ANOTHER LOOK AT ORIENTALISM:
WESTERN LITERATURE IN THE FACE OF ISLAM

by

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ABSTRACT

Another Look at Orientalism seeks to establish a genealogical link between the fields of literary criticism and Islamic studies through a case study of the Qur’anic scholarship of Abraham Geiger (1810-1874). Responding to Edward Said’s thesis in Orientalism (1978), which polemically subordinates all Orientalist scholarship of the nineteenth century to some form of imperialist motive, this dissertation argues that Geiger, as a member of the Jewish diaspora in a German-speaking land, reacted against the Christian bias in the philological scholarship of his time by highlighting the heading “Abrahamic” in his work Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? (1833). I see Geiger’s work as one of the first attempts to critique the internal imperialism of Western/European culture and, as such, a precursor of comparative and postcolonial literary studies of the twentieth century.

From a theoretical angle, I combine Jacques Derrida’s philosophy, particularly on “Abrahamic hospitality” and “exemplarity,” with perspectives drawn from diaspora and postcolonial studies, such as those of Aamir Mufti, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, Sander Gilman, Susannah Heschel and Amos Funkenstein. The aim is to show that Geiger’s pioneering influence on the “objective” study of Islam—however motivated by his defence of Judaism in face of Christianity—should be seen as a gesture of hospitality towards Islam. I ultimately argue that Islam was not always exterior but also implicated in the construction of modern European identity.

In the first chapter, I show how the corroboration of a Judaeo-Christian essence in Western literary criticism, particularly in the works of canonical critics like Matthew Arnold and Erich Auerbach, was informed by the nineteenth-century background of the “Jewish question.” In the second chapter, I trace how postmodern Jewish theory, as influenced by Derrida’s
philosophy, has contended with the supersessionist and hegemonic implications of the Judaeo-Christian “hyphen.” Next, I turn to my case study of Abraham Geiger and contextualize his work with respect to the methods of German Orientalism and in relation to the German-Jewish emancipation struggle. I then analyze Geiger’s *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* in the light of Derrida’s philosophy of exemplarity and hospitality, as explained in Chapter Two.
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DEDICATION

In memory of Özgür and Özgür
INTRODUCTION

[O]ur common ‘culture,’ let’s be frank, is more manifestly Christian, barely even Judaeo-Christian. No Muslim is among us […] just at the moment when it is towards Islam, perhaps, that we ought to begin by turning our attention. (Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge” 45)

A wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; most crude, incondite;—insupportable stupidity, in short! Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran, […] yet natural stupidity is by no means the character of Mahomet’s Book; it is natural uncultivation rather. (Carlyle 76)

These two passages present two aspects of the same diagnosis, namely, that Islam and its sacred text, the Qur’an, have been politically, culturally and aesthetically othered within Western culture at least since the Enlightenment. Western literary criticism today, as far as it recognizes its own affinities with Judaeo-Christian scriptural traditions, is indeed marked by a curious absence of the topic of Islam and its primary texts. Derrida, for instance, characterizes this “institution of literature” as the product of a distinctly Christian, Western sensibility, associated with the Enlightenment values of democracy, secularism and critical thinking, as our “hope” and as the site of endless possibilities, including those of democracy and of responsibility toward the Other. He provocatively asks whether “there exists, in the strict literal meaning of the word, something like literature and a right to literature in non-Latin-Roman-Christian culture and, more generally […], non-European cultures” (Demeure 21-3). Elsewhere, notably in the colloquy on “Faith and Knowledge,” from which the opening quotation is taken, he interrogates the conventional opposition of Judaeo-Christian versus Muslim within the triad of the “Abrahamic” faiths. Rather than simply confirming an incommensurability between Western values and Islamic culture, Derrida’s comments have prompted me to reconsider the nature and responsibility of modern literary scholarship in the face of Islam. Derrida made me wonder: How
and when did our modern discourses of literature settle on an image of Islam as irreconcilable with “the right to say everything” (Derrida, *On the Name*)? Was Islam always exterior to the construction of modern European identity, or did the reception of its texts and traditions at a point in history influence how Europe and its “literature” defined itself?

This dissertation aims to scrutinize the othering or exteriorizing of Islam from the cultural sphere called “Europe.” It does this by searching for a historical horizon for an involvement of Islamic hermeneutics in the shaping of Western literary criticism via the Qur’anic scholarship of nineteenth-century German-Jewish scholars, in the hope of bringing attention to a neglected and severed genealogy within the cultural identity of Europe. In my investigation of the case of the German-Jewish scholar Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), I show that the special circumstances of certain Jewish scholars of Islam working in the European intellectual sphere, especially within the German tradition of historical philology, led to the creation of a more sympathetic or at least more neutral account of Islam. These scholars elevated Islam’s image from being a Christian heresy to that of a monotheistic world religion. At the same time, their minority position and subversion of the inner hegemony of German scholarship rule out the “imperialistic” motivations that Edward Said argues were in play in the disparaging and exoticizing representation of Islam in the nineteenth century (Said, *Orientalism*). In fact, I want to claim that the German-Jewish scholarship on Islam might have had the exactly opposite function, namely of freeing both Judaism and Islam from the internal imperialism of Western/Anglo-Saxon cultural supremacy by demonstrating the heterogeneous influences behind what we call European identity. Geiger in virtue of his diasporic Jewish position, for example, elevated the categories “Abrahamic” and “Semitic” above those of Indo-European, Hellenic, and Protestant that were favoured among Christian scholars at the time by suggesting a historical allegiance between Islam and Judaism in
Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? (1833) [What did Muhammad take form Judaism?]. This work, which is commonly considered the first example of modern scholarship on the Qur’an,\(^1\) provides the case study of this dissertation. I will argue that Geiger’s pioneering influence on the comparative and “objective” study of the three Abrahamic religions, and the close attention he paid to Islam, should be seen as a gesture of *hospitality* towards Islam and an early warning of the hegemonic character of Western culture and epistemology.

This project not only draws attention to the hospitality towards Islam in Geiger’s Qur’anic scholarship, but it also aims to scrutinize Western literary criticism’s affinity with the Judaeo-Christian tradition via literary appropriations of the Bible—both in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century—and the resulting othering of the third monotheism, Islam, its sacred text and its interpretive traditions. My investigation ranges from the emergence of the historical-philological study of the Bible in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment periods in Germany—as the intellectual backgrounds of Geiger—to the corroboration of a Judaeo-Christian essence in Western literature in the works of canonical critics like Matthew Arnold and Erich Auerbach. I further trace how postmodern Jewish theory, influenced by Jacques Derrida’s philosophy of deconstruction, has contended with the supersessionist and hegemonic implications of the Judaeo-Christian “hyphen.” The Jewish emancipation struggle and intellectual anti-Semitism of the nineteenth century in Germany and Britain, and the persecution and dispersion of Jewish populations after World War II, are emphasized as the common social and political backgrounds for the developments in literary and interpretive history accounted for here. The Jewish minority subversion of the assimilative and hegemonic European host culture

\(^1\) For Geiger’s pioneering influence in the field, see Andrew Rippin’s “Introduction” to *Qur’an: Style and Content* (xi-xii), and W. M. Watt’s *Bell’s Introduction to the Qur’an* (184).
prompt the main theoretical claim of this project. The claim is based on a Derridean theory that sees the identities of the host and guest in a relation of hospitality, including that of state hospitality, as unstable and imbricated rather than essential and oppositional. Geiger’s use of the German host society’s discursive practices, namely “disinterested” scholarship, for asserting the validity of his own Jewish identity and in effect the monotheistic value of Islam creates a fissure within European culture and an opening towards its religious Others. The changes that Geiger brought to the ways in which Judaism and Islam were henceforth perceived, at least within the fields of biblical and Orientalist scholarship, testify that European identity, which in this study is limited to German and British examples, does not just consist of a systematic othering and exteriorizing of the non-Christian monotheisms. In contrast, it shows us that Europe as host culture is constantly challenged and re-defined by the ethnic differences it bears within itself, as the case of the Jewish minority challenge to European culture and thought shows. I offer Derrida’s philosophy of deconstructive hospitality and exemplarity as a theoretical model for this project and as a corrective to Said’s thesis on Orientalism, which tends to depict Europe as a monolithic and homogeneous entity. It will be seen that Islam, via its Jewish adaptations in the nineteenth century, was dialectically involved in the making of a European identity. This identity is, of course, also challenged today by Muslim minorities within Europe.

CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS
Besides Derrida’s provocative observations on the Western literary institution, cited above, there are two further instances in the history of Western literary criticism that prompted this project.
The first is related to the inner development of literary criticism in its affinities with scriptural, particularly biblical, interpretation. The literary critical tradition within Western Anglo-American academia since the nineteenth century assumes that there is a deep bond between Western literature and the Bible but not with the Qur’an, even though the latter claims to be an extension, if only a correctional one, of the previous two biblical traditions. It seems that the Qur’an, as indicated by Carlyle in the passage quoted above, found a more comfortable place within a form of cultural study that was dedicated to the “dutiful” appreciation of “natural uncultivation,” rather than occupying a place in humanistic high culture as defined by Victorian cultural critics, such as Matthew Arnold. By contrast, the Bible, since Blake, Coleridge and Arnold in Britain, has been used to define and refine literary sensibility, as well as to undergird the aesthetic and ethical value of literature. Western literary criticism’s affiliation with the methods of nineteenth-century secular biblical criticism, also referred to as Higher Criticism, has been treated in critical works such as Hans W. Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (1974), Elinor Shaffer’s “Kubla Khan” and “The Fall of Jerusalem”: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770-1880 (1975), and in the works of Northrop Frye, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Prickett on Romantic literary theory. Blake’s aphorism “the Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art” is representative of Romantic literature’s secularizing effect on the reading of the Bible. However, such views of the Bible also served to sacralize literary and artistic sensibility. They thus reinforced Eurocentric high culture. When we look more closely at generative moments of literary criticism in nineteenth-century Britain—and this is largely true for Germany as well—we notice that the Christian Bible, and by association the Hebrew Bible after being stripped from its ethnic and particularistic elements, was adopted into the secular culture of self-cultivation, the
Qur’an as an Abrahamic late-comer was not. Therefore, Derrida is right when he notes that “our common culture” as literary critics is “manifestly Christian” with residual Judaic elements. How did this come to be? What genealogy can explain this current state of affairs? Is the history of modern literary criticism merely that of an opposition of the Judaeo-Christian to the Muslim?

Besides the critical scholarship on Romantic and Victorian appropriations of the Bible, there is also a line of modern literary critics who recognize a certain affinity with Judaeo-Christian theology in the methods of an apparently secular and culturally neutral discipline of literary criticism. The lineage of such awareness stretches from such founders of the discipline of comparative literature as Erich Auerbach and Ernst R. Curtius to more theoretically ambitious critics like Frank Kermode, Harold Bloom, and Geoffrey Hartman. While their interests constellate along the rough axis of Judaeo-Christian/Graeco-Latin (essentially European) texts, and favour consideration of the midrashic or biblical characteristics of modern literature, or conversely, the literary aspects of the Bible, Islam and its interpretive traditions is conspicuously absent. As it appears at the moment, indeed, Western literary criticism is closed to the influence of Islam’s sacred literature and its body of commentaries, except when they are considered relevant to discussions of postcolonial or subaltern identities. The effect of this alliance is to create the unfortunate illusion that modern, Western literature has an essential link with the Judaeo-Christian and Graeco-Latin texts and traditions. This project aims to show that such alliances were in fact temporal necessities, forged primarily as part of national and religious identity-building in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe.

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2 A recent study by Ziad Elmarsafy, The Enlightenment Qur’an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam (2009), is an exception. Elmarsafy’s argument that German and French Romanticism engaged closely with Qur’an translations and integrated some of their tenets exemplifies the deconstructive reading of Western literary history that the present project is promoting. See also the Epilogue.
Although it would be easy to bracket this exclusion of Islam as a sign of Judaeo-Christian bias in literary studies, upon closer scrutiny we notice that the commonly employed hyphenation of “Judaeo-Christian” does in fact carry a significant tension and opposition within itself. Indeed, before Western literary criticism discovered its Judaeo-Christian affinities—with the Bible as common ground—nineteenth-century German-Jewish intellectuals found a Judaeo-Islamic hyphenation more meaningful. The Hebraism /Hellenism dichotomy, for example, has an important place in the critical traditions of the nineteenth century. Originally employed in biblical hermeneutics, the binary was carried over to secular philology during the nineteenth century and turned into a typology for the respectively moral and aesthetic values in a literary work, most prominently by Heinrich Heine in Germany and Matthew Arnold in Britain. The residues of this binary opposition are still visible today within literary theoretical discussions, even when, in some cases, they integrate postcolonial and poststructuralist considerations. What often gets overlooked, however, is that in the nineteenth century the “Hebraism” pole stood also for Islam before becoming an exclusive symbol for Judaism. As Maurice Olender argued in *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (1989), the emphasis on Hebrew and Hellene qualities in literary and historical criticism came out of a complex network of race, religion and language theories, and Hebraism/Hellenism was used interchangeably with another binary—now largely abandoned in the vaults of history—namely that of Indo-European (or Aryan) and Semitic. It was at this critical time of discursive formations that the German-Jewish scholar Abraham Geiger promoted the category “Semitic monotheism” over the Philhellenism and Christian-Protestant bias in contemporary scholarship by suggesting a

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3 An example of such a discussion can be found in *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation* (1993) by Vassilis Lambropoulos, in which he draws a genealogy for the archetypes of Hebraism and Hellenism in literary interpretation, and claims that Western interpretation, even in its poststructuralist or postcolonialist forms, developed around the internal tension of Hellenic and the Hebraic poles.
The phenomenon of German-Jewish scholarship on Islam was not a mere accident but was strictly tied to the Jewish emancipation movement and to the ways that the newly emerging nation states were defining their laws of hospitality in the face of their Jewish minorities. Jewish scholars of Islam turned the orientalization of their history as a Semitic tribe by the philological sciences to their advantage by reversing it and presenting the Semitic (or Hebraic, Abrahamic, monotheistic) qualities as the true origins of a European Enlightenment thinking that emphasized a universal ethics (which they defined as “ethical monotheism” instead of Protestant individualism) and cosmopolitanism. Out of this historical allegiance of the Jewish with the Muslim, for example, came the retrospective image of an exemplary cosmopolitanism in Medieval Spain under an Islamic state. In the field of Jewish studies, it was Geiger who first proposed this revisionist image. This “Jewish Philislamism,” as Susannah Heschel calls it, coincided with a tumultuous time in the history of European Jewry, characterized by the possibility of emancipation, integration and assimilation that came with Enlightenment reason and rationalism on the one hand, and by the rise of intellectual anti-Semitism, nativism and nostalgia for a pagan, pre-Christian Europe on the other. Following Geiger, Jewish intellectuals, most prominently in Germany the members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement, who were committed to the scientific and historical study of Judaism, and in Britain Benjamin Disraeli and some non-Jewish intellectuals like Arnold and George Eliot, who were supportive of Jewish legal emancipation, promoted the idea that “Hebraism” was an integral part of European character. As a result, the pressure exerted by a Jewish minority presence succeeded in creating alternative discourses on Europe’s identity in the nineteenth century. This state of affairs
contrasts with Said’s depiction of a Europe that was imposing a unified identity, based on white, Protestant and Anglo-Saxon supremacy.

The second instance in the history of Western literary criticism that prompted this project is Said’s theory on the Orientalism of nineteenth-century European culture and scholarship. I have chosen a case from German-Jewish Orientalism in order to respond to the stigma that has been attached to the academic study of Islam since the publication of Orientalism, in which Said claims that nineteenth-century Orientalist philology served as an imperial vehicle for Christian cultural domination and that current American extensions of the field fulfill a similar function. He ignores German Orientalist scholarship of the nineteenth century entirely, since he is convinced that this scholarship was dependent on the textual sources provided through Britain and France’s imperial ventures in the Middle East and thus cannot be exempt from the effects of imperialism (Orientalism 19). In fact, Said completely ignores the fact that today’s critical scholarship on Islam and the Qur’an—in the non-polemical form in which it is practised in Middle Eastern Studies departments—was inaugurated by Jewish scholars who worked within the tradition of Wissenschaft des Judentums, rather than by the mainly British and French figures that Said puts under anti-imperialist scrutiny in Orientalism. Said’s failure to acknowledge this fact was immediately noticed and disputed by contemporary Jewish Islamicists like Bernard Lewis (Lewis 1979). Subsequently, essays on nineteenth-century Jewish Islamicists who were sympathetic to Islam and promoted the cause of Islam were collected in a volume titled The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis (1999). Even though the essays themselves were insightful, and among them was an essay on Geiger by Jacob Lassner, the volume did not further an involvement with Islam but instead contributed to the existing polemics between American/Israeli Islamicists and Said.
Even though the absence of nineteenth-century German and German-Jewish Orientalism in Said’s study constitutes a fairly noticeable gap, his reference to the anti-Semitic context of nineteenth-century Orientalism invites further investigation of the role of the minority positions of these German-Jewish scholars and how they might have influenced their sympathetic or relatively neutral account of Islam. Said is in fact unable to ignore this similarity between the attitude of Orientalism towards the East and that of anti-Semitism towards the minority Jews. He briefly but strikingly implies that Orientalism was not only directed at the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam but also at Europe’s Jewish minorities as the Semitic Orientals within:

by an almost inescapable logic, I have found myself writing the history of a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism and, as I have discussed it in its Islamic branch, Orientalism resemble each other very closely is a historical, cultural, and political truth that needs only to be mentioned to an Arab Palestinian for its irony to be perfectly understood. (27-8)

While questions around secularism, exile and diaspora have occupied a significant place in Said’s writings, he never closely engaged with the theoretical implications of the Jewish minority position within Europe—his admiration of Erich Auerbach as an exilic intellectual was Said’s closest treatment of this subject. Said’s scholarly choices are highly determined by his political commitments in the present, and his avoidance of a closer engagement with nineteenth-century Jewish minorities should be taken as a strategic aspect of his “Arab Palestinian” subjectivity and commitments. How else can we explain the lack of this very important background—apart from the fleeting aside just noted—from a critic who was adamant about the “worldliness” of texts, which “even in their most rarified forms are always enmeshed in circumstance, time and place” (WTC 34-5)? If Said had brought up the case of the German-Jewish Orientalists in Orientalism, his overall thesis, construed to function as a liberatory argument for subaltern Muslim and Arab voices, would not have worked as forcefully since Islam was represented more positively in the
work of these Jewish scholars. It is hard to argue that Said’s liberatory argument was not effective. After all, it is to him in part that we owe the field of postcolonial literary theory. In this project, therefore, I read Said’s writings in light of his own “being in the world,” namely, the circumstances of his own minority position as an American-Arab-Palestinian. I argue that Said’s idiosyncratic concept of “secular criticism” comes out of his “affiliation” with exilic and minority intellectuals like Erich Auerbach, to which can be added his favourable accounts of Jonathan Swift, Vico, Joseph Conrad and Frantz Fanon as either minority critics or ones who sympathized with the position of a minority culture (WTC 20-3). What he calls the “worldliness” of these authors is in fact the quality of Otherness they are assigned either by the laws of state hospitality or by themselves. Said in his writings makes this Otherness the condition of criticism or of the critical distance of a scholar to his or her subject, the condition of what he calls “secular criticism.” In my dissertation, I—as a Canadian-Turkish-German—not only affiliate myself with Said’s minority existence but also create a reverse lineage from Said, via Lionel Trilling, Erich Auerbach, and Matthew Arnold, to Abraham Geiger.

Said’s reference to the Jewish minorities of Europe as fellow victims of Orientalism and the questions this raises about the role of state hospitality towards minorities have been noticed by scholars such as Aamir Mufti in the field of literary studies and Susannah Heschel in Jewish studies. Mufti in his work Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture (2007), poses the “question of Jewish emancipation-assimilation as an early, and exemplary, crisis of minority that has accompanied the development of liberal-secular state and society in numerous cases around the world” (7). Heschel, on the other hand, creates a direct link between Said’s and Geiger’s minority positions within academia, in her book Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus (1998). According to Heschel, Geiger in his activities as a
reform rabbi as well as a scholar of Jewish history critiqued “the academy’s construction of ‘Judaism’ and the political uses to which it was put,” a process which she sees as analogous to Said’s thesis in Orientalism (Abraham Geiger 21). Both Said and Geiger speak for their minority position within the discursive limits that their chosen discipline prescribes: Said as a literary scholar and Geiger as scholar of monotheistic religions. Besides their minority positions, they also have in common their disciplinary lineage in the historical-philological method of the nineteenth century.

Although displaying a rather anti-humanistic world view in his Orientalism, in his later works such as Humanism and Democratic Criticism (2004) and his further notes on Orientalism, Said indeed comes to defend the humanistic brand of historical philology of the nineteenth century that produced comparativists like Auerbach and Curtius. Said comments that “philology as applied to Weltliteratur involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and […] hospitality. Thus the interpreter’s mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other” (“Orientalism, Once More” 876). Said seemingly ignores the fact that Auerbach’s Mimesis totalizes Western literature and civilization into the dialectical tension between Hebraism and Hellenism, and chooses Auerbach as an exemplary intellectual mainly based on his being a Jewish intellectual exiled in Istanbul by the Nazis. Said’s later defense of humanism and his positive assessment of nineteenth-century historical philology—which he had previously dismissed as the “the laboratory” of “European ethnocentrism”—together with his note on the anti-Semitic background of Orientalism, prompt us to re-evaluate the phenomenon of the German-Jewish scholar of Islam in the nineteenth century (Orientalism 132). These scholars, due to their own subject positions as aliens within Europe, affiliated with the rationalism of scholarly language and with the Enlightenment “reason” of the age, with its focus on cosmopolitanism,
instead of with the literary Romanticism of the time that valorized German roots and languages. In their scholarship they developed a cosmopolitan appreciation of world literatures and cultures, as inaugurated by figures like Herder and Goethe. In this sense, Abraham Geiger as a German-Jewish scholar of Islam, with his adapted language of “disinterested” scholarship and his subject positions as a member of a Jewish minority within Europe, can be seen to occupy an intermediate position between Said’s insistence on humanistic secular criticism and his own minority position facing the hegemonic culture of the West.

THEORETICAL FRAMING
The questions of my project are largely raised by Said’s writings, and they are questions about state hospitality in face of the Jewish minorities of Europe, and about the hospitality implicit in the method of historical philology in the nineteenth century. I answer these questions by adopting Derrida’s philosophies of exemplarity and of deconstructive hospitality. Three essays by Derrida, “The Other Heading,” “Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German” and “Hos(ti)pitality,” together with his book The Gift of Death, aided me in formulating a theory of exemplarity and a theory of deconstructive hospitality—which Derrida often calls “Abrahamic hospitality”—to be employed in the assessment of Geiger’s historical circumstances and his scholarship on the Qur’an.

Exemplarity in Derrida’s philosophy is the condition of expressing a particularity, such as a cultural, religious, or gendered identity (in its unexpressed or inexpressible form Derrida calls it a singularity) through a common language and discourse that is available to the uttering
subject at a particular period in history. For example, Derrida in “Interpretations at War” reads Hermann Cohen’s Kantian defence of a symbiotic German-Jewish nationalism as a product of a German-Jewish intellectual psyche, that is, a hyphenated identity that responds to certain urgencies of Cohen’s present. In other words, Derrida reads Cohen’s hyper-nationalism as a rhetorical strategy situated strictly in certain circumstances and discourses of the nineteenth century. Expressing and asserting a particularity—in this case of Jewish identity—by these means usually involves adapting the language or discourse of the repressive, hegemonic and usurping Other. Cohen adapted Kant’s ethical philosophy, even though the latter was mostly disparaging of the particularism of Jewish identity. Similarly, I argue that Geiger’s adaptation and subversion of the language of secular biblical criticism for the assertion of his Jewish particularity—and in a parallel world, Muhammad’s adaptation of Judaism’s monotheistic tenets as described in Geiger’s work—constitute examples of exemplarity. In a way, exemplarity is the deconstructive version of Said’s worldly criticism and cultural materialism (as a way of worlding texts), but exemplarity pays closer attention to the instability and temporality of the guest and host, and to the entanglements of one’s own language with the language of the Other.

Derrida’s notion of deconstructive hospitality emerges from the philosophy of exemplarity and from his examination of the three Abrahamic faiths, their texts, their figures and their interactions. It is a way of reading the past by paying attention to the instabilities, contingencies and temporalities of the adapted discourses and chosen identities, whether cultural, religious or gendered. Derrida’s concept of Abrahamic hospitality, rather than essentializing the condition of hospitality to Abrahamic or monotheistic morality, thus refers to the momentary decision that the prophet Abraham makes on Mount Moriah, as described in The Gift of Death. It is also deconstructive in that it acknowledges that both the case in history that is read with
hospitality and the act of reading it with hospitality in the present will inevitably result in some form of conceptual violence and cultural, religious or gendered hegemony; hence Derrida’s syllogism in “hos(t)i)pitality.” This contradictory view of hospitality means that the welcoming of the Other will inevitably result in the suppression of other Others. Therefore, I read Geiger’s Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? not only as an example of exemplarity, but also as one of a deconstructive hospitality that welcomes the previously disparaged religion of Islam—since in the Christian view it is nothing but a historical heresy—as a valid faith and as a monotheistic world religion. However, Geiger’s work is also violent against Islam, since in its attempt to elevate Judaism’s image in his current discourses and cultural discussions, it erases Islam’s own particularity by making it a mere historical extension of Judaism. To put this in simpler terms, I employ a Saidean worldly criticism in my reading of Geiger’s Qur’anic scholarship but with a hospitable difference, that is, by welcoming the Orientalist scholar of the nineteenth century and his ally Islam into our discourse of literary studies. If we are to hope for a real engagement with Islam on the part of Western literary studies, we first have to scrutinize the assimilative power of culture, as insisted on by Said, and recognize the inner tensions within this culture. When talking about religious or ethnic particularities, it is easy to slip into a binary of assimilation versus authentic identity. Hospitality entails reading the past with the awareness that the Other is implicated in the making of the self, and that the only options are not either assimilation into the more powerful culture or preservation of the “authentic” self as a site of resistance. In this way, we may be able to discern a thread of difference within the hegemonic narrative that can be picked up and turned into a circling repetition of history that makes the encounter with the entirely Other, in this case Islam, possible. This can be done by seeing the heterogeneities implied in the history of “our culture” and by recognizing the differences within
it in the present. Therefore, instead of reading nineteenth-century Orientalism through Said’s model of the Western hegemonic misrepresentation of an “authentic” Orient, I employ Derrida’s philosophy of exemplarity and his concept of hospitality as means for describing the complexity of alterity, with the aim of drawing attention to the nowadays popular but highly problematic binary of “Islam and the West.”

Derrida’s philosophy is one source of account-taking of the differences and “Others within” in a discussion of Western culture and literature. I have also consulted studies that turn from a postcolonial to a more diasporic understanding of cultural criticism. I find, for example, the de-territorializing theories of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy especially suitable for the cultural and literary study of Islamic texts. I posit, with them, that Islam is part of the binary “Islam and the West” not because of any intrinsic values it may possess that are essentially incompatible with the intrinsic values of the West. I think this binary, just like the Jewish-Christian, Indo-European and Hebrew-Hellene binaries in the nineteenth century, was born out of the experience of Muslim, Arab or Middle-Eastern identities expressing and asserting their particularities from within the discourses of the West. In other words, today’s binary “Islam and the West” is a result of an encounter between the “minorities” and the Western nations that designate them as such, just as the binary Judaeo-Christian came into being through the intellectually assertive Jewish minorities of the nineteenth-century. In the field of Jewish studies, I am particularly grateful to the works of Sander Gilman, and of Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, which provide insightful examples from the experiences of American or European Jews without essentializing the notions of diaspora and exile as exclusively Jewish qualities and instead opening them up to further differences, such as those of Muslims within Europe and North America.
In the field of modern Islamic studies, I have been inspired by works that take a phenomenological approach to the study of Islam and its texts. Such an approach usually dictates that we take the various kinds of scholarships on Islam not as secondary sources but as primary data in order to draw conclusions on “how” Islam is represented under various circumstances and by various subjectivities, instead of trying to find out “what” Islam is. Especially important for my dissertation in this respect are the studies of Maxime Rodinson, Norman Daniel, Tomoko Masuzawa, Mohammed Arkoun, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and Andrew Rippin, which have taught me that the adapting of a Muslim cultural identity does not have to entail a conflict with scholarship, literature, secularism or even disbelief.

SIGNIFICANCE

The current project aspires to be interdisciplinary in its methods and subjects, but it also aims mainly to address certain urgencies within the field of literary studies and theory, which is facing the difference and particularity of Islam today. I suggest that there is a need for a Muslim cultural studies that would take into account the insights provided by all these fields in order to open a space for Muslim difference within Europe today. Considered in such a light, the case of Abraham Geiger, a nineteenth-century German-Jewish scholar of Islam and member of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, with his “neutral” or sympathetic account of Islam, motivated by the Jewish emancipation struggle, may be seen to constitute a stage of thinking towards inclusion of Islam within today’s literary and cultural studies.
The cultural and political struggle of European Jewry is also important for my project, as it forms a provocative analogy with the current situation of Muslims within Europe and the West. Back in the nineteenth century, the state hospitality laws of the major European nations were defined partially with the Jews in mind as the aliens within. Today these same laws are debated and reformed partially with Muslims in mind as the aliens within. My interest in the subject of German-Jewish history of the nineteenth century was heightened, for example, when I found out that my own legal status at birth, as a second-generation Turkish “guest worker” in Germany, was an effect of these nineteenth-century laws originally formulated in part to settle the legal status of Germany’s Jewish minorities by means of the introduction of the category “citizenship by blood (jus sanguinis),” a category which deliberately excludes those whose ancestors are not German by blood from gaining citizenship. Parallels between nineteenth century’s Jewish minorities and Muslim minorities today do not end with the state laws that define them as such. Discussions of multiculturalism both in Europe and in North America nowadays are usually marked by an anxiety about dealing with an inassimilable Muslim culture within, which seems to bear some core values entirely in conflict with Western ones. Gilman notes how nowadays this apparent clash between Western values and being Muslim resemble the discussions of the incompatibility of the figure of the Jew and the “culture of [Enlightenment] decorum” in the nineteenth century (Multiculturalism and the Jews). I do not propose that the Jewish emancipation struggle of the nineteenth-century is directly analogues to the accommodation of Muslim voices within today’s Europe. In contrast to the nineteenth-century context, there are today cases of Muslim anti-Semitism and of Jewish anti-Islamism. One of the limitations of this project, therefore, is its occlusion of aspects of a highly complex political context, particularly when considering Said’s investment in the political struggles of Palestine. That aspect of the
discussion must be reserved for another study. For now, the aim is to draw attention to the
double bind that Jewish and Muslim minorities within Europe experience and how this
influences their cultural productions. Gilman, for example, suggests that “it is in the world of
multiculturalism that literature […] generates the cultural capital to allow an ‘outsider’ to
become a multicultural insider” (22). My project tries to respond to Gilman’s invitation by
further investigating how “cultural capital” is negotiated between majority and minority
discourses.

With this study, I hope to provide the insight that hyphenated expressions like “Judaeo-
Christian” and unified identities like “Abrahamic” express violence as well as hospitality and
must therefore be employed with this caution if new paradigms are to be invented to allow
dialogue with Islam within literary theory and criticism. I also see this dissertation as closing a
gap between existing cultural analysis of Islam and the literary theories that take account of
scriptural interpretations in the formation of religious identities and cosmopolitanisms. Overall,
my study hopes to contribute to an understanding of Islam as a collection of personal testimonies
that were steeped in their own contemporary and historical liberation struggles against
hegemonic powers, while resisting the current and dangerous depictions of Islam as a monolithic
and homogeneous belief system set against Western modernity.
CHAPTER ONE
Edward Said on Culture and the Western Canon, or How the Judaeo-Christian View Came to Dominate Modern Literary Criticism

[T]he version of [our] culture inculcated by professional humanists and literary critics, the approved practice of high culture is marginal to the serious political concerns of society. (Said, WTC 3)

What Said means by “serious political concerns” in the above passage includes the West’s relation to the Islamic world. Said’s critique of literary criticism as such is prompted by the political urgencies that he responded to throughout his life, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Western reactions to the Islamist revolution in Iran, the wars between the United States and Iraq, and finally Islamic terrorism. There was a noticeable lack of interest in Islam’s primary texts and its interpretive traditions within literary studies when compared to the prominent presence therein of the Bible until Edward Said brought the topic of Islam to the attention of our discipline. At the same time, Said’s judgment on the Orientalist scholarship of the nineteenth century as an imperial vehicle has put a freeze on close engagements with Islam within literature departments. The new urgency for literary studies in this post-Saidean era, therefore, is to respond to the problem of Islam and the West in light of today’s political and social concerns.

Since the publication of Orientalism (1978), Islam has not only increasingly become the centre of political conflict in the world but also significantly grown beyond being the colonial subject or the imperial Other and become a minority force within the West that needs to be reckoned with in relation to the identity of the West. More specifically, we need to consider how Islam’s reception might have interacted with Western literature and its critical traditions. My
intention in the present chapter, therefore, is to unravel Said’s interpretation of literary history, which presumes that Islam and its primary texts were consistently othered and hegemonized. Through a critical and deconstructive reading of Said’s works and certain elements of our institutional history, I hope to reveal a thread of difference towards a more forgiving approach to nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship, and thus perhaps open up a possibility for reading Islam and the Qur’an itself within the disciplines of literary studies. With such an approach in mind, I will read Said’s contrasting of two figures from literary criticism, Matthew Arnold and Erich Auerbach, by contextualizing them through the Jewish identity struggle in the nineteenth century. The relation that these two critical figures have to the “Jewish question” and how they translate their personal responses into universal paradigms in their criticism will serve in an exemplary way to challenge the contemporary misconception that the idea of Europe was and always must be posited against Islam.

Said’s employment of Arnold and Auerbach as exemplary figures for his description of a “secular criticism” that would be more respectful and inclusive towards Islam will be treated first as an ethical, and second as a methodical choice. First, I will draw attention to Said’s ethical gesture of privileging the discourse of the guest over the host in his ethics of hospitality. I will then supplement Said’s ethics with the deconstructive hospitality of Jacques Derrida. While Said’s theory of Orientalism cannot be thought apart from deconstruction, Said contends that deconstructionist philosophy is in essence unethical because in its attempt to unsettle existing meanings it fails to take responsibility in the face of the current social and political urgencies. While Derridean interpretation moves indecisively between meanings and possibilities, not settling on one as the primary meaning, Said, as his idiosyncratic comparison of Matthew Arnold and Erich Auerbach shows, always tries to settle on a meaning by making exemplary alliances.
with certain intellectual figures. In fact, he calls such a gesture a worlded, or responsible interpretation: “It is the avoidance of this process of taking comradely responsibility for one’s reading that explains, I think, a crippling limitation in those varieties of deconstructive readings that end (as they began) in undecidability and uncertainty” (*Humanism* 66). In Chapter Two, I show how Derridean hospitality intentionally blurs the identities of the host and the guest in a relation of hospitality, and thus invites the perpetual movement between particular identity and universal language without a necessary closure. The ethics of hospitality suggests that admitting to undecidability but being open to the unexpected meaning in a state of hospitality can just as well be an act of responsibility. I shall concentrate on the examples of Matthew Arnold and Erich Auerbach to show how Arnold’s “culture,” just as much as Auerbach’s Western “canon” unsettle the relation of the host and guest in that they can both be read as hospitality and as hegemonic totalities when viewed in the context of the Jewish emancipation struggle of the nineteenth century and its sequels. In looking for gestures of hospitality, I shall keep in mind that hospitality is impossible and violent, while also suggesting that it is the only possible way of taking responsibility in the face of Islam today. As a result, it will become apparent that Said’s either/or approach to literary culture, his reluctance “to remain on the threshold” (Derrida, “How to avoid” 122), has to do with his own particular sense of responsibility.

The discussion of Said’s ethical choice will also shed light on his methodological dilemma relating to the difficulty of representing and defending the value of a particular identity, which in his case is the Muslim or Arabic identity. Said’s criticism often appears idiosyncratic to his critics because at times he presents particular identities and universal values as mutually exclusive while at other times he tries to hold on to universal concepts such as secular criticism, democracy or humanism. I would suggest that Said’s dilemma results from an incomplete use of
deconstructive exemplarity, particularly in his thesis on Orientalism. Deconstructive exemplarity is an ethical act that pays attention to the tangible particularity of the Other in its singularity, while it admits that this singularity is only accessible through the general and the philosophical. In an attempt to dispute the universalist discourses of the nineteenth century and to give voice to the particular and the subaltern, Said initially denies his own universalizing and humanistic tendencies. By refusing to replace Orientalism with an alternative method that can be expressed by a universal language, Said instead offers negative and positive examples of criticism, Auerbach appears as a good and Arnold as a bad example. In this chapter, I show how Said’s judgments of Arnold and Auerbach are based on the relation of these figures to the Orient. In the first instance, Said represents Arnold’s criticism, particularly his culture concept, as the powerful discourse of the Western host in colonial relationship. In the second case, Auerbach’s exile in the Orient and his Jewish identity take on a symbolic quality that turns Auerbach’s criticism into the voice of the subaltern and even Oriental guest within the West. In turn, Said’s ethics is based on reversing the power relation between the West and the Orient by privileging the discourse of the guest, the exilic and the subaltern over the usurping universal discourses of the Western host. Though very liberative in function, Said’s thesis on Orientalist scholarship fails deconstruction, since Said only attempts to reverse the dichotomy between host and guest, rather than taking into consideration their reciprocity and temporality.

Said’s privileging of the “Oriental” side of the East-West dichotomy has to do with his commitment to the Palestinian liberation struggle. Quite often, reference to Western politics in the Middle East undercuts his literary scholarship. His 1993 article “Nationalism, Human Rights, and Interpretation” is a case in point. In this article, Said starts by discussing Arnold’s cultural nationalism and fleetingly proves how Arnold constructs his hegemonic notion of culture based
on a Eurocentric viewpoint. However, Said devotes approximately two thirds of the article to the discussion of the Palestinian conflict and the first Gulf War. This article is a perfect example of Said employing his disciplinary discourse to draw attention to the current urgencies for which he is taking responsibility. In *The World, the Text, the Critic*, for example, he explains that the essays in this collection—primarily addressed to a literary critical community—cannot be thought apart from his previous “three books dealing with the history of relations between the East and West: *Orientalism* (1978), *The Question of Palestine* (1979), and *Covering Islam* (1981)” (27). Indeed, when discussing the political situation in Palestine he easily resorts to a simplified analogy between “Zionism and European imperialism,” which he claims “are epistemologically, hence historically and politically, coterminous in their view of resident natives” (*Question* 83). Said justifies such simplified connections by claiming to draw attention to “the relationship between scholarship and politics” (*WTC* 27). In the meantime, his acknowledgement of Zionism’s emergence as a reaction to European anti-Semitism is very limited or absent. With the aim to voice his political commitment to the Palestinian cause, he fails to be open to further differences and narratives of resistance, such as the Jewish emancipation struggle of the nineteenth century, of which Zionism was only one of the outcomes.4

Nevertheless, Said himself often demonstrates more openness to instability and reciprocity between the colonized and the colonizers than some of the postcolonial criticism that follows him. Later in his career, for example, he takes a step back in his critique of nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship when he speaks of the historical-philological method as a sign of

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4 For a discussion of Said’s ambivalence towards the relationships between Orientalism, Zionism and anti-Semitism, see Kalmar and Penslar’s introduction to the edited volume *Orientalism and the Jews* (2005).
“a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and [...] hospitality” (“Orientalism Once More” 876). Said discovers the deconstructive—or to use his own term “contrapuntal”—function of the historical-philological method in its ability to resist hegemonic discourses from within through a genuine sense of hospitality. This is the same historical-philological method—as practiced by Orientalism and adopted by Matthew Arnold—that he had previously dismissed as universalist, nationalist and hegemonic (in Orientalism). In his attempt to represent the singularity of the suppressed Other, humanistic philology becomes the last of his positive examples for the secular criticism he tried to promote throughout his life.

My point of departure is Said’s The World, the Text, and the Critic (1983), with a special focus on the introductory chapter “Secular Criticism,” which William Hart calls the “Rosetta Stone” of Said’s cultural critique (8). I will first provide a critique of Said’s synecdochal treatment of Matthew Arnold, and then turn to his treatment of Erich Auerbach. Said positions these two intellectuals with respect to their Oriental Other: in Arnold’s case, Britain’s Middle-Eastern colonies; and in Auerbach’s case, his location of Oriental exile, Istanbul. However, there is also another, unmentioned commonality to these two critics, namely their relation to the “Jewish question,” with Arnold situated at the beginning of modern anti-semitism and Auerbach at the tragic outcome of it. By choosing Auerbach as an exemplary critic, I argue, Said already opens up the possibility of taking Jewish existence in Europe as an exemplary case for Muslim minority identity within the West. Accordingly, I reinterpret Arnold and Auerbach’s writings through the lens of postmodern Jewish studies and deconstruction with the aim of demonstrating that totalizations like “culture” or “canon” for Arnold and Auerbach respectively are in fact circling and inclusive movements of dynamism. Rather than ideals borrowed from a Platonic universe, the concepts of culture and canon should be read as turns and bends in history that
allow an encounter with the radical Other while inevitably suppressing other Others through a language of universality. This deconstructive model of history is different than the nineteenth-century phenomenology that perceives history as a motion of progress towards perfection and universal truth. The aim here is to point out that the illusion today of a Judaeo-Christian alliance in literary criticism is a result of an identity struggle at a certain historical period rather than an essential and transcendent given. We must therefore ask ourselves: If the Judaeo-Christian can exist in literary studies despite its tensions and oppositions, can the Muslim-Judaeo-Christian also exist under the heading Abrahamic without its constituents losing their otherness, with their oppositional tensions alive but in alliance, as a response to our current urgencies?

MATTHEW ARNOLD THE ORIENTALIST

Said on Arnold’s Orientalism

In Edward Said’s works, especially in The World, the Text, the Critic (hereafter WTC), Matthew Arnold’s notion of culture is described as a great assimilative power that absorbs and neutralizes everything in its path. Most importantly, culture serves as an uncritical “agent of closure,” like the religion that it claims to supplement (Said, WTC 290). For Said, Arnold’s abstract notion of high culture stands for Anglo-Protestant culture that is valorized by cultural apparatuses like

5 Derrida describes the open-ended, and messianic understanding of history that he contrasts to Hegel’s as follows: “[i]t opens onto what remains origin-heterogeneous…; [t]o follow the path of a repetition which crosses the path of the entirely other. The entirely other announces itself in the most rigorous repetition. And this repetition is also the most vertiginous and the most abyssal” (Of Spirit 113). Later, he relates the process in which the singularity of the Other is recognized to the implied hospitality in this historical model: “the invention of the other […] would come through the economy of the same, indeed while miming or repeating it, to offer a place for the other” (“Psyche” 60).
scholarship and art to justify British state suzerainty abroad; therefore, it functions not only to enhance class differences, but also to establish the superiority of certain races and religions over others. As a matter of fact, Said’s thesis on hegemonic representation and the making of the Orient in *Orientalism* (1978) will only work if these things are done in the service of such high culture; that is, a culture which is controlled by a state built on the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and of Protestant Christianity. Said’s thesis thus excludes, for example, the context of nineteenth-century Jewish emancipation, even though it includes the colonial relation to the Muslim Orient. And yet, it may be claimed that Arnoldian culture, considered as representative for Europeanism and its relation to its others, has always been dynamic and dependant on converging and diverging discourses on race and religion in Victorian Britain. Indeed, Arnold’s texts with their contradictions and inconsistencies are perfect examples of worldly responsiveness in Said’s terms. Arnold’s dialectic of Hebraism and Hellenism in particular, when read through the history of nineteenth-century Anglo-Jewry (the history of emancipation, anti-Semitism, and the acculturation process), discloses an ambivalence that requires a reevaluation of the omnipotent hegemony that Said reads into Arnold’s notion of culture. It will be seen that Arnoldian culture, especially as sustained by the indeterminate function of criticism, creates an interpretive and historical fissure, instead of closure, when read through the lens of Jewish difference.

The chapter on “Secular Criticism” and the discussion of Ernest Renan and Louis Massignon in *WTC* reveal the paradoxes in Said’s judgment of Arnoldian culture and his subsequent conclusion that humanistic fields like Orientalist scholarship were “sustained by the unexamined prestige of culture” (279). A determining factor in Said’s judgment of Arnoldian culture in relation to Orientalist scholarship is his ethics, which privileges the guest over the host.
Said’s dilemma concerning high culture appears as he tries to establish common norms for criticism, even as he consistently sees himself as fighting universal discourses that serve to erase difference and particularity.

William Hart’s *Edward Said and The Religious Effects of Culture* (2000) was one of the first works to draw attention to Said’s reception of Arnold’s dialectic of Hebraism and Hellenism “as an instance of Orientalism,” through its use of nineteenth-century racial thinking (Hart 33). Otherwise, not much has been said specifically about Said’s reception of Arnold, except by Robert J. Young, to whom I will turn shortly. Throughout his works of literary criticism, Said evokes Arnold as the inventor of an exclusive and detached literary culture. Such a literary culture is built on the prestige of the Anglo-Saxon race, serves as an affirmation of Protestant Christianity under the guise of secularism, and promotes an English national canon. Rather than being politically detached, Arnoldian culture was allied with state power against anarchy and supported a “quasi-theological exterior” which, according to Said, was a sign of its being “at home” in religious discourse and therefore “uncritical” (*WTC* 12). Said’s contrasting of Erich Auerbach against Arnold is determined, accordingly, by his conviction that “culture often has to do with an aggressive sense of nation, home, community and belonging,” whereas—as we can judge from Said’s positive appraisal of Auerbach—being exiled from a nation exempts one from the hegemonic premises of its culture. Thus, Arnoldian culture is a “system of discriminations and evaluations” that sides with home and national filiations. Said calls Arnold’s culture “the assertively achieved and *won* hegemony of an identifiable set of ideas,” something that is decided upon by a select few as the “best that has been thought and said”, which is then imposed and disseminated into society “downward from the height of power” (12). Though not directly engaged in colonial rule, Arnold is not only “at home” but also makes the home rules:
“Distinguished intellectuals like Arnold and Renan,” Said states, were active in shaping “the domestic realm” that “in turn reinforced and reinscribed…the imperial spheres” (“Nationalism” 26).

Said’s thesis on culture as hegemony becomes more complicated when expanded to the whole of Western epistemology:

The large cultural-national designation of European culture as the privileged norm carried with it a formidable battery of other distinctions between ours and theirs, between proper and improper, European and non-European, higher and lower: they are to be found everywhere in such subjects and quasi-subjects as linguistics, history, race theory, philosophy, anthropology, and even biology. (WTC 14)

Said here essentializes “European culture”, treating it as an unchanging norm and unified concept across discourses and historical periods. As his thesis successfully disturbs the discourses on the Oriental other, so it comfortably settles in a discourse of Europeanism. Britain and Europe by association become the imperial hosts imposing home rules on the rest of the world while as the hosts they remain unaffected by this process. In fact, Said proclaims that intellectuals like Arnold endorsed “a national identity [that] homogenized the races and languages that [it] governed” and that “was European and English, as opposed to other [identities] present at the time” (“Nationalism” 27). The charge of essentialism or “Occidentalism” against Said is not new.6 What I want to point out here is that neither “Europe” nor Britain, nor the cultures constructed for them, were homogeneous entities that could simply be explained by either a single religion or race or by any other “pure” genealogy, since racial and religious differences were not just present in the external colonies but were also a domestic issue in Europe, particularly as manifested in the integration process of the minority Jews as, so to

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6 It is made already by Dennis Porter in “Orientalism and its Problems” (1982).
speak, the Orientals within. Because the tensions and inconsistencies caused by racial and religious differences manifest themselves in high culture and its discursive formations, the Orient in European culture cannot be envisioned as a homogeneous and monolithic entity, as Said presents it. It must be conceived as heterogeneous and multiple. In order to escape the Occidentals-versus-Orientalism binary of Said’s thesis, we need to accept Said’s judgment of high culture itself as an ethical and rhetorical gesture open to historical critique.

In Chapter Twelve of *WTC*, the ambivalent nature of Said’s approach to Arnoldian culture in relation to religion becomes fully apparent. This time he focuses on the “exemplary and inherently interesting figures of Renan and Massignon” and the process by which their work on Islam was produced for and within their own culture (275). For Said the point where Renan, Massignon and Arnold meet is the “cultural prestige” of being European/Anglo-Saxon, which “eliminate[s] the possibility of a valuable kind of radical self-criticism” (280). He starts his critique of these figures by comparing French and German New Philology to British Orientalism, which, I think, reveals his affinity for the secularizing intent of Arnold’s notion of culture. He begins by discussing Arnold’s yearning for French and German cultural “finish and maturity,” which he convincingly links to the late introduction of “the systematic and organized advances of New Philology” in British intellectual life (268-9). For Britain, where the Orient represented stylistic excess and eccentricity, the study of languages was not yet separated from the study of religion, or understood in the “secular, purely linguistic terms proposed by the New Philology” (274). Said seems to believe that Renan’s philological Orientalism, with all its ethnocentric implications, entered Britain via Arnold. According to a very linear logic, Arnold for Said represents the genealogical source of everything hermetic, ethnocentric, and religious in current literary criticism. Curiously, Renan’s philology is described in terms similar to those used by
Said in his discussion of Giambattista Vico’s humanist secularism: Renan was invested in a “philology that moved history away from the existential problems of revealed religion and toward what it was possible to study, toward those real things” (278). Elsewhere, in an appreciative mode, he sums up the philosophy of Vico (a consistently positive figure in Said’s works) as the view that “what human beings can know is only what they have made, that is, the historical, social and secular” (290). The secularizing effect of New Philology is something that Said cannot do without, yet he must criticize it for being in the wrong hands, namely those of intellectuals like Renan, Massignon and Arnold, who are at home in their culture, which they attempt to universalize, thereby erasing, as it were, local differences abroad.

Moreover, Said’s criticism of Renan here is based on the observation that the latter wanted do away with monotheistic revelation to “hasten the disappearance of Islam … as the postscript of a postscript, the trace of a trace” of the already disappeared revelation of Judaeo-Christianity (281). It is important to notice that Said places a whole generation of Orientalist scholars, and some non-Orientalists like Arnold, on the same front as the triumphalist secularism and scientism of Renan. As a matter of fact, Renan’s anti-monotheistic attitude, bias towards the Indo-European languages, and secular supersessionism were seriously challenged by, for example, the intellectual movement in Germany called Wissenschaft des Judentums, which represented Jewish minority voices that disputed the dominant liberal-Protestant discourses in biblical studies. The liberating function of the historical-philological method is most obvious when Orientalist scholarship becomes a ground for polemics between Protestant universalism and Jewish particularity, a historical fact that Said ignores in his judgment of Orientalist scholarship. We will see that Arnold’s definition of culture, especially his dialectic of Hebraism
and Hellenism, was not immune to these polemical discussions in biblical scholarship.\textsuperscript{7} When read from the perspective of Jewish difference, the hegemonic and homogeneous premise of Arnoldian culture as host discourse becomes doubtful.

In short, New Philology which Said in \textit{Orientalism} unrelentingly critiques as “the laboratory” of modernism and Eurocentrism (132), receives a more nuanced treatment in \textit{WTC}. Since the logic of Said’s argument that leads from the Orientalism of Renan to Arnoldian culture is hazy, we might ask ourselves whether he ignores Arnold’s role in Anglo-American culture in valorizing a certain “alien” intellectual class by outfitting it with the duty of cultural criticism.\textsuperscript{8} Indeed, Said acknowledges a difference between Renan and Arnold but only fleetingly (\textit{WTC} 282). Overall, Said avoids Arnold’s critical legacy unless it is mentioned as part New Criticism. As far as these passages at hand are concerned, Said reveals more ambivalence than certainty in his judgment of Arnoldian culture. I take this ambivalence as Said’s oblique affirmation of Arnoldian culture, especially of the power given to the intellectuals through the function of criticism. Said proves to be very Arnoldian as he is himself authorized by his affiliation with this high culture, and the cosmopolitan possibilities it offers. However, in the end, Said prefers to settle on the moral superiority of the guest, and holds the host responsible for its actions. This ethics proves to be the only consistent aspect of his critique of Arnold, Renan, Massignon, as well as of his appreciation of Erich Auerbach. In the following section I will show how Said’s

\textsuperscript{7} For Arnold’s knowledge of \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums} see Lionel Gossman’s “Philhellenism and Antisemitism: Matthew Arnold and his German Models.” Discussions of the modernization of Judaism and Zionism became popular in England when Benjamin Disraeli became the prime minister in 1868, and subsequently with the publication of George Eliot’s novel \textit{Daniel Deronda} (1876). These events coincide with Arnold’s increasing interest in the terms Hebraism and Hellenism.

\textsuperscript{8} Arnold famously acknowledges the intellectuals as a separate class: “Therefore, when we speak of ourselves as divided into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace, we must be understood always to imply that within each of these classes there are a certain number of \textit{aliens}, if we may so call them,—persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection” (\textit{Culture and Anarchy} 81).
ethical choice in judging Arnold as the inventor of the hegemonic and elitist notion of culture can be unraveled through a reading of Arnold’s dialectic of Hebrew and Hellene with the help of deconstructive hospitality.

The Hospitality in Arnold’s Dialectic of Hebraism and Hellenism

Hebraism and Hellenism,—between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them.

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)

Until recently, Matthew Arnold’s terms of Hebraism and Hellenism have been read as abstract and dialectical symbols roughly representing the moral and the intellectual impulses respectively. However, they can also be read as racial and religious categories, both markers for Jewish difference in nineteenth-century Europe. I would first of all like to reposition Matthew Arnold into this hermeneutical context, namely that of a European modernity that is in constant negotiation with its ancient other, Judaism. Ironically, Edward Said’s insistence on worlded criticism brought to attention the importance of Arnold for cultural studies, especially in regard to Arnold’s social and political involvement in minority issues, and in the formations of secularism and nationalism in Victorian Britain. Both Said’s and Arnold’s works, therefore, have now become important for the theoretical questions they pose in their contradictory responses to the historical and social circumstances of their time.

What potential does reading Arnold through the lens of the nineteenth-century Jewish question offer? It shows us that taking Arnold’s “Hebrew” as historical Judaism extracted from
the figure of the living Jew and “Hellene” as a sign of European superiority, eventually privileged over the Hebrew, does not exhaust the complexities and responsive strategies expressed in the dialectic of Hebraism and Hellenism. There are two conditions that gave rise to the Enlightenment consideration for the Hebraism/Hellenism binary, conditions from which Arnold’s terms cannot be separated: (1) the historical-philological (secular) reading of the Bible that led to Christianity’s admitting its Jewish past; (2) the Jewish minority presence in Europe that complicated race- and language-based nationalisms. My analysis will show that Arnold did indeed comment negatively about the Semitic races; nevertheless, his hospitality towards the Hebrew element in culture opened up a possibility for Jewish difference in literary criticism—as the example of Lionel Trilling’s reception of Arnold will exemplify.

Matthew Arnold’s use of the terms Hebraism and Hellenism terms is radically questioned in the context of the Jewish emancipation struggle in Brian Cheyette’s *Construction of the Jew in English Literature and Society* (1993), and Michael Ragussis’ *The Jewish Question and English National Identity* (1995). Cheyette and Ragussis mark a different era in Arnold studies. Beyond exposing the Jewish stereotypes in English literature, they focus on the role of the Jewish figure as a point of indeterminacy and an active participant in the making of the modern identity of Britain. Cheyette’s study considers the Hebraism/Hellenism binary in Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* as an expression of racial difference that can be transfigured into the higher realm of “culture” by eliminating some undesired aspects of “the Jew” which is

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9 Prior to that, there was Frederic E. Faverty’s work *Matthew Arnold, the Ethnologist* (1968), which contextualizes Arnold into nineteenth-century racial theories. David J. DeLaura in *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (1969) states that Arnold distanced himself from German philhellenism after *Culture and Anarchy* as a reaction to its anti-Christian, Teutonic resonances, and turned towards Hebraic moralism to establish a secular but ethical doctrine (187-9). Lionel Gossman expands DeLaura’s argument through a more detailed historical-critical approach in “Philhellenism and Antisemitism.”
“constructed as both an object that can be spectacularly civilized (embodying Arnold’s ideal of ‘culture’) and, at the same time, as an unchanging Semitic ‘other’” (13). In other words, the Jew becomes the figure at the edge of Enlightenment dilemma: the figure of the Jew embodies the Romantic valorization of racial particularity on the one hand, and clashes with the universal values of Enlightenment on the other. Cheyette prompts us to ask: How much of the racial particularity of the Semite can be tolerated in an Enlightened society guided by the principle of culture? Or, to put it differently, can one still talk of Jewish difference and particularity when the Jew has become part of high culture?

Ragussis, on the other hand, contextualizes Arnold’s concepts of Hebraism and Hellenism by showing how they were shaped through a dialogue with Benjamin Disraeli’s Hebraic project. He argues that Arnold’s ambivalence towards these terms is a strategic response to the politics of his time. Ragussis claims that since his lecture “On the Study of Celtic Literature” of 1867, Arnold employed the science of race to revise not only the status of the Celts in English society but also that of the Jews. This revision culminates in the Hebrew-and-Hellene formulations in *Culture and Anarchy*. Ragussis also points out that the figure of the Jew was represented through “negative historicization … by means of which [Arnold’s Jews] are fictionalized and figuralized as no more than an ancient race divorced from living Jews of contemporary England” (217). The Hebraism in Arnold’s writings, her argues, thus remains essentially Christian, and the Semitic elements of contemporary Jewry are extracted from his “historical” model.

