Loeb Classical Library, 1966), pp. 244a–245a.

> '*Non c'e creatore fuorche Iddio ed il Poeta'*. The latter affects the passions and searches the understanding more completely, but the former appeals to the Imagination, who is the master of them both, their God, and the Spirit by which they live and are.[303]

It is clear in these letters that Shelley is returning to an examination of the power of language, as he did in *The Revolt*. He is again taking up the strand of thought from his epic poem, and, I will argue, moving toward a new conception of language, power and creation which heralds the beginning of the synthesis approached on his 'pathway of doubt'. More than this, I believe these comments articulate the new vocabulary that Shelley required in order to synthesise the antagonistic tussle between his philosophical idealism and his political materialism. In short, this new vocabulary will enable Shelley to construct a successful articulation of utopian revolution where *The Revolt of Islam* failed. This argument will deconstruct the limiting frameworks scholarship on Shelley has often applied to his poetry, including the nature of his radicalism and an insistence on applying a contemporary atheism to a historical structure of feeling quite different to its modern name. Following in Garcia's footsteps, we should understand Shelley's relation to the atheism and deism of his time, and it is this insight into Shelley's epistemological framework which will help us to understand the second aspect of Shelley's relationship with Islam outside of the questions surrounding the historical reality of the East: the symbolism of Islam in Shelley's metaphysics.

This conception finds its philosophical expression in the fragmentary essay *On Life* (1819), where Shelley frames imagination as a creative, world-producing power and identifies wonder as the condition under which the given world might once again be apprehended as if newly made:

> If any artist, I do not say had executed, but had merely conceived in his mind the system of the sun, and the stars, and planets, they not existing, and had painted to us in words,

[303] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, p. 530.

> or upon canvas, the spectacle now afforded by the nightly cope of heaven, and illustrated it by the wisdom of astronomy, great would be our admiration. Or had he imagined the scenery of this earth, the mountains, the seas, and the rivers; the grass, and the flowers, and the variety of the forms and masses of the leaves of the woods, and the colours which attend the setting and the rising sun, and the hues of the atmosphere, turbid or serene, these things not before existing, truly we should have been astonished, and it would not have been a vain boast to have said of such a man, 'Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta.' But now these things are looked on with little wonder, and to be conscious of them with intense delight is esteemed to be the distinguishing mark of a refined and extraordinary person. The multitude of men care not for them.[304]

Wonder, and the suspension of the instinct to impose familiar structures of meaning upon what we perceive, had great importance for Shelley. In particular, Shelley begins to develop a theory of 'Imagination' which acts in that suspension and operates in the space of wonder – or, we might say, self-consciously, of enchantment.[305] In *On Life* this conception is already shadowed by a profound scepticism about the capacity of language to grasp being itself; yet what remains unresolved here is not the limitation of words as such, but the metaphysical status of the power that exceeds them – a question Shelley continues to explore in his letters of 1818–1819:

> How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being! Rightly used they may make evident our ignorance to ourselves, and this is much. For what are we? Whence do we come? and whither do we go? Is birth the commencement, is death the conclusion of our being? What is birth and death?[306]

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[304] Shelley, 'On Life', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 172. How like this is to Hegel's 'By the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss', which was quoted in the introduction.
[305] Enchantment is a term that has been used for the 'pre-modern' West in which the supernatural was a part of the epistemological structure of the world. Disenchantment is a term that has been used to describe the Enlightenment, in which all recourse to the supernatural has been ruled out and within which a process of secularization has occurred.
[306] Shelley, 'On Life' in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 172.

Here, Shelley questions how it is ever possible for 'words' to 'penetrate the mystery of our being'. However, as we have seen in the letters, by 1818 Shelley is advancing a theory of poetry which does not just reflect God-given creation but enacts it. Jerrold Hogle has noted the strangeness of Shelley's compounded atheism and 'Spirit', asking,

> Why then are the figures in his substitutions "instinct with […] spirit"? Why is Shelley's supposed causality, even in *The Necessity of Atheism*, a "generative power which is effected by its particular instruments" […]? […] why is the Spirit usually so godlike, so persistently biblical?[307]

This is an important question, and one often elided by scholarship that seeks to place Shelley within either a radical materialist or Neoplatonic idealist camp. I want to develop Hogle's hugely perceptive reading of Shelley's 'process' and examine the impact of Shelley's antagonistic epistemology upon his later metaphysics. This examination, however, is not possible without first examining the influence of Spinoza.

7. Shelley and Spinoza: Medievalism and Enlightenment Modernity, a new taxonomy

Shelley was always explicit about the significance of the Hellenic tradition to his thought:

> The study of modern history is the study of kings, financiers, statesmen, and priests. The history of ancient Greece is the study of legislators, philosophers, and poets; it is the

[307] Jerrold E Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 6.

> history of men, compared with the history of titles. What the Greeks were, was a reality, not a promise.[308]

It is, however, more than just Greek heritage that Shelley engages in, and seeks to syncretise into a narrative of inheritance. Humberto Garcia has described how an 'impulse to reinterpret Christian history alongside other religious myths is the driving force behind *The Assassins: A Fragment of a Romance* (1814-1815):

> By borrowing the name of an eleventh century radical Islamic sect, Percy and Mary Shelley provide an extremely unorthodox account on the origins of apostolic Christianity. Their synchronized prophetic (Abrahamic) history not only indulges in the Gnostic heresy but also implies that trinitarian Christianity deviated from the natural religion of love. Only 'gnostic' Islam remains faithful to primitive Christianity.[309]

Garcia's analysis of the poem's driving impulses is excellent, and I want to build on his argument that in 'this syncretistic mythographical tale, Jewish history is intertwined with the fate of the early Christians.'[310] The significance of such a move and an instinct in Shelley as early as 1814 provides the context for a re-evaluation of the significance of Islam in Shelley's entire oeuvre, albeit one severely underestimated and resolutely ignored by all except Garcia.

Islam, as I have argued, offers a third way whilst also, at the same time, enacting the suspension between the Hellenic and the Hebraic in its development and appropriation of both Hellenic philosophy and Hebraic theology. It is the missing strand of the Abrahamic triptych. And Shelley's interest in Islam, similar to his preoccupation with the East, is part of a desire to locate an alternative history of Platonic metaphysics which is untied to Christianity. Because Plato and Aristotle have afterlives in both the Christian West, and the Islamic (and Hebraic) East, Shelley, consciously or unconsciously, identifies Islam as a discourse descending from classical Greek

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[308] Shelley, 'A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 219.
[309] Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment*, p. 189.
[310] Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment*, p. 194.

philosophy uncorrupted by Christianity. As I will argue, it is possible in Shelley's 'Defence' to trace a line from Aristotle and Plato, through the Islamic philosopher al-Fārābī and the Jewish philosopher Maimonides to Spinoza, and in this way, I hope, recover the medieval in the midst of post-Enlightenment modernity.

For Shelley, then, in his letters of 1818/19, Imagination works on fundamentally the same plane as God the creator, and it is imagination itself which is, for Shelley, divinely inspired. Poetry is not – cannot – be the creation of 'cold prudence': it must spring from 'divine insanity'. How then can Shelley call himself an atheist, when it is so clear that some kind of divinity operates within his metaphysical system? Perhaps we can go back to Spinoza to historicise this structure of feeling. There is a long history of interest in the impact of Spinoza upon Shelley in scholarship which unfortunately remains largely unfulfilled. Perhaps best done in part by Timothy Morton in his article on Spinoza in Shelley's notes to *Queen Mab*, the wider implications of the Spinoza influence have been alluded to by Marjorie Levinson in her article 'A Motion and a Spirit: Romancing Spinoza' (2007), in which she noted a wider piece of research on Spinoza in Romantic Poetry – in particular Shelley, including the 'Defence' – which has so far not been published. Most recently work on Spinoza, and his impact upon Shelley, has been undertaken by Anthony Uhlmann, who, working with the Spinoza scholar Moira Gatens, has published on the link between an aesthetic theory of Spinoza and Shelley's aesthetic theory in the 'Defence'. I will later in this chapter take up the impact of Spinoza on Shelley's 'Defence' in order to trace a genealogy of theories of imagination and prophecy from Islamic philosopher al-Fārābī through Maimonides and Spinoza to Shelley; however, at this moment, I wish only to indicate the general significance of Spinoza upon Shelley's thought and philosophy. As Uhlmann has argued, it is Spinoza who:

> offers the most coherent and cogent statements of those range of perspectives that have been grouped under this heading of 'Spinozism' or, in the English context 'Deism', which had as its essential components the positing of an immanent rather than a transcendent God; the idea that we are led to understanding through the three kinds of knowledge

(imagination, reason, intuition) rather than through the revealed truths of sacred texts, and that achieving understanding is a fundamental good.[311]

For Shelley, who translated parts of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in 1817 (now lost), Spinoza was a model figure. Shelley even read the Enlightenment as being essentially Dutch in content, writing in 'A Philosophical View of Reform' that it is 'The Republic of Holland, which has been so long an armoury of the arrows of learning by which superstition has been wounded even to death'.[312] Such a reading is remarkably similar to Jonathan Israel's account of the Enlightenment, in which Holland figures as the centre of radical Enlightenment discourse and from which it spreads across Europe. Israel's Enlightenment figure *par excellence* is of course, Spinoza, who Israel argues is *the event* which puts into action the chain of discourse which we now describe as the Enlightenment.[313]

The position on Spinoza is not only relevant to Shelley's maturity. As early as 1811 he was writing to Elizabeth Hitchener his conception of God in a particularly explicit Spinozist vein:

> I have lately had some conversation with Southey which has elicited my true opinions of God—he says I ought not to call myself an Atheist, since in reality I believe that the Universe is God.—I tell him I believe that God is another signification for the Universe.—I then explain—'I think reason and analogy seem to countenance the opinion that life is infinite—that as the soul which now animates this frame was once the vivifying principle of the infinitely lowest Chain of existence, so it is ultimately destined to attain the highest.[314]

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311 Anthony Uhlmann, "Spinoza, aesthetics, and Percy Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry'", in *Textual Practice*, 33 (2019) p. 722.
312 Shelley, 'A Philosophical View of Reform', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 231.
313 Marjorie Levinson notes how '[t]he change in our grasp of Spinoza's cultural presence is the achievement of one scholar, Jonathan Israel.' "A Motion and a Spirit: Romancing Spinoza", in *Studies in Romanticism*, 46. 4 (2007), pp. 367-408 (this p. 375). The wider exploration of the relationship between Shelley and Spinoza is beyond the scope of this chapter, although I do hope to indicate both the significance of Spinoza in view of both Israel's foregrounding of the 'radical enlightenment' tradition and the Jewish scholarly tradition which seeks to re-emphasise Spinoza's inheritance from the Jewish (and Islamic) philosophical tradition, Maimonides in particular. Rather than seeing these traditions as mutually exclusive, I think that they can be, and are synthesised in Shelley's development of theories of imagination and what we could call the ideal state.
314 *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, p. 215.

We can hear Spinoza ringing through this description, and it is Shelley's reading of Spinoza which gives him two strands of the same discourse – that he is both an 'Atheist' and a Deist. Before considering Shelley's 'Spinozism', we need to trace two lines of thought in relation to Spinoza's Atheism/Deism. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), Leo Strauss made the argument that many philosophical writers write esoterically, that is, they obscure their 'true' meaning behind layers of meanings which utilise obscurity, contradiction and irony. Strauss argues therefore that Spinoza's pantheism was a deliberate cover for his atheism, disguising his true intentions and protecting himself from persecution. This is perhaps the most explicit labelling of Spinoza's twin discourses of response – the first which states Spinoza was an Atheist by philosophy and by implication, the second which states that Spinoza never wished to disavow God, but simply to delineate His power and its teleological implications in this world. We might then read Spinoza as an Atheist whose *Ethics* sought to establish the moral basis for the secular state, or we might read Spinoza as continuing in the Jewish philosophical tradition by both critiquing and approving of Maimonides's arguments regarding imagination and philosophy and the nature of prophecy.[315] I wish to suggest that a synthesis is possible between the position of Israel and the 'radical Enlightenment' Spinoza scholars and the Spinoza scholars who include Spinoza within a tradition of Jewish Philosophy, and that that synthesis is actually apparent in what we might call Shelley's Spinozism, which joins together both a radical politicism with a philosophical 'Platonism'. As previously, we should note the multiple terms that act as synonymous with Shelley: his 'Platonism', 'Neoplatonism', 'idealism' versus his 'materialism', 'atheism', 'radicalism'.[316] Such a synthesis, or at

[315] We might consider Israel's 'radical Enlightenment' account, alongside readings of Spinoza as atheist by scholars such as Leo Strauss and Ernst Cassirer (see Strauss, Spinoza's Critique of Religion (University of Chicago Press, 1965), and Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, trans. by Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton University Press, 1951)), in relation to the Jewish philosophical scholarship of Shlomo Pines, Alexander Altmann, Warren Zev Harvey and Heidi Ravven, which re-emphasises Spinoza's inheritance from that tradition. The relevance of these readings here lies in Shelley's conjunction of political radicalism and metaphysical speculation, which I read as bringing these emphases together.

[316] It is a larger point, alluded to but largely beyond the compass of this thesis, that it is in the philosophy of Spinoza we can find a pathway through the binary between materialism versus idealism, or indeed, more appropriately, between medievalism and enlightenment. I subscribe to the positions of both Warren Zev Harvey, who states that Spinoza is not the 'harbinger of modernity' but 'the last of the medieval Maimonidians' (Harvey, 'A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 19.2 (1981), p. 172), and to the position of Israel that Spinoza's role in

least, a point of view outside of the binary between materialism and idealism, stimulates Shelley's own antagonist dialectic in what I have referred to (after Hegel) as his 'pathway of doubt'. From the beginning, Spinoza had been read as an atheist, and had been labelled as such, in spite of his own denials. Indeed, Shelley thus identifies himself as an atheist even as he reproduces Spinoza's pantheism. It is in this way that Shelley participates in a contemporary metaphysical struggle between conceptions of atheism and God. Shelley's own pathway of doubt therefore finds its conception at the moment Spinoza's critics deny that it is possible to maintain a belief in God if that God is immanent in the frame of the universe, rather than above it, or that religious texts were the product of their historical environment, rather than divinely inspired.

The issue is at stake in the epistolary argument between Shelley and Southey in 1820. Shelley had been led to believe that it was Southey who had authored a highly critical review of Shelley's *Revolt* in the *Quarterly Review* in April 1819 which included a powerful *ad hominem* attack of Shelley. The review had stated that Shelley,

> draws largely on the rich stores of another mountain poet, to whose religious mind it must be a matter, we think, of perpetual sorrow to see the philosophy which comes pure and holy from his pen, degraded and perverted, as it continually is, by this miserable crew of *atheists or pantheists*, who have just sense enough to abuse its terms, but neither heart nor principle to comprehend its import [my italics].[317]

Beyond noticing that pantheism (and pantheists) are synonymised with atheism (and atheists), we can also see the trajectory of Southey's youthful radicalism broken off from the 'atheism' of

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the 'Enlightenment' was central. What I would add, however, is to emphasise Israel's account of the failure of the radical Enlightenment to the extent that *in spite of* the scholarly efforts of Israel, the common conception of the 'Enlightenment' is not Spinozist, but an amalgam of the 'materialist' reductivism of Locke, Hume, Adam Smith and Montesquieu. Moreover, the continued exploration of the themes of Spinozism in continental contemporary philosophy including most famously in the work of Deleuze, Negri and Balibar suggests that the West has not yet run to the end of its involvement in Spinozism in the same way that could be said for our involvement in Locke, Hume et al. Even if we point to the secular state and suggest its conception in Spinoza, it is the secular state of Locke which we see built around us. In brief, I would hazard a statement that Spinoza remains invested in the possibility of metaphysics, much like Shelley; whereas it is precisely metaphysics which is made redundant in our contemporary age in the West, ground to a halt by the new epistemology of empiricism, economics and statistics.

[317] Shelley's description, from, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, p. 127.

Shelley's radicalism. The point is made by Shelley, who castigates Southey for 'abandon[ing] the cause to which your early writings were devoted'.[318] Southey's response is equally vicious:

> Nor were my opinions ever similar to yours in any other point, than that desiring, as I still desire, a greater equality in the condition of men, I entertained erroneous notions concerning the making of that improvement in society & the means whereby it was to be promoted. Except in this, light & darkness were not more opposite than my youthful opinions & yours. You would have found me as strongly opposed in my youth as I am at this time to Atheism and immorality of any kind […] The Christianity which I recommended to your consideration is to be found in the Scriptures & in the book of Common Prayer.[319]

It is a mistake therefore, to apply today's rubric of atheism to the atheism that Shelley declared with confidence throughout his life, famously using the term to describe himself in a hotel entry book in Switzerland which Byron later censored. We must contextualise Shelley's Atheism, and inscribe onto the term as he uses it a theism which is by turns pantheistic, Neoplatonic, Spinozist. We would not expect any so-called atheist of our own period to also hold the position that 'the Universe is God' or another Spinozian/pantheistic account of God, although this is the position that Shelley takes. Implicit then, in Shelley's 'atheism' is also a Spinozist pantheism.[320] We need to be able to distinguish between the two versions of atheism that I have here identified. As I am discussing Shelley and trying to enter into his epistemological and linguistic frameworks in order to understand his ideas I will maintain his use of the word 'atheism' without changing it to a word closer to our understanding of the concept today (for example, pantheism, or even 'Neoplatonism'). However, when referring to the modern understanding of the term and concept of atheism, I will use the expression *'strict atheism'* to denote the contemporary sense of the concept

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[318] Shelley, letter to Robert Southey, June 1820, in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, p. 204.
[319] Robert Southey to Shelley, 12 October 1820 in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, p. 205.
[320] There is ongoing debate over the best way to describe Spinoza's views on the nature of the Universe and his pronouncements concerning God. As my intention is not to investigate the metaphysics of Spinoza as such, but to understand Shelley's metaphysics, I will use the term 'pantheism' for ease of clarity.

– one that more thoroughly rejects notions related to theism, such as those present in the pantheism of Neoplatonism.

In Shelley's appropriation of two strands of the same discourse regarding Spinoza, that of both 'Atheism' and 'pantheism', we must address the lack of 'radicalism' in Shelley's reading of Spinoza, and put paid to the idea that Shelley was a fully-fledged 1820s socialist.[321] Although there are certainly currents of Shelley's writing on superstition that suggests a conception of false consciousness prior to the articulation of the notion of 'false consciousness' in Friedrich Engels' letter of 1893, Shelley's writing on religion, and Christianity, is not wholly contentious. There are two ways to understand this, and a position must be taken. The first is that Shelley's reading of Spinoza is alert to the esoteric meaning of Spinoza's argument, and that Shelley simply reproduces that esotericism (that is, he reproduces the explicit message of Spinoza regarding God rather than an implicit or hidden argument of strict atheism) in his work. The second is that Shelley did not identify the strict atheism of Spinoza that was identified by his other readers and in the terms of Strauss's argument failed to understand Spinoza accurately.

I hold that it is easy to make the argument for the second position. Firstly, it is unlikely that Shelley would have faithfully reproduced Spinoza's esotericism in all his communication. Whilst he may have done so in published writings, it is unlikely that he would have reproduced that hidden meaning in letters or conversation without the loaded irony of shared meanings between friends. There is no such irony in Shelley's discussions on his brand of atheism in his letters – as with the letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, Shelley made clear his thinking on God, religion, and atheism

[321] An example of a critic who fails to be sensitive to Shelley's own epistemological framework, and thus inscribes onto Shelley's radicalism a post-Marxian understanding of societal relations is Marilyn Butler, whose essay on Shelley's mythmaking is generally sympathetic towards the dialectical antagonism of dogmatic religion and esoteric knowledge ('Myth and Mythmaking in the Shelley Circle', *ELH*, 49.1 (1982), p. 50-72). Butler makes the significant point that the movement towards a syncretic vision of religions and myths was also an attempt to subvert the orthodoxy of traditional religious dogma. So the leaning toward esotericism is both a movement into religious discourse as well as a subversion of dogma. It is in this discord that we will be best placed to locate Shelley. Butler, however, does not make explicit the significance of the difference between Shelley's epistemological framework and a modern critical vocabulary, and to this extent she estimates Shelley's radical atheism as somewhat concurrent with our own time. Her point on Darwin could be developed by acknowledging Shelley's blind spot regarding evolution, as she singles out Shelley's reading of Darwin against that by Wordsworth and Coleridge, who she calls the 'two orthodox Christians among the Romantic poets' (which, especially regarding Coleridge, is neither fair nor accurate).

confidently, somewhat naively, and just as boldly as his self-description in the Swiss hotel register. It is clear then, from reading not only Shelley's published poetry, but also his letters and the recollections of friends (including some highly critical remarks on Shelley's atheism by Byron) that Shelley was explicitly appropriating both Spinoza's pantheism and his atheism without questioning the implications of the tussle between those concepts.

Indeed, for Shelley, this ideological antagonism was particularly valuable, as it allowed him to be both radical in his politics whilst providing an ontological foundation for his esotericism. In this sense, I think that Shelley reproduces the Spinozian elision of the binary between materialism and idealism, or, as I have previously suggested, could more appropriately be called the binary between the medieval and the post-Enlightenment modernity. Shelley's fascination with esoteric knowledge, his preoccupation with metaphysics beyond a grounding in political pragmatism, his reproduction of both Spinoza's Hellenism and Hebraism: all point to a lacuna in Enlightenment discourse that elides the materialism/idealism binary. It is within this lacuna that we should read Shelley's discursive engagement with Islam. Indeed, as with Spinoza, whose philosophy engages both the Jewish and Islamic heritage, Shelley's engagement with Islam reaches toward an alternative history of Hellenism unimpeded by Christianity or the Enlightenment West. Indeed, what we can begin to appreciate in Shelley is that he recovers a Hellenic tradition through Islamic and Jewish philosophy that will enable him to foreground a revolutionary metaphysics of the imagination that is influenced most significantly by Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

This gap, then, between modernity's critique of this Deistic epistemology and the opening of discursive horizons around the point of imagination, is where we must locate Shelley's attitude to religion and its content. For Shelley, it is explicit that the authority of dogma is an unkind tyranny, ready to stifle freedom of thought, behaviour, and personal ethics. The broadening of a discursive framework that reopens old horizons for a potential understanding of religion at the same time removes the inherent critique of modernity that many critics bear when they approach Shelley. In many ways, this inherent critique is perhaps why so much Shelley criticism concerns his

'Idealism', his 'Neoplatonism', or his 'materialism'. Such interests are valid, and productive of understanding Shelley within the discourses that he operated within in his time; however, there is another tendency within Shelley criticism to see him as a forerunner of modernity, a poet whose metaphysics corresponds more closely to our own, as an 'Atheist, Democrat and Philanthropist'. Such a view is in part instigated by the Marxian comment that Shelley 'would always have been one of the advanced guard of socialism'.[322] Whatever truth there may be in that, Shelley's 'radicalism' should not prevent us from acknowledging that Shelley's epistemological and (by his maturity) political foundations allowed for legislation to be created by poets, whose work 'marks the before unapprehended relation of things'.[323] This is Poet as Prophet as Ruler, and it is as unlike later nineteenth- (or indeed twentieth)-century socialism as that sounds.

Finally, to reject any suggestion of Shelley's radicalism as inherently 'modern', I want to suggest that Shelley in fact did have access to the knowledge that would reconfigure his age's epistemological framework to resemble the framework of our time. For it is the theory of evolution that most radically dismantles an epistemological framework that posits imaginative knowledge as valid in place of an understanding of metaphysics as radically contingent and therefore non-profound. Shelley read Erasmus Darwin from youth, and whilst he adopted many radical opinions and practices, Shelley never fully comprehended Erasmus Darwin's evolutionary theory that he posits in *The Temple of Nature* (1803). This is a revealing blind spot in Shelley's thinking and is itself revealing of his unconscious desire to maintain a valid hierarchy of knowledge in which 'divine madness' and 'Imagination' as master of passion and understanding can posit authorial legitimacy.[324]

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322 Edward and Eleanor Marx-Aveling, "Shelley and Socialism", *To-Day*, April 1888, pp. 103-116.
323 Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 278.
324 I would argue that Darwin is one of the last of the British Enlightenment thinkers, working in the tradition of empiricism which I have already suggested characterises the common conception of Enlightenment as well as the more significant *event* from which modernity emerges. As noted before, I pay tribute to Israel's formula of the 'radical Enlightenment' – I just agree with Israel's later (and less quoted) hypothesis: that it failed. Shelley's blind-spot regarding Darwin's nascent theory of evolution as well as the fact that his philosophy is not steeped in Locke or Hume, suggests to me that Shelley is participating in another (to my mind more exciting) discourse of modernity.

This framework is most explicitly realised in Shelley's fragmentary essay 'On Christianity' (1817-18). Christ's God, according to Shelley, is 'the interfused and overruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things'; he – or it – is 'something mysteriously and illimitably pervading the frame of things' and 'a power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords, at will'.[325] The description of God here returns Shelley to a Blakean approach to Christianity, wherein religious institutions are criticised whilst a divine content is re-evaluated and re-appropriated for ethical as well as metaphysical use. For Shelley then, any sense of his utopia to come (and I am here deliberately echoing Derrida's framework of democracy to come), must reemploy the divine content of revealed religion whilst rejecting the institutionalised, delimiting apparatus.[326] Accordingly, Jesus then has much the same conception of God as Spinoza and Shelley himself, and it is incumbent upon Shelley that he reveal this:

> According to Jesus Christ, God is neither the Jupiter, who sends rain upon the earth; nor the Venus, through whom all living things are produced; nor the Vulcan, who presides over the terrestrial element of fire; nor the Vesta, that preserves the light which is enshrined in the sun and moon and stars. He is neither the Proteus nor the Pan of the material world. But the word God, according to the acceptation of Jesus Christ, unites all the attributes which these denominations contain and is the [interpoint] and over-ruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things.[327]

The significance of this passage is that Shelley wanted, both consciously and unconsciously, to maintain a potency for God or theism that was even in his time being denied by other writers and thinkers. Shelley's pronouncement on the 'violent dogmatism' of the materialists is here indicative of his rejection of an epistemological framework that denies agency to the immaterial and supra-

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325 Shelley, 'On Christianity', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 201.
326 See Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Indiana University Press, 1992).
327 Shelley, 'On Christianity', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 201.

rational. In his 1819 essay 'On Life', Shelley discusses the influence of the materialist writers such as Pierre-Simon Laplace, the Marquis de Condorcet and Baron d'Holbach who had most explicitly influenced the arguments of *Queen Mab*.

> The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, and its fatal consequences in morals, their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things, had early conducted me to materialism. This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk and dispenses them from thinking. But I was discontented with such a view of things as it afforded; man is a being of high aspirations 'looking both before and after,' whose 'thoughts wander through eternity', disclaim alliance with transience and decay, incapable of imagining to himself annihilation, existing but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be.[328]

Such comments are not indicative of a mature Shelley alone; they take us right back to the same aporias we found explored in *Alastor*.

Now that we have come full circle in an approach to Shelley's epistemology, we must finally examine the significance for Shelley of Islam in his metaphysics. Whilst the first part of my chapter examined the anxiety over the historical contingency of the East versus its irreal construction as part of a western discourse, this second part will establish how, for Shelley, Islam functions as a living alternative model for a lost Hebraic/Hellenic past, one which can recover a Neoplatonic (or Pythagorean) descent.

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[328] Shelley, 'On Life', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 173.

I have already suggested that Islam can never be fully Orientalised: its living traditions of belief, interpretation and practice cannot be exhausted by the Western discourses that seek to represent it. Before I trace the lineage of Islamic philosophy through al-Fārābī to Shelley, I want to articulate that point fully. If one of the central problems with Orientalism is whether it constructs the East in its own image, Islam brings the limits of that construction into view. Although it certainly exists within the Orientalist discourse, there is no way in which it could be said that Islam is entirely constructed by a Western discourse. Whereas Orientalist discourses often operate within a marginal plane on issues of culture, difference, and the Other, Islam's living adherents sustain traditions of interpretation and practice through which Western representations can be contested, rather than accepted as authoritative accounts of what Islam is. The discourses of Orientalism then, which are so pernicious precisely because of issues about falsifiability, encounter in Islam living traditions through which their claims can be challenged. Western attempts to tell Muslims what they are encounter adherents who refuse to be defined in Western or European terms, and who maintain the terms of their religious inheritance. This contest over the authority to define Islam is central to the argument developed here.

My analysis does not seek to put image and representation side by side and compare the two, although such work is valuable. Rather, I want to remain in the sphere of the discourse and understand the plane in which it operates, noticing, and interrogating, the moments of elision which signal a collapse of the frame. Indeed, it is rare that the discourses on Islam in the poetry of these Romantic poets come close to being real and contingent in the way in which Islam is really alive in the hearts of Muslims – and here Byron gets the closest. However, I want to make the point as strenuously as possible that there is a basic malfunction in a discourse that treats its representations of Islam as sufficient to comprehend the forms of life through which Islam is lived. I am not saying Islam cannot be known by non-Muslims – there are tenets that are no secret, and can be appreciated by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. But when we are discussing *poetry*, whose ontology is not an empirical construction of an outside phenomenon, but a living,

contingent creation, we must refute the logic of academic empiricism to argue instead that to 'know Islam' solely through its external description is like describing a house by numbering its windows. It is this gap between external description and lived meaning that I read these poems as continually revealing.

For poetry, all religions are secrets. And it is the secret of Islam that holds such fascination for Romantic poets. Because it is a secret, the familiar binary of academic knowledge is inverted in poetic discourse: rather than the Western discourse on the East maintaining a superiority over the reality of the East, in poetry, the reality of the East is hierarchically dominant over any poetic discourse that might touch upon it. In this respect, the hegemonic relationship of Islam to the 'West' or to Europe, is inverted compared to the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism. Whereas Orientalism maintains its power through withholding the real, becoming more interested in the fate of the representation over the image, the discourse on Islam must always know that it speaks on what it does not know. This is *the condition* upon which the poetic discourse is founded, as opposed to the scholarly discourses. And it is also the reason why, although the discourses *on* Islam intersect with the discourse *of* Orientalism, the power in the binary, between Islam and the 'West' which discourses upon it, resides with Islam. For Southey, Byron, and also Shelley, are aware of the supplementary nature of the Eastern reality – and there is the constant fear that the supplement will run away with the controlled representation they wish to sustain. It is a constant anxiety that Southey's (and Byron's) footnotes will run away with the poem.

