OTTOMAN EMPIRE
AND
EUROPEAN THEATRE

III

IMAGES OF THE HAREM
IN LITERATURE AND THEATRE

edited by
Michael Hüttler · Emily M. N. Kugler
Hans Ernst Weidinger

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Hans Ernst Weidinger · Michael Hüttler

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A COMMEMORATION OF LORD BYRON'S SOJOURN IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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ABBREVIATIONS

AD	*Anno Domini*
a.k.a.	also known as
b.	born
bapt.	baptized
BC	Before Christ
cent.	century
c.	circa
cf.	confer (compare, see)
d.	died
Diplomarb.	Diplomarbeit (unpublished Master thesis)
Diss.	Dissertation (unpublished PhD dissertation)
ed.	edited by, editor
eds.	editors, editions
et al.	et alii/aliae (and others)
ff.	and following
fl.	*floruit* (flourished)
fig.	figure
fol.	folio
ibidem	in the same place
idem	the same
no.	number
nos.	numbers
orig.	originally
p.	page
pp.	pages
r.	reign(ed)
rev.	revised
s.a.	sine anno (without year)
s.l.	sine loco (without location)
s.p.	sine pagina (without page)
s.n.	sine nomine (without name/author/editor)
s.typ.	sine typographus (without printer/publisher)
s.v.	sub verbo (under the word)
trans.	translated by, translator
vol.	volume
vols.	volumes
vs.	versus

REMARKS

Translations, if not indicated otherwise, are by the authors of the contribution. Quotations are generally in the original language, followed by an English translation.
Double quotation marks are used for quotations in the continuous text; single quotation marks indicate translated words or sentences, as well as otherwise highlighted words or phrases.

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EDITORIAL

Michael Hüttler (Vienna), Emily M. N. Kugler (Washington/DC),
Hans Ernst Weidinger (Vienna/Florence)

> Don Juan in his feminine disguise
> With all the damsels in their long array,
> Had bowed themselves before the imperial eyes,
> And at the usual signal ta'en their way
> Back to the chambers, those long galleries
> In the Seraglio, where the ladies lay
> Their delicate limbs; a thousand bosoms there
> Beating for love, as the caged birds for air.[1]

Images of the Harem in Literature and Theatre: A Commemoration of Lord Byron's Sojourn in the Ottoman Empire is the fifth volume of the "Ottomania" book series and, within that series, the third issue of the *Ottoman Empire and European Theatre* collection. While "Ottomania" deals with Ottoman–European cultural transfers and questions of Orientalism–Occidentalism in general, the latter focuses on theatre, music, arts and literature. The preceding volumes directed attention to musical interconnections and the works of composers such as Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756–1791)[2] or Joseph Haydn (1732–1809).[3] The present volume points more toward poetry and literature by devoting this edition to two popular topics of the long eighteenth century. It expands a subject that earlier volumes had touched upon but not explored in depth, one of the most popular subjects of eighteenth-century theatre and literature: the seraglio and its harem.

The second major topic of this volume, also closely tied to the themes associated with European depictions of the harem, is one of the most influenital British poets, George Gordon Byron, later George Gordon Noel, sixth Baron Byron (22 January 1788 – 19 April 1824), commonly known as Lord Byron. In Byron and his works all of the afore-mentioned themes are combined: theatre, literature and music,

1 George Gordon Byron: *Don Juan*, in: *The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome McGann, vol. 5. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, Canto VI, stanza 26, p. 307.

2 Michael Hüttler and Hans Ernst Weidinger (eds.): *Ottoman Empire and European Theatre*, vol. 1: *The Age of Mozart and Selim III (1756–1808)*.Vienna: Hollitzer, 2013 (= Ottomania 1).

