Orientalism in the Melodrama of the Early American Republic: William Munford, *Almoran and Hamet*

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While British melodrama in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries drew heavily on constructs of the Orient (Krug), American melodrama of the Early Republic offers only a few examples which operate with an Orientalist mode of representation. Since the 1790s, when Federalist distrust of the theater began to make way for a more liberal attitude that emphasized its potential for moral and political instruction, American drama could develop more easily and establish itself as the foremost civic genre of the period (McConachie 126-47). Melodrama profited from such liberalization in particular. By speaking more immediately to the growing popular audiences than the competing dramatic genres categorized as 'high' art, it must be regarded as responding particularly effectively "to rapidly changing social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances" (Richardson 258). This effect of immediacy was achieved by means of its aesthetic and psychological key features. Aesthetically, melodrama is characterized by its plot structure of rapid succession of emotionally charged scenes, by morally and socially transgressive actions and events that allow for the marginalized and repressed to become visible, and by closure that re-affirms a privileged moral and social order; it displays a character constellation of hero, heroine, and villain who operate on the basis of a Manichean moral universe that is governed by poetic justice; its rhetoric is marked by 'excess'—by hyperbolic language use that attempts 'to say it all,' to make the operations of good and evil explicit. Psychologically, melodrama allows for the gratification of the desire for the unknown, the exotic, the sensual and sexual, and the terrifying, while at the same time providing reassurance by insisting on a fundamentally moral universe in which the forces of good always win in the struggle against the forces of evil—a struggle that

manifests in the master plot of 'innocence persecuted and virtue triumphant.' Melodrama performs its cultural work in terms of addressing and containing situations characterized by instability and concomitant personal and social anxiety.[1]

Peter Brooks's argument that melodrama as a modem form emerged in the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath, when "the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarchy)" were abolished and when "an organic and hierarchically cohesive society" (Brooks 15) dissolved, may need modification when applied to the situation in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. Yet, the decades of the 1780s and 1790s were, in fact, marked by far-reaching political, economic, and social changes—for Gordon Wood it is especially the drastic changes in the social realm, the transformation of the hierarchical social structure of the colonial period into a much more egalitarian, liberal, and capitalistic structure, that mark 'the radicalism of the American Revolution.' The 1790s in particular, a decade characterized by social, economic, and political instability, by the radicalization of the revolution in France which intensified the conflict between Federalists and Democratic Republicans about the issue of political democratization (see Howe), therefore also created the need for melodrama's negotiation of the forces of evil that threatened the moral universe and for the reassurance its master plot of 'innocence persecuted and virtue triumphant' was ultimately able to provide. Similar to the emerging American novel, which was dominated by the gothic, the sentimental, and, again, the melodramatic mode of representation (Stem), melodramas on the American stage expressed the sense of crisis that marked the 1790s, and at the same time they "portrayed society's fractures, vented the age's anxieties, and lent support to the abiding hope that progress and a new, freer order were in fact the legacies of the American Revolution" (Richardson 259).

Many of the melodramas published and performed during the first two decades after the revolution worked with materials that reveal explicit participation in contemporary cultural, most significantly political and moral, debates. The heroic and the

1 For a more detailed and comprehensive introduction to the aesthetic features and possible psychological functions of melodrama, see Brooks; Grimsted; Richardson (256-62).

domestic melodrama in particular "contributed to a dynamic political discussion about the future of the country and helped to define the values of the nation in a particular manner" (Wilmer 53)—plays such as John Daly Burk's *Bunker-Hill; or, the Death of General Warren* (1797), which supported a Democratic Republican egalitarian stance and put emphasis on the legitimacy of American political independence, and Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787), which juxtaposed European decadence and corruption with American republican virtue thereby claiming superiority in morals and manners for the young nation. In this essay, I shall argue that in addition to the heroic and the domestic melodrama with their American settings, American Orientalist melodrama also participated in contemporary political and moral debates, albeit in an indirect way. By employing an Oriental setting and cast of characters, the plays contributed to the discourse of national identity formation in a way that allowed for a special degree of symbolic transgression and by doing so put into starker relief some of the political, social, and moral issues at stake during the period.