As I noted in Chapter 1, this also means that the power within the binary – for poetry – the stronger partner, as it were, is Islam, rather than its discourse. So, whereas Orientalism maintains its potency by projecting the truthfulness of its representation and was able to develop a primacy as a result of this trick of verity, any discourse on Islam becomes limited when it treats external description as sufficient to comprehend Islam's lived forms of life. Whilst writers on Orientalist discourses often verge into discussions on Imperialism, and indeed, partly acknowledge their task to be the Foucauldian/Saidian project of analysing processes of power, and thus placing their work

in the context of evidence for Said's critique, in the case of discourses on Islam, the frames of the discourse are significantly different. Here there is less (but not zero) ability for the discourse to project its reality onto Islam.[329]

Shelley's writing grapples with this issue multiple times, as we have seen in the analysis of the poems. The question of the living Islam, and the reality of the historical, contingent experience of Islam is a point upon which Shelley cannot discourse, one which he cannot disclose. Islam is an esoteric centre point in Shelley's oriental poems, one which he desires to comprehend in the same way he desires to comprehend his Neoplatonic, Hellenic, Hebraic inheritance. It is therefore also the case that Shelley co-opts the mystery of Islam to solve his metaphysical problems – and he does this through the framework of an epistemology that I have already described. This is what I mean, when I argue that it is Islam which is the key to unlock Shelley's utopian revolution, his 'democracy to come'.[330] What we have seen in *The Revolt of Islam* is that the *translation* of some unknown aspect in the tradition of Islam is the condition upon which the revolution will be sustained. But, since Shelley's poetry acknowledges that Islam is unknowable, Islam haunts the very landscapes upon which Shelley's utopian system is inscribed. However, unbeknownst to Shelley, there is an act of translation which is at work in his process, and it is – remarkably, miraculously – through that process of translation that Shelley is able to predicate a utopian society.

[329] Although this has long been its aim, and today is stronger than ever, when the West wishes to declare greater knowledge of Islam than the Muslim community – Macron as example par excellence, declaring Islam 'in a state of crisis' and taking control of what can and what cannot be spoken, worn, believed by a Muslim.

[330] I am of course using Derrida's positing of the constant process of democracy, which can never be fully realised, but must always be held '*à venir*'. Central to the concept of 'democracy to come' is the internal contradiction between sovereignty and the *demos*. In suggesting the autoimmune response of the structure to constantly resist the internal contradiction, Derrida is able to posit a transformational process at the heart of the idea of democracy. Shelley's utopia, built on the idea of poets as legislators, could be said to echo the centrality of the autoimmune response – constantly building and deconstructing meaning through the process of poetry.

8. The Prophetic Imagination: al- Fārābī – Maimonides – Spinoza – Shelley

Whilst I have already grounded what we might call Shelley's 'religious sensibility' in Spinoza, I want to trace a line of descent in Shelley's Neoplatonism through the Islamic philosophical tradition. In particular, I want to bring attention to a genealogy that Shelley inherits from Spinoza that can be traced back through Spinoza's reading of Maimonides to al-Fārābī, thus linking Shelley to another Islamic tradition that emerges in the 'Defence' as well as Shelley's poems of the same year: *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais*. The significance of their production in the same burst of energy that propelled Shelley's work of 1821 suggests that Shelley was in that time working through the problem that I have labelled his particular dialectic – his 'pathway of despair'. I wish to suggest then, that in 1821 Shelley had reached perhaps not a synthesis of this extraordinarily vibrant discord in his thought, but certainly a way of representing its relations, and that Shelley is able to provide both an explication of his resolutions on the relations between revolution and imagination as well as an artistic rendering of those relations in *Epipsychidion*, *Adonais* and *Hellas*. To work through these relations—between Shelley's revolutionary materialism and an 'idealism' that continually reaches toward a utopia of imagination articulated in language and poetry—I want to reconstruct a genealogy of Shelley's prophetic imagination, tracing its descent from Spinoza, through Maimonides, to al-Fārābī, where imagination emerges as the mediating power between intellect, revelation, and action.

There has been a recent surge of interest in both Spinoza's relation to Jewish philosophy and the relation of the philosophy of Maimonides to his Islamic contemporaries and influences.[331]

[331] Cf. for example: Lawrence V. Berman, "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfarabi," in Joseph A. Buijs, ed*., Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Jeffrey Macy, "Prophecy in Alfarabi and Maimonides: The Imaginative and Rational Faculties," in Y. Yovel and S. Pines, ed., *Maimonides and Philosophy* (Martinus

I have already emphasised Shelley's reliance on Spinoza for an understanding of God, which has often been mis-construed as simply Neoplatonism. In fact, we can understand Spinoza (and Shelley's) position more accurately by acknowledging the Islamic philosophical tradition inherent in Spinoza's thought. In particular, I wish to draw attention to Spinoza's conception of what has been termed the 'Prophetic Imagination', and relate the scholarship on al-Fārābī's influence on Spinoza to Shelley's working through of his own depiction of the Prophetic Imagination in his 'Defence'. The relationship between Spinoza's conception of prophecy and religion in his *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* and al-Fārābī's conception of prophecy in *The Virtuous City* (also translated as *The Perfect State*) (Mabādiʾ Ārāʾ Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila), has been noted before by Shlomo Pines, who argues in his article 'The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Maimonides' that,

> It is not a matter of indifference, that Maimonides encountered in a work written by al-Farabi, on whom he relied more than any other Arab philosopher, a conception which by and large seems to have corresponded to what was Spinoza's conception of prophecy.[332]

The link to Shelley's 'Defence', however, has not been made. A thorough analysis of the influence of Spinoza upon Shelley is surely urgently required, and unfortunately goes beyond the scope of my investigations here. However, I do believe that we can make a start by tracing the germination of al-Fārābī's conception of imagination and prophecy in *The Virtuous City* through Maimonides and Spinoza to Shelley's articulation of the same topic in the 'Defence'. In his article on Ibn Dāwūd's combination of an Aristotelian and Sufi approach to Psalm 139, Warren Zev Harvey notes that in spite of the probability of the wider influence of Jewish and Muslim philosophers

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Nijhoff: 1986); Shlomo Pines's Introduction to his translation of the Guide, and his change of mind in "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides" in I. Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History* (Harvard University Press, 1979); and Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics" in *Aufklärung: Studien zur jüdischen Geistesgeschichte* (J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987). See also F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (George Allen & Unwin, 1958) and Miriam Galston, *Politics and Excellence* (Princeton University Press, 1990). I will be mostly engaged with Heidi Ravven's foundational work on Maimonides's conception of imagination and its impact on Spinoza, which I believe we can trace through to Shelley.

[332] Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides." Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature. ed. I. Twersky. vol. I, pp. 82-109, (this p. 95).

upon Maimonides, he never cites Avicenna nor al-Ghazālī, preferring 'to cite al-Fārābī (6 times) and Ibn Bājja (6 times), whom he considered to be stricter Aristotelians'.[333] So it is clearly the case that Spinoza would have been acquainted with al-Fārābī and other Muslim philosophers by name at least even if not with their completed works. That is hardly the case for Shelley, whose classical education it seems did not extend to the Muslim and Jewish Platonists and Aristotelians who carried the classical philosophical tradition through the 'dark ages' of Europe until it was rediscovered by Western scholasticism in the late Middle Ages. However, let us consider Shelley's depiction of prophecy in the 'Defence' in order to discover the theories of al-Fārābī nascent in Spinoza.

Shelley begins his 'Defence' by distinguishing between reason and imagination, a familiar trope through al-Fārābī, Maimonides and Spinoza. Shelley notes that of reason and imagination:

> the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced, and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to color them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity.[334]

We can see the trace of al-Fārābī here, who, in line with Aristotle, categorises the faculties of the soul, and considers the imaginative faculty intermediary between the sensitive and rational faculties. As Howard Kreisel explains, Maimonides synthesises two complementary naturalistic accounts of prophecy. The first understands prophecy as the culmination of intellectual perfection, in which the human intellect attains conjunction with the supernal Active Intellect and thereby receives *waḥy*—a form of divine revelation granting access to metaphysical truths that transcend the limits of discursive reasoning. The second, indebted in part to al-Fārābī, locates prophecy in the imaginative faculty, through which theoretical knowledge is transmitted as symbolic or figurative

[333] Warren Zev Harvey, 'Ibn Daud's Aristotelian-Sufi Reading of Psalm 139', in *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 68, 2020, pp. 297-306. This p. 298)
[334] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 276-7.

representation.[335] We can read Maimonides's definition of prophecy as the 'Sixth Fundamental Principle':

> The Sixth Fundamental Principle is [the existence] of Prophecy… Among men are found certain individuals so gifted and perfected that they can receive pure intellectual form. Their human intellect clings to the Active Intellect, while a noble overflow pours from it upon them. These men are the prophets; this is what prophecy is.[336]

For Maimonides, the distinction between the prophet and the legislator turns on the relation between imagination and intellect. Prophets are endowed with both faculties at their highest pitch, whereas non-biblical leaders – what Shelley might call 'legislators of the world' – operate purely through imagination. As Heidi M. Ravven demonstrates, prophecy for Maimonides is a process in which the divine overflow from the Active Intellect first perfects the rational faculty and only afterward overflows to the imagination.[337]

This hierarchy, however, does not diminish the role of imagination. Rather, as Ravven observes, it makes imagination the necessary instrument through which rational truth is rendered in symbolic, persuasive form. The prophet's imagination translates abstract philosophical truths into images and narratives comprehensible to the multitude; prophecy is thus the vehicle by which the Torah communicates its deeper philosophical content.[338] Yet because this figurative mode conceals rational truths under imaginative guise, Maimonides insists that its esoteric nature not be revealed to the masses. What appears most mysterious about prophecy – its figurative, poetic form – is in fact its most human aspect, an embodiment of reason in imaginative language.[339]

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335 Howard Kreisel, 'Moses Maimonides' in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. by Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (Routledge, 1997), p. 264.
336 Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (Behrman House, 1972), pp. 418- 419.
337 Heidi M. Ravven "Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides about the Prophetic Imagination: Part 1. Maimonides on Prophecy and the Imagination" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2001, pp. 197-8.
338 Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 1', pp. 200-02.
339 Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 1', pp. 204–05.

This is a crucial departure from al-Fārābī. As Ravven notes, al-Fārābī conceives of the imagination as capable of representing metaphysical realities through 'imitations', or sensory images of great beauty and perfection; the joy of ultimate felicity is thus an aesthetic as well as intellectual experience.[340] For al-Fārābī, imagination participates positively in the apprehension of truth, serving as a bridge between sense and intellect. Maimonides, by contrast, delineates the prophet and the legislator precisely to mark the limits of that faculty: the prophet's imagination is guided by reason, while the legislator's imagination operates alone. As Ravven explains, this distinction 'marks the separation between imaginative and rational genres – the Bible and philosophy – that had been more dialectically united in al-Farabi'.[341] This splitting of imagination and philosophy, previously harmonised in al-Fārābī, introduces deep tension into Maimonides's thought. If imagination is the medium through which revelation occurs, yet also the mark of its human limitation, then prophecy embodies both the highest perfection and the deepest ambiguity of human understanding. It is this very ambiguity that Spinoza later seizes upon and exposes.

What happens to Maimonides's carefully balanced conception of prophecy in Spinoza is, as Ravven shows, both an appropriation and a critique. Spinoza inherits Maimonides's psychological account of prophecy as imaginative translation but strips it of its metaphysical dimension, transforming it into a natural process of human cognition.[342] For both thinkers, prophecy is not the reception of divine information but the imaginative expression of truths already accessible through reason.

However, Spinoza radicalises Maimonides' insight. Whereas Maimonides maintained the divine source of prophetic emanation, Spinoza reinterprets prophecy as a purely human phenomenon: a vivid and morally charged form of imaginative knowledge that operates within the bounds of natural law.[343] In doing so, Spinoza transforms the hierarchy between intellect and

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[340] Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 1', pp. 195–96.
[341] Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 1', pp. 210–11.
[342] Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides about the Prophetic Imagination: Part 2. Spinoza's Maimonideanism', in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2001), pp. 387-89.
[343] Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 2', pp. 391–92.

imagination into a political one – between philosophers who understand by reason and prophets who move the multitude through imagination.[344]

This transformation reveals the latent vulnerability in Maimonides's own position. Having defined prophecy as both imaginative and rational, yet legislators as purely imaginative, Maimonides had opened the way for Spinoza's reversal. Ravven traces how Spinoza appropriates this distinction to deny the philosophers' presence in the prophetic class altogether: the biblical prophets, he argues, were not philosophers but imaginative moral teachers. The esoteric link between prophecy and reason that Maimonides guarded becomes, in Spinoza's reading, a myth. As Ravven observes, this critique follows a line that Maimonides himself made possible. In Shlomo Pines's formulation – one that Ravven approvingly cites – '[i]t was an easy point to make that there is no scriptural evidence whatever that the biblical prophets were philosophers, and Spinoza makes it.'[345]

It is also the case that Shelley seems to intuit the problem that arises when the relationship between imagination and reason is sharply delineated and split. In 'A Defence of Poetry', he writes:

> Reason is the enumeration of qualities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those qualities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.[346]

Here Shelley restores a dialectic between reason and imagination that recalls, and perhaps is indirectly influenced by, the very problem Spinoza identifies in Maimonides. Shelley's formulation unites instrument and agent, body and spirit, suggesting that imagination gives moral and aesthetic value to what reason only enumerates.

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[344] Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 2', pp. 395–96.
[345] Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 2', p. 398.
[346] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Prose*, p. 277.

This restoration of the imaginative–rational dialectic also echoes the thread that runs through al-Fārābī's *Virtuous City*, Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, and Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: the notion that imagination is not merely cognitive but social. As Ravven observes, Maimonides's conception of imagination, inherited from al-Fārābī, is 'focused on the body (and its survival)' and 'operative in instituting moral conventions', making it the faculty through which the social body is constituted and maintained.[347] Spinoza, she argues, radicalises this idea by redefining imagination as the natural foundation of collective moral and political life. Shelley's view of the poet as both legislator and prophet thus continues this philosophical lineage. For him, the poet embodies the dual capacities that Maimonides separated and Spinoza naturalised – the imaginative power to move the multitude and the rational insight to discern unity among things. 'Poets', Shelley writes, 'according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators, or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters'. In Shelley's formulation, the poet reunites reason and imagination, reclaiming the prophetic role as both social and philosophical – a vision that, as Ravven helps us see, brings Spinoza's critique of prophecy full circle into the Romantic imagination.

This statement echoes Spinoza's account: 'the style of prophecy varied according to the manner of speaking of each prophet.'[348] However, it also gives Shelley a way of reconfirming the unity of imagination in the process of legislation – whether the name for the legislator is 'legislator' or 'prophet'. Shelley here then reverses Maimonides's distinction between the political leader and the prophet, which Spinoza criticised, and restores the unity of legislator and prophet. As Walzer demonstrates in his study of al-Fārābī, the philosopher sought to reconcile Greek theories of artistic and poetic inspiration with Islamic accounts of prophecy, presenting revelation not as supernatural rupture but as a perfected form of imaginative intellect. In this synthesis, al-Fārābī

[347] Ravven, 'Some Thoughts on What Spinoza Learned from Maimonides […] Part 2', p. 395.
[348] Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Hackett, 2001), p. 24.

transforms the Platonic and Plotinian tradition into a philosophical explanation of prophetic vision. As Walzer observes, 'a few scattered notices about the Platonising Hellenistic and Plotinian theory of art constitute the best parallel to al-Fārābī's theory of prophecy.'[349] Shelley, in turn, takes the account of prophecy in Spinoza and applies it – as al-Fārābī had done almost a thousand years earlier – to the construction of his own 'virtuous city'. This is the germination of al-Fārābī's *Virtuous City* blooming into modernity, and specifically, with Shelley, resonating with much later theories of language, and a phenomenology of presence in Derrida. For Shelley, then, poetry is the mirror 'of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present'. And so, we might ask, what are those shadows, if we look from our perspective of futurity? I think one of the shadows cast upon Shelley's past present is Islam, both in its nascent Wahabi iconoclasm and in the silenced tradition of Islamic philosophy.

I have previously described how, in *Alastor*, Shelley seeks an analogue of himself in the Other. In that poem, the implications of the intercourse between the two figures are overwhelmingly negative: I described the scene as a metaphorical rape of the imagined 'veilèd maid' within this Islamicate setting. I also pointed to the negativity of the content of 'the One' in *The Revolt of Islam*, as have Paul Whickman and Andrew Warren. However, I have also suggested that there is another aspect of Shelley's 'One' which is voiced elsewhere in his poetry, such as in *Adonais* and *Mont Blanc*, which is positive. Before concluding, I want to trace Shelley's 'One', or Eternal, back to its source – in the East.

Of all Shelley's poetry, *Adonais* is the most explicitly metaphysical for one simple reason – it deals with death, the afterlife, and the fear of 'cold mortality' (l. 486). It also has a particularly interesting title. Earl Wasserman has argued that with the name 'Adonais', Shelley combined the

[349] R. Walzer, 'Al-Farabi's Theory of Prophecy and Divination', in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 77.1 (1957), p. 145 (pp. 142-148)

Greek Adonis with the Hebrew Adonai (my Lord[s]), although the two words share the same etymology since the cult of Adonis was near Eastern in origin and the word Adonis is derived from the Canaanite word 'adōn (lord). In the very title, then, we have that combination of the Hellenic and the Hebraic, which we find so closely tied as to be, in fact, inseparable. In *Adonais* we find Shelley's One at its most positive, as the Eternal to which all return. Its most famous lines propound Shelley's philosophy:

> The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-colour'd glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments
>
> (ll. 460-4)

These lines however, go back to the source, the first Romantic text in English to go East – Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801):

> The many-colour'd domes
> Yet wore one dusky hue;
> The Cranes upon the Mosque
> Kept their night-clatter still,
> When thro' the gate the early Traveller past.[350]

And so, even in Shelley's imagination, Life, Heaven and Earth are entwined with the vision of a mosque.

[350] Robert Southey, 'Thalaba the Destroyer' in *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793-1810*, ed. by Lynda Pratt, 5 vols, (Pickering and Chatto, 2004), III, ed. by Tim Fulford (2004), p. 77 (fifth book, ll. 110-114).

9. Conclusion

In Warren's account of Shelley's 'immanent orientalist critique', he argues that what is left in poems like *Alastor* is a 'meticulous treatment of ethics', and that '[t]his ethical turn, which focuses on the (contingent, ephemeral, sympathetic) encounter between human being and human being, lies at the core of Shelley's critique of Orientalism.[351] This is perceptive, and I would like to bring that point to bear upon the context in which I have framed Shelley's dialectical process, contending philosophical idealism with political materialism, and extend the link back to Derrida, who foregrounds a phenomenological metaphysics in much the same way as Shelley.[352] I have previously described how, in *Alastor*, Shelley seeks an analogue of himself in the Other. In that poem, the implications of the intercourse between the two figures are overwhelmingly negative - I described the scene as a metaphorical rape of the 'veilèd maid'. I also pointed to the negativity of the content of 'the One' in *The Revolt of Islam*, as have Paul Whickman and Andrew Warren. However, I have also suggested that there is another aspect of Shelley's 'One' which is voiced elsewhere in his poetry, such as in *Adonais* and *Mont Blanc*, which is positive. I want to take up this issue of 'the one', now, and go back to what I think is the original germination of the drive for 'the one' which is in the desire to meet oneself in and submit oneself to the Other.

Shelley's repeated invocations of 'the One' crystallise the central tension in his thought: the yearning for unity that resists totalisation. His imagination is at once idealist and iconoclastic – a

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351 Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* p. 145.

352 Warren acknowledges, as Shelley scholars cannot fail to do, how common deconstructive readings of Shelley are, as if Shelley's poetry responds most obediently to a Derridean reading. My concern here is with the fertility of that relationship: Shelley himself tackles problems of Western metaphysics that Derrida would revisit over a century later. Indeed, I believe that Shelley's constant working through of language and meaning, knowledge and subject, signs and content led him to exactly the space where Derrida lingered in his work on Husserl. Shelley's response to such a problem is his poetry, with its convolutions and involutions and deconstructions, just as Derrida's response to the problem begins with différance and an a priori statement about the slipperiness of language. Where Shelley will take his response is to be seen in the 'Defence' in which he reconstructs the Platonic state through an act of radical rebellion by making legislation occur in the act of poetry, rather than philosophy, a very Derridean move. See Jacques Derrida, 'Living On: Border Lines', trans. by James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, by Harold Bloom and others (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 75–176.

power that seeks unity only by unmaking the idols that would close it down. Against M. H. Abrams's vision of Romanticism as the inward secularisation of theology, Shelley's 'one Power' unfolds as what Derrida and Levinas would call a relation of infinite responsibility to the Other.[353] The unity Shelley imagines is founded not upon sameness but upon difference: it is the ethical movement of reception and transformation, the 'hospitality' that knows its own impurity.[354] His iconoclasm, whether political or metaphysical, thus becomes an ethics of imagination – the refusal of mastery that allows revelation to occur. Yet as Derrida reminds us, every act of welcome inscribes; every openness entails the risk of appropriation.[355] Shelley's metaphysics of imagination therefore remains dynamic, defined by this ceaseless oscillation between freedom and responsibility, creation and relation.

This ethical reading finds its deeper structure in a metaphysical genealogy. The openness that Shelley calls 'the One' is not merely a moral posture but the poetic reanimation of a philosophical lineage – the transmission of the Active Intellect through the Islamic and Jewish traditions into European thought. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle had posited the *nous poietikos* as the intellect in act, the divine principle that actualises human thought. Islamic philosophy transformed this idea into the very axis of cosmology and epistemology: for al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, the Active Intellect mediates between God and the human soul, enabling both knowledge and prophetic vision. Through Maimonides and Spinoza, this doctrine becomes the foundation of monist metaphysics – *tawḥīd* translated into the language of geometry. Spinoza's *amor intellectualis Dei* secularises the ecstatic union of intellect and divine substance; Shelley, inheriting that transformation, restores its affective and creative dimension. His imagination is not a faculty of illusion but the human form of the Active Intellect itself: the process through which thought participates in being and being becomes self-conscious in thought.

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[353] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 26, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on* Exteriority, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 84.
[354] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby, (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 79.
[355] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pp. 79-81.

Shelley's desert poetics – those haunted, luminous spaces of *Ozymandias* and *Hellas* – stage this participation. The desolation of empire becomes the scene of renewed cognition: the imagination clearing away false mediations so that the divine intellect might perceive itself anew in the world. The 'Spirit of the Hour' who describes the transformed world in Act III of *Prometheus Unbound* is not a mere allegory of political revolution but a figure of the Active Intellect in act – the universal mind through which revelation and freedom coincide. In this sense, Shelley's iconoclasm parallels the metaphysical impulse of *tawḥīd*: the destruction of idols as the precondition for unity. The poet's task is to sustain this movement of purification and mediation, to hold open the relation between sense and intellect, matter and mind.

To conclude this story about Shelley and Islam, I want to point toward a restoration of the Islamic significance in Shelley scholarship, beginning with the best, and perhaps, most important, reader of Shelley's 'Neoplatonism': Abrams. Of all scholarship to be most alert to the traces of the medieval in Romantic post-Enlightenment poetry, it is Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism* which must be the foremost.

Abrams's arguments in *Natural Supernaturalism: tradition and revolution in romantic literature* (1973) provide one of the best frameworks for investigating Shelley's strange (for a supposed 'Atheist', although I hope I have historicised that term enough!) dependency upon the supernatural. The book's concern with 'the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking' provides a way of thinking about Shelley's metaphysics that I think should be (critically) recovered in contemporary scholarship. For example, the following passage in Abrams's introduction can read as highly enlightening on Shelley's 'pathway of doubt' that I have been tracing:

> A conspicuous Romantic tendency, after the rationalism and decorum of the Enlightenment, was a reversion to the stark drama and suprarational mysteries of the Christian story and doctrines and to the violent conflicts and abrupt reversals of the Christian inner life, turning on the extremes of destruction and creation, hell and heaven,

> exile and reunion, death and rebirth, dejection and joy, paradise lost and paradise regained.[356]

The statement reflects exactly the movement I have outlined in Shelley's recovery of Christian paradigms within the exclusion of a Christian institutionalism which we have seen in *The Revolt of Islam* and his poetic metaphysics. However, whilst I do want to recover much of Abrams's scholarship which is sensitive to a historical structure of sublime or religious experience that I think we have jettisoned in our current period I do want to perform a restoration of Islam to Abrams's Hellenic/Hebraic narrative.

Abrams's approach of returning to Plotinus to mark the genesis of Shelley's nascent 'One' is one way of elucidating the story of the 'radical monism'; however, to describe a narrative that 'Plotinus formulated a radical monism which holds that the first principle is the One, and that the One is identical with the Good' without so much as mentioning Islam is to substantially overlook an entire tradition that carried much of the content of the concept of 'radical monism' between both Christian and Jewish traditions, as we have seen with Spinoza.[357] The insistence on divine unity is, after all, central to Islamic tawḥīd, as essential to Sufism as to Wahabism. Abrams's narrative on the esoteric tradition performs a similar act of exclusion:

> There was some interchange between Kabbalism and European Hermeticism – that body of writings, evolving over many centuries of speculation, which existed both as an independent body of esoteric philosophy and as the metaphysical foundation of the science of alchemy -and though the one mode of wisdom undertakes to explicate the secret meaning of the Scriptures and the other to expound a secret practice, they share certain principles.[358]

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[356] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: tradition and revolution in romantic literature* (Norton, 1973), p. 66.
[357] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 147.
[358] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism,* p. 157.

However, as we saw in Shelley's *Alastor*, the merest hint of alchemy is linked to the desert through the persona of the Poet, and his eastern quest. To refer to alchemy and to exclude the Islamic tradition is to ignore the story the very word *alchemy* tells us. We use the word alchemy from the Arabic al-kīmiyā (الخيمياء), which came, in its turn, from the Greek khēmeía (χημεία). Let us be honest about the route that alchemy takes through its use in Greek, Arabic, Jewish traditions. For Shelley, esotericism is tied up in the East, in an ancient world that overlaps with contemporary Islam. I have demonstrated already, how, for Shelley, the idea of Wahabism is a force that returns Islam to its original status of a mystery in the desert, overcoming the colonialism of the Ottoman Empire. His view may well be erroneous – that is not my point, rather I have sought to trace this potency that, for Shelley, haunts the desert. By doing that I wish to exclude neither the Christian, Jewish, nor Hellenic traditions, but to elucidate how close they are in Shelley's metaphysical inheritance. For Abrams then, to state that

> the doctrine that perfection is identical with simple unity and that the cosmic course is from the One and the Good into evil and multiplicity and back to the One; and it has demonstrated remarkable tenacity, persisting into our day as the central component of the esoteric *philosophia perennis*. Two forms of this traditional wisdom were so widespread and so deeply influential as to justify particular comment. Both these traditions had a double origin – in the Bible, and also in various forms of Neoplatonism and of Gnostic and pagan mythology. One tradition is the Hebrew Kabbala, and the other the Christian version of Hermetic lore.[359]

This is correct – but let us not exclude the tradition of Islamic philosophy which developed the Aristotelian principle of the Active Intellect, and the desire for the felicity that will come from unity with the Active Intellect when the soul of man is inspired by *imagination*. By tracing just one single genealogy through Aristotle, al-Fārābī, Maimonides and Spinoza to Shelley, I hope I have

[359] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism,* p. 155.

indicated the extent to which Islamic traditions haunt the very contexts in which the West seeks to exclude them.

Then, this recovery of the Active Intellect also revises Abrams's account of Romantic 'natural supernaturalism'. Abrams rightly identified Romanticism as the secular continuation of theological ideas, but Shelley's version of that continuity depends upon a missing intermediary. Between Plotinus's emanationist One and the Romantic imagination stands the long mediation of Islam. To omit this lineage is to overlook the historical conduit by which the metaphysics of unity survived into the modern imagination. The very vocabulary of the esoteric – alchemy, illumination, Active Intellect – testifies to its Arabic transmission. Shelley's imagination therefore re-Islamicises the Romantic absolute, not by imitation but by restoration: by reopening the channel between intellect and revelation that rationalism had sealed. His poetry performs a metaphysical hospitality – welcoming into modern thought the genealogies of the East that Europe had sought to forget. Through this synthesis, Shelley's imagination becomes the Active Intellect made poetic: a power at once cognitive and ethical, metaphysical and political. To imagine rightly is to know rightly; to know rightly is to act justly. The 'one Power' that moves through *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) thus joins cognition to compassion, intellect to sympathy. In the deserts and ruins of his verse, unity is discovered as relation, and the revolt of Islam becomes the revolt of imagination itself: an act of iconoclastic creation that clears the ground for a renewed apprehension of the divine in the human.

If Abrams traced Romanticism's inward turn, Shelley transforms that inwardness into a cosmological relation; and where Derrida leaves hospitality suspended in aporia, Shelley translates it into a metaphysics of the Active Intellect – an ethics grounded in the shared medium of thought. Yet the question remains: how might this unity of intellect and imagination, of divine and human, be lived within history rather than merely conceived in poetry? It is this problem – the movement from metaphysical hospitality to embodied encounter – that takes us from Shelley to Byron. The

next chapter approaches it through Byron's embodied encounters. His early travels and the Turkish Tales offer a contrasting historical and ethical perspective on the relation between belief and action.

For Byron, the Islamicate is no longer a philosophical grammar but a lived environment: a social and ethical space where the metaphysical architecture of faith structures the possibilities of action. His early travels and the *Turkish Tales* offer a moral and historical counterpart to Shelley's speculative 'one Power'. In Byron, the encounter with the Islamicate takes us into the world as struggle, passion, and heroism; the imagination becomes will, and hospitality becomes history. The following chapter therefore traces how Byron's engagement with the Islamicate world sets Shelley's metaphysical vision alongside the drama of lived belief – the testing of the intellect in the crucible of faith, freedom, and the modern self. If Shelley's Islamic inheritance unfolds as a metaphysical restoration of the Active Intellect within Romantic imagination, Byron's engagement marks a historical and affective genealogy – one in which Islam becomes the frame through which the modern self encounters its own historicity.

Chapter 3.

