The Enlightenment and Genocide

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... with the Enlightenment came the enthronement of the new deity, that of Nature, together with the legitimation of science as its only orthodox cult, and of scientists as its prophets and priests. Everything, in principle, had been opened to objective inquiry; everything could, in principle, be known—reliably and truly.

—Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust

Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressors’ own nationals.

—Raphaël Lemkin, Axis Rule in Occupied Europe

The Nights can be seen to have a cross-cultural history and identity which impels it beyond the confines of any single representation of its identity, and which makes it relevant as the only piece of literature which inhabits the nexus of Eastern history and Western being.

—Eva Sallis, Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass

In this essay I’d like to craft a conversation between two fields which in different ways and with different verdicts have addressed the Enlighten-
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mention as a problem in what the nineteenth-century historian of Ireland W.E.H. Lecky called “the moral history of Europe”: genocide studies and “long eighteenth century” studies. In the controversies between different positions on Enlightenment and genocide, I will declare my preferences now: I will be defending the Enlightenment against what I see as its reductive constructions in “genocide studies.” Yet I will be suggesting that what is admirable in Enlightenment poetics is in tension with the race-thinking associated with colonialism, empire, and imperium: there may be imbrication here, entwinement enough perhaps to recall Walter Benjamin’s famous aphorism that every document of civilization is at the same time a document of barbarism (Illuminations, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 248).

An Elective Affinity?

It seems to have become a commonplace that social thought in the second half of the twentieth century and in the new millennium is justified in condemning the Enlightenment—in this discourse usually known as the Enlightenment Project—as bearing primary responsibility for the conceptual underpinnings of the Holocaust. The frame-story here has been given persuasive shape in sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s Modernity and the Holocaust (1989). Bauman says that he once thought the horror and inhumanity of the Holocaust was an isolated event outside the usual course of European history, a momentary madness. Now he realizes that the Holocaust is a crime of German history and a Jewish tragedy that yet has general disturbing significance for Western history and modernity. In implicating the Enlightenment in the Western “civilizing process” of which modernity and the Holocaust are outcomes and expressions (x, xiv, 68–69), Bauman draws on an older work, George L. Mosse’s Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism (1978), where Mosse argues that the “history of European racism must be seen as originating in the eighteenth century.” The “major cultural trends” of the eighteenth century “vitaly affected the foundations of racist thought,” in particular a fatal conjunction of science and aesthetics. The interest in observation, measurement, and comparison basic to the new eighteenth-century sciences was evident in anthropology, beginning in the second half of the century, followed in its last decade by phrenology and physiognomy.
Comparative physical measurements relied on a resemblance to ancient beauty and proportion legible in the classics; such fusion of classificatory science with ideals of "Greek beauty," embodying "order and harmony," determined the "value of man"; henceforth racial judgments were to be based on a particular kind of outward appearance. Such "continuous transition from science to aesthetics" became a "cardinal feature of modern racism" (xvi, 1–3, 5, 10–11). Mosse's "summary" of eighteenth-century cultural and scientific trends, Bauman tells us in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, presents a "most convincingly documented history of racism" (68).

In *Enlightenment and Genocide, Contradictions of Modernity* (2000), originally a symposium at the European University Institute in Florence in 1998, Bauman contributed the opening essay "The Duty to Remember,—But What?," where he restates the conclusions of his "study of the Wahlverwandtschaft between the Holocaust and Modernity." In the theatre of this collection, Bauman is immediately followed by way of contrast with political historian Robert Wokler's "The Enlightenment Project on the Eve of the Holocaust." Here are alternative conceptions of Enlightenment and modern European history for readers to choose between. Wokler (60) sees Bauman's harsh judgment on modernity as a continuation of Adorno and Horkheimer's pessimistic view in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), that through its enactment of the Holocaust civilization rendered itself perfectly barbarous, not by abandoning its principles but in fulfilling them. Wokler objects to the assumption that history is continuous, that there is a smooth passage of ideas and conceptions running from the eighteenth century through to the twentieth; the (Foucauldian) historiographical implication is that we should take note in history of disjunction, rupture, discontinuity, and reversal. In these terms, Wokler suggests that what characterized Nazi Germany was its nationalism, which was a culmination of the conception of the nation-state brought into destructive play in modern European history by the French Revolution, according to which a people partakes of human rights only by virtue of their shared nationality. As revealed in the course of the Revolution from 1789 and particularly in the Terror of 1793–94, the modern nation-state required that those who fall under its authority be above all united, that they form one people, morally bound together by a common identity. For Wokler, it is not the Enlightenment which insists on sameness not difference; on the contrary, the Terror of the post-Revolutionary nation-state followed directly from the idea of...
the nation’s sublime unity; those who resisted such unity or were seen to fall outside of it met exclusion, persecution, or death. It is the unitary principle of the post-French Revolution modern nation-state which leads to violence including totalitarian violence (60–63).