Over the last two and a half decades critical assessments of Edward Said's study *Orientalism* (1978) have repeatedly pointed out that Orientalist representation of "the East" cannot simply be regarded as part of a monolithic discourse of Western hegemony. While acknowledging that it has, indeed, often contributed to the stereotyping and effacement of the actualities of Eastern cultures as different as North West Africa, Egypt, Turkey, Persia, India, or China and while recognizing that the constructions of an Oriental Other have served purposes of—most importantly, national—Self-definition, they nevertheless insist on the ultimate heterogeneity of Orientalist discourse. By stressing Said's own claim that "Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West" (22), they argue that once the construction of an Oriental Other is analyzed in its historically and culturally specific contexts, it reveals much more about the cultural imaginary of the respective society than only its hegemonic thrust.[2] In her study *U.S. Orientalisms*, Malini Johar Schueller has thus convincingly demonstrated that over the one-

2 The most comprehensive study of the domestic functions of British Romantic Orientalist melodrama from 1790 to 1840 is provided by Krug. For a critical assessment of Said's basic arguments, see, for instance, MacKenzie (1-19); Porter.

hundred-year period between the 1790s and 1890s several types of Orientalist representation, which were all responding to specific historical—domestic and foreign—circumstances, constructed imperial concepts of the American nation while simultaneously containing national schisms—in the early decades of the republic most prominently the schism created by the existence and beginning removal of a native population and by the institution of slavery. The drama analyzed in this essay, William Munford's *Almoran and Hamet*, can be regarded as one more text which contributed to the heterogeneous Western discourse of Orientalism in general, and as one more text which testifies to the existence of a specifically American Orientalism during the decades of the Early Republic.

Almoran and Hamet, a tale of Oriental intrigue that explores and assesses two types of monarchy—despotism on the one hand and virtuous, benevolent monarchical rule on the other—was published in Richmond, Virginia, by Samuel Pleasants, Junior, in 1798.3The text reveals the use of British materials—a practice common at the time, especially because of the copyright situation. Munford dramatized British writer John Hawkesworth's narrative of the same title, *Almoran and Hamet*, which was published in 1761 and enjoyed a wide readership in England. In the following I will show that *Almoran and Hamet* addresses key issues of the post-revolutionary decades, especially of the 1780s and 1790s. Since the central concern of the drama is the assessment of the quality of monarchical rule, the central issues to which it responds are the continuing need to legitimize the revolution and independence, the need to address the moral foundation on which republican government should rest, and, closely linked to this second point, the need to discuss the issue of democratization, more particularly, the conflict between Federalists and Democratic Republicans over the extent of participation in the processes of political decision making.

3 It is not clear whether this drama was ever performed or whether it is a closet drama. There is, moreover, only scant information about the author. The book cover of *Almoran and Hamet* provides the information that William Munford was "of the County of Mecklenburg, and [of the] State of Virginia." In *American Plays*, Frank Pierce Hill provides the information that he lived from 1775 to 1825 (194). Further archival work is needed in order to shed more light on author, text, and possible performances.

Almoran and Hamet bears the subtitle "a tragedy," is structured in five acts, uses blank verse and an elevated diction, and displays a largely aristocratic cast of characters. The play is set in the city of Ispahan, Persia, at a time when Persia is ruled by two brothers, Almoran and Hamet. Almoran is the older, Hamet the younger brother. Their father, the deceased Sultan Solyman, had decided that Almoran, the first bom, was to share the reign with his younger brother. Almoran resists this decision. He is the villain character of the play, a despot who is ruled by his personal ambition, his greed, and his passions. Hamet, on the other hand, is the virtuous hero whose rule follows the principle that political decisions have to be based on what is best for the country and its people. The plot starts in the morning of the day when Hamet is to marry Almeida, the daughter of Abdallah, an officer of the highest rank. Shortly before the wedding ceremony, Hamet is informed by his adviser Omar that his brother resents his marriage, that he is envious, that he himself wishes to marry Almeida. And, indeed, Almoran is able to stop the wedding ceremony by means of magic: he summons a Genius, a ghost that suddenly appears among the assembled members of the Persian divan and that declares Almoran and Almeida husband and wife. The assembly regards the appearance of the Genius as a sign of divine will. Against Hamet's and Almeida's protests she is taken to Almoran's seraglio by the guards.