3 Michael Hüttler and Hans Ernst Weidinger (eds.): *Ottoman Empire and European Theatre*, vol. 2: *The Time of Joseph Haydn: From Sultan Mahmud I to Mahmud II (r.1730–1839)*. Vienna: Hollitzer, 2014 (= Ottomania 3).

the seraglio and adventures inside its harem, Orientalism and Occidentalism. The hero of his poem *Don Juan* (written 1819–1824) lives in 'feminine disguise' in the sultan's harem for more than a century, from the regency of Soliman II (or of Soliman I, according to some experts) to the siege of the fortress of Ismail by Alexander V. Suvorov in 1790 (Cantos VII and VIII). Cantos V and VI of the poem include various descriptions of the palace, the harem and its inhabitants. Byron himself, on his Grand Tour travelled to the Ottoman Empire, among others to Albania where he personally met Ali Pasha of Janina (*c.*1744–1822) and got insight into an Ottoman seraglio, all of which had an immense impact on the poet. "The poetic outcome of this journey would blow its English readers away with its new content and form", as Käthe Springer-Dissmann notes.[4] Byron also continued to Athens, Smyrna and Constantinople. On May 3, 1810, George Gordon Lord Byron swam like the mythic Leander from Sestos on the European side of the Hellespont to Abydos on the Asian shore. Later in his life he supported the movement for Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire and during his stay in Missolonghi eventually died on Ottoman Greek soil.

THE SERAGLIO AND ITS HAREM

In European literature of the eighteenth century the term seraglio was usually treated as synonymous with the term harem. The Italian word *serraglio*, often spelled in libretti with two r's, means a 'cage' (as used for wild animals), while the Turkish word *saray*, derived from the Persian *sara'i* (a 'palace, inn'), means 'palace, court'. The harem, the women's quarters, is part of the seraglio, and the word 'harem' derives from the Arabian *haram*, which means 'unlawful, forbidden, sacred'. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Ottaviano Bon's (1552–1623) book *Descrizione del Serraglio del Gransignore* (1608; in English, *The Sultan's Seraglio*, 1650) provided a general description of the palace and its architecture, but true to the meaning of the word harem, the women's quarters remained inaccessible.
Despite or perhaps because of this inaccessibility, the space of the harem frequently acts as the access point for European representations of the Ottoman Empire. Hidden from literal visitors, the imagined harem in European plays, letters, novels, and other mediums invited European audiences to see the Ottomans as well as their own cultures played out through the political and sexual intrigues of this cloistered world.
Differing European accounts over the nature of the harem reveal to today's readers more about the stakes of the writers within their cultural contexts than a historical reality of the Ottoman Empire. The capacity of the harem to

4 For an in-depth view of Byron's travel to the East cf. the contribution by Käthe Springer-Dissmann in this publication.

illuminate concerns and contestations within Europe comes ironically from both the foreignness and the familiarity of the Ottoman Empire to these occidental audiences. It served at times as a negative, foreign, other associated with tyranny and opulence. Although often on opposing sides of political issues, both Edmund Burke (1729–1797) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) pointed to the harem as a site of degradation against their aspirations for European society.[5] Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) defends European monarchy as an amenable environment to promote individuality, holding that those who called for the end of the French monarchy mistook a European Enlightenment system for "the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey."[6] Working from a different thesis but still using the Ottomans as a means of defining Europe against an unenlightened other, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subject*s (1792) holds that the "despotism that kills virtue and genius in the bud, [does not] hover over Europe with that destructive blast which desolates Turkey."[7] Having established the Ottomans as the model to shun, she uses the image of the harem as a means to criticize European treatment of women as estranged from a culture of liberty. She argues that an orientalist "love of pleasure or sway" describes "the husband who lords it in his little harem [and] thinks only of his pleasure or his convenience" and quotes in order to reject Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) advice to have "'a young English-woman cultivate her agreeable talents, in order to please her future husband, with as much care and assiduity as a young Circassian cultivates her's, to fit her for the haram of an eastern bashaw.'"[8]

From stage representations of the harem to later depictions in prose fiction, verse, music, the visual arts, as well as in legal discourse (all of which are discussed by the authors of this volume), the harem haunts European culture. To this day, it appears in multiple mediums of popular culture, including ones that only gained prominence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The simplified portrayals of the Ottoman harem continue, with examples such as North American graphic novelist Craig Thompson's *Habibi* (2011),[9] in which present-day oil oligarchies of a vaguely defined Middle East blur with an older image of the Ottoman harem

5 For an excellent comparative analysis of Burke and Wollstonecraft's depictions of the Ottoman Empire see Filiz Turham: *The Other Empire: British Romantic Writings about the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Routledge 2004, pp. 5–7.

6 Edmund Burke: *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceeding in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to be Sent to a Gentleman in Paris*. London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1790, p. 189.

