

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: SERVING EXOTICISM: THE
 BLACK FEMALE IN FRENCH
 EXOTIC IMAGERY, 1733-1885

Degree candidate: Adrienne L. Childs

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Thesis directed by: Professor June Hargrove

The black female played an important part in the construction of exotic female sexuality in French painting for nearly two hundred years, yet her symbolic complexity has not been fully explored. This thesis is a contextual analysis of the image of the black female in French painting from the early part of the eighteenth through the nineteenth century.

Representations of black females in this era are part of the larger development of *turquerie* in the eighteenth century and Orientalism in the nineteenth century. Centered around European

fantasies of Near Eastern and North African harem culture, *turquerie* and Orientalism provided an exotic framework in which issues of female sexuality and its relationship to race was explored. The objects discussed in this thesis, primarily well known works by academic painters, are examples of images in which the black female plays a significant stylistic and ideological role.

The works are examined in relation to literary and scientific discourses in which ideas about black women were negotiated during the period. Slavery, imperialism, as well as colonial expansion contextualize the imagery, and offer tools with which to uncover encoded meanings inscribed in the exoticized black female.

This analysis provides an expanded definition of the nature of the black female as a symbol, and outlines a complex, multi-dimensional framework in which black female figures operate as a sexual signifier.

SERVING EXOTICISM
THE BLACK FEMALE IN FRENCH EXOTIC IMAGERY
1733-1885

by
Adrienne L. Childs

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Advisory Committee:

Professor June E. Hargrove, Chair
Professor William L. Pressly
Professor Carla L. Peterson
Dr. Juanita M. Holland

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Introduction

The woman of color in French exotic imagery is an icon of sexuality and represents a complex matrix of discourses surrounding race, sex and gender at work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The black woman¹ plays a prominent role in the construction of the exotic female, yet her significance as a symbol of sexuality has not been fully explored. This survey of the painted image of the exoticized black female in France from 1733 to 1885 will provide a theoretical framework from which to address the woman of color as she is employed in the service of exoticism.

This thesis explores the contexts and theoretical structures that characterize the explosion of representations of the exoticized black female servant in eighteenth and nineteenth-century French painting. Black women were important characters in the harem scene, an immensely popular genre inspired by European conceptions of Near Eastern and North African culture. Harem life formed the essential framework for exoticized images of women from the eighteenth through the nineteenth century. Within this ongoing narrative of exoticism the black woman most often played the role of slave or servant to a

¹ In this document this term, woman of color and black female will be used interchangeably.

sexualized white female. The interplay between sexuality and servitude within the harem setting provides a ubiquitous backdrop for the pairing of the black servant and white mistress.

The image of the woman of color became well articulated in French *turquerie* of the eighteenth century as artists depicted “exotic” peoples and places in domesticated terms. In the nineteenth century, the black woman emerged as a vital character in the language of Orientalism, and served to define the forbidden realm of female sexuality. In the latter part of the nineteenth century avant-garde painters who examined the world of the Parisian prostitute also engaged the symbolism embodied by the woman of color. However, due to the confines inherent in an exercise of this length, the focus of this thesis is limited to French exoticism as manifest in *turquerie* and Orientalism, reserving the avant-garde material for the next phase of research.

This topic is vast and multi-faceted, spanning nearly two centuries and transversing multiple disciplines. The images have been organized chronologically beginning in 1733 and ending in 1885. Although they fall within generally accepted stylistic and ideological categories, namely *turquerie* and Orientalism, the current discourses fail to address adequately the trope of the woman of color within these

constructs. Therefore this project necessarily takes on the challenge of retrofitting the black female into these arenas.

The woman of color in French *turquerie* figures largely in what can be considered a discourse of power; power of man over woman, East over West, and white over black. The presence of blacks in *turquerie*, the eighteenth-century framework of the exoticized East, is a displacement of the immediate relationship between Ancien Regime France and colonial systems of slavery. The displacement of enslaved Africans in an exotic setting effectively naturalizes and neutralizes difficult realities of black servitude. The presence of this theme in the decorative arts further domesticates the paradigm. The matrix of power relationships that were established in *turquerie* of the eighteenth century set the stage for the explosion of Orientalism in the nineteenth century.