In Wokler’s view, it is the French Revolution and the modern nation-state which “betrayed” the Enlightenment’s notions of common humanity and attachment to universal rights. Wokler suggests that the Enlightenment admirably embodied the principles of civilization (a term which first acquired its current meaning around 1750) in its ideals and discursive practices of toleration of religious minorities, dislike of bigotry, and opposition to persecution of heretics. Voltaire and Rousseau, for example, denounced the refusal of French Catholic priests to administer the sacraments to Protestants, thereby disenfranchising them of all their civil rights. The Enlightenment Project was, Wokler suggests, an active “campaign” for the creation of a party of humanity, for a supra-national pan-European cosmopolitanism. And many Enlightenment figures were themselves forced into exile, to become, as Wokler puts it, an intellectual diaspora, part of an “outcast culture.” Given such dimensions, Wokler feels, the “Enlightenment did not just exclude the possibility of the Holocaust but in fact combated ethnic cleansing in all its pre-modern forms” and may indeed be “centrally defined as an intellectual movement,” a Project, “by virtue of that crusade against barbarism” (60, 65–69, 77).

In what follows, I will evoke my own enchantment especially with the literary Orientalism of the “long eighteenth century.” I will, then, go a long way in supporting Wokler’s sympathetic vision of the Enlightenment. But I will stop short of his confidence that the Enlightenment is completely opposed to barbarism.

**Unbuttoned, Unfixed, Mobile**

In this section, I will be sharply disagreeing with, and offering an alternative vision to, the Bauman-Mosse view that the major cultural trends of the Enlightenment were obsessed with order-making and harmony, and that modernity inherited an Enlightenment that “shuns passion, denigrates and disdains passion,” and has/had no interest in the “erratic” and “whimsical” (Bauman, 2000: 33, 54). In an earlier and related essay “Multiculturalism and Ethnic Cleansing in the Enlightenment,” in Grell and Porter’s
Toleration in Enlightenment Europe (the whole volume in effect a reply to the attempted indictment of genocide studies), Wokler suggests that Enlightenment writers like Montesquieu in *The Spirit of Laws* and *Persian Letters*, Swift in *Gulliver’s Travels*, Voltaire in *Candide*, opposed in clear anti-colonialist fashion Europe’s claims to spiritual and political hegemony over the world, valued the challenge of alterity, and were sensitive to the local variety, specificity and uniqueness of social institutions, customs, and mores (74–82).

In a striking phrase in his essay “Raymond Schwab and the Romance of Ideas,” in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Edward Said writes that Schwab “does not take explicit note of the sheer folly and derangement stirred up by the Orient in Europe” (253). Said is referring in particular here to European Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In *Orientalism*, Said tells us that in writers like Beckford and Byron there is a kind of “chameleon-like quality,” a “free-floating Orient” that he feels was severely curtailed with the advent of academic Orientalism, the field of provenance of his famous book (118–119). In an interview in 1992, Said, disagreeing with master narratives of the media, refers to the need to notice contradictions and untidiness, appealing to “the Deleuzian idea of the nomadic,” urging cultural analysis to be “relatively more unbuttoned, unfixed, and mobile” (*Edward Said: A Critical Reader* 240–41).