While both Cheyette and Ragussis defend a more exclusionist vision of high culture in relation to the figure of the Jew, Robert J.C. Young in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory,*
Culture and Race (1995)—which also engages with Edward Said’s reading of Arnold—highlights a more reciprocal relation between the two. Young, using Homi Bhabha’s term “hybridity” retrospectively for nineteenth-century English culture, and in effect for all Western culture, argues that British culture “was fissured with difference and the desire for otherness” and that it was Arnold’s idea of a living racial mixture that developed “into a theory of England as multicultural” (17). While accepting that Arnold was one of the first British critics who subscribed to the discursive authority and “objectivity” of the racial science of the late nineteenth-century, Young claims that Arnold’s culture in Culture and Anarchy is defined by what it lacks and “in strictly exotic terms,” and thus fails to accomplish a purist identification of English culture as Edward Said argues (57).

As can be seen, current scholarship is gradually accepting the cosmopolitan and hybrid character of Arnold’s culture concept, though doubts about its racializing and homogenizing implications are always present. The passage below, on the Indo-European versus Semitic distinction, is most commonly used to evidence Arnold’s ethnographic views:

Science has now made visible to everybody the great and pregnant elements of difference which lie in race, and in how signal a manner they make the genius and history of an Indo-European people vary from those of a Semitic people. Hellenism is of Indo-European growth, Hebraism is of Semitic growth; and we English, a nation of Indo-European stock, seem to belong naturally to the movement of Hellenism. But nothing more strongly marks the essential unity of man than the affinities we can perceive, in this point or that, between members of one family of peoples and members of another; and no affinity of this kind is more strongly marked than that likeness in the strength and prominence of the moral fibre, which, notwithstanding immense elements of difference, knits in some special sort the genius and history of us English, and of our American descendants across the Atlantic, to the genius and history of the Hebrew people. (Culture and Anarchy 95)

Cheyette reads the foregrounding of racial difference in such scientific terms as a sign of Arnold’s liberal rejection of Jewish religious particularity, and adds that “the uncontained
‘semitic growth’ of Hebraism can always be represented as a potentially ‘anarchic’ force” that needs to be contained by Hellenism (19). Cheyette’s position is similar to that of Edward Said in making Arnold’s subscription to “scientific” racial theories of the nineteenth century the main obstacle to his attempt to unite religious and racial differences under the transcending category of culture. Thereby, Cheyette and Said view Arnold’s statements on the races as an evidence for exclusionist nationalism rather than a liberal cosmopolitanism. It is clear that Arnold’s race-based nationalism expressed in passages such as this one is a sore spot in the history of literary criticism. A more hospitable picture of Judaism might emerge, however, when Arnold’s statements are read through the history of Jewish Enlightenment in Germany, and of Jewish emancipation in Britain.

As will be discussed in Chapter Three, German Enlightenment philosophy contrasts Hebraism to Christianity as being too law-bound, while Christianity is seen as more spiritual. Arnold himself affirms this view: “Christian duties are founded on reason, not on the sovereign authority of God commanding what he pleases” (Culture and Anarchy 134). It is true that Arnold does not entirely disrespect Judaic moralism as, say, Immanuel Kant does when he promotes “autonomous reason” against the heteronomous (God-bound, unquestioning) moral law of the Jews. Arnold sees a certain value in the practical side of Hebraism, standing for “conduct and righteousness …which is three-fourths of our life” (Literature and Dogma 227). In this context, Arnold’s privileging of Hebraic moralism turns into a strategy for rejecting German

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10 In contrast to such approaches, Donald D. Stone for example, argues that the cosmopolitan gesture in Arnold’s culture is more important than its exclusionist implications: “[Arnold] used the terms [Hebrew and Hellene] pragmatically, flexibly, to denote both a dual historical heritage and two complementary states of being (strictness of conscience and spontaneity of consciousness, respectively) that had practical bearings in a newly industrial and democratic world” (179).
transcendentalism. To repeat Arnold’s own metaphor, the “moral fibre” of Hebraism is “knit” into the character of Anglo-American culture.

Nevertheless, Arnold’s emphasis on Hebrew moralism remains limited because it implies hostility towards the Rabbinic tradition and Mosaic law. According to common Enlightenment belief and Protestant theology, the Rabbinic elements in Judaism continued after the correction of Christian spirituality and were incompatible with Enlightenment reason, and therefore also with Arnaldian culture. The Jewish Enlightenment as initiated by Moses Mendelssohn differs from German Enlightenment in this sense: it tries to preserve the current validity of Judaism, with all its elements, accepting it as a positive force while agreeing with the general assumption that Judaism is carnal and heteronomous, and that ritual and tradition have to be controlled by reason. This was the basis of the Jewish Reformation movement, and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was the science that would modernize Judaism according to the tenets of universal reason. Arnold was quite aware of the discussions in biblical criticism concerning the intertwined histories of Judaism and Christianity, and clearly took a stance that was in favour of the Jewish Reformation. A proof of Arnold’s awareness of this context can be found in his rejection of the claim that Christianity was a development of the Aryan race, as in his disagreement with Emile Burnouf in *Literature and Dogma*. The insistence on a Jewish Jesus was the ideological stronghold of the nineteenth-century modernizing Jewry. Most of the Jewish reformers subscribed to racial theories themselves but opposed the view that the Indo-

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11 Arnold, for example, states: “And, immense as is our debt to the Hebrew race and its genius, […]—who, that is not manacled and hoodwinked by his Hebraism, can believe that, […] our reason and the necessities of our humanity have their true, sufficient, and divine law expressed for them by the voice of any Oriental and polygamous nation like the Hebrews […] a Semitic people, whose wisest king had seven hundred and three hundred concubines?” (Culture and Anarchy 134).

12 Susannah Heschel in *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (1998) shows how discussions of the Jewish past of Christianity served as a liberating discourse for Jewish minorities in Europe.
European races were superior to the Semitic ones. Like Arnold and most of his contemporaries, they also did not question the preeminence of reason. In short, though Arnold positively acknowledges the Semitic origins of Christianity, he excludes the radically different, the professing/traditional Jew and the other Semitic peoples, the Arabs, from his civilizing project.

One must also consider that Arnold’s dialectic of Hebrew and Hellene only leads to the illusion of the special and unbreakable alliance of the Jewish and the Christian, with undesired aspects not only of Judaism but also of Christianity extracted. His *Literature and Dogma* (1883), for example, is a work addressed to the dogma and institutions of Christianity, not of Judaism. A reductionist and essentializing view of Christianity can clearly be observed in the following statement about Christian missionaries in the Orient facing other religions like “Mahometanism, and Brahminism, and Buddhism:”

Yet everyone allows that this strange figure [of the Christian missionary] carries something of what is called European civilisation with him, and a good part of this is due to Christianity. But even the Christianity itself that he preaches, imbedded in a false theology though it be, cannot but contain, in a greater or lesser measure as it may happen, these three things: the all-importance of righteousness, the method of Jesus, the secret of Jesus….Therefore to all whom it visits, the Christianity of our missions, inadequate as may be its criticism of the Bible, brings what may do them good. (Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* 198)

Throughout *Literature and Dogma* the Judaic background of Christianity is emphasized over and over again, while purist or science-based Christian apologetics are relentlessly criticized. In this passage it is clear that Arnold cannot deny that the Jesus of the “secret” was a Jew, yet he also implies that those other religions can never relate to this particular Judaeo-Christian “secret,” which he now embeds into the heart of “European civilization.” There are two ways of reading Arnold’s extraction of the principles of “righteousness,” “method” and “secret.” First, we can
read them as an affirmation of Christian onto-theology, or as Said would interpret it, a sign of Christian hermetism in literary criticism. Second, we can place Arnold in his rightful context of Romantic logocentrism, as famously refined by S.T. Coleridge in the symbol of Jesus Christ. Thus, we can read the passage as a statement about the literary/secular interpretation of the Bible, which is probably how it was received upon its publication—rather than as a theologizing of literature, as we tend to interpret it today. By doing so, we might gain an understanding of those principles as relating to the “function of criticism,” namely as ethical responsiveness to historical urgencies (righteousness), universal norms for determining the best that has been written and thought (method), and the indeterminacy of criticism (secret). One could note the similarities between such an interpretation and the secular criticism that Edward Said promotes, expect that when it comes to universal method Said cannot move beyond a certain point because for him any sort of universalism means the suppression of particularity. What needs to be emphasized, I suggest, is that Arnold’s literary universalism suppresses not only the particularity of the radically other religions, but also Christian identity as it has been threatened by increasing secularization of national culture in the hands of public intellectuals like Arnold. Thus, we must acknowledge that Arnold’s “culture,” based on the symbiosis of Judaism and Christianity, is inclusive of and violent towards both sides of the Judaeo-Christian hyphen, resulting in a deconstructive hospitality. While such a symbiosis implies the heterogeneity of “European civilization” in the face of Jewish difference, it nevertheless works to be hegemonic and violent with respect to the radically Other. What is to be acknowledged and welcomed in Arnold’s culture, I think, is an opening towards Jewish difference.

13 See for example, Mary Ann Perkins in Coleridge’s Philosophy: The Logos as Unifying Principle (1994).
The second aspect of Arnold’s deconstructive hospitality develops in the context of the Jewish emancipation process in Britain. Some critics have drawn attention to Arnold’s support for Jewish civil rights. Even Cheyette, who is probably the harshest critic of Arnold after Said, provides evidence to this effect, and recalls that Arnold was so pro-Jewish that there were suspicions that he might have had Jewish heritage (15). Jonathan Freedman in *The Temple of Culture* (2000) stresses the accommodation of the alien Jew within Arnold’s cultural scheme: “the pattern of simultaneous incorporation and expulsion of the Jews [defines] the drama of European culture building” (50). However, in contrast to Cheyette and Ragussis, who point to the repression of the living Jew in Arnoldian culture, Freedman argues that “Arnold seizes upon and makes his own the Jew’s marginalization to distance himself from his own provincial, ‘Philistinish’ national culture and to identify himself with a larger, European cultural project and ideal” (50). Freedman infers this from Arnold’s description of criticism as a “second Moses poised in the wilderness, espying from afar the Promised Land” in *The Function of Criticism* and from his poem “Rachel” which praises the Jewish-French actress’s cosmopolitan character.14

To conclude: Arnold’s position towards minority rights in Britain was a liberal one in contrast to the separatist views of his father Dr. Thomas Arnold. “The State is of the religion of all its citizens without the fanaticism of any of them,” he reminds us in *Culture and Anarchy*, clearly speaking in support of the granting of full emancipation to Jewish citizens in 1858 (10). Arnold creates an opening for the historical other of Christianity, instead of essentializing culture

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14 The last part of Arnold’s poem “Rachel” is as follows:

Ah, not the radiant spirit of Greece alone
She had—one power, which made her breast its home!
In her, like us, there clashed contending powers,
Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome,
The strife, the mixture, in her soul are ours,
Her genius and her glory are her own.
as exclusively Protestant Christian or Indo-European. Consequently, Arnold not only defends Hebrew moralism but also supports the political rights of the living representatives of biblical Hebraism. On the other hand, Arnold’s civilizing project is also violent because it excludes the other Semitic race, Arabs, and non-Caucasian races. Most importantly, it requires an assimilation of radical differences under the heading of culture.

Rather than focusing on how the culture concept served to suppress racial and religious difference in British society, I want to highlight the reception history of Arnold next. I believe that the cosmopolitan implications and focus on indeterminacy in Arnold’s criticism created a fissure in literary criticism enabling minority intellectuals like Lionel Trilling, the first Jewish professor of English in an American university.

**Lionel Trilling’s Admiration for Matthew Arnold**

Some of the dilemmas of being a Jewish intellectual in mid-twentieth-century America are poignantly expressed in Lionel Trilling’s biographical work *Matthew Arnold* (1939). Trilling reads Arnold’s lecture of 1866 “On the Study of Celtic Literature” as a combination of “literary and scientific methods” toward a “right [social] feeling” (232). What Trilling means is that Arnold resorts to the authority of racial science of his day, the anthropology that assumes that the character of a nation is determined by “blood” or “race,” in order to express his ethical reaction to purist, either Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon, and possibly anti-Irish, notions of Englishness. Arnold was “at pains to show that the English are an amalgam of several ‘bloods’—German, Norman, Celtic” (233). Moreover, Trilling points to Arnold’s use of race as a symbol for a unified national spirit consisting of varied temperaments, arguing that it serves “not to separate peoples but to draw them together” (236):
Using the terms of ‘race,’ Arnold is actually speaking of reason and the complete man (242). [...] The [race] theory, sprung from the desk of the philosopher and the philologist, had an unfailing attraction for the literary and quasi-religious mind; the conception of a mystic and constant ‘blood’ was a handy substitute for the soul. (234)

On the grounds of Arnold’s symbolic use of hybridized blood to defend “a far wider range of temperament than [England] had conceived” (242), and the wide-spread applications of such theory in Arnold’s day, Trilling both excuses Arnold’s subscription to racial theories and is convinced that “some [others] used it for liberalizing purposes, as Arnold himself did” (235).

Although Trilling primarily focuses on the more abstract, historical-dialectical meaning of Hebraism and Hellenism throughout the book, it is apparent from the following statement of his that the question of living Jews, and the anti-Semitism of the time when Trilling was writing this book, were looming in the back of his mind:

Today, when the anthropological doctrines which Arnold found so stirringly fruitful are supported only by political partisans or by writers whose scientific methods Arnold himself, were he now living would not accept, we must take [Arnold’s] elaborate theory only as a kind of parable. (Trilling 233)

Trilling begins his treatment of Arnold’s career with a long prelude about the Hyde Park riots in the summer of 1866. Such an act of historical contextualization mainly serves to prove that Arnold’s support for state order as opposed to working-class anarchy was the result of his criticism of the government for being the instigator of the riots through their weakness and indecisiveness (243-51). Trilling observes that Arnold’s ideal depiction of the state in the second chapter of Culture and Anarchy as being the representative of “our best self, or right reason,” is in accordance with his reaction to the Hyde Park events and with his attempt to redefine the state in terms of “culture” as “the best that said and thought.” The state for Arnold, according to
Trilling, is “a way to endow reason with power” (263). Thus, in contrast to Said’s interpretation of Arnold’s support for the state as a sign of “being at home” in power, Trilling offers the view that Arnold with his nineteenth-century mind believed in the universality and supremacy of reason and the “Platonic myth of state,” and was inviting the existing state to better itself on those principles (255).

The most striking example for Trilling’s and Said’s contrasting receptions of Arnold is their sharing of quotation from *Culture and Anarchy*. Trilling, emphasizing that these were Arnold’s “last words as Professor of Poetry at Oxford,” quotes a long passage from *Culture and Anarchy*:

> Plenty of people will try to indoctrinate the masses with the set of ideas and judgments constituting the creed of their own profession or party. Our religious and political organizations give an example of this way of working on the masses. I condemn neither way; but culture works differently. It does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely—nourished and not bound by them.

> This is the social idea; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. (Arnold qtd. in Trilling 271-2)

The subsequent sentences of this passage are also used by Said in *WTC*:

> The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time […] and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light. (Arnold qtd. in Said, *WTC* 10)
Trilling quotes this key passage for two purposes: First, he uses it to exemplify the Romantic attitude towards the cultivation of masses as the only means to civic equality and progression towards a perfect order. Trilling defends Arnold because Arnold’s idea of culture empowers the intellectuals to take on an active political role: “[Culture] is a method of historical interpretation which leads to political action (271).” For Trilling, Arnold’s open-ended definition of culture signifies a promotion of historical relativity and rejection of permanent and universal systems.\footnote{Trilling states that “[h]istory is a movement in a direction, but the direction is complex, certainly not a straight line, rather a confusion of currents in the stream of the universe, which veer now this way, now that—changeable, shifting, not easily charted. The work of culture is to ascertain the dominant culture, the one which keeps most nearly to the course of the stream itself. What the dominant current of the next moment may be is not predictable, yet it must be ascertained, man’s salvation is to move with it. The impracticability of any system lies in its negotiation of a moving current of history; it builds its house on the river bank, a static structure past which the living waters flow. Culture, on the other hand, seeks to navigate the flood by every trick of rudder and sail” (272). Elsewhere, Trilling also mentions the influence of Vico’s providential historicism on Arnold (51-3).} Said, on the other hand, reads this passage as endorsing hegemony, as elitism and as an affirmation that the universal rather than merely current form of culture is Anglo-Saxon and Christian. Said quotes this passage when he argues that it is state hegemony that determines what is “best,” but Said misapplies Arnold. He could have found a dozen passages on the authoritarian role of the state from *Culture and Anarchy*. However, he chooses this passage that revealingly reflects the aim of his own project of defining the “function of criticism in the present time” (*WTC* 5), namely to rid criticism “of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned” (Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 53). Both Said and Trilling clearly see themselves as part of the high culture that was secured by Arnold’s valorization of literary criticism.

Trilling, however, nuances his admiration for Arnold in his later writings. In the preface to the 1949 edition of *Matthew Arnold*, after having suffered the “assault on [his] mind of the
Nazis,” Trilling admits that he would not have written “quite so much as Arnold’s advocate on
certain particular points,” clearly referring to Arnold’s ethnographic writings. However, he adds:
“But I should write of him with an even enhanced sense of his standing for the intellectual
virtues that are required by a complex society if it is to survive in real and not in merely
simulated life” (Trilling 3). Anthony Julius and Jonathan Freedman’s accounts show how
Trilling, as the first Jewish professor in a university’s English Department in America, and one
who was subject to institutional anti-Semitism, clearly speaks from his Jewish subject position,
both when apologizing for Arnold and when acknowledging the racialist aspects of Arnold’s
writings (Julius 53; Freedman 192-5). However wrought with admiration, Trilling does
frequently cast doubts on Arnold’s legacy, as for example when he notes:

Out of the belief that the best self, Hero or State, is in touch with the right reason, will of
God, may flow chauvinism, imperialism, Governor Eyre, the white man’s burden—all
things which make us turn to Mill and skepticism, well-nigh willing to rest in
“anarchy.”(277)

It is possible to read this critical indebtedness to Arnold as a sign of Trilling’s acknowledgement
of his participation in institutional high culture, and at the same time a rejection of ethnic
assimilation within this institution. Both Said and Trilling are aware of the power given to them
by Arnold as classless, intellectual “aliens.” Trilling admits it, as we have seen, in an act of
forgiveness in his “Preface to the Second Edition.” Said denies it exactly because of Arnold’s
ethnological ideas that are pro-Jewish in a limited sense and essentially exclude the Semitic
races. Said speaks favourably about Trilling, and frequently repeats that Trilling was a mentor to
him at Columbia University (WTC 142 & 164-5). Although he possibly reads Arnold through
Trilling, he is very antagonistic towards Arnold. If Arnold’s definition of criticism as the “free
play of the mind upon all subjects” made Trilling’s presence in the literary institution possible
(both metaphorically and literally since his doctoral dissertation was on Arnold) as a second-generation Jewish immigrant who was subject to policies of exclusion, then Trilling and his influence on the literary institution presumable also helped make possible Said’s role as an Arab professor of English at Columbia University, just as Said’s presence in the literary academy and his legacy as a public intellectual have helped make it possible for many scholars from second and third world countries, like myself, to have a voice in English departments.

One must also add that what made Arnoldian culture accommodating of Jewish professors like Trilling was his belief in the German-Jewish symbiosis of the nineteenth-century, which was enabled through Bildung at the modern universities as well as the mobility of professions. As Anthony Julius in his book points out, the anti-Semitism of next-generation poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound was a reaction to the alienated cosmopolitanism of the European Jewry that Arnold was praising. The Jewish-German symbiosis, easily extendable to all European Jewry, is today either considered assimilation-by-culture or a completely failed illusion due to the trauma caused by the Holocaust. Nevertheless, Arnold was the only major literary figure in Anglo-American culture who gave consideration to this symbiosis model. Hence, Trilling’s admiration for Arnold is understandable in his pre-War discourse, and comparable to Said’s admiration for Erich Auerbach. Both men favour the inner tensions, complexity of institutional affiliations, double relation of marginalization and interdependence between the dominant discourse and its Others in their chosen exemplary critic.

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16 Freedman mentions Trilling’s influence on Harold Bloom while providing a context for second and third generation Jewish immigrants and their history in the literary academy (213-5).
17 Anthony Julius analyzes T.S. Eliot’s anti-Semitic poem “Sweeney Among the Nightingales,” which was written as a response to Arnold’s poem “Rachel.” According to Julius, Eliot uses common anti-Semitic themes to repudiate Rachel’s apparent cosmopolitanism and concludes that at the end she cannot escape her Jewishness (87-91).
Although, as we have seen in the analysis of *WTC*, Said critiques Arnold because of his affiliation with New Philology, more often than not he interprets Arnold as an Anglo-Saxon/Christian elitist rather than as a historical-philologist who sees cultures in temporal relation to each other. This tendency is apparent in his classification of Arnold as a modernist and even a New Critic avant la lettre. When noting that English studies dominated the literary critical academy until the 1960’s, he argues: “The believers in this area include Arnold at the beginning, later Leavis, Empson, Richards, and most of the southern New Critics, […] for them everything outside the Anglo-Saxon world had to bend around to Anglo-Saxon ends” (*WTC* 164). We must consider Said’s interpreting Matthew Arnold as an instigator of New Critical tradition, instead of seeing him as part of nineteenth-century humanist philology, as both an ideological and a rhetorical act. When Arnold advises the literary critic “to see the object as in itself it really is” and praises “disinterestedness” in *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, he at once promotes a humanistic responsibility and supports a positivist epistemology in humanities that might or might not lead to philological over-specialization. Interpreting “disinterestedness” as a refusal of the psychological, historical and sociological background of a literary work and seeing philological historicism as a sign of dilettantism belongs strictly to the critics who immediately follow Arnold. Philological historicism was under attack at the beginning of modernism for various reasons. However, it was not Arnold himself but his subsequent interpreters, such as T.S. Eliot, who translated “disinterestedness” into an elitist vision of literature.18

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18 See, for example, Baldick who notes how it was only during the war of 1914-18 that the study of English “as conducive to national pride and unity” was promoted and how the early criticisms of T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, and the Leavises “revived and modified” Arnold’s criticism in more “‘practical’ directions” (2-19).
Conclusion

Edward Said’s dilemma about offering an alternative method to Orientalism is exemplified in his ambivalent approach to Arnold’s historical milieu. Humanistic philology, with its insistence on secularism, cultural particularity and relativity is too precious for Said to disregard; however, it also happens to be the “laboratory” for racialist and hegemonic ideas in the nineteenth century (Orientalism 132). As a result, negative examples for criticism, like Arnold, who are “at home” in their culture are categorized in the negative aspects of both New Philology and New Criticism. As Turner and Roberts point out in The Sacred and the Secular University (2000), the secularization of the university—the move from “ideal knowledge cohering under a Christian worldview toward an attractive new ideal of specialized disciplinary learning,” especially in the humanities—was made possible by philological historicism, which assumed that “every human phenomenon was determined by its own distinct, unique, ultimately contingent history” (117-8). This method, they claim, intrinsically denied the imposition of an overarching schema, such as the Christian narrative, or a unified human-history because it treated such knowledge or narrative as the product of a certain civilization at a certain time. Ultimately, Turner and Roberts argue, “postmodern antifoundationalism is the natural child of philological historicism, bred up by humanities” (118). Said was clearly aware of the potential of this method: when the grand narrative is removed via the philological-historical method, morality and aesthetics are not in danger of being part of the hegemony of a certain religion or race. Philological historicism rather provides us with the conditions for understanding the morality of the Other, and this alone is its moral function. Said held on to the ethical implications of philological historicism in his later writings, primarily through his admiration for Erich Auerbach. The fact that he did not want to
consider even a tangential association of Arnold with this humanist philology is explicable because of the Judaeo-Christian view that Arnold imposed on the other religions and cultures of the world. Said is quite justified in detecting a certain elitism in the way Arnold assigns the guardianship of high culture to European civilization, which through the dialectic of Hebraism and Hellenism becomes primarily a Judaeo-Christian symbiosis, while other cultures at best fare as anthropological cultures that need to be kept in check by this high culture. However, as we have seen, Said errs in judging Arnold’s position as an uncritical closure and essentialism. As the example of Trilling helps us to see, Arnold’s insistence on an abstract and indeterminate “culture” could be an expression of secular historicism in the Viconian vein, since his welcoming of the Hebraic element created a fissure in the history of literary criticism —and in Anglo-American culture as a whole— towards an opening for Jewish difference and therefore potentially for other kinds of difference too.

ERICH AUERBACH: FROM WESTERN CANON TO WORLD LITERATURE

According to Edward Said’s comparison in the *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Matthew Arnold starts the New Critical period in literary studies with English national culture at the centre; in contrast, Erich Auerbach de-centers it with his emphasis on world literature. David Damrosch suggests that Said’s comparative approach to Matthew Arnold and Erich Auerbach has posed the study of world literature as a “challenge to the local, the national, or … the ‘filiative’” (“Secular Criticism Meets the World” 3). However, are Arnold and Auerbach as polarized as Said presents them? As we have seen in the previous section, Arnold’s contribution to the Hebraism and Hellenism dialectic complicates the vision of purist and elitist nationalism.
A closer look might likewise reveal that Auerbach in his writings and his reception is not that well suited for propagating world literature. Instead, I argue that Said’s polarization of literary critical history into comparative on the one hand and strict national and period studies on the other, is an ethical stance to justify Said’s minority subject position within the strict bounds of the English Department by alliance with an exemplary intellectual in exile. Erich Auerbach has consistently served as an affirmative example for Said’s criticism from his entry into the literary academy (one of Said’s first publications was a translation he did with his wife of Auerbach’s “Philology and Weltliteratur” in 1969) right up to his posthumous work Humanism and Democratic Criticism (2004). Said’s ethical and methodological dilemmas, namely the ethical privileging of the guest in an ethics of hospitality and the replacing of a universal language through exemplary alliances with intellectual figures from history (curiously similar to Auerbach’s own use of the humanistic genre of Geistesgeschichte), can be observed very clearly in his reception of Auerbach as well.19

Because of Said’s very early engagement with Auerbach and his emphasis on him as the “earthly critic,” it is no surprise that Auerbach today gets mentioned in the same breath as world literature and postcolonial cultural studies. As a long-time observer of Auerbach’s reception, Herbert Lindenberger in a recent article looks at how Said’s appropriation of Auerbach’s work has led to affinities that “would not be readily apparent to those [who are] familiar with [Auerbach’s] writings” (45). Lindenberger observes that to appreciate figures from the past whose innovations anticipated current issues is itself “a thoroughly traditional activity within the

19 Said in his “Introduction to the Fiftieth-Anniversary Edition” of Mimesis mentions Auerbach’s indebtedness to the German tradition of Geisteswissenschaft (generally known as humanities or in Said’s words “knowledge of the products of mind or spirit”) and how Auerbach developed his version from the secular historicism of Giambattista Vico. One can clearly read Said’s appreciation of this hermeneutical tradition as “a sympathetic dialogue of two spirits across ages and cultures who are able to communicate with each other as friendly, respectful spirits trying to understand each other” (xiii-xiv).
history of criticism” (54). I argue that Said’s attraction to Auerbach is rooted in their common minority position, which poses the philosophical dilemma of encountering the Other within an ethics of hospitality where the positions of the guest and the host are unstable and paradoxical. Both Auerbach and Said embrace the historical-philological method because it allows their own particularities to be expressed while being open to the unexpected other meanings and particularities. Such a worlded form of humanism, they believe, is responsive to actual historical events and is therefore ethical towards the living Other. Said’s treatment of Auerbach throughout his works is marked by a philosophical and ethical concern for hospitality and at the same time displays a constant pull towards worlding and contextualizing the terms of this ethics (what Auerbach calls “Konkretisierung” in Mimesis).

Auerbach the Exemplary Critic at the Limits

Said in a brief introduction to Auerbach’s “Philology and Weltliteratur” points out a continuity between humanistic philology, German Romance philology and the study of world literature, a line stretching from Vico, Goethe and Herder to Auerbach. He emphasizes the “visionary concept” of Weltliteratur for its ability to “transcend national literatures [to the level of Humanität] without, at the same time, destroying their individualities” (“Philology and Weltliteratur” 1). It is possible that Said’s interest was turning towards the figure of the exilic intellectual at the time of this translation. Auerbach’s essay, for example, famously ends with his quotation from Hugo of St.Victor about the spiritual benefits of exile, which is not mentioned in Said’s rather concise introduction but is quoted later in the chapter “Secular Criticism” in WTC.
The figure of Auerbach as an intellectual “in exile” is first discussed in *Orientalism* (1978), where Said’s admiration for Auerbach’s humanism is set against his unrelenting critique of the humanist tradition of Orientalist scholarship. While being critical of Orientalism’s “summational attitude” towards culture during the interwar period, which is explained as a reaction to a certain humanistic crisis in Europe, Said puts the non-Orientalist version of this attitude embodied in Auerbach in a surprisingly favourable light, and praises *Mimesis* as “an eloquent scholarly and personal testimonial response” to a crisis (*Orientalism* 258). What sets Auerbach apart from his Orientalist counterparts, Said explains later, is the fact that *Mimesis* was written during Auerbach’s exile in Istanbul “with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision” (*Orientalism* 259). The reason why a German philologist’s, such as Auerbach’s or Ernest R. Curtius’s, interest in Romance literatures is more favourable than a Western Orientalist’s reading of the “great works” of the East, according to Said, is that “Islamic Orientalism viewed the problems of mankind as separable into the categories called ‘Oriental’ and ‘Occidental’ of which the later one was always triumphant” (*Orientalism* 262-3). In other words, Said views Orientalist scholarship as the hegemonic discourse of the host employed to define and efface the identity of the guest.

Said’s ethics of hospitality that privileges the guest is more obviously expressed in his praise of Auerbach in the opening chapter of *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), where he elaborates on Auerbach as the “exilic critic” whose “work is steeped in the reality of Europe, just as the specific circumstances of his exile, in the non-Occidental Istanbul, enabled a concrete

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20 The passage from Hugo is as follows: “It is, therefore, a source of great virtue for the practiced mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about in visible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place” (Hugo St.Victor qtd. in Said, *WTC* 7).
critical recovery from Europe” (WTC 16). Thus, Auerbach’s “filiation” with his native country and his “affiliation” to humanistic criticism of the comparative literary tradition of Vico, Goethe and Herder, placed in an Oriental setting, becomes the figure for Said’s famous secular critic at the limits. More than a biographical fact, to which I will return later, the positive influence of the exile on Auerbach’s works takes on the quality of an exaggerated symbol for Said. Among all the various receptions of this particular but significant appropriation of Auerbach by Said, Aamir Mufti’s is so far the only one that approaches Said’s chosen affiliation with Auerbach as a shared minority concern, that is, in the contexts of Jewish diaspora in Europe and Arab/Muslim minorities in the West today. Mufti in “Auerbach in Istanbul” believes that the ethical implications behind its exilic production were what attracted Said to Auerbach’s philology. According to Mufti, “the history of the Jewish minority as the recurring occasion for crisis and control in post-Enlightenment secularism, [opens possibilities] for the distinctly modern vocation of critique” (104). Thus, in Said’s works, Auerbach as the “source and icon of a secular critical practice” becomes “worlded” through the “ethical imperative of loss and displacement” (“Auerbach in Istanbul” 106). But how does Said’s “ethical imperative” derive from this “critical distance”? Mufti ignores the many references to the concept of hospitality in Said, particularly those pertaining to Auerbach’s philological method, and prefers to harvest the notion of “secularism imbued with the experience of minority” as an alternative to “contentless cosmopolitanism” (“Auerbach in Istanbul” 94). As a closer reading of the chapter “Secular Criticism” in WTC will reveal, Auerbach’s significance for Said has close ties to the exploration of philosophical boundaries between home and exile, host and guest, power and resistance.

21 For example when Said comments that “philology as applied to Weltliteratur involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter’s mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign Other” (Said, “Orientalism Once More” 876).
The opening chapter of *WTC* is also where Auerbach’s Oriental location is foregrounded to explain his critical distance from his “home” culture, that is, Germany. Arnold, Renan, and Massignon are criticized in this book for operating from within their culture for their own culture. The paragraphs where Said poses Erich Auerbach as the exemplary secular and worlded critic are preceded by an appraisal of modern literary criticism, which Said thinks plunged from the apolitical and rigidly specialized “ideological bourgeois ‘humanism’” to an equally removed and aloof practice of “textuality” in the late seventies (*WTC* 2-3). The circumstantial and socially determined aspects of texts, or texts as “events” and “history,” were currently being neglected, according to Said. We see an almost Althusserian criticism of the two seemingly opposed high-cultural practices (bourgeois humanism and postmodern textuality) that in effect withdraw from true social criticism. Said in fact specifies the state’s assimilating power, in the guise of the “Reaganism” of the eighties as the backdrop for poststructuralist criticism (*WTC* 4). As we can see, the factor of being outside or part of state ideology is determining for Said as a criterion for just social criticism. His drawing attention to the worldly and historical aspect of human life prepares the way for an appeal to Auerbach’s philology and, most importantly, to Auerbach’s exemption from this assimilative state power through his exile in Istanbul.

Said’s conclusion about Auerbach’s critical distance enabled by his exile in Istanbul stems exclusively from his reading of Auerbach’s apologetic note in the epilogue to *Mimesis* on how the book came into being despite and because of the “lack of a rich and specialized library” in Istanbul (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 557). Said’s interpretation of this note is both complex and intriguing. There are two points supporting Said’s elucidation: First, he understands this note as testimonial to the fact that Auerbach in Istanbul was “hopelessly out of touch with the formidable tradition” of German Romance scholarship (*WTC* 6). Second, he perceives...
Auerbach’s emphasis on the location Istanbul as a confirmation of its pure and symbolic Oriental character, which was a prejudice created by the “exaggerated boundary between Europe and Orient” in European tradition (8). In a way, Said accuses Auerbach of Orientalism, and yet uses these two points as positive factors in Auerbach’s much appreciated “critical distance” to Europe. The facts and personal letters about Auerbach’s time in Istanbul reveal quite a different picture, to which I will turn shortly. Whether based on facts or not, such a symbolic elucidation of Auerbach’s exilic location (being removed from his affiliation with the specialized discipline of Romance philology and being removed from his European filiations) helps Said launch a cultural critique that depends a great deal on “the notion of place” and is vitally opposed to “being at home in a place” (WTC 8).

While I acknowledge the cosmopolitan, secular and counter-hegemonic prerequisites that Said sets for his criticism,22 I will focus on the philosophical or ethical rather than social premise of the phrase “being at home.” As a matter of fact, Said speaks of being at home in “culture,” meaning “an environment, process, and hegemony in which individuals and their works are embedded [and] overseen at the top by a superstructure and at the base by a whole series of methodological attitudes” (WTC 8). It is from here that Said moves to the negative example of Matthew Arnold’s elevated sense of culture. A philosophical perspective, specifically that of a deconstructive hospitality, allows us to perceive the host and guest as strategically and temporarily assumed positions rather than unchanging roles wholly dependent on the physical locale as Said’s rhetorical gesture implies. The lives and legacies of Matthew Arnold and Erich

22 In fact, Said’s privileging of the exilic critic has been received through these aspects so far by critics like Bruce Robbins in Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture (1993), Aamir Mufti in his various works on Said, and Paul Bové in Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power (2000).
Auerbach, even as they are made to conform to Said’s limited agenda, perfectly exemplify how blurry and instantaneous the boundary between host and guest can be within an ethical relation. Nevertheless, my intention is not to point any philosophical error on Said’s part but to acknowledge his purposeful acceptance of the role of the guest as an ethical response to the urgencies he perceives around him. This is a choice Said has made since his work *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), in which he set out a method of objective subjectivity that derives from other theories besides Auerbach’s definition of perspectivism in an historical-philological study as *Ansatzpunkt* (starting with the close reading of a text towards a historical thesis). This background can best explain how the awareness of one’s “beginning intention,” without the pretence of permanence or universality, is for Said the most ethical form of criticism. Auerbach for Said is a positive example because their beginning intentions are similar: Auerbach is in the double bind of being a guest both as an Orientalized, Semitic Jew within European culture and as a European in his Oriental exile. Said feels the same way about himself as an Arab professor of nineteenth-century English literature, which tells him that his Semitic nature is incompatible with what he studies and that he could at best be a guest mimicking the host. Said, therefore, anticipates deconstructive exemplarism because he believes that cultural difference in face of the radically Other can be best asserted by the expression of one’s own particularity through a common language, such as philosophy or literature. Auerbach, who is not at all a marginal figure to literary criticism, serves well for Said’s purpose as an exemplary figure through whom he can relate his own particularity.

It is for this reason that Said brings to the foreground the personal circumstances of Auerbach, who himself makes very few references in his works to personal experiences or contemporary events of his time. Though Said mainly values Auerbach’s notion of *Ansatzpunkt*
as a form of historicism based on close reading, he quite frequently elevates it to an ethics that is
determined by the concrete circumstances a subject finds himself or herself in. For example, Said
admits that his book “Orientalism is very much tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary
history” (“Orientalism Once More” 870), just as Auerbach’s Mimesis, he affirms in the
“Introduction to the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of Mimesis,” reflects the “paradox of a
Prussian Jewish scholar in Turkish, Muslim, non-European exile handling (perhaps juggling)
charged, and in many ways irreconcilable, sets of antinomies” (Humanism 98). In this more
recently written introduction, Said reviews the contents of Mimesis through what he believes is
Auerbach’s personal and historical situatedness. As a Prussian German specializing in Romance
languages, as Prussian nationalism defined itself in opposition to France during and after World
War I, Auerbach wrote “with a welcoming, hospitable attitude of humanistic knowledge
designed to realign warring cultures in a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity” (Humanism
93). Said reminds us that Auerbach was also a Prussian Jew who was “negotiating between the
Jewish and European (hence Christian) components of his identity” (Humanism 102). Hence,
Said makes the connection between the dynamic roles that Auerbach embodied and the
methodical convenience of explaining larger cultural and historical phenomena through minute
analysis of terms such as figura, sermo humilis, high and low style. As Said admits himself,
“Auerbach’s Jewishness is something one can only speculate about, …since he does not refer to
it directly in Mimesis” (Humanism 97). Auerbach’s liminal identity together with his ability to
bring out the antagonisms, mimicry and interactions between the guest and host identities in
literary history, are obviously things that Said identifies with as an intellectual wedged between

23 Edward Said’s “Introduction to Erich Auerbach’s Mimesis” in Humanism and Democratic Criticism is
a reprint from the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of Mimesis (2003), and is also published in Boundary 2
with the title “Erich Auerbach, Critic of the Earthly World”. My citations will refer to its latest
publication in Humanism and Democratic Criticism.
the East and the West with the mission to remain critically distant from either side. The individual chapters of *Mimesis* start with the precise analysis of examples and move towards a larger conclusion about an era of European literary history, and together the chapters culminate in a thesis about the current historical situation of Europe, which according to Said is Auerbach foreseeing the “downfall of Europe, and Germany in particular” (*Humanism* 115). Similarly, Said’s book *Orientalism* starts with the criticism of “exemplary” Orientalist scholars while consciously avoiding some others, quite like the synoptic gesture in *Mimesis*, to represent an era in European thought while triumphantly announcing the downfall of Western epistemology (*WTC* 275). In fact, Auerbach’s method of Ansatzpunkt remains a repeated defence of *Orientalism*’s historical situatedness. Self-conscious historicism turns for Said into the expression of his subject position and thus into the ethical stance he has taken in *Orientalism*.

In his later writings, Said moves away from this defensive position to a more reciprocal relation between the East and the West. In his lecture “Orientalism Once More,”24 he reflects on how European history consists of binaries, of hosts and guests, friends and foes: “neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other” (870). Not only does he acknowledge his own role in the polarization of East and West, but Said himself becomes increasingly deconstructive when he values Auerbach as being situated in between polarities rather than representing a singular minority position, and for his ability to bring out the “fruitful inner tension” of European literary history (*Humanism* 104). Later, when he admits that his book *Orientalism* has “lent itself to increasing misrepresentation and misinterpretation,” Said pays his

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dues to the tradition of European humanities and the institution of the university for making it possible to write such a provocative work in the first place (“Orientalism Once More” 869). In this sense, he situates his own critical legacy in relation to the literary institution, where he sees himself as the direct heir of Auerbachian comparative traditions.

In sum, what Said appreciates in Auerbach’s dynamic identity is that he always remains Other rather than blending in and domesticating into the transverse power structures of his current location. According to Said, Auerbach was not only physically a guest in Istanbul but also was made a guest as a Jew in the West through the implicit anti-Semitism in philological scholarship that orientalized European Jewry, reinforcing the myth of the Jew as the outsider. Thus, Auerbach’s “strategic location” as a critic determines Said’s interpretation of the Western canon in Mimesis as the welcoming of world literature (Orientalism 20). He sees Auerbach’s Mimesis as an attempt to rewrite the genealogy, or otherwise expressed, to change the “home rules” in order to defy his status as a guest in Europe.

Said, we may say, is in exile in the West though never quite home in the East, while Auerbach is exiled in the East and rejected by his homeland. Said is expected to represent the East as an Arab professor in the West and the West in the Middle East—with the added difficulty of being an American Palestinian in America in the late twentieth century. Auerbach, likewise, as a German Jewish professor in Istanbul is expected to or takes on the role of representing the West to the East during a time of war between nations and nationalism. Thus, what Said and Auerbach have both in common is that their positions as either the host or the guest are complex, ambiguous and shifting.
The Hegemony of Erich Auerbach’s Western Canon in *Mimesis*

My personal enlightenment happened sometime between the tenth grade and eleventh grade in the dark, small library of my high school in Turkey, where the only literary works were the books published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. These were paperback books in a uniform cover and printed on cheap paper, which constituted the minimum library collection in high schools all over Turkey. In hindsight, these publications were a curious collection. They contained the Greek classics, Dante, Cervantes, almost all the canonical French and Russian novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some German literature, no British literature except for Shakespeare and Virginia Woolf, and only a few of the great Muslim classics, such as Averroes, and Ibn Arabi—the ones widely received and accepted in the West. It is hard to overlook the detail that the Western canon readily available in every school of the country to the children of the new Republic was a Romance-oriented one, very much in line with Erich Auerbach’s representation of Western literature in *Mimesis*. The scarcity of Eastern/Muslim classics in the library undoubtedly complied with the Western and secular orientation of the new Turkish Republic. Auerbach’s monolithic summary of “Western Literature” now became the literary past of a nation that formerly was only acquainted with Islamic literature and culture.

Later I found out about the activities of “Tercüme Bürosu [office for translation],” which was founded in the 1940s in Ankara with the aim of translating Western classical and contemporary literature into modern Turkish, and which indeed had a direct relation to Auerbach’s teaching activities while at Istanbul University. Not only were the primary translators all students of Auerbach (Sabiha Rifat, Azra Erhat, Erol Güney, among others), but the number of initial translations from various European languages also reflected the contents of
Mimesis (out of 638 translations, 210 were from French, 90 from German, 78 from Russian, 65 from English, and only 34 were from Eastern languages). Moreover, once I started my undergraduate studies in Ankara at the English/German Language Department, I was again referred to Mimesis by my professors for the “correct” way to interpret literature, to which I reacted by consulting critics like Georg Lukács and Terry Eagleton instead. It is because of this Turkish background then that I was very surprised to find out that Auerbach was a model for Edward Said’s “secular critic” primarily through his interpretation of Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, that monument of Enlightenment humanism with an exclusive interest in Graeco-Latin-Judaean-Christian culture.

The pedagogical influence of Auerbach’s philology in Turkey might indeed be a special case because of Auerbach’s timely arrival immediately following the overhaul of the Turkish education system. However, it is also a fact that Mimesis was not considered a marginal work at its initial reception in North America either. Despite some criticism of minor, factual details, it was considered a “masterpiece” for its “uniqueness and distinction,” and its brilliant “combination of synchronic and diachronic observations,”—the same reason my professors included Mimesis in our literary curriculum (Orientalism 20). I have no doubt that Mimesis had a similar pedagogical function in the American literature departments as it had in Turkey. Thus, it does not only seem peculiar that Said evokes Auerbach in contrast to Arnoldian high culture, but also that Said’s reading of Auerbach found credibility among postcolonial critics who

25 On the activities and function of “Tercümé Bürosu” see Azra Erhat’s “Tercümé Bürosu” in Sevgi Yönetimi, Yavuz Bayram’s “Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bilimi ve Bir Uygulama,” and Arnold Reisman “Bringing the Best Western Classical Literature to Turkish Masses.”
26 Carl Landauer, for example, in his chapter “Auerbach’s Performance and the American Academy, or How New Haven Stole the Idea of Mimesis,” notes that “[f]or the mid-century attempt to apotheosize culture, in a sense to create an Americanized Kultur, Mimesis was an exemplary text” (180).
salvaged Auerbach’s diachronic and synchronic philology for contemporary cultural studies.

I do not argue that Said and these critics are entirely mistaken in their appraisal of Auerbach. On the contrary, I believe that a combination of Auerbach’s diasporic and exilic condition and the historical and textual strategies in his works, especially ones that emphasize the ethical and responsive aspects of philology, warranted his contemporary reception. I will therefore review some facts and secondary literature about Auerbach’s stay in Istanbul, in order to understand how the Oriental location of his exile has contributed to the achievements of Mimesis. I will then turn to the famous first chapter of Mimesis, “Odysseus’s Scar,” and his essay “Figura” in order to identify the textual strategies that reflect Auerbach’s diasporic and exilic subject positions. As many contemporary critics argue, the comparison of Homer and the Old Testament in the chapter “Odysseus’s Scar,” where Auerbach clearly favours the style of the Old Testament, does indeed reveal an oppositional tension between Judaism and Christianity. Though many critics argue that through such a comparison Auerbach implicitly asserts his Jewishness, I believe that the distinction between classical and biblical style should first be understood through the context of late nineteenth-century German classical philology and biblical criticism, and only second through the question of Auerbach’s ethnicity. The German philological tradition is a more immediate background to the ethical choices Auerbach makes in his historical-philological method that produces a unique and intriguing work like Mimesis. Ethnicity might play a role, but as Said came to acknowledge, the boundary crossings and strategic identities that Auerbach adopts are more important than a singular preference for an ethnic background. As a result, I will argue that Auerbach’s philology was primarily embedded

27 When mentioning Auerbach’s “diasporic” condition, I refer to his Jewish minority background in Germany; and with “exilic” I mean his background as an immigrant in Istanbul as a former German citizen. The same adjectives can also be applied to his later position in post-War America.
in its scholarly discourse and polemics. Reading the irregularities in *Mimesis* as a sign of the revolutionary change towards the inclusion of world literatures in literary studies is simply an overinterpretation. The note about the disadvantages in Istanbul at the end of *Mimesis*, therefore, should be read literally as an apology addressed to Auerbach’s scholarly community. It only makes sense to read a scholar, who advocated and applied historical contextualization in his criticism, in his own historical context, rather than using him as a ventriloquist for today’s issues about multiculturalism.

However, Auerbach did indeed create a historical fissure in literary criticism towards an opening for the study of other-than-European literatures, which was the actual point that made Auerbach so attractive to Said, and directly and indirectly assisted Said’s career as an English professor of Middle Eastern origin. I therefore argue that Auerbach’s historical philology combined with an ethics for interpreting literature democratically and comparatively (a position openly discussed only in the post-exilic writings of Auerbach) displays a deconstructive hospitality that is both violent and welcoming of the Other. Through this approach, I hope to draw attention to the potentially hegemonic effect that Auerbach’s particular European, Judaeo-Christian bias had on the modern study of literature. Auerbach’s attention to the dialectical tension between Judaism and Christianity resembles the function of Arnoldian high culture in that it valorizes the indeterminate and moral function of literary interpretation over any other cultural constant. In a contrasting move to the current reception of Auerbach, I propose that *Mimesis* does indeed represent a certain type of Eurocentrism that nevertheless is deconstructive in that it also emphasizes the inner tensions, heterogeneity and temporality of Europeaness.
The “Oriental” Location of Auerbach’s Exile

The Oriental location of Auerbach’s exile has become the subject of some recent critical discussions as it evokes theoretical questions about diasporic identities and the epistemological implications of exile. It also sheds some light on other factors that were not taken into account in Said’s reception of Auerbach’s exile. An initial reaction to Said’s symbolic use of Auerbach in Oriental exile came from Emily Apter in “Global Translatio: The ‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933.” Apter tries to correct the misunderstanding, which was partly initiated by Said, of placing the beginnings of comparative literature and translational studies in Auerbach’s exile in Istanbul. Through a number of factual examples, Apter shows that Auerbach remained detached from his exilic location, in comparison to Spitzer, and distanced himself from the modernizing nationalism of the new Turkish Republic. Apter contends that Auerbach’s postscript in *Mimesis* on the scarcity of resources is a symbolic gesture to establish his distance from the host country. Apter, in fact, is the first one to draw attention to Auerbach’s activities while in exile, such as his refusal to learn Turkish, his antipathy for the nationalistic tenants of the newly established Istanbul University, and the fact that there were enough primary sources of Western literature to enable Auerbach to edit course books for the faculty (216). Auerbach’s voluntary distance from his host culture can be read as an effect of his diasporic identity as a European Jew interfering with his exilic identity in which he was expected to represent the nationalistic tenets of European humanism.

The facts of Auerbach’s exile in Istanbul that Apter touches on in her work on Spitzer become the focus of Kader Konuk’s recent articles. She employs a perspective set in the

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28 Biographical facts of Auerbach’s exile in Istanbul and his supposed seclusion during this exile have previously been treated in testimonial rather than factual detail in Geoffrey Green’s *Literary Criticism and the Structures of History* (35-6), and Harry Levin’s *Grounds for Comparison* (110-6).
modernizing Istanbul of Auerbach’s exile rather than the Oriental Istanbul of Said’s Romanticized version. Konuk actually consults Turkish sources and Auerbach’s personal letters, in a gesture that almost reveals Said’s own Orientalism. Said’s driving assumption is that Auerbach considered Istanbul as merely the location of the Oriental other, “the terrible Turk, as well as Islam, the scourge of Christendom, the great Oriental apostasy incarnate” (WTC 6). One point of Konuk’s discovery about Auerbach’s life in Istanbul, in agreement with Apter, is that Auerbach was not comfortable with the nationalism of the new Republic, because it “represented the kernel of nationalist ideology [combined with a] strong commitment to Western scholarship” (“Jewish-German Philologists” 47). Indeed, the only remarks about his host country in Auerbach’s private letters are not about any Oriental characteristics but about the suppression of them by the new state and its modern universities. For example, in a letter written to Walter Benjamin in January 1938, Auerbach criticizes the “renunciation of all existing Islamic cultural tradition, a fastening onto a fantasy ‘ur-Turkey’,” and describes the result of the Republican reforms in Turkey as “nationalism in the superlative with the simultaneous destruction of the historic national character,” and adds that especially the language reforms “made it certain that no one under 25 can any longer understand any sort of religious, literary, or philosophical text more than ten years old” (“Scholarship in Times of Extremes” 751).

Another striking fact to which Konuk draws our attention is that the modernizing ideology of the new Turkish Republic valorized the Hellenic heritage of Anatolia over the Ottoman/Islamic cultural heritages. It was mainly for these reasons that classical philologists like Spitzer and Auerbach were invited and not for their cosmopolitan, Jewish backgrounds. Konuk shows us how the reformers of the Turkish education system usually agreed on a “Turkish humanism […] as a movement which sought to recreate Turkish culture by developing a system
of education on the basis of Western classical learning” (“Erich Auerbach and the Humanist Reform” 76). This Turkish version of humanism would serve to promote “Turkish national consciousness,” require the early acquisition of Greek and Latin, and a thorough knowledge of the regions of the Byzantine past (79). Konuk elsewhere also argues that Turkey was not the haven for Jewish-German scholars during wartime as it is widely claimed today to prove Turkey’s early, modern cosmopolitanism. In fact, with Auerbach and Spitzer, some Nazi philologists were also hired in the same faculty for similar reasons (“Jewish-German Philologists” 36). It is, for example, interesting that Auerbach in his letter to Walter Benjamin emphasizes that out of the seven assistants that Spitzer left for Auerbach in Istanbul “six [were] of Christian descent,” and that the Turkish government embraced émigré scholars “from whom one can learn without being afraid that they will spread foreign propaganda” (“Scholarship in Times of Extremes” 750-1).29 According to Konuk, it is only today that the presence of German-Jewish scholars in Turkey is “construed as a story that involves the rescuing of Jews,” while at the time, Turkish reformers understood it as the welcoming of European, humanist scholars to give impetus to a “Turkish Renaissance” (“Eternal Guests” 6).30 Overall, Konuk gives enough historical evidence from the period’s assimilationist and anti-Semitic policies to convince us that Auerbach’s Jewishness was not something celebrated or even foregrounded during his exile in Istanbul. Even if we consider that Mimesis was exclusively addressed to the scholarly

29 Konuk provides documentary evidence for the fact that Auerbach and other émigré scholars made a contract with the Turkish government to refrain from politics, and comments: “Émigrés shared with Turkish Jews the status of guests who were expected to refrain from promoting any national agenda other than Turkey’s—be it German or Zionist. Denationalized and secularized, émigrés hence enjoyed the privileges of a European intellectual under the condition of loyalty to the host country” (“Eternal Guests” 20)

30 Konuk’s main evidence for this point is a speech of Reşit Galip, the Minister of Education in 1933, who construed the welcoming of European scholars to Istanbul as a reparation for “the flight of Byzantine scholars to Rome [during the conquest of Constantinople] as something that had provided an important impetus for the Italian Renaissance” (“Eternal guests” 9).
community in Europe, it would have been risky for Auerbach to take a Jewish position before the war had reached an end.

Thus, what strikes us about the conditions in Istanbul is that, rather than an alien locale of exile, Auerbach encountered there more of what he was trying to escape by leaving Germany. It was not the complete alienness of the Oriental host-culture that dictated the critical distance towards Europe, but rather the adverse effects that European ideas had on non-European cultures. Auerbach indeed was concerned with the assertion of the assimilationist, suppressive mimicry of Turkish nationalism that overemphasized or even constructed cultural particularities. It could be said that he was more concerned with the expression of cultural particularity in this way, and preferred high-cultural harmony as a cultural model for the new Turkish Republic. Though only passively, he was averse to this politics that he was expected to engineer. *Mimesis* should thus be read not as the expression of his Jewish particularity only, but as a testament to the complexity and heterogeneity of European identity and the dangers of nationalism. Although Auerbach appears to be cynical in his letters about the way the Turks conducted their Europeanization process, there is no evidence showing that he was dismissive towards the Turkish claims for Europeanness or that he believed that the Oriental character of the Turks was entirely incompatible with what they wanted to become, that is, European humanists. We need to take into account that the Hebrew Bible was commonly regarded an artifact of Oriental monotheism (for Herder it was Oriental poetry par excellence) in the philological tradition with which Auerbach was working from. Therefore, if Auerbach started writing about the stylistic superiority of the Hebrew Bible over the Homeric texts in the first chapter of *Mimesis*, it certainly has to do with the situation he encountered in Turkey, namely purist and primitive nationalism on the one hand and superficial Hellenization conducted through the complete
suppression of the Oriental monotheistic past on the other. At the same time, such oppositional
tension between the Hebraic and the Hellenic elements is also a proof for the direct transfer of
the methods of biblical criticism to the field of literary criticism.

The Harmonious Tension between Hebrew and Hellene in “Odysseus’ Scar”

In order to understand Auerbach’s reaction to ethnic and purist notions of identity, we must read
_Mimesis_ in the context of German classical and biblical philology of the late nineteenth-century,
especially the discussions around Hellenism and Hebraism. The major contribution of Auerbach
to modern literary criticism is his analysis of Christian figural interpretation and the classical
styles of antiquity through the history of what he calls “Western literature.” This criticism,
known as “figural interpretation” is carried out in his colossal work _Mimesis: The Representation
of Reality in Western Literature_ (1953, in German 1946), and first laid out as method in a
previously written essay “Figura” (1938) published in English as part of _Scenes from the Drama
of European Literature_ in 1959. Both works were written during his exile in Istanbul between
1936 and 1947.

Auerbach develops the term _figura_ in the essay with the same title as a rhetorical structure
at work in the representation of reality in Western literature. He traces the history and use of the
Latin word _figura_ to pagan antiquity and compares it to its Greek counterparts _schema_ and _typos,_
where it mostly appears in rhetorical and philosophical contexts meaning either “shape” or
“copy.” Auerbach observes that with the Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, Origen and
Augustine, the term gains a more historical dimension, meaning “a prophetic event [usually in
the Old Testament] foreshadowing things to come” and complemented by the actual fulfillment
of the event (usually the coming of Christ or events in the New Testament) (*Scenes 29*). Most interestingly, Auerbach points out how the Pauline epistles and the distinctly Christian method of allegorism employ figural interpretation “to strip the Old Testament of its normative character and show that it is merely a shadow of things to come” (50) Auerbach asserts that the reverse effect perpetuated on the previously pagan world with the geographical spread of Christianity, where texts, concepts and even objects that were previously secular started to be interpreted figurally, even allegorically with a sense of morality. Finally in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the high rhetorical styles of classical antiquity and the Christian “spiritualistic methods of interpretation” are all diffused (56). At the end, Auerbach states that his purpose in this essay was “to show how on the basis of [the term *figura*’s] semantic development a word may grow into a historical situation and give rise to structures that will be effective for many centuries” (76).

