

***Les Trois Sultanes*: French Enlightenment Comedy and the Veil**

David Hammerbeck

In analyses of Enlightenment thought the *table* figures prominently. As articulated by Michel Foucault, Johannes Fabian, and other critics, the *table* functioned as an ordered arrangement of knowledge, one that organized seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistemology. This ontological structure provided the transcendent subject with “a universal method of analysis,” one that yielded complete “certainty by perfectly ordering representations and signs to mirror the ordering of the world, the order of being.”¹ This classification of the world developed as a response to what Homi Bhabha identifies as “a strategic response to an *urgent need* at a given historical moment.”² This need arose when the Western subject, due to increased travel, was confronted with a proliferation (and confusion) of foreign cultures, customs, and peoples. The Western subject attempted to make sense of this sensory overload by applying Western logic to these new phenomena. Westerners assigned meaning to these foreign phenomena through a logocentric set of referents in an attempt to bring foreign worlds into focus, to give them meaning within Western epistemology. Bentham’s Panopticon exemplifies this movement towards a clinical analysis of world, one that manifested an institutional need to organize, manipulate, and control. The inverse of this instrument of surveillance was the seraglio, in particular, the seraglio of the Ottoman Sultans in Constantinople, which gained notoriety as an impenetrable site for Westerners.

This article examines the comedy *Les Trois Sultanes*, by eighteenth-century French playwright Charles-Simon Favart (1710-1792), as a theatricalization of the desire to reveal and remake the “Orient” and the Oriental Other according to Western cultural and political dictates, into an object of Western knowledge.³ This program to pierce the seraglio and unveil the Islamic Near East entails rewriting Ottoman history, as part of an attempt to democratize and “enlighten” what Westerners construed as a secretive, oppressive, and impenetrable site of Otherness. Part of this project, in the mid- to late-eighteenth century, involves what Turkish feminist and sociologist Megda Yegenoglu terms the *rhetoric* and the *discourse of the veil*. According to Yegenoglu, these two ideologically driven agendas justified the

David Hammerbeck teaches at the Theatre School at DePaul University. He has published articles on French theatre, Russian theatre, and other subjects in *Theatre Journal*, *The Journal of European Studies*, and *Agora* and other journals. He has presented papers at conferences in the US and abroad and is currently researching meta performance and working on a book on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French theater and Orientalism.

opening up of the seraglio and the Ottoman Empire by Western Imperialist powers, both literally and figuratively. These two discourses are useful in teasing out ideas concerning politics, gender, religion, race, and history that inform how a prominent eighteenth-century French author constructed the “Turk.” I also examine this mid-eighteenth-century French comedy as an example of Orientalism in theatre, and of how a narrative theatre genre that had traditionally been considered subversive became, in the case of *Les Trois Sultanes*, a forum for national pride and Enlightenment universalist ideals. And, as will be noted in the latter part of this article, I will briefly critique how *Les Trois Sultanes* constitutes a self-reflexive Orientalism, one that offered thinly veiled criticism of the then-current Bourbon King Louis XV.

Western authors found in the Islamic Near East a fecund site from which to create tales concerning the fantastic, the erotic, and the cruel. These fictions increased in the eighteenth century as the Ottomans’ political clout waned in the Eastern Mediterranean, and British and French mercantile forces gained access to new territory. In the process, merchants, diplomats, and travelers fashioned personal narratives of the Near East that provided daily fodder for the journals and newspapers of Paris, London, and other European cities in order to entertain and instruct those who could not undertake the long voyage to Ottoman lands. Theatre also promulgated popular narratives of the Islamic world and circulated familiar characters from the Orientalist trope such as the cruel and lascivious sultan, languorous and sexually available concubines, ruthless janissaries, inscrutable muftis, machiavellian viziers, eunuchs, and many others.

Many of these narratives were imitations: pastiches and/or genre-driven works, written by authors who rarely left the hexagon of France. Favart never voyaged to the locale depicted in *Les Trois Sultanes*, as was the case with almost all seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French dramatists who chose “Oriental” subject matter for their comedies and tragedies. Though a stranger to Ottoman habits and customs, for Favart these settings provided a context in which to contrast French Enlightenment and Ottoman and Islamic ideology and identity. In *Les Trois Sultanes* the lead female role of Roxelane becomes the epicenter of the Western author’s intrusion into the seraglio. She provides commentary on national and gendered identity in French and Islamic societies and, in the process, reifies the epistemological and ontological norms for nation and gender in these two societies. Favart expressed his interest in establishing national and moral norms in a letter written in 1761, the same year as the play’s premiere. In addressing the moral objective of *Les Trois Sultanes*, he stated that “this comedy is of a genre more national than general: its principal pleasure consists of the opposition of our morals to those of the Turks.”²⁴ As designed by Favart, Roxelane, the central character of *Les Trois Sultanes*, erases the memories of an historical Ottoman sultaness of great political standing and historical importance. Instead, she becomes the focal point

for the Westernization of this paradigmatic Islamic and, therefore, non-Western site.

Les Trois Sultanes tells the story of a captured Frenchwoman (Roxelane) who enters Suleyman the Magnificent's (1494-1566) seraglio in order to tame and enlighten the sultan in the name of French humanism and universalism. She outwits her rivals—the Spanish slave Elmire and the Circassian captive Delia—and wins Suleyman's hand in the process. Roxelane, a Western interloper in the seraglio, alternately infuriates and seduces the Sultan with her Gallic pride, her insouciance, her championing of Enlightenment ideals, and her “*petit nez retroussé*,” or her “little upturned nose.” After numerous comedic encounters and plot turns, Suleyman banishes her from the seraglio, only to reverse his decision and marry her, thus defying Islamic customs for the proper choice of a bride. Roxelane accepts his offer of marriage and becomes sultanness, in the process abandoning her project for reforming Islamic customs in the seraglio and accepting a submissive role.

Charles-Simon Favart wrote *Les Trois Sultanes* for the Comédie-Italienne. A popular comedy noted for its exotic setting, the work stayed in the repertory of the Comédie-Française and other theatres after its premiere until the 1920s.⁵ The author of 158 plays (six written with his wife, Marie-Justine-Benoîte Duronceray), he wrote primarily for the *opéra-comique* and also penned satires, parodying the operaballets of Rameau (in *Le Ballet de Dindons*, 1742) and de la Noue's tragedy *Mahomet Second* (*Moulinet Premier*, written in 1741), both which played at the fairground theatres of Paris.⁶ He is widely viewed as being the second most famous author (after Marivaux) associated with the Comédie-Italienne, and the founder of the Opéra Comique (in 1762), which fused the Italian's *commedia*-based style with the fairground theatres of Paris that presented musical-comedies.