I think the disturbance and disorientation, the self-questioning and deranging of certainty, that frequently accompanied Europe’s interest in diverse cultures, religions and histories is very important in the “long eighteenth century” in its entirety, in both the literary and theologico-philosophical spheres. In literary terms, there was a turn to the exotic from early in the eighteenth century, as in new editions of *The Thousand and One Nights*, in Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721), in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Turkish Embassy Letters, drawn from her visit as ambassadress to the Ottoman Empire 1716 to 1718, or in George Lyttleton’s *Letters from a Persian in England, to his Friend at Ispahan* (1735), a surprisingly little discussed text, very popular at the time, that I will focus on (see Mack, *Oriental Tales*, Introduction, xiv). English translations of Galland’s French translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* became popular from the first decade onwards, influencing narrativity towards a delight in decentredness, and the mixing of heterogeneous genres, from the scata-
logical to cosmological fantasy. In the *Arabian Nights Entertainments* as they were usually known in England—by 1800 there were more than eighty such collections—the frame story featuring Scheherazade is in tension with the stories within stories within stories that always exceed the frame story and which the frame story can never rein in or direct towards an ideological end. Famed *Arabian Nights* stories like “Women’s Wiles,” “The Young Woman and Her Five Lovers,” and “The Three Ladies of Baghdad” feature female power and sexuality, figured as beyond male control; women who surprise the Caliph Haroun al Raschid with their eccentricity, liveliness, strength of character, and extravagant behavior. Such decentred narrative and powerful female figures are a feature of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, where the exchanges between Usbek the Persian traveler in Paris and his eunuchs and wives in his harem back in Isphahan as well as with his various male friends are in no necessary narrative order; the women of the harem rebel in his long absence, seeking independence sexual and other, with remarkable suggestions of female masturbation and sexual relations with each other.6

In her letters Lady Mary Wortley Montagu confesses to how much she learnt from the Ottoman Empire, particularly the cure for small pox, or its literary culture, as in her 1717 letter to Pope where she quotes some verse by the leading court poet Ibrahim Pasha: “The verse is a description of the seasons of the year, all the country being now full of nightingales, whose *amours* with roses is an Arabian fable as well known here as any part of Ovid amongst us.”7 The young witty adventurous Lady Mary relates how much the European gaze can be returned, as in her famous 1717 letter on her visit, incognito in a Turkish coach, to the ladies bathhouse in Sophia. The women, she says, whom she compares in their naked beauty to goddesses drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian, try to persuade their English visitor to undress for the bath: “I was at last forced to open my skirt and show them my stays.” They see that Lady Mary is “so locked up in that machine” that she could not open it, a contrivance they attribute to her husband.8 In her Turkish Embassy Letters we can see Lady Mary mixing European classical and neoclassical values and ideals with an interest in Oriental difference; there is exchange and interaction and engagement, rather than the Oriental being subsumed within the European.

Given the protean influence of *The Thousand and One Nights* in the “long eighteenth century”—manifest in diverse forms and media, from
Oriental tales, stories, novels, and poetry, to pantomime, burlesques, and farces, to erotica and pornography—it is not surprising to find parody, self-parody, carnivalesque inversion; to notice an enjoyment of metamorphosis and transformation, disguise and masquerade, enabling a surprising play with ethnic, cultural, national and sexual identity. In permitting a return of the gaze, such literary and theatrical conventions enabled distance, ambivalence, incertitude. Untidiness is left as untidiness.

An interesting text here is Lord George Lytton’s witty Letters from a Persian in England, to his Friend at Ispahan, which quickly tells the reader that this will be a playful sequel to Montesquieu’s Persian Letters, for while “Usbec” the Persian’s observations were centered on France, here Selim the Persian traveler and “lover of liberty” will largely comment on England: “there is a pleasure in knowing how things here affect a foreigner.” Selim’s principal focus, he tells his friend Mirza back in Persia, is English government and conduct of political life (Preface and Letter I). But there are many episodes and adventures reported which have no necessary relation to the political. What the eighteenth-century reader would have been able to discern is an interest in and enjoyment of relativizing, a rejection of moral absolutes, already familiar from Montesquieu’s famous and influential text. “For my part, Mirza,” Selim writes, “I set out with a resolution to give up hereditary prejudices, and form my mind to hear different opinions, as my body to suffer different climates” (Letter XXIII). Selim is as critical of Oriental prejudging of other societies and cultures as he is of Christian European complacency or what we would now call Eurocentrism. He reports to Mirza his frequent bafflement at “the contradictions that perplex” him in England:

My judgment is bewildered in uncertainty; I doubt my own observations, and distrust the relations of others. More time and better information may, perhaps, clear them up to me; till then, modesty forbids me to impose my conjectures upon thee, after the manner of Christian travellers, whose prompt decisions are the effect rather of folly than penetration. (Letter VII)