The Byronic Hero and the Oriental Frame: Byron's Islamic Historicity, A Genealogy

1. Introduction: Byron, heroism and Islam

In the period following his return to England after his Mediterranean travels of 1809-1811, Lord Byron wrote the poetry that made him famous and introduced his most enduring character archetype: the Byronic hero. This time in England, between his return in 1811 and his social downfall and self-exile in 1816, is that of fertile poetic production that brought him overnight fame following the publication of Cantos 1 and 2 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), and sees the runaway success of the 'Turkish Tales', a series of poems grouped primarily by their stylistic and narrative similarities and their dating (between 1813-1816).[360] These publications share a number of concerns, of which the potency of heroism in the contemporary age, and in Europe, is primary, so that the poems show almost in real-time the psychological development of the Byronic hero. Byron's interest in the nature of heroism extends beyond this period, continuing through the later cantos of *Childe Harold* (Canto III in 1816 and Canto IV in 1818) into not only his mature masterpiece, *Don Juan* (1819-1824), but through the fabric of his life until his death in Missolonghi in the Greek War of Independence. It is, however, the interest of this chapter to focus on Byron's

[360] The name 'Turkish tales' refers to the collection of poems published in quick succession after the run-away success of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. They are, with their publication dates, *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), *Lara* (1814), *The Siege of Corinth* (1816), and *Parisina* (1816). They are regularly called the 'Turkish tales' due to their Ottoman settings, although *Parisina* is set in 15th century Italy. The poems consolidate Byron's fame and success as a poet and dynamically demonstrate Byron's psychological 'working through' of the character of the Byronic hero. The name 'Turkish Tales' is not consistently used; Leask, for example, refers to them as the '*Eastern Tales*' (see Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), Chapter 1 'Byron turns Turk: Orientalism and the *'Eastern Tales'*', pp.1-67). I refer to them as the 'Turkish Tales', or, as the 'Tales'. See Jerome J. McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, 7 vols (Clarendon Press, 1980-93), III (1981), especially editorial commentaries on the poems. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt* is a four-canto epic poem. The first two Cantos – which trace the same terrain as Byron's own 1809-1811 journey through Spain, Portugal, Greece, Albania and Turkey – were published in 1812. Canto III follows the childe through Belgium (and Waterloo), down the Rhine and into the Alps, and was published in 1816. Canto IV is set in Italy and was published in 1818. Although these second two cantos develop Byron's reflections on heroism, my argument focuses on the influence of, and thematic interest in the Islamicate, which is most apparent in Byron's poetry produced after his initial return from the Ottoman Empire in 1811, until effectively the end of his marriage in 1816. See McGann (ed.) *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, II (1980), especially the editorial commentary on pp. 265-7. The 'Turkish Tales' were published after the first two Cantos, and the last two Cantos published after the poet's self-imposed exile from Britain. This chapter focuses on the development of the Byronic hero in the Islamicate settings of Cantos I and II, and the 'Turkish Tales', without particular reference to the second two Cantos of the poem which in spite of being part of the epic, are historically and stylistically quite distinct from the earlier Cantos.

poetic encounter with the Islamicate. Byron had a longstanding interest in Islamic (especially Ottoman) history and culture, and his travels around the Mediterranean had taken him into the Ottoman empire, firstly to present-day Albania and Greece, and finally as far as Constantinople, between 1809 and 1810. He was, then, the only Romantic poet who had actual experience of an Oriental, and specifically, Islamic society. Whilst much of the 'Oriental flavour' of his poetry often feels just that – a flavour – informed predominantly by William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), there is, beneath the superficiality of the Oriental costume, a sincere desire for an authentic encounter with the Islamicate. This sincerity transcends mere exoticism or aesthetic choice, reflecting Byron's personal experiences and observations during his travels in the Ottoman Empire, which deeply informed his poetic imagination. The desire for an authentic encounter, beneath the superficiality of the costume, is what orients Byron's poetic engagement with Islam and the Islamicate as an Other – one that is complex, multifaceted, and at times paradoxical, resisting simple reduction to Western stereotypes or Romantic fantasy. It is this tension between surface and substance, between ornamental exoticism and authentic engagement, that gives Byron's work its distinctive depth and enduring fascination.

This engagement also reflects a broader context of modern secularism as Taylor describes in *A Secular Age*. Modern secularism represents not just a decline in religious belief, but a fundamental shift in the 'grammar' or background conditions that shape how belief is understood and experienced. In this new secular framework, faith is no longer the default or necessary condition but one possibility among many. Byron's attraction to the Orient can thus be seen as a search for a cultural space where faith remains integral and unquestioned — offering a contrast to the fractured, pluralistic spiritual landscape of his own modern, secularising society. His poetry and personal writings reveal an anthropological impulse to live within and understand other 'forms of life' whose ethical and temporal structures resist the universalising, often reductive, logic of Enlightenment secularism. This tension between multiple synchronous histories and the

homogenising tendencies of modernity frames Byron's complex relationship to faith, identity, and the Other.

It is not only that Byron encounters the Islamicate as a space resistant to the secularising forces of Western modernity, and engages with Islamicate environments and discourses in his poetry: the Islamic staging of his poetry between 1812 and 1814 – specifically in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), and *Lara* (1814) – crucially provides an environmental framework for the development of the Byronic hero. It provides the staging, not only as world-environment, but as bounded space – both literally and figuratively. This is because in the poetry itself, the metaphysical certainties that underlie the social codes of Islamic society and culture provide a bounded frame in which the hero can operate. Byron discovers, in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, that modern heroism is performative, or postural, without the resistive friction of a metaphysical framework. The age of Classical heroism, of the feats of Achilles or Alexander the Great, is over, for reasons Byron does not explicitly state, but are implicit in the Islamic contextualisation of his heroes.

Grounding his poetry within the Islamicate's metaphysical framework — a cultural space resistant to the fragmented, pluralistic spiritual landscape of Western secular modernity — Byron reconfigures the concept of heroism away from the increasingly hollow and performative modes of his own society. The Byronic hero emerges not simply as a rebellious or tragic figure but as one whose identity and actions are deeply entwined with a coherent ethical and metaphysical order that gives meaning and gravity to heroism.

In a modern secular context, where belief is no longer axiomatic and heroic ideals lack absolute grounding – as Taylor outlines in *A Secular Age* – Byron's heroes often appear disillusioned, fragmented, or posturing without purpose. To see Islam merely as an antidote to this condition, however, is to miss its double function in Byron's imagination. On the one hand, Islam acts as a mirror of Christianity, embodying a comparable structure of metaphysical certainty and moral absolutes that Christianity still retained in the West. On the other hand, it stands as a radical

outside, a cultural and religious system whose unfamiliarity allows Byron to unsettle the binaries that defined his own culture – Christianity versus secularism, belief versus scepticism. The Islamicate setting thus becomes a 'bounded metaphysical frame' through which Byron can explore heroism, vengeance, and fate as authentic struggles, but always in ways that reflect back on, and destabilise, the categories of his own world. This chapter traces how Byron's poetic engagement with the Islamicate evolves from exoticised staging to a more historically grounded and ideologically complex encounter, with particular attention to how this shift shapes his conception of heroism. This contrast invites Byron to probe the limits and possibilities of heroism in a world where old certainties are fading. The Byronic hero's psychological complexity – marked by irony, internal conflict, and ambivalence – reflects the tension between a lost classical ideal and a search for new foundations in the modern world. Byron's engagement with the Islamicate thus offers a space in which heroism can be reimagined as more than mere performance or nostalgia: it becomes an exploration of how meaning, action, and belief intersect in a changing, secularising world.

Being so concerned with the nature and possibility of heroism, Byron frequently encounters the heavy literary and social history of chivalry, a discourse about which he remains ambivalent and suspicious. It is, indeed, chivalry and its discourses that change irrevocably the entire make-up of heroism. Chivalry removes heroism from the classical age, and brings us into a world in which, as religion loses its potency, the struggle for, or against, anything becomes a mere 'tilting at windmills'.[361] Byron's engagement with chivalry does not only thematically touch on the notion of heroism; it also unexpectedly returns to the encounter with Islam, since the discourse of chivalry *both* emerges from Arab/Islamic content (through textual sources), and is created in opposition to Arab/Islamic content (via the historical event of the crusades). As with Shelley,

[361] The phrase is of course from Miguel de Cervantes's, *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615). The novel is significant in this context for two reasons, firstly because of its place as a necessary foundation of Western literature, and secondly, because its origination in post-Reconquista Spain. Each reason poses a question, not irrelevant to our themes here: firstly, is 'modern' Western literature secular? And secondly, how is it that, after the reign of Christianity, Spain was able to produce a text so alien to Christian metaphysics? We should note as well the significance of Islamicate influences in the text, and in the life of Cervantes, who was captured by Barbary pirates in 1575 and not released from captivity until 1580.

investigations of the discourses of Islam in Romantic poetry unearth complex and contradictory discursive and historical entrails, to which the poets themselves, and many of their later critics, remain oblivious. Even whilst Byron never explicitly acknowledges the links between chivalry and the Islamicate, neither via chivalric literature's Arabic poetry ancestry nor its development out of opposition to Arab/Islamic content in the crusades, it is in his suspicion and ambivalence toward chivalry that we might sense an uneasiness at the complexity of the discourse.

It is, then, via the Islamicate settings of Cantos I and II of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) and the early 'Turkish Tales' that Byron develops a new type of (anti-)hero: the Byronic hero. He does this through grounding his character development in Islamicate settings, so that the Islamic staging provides an ordering architecture for the psychological disorder of the Tales and the dynamic character development of the Byronic hero.

The chapter makes this argument whilst simultaneously performing a close reading of the poems that utilise Islamic staging: as earlier identified, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara*. The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* depict a dissolute European hero travelling across the edges of the continent and into the Ottoman empire, unable to live up to any aspect of the chivalric ideal. The character of the Byronic hero is latent in the poems, as the 'childe' – an observer, rather than a protagonist. The plot-driven Tales, however, allow for Byron to play with his nascent hero in action. Here, the well-developed Islamicate staging of the poems' geographical and/or historical setting, offers an architecture which offers the necessary restriction to the libidinous impulse of the hero (indeed of Byron as a writer).

This close reading reveals a number of thematic elements that relate to Byron's engagement with the Islamicate. Firstly, the engagement reveals a curiosity about Islam and the Islamicate which becomes an almost anthropological investigation of a potentially radically different 'Other'. Secondly, Byron's inevitable encounter with the discourse of chivalry locates him as a participant in an ongoing dialogue about the difference between Occident and Orient which had begun with Herodotus and is still very much alive today. Thirdly, Byron's methodological slipperiness,

apparent not only in an ironic mode (nascent, and not in full force until *Beppo* [1817]), but in his shifting attitudes toward his experiences, his poetry, and Islamic culture, is in fact the aspect that allows for a sincerity, or earnestness. It is this earnestness, hand in hand with the ironical mode, that allows Byron to develop what I call his historicity in *Don Juan*, where difference, the arbitrary, and the compound (rather than the symbolic) order meaning. Finally, the encounter with Islamicate staging veers into poetic motifs of movement and shifting ground, especially via the sea (a watery desert), where figures of pirates (sea nomads?) provide ways to explore alternative models of social relations that can tolerate radical difference and thus provide a counterweight to the gravitational force of European imperialism. In this way, Byron's pirate curiosity emerges in the Tales out of a fundamental asymmetry: during the period of the height of the Ottoman Empire, Islamicate governance tolerated difference far better than Christian societies.[362] It also relates to the significance of the Bedouin peoples, and the European idealisation of peoples without a societal superstructure (read: 'civilisation'), which could compete with that of Byron's contemporary Europe.

Byron was later dismissive of the Tales, describing them as having a 'false, stilted trashy style, which is a mixture of all the styles of the day, which are *all bombastic*'.[363] But the libidinous energy of the Tales is certainly part of their success, and it is through the psychological disorder of the Tales that we see not only the emergence of the Byronic hero, but also the necessary developmental stage before the comic maturity of Byron's later poetry evidenced by *Beppo* (1818) and *Don Juan* (1819-1824). Indeed, the sense of disunity, exoticism, and excess makes the Turkish Tales more *Romantic* in generic terms than Byron's later poetry. Nigel Leask, whose chapter on

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362 See the Ottoman Millet system, tolerance of Jewish communities, and the fact that, during the European struggle for supremacy between Catholic and Protestant communities, individuals from minority Christian sects frequently moved to the Ottoman empire, preferring to live and worship there than in a Christian country where the other sect was the majority. See, for example, Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (I. B. Tauris, 2011), and Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

363 Leslie Marchand (ed.) *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 13 vols (John Murray, 1973-81), VII: '1820: Between two worlds' (1977), p. 182.

Byron in *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (1994), is an extremely well-articulated reading of Byron's Orientalism, quotes a passage from Raymond Schwab's *The Oriental Renaissance* (French edition 1950) which illustrates this:

It was logically inevitable that a civilization believing itself unique would find itself drowned in the sum total of civilisations, just as personal boundaries would be swamped by over-flowing mobs and dislocations of the rational. All this together was called Romanticism, and it produced, through its many recreations of the past, the present that propels us here forward.[364]

This observation – that a civilisation believing itself unique will be 'drowned in the sum total of civilizations', just as personal boundaries are 'swamped by over-flowing mobs and dislocations of the rational' – captures a central tension in Romanticism: the simultaneous allure and instability of imaginative engagement with otherness. Building on this, Schwab's emphasis on exoticism provides a lens for understanding Byron's Tales and their sustained engagement with the Islamicate, which functions as both a historical and imaginative counterpoint to European self-certainty. The first chapter of this thesis discusses exoticism as an aspect of Romanticism, and posits Byron as exemplary of this, whilst Shelley is more exemplary of the imaginative metaphysical tradition of Romanticism. As noted earlier, whereas Shelley's imagination tends toward the universal and metaphysical, Byron's is rooted in the particular and historical, most pressingly through his sustained engagement with the Islamicate world. This engagement is not merely a matter of subject-matter but of method: the Islamicate provides Byron with a framework through which to historicise Romantic imagination itself, transforming what for Shelley is a metaphysical exercise into, for Byron, a historically situated confrontation with cultural and political difference. Certainly, Byron is an outsider amongst Romantics when it comes to metaphysics – though his poetry touches on metaphysical themes and discourses, he does not share the same attitude, as Shelley does, that poetry is inherently metaphysical.

[364] Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. by Gene Patterson Black and Victor Reinking with a foreword by Edward Said (Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 18.

In this chapter, then, I argue that it is the concreteness of the Islamicate, and especially the concreteness of the metaphysical architecture of the Islamicate, that allows for the Byronic hero to thrive on the diverse energies of 'Religion – freedom – vengeance – what you will'.[365] Not only then is the Islamicate staging of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the Tales necessary to the development of the Byronic hero, but the Tales provide counter-points of various political systems, and different facets of the Islamicate, from the Oriental despot to the Sufi trope of the perfection of the rūḥ (spirit or soul). Whilst the development of the Byronic hero in the Tales provides us with an insight into Byron's relationship with Islam, the Tales also unwittingly point us back in the direction of the origin of heroic/lyric poetry, which emerged from the interaction between Christian, Neoplatonic and Arab/Islamic cultures in the songs of twelfth-century Mediterranean troubadours.

But it is the engagement with heroism in his poetry that sets up Byron's most consistent dialectical engagement: between action and word. This is quite different to Shelley's poetics, where the engagement with Islam is framed in a philosophical quest for shared metaphysical foundations. Byron's concern about the relations of action and words underlies his ironical poetics, and historical attitude to the Islamicate as a parallel (rather than inferior) civilisational phenomenon. The chapter ends with a reflection on this historical mode through Byron's representation of the young Muslim girl rescued by Juan in the siege of Izmail. This mode, as opposed to earlier, predominantly psychological, consciousness of Byron's Turkish Tales, allows for Islam and the Islamicate to take up historical presence – rather than being a narcissistic psychological projection onto an unknowable Other. In this way, Byron's poetry transcends the limits of Romanticism's European, individualistic consciousness, and engages with discourses of Islam in a genuine, historical (rather than symbolic) encounter. The action/word dialectic, then, that emerges out of Byron's fascination with the hero – in life and poetry – is what engenders an engagement with the

[365] The phrase is from line 867 of 'Lara', in McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, III (1981), pp. 214-256.

Islamicate that stands as an outlier in Romantic poetry, and quite contrary to Said's summary of Byron's poetry as archetypal of the *Orientalism* of the nineteenth century.

2. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage I and II: Beginning unhappily with chivalry

Byron's wildly successful *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* adapts the themes of chivalry to his contemporary age, indulging in the use of the 'childe' to indicate the period of maturity when the 'childe' becomes a knight. The poem's title signals a number of things immediately. The word 'childe' is a medieval title of a young noble who is not yet knighted – apt for delineating the youthful experiences of Lord Byron, but also knowingly archaic. Byron's title has implications for the nineteenth century: by needing to utilise an archaic, medieval term, Byron signals the paucity – or undesirability – of other available narratives in the early nineteenth century for a young man on a spiritual journey. The most familiar, early nineteenth-century narrative for a wealthy young man is the 'Grand Tour' – which is, in fact, the actual journey of the real young man (Byron himself), constituting the raw material for the poem. This journey – that of a recent university graduate on a Grand Tour of the Mediterranean, discovering in real life the now 'lost' (in multiple senses) lands of his classical gentlemanly education – makes its way much more explicitly into the poem through the apparatus of the notes, which constantly refer back to the first-hand experience of the travellers (Byron and John Cam Hobhouse) and map the abstractions of the poetry back onto real territory and real experience. That Harold cannot find a role for himself expresses the sense that there is no ideal role for a modern aristocrat, and indeed, no real role for a hero.

The medieval term 'childe', and the notion of chivalry that surrounds it, offer a clear narrative of experience building to maturity. The 'childe' is a phase of life, a significant phase which

encompasses the experience necessary to become a fully-fledged knight. What experience might this be? The medieval knight was not simply a man of renown or wealth or distinguished family, but a figurehead of chivalry, an entire code of conduct with established morals and patterns of behaviour. The childe's journey to become a knight would then entail a learning through experience of how to maintain that code. Byron's use of the term therefore signals a desire to tap into as well as critique a code of conduct which retained currency despite being wilfully archaic. By the early nineteenth century, the experience of a young lord included lessons in history and aesthetics rather than morality, already a rather luxuriant economy of excess rather than anything contained within the notion of pilgrimage, or even crusade.

Although the epic poem rarely refers explicitly back to these motifs, more frequently referring to the contemporaneousness of the poem's narrative, the moments when the poem does veer from the apparent modernity of the poem's physical settings to an abstracted investment in obsolete medieval motifs offer a sense of the dislocating effect of the multiple world-views the poem represents, and occasionally inhabits. We see this when Harold directs his song to the '[b]eauties' of Spain, echoing the troubadours' song to their beloved, unattainable fair maids, and the lyric is shot through with motifs of the Islamicate:

> Match me, ye climes! which poets love to laud;
> Match me, ye harems of the land! where now
> I strike my strain, far distant, to applaud
> Beauties that ev'n a cynic must avow;
> Match me those Houries, whom ye scarce allow
> To taste the gale lest Love should ride the wind,
> With Spain's dark-glancing daughters – deign to know,
> There your wise Prophet's paradise we find,

His black-eyed maids of Heaven, angelically kind.[366]

The *houris* – maidens of paradise in the Qur'an, celebrated for the beauty of their eyes – filter Byron's interpretation of Spanish women through Islamic motifs, underscoring the plurality of worldviews interwoven in the poem. This is epic poetry that acknowledges a metaphysical dislocation from its classical heritage and the imaginative stimulus of the Muses. Immediately following this stanza, the poet moves to have Harold gaze on Mount Parnassus, the home of the Muses. Here the poet ponders the potency of his own lyric:

What marvel if I thus essay to sing?
The humblest of thy pilgrims passing by
Would gladly woo thine Echoes with his string,
Though from thy heights no more one Muse will wave her wing.

(I, ll. 617-20)

Harold here finds himself incapable of lyric: 'I tremble, and can only bend the knee; / Nor raise my voice', and remarks that 'here no more Apollo haunts his grot, / And thou, the Muses' seat, art now their grave' (ll. 626-7, 634-5). If Hellenism is in the grave, the need for chivalric lyric is yet heightened, but as these stanzas demonstrate, that kind of chivalric lyric has need of Islamicate buttressing. The reasons for this are not yet clear, although the Canto II couplet of 'The bearded Turk that rarely deigns to speak, / Master of all around, too potent to be meek' (II, ll. 521-2), gives a bold hint. Cantos I and II rest on the tension between action and word, where lyric becomes impotent and the Childe is positioned in a vast, dissolute space of observation, without recourse to the metaphysical strength of classical poetry inspired by the muses. This tension between action and word is mirrored in Byron's own life, as he increasingly uses his poetry to poke fun at the ironic ineptitude of the poet or the figure of the hero, and eventually dies in Missolonghi having funded a small brigade of men to fight in the Greek War of Independence. This turn to irony, and

[366] Stanza 59 of Canto I of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, A Romaunt* in, McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, II, pp. 3-44 (this p. 31, ll. 603-611). Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text by canto and line number.

to action, over the typically Romantic position on the potency of lyric and of poetry, is indicative of Byron's predominant historicity, a complete contrast to Shelley's metaphysical stance on the potency of poetry. What shifts over the course of Byron's oeuvre is the use of the Islamicate as exotic staging that allows the poet to 'try on' different modes of being in the world to the Islamicate as participant in a broader historiography of the world in which the poet belongs.

This tension explains some of Byron's remarkable invective against the code of chivalry that run through his prose and letters from the 1812 'Preface' to Cantos I and II to an 1821 letter. By referring to narratives of chivalry and finding them obsolete in modern contexts, Byron offers a critique of chivalry in the modern day, a view that runs through his thinking from the time of the *Childe*'s publication to his later experiences in Italy. The 1812 'Addition to the Preface' tells as much:

> The vows of chivalry were no better kept than any other vows whatsoever; and the songs of the Troubadours were not more decent, and certainly were much less refined, than those of Ovid. – The "Cours d'amour, parlemens d'amour, ou de courtesie et de gentilesse" had much more of love than of courtesy or gentleness. – Whatever other objection may be urged to that most unamiable personage Childe Harold, he was so far perfectly knightly in his attributes […] By the by, I fear that Sir Tristram and Sir Lancelot were no better than they should be, although very poetical personages and true knights "sans peur," though not "sans reproche". […] So much for chivalry. Burke need not have regretted that its days are over, though Marie Antoinette was quite as chaste as most of those in whose honour lances were shivered, and knights unhorsed.[367]

The zest of Byron's critique of chivalry is extraordinary, indicative of the radicalism behind his hatred of hypocrisy. What this broadside makes plain, however, is the cynicism in Byron's formulations of chivalry – seeing nothing more in the tradition of the 'troubadours' than adultery at best, and hypocrisy at worst. His reference to Burke's lament for chivalry in his *Reflections on the*

[367] 'Addition to the Preface' of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, II, p. 5.

Revolution in France (1790) – 'the age of chivalry is gone' – is based on a logic that analyses chivalry not as an archaic discourse, but a contemporary one.[368] Byron's later reference to chivalry in his letter to Hobhouse about Teresa Guiccioli's criticism of *Don Juan* makes clear that Byron sees any appeal to chivalry in contemporary Europe as indicative of a strain of hypocrisy not to be tolerated: 'the illusion of sentiment – which constitutes their sole empire – (all owning to Chivalry - & the Goths – the Greeks knew better)'.[369] Byron's problem with chivalry in his contemporary society deserves investigation. It seems to me that the problem is rooted in religious hypocrisy. In a secular environment, as Western Europe increasingly was, any appeal to the inviolability of a religious code was fraudulent or worse: despotic. From his comments, we must understand that Byron is not pleased to live in such a society, which makes an ethical code based on faith an impossibility; rather, he was particularly sensitive to the ontology of a secular society and the limits of a secular epistemology.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, this anti-Burkean framework leads to a foregrounding of Hellenistic values (despite their loss) as superior to those of contemporary Europe – indeed superior to those of the chivalric genre. It is in this sense that McGann has argued that *Childe Harold* is 'obsessed with the idea of the renewal of human culture in the west at a moment of its deepest darkness', so that 'renewal of Greece as an independent political entity becomes "objective correlative" for this idea'.[370] The idea of renewal in dissolute Europe, and of a satisfactory role for the Lord in Europe is pertinent, but it is only *outside* of Europe that Byron is able to stimulate investigation into what that purpose or role might be. This has been noted by Elizabeth Fay, who accurately suggests that Byron 'distance[s] the childe hero's affects and historical embodiedness via Oriental culture'.[371] The significant ontological difference between the Hellenic republicanism of

[368] Edmund Burke*, Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (Penguin, 1986), p. 170.
[369] Marchand (ed.) *Byron's Letters and Journals*, VIII '1821: Born for opposition' (1978), p. 148.
[370] Jerome J. McGann, *Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Clarendon Press, 1988) p. 206.
[371] Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (Palgrave: 2002), p. 100.

Byron's historical imagination and the contemporary modes of modern Europe lead the frustrated protagonist to seek a renewal of purpose and role only by leaving Europe.

When Byron begins to explore the Eastern countries beyond the borders of European Christendom, it marks not only a geographical expansion but also the emergence of the poetic Byron. As he later reflected, '[w]ith those countries, and events connected with them, all my really poetical feelings begin and end.'[372] In *Lord Byron's Oriental World* (2011), Naji Oueijan underscores how this turn to the East shaped Byron's creative consciousness. He argues that Byron's encounter with the Orient was both aesthetic and existential – 'an attempt to liberate himself from his Western self by embracing the Eastern other [as well as] an attempt to procure physical, intellectual and spiritual healing.'[373] For Oueijan, Byron's Orientalism is not merely thematic but constitutive of his poetics: the myths, religious ideas, and moral frameworks of the Islamicate world become woven into Byron's unique psychological portraits of anti-heroes, whose conflicts dramatise the tensions between Western secularism and Eastern spirituality.

It is certainly true that Byron projects great meaning onto his encounter with Islam and with Muslims, as well as with a desire to *escape* from the West, writing to Hanson: 'allow me to depart from this cursed country, and I promise to turn *Mussulman* rather than return to it'.[374] Even after returning to England, he still harboured dreams of returning to the eastern Mediterranean: 'In the spring of 1813 I shall leave England forever. […] Neither my habits nor my constitution are improved by your customs or climate. I shall find employment in making myself a good oriental scholar.'[375] Further evidence of his continued fascination with Oriental cultures in the Levant is clear from his 1812 letters to Edward Daniel Clarke, the professor of mineralogy at Cambridge who published *Travels in various Countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa*, which appeared in six volumes between 1810 and 1823. Byron wrote to Clarke in 1812: 'I dote upon the Druses [*sic*]: but who the

372 Marchand (ed.), *Byron: Letters and Journals*, V '1816-1817: So late into the night' (1976), p. 45.
373 Naji Oueijan, 'Byron's Eastern Quest', *PALMA Journal of Notre Dame University, Lebanon*, 8.1 (2002), p. 85.
374 Marchand (ed.), *Byron: Letters and Journals*, I '1798-1810: In my hot youth' (1973), p. 202.
375 Marchand (ed.), *Byron: Letters and Journals*, II, '1810-1812: Famous in my time' (1973), p. 163

deuce are they with their Pantheism. I shall never be easy till I ask *them* the question.'[376] This desire to immerse himself in foreign cultures was not only felt in the years 1809 to 1812; it remained with Byron for the rest of his life, inherent in his discomfort about the hypocrisies of his own society and his investment in learning languages, and most of all, his exile from his homeland.[377]

The desire for travel in *Childe Harold* signals an essential difference between West and East – one that becomes foundational for Byron's engagement with the Islamicate. In *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (1998), Saree Makdisi describes the East Byron visited as 'still clinging to its own life, its own structures, its own meanings, distinct from the homogenizing modernity of the West – and thus profoundly attractive to exiles fleeing that modernity'.[378] For Byron, travel was not merely aesthetic or geographic, but existential, part of a broader search for civilisational alternatives to a Europe increasingly defined by Enlightenment rationalism and materialism.

As Makdisi notes, Byron could imagine the Orient as a spatial alternative to Europe because he viewed European and Oriental histories as distinct: *synchronic* rather than parts of one continuous, Europe-controlled *diachronic* history. Yet classical antiquity – overlapping both Occident and Orient – complicates this separation, producing a kind of historical vertigo in *Childe Harold*. Byron often aligns antiquity more closely with Oriental history than with modern Europe, drawing on his deep knowledge of Classical Greek culture and on the comparative lens of sexuality, morality, and social codes.

What, then, produces the rupture between Oriental and Classical cultures on one hand and Makdisi's 'modernity' on the other? I argue that it is the emergence of modern secularity, a product of Enlightenment thought, which leaves no space for the spiritual and mystical traditions – esotericism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, *prisca theologia*, Neoplatonism – that informed both classical

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[376] Marchand (ed.) *Byron: Letters and Journals*, II, p. 181.
[377] Byron held languages in particularly high esteem and viewed them as an essential aspect of the cultural immersion he desired. This is particularly important in view of *Lara*, as we shall see.
[378] Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 124.

and many Oriental worldviews. In this sense, secularism is an imperialist ideology, and Makdisi's 'anti-modern otherness' should be understood in sympathy with this idea: 'Romanticism […] can be understood as a cultural discourse defining the mutual constitution of the modern imperial metropolitan center [*sic*] and its anti-modern colonies and peripheries'.[379]

As Taylor argues, modern secularity did not simply *subtract* religious belief but actively *constructed* a new moral and experiential order – the 'immanent frame' – in which transcendence itself became marginal or unintelligible. Byron's Romantic Orientalism can thus be read as a kind of imaginative resistance to this construction: a search for alternative ontologies that preserve the enchanted, plural worlds erased by Enlightenment rationalism. Perhaps what makes a text like *Childe Harold* 'Romantic' is precisely its uneasy combination of a fascinated attraction to spaces of otherness with the dawning recognition that such spaces are inevitably doomed by the advance of modernisation – whose central 'will' is, as Taylor would say, to render belief in transcendence *optional, contestable,* and ultimately peripheral.

It is here that Byron's action/word dialectic becomes crucial. His fascination with the hero – both historical and poetic – allows him to approach the Islamicate not merely as a symbolic or psychological projection, but as a historical presence resistant to the homogenising pull of modernity. This historical mode, evident for example in his representation of the young Muslim girl rescued by Juan in the siege of Izmail, replaces the predominantly psychological consciousness of the earlier Turkish Tales with an encounter that is genuinely historical rather than narcissistically symbolic. This moment marks a pivotal shift in Byron's poetic method: the Islamicate is no longer a backdrop for Romantic self-fashioning or exotic fantasy, but a historically situated culture with its own metaphysical coherence. By foregrounding the action/word dialectic, Byron resists the Romantic tendency to internalise the Other and instead gestures toward a more anthropological, historically grounded engagement. This allows the Islamicate to function not as a mirror of

[379] Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*, p. 175. The reference to 'anti-modern otherness' is p. 21.

European anxieties, but as a parallel civilisational framework through which Byron interrogates the limits of secular modernity and the viability of heroism within it. In this way, Byron's poetry transcends the limits of Romanticism's European, individualistic consciousness, engaging with the Islamicate as a parallel civilisation in ways that resist the reductionism of nineteenth-century Orientalism as characterised by Said. This tension between attraction and resistance is captured with particular clarity in Makdisi's account of Romanticism's imperial unconscious:

> Perhaps what makes a text like Childe Harold […] romantic is its uneasy combination of a fascinated attraction to a space of otherness […] with a dawning realization that such spaces are inevitably doomed by the encroaching world of modernization whose central 'will' would be to draw everything into itself, to destroy the many synchronous worlds and histories, and incorporate them into the one unilinear, universal, diachronic, and tyrannical world history.[380]

This passage crystallises the chapter's central claim: that Byron's engagement with the Islamicate is not merely aesthetic or symbolic, but a sustained attempt to resist the homogenising logic of modernity. Rather than reducing the East to a foil for Western self-definition, Byron's poetry acknowledges the Islamicate as a historically grounded and metaphysically coherent civilisation. In doing so, he challenges the unilinear temporality of Enlightenment historicism and opens space for a pluralistic vision of world history – one in which multiple civilisational grammars coexist, however precariously, within the poetic imagination. This pluralistic vision is enabled not only by Byron's historical sensibility but also by his deployment of exoticism as a poetic strategy – one that does not merely embellish the verse with Oriental detail, but rather facilitates a mode of imaginative expansion that allows Byron to inhabit, however imperfectly, alternative civilisational grammars and metaphysical orders from within.