As developments in the political and social history of France evolved over the eighteenth century, representations that incorporated the view of the exotic began to change. While eighteenth century *turquerie* reflected French colonial relationships as mediated through an exotic illusion, it remained largely a fashion in which the French framed images of themselves. Conversely, the Orientalist movement of the nineteenth century was a deliberate project focused on representing exotic peoples and places with which there was both a

direct political and economic relationship as well as a vast gulf of cultural difference. This focus on the “other” precipitated a system of representation that, while conveying the same basic ideological structure, was qualitatively different than that of *turquerie*.

With Napoleon’s foray into North Africa came the enthusiastic, intensified focus on the Mediterranean world in art, literature, science and history that we now call Orientalism. Napoleon’s scholarly imperialism resulted in an assumed objectivity on the part of visiting scholars, writers and artists that permeated the Orientalist movement. The moral, cultural and political superiority inherent in the imperialist gaze framed Orientalist production for a century and established the racial polarity inherent in its structure, a polarity that was defined by the presence of the black female.

Another major undercurrent in the contextualization of the black woman in French painting of this era is the relationship between literature and visual culture. The single most important literary source regarding the exoticized Near East was *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (1704). From the beginning of the eighteenth through the nineteenth century the work was repeatedly translated and published throughout Europe. The black characters, both female and male, played large roles in the illustration of the debauched, exotic culture. Countless writers and scholars considered the stories accurate documentation of life in the

Ottoman court and expanded these notions to encompass a generalized view of the Near East and North Africa. Undoubtedly influenced by *Les Mille et Unes Nuits*, Romantic and Orientalist writers included the sexualized black female as a stock character in the exotic landscape. Powerful passages from texts such as Victor Hugo's *Les Orientales* (1829) or Gérard de Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* (1851) confirm the pervasiveness of the paradigms concerning race and gender that frame the black female in this period.

Images of the black female take on new importance in French exoticism after the 1830 colonial conquest of Algeria by France. Whereas Turkey was the favored locale in *turquerie* and remained popular through the Orientalist movement, after colonization the focus began to shift to Algeria and the neighboring states of Morocco and Egypt. Increased travel to the region facilitated first hand experiences with the land, the culture and its inhabitants, and resulted in a marked change in the tenor of exoticism. The presence of blacks in Orientalist works came to represent long-standing notions about Africa and Africans as the parameters of the "Orient" expanded.

As scientists grappled with issues of race and gender in the nineteenth century their arguments regarding the causes of human differentiation, both racial and sexual, fueled the institutionalization of white male superiority and power in the Western world. Key to the

science of race is the notion of a hierarchy of man in which the white male occupies the highest order and the black constitutes the lowest. The unquestionable assumption of a racial hierarchy is material to the depiction of non-European racial types during this period. Black women in particular were deemed lascivious because of what were considered inherent physical anomalies. The supposed anomalies of the black female were exploited by artists and writers who used the ideas associated with the black woman to infuse their scenes with sexuality, degeneracy and taboo.

The various aspects of this discussion seamlessly converge in the work of master Orientalist Jean-Léon Gérôme. Gérôme's black women, some of the most keenly articulated in the nineteenth century, speak to the major paradigms of this study. They parallel the literature, reflect the scientific discourses, and embody the imperialist gaze. Gérôme's signature brand of classicized exotica crystallized the issues that accompanied the black female in French painting since the eighteenth century.

Although much has been written about the representation of the objectified woman mediated through the transparent veil of exoticism, this is the first comprehensive study of the dependency of the exotic female on race. Blackness is isolated in this thesis to highlight common ideological strands that inform images of the woman

of color and shape the notion of Africa in the practice of exoticism.

However, the concepts surrounding the black woman do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of a tapestry of ideas and images that make up the intricately woven fabric of the exotic.

Chapter I - Turquerie and Mythologies of Difference

The woman of color in eighteenth-century French art exists almost exclusively within the realm of the popular style *turquerie*. *Turquerie*, the precursor of nineteenth-century Orientalism, describes the eighteenth-century French vogue for exoticized Turkish themes fashioned in items ranging from the decorative to the “fine” arts. The taste for things Turkish is not exclusive to eighteenth-century France, as an interest in eastern exotica is present in European art and literature since contact with the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century. However, in eighteenth-century France we find “exotic” themes relating to Turkey increasingly incorporated into mainstream art.

