بِســـــم اللهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحيـم

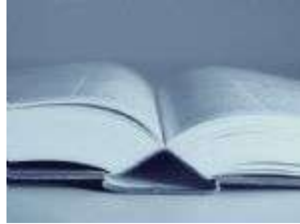
In the name of God,

Most Gracious, Most Merciful

‘Mysterious Irrationality’: English Literature and Islam

by

Geoffrey Clarke



Introduction

The 'Azan', the call to prayer, invites worshippers in London to the mosque at Brick Lane and Regent's Park, at Finsbury Park and Willesden, at Walthamstow Central and Cricklewood, and the faithful troop in for the evening prayers, cowering from the fog, rain and mist. Once inside, they settle into a calming and benign ritual that soothes their anxious spirits, and as they read the holy book in the English translation do they hesitate to recall how their religion may have been portrayed through the pages of British and specifically, English literature, it may be asked. The books and newspapers, television, the internet, and blogosphere all routinely portray the glorious religion of Islam and Muslims as a kind of third column, 3.4 million in number yet a suspected minority in the maelstrom of black, ethnic and third world immigrant population of London.

How has the situation come to pass where a mainstream journalist, Melanie Phillips, herself a member of a religious minority, castigates the arrivals to the city as constituting a 'Londonistan', and Phillip Hollobone, a prominent Member of Parliament, calls the wearing of an Islamic dress, the burqa, pejoratively as "going round wearing a paper bag over your head", claiming that it was "offensive" for women to restrict others from making facial contact with them, refusing to meet them at his political office, and going so far as to introduce a Private Members Bill named the 'Face Covering (Regulations) Bill'.

Islam and Muslims remain a religion and a group of religious believers not bearing an unique ethnicity like Jewish people who, numbering 13.4 million people worldwide, are an ethnoreligious group originating in the Israelis or Hebrews of the ancient Near East. Judaism is a monotheistic, Abrahamic and fatalistic faith originating in the 'Tanakah' or Hebrew bible. But for Islam it is a fact that Somalis, Saudis, Ethiopians, people from Western China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Holland and even Wales make up the conglomerate of people calling themselves 'Muslims', a word meaning submission: submission to the will of God.

Yet, was it ever thus, and does British literature furnish a different record of integration, amelioration and harmony? Does the record of the canonical literature present Islam in its true light as a glorious world religion, or does it denigrate and despise the teachings and tenets of the religion? Unfortunately, what we will observe is a litany of abuse and misinformation about the religion of Islam and the relations between the Christian West and the Islamic sphere. Christian writers such as Roger Bacon, Charles Doughty, Edward Pococke, Henry Maundrell and William Muir were hostile, superior and arrogant towards Islam, and it is not until we move into the modern era that we see a more positive and welcoming approach to Muslims and to their ideology.

As an author, I accept responsibility for charting a long and difficult relationship between the English literature on record since Bacon and Chaucer and the adherents of the faith throughout the same period. In the final analysis, if the book becomes a lexicon of anti-Muslim phobias, its general theme and content (not its authorial opinions that are hopefully balanced and objective) opposing any rapprochement with Islam, then I shall have failed in the endeavour, despite my good efforts to include ephemera, verses, ballads, poetry and any realia that might help the pro-Islam cause. I hope it will show profound scholarship and the most meticulous care to present in good light research on the topic, otherwise it can only remain as a simple pamphlet of genuine and kindly pro Islamic work, for I can only be pro

Muslim and not secularly uninvolved with the subject. Despite my care not to, I sincerely trust that it does not add to the weight of pro Christian message and proselytisation, rather than assist in a dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The present author does not wish to identify himself by default with any of the criticisms here recorded, and only sets them down as a matter of scholarly record in the hope that it will assist British Muslims to find their place in the complex discourse between East and West.

I find that I have needed to coin a number of words in this study such as 'Muslimdom' and 'Islamistas' rather than the dreadful secular terms 'Islamic world' and 'Islamists'. I have not followed the convention of inserting the phrase Salalahu wa Salaam or SAW after each mention of the prophet's name, since my reverence for the prophet is evident in every word that I write.

Chapter 1: Background and History

If Muslims were always to be described as gullible, disorganised and inferior, what was it about attitudes towards their religion that caused Christian writers to hold such views? The answer may be that they were approaching the subject from a Christian perspective. They positively viewed their own religion as received, permanent and unbounded and, therefore, were not predisposed to see any other religion as having merit, worth or spiritual attraction, but were fanatically against. It was a matter of faith; faith that knew no transgression. The liberal West was light, the fundamentalist East darkness: centuries of tradition enforced this rule and it remains the foundation upon which discussion about Islam was shaped.