[380] Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*, p. 184-5.

It is Byron who actually desires to *go there*, to live amongst that environment in which faith remains central to a code of ethics which permeates life. Makdisi argues that the narrative structure of *Childe Harold* 'affirms a belief in, or a claim to, sacred (or at any rate pre-modern) time.' Thus, 'Childe Harold, in leaving Europe, leaves behind the slowly-universalizing temporality of modernity and enters a synchronous structure of time, space, and history; not a *pre-modern*, but an *anti-modern* Orient'.[381]

Byron did not want only to experience different worldviews in order to gain knowledge of them that makes sense within the secularist discourse of understanding through evidence and argument. This reflects Taylor's analysis in *A Secular Age*, where he describes a fundamental transformation: from a society 'in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God' to one 'in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others'.[382] Taylor emphasises that modern secularity is not merely the decline of religious belief or practice, but the emergence of a new 'grammar' in which belief in God is no longer axiomatic, and alternatives to faith are visible and legitimate. Byron's attraction to the Orient can thus be seen as a search for a cultural and temporal space where faith remains an integral, unquestioned part of existence, contrasting with the fractured, pluralistic spiritual landscape of his own secularising society.

Exoticism, however, gradually gives way to a more grounded historicity, as Byron's engagement with the Islamicate deepens from ornamental staging to a sincere, if ambivalent, recognition of its metaphysical coherence and historical presence.

I have already suggested, and the argument made well by Caroline Franklin, that Byron's poetry does not present the reader with the classical 'specimens of Orientalism' in the sense of Southey, for example.[383] Byron is not a scholar mining the 'Orientals' and their societies at a remove. Instead, Byron wants to live through the cultures he describes. In this sense, Byron's

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[381] Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*, p. 125.
[382] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 3.
[383] Caroline Franklin, "'Some Samples of the Finest Orientalism': Byronic Philhellenism and Proto-Zionism at the Time of the Congress of Vienna." *Romanticism and Colonialism*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 221–242.

poetry is closer to the anthropological reading *with* that Said commends.[384] Recalling the discussion of this type of understanding from Chapter 1 of this thesis, and the associated references to Wittgenstein, we might say that Byron wanted to gain the knowledge of experience by living within another 'form of life'. This desire is constantly referred to in Byron's writing of the period, not only in his poetry, but also his letters. Writing in 1810 to his mother, Byron reflects on his travels that:

> I have not been disappointed or disgusted, I have lived with the highest and the lowest, I have been for days at a Pacha's palace, and have passed many a night in a cowshed, and I find the people inoffensive and kind.[385]

Byron here stakes his claim as the dispassionate, observant, and overall, tolerant, traveller. Observations made by *participating* in the local culture are more important than the kind of knowledge imparted by books and other literature. Later, Byron makes an interesting comment whilst requesting reading material:

> Voyages and travels, provided that they are neither in Greece, Spain, Asia Minor, Albania, nor Italy, will be welcome: having travelled the countries mentioned, I know that what is said of them can convey nothing further which I desire to know about them.[386]

This passage says more than at first appears – Byron is not arguing that he does not want travel books on the countries he has travelled to simply because he has already been there and knows all there is to know. Instead, Byron's comments suggest that there is more knowledge which he may 'desire to know', but that such knowledge could never be conveyed by 'what is said of them'. In this sense, Byron is rejecting contemporary written discourses on the countries of the Ottoman empire he visited in 1811 but acknowledging that any desirable information about them would be

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[384] See the 'Preface' to *Orientalism* (Penguin, 2003), and the discussion of this in Chapter 1 of this thesis, especially part 5, 'Orientalism, or, Speaking about Islam'.
[385] Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, I, p. 250.
[386] Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, VIII, p. 219.

gleaned through something other than books. It is also the manifesto of the anti-Orientalist, and a perfect counter to Southey's academic voraciousness.

What we might begin to make out, then, is that rather than Byron's 'exotic' Tales being antithetical in spirit to his mature, 'historical', poetry, there is a continuity of anthropological spirit of the kind that Said identifies in Goethe.[387] In a seminal work on Romantic poetry and Orientalism, Andrew Warren begins in the spirit of Nigel Leask, by suggesting that the Orient is 'self-critically understood by the Young Romantics as a historically determined fantasmatic projection of the West's own fears and desires', which is 'simultaneously an escape and return from the self, a vicious circle', just as Leask describes the 'stimulus afforded by imperialism, the desire for the Other, came to have the status of […] an *iatrogenic* illness, that is to say, an illness which is caused by that which was intended as a cure'.[388] Warren takes his analysis a step further than Leask, however, by considering the way in which the treatment of the Orient by Second Generation 'becomes – because it is nearly always self-conscious and ironic – itself a critique of Orientalism practiced by the eighteenth century and the First Generation Romantics'.[389] Despite his ceaseless curiosity, Byron's characteristic irony – indeed, his subversive insincerity – ensures that he never loses sight of himself, maintaining a constant self-awareness. And in doing this, the *reality* of the Other is necessarily guaranteed – the Other can never be adequately consumed and digested, the ironic self-awareness protects the reality of the Other. Indeed, paradoxically, it is the subversive insincerity in the form of the ironical mode that actually makes space for a sincerity about the totality of the Other. If Byron begins with curiosity and costume, and ends with tolerance and historicity, we may begin to see that both attitudes emerge from a spirit which is, at heart, anthropological – one way of saying this may be to note that for Byron, it is all *language games*. In Wittgenstein's sense, the meanings that animate both Oriental and Classical worlds are inseparable

[387] Said, 'Preface' to *Orientalism* (Penguin, 2003), p. xix. See also Chapter 1 of this thesis, part 5 'Orientalism, or, Speaking about Islam'.
[388] Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 3, and Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 10.
[389] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 3.

from the forms of life in which they are embedded. The contrast I am drawing is with the claim of Enlightenment secularism, as understood here, to provide a universal framework into which those meanings can be translated without loss. Makdisi's 'anti-modern otherness' thus becomes legible as a refusal to translate one civilisation's game entirely into another's, preserving the multiplicity of synchronous histories. Byron's action/word dialectic, then, is not merely a poetic conceit but a method of testing the limits of such translation, allowing the Islamicate to appear in his verse as a historical presence in its own right rather than as a symbolic projection of European consciousness.

Byron's interest in the multiplicity of worldviews, and the implications of their apparent contradictions on codes of morality, is thus seeded at the heart of the personal epic of *Childe Harold*. If the actual first-hand experience of Byron in his travels around the Mediterranean allowed the author to come face to face with the new worldviews of the societies he met abroad, the experience of writing *Childe Harold* and the Tales allowed Byron to play poetically with another layer of historical narrative worldviews – that of chivalry being one, that of Ancient Greece being another. Byron continues to explore this narrative mixing of worldviews by way of a protagonist coming into contact with different cultures and their differing attitudes, a poetic strategy which happened to be both financially and critically successful. The success of *Childe Harold* was followed by the even more successful publications of what became known as the Turkish Tales.[390] This group consists of six poems published in quick succession between 1813 and 1816 that take their collective name from their setting in the Ottoman Empire.[391] It is in these poems that Byron explores the discourse of chivalry further, manipulating the narratives of chivalry to explore both a past in which religious moral codes were immanent to society, but also to explore how that might have felt by means of experience of Islamic society. As we move from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to

[390] See Ian Jack, *The Poet and his Audience* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), who describes how 'the reading public of the time had become Byron's spaniel' after 10,000 copies of *The Corsair* were sold on its first day, p. 69.
[391] For the most part – *Parisina* (1816) is actually staged in fifteenth century Italy, taken from a story by Edward Gibbon about a former Duke of Ferrara.

the Turkish Tales, then, readers experience a resuscitation of the latent chivalric themes of the *Pilgrimage* through the Islamic staging: a case of 'chivalry is dead, long live chivalry'.

3. The Turkish Tales: Chivalry in Islamic settings

As noted, chivalry and its discourses emerged in the European Middle Ages, but the cultural origins of chivalry go back to Islamic Al-Andalus (contemporary Spanish Andalusia), where narratives of knightly behaviour and a particular code of ethics were explored by Ibn Ḥazm in *The Ring of the Dove* (1022). This work (which itself borrows from Plato's *Phaedrus*), as well as Ibn Sīnā's (Avicenna, 980-1037) *Treatise on Love*, influenced conceptions of love that flowed through chivalric narratives for centuries in European literature.[392] Tracing this influence, Abdullah al-Dabbagh argues that the development of the trope and practices associated with courtly love central to the chivalric theme relies on an encounter not only between European writers and the texts of Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Sīnā, but also between European writing and Sufism, pointing out 'the richness of the medieval Islamic heritage of philosophic and spiritual exploration of love' of which 'the Sufi perspective and model, through its numerous figures, exerted the greatest influence and set the basic guidelines'.[393] As with other literary scholars and historians, Al-Dabbagh argues that 'Western notions and practices of love poetry, as they first appeared in the poems of the Troubadours of the South of France in the twelfth century, owe their existence to this rich heritage'.[394] In this sense,

[392] See Chapter 1, section 4, 'Islam, Arabic and Romanticism: a multivalent symbolic engagement' for discussion of the influence of Arab-Islamic poetry on the development of the literary discourses of chivalry and courtly love, indeed the origins of lyric poetry.
[393] Abdullah al-Dabbagh, 'The Oriental Sources of Courtly Love', *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 3.1, p. 31.
[394] al-Dabbagh, 'The Oriental Sources of Courtly Love', p. 31. See also Alois Richard Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its Relations with the Old Provencal Troubadours* (J. H. Furst Company, 1946), John Jay Parry, *The Art of Courtly Love* (Columbia University Press, 1960), Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, trans. by Montgomery Belgion (Faber and Faber, 1956) and Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester University Press, 1977).

the specific iteration of the chivalric knight's love grows out of a tradition of Islamic philosophy which elevates love as the guiding force in the spiritual perfection of the soul:

> [i]t is by way of love that man can dissociate himself from worldly attachments and go back to the source of things […] through love that he starts the ascent of life on the scale of being, from stone to plant, from animal to man, to the angel and beyond.[395]

A number of scholars have already pointed out a link between Byron's early writings and Sufism, detailing not only Byron's encounter with Ali Pascha who belonged to the Bekhtashi order of Sufis, but also the poet's presentation of the love relations between his heroes and their female loves in the Tales.[396] These critics point not only to the idealisation of love in the poems, but also to the multiple references to the Sufi narratives of Majnoun and Laila, and the rose and the nightingale, symbols of which are so prevalent in Persian Sufi poetry.[397] Byron had come into contact with such motifs in his reading of Persian and Arabic poetry.

Within the discourse of the chivalric lyric, there is also a connection to Neoplatonic concepts of union with the divine, which for Denis de Rougement derive from the influence of the Cathars. The presence of Gnostic structures of feeling within lyric poetry of medieval Europe are then later unconsciously blended with Sufi structures of feeling (which originate perhaps from similar, yet older, Gnostic sources) by Byron within his lyric poetry. The presence of chivalric themes, Gnosticism, and Sufism in poetry which stakes itself on finding an existential purpose for a privileged young male in modern Europe indicates the valences of Islamicate material in Romantic Europe. Like Shelley, who unwittingly touches on Islamicate philosophy through his handling of the imagination, Byron unknowingly indicates the Islamicate origins of European

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[395] al-Dabbagh, 'The Oriental Sources of Courtly Love', p. 28.
[396] See Bernard Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam: the Triple Eros', *Journal of European Studies*, 4.4 (1974), pp. 325-363, Naji Oueijan, *Lord Byron's Oriental World* (Gorgias Press, 2011), and al-Dabbagh 'The Oriental Sources of Courtly Love'.
[397] The rose (*gul*, in Persian) and the nightingale (*bulbul*, in Persian) are symbols of the beloved (or in many instances, God), and the longing lover, respectively. The pursuit of the rose by the nightingale corresponds to the journey of the soul in this life toward union with the Divine. The trope occurs frequently in the poetry of Saʿdī, Rūmī and Ḥāfiẓ. See Elham Nilchian, 'Gul and Bulbul: Persian Love in Byron', *The Byron Journal*, 40.2 (2012), pp. 155-164, as well as Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press, 1975), especially Chapter 7 'The Rose and the Nightingale: Persian and Turkish Mystical Poetry', pp. 287-343.

romance poetry through his 'Turkish Tales'. By tracing the presence of chivalric themes, Gnostic and Sufi structures of feeling in Byron's poetry, we can see how the Islamicate influences embedded in European romance resurface in Romantic literature. This historical layering helps explain the imaginative and affective resonances Byron inherits from earlier literary traditions. In reflecting on these origins, Roger Boase notes that the term *'romantic'*, derived from literature written in the vernacular or *lingua Romanica*, had by the late seventeenth century already acquired connotations of being 'false as a fairy-tale' or 'strange and dream-like as a fairy-tale', linking the Romantic imagination directly to the imaginative and exoticised terrains Byron engages with in his 'Turkish Tales'.[398] What we have then is a confluence of discourses that come into play in Byron's 'Tales', some of them identified by the poet, and others uncited and even unconsciously echoed. Byron as a writer lifts Islamic motifs directly and indirectly from Arabic, Persian and Ottoman sources, as well as Western commentaries on the originals. We have reference to Byron's own Islamic and Ottoman sources in Moore's biography, where Byron states his voracious historical reading, including of Ottoman history, of which 'I know every event', as well as his reading of the Qur'an which he says 'contains most sublime poetical passages, far surpassing European poetry', as well as Islamicate poets, including 'the immortal Hafez'.[399] His handling of Islamicate motifs is not always, however, hugely sophisticated and is error-prone.[400] It is also highly likely that Byron lifts many Islamicate motifs from William Beckford's *Vathek* (published as *An Arabian Tale, From an Unpublished Manuscript* in 1786). The extent to which Beckford attains much accuracy in his Oriental

[398] Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, p. 15, citing F. L. Lucas, *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, (Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 18.
[399] Byron makes these statements in a very interesting list of his early reading and is quoted in Thomas Moore *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of his Life*, 10 vols (John Murray, 1830) I, p. 95. See also John D. Yohannan, 'The Persian poetry fad in England 1770-1825', *Comparative Literature*, 4.2 (1952) pp. 137-160.
[400] See Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Orientalism in Byron's 'Turkish Tales': The Giaour (1813), The Bride of Abydos (1813), The Corsair (1814) and The Siege of Corinth (1813)* (Mellon University Press, 1995). Most significant are some somewhat embarrassing language mistakes, especially those involving the refrain of the shahada in *The Corsair*, and some inaccurate representations of Islamic teachings on women, including that 'woman is but dust, / A soulless toy for tyrant's lust' in *The Giaour* (ll. 488-90), or that Mecca does not allow women to approach (in *The Bride of* Abydos, ll. 312-4)

details is widely contested.[401] It is likely that Byron uses D'Herbelot's encyclopaedia to check certain details. Beyond his reading of *Vathek*, and early reading noted in Moore's biography, Bernard Blackstone makes a highly convincing case for the use of Stephen Weston's *Moral Aphorisms in Arabic* (1805).[402]

In spite of the Oriental errors of Byron's 'Tales', in *Orientalism in Byron's 'Turkish Tales'*, Abdur Raheem Kidwai argues that Byron's 'judiciousness, sensitivity, ingenuity and sympathy were far more inseparably integrated', especially when compared to a writer such as Southey where such qualities 'float on the surface'.[403] It is indeed, Byron's more personal engagement with issues of identity, conversion, experience of the 'Other', and in particular, his manipulation of chivalric narratives of love and ethics that reveals much of not only his attitude to Islam, but also his interaction with the various discourses of Islam that run through the period in which he is writing. That the Sufi discourse of love, with its relation to a gnostic mysticism which promotes self-knowledge and symbolic meaning through faith in the Divine, is nascent in the chivalric narrative makes his engagement with chivalry unknowingly also an engagement with Islamic conceptions of love and mysticism. As a poet, the fact that he himself had visited the Ottoman Empire, and had met multiple Muslims, gives his engagement particular interest – a claim he was frequently fond of making himself. Whilst we can see that boast for what it is – a limited claim for authority on matters Islamic as a result of primary experience – we should also respect the motive that drives such a claim: a desire for a genuine engagement with Islamic forms of life. Whilst critics often point to the disorder, incoherence and unsophistication of the Tales, it is in fact this disorderly unconscious pull of unity tying the (Islamic) themes, (Islamic) staging, (Islamic) motifs and (Islamic) narratives that best reflects Byron's attitudes to Islam and the Other, as well as that has most often been ignored.

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401 See Donna Landry, 'William Beckford's *Vathek* and the Uses of Oriental Re-enactment', in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, ed. by Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 167-194.
402 Bernard Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam: the Triple Eros', pp. 333-43.
403 Kidwai, *Orientalism in Byron's Turkish Tales*, p. 203.

In *The Giaour* (1813) Byron exhibits this disorderliness by using multiple worldviews through poetry which mixes the voices of various different speakers, so that the poem is rendered as 'disjointed fragments' with voices of the Ottoman lord, Hassan, a Greek fisherman, and a monk of the local monastery. This form of writing is the antithesis of epic poetry and copious footnotes, *à la* Southey (and, indeed, Byron's earlier *Childe Harold*). Instead of glossing the poetry with scholarly detail, the worldviews of the individuals who make up the diverse community are given direct voice. The result is a poem of profound emotional impact, even, or perhaps because of the way the 'disjointed' elements resist categorisation.

Other poems of the Turkish Tale group, *The Bride of Abydos* (1813) and *The Corsair* (1814) further delineate Byron's interest in Islamic and Ottoman worldviews as well as allowing a staging of chivalric themes because of their cultural differences from contemporary European society. Whilst *Childe Harold* delineated an ideological impasse between contemporary society and narratives of chivalry, the location of the 'Turkish Tales' within an Islamic, Ottoman culture renews an interest in the chivalric mode that is suddenly able to emerge successfully in the narrative of the poem. Writing about the 'medievalism' of Romantic poetry, Fay notes that due to 'the Byronic hero's relation to the knight-lover, Byron's most medieval poems, at least in spirit, are not his self-epic, but his Turkish Tales'.[404] Following this insight, then, we note that it is the Islamic staging of the 'Tales' that makes possible a renewed investigation of chivalric heroism. So, then, the Byronic hero emerges not only in culturally Islamic settings, but precisely of necessity in Islamic settings. When we recall Byron's comment that it is in 'those countries, and events connected with them, all my really poetical feelings begin and end', we then have a clue as to the extent of the truth of such a statement. The following close readings of Byron's 'Turkish Tales' explore how each poem stages the Islamicate as a site of moral, political, and metaphysical inquiry, beginning with the fragmented and fatalistic world of *The Giaour*.

[404] Fay, *Romantic Medievalism*, p. 101.

4. The Giaour: Religious relations and a zero-sum game

Byron's first 'Tale', *The Giaour*, stages a dynamic and tense East-West conflict through a classic tale of adultery and revenge. The action of the poem is driven by a central issue of violence, creating a zero-sum circuit of action and reaction, retribution and revenge. The Giaour – a Turkish word for infidel or non-believer – is the central protagonist, his title decrying his exclusion from the Muslim Ottoman community in which he is situated. Byron foregrounds the Islamic staging of the action from early in the poem, describing the topography where 'the Crescent glimmers on the hill, / The mosque's high lamps are quivering still' and setting the drama on the eve of Eid al-Fitr, at the end of the holy month of Ramadhan.[405] The narrative of this vaguely but dramatically characterised figure 'of foreign garb and fearful brow' is primarily related by the Greek fisherman, situating the tale in the Mediterranean zone between (modern-day) Turkey and Greece, and thus also in a liminal conflicted space where Christian and Muslim find themselves in plays of power and dominance. The tale relates that the Giaour fell in love with Laila, a member of the hareem of despot lord Hassan. On discovering the adultery of Laila, Hassan has Laila drowned in a sack ('the Musselman manner', as Byron's advertisement reports), commandeering the use of the fisherman's boat in the process. In revenge, the Giaour plots an ambush on horseback of Hassan and his entourage, in which he kills everyone. After this violence, the Giaour purchases a monastic cell and lives in solitude. The simplicity of the revenge narrative is complicated by the shifting, disjointed paradigms of inter-cultural and religious conflict, as well as by the 'disjointed fragments' of the various speakers of the poem. However, at the centre of these fragments is a simple doubling in

[405] 'The Giaour', in, McGann (ed.) *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, III (1981), pp. 39-82 (this p. 47, ll. 222-3). Henceforth cited parenthetically by line number.

which the Giaour and Hassan seem to mirror each other, and the Giaour's implication that he 'would but do – what he hath done' (l. 1062).

Byron uses the narrative and its context to explore conceptions of the chivalric hero in the character of the Giaour, as well as the idea of courtly love which he depicts in the Giaour's love for Laila. The opening lines of the poem immediately situate the story of the protagonist in the context of the subjection of Greece by Ottoman Turkey, where the 'Athenian's grave' sits 'High o'er the land he saved in vain', and the speaker asks: 'When shall such a hero live again?' (ll. 2, 5, 6). The Giaour then is positioned to be the reviver of the Hellenic values that are set up in opposition to those of the 'Musselman' overlords. However, the narrative consistently questions whether the Giaour could be anything approaching a figure of a hero, and in this tension, and in the brooding, vengeful character of the Giaour, he sketches out the real first draft of the Byronic hero.

In spite of some chivalric qualities, the Giaour can never be a leader of men, not only because his fundamental misanthropy denies it (later, Conrad is an example of a misanthropic leader), but because he harbours a particular trauma – that he recognises himself in Hassan. Though later heroes in Byron's tales are misanthropic leaders, often harbouring deep traumas, it is this essential quality that marks out the Giaour.

There is a flattening of cultural difference through the pessimistic parallelism of the poem. The two principal narrators of the poem, the fisherman and the Christian monk, 'embody the superstitions of their respective cultures in such a way as to engender a parallelism in their 'naïve' representation of events'.[406] The perspective of the first narrator is clearly that of a Muslim, who views the Giaour as a foreigner, and as an infidel, a perspective which is later mirrored by the Greek monk:

[406] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 29.

His faith and race alike unknown
The sea from Paynim land he crost,
And here ascended from the coast;
Yet seems he not of Othman race,
But only Christian in his face –
I'd judge him some stray renegade,
Repentant of the change he made,
Save that he shuns our holy shrine,
Nor tastes the sacred bread and wine.

(ll. 807-15)

That the perspectives of the fisherman and the monk mirror each other reveals the respect Byron affords their mentalities. This is the first case of cultural mirroring that we can note in the poem, the other major mirroring being the relationship between the Giaour and Hassan. The word 'infidel', and the play on its meaning between those who use it genuinely, and those who take it ironically, ultimately collapses all meaning. In the end, it signifies so much as to make it empty. 'Giaour' is equalled by 'paynim'.

The Giaour himself maintains the symmetry by drawing parallels between himself and Hassan, ultimately establishing that Leila's death at Hassan's hands is mirrored by his own confession that

Not mine the act, though I the cause.
Yet did he but what I had done
Had she been false to more than one.
Faithless to him – he gave the blow;
But true to me – I laid him low;
Howe'er deserved her doom might be,
Her treachery was truth to me

(ll. 1061-7)

Leask notes how the confession 'destroy[s] any possible claims for the moral superiority of Europeans'.[407] The fatal attraction of this 'Islamic code' lies in its engendering of violence – not the arbitrary, nonsensical violence of imperialism, but a violence that, despite its seeming logical inevitability, is always a necessary outcome of the interaction between two characters of the same stock: Hassan and the Giaour. In this sense, it is a zero-sum game, producing a specific set of relations and a particular post-event state of mind. Violence here is paradoxical – both nonsensical, in that it follows the strict logic of a strange equation where opposites reflect each other to produce the same outcome, and dynamic, driving the plot forward and shaping the narrative as well as the psyche of the Giaour.

Hassan shares many qualities with the Giaour, and the two characters mirror each other, not least by the Giaour's later revelation that 'did he but what I had done' (l. 1062). In describing how Hassan's palace has been silenced by his death, the fisherman depicts how the palace was formerly the centre of a community:

> Nor there the Fakir's self will wait;
> Nor there will wandering Dervise stay,
> For Bounty cheers not his delay;
> Nor there will weary stranger halt
> To bless the sacred "bread and salt."
> Alike must Wealth and Poverty
> Pass heedless and unheeded by,
> For Courtesy and Pity died
> With Hassan on the mountain side. –
> His roof – that refuge unto men –

[407] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 29.

Is Desolation's hungry den.

(ll. 339-49)

A few lines later, Byron makes the note that 'I need hardly observe, that Charity and Hospitality are the first duties enjoined by Mahomet; and to say truth, very generally practised by his disciples', as if to make the point that the fisherman's perspective is valid – Hassan was a good leader.

> I never saw a Revolution transacting – or at least completed – but I arrived just after the last Turkish one – and the *effects* were visible – & had all the grandeur of desolation in their aspect – – Streets in ashes – immense barracks (of a very fine construction) in ruins – and above all Sultan Selim's favourite gardens round them in all the wildness of luxuriant neglect – his fountains waterless – & his kiosks defaced but still glittering in their decay. – They lie between the city and Buyukdere on the hills above the Bosphorus[408]

The complicated response of the Giaour to Hassan, and the writing of that complication is a result of Byron's own complicated response to both Ali Pasha and Selim III.

The strange moral position of the Giaour is often questioned. Why does he assert, as in lines 1061-7 that 'he [Hassan] did but what I had done'? As T. S. Eliot reflects:

> Why a Greek of that period should have been so oppressed with remorse (although wholly impenitent) for killing a Moslem in what he would have considered a fair fight, or why Leila should have been guilty in leaving a husband or master to whom she was presumably united without her consent, are questions that we cannot answer.[409]

Perhaps what troubles the Giaour is his acknowledgement that he would have done the same as Hassan – that in spite of everything, they share the same moral code in this respect. This troubled conscience reflects Byron's own critical examination of how a foreign, despotic code of ethics parallels the hypocritical moral standards of his own society, including the hypocritical ethics of his own political Whiggish ideology. Byron belonged to a political class whose ideology, on the one

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[408] Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III '1813-1814: Alas! The love of women!' (1974), p. 180.
[409] T. S. Eliot, 'Byron' in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 270.

hand, dismissed as irrational the claims of a Catholic ruler to govern by divine right, but on the other, could not comprehend an extension of enfranchisement in the form either of rights or of any kind of political capital to those not part of the same political class. In both Western and Eastern contexts, the treatment of women stands as a particularly charged point of contention, revealing unresolved contradictions in each culture's professed moral and political ideals. In this sense, the treatment of women in the Tales is unsurprising – articulating an underlying tension in a line of thinking that allowed for women to have souls equal to those of men, but forgetful of any evidence for such an argument. It is an undercurrent that disturbs the Tales – and indeed all of Byron's representation of Islamic society. It is partially resolved, or at least examined, through the characters of Gulnare and Kaled of *The Corsair* and *Lara*. Beyond that examination, which I will come to, there is no doubt that Byron frequently repeats the misunderstanding that women do not have souls according to Islam, or that they have only a specific quota of Paradise, after which no more would be admitted (*The Giaour* lines 487-90, *The Bride*, lines 588-9). Byron clearly thought he had eliminated the foreign misogyny in a note to line 487:

> A vulgar error; the Koran allots at least a third of Paradise to well-behaved women; but by far the greatest number of Mussulmans interpret the text in their own way, and exclude their moieties from heaven. Being enemies to Platonics, they cannot discern "any fitness of things" in the souls of the other sex, conceiving them to be superseded by the Houris.

Even when attempting to correct a misconception about Islam and women's souls, Byron perpetuates another myth, revealing both his partial knowledge and his readiness to generalise. The note itself, however, asserts another myth – that 'at least a third of Paradise' is reserved for women. It should have been clear to any reader of Sale's Qur'an (as Byron declared he was) that as many women can enter Paradise as deserve to go:

> Verily the Muslims of either sex, and the true believers of either sex, and the devout men and the devout women, and the men of veracity and the women of veracity,

> and the patient *men* and the patient *women*, and the humble *men* and the humble *women*, and the alms-givers of either sex, and the *men* who fast and the *women* who fast, and the chaste *men* and the chaste *women*, and those of either sex who remember GOD frequently; for them hath GOD prepared forgiveness and a great reward.[410]

The fact that Byron is so ready to draw moral parallels between East and West, yet falls into the same patterns of selective knowledge, overgeneralisation, and cultural prejudice, is telling. It mirrors the deeper contradictions of Whig ideology: a belief in liberty and progress alongside a blindness to structural exclusions and inequities at home. In Byron's case, this 'troubled Whig' stance manifests as a willingness to condemn despotic codes abroad while leaving unexamined – indeed, even reinforcing – comparable injustices in his own political culture. It is in the midst of this delineation of a troubled Whig ideology that the character of the Giaour appears as so alienated and contradictory. As Daniel P. Watkins describes: 'The Giaour's position here reveals a culture and a character so divided that only private meaning is imaginable, and this, through its sheer narrowness and selfishness, jeopardizes, threatens, and compromises all social possibility and finally all life.'[411] The character of the Giaour does not have much potential – for either further psychological role play or indeed meaning. He remains nameless, raceless, without creed, possessing few signifiers to single him out beyond his 'evil eye', ruthless expression, speedy black horse, and a single action that continues to trouble him, seemingly without reason. In this way, the Giaour becomes less a fully realised individual than a cipher through which Byron tests the limits of moral equivalence between East and West – a test that underlies the broader dialectic in his poetry between action and word, and between historical encounter and self-reflective myth.

The timing of the writing of the poem is significant. Watkins points out that the redrafting of the poem from 344 lines to 1334 lines indicates 'Byron's increasing sensitivity to social,

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[410] E. M. Wherry (ed), *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Quran: Comprising Sale's Translation and Preliminary Discourse*, 4 vols, (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), III, p. 318 (Qur'an, 33:35).
[411] Daniel P. Watkins, 'Social Relations in Byron's *The Giaour*', *ELH*, 52.4 (1985) p. 883.

historical, and political pressures'.[412] Watkins also notes how the poem was composed during and following the liaison with Lady Oxford, at the same time as the termination of his political career in the House of Lords.[413] Watkins describes how 'no single response to an event, the poem suggests, can be adequate, for every event is simply one part of a much larger social dialectic'.[414] This framing highlights how Byron's poetic voice positions itself as both radical and transgressive – self-consciously critical of his culture, of political orthodoxies, and of sexual propriety – yet never entirely disentangled from the Whiggish assumptions, class interests, and gender privileges that shape his perspective. In this sense, the poem's revisions register not only his engagement with contemporary politics, but also the tensions between his rebellious self-fashioning and investments that compromise it.