As French artists characterized the wonders of far away lands, the resulting imagery revealed as much or more about domestic notions of other cultures and races than the setting it purported to describe. The Ottoman Empire, centered in the metropolis of Constantinople since the fifteenth century, provided a wealth of cultural differences that fascinated western observers and sparked the

development of a system of western mythology that characterized this part of the world for centuries.²

Turquerie, a domestication of Turkish flavored exotica in *Ancien Régime* France, conventionalized western mythologies of the east and provided an arena where themes of sexuality, dominance, race and ethnicity were explored under the guise of fashionable exotica. The violence and debauchery of Arab men; the mystery, docility and sexual subservience of Arab women; and the naturalization of slavery were among the major themes that recurred in Western constructions of the east and were played out in French *turquerie*. However, it is the Western fascination with the interplay between the various races, particularly the role of the black male eunuch and the black female slave in the Ottoman social structure, that has significant impact on representations of blacks in eighteenth and nineteenth-century French art. Woven into the complicated fabric of *turquerie* is the notion that black women represent inherent sexuality, a sexuality that goes hand in hand with servitude. The black female servant becomes a major iconographic player in the construction of a narrative in which layered

² Edward Said's groundbreaking text *Orientalism* defines the Western discourse of power and domination over the Orient as roughly beginning in the late eighteenth century, I have applied this notion to systems evident in earlier discourses, particularly *Turquerie*. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

meanings reveal complex relationships between exoticism, race and dominance in the *Ancien Régime*.

The popularity of *turquerie* in France was manifest in a variety of trends in visual culture such as the proliferation of portraits *déguisé* in which French royals and nobles were portrayed as sultanas or sultans; the fashion for rooms decorated and furnished in the French interpretation of the Turkish style; and the development of Turkish themes in porcelain and tapestry. All of these modes of visual expression, while distinct, revolve around certain concepts of difference held by the French regarding exotic locations and cultures. Within each of these categories blacks as well as other exoticized peoples such as Chinese and Native Americans, are used as symbolic tools that infuse exoticism into the object, be it a painting or a porcelain bowl. This form of exoticism is not limited to the simple celebration of the differences of separate but equal cultures, but reinforces hierarchies of power, both political and cultural, that western cultures, in this case the French, maintain over these "others."³

³ Recent scholarship has widely explored the Western fashioning of the exotic other. Chinoiserie, a concept parallel to *turquerie*, was the realm in which the Chinese "other" was negotiated in French visual culture during the eighteenth century. The European view of the North American native is discussed V.G. Kiernan, "Noble and ignoble savages," in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1009).

French *turquerie* can be seen as one aspect of a long and complicated relationship that existed between France and the Ottoman Empire. The first permanent French ambassador arrived in Constantinople in 1535 and the union between the countries remained strong until the late eighteenth century.⁴ Some claimed that the motivation for the friendship was to protect and propagate Catholicism internationally and increase French commerce, still others maintained that the alliance was a purely political union in opposition to the Austrian Hapsburgs.⁵ Nonetheless, diplomatic relations between the two powers remained open, although at times strained, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. This relationship fostered a cultural exchange that would spawn the development of the *Ancien Régime*'s fascination with all things Turkish, expressions of which surfaced in visual arts, music and literature under the rubric of *turquerie*.

As diplomatic and trade relations between Paris and Constantinople opened, the flow of French artists, writers and travelers whose accounts served to fuel the European interest in Turkey naturally followed. French artists interpreted Turkish culture

⁴ Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire 1453-1924* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), 191.

⁵ *Ibid*, 192.

in a dual capacity, both as recorders of official Turkish visits to the French court, and as visiting observers on Turkish soil. Visual representations sent back to Europe from Constantinople by these early travelers, hand in hand with textual accounts, began to shape notions about Ottoman culture, particularly women, and squarely located the black female slave as an integral part of the narrative of exotic sexual domination that would develop in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Black Women in Turquerie

The standard role of the black female in French *turquerie* is the dutiful servant attending to the sexualized Turkish harem woman. While the woman she attends could be the high-ranking Sultana, first wife of the Sultan, or the lowly odalisque, a sexual concubine, the black female routinely fills the role of the lowest ranking servant. Although the mythology of the exotic harem arises from a host of fantasies and assumptions, the fascination is grounded in its actual

existence.⁶ The harem in particular was a microcosm of the varied people that inhabited the Mediterranean world.