Writers perceived Islam as a source of danger, leading to what Roger Bacon termed pluralistically as 'mysterious irrationalities' in their relationships with Muslims and people of other faiths also including Hindus, Jainists, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Jews. They were xenophobic in the sense that their country was best, their culture immutable and their religion sacrosanct. This hostility fostered myths in a manner so mysteriously rabid that any connection with the original was lost. Obviously, the outbreak of battles was the final link in this nationalistic, Christian preordination.

The Crusades, the battles against the Saracens, i. e. Muslims, were undertaken between 1095 and 1291 to recapture lands lost to Christendom, and specifically the Roman church. It was a movement to retake Jerusalem, defended by the great Saladin, or Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, for the West, and led to great bloodshed and a weakening of the Christian Byzantine Empire, which capitulated two centuries later to the Muslim Turks. In the late eleventh century, the resentment felt by Christians against the loss of the privileges in the 'holy lands' was so palpable that it led to a crusading zeal that swept across Europe, and involved King Richard I of England, better known as Richard the Lionheart, who sold off many of the country's assets in his desire to raise money to embark on the Third Crusade in 1189.

Jerusalem had fallen to the First Crusaders in 1099. Many of its Christian, Muslim and Jewish populations were slaughtered. The Crusaders did not spare the lives of children, women or the elderly even after first assuring them of their safety. Saladin defeated King Guy's army in 1187 at the Horns of Hettin, and soon after recaptured Jerusalem. Unlike the Crusading armies, Saladin, who was a Muslim who followed the teachings of Islam, did not slay the city's Christian inhabitants, nor lay waste to the land. Saladin's virtuous acts gained him the respect of his enemies and of history.

King Richard I, who led the Third Crusade to recover Jerusalem, met Saladin in a conflict that was to be recorded in later chivalric romances. The Crusaders failed in their attempt, yet Saladin respected Richard I as an honourable opponent. Saladin's legendary generosity and sense of honour in conducting the treaty that ended the Crusade earned him the lasting respect not only of his contemporary rivals but also of the modern historian. As the historian,

Norman Daniel has confirmed: ''It would probably be true to say that this legend was known over a wider area for a longer period of time than that of any political figure of the mediaeval West, and almost as favourably.''[1]

Rather than becoming a hated figure in Europe, Saladin became a celebrated hero in literature, which can be observed in later literary accounts in the masculine romance form by Rider Haggard and others.

We will turn to look at the record of the early relationships between English literature and its attitudes to Muslims to investigate the phenomenon of disapproval – and unfortunately the pattern of fear and distrust begins. A thirteenth century English writer and philosopher, Roger Bacon, one of the earliest advocates of the modern scientific method, was inspired by the works of Aristotle and later Arabic works, such as the works of Muslim scientist Alhazen. Born in Ilchester in Somerset, England, possibly in 1213, Bacon was interested in the use of reason to promote Christianity. He held that only through intellectual argument could the faithful approach 'infideles' and thereby attempt to convert them. And even in the case of conversion, they would still have to become true believers and truly devout in order to qualify as Christians. The prophet Muhammad was considered by Bacon as the 'Antichristus', one who opposed Christ, and therefore, "it would be extremely useful to the Church of God to give thought to the time of [the law of Antichrist]: whether it will follow swiftly after the destruction of the law of Muhammad or much later…"[2]

The concept of the tribes of Gog and Magog that he introduced,[3] an undefined concept emanating from the Old Testament of the Bible in Genesis 10. 2, and also seen in the holy Qur'an, was imperative to him, for his followers should be made aware of their "condition and location":

Since these peoples, confined in specific parts of the world, will emerge into a desolate region and meet Antichrist, Christians — especially the Roman Church — must consider well the position of these places. This will make it possible to comprehend the savagery of these tribes, and through that, the time of Antichrist's arrival and place where he will appear.

Fear of the Antichrist, a Christian idea based on the New Testament, was well marked in his literature, for he advised Christians to resist and develop methods of defence against 'the Antichrist'. He alarmed his followers by suggesting that he would use arts and powers known to scholars, despite the fact that Aristotle had used experimental science "when he delivered the world to Alexander… And Antichrist will use this wonderful science, far more powerfully than Aristotle." Christians had always believed that powers that had been given to the Antichrist by the devil would help him, as the Venerable Bede[4] had suggested, to "perform magic greater than that of anyone else." The irrational fear and superstition of these times was marked by Bacon in passages where the supposed evil, magic[5] and dark arts of the antichrist were a great challenge to the faithful, and particularly he suspected that, "Mongols and Muslims were already working against Christendom with such weapons: exercising fascination; stirring up mysterious irrationalities and dangerous impulses in the hearts of good Christians, sowing discord among the princes and causing wars among them."