This evolving poetic sensitivity also reflects Byron's increasingly fraught relationship with his Whig political identity. His earlier enthusiasm for liberal ideals becomes complicated by personal disillusionment and political setbacks, especially following his departure from the House of Lords. The poem's refusal to offer a single, definitive response to political events mirrors Byron's own ideological ambivalence – a recognition that the neat binaries of Whig liberalism could not fully address the deeper social and existential tensions he confronted. In this light, the poem emerges as an exploration not only of political issues but also of the broader, more enduring dialectic between individual difference and social belonging, a dialectic that underpins Byron's complex and often troubled engagement with his Whig convictions.

A further dimension to this impossibility of 'private meaning' in the figure of the Giaour lies in the interplay of determinisms: the Calvinistic fatalism of Byron's childhood faith and the Islamic doctrine of *qadar*. Both imply that human action is already inscribed in advance, foreclosing the possibility of a fully autonomous moral choice. This theological convergence mirrors the political contradictions of the Whig mindset: a professed commitment to human agency

412 Watkins, 'Social Relations in Byron's *The Giaour*', p. 889.
413 Watkins, 'Social Relations in Byron's *The Giaour*', p. 889.
414 Watkins, 'Social Relations in Byron's *The Giaour*', p. 890.

constrained by entrenched systems of exclusion. In this light, the Giaour's alienation stems as much from the suffocating inevitability of his fate as from any cultural dislocation, and Byron's treatment of him is also a meditation on the shared theological roots of fatalism across traditions that otherwise perceive themselves as irreconcilably different.

> She died – I dare not tell thee how;
>
> But look – 'tis written on my brow!
>
> There read of Cain the curse and crime
>
> (ll. 1056-8)

Both Bernard Blackstone and Alan Rawes have suggested a link between this curse 'written on my brow' and Calvinism.[415] It is highly possible that Byron's reading of the Ottoman historian and diplomat Paul Rycaut's *History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1665) had alerted him to the Islamic belief in pre-destination, or qadar. Rycaut writes that 'They [the Ottomans] are of the opinion that every mans [*sic*] destiny is wrote on his forehead'.[416] This may well have recalled to Byron the theological determinism of the Calvinism to which he had been exposed as a child. If Byron is making such a link, which is highly probable, it underlines the synthesis in the Byronic hero of a particular strain of religious belief that can be found in both Byron's early Calvinist upbringing and also in Islam. The link is already made for him by Rycaut: 'The doctrine of the Turks at this point seems to run exactly according to the assertions of the severest Calvinists'.[417] Byron's attraction to Islam's fatalism can be understood as resonant with his own internalisation of a Calvinist sense of being a 'fated' or 'cursed' individual, caught between predestination and personal rebellion. In this light, the Giaour's alienation stems as much from the suffocating

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[415] See Bernard Blackstone, "Byron and Islam: the Triple Eros", and Alan Rawes, 'Byron's Romantic Calvinism', *The Byron Journal* 40.2 (2012), pp. 129-141.

[416] 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. In three Books.* By Paul Rycaut Esq. (London, 1668), quoted in Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam', p. 331.

[417] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, quoted in Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam', p. 331.

inevitability of his fate as from any cultural dislocation, and Byron's treatment of him becomes a meditation on the shared theological roots of fatalism across traditions that otherwise perceive themselves as irreconcilably different.

The parallel between the determinism of Calvinism and Islam, recognised in Byron scholarship by Bernard Blackstone and Naji Oueijan, is particularly important for my reading of the Byronic hero.[418] The fundamental belief in predestination shared by both Calvinism and Islam is highly significant, as it represents a recurring preoccupation for Byron throughout his poetic work. Islamic predestination provides Byron with a framework to articulate the figure of an anti-hero – one who is simultaneously alienated from the conventional moral structures of his community and yet bound by a deeper, inescapable metaphysical code characterised by fatalism. This duality is central to understanding Byron's exploration of character and morality, as it transcends simple notions of good and evil and instead delves into the tension between individual agency and cosmic determinism. Byron's attitude toward religion is notably complex and nuanced. In a letter to William Gifford dated June 1813, Byron reflects candidly on his personal beliefs and early experiences:

> To your advice on Religious topics I shall equally attend […] I am no Bigot to Infidelity - & did not expect that because I doubted the immortality of Man – I should be charged with denying ye existence of a God. – It was the comparative insignificance of ourselves & our world when placed in competition with the mighty whole of which it is an atom that first led me to imagine that our pretensions to eternity might be overrated. – This – & being early disgusted with a Calvinistic Scotch School where I was cudgeled to Church for the first ten years of my life – afflicted me with this malady.[419]

This passage reveals several important dimensions of Byron's religious thought. His scepticism is not born out of outright atheism or rejection of a divine presence but arises from a profound sense

[418] In Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam: the Triple Eros', and Oueijan, *Lord Byron's Oriental World.*
[419] Marchand (ed.), *Byron: Letters and Journals*, III, p. 64.

of human insignificance within the vastness of the cosmos – 'the mighty whole' – which makes the human claim to eternal significance seem overstated. Moreover, his early upbringing within a rigid Calvinistic environment, which he describes as coercive and alienating, shaped his critical stance toward institutional religion. The 'malady' Byron refers to encapsulates a restless spiritual doubt combined with a search for meaning beyond dogma.

The resonance between Calvinist and Islamic doctrines of predestination would have been especially compelling for Byron, given his "fated" or "cursed" sense of self – a theme frequently manifest in his poetry. The Calvinist view of a predetermined elect and the Islamic concept of divine decree both reinforce the inevitability of certain life outcomes, which Byron transposes onto his poetic anti-heroes, notably figures like the Giaour. This theological fatalism allows Byron to craft characters caught in existential paradoxes, struggling between rebellion and submission to forces beyond their control. In this light, Byron's engagement with Islamic predestination is not merely an exotic appropriation but an integral part of his interrogation of fate, morality, and identity, reflecting his own conflicted relationship with religion and his broader Romantic scepticism toward Enlightenment rationalism and secularism.

Here questions of fate and predestination intersect with questions of desire, identity, and cultural positioning. As Landry observes of Beckford's *Vathek*, the Oriental court offered the most compelling stage for dramatising both transgression and its inevitable failure: satisfactions proved fleeting, appetites insatiable, and only the despot could embody the subject consumed by such restless excess:

> Beckford cultivated both transgression and its inevitable failure. Satisfactions and sustainability were nowhere to be found. The most gratifying scene within which to stage these provocations and disappointments was an Oriental one. Only the Oriental despot could trope the self or subject compelled by inexhaustible, insatiable appetites. Only the Oriental court could represent the splendour and exquisite aesthetic pleasures Beckford

desired, and wished fervidly—'fervid' being one of his favourite words—to pursue at any cost.[420]

Addressing issues of sexuality is one way to explore why this question is so pressing for Byron, and why it constitutes such a central aspect of the tales; but it is equally important to consider the perspective of a secular agnostic, frustrated by the limits of dogma yet curious about the values of faith, encountering a culture in which religion permeates every layer of social life. Byron was particularly attuned to such differences, and he retained a sympathy for – if not an identification with – a society in which religion was immanent in the culture as a whole. *The Giaour* stages his first immersion into that world: a kind of role-playing that probes how a figure not unlike himself might operate within it. Here Byron's imaginative investment parallels William Beckford's in *Vathek*, where, as Landry argues, Beckford cultivated both transgression and its inevitable failure, discovering no lasting satisfactions or sustainable freedoms. For Beckford, the Oriental court provided the most gratifying scene in which to stage these provocations and disappointments: only the despot could embody a subject compelled by inexhaustible appetites, only the splendour of an Eastern setting could realise the exquisite aesthetic pleasures he so fervidly desired. In Byron's case, too, the Oriental tale becomes a privileged site for testing identities – at once transgressive and compromised, critical of European dogma yet deeply entangled with questions of desire, faith, and cultural alterity.[421] Byron was particularly sensitive to different forms of life and retained a sympathy for (if not a conversion to) a society in which religion was immanent within the culture as a whole. *The Giaour* describes the first immersion into that world – a kind of role playing that examines how a figure not unlike himself could operate. What this character of the hero of the Tales really examines is to what extent a figure such as himself could belong in such a culture, and what the fallout from that experience would be, both in

[420] Donna Landry, 'William Beckford's *Vathek* and the Uses of Oriental Re-enactment', in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, ed. by Saree Makdisi, and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford, 2008), p. 176.
[421] For further analysis of Byron's sexuality and the Tales, see Chapter 5, 'Byronic Infidelity and Despotic Individuality: Sex, Religion and Free Agency' of Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud's *Radical Orientalism: Rights, Reform and Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 178-217.

terms of psychology, but also in terms of political understanding. Byron's evolution of his heroes – from *The Giaour*, through the half-Turk, half-Greek Selim in *The Bride of Abydos*, to Conrad of *The Corsair*, and finally *Count Lara* – demonstrates a deliberate use of the pirate figure as a means of stabilising his fractured identity. The moral agility of the pirate, and his capacity to live by a code as changeable as his location, offers Byron a solution to the dilemma of how an individual raised within a secular worldview might operate in a world where religion is foundational and immanent. The pirate figure also illuminates how easily a secular worldview could exploit a religious one, and how the mutable ethics of piracy might ultimately outmanoeuvre the fixed religious moral codes found in Islamic society, blending into an imperialist ideology that justified secularism's 'enlightenment' mission in the Islamic world.

Yet this fix was one Byron found ultimately repulsive, contributing to his disdain for the *Tales* and his later reworking of key themes in *The Island*, a work often paired with the *Tales* in critical discussions.[422] This ambivalence aligns with the complex provocations and inevitable failures that Beckford cultivated in his Orientalist work, as Landry notes. Byron's deployment of the Oriental setting as a stage for similar tensions – between desire and failure, transgression and constraint – thus reflects a shared Romantic fascination with the Orient as a space where social and moral extremes could be enacted, but never fully resolved. This intensifies Byron's ambivalence, as the pirate's moral agility both enables resistance to and complicity with imperialist and secular projects, mirroring the poet's own conflicted relationship with faith, identity, and the politics of his age.

Crucially, Byron's engagement also reveals a deeper, often implicit understanding that Western modernity – and its secularising project – is fundamentally universalising and totalising. He sensed that the pluralism and difference he encountered in the Islamicate world, with its

[422] See for example, Robert D. Hume, 'The Island and the Evolution of Byron's Tales', *Studies in Romanticism*, 32 (1993), pp. 275–98, Susan Oliver, *Scott, Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), and Peter Cochran, 'Byron's Polynesian Fantasy', *The Byron Journal*, 24 (1996), pp. 35–52, as well as Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East* pp. 54-67.

embedded metaphysical and social certainties, was under existential threat from the expanding narrative of Western modernity. This narrative insists on assimilating difference into a singular historical and cultural framework – one marked by disenchantment, the dominance of secular reason, and the reduction of value to the logics of capitalist exchange. Secular reason and disenchantment, in this light, function less as autonomous developments than as ideological expressions of capitalism's drive to rationalise, standardise, and flatten human experience. Byron's later historical mode, especially in *Don Juan*, strives to preserve multiplicity and historicity, resisting the flattening forces of universalisation. Yet he also understood that such resistance might ultimately be outrun by the relentless totalising logic of modernity, where all difference is subsumed under a homogenising capitalist-secular order. His poetry thus not only dramatises the tension between worlds but also anticipates the eventual dominance of a disenchanted modernity that seeks to enclose all histories and identities within a single, universal story.

Byron's secular agnosticism and his acute awareness of Western modernity's universalising and secularising tendencies shaped his engagement with Islamicate culture in complex ways. While modernity sought to absorb difference into a singular secular narrative, Byron's poetry reflects an attempt to appropriate select spiritual elements from Islam without fully submitting to its cultural or religious totality. In this selective process, Sufi Islam – especially its mystical language of love and transcendence – offered Byron (and many others) an appealing, yet ultimately partial, framework.

Sufism's emphasis on personal spiritual experience, metaphor, and poetic symbolism appeared more compatible with Byron's secular background, allowing him to explore metaphysical themes without the constraints of orthodox religion.[423] However, this engagement risks remaining superficial: Byron's fascination with Sufism often isolates its more poetic or mystical facets,

[423] For an example of love expressed through poetic symbolism, see Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Masnavi*, Book One, trans. by Jawid Mojaddedi (Oxford University Press, 2004), 'The Song of the Reed', vv. 1–34, pp. 4–6. Here the reed's lament for separation develops into an account of love's transformative power.

neglecting the deeply embedded cultural, doctrinal, and social contexts that make Sufism a living, holistic tradition.

This ambivalence is visible in *The Giaour*, where the depiction of love draws heavily on Sufi imagery:

> Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven;
> A spark of that immortal fire
> With the angels shared, by Alla given,
> To lift from earth our low desire,
> Devotion wafts the mind above,
> But Heaven itself descends in love
>
> (ll. 1131-6)

This speaker is the Giaour. As Bernard Blackstone notes, these lines echo Sufi concepts such as spiritual ascent, divine sparks (sirr), and the annihilation of the self (fanāʾ), highlighting Byron's appropriation of mystical doctrines.[424] Yet Byron's use of these themes often functions more as exotic ornamentation than as a genuinely integrated religious worldview. William Jones's interpretation of the *Majnoun ou Laila* legend, emphasising allegory and divine love, further frames Byron's appropriation within a poetic tradition but also underscores the fragmentary nature of this engagement. Later Blackstone points to Jones's description of the metaphysical aspect of love in the story of *Majnoun ou Laila,* who notes that whilst the poem is 'indisputably built on true history, yet avowedly allegorical and mysterious; for the introduction to is a continued rapture on *divine love*; and the name of Laila seems to be used in the *Masnavi* and the odes of Ḥāfiẓ for the omnipresent spirit of God'.[425]

[424] Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam', p. 351.
[425] William Jones, 'On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and the Hindus', quoted in Blackstone, 'Byron and Islam: The Triple Eros', p. 351.

Similarly, Byron's invocation of the rose and nightingale motif ('For there – the Rose o'er crag or vale, Sultana of the Nightingale' (ll. 21-22)) – central to Persian and Ottoman poetry – serves more as a symbolic gesture than a deep cultural immersion.[426] Again, the motif is a nod to the Persian poetry made popular through the translations of Jones, cited in Byron's 1807 list of his reading.[427] Byron's selective incorporation of Sufi elements, divorced from their full religious and social contexts, mirrors a broader tension in Byron's work: a desire to draw on the spiritual richness of Islamicate culture without wholly relinquishing the Western frames of reference with which he remained in conflict. In this light, Byron's Sufi curiosity can be seen as a strategic, if incomplete, way of grappling with difference – a way of borrowing spiritual imagery that complements his secular sensibilities but ultimately avoids the challenges of genuine religious or cultural integration.

In *The Giaour*, Byron's poetic engagement with Islam and Islamicate culture serves as a complex site for exploring his own ideological struggles, particularly his troubled Whig convictions. While much of the Oriental 'flavour' in his work can appear superficial or performative – drawing heavily on sources like Beckford's *Vathek* – there remains a sincere, if selective, curiosity about Islam, especially its spiritual and metaphysical dimensions such as Sufism. Byron's portrayal of the Islamicate world provides a framework in which the limits of Western secular modernity – marked by disenchantment and its accompanying drive toward capitalist universalisation and homogenisation – are both challenged and negotiated.

This encounter with Islam highlights the tensions in Byron's worldview: he is drawn to the metaphysical certainties underpinning Islamic society, which offer a bounded space for heroic action and identity, contrasting with the fragmented, often performative heroism of his own

[426] See Nilchian, 'Gul and Bulbul: Persian Love in Byron'.
[427] See note 405.

modern secular context. Central to this engagement is the argument that secularism itself renders heroism hopeless or merely performative. Without a concrete, metaphysical moral structure – such as that offered by religion – heroic action lacks grounding and purpose, becoming a posture rather than a lived reality. Byron's Islamicate setting, with its embedded religious certainties and social codes, offers a bounded moral universe where heroism can meaningfully unfold. This contrasts starkly with the fragmented, often hollow heroism available within secular modernity, which Byron critiques as lacking the substantive framework necessary for true greatness. However, Byron's engagement is fraught with ambivalence – his ambivalence toward inherited religious authority allows him to draw selectively on mystical elements such as Sufism, while often neglecting or simplifying the broader cultural and dogmatic contexts, resulting in a partial and sometimes superficial encounter.

At the ideological core, *The Giaour* functions as a displaced critique of Byron's Whig beliefs. While Whiggism opposes religious absolutism, it is itself riddled with contradictions – upholding a hierarchical social order that denies genuine enfranchisement to many. The poem's protagonists, bound by moral despotism, reveal these ideological limits. The figure of Leila and the theme of love gesture toward possible transcendence but ultimately underscore the Giaour's – and by extension Byron's – inability to fully escape the constraints of his inherited worldview.

Through this layered engagement with Islam, secularism, and Whiggism, Byron's *The Giaour* exposes the tensions of negotiating individual freedom, social hierarchy, and cultural difference within the expanding narratives of Western modernity. The poem reveals both the allure and the limits of imagining alternative modes of heroism and identity in a world shaped not merely by the decline of religion, but by the constructed immanent frame of modern secularity – a moral and experiential order in which transcendence, spiritual plurality, and mystical traditions are marginalised, making non-Western and premodern modes of being both compelling and increasingly precarious.

5. The Bride of Abydos: Contested land, the Sea and Nomadic Piracy

That Byron is using the writing of the Tales to explore aspects of what we might call his unconscious is clear – even intimated by the writer himself. On November 12th, 1813, Byron described the motives for the composition of the follow up to The Giaour, The Bride of Abydos as follows:

> It was written – I cannot say for amusement, nor "obliged by hunger and request of friends" but in a state of mind, from circumstances which occasionally occur to "us youth" that rendered it necessary for me to apply my mind to something – any thing but reality – and under this not very brilliant inspiration it was composed.[428]

That the tales are not told through a 'rational' or 'reasoned' frame of mind is apparent to Byron, and perhaps part of the reason for his self-consciousness about them later in life. The 'state of mind' he indicates suggests something about a psychological evaluation of his experiences – and the recollection of the internalised experience of the East itself, experience of another form of life.

The Bride is the only poem of the Tales in which all characters are Muslim, and the Islamic setting is clear throughout the poem. However, that Byron is using the material elements of the Oriental setting to exaggerate the exotic appeal of the poem is clear, and the Oriental detailing makes the poem the most material of all the 'Tales'. The plot of the Bride is another tale of forbidden love. The main protagonist, Selim, is the son of the Muslim (and despotic) ruler Giaffir. Selim falls in love with his half-sister (also a child of Giaffir), Zuleika. On learning of Selim's love for Zuleika, Giaffir, angered, denies Selim a key to his harem. Selim becomes a pirate and gathers a band of men to act out his revenge on Giaffir. Meeting Zuleika in a grotto on the coast, Selim reveals to Zuleika that they are not brother and sister, but cousins, since Selim's real father was

[428] Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III, p. 161.

Giaffir's brother, Abdallah. They are interrupted by Giaffir's armed men, and Selim is killed on the shore by Giaffir himself. After this Zuleika dies of sorrow and Giaffir lives the end of his days in solitude: another zero-sum tragedy.

The background of Selim, and his Greek mother, brings to the poem the sense of 'outsider status', which is so characteristic of Byron's 'Tales' and indeed the development of the Byronic hero. Giaffir refers to Selim as 'Greek in soul if not in Creed'.[429] The Islamicate ontology of the poem is undermined not only by Selim's background, but by the setting: the poem takes place on the Hellespont, which evokes the Greek myth of Hero and Leander. Leask does however go too far in suggesting that 'Byron originally intended to make Zuleika Selim's sister, and thus also, presumably, half-Greek' (l. 43). Zuleika and Selim were thought to share the same father, Giaffir, rather than mother. Giaffir's contempt for Selim's mother is explicitly stated: 'From an unbelieving mother bred' (l. 82), whereas Zuleika 'is the offspring of my choice / – Oh! more than even her mother dear' (ll. 148-9).

In *Childe Harold*, Byron had found the palimpsest effect of multiple histories layered upon the tangible physical place something which he at times is able to weave into his own poetic epic as a historical virtuoso, and at times, something that almost collapses the narrative into a state of vertigo. The overlapping of various cultural myths onto a single geographic location has vertiginous effects for the reader. Indeed, it seems at these moments as if the writer himself is dizzied by the overlapping of so many histories, each with their related discourses, onto a single place, as he weaves himself into the historical narrative by describing his own experience of swimming the Hellespont.[430] The over symbolism of land as a territory, ideologically and historically fought over and claimed, is a significant motif in Byron's early work. Byron uses the sea, and its permanence around the imperial impermanence as an anchor. *The Giaour* begins 'No

[429] Line 87 of 'The Bride of Abydos', in McGann (ed.) *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, III (1981), pp. 107-147. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text by line number.
[430] At Canto II, lines 28-38 of 'The Bride of Abydos', as well as at Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, stanza clxxxiv, line 3. He refers to the swim again in *Don Juan*, in Canto II, stanza cv.

breath of air to break the wave' (l. 1), and Canto IV of the *Pilgrimage* in stanzas 182-4, describing the ocean: 'Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee' (l. 1630). In *The Bride of Abydos*, Canto I begins with a description of the landscape 'the land of the cedar and vine' (l. 5), and Canto II with a description of the seascape: 'The winds are high on Helle's wave' (l. 483).

The return to the symbolism of the sea as a counterbalance to the imperially contested land is significant. If Byron finds land to be overburdened by a multiplicity of various historical forms of life, then the sea is a relief from the wearying over symbolism of land. This becomes more apparent as Byron begins to invest in the character of the pirate as potentially overcoming the ideological challenges of land. The figure of the pirate, which Selim becomes in an attempt to overthrow Giaffir (as is Conrad of *The Corsair*), is in this sense analogous to Byron himself – an observer of the different moral codes of the forms of life he encounters, but never a genuine participant. Earlier analysis of *The Giaour* reveals some of Byron's underlying insecurities about the hypocrisies of his own cultural background, including his own identity as Whig sitting in the House of Lords. The travels of 1809-11 were an attempt to gain an experience of different forms of life which could provide, in Makdisi's words a 'refuge' from his native culture, offering 'a space from which to critique modernity and the West itself'.[431] Byron's anxious discourse on his 'turning Turk' is an articulation of his desire to have fully immersed himself in the total existential experience of being a Muslim. The difficulty Byron experienced was his realisation that even if he did convert, conversion would not give him the total experience of his desires – it would still leave him an English speaker, ignorant of Turkish, Arabic or Persian, and still steeped in the ideological foundations of his own cultural environment. The disappointment of this realisation is what allows him to overlap multiple histories and ideologies onto a single territory – a method that leads to a confusion of incoherent perspectives, and a lack of clarity about his ideological *point*. But it is in

[431] Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*, p. 137.

fact this confusion – this 'state of mind' he describes in the letter to Moore – that is itself the point, and symbolic of the return to the slippery, mercurial ideological and poetic analogy of the sea.

In this respect, it is not difficult to see why the figure of the pirate proved so compelling for Byron. Unlike the chivalric knight, the pirate refuses any binding code of honour, instead living by a mutable ethic of self-interest and expedience. This makes the pirate an ambivalent figure: not simply a proto-colonial adventurer, but one whose opportunism and mobility both echo and unsettle the logics of empire. What most aligns the pirate with Byron's critique of modernity, however, is their secularity. Pirates operate outside any transcendent moral order; their world is governed instead by the disenchanted calculations of profit, loyalty, and convenience. In this sense, piracy embodies the secular grammar of modernity itself: identities may shift – Christian or Muslim, Greek or Arab – but the overarching frame of instrumental reason remains constant. Byron's romanticised pirates thus register the enticements and dangers of a world in which secular modernity, stripped of metaphysical grounding, reduces heroism to performance and survival.

Yet Byron does not reduce the pirate figure solely to a symptom of secular disenchantment. He also reimagines the pirate-band as a speculative social formation: a fragile experiment in liberty, equality, and radical community. As David Graeber has argued in *Pirate Enlightenment, or the Real Libertalia* (2023), historical pirate crews often practised forms of egalitarian governance, electing captains, redistributing spoils, and offering refuge to escaped slaves or press-ganged sailors.[432] Byron's fascination with pirates draws upon precisely this tension: if piracy exemplifies the pragmatic, disenchanted ethos of modernity, it simultaneously gestures toward alternative social imaginaries – fantasies of freedom and radical democracy that sit uneasily alongside his recognition of their instability and ultimate impossibility.

And oft around the cavern fire
On visionary schemes debate,

[432] David Graeber, *Pirate Enlightenment, or the Real Libertalia*, (Penguin, 2023).

To snatch the Rayahs from their fate.

So let them ease their hearts with prate

Of equal rights, which man ne'er knew;

I have a love for freedom too.

(ll. 864-9)

Here the 'enlightened pirate' becomes a mouthpiece for liberal ideals – equal rights, political emancipation – while acknowledging their distance from historical reality. Byron's pirates are not utopian builders; they are sceptical visionaries, rehearsing the language of freedom, but without the civic and institutional framework to realise it. It is this quality that Byron singles out elsewhere:

'Tis true, they are a lawless brood,

But rough in form, nor mild in mood;

And every creed, and every race,

With them hath found – may find – a place:

But open speech, and ready hand,

Obedience to their chief's command;

A soul for every enterprise,

That never sees with terror's eyes;

Friendship for each, and faith to all,

And vengeance vowed for those who fall,

Have made them fitting instruments

For more than ev'n my own intents.

(ll. 845-56)

Byron's description of the pirate band in these lines underscores precisely the ambivalence identified above. On the one hand, they are 'a lawless brood', defined by violence, vengeance, and obedience to their chief – a portrait that resonates with the secular pragmatism of piracy, where loyalty and enterprise substitute for any transcendent moral order. Their inclusivity ('every creed,

and every race') is not framed in terms of cosmopolitan idealism but as a byproduct of a world where difference is subordinated to expedience and survival: a secular grammar in which identity is endlessly flexible. On the other hand, Byron's lines also imagine the pirate community in terms strikingly close to Graeber's account of pirates as radical democrats and egalitarians.

Open speech, friendship, and faith between comrades suggest forms of horizontal solidarity and alternative modes of belonging. In this way, the pirate band functions as both a symptom of modernity's disenchanted, instrumental rationality and a speculative social formation that points toward radical equality and collective agency. That Byron describes them as 'fitting instruments / For more than ev'n my own intents' suggests that his imagination invests in their potential beyond mere criminality: they become a stage upon which competing fantasies of secular disenchantment and utopian freedom can be played out. Building on this vision of the pirate band as both a site of secular pragmatism and a speculative social formation, Selim's own account personalises these dynamics, emphasising the intimate interplay of freedom, mobility, and self-fashioning. In his lines:

> Ay! let me like the ocean-Patriarch roam,
> Or only known on land the Tartar's home!*
> My tent on shore, my galley on the sea,
> Are more than cities and Serais to me
>
> (ll. 870-3)
>
> *The wandering life of the Arabs, Tartars, and Turkomans, will be found well detailed in any book of Eastern travels. That it possesses a charm peculiar to itself, cannot be denied. A young French renegado confessed to Chateaubriand, that he never found himself alone, galloping in the desert, without a sensation approaching to rapture, which was indescribable.

Byron's reference to Chateaubriand locates this attraction within a European travel account: the young French renegado's desert freedom is conveyed as an almost ecstatic release. This supplies a

point of departure for the comparison with Ibn Khaldūn below, where nomadic freedom is considered in relation to moral discipline and collective life. The reference to nomadism is significant and helps explain its appeal for a European writer like Byron. The sea and the desert share an obvious symbolic affinity, and the pirate is in many respects a sea-nomad – defined by mobility, self-reliance, and an almost constitutive refusal of fixity. To unpack the full meaning of this lure of nomadism in Romantic writing, we might turn to Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* and his dialectic of nomadism, religion, and civilisation among the Arabs.[433]

For Ibn Khaldūn, nomads and sedentary peoples are distinguished not merely by lifestyle but by their moral and spiritual dispositions. Sedentary peoples, immersed in luxury and the pursuit of worldly pleasure, become softened and morally compromised. By contrast, the Arabs, as he describes them, are 'a savage nation', shaped by freedom from authority and an instinctive resistance to subservience – qualities that make them, in their natural state, the negation of civilisation itself. This restlessness erodes settled life: the nomad plunders, dismantles, and consumes the built world rather than sustaining it. Yet in the very same movement, Ibn Khaldūn identifies a hidden strength: because they remain uncorrupted by the distorted habits of luxury, nomads are uniquely receptive to religious truth and moral discipline – once their savagery is tempered by a concrete moral law.

Here Byron's pirate-nomad stands in telling contrast. Stripped of the religious frame that Ibn Khaldūn saw as essential to converting wild freedom into virtuous purpose, Byron's figure is left with mobility as an end in itself. Secularism's universalising grammar can absorb the pirate's freedom, the Sufi's ecstasy, or the nomad's restlessness into its symbolic repertoire, but in doing so it detaches them from the moral and communal structures that once gave them meaning.

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[433] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History – Abridged Edition*, trans. by Franz Rosenthal, ed. by N. J. Dawood (Princeton University Press, 2015), esp. Ch 2 'Bedouin civilization, savage nations and tribes and their conditions of life, including several basic and explanatory statements', pp. 91-122.

What remains is a heroism emptied of its religious core – restless, spectacular, and infinitely adaptable, yet incapable of producing the kind of purposeful action that Ibn Khaldūn's nomad might achieve once bound to faith.

It is precisely their naïve disregard for property rights that ensures that 'their natures have been preserved free from distorted habits and uncontaminated by base character qualities.' Thus, 'when there is religion (among them) […] then they have some restraining influence in themselves. The qualities of haughtiness and jealousy leave them. It is, then, easy for them to subordinate themselves and to unite (as a social organization).'[434] We can read part of this dialectic in Byron's depiction of piracy – namely, the effects of nomadism on the nature of the group. However, the legacy of nomadism in Byron's pirates never reaches its completion through religion as a unifying force. For British Romantic writers, the lure of nomadism is often a retreat from political engagement in corrupted systems, a withdrawal into an imagined purity of movement and self-sufficiency. In the case of Byron's pirates, restless freedom is instead bound up with materialism and self-interest, producing a form of 'nomadic colonialism' that mirrors British imperial expansion. Like pirates, colonial agents are adaptable and cosmopolitan, capable of adopting local forms and languages while pursuing profit and control without becoming truly embedded or transformed by their encounters.