In Acts II to V the struggle for Almeida and for the sultanship between the two brothers develops. In this ensuing struggle Almoran is repeatedly supported by the Genius, which provides him with several magical devices. An emerald ring, for example, enables him to assume another person's form, to become a shape-shifter, and a magic wand allows him to make opponents fall asleep and then move into their bodies—devices he uses, for instance, in his attempt to seduce Almeida in the shape of his brother and in his attempt to persuade Hamet to commit suicide in the shape of the officer Osmyn. In their defense against the villainous Almoran, both Hamet and Almeida have to prove their virtuous stance: Almeida resists Almoran's advances and Hamet repeatedly resists the wish to take violent revenge and the temptation to kill himself in a situation of utter despair. Ultimately, he has to prove his virtue by resisting the Genius's offer to use magic himself—for the purpose of killing his brother and securing the sultanship. In the end, virtue prevails. The Genius turns out to be a messenger of a God that

intended to test the virtue of the two kings. While Almoran fails this test and perishes, Hamet passes it. He gains the sultanship and Almeida.

Almoran and Hamet displays all the key typological features of melodrama. It reveals a Manichean moral universe and the character constellation of hero, villain and heroine. It operates on a plot structure that is, first, marked by the rapid sequence of emotionally strongly charged scenes—expressing, for example, the forebodings, the despair, and the relief of the lovers as well as the hatred and jealousy of the villainous Almoran. The plot structure is marked, secondly, by incidents in which the privileged moral code is transgressed—cases in point are Almoran's attempts at seducing the heroine and scenes in which he devises plans to kill his brother. And, thirdly, it is marked by closure since, in the end, the morally pure, the pious and just ruler Hamet and the equally pious heroine Almeida, emerge victorious from the struggle and re-establish the privileged moral code. Finally, we find the 'master narrative' of 'innocence persecuted and virtue triumphant.'

By presenting a tale of Oriental intrigue and by envisioning the Persian court as a site of moral and political struggle between an irrational, morally depraved ruler and an enlightened, morally virtuous one, the drama participates both in Western Orientalism in general and in a specifically American Orientalism. The stereotypical and denigrating representation of the villainous Almoran and his supporters serves the purpose of providing the Oriental Other against which a superior Occidental personal and political sense of Self is constructed. The fact that the characters who embody a virtuous stance are also Orientals introduces a certain ambiguity—*Almoran and Hamet* does not represent the Orient monolithically as a site of corruption—, which, however, qualifies the argument only slightly: Hamet, Almeida, Abdallah, and especially Omar are characters whose thought and actions bear such strong traits of Anglo-American eighteenth-century republican thought that they can be regarded as thoroughly 'Westernized.' The privileged moral code is a republican one. As a person and as a monarch, the virtuous ruler must excel in terms of integrity and disinterestedness: integrity with respect to his behavior within the

family and in the political realm, disinterestedness with respect to putting the public good above private interest.[4]

The assessment of two different versions of monarchy—despotism on the one hand and enlightened, benevolent monarchy on the other—on the basis of a republican moral code signals the specific American quality of Orientalist representation. The drama contributes to the preoccupation of post-revolutionary American culture with the revolutionary political process and with the legitimacy of independence. Moreover, as a closer analysis of the characterization of the two rulers and their supporters indicates, it addresses in detail the question of morally virtuous government, the question that dominated the conflict-ridden political debate between Federalists and Democratic Republicans of the 1790s.