It is significant that the allegations of demonic power against Muhammad have been an early and continuous feature of anti-Muslim rhetoric, seen throughout the Middle Ages. These have generally continued until today, but not without a vigorous defence from Muslims everywhere. Since the Rushdie affair, Muslims have become far more proactive in defence

of their religion. Some would wish to label this vigorous challenge as "terrorism", yet such a facile appellation is not helpful in a democratic context where integration and multiculturism are desired norms, and where all the citizens of Britain can hold equal rights, representation and justice.

Supposedly born and bred in England, in the town of St Albans, but now disputed, Sir John Mandeville may have been the author of his 'Travels' which allegedly first appeared in translation from Anglo-Norman French, and circulated between 1357 and 1371. They were subsequently first printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1499, when they were popularly enjoyed throughout Christendom. He translated the work of William of Tripoli who wrote an unsympathetic biography of Prophet Muhammad, rejecting much favourable information. Mandeville took a sympathetic view of Arabia, but not without the usual cavils about its desert nature:

Also the city of Mecca where Mohammet lieth is of the great deserts of Arabia; and there lieth [the] body of him full honourably in their temple, that the Saracens clepen [call ed.] Musketh. And it is from Babylon the less, where the soldan dwelleth, unto Mecca above-said, into a thirty-two journeys.

And wit well, that the realm of Arabia is a full great country, but therein is over-much desert. And no man may dwell there in that desert for default of water, for that land is all gravelly and full of sand. And it is dry and no thing fruitful, because that it hath no moisture; and therefore is there so much desert. And if it had rivers and wells, and the land also were as it is in other parts, it should be as full of people and as full inhabited with folk as in other places; for there is full great multitude of people, whereas the land is inhabited. Arabia dureth from the ends of the realm of Chaldea unto the last end of Africa, and marcheth to the land of Idumea toward the end of Botron. And in Chaldea the chief city is Bagdad.[6]

The 'Father of English Literature', the medieval poet and chronicler of the 'Canterbury Tales', Geoffrey Chaucer, born in 1343, wrote in middle English in a plain fashion about the events of the fourteenth century. He was a courtier, diplomat and civil servant who, as a renowned chronicler, became the first poet to be buried in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. Recording the character of his Parson in 'The Parson's Tale', he seems to belong to a Golden Age before the troublesome Islam came along. He portrays his Christian Parson as idealised and sentimentalised in contrast to his Wife of Bath who is bawdy, reckless and carnal. Such a juxtaposition may have been deliberate, for Chaucer sees more deeply into her character than he does the poor Parson, whose looking to worldly, materialistic qualities indicates that Chaucer has not enquired deeply into, nor is wholehearted about, the Christianity and the Church of his day. He draws back from the discovery of his own attitude to Christians and Christendom, even apologetically. This cripples his poetry.

Chaucer had an awareness of Muslims and Muslimdom, for recording the knowledge of his 'Doctour of Physic' he demonstrates that Arab philosophy and medicine had characters that he could recognise as worthy of inclusion in the world of his pilgrims:

"Wel knew he the olde Aesculapius | He knew well old Aesculapius
And Deyscorides and eek Rufus | And Deyscorides and also Rufus
Olde Ypocras, Haly and Galeyn, | Old Hippocrates, Jesu Haly (Ibn Isa) and Galeyn
Serapion, Razi and Avycen, | Serapion, Al Razi (Rhazes) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina)
Averrois, Damascien, | Averrois (Ibn Rushd),Damascien
and Constantyn | and Constantin
Bernard and Gatesden and Gilbertyn."[7] | Bernard and Gatesden and Gilbertin.

Chaucer cited these Arab scholars as the medical authorities for the Science of the time, in the 'Prologue to the Canterbury Tales'. Ibn Isa, Al Razi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Ibn Rushd were the four Arab physicians whose textbooks had been in use between the eighth and the twelfth century A.D. They were considered as the main sources of medical learning known to Europe from the early middle ages. These Arab physicians had been the basis of knowledge on medicine for four hundred years, and would continue to be so until the loss of Granada by the Muslims in 1492 to the kings of Castile.