The Grand Seraglio in Constantinople, the residential compound of the Turkish sultan, represents a paradigm of the exotic harem. The diverse inhabitants of the royal seraglio constituted the large staff of soldiers, slaves and concubines. Female slaves could have been Circassian, Georgian, Greek, Venetian, or African. Women were kidnapped, sold by their parents, volunteered for servitude, or obtained through the extensive African slave trade.⁷ Europeans learned of the exotic mix of people through popular travel narratives that appeared in Europe from the sixteenth century onward. The idea of a sequestered environment, driven by male sexual desire and stratified by race, spawned a particular brand of exoticism surrounding harem culture that maintained its currency through the nineteenth century.

Outside of the Sultan's seraglio, Africans, both slave and free, were part of a variety of races and ethnic groups that lived and worked

⁶For general information on the harem see: Ottaviano Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of the Life at the Ottoman court* (London: Saqui Books, 1996); Alev Lytle Croutier, *Harem: The World Behind the Veil* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989); and N.M. Penzer, *The Harem*, 277 ed. (New York: Dorset Press, 1993).

⁷ Fanny Davis, *The Ottoman Lady* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986)99-114.

in the Mediterranean world. The Muslims of the Mediterranean basin and the Near East obtained slaves from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. In Africa the trade moved up the Red Sea from Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa and the East Coast. After the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs, slaves were obtained from bordering Nubian kingdoms.⁸ While black male slaves were laborers, soldiers, or eunuchs, black women generally served in domestic roles. Black females were at the bottom of a hierarchy of slaves, and relegated to performing the heaviest household duties and serve as concubines to lower middle class males.⁹ In major commercial centers, female slaves, black and white, could be purchased in public slave markets.¹⁰

Certainly the existence of the harem, its inhabitants, and environment were fascinating to the Western observer. However, the artistic response to the East and fixation on the erotic environment of the harem is a product of the European imagination, and provides

⁸ J. O. Hunwick, "African Slaves in the Mediterranean World: A Neglected Aspect of the African Diaspora," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph E. Harris (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993),296.

⁹ Ibid,299; For black women in Muslim harems see Jean-Michel Deveau, *Femmes Esclaves: D'Hier À Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1998),179-180.

¹⁰ Davis, 102-105.

more evidence of Western racism and sexual obsession than that of the culture it attempts to portray.

From the earliest visual sources to reach Europe, the relationship of the black woman to the harem dweller is solidified. An important example is found in the work of Nicolas de Nicolay, a Frenchman who accompanied the second embassy of Gabriel d'Aramon to Sultan Suleiman I in 1551. Nicolay's account of his travels to and within Constantinople, *Discours et histoire véritable des navigations, pérégrinations, et voyages faits en Turquie* was published in 1567. Scholars contend that the engravings after his drawings in this volume became the unacknowledged source for numerous subsequent images.¹¹ The inaccuracy of the images notwithstanding, Nicolay's book enjoyed widespread popularity and distribution in several editions and languages and his engravings became a "documentary" model for depicting Ottoman women.¹² Louis Daret's

¹¹ Perin Stein and Philip Mansel both discuss Nicolas de Nicolay's images as an important influence on early western perceptions of Turks. Stein discusses the use of Nicolay's engravings by other artists. See Mansel, p. 214.; and Perrin Stein, "Exoticism as Metaphor: Turquerie in Eighteenth-Century French Art" (Dissertation, New York University, 1997), 56-57.

¹² According to Leslie Luebbers, Nicolas de Nicolay was the first travel writer to attempt to depict the forbidden precincts of the harem and hamman(bath) even though his access was extremely limited. See Leslie Luebbers, "Documenting the Invisible: European Images of Ottoman Women, 1567 - 1867," *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 24, no. 1 (1993),2.

engraving after Nicolas de Nicolay's *Turque allant au bain* (figure 1) depicts a robed, veiled Turkish woman walking to the baths. She is accompanied by a female slave with negroid features. The black woman, who carries a water basin upside down on her head, has a grim scowl on her face, in marked counterpoint to the veiled countenance of the Turkish woman. Nicolay's depiction lacks the blatant sexuality that is the hallmark of eighteenth and nineteenth-century images of this nature, but provides a basic outline of the relationship between these two women that will inform subsequent imagery. Significantly, both figures in Nicolay's *Turque allant au bain* resurface in Ingres's *Le Bain Turque* of 1862 (see figure 21), a work that is considered by some to be the epitome of nineteenth-century academic exoticism.¹³