Favart's association with the fairground theatres of Paris dictates the strategic orientation of his theatre, especially when compared to the traditional function of these popular theatres and performers of Paris.⁷ Since the twelfth century, at the Foire Saint Germain performers had been associated with this annual pre-Lenten fair, partaking in the carnivalesque atmosphere that was permissive, heterogeneous, and often directly opposed to official social and political discourse. The Foire Saint Germain was one of the primary examples of Bakhtin's carnivalesque in that its “images, indecencies, and curses affirm the people's immortal, indestructible nature.”⁸ In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Paris, this fair still existed as a remnant of disorderly popular medieval culture, festering in the middle of Paris's fashionable and bourgeois enclave of Saint Germain des Prés. Though the *théâtres de la foire* were known primarily for their body-centered and satiric performances, by the mid-eighteenth century these theaters had become more conventionalized. The often provocative and obscene performances of the mountebanks, *danseurs de corde*, jugglers, itinerant players, and resident troupes were being overtaken by

theatres that sought to compete with the established theatres of the Ancien Regime: the Comédie-Française, the Opéra, and the Comédie-Italienne.

Favart played a significant role in changing the status and direction of these often transgressive and “illicit” theatres. In the process, he gained a reputation for creating well-structured plots that focused on emotion and sentiment rather than on provoking or offending audiences. He, along with other authors and performers, transformed a popular, dialogic, and satirical theatre (characterized by one critic as “the Aristophanes of the public square”) into a monologic and, therefore, conventional theatre genre. This accepted type of performance would form another piece in the Foucauldian *table*, interpreting and performing the world through the ratiocentric ontology of the Enlightenment.⁹ Before Favart many of the scripted plays at the *foires* of Paris were considered by the literary elite as amateurish and crude—at best. But he (and other writers such as Fuzelier, D’Orneval and Le Sage) imposed the then-current literary standards on the frequently transgressive *théâtres de la foire*. Favart assisted in reforming the *foire*, a site of performance whose social status, according to historian Daniel Roche, was ambiguous at best and turned it instead into a exhibition for *l’amour-propre national*, or national pride.¹⁰ In the process they removed the more obscene and/or controversial material that had been popular with *commedia* players, *charlatans*, strolling players, jugglers, and others.¹¹

Les Trois Sultanes reflects the popular taste for the Orientalist and Exoticist literature and performance of the mid-eighteenth century, such as the novels *Le Sofa* and *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (by Crébillon fils and Diderot respectively), Voltaire’s plays *Mahomet*, *Zaire*, and *Zadig*, Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes*, and earlier works like Antoine Galland’s translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*.¹² By 1740, a particular theatre genre, the Oriental Comedy, had been formulated and established. According to the early twentieth-century critics Bernard Levy and Pierre Martino, it had become “a form of social satire, a playful or serious comparison of East and West where, in an agreeable contrast, the French and the people of the Orient were reconciled.”¹³ Favart based his play in part on a tale by the French Enlightenment essayist and moralist Marmontel. According to the *Notice historique* of the 1826 edition of the play, in writing his tale Marmontel:

did not aspire to conserve local color nor present a faithful picture of the morals of the time and country where the action was presumed to have taken place; he did not seek to paint the sentiments, the characters, nor to expose the principles which may be applied to all eras; he was content to fit his subject in the costume of his era, and to have his characters speak the language of contemporary good society.¹⁴

However, this “agreeable contrast” and “language of contemporary good society” often reflected cultural perspectives and ideological positions that were less than equitable towards Ottoman and Islamic cultures. According to the editor of a 1763 edition of Favart’s works, the playwright’s *oeuvre* reflected a singular

taste [that] is independent of our tastes & our genius, a sort of general sentiment which determines all ideas on the beautiful, the good, the bad . . . it is *the* Taste, strictly speaking, a uniform and invariable Taste amongst all People where the Letters and Arts are cultivated. It is a national Taste, which holds entirely to our morals, our general characters, to our biases.¹⁵

In other words a “universal taste,” trans-national and (it would seem) without temporal limits, indicative of a hegemonic Enlightenment ordering of the world, forms the ideological underpinning of Favart’s work(s). In addition, this “taste,” as we shall see in *Les Trois Sultanes*, is effected in the seraglio through the character of Roxelane. Favart’s dialogue achieved note for its light and comedic effect, similar to Marivaux’s word-play, and gained acclaim as the theatrical equivalent of the paintings of Boucher or of Watteau. But within *Les Trois Sultanes*, “French” values (as compared to those of the Ottomans) are clearly constructed as the benchmark, as noted by the above quotes. Taste and values are embedded in the language, to the extent that spirit, “charm,” and rhetorical power are present even when characters do not know what they are speaking about, as Roxelane explains to Elmire:

But of course; at the suppers which one gives in Paris,
Above all else nimbly one discusses, one reasons,
And never has one more spirit
Than when one knows not what they say,
The French are charming.¹⁶

This repartee reveals a distinct national chauvinism and ideological bias. Critic Yegenoglu defines this agenda as one where

the project of Enlightenment needs to be understood not only as a by-product of, as David Lloyd puts it, “the intersection of liberal humanism with the necessities of imperial polity,” but also as a process of temporalization which fostered a certain narrative of the world within which the West is anchored as the center.¹⁷

Thus, with the West positioned as a center from which power and knowledge radiated, the rest of the world became raw material for imperialist ambitions and

narratives. Therefore, the Orientalist and Exoticist theatre from this era can be read as a kind of rehearsal for colonialist ambitions, which more than frequently involved cultural misrepresentations and misapprehensions. While cultural values may have been compared in the literature and performances of that era, rarely did French values not triumph, and “Orientals” often gained from these interactions with the French (with one notable exception being Montesquieu’s Persians Rica and Uzbek in *Les Lettres Persanes*).

The egalitarian Roxelane serves as a voice for gender equality in *Les Trois Sultanes*. She is juxtaposed with two other members of the Sultan’s harem, Elmire and Delia. These two other women embody Western essentializations of Ottoman and Muslim “women” as sensual, exotic, and without agency, existing only as objects for the Sultan’s pleasure. Early in the play, in Act One, scene one, Roxelane is described to the Sultan by Osmin, his *aga* (or head) of the eunuchs, as a young Frenchwoman who is “Lively, irresponsible, proud, and who laughs to herself at everything; / She lives without constraint, and is never more at ease / Than when she pushes me to the limit.”¹⁸ Roxelane’s rebellious presence within the seraglio is contrasted to the five hundred other slaves of the women’s quarters, represented by Elmire and Delia, who are referred to by the Sultan as “complacent women” and “caressing machines” who bring the Sultan more boredom than pleasure.¹⁹ Though neither Delia nor Elmire were of strictly Muslim origins, they would still have been most probably viewed by mid-eighteenth century spectators as “exotic” and, therefore, othered.²⁰ And, as captives within the Sultan’s seraglio, according to Yegenoglu, they represent:

the grim picture of the Orient, the situation of its woman, who is secluded behind her veil [that] looked even more gruesome to the Western colonial gaze. Her situation thus required a much more serious working, for the most essential features of the culture are assumed to be inscribed onto her; she is taken as the concrete embodiment of oppressive Islamic traditions which the Orient desperately needed to break up in order to reach the level of development the West achieved a long time ago.²¹

This grim material reality is attested to early in the play, when Osmin, the Sultan’s preceptor, reminds the Sultan of a woman’s inferior status:

I told you before that women are women:
In this believe Mahomet, our legislator;
Prudent nature stamped in their souls
Complacency, gentleness

.....