These scholars included Adelard of Bath, who was a Western scholar who translated Al-Khwarizmi's texts on astronomy and Euclid's 'Elements' from Arabic into Latin. He was one of the first to introduce Indian numerals to Europe that now constitute our numbering system, 1,2,3 etc. He stands at the crossroads of three intellectual traditions: the classical learning of the French schools, the ancient Greek culture of Southern Italy, and the brilliant, original Arabic sciences. A popular theme was the Oriental tale written for Westerners. These included works by Petrus Alfonsi, an ex-Jewish writer converted to Christianity, who lived in Muslim Spain and author of the important text 'Disciplina Clericalis', which was the first collection of such works.[8]

Robert of Ketton, 1107 – 1160, was the first translator of the Qur'an into Latin in manuscript, known as the 'Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete'; (another anti-Muslim slur) and also translated several scientific texts such as 'Alchemy' by Morienus Romanus. He entered the priesthood in a village in Rutland, a short distance from Stamford, Lincolnshire. Robert of Ketton is believed to have been taught at the Cathedral School of Paris. He travelled to the East from France for four years during 1134-1137 with his fellow student and friend, Herman Dalmatin, learning Arabic and writing about Islam.[9]

According to John Foxe, Chaucer's work on religion was permitted by the bishops, referring to the Act of 1542, that authorised:

the works of Chaucer to remain still and to be occupied; who, no doubt, saw into religion as much almost as even we do now, and uttereth in his works no less, and seemeth to be a right Wicklevian, or else there never was any. And that, all his works almost, if they be thoroughly advised, will testify (albeit done in mirth, and covertly); and especially the latter end of his third book of the Testament of Love ... Wherein, except a man be altogether blind, he may espy him at the full: although in the same book …shadows covertly, as under a visor, he

suborneth truth in such sort, as both privily she may profit the godly-minded, and yet not be espied of the crafty adversary.[10]

Foxe considered some of Chaucer's works as being against his Puritanical view of religion, and doubted whether they represented the truth of Christian religion.

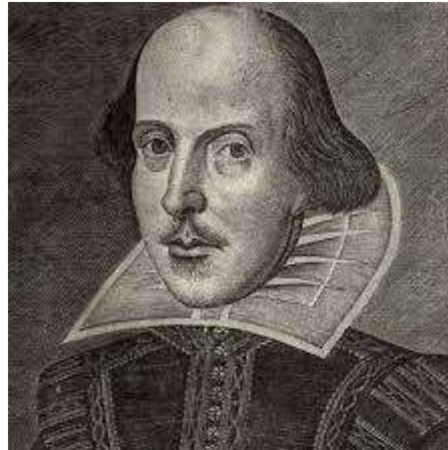
There was an interest in the Muslim East in the Elizabethan period. Richard Hakluyt copied the correspondence between the Ottoman queen mother, Queen Safiye and Elizabeth I in his 'Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation'.[11] Hakluyt was educated at Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford. He was the chaplain and secretary of Sir Edward Stafford, the English ambassador to the France between 1583 and 1588.

The potential for conflict with 'Others' such as Islamic people arises as early as the poet Edmund Spenser, who had sectarian, philosophical, linguistic and political difficulties with his contemporary life. Spenser includes the controversy of Elizabethan church reform within the epic, 'The Fairie Queene'. His character, Gloriana, has religious English knights decimate Roman Catholic continental power in books 1 and 5. Spenser's time saw conflict between the Protestant and Roman Catholic faiths, and it led to much sectarian division, just as exists today between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, the precursor of so called 'Islamist' terrorism in the UK. Spenser believed that all religions were unclear in some way, and although we all search for a clear message, it is not possible to find it.[12]

There was a possibility of integration with Irish subjects, but the secular issues of social intercourse, marriage, politics and especially language were in great need of reform, and this extract suggests that his unhappiness with the state of affairs in Ireland prefigures the current situation, where a great social divide between the two communities exists, and persists even today in its insolubility:

Now this kynde of intercourse with the Irish breaded such acquayntaunce amitie and frendshipp between them and us, beinge so furnisht with theire Languadge that wee cared not contrary to our duties in balancing our creditte, to make fostered, gossiping, and marriadge as aforesaid with them so that now the English Pale and many other places of the kingdome that were planted with English at the first Conquests are growne to a confusion.[13]

Shakespeare 21 April, 1564



The world-renowned Elizabethan genius, poet and playwright, William Shakespeare, the Bard of Avon, used the character, Othello in themes, amongst others, of racism in the Moor of Venice. This is not to declare that Shakespeare is a racist writer, but rather that he uses racial themes that he learnt elsewhere from different sources in his texts.

In the drama, Othello is a Moor of Moroccan origin. The term 'Moor' was used pejoratively in Europe in a broader sense to refer to anyone of Arab or African blood, whether living in Spain or North Africa. Moors are a people of medieval Muslim descent, whether the term is applied to the Berbers, North African Arabs, or Muslims from that region. Othello meets and marries the beautiful Desdemona in Venice, where he is a soldier of the Republic, and takes up his post in Cyprus. His contemporary, Iago, conspires in a plot to convince Othello that Desdemona has cheated him, singling out a black character for a racist attack, impugning his honour and integrity as well as that of Desdemona. "Even now, very now an old black ram is tupping your white ewe"[14] and, "I am one, sir that comes to tell you, your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs", claims Iago to Brabantio, Desdemona's father, [15] in a malicious plot to convince Brabantio of his daughter's adultery.