The concept that the black slave will bathe the women with the water in the basin she carries on her head insinuates an intimacy between the two that will become more pronounced in nineteenth-century imagery. The primary relationship between the black woman as a slave to an exoticized female, herself a type of slave, within the setting of the bath is the foundation upon which the image of the black

¹³ Leubbers points out that the veiled Turkish woman will be quoted by Ingres in his late nineteenth-century work *Turkish bath*. See Leubbers, 1.

woman in French painting evolves in the eighteenth century and will constitute the basic nature of the image of the black female in French art for two hundred years. The impact of Nicolay's images becomes evident in the work of Jean-Baptiste Vanmour whose work figured significantly in the eighteenth century.¹⁴

Regarding the eighteenth-century taste for *turquerie* in France, the most important embassy artist in Constantinople was Jean-Baptiste Vanmour. Vanmour arrived in Constantinople in 1699 and remained there until his death in 1737. Early in the eighteenth century the French ambassador to Constantinople commissioned Vanmour to paint 100 images of the different officials and races and their costumes.¹⁵ In 1713 Jacques Le Hay published the collection of engravings of the one hundred costume plates after Vanmour's paintings under the title *Recueil de cent Estampes représentant différentes Nations Du Levant*.¹⁶ From the Sultan to the chief eunuch, Vanmour's depictions not only helped to document Turkish costume that was becoming a vogue in western portraiture, but, as observed by Perrin Stien, "offered information on Ottoman class structure and

¹⁴ Leslie Luebbers describes the debt Vanmour had to Nicolay's model of depicting Ottoman figures. See Luebbers, 4.

¹⁵ Mansel, 217.

¹⁶ Luebbers, 4.

social activities which fueled the Western imagination, giving rise to the genre of harem scenes in French art."¹⁷

Vanmour's plates were considered documentary images of the various characters that populated both the metropolis of Constantinople as well as the interior of the Sultan's household. His interpretations of the role of blacks within the confines of the Sultan's household further substantiated the ideas about race that would be played out in French *turquerie*. The several editions of Vanmour's work published between 1713 and 1715 became the visual basis for much of eighteenth-century *turquerie*.¹⁸

Of the many aspects of harem culture described by Vanmour, the perceived role of blacks within the hierarchy of the harem became more clearly articulated. Although there is no reason to believe that Vanmour had access to the private domain of the harem or the hamman (the harem bath), he attempts to depict generalized types of women engaged in what he considered everyday activities in the harem; playing musical instruments, embroidering, taking coffee and bathing, among other things.

¹⁷ Stein, 58.

¹⁸ Perin Stein discusses the importance of Vanmour in the development of French *turquerie* and his debt to the tradition of costume collections that were produced by Turkish and European artists for centuries. See Stein, 60-62.

In keeping with Nicolas de Nicolay's sixteenth-century contribution, Vanmour represents the black servant attending the bathing woman. However, Vanmour's eighteenth-century concept of the role of the harem inmate and her black servant is more explicit than that of Nicolay. While Nicolay depicts the women traveling to the bath house, Vanmour goes inside the bath house to describe the activities in this forbidden domain. The bathing woman in general is common in Western art and is frequently charged with sexual undertones. The scene of a woman at her bath implies that she is preparing for an intimate, sexual encounter.¹⁹ The exoticized interior, particularly the bath, will remain the central local for the depiction of the woman of color throughout her eighteenth and nineteenth-century tenure as a sexual icon.

In the engraving *Fille Turque* (figure 2) by J. Haussard after Vanmour from *Recueil de cent estampes...*, the black servant is dressing the Turkish girl's hair inside a tiled bath house that is defined by the water fountain on the wall. Vanmour introduces nudity and a subtle intimacy into the scene that alludes to the sexuality of the

¹⁹ The theme of the bathing nude woman in both classical and Christian themes are discussed by Beatrice Farwell. She discusses the sexual undertones associated with the abundant images of the bath of Diana, the toilet of Venus, and the bathing Susanna and Bathsheba. Beatrice Farwell, "Courbet's 'Baigneuses' and the Rhetorical Feminine Image," in *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art*, ed. T.B. Hess and Linda Hochlin (New York: Newsweek, 1972), 65-66.

bathing woman and her servant, a notion that will come to define the essence of this symbolic pair for the next two centuries. In the plate *Fille Turque* Vanmour's purported efforts to document the various races is limited to variations in skin color and demonstrates no attempt at accurately representing the differences in facial features between the Turkish woman and her black servant. These two anonymous slaves, one black, one white, are fused to form a unit whose symbiosis represents the notion of an interdependency of racial servitude and sexuality.