Selim’s assorted observations of this strange society of England are indeed highly contradictory, and such contradictoriness he does not attempt
to resolve or foreclose. Certainly Selim is very critical of despotism and lack of rights in Islamic societies, relating to Mirza a nightmare he has, with visions of the arbitrary power of the Oriental prince and the constant violent seizures of power (Letter XXXIV). He complains to his friend of the ever-present fear anyone has in Persia of being shut up in prison on the "lightest suspicion," fear of being tortured, of one's property being confiscated at the "emperor's pleasure," of having no means of legal redress and being "deprived of the power even to complain" (Letter XL). By contrast, he very much admires English political and legal institutions, permitting and safeguarding liberties and "toleration"; the "better sort of people" are "no more offended at the difference of my faith from theirs, than at the difference of my dress," and "the mob," while they cannot comprehend how "it is possible to make such mistakes," rather condemn than hate the strange visitor in their midst (Letter XXX). Selim does observe, however, that such toleration "has not always been the temper of the English," and that formerly they waged war against Mahometans, burned heretics, and persecuted those of their own religion who dared even to display different ceremonials (Letter XXX). Selim respects English law, in particular the guarantee of being brought to trial, that one cannot be tortured, one cannot be forced to confess; he approves of "the right of being taxed by none but their representatives" and admires "liberty of speech in parliament, and liberty of writing and publishing": in such matters the "English are blest with some privileges which no other nation now in the world enjoys in so high a degree" (Letter XL).

Yet Selim finds himself also quite critical of aspects of life in "this famous island" (Letter I). He recognizes how confined are the lives of women in Persia, and declares himself an admirer of Elizabeth I as powerful woman. Yet while he observes that in England "women are admitted to a familiar and constant share in every active scene of life," including their frank enjoyment of libertine happenings on the stage in watching plays, he still feels that "particular care should be taken in their education, to cultivate their reason," because the lives of English women are at present appallingly frivolous (Letters VIII, XLVII). Writing to Mirza of the beau monde, Selim notes: "in my mind, our Persian method was more reasonable, of having several wives under the care of one eunuch; rather than one wife under the care of several lovers" (Letter IX). Attending the Bear-garden, with its bulls, bears, dogs and "fighting-men," he listens to a
Frenchman’s reproach on the “barbarity” of the English in delighting in such spectacles (Letter II). He observes upper-class men and women gambling while playing cards, including risking their whole wealth and estates, which he finds absurd (Letter V). He visits a debtor’s prison and realizes how much “mockery of justice” there is in English society (Letter IV). He observes how often in England marriage involves monetary bargaining (Letter XXII). He hears of drunken mobs at election time (Letter LII).

*Letters from a Persian in England, to his Friend at Ispahan* presents a kind of pluralising, relativising anthropology of different societies and manners: “I must own to thee, Mirza, there is nothing I abhor so much as persecution. . . . One would think, that the great diversity of opinions among mankind should incline men a little to suspect that their own may possibly be wrong . . . but to pursue all others with rage and violence, instead of pity or persuasion, is such a strain of pride and folly . . .” (Letter XXX). Such an anthropology is accompanied by a kind of poetics of chaos (*Kunstchaos*) in the arbitrary order of the letters themselves.11 As with Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, the letters are in no sequential order, and as reader one never knows what the next letter will be about or how it will relate to what is before and after it: here the letters-form itself offers its own pleasure of unpredictability. It also offers open intertextuality, as when Selim writes for Mirza a “continuation” of the history of the Trogladytes; here there is a footnote: “Vide Montesquieu's Persian Letters from Paris. Vol.I. Letter XI to XIV”; and Selim then goes on to suggest “by what steps, and through what changes, the original good of society is overturned, and mankind becomes wickeder and more miserable in a state of government, than they were when left in a state of nature” (Letters X to XXI). As in *The Thousand and One Nights*, there are stories within stories, including the sudden insertion of longer stories of almost novella length. In Letter XXXI we come across the evocation of the initially forced marriage of Polydore and Emilia at the time of Cromwell. Here, in playful tone, is the kind of narratology familiar from Bakhtin’s description of adventure-time and the proliferation of narratives in ancient Greek Romances in his Chronotopcs essay in *The Dialogic Imagination* (86–110): separation of the lovers over many years, disguises and changes in personalities, separate adventures and trials of virtue, histories of hardship and
distress and disaster, coincidences, encounters with the evil and wicked, meeting again, reconciliation, and fulfillment of love.