Othello is referred to as "a lascivious Moor", and there are a number of references to him as 'black', a term in Elizabethan times with negative connotations. Contrarily, Desdemona is referred to as 'white' as Shakespeare portrays an undiluted image of: "That whiter skin of hers than snow / As smooth as monumental alabaster" that turns to ice when she lies slain, so that Othello declaims tragically: "Cold, cold, my girl? / Even like thy chastity. O! cursed, cursed slave!"[16]

In the text, Othello becomes 'Other', an ethnic racial stereotype described by one character, Rodrigo, as "thick-lips". The act of miscegenation in marrying a beautiful white woman is clear to an Elizabethan audience not used to the celebration of ebony and ivory. [17] Why

should a fellow soldier engage in such racism, it may be asked. Jealousy of Othello's elevating another officer to high rank is the cause, and Iago plots to avenge him for it: "I follow him to serve my turn upon him", he cries. Iago's jealousy causes him to turn it upon others and to create a feeling for revenge in Othello's breast so that he murders Desdemona, stabs Iago, and finally kills himself: And in justification Othello declares wisely:

Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,

Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak

Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;

Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,

Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,

Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away

Richer than all his tribe.

Othello puts it on record to explain his actions undiplomatically:

Set you down this;

And say besides, — that in Aleppo once,

Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk

Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state.

The reaction to the tale of racism, passion and jealousy remains something to be regretted as a tragedy with implications for Othello's money and property; a Muslim is to be 'traduced' in turn by his Christian captains and servers:

O Spartan dog,

More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea!

Look on the tragic loading of this bed;

This is thy work: — the object poisons sight;

Let it be hid. — Gratiano, keep the house,

And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,[18]

The portrayal of Othello appeals to all the base connotations that the Elizabethans felt about Muslims. It did not assist matters either that the character was played upon the stage at the Globe theatre by a white, male actor with a face blackened with charcoal, leading to issues not only of gender, but of inequalities in the acting profession; nor did it help to cement relationships with those who frequented the 'pit' of the open – air theatre in London and those members of the Muslim population who were not theatregoers.

Another Shakespearean character who ascribed negative connotations to the Eastern world is Mark Antony in 'Antony and Cleopatra', delighting in the fact that: "The beds i' the east are soft, and who has an "emasculating" mistress in Cleopatra. Racist remarks in the voice of Romans are ascribed to Cleopatra by Captain Philo in "tawny front":

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front[19]

and again in "gypsy's lust":

…His captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper

And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust.[20]

The sexuality of her nature is foregrounded, to make her appear a figure of disrespect like a 'gypsy' or a whore who has totally captivated the Roman general, Mark Anthony, so that he becomes: "The triple pillar of the world transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool" [21]

Alive, she is a schemer and a clever trickster: "She is cunning past man's thought" and: "a wonderful piece of work."[22] Mark Anthony's speech infers a binary opposition between the supposed idleness of the East and the virility and greatness of the West:

But that your royalty
Holds idleness your subject, I should take you
For idleness itself.[23]

And again, Cleopatra has no use for a castrated man - only a virile one, indicating her allegedly lustful nature: "I take no pleasure / In aught an eunuch has."[24]

The contrary nature of Mark Anthony's marriage to Octavia points up Cleopatra's faults again:

…take Antony
Octavia to his wife; whose beauty claims
No worse a husband than the best of men;

Whose virtue and whose general graces speak
That which none else can utter.

Cleopatra has broken Anthony's sword, which has been "made weak by his affection"[25] suggesting that she has debilitated him sexually. His submission to Cleopatra offers up the desirability of the East versus the staid and duty bound soldier of Rome. The racism exhibited against the Egyptian queen by Caesar and his Roman generals is part, symbolically, of the Elizabethan audience's antipathy to things Eastern, Muslim and 'Other'.

Shakespeare's exact contemporary, Christopher Marlowe, (1564 - 30 May 1593), has fatalistic tendencies that parallel Islam in the way that many Muslims believe in predestiny and accept the destiny of Allah through subservience to the will of God.

In his deeply fatalistic work 'Dr Faustus', the protagonist Dr Faustus reaffirms the pact he has made with the devil in his quest for knowledge and power, and is, consequently, doomed forever. Like many Muslims, his search for redemption drives him to anticipate paradise, where all sins are redeemed, rather than hell where, traditionally, all sins are punished for eternity.

His acts are predestined, for we know that his heart and soul are crying out for repentance. Yet, some force has compelled him to remain silent.