The character of the despot Almoran invokes once again the former colonists' fear of a British king whose political decisions were perceived as indication for an increasingly despotic rule, and it legitimizes once again their protest and fight against it. *Almoran and Hamet* echoes the large number of revolutionary texts which identify British despotism and argue against it, most prominently texts such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and the Declaration of Independence. Almoran embodies and is part of an Oriental context that is marked by irrationality, cruelty, unchecked sexual passion, indifference to religion, and arbitrariness in political decision making. Omar, his former tutor, describes his response to the news of the marriage of Almeida and Hamet as that of a ferocious animal. He compares him with "a tyger wounded by the hunter / gnashing his teeth with rage [...] / lifting his eyes which flam'd with wrath" (32), and he characterizes him as "deprived of reason's guidance" (35). Almeida, while suffering Almoran's immoral advances, calls him only capable of a "tyrant's cruel love" (37), and her father Abdallah criticizes his cruelty as a ruler:

4 Gordon Wood delineates in detail how the principles of republicanism influenced the monarchical form of government, especially though not exclusively in England, throughout the eighteenth century. The meaning of the term republicanism must thus not be reduced to its reference to the republican form of government. If not explicitly used in this meaning, it refers to a cultural system that operates differently in different forms of government (Wood 95-225).

> Almoran rules like lions in destruction
> Thinks pow'r was giv'n to monarchs but to punish,
> Nor feels his greatness honor'd save when terror
> Strikes the pale wretch who trembles at his frown. (38)

Omar points out that Almoran regards religion as a set of meaningless customs that have to be obeyed for the sake of appearance only:

> [...] piety
> Her contemplative mirror ne'er applied:
> Religion's forms as custom led obey'd,
> Carried no warmth or goodness to his heart,
> Nor dream'd he of his prophet and his God. (34)

The two settings in which Almoran is most often placed signal his moral and political depravity as well: the seraglio, as a site of royal promiscuity where Almeida is kept hostage, and the dungeon, as a site of family betrayal and political treason in which Hamet is incarcerated for some time and which becomes the place where Almoran himself finally dies a violent death. The support he receives from the majority of the court, the imams, the mufti, and most of the high officers, finally, intensifies the representation of an irrational, morally depraved Orient. The divan, the political elite of the country, follows Almoran once the Genius has appeared for the first time. In contrast to Omar, Hamet's adviser, they do not take into consideration the possibility that Almoran might have summoned the powers of dark magic only to gratify his personal desires. On the contrary, when Hamet urges them to do so and claims that "reason" had sanctified his marriage to Almeida, the mufti argues that "the heav'nly voice [of the Genius]" uses "a louder tongue than reason" (43). The contrast created between religion and reason indicates the clinging to a pre-enlightenment religiosity which is opposed to the notion that the believer can seek God through reason. From the perspective of American republican thought—especially from the perspective of revolutionary Deist leaders such as Franklin and Jefferson—this notion signals superstition and thus cultural inferiority.[5]

5 See the chapters "What is Enlightenment? Some American Answers" (22-43) and "Religious Voices" (44-79) in Ferguson.

In a subplot, which focuses on the experience of two high-ranking officers with the arbitrary and abusive power of the despotic Almoran, the drama responds to the problem of political patronage that characterized the revolutionary and post-revolutionary decades.[6] The two officers Osmyn and Caled are part of the Persian elite that supports Almoran. Osmyn, captain of the guard, accepts the Genius's decision as God's will and keeps his allegiance to Almoran; Caled, an ambitious, opportunistic officer whose major motivation is personal gain, supports Almoran since he expects to profit from his patronage. Despite the fact that Osmyn is promoted to the office of Grand Vizier after the turbulent events at the wedding ceremony, he is not treated respectfully by the monarch, but falls victim to his excitable temper. In moments of rage Almoran vents his anger at Osmyn and twice threatens to kill him. Osmyn then realizes that he has pledged allegiance to a despot who abuses the loyalty of his advisers: "Oh hapless he who shares a monarch's council! / Whate'er his motive, he becomes his slave, / Joins in his curst designs t' oppress mankind, / And then he is rewarded just as I am" (74).