This reading illuminates how Byron's pirates function less as direct analogues of imperial power than as unstable figures through which the contradictions of Western modernity are staged. The pirate's rejection of fixed moral orders dramatises the impossibility of heroic action within a purely secular frame – heroism becomes performative, fragmented, or hollow. At the same time, the pirate's mutable identity and ruthless pragmatism echo certain logics of colonial expansion – mobility, appropriation, the subordination of difference – while also undermining them. Pirates were historically antagonists of empire, their multi-ethnic crews and attacks on imperial commerce

[434] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 120.

destabilising the very systems they seemed to mirror. Byron's pirates, then, embody the double-edged character of modernity itself: symptomatic of its disenchanted, instrumental logic, yet also disruptive of its universalising claims.

This tension surrounding the pirate as a secular, nomadic figure – simultaneously embodying freedom and corruption, mobility and materialism – finds its expression in the poem's rich attention to material detail, which culminates in a critique of property and possession as just another form of colonial appropriation. Byron's poems lavish care on the texture of the East: the inside of Ottoman rooms (l. 272 and Byron's note), the perfume of Persian roses ('The Persian is the finest', note to l. 270), Giaffir's gem-adorned chibouque (l. 233), and above all Zuleika's bedroom, where silken fabrics, fragrant beads of amber, amulets inscribed with sacred texts, and Persian scrolls combine into a heady vision of luxury and symbolic potency (ll. 541-64).

That Byron was proud of the authenticity of his details is clear by reading his letters of the period (November 1813).[435] He wrote to Lord Holland: 'it is my story and my *East* – (& here I am venturing with no one to contend against – from having seen what my contemporaries must copy from the drawings of others only)' and in the same letter, that his stanzas are 'thoroughly Eastern - & partly from the Koran'.[436] A week later he wrote to Lady Melbourne: 'When I speak of this *tale* & the *author* – I merely mean *feelings* – the characters & the costume & the tale itself (at least are very like it I heard) are Musselman'.[437]

There is an indication here of Byron's Islamic materialism, and an ambivalent response that fluctuates between critique and desire. While the pirate Selim sheds much of this opulence when reappearing as a Galiongee – discarding jewel-studded robes for simpler garb – Byron's narrative pauses to admire the craftsmanship and mystique surrounding Ottoman weapons and attire, preserving an orientalist curiosity that oscillates between fascination and critical distance. If Selim's

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435 Especially those of November 1813. Byron said in his diary of Nov. 16, 1813, that the poem was written "in four nights". But see letter of Nov. 12, to Gifford, where he says it was "the work of a week'" (note to p.156, Marchand (ed.) *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III).
436 Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III, pp. 168-9
437 Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III, pp. 175.

simplified new attire is a mark of his ideological liberation from the oppressive exotic materialism of Islamic rulership, Byron retains a curiosity and fascination with the Oriental outfit. 'Their dress is picturesque; and I have seen the Captain Pacha more than once wearing it as a kind of incog', Byron notes at line 632, stopping to interrupt the narrative to admire the craftsmanship of his own souvenirs:

> The characters on all Turkish scimitars contain sometimes the name of the place of their manufacture, but more generally a text from the Koran, in letters of gold. Amongst those in my possession is one with a blade of singular construction; it is very broad, and the edge notched into serpentine curves like the ripple of water, or the wavering of flame. I asked the Armenian who sold it what possible use such a figure could add: he said, in Italian, that he did not know; but the Mussulmans had an idea that those of this form gave a severer wound; and liked it because it was "più feroce." I did not much admire the reason, but bought it for its peculiarity. (note to l. 76)

This materialism is not innocent; as the poem reveals, the pirate's restless mobility and eager acquisition mirror colonial processes of appropriation, turning the allure of nomadism into a Westernised nomadic colonialism. Byron's pirates thus dramatise a secularism that fractures heroic ideals into performative gestures, leaving morality untethered and freedom compromised. And yet, piracy does not triumph in *The Bride*. The poem gestures toward alternative modes of connection and meaning, highlighting a tension between the secular, instrumental social models embodied by piracy and more traditional or transcendent frameworks of love and devotion. Here, Byron stages a retreat to chivalric codes. This honourable death marks the failure of piracy's utility-driven agenda: the pragmatic, self-interested ethics that define the pirate band are subordinated to the dictates of loyalty, affection, and heroic ideals. Selim's end, then, demonstrates that the radical freedoms of the pirate life cannot sustain themselves in the face of enduring ethical and social codes, underscoring Byron's meditation on the limits of secular, instrumental modes of action and the persistent pull of traditional moral frameworks. Both Leask and Fay have noted the chivalric

genealogies of Byron's hero, and both note the significance of the hero's gaze, Leask remarking that Selim 'is killed in battle on account of his chivalrous regard for' Zuleika, and Fay by noting that 'the Byronic hero always looks away'.[438] Here, however, Selim's regard for Zuleika contradicts Fay's thesis, which expands to note that '[i]n looking away, the Byronic hero […] embodies the relation of the West's gazing at the East, and the East always being absorbed […] in its own otherness, its own distancing.'[439] But with Selim, Byron explores a pirate/knight ideological conflict, and Selim's hesitation and looking for Zuleika precipitate his downfall:

> Ah! wherefore did he turn to look
> For her his eye but sought in vain?
> That pause, that fatal gaze he took,
> Hath doomed his death, or fixed his chain.
>
> (ll. 1045-8)

This moment underscores how Selim's allegiance to chivalric ideals – his attentiveness to love and honour – trumps the pragmatic, self-interested ethics of piracy. His pause, a gesture of courtly feeling, becomes fatal, demonstrating that the pirate's secular, utility-driven code cannot prevail when confronted with the enduring demands of loyalty, devotion, and heroic decorum. Byron thus frames Selim's death as both inevitable and noble: a 'glorious doom' that dramatises the limits of the pirate model and the inescapable pull of traditional moral frameworks over purely instrumental action. Selim's fatal adherence to chivalric codes here exemplifies the tension Byron explores throughout his poetry, where the heavy literary and social legacy of chivalry – emerging from both historical encounters with the Islamicate world and inherited European ideals – continues to shape and often constrain his vision of heroism in a disenchanted, secular age.

[438] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 40, and Fay, *Romantic Medievalism*, p. 100
[439] Fay, *Romantic Medievalism*, p. 100.

The failure of piracy to preside as the ruling ideology of the poem, linked as I have argued to secularism, suggests that we should look to other aspects of the poem to recuperate meaning. To do that, we should go back to the love relationship at the centre of the tale that creates the action of the narrative in the same way as it did in *The Giaour*.

In his chapter on 'The Bride of Abydos', Naji Oueijan relates the relationship of Selim and Zuleika to the story of Antara Ibn Shaddad, the composer of one of the *Mu'allaqat*.[440] Like Selim, Antara grew up in love with his cousin, Abla, as Oueijan relates:

> According to the custom, Antara had the first right to marry Abla; however, for political and social interests, his fierce uncle, an image of Selim's uncle, discarded the proposal of Antara, who was the son of a Christian slave mother […] like Selim he also died in a fight.[441]

Oueijan argues that Byron had probably read of Antara in Teignmouth's edition of Jones's *Life and Works*, noting that the book is listed in Byron's 1807 list of reading published by Moore.[442] Oueijan remarks further on the similarities between the story of Selim and Zuleika and more classic Arab/Islamic texts, including Jami's *Yusef and Zulaykha*, and the story of Majnoun and Laila, adapted by many Persian, Ottoman and Arab poets, arguing that Byron's depiction of Selim and Zuleika was a conscious attempt to echo the style and content of the original Islamic sources.[443] Oueijan goes on to point to the Sufi mysticism at the heart of stories like Majnoun and Laila, and again using the Sufi background to Byron's sources to suggest that Byron was not 'a Sufi poet, but that he wrote like one'.[444] As with Blackstone, Oueijan's case for the centrality of a Sufi strain in Byron's Tales is convincing. Whether such a link is consciously made by Byron, it is certainly true that Byron's Eastern tales alight on a conjunction of two apparently divergent narratives – that of chivalrous love in the European tradition, and that of an Eastern tradition of representations of

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[440] Oueijan, *Lord Byron's Oriental World*, Chapter 7 'Byron's Eastern Bride', pp. 85-97.
[441] Oueijan, *Lord Byron's Oriental World*, p. 87
[442] See note 405.
[443] Oueijan, *Lord Byron's Oriental World*, pp. 85-90.
[444] Oueijan, *Lord Byron's Oriental World*, p. 92.

love that emerge from Arabia and beyond and were blended in turn into Islamic conceptions of God in the Sufi tradition. In this respect, it does not matter whether Byron was consciously aware of the extent of his involvement in Sufi discourses of love; what is more significant is how Byron engages, consciously and unconsciously, with a discourse that aligns love with spiritual connection to God.[445]

It is alongside these questions that we can begin to investigate Byron's representations of women in the Tales. If love is being represented to depict a mystical relationship with God, this point should be related to what we could call 'the women problem' of the Tales – the silence and inherent weakness of the women in the plot. Firstly, Laila is silently drowned, without issuing a word to tell her story in a poem of many voices. Secondly, Zuleika appears as another love object – a motive for a male character to act without any agency of her own. No doubt this is an issue – for the writer himself – as he deals with the problem explicitly in *The Corsair* in the character of Gulnare. However, there is a cultural logic at work which plays into the matter in varying ways. Byron's comments on and representations of Muslim women, which suggest familiarity, seem implausible – it is doubtful Byron would have had access to Muslim women from his travels; it is more likely that he uses Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as the basis for his knowledge, noting frequently in his letters the veracity of her reports on Ottoman culture. As Byron describes Zuleika's 'comboloio', he adds a revealing note:

> "Comboloio," a Turkish rosary. The MSS., particularly those of the Persians, are richly adorned and illuminated. The Greek females are kept in utter ignorance; but many of the Turkish girls are highly accomplished, though not actually qualified for a Christian coterie. Perhaps some of our own "blues" might not be the worse for bleaching. (Note to l. 554)

[445] See discussion of courtly love in Chapter 1, especially part 4. See also Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society,* trans. by Montgomery Belgion (Faber and Faber, 1956), esp. pp. 108-126.

It is clear from the note that Byron regrets his treatment of 'Turkish girls' – by this account they sound far more interesting than they appear in his poetry. If Byron then acknowledges that 'Turkish girls are highly accomplished', but struggles with their representation in his own narratives, that tension or even contradiction seems to suggest a hangover from his *own* worldview rather than being indicative of a foreign society's gender relations – the last line of his note gives some indication of the way in which he views Western intellectual women. This is seen again and again in Byron's handling of the treatment of women in Islam. As we have seen, Byron in fact perpetuates the myth of a designated limit for women in heaven, even whilst he tries to correct another myth about Islamic attitudes to women. The myth of women having no souls is treated in a similar way – appearing in both *The Giaour* and *The Bride*, with not a little scandalous exoticism.

There is a sense that the acknowledgement of absurdity of such views (women having a limited quota in heaven and having no souls) is a kneejerk cultural memory, rather than a personal or logical view with anything much at stake in it. One senses Byron responding to such myths as 'of course, this is absurd', and yet, upon further inspection of their desire, finding no real objection to the idea of being greeted upon one's death by seventy-two virgins. Indeed, it is perhaps only because of the notion being foreign, and 'other', that it is condemned. Byron is implicated here in the representations he questions, although he does make attempts to resuscitate the souls of 'Turkish girls' in his next tale, *The Corsair*. If *The Bride of Abydos* introduces the pirate as a figure of ideological ambiguity, *The Corsair* deepens this exploration by testing the limits of chivalric honour and secular pragmatism through the character of Conrad.

6. The Corsair: the Hero from Protagonist to Pirate

In his 1813–14 journal, during the period when he was writing and publishing *The Bride*, Byron expresses a sharp critique of European politics and the constitutional compromises that defined them:

> Men never advance beyond a certain point; — and here we are, retrograding to the dull, stupid old system, — balance of Europe […]. Give me a republic, or a despotism of one, rather than the mixed government of one, two, three. […] The Asiatics are not qualified to be republicans, but they have the liberty of demolishing despots, which is the next best thing to it. To be the first man — not the Dictator — not the Sylla, but the Washington or the Aristides — the leader in talent and truth — is next to the Divinity.[446]

This passage reveals Byron's impatience with political 'half-way houses' – the stagnant compromises and balances that frustrate decisive progress, and gives some background context for his ambivalent appreciation of the despotic strong-man, an Oriental archetype that appears throughout the Tales and well into his later poetry, including the old Khan at the siege of Izmail in *Don Juan*. His preference for 'a republic, or a despotism of one' expresses a desire for political forms that produce real change, rather than the paralysis of mixed government. The reference to Washington and Aristides highlights his admiration for exemplary leaders who combine moral virtue with practical authority – figures who are 'the leader in talent and truth', embodying a kind of secular, almost heroic ideal, rather than religious or theocratic rule.

Byron's comment on 'Asiatics' should be understood less as praise for Eastern theocracy and more as an acknowledgment that, while some societies may lack institutional republicanism, they retain the capacity to overthrow tyranny and thus enact political renewal. This reveals Byron's underlying political radicalism, rooted in a critique of the British constitutional status quo, which he saw as preserving social hierarchies under the guise of balance and moderation.

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[446] Marchand (ed.), *Byron's Letters and Journals*, III, p. 218.

This 'first man' impulse – the yearning for a decisive, virtuous leader capable of breaking through political inertia – animates Byron's subsequent works, including *The Corsair* and *Lara*.

These poems dramatise the tensions Byron felt about modern politics, celebrating figures who embody action and integrity amid corrupt and complacent systems. While Byron's engagement with Islamic and Ottoman contexts provides a comparative frame, it does not suggest a turn toward theocracy, but rather a search for alternatives to the stifling 'balance' of British political life. Indeed, Byron's restless dissatisfaction with 'halfway houses' and mixed government leads to an imaginative attraction to extremes, absolutes, things radically outside of conventional frame of British politics/culture – including Islam.

The narrative action of *The Corsair* revolves around an issue of chivalric ethics – the fair fight. The protagonist, Conrad, is introduced to the reader as a pirate, albeit one with a wife and home. He plans to launch an attack on a Pacha, Seyd, to claim his possessions, although his wife, Medora, attempts to convince him not to, fearing the risk. Conrad goes ahead and initially is able to win a skirmish and appropriate the treasure. However, Conrad hears the cries of the women of Seyd's harem, and changes his plans to launch a rescue mission. This enables Seyd's men to counter, killing many of Conrad's privateers, and imprisoning Conrad. A woman from the harem, Gulnare, secretly visits Conrad to thank him for the attempt to rescue the women. She launches her own mission, to free Conrad. Seyd hears of this and threatens to kill both Gulnare and Conrad. Arranging for a knife to be brought to Conrad, Gulnare tries to convince Conrad to kill the Pasha. Conrad refuses, on the basis that doing so would not be an honourable fight. At this point, Gulnare kills Seyd herself, and she and Conrad escape, returning to Conrad's island-home in the Aegean. Medora has died of grief, thinking that Conrad had been killed in the initial skirmish. The tale ends with Conrad departing the island alone, leaving 'a Corsair's name to other times, / Linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes'.[447]

[447] Lines 695-6 of 'The Corsair', in McGann (ed.) *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, III, pp. 148 - 214. Henceforth cited parenthetically by line number.

The Bride of Abydos had begun Byron's poetic investigation into the social dynamics and possibilities of the pirate community – a model that, while outside traditional political and moral codes, offers an alternative form of social organisation. Byron's portrayal of pirates reflects an interest in the tensions between freedom and authority, individualism and collective loyalty, which resonate with his broader political frustrations. This exploration is extended in *The Corsair*, where Byron continues his interest in the valences of pirate republicanism, but threads aspects of chivalric code through his pirate hero-ideal. Here, the figure of Conrad, the titular corsair, embodies not only the allure of rebellious liberty but also the enduring shadow of chivalry. Conrad's choices and internal conflicts raise significant questions about honour, loyalty, and personal sacrifice, complicating the ideal of the free pirate community by confronting it with codes of conduct and moral responsibility traditionally associated with knighthood and aristocratic virtue.

If Byron idealises Hellenistic, republican virtues, they are not to be found in any of the spheres of empire he has seen – this is clear from both the *Pilgrimage*, and also from the Tales so far. What we have, then, in *The Corsair*, is a move away from an attempt to resurrect Hellenistic values in the territory of an empire led by despots, to an engagement with what that 'Asiatic' quality of demolishing despots might be. Instead, *The Corsair* is an attempt to examine the spirit of those 'Turkish girls' Byron had previously refrained from investigating. The character of Gulnare, who murders the Muslim tyrant Seyd, disrupts the endless cycle of male honour reproduced through revenge and remorse – a cycle famously exemplified in *The Giaour*. Her act fractures the chivalric honour system, granting a woman agency beyond the limited symbolic roles traditionally afforded in Byron's previous works – such as mere signifiers of lost love or embodiments of divine love within the Sufi tradition.

This ambivalence toward Sufism reflects a broader tension in Byron's engagement with religion and politics, which we have seen earlier in his attraction to Sufism's spiritual depth alongside his secularist framework. Byron seems drawn to Sufi ideas precisely because they offer a form of love and transcendence that can be appropriated without demanding full immersion in

religious dogma or political structures – fitting neatly with his secular, often sceptical stance. However, this selective engagement leads to a certain apolitical romanticism, where the Sufi emphasis on abstinent, mystical love is perceived, perhaps unfairly, as a withdrawal from urgent political realities. This critique echoes a persistent modern tendency to valorise faith traditions like Sufism, Buddhism, or Kabbalah only insofar as they appear apolitical or personally enriching, sidelining their complex social and political dimensions.

Byron's uneasy relationship with Sufism – embracing its spiritual allure while resisting its deeper political and theological commitments – mirrors the conflicted emotions of his characters. This tension becomes strikingly evident in *The Corsair*, where the personal and the political, the sacred and the secular, collide within Conrad's psyche. The poem's lines capture this profound inner turmoil:

> My very love to thee is hate to them,
> So closely mingling here, that disentwined,
> I cease to love thee when I love mankind
>
> (ll. 403-5)

Medora's near contagion by Conrad's misanthropy signals Byron's incomplete engagement with the Sufi idea of divine immanence; he flirts with a mystical unity of love and God, yet cannot fully embrace it without linking divinity to power and earthly authority.

This ambivalence connects with Byron's earlier 'first man' impulse, expressed in his journal during the time of *The Bride*, where he elevates the ideal leader – not as a democratic figure but as a singular, exceptional individual 'next to the Divinity'. Conrad embodies this archetype: a leader defined by personal talent and truth, who commands not through democratic consensus but through a mix of charisma, martial prowess, and a quasi-religious authority. It is this figure – the solitary, quasi-divine 'first man' – that Byron imagines at the intersection of political despotism and spiritual aspiration.

Perhaps this partial embrace of Sufism, combined with the 'first man' ideal, explains George Rishmawi's provocative suggestion that Conrad 'secretly desires to become a Bektash' – an allusion to the Bektashi order, a martial Sufi tradition known for its fusion of spiritual devotion and militant ethos, embodied in figures like Ali Pasha.[448] Elements of Conrad's character reveal echoes of this complex, syncretic identity, blending spiritual aspiration with worldly conflict. This complex fusion of spiritual striving and authoritative leadership shapes Conrad's presence and his relationship with those around him. He does not mingle as an equal among his men but asserts command with a quiet, commanding intensity:

> With these he mingles not but to command –
> Few are his words, but keen his eye and hand.
> Ne'er seasons he with mirth their jovial mess,
> But they forgive his silence for success.
> Ne'er for his lip the purpling cup they fill,
> That goblet passes him untasted still
>
> (ll. 63-8)

Indeed, abstinence from worldly pleasures feeds his stern authority:

> But while he shuns the grosser joys of sense,
> His mind seems nourished by that abstinence.
>
> (ll. 75-6)

However, there are elements of Conrad's character that are suggestive of his own tendencies towards an extreme form of arrogance that veers into a kind of despotism:

> … he could
> At times resign his own for other's good,
> But not in pity, not because he ought,

[448] George Rishmawi, 'Islam and Muslims in Byron's *The Corsair*', *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 6.1 (2006), pp. 299-312.

But in some strange perversity of thought,

That swayed him onward with a secret pride

To do what few or none could do beside.

(ll. 337-42)

To this extent, Conrad is not unlike a Hassan, or a Giaffir. Leask suggests that 'Conrad is motivated by pride rather than principle; he belongs in the world of Byron's Napoleon or Manfred or Cain'.[449] These character traits are suggestive of Conrad's despotic ideology and twin him with the other despot of the tale, Seyd. Byron is not naive regarding the workings of so-called Oriental despotism, and his characterisation of Seyd is highly stereotypical:

High in his hall reclines the turbaned Seyd;

Around – the bearded chiefs he came to lead.

Removed the banquet, and the last pilaff –

Forbidden draughts, 'tis said, he dared to quaff,

Though to the rest the sober berry's juice,

The slaves bear round for rigid Moslem's use;

The long chibouque's dissolving cloud supply,

While dance the Almas to wild minstrelsy.

(ll. 633-40)

Seyd's consummate cruelty is never in doubt: 'His only bends in seeming o'er his beads, / But inly views his victim as he bleeds' (l. 1306-7). Yet Byron is not ignorant of Western despotism either and the particularly insidious form of imperialism it breeds. Byron writes his Preface, dedicating the poem to his friend Thomas Moore:

[449] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 47.

you are engaged in the composition of a poem whose scene will be laid in the East; none can do those scenes such justice. The wrongs of your own country, the magnificent and fiery spirit of her sons, the beauty and feeling of her daughters, may there be found.[450]

Indeed, the poem is dedicated to Moore, and as such makes the comparison between British imperialism in Ireland with Ottoman imperialism in the Levant. There is not a distinction between these operations; rather, Byron detects imperialism as imperialism – suggestive of his self-positioning as belonging neither to his contemporary culture, nor a rival culture.

The difference between the heroes of the *Tales* and the archetypal Muslim despot is instead a kind of existential agility – an ability to dress up, to be disguised, to move more quickly and quietly than the enthroned tyrants, heavy with their robes and their clear role, and thus outstrip their lumbering weight. Conrad plays the role of a dervish to gain entrance to Seyd's court.

His death yet dubious, deeds too widely known;
He left a Corsair's name to other times,
Linked with one virtue, and a thousand crimes.

(ll. 1861-3)

If Conrad does represent an orientation to the Bekhtashi ideology, Byron critiques that ideology through his depiction of Conrad. It is Conrad's reaction to Gulnare that is critical here, and *The Corsair*, as with the other Tales, opens up a discursive space to explore the Islamicate and role of women.

Byron could hardly be unconcerned by the tradition of the Ottoman harem, and the treatment of women. Whilst his concern is often reduced to Orientalist trope, it is Conrad's response to the murder of Seyd by Gulnare that hits the mark:

But ne'er from strife, captivity, remorse –
From all his feelings in their inmost force –

[450] Preface' to 'The Corsair', in McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, III, p. 149.

So thrilled, so shuddered every creeping vein
As now they froze before that purple stain.
That spot of blood, that light but guilty streak,
Had banished all the beauty from her cheek!
Blood he had viewed – could view unmoved – but then
It flowed in combat, or was shed by men!

(ll. 1589-96)

In this way, Byron is both critiquing the despotic treatment of women in the Ottoman court and synthesising this critique with a critique of his own culture's treatment of women by having Conrad respond to Gulnare with horror for what is a 'legitimate' killing of a despot by a slave who would probably have suffered her own death at his hands later on. It is also reflective of the Western repulsion at Islamic violence – seeing in it not a reflection of violence's prevalence in all cultures, but a specifically terrifying phenomenon. Even when violence is warranted, there remains a fundamental horror that originates from the Otherness of the Islamicate and its position as threat and competition to Christendom.

Conrad himself analyses his response as follows: 'She wrongs his thoughts; they more himself upbraid / Than her,' (ll. 1643-4) – as if he knows that Gulnare is innocent – perhaps not of the crime, but of his repulsion – which reflects back on him to further remind him of the weakness of his own worldview.

It is, however, the 'woman still' that is the critical character of *The Corsair*, advancing Byron's thinking beyond the reductive circuit of chivalry and despotism, and creating a potential path towards a new system. The phrase comes from the realisation that in spite of the extremity of her actions, Gulnare retains an irreducible moral complexity: 'Extreme in love or hate, in good or ill, / The worst of crimes had left her woman still!' (ll. 1688-9). It takes this character, an 'Asiatic', and a woman too, to forge this new path out of the dead circuitry of chivalry. As Leask notes: '[i]n place of the orientalist stereotype of 'white men saving brown women from brown men' […] we

have a brown woman saving a white man from a brown man'.[451] Leask also identifies that as a slave and a prostitute Gulnare is 'emancipated from any 'reproductive' wifely role' and 'breaks the symbolic code of the *Tales*', but also that

> [a]s a female version of Conrad himself, she disrupts the Tale's sexual economy. But she also reveals herself as more than Conrad in her willingness to stab Seyd in his sleep and make good their escape; unhampered by an aristocratic code of honour, she provides the missing link between the Byronic hero (the Giaour/Selim/Conrad) and the revolutionary politics of the pirate band.[452]

We can move beyond Leask's analysis, however, by noting that Byron's representation of Gulnare is guided by a conception of her as a Muslim – although a different one to any we have seen before. 'Oh! couldst thou prove my truth, thou wouldst not start, / Nor fear the fire that lights an Eastern heart' (ll. 1519-20), Gulnare exclaims. There is here the echo of that 'truth' that Byron wrote about in his journal, indicating how Gulnare, unlike other characters, has a truth she wishes to be proved. The lines also depict Gulnare's zealous spark – a quality not to be found in Conrad, who 'hated man too much to feel remorse' (l. 262) and who by contrast is depicted as so cold as to desire his own death.

Gulnare's desire for Conrad to 'prove my truth' is suggestive of her untapped leadership skills, as well as Byron's own possible attitude to that leadership. Leask remarks on how '[t]he revolutionary connotations of the Turk Gulnare […] represent the triumph of 'Asiatic' over 'Hellenistic' / aristocratic values. The cost of *effective* resistance to tyranny is the sacrifice of 'gentlemanly' principles'.[453]

In *The Corsair* as in *The Bride*, Byron employs the moral flexibility of piracy to interrogate disenchanted, secular, and imperial Western modernity, revealing how pragmatic, self-interested

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[451] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 51. It is important to note that Leask is alluding to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'The Rani of Sirmur' essay here, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', in *History and Theory*, 24.3 (1985), pp. 247-272.
[452] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 50-1.
[453] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 53.

codes of conduct both enable modern power and collide with enduring ideals of heroism and chivalric honour. Byron's exploration of piracy as a site of moral flexibility and secular pragmatism is immediately foregrounded in the opening lines of *The Corsair*, which celebrate boundless freedom and imperial dominion:

> O'ER the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
> Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free,
> Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,
> Survey our empire, and behold our home!
> These are our realms, no limits to their sway –
> Our flag the sceptre all who meet obey.
>
> (ll. 1-6)

Yet even within this celebration of pirate autonomy, Byron complicates the code: the heroic ideal is unsettled by Conrad's strange behaviour, which marks him as both a pirate and a figure sharing the 'mark upon my brow' of the Giaour and Selim – a fatal entanglement with a soulless woman that undercuts the purely instrumental ethics of piracy and gestures toward the persistent influence of chivalric and emotional imperatives. He also has a code:

> Oh! burst the Haram – wrong not on your lives
> One female form – remember – we have wives.
> On them such outrage Vengeance will repay;
> Man is our foe, and such 'tis ours to slay;
> But still we spared – must spare the weaker prey.
>
> (ll. 807-11)

Again, it is chivalric behaviours that drive the plot and substantiate the Byronic hero archetype. As Leask notes: Conrad's 'victory is thwarted by his chivalrous insistence – in the name of his

allegiance to Medora – that the women of the harem be saved'.[454] It is thwarted a second time by Conrad's chivalrous insistence on the ethical etiquette of the 'fair fight' and his refusal to kill Seyd in cold blood, even whilst he has him imprisoned. The clinging to a code of honour suggests that in spite of an inevitable reduction of values to those of the pirate (which I have linked to the operations of secularism), Byron cannot fully endorse such values. It is a point of contention that Byron veers from a marked dismissal of chivalry in his private speech – both through the rebuff to Burke and the comment about Teresa Guiccioli and Italians loving chivalry – to a pessimistic endorsement of chivalric values in his Tales. I would argue that this pessimism about chivalry is the reason for Conrad's strange reaction to his own death sentence:

> Why shouldst thou seek an outlaw's life to spare,
> And change the sentence I deserve to bear?
> Well have I earned – nor here alone – the meed
> Of Seyd's revenge, by many a lawless deed.
>
> (ll. 1451-4)

It is Gulnare's actions that provide a relief from this problematic circuit of piracy and chivalry, leading the way for a new set of power relations which are revealed in *Lara*. However, in *The Corsair*, Byron is more focused on an investigation of how to respond to the character of Gulnare, and the potential values she represents.

> And Conrad following, at her beck, obeyed,
> Nor cared he now if rescued or betrayed;
> Resistance were as useless as if Seyd
> Yet lived to view the doom his ire decreed.
>
> (ll. 1615-18)

[454] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 49.

The 'following' of Conrad, 'at her beck', opens up the space for the narrative of *Lara*, which investigates what happens when this meeting of Western and Eastern individuals returns to Europe. *Lara* marks a turning point in Byron's poetic project, bringing the Byronic hero and his Islamicate companion back into a European setting, where their foreignness becomes a lens for critiquing Western despotism and secular disillusionment.