When we consider that Faustus shows an urge to repent and that, overwhelmed by his wickedness, he continually questions himself about the desirability of turning to God and asking for his forgiveness, the conflict between these two ideas arises once more. Faustus's soul is crying out for redemption. And yet, for no apparent reason, some unseen force forbids this course of action and Faustus is therefore doomed to damnation in hell. This idea pervades the rest of the play. Faustus, as the end of the tragedy approaches, really wants to cry out for forgiveness for his sinful pact with the devil. He cries out that he knows that he is damned. After the words of the 'Old Man' he will repent his descent to hell during his quest for power and knowledge. His greed has led him to this fate. Yet he ponders for a moment and then declaims:

I do repent and yet I do despair
Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast
What shall I do to shun the snares of death?[26]

This means that he will ask God for redemption. It is difficult to decide whether, as John H Ingram declared, it remains merely a tragedy where "a mighty mind is gradually subjugated by the power of evil passions".[27] Or is it to say that Faustus is an example of the great tragedy of a man who is predestined to a terrible doom and who cannot escape, however much his soul cried out for release from its prefixed bonds. I take the latter view that Faustus was fated, like many Muslims believe they are, to make the choice that he was unable to avoid through an almighty and overpowering predestiny.[28]

A little later, an Arabic scholar, Edward Pococke, 1603 -1691, held the chair of Arabic at Oxford University. In 1650 he had published a short chapter on the history of the Arabs before Islam; however, in this work allegations against the morals of Muhammad were made, not helpful to Muslim – Christian discourse. As a collector of manuscripts on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he was in a unique position to influence his followers with regard to Islam. Pococke's attitude to Arabic philosophy was dismissive and inaccurate,[29] despite the fact that the holy Qur'an, its main philosophical text, had stood the test of time for a thousand years. His translation of Ibn Tufayl's 'The Living Son of the Awake' had an influence on Daniel Defoe as the model for 'Robinson Crusoe', and which was also influenced by Shakespeare's 'The Tempest.' Shakespeare's comedy, according to Octave Mannoni, is a springboard for the story of Prospero, Caliban and Ariel, whom Mannoni thinks are positively the original characters for the embryo of the escape novel, 'Robinson Crusoe' which recounts, "the long and difficult cure of a misanthropic neurosis".[30]

These traditional Islamic worldview stories, such as 'Robinson Crusoe', had their apogee in 'The Tempest' and are adventure myths set in island places bounded only by the imagination, morality and unwritten law. They stand as symbols for the area of the imagination which a reader makes for himself - the isolation, the clear boundaries, are part of the human limitation which the genre required. Tools are their subject in hand, and this is their satisfaction. Their air is contrived, artificial, constrained: theirs the remoteness, imprisonment, convictdom of the unfree. The only freedom that Crusoe maintains is the freedom of a personal existential struggle to end his own mysterious, irrational, island captivity.

But Edward Pococke, who had studied Arabic, did want to avoid 'mysterious irrationalities', basic beliefs and old tales that misrepresented Islam and Muhammad. He helped to introduce the use of primary sources as well as doing field-work in Islamic contexts, and his approach to Islam was through ancient texts, by way of historical rather than modern viewpoints. Writing in Latin meant, however, that he reached very few of the common people in England at the time.

There continued to be mysterious and strange interpretations of Islam throughout the period, but they continued side by side with some positive ones. Edward Gibbon gave a personal description of Prophet Mohammad in his book 'The Decline and fall of the Roman Empire'. Gibbon took Prophet Muhammad to be a humble, modest and unassuming human being whose rustic charm is appreciated :

'The good sense of Muhammad despised the pomp of royalty. The Apostle of God submitted to the menial offices of the family; he kindled the fire; swept the floor; milked the ewes; and mended with his own hands his shoes and garments. Disdaining the penance and merit of a hermit, he observed without effort of vanity the abstemious diet of an Arab.'[31]

However the image he portrayed was not totally positive as the author of the book considered Muhammad as an imposter.[32]

There were also travel books that referred to Islam and Muslims. Recording an eighteenth century journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem, [33] Henry Maundrell wrote an account of his

encounters with the Middle East. The travel book had its origins in the diary he carried with him on an Easter pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1697. He was born at Compton Bassett near Calne in Wiltshire in 1665. He attended Exeter College, Oxford from 1682 and then obtained his MA in 1688. Maundrell made no attempt to understand Islam or to read Arabic. His work was descriptive and he recorded local scenes with great detail. He was quite disinterested, and brought no local colour or human interest into his accounts. Maundrell's criticisms were insignificant and only carried his own mysterious prejudices and judgments about the region without bringing any humanity or warmth towards people of the Orient.[34]