All these beings created for the happiness of men,
 Are tender by calling, and weak by duty:

.....
 Elmire is worth as much as any other:

To yield is her destiny, to triumph is yours.²²

As such, these captives of the seraglio personified an aspect of the Orientalist trope that predated the advent of Islam. Delia and Elmire's servile existence provided testimony to an Asiatic mode of governance in which a despot ruled over a nation of slaves. This power structure, assumed to be the "natural" form of non-Western systems of governance, originated in Aristotle's *Politics* and was re-articulated by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws*. Critic Alain Grosrichard points out that in a Western ontology that constructs the non-Greek or "barbarian" space, the "Asiatic" country is invariably one "where men are slaves by nature. . . . Among the barbarians there are no distinct kinds of power such as one has to observe among the Greeks. They can only know one type of power: despotism."²³ Delia's cultural origins as Circassian, or non-Western, would necessitate that she should be viewed as "a slave by nature," an individual incapable of questioning her lack of freedom. Elmire's identity is somewhat more complex. She would have been viewed by the French viewing public as a Westerner, but due to Spain's Moorish past and France's tenuous relationship with Spain, her cultural identity probably would have been more ambiguous. She was not Muslim, yet *not* not Muslim.

The "grim reality" attested to by Yegenoglu provided the rationale for a dramaturgical and metaphorical incursion into the seraglio by Roxelane, in order to liberate the women in the name of the Enlightenment. The customs of Islam became the target of change, with women as the fulcrum. As critic Leila Ahmed notes, "[the] idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples."²⁴ In Favart's hands, a Western slave has the power to modify—as only the West is capable of rewriting history—and transforms a society that was castigated as "backward" or "barbaric."²⁵

Favart rewrites the life of the historical Ottoman sultanness and Suleyman II's second wife, Hurrem. Hurrem was either a Polish or Ukrainian captive (born Alexandra Liskowska in Lvov), seized during a Ottoman slave raid on the Tartar khanate of the Crimea. Why she was in the Crimea, rather than in her native land, at the time is not known for certain, but it seems probable that she was traveling with her merchant father. She became Suleyman II's sole and legal wife in 1524, outmaneuvering her rival Mahidevran, Suleyman's first wife, and in the process disrupting the marriage protocol for an Ottoman Sultan. Historian Philip Mansel terms this marital procedure "serial concubinage with slaves," pointing out that

“concubines within the palace could be more easily manipulated in the interests of the dynasty than free Muslim women with legal rights prescribed by *shariat* [*shari'a*].”²⁶ While desire for numerous sexual partners might dissuade a sultan from marrying one or a few concubines, the main reason that such marriages were not allowed was that serial concubinage produced a number of potential heirs. As no order of maternal precedence existed, because the mothers would have all have been of the same social standing, the question of succession was left to the Sultan and his inner council. To choose one concubine over all others was to invite political infighting, and possible retaliation, and murder plots against favored concubines and their offspring were not uncommon. Marriage with members of the powerful families of Constantinople was also prohibited.

But although Hurrem was a non-Muslim, as the legal wife of Suleyman she still received full protection under *shari'a*. Her union with the Sultan lifted her above all the other women of the seraglio. Usually the Mufti of Constantinople, a high-ranking Muslim cleric who specialized in “giving rulings (*fatwa*) on questions of law” would have been consulted in such a case.²⁷ However, Suleyman’s choice of Hurrem was final and rather abrupt. The Mufti had not been consulted, in the process creating friction between him and the sultan. But, due to Suleyman’s complete command of the largest empire in the world, stretching from Morocco to Persia, from the Balkans to Egypt, this animosity never engendered more serious consequences. Later Ottoman rulers, such as the early seventeenth-century sultan Osman, would run afoul of the Mufti—in Osman’s case it resulted in his death.²⁸

The historical Hurrem wielded great power, perhaps the most ever enjoyed by an Ottoman Sultanness. She ordered the building of large royal structures in Constantinople and Jerusalem, and Suleyman built monuments for her in Mecca, Medina, and Constantinople. Critic Leslie Pierce asserts that “the privileges allowed Hurrem were extraordinary for a woman who was not the blood relative of the reigning sultan, indeed unique in the history of the dynasty: Hurrem’s mosque complex in Istanbul was the only complex built for the concubine or wife of a sultan during his lifetime.”²⁹ Pierce portrays Hurrem as a woman who formed an integral part of the power dynamics of Suleyman’s court, one who wielded power and was widely respected by her subjects. Mansel makes similar observations. He notes that she “became a power in the palace,” and quotes the seventeenth-century Venetian author Bailo in stating that there “has never been in the history of the Ottoman house a woman who enjoyed greater authority.”³⁰

Roxelane presents the viewer and reader with a very different picture of this sultanness, in part because she derives her individual agency not from personal attributes, nor from psychological motivation or subtle characterization, but from nationalist essences. Favart’s protagonist embodies the paradigmatic French Enlightenment virtues of reason, liberty, and equality, while at the same time conforming to the role of the resourceful and appealing maid familiar from the

plays of Molière and Marivaux. In many ways, she can be reduced to a *coquette* in Ottoman garb, a veiled ingenue, and a progenitor of Beaumarchais's Suzanne, though without the latter's revolutionary credo. The eighteenth-century critic Geoffroy reduces her character to that of a "most distinguished coquette of the genre who reunites reason with craziness, sentiment with gaiety, nobleness of the soul with frivolity, a heroic courage with all of the graces and little affected ways of her sex."³¹ But this coquette, though initially a destabilizing force within the seraglio, ultimately reneges upon her liberalizing agenda, instead opting for a submissive domestic role at the end of the play with her vow of submission to the Sultan.

The differences between the historical Hurrem and Neoclassical and Enlightenment perception(s) of this exotic sultaness articulate how a powerful and respected woman formed a threat in Westerner's imaginations. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Western historians regarded Hurrem with fear, viewing her as politically motivated, manipulative, and ruthless. The *Sieur de Verdier* credited her motives and ambitions to her "resolve to take further the effect of her hatred and malice"; the Ottoman historian Chalcondyle attributed her machinations to her fears of Mahidevran's son's "perfections," and Jean Leunclavius, adding to Chalcondyle's compendium on Turkish history, attributed her powers to the "enchantments of a Jewish sorcerer."³² These critics reduced this Ottoman sultaness to an archetypal Oriental *femme-fatale*: cunning, manipulative, and dangerous. Favart's sultaness (or actually sultaness-to-be) poses little threat, other than her flippant behavior, which mildly shocks the Sultan with its "arrogance."³³

Hurrem's status as an outsider also positioned her against French phallogocentric and universalist concepts of identity, since as a foreigner and as a woman, she would have lacked the faculties for reason and the capability to wield power. However, this is not the case in *Les Trois Sultanes*, where Roxelane embodies the universalist agenda of the Enlightenment as a Westerner in the seraglio, as the subject who dictates the parameters of meaning within the world-view of the play. She possesses, in the words of Fabian, "the educated French traveler's knowledge . . . It is a superior knowledge, for it is not shared by the Orientals caught in the present of their cities, either deserted and dilapidating, or overpopulated and putrid."³⁴ Roxelane's "superior knowledge" gives her the moral as well as intellectual authority to reform the seraglio, starting with Suleyman, as she tells him that she will, "Commence, if you like, to disabuse you / Of the notion that you have the right to tyrannize us."³⁵ And later on, she succinctly states her intent while expressing her exasperation with Osmin: "Oh! I don't want someone to fall asleep / When they should snap to and obey me. / I want to establish reform in the seraglio."³⁶ Roxelane's imperialist imperative had its roots in the Western perception that the Ottoman Empire, in the eighteenth century, no longer formed the threat it formerly had.