7 Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1792, p. 90

8 Ibidem pp. 158, 190.

9 Craig Thompson: *Habibi*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.

reminiscent of orientalist images by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867). The global popularity of the Turkish soap opera *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* ('The magnificent century', 2011–2014) in Europe, Latin America, as well as parts of the former Ottoman Empire also points to the continued resonance of history of European-born Hürrem Sultan (*c.*1500–1588), commonly known as Roxelana, whose rise from captive to harem favorite to sultana has inspired playwrights, novelists, and poets since her reign. Likely born in present-day western Ukraine, the historical Hürrem was captured by Tartars and sold to the Ottoman harem where she rose to unprecedented power as sultana. Her name in many forms – Roxelana, Roxelane, Roxanae, Roxane – became shorthand in European representations of the harem, especially in narratives where European women come in contact with this Ottoman space. The variety of portrayals of Hürrem in European sources illustrates an equally varied range of stances on the Ottoman Empire and its relations with its Western neighbors. Does she represent a European influence on the foreign space of the harem, or does she serve as a warning to European audiences not to allow outsiders to influence domestic hierarchies? This complexity is explored throughout this volume, with specific discussions of the historical Hürrem's role in European culture alongside essays in which variations on the name Roxelane are found in other represention of the Ottoman.[10]

This volume aims for something more complex than simply retelling the history of European objectification of Eastern culture. In his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said (1935–2003) described European relations with the 'Orient' as one of Europeans exerting systematic knowledge of the region since the mid-eighteenth century and continually representing Europe "always in a position of strength, not to say dominance."[11] Forming a binary option, the "Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'" which in turn makes "the European [...] rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'."[12] Said's concept of Orientalism – "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority of the Orient" – accurately describes many European representations of the Ottoman Empire and its surrounding areas. Yet the historical reality was far more complex; there were active exchanges and collaborations on both sides, with the Ottoman Empire acting alternatively as a partner, rival, and often more powerful force than its European counterparts.[13]

10 See the contributions by Emily M. N. Kugler, Michael Hüttler, and Bent Holm in this volume. For an example of Roxane as a name associated with harem representations in general see the contribution by Domenica Newell-Amato in this volume. For more on the historical Hürrem, see *Roxolana in European Literature, History and Culture*, ed. Galina I. Yermolenko. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.

11 Edward Said: *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. (Orig. Lodnon: Routledge, 1978).

12 Ibidem p. 40.

13 Ibidem, p. 3. It is worth noting that Said's *Orientalism* is less concerned with presenting a historical

This volume presents diverse portrayals of European and Ottoman empires and their interactions, its authors drawing upon English-, German- and French-language sources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. One of the most famous European visitors to the Ottoman harems, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) provides an epistolary account of the harem that – as Stefanie Steiner points out in the Prologue of this volume – provided a rare eyewitness account of the Turkish harem, along with an equally rare attempt to understand the culture through a study of its languages and literature.[14] As discussed by authors in this volume, Montagu's work played a key role both in producing new knowledge of the harem as well as entering into an ongoing discourse on the harem occurring in Europe.[15] Later, another key figure in this volume, Lord George Gordon Byron, would again shape European conceptions of the Ottomans through the profusion of poetry produced in his short life. His travels to the Ottoman world – from his 1809–1811 Grand Tour's inclusion of the Ottoman Mediterranean to his involvement in the Greek independence struggle in the last years of his life – deeply influenced his writing and provided an influential cultural representation of the Ottomans and the harem.[16]

MAPPING THE ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

The Prologue presents the reader with an overview of various Western conceptions of the harem from literary sources of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Stefanie Steiner's introductory text "Enchantment/Disenchantment: Conceptions of Harem and Seraglio in Selected Literary Sources from 1608 to 1852" offers probably the most lucid description of the (literary) Orient in the early twentieth century, by quoting Paul Valéry's (1871–1945) famous thoughts about the development of an

analysis for its own sake and more with explaining through historical example late twentieth-century representations of Palestine in Europe and North America. For more see Emily M. N. Kugler: *Sway of the Ottoman Empire on English Identity in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 5–6.