In 1708, a scholar named Simon Ockley, along with edited editions by Edward Gibbon, the author, as we saw, of 'Decline and Fall', produced a 'History of Saracens',[35] the pre-Crusade inhabitants of Europe, referred to as the "Greeks and Latins", in which he made astonishing comparisons with the Arab nation. Ockley referred to the Arabs in "the age of Moses or Mahomet" [sic] thus: "the human brute, without arts or laws, almost without sense of language, is poorly distinguished from the rest of the animal creation"[36] A further slur upon the Arab nation was contained in the history, where it went at lengths to explain the perfidy and (dis)honourable conduct of its people:

The nice sensibility of honour, which weighs the insult rather than the injury, shed its daily venom on the quarrels of the Arabs: the honour of their women, and of their beards, is most easily wounded; an indecent action, a contemptuous word, can be expiated only by the blood of the offender.[37]

While it is true to say that, even in modern-day Arabia, there is normally a 'blood price' of money to be paid for the crime of murder, this is most often redeemed by forgiveness from the victim's family and does not usually result in the drawing of blood. Such comments only serve to endorse the general stereotype that Western travel writers would like, and still to this day, *do* place on Arabs' appearance, dress, manners, customs and religion.

Yet, contrarily, Ockley commented with favour in 'History of the Saracen Empire,' on the profound influence of prophet Muhammad, and found much to be admired in the spirituality of Islam: "The greatest success of Muhammad's life was effected by sheer moral force", he wrote. He went on to comment admiringly on the spiritual profundity of Islam that:

It is not the propagation but the permanency of his religion that deserves our wonder, the same pure and perfect impression which he engraved at Mecca and Medina is preserved after the revolutions of twelve centuries by the Indian, the African and the Turkish proselytes of the Koran....The Mahometans have uniformly withstood the temptation of reducing the object of their faith and devotion to a level with the senses and imagination of man. 'I believe in One God and Mahomet the Apostle of God' is the simple and invariable profession of Islam. The intellectual image of the Deity has never been degraded by any visible idol; the honors of the prophet have never transgressed the measure of human virtue, and his living precepts have restrained the gratitude of his disciples within the bounds of reason and religion.[38]

We begin to see here glimmers of an understanding of Islam and Muslims.[39]

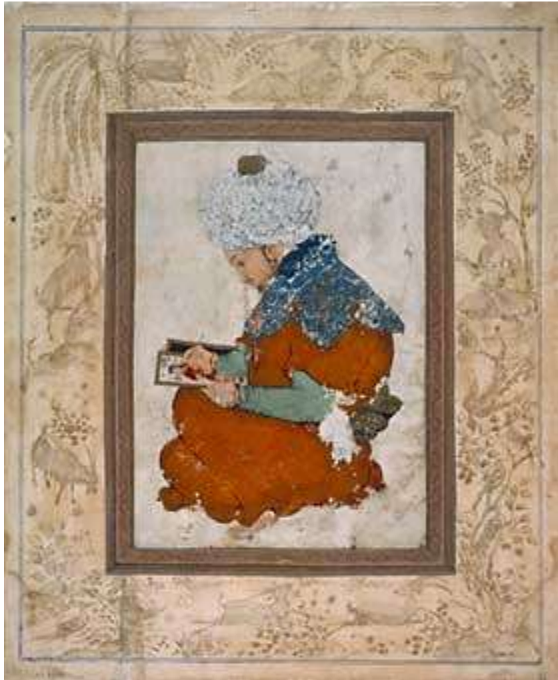
Thomas Moore's novel 'Lalla Rookh' is an Oriental romance, published in 1817.[40] The title is taken from the name of the heroine of the frame tale, the daughter of the 17th-

century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Engaged to the young king ofBukhara, Lalla Rookh goes forward to meet him, but falls in love with Feramorz, a poet from her entourage. The bulk of the work consists of four interpolated tales sung by the poet: ''The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan'' loosely based on the story of Al-Muqanna,''Paradise and the Peri'', ''The Fire-Worshippers'', and ''The Light of the Harem''. When Lalla Rookh enters the palace of her bridegroom she feints, but is restored at the sound of a well known voice. She awakes with rapture to find that the poet she loves is none other than the king to whom she is engaged.

Rich and wealthy people had begun to add Egypt and the Holy Land to their "Grand Tour", a requisite for the upper classes in the early nineteenth century. William Makepeace Thackeray's travel book, 'Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo',[41] published under the pseudonym "Tit-marsh", provided a stimulus for English people to go to visit the lands that he described and report on their findings.