Caled on the other hand is focused on his ambitions. After following Osmyn in the office of captain of the guard, he hopes to profit from Almoran's patronage even more and decides to kill Osmyn in order to become Grand Vizier himself. Yet, his plan to poison Osmyn fails dramatically. Since he mistakes Almoran for Osmyn—the despot had assumed the shape of his Grand Vizier for the purpose of persuading Hamet to commit suicide—, he administers the poisonous beverage to his patron. When Almoran, shortly before his death, finds out about this, he kills Caled in a rage. This subplot exposes the system of monarchical patronage as arbitrary and cruel and as a breeding ground of corruption. It formulates a warning against absolute dependency on a despotic ruler.

In contrast to his brother Almoran, Hamet embodies the enlightened monarch, the ruler who tries to link religion and reason and who by doing so attempts to reform the political order and set a new standard of monarchical behavior. His insistence on reason as a

6 On the British colonial system of patronage, on the revolutionaries' rejection of it, and on the difficulties the young republic faced in terms of avoiding it in the context of emerging factionalism and partisanship, see Wood (57-77, 174-180, 300-302).

guiding moral force motivates not only his behavior within the family but also his decisions as a ruler. In a conversation with his daughter, Abdallah points out that her future husband "[s]ees his sole object in his country's good," a principle Hamet had acted upon most importantly by introducing written laws—a kind of bill of rights—that curb monarchical power. Abdallah continues:

> Has not the gen'rous Hamet done a deed
> In history unequall'd, yielded up
> The Power despotic; with persuasion mild
> Mov'd his fierce brother to relent, and bind
> His naughty will with written statutes, fram'd For public rights, and public liberty [...]. (38)

It is such decisions—including probably his plan to abolish the institution of the seraglio (39)—that have made the people of Ispahan call Hamet their "friend and father" (38).

The rhetoric of these lines does not only express the republican definition of political virtue—the principle to put the public good above private interest which was applied to monarchical as well as republican government—, but in addition points toward the ideologies of paternalism and sentimentalism that developed in the course of the eighteenth century and that were important culturally formative concepts in the Early Republic. The two concepts marked a redefinition of authority, both in the realm of the family and in the realm of the state. The shift from an earlier patriarchal model to a paternalistic model was based on the analogy between familial and political authority: while in the patriarchal model the father's or ruler's authority was absolute and could not be called into question, in the paternalistic model it depended on his willingness to reason and persuade, on his understanding, benevolence, and affection. The relationship between father and child and between ruler and the governed had to be based on mutual respect, it was to serve the educational purpose of creating independent human beings, and it was envisioned as consensual.[7] The characterization of Hamet as "friend and father" of the Persian people defines him as a

7 For a detailed account of the Lockean and Scottish Common Sense philosophy sources and of the manifestations of this shift in models of authority during the second half of the eighteenth century, see Fliegelman. See also the chapter "Enlightened Paternalism" in Wood (145-68).

paternalistic ruler who has earned their respect through actions that signal benevolence, affection, and regard for the common good. The fact that he successfully used "persuasion mild" for the purpose of winning his brother Almoran's consent to his legislative project again emphasizes his status as an enlightened monarch, as a ruler who believes in the necessity to explain his ideas and to convince others rather than impose his will on the people.

And yet, despite the representation of Hamet as virtuous monarch who respects and protects "public rights, and public liberty" through his legislation, his character also reveals weaknesses. Hamet must frequently fight despair, and he can only muster the emotional and intellectual strength to resist his brother's violence and the temptation to use dark magic himself because he continues to receive support from his adviser Omar. In fact, the drama strongly suggests that it has been Omar, adviser already to the Sultan Solyman and Hamet's tutor since boyhood, who is largely responsible for Hamet's development into a benevolent, enlightened monarch and who through his influence on him still functions as the central moral authority in the state. Despite the fact that Hamet is called the people's "friend and father," it is first and foremost the character of Omar by means of which the necessity of an enlightened paternalism for the development of virtuous rule is emphasized. Moreover, since Omar does not belong to the royal family, since he is simply a member of the political elite, he can be read as a character that embodies the Federalist ideal of a virtuous political leader and officeholder in the young American republic. Hamet's dependence on his paternal adviser is so vital that it is possible to argue that *Almoran and Hamet* focuses first and foremost on the dramatization of the concept of political virtue in general rather than on the dramatization of monarchical rule. The pivotal role of Omar sheds doubt on any manifestation of monarchy and to a contemporary audience may even have suggested the ultimate preferability of the republican form of government.