The same ideas are put to work in *Mimesis*, which starts with a chapter on Homer’s *Odysseus* in comparison with the Old Testament. Realism in Western literature, according to Auerbach, is the extension of Christian figural interpretation. However, this figurative principle is not only incessantly preserved in all Western literature, it is also undermined through waves of outside influences such as classicism, pagan beliefs, or philosophical currents. Throughout the chapters of *Mimesis*, the tension between classical antiquity and Christian figurations of the Old Testament is demonstrated in the works of various authors from the Western world, from Petronius to Virginia Woolf. One can clearly see the colossal achievement of *Mimesis* for literary criticism. It provides a summary not only of Western literature but also the cultural history of European humanism. Therefore, I see *Mimesis* mainly as a work at the crossroad between the historical-critical principles of German historical philology and the synchronic methods of New Criticism. Postcolonial readings of *Mimesis* today are perhaps taking more into consideration
what comes after—and thereby overemphasize its subversive aspects—rather than what came before, namely the German, humanist tradition of historical philology.

The only recent criticism of *Mimesis* through the background of German philological disciplines appears in James I. Porter’s article “Erich Auerbach and the Judaizing of Philology” (2008). Porter’s contextualizing of the dominant tension between classical and biblical styles in *Mimesis* within the “local, German context” instead of the “mythologized” version that takes Auerbach as “lonely comparativist writing without the benefit of a library in a non-European land” is an earnest, historicizing gesture, and parallel to my intentions here (116). Even then, Porter’s argument essentially reflects more the postmodern concern of Jewish difference within Europe rather than drawing attention to the continuity between German historical philology and Auerbach’s *Mimesis*. Porter argues that the chapter “Odysseus’ Scar” is meant as a provocation to German historical-philology at the time because “the Jews in that chapter are a little *too* Jewish, while the Greeks are a little too, well, … *German*” (115).

Indeed, as I show in subsequent chapters, German philological studies of the nineteenth century were marked by ideological contrasts like these despite the common image of objective and detached scholarship. The urge to compete with and modify the French brand of Enlightenment due to ongoing political conflict with France, coupled with the particular form that the Jewish question took in German-speaking lands, especially in Prussia, reflected directly onto the discussions in philology and biblical criticism. The tension between Hellenism and Hebraism also came out of this atmosphere and found its way into these “objective” disciplines. I think Auerbach was primarily conversing with this background. While there was an increasing, Romantic interest in the Old Testament as the natural poetry of the Hebrews, the association of
the Oriental, Semitic Hebrews with the now orientalized Jewish minority in the German-speaking lands caused anxiety because it threatened the long-desired unification of Germany. As a result, the dominant, liberal-Protestant breed of German classical and biblical philology tended to be philhellenic, in some cases even visibly pro-Teutonic, while rejecting the Hebrew and Semitic elements of German culture and Christianity.

Porter successfully draws attention to this background in his analysis of “Odysseus’ Scar.” For example, he claims that when Auerbach prefers the historical depth of the Old Testament to the rhetoric and dependence on legend in Homer, he is actually settling historicism and realism against the speculative reason of German transcendental idealism and the use of Teutonic mythology: “Auerbach’s view of historical reality, with its plunging verticalities, is full of terror and of beautiful potential [and] might well be called Abrahamic” (156). As we will see in Chapter Three, Auerbach was not nearly as radical in his claim for an Abrahamic tradition as Geiger was in his historical scholarship. While Porter’s claims are in line with contemporary interest in Jewishness as part of Abrahamic tradition, I find that Mimesis from this perspective will be overinterpreted or even misrepresented. I disagree with the idea that Auerbach’s Jewishness “spectacularly emerges in Mimesis” (116). Auerbach at best remains reconciliatory and far removed from asserting Jewish difference. For example, even though Auerbach is not too fond of Homer’s simple and dimensionless style, he is never dismissive about the classical, Hellenic elements in Western literature. For Auerbach, rather than defending the Abrahamic aspects of Judaism, as far as it can be represented by the Old Testament only (note that even the name “Old Testament” reflects the Christian perspective and not the Judaic one), still assumes an essential and even supersessionist link between Judaism and Christianity. As I will argue further below, Auerbach’s figural interpretation places a special emphasis on the uniquely Christian
notions of incarnation and the passion of the Christ (which are accepted by neither of the other two monotheisms) as a precondition to the representation of reality in Western literature. In that sense, I do not see much difference between the “religiosity in literary criticism” that Said criticizes in WTC and the literary criticism of Auerbach (290-5).

John D. Dawson in a theological study, on the other hand, places too much emphasis on the continuities between Auerbach’s figural interpretation and the Christian allegorical tradition. Dawson’s convincingly shows that Auerbach’s historicizing reading in Mimesis is not that different than Origen’s allegorism, which is repudiated by Auerbach as being anti-historical. Dawson places critics of Jewish origin such as Daniel Boyarin, Auerbach and Hans Frei in dialogue with Origen, while he discusses how the chosen identities of these critics, whether through a modernist or poststructuralist discourse, determine their opinions of Origen’s allegorism. Unfortunately, Dawson’s study barely states anything about the cultural identities of the figures he discusses; instead, he uses them as facilitators for a defence of Origen from a poststructuralist perspective. Nevertheless, Dawson’s identification of an essentially Judaeo-Christian principle in Auerbach’s European literature is worth considering. Dawson, like Porter, contextualizes Mimesis in the biblical studies and classical studies of the time in Germany, where debates were held about whether Christianity should be completely de-Judaized—including the elimination of the Old Testament from the Christian canon—or whether the Old Testament should be preserved after being stripped off its Judaic elements through Christian figural interpretation. Dawson observes that in an attempt to preserve the historical reality of the Old Testament, Auerbach condemns allegorical interpreters like Origen of “stripping” figures and

31 Dawson uses a speech on this subject of Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber, Old Testament scholar and archbishop, given two years before Auerbach’s exile to Istanbul in 1935, to contextualize his study.
events of the Old Testament of their “concrete reality,” and praises Christian figural interpretation, such as that of Tertullian, for preserving the Jewish character of the Old Testament within a religion of universal claims (114). In the end, Dawson’s argument matters more for Origen’s current reception than for Auerbach’s, since he claims that there is in fact a “functional similarity [between] Origen’s and Auerbach’s common insistence that the history that matters is the history to which the reader relates in ways that affect his or her stance toward self and others in the present” (12).

I want to point out what cultural critics of Auerbach nowadays ignore in their enthusiasm to make Auerbach a spokesperson for Jewish particularity and what Dawson takes for granted: Auerbach worked within the paradigm of Judaeo-Christian universalism; more specifically, he accepted a symbiosis model between the Judaic and the Christian elements of European humanism, with a complete disregard for the particularity of contemporary, living Jews, reminiscent of the Arnoldian dialectic between Hebraism and Hellenism. Second, though Dawson’s book contains the word “identity” in the title, Auerbach’s way of fashioning his own Jewish identity by choosing allies and foes in Christian hermeneutical history, as shown in the polarity suggested between Origen and Tertullian, is brushed aside by Dawson. What needs to be added perhaps is that Auerbach was making ethical choices “towards [his] self and the other” by reacting to the racist implications in his subject matter while trying to remain within the discursive limitations of his discipline (Dawson 12). Once Mimesis is contextualized in such disciplinary discussions, poststructuralist over-interpretations of this work or the owning of it for the Christian hermeneutical tradition appear equally flawed.
As a side note, I would like to give an example of the disparate interpretations of *Mimesis* by these two sides. The varied reception of the last chapter of *Mimesis*, where Auerbach offers a critique of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and for the first time reflects on his own method and historical circumstances, is the case in point. David Damrosch interprets this chapter to make a point for world literature, while Dawson draws a conclusion about Christian hermeneutics. Dawson argues that Auerbach favours Woolf’s novelistic style despite its fragmentary and vague nature, because it is still an extension of the Christian figural interpretation of the Old Testament in that it asks for a “meaning” or a “spirit” while it preserves the concreteness of the present, psychological event: “the texture of life that comes into view by way of the opening up of present occurrence as *figura* to the depths of the past is the kind of ‘fulfillment’ that Auerbach sees in modern realistic representations” (111). Thus, for Dawson’s Auerbach, the hermeneutical relation between the Old and New Testament is essential to Woolf’s novels, which allow interpretation and literary work, signifier and signified to exist alongside each other. Damrosch in his article “Auerbach in Exile” (1995), on the other hand, observes throughout *Mimesis* a polarity between “classical (Greek) harmony, order, balance, free play, and presence” and, as revealed in Auerbach’s admiration for Woolf’s fragmentary style, “modernist (Jewish) fragmentation, psychological complexity, and exile or absence” (113). In contrast to Dawson’s, Damrosch’s interpretation of Woolf’s modernism has already dropped the “call for meaning,” or the presence of the signified (Dawson 111). Furthermore, Damrosch notes that Auerbach withdraws his admiration for Virginia Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness by interpreting “the modernist retreat from system and chronology [as paving] the way for the rise of fascism,” thereby relating it to the racial particularism of the Nazi regime (113). Damrosch foregrounds the fact that Auerbach uses “literary analogies” to comment on the political situation in his time, and
chooses to ignore that Auerbach might be reacting to modernism from the standpoint of universal
humanism and ethics instead of asserting a Jewish particularity, or any type of particularism for
that matter.

Dawson and Damrosch represent the two poles of the interpretation of Auerbach’s ethical
philology. The one reveals the Protestant and universalist aspects of Auerbach’s figural reading
and the other argues that Auerbach’s Jewishness has influenced the content of his works a great
deal and thus led to the study of a world literature based on the appreciation of local
particularities. In other words, one critic emphasizes the hegemonic aspect of Auerbach’s
Western canon in *Mimesis*, and the other the hospitable aspect. I believe that both are true when
read through the lens of deconstructive hospitality. Auerbach draws attention to the tensions
within the West, even relativizes the value of Western literature; however, as a humanist he
favours harmony over opposition, and ultimately establishes a hierarchy in which Western
humanistic literature occupies a very special place at the top. In the remaining part of this
chapter, I will show how in Auerbach’s essay “Figura” and his chapter “Odysseus’s Scar” the
tension between the Judaic and Christian elements of Western literature are nothing more than
the extension of the harmonious play of the Hebraic and Hellenic aspects of European culture,
reminiscent of Arnold’s notion of high culture.

Most critics who read Auerbach’s assertion of Jewish difference in *Mimesis*, interpret
figural interpretation as mainly a historicizing gesture to counter the typological forms of
classical Christianity, and take Auerbach’s more detailed analysis of the Old Testament in
*Mimesis* as a sign of privileging the law-bound and concrete aspects of Judaism as opposed to the
style and legend-oriented Hellenism of Homer. However, as can be seen in the “Figura” essay,
Auerbach also shows interest in the synchronic analysis of forms, structures and styles. For example, Auerbach refers to symbolic and mythical forms, which were “characteristic of primitive cultures” and “first recognized and described by Vico” (*Scenes* 56). Symbols and myths are not imitations, and their meanings, usually possessing magical power, are contained in themselves; moreover, they are to be found, like “figura,” in religious spheres. Auerbach also distinguishes between figural prophecy and symbol, because the former “relates to an interpretation of history—indeed it is by nature a textual interpretation—while the symbol is a direct interpretation of life and [...] of nature” (*Scenes* 57). These two ways of interpreting, both new and infinitely old (the “veiled eternal reality” of figural prophecy), are synthesized in the figuration of the Old Testament and henceforth preserved in all Western literature. The exemplary interpretative moment in the New Testament would be “the sacrament of the sacrifice, the Last Supper,” as both a figure and a symbol, giving us “the purest picture of the concretely present, the veiled and tentative, the eternal and supratemporal elements contained in figures” (*Scenes* 60). Evidently Auerbach does not disregard entirely the symbolic significance of the Passion as a moment combining the diachronic and synchronic elements of figural interpretation. Clearly, Auerbach views the Passion of Jesus, and by extension the gospels of the New Testament, as the generative moment of Western literary tradition.

Moreover, in “Odysseus’s Scar,” Auerbach draws his famous conclusion that the Old Testament’s claim to truth is “tyrannical,” since what the [the writer of the Old Testament] produced then, was not primarily oriented towards “realism” (if he succeeded in being realistic, it was merely a means, not an end): it was oriented to truth. … The Bible’s claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer’s, it is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims. (*Mimesis* 14)
The “tyrannical” sense of truth which claims sole authority over other realities creates the constant need for interpretation, which “reached such proportions that the real vanished” (15). Even though it is largely agreed that Auerbach is deeper and more sympathetically engaged with the style of the Old Testament in this chapter, he acknowledges the truth claim of the Bible as something negative (“tyrannical”) and even hegemonic. As a matter of fact, while the Jewish perspective subordinates earthly truth to the biblical truth, “the very claim,” explains Auerbach, “forces it to a constant change in its content,” for which the incarnation of Christ in Paul’s mission to the Gentiles is the most striking example (16). Thus, Christianity (or the New Testament), with the symbolic event of incarnation, becomes the first example of realism in Western literature. Judaeo-Christianity is placed in the very heart of literary sensibility, which makes I think, the notion of “world literature” a paradox in Auerbach’s world.

Starting the Western literary canon with the Old Testament is indeed a defiant gesture compared to the interests of the mainstream of German classical philology in Auerbach’s milieu. However, it is still far removed from today’s interest in Jewish particularity that is mediated not through the Old Testament only but through particularly Jewish traditions like midrash and the Kabbalah. Auerbach, although placing an emphasis on Jewish names and Hebrew expressions, does not show any interest in the post-biblical and rabbinic traditions of Judaism. Edward Said himself in his introduction to *Mimesis* is very clear about Auerbach’s Judaeo-Christian bias:

Thus for all the complexity of his argument and the minuteness of the often arcane evidence he presents, Auerbach, I believe, is bringing us back to what is essentially Christian doctrines for believers. (*Humanism* 95)

In the preceding pages, Said similarly admits that Auerbach “as Romance philologist was a man of a mission, a European (a Eurocentric) mission” (96). Said, who brought Auerbach to the
attention of postcolonial criticism, is also the one who accepts Auerbach’s Eurocentric humanism. In fact, Said never reads an assertion of Judaism in *Mimesis*. On the other hand, many critics who came after Said and who were partially influenced by him, such as Geoffrey Green, Jesse M. Gellrich, and David Damrosch, take the influence of the Nazi background on *Mimesis* as a sign of the assertion of Jewish particularity. Few other critics discuss Auerbach’s Eurocentrism. Vassilis Lambropoulos in *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation* (1993), for example, claims that *Mimesis* aspires to be “the Bible of literary criticism,” and that it gives a “sweeping Biblical view of literary history,” and thus reinforces a sense of Eurocentrism with its insistence on Hebraism (5-6). However novel his claim might seem, Lambropoulos approaches Auerbach’s Eurocentrism from the opposite and equally flawed angle by making “Hellenism” the victim, which together with Hebraism is presented as a very loose and changing concept in his sweeping thesis on “Western interpretation.” Michael Holquist, on the other hand, in “The Last European: Erich Auerbach as Precursor in the History of Cultural Criticism,” argues that *Mimesis* is far from being a monument for Eurocentrism in that it pushes the limits of Europe by over-defining it, and thus turns into a pioneering work of recent cultural criticism.

It is only in Auerbach’s post-exilic works, such as *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (trans. in 1965) and “Philology and Weltliteratur” (1969, in German 1952), that he reflects upon his own methods and his position within “the European drama.” He draws from Vico’s historical relativism the notion that the history of Europe as a totality only “sketches a certain pattern of human destiny [...] a kind of drama” (*Literary Language* 21). Auerbach’s next conclusion is that this phase of human civilization “is approaching the term of its existence”; therefore, “we must today attempt to form a lucid and coherent picture of this civilization and its unity” (6). Furthermore, in “Philology and
“Weltliteratur,” for example, Auerbach shows awareness of a certain Eurocentrism in what is emerging as “comparative literature,” or Weltliteratur, of his time. He warns against the “homogenizing” effects of such literary study that is burdened by specialization and economical demands. “In any event, our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation,” he concludes, and adds that “the most priceless and indispensable part of a philologist’s heritage is still his own nation’s culture and language [the Ansatzpunkt]” (“Philology and Weltliteratur” 17). Although, Auerbach in his post-exilic phase in America does indeed critique the Eurocentrism in literary criticism, his Mimesis, complemented by many methodological essays, is imposing a sense of European cultural superiority as the current.

**Conclusion**

In his “Introduction to the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition” of Mimesis, Edward Said calls for a study of Greek-Arab-Judaeo-Christian cultural interactions in the philological-historical style of Herder and Goethe. However, he does so with Auerbach’s modern awareness that this can only be done from the “limited perspective” of one’s own time and its urgencies (xxxii). This is Said’s praise for Auerbach’s worldly but secular and detached philology, and also a way of relativizing and “worlding” his own theory about Orientalism. The commitments he made throughout his life—his involvement in the Palestinian struggle and his opposition to American politics in the Middle East—form the “beginning intentions” for his literary criticism. Responding to these urgent issues through the language of literary scholarship, which is his own professional discourse, is his way of taking responsibility. His negative depiction of Arnold and his praise of Auerbach in WTC must be understood in this context.
Said’s responsibilities and the way these influenced his one-sided critique of Western Orientalism and its literary extensions in the nineteenth century, in a way, undermines the responsibility of literature as the “right to say everything” (Derrida, *On the Name* 28). Said’s political commitments as an American Palestinian—ironically from a Maronite Christian background—both opens up our discipline to the discussion of Islam and contradictorily makes it more difficult to speak about Islam from within Western discourses. As a result, Said’s writings and his legacy as a public intellectual leave us with a dilemma: What to do next as modern, Western literary critics in the face of Islam? (1) Either we can insist that everything the West does and says will be exclusively Western, Christian, Hellenic, Judaic, Latin, and that it will never include Islam, and that Islam will remain the radically alien, or (2) we can believe that the idea of the West itself consists of tensions and oppositions, that it always was transcultural, transnational, and was determined by histories and cultures in constant contest with each other, and that there is a possibility that Islam can be read as part of this dynamic. As we will see in the following two chapters—both in the context of contemporary Jewish theory and the cultural emancipation struggle of the Jewish minorities in the nineteenth century—questions such as these are closely related to philosophies of alterity. It is worth noting for now that discussions on the alterity of the “Jew,” both within modernity and postmodernity, eerily beckon us towards the current discussions on Islam’s difference within the West.

The allegorization of Jewish history by Christian exegesis is the historical extension of the conflict between the spirit and the letter/law since the time of Paul and it has been central to the discussion on Jewish identity today as well as in the nineteenth century. As we have seen, Auerbach does not refute such allegorization but in fact contributes to it through his description of Western literature in *Mimesis*. I argue that the assertion of Jewish difference and cultural
particularity became part of European cultural criticism only after Christian-Protestant universalism was overcome through poststructuralist and postcolonialist theorization. Derrida’s philosophy of deconstruction was certainly one of the biggest influences. In the following chapter, I will explore how Derrida’s philosophy contributed or interacted with such assertions of Jewishness that found the Judaeo-Christian hyphenation problematic rather than imagining it as a unified Western identity.
CHAPTER TWO
Unsettling the Judaeo-Christian Hyphen

[T]he Jew, the name Jew, is a *Shibboleth*; [...] witness to the universal, but by virtue of absolute singularity, dated, marked, incised by virtue of and in the name of the other [...]. It marks the fact that there is a ciphered singularity irreducible to any concept, to any knowledge, or even to a history or tradition, be it of a religious kind; a ciphered singularity in which a multiplicity gathers itself. (“Shibboleth” 327 & 338)

According to Derrida, the code word Shibboleth marks an unassimilable singularity and the collective existence of these singularities within a plurality. However, Derrida tells us that every Shibboleth carries also a “*double edge*” that marks a “ring of alliance [...] for the purpose of denying the other, of denying him passage or life,” thereby alerting us to the dangers of Jewish chosenness and the nationalist violence it may bear (“Shibboleth” 346). Derrida implies that Jewishness can stand for radical otherness and for all people who are marginalized. The figure of the Jew has carried the burden of difference and otherness, and has existed for a long time only in relation to a hyphen, as in Spanish-Jew, German-Jew, or American-Jew. In that sense, the name Jew can be exemplary of the aporia or hyphenated existence of any identity. On the other hand, Derrida points out in his reading of Paul Celan’s poetry that Celan’s association of being a poet with being Jewish amounts to a universalizing of exile, which may imply that “anyone or no one may be Jewish” (“Shibboleth” 341). A view of the Jew as a representative of the marginalized individual will contradictorily erase the particularity of being Jewish. The Jew as a

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32 The word “Shibboleth” is used in a biblical parable in Judges 12, where the difference in pronunciation of this word allowed the men of Gilead to identify their Ephraimite enemy at a border crossing. In its more common usage, it also means a custom, principle, or belief distinguishing a particular class or group of people.
poet will erase the Jew as a rabbi. Derrida, however, wants to keep both the poet and the rabbi.\textsuperscript{33} Therefore, he warns against “this narcissistic and exemplarist temptation,” the act of “acknowledging, or claiming to identify, in what one calls the Jew, the exemplary figure of a universal structure of the living human, to wit, this being originarily indebted, responsible, guilty” (“Abraham, the Other” 12). As soon as a discourse is applied to the aporia of Jewish identity, such as that of exile, multiplicity, or carnality, Jewish identity will lose its radical otherness. Derrida wants to hold on to the aporia in Jewish identity that is always in relation to a momentous hyphen, so that the Jewish experience can be a model for a plurality that is infinitely open to other differences. The integrated and the assimilated culture of modernity consists of non-stable singularities to be discovered besides and not only through Jewish experience. Therefore, if Judaism should be exemplary of anything it should be exemplary for the responsibility towards the radically other to come and yet not announced. It should be so especially because of the suffering of the Holocaust, which also bears the danger of being transformed into an ahistorical metaphor for Jewishness if one is not watchful. Derrida cautions us against such metaphorization when stating that “there is a date of a certain holocaust, the hell of our memory, but there is a holocaust for every date, somewhere in the world at every hour” (Derrida, “Shibboleth” 336). To draw attention to such transcendentalizing tendencies, Derrida reminds us of the “holocaust for every date” and the actuality of death. One may also ask whether this act of metaphorizing the Holocaust as a sign of Jewish difference is not similar to the Christian doctrine of incarnation, where bodily differences are erased with the spiritual meaning assigned to the letter and where the letter itself becomes the body of Christ, so that the

\textsuperscript{33} In “Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book” Derrida states, “the difference between the horizon of the original text and exegetic writing makes the difference between the rabbi and the poet irreducible […] The original opening of interpretation essentially signifies that there will always be rabbis and poets. And two interpretations of interpretation” (\textit{Writing and Difference} 67).
metaphors and the literal differences of the body are fused and become inseparable. We should be alert to but not alarmed by the fact that Jewish attempts at liberation from Christian-Greek metaphysics may be repeating the very metaphysical concepts that they are trying to overcome.

Besides certain concepts or discourses becoming timeless ethnographic or religious metaphors, certain hyphened relations can similarly become stabilized and so lose their qualities as momentous differences or allegiances. The dichotomous adjective of Judaeo-Christian (together with the analogous Greek-Jew or Hebrew-Hellene), which is actually only one of the many hyphens formed out of Judaism, has become an ahistorical metaphor standing either for historical progress through harmonious tension or for the struggle for liberation from hegemonic Western metaphysics. “Are we Jew or are we Greek,” Derrida asks us and continues, “and does the strange dialogue between the Jew and the Greek [carry] the absolute, speculative logic of Hegel?” (Writing and Difference 153). The Greek-Jew dialogue, whether perceived as harmony or as resistance, is a continuation of the Western metaphysics that is built on the confrontational and complementary relation between the Jewish and Christian religions. Especially when this hyphenation is employed for a defence of Jewish particularity, it often falls into the trap of repeating the same Christian metaphysics it tries to overcome. Derrida, by contrast, urges us to turn this relation from a dialogue to a polyphony where each side of the hyphen is open to further hyphenations. Jean-Luc Nancy, likewise, draws attention to the inherent failure of the hyphenation Judaeo-Christian, or of any hyphenation for that matter: “it draws or traces from itself a general de-composition. This de-composition first disunites the three religions called ‘of the book,’ and thus composes with Islam another assemblage and another discontinuity relative to the West” (215-6). In fact, what Nancy is referring to is the assemblage with Islam formed out of this discontinuity of the Judaeo-Christian; that is, Nancy chronologically orders the three
monotheisms in relation to Western/Hellenic philosophy. However, Nancy also observes that the Judaeo-Christian hyphen is the “uncomposable and undecomposable non-thought of our history” and somehow remains intact, at least for the time being (217-8).

Nancy’s analysis prompts us to ask: Are Jews still other within the West? Or to put it differently, can the Jewish experience in modernity and postmodernity still serve as an example for today’s issues around multiculturalism and religious particularity? On the one hand, David Stern notes that Jewishness, or Judaism as a religion, “is no longer understood as the repressed or suppressed ‘other’ of Western culture” (9). On the other hand, Sander Gilman draws our attention to the striking similarities between today’s discussions around the acceptability of Muslim religious practice and ritual within Europe and the emancipation struggle of the Jews within Enlightenment Europe in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Gilman argues that the Jewish experience indeed can be a model for the Muslim experience within multicultural Europe (1-22). And he gestures in the direction of literary studies, when he observes that “it is in the world of multiculturalism that literature […] generates the cultural capital to allow an ‘outsider’ to become a multicultural insider” (22). Gilman’s historical insight reminds us that the now abject or threatening image of the practising Muslim or the barbaric Arab could once easily pass as “exotic,” while the now acceptable image of the orthodox Jew within multiculturalism used to represent the violation of decorum in the Enlightened European society of two hundred years ago—while some forms of anti-Semitism unfortunately persist today. No single identity, or trait of identity, ever remains ahistorically marginal or Other. In fact, the designation “radically other,” for example in Derrida’s own usage, means that the other to come is unpredictable. Jews and other marginalized peoples in history provide us with insights
into the continual process of other-becoming-the same and the same-resembling-the-other, that is, in Derrida’s terms, the unstable relation of the host and guest within a relation of hospitality.

As we will see in the following sections, the Judaeo-Christian hyphenation is usually mediated through a treatment—literary, historical or theological—of the Bible. Though the biblical canons in Judaism and Christianity are substantially different, the culture of a common book of the Bible is more easily accepted in literary studies than the Qur’an considered as part of this same biblical and Abrahamic tradition. Although this dissertation concerns itself mainly with the literary aspects of scriptural interpretation rather than with literature itself, in this chapter I want to emphasize the point that the expression “people of the book” is first and foremost a cultural statement—rather than a religious statement—in which literature partakes. If reading the Qur’an as literature seems to be impossible or irrelevant for the moment, much can be said about treating the Qur’an as part of book culture within Western literary studies. The transnational and diasporic aspects of Muslim identity, at least since the nineteenth century, either directly or via Jewish appropriation, are evident enough that it is possible to talk about a modern, European book culture that no longer refers only to the Bible but now also to the Qur’an. To this end, a certain degree of de-territorializing of critical studies is required; in other words, we need a criticism that moves from a postcolonial towards a diasporic orientation.

In 1992 Jonathan Boyarin critiqued the postcolonial studies of his time, particularly Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, for their “conventional geographical specification of the other outside Europe and America” (80). Since then, critical studies have reoriented themselves to include a consideration of minority literatures and discourses within the West, partly thanks to the efforts of both Jonathan Boyarin and his brother Daniel, who followed a line of cultural
theorists like James Clifford, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. However, some territorializing paradigms are repeated even within the Jewish cultural studies that the Boyarins promote. The biggest obstacle itself is the hyphenation “Judaeo-Christian” with its pseudo-universalizing tendencies. Engrained into the Western historic consciousness in the nineteenth century, with its racialized overtones as Hebrew and Hellene, it continues to haunt cultural studies today. Subaltern postcolonial studies and some forms of Jewish cultural studies have repeated the myth of the Judaeo-Christian, thereby making the third Abrahamic religion and its core texts irrelevant to cultural and literary studies. I think this tendency can be put down largely to the habit of territorializing within critical studies, and in the case of Islam, of making it a subject belonging exclusively to Middle Eastern geographies with the consequent disciplinary division in academia. Deterritorialization of Islamic studies will start with the acknowledgement that representations of Islam or oppositional voices in the name of Islam emerge out of the encounter with Western hegemony. To this, the rise of postcolonial studies itself testifies, since that new discipline was primarily initiated by exiled or migrant subjects like Said and Spivak, listening to the voice of the distant other, beginning with the other within. Including Islam as a history, a collective memory and a body of texts within broader, even high-cultural discussions will not only give voice to the millions of identities within the West but eventually will empower third-world scholars in their own locations. This is why I believe that the openness to the radically other in Derrida’s theory of hospitality is the most suitable discourse for making Islam’s scripture and tradition part of theoretical and cultural discussions today.

In the first section of this chapter, I will look at examples from contemporary Jewish theory that see modernity as an ongoing tension between the Judaic and the Christian elements of Western culture rather than an allegiance. Such assertions of Jewish identity usually involve the
reading of biblical material and intersect with the poststructuralist theory of Derrida as well as with literary criticism. The Jewish theorists that will be treated in this chapter were selected because they are aware of the singularity of the identity they want to assert and yet they “testify to the features of structures nevertheless universal” (Derrida, *Monolingualism* 20), in this case to poststructuralist theories. The main inquiry of this chapter thus will be to ask how one can testify to the irreducible singularity of the Other—Jewish, Muslim, woman—and still be representative of something universal—Jewish, Muslim, woman—the aim being the formulation of a deconstructive reading of the past that will work towards the assertion of a Muslim identity or difference. The examples accounted for and critiqued here all testify to deconstructive exemplarity, that is, they demonstrate how a subjectivity (Jewishness) can be best expressed in relation to one’s Other (Christianity) and how the Other’s image eventually determines how the self defines itself. It will become apparent that I favour certain expressions of Jewish particularity over others, particularly when there is a danger that Jewish qualities may otherwise be sublimated, essentialized or turned into timeless metaphors.

In the first section I look at critics who highlight the supersessionism implied in the hyphenated designation of Judaeo-Christianity by expressing Jewish difference in terms of textuality, memory/historicity or materiality. I argue that the expression of Jewish particularity by these means was only possible once Christian-Protestant universalism was overcome through poststructuralist and postcolonial theories. I suggest that the Jewish experience in post-/modernity can be exemplary for the assertion of Muslim difference within the West without necessarily leading to a clash of cultures or assimilation of the minority culture into the host culture. Today multiple cultural readings of Muslim scripture can lead to a multiplicity of Muslim identities. However, the singularity and cohesion of the Qur’an, which is its main claim
for difference in the face of the previous biblical traditions, must also be acknowledged in the process.

In the second section of the chapter, the focus shifts to Jacques Derrida’s discussion on Islam’s place within the Judaeo-Christian/Graeco-Latin culture of Europe and its relation to his own Arab-Jewish background. The two historical and interpretive concepts of Derrida that I use to express the possibility of Muslim difference in literary theory are “deconstructive exemplarity” and “Abrahamic hospitality.”

Some discourses can turn names like “the Jew” into dangerous and monolithic entities, either to be attacked or to be valorized—anti-Semitism is certainly not a thing of the past. The same can happen to the name “Muslim” as well. The goal of this discussion is to approach an understanding that there is no single Islam nor any uniform Muslim identity and that there are only performed identities. Despite our postmodern theories’ focusing on multiplicity as opposed to unchanging or homogeneous identities, our discourses on Islam outside and inside academia can sometimes resort to interpretations that still privilege the act of grasping the whole of or revealing the meaning behind the name Islam, just as was done to Judaism in the nineteenth century by gentiles and by Jews alike. What we need is a way of reading Islam that can effectively caution us against this homogenization but that does not ignore the need for talking about a singular/universal Islam. The last section below, dealing with Derrida’s writings, will show that reading the past through deconstruction involves reading and writing with an openness and an acknowledged responsiveness towards the Other that is decided on at the moment with hospitality.
FORMS OF JEWISH DIFFERENCE

Textuality

“Of course, resemblance is not identity. But the mapping of resemblance is often the closest we can get to knowing identity of any sort” (Hartman and Budick x). The resemblance that Geoffrey Hartman in the introduction to the book Midrash and Literature (1986) is referring to is one between the rabbinic exegesis of midrash and poststructuralism, more specifically deconstruction, around the time when Derrida’s philosophy was peaking in popularity. This resemblance was in fact a “mapping of difference” of Judaism, namely by a focusing on the rabbinic traditions that developed and defined themselves in opposition to the Graeco-Christian hermeneutical traditions. Rabbinic exegesis that was previously considered unsystematic, subjective and marginal by nineteenth-century biblical scholars, both Jewish and Christian—only entered the discourse of criticism with the subsequent questioning of the epistemological dominance of scientific method and the repressive aspects of Enlightenment universality. In fact, midrash served as a point of reference within poststructuralism, particularly within deconstruction, to test the Graeco-Christian limits of literary criticism.

The initial articulation of a resemblance between poststructuralism and midrash came in Susan Handelman’s The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory (1982). The insistence on the Hebraic aspects of the interpretive act, often set against the primary text-oriented classicism of the New Critics, was not new in the literary academy; it was often articulated in the “deconstructionist” criticisms of the Yale school, most prominently by Geoffrey Hartman in Criticism in the Wilderness (1980) and in Harold Bloom’s
Kabbalah and Criticism (1975). The attempt to de-Hellenize literary criticism can also be traced back to critics like Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe and even to Erich Auerbach. The poststructuralist re-interpretation of Jewish history and tradition also bears a resemblance to the Wissenschaft des Judentums of the nineteenth century that is considered the beginning of modern Jewish studies in that it attempts to adapt a religious tradition to existing philosophical currents (Hartman and Budick xii; Stern 7). However, Handelman’s work constitutes a first in that it takes these hints further and engages literary theory with a normative Jewish tradition like midrash (the canonicity of which is not disputed like that of Kabbalah) that developed in spite of and in opposition to the Christian and Platonic traditions; in Handelman’s own words, her book “concentrates more on the eras of antagonism than the moments of accommodation” between the two traditions (3). Handelman’s study exemplifies the early phase of poststructuralism in that it focuses on the textual and semiotic features of Christian and Jewish ways of reading texts.

Handelman traces midrash’s ontological difference to two historical sources: first, the syllogism arising from the mathematical thinking in Greek philosophy that disrupted “the original unity of word and thing, speech and thought, discourse and truth” (4); second, to the patristic and Greek desire to separate letter from spirit and to overcome scripture through the incarnation of the divine word in Jesus. Handelman argues that the Christian spiritualization of scripture in effect resulted in a radically literalized representation of Judaism in the sense that the “exiled, wandering, mourning, condemned outcast, accused of unredeemed original sin, [became] the Jew, the carrier of letter, the cultist of Writing” (169). Such a genealogy of Western logocentrism is familiar to us from Derrida’s work, particularly in Of Grammatology and Writing and Difference, to which Handelman makes ample references. With such a historical background and such modern resemblances in mind, Handelman establishes the most important feature of
midrash as the willful rejection of a logocentric exegesis. In Daniel Boyarin’s words, she gives an account of “midrash …as a token of what commentary might look like in a world without Logos” (“Midrash” 169). She establishes the tropes of similarity between poststructuralist theory and midrash by the function of the text as signifier:

The tendency to gather various meanings into a one [logos] […] is characteristic of Greek thought in general: its movement towards the universal, the general, the univocal. The Rabbinic tendency, by contrast, is towards differentiation, metaphorical multiplicity, multiple meaning [without] the confinement of meaning within the ontology of substance. (This liberation from the ontology of substance is, of course, precisely Derrida’s intent.) (Handelman 33)

Handelman evokes Derrida’s concept of “white mythology”34 whereby Western metaphysics, through the Christian doctrine of incarnation of the word and the mathematical/scientific thinking of Greek philosophy, “blanked out the recognition of itself as mythology and has taken itself for literal truth” (17). Midrash, on the other hand, resisted the literalization of the metaphor and maintained the search for the “original language, the concrete meaning behind the abstract concept” (18-9); therefore, Handelman argues, “rabbinic interpretation is not from one opposing sphere to another, from the sensible to the nonsensible, but rather ‘from sense to sense,’ a movement into text, not out of it” (21). Handelman gives specific consideration to the theories of metaphor in Freud, Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss besides Derrida, and often contrasts them to the “restitution of metaphorical consciousness” in Gadamer and Ricoeur’s theories (17). For Handelman the value of midrash for contemporary theory is the legitimation of an “infinity of meanings and plurality of interpretation,” as opposed to the Graeco-Christian insistence on the Logos as unified meaning (21).

34 Derrida’s essay “White Mythology” was published in New Literary History in 1974.
Though Handelman’s reasoning is too extensive and intricate to be briefly summarized here, I will critique certain features of this “mapping of resemblance.” Handelman’s reasoning starts by focusing on the contingency of language in the biblical passage, “in the beginning God created the heavens and earth” (17). Not only does she ignore the implication that God’s will comes before this contingency, but she also falls under the power of the Hellene-and-Hebrew dichotomy when making this Hebrew “contingency” the source for interpretation itself when contrasted to the materialism or “realism” of Greek thought. Unsurprisingly, Handelman uses Auerbach’s chapter “Odysseus’s Scar” to back up her argument on the “interpretive urge” in the Hebrew Bible (29-30). However, Handelman ignores the “tyranny of truth” of the Hebrew Bible that Auerbach points out and favours the infinite possibilities and multiplicities that this urge towards interpretation suggests. Her selectiveness almost fetishizes the act of interpretation, clearly with the motive to make midrash appealing to modern literary theory. Even when done for the sake of resemblance—and Handelman refers to Derrida to justify the need for resemblances—she disregards the possibility that for the rabbis who produced the midrash the book and God’s will behind the book were the limits of their interpretation. Besides misrepresenting midrash, such an argument also contains a misrepresentation of Derrida’s thought. Simply put, it makes Derrida look very biblical. For example, the title of a chapter becomes “Reb Derissa’s Scripture” and deconstruction is called “a new religion of Writing” (Handelman 163-4).\(^{35}\) Derrida’s concept of différance, in fact, goes beyond the contingency of the word, beyond creation and beyond the book. Deconstruction takes the metaphoric relation itself as anterior to any theological presence as metaphor and therefore calls for a radical otherness in writing/interpreting, without the anticipation of a meaning or any limitation on

\(^{35}\) Derrida provocatively signs off his essay “Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book” with the signature “Reb Rida” (Writing and Difference 67).
meaning. Through the same logic, Handelman also presents deconstruction as a tipping towards midrashic interpretation, or in other words, a privileging of the Hebrew pole of the familiar dichotomy, whereas deconstruction draws attention to the relation between such poles, neither ignoring nor favouring one side over the other.

My intention is not to be merely critical but to point out the consequences of Handelman’s argument. Just as “literature” in the West was essentialized as the harmonious tension of Judaeo-Christianity in Arnold’s and Auerbach’s criticism, Handelman in a way essentializes interpretation and multiplicity as Jewish. Although multiculturalism and pluralism are at stake here, high culture in its literary and critical aspects is territorialized, once again, between Athens and Jerusalem. Handelman falls for the “temptation of exemplarity” (Derrida, “Abraham, the Other” 12) in accepting the very assumption she is critical of; namely that the “exilic, wandering Jew” is the embodied metaphor for textuality and infinite criticism (Handelman 169). Textuality becomes an ethnographic metaphor for Jewishness. At the end, the resemblances established between midrash and literary theory can be said to be a sort of Jewish “liberation hermeneutics,” failing the larger project of promoting cultural plurality (Sugirtharajah, The Bible and the Third World 259).36

The resemblances forged between midrash and deconstruction are based on the assumption that midrash is unsystematic, fragmented and thus open to endless interpretation. However, we must also take into consideration that the representation of midrash as “unsystematic” is the result of Graeco-Christian hermeneutics and partly of Enlightenment

36 Sugirtharajah’s notion of “liberation hermeneutics” is used to define a certain type of biblical criticism that aims to “dismantle hegemonic interpretations” and to “undermine the certitude of dominant biblical scholarship,” but one that is still entrenched “within the modernistic framework” and does not fully embrace “postmodernism for its liberative cause” (The Bible and the Third World 259).
rationalism and does not necessarily mean that the rabbis celebrated their own work for these qualities. In that sense, Handelman’s association of midrash with Derrida’s theory reminds us of the resemblances detected between deconstruction and negative theology around the same time. Besides bearing the danger of theologizing Derrida’s philosophy, these sorts of resemblances, as David Stern later points out, exemplify “theory’s imperializing claim” over the representation of midrash, which is something that scholars of midrash found offensive and damaging (5). Handelman’s argument also disintegrates when we are informed, for example by Daniel Boyarin, that midrash did not evolve in isolation but was subject to the influence of logocentrism, particularly in medieval times (“Midrash” 169). To conclude, we must realize the power and necessity of a liberation hermeneutics that to a certain degree operates through establishing resemblances to current theory in order to draw attention to cultural particularities and differences. However, we cannot lose sight of what is universalized, essentialized and given exemplary or metaphoric qualities in this process, thereby suppressing other particularities and differences. According to Handelman’s study, the dialectical struggle between the Hebrew and the Hellene in literary criticism is finalized with the ultimate victory of the Hebrew, this time standing exclusively for Jewish difference.

Though the history described in Handleman’s book appears at times polarized between midrash and Graeco-Christian logocentrism, it is nevertheless an inspirational and pioneering work that created a crack in disciplinary walls and brought Jewish studies to the attention of theory. Subsequent attention to the history and use of midrash within literary studies was more self-conscious, as in the volume *Midrash and Literature* (1986). For example Harold Fisch in one of the essays of this volume warns us that “any attempt to harmonize the theory of the composition of midrash with modern literary theory faces a difficulty so formidable that all that
has been said so far is called in question” (Hartman & Budick 231). What I want to focus on next is the opening essay of Midrash and Literature by Geoffrey Hartman, “The Struggle for the Text.”

As in Criticism in the Wilderness, Hartman in this essay tries to erase the hierarchy between text and commentary by adding a historical dimension to the textual criticism of the Bible when he asserts, “for any text to remain alive requires the supplementation of commentary” (9). Hartman’s reading of Jacob’s struggle with the angel in the Bible (Genesis 32) demonstrates the significance of the “historical layering” of commentary, a term he borrows from Auerbach’s adjective geschichtet for biblical narratives, meaning both “layered” and “historicized.” Rather than establishing a direct analogy between the biblical qualities of multi-referentiality, fragmentation, intertextuality and literary language, as had been done before by critics like Barthes, Levi-Straus and Bakhtin, Hartman here attempts to distinguish between literary fiction and scripture by emphasizing how scripture “leaves traces, which incite and demand interpretation, [and] recalls […] the authority of traditions handed down, each with its truth claim” (13). In other words, Hartman points out that the preceding New Critical and semiotic approaches to the Bible either impose a textual unity and an aesthetic value on scripture or ignore the text’s “teleological impulse” by reading it merely as a collection of legends (15). He refers to Auerbach’s chapter “Odysseus Scar” in Mimesis as maintaining a gap, through the Bible’s truth claim, between fiction and scripture. What Hartman suggests is a contemporary reading of the Bible that is closer to exegesis, such as midrash, and one that would “keep the Bible from becoming literature” (9). In that context, he sees the value of midrash as a mode that preserves layers of tradition with “faith” while answering to concrete human needs in the present:
The accreted, promissory narrative we call Scripture is composed of tokens that demand the continuous and precarious intervention of successive generations of interpreters, who must keep the words as well as faith. (Hartman and Budick 17)

In this passage, first of all, we read a correction to the simplified resemblances drawn between midrash and literary theory by a consideration of faith. Rather than a theological necessity, “faith” here implies a struggle for cultural identity and the need to preserve that identity through interpretive continuity. Hartman prefers to bring out the “layered” aspect of rabbinic hermeneutics instead of the linear evolution of it parallel to Graeco-Christian traditions, as emphasized by Handelman, precisely because it is the divergence between the layers, its “folds” so to speak, that brings “together radically divergent modes of representation under the sign of difference” (16). What is at stake here is, of course, the continuity of Jewish identity despite and alongside Christianity. The rejection of the Platonic split between meaning and thing and the Christian supersessionism of spirit over letter, Hartman implies, are what keep Jewish identity and the faith in difference alive. The tradition of midrash is preserved through its Graeco-Christian Other, without which it would not exist. At first sight, Hartman’s effort seems similar to Handelman’s liberation hermeneutics, that is, forming an alliance with current theory against the hegemony of Graeco-Christian hermeneutics. However, Hartman’s focus on the historical “struggle for text” has its eye on current Jewish self-definition; as a result, midrash’s relevance to theory is starting to become a diachronic rather than a synchronic matter. In a way, Hartman’s interest in midrash is “an effort to find a genealogy, a precursor, for theory itself” while preserving “Judaism as [an] unassimilated foreignness” for today (Stern 4).

Hartman appreciates how Auerbach reflects “the depth and concreteness of historical life” in *Mimesis* and relates to Auerbach’s being an “expatriate victim of German national
socialism” (16). Hartman is clearly aware not only of Auerbach’s Jewish subject position but also of his own subject position in the literary critical institution as a Jew. However, Hartman’s theory of midrash still does not leave the bounds of the dialectic between Hebraism and Hellenism. His addition is to make différance diachronically an extension of Jewish thinking or Hebraism. The midrash-and-theory adventure is mainly significant for showing us the limits of theory facing a particular ethnic and religious tradition like midrash. The interest in midrash as textuality ends by hitting the walls of historicism, or more specifically, what gets to be called “Jewish memory.”

David Stern in his book *Midrash and Theory* (1996) summarizes this relationship from the perspective of Jewish studies, and helpfully presents the literary critical interest in midrash as an extension of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of the nineteenth century, which read midrash through the then popular historical philology and as part of the modern struggle to establish “Jewishness as a secular identity” (9). However, Stern notes that the midrash-theory connection tries to overcome the historicisms of existing Jewish studies and follows the theologizing aspirations of the Romantic interpreters of the Bible in order “to find in midrash a kind of hermeneutical metanarrative that would transcend the ironic awareness of history” (10). As the discussion in the next section will show, there were various reasons for the rejection of historicism among post-Holocaust Jewish scholars, one of which was the failure of a hybrid German-Jewish identity that was the main drive behind the *Wissenschaft des Judentum’s* positivist historicism. The literary critical attempt to revive Jewish traditions in the search for a modern, Jewish selfhood was another way of dealing with the trauma of the Nazi persecution and facing the failures of Jewish intellectualism that preceded the catastrophe. However, as we have seen, the familiar dichotomy of Hebrew and Hellene with its racialized and territorialized
meanings mainly invented in the nineteenth century left its marks even on these corrective endeavours in modern times.

On the other hand, as Stern notes, the “Jewish criticism” of Bloom and Hartman did “evoke a real excitement among contemporary Jews […] at least within the ‘university’” (10-1). I argue that whatever has been said about the similarities between midrash and deconstruction repeated to a degree the paradigms that such interventions were trying to overcome through an added awareness of différance in place of harmony or dialectics. That said, they served their purpose as a Jewish liberation hermeneutics in a way that Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis* did not, since Auerbach’s work primarily contributed to the forming of a “common culture” of Judaeo-Christianity rather than its dispersal. And yet, perhaps we should consider that the latter would not have been possible without the former, and that attempts to question the Judaeo-Christian hyphen would not have been possible before such an alliance was even uttered in the form given to it by Auerbach. In fact, the Jewish qualities of Auerbach’s *Mimesis* came to the foreground in retrospect only after the liberating effects of the alliance between midrash and theory took effect. Most of the essays in the collection *Midrash and Literature* show an awareness of their performative function for modern Jewish identity. On the other hand, we still see a contrast between the emancipatory insistence on the “difference” or even “essence” of Jewish identity in Hartman’s essay, for example, and Derrida’s conviction that “what is proper to the Jew is to have no property or essence” in the essay “Shibboleth” in the same volume (328). As Ash argues in a review, “Hartman’s and Bloom’s careful definitions of cultural identity (genre, type) would also be considered by Derrida as completely permeable thresholds” (Ash 78).
Derrida’s theories on the aporia of cultural and religious identity would open the way to Muslim difference by going beyond the Book in book culture, by which is usually understood the reception of the Bible and rarely the Qur’an. Only when the Qur’an becomes part of this previously biblical book culture in the academy—and outside literary criticism, notably within Islamic studies, this expansion has already taken place—will Muslim “liberation hermeneutics” be taken seriously. But such going beyond the Book initially needs a consideration of its historical dimensions.

**Historicity**

Another way of asserting Jewish identity after the Holocaust was by the exploration of a collective Jewish memory, which was first defined in opposition to Jewish historiography in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s book *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982).

Yerushalmi’s book concerns itself with the role of “collective memory” in “the survival of a people that has spent most of its life in global dispersion” (5).³⁷ The primary trajectory of the book follows a three-stage development of Jewish historiography within Jewish memory: the biblical/rabbinic, medieval/pre-modern and the modern. According to Yerushalmi, the pagan “repetition of mythic archetypes” and the Hellenic tradition of chronicle met in the Hebrew Bible as an understanding of “meaning in history,” such that God could only be known and remembered through his acts in history. The frequent evocation of memory in the Hebrew Bible as “zokhar” supplies the title of the book. Though a collective memory is now chronicled in

³⁷ The term “collective memory” was first used by Maurice Halbwachs in *Le Mémoire Collective* (1950) but not in the context of the Jewish people. It was later developed by Pierre Nora in *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984-94), and by Eric Hobsbawm in *Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (1987). Yerushalmi himself only refers to Halbwachs’s influence in the prologue (xv).
written form, it is the ritualistic function (recitation) of the sacred texts that keeps it alive. In that sense, Yerushalmi makes sure that the Bible is not to be confused with historiography. However, he also notes that this Jewish recorded history, even in its mythologized forms, was primarily a concrete and human history. It was after the destruction of the Second Temple and with the move from biblical to rabbinic literature, Yerushalmi contends, that Jews stopped recording history, so that their interpretation of historical events became more “archetypal” and messianic (36-52).

Subsequently, after the trauma experienced with the Spanish expulsion, the rabbinic interest in historiography was completely suspended for an interest in myth and mysticism, as in the study of Kabbalah. This later period was also where Jewish memory, through recital and ritual, remained the strongest (57-74).

I want to focus briefly on the last section of the book titled “Historiography and its Discontents,” where Yerushalmi moves from a descriptive to a more prescriptive mode as he critiques the scientific historicism of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of the nineteenth century. Yerushalmi argues that the embrace of historiography among the Jews in this century did not naturally evolve from the Jewish tradition or memory, but that it “began precipitously out of that assimilation from without and collapse from within which characterized the sudden emergence of Jews out of the ghetto” (85). Accordingly, Jewish philosophy did not interact with European culture, but instead European Enlightenment philosophy was unquestioningly adapted by Jewish historians for the study of Jewish history. Thus, the encounter between Jewish tradition and the Enlightenment was at best a shallow if not one-sided encounter. To use Yerushalmi’s own words, “Jewish scholarship impinged upon cognate fields of general scholarship, a process now constantly accelerating” (86). The critique here, at once liberating and accusatory, is that “Jewish memory” was sacrificed for the scientific study of Jewish history, whereby the only appeal of
Jewish identity became its scientifically identifiable history, instead of its sacred texts, living traditions, or rituals. In other words, Jewish scholars assimilated Jewish history to a Christian epistemology that perceived Judaism as a superseded history. Yerushalmi calls the historiography under the name of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* “the faith of fallen Jews” (86).

While Yerushalmi makes very little reference to the Holocaust, his liberating recovery of Jewish memory can be seen as yet another attempt at finding an ethnographic metaphor for Judaism or for defining “real” and authentic Judaism. In this sense, the valorization of Jewish collective memory bears a similarity to other forms of Jewish thinking after the Holocaust that question the bias towards scientificity and historicity in German-Jewish scholarship of the nineteenth century. Gershom Sholem, for example, devoted his scholarship to the study of Jewish mysticism, which was not taken seriously by his precursors in the *Wissenschaft* tradition. Scholem also calls the achievements of German-Jewish historical scholarship a “cry in the void,” denies that there was ever a common German-Jewish culture and alleges that the Jewish side tried to assimilate into the host culture.³⁸ Both Yerushalmi and Scholem, it appears, build their own scholarship on the foundations of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and yet they are motivated by the urge to salvage a tradition or memory that was previously neglected due to the emphasis on scientificity. There is an implicit accusation against Jewish historiography in their critique for losing an authentic Jewish identity to a hegemonic culture that eventually produced the Holocaust. However, if the self is already formed in the image of its Other, than it carries its Other within its identity, and thus, concerns about assimilation as opposed to the separation of an authentic self are redundant. We will see in Chapter Three, when we come to consider the

³⁸ See, for example, Gershom Scholem’s “Against the Myth of the German-Jewish Dialogue.”
dialogue between Mendelssohn and Kant, that the German culture that bore the Aufklärung was already integrating the Jewish influence at its very inception.

Yerushalmi also urges his fellow historians not to lose sight of their agency in the world and to avoid antiquarianism in their research. He also recommends a more literary critical awareness as a corrective to historical over-specialization. The divorce of memory from history, he believes, is the “divorce of history from literature,” which “has been calamitous for Jewish […] writing […] because it affects the very image of the past that results” (100). In speaking of literature, he clearly refers to the literature produced after the Holocaust to memorialize the trauma that occurred. Just as subjectivity is expected from this type of memorializing work, so a consideration of collective memory is required for the historical study of a specific group or community. Thus, Yerushalmi concludes,

The notion that everything in the past is worth knowing “for its own sake” is a mythology of modern historians, as is the lingering suspicion that a conscious responsibility toward the living concerns of the group must result in history that is somehow less scholarly or “scientific.” (Yerushalmi 100)

Yerushalmi suggests, and I agree with him, that the selectiveness of historical scholarship depends on the scholar’s subject position and his or her current responsibilities towards a group, ethnic or gendered. However, Yerushalmi does not sufficiently allow that this was true for the scholars of Wissenschaft as well, who asserted their diasporic subject positions by preferring one of the dominant philosophical languages of their time, namely universal rationalism, over another one, Romantic nationalism, which territorialized identity, valorized fixed roots and represented literature and folklore as its allies.
Although Yerushalmi observes that the catastrophic and disruptive events experienced by the Jewish community result in a turn to myth and internalization, he only vaguely acknowledges that his own appeal to “Jewish memory” is a similar turn in the wake of the Holocaust (see Rosenfeld 510-12). Yerushalmi yearns—self-consciously— for a lost “Jewish memory” and thinks that modern literary forms, particularly the novel, provide a “temporary modern surrogate [for] a new, metahistorical myth” (98).

There are several aspects of Yerushalmi’s overall argument that deserve emphasis here. First, his general insight that the trauma of dispersion is usually followed by the construction of communal myths can also be applied to other diasporic communities. Instead of seeing the Jewish diaspora as an ahistorical myth or ideal metaphor for today’s issues around globalism and pluralism, we must use it as a contingent example and be open for further differences instead of essentializing qualities like exile, diaspora, and criticism as Jewish. Such an approach would allow us to recognize other current traumas and the myths they bear. Current thinking, for example, is liable to reinforce the nineteenth-century habit of territorializing and victimizing the Other and the subaltern, which makes an expression like “home-grown terrorists” stand for an anomaly rather than an expected outcome of colonialism. From a Christian-Western point of view, 9/11 is usually represented as the trauma of our generation, creating or enforcing myths about a unified and homogeneous Islam threatening the West. However, we must also remember prior traumas, such as colonialism, the dispersal of Muslim populations, the Iraqi wars, and the occupation of Palestine, which fuelled the myth of the “West” as the hegemonic Other, eventually leading to the 9/11 attacks. Politicians and sometimes even postcolonial theorists tend to geographically locate issues around Islam, either out of malice or good intentions, in the Middle East. However, we must acknowledge that ideas on Western hegemony are generated
through the traumatic encounter with or within the West. As a result, though Yerushalmi’s thesis on the importance of myths for the continuity of Jewish identity is valuable; however, we must also be alert to the dangers behind the essentialization and metaphorization of Jewishness as diasporic consciousness.39

Second, Yerushalmi’s liberation hermeneutics regarding Jewish memory does indeed serve the psychological function of memorialization, which clearly is required for the healing of trauma. In this sense, Yerushalmi’s pledge to “literature” to acknowledge its function as a memorial to the traumas of the past caused by religious conflict or persecution (100-1) opens up our discipline to ethnographic studies. Though the view of Jewish collective memory in Yerushalmi’s interpretation is to a degree Romanticized, his monumental book *Zakhor* has contributed towards a disciplinary opening that has revitalized Jewish studies and turned it into a Jewish cultural studies, or a Jewish self-ethnography, such as is currently practised by scholars like Sander Gilman, and Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin. These scholars usually combine Yerushalmi’s notion of Jewish memory and the historical, psychological, sociological study of the Jewish people with insights from literary criticism and theory. My hope is to see the same happen with Islamic studies.

The polarized vision proposed by Yerushalmi in *Zakhor* is discussed by Amos Funkenstein in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (1993), in which Funkenstein suggests the category of “historical consciousness” as a mediator between historiography and collective memory. Funkenstein in this book continues the same discussion that started over the role of the

39 It can equally be said that the valorization of diasporic consciousness—whether Jewish or not—is also partially owed to Edward Said’s insistence on the “exilic” subject position as a condition for criticism. Said’s ambivalence towards the Jewish implications of exile have been discussed by Richard H. Armstrong in “Last Words: Said, Freud and Traveling Theory” in *Edward Said and Critical Decolonization*. 
historian in asserting Jewish difference. The main contrast between Yerushalmi’s and Funkenstein’s perceptions of Jewish history is that the former emphasizes the ruptures and the latter the continuities and fissures that lead to heterogeneous and yet distinct new phases in Jewish intellectual history. Funkenstein’s historical philosophy suggests that “heresy” in theology and the genre of “counter-history” in historiography, both usually employed for polemics, are the driving force behind the historical understanding and memory of a group or community. In contrast, Yerushalmi’s vision suggests a power struggle whereby a weaker system of thought is assimilated by a stronger one.