The journey begins by sea at Gibraltar, meaning Jab al Tariq, named after the Moorish general, Tariq ibn Ziyad, who captured the promontory on the coast of Spain after a short siege. The Muslim presence in Gibraltar commenced on 27 April 711 when the Berber general led the attack on the Rock. Thackeray refers to the "Moorish castle" as "the only building about the Rock which has an air at all picturesque or romantic…" He then continues to refer to chivalrous romances in which Sir Huon of Bordeaux is made to prove his knighthood by travelling to Babylon and there extracting the Sultan's front teeth and beard. He hopes whimsically that he "is reconciled to the loss of his front teeth and whiskers – let us try to think that he is better off without them…"[4

Journeying on by steamship to Athens, which "was a disappointment", he soon came upon Constantinople where the holy month of Ramadan was being observed: "… no eating, the fish and meat fizzing in the work-shops are only for the Christians" and observes "meandering minstrels were there selling figs (in the name of the prophet, doubtless)". He encounters Islamic ornamentation where:



There was a man sitting in an open room, ornamented with fine long-tailed sentences of the Koran: some in red, some in blue; some written diagonally over the paper; some so shaped as to represent ships, dragons, or mysterious animals. The man squatted on a carpet in the middle of the room, with folded arms, wriggling his head to and fro, swaying about, and singing through his nose choice phrases from the sacred work.

In the room above he discovers a schoolroom where a child was being chastised and Thackeray comments "I pity that poor blubbering Mahometan: he will never be able to relish the "Arabian Nights" in the original, all his life long," he continued "they still occasionally beat a man for going into a mosque, but this is almost the only sign of ferocious vitality left in the Turk of the Mediterranean coast."[43]

A negative does not prove a positive, but arriving in the city he declared what he had *not s*een during the holy month of Ramadan rather than what he had witnessed:

I didn't see the dancing dervishes, it was Ramazan; nor the howling dervishes at Scutari, it was Ramazan; nor the interior of St Sophia, nor the women's apartments of Seraglio, nor the fashionable promenade of the Sweet Waters, always because it was Ramazan; during which period the dervishes dance and howl but rarely, their legs and lungs unequal to much exertion during the fast of fifteen hours. Royal palaces and mosques are shut; and though the Valley of the Sweet Waters is there, no one goes to walk; the people remaining asleep all day, and passing the night in feasting and carousing.[44]

While in the island of Rhodes, he refers to the Sultan as "the picture of debauch and ennui" and continues, in some scathing terms, an irrational allusion: "the awful camel driver, the supernatural husband of Khadija" to the holy prophet:

This sad spectacle of the decay of two of the great institutions of the world. Knighthood is gone – amen; it expired with dignity; face to the foe: and old Mahometanism is lingering just about to drop. … Think of the poor dear houris in Paradise, how sad they must look as the arrivals of the faithful become less and less frequent every day… the fountains of eternal wine are beginning to run rather dry, and of a questionable liquor; the ready-roasted-meat trees may cry "Come eat me", every now and then in a faint voice, without any gravy in it – but the faithful begin to doubt about the quality of the victuals. Of nights you may see the houris sitting sadly under them, darning their faded muslins: Ali, Omar and the Imaums are reconciled and have gloomy conversations; and the Chief of the Faithful himself, the awful camel driver, the supernatural husband of Khadija sits alone in a tumbledown kiosk, thinking moodily of the destiny that is impending over him; and of the day when the gardens of bliss shall be as vacant as the bankrupt Olympus…[45]

Finally arrived at Cairo, Thackeray makes the profoundly obtuse observation about the Pyramids that:

… the truth is, nobody was seriously moved. And why should they, because of an exaggeration of bricks ever so enormous? I confess, for my part, that the Pyramids are very big.

The constant theme is of Islam as 'Other', different, inaccessible, interesting, yet beneath the gaze of the "snob" Englishman he outlined in his "Book of Snobs."[46] A snob, of course, was an adaptation of the term to refer to people who felt that they were superior to others, and held those whom they encountered as being their social, intellectual (and religious) inferiors.

An exactly contemporary figure, George Gordon Noel, the sixth Baron Byron, born 22 January 1788, commonly known as Lord Byron, or Byron, was an English poet, a Lord and a leading figure in the Romantic movement. Among his best-known works are the lengthy narrative poems 'Don Juan', 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' and the short lyric "She Walks in Beauty".

Byron's wife, Anne Isabella, believed that he had become a "Mussulman". This contention probably arose from his great interest in the Levant and from his travels between 1809 and 1811 in the East that concluded in his 'Turkish Tales'. Determined to study the fascinating Orient, he arrived in Malta and took Arabic lessons. In Albania he made friends with the independent pasha, Ali, who loaned him a bodyguard for his journey to Corinth. But in Greece, if Greece is in the Orient, Byron's friends were Christians, yet there were numerous Turks there, with whom Byron may have made contact. Whether Byron knew Persian is

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