14 Montagu's letters were based on her travel diaries during her husband's 1717–1718 ambassadorial, circulated as manuscripts later, and finally published posthumously as a whole in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763). Although they significantly influenced future portrayals of the Ottoman Empire, Humberto Garcia points out that they also drew on the pre-existing European genre featuring around a fictitious Muslim narrator, such as Giovanni P. Marana's *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (1691). These were a popular genre, for example, Garcia points out that the eight-volume English translation of Marana text went through thrity-one editions between 1692 to 1801. Humberto Garcia: *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012, p. 63

15 For more on Montagu in this volume, see contributions by Stefanie Steiner, Hans-Peter Kellner and Isobel Grundy in this publication. For a fuller treatment, see Grundy's excellent biography: *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

16 See especially Acts III and IV of this volume.

oriental myth generated by Western literary fiction. Steiner than analyzes how fictitious harem scenes were literally constructed and explores the general intentions of selected authors of travelogues, romances, poems or letters.

Act I is dedicated to English authors of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with works of Mary Pix (*c.*1666–1709), Aaron Hill (1685–1750), Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), and Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) in the center of the contributions. Anne Greenfield's "Veiled in the Seraglio: Whig Messaging in Mary Pix's Tragedy *Ibrahim* (1696)" investigates if Pix's play *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* contained Whig political propaganda and messaging, despite Pix's claim that her play was not designed to be taken ideologically. Greenfield here questions the critical commonplace that Pix's plays are not overtly political. English writer Aaron Hill, on the other hand, in his dramatic works and especially his historico-political book *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1709), deliberately included some quite titillating descriptions to whet the appetites of readers. In "Capturing the Seraglio: From the Life and Work of Aaron Hill (1685–1750)" Hans-Peter Kellner takes a close look at Hill's life, examining how this young Englishman – Hill was only 15 when he arrived in Istanbul – could obtain such close insight into the secrets of the seraglio in Constantinople, which he later used successfully to draw attention to his works.

Emily M. N. Kugler, in her contribution "Playing the Sultana: Erotic Capital and Commerce in Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* (1724)", analyzes that novel in the light of female and English identity. Although set in Britain during the reign of Charles II (1630–1685, r.1660–1685), the name given to the heroine, Roxana, is meant as an allusion to the historical Roxelana, a harem slave that became the wife of Sultan Süleyman I (1494–1566, r.1520–1566). Kugler shows how Defoe's text ties itself to a history of English representations of the Ottomans, in particular the contradictory views of the harem as a place of female enslavement, enclosed safety, and potential power.

Michael J. Chappell investigates "The Pleasures of Friendship and Society" by analyzing "Pekuah and the Arab's Seraglio in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759)". Chappell focuses on narratives of intercourse – social as well as sexual – in Johnson's work, with the experience of the maid Pekuah in an Arabic harem as a critique of both Arab and English patriarchalism, using women as objects of trade in not so different ways.

Act II continues the focus on English authors but shifts chronologically to Britain in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. In "Justice and the Bashaw of Merryland: Harem Fantasy, Rape Narrative, and the Trial of Lord Baltimore (1768)" Jennifer L. Airey takes a close look at the most astonishing case of a true captivity tale that took place in England and included an English harem replica and English 'sultanas'.

Isobel Grundy contributes "English Women's Various Harems", considering the varied and even contradictory approaches to the harem subject by three female authors: Eliza Haywood (*c.*1693–1756), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) and Elizabeth Marsh (1735–1785). As Grundy shows, all these writers used the image of the harem to further their own ends.

Another English female author is the focus of the attention in Gönül Bakay's contribution "Is It Possible to Have Freedom in a Prison? Emmeline Lott's *The Governess in Egypt* (1865)". Lott lived as an English governess in the harem of the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt, İsmail Pasha (1830–1895), and later wrote a book about her experiences. Bakay's analysis of Lott's memoirs examines the socio-cultural politics of the Ottoman-Egypt harem and questions how much freedom was possible for its inmates.

The following contributions in Act III and Act IV are all dedicated to Lord Byron's works and their significance for the subject of the book. Act III – Byron: The Youth starts with Käthe Springer-Dissmann's essay about Lord Byron's travels to the Ottoman Empire: "'Now at Length We're Off for Turkey, Lord Knows When We Whall Come Back!': Byron's Grand Tour to the Bosphorus 1809–1911". Springer-Dissmann unfolds Byron's journey as a travelogue, focusing on his travels in Albania and his sojourn in Ali Pasha's seraglio, and commenting on the great impact that journey had on the poet and his creative life. Added to the essay is a useful addendum listing "Scanderbeg in Italian Opera up to Byron's Time".