While the seraglio of Constantinople had previously enticed foreigners with its promises of untold riches and tightly guarded secrets, by the mid-eighteenth-century Westerners primarily regarded the Ottoman Empire as a decrepit vestige of a despotic Asiatic autocracy. The city served as physical evidence of a splendor that had been overtaken by squalor and decay, a past that could not be surmounted.³⁷ This same metonymy, when applied to Hurrem's identity as constructed by the aforementioned Enlightenment historians, was indicative of a tension "between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated." It is "as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved."³⁸

The repetition of Orientalist typology, as applied to Hurrem, merely served to reaffirm "timeless" or fixed stereotypes, which are accepted as truths only through their repetition. Like the city she once ruled, she was magnificent yet decrepit, riddled with subterfuges and vices, shadowy areas of her identity that troubled the Western mind. Her cultural uniqueness was ignored, and instead she (like the Ottomans in general) was fixed to a Western linear chronology that placed her as uncivilized and un-evolved. Via repetition over generations, these stereotypes (again, the cunning yet mysterious Asiatic female, supine yet treacherous, a *femme fatale*, etc. . . .) achieved in Western cultural memory the ontological status of "truth," without ever having been tested by empirical evidence. If there were other, more sympathetic accounts of Hurrem circulating in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, they were not incorporated into canonical texts, such as those by Chalcondyle and Leunclavius, both of which were assimilated into the historian Mézèray's seventeenth-century compendium on Ottoman history. These historians seemed destabilized by the anxiety caused by this woman who emblemized the "mysterious Orient," a psychological reaction addressed by Yegenoglu in her articulation of the *rhetoric of the veil*.

In *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Yegenoglu identifies the veil as a site of topological excess, a fetishistic object of fear for the phallogocentric Enlightenment, one that countered the Age of Reason's ideals of reason, truth, and progress. The veil was also a metonym for the Orient, one that spoke of the "grim picture" of Islam alluded to earlier in this article, and its various cultures and societies. When confronted with the foreign object (or place), the scopoc Enlightenment agenda attempts to unveil it in order to "reshape that body [or space] by making it available for vision and thereby for knowledge" and, ultimately, to conquer and subjugate.³⁹ This agenda comes about as a reaction to what Yegenoglu terms the *rhetoric of the veil*, the inverse of the Panoptic gaze. In this discourse, the Western subject suffered "a complete reversal of positions" when confronted with the female Islamic object: "her body completely invisible to the European observer except for her eyes, *the veiled woman can see without being*

seen. The apparently calm rationalist discipline of the European subject goes awry in the fantasies of penetration as well as in the tropological excesses of the veil.⁴⁰ Leila Ahmed notes that eighteenth-century traveler Lady Mary Wortley Montagu found that this invisibility was an advantage: “[She] also said that having herself not only observed veiled women but also used the veil, she was able to assert that it was not the oppressive custom her compatriots believed it to be and in fact it gave women a kind of liberty, for it enabled them not to be recognized.”⁴¹ Though it is difficult to tell from historical sources if veils were used during performance (though Mme Favart, like Mme Clairon of the Comédie-Française, gained note for her interest in historical and cultural accuracy in costumes), *Les Trois Sultanes* comprises a series of unveilings and veilings in which liberty is manifested solely in Western terms.⁴²

The veil also serves as a screen upon which the Western subject projects fears and fantasies of the Islamic world. These fantasies frequently express themselves on a sexual level, revealing the Western subject’s frustration at its inability to “know” what she/he constructs as the eternally elusive, yet exotic and alluring “feminine” Orient, a constant theme in the Orientalist trope.⁴³ Since the Middle Ages, the veil has functioned as a site where Westerners could project and relive memories of historical events, such as the Crusades, the fall of Constantinople, and Islamic incursions. However, by the time Favart wrote *Les Trois Sultanes*, the defeat of the Ottomans at Vienna was seventy-eight years in the past and desire for the Islamic Other complemented and supplemented fear of it. The veil thus comprised a mixture of Western desires, fears, and fantasies that obscured, for the most part, the ability to perceive the Islamic world in a culturally specific and contextually accurate way.

On a fundamental level, the West’s staging of the Islamic Other is an act of unveiling. Rather than allowing Islamic culture to speak for itself, “it” is staged via Western epistemology, spoken for in the language of the French Enlightenment. Although he is not considered a *philosophe*, Favart’s ideas are deeply embedded in the universalist Enlightenment ideas of progress, truth, and reason. Moreover, the primacy of the French language, culture, and political system forms a major theme in *Les Trois Sultanes*. Roxelane embodies these ideals in chastising Suleyman for the seraglio’s gloomy atmosphere. She challenges him to open it up, to treat the slaves and women of the quarters with gallantry, respect and tenderness, and to replace the iron bars on the windows with flowers:

Why are your windows covered with a hundred bars?

It is with flowers that they must be decorated;

In the seraglio the doors must be opened,

Only happiness shall keep one from leaving.

Treat your slaves as ladies,
Be gallant with all over the women,
Intimate with one only. . .⁴⁴

She refers to Suleyman as “*monsieur*” rather than “*seigneur*” or “*sire*,” the latter two words more aptly acknowledging their class differences and the demands of court etiquette. But her usage of “*monsieur*” marks a lexical shift that leads her to extemporize upon French and Ottoman values:

You can fully tell me what is the difference between
This accursed country and mine.
No slaves in our homeland; one does not breath in France
Anything but pleasure, liberty, ease,
“All citizens are king, under a citizen-king.”⁴⁵

Of course, what Roxelane fails to mention is that, in 1761, the French were still subjects, under an autocrat (Louis XV) who was anything but a citizen. Though criticism was offered against monarchies in general, Favart was politically cautious and reminded the audience and reader of the advantages of life under the Bourbons.