Literary Exoticism: Les Mille et Une Nuits

The eroticism of the Turkish harem, a location that epitomized female submissive sexuality and male dominance, became a primary paradigm of exotic cultures as depicted by the Western observer/traveler/writer/artist. Western perceptions of the inner workings of the harem, its hierarchies, divisions, and roles, provided a thematic structure that spawned a discourse in which political and cultural relationships were explored as well as notions of race, gender and sexuality. As we consider the role of the black figure in

eighteenth-century exoticism, the literary tradition provides vivid characterizations that underscore those found in the visual arts.

Scholars agree that literary exoticism had the most significant impact on French notions of distant cultures and fanned the flame that was played out in turquerie.²⁰ Highly influential was the publication of Antoine Galland's translation of the *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, the first volume of which was published in 1704. Galland's translation of this compendium of Arabian folklore whetted the French appetite for exotic themes of the Orient. To the European reader, the text was a cohesive work and considered an accurate reflection of a static Middle-Eastern culture. However, there was never a definitive text of these stories in Arabic literature. According to Rana Kabbani, the tales were born out of an oral tradition and differed substantially from version to version. Kabbani maintains that, when written, the tales were as amorphous and diverse as the oral versions, and were characterized by vulgar vernacular, reflecting the popular prejudices of the masses to whom they were recounted.²¹ No doubt they did reflect

²⁰ See Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) and Suzanne Rodin Pucci, "The discrete charms of the exotic: fictions of the harem in eighteenth-century France," in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

²¹ Kabbani, 23.

the prejudices of those that recounted the story, not the least of which was Antoine Galland. Kabbani writes of Galland:

He is not a mere translator of these Arabic stories; he is the inventor of a Western phenomenon, a circular narrative that portrayed an imaginary space of a thousand and one reveries...He was his Scheherazade just as Flaubert was his Emma Bovary.²²

The influence of Galland's perceptions as a Western European on the assembly and translation of the tales cannot be underestimated.

The publication was met with widespread enthusiasm and enjoyed instant success.²³ *Les Mille et Une Nuits* prompted interest in sumptuous exoticism, violence and decadence of the Turkish ruling classes, but it was the accounts of the "oriental" harem, around which the tales were centered, that caught the imagination of the Western reader/voyeur.

The sexuality of black slaves comes into play throughout the various tales. The incident that sparks the initial rage of the Sultan is the orgy he witnesses among his Sultana, concubines and several black male slaves.²⁴ The slaves are characterized as sexual animals

²² Ibid, 23-4.

²³ Suzanne Rodin Pucci states that Galland's publication marked the advent of a new literary phenomenon that was linked to the travel narrative. See Pucci, 147.

²⁴ Antoine Galland, *The Arabian Nights: In Four Volumes*, trans. Edward Forster (Philadelphia: J.&A.Y. Humphreys, 1812),38.

lusted after by the lascivious women of the harem. *Les Mille et Une Nuits* celebrated the sexual interplay between slave and master, between black and white, and among slaves of differing ranks and races. The sexual freedoms, explorations of taboos, and the rigid social hierarchies outlined in *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, ideas already present in the European concept of exotic sexuality, flourish within the tales and provide rich sources for pictorial exoticism for the next two hundred years.

An Allegory of Sexuality - Jean-Marc Nattier, *Turquerie*, and the Court Tradition

The strong presence of *turquerie* in the literary realm and its proliferation through prints, travel writing and fiction, provide both sources and a rich context for French painters working in this genre during the eighteenth century. Artists such as Nicolas Lancret, Jean-Marc Nattier and Carle Van-Loo, all of whom enjoyed royal patronage, were among those who solidified the vogue for *turquerie* within the upper levels of French society. Whether a royal princess, or the mistress of the King, artists fashioned contemporary sitters as Turkish stereotypes, many adorned with exotic slaves. These types of images

conflated exotic sexuality implied by the Turkish setting, particularly the harem, with systems of cultural and racial dominance at work in French society during this era.