In his book *Theology and Scientific Imagination* (1986), Funkenstein argues that modern historical consciousness emerged somewhere between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries not as a sudden rupture but rather as an application of new secular and scientific principles to old theological subjects. The legacy of this work is primarily the tracing of modern thought to medieval theological discussions, which subverts the commonly perceived progression from religious to secular. Funkenstein carefully analyzes sixteenth and seventeenth century sources and traces the changing connotations of medieval theological themes (such as Divine Providence, God’s omnipresence and omnipotence) in the new, secular climate. What happened in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries was, according Funkenstein, the “secularization of theology,” the adopting of theological problems by laymen, such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Newton, Galileo and Vico, who turned the principles of mathematics into the universal base of epistemology. For Funkenstein, this, contrary to what is generally believed, is not a story of the secular rising against the religious but rather a dialectical transformation of ideas, wherein the new always carries traces of the old, and each rupture contains continuity. Therefore, instead of a radical displacement of theological ideas, this epistemological unification, with the Reformation
as its background, entailed at the same time a “sacralization of the world and even of ‘everyday life,’” such that the world ceased to be the transitional stage in church history and turned into “God’s temple, and the layman [turned] into its priest” (5-6). Studying the world became a form of worship.

The most important outcome of this “secular theology” on the one hand and “sacred science” on the other was the emergence of modern historical consciousness: historiography changed from the scholastic ordering of atomic facts to “contextual reasoning,” whereby “historical fact became ‘understood’ and meaningful only in the context in which it was embedded” (*Perceptions* 14). Funkenstein adds that this was a result of medieval Christian and Jewish historiography, and specifically of the hermeneutic method of “accommodation” being taken out of its context and becoming a “mode of interpreting present and recent history.” The Lutheran strife to internalize exegesis (*Verinnerlichung*) meant that the individual also had to make sense of his existence through his context and through his acts in the world. While this idea was “transferred from the religious domain to the secular in the seventeenth century,” it was not until “the nineteenth century that history became the primary discipline of all human sciences” (*Perceptions* 15).

In the first instance, Funkenstein defines “counter-history” as a genre of polemical historiography, one that “[systematically exploits] the adversaries’ most trusted sources against their overt intent” (273). This genre was common from antiquity to the Reformation (Funkenstein’s examples include Manetho’s hostile account of Jewish history, Augustine’s history of Rome in *The City of God*, and Luther’s account of Church history), but once historical-philological criticism was established towards the end of the seventeenth century, a more
“critical counter-history” emerged in Gottfried Arnold’s “impartial” account of Christianity and its heresies (*Unparteyische Kirchen and Ketzerhistorie* of 1699). Arnold was a pietistic theologian, and this was the first time “heresies” were taken seriously as necessary for human progress. While in medieval thinking heresies were seen as a providential challenge to the truth of the Church that must be overcome, with Arnold heresies become “the only historical vestiges of Christianity in the time of its decay” (276). Methodical heresies and heresies of dogma became the only way of rejuvenation and means for progress in the secular world. In other words, the medieval genre of polemics under the new light of a unified epistemology (based on mathematical reasoning) gained an “objective” authority, and became “critical counter-history.”

Around the same time in Italy, Giambattista Vico was transforming the medieval principle of “accommodation” into his secular Providence, which according to Funkenstein, assigned God’s creative power to “a principle of human creativity” (*Theology* 289). Vico introduced this “mediatory function of imagination [through introspection]” for reconstructing the realities of geographically and temporally distant cultures (*Theology* 283). Thus, the study of human civilization, in contrast to the study of physical laws, required the employment of the subjective, the personal and the poetic. Arnold and Vico represent for Funkenstein the spirit of Humanism, which held the personal, the heretical, and the counteractive as favourable qualities that are not necessarily opposed to but can exist alongside the objective, scientific and the normative. Such is the influence of a personal or group memory for Funkenstein, whereas for Yerushalmi modern historical consciousness is “thoroughly at odds with” memory (Yerushalmi 93).
Heresies and counter-histories, according to Funkenstein, then, first serve to distort the ideas of the Other and later become the norm to eventually influence the Other’s self-image. In a more recent essay, Funkenstein focuses on the written polemics between Judaism and Christianity, which “reflect[s] or distort[s] the vital ideas of the two religious communities” (“Jews, Christians, and Muslims” 23). Funkenstein argues that Judaism and Christianity were always confrontational religions, or “ideological and historical enemies,” in a way that Judaism and Islam, for example, were not. Accordingly, qualities assigned to Judaism, such as those of being letter-bound, textual, or carnal, stem from the accusations in Christian anti-Jewish polemics. Strikingly, Funkenstein attests that he could “find a Jewish equivalent for every Christian dogma […] even for the dogma of Trinity and the doctrine of Original Sin” (24). In other words, although each community shows within itself a wide range of heterogeneity, the differences between them only become pronounced at the moment of confrontation, namely in their polemical literature. With the passage from Reformation to Humanism and objective science, Funkenstein asserts, this confrontational attitude loses its vital polemical aspect and is replaced by Enlightenment indifference towards Judaism. Up until the nineteenth century, Jewish communities merely “exemplify the disgrace of religious intolerance or the dangers of an ethnocentric particularism. Occasionally, the attack on Judaism was really a cover for an attack on Christianity” (29). Once Jewish people started to become assimilated and emancipated, and “could no longer be outwardly recognized,”—and with the Romantic interest in medievalism—the older anti-Jewish ideologies resurfaced as anti-semitism based on racial science (“Jews, Christians, and Muslims” 29). Funkenstein similarly accounts for the anti-Christian polemics of the Jews that increasingly came to represent Christianity as fallen from true monotheism and as a
return to idolatry. He views Geiger’s Jewish historiography and his positive depiction of Islam as the secular extension of these polemical arguments (*Perspectives* 91).

I consider Funkenstein’s attention to polemical confrontation, heresies and counter-histories between religious communities as a type of deconstructive reading, because focusing on the relational self-definition of communities reveals there is no essence on either side but only a difference decided at the moment of confrontation. Ironically, Funkenstein also reveals the essentialism of certain modern discourses on Jewish identity that openly subscribe to deconstruction, such as attempts to establish resemblances between midrash and theory, that valorize textuality, interpretive plurality or carnality as quasi-authentic Jewish qualities. In short, if the relation to its Other defines a community’s self-image, polemical literature and heresies are the best sources for discerning how a community’s ideals and values came to be or are developing at the moment.  

Funkenstein’s own heresy was to revise the Western-Christian canon, and insert medieval Jewish sources, such as Maimonides and Abraham Ibn Ezra, into the genealogy of modern historical consciousness, thereby making it heterogeneous. As David Biale remarks, he “sought to infuse the study of the medieval Christian scholastics with their Jewish counterparts,” and therefore “Jewish intellectual history” assumes in his works “as important a place as a Christian [one]” (3). Funkenstein, with his retrospective search for Jewish influence on Western thought, brings out the heterogeneity behind the identity called European and thereby inserts his own subjective heresy into the very heart of the hegemonic epistemology. He therefore read

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40 A similar argument on the role of inter-religious polemics in community formation has been made in relation to Muslim-Christian polemics by Hartmut Bohzín in *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa* (1995) and by Hava Lazarus-Yafeh’s in *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (1992).
history with hospitality, which I will endeavour to do in tracing Geiger’s possible influence on Western literary history. Funkenstein refers to Abraham Geiger’s research on the origins of Christianity and Islam as “critical counter-history” in his book *Perceptions of Jewish History*. Yet he ignores the fact that Geiger’s analysis of the Qur’an borders on the apologetic form of counter-history rather than the critical type, since in the spirit of defending Jewish identity against Christian narratives, Geiger robs Islam of its originality and makes it a mere continuation of Judaism.

In their respective ways, Yerushalmi and Funkenstein show us that the disciplines of history and literary studies have to join hands and become aware of their common origins, and once again employ contextual reasoning with careful textual study to read the Qur’an and other texts of Islam. Following their examples as histories of Judaism, we need to look a new at the history of European thought and consider too how the study of Islam as the Other may have shaped the identity of Europe as a whole. This is the only way that Islam can once again be considered a living and evolving tradition, rather than an antiquated culture that has been in decline for some time. Responding in particular to Funkenstein’s call, we must respect and recognize the counter-historical or heretical nature of Islam’s representation of itself in face of the West, even of those representations of it that are considered today as apologetic or fundamentalist.
Materiality

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.
(Galatians 3:28)

Although at first sight Daniel Boyarin’s theory regarding the affinities between midrash and recent literary criticism appears like the reinstatement of Handelman’s comparison of midrash and theory discussed earlier, Boyarin’s approach differentiates itself in that it focuses on the “matter” of language instead of its textuality (“Midrash” 173). Boyarin takes midrash from the realms of semiotics and historiography and brings it into the field of cultural studies. Boyarin’s claims rest on a type of cultural materialism—or in his own words “cultural dialectics”—that takes as its case study the partition of Christianity from Judaism in antiquity, particularly the struggle for cultural identity between Paul the Apostle, the Greek-speaking Jew, and the subsequent rabbinic tradition of the Aramaic and Hebrew-speaking Jews of Palestine in the first century AD. Boyarin’s argument is that “Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianities were very different from each other in their ideologies of sexuality and thus the self and the collective cannot be subsumed under a rubric of Judaeo-Christianity” (Carnal Israel 6). This argument is most prominently carried out in Boyarin’s books *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (1993) and the complementary *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (1994).

In the later book, Boyarin argues that Paul’s identity struggle as a first century Greek-Jew reflects on his life and exemplifies “the paradoxes not only of Jewish identity but [...] of all identity as such” (A Radical Jew 3). Paul’s Platonic background meant that he adopted an ontological dualism between body and soul with a striving for oneness and thus his cultural hybridity motivated him to integrate Gentiles and Jews under a heading of universal humanity.
for which it was necessary to allegorize Jewish scripture and law as Spirit. In contrast, Jews remained ontologically monists. Therefore, in Paul’s writings the “quintessentially different people were Jews and women,” who needed to be subsumed under universality (A Radical Jew 17). Such a thesis on Paul’s universalizing mission recalls previous Pauline scholarship—and Boyarin acknowledges the influence of modern scholars like W. D. Davies, E. P. Sanders and the affinities with the nineteenth-century philologist Ferdinand Christian Baur’s ideas (A Radical Jew 11). Boyarin nuances his argument in that he sees Paul as mainly an “internal critic of his own culture,” therefore neither as anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish, nor as a Hellenic elitist. Boyarin asserts that Paul was a genuine egalitarian and stood for tolerance; however, because his egalitarianism “was based on sameness, […] his social thought was deeply flawed” (A Radical Jew 9). Boyarin takes an idea of Baur’s, who in his Hegelianism praises Pauline universalism, and turns it upside down by expressing a preference for Jewish and female particularity and the hermeneutic multiplicity of midrash. As we will see in the next chapter, Boyarin’s argument is a variant of Abraham Geiger’s views on Jesus as a Jewish reformer, though there is no reference to Geiger in either of Boyarin’s books. (Geiger in his scholarship on Judaism was conversing with the Tübingen School of Theology, to which Bauer belonged.)

Boyarin’s thesis on the rabbinic discourses on sexuality and the body, and his hermeneutics based on cultural materialism, are most clearly stated in his book Carnal Israel. This is the type of reading of the past that I want to bring to the foreground, which I see as an example of deconstructive hospitality and that Boyarin calls “generous critique.” Boyarin bases the title and the argument of the book on the first-century and patristic distinction between carnal Israel and spiritual Israel, of which the former refers to Hebrew-speaking Jews and the latter to
Greek-speaking Jews and early Christians. Boyarin argues, through a careful reading of rabbinic literature on sex and the body, that this distinction is in fact valid because “midrash […] seems to precisely refuse [Platonic] dualism, eschewing the inner-outer, visible-invisible, body-soul dichotomies of [Paul’s] allegorical reading” (Carnal Israel 9). Hellenized Jews such as Paul and Philo were allegorizing Israel in order to promote their Platonic vision of universalism and egalitarianism while rejecting non-Hellenized Judaism as carnal and particularistic mainly through a discourse on the body—and Boyarin demonstrates this on Paul’s reading of the rite of male circumcision in A Radical Jew. On the other hand, rabbinic Judaism maintained its ontological monism to resist these Hellenizing influences:

Some Christians (whether Jewish or Gentile) could declare that there is no Greek or Jew, no male or female. No rabbinic Jew could do so, because people are bodies, not spirits, and precisely bodies are marked as male or female, and also marked, through bodily practices and techniques such as circumcision and food taboos, as Jew and Greek as well. (11)

According to Boyarin then, rabbinic Judaism came to emphasize certain characteristics over others in order to protect itself from a threat, which was from within as well as from without. Although this argument in essence is similar to Handelman’s thesis on the evolution of midrash in opposition to and despite Graeco-Christian hermeneutics, Boyarin distinguishes his approach by focusing not on the textual reasons behind this split but on the material and ideological causes. In other words, according to Boyarin the ontological monism of rabbinic Judaism is an

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Boyarin opens the book with a quote from Augustine’s interpretation of the biblical passage “Behold Israel according to the flesh” (Corinthians 10:18). Paula Fredriksen in Augustine and the Jews: A Christian defense of Jews and Judaism (2008) argues that Augustine tried to revive the egalitarian aspects of Paul’s attitude towards the Jews and was more tolerant towards Judaism than the prior Christian traditions were.
example of a culture adapting its ideological position in face of the Other in order to assure the continuity of its community.

Clearly, there are also some problems attached to such an interpretation, which Boyarin himself partially acknowledges. First of all, for the sake of bringing out Jewish particularity, Boyarin has to ignore the heterogeneity within rabbinic discourses. Though he admits that rabbinic Judaism in its long history occasionally came close to Hellenic sexual ideologies and asceticism, for example through the influences of Stoicism in the Palestinian era or Arabic philosophy after the Arab conquest, he asserts that it never merged with this Hellenic ideology because it was “founded on an underlying unity, the interpretation of human being as fundamentally and essentially corporeal” (*Carnal Israel* 29). Second, Boyarin’s argument implies that the rabbinic rejection of dualism also eradicates misogyny to the degree that it becomes a model for today’s feminism.42 As Naomi Seidman in a review of the book points out, such an interpretation would mean “ignoring the inequitable gender politics of talmudic practice,” such as the restrictions on women participating in Torah studies (117). As a defence, Boyarin states that he has “tried to avoid the temptation” of ascribing misogyny exclusively to the Hellenic residue in Christianity, and admits that rabbinic culture is full of gender and sex-role differentiations that clearly are patriarchal. Boyarin cautions against making judgments or indulging in triumphalism, and instead urges a “cultural dialectics” which would allows us to see ideological differences between cultures as “complementary solutions to given cultural problems” (*Carnal Israel* 22-3). In fact, Boyarin makes it clear that he chooses no sides:

Thus, if Hellenistic Judaisms provide an attractive model of human equality and freedom […], they do so at the severe devaluation of sexuality, procreation, and

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42 For example, Boyarin compares the rabbinic resistance to dualist ontology to Judith Butler’s feminist critique of Western metaphysics (*Carnal Israel* 237-9).
ethnicity. And if rabbinic Judaism provides a positive orientation to sexual pleasure and ethnic difference, it does so at the cost of determined stratifications of society. (Carnal Israel 231)

While Boyarin insists that the Pauline type of tolerance through leveling differences is flawed, he admits that “its opposite, […] insistence on the special value of particularity [,] is equally flawed” and that “the claims of difference and the desire for universality are both contradictorily necessary” (A Radical Jew 10). Cultural dialectics helps us see both the hospitable and the violent aspects of the ideological solutions of a group or individual to a certain cultural dilemma. It shows us that talking of particularity does not have to be exclusive of universal expression and vice versa.

What I think is the most noteworthy interpretive gesture of Boyarin is precisely his acknowledgement of the necessity for a universal language in order to express particularity, which accords with Derrida’s theory of exemplarity. Combing Jewish history and scripture to make it appealing for current theoretical and ideological concerns, in this case by the appeal to “body,” can be seen as a form of apologetics, as Seidman for example judges in her review. Boyarin in fact pleads for a type of apologetics that is nevertheless respectful towards the Other; he calls it a “generous critique, a practice that seeks to criticize the practice of the other from the perspective of the desires and needs of here and now, without reifying the other or placing myself in judgment over him or her on his or her there and then” (Carnal Israel 21). Proposed as a practice for representing the past, such a “generous critique” is dependent on one’s current ethical responsibilities and “province,” by which Boyarin means one’s area of intellectual discourse. Boyarin declares that his intellectual discourse is Judaism, with an expertise in early rabbinic Judaism, and that his “ethical commitment [is] to changing the present gender practices
of [the Jewish] culture” (20-1). Thus, Boyarin’s reading of Jewish history responds to his current needs and responsibilities. Scholars and cultural critics should look for “other faces in the same texts, faces that can be more useful for us in re-constructing our own versions of culture and gender practices” (Carnal Israel 21). However, insisting that a particular “face” of a text, sacred or profane, is the real and authentic face and that all other faces are wrong would be considered as apologetics and essentializing. Claiming authenticity can take subtle forms, sometimes by idealizing certain ethnic, religious or gendered qualities and narratives over others or even in the guise of objective science. However, if one admits that one’s cultural dilemmas prompted the selection of a certain face of a text over the other, according to Boyarin, then it is generous cultural critique.

I believe the reason Boyarin’s representation of Jewish difference is more “generous” than perhaps the other ones that were recounted in this section is that Boyarin integrates and acknowledges Edward Said’s thesis in Orientalism. The perspective of the English speaking Arab-Christian, so to speak, helps Boyarin to be open to other differences. After establishing that first-century rabbinic Judaism developed under Roman colonial hegemony, Boyarin suggests that he will read his own history, “at once his own and not his own,” as Said reads the practice of Orientalism (Carnal Israel 23 & 229). To this end, Boyarin appeals for a post-Saidean anthropological study of the past that does not place itself in a superior position towards the Other, either judgingly or apologetically:

Cultural critique involves then, in my view, precisely the ability to contextually and historically understand practices of the past “other”—who is ourselves—in such a way that that culture can serve us well in constructing our own social practices, providing the richness of belonging to the past without constricting us in forming more liberatory and egalitarian practices in the present. (Carnal Israel 229)
Boyarin mentions Said in no more than two sentences; however, we have seen in the previous chapter that what drives Said’s cultural critique of nineteenth-century Europe is precisely the ethical commitments he has made in the present. In fact, Said’s own definition of secular or “worldly” criticism is similar to the critique that Boyarin promotes here. For example, Said appreciates Erich Auerbach as a “worldly critic” for reading the past from his current situatedness as a starting point (*Ansatzpunkt*). However, nowhere in Auerbach do we read a revelation of a chosen responsibility towards a group or an ideology. Though Said praises Auerbach’s humanism, I think what kept Auerbach from openly declaring worldly responsibility and commitments was exactly his humanist universalism and perhaps even the Pauline understanding that ethnic and religious particularities need to be overcome. Christian valorization of universality and oneness, whether you call it Pauline or Protestant, served a liberatory and egalitarian purpose once, as Boyarin demonstrates. However, it took postcolonialism and overall the anti-humanism of the twentieth century to fully recover the value of particularity and cultural plurality in face of other differences. Now our challenge is to find a hospitable balance between the two.

**Conclusion**

Studies like Boyarin’s openly ground historical research in the materiality of here and now—such as the current interest in the representation of the body—which could give us insights for the study of Islamic texts within cultural and literary studies. Within our cultural and academic discourses, we initially need to acknowledge that apologetics and liberation hermeneutics are not simply misrepresentations of the past, Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, but a necessary step toward
a more generous cultural critique that recognizes one’s agency in the present. Boyarin, for example, while acknowledging his subjectivity, does not fall into the “temptation of exemplarity” (Derrida, “Abraham, the Other” 12). He contrasts his own approach to previous claims for Jewish difference on the grounds that he studies the Jews as yet “another tribe” (“Response to Leon Wieseltier” 443). Moreover, Boyarin provides us with the insight that ideologies and liberation exegeses are shaped within the unique cultural and social circumstances of the time. Our discourses on Islam, within or outside academia, tend to essentialize today’s reactionary, apologetic or fundamentalist expressions of Islam as Islam’s authentic qualities rather than temporary reactions out of the encounter with the West. It must be acknowledged that radical Islamic identities today are reactions to the encounter with the West and come out of interpretations of the Qur’an that may be considered similar to the “liberation hermeneutics.” Studying these with hospitality from cultural and literary perspectives, instead of essentializing them as the “true” face of Islam, may require something similar to a “postcolonial hermeneutics” of the Qur’an as Sugirtharajah defines it:

Postcolonial hermeneutics has to be a pragmatic engagement, an engagement in which praxis is not an extra option or a subsidiary enterprise taken on in the aftermath of judicious deconstruction and reconstruction of texts. Rather, this praxiological involvement is there from the outset of hermeneutical process, informing and contesting the whole procedure. (Postcolonial Reconfigurations 33)

More recent Jewish studies is alert to the danger of exemplarity and the closure to further difference because of the current political situations regarding Islam. Or, perhaps, as the phenomenon of German-Jewish Orientalists at the end of nineteenth century testifies, Judaism has always been Islam’s “secret sharer” within modernity as Edward Said has pointed out in

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43 Daniel Boyarin in this article responds to the attacks on “cultural materialism” in Jewish studies and comments that the alternative of preserving Jewish chosenness is similar to the disembodiment and spiritualization of Jews by early Christians.
Orientalism (27). Today, Islam has become the test to the Judaeo-Christian limitations of our literary-critical and theoretical practices. Therefore, claiming a difference for or liberating the “Judaic” from the Judaeo-Christian hyphenation now necessarily has to involve a consideration for the singularity of Islam. The examples of modern Jewish studies presented here are preoccupied with ways of expressing Jewish particularity and in general with ways of expressing cultural, ethnic or gendered particularities through the common language of theory. This is not only an exemplary interpretive act but also a proof for the possibility of exemplarity itself. From apologetic to liberatory to generous, these readings of sacred and exegetical texts of the past all have in common a concern for the identity of a certain community and within it a singular individual, namely the author herself or himself. How can one be a Jew singularly in relation to one or more hyphens (woman, homosexual, American, Arab, etc) while expressing the experience of being Jew universally? The generality and particularity of any given identity, individual or communal, will have to appeal to a common language, whether in the form of philosophy, literature or history.44 The singularity of Other can only be experienced in silence and in “secret” (Derrida, On the Name); as soon as it is expressed it will become spatially and temporarily familiar. However, the right for particularity is gained by speaking abundantly instead of succumbing to the violence inherent in silence; thus, literature’s hospitality as “the right to say everything” becomes the language of such an infinite and unexpecting democracy (Derrida, On the Name 28). Just as all these expressions of Jewish difference are directly or indirectly influenced by Derrida’s theories, I believe that Derrida’s deconstructive concepts of exemplarity and hospitality can be directly employed today in the face of Islam. Deconstructive

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44 The binaries “singularity/generality” as well as “particularity/universality” are taken from Derrida’s philosophy and will be closely discussed in the next section within the discussion of deconstructive exemplarity.
openings towards Islam have certainly already been made, but it is the welcoming of Islam’s difference and particularity in Derrida’s writings that I shall focus on next.

DECONSTRUCTION AS AN OPENING TOWARDS ISLAM

This project was undertaken with two broad questions in mind: (1) How to read Islam—everything that is understood under Islam, its culture, its religion, its art, and its scripture—from within the “institution of literature” without disregarding its otherness (Derrida, *Acts of Literature* 33); in other words, how to read Islam without practising Orientalism as Edward Said defined it: as the defacement and usurpation of the subject matter. (2) How to facilitate the acceptance of Islam within European (post)modernity—its physical borders, its culture, its religion, its art and its scripture—to make it possible to read a hyphen between the European and the Muslim, and to start speaking of the Muslim-European. To answer such broad questions, I have so far explored different ways of interpreting literary and critical history in search for exemplary fissures in the discursive formation of our discipline that make an encounter with Islam as the current Other possible. The case study in Chapter Three of Abraham Geiger’s *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* exemplifies the situation of the German-Jewish intellectual who was facing the rise of a secular modernity in nineteenth-century Europe and negotiated his Jewish identity through an alliance with the sister Abrahamic religion, Islam, while at the same time initiating a Jewish reformation that would significantly influence Judaism’s role within modernity. Before moving to the case study, I will give a brief account of my interpretation of Jacques Derrida’s writings to clarify the theoretical framework of this project.
Derrida and Islam

Derrida, especially in his later writings, has engaged with religion and reserved a special place for the subject of Islam, though avoiding a direct engagement with it. In fact, the first sign of such avoidance appeared in the essay “How to Avoid Speaking” in 1992:

I thus decided not to speak of negativity or of apophatic movements in, for example, the Judaic and Islamic traditions. To leave this immense place empty, … to remain thus on the threshold—was this not the most consistent possible apophasis? Concerning that about which one cannot speak, isn’t it best to remain silent? I let you answer this question. It is always entrusted to the other. (122)

Earlier in the essay, Derrida gives his biographical closeness and “the place of an internal desert” as reason for this avoidance (100). It is clear that the religions Judaism and Islam have a closer relation to Derrida’s own Algerian past, but at the same time it appears that Derrida sets them apart from Christianity because he wants to reveal the Western (Greek, Latin and Christian) orientation of the dominant systems of thought. From 1985 onwards, Derrida’s writings become almost dominated by topics such as Christian mysticism, the three Abrahamic faiths, Abraham himself, the gift, the Bible, revelation, apocalyptic philosophies, Judaism, circumcision and finally his own Algerian-Arab Jewishness. For example, in Of Spirit (1989), Derrida critiques Heidegger for not being able to escape Christian theology or metaphysics as he claims to do and argues that his concepts of “gathering” and “origin-heterogeneous” correspond to the meaning of spirit which “is nothing other—but it’s not nothing—than the origin of Christianity: the spirit of Christianity or the essence of Christianity” (108). It is here that Derrida brings in the voice of the Muslim theologian for the first time: “I’m not certain if the Moslem and some others wouldn’t join in the concert or the hymn. At least all those who in religions and philosophies have spoken
of *ruah, pneuma, spiritus* and, why not *Geist* (*Of Spirit* 111). Derrida tells us that the “hymn” or “concert” responds to Heidegger’s Spirit as “pre-archi-originarity”; furthermore, he points out that this notion may be in agreement with the Judaeo-Christian-Greek, and perhaps with the German notions of spirit; however, he is expressing at least some uncertainty about the Muslim theologian’s response. I see this uncertainty as the first opening towards a philosophical inquiry into the difference of Islam.

In this section, I will read Derrida’s essay “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone” (1996) as the first explicit example of such inquiry. This essay, which was first given as a talk at a meeting on religion at the Isle of Capri in 1994, also marks the first occasion where Derrida examines “religion” as a singular noun in response to a “historical urgency,” by which is meant a perceived “return of religions” prompted by the recent occurrences of religious fundamentalism (“Faith and Knowledge” 45). First, I will discuss how Derrida’s own Arab-Jewishness prompts the theme of religion and consequently his focus on Islam as the Other within the Judaeo-Christian West. Later, I will analyze the concepts Derrida develops in relation to what he calls the “surge of Islam,” namely “auto-immunity” and the “theologico-political,” and his references to the nineteenth-century “Jewish question.” I will finish by considering how contemporary intellectuals received his treatment of Islam in this essay.

Derrida for the first time in this essay treats Islam with an admitted responsiveness to such urgency, whereas in his previous writings all three monotheisms were usually placed under the same heading of the Abrahamic. I think that this crucial recognition has to do both with Derrida’s autobiographical sensitivity towards the violent terrorism in Algeria as well as his
sense of an ethical responsibility in the face of current events around the world. The gesture of interpreting Islam as an aporia wedged between an autobiographical necessity and the universal name of “religion” is significant in that it reveals the othering of Islam within our Western interpretative traditions, or to put it differently, the “unthinkability” of Islam within the Western philosophical tradition. Derrida’s continuing avoidance of an in-depth engagement with Islam—for example, he never reads an Islamic figure directly or any form of Islamic self-representation in any of his writings—can be seen as an admission of being part of this Western philosophical tradition. Derrida’s essay “Faith and Knowledge,” in that sense, pioneers an encounter between the oldest principles of our human sciences (all disciplines that are based on the act of interpreting texts) and the onto-theological differences of Islam and its interpretative traditions. With the global and autobiographical responsibility that he adopts towards Islam, Derrida is pointing scholarly attention towards the necessary study of these differences “at the limits of faith and knowledge.” This is a call for Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals to represent Islam as a living religion at Capri, or in the field of human sciences in general. Derrida expresses this call by observing that “no Muslim is among us … speaking about these mute witnesses without speaking for them, in place of them, drawing from this all sorts of consequences” (“Faith and Knowledge” 45). Derrida’s avoidance relates to the difficulty of talking about the singular Other, especially when there are so many discursive obstacles that make listening to the Other difficult. Yet this difficulty of listening to the Other is not a case of incommensurability either, since intellectual history is full of fissures and ruptures that constantly change or revise the identities of the Other and the same. I believe, then, that Derrida’s “silence” on Islam is an effect of his responsibility: first, Derrida exemplifies the

45 Referring both to the history of philosophy and to the location of the meeting, Derrida affirms, “if to think ‘religion’ is to think the ‘Roman’” (45).
deconstructive idea that it is impossible to talk about the singularity of the Other, a position he clearly wants to reserve for Islam at this moment of urgency. Second, Derrida accepts his subject position as a Western philosopher, albeit with his own Algerian-Arab-Jewish past, and thereby offers a self-critique as the most hospitable and responsible response towards this philosophical Other. I think that Derrida legacy succeeds in this act of hospitality, with all the violence implemented in it.

Derrida’s is a twofold encounter with Islam: first it is due to the urgency posed by this “radical evil” called fundamentalism; second, it is a personal response to the events and violence happening in Algeria, Derrida’s birthplace. There is only one significant reference to Algeria in “Faith and Knowledge.” It is, however, clear from other writings by Derrida, such as the essay “Circumfession” (1991), and Monolingualism and the Other (1998), or the more recent Philosophy in a Time of Terror (2004) and posthumously published interviews in Islam and the West (2008), that he was taking an interest in autobiography and his Algerian-Arab-French-Jewishness. The constant move in the essay “Faith and Knowledge” between the two levels of addressing the audience at Capri and addressing a general, reading public is an expression of the reflexivity between the personal/particular and the universal/philosophical. The autobiographical element might not be very obvious in this essay, but it is certainly one of the motives for his decision “not [to] avoid religion” any more (“Faith and Knowledge” 101). This twofold acceptance of responsibility inevitably brings Derrida face to face with Islam as the other of the Judaeo-Christian West that he himself is part of as a philosopher, but also with Islam as he is familiar with it through his Arab-Jewish self, having suffered the oppression of the colonizing

46 Derrida talks of the violent “tortures, beheadings and mutilations” taking place in Algeria “in the name of Islam” (88-9).
Thus, he is both host and guest in the face of Islam, yet he will not speak in the name of Islam through the discourse of philosophy.

Derrida also projects this “double horizon” of the personal and the global onto the tensions within the Abrahamic religions in “Faith and Knowledge” (78). Part of the essay groups Judaism with Islam, and yet, Judaism is also occasionally placed on the side of the dominant world culture. Islam preserves its enigmatic, separate place consistently throughout the essay. At first, Islam is evoked with a treatment of the “return of religion.” The most important point that Derrida makes on religion and about the “surge of Islam” (58) in this essay is that this phenomenon cannot be separated from the conditions of today, and hence that it does not really constitute a “return” but a case of “auto-immunity”:

the said “return of the religious,” which is to say the spread of a complex and overdetermined phenomenon, is not a simple return, for its globality and its figures (tele-techno-media-scientific, capitalistic and politico-economic) remain original and unprecedented. (“Faith and Knowledge” 78)

The “figures” that Derrida refers to here, commonly classified as secular, carry a radical understanding of religion within themselves, similar to the Freudian concept of the “death-drive” (90). Accordingly, secularism’s insistence on the strict separation of the theological from the political and the “tele-techno-scientific” leads to the politicizing of religion and vice versa, that is, either to religious fundamentalism or to covert religiosity under the guise of “globality” (79).

Derrida compares this phenomenon to the medical condition of auto-immunity disorder (the most

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47 In an interview titled “This Strange Institution Called Literature,” from Acts of Literature, Derrida comments on the colonial oppression during his childhood: “[b]eing Jewish and a victim of anti-Semitism didn’t spare one the anti-Arab racism I felt everywhere around me, in manifest or latent form” (Acts of Literature 39).

48 See for example Derrida’s comment in an interview with Richard Kearney: “In my short essay ‘Faith and Knowledge,’ I ask the question of Islam in relation to other religions. We have the Judaeo-Christian couple as opposed to Islam, but, on the other hand, we have the Judaeo-Islamic couple as opposed to Christianity” (Gratton, Manoussakis, and Kearney 23).
well known form of which is AIDS), whereby an organism attacks its own immune system, leading to self-destruction. Every being with carefully drawn borders, such as an autonomous self, a sovereign nation or a universalized God, carries its own destruction within itself. Auto-immunity then becomes another metaphor for the act of deconstruction whereby an intact and self-contained system, in this case secular science and technology, is doomed to give way to its opposite, religious fundamentalism, since this duality is always already implemented at its origin. By the same token, it was religion that bore secularism in the first place since every notion comes out of the binary relation to its opposite and not from an originary essence: “It is the terrifying but fatal logic of the auto-immunity of the unscathed that will always associate Science and Religion” (“Faith and Knowledge” 80). Derrida calls this principle in Of Spirit the “origin-heterogeneous,” where the origin is always already heterogeneous and dual (107). Similarly, there is never an originary truth but instead a testimony to truth, faith and perjury always already at the origin. Hence the origin is a “prosthesis” rather than a thing in itself (Monolingualism). Therefore, according to Derrida, the view that secularism and science will supersede religion only leads to a more radical return of religion, according to a logic similar to Freud’s theory on the return of the repressed (“repetition compulsion”) (“Faith and Knowledge” 89-90).

Derrida, in his usual manner, either disbands concepts or re-engages commonly accepted oppositions (such as religion and science) through the use of metaphors such as auto-immunity, without providing a resolution. However, a fleeting reference to the “Jewish question” is worth exploring in order to move beyond Derrida’s deconstructive impulse. What is being repeated in the return of religion or at least what “finds itself in close proximity with” it—and the reference to Freud shortly after is not coincidental—is the “interminable Jewish question”:
Whether it is “exemplary” or not, the Jewish question continues to be a rather good example (sample, particular case) for future elaboration of this demographic-religious problematic. (“Faith and Knowledge” 90, Derrida's emphasis).

A case in European history that perfectly testifies to the blurring of the binaries science and religion, politics and theology is the nineteenth-century “Jewish question,” or more correctly expressed, the Jewish emancipation struggle in Europe. Derrida’s hyphenation in the phrase “demographic-religious problematic” is a strategy that calls for a historical-critical perspective. First of all, Derrida invites us to acknowledge the singularity and the unrepeatability of a historical event such as the “Jewish question,” as a case that is nonetheless open to future possibilities, in as much as it provides a common language for the current situation of the so-called “surge of Islam.” This, as we will see shortly, is an example of deconstructive exemplarity. Second, Derrida draws attention to the nineteenth-century context of this problematic, namely, the general proliferation of theories on universality (including a concept of religion within the limits of reason alone, and the strict separation of faith and knowledge) on the one hand, and on the other hand the demographic problem of drawing the perfect borders for a nation state. Obviously, the Jewish presence stretches within and across these European borders in the nineteenth century, both religious and demographic. In fact, Derrida claims that neither religion nor demography takes precedence but that both—or more specifically their relationality—are at the origin of the so-called “Jewish question.” Thus, the “future elaborations” of this problematic (he clearly refers to the “surge of Islam,” or what we may call the “Muslim question”) need to be perceived in a similar way (“Faith and Knowledge” 46). The matter of Europe facing Islam today is neither strictly a demographic problem (Muslim minorities within, war against terrorism in the Middle East, inclusion of a Muslim country in the European Union)
nor strictly a religious problem regarding Islam’s theological differences with the Christian heritage of Europe. It is rather the aporia between the political and the theological, a space that requires a historical, theological and sociological approach at once.

Gil Anidjar offers a similar reading of Derrida’s focus on the “theologico-political” in *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (2003). Anidjar draws attention to the constructed identities of the “Jew” and the “Arab” as enemies throughout the intellectual history of Europe and claims that the “idea” of a secular and democratic Europe would not have existed without the theological and political enemies of “both the Jew and the Arab” respectively (xxv). Such an argument suggests that the secularization of Europe, meaning the separation of church and state and of the theological from the political, was accompanied by the process—based on the logic of auto-immunity—whereby religious radicalism was assigned to the political enemy in the East. Anidjar’s argument at times appears slightly paradoxical. At one point, he claims that Europe constructs the Jew as the theological enemy and the Arab as “internal exteriority” of the political enemy and offers Derrida’s concept of the theologico-political to overcome such constructions (*The Jew, the Arab* xxi & xxii; Derrida and Anidjar 5). However, the symbiotic relation of Orientalism and anti-Semitism is also proof that these poles are already conflated and blurred with the rise of secularism. After all, it is in nineteenth-century scholarship that Jews become

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49 This claim reminds us of Amos Funkenstein’s thesis mentioned in the previous section on the “confrontational relation” between Christianity and Judaism, in comparison with which the relations of these two to Islam are more external or impartial. I think that Anidjar is basically making the same observation, except he is drawing attention to another confrontation between Judaism and Islam constructed artificially by modern, Eurocentric discourses leading to today’s Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which I believe is the current urgency that Anidjar’s book is responding to.

50 The paradoxical and synchronic split and conflation of the theological and the political within secularism is endorsed by Anidjar when, for example, he states in an interview that “with ‘secularization,’ more or less, Islam became a ‘world-religion’” (Shaikh 229). The same subject is taken on in detail in Anidjar’s subsequent work *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (2008) in the section titled “The Semitic Hypothesis (Religion’s Last Word)” (13-38).
an oriental race and the Arabs become the monotheistic Semites. We might assume that Anidjar intends this paradox since the general gesture of the book is to repeat the deconstructive impulse of disbanding, complicating, or conflating dichotomies in the fashion of Derrida. Although the book contains some detailed case studies (such as Hegel’s, Freud’s, and Franz Rosenweig’s discussions of Islam), it has no real “thesis” in the conventional sense, though this does not at all deflect from its theoretical force. Anidjar’s observation that anti-Semitism and Orientalism went hand in hand in the nineteenth century is likewise the basis of the present project, the aim of which is to offer a deconstructive reading of this past via the case of the German-Jewish Orientalist.

To summarize thus far, Derrida’s avoidance of a direct engagement with Islam suggests both an autobiographical exposure and a professional caution. This means that he perceives the “surge of Islam” through his own Arab-Jewish urgencies—i.e. the violence in Algeria—and through the complex history of Judaism’s relation to Europe. The essay on “Faith and Knowledge” was written before September 11, 2001, after which Derrida was asked to talk specifically about Islam and terrorism with increasing frequency.51 However, the foundations of concepts such as auto-immunity, the theologico-political and tele-techno-science, which Derrida often repeats when discussing the topic of Islamic terrorism, were laid in the earlier essay.

Derrida’s avoidance also hints at an invitation eventually to talk about Islam abundantly. To understand this point better we need to look at how Derrida differentiates Judaism and Islam from Christianity, namely through their relation to a living god, which puts them both in a problematic relation with the Christian heritage of Enlightenment modernity:

51 Derrida before his death commented on the events of 9/11 in books such as, _Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida_ by Giovanna Borradori and _Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida_ by Mustapha Chérif.
Judaism and Islam would thus be the last monotheisms to revolt against everything that, in the Christianizing of our world, signifies the death of God, death in God, two non-pagan monotheisms that do not accept death any more than multiplicity in God (the Passion, the Trinity, etc.), two monotheisms still alien enough at the heart of Graeco-Christian, Pagano-Christian Europe, alienating themselves from Europe that signifies the death of God, by recalling at all costs that ‘monotheism’ signifies no less faith in the One, and in the living One, than belief in a single God. (“Faith and Knowledge” 51)

Derrida, who previously explored the Judaeo-Christian hyphen in the essay, now ventures to draw attention to another possible allegiance, namely the one between Judaism and Islam. His emphasis on the two “non-pagan monotheisms” is significant in that it recalls Geiger’s differentiation of Islam and Judaism from Christianity in *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* based on their insistence on a single god—just as Abraham the prophet, according to midrashic sources and the Qur’an, fights idolatry and multiplicity for the first time in biblical history, Muhammad fights against the polytheism of the Arab tribes (see below, Chapter Three/3). It is therefore worthwhile reading this passage closely as a testimony to the temporality and contingency of hyphenated relations between the three monotheisms, or any hyphenation for that matter. With the “death of God,” Derrida might be referring to Kant’s valorization of onto-theology over religious experience and revelation, or directly to Nietzsche’s famous statement, which was itself an observation on the transcendental philosophies of the Enlightenment. However, it is also a comment on how deeply embedded the death and the multiplicity of god is in Western metaphysics. Thus a curious question arises: Is Derrida hinting at a metaphysical incommensurability between Judaeo-Islamic monotheism and Christianity? Does Derrida’s avoidance of a closer engagement with Islam mean that one cannot escape Orientalism when talking about Islam from within the Western intellectual tradition? I

52 In *Critique of Pure Reason* (1791), Chapter III, Section 7 and in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), “Preface to the First Edition.”
rather think that Derrida, by switching from one hyphenation (Judaeo-Christian) to another (Judaeo-Islamic) instantaneously, wants to exemplify that hyphenations or headings, such as “monotheisms” or “Abrahamic religions,” remain aporias only to be given meanings at moments of confrontation and decision, later to be overcome by another decision responding to another urgency or subjectivity. Tensions and differences, even metaphysically fundamental ones like the death of god, are decided at the moment of confrontation between two opposing subjectivities. For instance, the auspicious heading of Abrahamic monotheism that Geiger constructs for Islam and Judaism, as we will see, comes out of his reaction to Christian hegemony and anti-Semitism in the biblical scholarship and the society of his time. Therefore, Derrida’s view of Islam’s radical difference within Western discourses, I suggest, is not of an enduring incommensurability but rather of a historical and singular instance created by the meeting of tele-techno-science and the theologico-political. Rather than trying to preserve Islam’s radical difference and resistance, Derrida calls for an “intellectual and philosophical memory [that will] rediscover that grafting, that reciprocal fertilization of the Greek, the Arab and the Jew” (Chérif and Derrida 39).

My point about Derrida’s rejection of the incommensurability idea can be best demonstrated by contrast with an argument of Ian Almond, who in his book *The New Orientalists* argues that “Western” philosophers and writers in the line of postmodernism, among them Nietzsche, Foucault, Baudrillard, Žižek, Borges, Orhan Pamuk and Salman Rushdie, as

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Aziz Al-Azmeh, for example, critiques postmodernism—and indirectly Derrida—for promoting such an incommensurability from a Muslim intellectual’s perspective when he comments that, “the late capitalist, postmodern emphasis on self-referentiality and self-representation, the drift towards conceiving difference as incommensurability, the cognitive nihilism associated with post-modernism, the dissolution of objects of ethnographic study into ‘voices’: all this, to my mind, leads to ejecting the tools of the historical and social sciences implicitly, but in most cases inadvertently and unreflectively, in favour of an irrationalist and anti-historicist sympathetic sociology of singularity” (29).
well as Derrida, represent Islam as the “tout autre [entirely other] of modernity in their own struggle against it,” which then, as the title suggests, constitutes a new form of Orientalism (196). I think Almond has a very valid argument. Indeed what constitutes Orientalism is not only disparaging representations of the Islamic East or the commodification of it as the exotic. As the case of the German-Jewish Orientalist testifies, Islam was also represented in ways intended to facilitate serious social and political criticism within various European settings. However, Almond’s conclusion that the postmodern approbation of Islam, especially when it is radically and violently resisting Western modernization, homogenizes and misrepresents Islam is an unjust claim, at least in the case of Derrida. According to the logic of selection, Edward Said himself should have qualified as a “new Orientalist.” Claiming that postmodern representations of Islam do not escape the “unspoken centre, an unarticulated privilege, the tacit and unintrusive reaffirmation of a very European vocabulary,” in other words Eurocentrism, makes Almond’s conclusions in regards to Western intellectual traditions very solipsistic (Almond 202). And from an Islamic perspective, this claim leads to a very pessimistic conclusion that there is no language possible for asserting Muslim identity within the West, from which follows that the only course remaining is physical violence and radicalism. That said, Almond’s insights from Muslim thinkers, particularly the way they either integrate or reject postmodernism, are valuable.

The fact that Derrida in “Faith and Knowledge” calls for speaking “in the name of Islam” as opposed to being silent about is consistent with Derrida’s position that first-hand testimony

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54 Although Almond’s book is truly informative and a pleasure to read, I found that his overall argument about New Orientalism only partially convinces in the chapters about Foucault and Baudrillard, where he alleges that Foucault’s writings on Tunisia and Iran inadvertently assign a homogeneous quality to Islam apparently operative in both locales and that Baudrillard uses Islamic tropes rhetorically in order to critique capitalist ideologies. However, for the rest of the figures mentioned, Islam is represented so heterogeneously and in such a self-conscious manner (especially the Islam in the works of the novelists Borges, Pamuk and in Rushdie) as to defeat Orientalism rather than contributing to it.
does not have precedence over a second-hand one since origin is already a supplement to meaning. Thus, I suggest that Derrida in remarking that “there is no Muslim among us” does not lament the absence of an “authentic” Muslim thinker. The language that the Muslim thinker would use, if he or she were present in Capri, would have been always already the language of the Other—in this specific case, the discourse of Western philosophy. Besides, the reason Almond himself includes postmodern Muslim thinkers, such as Aziz Al-Azmeh, Bobby Sayyid, and Akbar S. Ahmed (all currently working within Western institutions), is because he can relate to them on a discursive level.

A further point is that Almond interprets Derrida’s treatment of Islam in “Faith and Knowledge” as “paradoxical” and full of “mixed messages” (58). On the one hand, he admits that such “semantic emptying” might be designed to preserve Islam as the “if” (rather than tout autre) of Derrida’s own subjectivity and gives an apt quotation from Derrida about the need for “constant interruptions … for glimpsing the otherness of the Other through the broken ruins of one’s constructions” (59-61).55 On the other hand, Almond blames Derrida for “de-essentializing Islam” and approvingly evokes Lambropolous’s thesis in The Rise of Eurocentrism, which argues that Derrida’s use of Islam as an empty “mirage” to talk about the West affirms “Protestant modernity” and therefore constitutes Eurocentrism (61). I think that Derrida’s call for Muslim scholars and his conscious avoidance of speaking for Islam is in fact an invitation to the audience “to speak for them, in place of them,” which ironically is exactly what Ian Almond is doing (to clarify, anybody with a less Anglo-Saxon name would have been doing just the same).

55 The passage runs as follows: “By interrupting the weaving of our language and then by weaving together the interruptions themselves, another language comes to disturb the first one…Another text, the text of the other, arrives in silence with a more or less regular cadence, without ever appearing in its original language, to dislodge the language of translation” (Derrida, Between the Blinds 414).
Grand claims of Eurocentrism, such as Almond’s and Lambropoulos’s, almost always assume that Europe, as the host, is never affected by the various differences it hosts within itself and that in effect it remains unchanged. For these scholars, there are only two ways of talking about Islam’s difference: either by assimilating into the more powerful host discourse or by attempting to represent a purified or authentic version of the disadvantaged guest’s identity. Once we start reading deconstruction as hospitality and as the welcoming of the Other we may be able to overcome this postmodern impasse in face of Islam.

To his credit, Almond in his conclusion observes that Islam in postmodern theory tends to be represented as “a purely anthropological phenomenon, a cultural manifestation, an object of primarily material significance,” while the fact that Islam is also a “transcendental belief-system no different metaphysically from that of Christianity or Judaism” is usually forgotten (196). I agree that the theological diversities within Judaism, Christianity or Islam are usually overlooked in favour of emphasizing their difference from each other. However, the need to talk of difference has risen from the suppressive effects of Enlightenment universalism and still has a certain validity when it comes to equitable representation. The imperative here is, following Derrida’s call, to talk at the limits of reason rather than within it, in order to perceive faith as not only a discursive limit but as a possibility. As Derrida suggests:

*The surge [...] of ‘Islam’ will be neither understood nor answered as long as the exterior and interior of this borderline place have not been called into question; as long as one settles for an internal explanation (interior to the story of faith, or religion, of languages or cultures as such), as long as one does not define the passageway between the interior and all the apparently exterior dimensions (technoscientific, tele-biotechnological, which is to say also political and socioeconomic etc). (“Faith and Knowledge” 58)*
I would like to conclude this section by taking the above passage as a call for a “worlded criticism”—as suggested by Said and exemplified by Daniel Boyarin’s “generous critique” in the preceding section. This passage also points to the inevitability of faith (secret, passion, aporia) at the heart of every testimony, including science, politics and law, literary criticism and literature. What I see as a problem for literary criticism in regard to scriptural hermeneutics is that it typically either focuses too much on politics (“external explanation”) when it comes to the Qur’an, as if Islam has no theological relevance to either Christianity or Judaism, or too much on theology (“internal explanation”), particularly when it comes to the Bible. The theologico-political approach as the third way can be best accommodated from a literary critical perspective that combines scriptural interpretation with postcolonial or poststructuralist theories. This would mean going beyond Said’s reversal of the Islam-and-West dichotomy, and instead reading the past with hospitality in order “to deconstruct the European intellectual construct of Islam” (Chérif and Derrida 38). I therefore see Abraham Geiger’s gesture of including Islam as part of a biblical tradition, however carefully and rhetorically enshrined in objective language, as an important shift in Western intellectual history. Geiger’s life and legacy prove that it is at the limits of faith and knowledge that religious reform takes place.

As we have seen, talking about and for Islam abundantly is today equal to exploring the “unthoughts” of Western scholarship and therefore parallel to the function of deconstruction.56 Looking at Islam from within literary criticism might entail searching out subjects that are similar to current literary interests or privileging certain narratives over others. As Jonathan Boyarin wittily points out, if done with righteousness, this might amount to a “hegemony of

56 This argument was also put forward by the Franco-Maghrebian intellectual Mohammed Arkoun, particularly in his book The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought (2002).
empathy” (86).\textsuperscript{57} However, discursively seeking out similarities to talk about the Other, or to realize that “the Other is not that other” after all, is inevitable because deconstructive exemplarity is the only way of speaking about the singularity of the Other (J. Boyarin 77). The singularity of the Other can only be expressed through the language of the familiar.

Deconstructive hospitality, on the other hand, asks us to be aware of the fact that one can never genuinely be hospitable but that we may still strive for an opening towards differences yet unexplored. This openness will guarantee not a democracy that is already established but a “democracy to come” (Derrida, \textit{Specters of Marx} 64-5). I now would like to proceed to explaining what exactly I understand by deconstructive exemplarity and hospitality.

**Deconstructive Exemplarity and Hospitality**

To explain the deconstructive principles of exemplarity and hospitality, we need to look at some metaphors that Derrida uses—and what else is metaphor itself but an instance of exemplarity? For this, I will first look at the metaphor of “heading” in Derrida’s 1992 essay “The Other Heading: Memories, Responses, and Responsibilities,”\textsuperscript{58} and then explain the use of the metaphor “psyche” in his essay “Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German” (1991). It will become apparent that “exemplarity” is a philosophical paradigm described by Derrida, while “hospitality”—originally borrowed from the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas—is the

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\textsuperscript{57} Boyarin comments on the difficulty of expressing “the paradoxical linkage between shared humanity and cultural Otherness,” but does not rule out empathy as a possibility. The example of hegemonic empathy Boyarin gives from the docudrama \textit{Holocaust} is quite demonstrative and therefore worth mentioning. The docudrama follows the life of “a middle-class, German speaking [Jewish] nuclear family” who end up in Nazi concentration camps. Boyarin comments that such representations of similar difference “do not really expand the space of the Other” (86).

\textsuperscript{58} The title of the book, \textit{The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe}, which covers a preface titled “TODAY” and another essay titled “Call it a Day for Democracy,” reflects more accurately the journalistic and political quality of the essay.

**Europe’s other heading and hospitality**

Derrida in “The Other Heading,” starts by evoking Francois Mitterand’s speech in which the French president speaks about a Europe that “returning in its history and its geography like one who is returning home” (*The Other Heading* 9). Derrida begins by asking what this “home” might be, what it was in the past and what it is expected to be; what is specific to European identity, or how can Europe culturally be identified? However, instead of offering answers to these questions, Derrida leads us into the contingency and temporality of cultural identity and suggests that at the core of any identity is “a difference at once internal and irreducible to the ‘at home (with itself)’” (*The Other Heading* 9). Therefore, for example, when one asserts that Europe is responsible towards its others, one assumes that there is a Europe within itself. By contrast, Derrida thinks that European responsibility starts with the acknowledgement that its identity is not a coherent entity posed against “others” but that the Other is constitutive of European identity itself. The essay’s argument in general is that Europe’s responsibility lies within this exemplary function of the limitless and unexpected openness towards the Other.

“The Other Heading” was first published as an article in newspapers in 1990 in major European centres such as Frankfurt, Paris, Turin, and Madrid. Derrida himself refers to this journalistic background in a preface titled “TODAY,” which indicates that it was written with such a responsibility in mind. More than just an explanatory preface, it becomes apparent that the title “TODAY” is closely related to Derrida’s definition of European responsibility. Derrida
draws our attention to the current events in Europe at the time the essay was written: the bicentennial of the French revolution, the fall of the Berlin wall the year before, the start of the first Gulf War two months earlier, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which led to debates about the expansion of the European Union to the former communist countries. In the background, there was also an increasing anxiety, particularly in France and Germany, about a certain “foreigner problem.” All of these events, with more or less emphasis, are mentioned in the essay. The journalistic and politically responsive character of the essay, together with a motivation to make philosophical statements about the cultural identity and future of Europe, inform Derrida’s historical-critical perspective on the previously constructed headings for a European identity, such as those of Edmund Husserl, Karl Marx and Paul Valéry. This historical-critical grounding, I think, is at the core of exemplarity.

To demonstrate this, I will briefly summarize how Derrida evokes the exemplary date marked in Paul Valéry’s historical writings about Europe’s identity that are “bear[ing] the marks of an urgency, …or imminence,” namely that of the advent of the World War II (The Other Heading 61). A common feature in Derrida’s political writings is that he takes an unlikely or controversial work of a literary or philosophical figure and contextualizes it as a rhetorical strategy.59 For example, Derrida notes that in Valéry’s work The Freedom of Spirit, published in 1939, the tremors of a partitioning Europe and the imminence of its destruction were felt and that it is precisely at such a date that Valéry makes an appeal for a unified European spirit. To counter the existing east-central-west alliances and conflicts within Europe, Valéry offers, as a subject from the Mediterranean coast of France, a Mediterranean spirit as a current “heading” for

59 Derrida is intentionally choosing a political work of Valéry’s, less well known than his poetry (see also Naas in The Other Heading xxiv).
Europe. Derrida refers to Valéry’s *History and Politics* (1939) and quotes: “[T]he Mediterranean has been a veritable *machine for making civilization*. And in creating trade, it necessarily created *freedom of the spirit*. On the shores of the Mediterranean, then, *spirit, culture, and trade* are found together” (Valéry in Derrida, *The Other Heading* 64, Derrida's emphasis). What Derrida reads in Valéry’s appeal to the Mediterranean is the expression of the particularity of European identity through universal paradigms, such as “*spirit, capital, and culture*.” On the one hand, Derrida appeals to the singularity of Valéry’s “TODAY,” where the threat of losing Europe’s function as a capital example was imminent in violent claims for particularity, such as those of Nazism or communism. On the other hand, Derrida also draws attention to the singularity of his own “TODAY,” where Valéry’s appeal seems violent in its hegemonic and capitalist Eurocentrism for appealing to a European “*spirit, culture, and trade*.”

Derrida does not simply point out the rhetorical strategy in Valéry’s utterance of a heading for Europe such as that of Mediterranean. He also wants us to see philosophical language in the making, and how such language relates to the singularity of a cultural identity and at the same time appeals to a general language. Derrida thus exemplifies the principle of exemplarity, as noted by Michael Naas when he calls the essay “an exemplary reading of the politics of example” and states that for Derrida “the question of politics … is always a question of situation and context” (*The Other Heading* xxiii). To add my own metaphor from geometry, Derrida suggests that a certain “heading” for a cultural identity, European or other, is the product of three spatial and temporal vectors, which make each heading unique. The first one is the unrepeatable and irreplaceable particularity of the uttering subject, which in the case of Valéry is Mediterranean, French, male; particularities that are usually if not always in a hyphenated relation. The second vector marks the singularity of the date, TODAY, usually underlined by the
imminence or urgency of a war. The third vector is constituted by the unavoidable appeal to a
universal language current at the time. The last vector, I would emphasize, is unavoidable and
necessary for Derrida’s understanding of political ethics, even though he is popularly known as
the philosopher of particularity and difference. And yet, Derrida’s understanding of universality
does not inscribe permanence or centralization but takes the risk of being overcome and
overturned. As Giovanna Borradori comments, “[f]ar from curtailing the demand for universal
justice and freedom, deconstruction renews it infinitely” (17).