But the character of Suleyman more testified to the French king’s extra-marital affairs (which were plentiful, with Mmes Pompadour, du Barry, Mailly, Châteauroux, and the many *petites maitresses* of the Deer Park of Versailles),⁴⁶ resulting in the voluntary censorship by Favart of several lines when the play premiered at Versailles and, later, in performance at the Comédie-Italienne. Suleyman personifies the early modern Western construct of the Asiatic potentate, an almighty but jaded voluptuary. This portrayal intentionally paralleled popular portrayals of Louis XV, as was the case with Marmontel’s version. As noted in the 1826 *Notice historique*, one of the primary attractions of the play were these allusions to life at court, centering on Louis and Mme de Pompadour.⁴⁷ Roxelane bears resemblance to Pompadour insofar as that, like the king’s favorite mistress, she is “intelligent and philosophical” and intervenes in court politics in order to “stiffen the king’s resolve” in effecting her priorities.⁴⁸ Court censors suppressed many lines in performance in 1763, due to the obvious allusions to Louis’s private life.

The character of Suleyman undergoes a marked remaking in the play. The author of the *Notice historique* informs his reader that Favart’s (and Marmontel’s) “voluptuous and blasé” king is “far removed” from the “terrible Suleyman of history.”⁴⁹ What the anonymous author of the 1826 *Notice historique* fails to inform his readers is that this “terrible” ruler was modeled on the only template for an “Oriental” ruler at the time: that of the tyrant. Grosrichard, in *The Sultan’s Court*:

European Fantasies of the East summarizes the Western essentialization of the Oriental “tyrant” thus:

From Bodin to Montesquieu, from the end of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth, “despotic power” will become gradually muddled with what Bodin designates as “tyrannical kingship” to become the form of extreme political corruption. . . . It was to the Grand Turk that Bodin’s contemporary readers turned when they sought out an example of baronial kingship. People still had him in mind when, in the seventeenth century, “despotic power” began to be talked of in the clearly Gallicized version of the Greek term. And finally—as the supreme representative of the regimes of Asia—he it was whom Montesquieu had as his target when, in the *Spirit of Laws*, he introduced the noun “despotism” to designate a specific form of government.⁵⁰

This epistemological essentialization of the Ottoman Sultan as the paradigmatic “despot,” ruling over a country of slaves, was merely the latest in a long line of such figures from the Orientalist trope, extending back through time to the Near Eastern historical figures Darius and Xerxes and to the mythological character of Solomon. Roxelane acknowledges her status upon her first meeting with the Sultan by mocking him: “Ah! at last, thanks be to heaven, a human figure. / You are therefor the sublime sultan / To whom I am a slave?”⁵¹

But Roxelane, in reacting against the despotism of the sultan, reveals her intent to indoctrinate the Sultan and the Ottomans in the advantages of Western progressive ideals. In Act One, she chastises the Sultan for misunderstanding gender and political roles. She tells him, “I want to make of you an accomplished sultan,” and then seeks to alter his objectification of women by stating, “Men are made but to amuse us. / Correct your ways, seek to please, / In your home one dies of boredom.”⁵² She concludes her critical evaluation of the seraglio by instructing Suleyman: “Here is my first lesson; / Learn from it; we will see if you are worth the effort.”⁵³ Favart positions Roxelane as a Westerner whose inherent cultural, intellectual, and moral superiority more than makes up for her servile position. Though pitted against a monarch who was regarded as the most powerful man in the world, Roxelane, emboldened by the power of French logic, debates Suleyman with confidence in her eventual victory. The Sultan, in turn, cannot deny his fascination with her, due to her logical critique of his arbitrary absolutism—and her indifference to his advances.

Roxelane’s intrusion into the seraglio theatricalizes the analytical power of the *discourse of the veil*. This discourse answers the *rhetoric of the veil*, rendering

the objects of the seraglio visible, available to the Western gaze. Favart opens the seraglio to reveal a Western woman who proposes “an improvement in the status of women . . . in terms of the need to abandon the (implicitly) ‘innately’ and ‘irreparably’ misogynist practices of the native culture in favor of the customs and beliefs of another culture—the European.”⁵⁴ Ahmed reiterates Yegenoglu’s concern with the colonialist discourse that underpins the Western desire to unveil. She identifies a phallogocentric drive behind colonialist ideology, one that:

became insistent and pronounced with colonial domination, and it was in this context that the links between the issue of women and the issues of nationalism and culture were permanently forged. They were fused initially in the context of Western economic and cultural encroachment and finally and most forcefully in the context of its political and discursive domination—a domination that was to precipitate new kinds of . . . cultural conflict. The debate over women became a dominant mode through which these other profoundly divisive matters were contested. It was at this point that the veil emerged as a potent signifier, connoting not merely the social meaning of gender but also matter of far greater signification.⁵⁵

Ahmed, like Yegenoglu, imbricates Western feminist criticism with colonialist and phallogocentric epistemology, as movements that critique the veil and subjugate non-Western women while attempting to rehabilitate and free these same women. As a symbol of the “secretive” and mystifying essence of the Orient, the veil was (and continues to be) a potent metaphor. For the Enlightenment, the Ottoman Empire and other “Orient” appeared as closed societies: cultures ripe for change as well as economic and political development according to Western standards and models, a complex and frequently one-sided relationship between West and non-West that persists to this day in the Middle East and other regions.

The Western gaze’s ability to master the seraglio carried great political and economic ramifications. As mentioned previously, Favart’s play, like many other fictions of the Islamic Orient, reflected what many viewed as the declining political and economic power of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁶ In France and Western Europe, a growing economy, a modernization of the sciences, an interest in more democratic political philosophies, and increased voyages throughout the world all assisted in expanding the world-wide scope of Enlightenment humanism. And, while French colonialism had all but ceded control of North America and India to the British Empire, the Eastern Mediterranean beckoned as an area for economic development and, perhaps, future territorial gains. As the “Turk” increasingly became an accepted object of representation, the accepted meaning(s) of this representation became

conventionalized and normalized as a reflection of bourgeois morality and concerns. In Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, written some eighty years before Favart's play, the "Turk" became an object of parody because of anxiety over Ottoman power. But by the time Favart penned his play, French anxiety over the Ottoman threat had dissipated, and *la mode à la Turquie* was more frivolous, a sign of French and European self-confidence.

Favart uses Roxelane not only as a tool for championing Enlightenment morals and values, but also to invert Islamic gender roles. Barbara Freyer Stowasser notes that in traditional Islamic gender roles the man possessed a "decisive will [and] power of reason . . . The woman he created sensitive [and] emotional."⁵⁷ Enlightenment thought paralleled Islamic fixing of gender qualities, a trend that critic Dorinda Outram identifies. She notes that eighteenth-century English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft identified sexist and racist elements of Enlightenment epistemology:

Wollstonecraft pointed out that ideas of femininity supported by writers such as Rousseau, which designated women as inferior to and different from men, did nothing more . . . than replicate in domestic life the political system based on privilege and arbitrary power, enjoyed by the monarchs and aristocrats over their subjects, or slave owners over their slaves, which those same thinkers were so ready to criticize in other contexts. Wollstonecraft also identified yet more serious contradictions in Enlightenment thought as it clustered around gender. She pointed out that Enlightenment was based on ideals such as "reason" and "virtue" which were alleged to be innate in, or attainable by, all human beings. But rationality was precisely what was denied to women by writers such as Rousseau, and by the medical writers, while "virtue" was defined for women in an exclusively sexual sense.⁵⁸

Although Suleyman embodies the "Turkish despot," he follows male Enlightenment conceptualizations of "female" identity and agency in his irrational behavior. Roxelane asserts her agency via her powers of reason and her ideas on gendered and ethical behavior, indicating a slippage in traditional gender roles for both characters, though her idea of "virtue" does conform to the sexual standard mentioned above.