Mi Zhou researches "The Monster Within" by also taking a close look at Byron's encounter with Ali Pasha and scrutinizes "Ali Pasha's Seraglio in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*". Zhou's critical attention is drawn to Byron's description of the "Mahometan Buonaparte's"[17] seraglio and his writing on Albania and its people, which for him oddly resembled the familiar Highlanders of Scotland.

For nineteenth century Greece Lord Byron became a national hero. Greek writers, inspired by *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) and *Manfred* (1816), created a whole literary production dealing with the death of the romantic poet, along with an entire style of 'Byronism'. Walter Puchner takes a close look at these developments in "The Reception of Lord Byron in Greek Theatre and Drama in the Nineteenth Century", analyzing how, among others, *The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (1813) and *Manfred* deeply influenced Greek dramatist Panayotis Soutsos (1806–1868).

Act IV Byron: The Sultana revolves around the role of music either in Byron's works or musical works influenced by Byron's poetry. In "'The Soft Hours of Sardanapalus': Music and Effeminacy in Stagings of Byron's Seraglios" Laura Tunbridge examines the role of music in Byron's descriptions of seraglios and harems, especially in his poem *Sardanapalus* (1821) and its nineteenth-century theatrical productions.

17 Cf. the contribution by Mi Zhou in this publication.

Marian Gilbart Read investigates Giuseppe Verdi's (1813–1901) opera *Il corsaro* (1848), an adaptation of Byron's narrative poem *The Corsair* (1814), in its Risorgimento context. Her "'Schiava son io, Corsaro!' Does the Escape from the Harem Dramatize the Risorgimento Struggle in Verdi's Adaptation of Byron's *The Corsair* (1814)?" takes a close look at the textual changes in the Italian-language version of the text, written by Verdi's Venetian librettist Francesco Maria Piave (1810–1876) after his instructions. Added to this is an appendix with a "Timeline of Byron, Verdi and Risorgimento Events".

Himmet Umunç's contribution "In Search of Exoticism: Byron's Reveries of the Ottoman Orient" looks for an inherent oriental exoticism in Byron's work. Umunç focuses on the poet's perception of the Ottoman Orient and demonstrates through references to his fabulations and statements how this perception was romanticized in fantasies and exotic reveries.

The Orient had been a special source of fascination for the French since the late seventeenth century, with theatre playing a particular role in mirroring otherness to the French (and European) self. Act V therefore shows how the French Influences to European theatre had also affected the oriental plays and *Türkenopern* ('Turkish operas') of that time. The character of Rox(el)ane started her literary success in France, and she appears, as the attentive reader will notice, in all contributions of this chapter.

Domenica Newell-Amato opens Act V with the discussion of a classical French tragedy of the oriental harem. In her contribution "Of African Monsters and Eunuchs: Colonial Fashioning with the Harem of Jean Racine's *Bajazet* (1672)" she considers the orient as cultural counterpoint to the French.

Michael Hüttler in "'Five Hundred very happy Women!': The Harem as a Locus of Social and National Identities in Eighteenth-Century German-Language Theatre" studies three theatre pieces – all deriving from a French source, Charles-Simon Favart's (1710–1792) comedy *Soliman second* (1761) – and their use of the setting of an Ottoman harem to profile social and national identities, as well as for representations of the other.

Bent Holm directs our attention further north with "The Ambiguous Harem: Moralism and Exoticism in Danish Harem Images of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries". Holm makes a successful attempt to observe the harem motif through Danish historical glasses, while at the same time refracting certain Danish notions through the harem prism.

Last but not least Andreas Münzmay leads us directly back to the Parisian stages. His text "Musical Representations of the Seraglio in Eugène Scribe's Vaudeville *L'ours et le pacha* and in its Adaptations in Nineteenth-Century European Theatre" examines Scribe's play, its subject and idea, how it plays on exoticism, how its

musical dramaturgy works in general, and the musical representation of the seraglio in particular. Münzmay raises the question if and to what extent the musical patterns of representing the seraglio in French vaudeville were transferable to other European music-theatre cultures.
The publication is rounded up with an Appendix, containing an Index and Curricula Vitae.