I suggest that reading the various headings and constructions of European identities of the
past through these vectors constitutes what Derrida calls a “deconstructive genealogy” (The
Other Heading 77). Hospitality is a welcoming of that which cannot be prescribed; it is a
heading for an identity that has not been explored and one that is not yet expected. This is what
Derrida has to say about the need for headings:

> It is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of
Europe, but of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity
and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other
heading or the heading of the other, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition,
another border structure, another shore. (Derrida, The Other Heading 29)

A hospitable reading of identity constructions in the past means reading them as rhetorical acts
that assume responsibility in the face of their current urgencies but that create a violence in the
face of other differences. Thus, every heading, such as Valéry’s Mediterranean and Geiger’s
Abrahamic, however temporary, will inevitably contain elements of violence as well as
hospitality.

Besides employing “heading” in the sense of a title or a “chapter heading …[cap],”
Derrida also makes use of it as a metaphor taken from the “language of air and sea navigation” to
tease out the meaning of it in verb form as “heading” towards a destination (The Other Heading 13). While for Derrida this navigational sense of “heading” refers to an “end, the telos of an oriented, calculated, deliberate, ordered movement,” his addition of the prefix “the other” refers to what is to come, and to that “before which we must respond, which we must remember” (14-5). Derrida’s use of the title “the other heading” resembles his use of the phrase “messianic without messianism,” which he elaborates later in Spectres of Marx as the non-religious, non-originary and non-eschatological “coming of the other, the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant as justice*” (28). Moreover, Derrida also draws attention to the “other of the heading,” meaning the identities, singularities and differences that are inevitably suppressed with every constructed heading. This tendency to be inclusive and yet with an eye for what will always remain outside and excluded explains Derrida’s attempt to move the discussions about European identity “beyond all the exhausted programs of Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism” and towards a more hospitable understanding (The Other Heading 12-3). In short, Derrida wants to draw attention to the fact that European identity is not an unchanging entity hegemonizing its Others but an ongoing dialogue that integrates differences within and changes at every fold of history.

Since the vectors of exemplarity likewise apply to Derrida, I see his insistence on the opening of European identity to other differences as his response to the so-called “foreigner problem” and to the escalating attempts to close off European identity. The “Jewish question”—a designation which, like “problem,” is another attempt to exteriorize a difference within Europe—again lurks behind Derrida’s “the other heading,” particularly when he stresses that responding to today’s urgencies means “remembering” (15). Derrida’s Jewishness asserts itself when he refers to the double meaning of “hospitality” as the laws of European citizenship and immigration,
which Derrida in *Of Hospitality* traces to Kant’s definition of “universal hospitality” in the essay “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (1795). Instead of this Enlightenment understanding of hospitality, Derrida prefers an open-ended and messianic version of hospitality, one that does not expect a perpetual peace to actually happen but one that preserves this goal as the *if* (*Of Hospitality* 71). The reference in “The Other Heading” to the Enlightenment sense of hospitality in relation to the Jewish question is clearly intentional since the former solidified around the same time as the “Jewish question” was posed. This Enlightenment version of hospitality, usually requiring the integration or even assimilation of the guest, still provides the legal language today for the relation between the “national host” on the one hand and the “foreigner” as guest on the other. Derrida, however, defines European responsibility as a “duty [that] dictates welcoming foreigners in order not to integrate them but to recognize and accept their alterity: two concepts of hospitality that today divide our European and national consciousnesses” (*The Other Heading* 77).

Let us recap by applying the metaphor of vectors to my own project: What is *my* responsibility today? The first vector dictates that I disclose my own subject position, which is never one thing but a set of adjectives in endless and sometimes imbalanced hyphenated constructions, such as, Oriental, German, Canadian, female, literary critic. The second vector consists of the urgencies TODAY. On the one hand, there is the war between the West (North America and Europe) and the violent terrorism conducted in the name of Islam, a war that implicates territories where Muslims outside the West live. On the other hand, we have the question of integrating Islam into Europe as posed by the challenge of Turkey’s possible membership in the EU and the presence of Muslim minorities within Europe as the seemingly unassimilable religious “others” within. The third vector is the universal language I chose to
speak through, namely, the understanding of a hospitable (as opposed to tolerant)-multiculturalism with the aim to de-territorialize and make heterogeneous the cultural and religious differences we build our communities on; and language of literature as “the right to say everything” (Derrida, *On the Name* 28).

**The Jewish-German intellectual Psyche**

Since Jonathan Boyarin wrote about European Jewry as the “Other Within” in 1992, the subject of the Jewish diaspora in Europe, especially the Jewish emancipation movement of the nineteenth century, has come to the attention of postcolonial theorists as an exemplary case of the paradoxes involved in the marginalization and assimilation of ethno-religious minorities in the new nation states of Europe. Complementary to the postcolonialist perspective is Dana Hollander’s philosophical approach in *Exemplarity and Chosenness*, which elaborates on the accommodation of the particular within the philosophical-universal and on the construction of the exemplary or chosen nation through the discourse of philosophy.

I start by mentioning these works by Jonathan Boyarin and Dana Hollander because they, in a Derridean vein, emphasize a reciprocal process of identity formation of both gentile Europe and the minority Jews. Both complicate the relation between the *host* and the *guest* in an ethics of hospitality, terms that become most suspicious especially in the case of European Jewry since the Jewish presence in Europe is almost as old as Europe itself. These works remind us that notions such as assimilation, separation, acculturation, and integration were invented during the process of modern nation-building and still prevail in today’s globalized world. Complicating  

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60 I make this distinction based on Derrida’s brief “historical genealogy of the concept of tolerance,” where he remarks that tolerance is “a form of Christian charity” and “marked by the religious war between …Christians and non-Christians” and therefore the “opposite of hospitality,…[o]r at least its limit” (Borradori, Derrida, and Habermas 126-7).
these terms when talking about minorities in Europe—Jewish, Muslim or other—starts with complicating the identities of the host and the guest. This first of all requires that we change the way we perceive hyphenated identities, such as German-Jewish or European-Muslim, that are usually not balanced in terms of power. The deconstructive exemplarity that is exemplified in Derrida’s essay “Interpretations at War” focuses on the function of hyphens in identity constructions and assertions. More specifically, it cautions us against privileging one side of the hyphen, and favours fully partaking of the particularity of each side. According to Derrida, such “disjunctive-conjunctions” (“Interpretations at War” 143) in history between peoples and cultures can never find closure or be decided on except at the instance of an “absolute decision” which is “the experience of the very ordeal of the undecidable” and therefore the very act of responsibility (*The Gift of Death* 5). What remains to be done for literary studies is to discursively engage in this type of conjecture with the objective of responsible interpretation—perhaps a sort of late-postcolonialism—when reading Islam. This would be an Islam which is no longer the singular Other that is far away, in a warmer climate then ours and in a war zone, but the other Other within Europe and within the wider “West,” from which I, and other critics here mentioned are writing, as part of and in interaction with the European psyche. Before I say more about this metaphor of psyche—soul, or ruah in Hebrew and ruh in Arabic—I need to briefly explain why the late nineteenth century German-Jewish case is especially exemplary (though a more detailed contextualization will appear in the following chapter.)

While the nineteenth century witnessed the founding of civil society-based nation states throughout Western Europe, the Enlightenment paradigms of universal human nature on the one hand and cultural particularity and cosmopolitanism on the other became clashing values in the integration of Jewish populations into these nation states. For a Germany that was exploring an
anti-Napoleonic German nationalism with the goal of unifying all German states, the integration process constituted an Enlightenment paradox juxtaposing German cultural particularities to the Jewish ones. The Jewish emancipation was completed in the German lands with the unification in 1871—later to be reversed in 1933 by the National Socialists—and soon after German citizenship and state hospitality laws were defined in the “Nationality Law of the German Empire and States” (*Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz - RuStAG*) of 1913. These laws are now in the process of being redefined and are subject to heated debates in Germany. The most controversial parts of these laws relate to citizenship as determined by *jus sanguinis* (“the right of blood”) and the prohibition of dual citizenship. 61 It is interesting to observe how the relation between the Jewish and the gentile population in Germany is constantly redefined by the granting and withholding of rights, emancipation on the one hand and citizenship by blood on the other. One thing is worth noting: it was not only this internal affair that shaped the new German nation and its laws, but also Germany’s anti-French and anti-imperialist politics and the opposition to everything that came with the French brand of liberalization, including Jewish emancipation.

This background of German-Jewish history in the nineteenth century becomes significant for Derrida’s reading of Hermann Cohen’s *Deutschtum und Judentum* (1915) in the essay “Interpretations at War.” Although the second half of the essay is dedicated to Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*—and Rosenzweig’s relation to Cohen is clearly quite significant for Derrida’s argument in the essay—I will only focus on Derrida’s interpretation of

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61 For a detailed study of the process that formed France and Germany’s citizenship laws and how they today influence the ethnic differences within each country, see Roger Brubaker’s *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* and Saskia Sassen’s *Guests and Aliens*, Chapter 4. The 1913 Nationality Law was only modified in January 2000 to add *jus soli* (citizenship by territory of birthplace); however, the law bears some restrictions and dual citizenship is still not fully permissible in Germany.
Cohen’s text here.\textsuperscript{62} For Derrida, Cohen’s articulation of a German-Jewish symbiosis becomes an example for deconstructive exemplarity, whereby a certain particularity can only be expressed through an “exemplary” language of the Other that is closer to universal terms at that particular instance in history. The fact that this essay on Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig was delivered as a lecture in Jerusalem in 1988 shortly after the first Palestinian intifada makes it especially provocative. It also suggests that Derrida intends to make a political commentary in regards to the function and responsibility of the Israeli institution of the Hebrew University, where the lecture was delivered. Indeed, Derrida opens the essay by admitting that the subject of the essay bears a “\textit{necessary} relation to this very \textit{place} [and] \textit{moment}” (“Interpretations at War” 137).

What is Cohen’s \textit{Deutschtum und Judentum} about? Derrida starts by recalling that this work is often considered \textit{maudit} (“cursed”), because it is German hyper-nationalism expressed by a German Jew. Cohen in this work proposes not a synthesis but a historical symbiosis of Jewishness and Germanness that would be progressing towards a perfect future. This project is cursed because it failed badly, as Cohen’s very own family was to be killed in the Nazi camps. However, Derrida reads Cohen as staying loyal to his Jewish particularity while holding on to the universality of German idealism, the idealism of Kant, like his Enlightenment predecessor Moses Mendelssohn. Cohen’s version of neo-Kantianism is founded on reason and the scientific method, as opposed to more particularistic, nationalist and anti-cosmopolitan versions of

\textsuperscript{62} Derrida later in the essay writes about the effect that Cohen had on Franz Rosenzweig as “a volcanic eruption …and interruption” (“Interpretations at War” 145). Both count as the most influential Jewish philosophers of the modern era after Mendelssohn. Derrida’s gesture of choosing to write about one of Cohen’s more controversial works, \textit{Deutschtum and Judentum}, instead of his more appreciated \textit{Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums} (\textit{Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism}, 1919), shows that Cohen’s reconciliatory approach to Germanness opened up the possibility for a more radical assertion of Jewishness in the works of Rosenzweig.
transcendental idealisms such as Gottlieb Fichte’s. Moreover, Derrida reports, Cohen combs the history of the Christian logos for evidence of a symbiosis between Jewishness and Germaneness, so that he locates the origin of German Volksgeist in the Judaeo-Hellenic, cosmopolitan Alexandria of Philo. Cohen then traces this neo-Platonic logos to the Lutheran Reformation via Maimonides, whom he calls a proto-Reformist. In this historical account, Derrida reminds us, there is a “deep internal kinship” between Jews and Germans marked by the spirit of the logos, which is a Judaeo-Hellenic invention, and it is this spirit that carries the German Volksgeist and not the “blood” of Teutonic Hellenism. Moreover, it is neither Christianity nor Hellenism alone, but the Jewish influence on the German nation that brings about the unique Volksgeist, which also incorporates Protestantism and the Aufklärung, the events that put Germany in the centre of globalization. In short, according to Cohen, it is the Jewish influence on German thought that stirred the German people towards cosmopolitanism and the scientific method while creating a counter-force to dogma (Derrida, “Interpretations at War” 146-61).

One can instantly see the grandiosity of Cohen’s narrative, the centrality of Germanness and of Jewishness, the “German-Jewish” as the exemplary spirit manifested in the unquestionable authority of rationalism and scientific method. Cohen’s project is also a manifest hyper-nationalism and logocentrism, the two aspects of modernism as a “cursed” ideology. So why does Derrida read Cohen in such an apologetic manner? First of all, Derrida draws our attention to the syllogism of the “Judaeo-Graeco-Christian” in Cohen’s work. In deconstruction, every name, or gathering under a name, especially one that is held by a hyphen, is a suppression of a difference (suppressed for the moment) and therefore has violence in its centre, as does any form of nationalism, with or without a hyphen. The more specifically the name is defined the greater the violence will be. The sharpest expression of such violence is no doubt the Holocaust.
Cohen’s Judaeo-Protestant logocentrism, Derrida tells us, is the origin and the face of modern globalization. The German-Jewish psyche carries this economy, the economy of “spiritual hybridization as world genealogy”; thus, Cohen aligns his own Jewishness with the dominant discourses at the time, namely, idealism, science, Hellenism, Protestantism (“Interpretations at War” 158).

The second aspect of Derrida’s defence of Cohen begins with a shift in focus to the word “spirit,” or psyche, and employs the second meaning of this word in French as a metaphor: a pivoting, double-sided mirror. Derrida especially emphasizes how this historical psyche is the coming to terms with one’s Other, and yet it is not a natural union and not based on blood:

At each turning point, each curve, each turn or bent of the German mind, an originary ‘force,’ namely the Jewish genealogy or lineage, must have played a marking role. The German comes to terms [...] with the Jew at each decisive turn of his history, in history as the history of the spirit, and in an exemplary manner, as history of the German spirit. In coming to terms with the Jew, the German comes to terms with himself since he carries and reflects Judaism within himself: not in his blood but in his soul. Or in his psyche. Not in his blood, for this genealogy is not natural but an institutional, cultural, spiritual, and psychic one. (“Interpretations at War” 149)

To put it in simpler terms, Cohen’s German-Jewish hyper-nationalism and his adoption of this rhetoric at a time of rising anti-semitism is a reminder to the Germans that they are just as much shaped by their enemies as by their chosen allies such as Christianity, Hellenism, or the Teutonic race. And this is the heart of Derrida’s defence of Cohen: Derrida draws our attention to the strategy and pragmatics of Cohen’s text, and his rhetoric that is conditioned by very specific contextual and institutional circumstances, namely the discourse of war “at war.” To give an example: Cohen’s most quoted line from Deutschtum und Judentum is the statement “Germany is the true motherland of [the Jewish] soul” (Cohen in Derrida, “Interpretations at War” 168). It
is needless to point out the historical irony in this statement. However, Derrida reminds us that Cohen is responding to the institutional situation at that time, namely the discriminatory treatment of Jewish students at German universities and “the war of 1914” (140). Cohen addresses American Jews, the other Judaeo-Protestant nation, calling them to exert pressure on their government so that they do not side with France and Britain in the war against Germany. Derrida argues that Cohen, as “this Jewish, socialist, German, pacifist, antinationalist, internationalist and neo-Kantian philosopher,” tries to prevent the war between Germany and America (“a war within the spirit”) in order to “protect the Judaeo-Protestant logos under the charge of the Jewish-German psyche” (Derrida, “Interpretations at War” 160). In short, Derrida does a historical-critical reading of Cohen as an intellectual taking responsibility in face of the urgencies of his time.

In fact, Derrida reminds us that this type of discourse was very typical among the members of the German-Jewish intelligentsia at the time, and that history as a whole is full of such strange alliances. Derrida’s anecdote about a group of French-Jewish militants presenting a bouquet in appreciation of Jean-Marie Le Pen is very striking in this respect. Le Pen is a politician who infamously made a statement about the Holocaust as a “detail” in 1987, yet he is also known for his anti-Islamic and xenophobic statements and for surprisingly gaining 14% of the votes in the 2002 French general elections. Derrida provocatively draws the attention of his Israeli listeners to the “the matrix of strategies gathered together in this bouquet” (“Interpretations at War” 166).

This gesture brings us back to the metaphor of psyche, the double-sided mirror. The double-sided mirror is a metaphor for the particular and the universal, but also for the German
and the Jewish; it is Cohen and Fichte’s nationalisms on one side and Kant’s universal cosmopolitanism on the other; anti-semitism on one side and philo-Semitism or Zionism on the other. No identification is ever possible between these sides and yet they cannot exist without each other; external and fascinating at the same time, they “pivot around each other –like a psyche” (“Interpretations at War” 176). Dana Hollander expresses quite vividly why Derrida comes to defend Cohen’s hybrid nationalism: “Cohen’s conception is not only of a Jewish exemplarity but of a double, reciprocal exemplarity of Germanism and Judaism which requires both Germanism and Judaism to be essentially open-ended idealities and thereby disrupts the logic of assimilation versus separation” (Hollander 129). Jewish peoples derive their exemplarity not “from the fact of being the contingent bearer of a trait or message, but from living the chasm between particularity and universality”, that is, from their diasporic status (Hollander 32). It is this sense of deconstructive exemplarity, as an alternative process to the binary of assimilation versus separation that I want to hold on to most in order to draw attention to the situation facing Muslims within the West today.

It should be clear by now that the three vectors I described above make each ethical encounter with the Other so unique and singular as to defy any prescribed form of universal ethics. On the other hand, these vectors are also linked to the necessity and value of the exemplarity that inscribes the universal in the proper body of a singularity, of an idiom or a culture, whether this singularity be individual, social, national, state, confederate, or not….Each time, it has to do with the discourse of responsibility: I have, the unique “I” has, the responsibility of testifying for universality. (Derrida, The Other Heading 73)

Deconstructive hospitality involves both responding to today’s urgencies and remembering the past with an unexpectant openness towards the future. The disjunctive conjunction of Derridean
time, or the “messianic,” is a sign that the past will continue to haunt both the present and the future, and yet that the future will always remain unpredictable. Thus, another duty that Derrida assigns to Europe is to

[cultivate] the virtue of […] the critical tradition, but also submitting it, beyond critique and questioning, to a deconstructive genealogy that thinks and exceeds it without yet compromising it. (The Other Heading 77)

Responding to Derrida’s call for deconstructive genealogy, I argue that deconstructive hospitality can be used to read the scriptural interpretations of the past, both biblical and Qur’anic, as acts of literature in order to open up literary criticism in the present and future towards the difference of Islam. This type of reading does have an affinity with philosophical hermeneutics, or rather with the “hermeneutics of suspicion” as Paul Ricouer puts it (285), because this type of interpretation unmasks the hidden and suppressed aspects in the exegesis of the Other. The hermeneutical method, in its historical development, also best expresses the borderline position of interpretation between faith and knowledge, between testimony and fact. Originally a secularized form of Christian biblical hermeneutics, philosophical hermeneutics in the nineteenth century became the basis of social and textual studies, including those of Orientalism. I interpret Derrida’s provocative avoidance of the subject of Islam as an attempt to remain on the “threshold” of faith and knowledge, and at the same time, as an invitation to talk freely about Islam, by literature’s right to say everything. However, I refrain from using the term “hermeneutics” when talking about Islam, because no matter how we redefine its meaning and use, the term will bear the Christian and ontological burden that it brings from its past.

63 See, for example, Specters of Marx, where Derrida elaborates the unstable and “haunting” relation of the past to the present and the future, while analyzing the phrase “this time is out of joint,” from Shakespeare’s Hamlet (Specters of Marx 3-77).
64 More on the relation between philosophical hermeneutics and the rise of historical-critical philology will be said in the following chapter.
Moreover, hermeneutics implies a sort of method applied to “explain” or “reveal” a meaning behind a text, while deconstructive hospitality proposes to be open to endless meaning and possibilities. At the same, we cannot ignore the fact that Derrida’s philosophy is based on the refutation of Heidegger’s and Husserl’s ontological hermeneutics. Derrida’s point about deconstructive genealogy above, therefore, can be best read as hermeneutics that is “under erasure” (*Of Grammatology* 60). The present project performs such a deconstructive genealogy, but it bears the traces of hermeneutics, both due to the close relation of Geiger’s methods to the philosophical hermeneutics in the nineteenth century and the evolution of deconstruction from ontological hermeneutics. The type of hermeneutics I associate with Derrida’s deconstructive hospitality, therefore, is both “under erasure” and it calls to be aware of the violent and exclusionary nature of a signifier—whether this is an identity heading such as “Abrahamic” or hyphenated constructions such as “Judaeo-Christian.” The next section will further elaborate how deconstruction as hospitality adds an ethical—or rather, responsible—dimension to the principle of exemplarity.

**The Abrahamic and deconstructive hospitality**

In order to explore the heading of Abrahamic suggested by Geiger and some of his contemporaries for Europe’s religious identity, I first have to discuss how Derrida himself is employing the Abrahamic particularly in relation to his concept of hospitality. Derrida’s interest in the Abrahamic heading runs parallel to his discussion of Islam’s position within the West. And yet, Derrida is always careful not to other Islam in the Eurocentric sense. For example, he never talks about Islam as the singular but always places it in a relation with a hyphen. The heading “Abrahamic faiths” or, as Derrida calls it in *The Gift of Death*, “religions of the book,” is also directly a phrase form the Qur’an and is in effect a Muslim perspective, as neither Judaism not
Christianity would accept such a union (64). In fact, all such apparent unions, hyphens or headings in Derrida’s writings are metaphors of a specific kind. Whenever Derrida talks of Abrahamic monotheisms as a heading, it is in order to discuss the law of hospitality in these faiths. Rather than signifying the permanence of an essential identity or alliance, this heading and the various hyphenated relations within it always signify the interruption of self in time and the pivoting relationship between the host and the guest.

Derrida started writing about the Abrahamic and hospitality in the early 1990s, and did so usually in relation to Emmanuel Levinas’ philosophy; this is what some have called Derrida’s “ethical turn.”65 The first such work was The Gift of Death (1992, which was followed by Politics of Friendship (1994), Adieu To Emmanuel Levinas (1999), Of Hospitality (2000) and finally the essays within the collection Acts of Religion (2002). The full phrase “Abrahamic hospitality,” however, is used for the first time in the essay “Hostipitality,” which was first published as seminar notes in Acts of Religion. According to Derrida in this essay, genuine hospitality is impossible. He exemplifies this by the double meaning of the word hostis in Latin, meaning both the host and enemy; hence, the neologism in the title “Hostipitality.” Hospitality is a contradictory term, because in order to be hospitable one must be ready to be overtaken, to be surprised; the self of the host must be open to being violated, which means that at the moment of hospitality the host becomes obsolete and it becomes impossible to talk about hospitality. On the other hand, when the rules of hospitality are circumvented by the strict definitions of the host and the guest, or hospitality is performed as an acquired habitus, as a duty, again hospitality fails because it is not the opening of one’s self to the unexpected, or in Derrida’s words “let[-ting]

oneself be swept by the coming of wholly other, the absolute unforeseeable stranger, the uninvited visitor, the unexpected visitation beyond any welcoming apparatuses” (“Hostipitality” 361-2). This contradiction of hospitality is the very act of deconstruction itself. Deconstruction, or hospitality, defines the relation to the absolute Other, which is no longer the other of one’s self because the moment one is hospitable to the other, the relation of the host and the guest is dissolved. Thus, absolute hospitality is the opening of one’s self to the other that can never be welcome since it will never come:

Hospitality, the experience, the apprehension, the exercise of impossible hospitality, of hospitality as the possibility of impossibility (to receive another guest whom I am incapable of welcoming, to become capable of that which I am incapable of)—this is the exemplary experience of deconstruction itself. […] Hospitality this is a name or an example of deconstructing. (364)

Derrida in the remainder of the essay offers a reading of Louis Massignon’s life and his Christiano-Islamic spiritualism, in the light of Levinas’ philosophy of the absolute Other. The best known fact about Massignon’s life is his conversion to Catholicism after having experienced Islamic hospitality in the desert of Mesopotamia. This experience launched him upon a life of scholarship that culminated in “a new approach to Islam on the part of non-Muslim Christians” and a “rethinking of Christianity nourished by Islam” (366). Massignon’s experience of hospitality inspires him to build his exegesis on the premise that the three monotheistic religions are from the same source, namely, from the absolute hospitality exemplified by that offered to Abraham as a “stranger, as hôte” in Genesis 12:1 and 21:1. These passages from the Old Testament are the source of Massignon’s famous statement about Islam: “God did find a hôte [meaning both guest and host in French] in Abraham and these Arabs are the last witnesses of this cult of hospitality” (Massignon in Derrida, “Hostipitality” 369).
Derrida evokes Massignon’s notion of “Abrahamic hospitality” as explained in the “Statutes of Al-Badaliya” (the principles of the Christian organization that Massignon founded in the Middle East for Christian minorities there) and his offering himself as “hostage.” Even though the content of the “Statutes” may sound missionary to contemporary readers, Derrida surprises his readers by interpreting them as a call for the modification of Christianity and Catholicism rather than as a call for Muslim conversion to Christianity. Derrida in fact argues that, by centering his faith around the principle of the Abrahamic, Massignon added the unique perspective of Islam and thereby changed his version of Christianity beyond recognition, while at the same time reading the “inscription of Jesus Christ written in the hearts of the Muslims” (372). The Christian and the Muslim, the host and the guest, in the “Statutes” are thereby put into the reciprocal relation of the psyche, the double-sided pivoting mirror. Massignon is usually dismissed in Islamic scholarship as a mystic and was famously put in a negative light as an Orientalist by Edward Said for only salvaging a minor figure of Islam in his scholarship, Al-Hallaj, the medieval mystic. On the other hand, Massignon was considered a heretic by the Catholic Church for his involvement with and promotion of Islam in Europe. However, Derrida, in a similar manner to his treatment of Hermann Cohen, salvages the message of hospitality in Massignon’s spirituality as an act of deconstructive genealogy, exemplifying hospitality in his own interpretation.

Besides employing deconstructive hospitality for a reading of the past, Derrida also draws attention to the singularity of the individual who makes his or her ethical choices in an instant of decision. The ethics of deconstruction, like absolute hospitality, is based not on a form of prescribed ethical law but on the moment of the decision to welcome the absolute Other as Abraham did on Mount Moriah. Derrida uses the example of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac to
differentiate between universal ethics and responsibility, the latter of which is tied to this urgent moment of decision in *The Gift of Death*. Although Derrida primarily reads Isaac’s binding in the Bible through Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* (1843), the influence of Levinas’ “ethics as first philosophy” can be felt in his interpretation.\(^6\) Accordingly, the philosophy and universal ethics laid out in Kant’s and Hegel’s works—the two philosophers that Kierkegaard converses with—do not allow an “irreducible secret” that is attached to the singularity of the individual; in other words, “universal generality is superior to the individual.” In Enlightenment philosophy “faith” is interiorized and separated from the generality that is called “universal duty.” For Kierkegaard, according to Derrida, absolute duty “towards God and in the singularity of faith,” replaces this generality beyond a “debt” or an economy of exchange, and is in fact a sacrifice as “the gift of death” (*Gift* 63). For an absolute duty, this sacrifice, or the gift of death, and the hating of one’s loved ones is required. Thus, Abraham in Kierkegaard’s interpretation betrays his loved ones in order to respond to God as the absolute Other.

Derrida summarizes Kierkegaard’s paradoxical understanding of faith in the story of Abraham, a story common to the “three so-called religions of the Book,” to lead the discussion towards the basic paradox within “Judaean-Christian-Islamic morality, or …the religion of love in general” (64). It soon becomes clear that Derrida ties the ethics of deconstruction as responsibility to this paradox and to the “instant of decision,” which “like the gift and ‘the gift of death’[…] remains irreducible to presence or to presentation, [and] it belongs to an atemporal temporality, to a duration that cannot be grasped” (65). Just as Abraham’s response to God means the sacrifice of his son, every responsible response means the sacrifice of another Other. It must be repeated that the heading “Abrahamic,” figuralized in Abraham’s sacrifice of his son

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(Isaac or Ishmael), here serves as a metaphor of the inseparability of faith and knowledge, and of each responsibility as the unique union of a universal language, the singularity of the individual and the instant (the three vectors). It does not mean that Abraham’s sacrifice is valorized over other acts of faith, nor is it used as an ahistorical metaphor to glorify monotheism over other forms of faith:

Through its paradox [the story of Abraham] speaks of the responsibility required at every moment for every man and every woman. … At the instant of every decision and through the relation to every other (one) as every (bit) other, every one else asks us at every moment to behave like the knight’s faith…. It stands for Jews, Christians, Muslims but also for everyone else, for every other in its relation to the wholly other. We no longer know who is called Abraham, and he can no longer even tell us. (Gift 79).

Part three of The Gift of Death summarizes all the elements of Derrida’s philosophy that I am using in this project to read Abraham Geiger as the German-Jewish Orientalist, who changed the way his own faith was perceived through an exemplary alliance with Islam. Abraham Geiger’s treatment of Islam still partakes in the hegemony of Orientalism; however, it also responds to the singular Other in an instant of decision through the language of scholarship. Geiger’s Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? constitutes both an example of how exemplarity works and serves as an act of hospitality that interrupts the self in time, that is, as the interruption of the Jewish psyche by its monotheistic Other Islam in response to another, hostile Other that is Christianity. It is one of Derrida’s simplest sentences that best summarizes deconstructive ethics as a response to the singularity of the Other: “I can respond only to the one (or to the ONE), that is, to the other, by sacrificing the other to that one” (Gift 70).
The political and institutional implication of deconstructive hospitality then is, first of all, welcoming the Other without assimilation and being aware that to offer hospitality means that the Other may ruin my space. On the other hand, it is the awareness that my hospitality towards the singular Other will ruin the space of another Other. Hospitality is therefore a risk, which has to be negotiated at every instant. Derrida’s call for responsibility is intended for this grave and urgent moment, which contains the discourse of a war against terrorism, or against Islam, when Islam is least welcome in Europe. For Derrida, literature has the potential to be the perfect example of deconstruction and hospitality because it is permanently bound with the question of politics and democracy, and because the literary institution—a space where “anything and everything may be said”—lies at the heart of Western democracies. Reading the spiritual hybridity of Islam and Europe, in the fashion that nineteenth-century Jewish intellectuals read their own pasts, will maintain the radicalism of the Other; however, it will hold them together not as two separate ipseities, as Islam and the West, but as a psyche, a pivoting mirror where the two sides are unthinkable by themselves. The responsibility that literary studies must take today as a temporary necessity, in this discourse of war, is to recognize the Abrahamic roots of Western civilization. Kantian ethics and Hegelian universalism formed the ethical paradigm of the nineteenth century, providing the philosophical contexts for figures like Valéry, Cohen, Massignon and Kierkegaard. With the same logic, Derrida’s philosophy of hospitality can be the philosophical context for the ethical response towards today’s conflicts. It is necessary to decide on the hyphen between Muslim-European and the heading of Abrahamic unconditionally, for this moment, without expecting a reward, open to all risks in order to let the heresy of Islam into our discourses. This is the only way the Other will be allowed into the institutional realm, first into our departments and then into our laws, the laws of immigration, citizenship and of hospitality in general, which will be changed until a new urgency appears on the horizon.
CHAPTER THREE

German-Jewish Scholarship on Islam: Abraham Geiger in his Contexts

The strategy here is to seek to identify the times and places of manifestation, deployment, and rupture in the long history of human reason’s engagement with the never-ending quest for universally applicable meaning that will be lasting, transcendent, and able to act as a foundation for political, ethical, legal, and spiritual legitimacy. (Arkoun, “Islam, Europe, The West: Meanings-at-Stake and the Will-to-Power” 253)

What Arkoun sets as a strategy for his work at the beginning of his essay “Islam, Europe, The West: Meanings-at-Stake and the Will-to-Power” seems to be a grand, unmanageable project even if he limits his subject to the “history of thought of the Mediterranean area,” an intellectual geography defined by societies “torn … between religious monotheism on the one hand … and, on the other, a tradition of philosophical thought mainly deriving from classical Greece.” Though they constitute at best a loose amalgamation, Greek philosophy and monotheistic theology on the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea lie at the heart of most of the cultural and political conflicts that shape the everyday lives of millions of people living there and elsewhere today. Arkoun sees a certain urgency in the “historical, cultural, and spiritual reintegration of the Mediterranean” because it bears upon “the new historical solidarities, which will form within the matrix of … the European Union” (253). What does such a reunification mean? The idea of Europe is dynamically in process, and throughout history was constructed and deconstructed through ruptures in thought. Currently it has expanded itself to the concept of the “West”; however, in the past it has been Christian, Aryan, Judaeo-Christian, Graeco-Latin-Judaeo-Christian, and now the possibility of being “Mediterranean,” or Greek-Abrahamic is being
explored. Discussions of this matter are emerging and have become “urgent,” as Arkoun puts it, because change is obviously imminent and new fissures in the history of thought have already occurred. Of course, the real matter at stake for Arkoun is the integration of Islam into Europe.

The nineteenth century witnessed several of these fissures in mainstream epistemology: one of them happened in the field of religious studies, yet it affected the course of literary and historical studies. At a moment when Europe was intellectually at the peak of its confidence and about to be frozen into a set of universal, transcendental, spiritual definitions, a counter-movement occurred at its heart. This chapter of my dissertation will contextualize and analyze the counter-theories on the religious identity of Europe in the works of Abraham Geiger, who pioneered the scholarly study of Islam in the late nineteenth century.

The first part discusses the rise of the historical-philological method in German Orientalist scholarship and its discursive particularities in the face of the political situation leading to the unification of the German-speaking lands. I draw a genealogy for this particular discourse that starts with the cultural and historical relativism in Vico’s thought and continues with Herder’s poetic anthropology, culminating in a certain philosophical hermeneutics that provided the basis for the historical-philological method adapted by biblical studies. The development of German Orientalism explained through such a genealogy provides the context for the methodological choices that Geiger made in his scholarly treatment of the Qur’an in Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? In short, Geiger’s persona as a Qur’anic and biblical scholar will be contextualized in this first part.

In the second part of the chapter will, then, contextualize Geiger’s persona as a rabbi-scholar, who negotiated his Jewish identity through the language of scholarship and the scientific
method. I show how the Enlightenment discussions on the nature and validity of Judaism resulted in a peculiar German-Jewish intellectual psyche, as Derrida aptly calls it (“Interpretations at War”). With the Jewish emancipation struggle in the background, the philosophical and hermeneutical discussions between Christian and Jewish intellectuals determine Geiger’s assertion of a Jewish historical and contemporary presence within the German academic and public spheres, eventually contributing to the reformation of Judaism as well as to a paradigm shift in Western attitudes towards Islam.

The third and last part contains a close reading of Geiger’s Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? (hereafter WMJ), which was awarded a prize by the University of Bonn in 1833 and subsequently accepted as Geiger’s doctoral thesis by the University of Marburg in 1834. I shall read Geiger’s work on Islam through Derrida’s concept of deconstructive hospitality, a reading that entails a consideration of the three vectors—as described in the previous chapter—that shaped the particular character of the work. First, I look at Geiger’s use of the scholarly method of historical-philological analysis in WMJ and discuss why such an analysis constitutes a novelty at the time for the treatment of Islam and its prophet Muhammad. Second, I analyze how Geiger’s Jewish subject position influenced the depiction and valorization of the Judaic influence on Islam’s genesis. Third, I identify the polemical moments in the text, which are mainly directed against the biased and universalizing tendencies of Geiger’s Christian-Protestant opponents in the field of biblical studies. Such a close reading will show that some attributes of nineteenth-century assertions of Jewish identity and their corresponding sites of resistance can be considered exemplary situations for the vectors in today’s trajectory of change towards the inclusion of Islam in European culture and history.
THE DEVELOPMENT AND PREDICAMENT OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN ORIENTALISM

The Emergence of the Historical-Philological Method: Vico and Herder

Erich Auerbach in his introduction to Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages ascribes the popularity of Romance philology in Germany to Romantic historicism, which has “disclosed an historical perspective embracing Europe as a whole” (5). Indeed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a distinct European literary identity starts to emerge, as Auerbach points out, in the works of “European philologists” like Karl Vossler, Ernst Curtius and Leo Spitzer (6). However, according to Auerbach, this task of documenting European literary history is a result of a crisis rather than a sign of triumph. He wants us to understand his grand summary of European literature in Mimesis, not as a sign of European cultural superiority, but as an attempt to grasp Europe, with its Judaeo-Christian and Hellenic heritage, as a whole and as a passing phase of history: “European civilization is approaching the term of its existence; its history as a distinct entity would seem to be at an end, for already it is beginning to be engulfed in another, more comprehensive unity “ (6). Auerbach, as one of the last members of the German historical-philological school and one of the first advocates of comparative world literature, mentions Giambattista Vico’s influence on the formulation of his historicism. German historical-philological scholarship has its roots in Vico, J.G. Herder and the Romantics. I want to contextualize Abraham Geiger’s works within this strain of intellectual history that gave rise to a uniquely German sense of academic Orientalism. I believe that it was Geiger’s rigorous study of Judaism and Islam that pushed European identity to its Christian
limits, to the threshold of a “more comprehensive unity” that Europe is still struggling to achieve today.

Prior to the seventeenth century, the study of the Muslim Orient in Europe was mainly characterized by either the study of Arabic, Persian and Turkish, or by theological-polemical writings on the life and character of Muhammad. The pioneering academic institution was the Oriental Languages chair at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, which became known for philological studies through the presence of the prominent classicist Joseph J. Scaliger (1540-1609). Scaliger was famous for expanding the field of classical studies from Greek and Latin to Hebrew, Persian and Arabic, which would soon lead to the establishment of a separate chair for Arabic in 1599. Dutch trade interests in the Ottoman Empire contributed on the one hand to the financing of Arabic and Persian studies, while on the other hand these interests enabled the collection of numerous manuscripts in these languages, so that the University of Leiden library soon became the “Mecca for Arabists” of Europe (Waardenburg 740). In theological faculties across Europe, especially those under the rule of the Catholic Church, whenever Islam as a religion was the topic it was either a target of hostility or a pretext for Christian apologetics. During the Reformation, with the emergence of Lutheran theology in Germany, there were rare examples of alliance with Islam as part of a polemic against the Catholic Church. Most importantly, the first printed translation of the Qur’an, derived from Robert of Ketton’s translation of 1143, appeared with the support of the Protestant theologian Bibliander in Basel in 1543. However, the Reformist, polemical writings in which the Muhammadan religion was

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67 For a more detailed summary of Orientalist studies in Europe see Jacques Waardenburg’s entry titled “Mustashrikun” in the Encyclopedia of Islam, (735-753). The following summary is adapted from this article.

referenced usually characterized it as a heretical movement aiming to distort the true message of Christ, an argument similar to that used against the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{69}

The liberation of Islamic studies from the confines of Christian theology, according to Jacques Waardenburg, started as early as the seventeenth century with the unsuccessful siege of Vienna and the subsequent retreat by the Ottomans in 1684. With the reduced threat of the Muslim Ottomans, “a curiosity and cultural openness” to Islamic culture allowed a breakthrough in the types of publications on Islam. Waardenburg adds that this “open spirit” was characterized by an appreciation of belles lettres of the Muslim world and a change in perspective on Islam, perceived no longer as the theological enemy but rather as one of the world’s religions, which produced work that promoted a “spirit of reasonable representation” instead of outright rejection of Islam (741). A series of publications with this more sympathetic spirit was to appear in the course of the eighteenth century, one of the most popular examples being the French translation of Arabian Nights by Antoine Galland (1704-1717). Enlightenment philosophers distanced themselves from Christianity, while figures like Voltaire, Leibniz and Montesquieu treated Islam as one of the “natural religions,” using it as an indirect way of criticizing their own society and institutions. The rationalist aspiration to give “objective” accounts of Muslim history created a different breed of Orientalist publications. Among these were George Sale’s Qur’an translation, Edward Gibbons’s book on the history of the Roman Empire as part of Middle Eastern history, and Adriaan Reland’s De religione Mohammedica libri duo (1705), which Waardenburg calls the “first enlightened study of Islam as a religion” (741). Albert Hourani connects this new spirit to the Enlightenment’s rational approach to religion, and points out that the perception of Islam

\textsuperscript{69} See Hartmund Bobzin’s works on the reception of the Qur’an during the Reformation in Germany, especially his book Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa (1995).
participated in a new perception of all religions, marked by an understanding of “religion” as a human construction: “If the word was used in this way, than there can be different religions, all of them worthy of rational study and consideration” (Waardenburg 740).

My contention is that the emergence of a certain historically oriented philological discourse in the early eighteenth century is accountable for the progress made from the Enlightenment openness towards the other monotheisms to the systematized study of Oriental philology in nineteenth-century German universities. The ideas of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) are usually considered the source for this philological-historical method, and Germany as the main territory where the modern discipline of philology was instituted.

Today in literature departments, we read Vico as the precursor of modern philology primarily through Erich Auerbach’s historical assessments. Vico’s substitution of philosophy with philology in The New Science (1725) and some earlier works marks the beginning of a radical historicism, which Auerbach calls “aesthetic historicism” (Scenes 188). Vico’s starting point, according to Auerbach, is his objection to the “Cartesian contempt of history” and to other Enlightenment philosophies of his time that sought to define an absolute human nature. Instead, Vico proposes a revolutionary “principle of historical understanding” that completely relativizes human nature according to various historical phases and cultures (197). “In my science,” Vico asserts in The New Science, “philosophy undertakes to examine philology. By philology, I mean the science of everything that depends on human volition: for example, all histories of the language, customs, and deeds of various peoples in both war and peace” (6). Historical fact-finding through philological and anthropological study, then, replaces philosophy’s attempt to
define an absolute human nature. As a result, not only are the truths and symbols of ages and cultures relativized but also the humanist historian who is to study these is forced to be aware of his or her subject position. However, Enlightenment thought—modeled after ancient Greek philosophies and scientific methods and with its habit of universalizing and abstracting—does not entirely disappear from Vico’s epistemology, nor from the pre-Romantic and Romantic movements in the following centuries, not at least until Nietzsche’s radical questioning of Western philosophy. The result is a philosophical philology different from all previous philological or philosophical methods, one that cultivates a certain irony or a dialectical structure between the particular and the universal-human.

The originality of Vico’s system and how it translates into Herder and the Romantics are explained by Isaiah Berlin, upon whom I mainly rely for the purposes of this study. The first principle, as mentioned above, is Vico’s emphasis of historical relativism, namely that human nature changes according to history. What follows is a theory of interpretation that assumes that humans can only have an understanding of what they created themselves, and since they created human history, language, and all aesthetic artifacts, the only meaningful study is the one of human production and not of nature, as rationalist philosophies propounded. God created nature, and it is only possible for God to understand nature fully. This is humanism and an assertion of human autonomy in its purest form, but one that opposes Enlightenment rationalism instead of working with it. Most importantly, it marks the first theorization of humanities, and thus, the surfacing of a “dualism” between the natural sciences and the humanities, or as Isaiah Berlin observes, “between self-understanding on the one hand, and the observation of the external world on the other” (6).
Another novelty in Vico’s thought is related to the meaningful progression of history, according to which history moves in phases similar to those of human life—infancy, youth and maturity—with a return (ricorso) at the end, and every culture goes through these phases in its own time and way. It is in this sense that Vico’s theory becomes an aesthetic historicism: every culture must be interpreted with an awareness of the symbols and modes of communication that pertain to that specific historical phase and culture. The interpreter, who is also aware of his own historical situatedness, accomplishes this taste not with the help of any timeless standards of beauty but by carefully studying the modes of communication specific to that time or culture until his fantasia, or reconstructive imagination, enables an understanding of their reality. In fact, interpreting through fantasia is more of a transformation or “becoming” than an understanding since understanding would presume the superiority and exclusiveness of the subject. Robert S. Leventhal observes in this line of thought an early form of Romantic interpretation, namely the principle of indeterminacy, or the necessity of “not understanding” a text in order to “be able to produce the thing out of the imagination and therefore truly understand it” (9). What distinguishes Vico’s sense of understanding from his contemporaries’ is his sense of the potential for self-realization and transformation that the interpreter will experience by the employment of “imaginative metaphysics” (instead of “rational metaphysics”): “when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them” (Leventhal 2). As Leventhal does, many contemporary Vico critics recognize an anticipation of poststructuralist theories in Vico’s aesthetic historicism, as for example in his awareness of the hegemonic character of certain epistemological systems. The self-reflexivity of this interpretive mode marks, in fact, a shift from normative aesthetics to a moral aesthetics, an aesthetics of growth and betterment,
which was to be further developed by the Romantic thinkers into the concept of *Bildung*, and then systematized in Immanuel Kant’s philosophy as the aesthetics of the sublime. In contrast to the prevailing rhetorical sciences of his time where interpretation has a secondary, more evaluative and descriptive function, Vico makes the interpreter part of the creative process.

Even though Vico’s historicism with its rejection of absolutes about human nature allows an infinitely relativist perspective for the study of cultures and histories, according to Vico all nations and times are part of a bigger, universal history, namely that of Providence. Vico’s cultural relativism, coupled with the indeterminacy allowed by imaginative interpretation, as Berlin puts it, “can unravel the mysteries of cultures entirely different from one’s own and hitherto dismissed either as barbarous confusions or as being too remote and exotic to deserve serious attention,” which in turn led to disciplines invested in the study of archaic and foreign cultures in the following century (11). But it is also possible to read Vico’s vision of human history in *The New Science* as a reflection of a Christian historical model of Fall and Redemption, which could in fact be the only “Common Nature of Nations” in Vico’s highly relativistic universe. In the introduction to *The New Science*, for example, Vico explains the hierarchy as represented in the front piece of the book: “For in the present work, [metaphysics] contemplates in God the world of human minds, which is the metaphysical world, in order to show His providence in the world of human spirit, which is the civil world and world of nations” (Vico 3). Whether Vico’s system describes a religious or secular universe is under debate even today.70 Berlin, for example, does not observe any reference to a “central style … that determines or renders coherent” universal human-activity in Vico (13). Donald P. Verene in *Vico’s Science of*

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70 Some scholars, such as John Milbank in *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico 1668-1744* (1992) and Mark Lilla in *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (1993) argue that Vico’s thoughts on secular history cannot be separated from his theology.
Imagination (1981) likewise construes Vico’s phrase “divine providence,” not in the sense of a transcendental and theological power separate from human imagination, but as referring to an epistemological necessity for explaining the function of “recollective fantasia [in] apprehending the universality present in the particulars of history,” and therefore as nothing more than a “subjective universality” (146). Israel supports Verene when he argues against the claims that Vico’s use of “divine providence” proves Vico’s “anti-modern Catholicism”; instead, Israel argues that Vico’s Catholic background was inconsequential since “Vico’s great work departs dramatically in every way from the biblical account of Creation and the origins of Man” (532). Indeed, the fact that Vico emphasizes human autonomy in the making of history and defines human language as the main archive of this history makes his method secular in the humanistic sense, with all the nuances attached to it. What is important for us is to recognize the epistemological function of providential design in the historicism that is to follow, the highest form of which is Hegelian metaphysics, and its traces in the disciplines born out of secular humanism such as literary studies, anthropology and history. Later on we will see how it applies to the discourses of Orientalism, especially the study of Semitic versus Indo-European languages.

The direct reception of Vico by Herder is disputed. It is generally accepted that Jules Michelet, the French historian, spread the secular aspects of Vico’s historicism, and by the 1820s Vico had become quite famous in the reading circles of Europe (Auerbach, Scenes 188). According to Auerbach, Vico remained an obscure figure for the next century and his New Science had no “appreciable influence upon the pre-Romantic or Romantic movements” (Scenes 188). And yet, there are remarkable similarities between Vico’s thought and Herder’s. Vico’s influence on the practice of German Orientalism might not be as direct as that of Herder; however, Vico’s later reception in Germany by figures like Friedrich August Wolf and J.G.
Eichhorn links him both to the discipline of philology and to the mythological school of biblical criticism. Most importantly, Vico’s revolutionary ideas, even if only in retrospect, explain the hermeneutical foundations of nineteenth-century human sciences in which the investigative subject is aware of the construction of human discourse. Moreover, Vico’s thought inspires a relativistic view of the cultural differences and peculiarities of the world, each deserving equal and imaginative attention but within a single universal design. Last but not least, Vico vision in the *The New Science* brings the function of language to the foreground as the key for understanding not only the individual but also various nations.

It is with J. G. Herder that we can start talking about a distinctly emerging German Orientalism. Most of the points summarized above have their counterparts in Herder’s thought, such as the acceptance of cultural and historical relativism, imaginative responsiveness to these differences, and the centrality of philological study. More so than Vico, Berlin comments, Herder’s “radical departure” from Enlightenment thought, which valued rationalism and morality as overarching values for all humanity, was that he held the “variety” of cultural forms above their “uniformity” (16).

In Robert S. Leventhal’s summary, Herder’s foremost contribution to the emergence of a philological discourse and its institutionalization in early nineteenth-century Germany lie in his innovations regarding language theory and hermeneutics as set out in his *Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (1766-67) and *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772). First of all, Herder gave primacy to discursive representation, or *Ausdruck*, over mental activity, which means that he reversed the traditional order of “thought and text,” of the previous semiotic and rhetoric traditions, and made language the determinant of thought. Thus, “language is no
longer the neutral, arbitrary system of signs in the service of mental representation, but the historical artifact of a specific culture” (Leventhal 20). In this respect, Herder’s historicism is very similar to Vico’s, holding that manners and concepts of a certain culture or age can only be accessed through their symbolic expressions. Also, for Herder as for Vico, rationalism and the need to define the absolute human nature are the expressions particular to the age of Enlightenment in Europe and will pass; in other words, it is only in the age of European Enlightenment that cultural and historical differences give way to the universality of reason. Secondly, Herder’s theory of interpretation rests on the assumption that concepts, beliefs and sensations of other times and places can be radically different than ours; thus interpretation cannot be an act of revealing but is more of a struggle between the text and the interpreter (Leventhal 231). Herder’s hermeneutics emphasizes the psychological transformation of the interpretive subject in relation to the historicity of the given text. Reading becomes “the site of a clash or collision between disparate worlds, one in which the subject is necessarily thrown back on itself to reflect upon its own derivation and conditions of possibility” (Leventhal 21). The only coherence and meaning that can be assigned to the histories of cultures or individuals is the narrative unity that language creates either as the self or as a nation. This of course puts into question the translatability of cultures; it could be taken to imply that the knowledge of the object is only possible within the object itself. And yet, even though a struggle, the interpretation of a cultural or personal object, according to Herder, is not impossible for an external subject. 71 In his Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit (1774), he defines a hermeneutics that can bridge even the most radical differences and one that can enable knowledge of the other through the employment of Einfühlung, meaning empathy or more literally “feeling one’s way in.” It is

71 The following explication of Einfühlung is adapted from Michael N. Forster’s introduction to Herder’s Philosophical Writings.
not a way of projecting one’s own psychology onto the text, but rather a non-assimilative process of rigorous historical-philological study. It is important that we expand the concept of *Einfühlung* at this point. It is, first of all, a metaphor standing for a radical difference or a gulf between the interpreter and her or his object, which can only be bridged by laborious and careful study of language use as well as of historical, social and geographical circumstances. What is essential alongside this careful and methodical study, however, is the “imaginative reproduction of [the studied object’s] perceptual and affective sensations” (Herder, *Philosophical* xvii). It is not difficult to notice the similarities between Vico’s *fantasia* and Herder’s *Einfühlung*. In a way, these two philosophers want the reader to modify Enlightenment empiricism through a Romantic consideration for emotions and subjectivity. Furthermore, in order to make a correct application of *Einfühlung*, the reader must neither demonstrate hostility nor extreme identification with the object of study.

One of the central theories of Herder, according to Berlin, was the “idea that men […] need to belong to identifiable communal groups, each with its own outlook, style, traditions, historical memories” (Herder, *Philosophical* xvii n21). The self-awareness of the learned subject needs to extend to that of the communal group or nation, and must have a grasp of its unique *Volksgeist*, or national spirit. This central idea makes Herder not only the pioneer of modern historicism but also of modern nationalism, a Romantic view of ethnicity that defines nations as products of organic growth, with common language and myths, and possessing a unity beyond the juristic and political unions defined by governments. Herder’s unique combination of historicism, cultural relativism, and primitivism, leads to a distinct form of German Orientalism, which fuses German nationalism with an interest in foreign cultures; whether this interest is a product of genuine curiosity or of pre-colonial aspirations is a disputed topic and will be discussed shortly.
Todd Kontje’s chapter on Herder in his book *German Orientalisms* attempts to bring out these nuances that Herder’s historicism created. According to Kontje, Herder’s Orientalism “negotiates a path between Eurocentrism and German nationalism” (65). Herder’s epoch-making work *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773), which is usually regarded as the work that triggered the *Sturm und Drang* movement and led to the emergence of Romanticism in Germany, defines a “bardic nationalism,” which echoes Vico’s poetic age and gives priority to the primitive, oral and emotional literature over the modern, written, rational and refined one. Kontje argues that the alliance that Herder constructs between Celtic poetry, Ossian, Shakespeare, Native American, even Hebrew poetry from the Old Testament and German *Volk* literature is a form of polemics against “the French abroad and a German aristocracy under French influence at home” (67). Therefore, Herder’s German nationalism constitutes the continental version of anti-imperialist dynamics that was already initiated in the British Isles by Scottish, Irish, and Welsh poets.

Bardic nationalism was already an existing movement among the German-speaking literati; however, Herder differs from them in the scope of his projects, which extended to writing the history of all periods and nations with a consideration for all their unique circumstances and sentiments, making them a part of a common “narrative of human progress” with the ambition to create a hermeneutics that could bridge these two disparate goals (Kontje 66). On the one hand, Herder resorts to factors like innate characteristics and climatic determinism to bring out the distinct spirit of each nation, then uses these differences as an argument against European imperialism, against the conquering and pillaging of other, supposedly inferior cultures. In this sense, Herder’s is a critique of Eurocentrism that urges Europeans to see their present state as only a small phase of universal human progress, and not as a state of universal wisdom that must be imposed on the rest of the world. On the other hand, this narrative of human progress, which
he tries to demonstrate in his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* through an examination of various cultures, ironically creates a hierarchy of nations, with Black Africans and Native Americans at the bottom, Asians as once progressive but now stagnant, and finally Europeans—as represented by Germans—at the top. Moreover, Herder’s historical narrative of humanity, with all the superior qualities attached to the notion of ‘human,’ starts in the Orient and reaches its goal in modern Europe (Kontje 76-7). Progress within each culture eventually leads to European modernity but it cannot be imposed prematurely. Thus, Kontje concludes,

> Herder leaves us with an image of the Germans as the good Europeans who carry forth the torch of human civilization that was first ignited in the Orient, while criticizing other modern European nations who have returned to the East as conquerors and colonizers. The absence of a German empire becomes a moral advantage: while others exploit the rest of the world, the Germans cultivate themselves at home. (83)

The picture that emerges of German Orientalism, therefore, at least for the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, is one in which Germany advances intellectually in the race for colonialism, not as the administrators but as the spiritual educators of the less developed cultures. According to Kontje, Germany’s greatest intellectual export was historicism and the “spiritual freedom” of Hegelian philosophy (6). It is interesting to note that these intellectual developments are at the same time the products of intra-European, anti-imperialist conflicts.

The inconsistencies in Herder’s cultural anthropology are also discussed by Maurice Olender in *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*. Olender contends that Herder’s progressive history has a religious as well as aesthetic and moral imperative. Even though on many occasions Herder points to the destructive power of the enforced Christian conversion of other peoples and argues strictly against the hierarchy of cultures, according to Olender, the geographical (east to west) and the temporal (measured against
the Christian calendar) development of humanity does eventually centralize in modern, Christian Europe. According to Olender, Herder’s “very secular ambition to write cultural history respecting national and spiritual diversities” runs against his “very Lutheran desire to institute a providential anthropology” (44). Olender demonstrates how Herder in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91) gradually comes to privilege the Christian Revelation above the others and makes the “Christian West” the “leaven among nations” (48). After some complex reasoning and aesthetic assessments, Herder concludes that the chosen ones are those who inhabit “the places where Jewish and Christian revelation received its impetus and from which it was propagated. This is the decisive event. In other regions, independent human reason still lies dormant” (Herder qtd. in Olender 48). Elsewhere, Herder eliminates Jewish revelation, which is “sublime” and beautiful but not compatible with “independent human reason,” from the history of human progress towards Redemption. Olender makes an important point in observing a certain Christian-Lutheran bias in Herder, even though Herder is subjected to the mildest criticism in this respect compared to the other figures examined in his book. Whether one can call this bias a form of Christian apologetics or the secularization and universalizing of Christianity that started at the latest with the Lutheran Reformation, is a matter of perception. If we consider Herder’s very Viconian, cyclical view of a history that is moving towards an unknown end, it seems that he is almost aware of his bias for the spirit of his times; in a way, he is aware of his agency in the creation of this spirit, while the limits of his language inescapably result in the centrality of the times he writes in. As a matter of fact, we must subject Herder’s idiosyncrasies to a hospitable hermeneutics by taking into consideration the historical circumstances of his time and Herder’s historical and cultural others at the time. What prompted Herder to negotiate the universalism of the Enlightenment, resulting in an aesthetically and morally functioning
Lutheran-Providential historicism enmeshed with German nationalism, was his relation to an imperial Europe lead by Catholic countries like France and Spain and more specifically the cultural hegemony of France over Germany. Herder’s historical context and subject position constitutes a counter-narrative to the Enlightenment picture of the world, which in turn culminates in a radical rupture in the history of thought. At the same time, Herder’s historical vision inevitably carries the residues of Enlightenment epistemology, as his attempt to assess the quality of revelation through independent human reason proves, since this is the mode of communication of the current intellectual phase that he cannot escape. Therefore, we can conclude that Herder’s hermeneutical mode can be both a subject and an example of deconstructive hospitality and exemplarity.