One example of this role-reversal is when the Sultan invites Roxelane to dine with him. She accepts, declaring that she had no particular interest in him, but then changes her mind and instead invites him to dine with her. She proceeds to inform Osmin to notify the royal chefs that she will be treating Suleyman to a sumptuous

repast. The Sultan assumes that they will be dining alone, but Roxelane insists upon inviting Delia and Elmire and sends the Sultan off to concern himself with political matters. She scoffs at Osmin's objections to her feast and then sets about transforming the room into a French *salon*, objecting to Turkish customs: "Dinner *à la turk!* what a pleasant thought! / You people, you eat seated on the ground, crouching / Like monkeys! A table, and chairs, / Follow French customs."⁵⁹ She then magically furnishes the room with Western furniture and dining utensils (their presence in the seraglio remains unaccounted for), an attempt by the Frenchwoman to civilize through the body, to mold morals through correct posture and eating habits. Once her three guests have arrived, and Elmire and Delia have assumed their submissive roles in front of the Sultan, Roxelane initiates her program, vaunting her cultural and gendered prerogatives:

According to my fantasy
 Let me govern the conqueror of Asia,
 For just a few days. I will then give back to you
 A man as affable as a Frenchman.
 And lead him to your feet, to your feet, of this I'm sure:
 This will be done with little effort.
 I want to avenge here the honor of our corps.⁶⁰

In the dinner scene, and in other scenes in *Les Trois Sultanes*, Roxelane disrupts the passive, mysterious, and silent feminine Orient, using her will and reason. She agitates for reform within the seraglio, stating that women must assume a dominant position. Favart's creation of an active female Western agent within his play runs counter to his representation of Suleyman, who can be viewed as the antithesis of a powerful, effective ruler. Roxelane also reifies differences between the "East" and the "West," clearly defining the latter as being based on democratic values, while the former reflects a fixed or static and despotic state, unable to achieve progress without outside intervention. All this at a time when the Bourbon monarchy had been no less autocratic and repressive than the Ottomans and, generally, more repressive towards religious minorities at home.

Before her reversion to a submissive role as the Sultan's wife, Roxelane performs the "colonial task of mastering the Other," an act that reduces the "Asiatic" to a less civilized level of existence.⁶¹ Yegenoglu articulates this process, glossing Talal Asad, who:

suggest[s] that the Orientalist's concern in comparing and contrasting the Orient with his/her own civilization is to show the absence of "liberty," "progress," and humanism in Islamic societies, and that the reason for this absence is located in the

religious essence of Islam. The lack of freedom is traced in the Asiatic despotic mode of production, irrationality is discovered in tradition, barbarism is evidenced in various cultural and religious practices. In short, all these “discoveries” implied that the barbaric Orient had to be tamed and civilized. Such a taming required the dissemination of rational procedures of Western institutions of law and order and the reorganization of the capillaries of Oriental cultures along the principles of “modern,” “progressive,” and “civilized” West.⁶²

Roxelane serves as a Westernizing agent, sent to “civilize” the despotic Sultan. Favart, however, places this sympathetic sultan in a seat of power that represents despotism and absolutism. As Grosrichard noted, “there is a place—Asia—where all political power seems to be reduced to an appearance thinly masking a despotism willed by nature This Asia of Aristotle will by now be recognizable as the one that Europe was to reinvent with the Classical age and the onset of colonization.”⁶³ Roxelane reveals, for a French audience’s edification, the despotic nature of the seraglio. With the seraglio’s inherent injustices established, the colonialist task of remaking the seraglio (and the Ottoman Empire) according to Western notions of thought, government and behavior can now proceed.

But Favart abandons this liberalization of the seraglio. This retreat by Roxelane from her stated agenda indicates Favart’s unwillingness to make his challenge to absolutism the overriding message of the play. Instead, the disruptive forces at work within the play are ultimately reincorporated into the status quo, and the “order of being” still reflects that of the monarch (be it Suleyman, Louis XV or Suleyman as Louis XV). In the final analysis, *Les Trois Sultanes* furnishes evidence of the inherently conservative quality of Favart’s comedies. Though criticism of political institutions and individuals is offered, in the end, the audience (or reader) is left with images that reconfirm well-entrenched nationalistic associations of the Ottomans. The image of a contemporary Oriental ruler, and those who surround him, differs little from representations of Oriental rulers of antiquity. These images contrast with Roxelane’s freedom of movement within the seraglio, her insouciance when faced with a ruler who was regarded by his subjects as a supreme ruler, and her ability to challenge his authority with her superior individualistic qualities.

In conclusion, I contend that this particular example of “Oriental” subject-matter as viewed through the lens of Western epistemology gives us insight into the process(es) that construct Western identity and non-Western subjectivity. As with other Orientalist plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *Les Trois Sultanes* furnishes textual evidence of the course of pre- or proto-Orientalist discourse in French and Western culture of the time. *Les Trois Sultanes* exemplifies aspects of Enlightenment ontology and epistemology that still play a defining role

in contemporary Western thought and culture. What is now referred to as the “Western gaze” is a continuation of this ordering agenda (a movement dating back to the Renaissance), again epitomized by the Panopticon, which seeks to order and control by first seeing and then defining according to cultural theories that (in general) do not (or cannot) accommodate non-Western systems of thought and perception. As Michèle Longino notes in the conclusion of *Orientalism in French Classical Drama*, we need to understand the cultural products of the past in order to ascertain where we stand today. Locating the Other in French literature of the past can inform how we understand the construct of national and individual identities today, in cultures and nations around the world. There are clues in the past that should not be ignored, as Longino notes:

It may indeed be far-fetched to claim that we see in these works the seeds of the colonialism that will come to fruition in the 19th-century. But if not here, then where? We could indeed go further back in time, and examine the crusader discourse, or we could as many do, jump ahead to examine that of the “enlightened” eighteenth century.⁶⁴

I argue that both Neoclassical and Enlightenment French epistemology inform contemporary conceptualizations of the Other, in particular the Islamic Other. While in the plays of Racine, Tristan l’Hermite, Molière, Rotrou, and Corneille we can see particular seventeenth-century conceptualizations of the Oriental Other, Enlightenment theatre both continues certain seventeenth-century trends and manufactures its own. It would seem that plays of the mid- to late-eighteenth century, such as *Les Trois Sultanes*, are more complicit with French colonial ventures abroad, producing objects of knowledge that sat easily within “the table.” Favart’s comedy now seems less openly critical of the home culture than do seventeenth-century Orientalist works such as Racine’s *Bajazet* or Tristan’s *Osman*. And in *Les Trois Sultanes*, the lead character of Roxelane, like the veil, serves as a screen upon which Favart projects ideas about nation, gender, politics, and individual will that recast the seraglio and the lands of Islam according to Enlightenment ideas and morals. These ideas, re-amplified and discussed in the years since, currently generate much debate and still serve to support much of the West’s perceptions and representations of the Islamic world.