Omar is an old man, a father figure to Hamet, and a scholar whose actions are grounded in an extensive knowledge of the laws of nature and of the phenomena of the spiritual realm. In a conversation with Hamet he talks about the scholarly pursuits of his youth:

> [...] before these cheeks were rough,
> And ere these locks were grey, my bosom yearn'd
> For knowledge, and my prayer in silence rose
> To him from whom all science is deriv'd,
> By him enlighten'd, long I search'd the books,
> The sacred monuments of ancient wisdom;
> And by the midnight lamp the secret springs
> Of nature were expanded to my view. (29)

In this speech Omar links religion and reason by claiming divine power as the source of all science and wisdom. Of the two brothers to whom he had been tutor, only Hamet had responded to his teaching in a way that "enlighten'd" him as well. Again and again he expresses the reverence and trust he feels for his tutor and fatherly friend who had cultivated both his reason and affections. For example, when Omar is able to calm him after having heard about Almoran's resistance to his wedding plans, Hamet exclaims:

> My friend, my friend thy reasons have prevail'd
> My heart begins already to dilate [...]
> [...] and as in thee
> I put my trust, when gay prosperity
> With favorable breezes fill'd my sails
> Thou now shalt be my aid, and with my counsel
> Undaunted will I stand the keenest blast. (32)

While the paternal relationship to Hamet bears fruit, it can never develop with respect to Almoran. In the case of the older brother, Omar's teaching fails. He comments on the detrimental "fruits of education," which Almoran received from "flatterers": "Thy brother early leam'd from all around / The sov'reign pleasures of despotic sway, / To view mankind as made for him alone, / His beasts of burden, not himself for men" (34).

It is, moreover, Omar who delivers the only explicit formulation of the concept of virtuous rule. Suggesting how as a tutor to the boy he taught him a virtuous moral stance, he addresses this issue in a conversation with Hamet:

> Where's the pre-eminence which monarchs boast?
> A name, a title, an embroider'd robe?
> All these are not their merit but their fortune
> Vain to the soul; may fill their minds with pride,
> But ne'er contribute to their solid glory.

> The madman crown'd with straw, and rob'd with chain
> Has all the pomp can give the greatest king,
> And all is joy; can strut and talk as big
> And feels as happy on his wretched bed,
> As he upon his throne: 'tis but conceit
> That makes the monarch's glory and the madman's.
> No real greatness bred within the mind
> The poor man wants; and fortitude and virtue
> Alone can raise thee o'er the meanest subject. (32)

Omar insists that a ruler needs to *earn* his status and thus introduces the concept of meritocracy. This concept figures prominently in the rhetoric of the revolution—again probably most influentially in Paine's attack on hereditary monarchy in *Common Sense*—, and it is frequently explicitly proposed as the central guiding principle for morally virtuous behavior in the drama. Abdallah, for instance, reminds his daughter that the status of their family has been earned by virtuous behavior: "[...] my child forget not / Whence came thy race; remember that from worth / And worth alone thy exaltation sprang, / And therefore strive by merit to secure it" (36). And in the last scene of the play, the Genius, who has finally revealed itself as a messenger of the forces of good, explains that God rewards "the works of all men [...] / According to their merits" (102). Hamet's greatest merit as a ruler is, and here Omar leaves no doubt, his decision to introduce legislation that restricts monarchical power. When Omar informs a group of the people of Ispahan about the events at court surrounding the wedding ceremony, he reminds them of the benefits they had received as a result of Hamet's policies. After enumerating the dangers of despotism—in fact, Omar presents a list of dangers that recall the 'list of grievances' given in the Declaration of Independence[8]—