The most important contribution of Herder to German Orientalism is probably the way he treated the Old Testament as an Oriental book: “to be interpreted in accordance with the habits of mind of Semitic peoples” (Cheyne 14). In Vom Geist der Ebraischen Poesie (1782), Herder analyzes the opening verses of Genesis as the oldest and most genuine expression of Oriental poetry. Although the first person to treat the Old Testament as “literature” was Robert Lowth in The Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (1749-50), E.S. Shaffer in her book “Khubla Khan” and The Fall of Jerusalem points out that it was Herder who made the Old Testament part of Oriental literature and history, which in turn influenced J.G. Eichhorn and the rise of Higher Criticism in Germany. Shaffer also points out that the modern interpretation of the Book of Revelation with reference to the events of first century AD is owed to Herder (Shaffer 20). Michael Forster relates this higher-critical strain in Herder to his principle of “autonomous” and “secular” interpretation, according to which all literary works, even the Bible, must be interpreted as “a collection of human texts.” However, he also adds that Herder’s insistence on secularism “led to an
undermining of the Bible’s claims to intellectual authority,” and therefore “[m]uch of what Herder has ultimately achieved in this area would […] be deeply unwelcome to him” (Herder, *Philosophical* xxxv). The ambivalence of legitimizing the authority of revelation through Enlightenment empiricism—in Herder’s case, the methodical application of historical and philological criticism to scriptures—remained a characteristic of most scholars of religion to follow, and we will see how Abraham Geiger for the first time applied this style and method to the study of the Qur’an.

Herder’s approach to the Old Testament was to inspire and be part of modern Higher Criticism, often also referred to as the ‘mythical school’ of biblical criticism, as practised by figures like J.D. Michaelis, J.S. Semler, J.G. Eichhorn, and later L.A. Feuerbach and D.F. Strauss in Germany. A modern way of reading scriptures that was also applied to the New Testament and first to the Qur’an by Geiger, Higher Criticism, was the historical and literary study of scriptures guided by a free spirit, as inspired by Herder and his contemporaries. Most importantly, it was based on rational and scientific reasoning. Eichhorn, who is considered the founder of Higher Criticism with his seminal work *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1780-3), was a Professor of Oriental languages at the University of Jena, where he first published on the history of Islam and Arabic literature. Thus, “it was as an Orientalist that he approached the study of the Old Testament” (Shaffer 23). Whether in its religious form (as a way to prove revelation in scientific and semiotic terms) or as radical rejection of supernaturalism, Higher Criticism has been the dominant scholarly method of studying scriptures in the West ever since.

The historical-philological method, which made probably its biggest breakthrough in the field of biblical criticism, as we have seen, is largely owed to Vico’s and Herder’s reactions to
Enlightenment universalism and to the absolute truth claim made by scientific methods. However, such opposition does not escape Enlightenment habits of universalizing nor the aspiration to truth through methodical study. Instead, these thinkers integrate such habits into their philosophies to legitimize their own heart-felt reactions to their times. The following century in German thought witnesses the systematization of the ideas of these eclectic thinkers not only into biblical criticism but also into the modern theory of hermeneutics devised by the likes of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Ast, Friedrich August Wolf, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Moreover, learning about one’s own or another culture’s history starts to be seen as a vehicle of self-transformation and self-construction, as represented by the term Bildung, meaning education, or more literally “the making of the self.” In 1807 Hegel published *Phenomenologie des Geistes*. It was then only a short step before philology-based disciplines, among them Orientalism, became the most popular fields for academic study, while the modern University of Berlin became the centre of higher education based on the humanist paradigm of self-improvement.

**The Rise of Historical Philology in German Universities**

Apart from individual examples such as Eichhorn in an Oriental languages department, classical philology was the first discipline to carry the flag of this new historical-philological discourse as scientific method. Anthony Grafton in *Defenders of the Text* identifies Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) as the founder of modern philology in Germany because he “combined detailed work on textual criticism with a general contribution to broad and fashionable literary problems” (Shaffer 23). What Wolf differentiated from previous philologists was that he made interpretive concerns part of textual study, putting equal emphasis on the linguistic as well as the historical
facts. In Humboldt’s words, he made philological study “geistvoll [spirited].” Grafton demonstrates that Wolf was in close interaction with Eichhorn’s higher-critical method: “Wolf himself hinted in a variety of ways that biblical scholarship was the model that anyone interested in the history of ancient scholarship must imitate” (241). The most important fact about Wolf, however, according to Grafton, was that he applied Jewish sources to the criticism of Homeric texts. Whether to give authority to the work of Hebrew grammarians in the correct transfer of biblical texts or to Greek textual critics was a debate that continued well into the eighteenth century among biblical scholars. Eichhorn was the one, in his Herderian spirit, who privileged Hebrew sources and methods in his Old Testament criticism. Wolf, according to Grafton, was the only classical scholar of his time to borrow methods from “Semitic philology” (243). The cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach that Wolf applied to the texts of Greek antiquity was therefore an innovation. This open spirit in textual study was to characterize the university reforms promulgated by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the next couple of decades. As a matter of fact, Wolf was given the task of founding the philological seminar at the University of Halle in 1787 and then in Berlin in 1809, which were the first steps in Humboldt’s educational reform. Thus, Grafton makes Wolf the precursor of philologists and pioneers of comparative literature like Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach. In turn, Auerbach starts the survey of European literature in his *Mimesis* not with the Greek classics but with the Hebrew Bible. Wolf’s cross-cultural approach also bears similarity to Abraham Geiger’s and other German-Jewish Orientalist’s innovations in regard to the interchanging of Judaic and Islamic sources in the textual criticism and historical research of their specific subjects.

Taking philosophical hermeneutics as his focal point, Leventhal traces the emergence of the philological discourse in the German states back to C.G. Heyne’s (1729-1812) professorship
at the University of Göttingen. He sees Herder’s radical historicism and Heyne’s seminars on Greek classics in the 1770s as the first instance of philology that is “not simply the critical reconstruction of texts but the comprehensive activity of seeking to understand historical cultures through textual analysis and interpretation” (Leventhal 237-8). Leventhal shows how this discourse leads to historical-philological scholarship, such as the disciplines of historical linguistics, philological-cultural interpretation and philosophical hermeneutics, all of which are part of the discursive formation of German academic Orientalism, and most importantly the scholarly study of Islam, Islamwissenschaft, which starts with Geiger but is fully developed with Ignaz Goldziher’s standard-setting, rigorous work on Islam. Leventhal connects these disciplines to the emergence of another uniquely German phenomenon, namely, the “specific forms of educated participation and interaction […] shaping the career channels of the ascendant Bildungsbürgertum [educated middle class]” (240). Quoting Günther Buck, Leventhal reminds us that this “culture of interpretation becomes one of the ‘dominant models of modernity’, i.e. the narrative of the emancipation of the ‘autonomous’ subject through the trials of self-formation” (22). We should see the rise of Jewish studies in Germany (Wissenschaft des Judentums) and its alliance with Islamic studies in the late nineteenth century as an outcome of this social and intellectual emancipation movement.

The “neo-humanistic program of self-formation (Bildung),” had political as well as intellectual implications for Germany. For Leventhal, the new language theory of the 1770s formed a new political understanding of “self-reflection and education” that led to political and educational reform movements in the German-speaking territories (Leventhal 246). Since this new hermeneutics proposed that language is formative of thought, art, and even scientific

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72 F.A. Wolf, the Schlegel brothers, S.T. Coleridge, and Wilhelm von Humboldt were among the students who were enrolled in Heyne’s seminars in Göttingen in the 1780s and 1790s.
discourse, and furthermore of individual and national identities, the centuries-old struggle to
unite German-speaking states under one organically whole “nation” played out most strongly in
the philological departments of the late eighteenth century, as Leventhal demonstrates in an
analysis of the Philological Seminar in Göttingen under Heyne. Leventhal assigns an almost
revelatory role to Herder’s language theory in the political and social developments of the
following decades in Germany. However, if we remember Kontje’s discussion of Herder’s anti-
imperial, anti-French German nationalism, we can just as well claim that political motivations
came prior to this hermeneutical shift, noting that Herder’s book on language theory was written
immediately after his travels in France. Moreover, Leventhal fails to mention the effects of
Napoleonic imperialism on the rise of German nationalism, which can hardly be separated from
the educational reforms to follow.

Kontje gives a detailed account of the effects that Napoleon’s invasion of the German
states in the late 1790s and the defeat of the Prussian armies in 1806 had on the development of
German Orientalism. The hermeneutical and philosophical emphasis put on Bildung turned now
into a nationalist one, among others, in the writings of J.G. Fichte, especially his Reden an die
deutsche Nation (1807-8). Fichte called for a German national education, and soon after the
Prussian king gave Wilhelm von Humboldt the task of establishing a university in Berlin. These
new types of universities were quite different from any previous German universities. On the one
hand, the reformed universities were run by the provincial states, and the professors were civil
servants; on the other hand, the universities were to reach beyond their provincial borders to
“exert an influence ‘on the Bildung of the entire German-speaking nation’”(Kontje 102-3). They
were founded on strictly secular principles, so that theology was replaced by philosophy, while
the language of instruction would only be German, resulting in a new emphasis put on German
philology (*Germanistik*). Specialization was a secondary requirement and interdisciplinarity was encouraged. Students could study whatever would allow knowledge to flow “out of the depths of the spirit” (Humboldt qtd. in Kontje 103). Thus, *Bildung* for Humboldt meant not only national education but also an aesthetic education, one that put self-reflection above fact-finding and pragmatism. It is also a fact that the education reform as overseen by Humboldt played a role in the rising political power of Prussia, which henceforth contributed to German unification under the German Colonial Empire in 1871.

With the founding of a state-supported, liberal university, intellectual life flourished in the state of Prussia and universities in other states followed suit. Teaching certificates were required, exams were standardized, and a proliferation of disciplines and specializations occurred in humanities as well as sciences. Philology remained central, broadening its definition to “[a]ll university-standard activity related specifically to the study of language,” which would include comparative and general linguistics, historical reconstruction of texts and languages, and literary hermeneutics, until all these fields became so specialized that the united term “philology” was no longer representative “by about the 1920s” (“Philology” in Groden and Kreiswirth 739).

German Romantic thinkers were to immerse themselves in the study of German medieval literature, accompanied by an increasing interest in Oriental literatures and scriptures. In Goethe’s archetypal *Bildungsroman*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1787), Werther sought self-consciousness by looking at his own past. Similarly, for a German-national consciousness one had to look back at German history and literature, while to be a universal citizen one had to study world history, the origins of which were believed to be in the Orient. Therefore, following the university reforms and until German unification, German academic Orientalism flourished
under the paradigms of a rising German nationalism accompanied by a desire for cosmopolitanism.

Friedrich Schlegel’s work Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier (1808) inaugurated Indo-European-based German Orientalism, and led to the German version of what Raymond Schwab called an “Oriental renaissance.” This meant that Germany took the flag of Orientalism over from France and England and added its peculiar historical-philological discourse marked by scientific accuracy and a Romantic passion for self-education, both of which were now institutionalized and well-funded by the states. Kontje thinks that Schlegel’s concept of “Indo-European” derives from his enthusiasm for medieval European culture as a cosmopolitan ideal, “that arose from the confluence of Germanic and Oriental [Arabic]” influences (106). Once Schlegel deepened his knowledge of Persian and Sanskrit through his studies at the Oriental Languages Department under Silvestre de Sacy in Paris, he soon theorized the linguistic similarities between Greek, German, Persian and Sanskrit into the “Indo-European” genetic group of non-inflected languages, which later was to be called Aryan, sometimes even narrowed down to the “Indo-Germanic.” Even though cosmopolitan in intention, Kontje observes, Schlegel’s analysis exhibited “implicit denigration of agglutinative languages,” and thus “his theory […] marks a considerable constriction of Early Romantic cosmopolitanism into a narrowly defined Indo-European tradition” (107). We can see how Herder’s ambivalence about anti-imperialist German nationalism on the one hand, and Viconian cultural openness on the other continues in Schlegel. The difference in Schlegel is that he writes in a period when German

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73 See Raymond Schwab’s Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880, which was originally published in French in 1950. Schwab mainly refers to the Orientalism of France and England during the late eighteenth century.

74 Maurice Olender in Languages of Paradise states that the father of the Indo-European hypothesis was the British historian William Jones (1746-1794), but he adds that it was Schlegel who brought it to popular attention (6).
nationalism is more active due to Napoleon’s invasions, nevertheless displaying more confidence in the educational and political reforms that signaled German unification and possible colonial expansion. This is not to say that Schlegel was more “Orientalist” in the Saidean sense than Herder was. However, it is important to point out the political and social circumstances of this intellectual shift in the study of the Orient, as the study of Indo-European languages in Germany reached unprecedented popularity and range in the decades to come.

Institutionalization coupled with a certain pre-colonial anticipation created the norm of genetic relations as part of philological study, which henceforth was split into sub-disciplines that were structured “genetically, according to language families” such as “Romance [coexisting] with Germanic, Slavic, Oriental, Semitic, and classical” (“Philology” in Groden and Kreiswirth 739). Later, the appointment of Friedrich’s brother, A. W. Schlegel, and Franz Bopp as Sanskrit philologists at the Universities of Bonn and Berlin in 1818 and 1821 set a lasting pattern in German Orientalism.

In order to understand Geiger work on the origins of Islam, it must be recognized that these new racial norms were part of a Romantic mode that was almost obsessively concerned with the origins of individual nations and of all humanity. Racial categories based on language families inevitably created hierarchies, such as beautiful versus dry literatures, organic versus mechanical languages, philosophical versus dogmatic or spiritual versus moral religions. The Romantic era clearly privileged the first elements of these dichotomies, a mode of thought that is deeply engrained in our scholarship-based modernity. We must also remember that the “races” in question were mainly judged by their languages and histories, as read mainly in their religious documents, and not by observation of their living people. This is how we must understand nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship, especially the German version. Waardenburg adds
that it was typical of nineteenth-century Orientalism to assume that “in contrast to the West, the spiritual and in particular the religious element predominates in the Oriental cultures,” while changing socio-economical conditions were not considered when talking about the “innate” character of a certain nation (745).

Maurice Olender’s main thesis in *The Languages of Paradise* is based on a similar observation, namely, that racial philology in the nineteenth century was in fact the search for the *Ursprache* (arche-language), and thus a continuation of both the theological tradition of mapping Paradise and the Enlightenment attempt to define an ideal humanity. Until the spread of Indo-European theories, Hebrew was considered the oldest language and the Old Testament the oldest document of humanity, which then gave way to Sanskrit and ancient Indian literature. While Olender detects in Herder a special interest in the Indian mountains as a possible locale for Eden, he also shows that Herder took Hebrew as the oldest language, while strictly warning against a “political-theological archeology” and insisting on reading Genesis mainly as a mythic poem, not as an “archive” or an archeological site (3-4). However, after the use of the Indo-European category proliferated in works of Orientalists such as Adolphe Pictet (1799-1875), Ernest Renan (1823-1892), and the scholar who brought the term “Aryan” into general use, Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), historical-philological method got so enmeshed with that of natural sciences that it resulted in a “linguistic paleontology” (8). Research into Indo-European languages and cultures was then largely carried out in comparison to its other, the Semitic languages, Hebrew and Arabic.

Olender also points to the inherently Christian and biblical view of history that remained in the works of nineteenth-century secular philologists: “Though they cast aside old theological questions, they remained attached to the notion of providential history. Although they borrowed
techniques of positivist scholarship [...] they continued to be influenced by the biblical presuppositions that defined the ultimate meaning of their work” (20). In this respect, “Aryans and Semites formed a functional pair with a providential aspect” for comparative philology in the nineteenth-century (18). Thus, Indo-Europeanists and Semitists made use of these Aryan and Semitic categories because they considered them to be at the providential origin of civilization and therefore worth studying. Olender’s thesis is useful to identify the Christian bias and inherent anti-semitism in nineteenth-century historical-philological scholarships, as this will be the main episteme that Geiger and other subsequent German-Jewish Orientalists tried to counter in their work. However, one must remember that the same historical-philological discourse also produced scholars like David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) and Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804-1872), both of whom studied at the University of Berlin and whose work shook the foundations of Christianity by bringing out its mythical origins. These philosophers are excluded from Olender’s book because they do not rely so much on the Aryan-Semitic categories; and yet, they did influence Geiger’s works profoundly, especially those on Jewish history. One must take into consideration that the emerging secularism in academic discourse had its religious as well as anti-religious varieties, with varying degrees of association or disassociation with Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. It would be wrong to characterize philology only with the stamp of Aryan-Christian. Moreover, the Calvinist theory of Providence went through so many revisions during Enlightenment humanism and Romanticism that it lost its uniquely Christian aspects and, as a result, its residues in secular historicism could not merely be of Christian character anymore. It is true that the strain of Christian providentialism based on Aryan origins in philological study was dominant for a short time due to the power given to it by intellectual and political institutions, but it almost immediately came with its own reactions from the so-called “Semitic” sites, whose
works were not at all marginal in the history of Orientalist scholarship, as will be seen in the arguments of the members of the Wissenschaft des Judentums. The emergence of modern philology as an academic discipline in early nineteenth-century Germany, with the backdrop of intra-European conflicts, the rise of German nationalism, and power given to the university as a state institution, all resulted in a shift in the way European genealogy was perceived. It first changed from Greek-Latin-Hebrew to Greek-Latin-Hebrew/Oriental, and finally to Greek-Latin-Aryan. As Olender shows throughout his book, not everybody bought into the idea that Aryans were superior. While many scholars were convinced by the power of the Indo-European hypothesis, particularly German-Jewish philologists such as Geiger managed to challenge the Aryan versus Semitic dichotomy through detailed comparative, historical and philological study of the Abrahamic religions.75

The Predicament of German Orientalism

There remain a few concluding words to be said on the distinct character of German Orientalism. Nowadays, any modern assessment of German Orientalism starts with Edward Said’s move to leave out German academic Orientalism from his post-colonial criticism in Orientalism. Said’s discussion of nineteenth-century academic Orientalists consists of only a few names, such as Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan, Hamilton Gibb, and Louis Massignon. After Said justly “reproaches” himself for not discussing “the German developments after the inaugural period dominated by Sacy”, he argues that “what German Oriental scholarship did was to refine and elaborate techniques whose application was to texts […] gathered from the Orient by imperial

75 Olender exemplifies the Jewish argument against the “Indo-European hypothesis” in a chapter dedicated to Ignaz Goldziher, who following Geiger’s style and method founded the discipline of Islamic studies.
Britain and France” (Orientalism 19). He reminds us that most German Orientalists, including Friedrich Schlegel and Franz Bopp, were educated under Silvestre de Sacy in Paris, and that Germany had more of an “intellectual authority” over the Orient than a colonial one. It is true that German-speaking states produced their most influential scholarly work on the Orient before the unification of the German Empire in 1871 and Germany’s first colonial policy was signed in 1884, after which Germany engaged in only a short term of colonial activity until the end of World War I. So, Said rightly affirms that Germany could not have a “sustained national interest” in the Orient because there was no German nation to speak of until 1871 and no physical colony until late in the nineteenth century (19).

Kontje starts his book German Orientalisms by questioning what exactly this “national interest” could mean. Once we define “national interest” as “an intellectual effort to locate and preserve a sense of communal identity,” Kontje affirms, “we can indeed speak of a German national interest in the East.” “In fact,” Kontje adds,

the very lack of a unified nation-state and the absence of empire contributed to the development of peculiarly German Orientalism. German writers oscillated between identifying their country with the rest of Europe against the Orient and allying themselves with selected parts of the East against the West. (2-3)

Indeed, Germany’s position in Europe has been a unique one. On the one hand, German culture had a powerful intellectual influence on the rest of Europe right after the spread of Lutheran Protestantism; on the other hand, it could never establish the same political or colonial power as nation-states like Britain, France, Spain and Netherlands because political authority was split into states among the German-speaking peoples. For this reason, German nationalist sentiments were always accompanied by philological and historical study in an attempt to find common ancestry, so that a common language, literature, mythology constituted the base for a German nation,
rather than a juridical or monarchic commonality. As Kontje shows, German nationalists—including Orientalists—always wanted to be part of a politically powerful Europe, while at the same time remaining critical of intellectual and political Eurocentrism. It was therefore much earlier than the German unification, with thinkers like Schlegel and Fichte, for example, that German nationalism allied itself with Europe, from a certain distance. As Kontje observes: “Schlegel rejects petty nationalism; however, he also asserts a larger pan-European cosmopolitanism based on German leadership,” since he believes that Germany’s lack of a nation-state throughout history, and especially medieval Germany, qualifies it to be a model for cosmopolitan Europe (91). It is this alliance with Europe, especially Germany’s envy of the powerful French and British Empires, that gives rise to the racialist branch of German Orientalism, while the acknowledgement of the evils that such imperial colonialism has created prepares the ground for proto-postcolonial theories in the works of certain German thinkers. Moreover, one must add that the strategic move to establish national education before there was an actual German nation, was certainly a factor in making Germany an intellectual authority over the East, which, as Kontje shows, cannot be separated from colonialist aspirations.

While Kontje takes a balanced approach to the question of Germany’s colonial motivations, George Steinmetz in his introduction to a special issue of *Postcolonial Studies* on German theory and post-colonialism argues that Germany does indeed have a colonial past, and that even theorists like Nietzsche, Freud and Marx, who lie at the base of post-colonial theory, should not be exempt from a “decolonizing” reading. Steinmetz reminds us that even before Germany’s actual colonial venture, German missionaries were joining “European exploration, colonialism, and slaving, often in the service of another flag,” and that a large number of scientifically respected theories on race serving to justify slavery were produced by German
anthropologists in the nineteenth-century (3-4). Especially noteworthy is the parallel Steinmetz draws between Nazi fascism and imperial colonialism as forms of totalitarianism, recalling Hannah Arendt’s suggestion that the “seeds of Nazism lie partly in colonialism” (4). Indeed, most Holocaust theorists would have difficulty separating the rise of German nationalism in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth-century from the nationalism and belated colonialism of the Nazi regime. Moreover, one could say that Germany had a sort of inner-colonial struggle with its Jewish population, which according to some critics had a close tie with German Orientalism.

Suzanne Marchand, for example, in her article “German Orientalism and the Decline of the West,” favours the proto-postcolonial aspect of German Orientalism. To this end, Marchand takes a look at the division of the German philological disciplines. She contends that German classical philology was the dominant, “hegemonic” discipline, whereas Oriental philology—largely influenced by Higher Criticism that as practised by Eichhorn, Strauss, or Julius Wellhausen—was a form of “cultural radicalism” (467). It was thus a certain “anti-classicist” and “anti-bourgeois” strain of Orientalism that allied Germany with India or inspired Orientalism-influenced occultism, all of which served to “destroy Western self-satisfaction, and to provoke a momentous change in the culture of the West: the relinquishing of Christianity and classical antiquity as universal norms” (Marchand 465). Marchand adds that radical-historical totalizations of Europe by the beginning of the twentieth-century in the works of thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Oswald Spengler and Friedrich Meinecke would have been unthinkable without this past. While I think that it exposes an interesting aspect of Orientalism that Said clearly ignores, Marchand’s article does not point to the special circumstances that gave way to a unique German Orientalism. Moreover, Marchand’s concept of Orientalism does not recognize a
difference between Orientalism focusing on the Semitic/Near East and Orientalism focusing on the Asian/Indian/Far-East, nor does it draw limits between popular and academic Orientalism. I contend that because Judaism and Islam had constituted the theological enemies for centuries, while the interaction with the Far East was far more restricted, Orientalism towards the so-called “Semitic” nations had a significantly different character. German appreciation of the East was still somewhat arrogant and remote. As we have seen in Herder’s dilemma, there is also a certain superiority inherent in the German Romantic interpretation, which assumes that the East was not capable of interpreting itself as well as the rationally developed and emotionally responsive German intellectuals could interpret it. Marchand’s thesis that German Orientalism undermined Christian-Hellenic Eurocentrism before the time of post-colonialism can only be valid for certain “Semitic” sites within German academic-Orientalism. Since an Arab scholar of Islam was unthinkable in a nineteenth-century German university, it would have to have been German-Jewish scholars who attacked the Eurocentric foundations of Orientalist scholarship.

As will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, the German-Jewish condition had some implicit post-colonialist aspects. Susannah Heschel, for example, states that the “German orientalist project included the scholarly investigation of Judaism, whose political ramifications entailed not an overseas colonization, but a domestic one” (“Revolt” 63). Complimentary to this, Michael Mack reminds us that the perception of the European Jewry as Oriental was a construction of German idealist philosophies: “By attempting to depict Christian and then, in turn, German essence as being independent of or, rather completely removed from its Jewish roots, Kant and Hegel set out to orientalize Judaism. The European Jew thus surfaced as the Oriental other” (11).
It was the anti-imperialist, particularly anti-French, strain of German nationalism obsessed with unification that endorsed the myth of homogeneity in the German consciousness, which since its inception has always been in conflict with the Romantic, particularly Herderian, spirit of cosmopolitanism. It was to be the Jewish minority in German-speaking lands who reflected this cosmopolitan spirit in a Jewish Renaissance from the mid-nineteenth century to the unfortunate events of the Holocaust. Thus, the phenomenon of the Jewish Philislamism that emerged in Germany the decades after Geiger is not a coincidence but a unique result of the German political condition and the scholarly and intellectual developments that accompanied it.\textsuperscript{76} Besides Abraham Geiger, subsequent rabbi-scholars of the Qur’an such as Heinrich Speyer, Gustav Weil, Ignaz Goldziher and Josef Horovitz were members of the prolific German-Jewish intelligentsia of this period.\textsuperscript{77} Until today, they have mainly been known for their pioneering role in the “objective” study of monotheistic religions to the extent that their historical and philological research is still considered authoritative in contemporary Islamic and Qur’anic studies. The main reason why German-Jewish scholars took on the study of Islam that there were no departments for \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums} in German universities. Looking for legitimation in the context of the contemporary German academic world, Jewish scholars saw their own field of study largely as a subfield of Semitic philology and Oriental studies. Apart from this practical reason, I claim that they formed an alliance between Islam and Judaism that countered the current discourses of Indo-European versus Semitic religions. The exact circumstances and the

\textsuperscript{76} The peculiar case of German-Jewish “Philislamism” was explored in detail in Susannah Heschel’s article “Abraham Geiger and the Emergence of Jewish Philislamism,” which will be discussed below in the context of Geiger’s work. Chapter 11 of Tom Reiss’s \textit{The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life} also gives a detailed account of specific examples of such Philislamism in Germany.

\textsuperscript{77} There were also lesser known German-Jewish scholars of the Qur’an and early Islamic history, such as Isaac Gastfreund, Moritz Wolff, Hartwig Hirschfeld, Jacob Barth, Israel Schapiro, Rudolf Leszynsky, Joachim W. Hirschberg, Fritz Goitein und Dawid H. Baneth (Hartwig 238).
philosophical-hermeneutical context for the rise of German-Jewish Orientalism will be explored in the next section. For now, we need to acknowledge that their subject positions as researchers are unique and important due to their mobility between their ethnicities as German Jews, their methodological diversity as religious reformers as well as scholars, and the elusiveness of their institutional positions. By virtue of this combination of qualities, their scholarly achievements exceed the collection of historical data and literary analysis applied piecemeal to various Islamic subjects. Their work must be considered as a whole and as a hermeneutical rupture in the course of Western thought having implications for the inclusion of Islam and Qur’an in the intellectual history of Europe. My aim, aim accordingly, is to rescue these figures from the archives of Religionswissenschaft and make them part of the history of hermeneutics, to explore the commonalties and exchanges between their interpretations of religion and their interpretations of literature, and—in the light of their work—to explore the possibility of interpreting the Qur’an as part of European history and literature.

THE “GERMAN-JEWISH INTELLECTUAL PSYCHE” AND THE ORIENTALIZATION OF EUROPEAN JEWRY

In the previous section I laid out how academic Orientalism in the nineteenth century came to agree on a paradigm that mainly consisted of the historical-philological study of an “oriental” subject, and how this was nurtured by ideas and ideologies prevalent in the German-speaking lands. In this chapter, I will explore what the stakes were for intellectuals of Jewish descent in being part of such a discursive formation that often excluded or objectified Jewishness; in other words, I will look more closely at the circumstances that shaped what Derrida calls the “German-
Jewish intellectual psyche” during a time in which the “modern episteme” of human sciences gained momentum and proliferated (Foucault 325 & 365).

The topic of the German-Jewish scholar in the nineteenth century is not only an intricate one because of our post-Holocaust perceptions, it is also a subject gaining importance in recent years with discussions of European identity and the integration of its ethnic-religious minorities. One study that facilitates such a perspective is Aamir Mufti’s recent book Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture (2007). Mufti explores the experience of the European Jewish minority of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as an “archive” for the current experiences of the Muslim minority in secular India after Partition. More precisely, Mufti poses the “Jewish Question” as an “exemplary crisis” for European modernity in the generation of categories such as “minority” and “secular state”:

Abstract citizen subjectivity and national belonging constitute moments in the dialectic of modern selfhood, with the figure of the Jew coming to mark the inherent limit of each moment of identification, to mark the disruption of categories of identity, becoming in the process the site of crisis and its attempted containment. (Mufti, Enlightenment 39)

As we have seen in the previous section, German Volksgeist was in accord with Enlightenment values and the subsequent Romantic sensibilities, and in fact a significant component in the generation of such values and sensibilities; the same was not true (or at least highly disputed) when it came to Jewish particularity, which was a radically different culture, and in an immediate proximity rather far away in an exotic land. Enlightenment had to straighten this paradox by salvaging the “human” aspect of the individual Jew and alienating Judaism as a faith, which was believed to be the source of these cultural particularities in the midst of Europe. Owing to their peculiarly fragmented nature, the German lands under the leadership of Prussia
became the testing ground for the application of equitable civil rights in the face of this “Jewish question,” which, as Mufti suggests, became a “crisis” against which the German nation-state was shaped.

In this section, I will identify such “moments of identification” of universality and particularity in the categories created by German scholars, and the corresponding Jewish disruption of these categories in the context of historically and philologically based disciplines of the nineteenth century, with the aim of providing an intellectual background to Abraham Geiger and other German-Jewish scholars of Islam that followed him. Such a contextualization will also help us understand how this crisis in modern identity determined the intellectual and historical alliance formed with Islam, or Jewish Philislamism, in the historical narratives of these scholars, which have determined the basic principles of the modern scholarship of Islam. We will subsequently ask ourselves: If the Jewish question was at the very heart of modernization and secularization of Europe, what is the significance of the Jewish interest in Islam for our own historical juncture?

The uniqueness of the German-Jewish ethnicity is a result of a long and complicated history woven with waves of persecution as well as periods of tolerance and emancipation. However, the position of the German-Jewish scholar in the nineteenth century is a special one for two reasons. It is so, firstly, because of the dominance of German Idealist philosophies in the intellectual atmosphere of Europe and their essentialist and deprecating conclusions about Judaism—conclusions which led to Jewish reaction culminating in the movement now referred to as the “Jewish Enlightenment,” which spread from German Prussia to other European countries. It is so, secondly, because the scholarly and critical study of the Bible, which
contributed to the orientalization of Judaism by making the Hebrew Bible part of antiquity and by disregarding rabbinic literature, and the response to this in the form of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, both originated in the German-speaking lands. All these intellectual developments occurred alongside political discussions of the Jewish emancipation; thus, historically speaking, the emancipation period, which is usually assumed to start with the time of Moses Mendelssohn’s Jewish Enlightenment in the 1780s (Haskalah) and end with the pivotal point that is the emancipation of the German-Jewry in 1871 following the unification of the German lands, constitutes a common background for the rise of German-Jewish Orientalism.

**Judaism during the Aufklärung: The Dialogue between Kant and Mendelssohn**

Michael A. Meyer observes how Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the outstanding representative of the *Aufklärung*, hoped that the figure of the “noble-minded Jew” in his plays would not only prove “to him but to the Enlightenment as a whole … that the universal ideals of the age were valid” (*Origins* 18). Lessing’s plays *Die Juden* (1749) and, most prominently, *Nathan der Weise* (1779) are perfect examples of Enlightenment attitude towards the Jews. The struggle to prove the validity of universal human values, as Mufti noted, could not have had a better experimentation ground than “the figure of the Jew,” not the Jewish people, but the Jew as individual (*Enlightenment* 39). From “he/she is human like us” to “if he/she were only like us” to “they will or can never be like us,” Enlightenment humanism during the period in question defined itself and Judaism in an oppositional way, juxtaposing Jewish particularity to the universal characteristics it was trying to prove were present in all of us, thus creating the paradox of otherness within the same.
Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* is significant for staging for the first time the idea of unity and harmony between the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, as a spectacle for the popular imagination of Europe. That was why the appearance of the play was sensational and performances of it were initially banned by the Church. The story of the play is set in twelfth-century Jerusalem during the Third Crusades and centered around the wise and rich Jew Nathan, who is reconciled with the Sultan Saladin and the Christian Knight Templar after they realize their family ties and common humanity. Lessing’s Nathan, as the enlightened and individualized Jew, later came to symbolize the demands of the Jewish emancipation movement on both Germans and Jews alike. The Jewish Enlightenment and the subsequent emancipation struggle conflicted with German nationalist interests, since it was crucial to remain German and particular in the face of the cosmopolitanism that the Enlightenment had brought to international politics. However, the same logic required that particularity would be granted to other groups within German lands, like the Jews. It is for this reason that Mufti takes Lessing’s “religious tolerance” in *Nathan der Weise* with a grain of salt. The answer to the question “Who are you?” gradually changes from “I am a Jew” to “I am a man” in the play; thus, Mufti argues, “the tradition of Jewish emancipation into the *Bildungbürgertum* [educated citizenry] remained predicated on the assimilation of the Jews to the ‘universal’ culture and subject position of the majority, coded as the standpoint of humanity” (*Enlightenment* 55). Therefore, from the Jewish perspective, political emancipation ran the risk of being a cultural enterprise of the Jewish people entailing its complete absorption or assimilation into its German host culture. This socio-political background certainly had an effect on the emergence of the Haskalah philosophy—if not on the *Aufklärung* as a whole—as well as on the biblical scholarship conducted by both German and Jewish scholars in the decades to follow.
The figure of the “noble Jew” was embodied in Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786). Ranking among the most prominent German philosophers of the Aufklärung and an inspiration for Lessing’s Nathan der Weise, Mendelssohn ever since has been seen by German-Jewish intellectuals as either the liberator or the destroyer of the Jewish nation. Not only is he at the beginning and the centre of the discussions regarding Jewish emancipation, the conflicts between Mendelssohn’s Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) and Immanuel Kant’s radical version of Enlightenment also account for the major contradictions in the scholarship on Judaism and the Old Testament in the following century. Mendelssohn most important contribution to the Haskalah is today considered to be his German translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch together with other parts of the Bible published periodically between 1780-83 in the Jewish periodical Ha-Me’assef and later collected in a five-volume edition titled Sefer Netivot Ha-Shalom.

According to Alexander Altmann, Mendelssohn’s place in eighteenth-century German philosophy “was one of distinction” and “his fame suffered eclipse only when Kant overtook him and gave philosophy a new direction.” Altmann also calls Mendelssohn the “archetypal German-Jew,” who adopted German culture as his own but remained loyal to his Jewish faith despite challenges posed by both theoretical and practical incidents (24). Particularly relevant to the current study is Mendelssohn’s archetypal role for the coming generation of German-Jews such as Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Reform movement.

The dialogue between Kant and Mendelssohn will be discussed here as a hyperbolic example of the dilemmas of the German-Jewish intellectual in the nineteenth century. Traces of

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78 Johann Caspar Lavater challenged Mendelssohn to convert to Christianity in 1781, claiming that by defending rational religion he had abandoned Judaism and practically entered Christianity, to which Mendelssohn replied: “I fail to see what could have tied me to a religion so overtly strict in appearance and held in such contempt by the general public, had I not been persuaded, in my heart, of its truth” (qtd. in Altmann, 22).
this dialogue continue with variations in the philosophies that follow, both Christian and Jewish.

Two thorough examinations in English of this dialogue with a particular focus on Judaism appear in Mack’s *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German-Jewish Responses* (2003) and Nathan Rotenstreich’s *Jews and German Philosophy: The Polemics of Emancipation* (1984), both of which examine Hegel on Judaism alongside Kant. I would first like to summarize from these works the exchange that took place between Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism* (1783) and Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793) (hereafter *RBMR*). Mack and Rotenstreich reach opposing conclusions on the achievements of the Jewish Enlightenment. Mack believes that Mendelssohn in *Jerusalem* “turned the tables on Enlightenment philosophy that stigmatized the Jews as superstitious and irrational,” a proceeding which in turn contributed towards a distinct German-Jewish philosophy during the following centuries, making possible the postmodern critique of the Enlightenment (80). Rotenstreich, on the other hand, agrees with Gershom Scholem’s famous statement on the impossibility of the “German-Jewish symbiosis,” meaning that the Jewish Enlightenment was a one-sided and unrequited effort on the side of the Jews to become part of German society and culture that ultimately failed. Views are equally split on Mendelssohn’s recognition as a “Jewish” philosopher in these works.

Both being Enlightenment thinkers, Kant and Mendelssohn agreed on most of the Enlightenment principles, such as the supremacy of reason in epistemological and moral issues, except in regards to the nature of Judaism as a religion. Their disagreement over Judaism in turn led to a difference in their approach as to the relation between reason and morality. In Mack’s analysis, the core of the disparity lay in Mendelssohn’s insistence on reason’s heteronomy in the face of Kant’s autonomous reason. Kant’s definition of moral religion in *RBMR* is of a category
available to all rational beings; however, according to Mack, Kant “constructed this […] autonomous rationality with reference to traditional Christian rhetoric” in an attempt to “do away with the Jewish foundations of Christianity,” thereby creating a “pseudotheological discourse” that was reinforced by the succeeding idealist philosophies and constituted the basis of “pseudoscientific, anti-Semitic fantasies at the end of the nineteenth century” (24). While Mack argues that Kant’s moral philosophy developed in relation to a political agenda, and that therefore Kant’s exclusion of Judaism from his transcendental empiricism is a form of anti-Semitism, I will refrain from such a broad definition of this term and preserve it for later, post-Napoleonic discourses on Jews and Judaism. In Mack’s study Kant sees Jewish people as unable to transcend empirical necessities and as irrationally attached to an outside force, i.e. as being heteronomous, and therefore incapable of applying autonomous reason, which was required for a moral religion. In fact, Mack asserts, Judaism in that sense was not a religion but “a form of politics” (23). After establishing how Kant’s revision of empiricist metaphysics created a philosophy based on the autonomous or the transcendental will, Mack demonstrates through an analysis of RBMR how this system of thought accounts for the “secularization and politicization of Christianity’s otherworldly elements” (32). From a number of passages in RBMR about the revolutionary character of Jesus, Mack concludes that Kant’s reference to Christ’s dying away (absterben) from the “earthly life to the detriment of morality” (Kant qtd. in

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79 In this, I am following Hannah Arendt’s definition of the anti-Semitic movement in Germany, in her book The Origins of Totalitarianism, as a phenomenon that rose with the German nation-state after Prussia’s defeat by Napoleon (29). Moreover, the category “Semites,” designating both Jews and Arabs, was not in common use until the mentioned period (the introduction of this term into biblical scholarship was discussed in the previous section).

80 Kant states: “The Jewish faith, as originally established, was only a collection of statutory laws supporting a political state; for whatever moral additions were then appended to it, whether originally or only later, do not in any way belong to Judaism as such. Strictly speaking, Judaism is not a religion at all but simply a union of a number of individuals who, since they belonged to a particular stock, established themselves into a community under purely political laws, hence not into a church” (Kant 139).
Mack 33) builds a moral philosophy that is only “rational along the lines of Christ’s death to the world” (Mack 11). Mack finds this demand made on the citizen of the modern society to “die away” from the sensuous and the material world analogous to Christ’s overcoming of the “earthly” Judaism. Hence, according to Mack, German Idealist philosophy defines itself against the supposed realism or materialism of the Jew whose Jewishness has no place in the “secular state” that emerges out of the political theory that Kant (and Hegel) developed as a “unity…of epistemological, moral and theological elements” (13). The modern nation state stands essentially for the German (Protestant) values of autonomy and liberalism, and therefore contradicts the Enlightenment’s claim for universality and cosmopolitanism. Mack concludes that this is evidenced in Kant (and Hegel)’s attempts to remove Jewish roots from this German-Christian essence by “set[ting] out to orientalize Judaism. The European Jew surfaced as the Oriental other. Being immutably bound to God, he could not make the transition to modernity” (13). Kant’s contradictory approach to Judaism is often dealt with in the context of this main paradox: he is critical of the statutory laws of Judaism for only regulating the external world and not making a demand on an inner, moral disposition that would unite humanity in a heaven-like, ethical commonwealth. On the other hand, Kant’s phenomenology dictates that human

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81 As we have seen in Chapter Two, Daniel Boyarin in *The Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* examines Paul’s radical criticism of Jewish culture and how this constitutes the first instance of a rift between Jewish particularism and Christian universalism. Mack refers to Boyarin’s work to show how this Christian discourse is maintained in Kant’s secular philosophy (38). Mack observes a similarity between Kant’s *Sklavensinn* (slave mentality) and Paul’s freeing of the Jewish people from their slavish bond to God that Boyarin discusses in his book.

82 Kant in *RBMR* comments on this: “And although the Ten Commandments would have ethical validity for reasons even if they had not been publicly given, yet in that legislation they are given with no claim at all on the moral disposition in following them (whereas Christianity later placed the chief work in this) but were rather directed simply and solely to external observance” (131).
consciousness cannot know anything other than what is in this world.\footnote{Emil Fackenheim in “Kant and Judaism” in \textit{Commentary} (1963) and Sidney Axinn in “Kant on Judaism” in \textit{The Jewish Quarterly Review} (1968) discuss these contradictions in Kant’s thought on Judaism and moral religion.} One could almost conclude that Kant’s is a personal response to Judaism rather than a philosophical one.

Seen in this light, Mack’s most striking claim is that Kant’s rational theology in \textit{RBMR} emerged in conversation with Mendelssohn’s \textit{Jerusalem} and that therefore the concept of moral heteronomy was disdained with Judaism in mind: “In order to fully define the formal structure of his philosophy…, Kant almost unconsciously fantasized about the Jews as its opposite” (34). The implication here is that not only the German-Jewish psyche but also the German Enlightenment was constructed with Judaism as Christianity’s Other in mind. This “static and essentialist view”, which Mack explains with Kant’s anxious response to the rising materialist capitalism, amounts to the abstract construction of “the Jewish as the ‘heteronomous’ in direct opposition to the ‘rational’ as the secularized Christian idea of autonomy from empirical (worldly) determinations” (39). Mack also notes that such a seemingly abstract and universal concept as the heteronomy/autonomy divide in Kant’s moral philosophy is constructed in direct reference to concrete historical and religious contexts that compare Judaism to Christianity. Most important of all, in Kant’s version of the Christianity versus Judaism debate, the latter has no value or share in the generation of the former, that is, continuity between the two faiths is ultimately denied as Christianity is seen rather as a “rupture” that “suddenly though not unprepared arose” from the “servile faith” that is Judaism. Here is a passage from \textit{RBMR} that exemplifies Kant’s inductive reasoning on Judaism:

\begin{quote}
For this purpose, therefore, we can deal only with the history of the church which from the beginning bore within it the germ and principles of the objective unity of the true and \textit{universal} religious faith to which it is gradually being brought nearer. —And
\end{quote}
it is apparent, first of all, that the Jewish faith stands in absolutely no essential connection to, i.e. no unity of concepts, with the ecclesiastical faith whose history we want to consider, even though it immediately preceded it and provided the physical occasion for the founding of this church (Christian). (Kant 132)

Kant’s *RBMR* includes several direct references, particularly in footnotes, to Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem*. Although Kant’s relation to Mendelssohn’s philosophy was, according to some sources, appreciative in essence, it is obvious that, along with the majority of Christian *Aufklärung* philosophers of the day, Kant found Mendelssohn’s defence of Judaism incongruous. The numerous references to Mendelssohn’s statements on Judaism’s rationality depict a negative or at best corrective reception by Kant. In this gesture alone, it is possible to observe the assimilative impulse of German philosophy and scholarship in the following century, namely to remove the particularistic forms of Jewishness from the enlightened, individual Jew.

Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* was possibly projected with Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) in mind, but most certainly it was a response to the claim in current political theory that the main obstacle to Jewish emancipation was the intrinsic nature of Judaism. The first part of *Jerusalem* advocates a political theory wherein the state and church must be completely separated in order for the Jewish people to participate fully in civil society without having to lose their religion. This entails, according to Mack, a correction to Kant’s fusion of “morality and epistemology,” and a refusal of assimilation for the sake of emancipation, implying that the state must rid itself of all religious disposition and not the citizens (79). It must be noted at this point, that Mendelssohn’s views on religion were more radical than those of the *Aufklärung* philosopher, as he demanded a radical questioning of any kind of religious authority, and yet more conservative than those of early Jewish Reformers—such as Leopold Zunz and David
Friedlander who more or less adopted Kant’s duality regarding morality versus legalism—in that he believed that Judaism need not be reformed but that the secular state must redefine itself. Abraham Geiger, as we will see in the following section, follows Mendelssohn’s path when it comes to his scholarship and yet he adopts the liberal approach of his reformist predecessors in his persona as a rabbi. Mendelssohn’s philosophical radicalism, as Mack shows in his book, is neither apologetic nor reformist, since it completely revises Enlightenment thought in Judaic terms. Mufti agrees with this assessment, when he states that Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem “inverts the terms of the interaction [between Aufklärung and Judaism], with Jewish experience now providing the location for an interrogation of the philosophical arguments of its interrogators” (Enlightenment 79).

Mendelssohn is troubled by the transcendentalizing trends in the rationalist philosophies of his day, and he believes that “Jewish way of life was more reasonable and rational than the speculative flights that issue from the modern, written culture of autonomous reason” (Mack 80). Mendelssohn bases this claim on his famous distinction between Christianity as revealed doctrine and Judaism as revealed legislation in the second half of Jerusalem. Mendelssohn finds the latter more concordant with Enlightenment rationalism and requisite to cultural and religious diversity within the civil state, meaning the opportunity “to live with a plurality of identities and cultures—which is increasingly recognized to be a salient feature of Western modernity” (Mendelssohn qtd. in Mack 81). Mack comments that Mendelssohn justifies his call for the separation of church and state by separating morality and epistemology. Revealed doctrine (Christianity), is written, closed and immutable, and imposes an epistemology, whereas revealed legislation (Judaism) is oral and fluid, does not disclose a doctrine or epistemology, and is therefore open to interpretation, more inclusive, and allows diversity when adapted to new social
and political circumstances. Therefore, Kant’s fusion of morality and epistemology imposes a “closed” doctrine channeling the Christian one, whereas “Israel’s revealed legislation [is] a way of precluding idolatrous assumptions of immanent self-sufficiency, and also an admonition against the intolerance, religious and political, that accompanies presuppositions of a universally valid way of perceiving the world” (Mack 82-3). In Mack’s interpretation, Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem is an early recognition of the hegemonic character of Enlightenment’s universalism, and a reminder of the cosmopolitan and egalitarian values of the modern state. Similarly, Altmann reports how Mendelssohn insisted on Judaism as a “natural religion,” the eternal truths of which are “the necessary truths of reason … open to all men,” while a doctrine composed by human knowledge designates a specific nation or group as the beneficiary of that truth (25). This makes Mendelssohn the “first modern Jew to adumbrate the notion of a definite superiority, in rational terms, of Judaism over Christianity” (Altmann 26). One must note that Mendelssohn’s stance is not marginal to what follows in the field of philosophy and biblical studies in the next century. The awareness of the Christian bias in Idealist philosophy and consequently in secular biblical studies informs Geiger’s approach and the subsequent pro-Semitic and anti-Christian stance of Jewish scholars of Islam, particularly in Ignaz Goldziher’s writings on Jewish history. Moreover, as Mufti argues, Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem is the first instance of a “Jewish narrative” that “brings into crisis” the assumptions of modernity by “highlighting the dilemmas of minority existence” (Enlightenment 11&13).

Another important aspect of Mendelssohn and Kant’s disagreements is in regard to the historicity of Judaism. While Kant regarded Judaism as a historical faith in a derogatory sense—the function of Judaism was fulfilled with the emergence of Christianity and its persistence can only be explained in political and not religious terms—Mendelssohn insisted that Judaism’s
Historicity is the very evidence of its truth. Kant’s moral religion within the boundaries of reason was universal, self-evident and ahistorical, and thus excluded the historically outdated faith of the Hebrews despite the rabbinic tradition that tried to keep it alive. The modern state’s main issue with the Jewish people was the ceremonial laws that kept them in separate legal corporations; these were seen as irrational and incompatible with modernity. These laws had their source in the Talmud (revealed law, a product of rabbinic Judaism) and were not part of Moses’s revelations, the Mosaic law, which themselves lost their statutory validity with Christ’s appearance on the historical scene. This was the general view on Judaism of the Aufklärung, not only of Christians but also of many German-Jews who stood for emancipation and reformation. However, Mendelssohn’s version of the Enlightenment viewed the function of Judaism differently. As Altmann comments, Mendelssohn’s insistence on the historical and religious function of ritual and law was something “distinctly modern,” and in line with the “messianic goal of history in the triumph of pure, unadulterated monotheism over degenerate beliefs (idolatry, paganism) and unbelief (atheism)” (24-5). In other words, Mendelssohn saw in ceremonial law the persistence of the true, natural religion that is meant for everyone and for all times. For the first time in the Aufklärung’s Christianity versus Judaism debate, we see the representation of Judaism as the “pure monotheism,” a significant marker that will inform Geiger’s conceptualizing of a rational and universal Abrahamic faith based on Judaism.

84 In RBMR, Kant notes: “Every faith which, as historical, bases itself on books, needs for guarantee a learned public in whom it can be controlled, as it were, through writers who were the contemporaries of the faith’s first propagators yet in no way suspect in special collision with them, and whose connection with our present authors has remained unbroken. The pure faith of reason, on the contrary, does not need any such documentation but its own proof” (133-4).
85 Mendelssohn made a distinction between “rational” and “mystical” rabbinic law, the latter of which he saw as a result of the corrupting influences of local paganisms rather than true Judaism (Altmann 23).
Furthermore, in contrast to Kant, Mendelssohn also had a very non-progressive sense of history. Nathan Rotenstreich underlines Kant’s response to *Jerusalem* in an essay of 1793. Kant argues that his thought differs from Mendelssohn’s in its historical understanding by indicating that Mendelssohn did not believe in the “divine education of mankind,” that he was for the betterment of the individual but thought that it was “sheer fantasy to say that all mankind here on earth must continually progress and become more perfect through the ages” (Rotenstreich 25). In this instance, we can clearly see how Mendelssohn anticipates the anti-Hegelian strain in postmodern philosophies, while bringing out the paradox of the following Idealist and Romantic philosophies that defend historical-cultural diversity yet subordinate these differences into a hierarchy based on a Lutheran sense of Providence with German-Christian principles placed on the top as desirable values. In a sense, Mendelssohn defends an even more radical historical relativism than we saw in Vico’s thought, since this time his own Jewish identity, as part of a European minority and as the eternal Other within, is at stake.

Romanticism’s relation to Judaism becomes more complex as the static and universal view of reason is challenged primarily in Fichte’s, Schelling’s and Hegel’s thought. One could almost claim that these philosophies integrate Mendelssohn’s critique of rationalist Idealism. On the other hand, Mendelssohn remains strikingly rationalist compared to his Romantic successors.

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86 See Kant’s essay “On the general saying: this might be true in theory but not true in practice” (1793).
87 Meyer quotes Mendelssohn’s Jerusalem as follows: “I, for my part, have no concept of education of humanity…Progress is for the individual human being whom Providence has destined to pass a portion of his eternity here on earth …. But that also the whole, humanity here below, should in the course of time ever move forward and perfect itself, this, it seems to me, was not intent of Providence” (*Origins* 55).
88 The following passage from *RBMR* reflects this view: “Should one now ask, Which period of the entire church history in our ken up to now is the best? I reply without hesitation, The present. I say this because one need only allow the seed of the true religious faith now sown in Christianity – by only a few, to be sure, yet in the open – to grow unhindered, to expect from it a continuous approximation to that church, ever uniting all human beings, which constitutes the visible representation (the schema) of an invisible Kingdom of God on earth” (Kant 135).
There are two opposing views on Mendelssohn’s connection to Romanticism. Michael A. Meyer claims that Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem* was an “ephemeral solution” to the Jewish question, and that he failed to see the coming new philosophy (in Lessing’s work) because it came at a time when “the rays of Enlightenment were already dimmed by an oncoming turbulent Romanticism, and when Judaism was being declared a historical anachronism” (*Origins* 56). Meyer’s thought is in line with the view that there was no distinct German-Jewish philosophy before World War II and even if there was one it was not effective. Altmann, on the other hand, places more emphasis on Mendelssohn’s profound and archetypal influence on the development of German-Jewish philosophy: “the static reason of Enlightenment became dialectical” in the following idealist and neo-Kantian philosophies, while with succeeding German-Jewish philosophers, including Abraham Geiger as the leader of the Jewish Reform movement, Judaism remained a “religion of reason” all the way down to Hermann Cohen’s ethical monotheism as defended in his *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums (The Religion of Reason from the Sources of Judaism)* (1919), and possibly beyond (Altmann 26n). Altmann’s model of continuity is more in line with the position that the present study takes on Mendelssohn’s reception history. Mufti agrees with this view when he states that Mendelssohn, by making the “infamous materialism of the Jews […] the basis and guarantor of Enlightenment itself,” contributed towards a critical reception of Enlightenment rationalism and universalism (*Enlightenment* 64). In fact, the Haskalah as a philosophical movement mainly focused on the “ethical” implications of Kant’s moral religion by transposing the corporeal, the living and human “action” as the basis of civil rights in the modern society in place of the speculative and the transcendental flights of idealism (Mufti, *Enlightenment* 63). The German-Jewish philosopher, in face of the assimilative strain of German idealism’s speculations on the essence of Judaism, found its philosophical
niche in the ethical and social function of religion, of which ritual and particularity were essential elements and not detriments to morality. It is thus understandable that the German-Jewish philosopher distanced himself from the aesthetic and literary idealism of Romanticism—which gave even more speculative power to Christianity—and remained loyal to rationalism and the scholarly discourse. The Jewish philosopher was also anticipating and reacting to the rising irrationality of the age with its increasingly anti-Semitic undertones. To those developments we now turn.

**Romantic Nationalism and the Radical Difference of the Jew**

To understand the challenge posed by Romanticism to Jewish emancipation in the conservative form that Mendelssohn desired, we must first remember the role that linguistic unity and progression through education (*Bildung*) played for the assertion of a German *Volksgesit* in this era. We have seen in the previous section how these factors accounted for a distinctly German hermeneutics of the Oriental Other. It is now time to show how the Jewish question once again was at the heart of this attempt to combine the liberal and cosmopolitan ideals of the *Aufklärung* with the post-revolutionary subjectivism and anti-Napoleonic nationalism increasingly observable in the works of the German Romantic intellectuals.  

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89 Michael A. Meyer notes that Romanticism was a bigger challenge for retaining the Jewish identity and reminds us how all of Moses Mendelssohn’s children converted to Christianity in the coming century, either out of complete disbelief and convenience (his sons Abraham, Nathan, Joseph) or genuine Christian conviction (his daughters Dorothea, Henriette, Rahel) (*Origins* 89-114).

90 Meyer in *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* comments that secularism was never an indispensable element of the modern, German state: “French Enlightenment was more anti-religious (secular, *laïcité*) whereas German Enlightenment tolerated organized religion as long as it was subservient to reason and individual autonomy” (16).
The proto-Romantics J.G. Herder and G.E. Lessing, the latter being a close friend of Mendelssohn throughout his life, were closer to the idea of a cosmopolitan humanism as contrasted with Kant’s universal rationalism. And yet, both privileged Christianity over the other monotheisms as a more developed form of humanity. Lessing, for example, saw Judaism as a “superseded stage in a cosmopolitan ‘education of the human race,’” while Mendelssohn and most other German-Jewish philosophers insisted that Judaism’s traditions and particularity were an essential part of modern life (Mufti, *Enlightenment* 63).91 Herder in particular seems to be the most idiosyncratic example of a Romantic perception of the Jewish religion. Herder’s approach to Judaism as a political question is at first genuinely egalitarian, envisaging a time “when in Europe no one will ask any more who is a Jew and who is a Christian: for the Jew will also live in accordance with European laws and contribute to the well-being of the state” (Herder, *Ideen* 6:702). However, as Kontje observes, for a “Nazi a Jew remains a Jew,” while according to Herder’s “tolerant” view the Jews can only be integrated when “they become indistinguishable from the Germans, that is, when they cease to be Jews” (75). The most memorable of Herder’s comments on Jews is his plant analogy is the passage in which the Jews are described as “a parasitic plant upon the stems of other nations” (Herder, *Ideen* 6:509). Taken out of its original context, this statement was employed for various anti-Semitic discourses in the following

91 Meyer presents a close analysis of Lessing’s last work, *The Education of Humanity* (1780) in this regard. Meyer comments that according to the early Romantics “reason… was immersed in the process of becoming. Each new generation possessed a higher religious truth than that which had preceded it” (*Origins* 55). One must note the paradoxical nature of this statement. Accordingly, Islam should be ‘truer’ than Judaism and Christianity, while Jewish Reform and the *Haskallah* should be superior to the Protestant Reform and the *Aufklärung*. This Hegelian and strictly Protestant sense of progression on earth towards the better seems to be the key disagreement between the Christian and the Jewish sense of morality in this age.
century. However, Herder’s role in the appreciative study of the Hebrew language and the Old Testament was undisputable, as seen in the previous section of this chapter. And indeed it could generally be said that Herder’s approach to Judaism stands quite in opposition to Kant’s essentializing speculations.