Notes

All translations unless otherwise noted are the work of the author.

1. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 19.

2. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 72.

3. I am aware that my use of terms such as “Western” culture and “Western” ontology, to a certain extent, reify a single, corporate identity for the “West” and can be construed as duplicating the same mentality I am critiquing *vis à vis* Western essentializations and stereotyping of Ottoman and Islamic cultures. While I use terms such as “Western” or “Ottoman” in this paper, I do so only in efforts to describe and analyze precise, contextual cultural perceptions and their expression in art and literature. What I attempt to do is locate and analyze these culturally and historically defined terms and place them in a context with larger historical processes.

4. “*Cette comédie est d’un genre plus nationale que général; son principal agrément consiste dans l’opposition de nos moeurs à celle des Turcs.*” Charles Simon Favart, *Mémoires et correspondance littéraires, dramatiques et anecdoctiques* 3 vols. (Paris: Microfiche, 1808) n.p.

5. A revival in the early 1920s at the Comedie-Française featured Falconetti (who is best known for her remarkable acting as Joan in Carl Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, her only film role) as the Circassian slave Delia.

6. *Le Ballet de Dindons* translates as *The Ballet of the Turkeys* and *Moulinet Premiere* roughly translates as *Little Windmill the First*.

7. The two most popular and important fairground theatres in Paris in the eighteenth century were the Foire St. Germain (run by the Abbaye de St. Germain des Prés in what is today the sixth arrondissement) and the Foire St. Laurent, which was located in north Paris, not far from the Hôpital St. Louis in what is today the 10th arrondissement. Paris had other fairs, but these two were far and away the most important, largest, and longest standing, with the Foire St. Germain dating back to the eleventh century CE. Both fairground theatres, especially the pre-Lent Foire St. Germain were associated with not only satirical and transgressive performances, but with other ludic behaviors: fights, public drunkenness, prostitution, and other sights and types of behavior that epitomize the Bakhtinian carnivalesque.

8. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 256.

9. “*Gens de robe et d’épée, comédiens et grandes dames, abbés et médecins, nul était épargné par les Aristophanes de carrefour.*” August Font, *L’Opéra Comique et la Comédie-Vaudeville aux XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1894) 14-15. The author refers to the Italian comedians of the late seventeenth century, but has taken it in its full carnivalesque meaning. This would also refer to the other performers of the *foires* and public places of Paris.

10. Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998) 656-57.

11. The move to scripted plays, from unscripted, itself is indicative of the changing status of theatre at the Foires. For example, the first recognized troupe of actors did not appear at Foire St. Germain until approximately 1595, though the fair had been playing host to performers since the eleventh century CE. Unscripted, popular performers, in the mold of the seventeenth century comedic actors Gros Guillaume and Gaultier-Garguille, were more representative of the typical performer at the Foire St. Germain and other Parisian fairs up until the early- to mid-eighteenth century. Their unscripted performances, often filled with *lazzi* inspired jokes and physical humor, were much more disruptive in

nature than the plays of Favart and his kind. Some of these were written down in the early eighteenth century, such as *Le Marchand du Merde*.

12. This trend can be traced back to Baroque and Neoclassical France, where in the 1630s the popularity of the novels *Floridon* by Jean Segrais and Madeleine de Scudéry's *Ibrahim, l'Illustre Bassa* in the *chambre bleu* of Mme Rambouillet would produce an Ottoman and Islamic "fad" in the theatre, which would later result in plays such as Tristan l'Hermite's *Osman* (1652) and Jean Racine's *Bajazet* (1672).

13. Bernard Levy, *The Unpublished Plays of Carolet* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1931) 237; Pierre Martino *L'Orient dans la littérature française* (Paris, 1906) 240.

14. "Marmontel n'avait pas prétendu conserver la couleur locale ni présenter un tableau fidèle des mœurs du tems et du pays où l'action est censée avoir eu lieu; il n'avait pas même cherché à peindre des sentimens, des caractères, ni à exposer des principes qui puissent s'appliquer à tous les tems; il se contenta de revêtir son sujet de l'habillement de son époque, et de faire parler à ses personnages le langage de la bonne compagnie contemporaine . . ." P.L., "Notice historique sur le sujet et sur la pièce *Des Trois Sultanes*," *Bibliothèque Dramatique, ou Répertoire Universel du Théâtre Français* (Paris: N.p., 1826) 417.

15. "Il y a un Goût indépendant de nos mœurs & de notre génie, une sorte de sentiment général qui fixe-par-tout les idées du beau, du bon, du mauvais . . . c'est là le Goût, absolument dit, Goût uniforme & invariable chez tout les Peuples où sont cultivés les Lettres & les Arts. Il y a un Goût national, qui tient entierement à nos mœurs, au nôtre caractere général, à nos préjugés." *Théâtre de M. Favart, ou Recueil des Comédies, Parodies & Opéra-Comiques . . .*, vol. 1 (Paris: Duchesne, 1763) I-III.

16. "Mais oui: dans les soupers qu'à Paris on se donne,

Sur tout légèrement on discute, on raisonne,

Et l'on n'a jamais plus d'esprit

Que quand on ne sait ce qu'on dit,

Les Français sont charmans. (Charles-Simon Favart, *Les Trois Sultanes, ou Soliman le Second* [Paris, N.p., 1817] 380)

17. Megda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 96.

18. " . . . une jeune Française,

Vive, étourdie, altière, et qui se rit de tout;

Elle vit sans contrainte, et n'est jamais plus aise

Que lorsqu'elle me pousse à bout." (*Les Trois Sultanes* 325)

19. "Que de ces femmes complaisantes,

De ces machines caressantes?" (*Les Trois Sultanes* 333)

20. Frequently, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, charlatans and mountebanks would often appear in the *foires* and public places of Paris with dancers billed as coming from "exotic" locales such as Spain, or even Flanders.

21. Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies* 97-98.

22. "Je vous l'ai déjà dit, toutes femmes sont femmes:

*Croyons-en Mahomet, notre législateur;
La nature prudente imprime dans leurs âmes
La complaisance, la douceur*

.....
*Tous ces êtres créés pour le bonheur des hommes,
Sont tendres par état, et faibles par devoir;*

.....
Autant vaut Elmire qu'une autre:

Céder est son destin, triompher est le votre." (Les Trois Sultanes 332-33)

23. Alain Grosrichard, *In the Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East*, trans. Liz Herron (New York: Verso, 1998) 16-17.

24. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 151.

25. Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies* 98.

26. Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire 1453-1924* (London: John Murray, 1995) 82. *Shari'a* is the ethical and moral code as defined by the Qur'an and the *hadith*, and as interpreted by Muslim clerics since the seventeenth century CE.

27. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1991) 114.