7. Lara: Endless Outsider

It is in *Lara* that Byron makes his most mature exploration of the Other, of Islam, of imperialism and secularism by bringing his most suggestive characters, the Byronic hero figure of Conrad, and the Muslim woman – Conrad and Gulnare – into the sphere of Europe. Byron hints heavily in the 'Advertisement' to *Lara* that the poem follows directly from *The Corsair*, and that the main character remains Conrad:

> The reader of "Lara" may probably regard it as a sequel to a poem that recently appeared: whether the cast of the hero's character, the turn of his adventures, and the general outline and colouring of the story, may not encourage such a supposition, shall be left to his determination.[455]

The plot of *Lara* narrates the return of 'Count Lara' to his native country after spending years abroad. This native country is deliberately left anonymous; although Byron uses a note to alert the reader to Spanish origins of the name Lara, there is otherwise 'no circumstance of local or national description fixing the scene or hero of the poem to any country or age'.[456] He is accompanied by a page, Kaled, who is largely silent, but occasionally speaks with Count Lara in a foreign language. One night there is a terrible shriek, and servants find Count Lara prostrate on the floor, where he

[455] Advertisement to 'Lara", in McGann (ed.) *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, III, p. 453.
[456] Byron's note to line 1 of 'Lara', in McGann (ed.) *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, III, pp. 214-256. Hereafter the poem is cited parenthetically by line number.

is revived by Kaled, speaking in their unknown language. Following this, Count Lara attends a reception by another dignitary, Count Otho, where he is recognised by Sir Ezzelin. Ezzelin challenges Lara regarding crimes conducted abroad. Otho arranges for the two to meet before local nobles who will judge the accusations. The second Canto begins with the nobles assembled, but Ezzelin does not present. Otho offers himself to fight Lara, who only spares Otho on the intercession of the nobles. The disappearance of Ezzelin casts suspicion on Lara, and Otho with the other nobles begin preparations to put Lara on trial. Lara incites the peasantry, named as 'serfs', to raise a rebellion, but the army is near crushed. Count Lara gets his remaining faithful men over the border, but they are intercepted, and Lara is shot with an arrow. He dies whilst speaking with Kaled in their foreign language. After Lara's death, Kaled faints and is discovered to be female. She remains at the site of his death until her own death.

Leask argues in reference to *Lara* that the 'European who beats the Turk at his own game can only do so by internalising his enemy's unscrupulous techniques, by sacrificing the 'Hellenistic' values of European civility and becoming 'Asiatic".[457] Count Lara may well have 'internalised his enemy's unscrupulous techniques', but here he is not besting 'the Turk at his own game'; rather, he confronts European corruption and European despotism. The serfs who join Lara's rebellion are not resisting a distant Oriental ruler – they rise against the structures of oppression enforced by their own lords, in their own land. In this way, Byron offers perhaps the clearest articulation yet of the mirroring that runs through the *Tales*, where 'the enemy's unscrupulous techniques' are revealed as no different from the West's own mechanisms of domination and exploitation. Read this way, *Lara* stages not simply a longing for 'Hellenistic' or republican virtue – which, in Byron's world, remains stubbornly absent – but also the *first man* impulse we have already traced: the attraction to a singular, decisive figure whose talent and truth seem capable of cutting through the paralysis of 'mixed' governments. In the absence of genuine republicanism, these 'Asiatic' virtues –

[457] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, pp. 59-60.

visible in Hassan, Giaffir, Seyd, and even Gulnare – become the next best thing: a volatile, personalist form of leadership that Byron both desires and mistrusts.

Count Lara returns from his travels in a mysterious psychological predicament, with the suggestion that his travels have left him somewhat unhinged: 'Short was the course his restlessness had run, / But long enough to leave him half undone' (ll. 23-4). Not only this, but the Count has a secret 'That must not be known' (l. 139), and behaves in a strange manner: 'Why slept he not when others were at rest? / Why heard no music, and received no guest? / All was not well, they deemed – but where the wrong?' (ll. 147-9). Central to this peculiarity is his past experience, which we can guess from the advertisement, and becomes explicit at the end of the poem, is an experience of the East. Clues for this in the narrative are most obvious in a sort of 'episode' in which the count speaks in an unknown language: 'but his words are strung / In terms that seem not of his native tongue' (ll. 229-30), understood only by a page, Kaled:

> And in that tongue, which seemed his own, replied,
>
> And Lara heeds those tones that gently seem
>
> To soothe away the horrors of his dream
>
> (ll. 242-4)

This page, who is his only companion on his return, is 'Of foreign aspect, and of tender age' (ll. 47-8). Later we are given a hint as to the page's foreign provenance: 'His only follower from those climes afar / Where the soul glows beneath a brighter star' (ll. 512-3). Like Gulnare, Kaled has a particular brightness, echoing that zeal which marked her out from other heroes, whose actions are almost imposed on them by a damning fate – a mark of Cain – and suggestive again of Byron's reading of Muslims as having a 'glow' unlike that of non-Muslims. Rather than specific only to Muslims, the emanating glow of some of the female characters is less a result of dogma than of firm belief. It is as if there is a brilliant (in the literal sense) purity that is rubbed out by the exposure to secularity, which reduces everything to materiality or to reason alone.

Kaled's language is a source of deep meaning – identity springs from this totalising force:

Though not unknown the tongue of Lara's land,

In such from him he rarely heard command;

But fleet his step, and clear his tones would come,

When Lara's lip breathed forth the words of home;

Those accents, as his native mountains dear,

Awake their absent echoes in his ear,

Friends', kindreds', parents', wonted voice recall,

Now lost, abjured, for one – his friend, his all

(ll. 518-25)

Their experience inside foreign cultures has created for each of them a homelessness that leaves them outside of society:

He seemed, like him he served, to live apart

From all that lures the eye, and fills the heart;

To know no brotherhood

(ll. 550-2)

The experience of another form of life has left them strangely disjointed, unable fully to participate in their own cultures. To anyone who has had such an experience of living in a world so totally different from one's own native society, the effect will be immediately recognised. It is clear that Byron is here examining the effects of his own travels, and immersion (whether successful or not) in the culture of the East. This is no more apparent than at Lara's death, when Lara and Kaled share their history in words that no observer – fictional or real – can understand:

They spake of other scenes, but what – is known

To Kaled, whom their meaning reached alone;

And he replied, though faintly, to their sound

(ll. 1091-3)

Kaled later lived to 'trace strange characters along the sand' (l. 1270), suggestive of the symbols of Arabic, unknown by those that surround them. It is clear the narrator has no knowledge of Arabic. Moreover, at line 1107, the narrator makes his identity known: 'But from his visage little could we guess'; he is part of that 'we' that unites readers with the Lara's fictional society.

Lara has a commonality with the earlier heroes of the Giaour, Selim, and Conrad: 'There was in him a vital scorn of all – / As if the worst had fall'n which could befall' (ll. 313-4), and a suggestion that '[h]is madness was not of the head, but heart' (l. 358). What this 'worst' might be remains unknown.[458] Here, this 'worst' is transposed onto the East, indicative of an internalised experience that he continues to carry. That this experience is registered as a kind of trauma is significant.[459] It is also an existential problem. When Lara is marked out by Ezzelin at Otho's ball, Lara stops the accuser from listing in full his accusations, sensing that they are at the core an existential threat: 'Whate'er I be' (l. 455). There is here an echo of that essential 'frisson' of turning Turk that Leask describes, and there is a strange narrative revelation of the essential experience of the East, that of movement:

> Not much he loved long question of the past,
> Nor told of wondrous wilds, and desarts vast,
> In those far lands where he had wandered lone,
> And – as himself would have it seem – unknown
> […]
> The rapture of his heart had looked on high,
> And asked if greater dwelt beyond the sky;
> Chained to excess, the slave of each extreme,
> How woke he from the wildness of that dream?

[458] It reveals itself through its genealogy; paving the way for Manfred, it is not hard to read back to Selim's seemingly incestuous love for Zuleika, and see Byron's own anxiety of his feelings for his half-sister Augusta.
[459] See Warren's discussion of Lara's trauma in "Byron's Lament: Lara (1814) and the Specter of Orientalism." *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 95–129.

(ll. 85-8, 125-8)

These passages recall the pull of nomadism we have seen in *The Bride* but also seem over-determined. In the sense that these lines recall the lure of nomadism, we have already seen where such desires end. But these words are suggestive of another dangerous lure: the path of the dervish. With 'rapture of his heart' directed toward God, the dervish is 'Chained to excess, the slave of each extreme'. In *The Giaour* and *The Bride*, Byron had already hinted at a critique of the Sufi's detachment from worldly affairs, using the figure of the idealised beloved – often a woman – to parallel the Sufi's passionate but abstracted devotion to God. In both cases, the object of love is removed from its human, material centre: the woman's lived reality, or the political condition of man. In Sufi texts such as *Yusuf and Zuleikha* or *Layla and Majnun*, however, the beloved can embody mystical truth, rather than simply displace a human reality. My concern here is with Byron's handling of that symbolic possibility, rather than with an inherent withdrawal from worldly affairs in Sufism itself. Here, Byron goes further, aligning the Sufi's ecstatic withdrawal with the most selfish forms of human indulgence. Byron's depiction is not an accurate representation of Sufism, but it exposes his distrust of any ideology – religious or otherwise – that divorces man from material and rational engagement.

This scepticism reflects the same impulse behind Byron's 'first man' ideal, articulated in his 1813–14 journals, where he rejects the balance-keeping 'mixed government' of England in favour of the leader 'in talent and truth' who acts decisively upon the world. For Byron, whatever attraction Sufi mysticism might have held was too easily entangled with passivity; the 'first man' is its opposite – a figure of material action, political intervention, and worldly consequence. Napoleon Buonaparte is of course the natural archetype of this figure. In this light, the 'East' Byron travelled through becomes a kind of intoxicating dream from which he must awaken, in order to pursue the forms of decisive leadership that fascinate him throughout the Tales.

Having dismissed the possibility of retreat into Sufi detachment, Byron must imagine a hero who, however imperfectly, engages with the structures of power around him. Conrad could

not be like the Giaour and wither in private revulsion; he must act within the very system that constrains him. This is the 'first man' impulse translated into the idiom of the pirate republic – restless, unmoored, yet compelled toward decisive intervention. But here the action is stripped of ideological purity: the call to arms may rally around 'Religion – freedom – vengeance – what you will,' but it is ultimately a matter of expedience rather than conviction. In this way, Byron dramatises both the necessity and the hollowness of political participation in a corrupt world, paving the way for the more overtly political resonances of *Lara*.

The political turn of the poem in verse 8 is, then, an attempt to reclaim that materiality of the system in which he is bound. That participation is half-hearted, and certainly there is no convincing ideology which Lara follows to guide its progression:

> That morning he had freed the soil-bound slaves
> Who dig no land for tyrants but their graves!
> Such is their cry – some watchword for the fight
> Must vindicate the wrong, and warp the right;
> Religion – freedom – vengeance – what you will,
> A word's enough to raise mankind to kill
>
> (ll. 863-8)

There is no question but that Lara's position echoes Byron's own situation in England upon his return. However, it is interesting that Byron suggests an innocence to Lara that may well be reflected back at him:

> Thus Lara had inherited his lands,
> And with them pining hearts and sluggish hands;
> But that long absence from his native clime
> Had left him stainless of oppression's crime
>
> (ll. 813-6)

In this sense, Byron sees himself as outside his own system. In spite of his travels to find another, he has returned, enlightened by the experience of those foreign lands as lessons in criticism of his own system, but not sustained by an ideological investment in a new system. As we have seen, the lure of Sufism has come undone, and Byron makes new plans – to investigate the meaning of the Druze, and to return again to the East, next time to the Levant.

As a poetic hero it is impossible, however, from within the prism of the secular West, to truly find an authentic connection between action and word. For Lara, action is reduced to symbolic gesture. Eventually, the meaning of Conrad's – and by extension, Lara's – experience is distilled into a single emblematic image: 'Rose Lara's hand, and pointed to the East' (l. 1112). This is no blueprint for transformation but a sign without substance, a legacy of Gulnare's decisive act rendered inert when transposed back into Europe. Byron underscores this displacement-effect in the silencing of Kaled: her words, potent for those who understand Arabic, remain inaccessible and therefore powerless in the Western context. In doing so, Byron does not deny the possibility that Islamic 'systems' might evolve beyond despotism, but he marks their incompatibility with the secular, disenchanted West. In the Tales, the reason is clear: modernity's reach is total, stripping life of the mysticism that might otherwise sustain such transformation. The desire for an intrinsic mystery continues, through as different outlets as Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and other forms of mystical thinking, such as those explored in the Shelley chapter. These developments culminate in *Don Juan*, where Byron's engagement with the Islamicate becomes less symbolic and more historical, allowing for a more sincere and humanised representation of cultural difference.

8. Byron's Islam: from Exoticism to Historicity

In light of this desire to leave contemporary Europe and experience a new form of life, Byron does not just want to put on a costume to experience the East (although he definitely *does* want to do

that), he wants to feel what it is like to live and breathe and speak in that costume and within that environment and atmosphere.

So much of this desire exists within that dichotomy of belonging and difference. The twin desires to belong to, and to be different from, one's contemporary society are always at work in any individual, but Byron is more extreme than most in his disgust at his own society, and his desire to immerse himself in the 'Other'. As he knew, however, the experience of foreign culture threatens to reduce the individual into caricature, another costume waiting to be put on.[460] Returning from the East with a wardrobe of costumes and props indulged the attitude of the spectators at the zoo, the simplest operation of Orientalism. Byron was hyper-alert to both threats, loathing the trope as reductive, but he was the master of redirecting the insult back at his audience. The Tales play with such reductivism, as Leask notes: 'The presiding fear, as well as the "frisson", of Byron's *Tales* is of "turning Turk".'[461] It is important in this context that we examine (as Byron himself examines as he writes), the heroes of the tales, as they are the figures that *become* the conduit for the kind of experiential knowledge that Byron so desires, reflecting back at his audience their own reductive fantasies and anxieties.

If Byron's early poetry carried a chivalric undercurrent, his later works engage more directly with varying forms of the chivalric hero and expressions of courtly love. In this way, the poems function as a kind of psychic projection – brimming with latent libidinal desires that remain fragmented and ambiguous. Their lack of definitive cohesion makes them suggestive rather than fixed, providing fertile ground for both the poet and the audience to invest multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings. Byron himself would later dismiss his *Tales* as immature and 'likely to interest the women' a phrase that crudely (and with some spiteful prejudice) signals his recognition of their youthful, exploratory nature – an artistic stage he would eventually move beyond. I would argue that the poems were necessary precisely because Byron's travels had not provided the kind of

[460] One can see the legacy of this kind of engagement with 'the Orient' in the character of Dolokhov from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1867).
[461] Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*, p. 60.

experiential experiment that he truly desired. The central issue is the anti-climax of Byron's time in Constantinople – the centre of the Islamic world that he so longed to experience. It is in Constantinople, I argue, that it is revealed to Byron how hard it would be to fully enter into the new form of life of the Islamicate.

Even Hobhouse's response to Constantinople is surprising. In his diary of 21st May, Hobhouse tours the outside of the Seraglio, seeing the sepulchres of the recently dead Selim III and Mustapha IV. At Galeogis Wharf, he sees 'a dead man on his belly with his head off lying between his legs, face upwards. He had been executed yesterday on the same spot. The skin was off his legs and arms by bastinado or burning. He had been a Greek Cogia Basha'.[462] Frederick Chamier, midshipman of the *Salsette*, claimed Byron had been present at the execution, and upon seeing dogs rush in to lap up the blood of the deceased, 'ejaculated a sudden 'Good God!' [and] turned abruptly away'.[463] The scene does not repel Hobhouse so much that he finds it strange to write that the same day's tour

has left upon me a much more favourable idea of Constantinople than I entertained before. The streets are clean, more regular, wider, and better built than Pera, and the bazaar and buistun are very striking, even to a person acquainted with and accustomed to the wealth and the shops of London. The number of Jews everywhere immense – not insulted.[464]

He himself was aware that travelling through the outskirts of the Ottoman empire in Greece and Albania did not provide the perspective on Islamic society he desired. The Constantinople episode has probably been over-emphasised by scholars for the wrong reasons – we tend to think of Byron as the writer who had been to 'the East', and credit him with a certain status as a result of that experience. In fact, although Byron certainly drew a wealth of information from the visit, the information is predominantly visual – Byron repeatedly talks of his being

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462 Hobhouse's diary, which remains unpublished in print, but has been transcribed by the indefatigable Byron scholar Peter Cochran, who published it on his website. www.petercochran.wordpress.com/hobhouses-diary/ See part 7. Constantinople, p. 225.
463 Chamier, quoted in Hobhouse's diary, ed. Cochran p. 225.
464 Hobhouse's diary, ed Cochran, p. 226.

allowed to see the inside of the Mosques (emphasising that such a treat is not often granted to the Western traveller as if to protect his integrity of experience), and of the view of the Golden Horn as the best view one could see. However, this visual knowledge is deeply superficial – real understanding of the culture beneath the 'view' remains limited. What could be more 'surface' than a view? It is this disappointing experience that necessitates the Tales, which allow Byron the imaginative licence to fabricate the experience of Ottoman and Islamic culture he could not have on his travels. This has important consequences for the representation of the Islamic world we have in his poetry, but most significantly, has an important effect on the writer's own attitude towards his poetry – there is a sense that the closer he gets to sincerity on his Ottoman theme, the more he senses a facetiousness hovering, and only when he can make that facetiousness obvious (as he does in *Don Juan,* (1819-24)) can he retain pride in his work.

Byron's interest in the hero shifts away from the psychological landscape of the 'Turkish Tales' after finding its apex in the figure of Manfred, into the ironic mode of *Beppo* and the historical epic of *Don Juan*. Here the hero finds himself in a picaresque, yet historical, landscape, journeying through time and place as a hapless, often inept, protagonist. Gerald MacLean points out that this landscape offers a meditation on Englishness itself, imagining the English countryside as 'a repository where the riches of trade and plunder could be accumulated'.[465] This is at once part of Byron's ironic stance, as he writes 'in comic and satiric amusement', mocking 'the ways nationalist pride disguised a whole series of importations and hybridizations.'[466] Yet the poem's satire does not preclude moments of genuine feeling. Juan's decision to care for the Muslim girl orphaned at Izmail is presented with unmistakable sincerity. At the same time, the act remains legible within the very structure MacLean identifies: a compassionate adoption that, though tender,

[465] Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 231.
[466] MacLean, *Looking East*, p. 231.

still follows the pattern by which the Englishness comes into being through the incorporation of what has been violently acquired elsewhere.

> The Moslem orphan went with her protector,
> For she was homeless, houseless, helpless; all
> Her friends, like the sad family of Hector,
> Had perished in the field or by the wall:
> Her very place of birth was but a spectre
> Of what it had been; there the Muezzin's call
> To prayer was heard no more! – and Juan wept,
> And made a vow to shield her, which he kept.
>
> (VIII, st. 141)[467]

It is curious that Byron here uses the Classical period to extend sympathy to another period, another form of life, for in spite of the many cultural differences, the orphaning of the young girl, like the destruction of her hometown and its social life, has a fixity that does not need to be relativised. Here chivalry too, in spite of all the irony of *Juan*, creeps back in. It remains possible to do good, to protect those weaker, and perhaps faith, and the moral bulwark of religion, is not necessary after all for such heroic deeds.

Byron's inclusion of the Muslim girl also provides another way of 'seeing Muslims' in his poetry. Her view of the world, shaped by her cultural and social background, is maintained, and almost given space in the poem. 'The little Turk refused to be converted' (X, l. 440), and there is a gentle humour to her obstinacy, which, again, lends a deeper underlying sincerity, even endearment to the characterisation. This is a Muslim who does not need to do or *perform* anything, so not driving the plot or being a love object. The poetry notes this:

> And thus they formed a rather curious pair;

[467] From *Don Juan*, in McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, V (1986), p. 407-8. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text by canto and stanza or line number.

A guardian green in years, a ward connected

In neither clime, time, blood, with her defender;

And yet this want of ties made theirs more tender

(X, ll. 453-6)

There is an authenticity to her appearance in the text that is itself a characterisation of Byron's historical mode, where human nature has a permanence that cannot be eradicated by the various forms of life which may mediate it. There is an endearing sincerity too in the narration of the girl's response to Canterbury cathedral:

[…] being told it was 'God's house,' she said

He was well lodged, but only wondered how

He suffered Infidels in his homestead,

The cruel Nazarenes, who had laid low

His holy temples in the lands which bred

The True Believers; - and her infant brow

Was bent with grief that Mahomet should resign

A mosque so noble, flung like pearls to swine.

(X, st. 75)

Faith here is childish, but that does not make it worthless. It is this childish naivety which stops Byron's ironical mode from being morally empty – it is indeed what stops Byron from being an interminable dandy. Similarly, as MacLean also recognises, quoting Byron's lines on 'her Orient eyes / And taciturn Asiatic disposition' (XII, ll. 209-210), Leila becomes 'the mystery she was destined to become all along because, unlike her guardian, she can see right through everything.'[468] There is, certainly, a nostalgia for the coherence of a religious worldview, though Byron does not attempt to formulate a creed. As in the Tales, he recognises that his immanently secular outlook is,

[468] MacLean, *Looking East*, p. 241.

for better or worse, the inheritance of his culture. Yet within this recognition, Byron approaches the Islamicate with a genuine curiosity and, ultimately, a sincerity that does not attempt to absorb it into a narrative of the self or the West, but instead acknowledges both its strengths and its limitations, as well as its own historical situatedness. In this way, Byron does not seek to make the Islamicate meaningful for his own sake, or to make it symbolic, but rather the Islamicate takes up, in *Don Juan*, a place in history, and therefore has a historical, rather than poetic meaning.

Byron's poetic engagement with the Islamicate unfolds across his major works as a dynamic and layered response, moving from symbolic and chivalric explorations to political critique and, finally, to historical recognition. It begins in earnest with *The Giaour*, which introduces a critical perspective on the destructive cycles of male honour, revenge, and remorse that underpin cross-cultural conflict. This poem lays the thematic groundwork for Byron's ongoing interrogation of chivalry and the social codes shaping both East and West, highlighting the limitations and violence inherent in traditional honour systems.

In *The Bride of Abydos*, Byron begins an investigation into the possibilities of alternative social orders through the figure of Selim, the pirate, whose ambiguous code blends republican and chivalric elements. This poem explores the valences of pirate republicanism – an idealised but unstable social code that challenges established imperial orders – while also questioning the limits of chivalry as a governing ethic. The pirate becomes a figure caught between lawlessness and honour, embodying Byron's fascination with political and social alternatives, but also the contradictions inherent in heroic ideals.

This exploration continues and deepens in *The Corsair*, where the pirate Corsair Conrad emerges as a complex figure negotiating between chivalric honour and despotic power. Byron extends his critique of chivalry here, highlighting how the traditional male honour system perpetuates cycles of revenge and violence. The figure of Gulnare, who disrupts this system through her decisive action, introduces a challenge to patriarchal and chivalric norms within the

Islamicate context. Yet Byron's secular worldview limits the potential for fully embracing the mystical or religious dimensions associated with Sufism, revealing a tension between spiritual idealism and political materialism that runs throughout these tales.

With *Lara*, Byron's attention shifts toward a more explicit political dimension, where the East-West dichotomy collapses into a mirror reflecting European despotism and corruption. The 'Asiatic' qualities Byron once associated with Islamic governance – such as the revolutionary zeal to demolish despots – are revealed to exist equally in the West, rendering the ideal of Hellenistic republican virtue elusive and perhaps unattainable. Lara's rebellion, like Conrad's, ultimately gestures toward symbolic resistance rather than transformative action, trapped in a secular world that has lost the metaphysical framework necessary for heroic certainty.

Finally, in *Don Juan*, Byron's relationship to the Islamicate becomes historical and humanised rather than symbolic or oppositional. The Muslim orphan from the Siege of Izmail is presented with dignity and sincerity, her cultural identity respected and preserved without narrative coercion or exoticism. Here, Byron acknowledges the Islamicate as a living, complex civilisation with its own history and internal dynamics, not merely a poetic device or foil for Western self-definition. This shift signals Byron's recognition of the secular age's impact on heroism and belief: without a concrete metaphysical or moral architecture, the heroic figure transforms from the Byronic archetype – rooted in grand passions and spiritual depth – to the ironic, picaresque Juan, whose actions are fragmented and often ineffectual but nonetheless marked by moments of genuine care and humanity.

Through this progression – from the chivalric-pirate figure in *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*, through the political and secular ambiguities of *Lara*, to the historical humanism of *Don Juan* – Byron's poetry charts the complexities of his engagement with the Islamicate. It is a movement from fascination and idealisation, through critique and ambivalence, toward a nuanced acknowledgment of difference and historical reality. Ultimately, Byron's secular inheritance both

constrains and deepens this engagement, limiting the possibility of fully inhabiting an Islamic or mystical worldview while opening space for sincere, if incomplete, cross-cultural recognition.

Most importantly, Byron's sustained engagement with the Islamicate reveals how it shapes his exploration of heroism by providing a cultural and metaphysical context often absent in Western modernity. The social and religious frameworks within Islamic societies offer a coherent set of values and existential certainties that allow Byron's heroes to exist meaningfully within a bounded moral universe. In contrast, the secular and relativistic tendencies of Byron's own time undermine such coherence, rendering heroic action more ambiguous and fraught.

Thus, the Islamicate serves not merely as a backdrop but as a vital space where Byron can probe the tensions between honour, power, faith, and individual agency—questions central to his evolving conception of the hero. This complex dynamic ultimately frames Byron's transition from the passionate, mythic figures of the *Turkish Tales* to the more ironic and historically grounded heroes of his later poetry.

Chapter 4.

The British in Arabia: the genesis of a Romantic discourse and the colonial (de)construction of Palestine

Over a decade before the agreement that would seal his name in the annals of history and come to determine British relations with the Middle East for at least the next one hundred years, Mark Sykes wrote of the 'Bedawin' as 'the foundation of all that stands for Islam'.[469] In this he meant the highest praise, going on to write of the Bedouin Arab:

> Rhetoricians and poets of the highest order, they have no place in a civilized community;* their love of freedom and open spaces, their incapacity and contempt for manual labour, absolutely forbid their dwelling in houses or villages.
>
> * Civilized. May I be permitted to explain my meaning of this word? In text I intend it to express a community living in towns and in houses, suffering from infectious diseases, travelling in railway trains, able to read and write, possessing drinking shops, reading newspapers, surrounded by a hundred unnecessary luxuries, possessing rich and poor, slums and palaces, and convinced that their state is the most edifying in the world.[470]

Sykes was not alone in viewing the Bedouin as a privileged people; indeed, by the time Sykes was writing, such a view as that expressed above was commonplace amongst those who considered themselves knowledgeable about Arabs and Arabia. Indeed, Sykes's vituperative account of Western 'civilised' society versus the nobility and freedoms of the Bedouin draws on a discourse that can be traced back to the genesis of 'Arabia' and the 'Arab' as symbols in Romantic poetry.

Writing after the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt and Palestine of 1798 to 1801, Romantic poets were especially alert to the Arabian Peninsula as an unknown (and possibly unknowable) wilderness. The poetic exploration of that landscape and its people led to the development of certain discursive formulations of 'Arabs' and 'Arabia'. It is this discursive ground which frames

[469] Mark Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam* (Bickers and Son, 1904), p. 12.
[470] Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, pp. 12–13.

British interactions with the peninsula throughout the nineteenth century and the colonial organisation of the region during the First World War. There are three major tenets of this discourse, each seeded in British Romantic Poetry. Primarily, the Bedouin Arab emerges as a Romantic symbol of a people privileged with esoteric knowledge lost in the modern West. This first tenet is established in Wordsworth's 'Arab Dream' of Book 5 of *The Prelude*.

Secondly, this 'Arab' can and/or will serve a revolutionary purpose which is both complementary to British political strategy in the Arabian Peninsula whilst also being discursively independent of that political strategy. This second tenet can be found in the Volney-inspired revolutionism which permeates Shelley's middle period (most notably in *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam,* and 'Ozymandias'). Thirdly, a chivalric role model for the British individual in Arabia is provided by the Byronic hero of Byron's 'Turkish Tales'. This role model allows the preceding tenets of the Romantic discourse to be enacted in the character of an emerging nineteenth-century figure, the 'Arabist', most famously exemplified by T. E. Lawrence. Sykes's comments on the Bedouin are a century-later echo of the first tenet; the succeeding tenets instrumentalise the fundamental principle that the Bedouin Arab is a privileged category on behalf of the agency of the British, at the level of both state and individual. The construction of 'Arabia' and of the 'Arab' in British Romantic poetry then underlies the colonial construction of the region one hundred years later. It is by tracing the evolution of these discursive tenets that one can note how the privileging and delimiting of the Bedouin as a category comes at the expense of other constructed categories of people in the region, especially the settled *fellahin* (agricultural land workers) and the urban 'gosmobaleet' (cosmopolitan). The ensuing racial hierarchisation of Arabia is then literally mapped onto the peninsula in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, leading to the disparate colonial fates of the peoples of the Middle East. In this way the British Romantic symbol of the 'Arab' provides the discursive ground for the Balfour Declaration and the (de)construction of Palestine.

In her seminal *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (2008), Priya Satia traces the 'cultural foundations' of the operations of British colonialism in the Arabian Peninsula and demonstrates how the architecture of British policy was drawn from certain 'epistemological principles' contained in the 'cultural representations' of the region.[471] Other historians have pointed to the same principle – that there is a tangible link between the discursive construction of 'Arabia' and the colonial construction of the Middle East. Most noteworthy is Kathryn Tidrick's 1990 *Heart Beguiling Araby: The English Romance with Arabia*, which narrates the development of a certain type of English person – the Arabist.[472] Examining the major nineteenth-century British travellers to the peninsula and the evolution of discourses about Arabs and Arabia (in which Sykes is a major participant), Tidrick suggests that the momentous drawing of maps by the colonial powers was in part due to the First World War being 'the Arabists' moment in history'.[473] Both Satia and Tidrick point out that the mythopoeic territory of 'Arabia' emerged from literary discourse, with Satia arguing that the Arabist was in almost all cases of 'an intense literary ambition'.[474] Neither, however, examines in depth the Romantic origins of this symbolism. Aware of 'the enduring fascination with Arabia as a spy-space', Satia delineates how 'representations mattered in the creation of material structures of power in the Middle East,' although her argument relies upon the (small case) 'romanticisation' of Arabia rather than its Romantic heritage.[475] Tidrick comes closer by suggesting that it is the 'influence of Byron, with his insistence that "there is society where none intrudes," which was above all responsible' for the idea of the desert as the place in which travellers can lose and find themselves.[476] Tidrick's connection of the Romantic trope of social isolation leading to self-realisation within the mythopoesis of the

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471 Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4.
472 Not always a man – the list includes not only Lawrence, but also Gertrude Bell, Richard Burton, Jane Digby, Wilfrid Blunt, Lady Anne Blunt, and Lady Hester Stanhope. All were 'literary' people, and many published works which developed the discourses on Arabia which I identify as Romantic in genesis.
473 Kathryn Tidrick, *Heart Beguiling Araby: The English Romance with Arabia* (I. B. Tauris, 1990), p. 163.
474 Satia, p. 5.
475 Satia, pp. 4, 10.
476 Tidrick, p. 34.