The most influential appearance of the Jewish question in Idealistic and Romantic philosophies, however, occurs in Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807-8). Considered today as the originary work of German nationalism and nation-thinking, Fichte’s *Addresses* were given as lectures right after Prussia’s defeat by Napoleon and while Berlin was under French occupation. The work introduces “a philosophical brand of Jew-hatred,” by defining the Jews as a “state within a state” that is incapable of adopting modern values such as political universalism even through assimilation (Levy 227). The Jewish question now takes a different turn: Herder’s climatological determinism of nations is taken a step further in Fichte’s work to prove that the “oriental” Jew can never be integrated into German language and culture. As a result, legal emancipation as imposed by the terms of the French Revolution might become reality but cultural assimilation never will. Fichte writes in *Beiträge zur Berichtigung der Urteile des Publikums über die Französische Revolution* (1793) that the Jewish emancipation might only

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92 Herder compares the world to a garden and the nations to plants that have their roots in certain climates; while some plants grow strong stems and strive some are weaker or underdeveloped. In this sense, Jews, since they are a nation without a definite geography, are like parasitical plants without roots. Within the context of this analogy, the “parasite” analogy is mainly used for a descriptive purpose. Berlin, like many other Herder scholars, emphasizes the philosemitic character of Herder, who saw the Jews as “the most excellent example of Volk” that managed to survive despite the lack of a native land (183 n3). However, certain passages in Herder’s *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* also refer to Jews as “usurers” and “sly negotiators” who introduced commerce to Europe, statements which conform to the popular, conservative discourses of Jew-hatred. For more on whether Herder was anti- or pro-Jewish, see *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, edited by Richard S. Levy, “Herder” article.

93 John H. Zammito in his book *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), for example, writes about the influence that Kant’s early writings had on Herder and how Herder separated his thoughts from Kant’s towards a hermeneutical history and a more cosmopolitan anthropology.
work if one was “to cut off their heads in one night and put others on them in which there would not be a single Jewish idea” (Fichte 292-3). What has previously only been implied within the discussions on Jewishness and Enlightenment is more openly admitted by Fichte’s Romantic nationalism that sees a complete incommensurability between Enlightenment values that were invented on German lands and the condition of being Jewish. According to Mufti, Fichte’s Addresses is symptomatic of “a powerful anxiety” over the corruption of the natural and organic German language by the influx of foreign influences, most prominently through the “linguistic self-transformation” of the Jew by means of emancipation (Enlightenment 72). Moreover, Mufti tells us that Fichte’s linguistic nationalism as defined in the Addresses was based on the premise that the German language’s ability to transcendentalize and its “metaphysical excess” were proofs of its superiority and that therefore Jews must not or cannot truly participate in higher levels of language production, such as being agents of philosophical knowledge. In other words, these “outsiders” should not have an effect on the German language, which is the product of a distinct Volksgeist rather than an arbitrary unity. Volksgeist cannot be passed on in a single historical event such as the granting of civil rights. Rather, it must be acquired in a unity of communication that was uninterrupted for centuries, such as that experienced by the German people. In this sense, Jewish intellectuals, if the term is possible at all, should not really be part of academic life and a German-Jewish philosopher can only be of “second rank” (Mufti, Enlightenment 71-4).

Again, here we see the implications of the Kantian duality of morality versus Jewish corporeality. In a way, just as Kant defined his universal morality with Jewish particularity in mind, German nationalism is theorized by Fichte against the Jew as the dissimilative Other within. Needless to say, this linguistic anxiety is occasioned by historical factors such as the
French occupation and its imperialistic mission leading to a distrust of revolutionary abstractions like humanity, equality and liberalism, and Prussia’s dream of unifying the German-speaking lands. These factors cause Fichte to prioritize the pure over the hybrid. It appears that the majority of Jewish intellectuals reacted to Fichte’s *Addresses* by trying to reverse this dichotomy in the coming centuries. “Jews came to represent an internal presence of the outside threat the fear of the transnational character of the economically powerful Jew was felt in all other European countries, including France (Mufti 72). Historically speaking, Jewish emancipation was seen as something imposed by the French, although as we have seen, the *Aufklärung* was also sympathetic to the Jewish cause, even if only on assimilative terms.\(^{94}\) In short, Fichte’s work transforms the Jewish question from being a religious question into a secular and racial question through the Romantic discourse on linguistic unity.

According to Amy Newman’s article “Death of Judaism in German Protestant Thought from Luther to Hegel,” the historical disappearance of Judaism in Protestant tradition was only a metaphysical, other-worldly expectation; however, with Kant’s and then Fichte’s (and Schleiermacher’s) discourses on Judaism, it became a “revolutionary social ideal requiring concrete human action in the present for its empirical actualization in the future” (456).\(^{95}\) Newman notes that this philosophical anti-Judaism was further enforced by Georg Wilhelm

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\(^{94}\) The first legal emancipation of the Jews in German-speaking lands took place in the then French occupied Rhineland in the 1790s. Jews were not officially emancipated in Prussia until 1812. The modernization of the unified German Empire (after 1870) went parallel to the increase in the civil rights given to Jews, only coming to a halt with the Nazi regime. In practice, however, Jews under the German Empire were less accepted into the higher ranks of society than ever, even if they had already converted to Christianity.

\(^{95}\) Newman sees the historical change from expecting a natural dying out of Judaism to a death that should be forced in Kant’s “notorious” statement in *Religion within the Borders of Mere Reason* “euthanasia of Judaism is pure moral religion, freed from all the ancient statutory teachings” (Kant qtd. in Newman 461).
Friedrich Hegel’s (1770-1831) dialectical model of Geist (spirit/mind) progressing in time. Although at first sight Hegel’s notion of Aufhebung (sublation) adds a dialectical dimension to the Judaism-and-Christianity relation through its recognition of the historical necessity of Judaism, the progressive move towards the universal truth of Christianity, which Newman demonstrates through Hegel’s interpretation of Christ’s incarnation, erases the particularity of the Jewish body and makes its presence an anomaly (Newman 472-5). Hegel’s philosophy of the Geist is not only important in that it develops Romantic Idealism’s theories on subjectivity into a theory of history, whereby the Geist represents the gradual evolution of a unified human consciousness, but also in that it puts the thinking subject into a dependent relation to its Other. Hegel’s philosophy is far too complicated to summarize here; thus, I will only discuss what such a dialectical relation to the Other implies for the relation between Judaism and Christianity. As previously mentioned in the context of Derrida, for Hegel the Greek-Jew dialectic is an important step in the evolution of this Geist and it is very tempting to succumb to Hegel’s sweeping vision when discussing Judaism’s necessary relation to Christianity. According to Hegel’s philosophy of religion, the Geist goes through several stages of religious consciousness, the first of which is nature worship, where human consciousness sees itself as part of a finite and exteriorized nature. It is in the next step only that the Geist rises above itself and discovers the divine and the infinite through the worship of revealed truth. Through this process human consciousness transforms itself from a natural being into a religious being. For Hegel, the Jewish religions and the Graeco-Roman traditions stand next to each other in anticipation of the same “truth” yet they are opposed to each other as the religious and the natural stages of consciousness. Though the progressive scheme at first implies that Judaism supersedes Greek naturalism, Hegel’s historical vision is more than a simple logic of supersession or replacement.
of the previous stage, due to the principle of *Aufhebung*. Sublation implies that the current stage would not be what it is without its preceding stage. Therefore, the Greek-Jew relation suggests a conceptual dialectics as well as a historical succession. The Jewish religion together with the Greek-Roman religion confront the Christian faith, the latter being the “consummate religion” reconciling the Greek-Roman “godless world” with the Jewish “worldless god” as the spiritual religion leading to self-consciousness (Fackenheim, *Religious Dimension* 197-8). Hegel’s ontology of the self in relation to its Other results in a complicated form of a Trinitarian philosophy, such that Christian faith qualifies as the more advanced spiritual and philosophical religion. Hegel states that the spirit becomes “an object for us that stands neither [solely] on the finite side nor on the universal side; rather this *relationship* of spirit to spirit —this alone is [consummate] religion. […]Universal and finite spirit are here inseparable” (Hegel 165). In short, Hegel’s complex dialectic explains how the “Jewish East and Greek-Roman West … are themselves internally related,” the necessary conflict of which leads to self-conscious religion embodied in Christianity. Implied here is a reversal of the Enlightenment view of Judaism. With Hegel, Judaism exists within the philosophical consciousness not as the corporeal and “earthly” (as in Kant) element but as the “divine” element for worshipping a God that is not in touch with the world (Fackenheim, *Religious Dimension* 200). Ultimately, Christian faith remains superior in Hegel’s thought because it embodies a “spiritual individuality” and thus is closer to philosophical consciousness, which is a more advanced stage of the *Geist* than the revealed and divine but incomplete truth of Judaism (Hegel 267 55n).

Meyer comments that Hegel’s influence on Jewish intellectuals (as on the whole German philosophy) was enormous, and while “thoughtful Jews had to grapple with Hegel’s philosophy, ultimately they all rejected some of its most basic elements.” Meyer adds that Hegel’s
philosophy failed to account for morality and individual responsibility, and therefore the subsequent Jewish reformers held onto a more prophetic understanding of morality instead of Hegel’s model of state “as the highest embodiment of World Spirit” (*Response* 67). Geiger’s early works converse with Hegelian historicism insofar as it is mediated through the works of theologians such as F.C. Baur, the founder of the Tübingen School of Theology. It is in Geiger’s later works on Jewish history that he more closely engages with Hegel’s historical model.96

**Liberal-Protestant Old Testament Criticism versus *Wissenschaft des Judentums***

Fichte’s anxiety about linguistic purity in relation to the Jewish Other within is not completely unrelated to the popularity of Mendelssohn’s famous German translation of the Pentateuch and Mendelssohn’s and his follower’s success in implementing the principles of *Bildung* into the Jewish community of his time. In this section, I will discuss the more immediate intellectual background to Geiger’s work on Islam and Judaism, namely the methods with which the dissolution of Judaism was legitimized within the scholarly discourse of German (liberal/Protestant) biblical criticism, which James Pasto calls the “missing link … between knowledge and power, …between the expanding nation-state and its ideology of Jewish corporate dissolution” (‘Islam's Strange Secret Sharer” 438), and the subsequent Jewish reactions to it in the form of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

Edward Breuer in *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* remarks that Mendelssohn’s Bible translation marks the beginning of a Jewish and Christian disparity in biblical studies. With the early, pre-Kantian *Aufklärung*, the

Jewish question was posed in terms of acculturation rather than assimilation or conversion, meaning that it was possible to be enlightened and Jewish at the same time. Therefore, a focus on language studies (of the Hebrew Bible) and historical study (mainly of medieval Hispano-Jewish scholarship) was at the origin of the Haskalah. While the Haskalah developed parallel to the rise in the historical-philological study of scriptures in general, the maskilim (the followers of the Haskalah) saw the Old Testament as the point of departure for a common culture of Judaeo-Christianity within the terms of the Enlightenment and a platform for acculturation (Breuer 20). However, Mendelssohn’s Bible translation also had a dual character: it replaced the previous Yiddish translations with Hochdeutsch as “the only literary language worthy of scripture,” but at the same time it remained loyal to normative Judaism by employing rabbinic authority and commentary (22). The latter aspect, Breuer comments, “elicited a measure of consideration for the incompatible, if not irreconcilable, differences between European and Jewish readings of the sacred literature” (21).

The first reaction to Haskalah’s attempt to assert Jewish identity through the integration of rabbinic history into “objective” study came from the progressive biblical scholars, such as J.H. Michaelis and J.S. Semler, who advocated a sort of historical-philological approach that treated the Pentateuch as mainly an anthropological document of the Middle East. This new textual and historical analysis was critical of rabbinic sources, seeing them as false additions and manipulations of the Hebrew Bible, and simply not compatible with the scholarly standard of subjecting “all exegesis … to the rigorous test of language, text, and reason” (Breuer 102). This was due to several reasons. First, it was assumed that the Talmud was formed by ignorant rabbis to mediate the needs of their own times, and could not at all reflect the absolute truth and beauty of the Hebrew Bible. Second, “oral sources,” of which the Talmud consisted, were not reliable
enough. Third, their content was too particular to the Jews, meaning it was not in line with the universal values of the Enlightenment. We must note here that the legitimacy of sources for the study of scriptures was determined in a highly selective manner according to the Enlightenment principles of the historical-philological method. This was due in part to the incompatibility of this method with certain types of exegetical traditions, but also in part to the origin of this type of scholarship in Protestant theological traditions. Despite the “scholarly and non-confessional hermeneutics” of these early biblical critics, certain Christian, polemical oppositions to the Talmud spilled over into the field of secular scholarship (Breuer 106). As Newman notes, for example, the refusal of rabbinic, post-biblical tradition was in line with the Lutheran desire to implement a “wide scale subversion of rabbinic authority” because Luther believed that the “failure of Jews to convert was the fault of the rabbis” (457-8). Breuer, on the other hand, maintains that there was a genuine critical interest in the Hebrew Bible, and that certain traditions of Hebrew commentary were favoured over others due to methodological priorities, while he admits that sometimes the majority of the rabbinic commentaries were dismissed as not being aesthetically pleasing or sophisticated enough even for philosemites like Herder and Lessing.\footnote{For example, some German scholars favoured Karaitic exegesis over other rabbinic traditions for being more literal in its exegesis (Breuer 104-5).} The faith in universal reason was so strong in this early stage of positive biblical studies that certain sources for the study of the given monotheism were legitimized over others purely by the degree of their agreement with the principles of Enlightenment rationalism. Such selectiveness can also be observed in Geiger’s treatment of the Qur’an, which privileges readings of the Qur’anic passages that support the view of Islam as a rational religion. However, Geiger’s methods were subversive within the biblical studies since he used rabbinic and talmudic sources for his historical investigations.
Romantic philosophy introduced a more critical and dialectical sense of reason, but it added aesthetic evaluations to the same criteria for the selection of sources which persisted in the textual and historical scholarship of the nineteenth century. Breuer also insists that as the scholarship became more established the same critical rigour was applied equally to Christian sources and their methods were increasingly separated from Christological exegesis (106). Finally, Breuer concludes that as “the critical study of scripture [started] to occupy an important and visible place in humanistic science,” the disparities between Jewish and modern biblical criticism “posed a serious challenge” to the emancipation and acculturation efforts of the Jews (107). Most importantly, the insistence on tradition among the Jewish biblical critics of the Haskalah and later within the Wissenschaft des Judentums undermined the universalist claims of the Enlightenment, creating space for cultural particularity and difference. Not only did this disparity influence the nature of scriptural scholarship henceforth, but it also became the crucial dilemma of Judaism facing European modernity.98

The conviction that rabbinic tradition was the degenerate aspect of Judaism was legitimized within the discourse of German biblical scholarship, as James Pasto shows in his article on W.M.L. De Wette’s (1780-1846) invention of “post-exilic Judaism.” De Wette’s scholarship is important for our purpose, not only for his influence on Geiger, but also for practically establishing the terminology for critical Old Testament studies carried out in the nineteenth century, for Jewish and German scholars alike. De Wette and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn were to Old Testament scholarship what F.A. Wolf was to modern classical-philology

98 See, for example Breuer’s comment that “[t]he significant differences between the prevailing Jewish and German modes of biblical scholarship thus aptly demarcated what would remain, over the next two centuries, the essential problematic of Judaism and modernity…. To the degree that Jews chose to internalize the cultural values and ideals of the modern West and to reconsider the religious traditions they inherited, the difficulties inherent in the balancing of Jewish particularities against the universalist predilections of modernity would be revisited time and again” (228).
(Altertumswissenschaft) and Ignaz Goldziher to modern Islamic studies, in the way they invented
the critical tools for reading scriptures within religious studies. De Wette’s historical perspective
on the Old Testament, based on the suspicion that Israelite history was different than what was
told in the Old Testament, along with the invention of certain terms in regards to Judaic history
(such as the distinction between Judaism and Hebraism, or the emphasis on the “exilic rupture”) set scholarly standards for the coming generations of Old Testament scholars (Pasto, “W.M.L. De Wette” 33-5).

Pasto argues that De Wette’s literary analysis of the Old Testament was rigorous and
methodical, quite in accordance with the new scholarly hermeneutics of his time, but that the
historical conclusions he derived from this analysis, especially those on the degenerate character
of post-exilic Judaism, were made in reference to the political debates on Jewish emancipation
and based on “a Christian allegory of the self set out in terms of the bifurcation of a Jewish
Other” (50). There are three points that are important for our purpose in Pasto’s interpretation of
De Wette’s scholarship. First, De Wette continued to denigrate rabbinic Judaism by separating
“Judaism” from “Hebraism” (or ancient Israel), of which the latter was the more universal
monotheism that was corrupted by “post-exilic Jews [who] exacerbated its particular side by
making what was intended as a religion for humanity into the patriotic expression of a particular
Jewish Volk” (48-9). Thus, De Wette believes that by stripping this “nationalistic” aspect of
Judaism and bringing out the Hebraic universalism by way of a reform, Jewish people could be
integrated into the Protestant nation. Second, since ancient Israel was already a part of Christian
history, the histories of Jews and Christian were actually one, and the “theological fulfillment of
Hebraism in Christianity prefigured a necessary social absorption of the Jews into the German
Protestant state” (49). Third, in order for the Old Testament to retain its universal (and Christian)
value its narratives had to be mythologized rather than seen as the historical documents of a
certain people, the Israelites. This latter point is especially important as it shows how the
methods of literary analysis and historical fact-finding are fused in order to conjure a greater
truth about the past and the present that could be “grasped in the whole by the heroic scholar”
(50). De Wette, as we saw with F.A. Wolf in the previous section, becomes the model for the
modern scholar of the Bildung, autonomous, totalizing, morally responsible and at the top of the
trajectory of human progress. Despite De Wette’s Christian/Protestant bias, his hermeneutics,
just like his historical conclusions, were highly influential on Geiger’s methods.99 These three
aspects of De Wette’s approach will help us to understand Geiger’s representation of both
Judaism and Islam in terms of degeneration and rejuvenation (or a nostalgia for an earlier, purer
Abrahamic monotheism),100 and the tendency to explain scriptures in mythological terms.101

Thus, opposed to Fichte’s conservative, nationalistic discourse, there were also the
liberal, progressive and pro-emancipatory views of intellectuals like De Wette and Geiger. As
Mufti notes, Jewish emancipation was instrumental for the emerging “liberal order” and
represented the “uprootedness and abstraction of bourgeois culture” (Enlightenment 38-9). The
academic study of Judaism by progressive scholars was naturally supported by a state oriented

99 Susannah Heschel in Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus confirms Geiger’s favouring of De Wette’s
hermeneutics (6).
100 Pasto remarks that the Jewish similarly perceived their own culture as being in decline, thus agreeing
with Protestant-liberal biblical studies. However, “associated with galut—dispersion—and not with
rabbinic Judaism.” Interestingly, Pasto refers to other postcolonialist works that deal with the Orientalists
who conclude an “Islamic decline (after Ibn Khaldun)” (“Islam’s Strange Secret Sharer” 460 n45).
101 The German origins of the mythological school in biblical studies, also referred to as “higher
criticism,” is described in Eleanor Shaffer’s ‘Kubla Khan’ and ‘The Fall of Jerusalem:’ The Mythological
School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880 (1975). Shaffer makes it clear that this
scholarship was more than the rationalist, dispassionate, free, and for-its-own-sake critical enquiry it was
believed to be. It was rather an internalization of religious feeling and sensibility, tightly bound up with
Romanticism and Herderian brand of nationalism. Thus, the mythologizing of scripture cannot only be
explained by rationalistic, empirical reasoning; at least not in its original scholarly context. The more
radical, atheist brand of mythological criticism is a late nineteenth-century development in Germany,
prominently represented by Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach and David Friedrich Strauss.
towards liberalization. And, as Amos Funkenstein observes, methodologically speaking, modernization was in direct relation to “historical consciousness”; that is, it was related to the tracing of the *Volksgeist* (whether German or Jewish) in order to qualify as a citizen of the nation state:

> The historian became the industrious citizen [member of civil society, *Bürgertum*, bourgeoisie], a conscientious laborer on the historical sources that he also made available. [Unlike the court historian] he must rather, in painstaking work, unearath and reconstruct his sources, and then detect in them information they did not intend disclosing, and reveal deep trends which the historian of earlier generations inevitably overlooked. *(Perspectives 249)*

Funkenstein here draws our attention to the scale and importance of historical research in the assertion of a Jewish identity within the newly forming matrix of nationalism and global dispersion. Biblical scholarship was the foremost branch of scholarship where such identity politics could successfully be combined with apparently “disinterested” scholarship, given the entangled histories and scriptures of the Jewish and Christian traditions.

The Jewish response to the Christian bias in Old Testament studies came in the form of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the scientific study of Judaism). Naturally, as part of their modernization effort, Jewish people felt obliged to produce their own historians, philologists, and in general their own enlightened scholars who could legitimize the study of specifically Jewish subjects such as rabbinic literature, which were systematically excluded from the mainstream biblical scholarship. Ismar Schorsch calls *Wissenschaft des Judentums* “German Jewry’s most far reaching legacy [which] was to make historical thinking the dominant universe of discourse in Jewish life and historians its major intellectual figures” (1). *Wissenschaft des Judentums* is so called for the *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (Union for the
Culture and Science of the Jews) an organization founded in Berlin, 1819 by figures like Leopold Zunz, Heinrich Heine and Eduard Gans, to promote the historical study of Judaism. To some scholars, however, rather than a lasting legacy of German Jewishness, Wissenschaft des Judentums had a largely apologetic character that attempted solely to reconstruct Judaism according to the spirit of the times by focusing on aspects of Judaism that were compatible with the liberal, Protestant views on religion; in other words, it was closely related to the Jewish emancipation and reform movements. Some of its early Jewish orthodox opponents even saw it as a confirmation that Judaism was now actually dead, a “historical relic” that needed to be studied, and represented the Wissenschaft des Judentums as an “extended obituary properly eulogizing the deceased” (Mendes-Flohr 35 & 41).

Meyer explains the emergence of this field as a turn from philosophy to Wissenschaft (scholarship), particularly to objective historical study, in obedience to a Romantic sense of Volk. The German term Wissenschaft means “more than just empirical study”; it is rather the principle of scientific knowledge that “absorbs philosophy” and is practised with a high sense of “moral force” as Wilhelm von Humboldt imagined it. Following Herder’s cosmopolitan revision of Enlightenment humanism, whereby universal humanity could be reached only through the particularity of a specific, organically grown Volk, and Fichte’s emphasis on the individual’s dependence and “duty” towards the group or Volk that he or she is submerged in, there occurred a turn to national education (Volksbildung) in place of the universal education of the Enlightenment. Wissenschaft des Judentums, argues Meyer, is the result of the realization that such a national education was essentially “bound up with Christianity” and was thus in conflict with the ideals of the Jewish emancipation, and eroded Jewish particularity (Origins 145-6). By this time, the Jewish reform movement was having its effects on the practice of rituals in Jewish
circles and on the part of many young Jewish intellectuals. Among these young intellectuals were the founders of the Verein, well versed in the dominant German philosophies of Kant and Hegel as well as the traditional, Talmudic education received from family and community. The new solution to the Jewish question for these German-Jewish intellectuals was the Wissenschaft des Judentums, as an assertion of the Jewish Volk in the intellectual sphere of Germany. In a way, it was a reply to the Christian anxieties about the historical persistence of Jewish nation. Since liberal state politics were in opposition to any sign of Jewish national claims, these Jewish scholars were not admitted to the modern German universities to study Judaism, on the grounds that this would not be true scholarship but simply a form of Jewish apologetics (Mendes-Flohr 39-40). Thus, the work was largely carried out in rabbinical circles and Jewish seminaries. It is no wonder that, given the contradictory nature of the Wissenschaft des Judentums, the historical research resulting from this effort led to diverse Jewish movements such as Zionism, orthodoxy, Reform, and even anti-Semitism. Conversion to Christianity among the members of the Wissenschaft (if only as a means to be accepted into state institutions) was not uncommon (Schorsch 1-3).

For Funkenstein, Jews were not accepted into the “modern historical consciousness” represented by the new state institution of scholarship on account of the nature of Judaism itself. Unlike Protestantism and Catholicism, Judaism’s messianic character hindered the adoption of a historical-philological method in which morality and empiricism were conflated. Jewish historical research at that time was manipulated to reflect “the wishes and concerns of the community” (i.e. that there was a prominent Jewish antiquity, that they were universal, democratic, enlightened and that Judaism was “pure” monotheism). Wissenschaft’s aim was to form a German-Jewish subculture in order to remain German but to be recognized as separate.
(After all, the loyalty of the German Jews was with their German state, and no other national state could be imagined at this point.) In this respect, Wissenschaft’s character was “ahistorical,” or at best, “counterhistorical” rather than historical (Funkenstein, Perceptions 250-5).

Funkenstein, like Meyer and Mendes-Flohr, insists on the apologetic nature of these early Jewish historians’ works, including that of Geiger who used his historical research to support his reform movement. It is important to note that while Geiger’s work on Islam’s origins was accepted by mainstream scholarship as “objective” (in fact the first example of such scholarship), his study of Jewish history was dismissed as apologetic.

Meyer poses some intriguing questions about this “tension” between objectivity and apologetics within the Wissenschaft des Judentums. Can one study her or his own history and religion objectively without being apologetic? How is the insider’s view different? Was Wissenschaft des Judentums a secular or religious enterprise? Can a scholar who is operating within the principles of Wissenschaft be religious at the same time? Through a historical review of the field, and by providing examples from both the theological and the secular poles of the Jewish scholarship on Judaism, from its beginnings to the present, in Germany, in the rest of Europe, Israel and the United States, Meyer concludes that this “tension remained unresolved, without doubt because [it is] inherent in the very enterprise of Jewish scholarship” (“Two Persistent Tensions” 116). Since Wissenschaft des Judentums started as a defence of Judaism in face of the assimilative power of modernity, it is hard to extract the “Judaism” aspect from its “Wissenschaft.” Today, however, we operate with the Foucauldian awareness that secularism was just another facet of the episteme called objective scholarship. Even though genealogically

102 Funkenstein mentions Abraham Geiger’s study of the Pharisees, and the way he tried to represent them as the prototypes of “true reformers” in Perceptions of Jewish History (20 & 255 n69).
the idea of secularism was based on liberal Protestantism, as the paradigm of *Wissenschaft* became more established and its fields expanded, the secular approach to religion became more of an absolute value in the study of both Christianity and Judaism.

There are also works that highlight the proto-postcolonial aspect of the relationship between Protestant, liberal biblical scholarship and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Susannah Heschel, for example, argues that the German-Jewish relation is essentially a colonial one and that the German Orientalist scholar does indeed partake of the Saidean sense of Orientalism, albeit an internal Orientalism in this case, with a mission to subdue the Jewish emancipation movement in Europe ("Revolt" 62). Christian Wiese, who admits to being influenced by Heschel’s approach, opens his book *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany* by discussing the conundrum of studying pre-1933 (pre-Nazi) German-Jewish history. On the one hand, there are scholars like Gershom Scholem, who call the achievements of the *Wissenschaft* a “cry in the void,” denying that there was a common pre-War culture shaped by both Jewish minority and German host-culture. On the other, some scholars hold the belief that the German-Jewish relation was characterized by a “symbiosis” whereby both the minority and the host culture went through a change (Wiese 3-6). Wiese himself believes that this period of Jewish history “offers a diverse and ambiguous image with countless nuances” and that it should not be reduced “to a mere prehistory of the Holocaust” (3). David Sorkin further complicates the dichotomy of assimilation versus separation by suggesting that the German-Jewish minority formed a distinct “subculture,” which negotiated its identity through the tension with German society (6). Both Heschel and Wiese locate the proto-postcolonial site of resistance between the fields of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Protestant theology. In a way, Heschel contributes to the assimilation versus integration debate by
supporting the latter: Jewish historical scholarship as practised by Jews themselves is not a sign of assimilation by the mere adaptation of scientific method; it is an effort to “enter the intellectual world that had created those [Semitic] stereotypes in order to attempt a liberation from Christian hegemony” (“Revolt” 62). As theological as it might seem, *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, due to the popularity of theological/historical studies in Germany, had a much broader effect on the development of German-Jewish culture. This latter point also constitutes the main argument of Nils Roemer’s *Jewish Scholarship and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Between History and Faith* (2005). Roemer documents the history of modern Jewish historiography in Germany with an emphasis on its interaction and reception in popular culture. Roemer’s cultural study demonstrates not only the way modern Jewish identity is formed through the direct application of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to public education and cultural production, but also the blurring of the borders between German and Jewish identities through a “process of intertextuality” with the disciplines outside Jewish studies (3-7). Thus, Roemer’s book also contributes to the recent trend in German-Jewish historiography that supports the idea of “symbiosis,” or hybridity, a perspective that is characteristic of postcolonial studies.

As mentioned already, some recent works on German-Jewish history claim that the “counter-histories” written by a group of German-Jewish intellectuals in the nineteenth century had a lasting effect on the perception and integration of Jewish culture into European modernity. Mack’s and Mufti’s works are examples of such approaches. Mack, for example, supports the thesis that “modern Jewish thought, from Mendelssohn via Rosenzweig to Levinas, advances an understanding of what it means to be enlightened,” which “substantially differs from that which was developed by Kant, Hegel, and Feuerbach” (12). Mack’s work relies heavily on the idea that the Jewish opposition to German Idealism’s inherent anti-Semitism led to a more inclusive sense
of modernity, in the works of Jewish thinkers such as Mendelssohn, Geiger, Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, Levinas, Freud and Marx. According to Mack’s logic, we could also add Derrida to this list. Although Mack’s study is mainly a philosophical analysis of German Idealism’s caricatural depiction of Judaism, which to an extent also included the other Semitic religion, Islam, Mack’s conclusion is an important one: nineteenth-century Jewish thought attacked systematized transcendental philosophies in a way that anticipates twentieth-century postmodernism. Mufti’s *Enlightenment in the Colony* operates on the same principle, but it also draws attention to the generative function that the Jewish question in the nineteenth century played for the term “secularism,” and how it subsequently got employed in various colonial locales like post-Partition India. Pasto in his article “Islam’s ‘Strange Secret Sharer’: Orientalism, Judaism, and the Jewish Question” (1998) follows a similar line of argument when he argues that “the contradictory tendencies that scholars posited within Judaism were in fact the contradictions between Judaism and the nation-state” (459). Pasto further argues that liberal, biblical scholarship, within the power of the German Protestant nation-state, practises an Orientalism on Judaism as it does on Islam, thereby confirming his agreement with Edward Said’s description of Judaism as Islam’s “strange secret sharer” (*Orientalism* 27-8). In this sense, Pasto perceives the work of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or at least most of its representatives, as contributing to “counter-hegemonic, and counter-Orientalist genealogies” (466 n59). Said avoids the German-Jewish Orientalists, Pasto argues, because he does not want to face the fact that Judaism was equally Orientalized.

Much has been said about the exclusion of German-Jewish Orientalists from Said’s *Orientalism*, the most prominent study being the collection of essays titled *The Jewish Discovery of Islam* (ed. Michael Kramer, 1999), which also includes an essay on Geiger by Jacob Lassner.
John M. Efron’s “Orientalism and the Jewish Historical Gaze” in the collection *Orientalism and the Jews* (2005) also examines Geiger and other Jewish scholars of Islam in the light of the historical methods they employed and considers what they meant for the Jewish emancipation struggle. The most recent publication comes from Germany: “Im vollen Licht der Geschichte”: *Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung* (2008). These and other studies will be taken into account in the following section. None of them, with the partial exception of the last, deal in any detail with the methodological choices made. That is to say, they do not explain why German-Jewish scholars of Islam who at the same time were invested in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, such as Geiger, applied their adopted critical methodology to the study of Islam and the Qur’an, or indeed why these scholars are typically considered more objective than the Christian Orientalists of their time. These and other questions will be the subject of the following section.
It is precisely to Judaism that all the great religious transformations, which determine cultural perspective, attach themselves. Christianity and Islam have issued forth from it, been nurtured by it, and it is within Judaism therefore that the new religious transformation must take place. (Geiger qtd. in Meyer, *Response* 98)

Abraham Geiger is primarily known as the intellectual leader of the Jewish Reformation movement of the nineteenth century. The above quotation summarizes Geiger’s drive to both elevate and reform Judaism, which in turn determines how he represents both Islam and Christianity in his scholarship. The use of the phrase “cultural perspective” above is also an important indicator of Geiger’s scientific approach to religion. Religious identity and practice for Geiger are contingent on cultural contexts and important in so far as they explain the interactions of cultures. As a matter of fact, these are the two main claims of Geiger’s work as scholar and rabbi: Judaism is the original monotheism and religious reform can only be achieved through the language of scientific reason that approaches faith and belief as historically situated social and cultural phenomena. It was in the face of the anti-Semitic and discriminatory versions offered at the time that Geiger claimed an Abrahamic identity for Europe’s progressive and enlightened values. His claim exemplifies how religious identity, like identity in general, hinges upon the socio-cultural circumstances of a specific moment in history.

Geiger derives the heading “Abrahamic” for Europe not only from his close reading of the traditional texts of Judaism but also from his attachment to the Enlightenment view of a non-dogmatic and universal moral religion. His model, however, for such ethics is less the Protestant-influenced focus on individual judgment and betterment than an Enlightenment tolerance that

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103 Meyer translates this passage from Geiger’s *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume 5, 348-9 (Berlin, 1875-8).
allows the coexistence of various ethnic communities and creeds. Following in the footsteps of Mendelssohn’s Haskalah on the one hand and Herder and Lessing’s visions of cosmopolitanism on the other, Geiger chooses the heading Abrahamic as a solution to the dilemmas that arise from being Jewish within a largely Protestant-influenced culture and epistemology.

In this section, I will present Geiger’s work on the beginnings of Islam as an instance of deconstructive exemplarity constituted as the outcome of three vectors: first, the language and discourse of scientific reason and “disinterested scholarship”; second, Geiger’s subject position as a rabbi-scholar; and third, the current urgencies he responds to. By reading Geiger’s work Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen? (hereafter WMJ) as the unique product of these three vectors, I aim to practise deconstructive hospitality myself. Such an approach responds to Derrida’s call “to deconstruct the European intellectual construct of Islam” (Chérif and Derrida 38).

I am also responding to a certain urgency within Islamic studies today that requires the field to be opened for the broader study of culture and to a disciplinary genealogy. I will be responding, for example, to Aaron W. Hughes’s call to take “scholarly literature produced on Islam …as primary data” in order to ask “how and why scholars of Islam construct theories the way they do, and how […] these theories, in turn, predetermine what type of Islam will be found” (Situating Islam 2). Hughes has written extensively on the state and importance of Islamic studies after 9/11. He reminds us that scholars of Islam have taken enormous responsibilities after 9/11 in representing Islam in a certain way to the media and therefore are more vulnerable to generalizing and essentializing definitions of Islam. Hughes’ critique is particularly directed towards scholars who are “too quick to bracket off something that often
coincided remarkably with ‘Western values’” and then “attach labels such as ‘authentic’ or ‘real’” (Situating Islam 3). Although I agree with Hughes that the name Islam is “something that emerges at a particular historical moment in Europe’s thinking about itself,” I also believe that aligning the representation of Islam with current values and language is unavoidable, as I have explained in the context of Derrida’s philosophy of exemplarism (3). On the other hand, as Hughes also warns, “the desire to appeal to the rhetoric of essences” when representing Islam, either for apologetic or for exclusionist purposes, will fail to be hospitable in the deconstructive sense because it does not admit to the contingency of cultural and religious identity (4). What makes Geiger’s discourse on Islam so pioneering is that he constructs contingent identities for both Islam and Judaism through a historical-philological approach without resorting to the rhetoric of essences and as a result brings forth a discursive shift in the existing language of Oriental studies. Geiger’s representation of Islam, therefore, offers a case where the chosen responsibility of a religious reformer created a fissure in the existing discourses on Islam through the assertion of his Jewish/Semitic identity.

The phenomenon of German-Jewish Islamicism has been contextualized in the previous sections with reference both to the particular German predicament influencing the development of a historical-philological method in Orientalist scholarship and to specific features of the Jewish emancipation struggle, particularly the rise of Haskalah and Wissenschaft des Judentums, in German-speaking lands. Since the focus of the present study is on how the diasporic dilemmas of a German-Jewish subject lead to a relatively sympathetic account of Islam, it is essential to explore Geiger’s personal achievements and the conditions that preceded and followed the publication of WMJ. Therefore, the first part of this section gives an overview—gathered from secondary sources—of Geiger’s life and work, and of his legacy in the field of biblical and
Islamic studies. In the second part, I argue that the rhetorical strategies employed in Geiger’s *WMJ* are guided by the three vectors mentioned above: namely, I first look at how Geiger uses the language of “disinterested scholarship” in giving a neutral description of Muhammad and his mission; next, I examine the image Geiger draws for Judaism in *WTJ*, motivated by the struggle to elevate Judaism to a respectable position in the biblical scholarship of his time; as the last vector, I look at the ways Geiger represents Christianity—both in Muhammad’s time and in his own time—as the oppositional other to the two ideal, Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam. In order to elevate Judaism, I argue, Geiger creates an Abrahamic alliance between Judaism and Islam, whereby Muhammad’s insistence on Judaic monotheism is constructed as a superior quality to Christianity. It becomes apparent that Geiger, through these three vectors, identifies with the figure of Muhammad and represents him as the reformer of the corrupt and outdated principles of the Abrahamic spirit. These three vectors and their simultaneous workings, I contend, result in a positive image of Islam in *WTJ*, and thus exemplify deconstructive hospitality. This hospitality, I note, is also hegemonic and violent since Geiger erases Islam’s claim for difference by shaping it according to the ideal and reformed Judaism he proposes as a solution to the dilemmas he is experiencing as a German-Jewish subject.

**Abraham Geiger and the German-Jewish Interest in Islam**

Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) was a rabbi and a scholar who received an orthodox Jewish education during his upbringing in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Being a close reader of the Torah and the Talmudic texts from early on, he went to Heidelberg to study Oriental languages under the prominent Old Testament philologist and Protestant-Christian theologians of his time.
Later he moved to Bonn where he developed an interest in philosophy and history while also studying Arabic under the guidance of Georg Freytag. While he was in Bonn, Freytag encouraged him to enter an essay competition devoted to the topic of Judaic influences on the Qur’an. Geiger’s essay, which was originally written in Latin, won the prize and was later published in German under the title *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* in 1833. The following year, the essay was accepted as a dissertation for the requirement of a doctoral degree at the University of Marburg. Throughout his university years, Geiger continued his close study of the Talmud and practised as a rabbi by preaching sermons to the Jewish community. He subsequently became a rabbi to the communities of Wiesbaden, Breslau, Frankfurt und Berlin, while he published and wrote in scholarly journals on the historical and philological study of Judaism. Later in his life, he was active in the founding of the “Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums” (Academy for the Scientific Study of Judaism) in Berlin and served as the head of the academy until his death in 1874. Geiger never worked at a university since Jews were not allowed to take up academic positions. He worked as a rabbi throughout his life and did not publish anything else on the subject of Islam apart from the prize essay, which is the subject of the present study.\(^{104}\)

Most of his biographers agree on one personality trait in Geiger: his zeal to reconcile the Enlightenment thought and sentiments of his time with his deeply felt attachment to his Jewish identity. Susannah Heschel, for example, in *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (1998) portrays the passionate and the conflicted personality of Geiger, all the while keeping the focus on how his German-Jewishness might have shaped his scholarship on both Judaism and Islam.\(^{104}\)

\(^{104}\) Detailed biographies of Geiger can be found in Ludwig Geiger’s *Abraham Geiger: Leben und Lebenswerk* and in Max Wiener’s *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism: The Challenge of Nineteenth Century*.  

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Likewise, Michael A. Meyer points out how Geiger’s “conflicting feelings” stem from “deep-seated attachment to Judaism on the one hand, and an equally profound alienation from its present forms on the other” (Response 91). These feelings are evident not only in the diaries and letters of Geiger, but also, as Heschel shows, in his activities as a reforming rabbi and his representation of the three monotheistic faiths in his scholarship.

Secondary literature on Geiger points to two elements in Geiger’s life that might have led to the positive depiction of Muhammad and Islam in WMJ, leading to a long-lasting Philislamism among German-Jewish scholars in the following decades. First, Geiger’s scholarly writings on the common histories of Judaism and Christianity reveal a constant effort to modernize Judaism according to Enlightenment ideals, which he saw as saturated with Christian theological bias. However, as we will see, Geiger does this not by risking a complete erasure of Jewish tradition and religiosity, but rather, in a manner similar to Mendelssohn’s vision, by revising those Enlightenment ideals in pluralistic and more specifically Jewish terms. Second, Geiger’s historical-philological approach to the monotheistic religions is determined by his liberal approach to Judaism and his lifelong struggle, which started as early as in his university years, to reform the present practices of Judaism. Therefore, his reforms are dependent and insist upon the peaceful existence of plural religious practices within the state rather than a complete rejection of religious and ritual practice or the assimilation of them under Protestant ideals. Such a perspective on Geiger allows us to see how he defended Islam’s difference within European modernity besides Judaism’s, though only as far as was possible.

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105 Geiger convened “the first meeting of Reform rabbis in Wiesbaden” and tried to modernize Jewish practice, like removing reference to animal sacrifice and the concept of nationhood from Jewish prayer books (Cohn-Sherbok 72-3). He also implemented reforms such as implementing reforms in the synagogue (Heschel, Abraham Geiger 5 & 32).
within the limits of the existing discourses and as far as it served his Jewish mission. Recent scholarship makes it possible to appreciate Geiger’s legacy as rabbi and scholar not as a futile struggle to assimilate into the surrounding German culture but as an attempt to modify both the German perception of Judaism and the Jewish perception of the surrounding German culture. As Suzanne Marchand observes, dismissing Geiger either as a member of hegemonic Orientalism or as an assimilationist would be to dismiss the possibility that nineteenth-century Orientalism might have “furnished at least some of the tools necessary for constructing the post-imperialist worldviews we cultivate today” (German Orientalism xx).

The study that first drew attention to Geiger’s proto-postcolonial historicism was Heschel’s Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus. Heschel not only created a new phase in Geiger studies but also brought a new energy to contemporary Jewish studies by presenting pre-Holocaust German-Jewish history in terms of contemporary postcolonial theory. Heschel uses Amos Funkenstein’s concept of “counter-history”106 and the postcolonial theory of Homi Bhabha107 to bring to the foreground the subversive and proto-postcolonial aspects of Geiger’s work on Jewish history, which was seen by modern Jewish historians after the Holocaust as an effect of assimilation into the Protestant and liberal scientism of the age. Heschel argues that Geiger’s revision of Christian origins was “an attempt to subvert Christian hegemony and establish a new position for Judaism within European history and thought (“Revolt” 64). I will rely on Heschel’s argument for my reading of Geiger’s WMJ as a defence of Jewish tradition against the dominant depiction of Judaism as historical anachronism. My particular concern, 

106 I explain Funkenstein’s theory of “counter-history” in Chapter Two.
107 Although Bhabha is not cited in Heschel’s book, she makes consistent reference to Bhabha’s theory, particularly to his The Location of Culture (1994), in her article “Revolt of the Colonized,” which is a condensed version of the argument presented in her book.
different from Heschel’s, will be to show how Islam’s image fares when this text is read as a document of anti-imperialist resistance and “counter-history.” I argue that Geiger’s hospitality towards Islam as such opens up the possibility that Islam can be perceived as an equally valid monotheistic faith, susceptible to study by the same secular methods that the other two faiths are subjected to.

Said argued in *Orientalism* that Europe’s imperial relation to the Muslim Middle-East was more direct than the inner-imperialism of Germany with respect to its Jewish minorities. On the other hand, as Susanne Marchand points out, Europe’s heterogeneity at the turn of the nineteenth century meant that the “binary distinction [of] European and Oriental” was not necessarily what mattered most to Europeans, some of whom “lived their lives in borderlands […] and believed the ultimate ‘other’ sat in Rome, St. Petersburg, or Vienna, not in Istanbul, Cairo, or Delhi” (*German Orientalism* xxii). This heterogeneity of Europe was reflected in the ethnic diversity within the field of Orientalist studies, particularly in the decades that followed Geiger’s publication on Islam. We see, for example, Hungarians, Dutch, and Swedes besides Germans and Jews, among the scholars who created the basic vocabulary and methods for the modern discipline of Islamic studies. Besides, the fact that Jewish scholars such as Geiger were not allowed to be members of academic institutions but nevertheless contributed to the knowledge-making process, might seem to exempt them to a degree from ordinary “imperialist” relations. What sort of Islam might such heterogeneity within Orientalist studies construct? In approaching this question we must make due allowance the complete lack of scholars trained in Muslim countries within the knowledge-making process. We must also remember that representing the religion of the other—or even one’s own religion—without prejudice and conceptual violence is impossible. And yet discursive practices of scholarly fields may change
through the momentous hospitality employed in their hermeneutical practices; thus, they cannot be considered timelessly and universally hegemonic. Therefore, while I refrain from an outright defence of the Orientalist scholarship of the period, I value attempts to situate the production of these Orientalist discourses historically and culturally. Heschel’s book is valuable because it does not impose Geiger as the benevolent Islamicist that Edward Said wrongly neglected, but instead presents him as a German Jew who, in his personal struggle to reconcile the oppositional worlds of traditional Judaism and Enlightenment Germany, conducted his scholarship with similar motives to those of Said in *Orientalism*. Heschel’s most important historical move is her reading of Geiger as the precursor to Said (and Spivak) in critiquing “the academy’s construction of ‘Judaism’ and the political uses to which it was put,” and in letting the “subaltern Jewish voice” speak (*Abraham Geiger* 21). Nevertheless, Geiger’s position with respect to Islam might still be considered hegemonic because he subordinates Islam’s history to a Jewish worldview.

Heschel examines Geiger’s work on the common origins of Judaism and Christianity, primarily his *Urschrift und die Übersetzung der Bibel* (1857) and *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (1863), as evidence for his counter-historical struggle to prove the superiority of Judaism over Christianity and its compatibility with Enlightenment modernity. The historical thesis in these works, according to Heschel, is that Second Temple Judaism, as a period of conflicts between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, gave rise to the apostolic movement of Jesus. The novelty of Geiger’s historical study was that he pieced together the circumstances of Jesus’s early life entirely from Jewish, particularly Pharisaic, sources. Geiger’s approach later became “commonplace” among biblical scholars but, because of the implication that Jesus was Jewish and that it was Paul who founded Christianity, Geiger’s thesis initially provoked “hostility” especially among Christian theologians (Heschel, *Abraham Geiger* 6-7). Heschel interprets the
hostile reaction of Christian theologians as a clear sign that Geiger was not just assimilating into the Christian model of history or revising Jewish history in Christian terms. Geiger’s revision of Christian history through Jewish sources constituted a “Jewish revolt against Christian colonialism” within the field of Christian theology (“How the Jews” 50-1).

Geiger’s and other Jewish scholars’ accounts of Jesus’s life as a first-century Jew bear all the characteristics of the counter-historical genre as defined by Amos Funkenstein. Foregrounding Jesus’s Jewishness “demonstrates the Jewish desire to enter the Christian myth, become its hero, and claim the power inherent in it” and thereby functions as the “reversing [of] the [Christian theological] gaze” (Heschel, Abraham Geiger 19). It follows that the counter-identity forged for Jewishness within the Christian theological discourse becomes dependent on the same discourse, and therefore also threatens to erase Jewish particularity (16). Heschel compares this tension between reversal and self-erasure to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s descriptions of nineteenth-century women’s literature in Britain as “killing the angel in the house” by means of a reversal of the image of the female ideal in male literature from within the genre of novel.108 Similarly, Geiger and other members of the Wissenschaft “initiated an effort to destroy the image of Judaism within Christian theology as part of their project of self-definition” (18). The Protestant brand of Old and New Testament scholarship, as we have seen in a previous section of this chapter, was based on the ideology that Christianity was the only religion corresponding to the Enlightenment ideal of universal morality and that Jesus was the exemplary and unique individual carrying all these virtues both historically and ahistorically. Thus, when Geiger claims, from within the same discourse, that Jesus was nothing more than a historically

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108 Heschel refers to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s Madwoman in the Attic.
situated Jew entangled in his own sectarian struggles at that time, he does two things. First, he claims that it was Judaism that bore, via Christianity, universal morality and other virtues of Enlightenment modernity. Second, he highlights the Christian bias in his peers’ historical-philological methods and offers a more radical historicism that nevertheless salvages Jewish ethical monotheism\(^{109}\) instead of Jesus’s personality and the gospels as the basis for a genealogy of modern Europe. In fact, Heschel observes that Geiger did not simply offer a defence of Judaism, but made “a presentation of Judaism as the universal religion [from which] Christianity and Islam [were] derived” (105). It can also be said that Geiger’s Jewish challenge to existing biblical scholarship signifies a discursive change that separates \textit{Wissenschaft}, or the part of it that we now call “religious studies,” from theology, since it expands from a Christian worldview towards a more inclusive one.

Ken Koltun-Fromm in \textit{Abraham Geiger’s Liberal Judaism: Personal Meaning and Religious Authority} (2006) aims to supplement Heschel’s focus on Geiger’s outward resistance to Christian theology by concentrating on his inward struggle to reform Judaism and Jewish identity. His book presents Geiger’s historical scholarship as an example of identity politics and of liberalism grounded on the authority of personal meaning. Koltun-Fromm further argues that Geiger satisfies the need for personal meaning by summarizing religious ideals. In this context, Judaism’s spirit is emphasized as the expression of Kantian pure morality while the external,

\(^{109}\) Theodore M. Vial in his introduction to \textit{Ethical Monotheism, Past and Present} explains that ethical monotheism was a notion that specifically emerged from the post-Humean dilemmas of hermeneutical practice. It was a response to the question, how “faith [would be] possible in the modern context in which a historical consciousness is part of the furniture of mind” (3). Vial mentions a line of Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers, running from G.R. Lessing to F.D.E. Schleiermacher and Hermann Cohen, who treated ethical monotheism as a viable alternative to Kant’s transcendental ethics. He adds that it eventually became a Jewish argument as the basis for the emancipation movement. Today, the ethical monotheism concept is being revived in theological circles to emphasize interfaith dialogue and the common principles of the Abrahamic religions, as for example, in \textit{Monotheism and Tolerance: Recovering the Religion of Reason} by Robert Erlewine.
“material history” that developed around Judaism, including Christianity and Islam, becomes the ever-changing prosthesis of this moral essence (Heschel, Abraham Geiger 19). According to Koltun-Fromm, Geiger was interested in reforming pedagogy to make Jewish schooling more attractive to Jewish children who were faced with a variety of secular and Christian-biased educational options at the time (2). His role as a liberal rabbi thus determined his historical scholarship on Jewish history. Koltun-Fromm’s contextualization of Geiger’s works is a “project of recovery” for understanding how today’s Jewish identities are determined by “those personal sources that motivate and inspire” (Koltun-Fromm 3). He rescues Geiger’s scholarship from the accusation of being merely apologetics on the one hand, or a simple attempt at assimilation on the other. He shows us how religious identity, in the past or today, is built on the authoritative reading of textual history in a way that is strongly connected to personal and social commitments in the present. “The practice of that authority,” Koltun-Fromm comments, “lies in reading the Bible as an Urschrift—as a text of competing cultural pressures that inform the struggle for Jewish identity, then and now” (Koltun-Fromm 9).

Heschel and Koltun-Fromm’s perspectives give us the insight that Geiger’s reversal of the Christian myth of Jesus served in its own time as a move towards a pluralistic Enlightenment that would include Judaism both as a current identity and as an historical development not overshadowed by Christian narratives. We can also conclude, following these two scholars, that Geiger remained an Enlightenment thinker who reversed Christian essentialism only to replace it with a Jewish one. Michael A. Meyer’s description of Geiger as the intellectual leader of the Jewish Reform, meanwhile, assures us that Geiger’s most important legacy was not so much the promotion of a Judaeocentric worldview or Jewish apologetics as his uncompromisingly scientific approach to Judaism. Although Geiger was deeply committed to his Jewish identity,
“scientific truth, not faith, remained his ultimate standard” (Meyer, *Response* 89). Scientific truth in the matter of cultural production, including sacred texts, could only be reached by careful historical-philological study.

Meyer maintains that Geiger’s approach to the revival of Jewish identity was dedicated not to bringing back ancient orthodoxies and dogmas but rather to “demolishing” the timeless authority of sacred texts so as to allow a “closer identification” with the Jewish creative spirit (91). He connects this historicist perspective to J.G. Herder’s influence on Geiger’s hermeneutics. While studying philosophy and history in Bonn, Geiger came to regard Herder’s historical hermeneutics, particularly the suggestion that the Bible was the product of its time, as more attractive than Hegel’s comprehensive system of human mind (Meyer, *Response* 89). At the same time, he was highly critical of the historical strain in Herder’s thought that led to Romanticism, which he dismissed as “thoughtlessly venerating whatever [was] ancient” (96). In the field of biblical criticism, Meyer also mentions David Friedrich Strauss’s profound influence on Geiger. Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* (1836) was an example for Geiger of what he himself wanted to do in regards to the sacred texts of Judaism, since this work completely demolished the traditional authority of the gospels, making them mere “myths” and contingent documents of their times (Meyer, *Response* 92). Geiger’s *WMJ* was published before Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*, and he had already applied such a form of radical historicism to the Qur’an. However, since the Qur’an’s textual authority was never taken seriously among biblical critics and Orientalists, Geiger’s historicization of the Qur’an did not have the same shocking impact as Strauss’s work did. In fact, some contemporary Orientalists, such as Silvestre de Sacy, critiqued Geiger for giving too sympathetic an account of Muhammad in *WMJ* (Pearlman x).
“The cumulative effect of Geiger’s critical work,” Meyer concludes,

was thus to historicize and therefore to relativize every sacred text of Judaism, biblical no less than rabbinic. Each reflected its age and origin, none stood above its historical milieu, none could serve as unassailable [or] as timeless norms for belief and practice. […] Texts [as such] could be seen as sources for the spirit of Judaism. (Meyer, *Response* 93)

A spirit that is subject to such a degree of historicization resembles Derrida’s description of *psyche* as explained in Chapter Two in the context of Hermann Cohen’s philosophy. Geiger’s radical historicization creates the effect of the double-sided mirror of Judaism and Christianity, revolving and never deciding on one side as the universal identity. As Heschel states, “Judaism’s significance to Western civilization is tied to the success of its ‘daughter’ religions, Christianity and Islam” (“How the Jews” 64). Geiger’s Jewish “spirit” is mediated through changing cultural circumstances, unlike the Hegelian spirit that evolves in history towards perfection. Geiger as a historian, then, joins the rank of Jewish intellectuals who since Mendelssohn negotiated their Jewish identity within modernity in terms of ethical monotheism, which in principle assumes an Abrahamic unity. That this new heading of Abrahamic creates a new totality and therefore a new violence is a point that cannot be ignored. For the time being, however, we will consider Geiger’s *WMJ* as a gesture towards a more inclusive and pluralistic scholarship, since it also includes Islam as part of the monotheistic spirit he so elevates, although only as a historical artifact rather than as a living faith.110 One could easily downplay the importance of *WMJ* for Geiger’s life and mission, given that he wrote the piece as a requirement for an essay prize and

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110 Heschel points out how Geiger adopted the Romantic view that religion was a “single [and] innate phenomenon,” yet added that this universal spirit was born out of the soul of Judaism (“Jewish Philislamism” 68).
never wrote at length on the topic of Islam again. However, as we will see, Geiger’s reputation, at least among the Christian and Jewish biblical scholars of his time, rested on the impact of this work, which in the long run led to an increased interest among other Jewish scholars in the historical study of Islam.

Friedrich Niewöhner in his preface to the latest German edition of *WMJ* affirms that Geiger’s dissertation on Muhammad was the first work that represented Muhammad “without disrespect, degradation or even praise,” and resulted in a “neutralization” of Islam, as “theological critique was replaced by historical description” (9, my translation from German). He adds that Ignaz Goldziher would count as the founder of modern Islamic studies but that it was Geiger’s *WMJ* that determined the trajectory of the field. The observation that a “neutral” study of Islam and its sacred text was initiated by scholars who, like Geiger and Goldziher, were Jews and also committed to the historical study of Judaism is likewise the basis for a volume recently published by a group of German scholars of the Qur’an. The English translation of the title is “*In the Full Light of History*: Wissenschaft des Judentums and the Beginnings of Critical Qur’anic Research (2008). At least a quarter of the book is dedicated to Abraham Geiger. Angelika Neuwirth in the introduction explains that Geiger’s work was the first “non-theological perspective on Islam, a novelty in European scholarship at the time” (13). She confirms that it could be seen as a sympathetic and more humane approach to Islam compared to what was being written by established Orientalists. In the same volume, Aaron W. Hughes remarks that in the works of these Jewish scholars the Qur’an was subjected for the first time to the methods that were used for “the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Vedas,” a process that had the exact

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111 Heschel observes that Geiger’s positive view of Muhammad later changed to a negative one in his work *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (Abraham Geiger 54n12).
opposite effect of “othering” Islam, as is assumed by the accusation of Orientalism. Hughes argues that the German-Jewish scholars of Islam gave Islam its due respect as a world religion by “showing how Muhammad and the Qur’an fitted into broader religious, intellectual, and philological contexts of the Arabia of late antiquity” (“Contextualizing Contexts” 93). The common goal of the authors in this volume is to call attention to the interest of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the Qur’an, in order to “initiate a dialogue between the position of Islamic tradition and historical criticism [of the Qur’an]” (12). Or, as one of the editors of the book elsewhere states, the exemplary identity struggle of the Jewish minority and its relation to the historical-critical study of the Qur’an “expands the horizon of tradition [Traditionshorizont] on both sides” and can therefore “serve as a common signifier for the co-inhabitation of Europe today” (Hartwig 253, my translation from German).