In the story of Polydore and Emilia there is the operation of chance itself, observed by Bakhtin to be a feature of the Greek Romance (The Dialogic Imagination, 95–6): chance as a cosmology, of unpredictability and transformation as principles of universal being. Such a cosmology is evident also in another story of almost novella length, “The Loves of Ludovico and Honoraria,” set initially in Genoa. Here we have the story of a man and his chaste wife, who are captured by a corsair and enslaved in Tunis.12 The unfortunate and scorned European husband is made a eunuch, while the chaste Honoraria, once concerned only with love as “Platonic” and with things of the mind, in the end happily marries a Mahometan and becomes herself Mahometan. There are suggestions in this story of Eastern sexuality as a release of repressed sensuousness in European women, recalling the libertarian sexuality associated with the Radical Enlightenment (Jonathan Israel, Radical Enlightenment, 82–3) as well as anticipating later Orientalist erotica in this tradition like the early nineteenth-century English text The Lustful Turk (1828).13

In my 1492: The Poetics of Diaspora (75–6) I argue that in the Enlightenment the textuality of The Thousand and One Nights, continuously Europeanized and transformed, crossed with philosophical speculation, was a thriving fissiparous alternative to stable literary canons, aesthetic homogeneity, and neoclassical demands for unity and continuity. Contributors to Peter Caracciolo’s collection The Arabian Nights in English Literature point to how much English writing in the nineteenth century and later, as in Dickens and Wilkie Collins, or Conrad, Wells and Joyce, was influenced by the Nights in terms of narrativity and formal complexity. In The Arabian Nights: A Companion, Robert Irwin suggests that the Nights influenced twentieth-century modernism as in Joyce’s Ulysses and also the arabesques and magical realism of Borges: there was delight in this long genealogy in self-reflexivity, embedded references, hidden patterns, recursiveness and intertextuality, playfulness, doppelgängers, and labyrinthine structuring.

In Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass Eva Sallis offers a long cultural history, Persian, Middle Eastern, and European, for such recent interest in the textuality of the Nights, a history marked by translation, appropriation, and transformation. Sallis suggests a necessarily speculative
genealogy. The *Nights* began their life in the Islamic Middle East in the eighth century, with the translation and appropriation into Arabic of the Persian *Hazar Afsana*, or thousand legends; here was inaugurated an Oriental history that has continued separately from the European history of the *Nights*, though the Oriental and European histories have also continuously interacted, so that the *Nights* now are a remarkable historical compound (11). In eighteenth century Europe Galland’s beautiful translations appeared from 1704, and by 1706 Grub Street versions were available in English. Hence now in Europe was initiated a century of extraordinary popularity, in imitations, variations, and extensions (2–3), offering contradictory interpretations, lawless imagination, immoderate improbability, and the ultimate in flights of fantastic unreality (6). Bizarrely, however, in the positivist nineteenth century the *Nights* were often perceived as social realism. In the twentieth century, the *Nights* became children’s literature, until in its latter part critics began again to look to the complexity of their narrative art and internal virtues (9–10, 14–15).

In terms of the difficult recovery of cultural history, Sallis suggests that features which characterize the European (especially English and French) eighteenth century culture of the *Nights* perhaps give insights into how in the eighth century and onwards the *Nights* were translated and appropriated from the Persian into the Arabic world (20–21). The present day *Nights* seems to owe only their frame story to the early Persian collection *Hazar Afsana*, for continuously and for many centuries stories of Arabic origin and taste were added, including tales of heroism and countercrusade, and there was an enduring complex relationship between frame stories and enframed material (2, 24–5). As later in Europe, the stories were quickly imitated, adapted, transposed, supplemented, transformed, not least in Baghdad, which in the late eighth century was a burgeoning city, multicultural and cultivated, industrialized and world famous, but also in Egypt (3, 20–21). By the twelfth century the stories (around two hundred tales taking a thousand nights to recite) were extraordinarily popular, appealing to a very wide range of people; the stories were material for the professional reciter who would add or subtract elements according to personal or audience taste, and also for rewriting by literary figures and the educated (23–4). It had become, then, Sallis feels, a public library, a free resource with something for everybody. Stories could be literary, bawdy, edifying, and any of these types could be lampooned and parodied
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(27–28). The Persian frame tale maintained its fascination both as a tale of female power and resourcefulness, and because it suggested and enacted deferral of resolution of its story (25). 14