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The character *Don Juan* has, again, proven to be a cultural link between theatre, music and literature, as well as between Orient and Occident because, as Himmet Umunç in his contribution to the present volume concludes,

18 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies March 17–20, 2011, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

19 *Ottoman Empire and European Theatre, Seraglios and Harems. A Commemoration of the Bicentenary of Lord Byron's Sojourn in the Ottoman Capital (1810)*. International Symposium in Two Acts Organized by Don Juan Archiv Wien Forschungsverein für Theater- und Kulturgeschichte in cooperation with The UNESCO International Theatre Institute in Vienna and The Austrian Cultural Forum in Istanbul. April 23–24, 2010 at the UNESCO – ITI, Palais Khevenhüller, Türkenstraße 19, Vienna and on May 27–28, 2010 at the Austrian Cultural Forum, Palais Yeniköy. Köybaşı Caddesi 44, Yeniköy, Istanbul.

> […] it is in *Don Juan* that Byron's reveries of the Ottoman Orient reach their climax. His representation of the Ottoman seraglio, which, for him, constitutes the core of his oriental reveries, is fully romanticized and glamourized through his depiction of the sultana Gulbeyaz, captivating concubines, black eunuchs, a magnificent set of rooms and halls, and Eden-like gardens with exotic flowers and trees.[20]

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20 Cf. Himmet Umunç: "In Search of Exoticism. Byron's Reveries of the Ottoman Orient" in this publication, p. 338.

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PROLOGUE

ENCHANTMENT / DISENCHANTMENT: CONCEPTIONS OF HAREM AND SERAGLIO IN SELECTED LITERARY SOURCES FROM 1608 TO 1852

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In 1938, the French philosopher Paul Valéry (1871–1945) made a try to give a general description of the 'Orient', probably not even aware of the fact that he actually described with an astounding lucidity the development of an oriental myth generated by (Western) literary fiction:

> Pour que ce nom produise à l'esprit de quelqu'un, son plein et entier effet, il faut, sur toute chose, n'avoir jamais été dans la contrée mal déterminée qu'il désigne.Il ne faut la connaître par l'image, le récit, la lecture, et quelques objets, que de la sorte la moins érudite, la plus inexacte, et même la plus confuse. C'est ainsi que l'on se compose une bonne matière de songe. Il y faut un mélange d'espace et de temps, de pseudo-vrai et de faux certain, d'infimes détails et de vues grossièrement vastes. C'est là l'ORIENT de l'esprit.[1]
>
> ('For the Orient to develop its full scope in the mind, it is essentially important never to have travelled to the undefined region the term denotes. Illustrations, narrations, readings and a few small items should only give you the most inaccurate, unscholarly, even nebulous "knowledge" to deliver you with a good foil for your own dreams. It needs a blend of space and time, of ostensible truths and deceitful certainties, of tiny details and wide perspectives. This constitutes the ORIENT of the mind.')

Predestined for this process denoted by Valéry – an unstructured, unsystematic fictional approach towards a foreign culture mainly based on fantasy and dream – was the harem. This secret, hidden place, inaccessible to the Western male's curiosity seemed to be synonymous with promiscuity, with a promise to perfect sensual and sexual fulfilment – even if seen only from the outside. Its inaccessibility did not help at all to avoid wildest speculations, just the contrary: Lacking trusted facts about the real life in the harem, doubtful lores depending on western males' fancies were invented and presented for real in literary descriptions. The less you

1 Paul Valéry: *Orientem versus* (1938), in: Idem: *Œuvres*, ed. Jean Hytier, vol. 2. Paris: Gallimard, 1960, pp. [1040]–1045, here p. 1041.

knew for sure about the harem, the better it was for projecting a lot of secret wishes and desires upon the empty canvas of the term.
In the following, I'd like to give an account of some examples taken out of selected literary sources. How is a fictitious harem scene literally constructed? What are the intentions of the authors? The selected examples are intentionally taken out of different countries and different literary genres, the spectre ranging from letters to travelogues, from romances to poems. The time frame considered extends over the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries.

FICTION AND REALITY

> […] Qu'entends-je au loin?… des cœurs… sont-ce des voix de femmes?
> Des chants murmurés par des âmes?
> Ces concerts!… suis-je au ciel? – Du sang… c'est le sérail![2]
>
> ('[…] What do I hear from far away? … these choirs … are that women's voices?
> These chants whispered from the souls?
> These concerts! … am I in heaven? – Blood… this is the sérail!')