Heschel’s contribution to the same volume, titled “Abraham Geiger and the Emergence of Jewish Philislamism,” explores what was at stake for these Jewish scholars in their making of an alliance with Islam against the hegemonic narratives of the Christian scholarship at the time. Her demonstration that Philislamism among German-Jewish scholars formed a counter-balance to Philhellenism among the Christian scholars is especially interesting for our purposes in that it points to the severed genealogy between Qur’anic and literary studies. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Philhellenism—as carried over into Matthew Arnold’s and Erich Auerbach’s criticism as the Hebrew/Hellene dichotomy—played a major role in the modern development of literary criticism as a putatively universal practice. While Hebraism is often recognized as the monotheistic counter-balance to Hellenism and associated with Judaism, the fact that Islam was treated by Jewish scholars under the same umbrella term is generally ignored in the history of literary criticism. “The rhetorics of Orientalism that Said identified among European scholars,”
Heschel argues, “were shifted by Jewish scholars from Islam to Hellenism […]. The Hellenic was disparaged for having degenerated into Hellenism that was the womb of Christianity and its compromised monotheism”—as we have seen in the previous section in context of the dialogue between Kant and Mendelssohn. As Heschel makes clear, the real issue was the capacity of Judaism (or “Hebraism”) as pure morality to serve as an alternative to the “immorality of modern European society [born out of a] Christianity [that] was contaminated by paganism” (“Jewish Philislamism” 73). As a result, she concludes, Jews created a *Kulturislamismus*, or “cultural Islamism,” with very selective traits common to both Islam and Judaism and with an emphasis on what they perceived as the degenerative influence of Christianity on Europe. In short, they shaped their own and their ally’s image in the mirror of the Other:

> With the Christian as signifier, Judaism is lost, denigrated, swallowed, superseded. With the Islamic as signifier, Judaism seemed to be elevated—at least in the imagination of pre-World War II Jews. […] Perhaps we should consider not simply that [Jewish scholars of Islam] invented an Islam after the model of Judaism, but the reverse: that they invented a Judaism after the image of Islam: a religion of ethical monotheism, rejecting mysticism, apocalypticism, and anthropomorphism, centered on family, law and morality. (Heschel, “Jewish Philislamism” 86)

It is curious to note that such a construction of oppositional identity resembles today’s anti-Western polemics in Islamist circles. It is possible that the foundations not only of today’s postcolonialism, as Heschel argues, but also of today’s Islamic apologetics or even fundamentalism are to be found in the anti-Christian Jewish polemics of the nineteenth-century European scholarship.

A further important point is that both Heschel and Hughes ascribe to Geiger the nineteenth-century myth of the golden era of medieval Spain, where Muslims and Jews lived in a “creative symbiosis” (Heschel, *Abraham Geiger* 61 & “Jewish Philislamism” 78-9; Hughes,
“Golden Age” 59-62). However, as Hughes notes, Geiger seemed to be less interested in Islam’s contribution to the creation of such a symbiosis than in showing how Judaism can thrive once state suppression is eliminated; in other words, Geiger was using medieval Spain as a “construct serving as a basis for Jewish renewal in the present” (“Golden Age” 62). Henceforth, Jewish Philislamism became not only a public phenomenon in Germany but also in Britain, as the case of Benjamin Disraeli’s Turcophilia attests. Jewish Philislamism uses Islam as a strong ally in the fight against Christian hegemony, thereby raising Judaism to the level of ethical monotheism. Thus the “Judaizing nature of early Islam,” as Gilman notes, also functions as “a model for the potential reform of contemporary Judaism” in reaction to the effacing power of the Christian-biased Enlightenment and its Romantic offshoot (“Golden Age” 62).

The myth of Jewish-Muslim alliance in the nineteenth-century can also be perceived as feeding into the “Semitic hypothesis,” which was inscribed into the popular imagination by Orientalists like Adolphe Pictet, and later Ernest Renan and Friedrich Max Müller, as a counter-identity to Indo-European or Aryan languages and influences (Anidjar, *Semites* 13-38). As

112 The term “creative symbiosis” was first coined to express the medieval Jewish-Muslim relations by S.D. Goitein in *Jews and Arabs: Their Contact Through the Ages* (1955). Hava Lazarus-Yafeh comments that this symbiosis was imagined to be a result of the common philosophy of monotheism confronting “the pagan cultural legacy” of medieval Christianity (“Judeo-Arabic Culture” 102).

113 Tom Reiss’s chapter on “Jewish Orientalism” gives examples of this Jewish Philislamism in both Britain and Germany, including the “Moorish style” of architecture used to build synagogues, of which the most famous one is in Berlin (229-30).

114 Gilman evokes Ignaz Goldziher alongside Geiger to emphasizing their search for the Jewish roots of Islam. He points to Goldziher’s diary entry, in which he praises Islam as a model that contemporary Judaism should look up to. It is worth quoting Goldziher’s statement in full here as it perfectly exemplifies how Jewish Philislamism selectively valorized certain characteristics, such as rationalism, over others in a way that entirely responded to the Jewish scholars’ reaction to the irrational and nativistic aspects of Romanticism in their own times: “I truly entered into the spirit of Islam to such an extent that ultimately I became inwardly convinced that I myself was a Muslim, a judiciously discovered that this was the only religion which, even in its doctrinal and official formulation, can satisfy philosophical minds. My ideal was to elevate Judaism to a similar rational level. Islam, so taught me my experience, is the only religion, in which superstitious and heathen ingredients are not frowned upon by the rationalism, but the orthodox teachings” (Goldziher and Patai 20).

For Geiger’s influence on Goldziher, see Heschel in “Jewish Philislamism,” pp. 80-1.
Heschel shows, scholars like Geiger and Goldziher defended Semitic monotheism as superior and therefore reversed this hypothesis in their polemics against Christianity while keeping it structurally intact. Goldziher, for example, defended both Islam and Judaism against Renan’s claim that Semitic monotheism was lacking in mythology and Semitic peoples were therefore incapable of “scientific and artistic originality” (Heschel, “Jewish Philislamism” 82). Goldziher, who remained in dialogue with Renan throughout his life, wrote works that demonstrated the richness and creativity of mythology in both Hebrew sources and Muslim ones, particularly the Muslim Hadith.115 Goldziher followed Geiger’s path but with a more pronounced sympathy and appreciation for Islam than Geiger ever had.116

Finally, apart from the Jewish struggle with the dominant Christian discourses in biblical studies on the one hand and the reformation attempts within Judaism on the other, there were also some practical, and non-ideological reasons behind the proliferating Jewish interest in Islam. Jewish scholars, like Geiger and Goldziher, who were raised with a traditional Jewish upbringing and learned Hebrew early in their life, found it easier than their Christian counterparts to learn Arabic later. Furthermore, Geiger’s WMJ coincided with the beginning of the political collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was not yet seen as the “sick man of the Orient,” but it had started losing land in Europe, with the independence of Serbia in 1817 and Greece in

115 See, for example, Goldziher’s Mythos bei den Hebräern und seine Entwicklung, Untersuchung zur Mythologie and Religionswissenschaft (1876), translated into English as Mythology among the Hebrews and its Historical Development by Russel Martineau (1877), and Mohammedanische Studien (1889-90) translated as Muslim Studies by S.M. Stern and C.R. Barber.

116 Heschel (“How the Jews” 63-4) and Niewöhner (30-3) report that Geiger also had an intellectual exchange with Renan on the Jewish background of Jesus. Both confirm that Renan was appreciative of Geiger’s study of Jesus’s rabbinic sources—he even made a positive reference to Geiger’s Urschrift in the preface to his famous Life of Jesus (1863)—but that he at the end did not agree with Geiger’s thesis and instead fabricated his own version of the Pharisaic background of Jesus. Renan, although as radical in his historicism towards Christianity, was more appreciative of Christianity’s Hellenizing influence than Geiger ever could be.
1830. Muslim exegetical sources became more easily available and Jewish scholars, with their facility in Arabic, were the first ones to decipher them.

In the end, the ideological ferment of the Jewish scholar who used the orientalization of his own history by Christian scholars to his advantage is the only way to explain this widespread phenomenon of German-Jewish scholarship on Islam in the nineteenth-century. Bernard Lewis, who, to his credit, in 1979 first brought attention to this historical phenomenon, states that “Jewish scholars […] played a key role in the development of an objective, nonpolemical, and positive evaluation of Islamic civilization” because they were “less affected by nostalgia for the Crusades, preoccupation with imperial policy, or the desire to convert the ‘heathen’” than their Christian counterparts (370). Martin Kramer comments that the “heightened empathy and sympathy for Islam” among the Jews in the nineteenth century was based on the rationale that a “Europe respectful of Islam and Muslims was more likely to show respect for Judaism and Jews” (3). Both Lewis and Kramer’s claims are part of their polemics against Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. And yet, I think combining the perspectives of the Lewis-camp and the Said-camp on nineteenth-century Orientalism in order to look for signs of hospitality while acknowledging its hostility will lead to a more sincere engagement with the Muslim perspective. The following pages, therefore, examine Geiger’s *WTJ* with the awareness that one needs to contextualize the various representations of Islam in their own historical circumstances and in relation to the different responsibilities that these circumstances prompted.
Geiger’s Representation of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in *WMJ*

Geiger’s *WMJ* is marked throughout by a tone of scientificity, which to a contemporary reader might appear naïve at first. However, from the first page of the introduction, phrases such as “scientific precision,” “evidence,” “probability,” and “scientific presentation,” together with Geiger’s clarification of how this scientificity can be attained through a careful, text-based historicization of the “events of [Muhammad’s] time, which either determined his actions or were determined by him,” give the sense that Geiger was aware of the novelty of his approach to the Qur’an (Geiger 1-2).\(^{117}\) The structure of *WMJ* is dictated by this scientific approach and precision prescribed by the historical-philological method. Geiger first carefully contextualizes Muhammad’s life circumstances around the time when the Qur’an was produced and looks for evidence of the Prophet’s receptiveness to Jewish influence. He is careful neither to Romanticize Muhammad nor declare him a villain or deliberate deceiver. Instead, strategically avoiding the discussion of whether the Qur’an was revealed or fabricated by Muhammad, Geiger upholds Islam’s originary myth that Muhammad was illiterate and calls him a “genuine enthusiast, who was himself convinced of his divine mission” (25). The “First Division” of *WMJ* documents Muhammad’s struggle to win the favour of his Jewish neighbours and his appreciation for the monotheistic principles of Judaism, together with his concern about and interest in “the compatibility [of Muhammad’s religious ideals] with his plan to borrow from Judaism” (2). Geiger here establishes that Muhammad adopted only from oral sources. In the second division, he demonstrates that borrowing has actually taken place, by moving from narrower to larger discursive elements in the Qur’an. He first explores “concepts” and “thoughts”, then “views,” and lastly “stories” taken over from Judaism. He concludes with an appendix, in which he refers

\(^{117}\) Though I will consult Geiger’s original text in German for my analysis, for the citations I use the English translation by F.M. Young originally published in 1896 with the title *Judaism and Islam*.
to passages from the Qur’an and shows that Muhammad not only borrowed from but also assessed and revised the Jewish sources with a “hostile spirit” (2). In the “Preface,” Geiger declares that he relied upon the “bare Arabic text of the Qur’an [and] an intimate acquaintance with Judaism and its writings” (xxx-xxxi). The only non-Qur’anic Islamic source that he used was the thirteenth-century commentary of Baydawi. He also confined himself to Jewish writings before Muhammad’s time—the Bible, the Talmud, and the midrashim (xxxii). The limitation of his Islamic and Jewish sources Geiger also presents as a sign of scientific precision and “an unbiased mind” (xxxi).

A prospective reader might infer from the title of *WMJ* that Muhammad authored the Qur’an and that he did so by “borrowing” extensively from the Judaic sources around him. Such a claim would still not be welcomed by many faithful Muslims today. However, as soon as we look more closely at the text itself and the discursive strategies it employs, we discover that this is far from Geiger’s intention. Rather than seeking to demonstrate the human authorship and inauthenticity of the Qur’an or Muhammad’s unoriginality, Geiger seems to be ignoring such controversial topics intentionally for the sake of establishing an objective and scientific language. In fact, it is this sensitivity that makes Geiger’s approach to the Qur’an in *WMJ* so pioneering. Niewöhner comments that “the profanization of the Qur’an as a revealed text” implied by the verb “aufgenommen” in the title is nothing more than a sign that Geiger treats the Qur’an as “poetry” (*Dichtung*) and Muhammad as a “historical persona” (18-19). I will look at this discursive choice as the first vector of Geiger’s hermeneutical hospitality towards Islam, and

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118 Parvaz Manzoor, for example, calls the modern historical-critical philology of the Qur’an “a project born of spite, bred in frustration and nourished by vengeance: the spite of the powerful for the powerless, the frustration of the ‘rational’ towards the ‘superstitious’ […] an assault on the citadel of Muslim faith” (35).
argue that what motivated this choice were the other vectors, namely his Jewish-German subject position and his chosen responsibility to reform and elevate Judaism within modernity.

Geiger’s discourse of “disinterested” scholarship

To overcome the initial hegemonic impression that the text imposes, we need to first scrutinize the problematic English translation of the title. The rendering of the German verb *aufnehmen* in the original title and within the text as “borrowing” in English stems from the first and only translation of this work, by F.M. Young in 1896. Secondary literature in English today still uses the verb “to borrow” to describe the interaction between Muhammad and the Jewish sources as documented in Geiger’s work. However, the verbs *aufnehmen* in German and *derivare* in Latin, from which the German word was originally translated, imply more nuanced meanings than the very hegemonic sounding “borrow” that Young prefers. This does not come as a surprise because Young states in her brief translator’s note that she was commissioned by the Cambridge Mission at Delhi in India to translate Geiger’s text to for use in their “dealings with the Muhammadans” (Geiger xxvii). The text might have been used as proof for Islam’s inauthenticity by the Christian missionaries among Muslims in India or simply as a source of knowledge about Islam. *Aufnehmen* can mean derive, receive, absorb or adapt in German. When these meanings are foregrounded, the question of authenticity—in “borrowing” the objects essentially remain Jewish—becomes irrelevant to Geiger’s intentions in *WMJ*. As a matter of fact, when we look at Geiger’s text closely, we see that both Muhammad’s agency and his ability to critically adopt the Jewish sources are emphasized. Geiger gives an account of how

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119 The German title was roughly adapted from the subject that was set for the competition for which Geiger’s essay won the prize, which was announced in Latin as *Inquiratur in fontes Alcorani seu legis Mohammedicae eos, qui ex Judaismo derivandi sunt* (an inquiry into sources of the Qur’an derived from Judaism) (Geiger xxx).
Muhammad altered Jewish sources, for example on the order of Angels, through an “intentional misrepresentation [verfälschende Absicht]” (10). Of course, we have to take into account that both the German original and the English translation of this phrase express the accusation of falsification of what was originally the “truth” of Judaism. However, Geiger does not accuse Muhammad of distortion, since the image he draws of the Prophet is quite different than that of a deceiver. Later, for instance, he states that the Jewish sources appealed to “the poetic genius of the prophet,” who took material over from Judaism “as long as the Jewish views were not in direct opposition to his own” (17) and in order to “restore” earlier revelations that “had been spoiled by additions and perversions” (22). We see here a depiction of Muhammad as a person with principles, whose mission was driven by poetic and reformist motives. As Geiger himself notes, this constitutes a stark contrast to the previous depictions of Muhammad as someone who “deceived intentionally, and with a well-weighed consideration of each step as to whether or not it would help him towards his aim of deluding others” (24). Geiger distinguishes his image of Muhammad from the “unjustifiable […] harsh judgments generally passed upon him,” for example by S.F.G. Wahl (the German translator of the Qur’an which Geiger also consulted for his Qur’anic citations). He then emphasizes that Muhammad was a “genuine enthusiast, who was himself convinced of his divine mission, and to whom the union of all religions appeared necessary to the welfare of mankind” (25).

Geiger, I wish to argue, identified with Muhammad to a certain degree as a fellow promoter of an essential and ethical monotheism. His Muhammad, on the one hand, tried to adapt Jewish monotheistic principles to his own times and milieu, and, on the other, strove to

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120 Geiger also has a separate category for Muhammad’s alteration of Jewish sources as “mistakes” due to the process of oral transmission (18).
purify his version of this monotheistic essence from the corrupting influences of Christianity and of certain particularistic Jewish sects. Heschel, likewise, interprets the parallels between Geiger and Muhammad as a chain of “misreadings,” according to which, “Muhammad [and Paul] misread Judaism [just as] Geiger misread Islam and Christianity to gain support for the religious tradition [he was] creating,” which in the case of Geiger was Reform Judaism (*Abraham Geiger* 62). In short, Geiger reads the history of Qur’an in response to his present need to reform Judaism of its particularistic and antiquated elements and to find a comfortable position for an unassimilated Jewish community within modern and secular German surroundings. The relations between Geiger’s Muhammad and his Jewish surroundings and Geiger himself and his German surroundings are more reciprocal and transformative than the verb “borrow” can express.

In addition to the weight exerted by the English verb “borrow,” Geiger’s growing attachment to Judaism in the later years of his career as a rabbi can sometimes overshadow the positive and independent image of Muhammad in *WMJ*. Geiger’s later writings usually contribute to Islam’s being interpreted as a mere branch of Judaism in this work. But Geiger, when writing his dissertation on the Qur’an, was a young scholar at the height of his idealism and closest to the Protestant philosophies he encountered with admiration during his university years. It was quite possible that attachment to his Jewish identity and admiration for Enlightenment principles and for the notion of a universal religion guided his strategies in representing the three monotheistic religions in *WMJ* as ethical monotheisms. Heschel explains that Geiger in his later years grew more hostile and cynical towards both Christianity and Islam and more particularistic in his Jewishness—to the degree that in 1862 he called Judaism the “only religion of revelation” (“Jewish Philislamism” 53). However, as far as the limits of the text
in hand are concerned, the revelatory truths of Judaism or Islam are in the background while the
dominant sense is of the possibility of synthesis and transformation.

For instance, when introducing the section that accounts for the “thoughts” that
Muhammad adopted from Judaism, Geiger makes clear that he is not simply talking about the
unoriginality of Muhammad’s historical borrowings from Judaism. In fact, he divides the section
in two: in the first part, he accounts for the conceptions that are “radically new [to] the adapting
religion [so that] they require accordingly new words [from Judaism] for their expression”; in
the second, he will account for the conceptions that indicate that some thoughts have “long been
in existence but not in this combination, the form in which these conceptions being a novel one,
and the view, therefore, which arises from this unusual presentation being new” (30). The
emphasis on the novelty of Muhammad’s adaptation shows that Geiger considers Muhammad
capable of being original and inventive. Yet, such a view of Muhammad as an exegete and
reformer also proves Geiger’s scientific approach to new religious identities, which no matter
how radical in intent, are always contingent on the existing traditions and discourses. It is
almost as if Geiger were conceding that he himself could not be radically original in his
Jewishness, without also being influenced by the language that he shared with his
contemporaries, namely Enlightenment universalism.

Heschel, drawing on Geiger’s later writings, interprets Geiger’s description of Islam as
“unoriginal in terms of the human religious imagination,” and adds that Geiger’s loyalty to the
historical-philological method meant that there was nothing at stake in “disprov[ing] Islam’s
claim to divine revelation” (Heschel, Abraham Geiger 61). I suggest that it was exactly Geiger’s
strictly scientific methodology that secured him against the danger of slipping into a Jewish
apologetic argument to prove Islam’s inauthenticity. This scientificity, under the appearance of
disinterestedness, was supported by Geiger’s personal commitment to the idea of Abrahamic
unity, which could allow a peaceful co-existence of Christianity, Islam and Judaism within
modernity, without the assimilation or conversion demanded by the Christian host culture. If
Geiger’s text had instead taken the tone of Jewish polemics—Heschel contrasts it to Peter the
Venerable’s polemics against Judaism as the creator of Islamic heresy—the publication of *WMJ*
would have led to discourses of closure instead of further historical investigation resulting in
sympathetic and positive accounts of Islam, such as Goldziher’s, and Jewish Philislamism in
general. Geiger’s discursive opening, posing as disinterested scholarship and yet motivated by
his personal urgencies, amounts, in my view, to a momentary hermeneutical hospitality towards
Islam. The enabler of this hospitality, however seemingly hegemonic at first sight, is the heading
of “Abrahamic” that guides Geiger’s depiction of the three religions in *WMJ*. The way Geiger
represents Judaism in defence and Christianity in opposition determines in turn what kind of
Islam is depicted in *WMJ*.

**Geiger’s German-Jewish subject position**

The question of direct Jewish influence on Muhammad, that is, whether historically and
geographically Muhammad was in close contact with Jewish sources and figures, is explored in
the First Division of *WMJ*. Here Geiger documents, from Jewish sources and from various
histories of Arabia, the political power of Jewish tribes in the Arabian Peninsula during
Muhammad’s life. Most significantly, however, he deduces Jewish influence not only from the
“fear” and “respect” in Muhammad’s mind towards the “physical power” of Jews, but also from
his awareness of their “mental superiority” and their “intellect and wit” (6 & 14). In fact, Geiger
makes the intellectual challenges that the Jews were posing as the primary motive for his
adaptations, rather than Muhammad’s political struggle for power. Such a perspective on Muhammad as an intelligently strategizing agent is not only in contrast with existing depictions of Muhammad as a barbaric warrior-prophet, but it also shows that Geiger wants to align the Prophet, despite the latter’s personal “hatred” for his contemporary Jews, with the monotheistic message of Judaism. Thus, Geiger states that Muhammad wished to have the Jews as “adherents” because “though themselves ignorant, [they were] far in advance of other religious bodies in that knowledge which [he] professed to have received by Divine revelation” (4). Clearly, the “knowledge” that Muhammad distinguishes from the other religions in his region is that of monotheism. Geiger therefore claims that Muhammad adopted Judaism as the best model for the monotheistic worldview he wanted to promote among the polytheistic Arabs of his time, which he called the ignorant age (jahilia) (41).

In effect, Geiger describes Muhammad as the heir of Abraham, who in a polytheistic and fragmented world discovers or has revealed to him the possibility of monotheism. Only in the case of Muhammad, there is already a rich scriptural tradition that has established such monotheism and it happens to be mainly in the possession of his Jewish neighbours. Geiger even argues that Muhammad was not just uncritically taking over religious tenets from Judaism for the attainment of power but eliminating certain aspects, such the particularistic ideas found among his contemporary Jewish neighbours while emphasizing certain others, such as the universality

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121 Geiger states that “Abraham was [Muhammad’s] great prototype, the man of whom he thought most highly, and the one with whom he liked best to compare himself and to make out as one with himself in opinion” (95).
122 Geiger states in the “Appendix” that Muhammad later made laws that were directly in opposition to Jewish ones because he despised certain aspects of Judaism, among them, “that they in common with Christians thought themselves specially favoured by God, [and] that they alone should possess Paradise” (158).
that the attachment to monotheism implies. Thus, Geiger focuses on the universalizing mission of Islam. Examining the transmission of the concept of *Furqan* (deliverance), he explains that, Muhammad entirely diverging from Jewish ideas, intended to establish his religion as that of the world in general. He declared his creed to have been revealed through God’s Apostles from the earliest times, and to have been only renewed and put into a clearer and more convincing form by himself. (41-2)

He makes it clear that Muhammad “desired no peculiarity, no new religion” (21) and that his idea was in “harmony with the spirit of Judaism” and that it was “in fact only an offshoot of a great tree” (45). Clearly, “tree” does not mean Judaism in its latest form as it was lived in Arabia at the time. On the contrary, we should conclude from Geiger’s emphasis on Muhammad’s own selectiveness and corrections that it was a certain “essence” of Judaism that Muhammad wanted to revive. If we were again to refer to the parallels between Muhammad and Geiger, we should remind ourselves of the latter’s attempts at ridding Judaism of its particularistic and nationalistic tenets, and at harmonizing Jewish lifestyle with the religious and intellectual sensibilities of his times by stripping it down to its universal aspects. Thus, Geiger’s Muhammad, like Geiger himself, was attempting to be “in accord with earlier revealed writings,” and to restore “to their proper position those of them which had been spoiled by additions and perversion” (22). Both Geiger and Muhammad can be said to reduce the essence of monotheism to Abraham’s struggle with idols and his submission on Mount Moriah. For both Geiger and Muhammad, rituals, practices and laws had to conform to this essence and hence were open to change according to the circumstances of time and milieu.123

123 Geiger observes that Muhammad did not reject the Arab customs and practices of his time. He explains that Muhammad “had very little intention of imposing a new code of individual laws” and that instead his aim was “the spread of new purified religious opinions, as in the matter of practice he was far too much of an Arab to deviate from inherited usages, unless they came directly into opposition to these higher religious views” (70).
Before looking more closely at the figure of Abraham in Geiger’s depiction of Muhammad, the earlier passages in *WMJ* about Muhammad’s verbal disputes with Jews in the Qur’an should be briefly mentioned. Geiger notes that the Jews of Arabia, though politically powerful, were culturally inferior to Jews elsewhere, as shown “by the silence of the Talmud concerning them” (6). He explains that still enough of the Jewish “traditions and pithy sayings survived in the mouth of people, which doubtless gave the Jews an appearance of intellectual superiority” (7). Geiger’s primary evidence for claiming that Muhammad was influenced by Jewish ideas consists of Qur’anic passages that contain the “witty play of question and answer” between Muhammad and the Jews which the Prophet regarded as “bona fide expressions of opinions and not as mere teasing mockeries” (8). Such a depiction of Muhammad’s verbal interaction with the relatively ignorant Jews around him could lead us to think that Geiger did not think very highly of Muhammad’s mental capabilities, or that proving the intellectual and witty nature of Jews was important for his argument against the Christian theological claims about Jewish inferiority. Heschel comments that “[p]reserving some degree of Muhammad’s integrity and intelligence was necessary to Geiger’s construct, since Muhammad would otherwise be unable to comprehend the religious teachings he was transmitting” (*Abraham Geiger* 54). Sander Gilman, meanwhile, refers to Muhammad’s interaction with the Jews as described in Geiger’s work as a reflection of the anti-Semitic trope of the “smart Jew.” For Gilman, Geiger describes the Muslim fear that Jews are manipulating the world through their “slyness”; at the same time, Muhammad functions as a stand-in for Christians in proving how the latter are “crypto-Jews themselves, fearing the point of their origin” (231–2). Neither of these viewpoints detracts from the positive image that Geiger draws of Muhammad. Geiger’s main
concern, I contend, was to depict Muhammad as a great thinker who was challenged by the circumstances of his times and surroundings.

It is likely that Geiger thought that a reformist and intelligently critical Muhammad would better suit his own Jewish subject position and the urgencies he perceived around him. Muhammad, like Abraham the prophet, stood up against the polytheism and idolatry that he perceived in his surroundings, just as Geiger fought the discriminatory, nativistic and “Hellenic” flights he observed in the Protestant scholarship of his time. It is a purified monotheism that Geiger depicts in the guise of Muhammad and the Jewish influences that surrounded him:

[The] idea of the unity of God [is] the fundamental doctrine of Israel and Islam. At the time of the rise of the latter, this view was to be found in Judaism alone, and therefore Muhammad must have borrowed it from that religion. (Geiger 46)

Geiger elevates the “unity of God” as the supreme value in Judaism and as one that Muhammad also aspired to preserve in the Qur’an. In the context of the Hellenism-versus-Hebraism debates—or their extensions—within the discursive practices that Geiger was writing from, WMJ raises the flag of monotheism against the Hellenism of contemporary biblical scholarship of his time. Particularly in the section about the transmission of the stories about the prophet Abraham, there are clear signs that Geiger aligns Muhammad with the teachings and figure of the patriarch. He points to the passages in the Qur’an that state that “Abraham’s faith […]is preached in the Qur’an” and that Abraham “was the believer in the unity of God […], neither Jew nor Christian, but he was a believer in the unity of God, given up to God (a Muslim)” (Qur’an qtd. in Geiger 95). Geiger is determined to prove the immense influence that the midrashic stories of Abraham had on Muhammad. For example, he shows how “Abraham is intended to be a type of Muhammad” and how Muhammad, when reporting the speeches ascribed to Abraham, “indulges
in digressions unsuitable to any but himself, and thus falls from the part of narrator into that of admonisher” (99). By emphasizing Muhammad’s affinity with the mythical father of monotheism—particularly in the context of Muhammad’s narration of Abraham’s destruction of the idols—Geiger seeks to demonstrate that Muhammad was not seeking to be the founder of yet another sect of Judaism with minor differences in practice but a progenitor of another Abrahamic faith. Certainly Geiger saw both Islam and Christianity as extensions of Judaism, as Heschel underlines. However, for him this Judaism was not the religion under its current forms and practices, but an Abrahamic brand of monotheism fit to serve as a model for universal morality. Through his desire to reform Judaism through scholarship and through his contempt for current Christianity, Geiger provides a respectful depiction of Islam as a genuine religious movement, and thus, in my terms, practises a hospitable hermeneutics of the Qur’an.

**Geiger’s response to Christian biblical studies**

Muhammad’s positive image in *WMJ* serves to strengthen Geiger’s hypothesis that both Islam and Judaism have a monotheistic superiority in the face of Christianity’s Hellenic paganism. I will now examine the polemical moments in the text which are mainly directed against the biased and universalizing tendencies of Geiger’s Protestant Christian opponents in the field of biblical studies. Geiger’s struggle against the hegemonic language of Protestant universalism in biblical scholarship does not only have a liberative function for Judaism but also for Islam. Such an alliance between Islam and Judaism clearly reinforces the dichotomy between Christian-Hellenic Europe and the monotheistic Orient, but this time it is the latter that is imposed as superior. It is important to remember that such a reversal of the Hellene/Hebrew dichotomy, while keeping it structurally intact, constitutes the opposite of what Said claims about nineteenth-century Orientalism. It is in fact, as Heschel shows in her book, a form of Occidentalism.
Geiger’s opposition to Christian hegemony in European thought shows itself only subtly and on few occasions within the scientific language he so carefully employs to study the Qur’an. His main thesis that Jewish sources had a greater influence on Muhammad than Christian ones can be regarded as an argument against the existing scholarship’s claim that Islam was just a Christian heresy. As we have seen, Geiger’s study successfully and convincingly documents how Muhammad not only instigated a local reaction to existing forms of Christianity and paganism in the Arabian peninsula, but also offered a Jewish-Abrahamic correction to these in the Qur’an. Geiger upholds a hierarchy between Christianity and Judaism, both in respect to their influence on Muhammad’s mission and in their monotheistic closeness to the religion of Abraham. For instance, when providing evidence for Muhammad’s interaction with his Jewish neighbours, he refers to the passage in the Qur’an about “the different creeds [which] mentions the Jews immediately after the Muslims” and shows that the Qur’an further promises “God-fearing Jews absolute equality with Muslims”; he then concludes that in the Qur’an “precedence over other religious bodies is given to the Jews” (16). Although such a verdict cannot directly be considered a polemic against Christian scholarship, we may assume that the hierarchy between the three religions that Geiger points out in the Qur’an confirms Muhammad’s monotheistic mission. Moreover, Geiger proves that Muhammad’s “intimate knowledge” of the Old Testament could not have stemmed from Christian sources since the Christians of that period would not put the “Old Testament on a level with the New in respect of holiness and divine inspiration [and had] a more lively interest in the New Testament, since it was the expression of their separation and

124 Geiger’s scholarly success was directly tied to this specific thesis, which was taken seriously among biblical scholars and Orientalists at the time. Heschel relates how following Geiger’s WMJ a number of publications appeared further arguing for “the predominance of Jewish influence of Islam” (Abraham Geiger 57). Eventually, other Jewish scholars also became interested, such as Gustav Weil, who made this approach more popular among the scholars of late nineteenth-century Britain and Germany (Pearlman xi).
independence” (74). From this statement we can infer that Geiger’s Muhammad felt closer to the
emphasis on monotheism and the figure of Abraham in the Jewish sources than he did to the
New Testament’s accounts of Jesus’s life or its intimations of the doctrine of the Trinity.125
Geiger’s scientific method of citing the textual sources of the Qur’an—and especially the novelty
of his inclusion of midrashic sources—thus operates as a rhetorical strategy. It reveals his own
view of the hierarchy of the three monotheisms: Judaism via Abraham at the origin, then Islam
within an Arab context, and finally Christianity, with the latter corrupted by the polytheism of
the Greeks.

On other occasions, Geiger enters a direct conversation with the Christian scholars of his
time. We are clearly told, for example, that he intentionally “limits” himself to the doctrines in
the Qur’an adopted from Judaism instead of attempting to “expound the whole Qur’an [or] set
forth the theology of the Qur’an; an undertaking which was begun with considerable success in
the Tübingen Zeitschrift für Evang. Theol. [Tübingen Journal for Evangelical Theology]”126
(45). We can understand this as another of Geiger’s rhetorical strategies for distinguishing his
approach from the Christian-biased scholarship of his time. On several other occasions, Geiger
takes a more direct stance against the previous depictions of Muhammad within Christian-
influenced scholarship. For example, he mentions Wahl, the German translator of the Qur’an,
whose version was widely used among Orientalist scholars at the time.127 We have seen above
how Geiger contrasted his unbiased account of Muhammad to that of Wahl. Geiger mentions

125 We cannot talk of this later point with certainty as there is no mention of the doctrine of Trinity in
WMJ. Nevertheless, there is enough emphasis on the unity of God in Islam and Judaism to make us think
that Geiger rates Christianity lower for having deviated from such unity.
126 Heschel shows how Geiger was influenced by the Tübingen school of theology, which at the time
counted as the “avant-garde” school of biblical criticism; and yet he was also critical of their tenets
(Heschel, Abraham Geiger 118-8).
127 Niewöhner comments that Geiger translated the verses from the Qur’an himself, while occasionally
consulting Wahl’s translation.
Wahl again when referring to passages in the Qur’an in which Muhammad’s own voice blends with the speeches of the prophet Abraham. Geiger disagrees with Wahl’s “desperate expedient” that these passages must be explained by “a transposition of verses, or an interpolation”; instead, Geiger argues that the “true explanation [was] rather Muhammad’s entire identification of Abraham with himself” (100). Here, Wahl’s side of the debate assumes imperfections and errors in the transmission and recording of the Qur’an to the extent of denying Muhammad’s agency. However, Geiger, more in line with the Muslim view, claims that these switches between narrative voices were intended by Muhammad and were a sign of his poetic adaptation of the Abraham stories. As Niewöhner notes, Geiger critiques Wahl’s “Christian-polemical prejudices against Muhammad,” of which “no traces could be found in Abraham Geiger [because] in this text he was merely a philologist, and his method was ‘historical criticism’” (14). I suggest that Geiger preferred this method because it provided a rhetorical strategy for sheltering not only Islam and its founder from such over determined Protestant readings but also his own religion Judaism.

Geiger’s most direct confrontation with Christian scholarship in *WMJ* highlights his own Jewish subject position:

In those days people had not reached such a pitch of so-called enlightenment, as to consider the followers of one creed only as in the right, and to regard everything belonging to another belief as worthless; to restrict to Christians the elements common to humanity, and to condemn Judaism as crafty and lifeless. (Geiger 23)

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128 On quite a few occasions, Geiger refers to Muhammad’s poetic drive and his tendency to embellish stories. For instance, referring to Muhammad’s use of the patriarch narratives in the Old Testament, Geiger comments that “this fairy-tale form appealed to the poetic fancy of Muhammad, and suited the childish level of his contemporaries” (73).
This passage suddenly emerges from the examination of Muhammad’s life and times as a comment on Geiger’s own life and times. In this section of *WMJ*, Geiger undertakes to discover whether it was Muhammad’s intention to adopt the views of Judaism (21). He concludes that much of Judaism “accorded with the Prophet’s poetic spirit” and that therefore it was indeed Muhammad’s intention to adopt those views because he meant to “prove the harmony which must necessarily exist between the various revelations of the same God” (23). Adding that nobody among Muhammad’s contemporaries would have objected to such appropriations, Geiger suddenly turns his critique towards his own milieu in which Enlightenment ideals were manipulated and subordinated to a Christian worldview. Geiger cleverly lets Muhammad voice Geiger’s own reaction to his scholarly context. His reference to a “so-called enlightenment” is reminiscent of the discussion between Mendelssohn and Kant as discussed in the previous section. For Geiger, it is only a certain interpretation of Enlightenment that imposes an exclusionist view and that relies on a “lifeless and crafty” image of Judaism to do this (23). We understand that Geiger does not discredit Enlightenment as a whole. The passage quoted above is directed at a phenomenon that we nowadays would call Eurocentrism, in other words, the hegemonic dissemination of certain local and transient values to all of humanity. Bearing in mind that the project on the Qur’an is only one reflection of Geiger’s lifetime mission to promote an ethical monotheism as the “true” Enlightenment—which he at that time could not do with Judaism—we realize that Geiger himself in fact universalizes Abrahamic values over others. This creates an irony that can best be explained in terms of deconstructive exemplarity and hospitality. First of all, according to a philosophy of exemplarity, the new is a continuation of the old, and in this case the language of Enlightenment universalism prevails in Geiger’s insistence on an Abrahamic identity, which is truly Jewish and Muslim but only marginally Christian.
However, by radically displacing the agency of universal morality from Christianity to Judaism, Geiger creates a fissure that opens a space for Islam. The repetition of the same results in the inclusion of the unexpected Other. Clearly, Geiger fails to escape the complex and absorbing model of Hegelian historicism. However, Hegel prioritized Christianity as the spiritual religion that sublated Judaism (see previous section), while Geiger implies that the absolute spirit will correspond to the monotheism of Abraham. Second, Geiger’s approach to the Qur’an is a form of deconstructive hospitality, since we admitted that—following Derrida’s argument—genuine hospitality is impossible. In the process of defending Jewish identity against Christian narratives, Geiger robs Islam of its claim for novelty and makes it mainly a continuation of Judaism. Although, as we have seen, Geiger gives consideration to Muhammad’s revisions and changes, he does so out of the loyalty to his chosen method in *WMJ*, historical philology. The hospitality towards Muhammad and his religion, then, is contingent on Geiger’s method, chosen by him to serve his German-Jewish subject position in order to respond to an encompassing Christian hegemony.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, the hospitable representation of Islam in *WMJ*—the work’s description of Muhammad as an original religious figure—is a rhetorical strategy that is highly entangled with Geiger’s own subject position and his reaction to the Christian bias in historical and theological studies. This is not an insignificant achievement. It does in fact establish Islam as a world religion based on Abrahamic monotheism in the European psyche. In the short term, Geiger’s *WMJ* initiated an interest in the origins of Islam based on Jewish sources. Many important
Arabists of the time, not only Weil\textsuperscript{129} and Goldziher but also Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), Josef Horovitz (1874-1931) and Heinrich Spreyer (1897-1935), used Geiger’s work as reference and expanded his thesis by adding more Jewish sources (Lassner 104). On the other hand, Geiger’s thesis was also met with resistance, as Heschel shows, from prominent Arabists such as Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) (Abraham Geiger 58). In the long term, Geiger not only brought attention to the study of Islamic history, but also, by presenting Islam in such a symbiotic relationship with Judaism, offered a new perspective to the study of Judaism. Indeed, it is quite possible to argue that Geiger’s representation of Islam in these terms contributed to the exotification of Judaism, thereby giving impetus to a more Hebraic-oriented cultural taste in Europe, as represented by Arnold and Disraeli, among others.

With both the short-term and the long-term effects in mind, we can summarize the image that Geiger creates for Islam and Muhammad, based on his own German-Jewish position, as follows: (1) Muhammad becomes an exegete of the same interpretive tradition that Jesus was, namely Judaism, rather than a heretic with respect to Christianity. Similarly, Geiger, in his uncompromising historical and scientific approach, saw himself as a reforming exegete in the line of both Jesus and Muhammad. (2) Muhammad is also a poet, who “embellishes” stories. He makes the patriarchs of the Mosaic age his inspiration in order to talk about his own times. Geiger, however, is the disinterested “philologist” who contextualizes and identifies such poetic embellishments. Precisely by distancing himself from the godliness of Muhammad’s revelation, Geiger is able to rank all three religions at the level of Wissenschaft, a gesture that works as hospitality and violence at the same time. Revelation becomes as irrelevant to the study of

\textsuperscript{129} Philip C. Almond in his book Heretic and Hero: Muhammad and the Victorians, for example, relates how the impression of Muhammad as a sincere enthusiast passed to Victorian England via Gustav Weil, who was greatly influenced by Geiger’s methods (18-20).
religion as creationism is to the science of biology. While this is unmistakably an extension of the nineteenth century’s trend toward secularization, which might today be considered an effacement of religious particularities, in the context of Geiger’s work it meant liberation and respect for religious particularities, particularly Judaism. Geiger himself was clearly worried about the abandonment of the secular ideals of the Enlightenment and felt that religious sensibilities were infiltrating the language of scholarship and philosophy. Thus, though he himself is not entirely free of religious sensibility, his reaction to Christian bias in scholarship obliges him to keep his own language as unbiased as possible. His insistence on scientific language can only be explained in these terms. (3) It could seem that Geiger constructs his version of Judaism—one that would be the outcome of a thorough reform—in the image of the Islam that Muhammad founded. As Lassner comments, “Geiger had a great respect for the pure monotheism of Islam and the free spirit he associated with the Muslim faith” (106). However, at the same time, the Islam in *WMJ* is constructed according to a purified Judaism, which Geiger thought would best respond to the Jewish-Christian debates of his time. His construct leads to a homogenization of Islam as Abrahamic, strictly monotheistic and universal, and largely rational. Islam, due to Geiger’s desire to define Judaism as different and oppositional to Christianity, is itself defined and frozen into a set of qualities in this process, rather as Judaism was by the Haskalah. Geiger revised Enlightenment thought to exclude everything Hellenic and Indo-European and insisted that universal morality could only stem from the monotheistic and Semitic Abraham.

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130 Lassner bases this view on the following passage he quotes from Geiger’s book *Das Judenthum und seine Geschichte* (1871): “Islam always left itself favorable to the cultivation of science and philosophy, with a Christian Church that increasingly nourished a repugnance of science and reason” (Geiger qtd. in Lassner, 106).

131 Geiger points out how Muhammad answered the challenges of the Jews, who questioned him for not performing miracles, by saying that he was “a preacher only and not a wonder-worker” (28).
With respect to the hegemonic and essentializing violence towards a Muslim worldview and diversity that is implicit in Geiger’s *WMJ*, a deconstructive reading must take into consideration the hospitable possibilities it also creates toward the welcoming of Islam within Western epistemology. I would like to end with Dirk Hartwig’s comment that Geiger’s *WMJ* is an “hermeneutical opening of a text, a transporting of a timeless text to the present,” to which he adds that *WMJ* stands on the tense relationship between disbelief and the preservation of religious identity, and thus, its meaning for the secularization of Judaism cannot be underestimated. Islam has a similar battle to fight with the process of transformation of its self-image, and the modern study of Qur’an poses a similar challenge to Muslims today. (250, my translation from German)
EPILOGUE

Islam has just as much the right to claim to be the synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism. [...] Islam is not another cultural tradition. It is not, specifically, of course, another oriental cultural tradition, with that implied traditional distinction between East and West. It is not an oriental tradition: it is an alternative, a rival interpretation of our tradition. (Brown 3).

Norman O. Brown, a classicist and literary scholar who taught Western Civilization and who saw his “role to be Athens versus Jerusalem,” declares in his lectures that he is “doing his homework on Islam” by relating “the present to our past cultural tradition” (1-2). He adds that he also aims to show that we, as readers, can also do our homework on Islam. With this dissertation, I hope to have done so as a literary scholar who finds the nineteenth-century past of “our” cultural tradition particularly fascinating.

We have seen that Abraham Geiger’s scholarship on the Qur’an constructs Islam’s and Judaism’s historical identities in each other’s image, which he in turn defines according to what Christianity at the time was not. Geiger elevates the monotheistic qualities in these religions to respond to the Philhellenism of the Christian scholars of his time and emphasizes the rationalism in them in order to respond to the Romantic nativism and spirituality he sensed in the culture surrounding him. Both Philhellenism and Romantic nationalism, in fact, represented for Geiger forms of anti-Semitism that made life difficult for him and the community which he served as a rabbi. Though Geiger’s contribution to his own community’s self-image must have been immense, his construction of Islam according to what Christianity is not raises some serious questions. How far, for example, did Geiger’s sympathetic account of Islam and the subsequent Jewish Philislamism in Europe—sometimes leading to the political propagation of Islam and even to conversions to Islam from both Judaism and Christianity—align with anti-imperialist
sentiments within Europe and so contribute to the construction of Islam as the alternative to European thought? Were there significant Muslims minority voices already within Europe in the nineteenth century reacting to the dominant discourses that Geiger was also reacting to? If so, what public influence did they have? Questions like these exceed the scope of this dissertation but deserve further consideration.

This study has shown, in the example of Abraham Geiger, that the name Islam, like that of Judaism or Christianity, is constructed and deconstructed with every social and political urgency that needs to be responded to in the present, whether we recognize it or not. Awareness of the contingency and temporality of such names can help us read our past and our present with hospitality. The methods of historical philology in the nineteenth century—not the branch that focuses on linguistic roots and races, but one that adheres to the cosmopolitanism and cultural relativism of Vico, Herder and Goethe—provide continual resources for such a hospitable reading of the past.

More than just a scholarly endeavour to read our past, hospitality also means recognizing the dangers that face us today with the construction of such grand headings as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, the “West” or even Abrahamic. Unfortunately, these names have an impact on politics, often leading to violence. Why do people choose to associate with one of these headings exclusively and then become willing to die and kill for it? Is not an individual’s identity more complex than any single heading can express? It certainly is a very complicated process that leads to such violence; however, I think that we intellectuals have a responsibility to offer alternative modes of thinking for diasporic people or people who feel as if they are wedged between two cultures that are said to be “clashing.” One alternative mode of thinking, for example, would be to show that an individual’s identity need be defined neither by complete
assimilation into the dominant culture nor by the choosing of an authentic or pure identity that is in complete contrast to this hegemonic culture. Many books have been written in response to Samuel Huntington’s notorious thesis on “clash of civilizations.” It is probably also unfair to take this claim out of its context and make it a target of polemics. However, the “clash of civilizations” argument has been a motive in the making of policies, in decisions regarding wars, and most importantly, in public opinion fuelled by the rage and fear that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The immediate psychological influence of the reinforced “Islam and West” dichotomy since then was felt not only among North-American Muslims but also by every Muslim—and I am not talking of a single identity heading here but of part of a hyphenated identity—either living within the West or encountering Western systems outside the West. The designation “Muslim” is now even more removed from being a cultural marker and has become an exclusive sign of faith irreconcilable with other identity markers, such as secular, liberal, scholar, female, homosexual and democratic. For example, a Western family can be secular or atheistic in orientation but would still celebrate Christmas and Easter. However, a family from a Muslim background in the same situation would feel pressed to extract everything from their daily practices that implies a faith in Islam. I can personally testify to that. The gap between secular (laik) and faithful Muslims in Turkey, for example, is growing faster today than it ever has. The scope of today’s political and religious identity headings is growing, and is becoming more intolerant of difference.

Even Geiger’s name has been used to prove the apparent “clash” between Islam and the West. Geiger’s WMJ is no mere “detail” in intellectual history, safely left to a handful of scholars and experts. The work appears online as a full text in two well-known and polemical websites, www.answering-islam.org (a site dedicated to Christian missionary work among Muslims), and
www.islamic-awareness.org (a site defending Islam against missionaries and “orientalists”). The first site disagrees with Geiger’s thesis on the Jewish influence on Islam and attempts to restore the view that Islam was a heresy of Christianity and that Muhammad obtained his biblical material from Christian sources directly and then distorted it. The second site uses the same secondary sources as the first site to dispute that Muhammad borrowed anything from prior traditions and to demonstrate that the Qur’an was revealed to him by Allah. These websites—which one started first is unclear—almost mirror each other, almost comically, as most of the arguments presented on one find an answer on the other. We can call these sites the double-sided mirror, *psyche*, of Christian-Muslim polemics. Another Christian website, www.truthnet.org, uses Geiger’s text for a similar argument. These are not the only appearances of *WMJ* on the Internet. It is also frequently used on pro-Israeli, anti-terrorist sites and blogs.

The current uses of Geiger’s *WMJ* confirm that theories on the origins of Islam and the formation of Qur’an form an important part of the construction of Muslim identities as well as being crucial for the denial of Islam’s originality. On the one hand, studies that construct Islam as an extension of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, such as Geiger’s, will clash with the Muslim view that the Qur’an is the revealed word of Allah, since they imply that Muhammad was the “author.” On the other hand, without the ability to contextualize a sacred text there can be no scholarly study of a religion. I think that viewing the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions as histories of cross-fertilization rather than parallel and separate developments would not necessarily harm the basis of any faith. Surely what is at the heart of the polemics between these faiths is the fear of giving up one’s identity to a powerful Other and the urge to hold onto something oppositional that is perceived as an authentic identity. Some of today’s Muslim’s might prefer to talk about the origins of their religion as wholly purified from Judaeo-Christian
influence. However, at the time when the Qur’an itself was compiled such an opposition and separation from these previous traditions was apparently not as urgent or the Qur’an would not refer to Jews and Christians as fellow “people of the book (Ahl al-Kitāb).”

How should we study and construct this formative history of the Qur’an today in order to eschew the violence that comes out of the assimilation-versus-authenticity binary? First of all, our view of binaries in general needs to be modified, that is, we must understand that binaries or hyphenated relations—especially when they are identity markers—need not be oppositional and exclusive of each other and that they are typically mutually implied and temporal. Second, the history of “our” monotheistic civilization needs to be read, at this moment in history, through an Abrahamic perspective in place of the Judaeo-Christian versus Muslim-Oriental perspective that has been employed so far.

Perhaps the most urgent task at this moment is to bring a new perspective to the formative period of Islam. A group of Qur’an scholars in Germany who gather around the working group Corpus Coranicum and who have published the book Im vollen Licht der Geschichte (reviewed above in Chapter Three), for example, took on the responsibility to promote the historical-philological method for the study of the Qur’an’s formation, in the style of Geiger and his contemporaries. Neuwirth in the introduction of this book comments that modern Qur’anic scholarship has avoided historical readings of the Qur’an precisely because questions on its formation are so entangled in polemics (13). The essays in the book agree on the implicit hospitality of the historical-philological ways of reading as long as they are combined with the insights now provided by postcolonial theories and diaspora studies.

132 For example in verses 2:62, 3:64 and 29:46 of the Qur’an.
In the field of Islamic studies, there already are works that aim to demonstrate the Muslim influences—particularly in the ways Qur’an translations were employed for Christian sectarian polemics—on the forming of a European modernity. Hartmund Bobzin’s research on the translations of the Qur’an during the Reformation and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh’s works on medieval inter-faith polemics are good examples. Ziad Elmarsafy’s recent study of the literary and political influence of Qur’an translations during the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment periods in Europe is a contribution to such a perspective from the field of literary studies. This book is important, first of all, because it makes a convincing claim about the way in which the tenets of the Qur’an were integrated into generative moments in literary studies, such as that which produced the concept of “world literature”; second, it looks at a crucial time in history where the concepts of our current modernity were shaped. Elmarsafy not only demonstrates Qur’anic influence on the well-known literary sympathizer of Islam, Goethe, but also on Voltaire, Rousseau and Napoleon. He observes, for example, that in the travel literature of early modernity “cultural differences often prompt emulation and altered self-definition rather than violence” (x). He then claims that during the Enlightenment, the dynamic engagement with Islam, through the numerous Qur’an translations that were available, “enables a radical break with past traditions and the conception of something entirely new” in the works of the intellectuals under consideration (x). Especially important is Elmarsafy’s argument that Goethe in his West-östlicher Divan and in Dichtung and Wahrheit formulates his ideas on the relation between prophecy and poetry through the figures of Muhammad and the Qur’anic Abraham, which he then develops into a vision of Weltliteratur (159-179). The implication is that the Romantic sacralization of poetry, which went hand in hand with the secularization of the Bible, cannot be thought apart from the influence of Muhammad’s revelation. This is the type of
reading that my own dissertation is aiming to promote. It would exemplify a deconstructive hospitality, one that recognizes cross-fertilization between Western modernity and the Islamic East.

One a way to make the adjective “Muslim” name a more capacious cultural identity would be to facilitate more literary readings of the Qur’an, as has been done for the Christian and the Hebrew Bibles. The history of tafsir (Qur’anic interpretation) is in fact full of aesthetic and even literary readings prior to the nineteenth century. This fact is in stark contrast to the common misconception today that the Qur’an rejects artistic and literary sensibilities and imposes an entirely moralistic and dogmatic view of life. Possibly this negative image of Islam can be partly attributed to the way that Jewish Orientalists, like Geiger and Goldziher, reflected Islam in their works in opposition to the Hellenic qualities popular at the time, which were commonly understood as composing the creative and artistic element in a culture, or as Arnold called it in Culture and Anarchy, the “spontaneity of consciousness.” The reaction from Muslim orthodox sites towards subjecting the Qur’an to linguistic and literary analysis is more exaggerated today than it has ever been. Whatever process was responsible for Islam’s adopting the image of a philistine and dogmatic religion, as intellectuals we may try to spread the idea that reading the Qur’an as literature today does not necessarily lead to profanization and that philosophical and linguistic approaches do not have to damage the revealed character of the Qur’an. Sadly, as Mohammed Arkoun in Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers observes, “philosophical critique of sacred texts—which has been applied to the

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133 Such a history was successfully pioneered by Navid Kermani in Gott ist schön. Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran (1999), which also includes the Qur’an’s aesthetic receptions during European Enlightenment and Romanticism.
Hebrew Bible and to the New Testament without thereby engendering negative consequences for the notion of revelation—continues to be rejected by Muslim scholarly opinion” (35).

A telling example of the “clash” between linguistic or literary analysis of the Qur’an and Islamic orthodoxy is provided by the case of Nasr Hâmid Abû Zayd. A professor of Arabic literature at the University of Cairo, Abû Zayd was first dismissed from his academic position in 1994 and then divorced from his Muslim wife by the Egyptian government for the reason that he was an apostate. The scholar and his family were forced to live in exile. The cause of his persecution was the book that he wrote about the textual study of Qur’an, titled *Mafhum al-nass* (The Concept of Text). Abû Zayd’s ideas cannot be considered very revolutionary when observed from within Western Qur’anic studies. However, it is apparent that his background in secular literature and Western philosophy influenced the way he read the Qur’an. In *Mahfum an-nass*, he focuses on the notion of Qur’an as “text” in the poststructuralist sense. He himself believes that his ideas received the reaction they did from Muslim theologians because “[d]enying the textuality of the Qur’an leads automatically to freezing the meaning of its message”, through which authorities can easily practice “the manipulation of meaning” (“The Textuality of Qur’an”). While critical and textual approaches to the Qur’an with present concerns in mind would be most effective if they originated from within the Muslim world, religious authorities in power keep hindering such attempts. Beyond Abû Zayd’s example, promising young scholars leave Muslim countries every day because of restrictions on academic freedom or low wages. Seeing every academic endeavour in light of the dichotomy of Islam versus the West, and in terms of either assimilating or defending “authentic” Muslim identity, creates an unfortunate obstacle for the acceptance of Islam as a cultural identity. There is a silent majority
of people from Muslim backgrounds, who do not want to be involved in any form radicalism or fanaticism, yet who do not want to give up the Muslim part of their identities.

Besides the orthodoxy of some Muslim authorities, the so-called European or Western host cultures also need to avoid further corroboration of the “Islam and the West” opposition. Multiculturalism in Europe—which is mainly a question of Muslims and Christians living together—will indeed be possible if Europe stops perceiving itself as a host in control of the home rules, and accepts that it is being constantly changed and redefined by the differences it hosts within. Sadly, the German premier Angelika Merkel announced recently that “Multiculturalism in Germany has failed” (October 17, 2010). We should ignore such statements as the rhetoric of a political campaign, because even if their physical departure were now an option, Muslims, Turks, Arabs, and others have already become part of German history, and this alone is multiculturalism.

It is important, therefore, that cultural and literary studies today do their homework on Islam. We can start by reading the Qur’an as part of European book culture, as Elmarsafy has done convincingly. Whether a person is religious or not, the sacred book of a culture has a role in defining her or his selfhood. Islamic cultural studies will have to include the study of the “book” and how it influenced the community and its cultural productions. The “book,” moreover, for diasporic communities takes on a different meaning. It has to answer to their present needs in facing their host culture, provide them with a cultural memory that holds them together as diaspora, and serve as an inspiration in their cultural productions—all of which functions are supported or disrupted by other identity markers, national, political, occupational and gendered. The stereotypes of the Qur’an must be deconstructed—such as the meaning of jihad, or the veil, or its own resistance to aesthetics criticism—according to the needs of today. At the same time,
Qur’anic difference from the “biblical” traditions has to be recognized in order to avoid the possibility of assimilation. While states, like Germany, can continue to debate what they understand by multiculturalism and how their existing state hospitality laws can be modified to mend its failure, we as intellectuals must do our part towards deconstructing Islam’s image to better respond to present dilemmas.
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