We could now add to this particular Nights-inflected genealogy in the “long eighteenth century” another influential genealogy, of the fragment; a genealogy that looks back to the fragmentary heritage of antiquity while working its vigorous way forward in early modernity and modernity in moral-philosophical writing from Montaigne’s Essays through Pascal, Shaftesbury and La Rochefoucauld to the literary-philosophical modes of the Athenaeum Fragments of Jena Romanticism. In The Literary Absolute, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy suggest that the fragment involves an essential incompleteness; it does not aim at a program or prospectus but performs an immediate project of what it nonetheless incompletes; attempts at its definition were always contradictory; it sought individuation and individuality; the genre inheres in multiplicity; the pursuit of truth is to be accompanied by exchange, mixing, friendship and love between those who contribute to its conversations; it is allied to other forms like the dialogue and letter; as thought it is not systematic; and if it is to be related to an elusive whole or System, that System is perhaps fragmentariness or fragmentation itself; it is usually associated with irony and parody and self-parody (The Literary Absolute 40–58). 15 The fragment would clearly continue to be influential in Nietzsche texts like Beyond Good and Evil (1886) or Benjamin in One-Way Street (1925–26). 16

I will end this section by suggesting that much textuality in the Enlightenment looks forward—in terms of a cosmology of random chance shaping events and happenings, of fortune and misfortune, adventure and misadventure; and in terms of narratology that fragments, denies sequence, disorders its material—to cultural features of modernity and post-modernity like pastiche and montage, polyphony and heteroglossia. In The Thousand and One Nights there is an ever-present tension between the One and the Many, between the frame story and the proliferating stories and stories within stories. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy suggest a similar tension within the fragment, of combination and dissolution, totality and dispersal (The Literary Absolute 57). 17

Further, I would suggest that the kind of pluralizing, relativizing anthropology evident in Nights-infused writing like that of Montesquieu, Montagu, and Lyttleton anticipates postmodern anthropology, self-reflex-
ive and experimental in narrative form, as in Richard Price’s *Alabi’s World* (1990), a study of eighteenth-century Suriname in the form of a narrative with four different voices (of the Samarakas the ex-slaves, the colonial Dutch, the Moravian missionaries, and the historian himself), each with a specific typeface (Curthoys and Docker, “Is History Fiction?” 33 and 37 note 34). In the Prologue to *Alabi’s World*, Price writes that he wishes to “decenter the narrative, to fragment the power of the author’s inevitable authority,” in part by returning to travel narratives from the sixteenth century onwards (xvii-xviii).18

**Rawson’s Intervention**

For all the admirable literary cosmopolitanism of the “long eighteenth century,” are there nonetheless significant limits, is there imbrication with barbarism? It is sobering at this point to recall Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s notorious remarks, whose brutality shocks even now, on North Africans on her return journey from Constantinople to England. In her letter to the Abbé Conti from Tunis, 31 July 1718 (*Complete Letters*, Vol.I), Lady Mary makes it clear that it is the classical ruins she and her husband the ambassador look out for on their way back through Asia Minor and the Mediterranean that chiefly interest her; indeed, coming across some classical-age ruins near “where Achilles was bury’d and where Alexander ran naked round his Tomb in his honnour,” Lady Mary tells her correspondent that Mr Wortley ordered “a Stone” to be taken from the ruins and placed in their ship (417). In Tunis Lady Mary finds the heat so intolerable she cannot take in sights during the day. One evening she sees some local country people in their “natural Deformity” “eating, singing, and dancing to their wild music”: “They are not quite black, but all mulattos, and the most frightfull Creatures that can appear in a Human figure” (425). Early one morning Lady Mary visits the ruins of Carthage, and while resting in the cool of a subterranean room, local women flock in to see her: “we were equally entertain’d with viewing one another.” “Their posture in siting, the colour of their skin, their lank black Hair falling on each side of their faces, the shape of their Limbs, differ so little from their own country people, the Baboons, tis hard to fancy them a distinct race, and I could not help thinking there had been some ancient alliances between them.” When she is “a little refresh’d by rest and some milk and ex-
quisite fruit” they have brought her, Lady Mary walks up a little hill and imagines the situation of “the Famous City of Carthage” (427).