To western cultures, the 'Orient' often appeared as a menace as well as a strange, fascinating and seducing world. Reports of cruelties during the Turk wars were constantly perpetuated, myths of immeasurable treasures circulated in the Occident, and legends of the secret harem where hundreds of beautiful women were available to a mighty sultan's disposal ignited the fancy of western males. Especially the idea of polygamy attributed to the oriental world seemed to be very tempting – in fact, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at least two bills were introduced to the English parliament to legally allow multiple marriage.[3] At about the same time, in the German speaking world some treatises defending the *Vielweyberei* ('polygamy') were anonymously published.[4]
On the other hand, there were conservative authors such as the Swabian clergyman Salomon Schweigger (1551–1622) who, in the year 1608, published

2 Victor Hugo: *Les Orientales* (1829), in: *Œuvres poétiques*, vol. 1: *Avant l'exil (1802–1851)*, ed. Pierre Albouy. Paris: Gallimard 1964, from the chapter "Les têtes du sérail (Juin 1826)", Part III, pp. 598–601, here p. 601.

3 Sven Trakulhun: "Reisen in das Reich der Sinne. Asiatische Frauen im europäischen Diskurs der frühen Neuzeit", in: *Reisen in den Orient vom 13. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Eva Hofstetter. Stendal: Winckelmann-Gesellschaft, 2007 (= Schriften der Winckelmann-Gesellschaft 26), pp. 31–42, here p. 35.

4 Ibidem. The author publishing under different pseudonyms could later be identified as a cleric named Friedrich Leyser.

a *Newe Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland Nach Constantinopel und Jerusalem* […] *Mit hundert schönen newen Figuren*[5] ('New description of the journey from Germany to Constantinople and Jerusalem [...] With Hundred fine new figures'). Though Schweigger never explicitely mentions the term harem, his book contains a detailed account of the seraglio building – from the outside.[6] According to his vivid description, however, the daily life of the Turkish male does not seem to be too appealing; the Turkish husband is rather depicted as a deplorable person, mistreated by his wives who keep him on his toes all day long. While all the world shudders in the face of the Turkish army, their warriors shudder in the face of their 'house dragons' (or so Schweigger claims to know):

> Eigentlich davon zu reden, sein die Türcken ihrer Weiber Trippelknecht, die da müssen die Haushaltung versorgen mit Brot, Fleisch, Kuchenspeis und ihnen allerlei Nahrung zutragen. In solcher Weil sitzen die Weiber daheim bei ihren guten Gespielen, verrichten ihr Geschwätz. Oder wenn sie gut Wetter haben und schön ist, spazieren sie hin und wider in der Stadt zu ihren Gespielschaften, ziehen rottenweis – etwan ihrer 10 oder 20 miteinander – oder gehen solcher Gespielschaft ins Bad. […] Diese Gnadfrauen treiben kein Arbeit, weder mit Spinnen, Nähen, Stricken, Weben, Wirken oder dergleichen weiblicher Arbeit. Sie wissen nicht, was Haushalten ist – unsere Kinder in der Christenheit, wann sie mit ihren Docken und mit sich kurzweiln, können dasjenig, was zur Haushaltung dienet, besser und mit mehrerm Verstand anschicken (als Essen-, Trinkenkochen etc.) dann diese türckischen Schlumpen ihr Hauswesen –, sondern sitzen daheim im Haus wie ein Gast, der sich keines Dings annimmt. Jedoch haben sie viel Magde […].[7]
>
> ('If it comes to that, the Turks are their women's servants who have to organize bread, meat, cake, and other types of food. Meanwhile, the women are sitting at home with their female friends, chatting away. Or, if the weather is fine, they go for a walk to their companions, assemble outside in groups of 10 or 20, or go to the hamam. […] These idle women don't do any housework, don't spin, sew, knit, weave or do any other such female works. They don't even know what housework is – our children in Christianity, when playing with their spindles, are more competent of and skilled in housematters such as the preparation of drinks and food,

5 Salomon Schweigger: *Zum Hofe des türkischen Sultans, bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Heidi Stein*. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1986 (orig. *Ein newe Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland Nach Constantinopel und Jerusalem* […] *Mit hundert schönen newen Figuren*, 1608).

6 Ibidem, p. 133.

7 Ibidem, p. 200.