28. This incident, which took place in 1622/1623, was dramatized in Tristan l'Hermite's *Osman: tragédie* (1648).

29. Leslie Pierce, "The Family as Faction: Dynastic Politics in the Reign of Suleyman," *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992) 111.

30. Mansel, *Constantinople* 84.

31. "*Roxelane est une coquette du genre le plus distingué; elle réunit la raison avec la folie, le sentiment avec la gaiété, la grandeur d'âme avec la frivolité, un courage héroïque avec toutes les grâces et les petites minauderies de son sexe.*" Geoffroy, "*Examen des Trois Sultanes: Opinion de Geoffroy.*" *Bibliothèque Dramatique, ou Répertoire Universel du Théâtre Française* (Paris: N.p., 1826) 424-27, especially 425. The role was originally played by Mme Favart, who, according to critics, suited the part with her carefree charm, intelligence, physical appeal and wit.

32. Chalcondyle, *L'Histoire de la Decadence de l'Empire Grec et établissement de celui des Turcs par Chalcondile Athenien*, trans. B. de Vignere Boubonois, Tome I (Paris: N.p., 1612) 617; Sieur de Verdier, *Abbrégé de l'Histoire des Turcs*, vol. 2 (Lyon: Beaujollin, 1665) 243; Leunclavius, Sieur de Mezeray, *Histoire Generale des Turcs*, vol.1 (Paris: Dechet, 1662) 47.

33. "*Je ne sors point de mon étonnement;*

Une esclave parler avec cette arrogance!" (Les Trois Sultanes 348)

The Sultan's astonishment at her behavior turns to curiosity five lines later; this is the first time the Sultan has encountered "caprice and independence" in the harem.

34. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 10.

35. "*Commencez, s'il vous plait, par vous désabuser*

Que vous ayez des droits pour nous tyrannizer." (Les Trois Sultanes 345)

36. "*Oh! je ne veux point qu'on s'endorme*

Quand il s'agit de m'obéir

Je veux dans ce sérail établir la réforme." (*Les Trois Sultanes* 363)

37. The splendors of Suleyman's empire were now viewed through two centuries of increased Western political and economic strength in the Eastern Mediterranean and a steady decrease in Ottoman power over their colonial lands. This is the more common interpretation given to a period of change within the Ottoman Empire. Albert Hourani summarizes an alternative viewpoint that is more complex in addressing regional change in the Maghreb, the Fertile Crescent, the Balkans, and other Ottoman lands: "Rather than speaking of decline, it might be more correct to say that what had occurred was an adjustment of Ottoman methods of rule and the balance of power within the empire to changing circumstances. By the end of the eighteenth century the Ottoman dynasty had existed for 500 years and had been ruling most of the Arab countries for almost 300; it was only to be expected that its ways of government and the extent of its control would change from one place and time to another" (Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* 250).

38. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 66.

39. Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies* 108.

40. 43.

41. Ahmed, *Women and Gender* 150.

42. The editor of the 1826 edition laments that French actors of his time did not pay attention to detail as carefully as did the actors in Favart's time. According to the editor, in Favart's time the sultaness's costumes were made in Constantinople, in the same style as was worn by the women of the seraglio. Unfortunately he gives no other details. ("*Du tems de Favart, on n'oublia rien de ce qui pouvait embellir cette représentation. Les décorations étaient magnifiques, et les habits de sultanes furent faits à Constantinople avec les étoffes du pays, et sur le modèle de ceux que portaient les femmes du sérail*") (*Les Trois Sultanes* 319).

43. While this theme has always been present in Orientalist literature, it seems to be more prevalent since eighteenth century and, perhaps, more prevalent in novels, memoirs, and opera than in tragedy or, for obvious reasons, comedy.

44. *Pourquoi de cent barreaux vos fenêtres couvertes?*

C'est de fleurs qu'il faut les garnir;

Que du sérail les portes soient ouvertes,

Et que le bonheur seul empêche d'en sortir.

Traitez vos esclaves en dames,

Soyez galant avec toutes les femmes,

Tendres avec une seule. . . (*Les Trois Sultanes* 346)

45. *Vous faites bien sentir quelle est la différence*

De ce maudit pays au mien.

Point d'esclaves chez nous; on ne respire en France

Que les plaisirs, la liberté, l'aisance.

"Tout citoyen est roi, sous un roi citoyen." (*Les Trois Sultanes* 356)

46. Roche, *France in the Enlightenment* 260.

47. "Mais, ce que peu de personnes savent aujourd'hui, et ce à quoi aucun historien ni aucun critique n'a pensé, c'est que cette comédie n'offrit un si grand attrait à la curiosité, que parce qu'on crut y voir une allusion aux mœurs de la cour, de Louis XV lui-même, qui paraît être si bien caractérisé dans le personnage de Soliman. Marmontel même avait eu en secret l'intention positive de représenter ce monarque dans son conte; et nous, qui écrivons ceci, avons de puissantes raisons pour croire que ce fut madame de Pompadour que l'académicien eut en vue sous le nom de Roxelane" (Notice historique 421).

48. Roche, *France in the Enlightenment* 260.

49. "Le Soliman de Marmontel et de Favart est trop éloigné du terrible Soliman de l'histoire, et il est clair qu'on a voulu peindre en lui un roi voluptueux et blasé" (Notice historique 421).

50. Grosrichard, *In the Sultan's Court* 18-19.

51. "Ah! voici, grâce ciel, une figure humaine.

Vous êtes donc ce sublime sultan

De qui je suis esclave?" (Les Trois Sultanes 343).

52. "Je veux faire de vous un sultan accompli";

.....
"Les hommes ne sont fait que pour nous amuser.

Corrigez-vous, cherchez à plaire;

Chez vous on s'ennuie à perir." (Les Trois Sultanes 345)

53. "Voilà ma première leçon:

Corrigez-vous, cherchez à plaire;

Chez vous on s'ennuie à perir." (Les Trois Sultanes 346)

54. Ahmed, *Women and Gender* 129.

55. 129.

56. As previously mentioned this interpretation is questioned by some critics, such as Albert Hourani, who view this era in Ottoman history as less of a decline and more of "an adjustment of Ottoman methods of rule and the balance of power within the empire to changing circumstances" (Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* 250).

57. Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an: Traditions, and Interpretations* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 37.

58. Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 81-82.

59. "Un dîner à la turque! oh! le plaisant usage!

Vous autres, vous mangez sur la terre accroupis,

Comme des sapajous. Une table, des chaises,

Suivez les coutumes françaises." (Les Trois Sultanes 364)

60. "Selon ma fantasie

Laissez-moi gouverneur le vainquer de l'Asie

Quelques jours seulement. Je vous le rends après

Aussi complaisant qu'un Français,

Et l'amène à vos pieds, j'en suis sûre:

Ce sera sans beaucoup d'efforts.

Je veux ici venger l'honneur du corps." (*Les Trois Sultans* 373)

61. Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies* 96.

62. 97.

63. Grosrichard, *In the Sultan's Court* 17.

64. Michèle Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002)

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