Wokler in his defense of Enlightenment anti-colonialism highlights *Gulliver’s Travels*. Claude Rawson, however, in his wonderfully entitled *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* (2001), asks searching questions of the work of literary greats like Montaigne and Swift in relation to wider European social and cultural attitudes in terms of common figures of speech, casual conversation, diverse travel writings, documents of colonialism in the Americas and Ireland, utopias and dystopias, the biblical heritage, satirical prints, arguments about gender, and ideas of extermination, from the English towards the Irish to the Nazis towards the Jews.19

Rawson warns that in general terms in cultural history a subtle reading of textuality and intertextuality must ponder the difficult ever-elusive relationships or possible non-relationships between texts and events, between remarks, myths, narratives, histories, and implementations, actions, policies. We should recognize, Rawson urges, that figures like Montaigne and Swift are irreducibly contradictory, their writings participating in both racism and anti-racism, colonialism and anti-colonialism, cruelty and outrage against cruelty, the exterminatory and protest against exterminatory desires and practices. We should value their sensibility precisely because they don’t resist, they go with, ambivalence and inconsistency, letting thoughts run where they will, turning things upside down and inside out, pluralizing cultural values, discomforting and teasing the reader with verbal and conceptual slippages and unreadable resonances, impishly playing with indeterminacy and unknowability: “who knows what Swift meant literally, ever” (249).

Yet, Rawson argues, writers like Montaigne and Swift are so interesting for the moral history of Europe because their writings do indeed illuminate for us “the spectrum of aggressions,” the “nexus of associations,” between figures of speech and their possible realization in time and space, “from the book of Genesis to the present day”; from the brutal treacherous Spanish conquest of the Americas to Nazism and World War Two (vii, 294). And here, drawing them into such nets of literary, cultural, political and colonial association, Montaigne and Swift, especially Swift, can be critiqued.

Swift’s “extermination fantasies and velleities” (velleity is a favorite term, a wish that is not necessarily accompanied by a desire to realize that
wish) may have only an oblique relation to historical practices, yet relations there are. Swift’s Anglo-Irish colonizer’s contempt for the native (Catholic) Irish and their priests is an example. Swift was an important Anglican church official, he possessed power and tried in his writings and proposals and opinions to influence English colonial policies. In his *Proposal for Giving Badges to the Beggars in all the Parishes of Dublin* (1737) Swift recommended that the indigent be forced to wear a badge and then be sent back to the local parishes from whence they’d come. Here, says Rawson, Swift inherits and builds on an earlier English desire to punish and humiliate, as in Spenser (who hoped the Irish might perish by starvation), while proleptically anticipating Nazi practices insisting Jews wear a yellow star. We have to recognize such writings as part of a sinister European “continuum” (249) in treatment of outsiders internal and external. Early in the eighteenth century ideas were mooted or even passed as bills by English and Anglo-Irish political institutions to have Irish priests castrated or branded on the cheek.

In *Gulliver’s Travels* the Yahoos are an “allegory of the savage Irish” (231). Every year in the Houyhnhnm assembly (the utopian society) there was a periodic question raised whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the face of the earth. Rawson says (231, 273) that Gulliver, while a mere contemptible human, makes a comment that suggests an idea to his equine master, of castration of the Yahoos as an alternative to wholesale killing, an expedient which “would in an Age put an End to the whole Species without destroying Life.” Here an unsettling modern parallelism rears its head in Nazi practices of castration and sterilization (232).

In Wokler’s view, it is the French Revolution and the modern nation-state which betrayed the Enlightenment’s notions of common humanity and attachment to universal rights. Yet such betrayal had already occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century in Swift’s punitive reflections on the Irish and Lady Mary’s haughty observations of the North African women who had come to be hospitable to their European visitor and offer her refreshing milk and exquisite fruit. How different from her admiring interactions with the Ottoman women! Here the Bauman-Mosse thesis is illuminating. Lady Mary cannot see any resemblance to classical or neoclassical beauty in the North African women, and accordingly it would appear judges them to be deformed. Clearly also, she expects her clerical interlocutor in Europe to enjoy her cruel wit at their
expense. It’s interesting to reflect as well on Mr Wortley thieving a stone from an ancient Greek ruin in Asia Minor and transporting it back to England; the editor notes that Wortley kept the marble in his London house, and after his death it was presented to Trinity College, Cambridge, and can be seen today set in the wall at the entrance to Trinity College Library (418, note 1). So here we have casual plunder of the non-European world with no intention to return such plunder, and cold superiority towards Africans as less than human, prefiguring nineteenth and early twentieth century European colonizing of the continent evoked so powerfully as genocidal by Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist in his *Exterminate All the Brutes* (1992).22