8 "Oh then, my friends, if yet you love your country,/Rise and protect yourselves:the hand of pow'r/Will soon oppress you. Almoran begins/The reign of tyranny with Hamet's fall/Where soon will be contentment? Where the joy/Of property andsafety? All are gone/Your wives and daughters will be seiz'd/To satisfy the tyrant's lust, and fill/His overstocked Seraglio, or supply/The fierce desires ofupstart ministers./Your fertile fields no longer will be your's/Your wealth enrich the minions of a court. To labor driven by dire necessity,/Your toils will scarce suffice to pay your taxes,/To swell the pride of pompous luxury./If you complain, the dungeon's dreary mouth/ Opens to take you in: there bound in chains/And wrap'd in darkness you will stay forever,/Or come forth but to death, to racks and torments." (48)

Omar describes Hamet as "The prince who gave you all you now enjoy, / To whom you owe that law and justice rule / And not the will of kings or ministers" and he calls him "the guardian of your liberty" (46).

The reading of Omar as embodiment of the Federalist ideal of a virtuous political leader is, finally, supported by the events in a scene in which he, Hamet, and Abdallah meet some inhabitants of Ispahan in the streets for the purpose of soliciting their support for Hamet's cause. In fact, this scene even suggests that *Almoran and Hamet* responds to the ongoing debate between Federalists and Democratic Republicans about the extent of participation in the processes of political decision making—the conflict-ridden debate on the issues of egalitarianism and democratization that created the two factions which were to dominate the political discourse of the 1780s and 1790s. Federalists and Democratic Republicans did not differ over whether the United States should be a republic, that is, a political system in which government was based on the consent of the governed as expressed through the vote. They did differ, however, over the extent of active participation in the political process. For both, the functioning of the republican order and the protection of the revolutionary values depended on the existence of politically and morally virtuous citizens. Yet, while the Federalists proposed an elitist concept according to which a strong national government must rest on the shoulders of a small, wealthy, and well-educated (white, male) elite, which to their mind was alone able to put the public good above private interest, the Democratic Republicans proposed a more egalitarian concept according to which strong state governments should rely on the participation of a much larger part of the (again: white, male) population.[9] In the first scene of Act II, Omar, Hamet, and Abdallah inform a "crowd of people" about the events surrounding the thwarted wedding ceremony for the purpose of soliciting their support against the despot. The members of this "crowd" are called "the citizens" (45). The fact that they are introduced as types and not as individuals is a first indication of their morally and politically questionable and, ultimately, inferior status. Further indications follow in the

9 A comprehensive discussion of the impact of the Federalist and Democratic Republican concepts of virtue in the context of (literary) attempts at founding a 'virtuous' American republic provides Schloss.

remainder of the scene where the citizens are depicted as easily excitable, as lacking rational capability and a firm moral stance. It is, at first, hard for Omar and the others to convince them that Almoran made use of dark magic for the purpose of introducing despotic rule. They have to be reminded that it was Hamet who against the will of his brother established laws that secured them their liberty. Once they believe the three men, they suggest going to the palace at once and killing Almoran—only to be reminded of the value of mercy. All in all, the play presents a group of citizens whom the Federalists would have called a mob that must not be involved in the processes of political decision making. The scene hints at the specter of 'mob-rule' and thus privileges an anti-egalitarian Federalist stance.

In *Almoran and Hamet*, the Orientalist melodramatic mode of representation is thus used to respond to the young nation's anxieties about a possible loss of political and social order. At the end of the decade of the 1790s, during the last years of John Adams's Federalist presidency, the drama tries once again to buttress Federalist power by insisting that a far-reaching egalitarian and democratic stance might prove detrimental to the republican experiment. The assessment of the two manifestations of monarchy, despotism on the one hand and virtuous monarchical rule on the other, can be understood as a means to present Federalist social and political notions as a middle ground on which the young republic ought to be founded. In the context of post-revolutionary attempts at national identity formation, the drama thus presents both Oriental despotism and Democratic Republican egalitarianism as the Other against which a superior sense of Self can be constructed.

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