Arabian desert is, in broad strokes, correct. In fact, the Romantic mythopoesis of the desert emerges from Wordsworth and Shelley, and Byron's contribution to the poetical and colonial construction of 'Arabia' is in the character of the outsider (anti)hero. It is this character which provided the model for Satia's Edwardian agents, whose activities in the peninsula aspired to a distinctly Byronic 'authentic heroism'.[477]

The epistemological privileging of the Bedouin which marks the genesis of the Arab as a Romantic symbol occurs with Wordsworth's 'Arab Dream' of *The Prelude*. In this famous episode of Book 5, a speaker relates a dream, beginning in the 'Arabian waste', in which he interacts with a man who 'seemed an arab of the Bedouin tribes'.[478] The Arab holds two objects, 'A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell / Of a surpassing brightness' (lines 80–81), and remarks that 'the stone […] / Was Euclid's Elements' (ll. 86–87) but that the shell 'Is something of more worth' (l. 91). Jane Worthington Smyser has convincingly argued that Wordsworth's dream is a retelling of a 1619 dream of René Descartes, in which Descartes was presented with two books: an encyclopaedia and a collection of Pythagorean poems. As with Wordsworth's stone and shell, also referred to as 'books', there is the apprehension that the texts are indicative of two different epistemologies: 'the encyclopaedia' indicating 'the branches of Science' and the 'Corpus Poetarum,' 'Philosophy and Wisdom joined together'.[479] In the interval between Descartes's dream and the retelling of the dream in Wordsworth's poetry, the 'divinity of Inspiration' collected in the Pythagorean *Corpus Poetarum* is transfigured into the shell's 'prophetic blast of harmony' (l. 96). This is the sublimity of inspiration to which Wordsworth's poetry aspires, though we recall that a key component of Romantic discourse is that such sublimity must be *rediscovered* – through nature, other cultures, or

[477] Satia, p. 19.
[478] My quotations are from the 1805 edition in William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850,* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (W. W. Norton and Company, 1979), pp. 28-482. (The 'Arab Dream,' pp. 154-160) Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text by line number.
[479] Adrien Baillet, *Vie de Descartes*, quoted in Jane Worthington Smyser, "Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science: The Prelude, V." *PMLA* 71.1 (1956), p. 271. (original in French)

individual experience. By locating divine inspiration in the figure of the Bedouin, Wordsworth articulates an anxiety that esoteric knowledge is no longer accessible in the Western tradition, indeed, the prophetic sound of the shell is delivered in 'an unknown tongue, / Which yet I understood' (ll. 94–95). The very model, then, of Romantic inspiration which Wordsworth here depicts sets up the highest category of knowledge, *contra Descartes*, as outside the Western tradition. Locating this privileged epistemology in the Bedouin Arab marks the genesis of the Romanticisation of Arabs and Arabia in precisely the way that Satia describes of Edwardian agents being drawn to Arabia in 'the hope of finding in a proverbially mystical and antique land the metaphysical certainty they no longer felt at home'.[480]

Wordsworth's 'Arab Dream', then, crystallises the figure of the Bedouin in Romantic poetry and the mythopoeic landscape of the Arabian desert as a space for recovering lost truths. As seen in Chapter 2, Shelley not only takes up the psychogeography of the desert (as in *Alastor*) but uses it as staging for his most significant thought experiment in revolutionary utopianism. As already noted, much of Shelley's revolutionism is oriented by his reading of the comte de Volney's *Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (1791), which also instrumentalises the ruins of the desert as a psycho-political space.[481] In *The Revolt of Islam*, it is 'Constantinople & modern Greece' which provides the setting for Shelley's '*beau ideal* […] of the French revolution'.[482] It would appear at first that Shelley's preoccupation with the Ottoman Empire is merely superficial, allowing him to envision a (European) revolution that overcomes political tyranny which would be impossible to stage in Britain during a period of strict political censorship. However, reading the later 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (1820), there is a clue that Arabia is in fact integral to the geography of his utopian eschatology:

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480 Satia, p. 3.
481 As noted in Chapter 2, further reading on the symbolism of the desert in *Alastor* can be found in Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 137–57.
482 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L Jones, 2 vols., (Clarendon Press, 1964), vol. i, p. 564.

> The Turkish Empire is in its last stage of ruin, and […] the time is approaching when the desarts [*sic*] of Asia Minor and of Greece will be colonised by the overflowing population of countries less enslaved and debased […] In Syria and Arabia the spirit of human intellect has roused a sect of people called Wahabees, who maintain the Unity of God, and the equality of man, and their enthusiasm must go on 'conquering and to conquer' even if it must be repressed in its present shape.[483]

Utilising the familiar trope of the Ottoman Empire being in a state of terminal decline, Shelley suggests that it is the revolutionary spirit of the 'Wahabees' which will instantiate the utopian ideal of 'the equality of man'.[484] Shelley's use of 'Wahabee' is indicative of the instrumentalisation of the Bedouin as a revolutionary force, having emerged as a term for the emergent political-religious group which comprised an alliance between the *Nejdi* (central Arabian) Saud family and the religious *Muwahhidun* movement founded by Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The infamy of the Saudi Wahabis after the sacking of Karbala in 1802 and the capture of Mecca in 1803 was quickly linked to revolutionary Jacobinism in Europe. A British minister in Istanbul 'feared that as 'seceders from the rights of the Modammedan [*sic*] sect' [the Saudis] might join with 'their brethren in principle from Paris'.[485] Such zeal certainly ignited Shelley's Volneyan utopianism. Shelley uses 'Wahabee' synonymously with 'Bedouin,' later describing his family as 'like Wahabees' for their peripatetic lifestyle rather than, as would be more appropriate, as Bedouin.[486] This synecdoche shows the shift of the Bedouin Arab as an *a priori* Romantic symbol to their identity as iconoclasts *par excellence* in Shelley's imagination, marking the Romantic origin of the British conceptualisation of the Bedouin as a proto-revolutionary force. This volatile discourse, envisioning Arabs with

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[483] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Philosophical View of Reform', in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E Peck (Ernest Benn Limited, 1965), VII, p. 18.
[484] For a discussion of the myth of Ottoman decline, its origins and pervasiveness, see *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries,* ed. Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj (Syracuse University Press, 2006) and *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. by Dana Sajdi, (I.B. Tauris, 2014).
[485] Albert Hourani, "The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent in the XVIIIth Century," *Studia Islamica*, 8 (1957), p. 108.
[486] Shelley, *Letters*, II, p. 137.

inspired awe *and* a view to strategic utility, is repeated throughout the nineteenth century with precisely the same mixture of political self-interest and fetishised enthusiasm until its internal contradictions lead to the historical implosion of the colonial authoring of the region in the First World War. It is peculiar to hear Shelley – the self-styled 'Philanthropist, Democrat and Atheist' – using a biblical phrase ('conquering and to conquer') to help him articulate the mechanics of his revolutionary ideals.[487] Yet Shelley's mixing of contemporary geo-history and biblical eschatology would become a common trope, seemingly impossible for the British to refrain from when dealing with the Middle East. Indeed, the idea that the region could only be understood through biblical texts was so prevalent that in the First World War General Allenby based his military plans in Palestine 'on the studies of the wars of Joshua'.[488] So 'convinced' that 'in the unchanging East history would repeat itself,' Allenby thought 'the decisive battle of the campaign would be fought at the Pass of Megiddo'.[489] The revolutionary-religious eschatologies inherent in British conceptualisations of Arabia, then, have then a very peculiar Romantic heritage in the figure of Shelley.

Finally, it is Byron who provides the model, for the British Arabists, of the chivalric hero in Oriental (and especially Islamic) settings. Byron's 'Turkish Tales' are set in the Ottoman Empire, rather than in the Arabian Peninsula *per se*; however, whilst Wordsworth and Shelley provided the metaphorical *mise-en-scène* of the Arabian desert and its Bedouin inhabitants, Byron established the character type of the Romantic outsider which would become the archetype of the British Arabist.[490] Byron's heroes – the Giaour, Conrad the Corsair, Selim of *The Bride of Abydos* – all share one defining attribute: they are unafraid to rebel against the moral code of their environment. Chivalric narrative requires an underlying structure of 'metaphysical certainty,' such that, Satia

[487] It is Revelation 6:2: 'And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.' Shelley infamously styled himself 'Philanthropist, Democrat and Atheist' in the register of the Chamonix Hôtel de Villes de Londres in 1816.
[488] Archibald Wavell, *Allenby: Soldier and Statesman* (George Harrap and Co., 1946), p. 162.
[489] Wavell, p. 162. As with Shelley, the biblical reference is to Revelation – Megiddo is more well known as the biblical site Armageddon.
[490] See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

notes, had been lost in Europe and could be rediscovered in Arabia. Byron shows that, by immersion in an alien culture – of necessity one in which metaphysical certainties are embedded – a chivalric hero can be resuscitated. The chivalric hero had been dormant in the West for a long time preceding the Romantic age but had become an especially depleted figure after the horrors of the Napoleonic wars. For the society not grounded in the metaphysics of ordained destiny, victory becomes petty, heroism absurd: 'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose'.[491] Byron's instinct in the 'Turkish Tales' is to restore what he had referred to as 'the rapture of the strife' (in 'Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte', l. 29) by establishing a heroism with moral dimensions; doing that required a setting grounded in religious structures of feeling. By the early twentieth century, then, part of the very attraction to the Arabian Peninsula was its metaphysical difference and opportunities for heroism. It is well known that Lawrence was obsessed with ideas of chivalry, carrying Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) throughout the Arabian campaigns.[492] The trend however was common; Satia writes that agents tended to elevate their missions from geo-political state work to 'epic quests', aglow with 'the code of honor, loyalty, and duty'.[493] Yet it is the moral lesson of Byron's 'Turkish Tales' that agents would have done well to remember; undoubtedly narcissistic at the individual level, the chivalric quest narrative yielded a historically disastrous outcome in the colonial construction of the region.[494]

It is in the later nineteenth century that the 'Arabist' emerges, developing the Romantic discourses of the 'Arab' and 'Arabia'. The idea of the Arab Bedouin as a privileged people turns from being grounded in epistemological to racial difference and instantiates a vehement racial

[491] Lord Byron, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' Canto III, line 359. Quotations from Byron's poetry are from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann, 7 vols. (Clarendon Press, 1980–1993). Hereafter cited parenthetically by line number.
[492] Tidrick, pp. 178–79
[493] Satia, p. 74.
[494] As noted in Chapter 3, the central dramatic turn of the 'Turkish Tales' narratives is often a zero-sum game in which everybody (especially the protagonist) loses, so that the only winner is, in a sense, the metaphysical certainties.

categorising of the 'true Arab'. In 1866 Gifford Palgrave listed the myriad peoples of the peninsula who were not, in fact, 'Arab', but 'Curds, Turcomans, Syrians, Phoenicians, Armenians, Berbers, Greeks, Turks, Copts, Albanians, Chaldaeans'.[495] Even the 'unlucky and much talked of Bedouins in the Syrian, also miscalled Arabian, desert, are in fact only hybrids'.[496] Mapping the racial geography of the peninsula, Palgrave asserts that 'Arabia and Arabs begin south of Syria and Palestine'.[497] These discourses of racial categorisation soon became affiliated with discourses on the ethics of colonial administration. Traveller and poet Wilfrid Blunt was at the centre of the social matrix of the Arabist and perfectly exemplifies the Byronic structures of feeling typical in the character-type. His wife and co-traveller, Lady Anne Blunt, was co-incidentally Byron's granddaughter, and a family inheritance 'of sympathies in the cause of freedom in the East' was imputed to her.[498] Echoing Shelley, Blunt argues that '[f]ortunately the day of Ottoman tyranny in Asia is very near its close', and that championing 'Arabian liberty would be as worthy an endeavour as had been that for which Byron had died'.[499] Blunt was critical in the nineteenth-century shifting of 'Arabs' and 'Arabia' from Romantic to geopolitical discourses: Satia describes how the Blunts were 'pivotal figures' in a 'web of relations' between the Arabists and other influential British social circles, arguing that 'the cult of Arabia' had, by the Edwardian era, 'become mainstream'.[500] Developing Palgrave's racial categories in accordance with the appropriateness of colonial control, Blunt writes in 1880 that Egyptian Christians, (the 'Copt of the Nile'), Levantine Arabs ('the Canaanite of Syria') and the 'bastard Iraqi' ('for centuries a slave') 'are not real Arabians and should not be confounded with them'.[501] Moreover, such peoples are 'without the political instincts inherent in the pure race' and 'may never be worthy of their independence, or capable of self-

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[495] Gifford Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia (1862-63)*, 2 vols, (Macmillan, 1866), II, p. 163.
[496] Palgrave, p. 163.
[497] Palgrave, p. 163.
[498] Wilfrid Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt, being a personal narrative of events* (Alfred A Knopf, 1922), pp. 5–6.
[499] Blunt, "Recent Events in Arabia," *Fortnightly Review*, n.s., 27, (1880), p. 719; Blunt, *Secret History*, p. 6.
[500] Satia, pp. 63–4.
[501] Blunt, "Recent Events," p. 719.

government'.[502] In this way, the Shelleyan and Byronic themes of overcoming 'Ottoman tyranny' and the 'complete and lasting freedom of Arabia' (for *'real Arabians'*) are echoed through the nineteenth century.[503]

In the early twentieth century, Mark Sykes regurgitates many of these tropes, arguing in *Dar-Ul-Islam* (1904) that '[t]he man who took the Bedawin from their present state of happiness and taught them to be civilized […] would be committing a crime crying to heaven for vengeance'.[504] Alongside the privileging of the 'Arab' is a disgust for the supposedly not 'true Arab' natives of the peninsula. Blunt had decried the native of 'Cairo' or 'Palestine' and the '*fellahin* of the Tigris' whose 'beggarly ways' mark them as 'representatives of barbarism clothed in European forms'.[505] The *fellahin* (peasant or settled agricultural labourer) had long been despised in travel literatures. Jane Digby provides a familiar example of the discursive ennobling of the Arab and the denigration of the fellahin in a letter of 1853 when she describes 'wild Arabs' as having 'many qualities we want in civilised life' including, 'certain high-bred innate politeness, quite unlike the course vulgar Fellah'.[506] Alongside the fellahin, special contempt was also reserved for a newly constructed category: the Levantine. Sykes uses his own particular term for the urban citizen of the towns of the northern (and especially Mediterranean) part of the peninsula: 'gosmobaleet' (an Arabicised articulation of 'cosmopolitan'), 'descriptive of that peculiar and horrible sickness which attacks a certain percentage of the inhabitants of interesting and delightful lands'.[507] As with Blunt, he attacks their 'European clothes,' as well as their European Enlightenment pretensions with their 'catch words, such as 'The Rights of man,' 'Leebarty,' 'Civilizations', 'Baleetical Affences".[508]

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[502] Blunt, "Recent Events," p. 719.
[503] Blunt, "Recent Events," p. 719.
[504] Sykes, p. 16. It is in this distinctly Rousseauian trope that Sykes gives another example of the Romantic lineage of colonial discourses in Arabia.
[505] Blunt, "Recent Events," p. 719.
[506] Jane Digby, quoted in Charles Glass, *Tribes with Flags: A Journey Curtailed*, (Picador, 1990), p. 242.
[507] Sykes, p. 18.
[508] Sykes, p. 18.

Implicit in Sykes's definition of the 'gosmobaleet' is the trace of that first tenet of the Romantic discourse on Arabia, which by the early twentieth century evolves from the privileging of the Bedouin Arab into the debasement of another collective: the Levantine. The historian Elie Kedourie describes how 'a particular attitude towards the East' is demonstrated in the 'gradual change' of the meaning of the term 'Levantine' in the late nineteenth century:

The theory of it, invented and put into circulation by Europeans, was to the effect that Eastern civilisation was purer, more spiritual, more wholesome, than Western, and that European greed and viciousness was destroying the East; further, since viciousness and greed of Europe was flowing into the East through the non-Muslim Levantines […] it followed that these Levantines were the corrupt element in Eastern society.[509]

This discourse became written into the self-concept of being Levantine to the extent that Lebanese British historian Albert Hourani could write in 1947:

> to be a Levantine is to live in two worlds or more at once without belonging to either; to be able to go through the external forms which indicate the possession of a certain nationality, religion or culture without actually possessing it. It is no longer to have a standard of one's own, not to be able to create but only able to imitate […] It is to belong to no community and to possess nothing of one's own. It reveals itself in lostness, pretentiousness, cynicism and Despair.[510]

Kedourie follows the logic of this idea to outline the very same ideology iterated by Sykes, that European greed and viciousness was destroying the East further, [and] since viciousness and greed of Europe was flowing into the East through the non-Muslim Levantines […] it followed that these Levantines were the corrupt element in Eastern society.[511] The British discourse of the

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[509] Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1921*, (Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987), p. 74.
[510] Albert Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World*, (Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 70-71.
[511] Kedourie, p. 74. It is this discourse which prompts Albert Hourani to write of being Levantine as 'to live in two worlds or more at once without belonging to either', of having 'external forms which indicate the possession of a certain nationality, religion or culture without actually possessing it', resulting, ultimately, in 'lostness, pretentiousness, cynicism and Despair.' See Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World*, pp. 70–71.

superiority of the Arab, and an obsession with racial singularity, led to an understanding of the Levantine as cosmopolitan in a world where being 'gosmobaleet' had become derisible.

This emergent racial discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which prized the exclusivity of a given race and its culture can also be traced back to Romantic discourses and a nascent Zionism. Just as Wordsworth privileged the Bedouin Arab as having recourse to an esoteric epistemology lost to the West, both Byron and Shelley singled out 'the Jew' as belonging to a singular race which likewise held access to structures of sacred knowledge lost to the West. Byron's 1815 Hebrew Melodies were written and published to capitalise on the success of other collections of 'national melodies.' Byron was originally requested to write a collection of melodies for Wales or Ireland, but declined on the basis that collections already existed. This is not Byron the cosmopolitan, but rather Byron the nationalist, for whom the idea of a collective, national identity is to be celebrated. As Joseph Slater makes clear in his paper on the Melodies, Byron was hardly an ideologically committed Zionist but rather invested in the Romantic trend of twinning the concept of the nation with ideas of cultural and racial singularity.[512] Amongst the frequent allegorical references to Napoleon, it is the Romantic sentiment of longing which is most clearly felt in the sensibility of the Melodies. 'On Jordan's Banks' is typical, and demonstrates the lost homeland *ubi sunt* motif which is characteristic of a number of the poems:

> On Jordan's banks the Arab's camels stray,
>
> On Sion's hill the False One's votaries pray,
>
> The Baal-adorer bows on Sinai's steep –
>
> Yet there – even there – Oh God! thy thunders sleep.
>
> […]
>
> How long by tyrants shall thy land be trod?
>
> How long thy temple worshipless, Oh God?[513]

[512] Joseph Slater, 'Byron's Hebrew Melodies', in *Studies in Philology* 49.1 (1952), pp. 75–94.
[513] Byron, 'On Jordan's Banks', 1815, in Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome McGann, (Oxford University Press, 1981), III, p. 293.

(ll. 1-4; 11-12)

It is interesting here that 'the Arab' is a 'Baal-adorer'. Baal was a pre-Islamic Middle Eastern god most often associated with the Canaanites of Palestine; their most famous temple being that found in Palmyra. There is then, already here, the erosion of Levantine culture both geographically – in the sense that such Arabs do not belong 'On Sion's hill' – and historically – in that the poem's time frame is biblical and not contemporary.

In an enlightening article on Shelley's fragment 'On Zionism' or alternatively, 'Restoration of the Jews'(written around 1820-1821), Nora Crook and Tatsuo Tokoo summarise Shelley as identifying Jews with that 'indispensable [and one might add, supremely Shelleyan] moral quality: "an unconquerable hope of liberty"', as well as being 'drawn towards the unorthodox, rebel, or outcast Jew'.[514] The fragment articulates a plan for reviving the Jewish commonwealth under Mosaic law, and the reconstruction of the Temple. Crook and Tokoo note that Shelley's feeling towards the Jews and the idea of Israel was intricately tied to his political millenarianism and his belief in the fall of the Ottoman Empire.[515] Jews, in Shelley's Volneyan utopianism, are here the twins of the Saudi Wahabis, both testifying, in Crook and Tokoo's phrasing, 'to Shelley's conviction that all peoples in the Congressional post-Napoleonic era could be roused to self-enfranchisement'.[516] But the Romantic ideal of self-enfranchisement turned on the idea of racial and cultural singularity, the outcome of which was a hierarchisation of races that led Winston Churchill to proclaim, by analogy with the 'Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia', to the Palestine Royal Commission in 1937 that 'I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly-wise race has come in and taken their place'.[517]

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514 Nora Crook and Tatsuo Tokoo, 'Shelley's Jewish 'Orations" in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 59 (2010), p. 45.
515 Crook and Tokoo, 'Shelley's Jewish 'Orations',' p. 47.
516 Crook and Tokoo, 'Shelley's Jewish 'Orations',' p. 53.
517 Churchill, testimony to the Palestine Royal Commission ("Peel Commission"), 1937, quoted in Samar Attar, *Debunking the Myths of Colonization: The Arabs and Europe* (University Press of America, 2010), p. 9.

It is within this discursive context, which privileges the singularity of the Bedouin Arab or the Jew, and de-values the 'gosmobaleet' or the unhappy 'hybrids' of the Levant, that we should read the British handling of Palestine in the twentieth century. In Sykes's terms, Palestine, with its mix of 'gosmobaleet' in the towns and fellahin of the country, could hardly be afforded the privilege of the Romantic idea of 'Arabia', colonial control over whom would be 'a crime crying to heaven for vengeance'.[518] In the Romantic discourse of 'Arabia', Palestine, unlike Saudi Arabia, with its enormous, entrancing wilderness, and esoterically driven, proto-revolutionary Bedouin, lacked the sublimity of geography and the wild, uncolonisable inhabitants the discourse favoured. As the discourse on Arabia evolved into a colonial discourse, the people of Palestine were conceived of not as Arabs, but remote descendants of the Canaanite tribe. It is in this way that the peoples of the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula could so easily be dismissed as colonial subjects, whilst the peoples of the 'real Arabia' treated with magnanimity.[519] In the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 European colonial control was asserted in the northern part of the peninsula and not in the delimited territory of the 'real Arabians.' With extraordinary uncanniness, the geography of the treaty reproduces precisely Palgrave's 'line […] from the top of the Red Sea to the top of the Persian Gulf; what is below that line is alone Arab'.[520] In contemporary terms the line traverses the Arabian Peninsula from Jordanian Aqaba on the Red Sea, to the point at which Iraq meets the Persian Gulf; territories above that line comprising Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and below, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Yemen.

[518] Previously quoted, Sykes, p. 16.
[519] Though not as equals – one can read the particulars of the McMahon-Husayn correspondence for an idea of how the 'wild Arab' could be heard but not always indulged. See Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and Its Interpretations 1914-1939*, (Cambridge University Press, 1976).
[520] Palgrave, p. 163.



FIG 1. 'Arabia, showing areas under French and British control according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement' (UK National Archives). The finely dotted line in blue marks the dividing line between colonised and non-colonised territory, matching Palgrave's delimited geography of 'Arabia.'

It is, though, Palestine which was especially condemned by the logic of these racial discourses. More than any other region of the peninsula, 'the Holy Land' was also haunted by biblical discourses. In this way, the peoples of Palestine in the early twentieth century were conceived of as part of a matrix of racial discourses. Whether they were viewed contemporaneously as Levantine/fellahin, or biblically as Canaanites, they were always especially abject. In 1903 John Wordsworth, biblical scholar and Bishop of Salisbury (his father nephew to William Wordsworth) told the Palestine Exploration Fund:

Nothing, I think, that has been discovered makes us feel any regret at the suppression of

> Canaanite civilization by Israelite civilization. [Excavations show] the Bible has not misrepresented at all the abomination of the Canaanite culture which was superseded by the Israelite culture.[521]

These racial precepts also inform Churchill's statement to the Palestine Royal Commission quoted above. The moral ambivalence of the Balfour Declaration (1917) is assumed then on the basis of the devaluation of the people of Palestine:

> His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.[522]

Sealing the fate of Palestine with remarkable passivity and brevity, the hesitant reluctance of the declaration is an instance of self-interested misgivings rather than any concern for the (non-biblical) historicity of the region. In face of the geo-political pressures of an international war, the British pragmatically stood aside, as an empire, but did nothing to contradict the tenets of a discourse on the 'Arab' which had evolved over the previous hundred years. Since that discourse had privileged racial singularity above hybridity or plurality, nothing was lost by the 'establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'. There might have been people in Palestine, but they were not 'a people' – with the additional clause that even when they *had been* a people (Canaanites), they had been worth 'supersed[ing].'

After the First World War, as Said concludes, the 'romance of the Orient' was 'succeeded by the problems of dealing with the Orient'.[523] The three tenets of the Romantic discourse which can be traced back to Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron, had established the mythopoeic

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[521] Quoted in Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 79.
[522] Arthur James Balfour, 'Balfour Declaration' [letter to Lord Rothschild], November 2nd 1917, National Archives, CAB 23/4/35. In earlier drafts the wording was more explicit: 'Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people.' (See Paul Goldstein and Eyal Lewin, *The Serendipitous Evolution of the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), p. 284).
[523] Said, p. 3.

foundations for the colonisation of the Middle East. They had provided the ground for a hierarchical delineation of 'the Arab,' pointed to the Bedouin of Saudi Arabia as the revolutionaries who would enable the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and provided the character of the chivalric, Western (anti)hero who could become the protagonist of a drama determining the fate of nations. The Romantic inclination to identify racial singularity as indicative of a protected culture led to an exclusive category of the 'true Arab' which undid the social foundations of a region which had, more or less successfully (and certainly more successfully than what was to come), enabled multiple ethnicities and religious groups to live alongside each other for centuries without borders.[524] By tracing the Romantic symbols of 'Arabia' and the 'Arab' through the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, one can begin to unpack the mechanisms by which the 'romance of the Orient' provided the discursive ground for its twentieth-century colonial history. So often noted but never adequately explored, the Romantic heritage of the discourse on Arabia was more historically pertinent than even Said assumed and continues till today to have a profound impact on the peoples of the peninsula.

What this thesis has sought to demonstrate is that the roots of this historical and political entanglement run deeper than the nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperial archive alone. The Romantic encounter with Islam was not simply an encounter with a cultural or geographic Other, but a return to a set of metaphysical and epistemological structures that were already part of the shared intellectual inheritance of Europe. The Islamicate tradition of the Active Intellect, transmitted through Avicenna, Averroes, Maimonides and finally Spinoza, underlies many of the imaginative and philosophical formulations that Romanticism has long been understood to develop 'internally' within European thought. Romanticism did not simply turn outward in search of an exotic elsewhere; it returned – without full recognition – to a tradition through which it had

[524] For a discussion of how the Ottoman empire had maintained relations between different religious groups, see Nicholas Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and Its Destruction in Late-Ottoman Anatolia*, (Oxford University Press, 2013).

already been formed. The figure of Islam in Romantic poetry therefore marks a site of both proximity and disavowal, inheritance and estrangement.

The stakes of this recognition are twofold. First, it alters how we read the Romantic imagination itself – not as a uniquely European metaphysical innovation, but as one articulation within a longer, trans-Mediterranean genealogy of thinking about the relation between mind, world, and the divine. Second, it allows us to see how the symbolic resources of Romanticism later became instrumentalised in the political and territorial reconfigurations of the modern Middle East. The Romantic 'East' is not simply a poetic invention; it is a discursive formation with material and geopolitical afterlives. To read Islam in Romanticism is therefore also to read the history of modernity's entanglement with the Islamicate – an entanglement that continues to structure cultural, political, and philosophical imaginaries today.

Romanticism's turn to Islam reveals, at its core, a desire to recover forms of coherence, meaning, and metaphysical depth that Enlightenment rationalism had rendered difficult to sustain. But the terms of that recovery – structured as they were by Orientalist grammars of difference – ensured that the Islamicate could appear only as both foundation and Other, origin and limit. The task, then, is not to resolve this paradox, but to recognise it as constitutive. It is here, in this ongoing oscillation between inheritance and projection, that the intellectual history of Romanticism and the modern history of the Middle East remain bound together.

This thesis makes a contribution to Romantic studies, intellectual history, and the study of Orientalism by reframing how we understand the Romantic imagination and its relation to Islam. The Romantic conception of imagination as a mediating metaphysical faculty has traditionally been situated within a European lineage running from Christian theology through Neoplatonism to post-Kantian idealism. By tracing the genealogy of the Active Intellect across Islamicate, Jewish, and early modern philosophical traditions, this thesis demonstrates that Romantic thought draws upon a shared trans-Mediterranean inheritance that has gone largely unacknowledged. Moreover, it shows that the Enlightenment itself was shaped by Islamicate scientific, mathematical, and

rationalist discourses; the very conceptual and epistemological structures that Romanticism both inherits and contests were already routed through Islamic intellectual history before they became thinkable as 'European'. Romanticism, therefore, does not simply turn to Islam as a symbol of alterity – it encounters in Islam a set of conceptual resources foundational to the very modernity it seeks to critique.

In turning to Islam, Romantic writers did not merely construct an exotic outside. Their poetry and prose often register a return to philosophical and metaphysical frameworks that underwrite their own imaginative aspirations, even as these frameworks are experienced and represented as foreign. This thesis therefore extends the analysis of Orientalism by identifying moments in which inheritance appears as estrangement, where conceptual continuity returns under the sign of cultural distance. Romantic Orientalism is thus not only a discourse of projection and domination, but also a site in which suppressed intellectual genealogies re-emerge, partially recognised and partially disavowed. It is in this oscillation that Romantic thought negotiates its most ambitious metaphysical claims.

The thesis also contributes to our understanding of historicity and literary form in Romantic studies. By attending to Byron's sustained engagement with Ottoman and Arab-Islamic cultural contexts, rather than treating the 'Turkish Tales' and *Childe Harold* as merely symbolic or exoticised, it demonstrates that Byron's poetry is shaped by modes of narration, ethical stance, and character typology that draw upon Arabic and Islamicate literary traditions as much as upon European ones. The Byronic hero does not simply appear against an Islamic backdrop; his narrative structure — the lonely protagonist whose moral gravity depends on being embedded in a world of reciprocal obligation, hospitality, and honour — is itself resonant with Arabic and Islamicate poetic and narrative forms. Byron's eventual movement toward a historically situated mode of recognition in *Don Juan* reveals a model of Romantic encounter that neither wholly appropriates nor simply rejects the Other, but attempts to think *with* it. This complicates the

inherited critical binary between Orientalist fantasy and empirical record and shows Byron working through difference rather than merely staging it.

Finally, by tracing the Romantic symbolic constructions of Arabia and the Arab into the twentieth century, the thesis demonstrates how poetic constructs became implicated in the colonial reconfiguration of the Middle East. The frameworks established by Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron did not remain literary: they informed British diplomatic, military, and administrative constructs, particularly in the period surrounding the First World War and the subsequent partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. The study therefore shows that Romanticism's engagement with Islam is not a closed aesthetic episode, but part of a longer, ongoing entanglement between Europe and the Islamicate world – one that continues to shape cultural, political, metaphysical and material constructs of the present. To tell the story of Romanticism, we must once again begin in the places it believed it had left behind. The record shows that Romanticism and modernity were formed within a shared intellectual inheritance that Europe elected to disavow; consequences of that disavowal continue to organise the present.

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