**Conclusion**

Mikhail Bakhtin wrote that the Enlightenment impoverished the mental world of the eighteenth century, compressed and reduced it, made it drier, by rejecting previous literature with its fascination with fantasticality and the unknown.23 We can agree that exactitude, measurement, comparison, and classification did indeed become very important in the Enlightenment, not least in the mapping and scientific investigations that were so important in voyaging around the world with all the implications such voyaging has in Europeans claiming territory that didn’t belong to them, invading and colonizing, and destroying the life-worlds of other peoples.24 Yet such practices of exactitude—of the instrumental reason so evident later in European history in modernity and the Holocaust—were in tension with other modes of writing and reflection, far more fantastical and fragmentary, and, contra Bakhtin, I don’t think there was a diminution of the kind he feels occurred. In the wayward textuality—replete with the enigmatic, odd, quirky and puzzling—manifest in the “Oriental” literature and theatre of the “long eighteenth century,” there is as much anti-Orientalism as Orientalism; there is as much openness to cultures, civilizations, and arts of the self beyond Europe, as the more conventional Orientalist desire to order, classify, regulate and intimidate the non-European exotic world.25

We can, then, reject the Bauman-Mosse thesis when it assumes that the cultural trends of the Enlightenment were pervaded by a single spirit. We
can recognize the Enlightenment as highly contradictory. But we cannot celebrate it as Wokler does—nor as I would occasionally like to do!

Notes


4. My thanks to Ian Higgins for leads into the labyrinth of the English Enlightenment. Earlier versions of this paper were given to the XIth David Nichol Smith Conference "The Exotic During the Long Eighteenth Century (1660–1830)," a joint ANU Humanities Research Centre and National Library of Australia conference, 26–28 March 2001; and to the Department of English with Cultural Studies, University of Melbourne, 9 May, 2001. Thanks also to Ned Curthoys for general discussion of ideas. I would also like to thank the two anonymous readers, whose suggestions were immensely helpful.


6. Cf. Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 96, note 94, which refers to late seventeenth century forerunners in erotic novels like *Venus dans le cloître* (c.1682) in which a young nun learns to become enlightened through masturbation, lesbian love, and discussion with older nuns of matters concerning women and sexual education.


9. See the interesting discussion in Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, ch.5, “Spectacles of Cultural Contact: The Fable of the Native Prince,” 182, distinguishing between the “native prince” and the urban foreign traveler figure of *Persian Letters*.


13. As captivity tale *The Lustful Turk* has a political context of Greek striving for independence from Ottoman rule; at the end, a captured young Greek woman, while making love with the Dey, suddenly produces a knife and divests the Dey of, in the language of such erotica, his “pinnacle of strength”, then immediately kills herself; the English women whom he has captured are then rather to their regret released so they can return to England, the Dey now preserving his “lost members” in “spirits of wine in glass vases” (140).


15. My thanks to Ned Curthoys for this reference.


17. For the theological notion of the One and the Many see my “In Praise of Polytheism,” 163, and “The Challenge of Polytheism—Moses, Spinoza, and Freud.” In my companion essay, “The Enlightenment, Genocide, Postmodernity” (in preparation), I discuss and extend Wokler’s suggestion in his essay “Multiculturalism and Ethnic Cleansing in the Enlightenment” that there is much affinity between the postmodern valuing of human variety and difference and a similar spirit in the Enlightenment.
18. James Clifford, "Partial Truths," has praised Price as postmodern ethnographer. See also Peter Burke, "History of Events and Revival of Narrative," New Perspectives on Historical Writing (239).


20. See also Rawson, Order from Confusion Sprung, 124–5, 134–5, 139.

21. Cf. Said, Culture and Imperialism, 5: "... it is generally true that literary historians who study the great sixteenth-century poet Edmund Spenser ... do not connect his bloodthirsty plans for Ireland, where he imagined a British army virtually exterminating the native inhabitants, with his poetic achievement or with the history of British rule over Ireland, which continues today."

22. For possible relationships between colonialism and genocide, see also Churchill; Curthoys and Docker; Ned Curthoys; Dirk Moses; Tony Barta.

23. See Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, 42–7, and Docker, Postmodernism and Popular Culture, 184.

24. See Said, Culture and Imperialism, xvi, concerning an "Enlightenment discourse of travel and discovery."

25. See also Lowe, Critical Terrains, on how heterogeneous and paradoxical are the attitudes and discursive positions in Montagu’s Turkish Embassy Letters. For critique of Lowe’s Critical Terrains in relation to Lady Mary Montagu, see Meyda Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism, esp. 79–90.

Works Cited


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