The ties between France and Africa are more immediate and important than is implied by the peripheral presence of African servants in the framework of French exoticism.²⁵ At this point in French history African slaves constituted the colonial labor force in the Caribbean that fueled the economy of the *Ancien Régime* and in turn contributed to the foundation for eighteenth-century wealth and culture.²⁶ Meanwhile on French soil, the status of black slaves was a

²⁵ William B. Cohen chronicles the political and cultural reception of Africa and Africans by the French for more than 300 years. He discusses issues such as Enlightenment philosophy, colonialism, imperialism, slavery and scientific racism. He illustrates the numerous levels on which the French discourse on Africa existed during the eighteenth century. William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

²⁶ Both Albert Boime and James Smalls point out the connection between slavery, eighteenth century wealth and the images of blacks that appear in art of this period in Europe. Although their conclusions are oversimplified, it can be deduced that the upper echelons of the society in France indirectly benefited from the trade in slaves and more directly from colonial enterprises. Robert Louis Stein makes it clear that although the most wealthy traders and merchants were among the richest people in the realm, they were generally not part of the *Ancien Régime* aristocracy. Robert Stein points out that after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 the slave trade in France blossomed and reached unprecedented heights after 1736. He also maintains that generally the trade in slaves and the marketing of colonial commodities produced by slave labor, were fundamental aspects of the country's financial stability during this period. It is in

hotly contested issue. Until the eighteenth century the "Freedom Principle," the notion that any slave who sets foot on French soil becomes free, was strictly adhered to. However, when France became increasingly entangled in the Atlantic slave trade, the number of blacks coming to France as servants of colonial masters increased and issues of property and economics became paramount. Finally provisions were established under the Edict of October 1716 whereby colonial masters could bring slaves onto French soil without losing them. By the middle of the eighteenth century thousands of blacks, both free and slave had migrated to France.²⁷ The century was characterized by numerous legal cases challenging the law as well as government attempts to limit the number of blacks allowed in France. Toward the end of the eighteenth century the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, the first French abolitionist organization, was formed. It was

light of the integral role of blacks in the macro-economy of France during this period that I make connections between colonial enterprises and Ancien Régime art. Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Revolution 1750-1800* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987),19-20; James Smalls, "Esclave, Nègre, Noir: The Representation of Blacks in Late-Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century French Art" (Dissertation, University of California, 1991),16-23; Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979)13-47,188-89,196.

²⁷ Sue Peabody, "Race, Slavery, and the Law in Early Modern France," *The Historian* 56, no. 3 (1994): 501.

not until 1848, however, that the French government achieved the irrevocable abolition of slavery.²⁸

If we consider the complexities of the relationship of France to blacks during this period it becomes apparent that images of blacks necessarily reflect the notions about race and slavery being developed and negotiated in the larger society. The image of a contemporary sitter and black servant in an exoticized setting effectively rerouted the significance of the present relationships between the French and enterprises dependent on black slavery from the immediate present to the “East”, a distant setting, frozen in time. The East represented not only a remote location but the antithesis of French culture and Enlightenment reason, a stagnant local where self-indulgence, lascivious behavior and the enslavement of humans was a natural part of the environment. The distancing of black servitude detracted from the strong connections between the French ruling classes and the colonial enterprises that supported the French economy, and naturalized these otherwise difficult relationships. Within this displaced location the dominance of whites over blacks, man over woman, France over “Others” could be freely explored and expressed behind the artifice of exoticism without self-examination or incrimination.

²⁸ Ibid, 501-510.

A close reading of Jean-Marc Nattier's *Mademoiselle de Clermont en Sultane* (figure 3) is an articulate example of the conflation of race, sexuality and dominance naturalized by *turquerie*. The matrix of ideas at work in this portrait provides a framework for the analysis of the role of blacks in French painting that remains relevant through the nineteenth century.

Jean-Marc Nattier, court painter to Louis XV, is noted for his allegorical portraits of figures from the court at Versailles and Parisian society.²⁹ *Mademoiselle de Clermont en Sultane*, painted in 1733, is a portrait of Anne Marie de Bourbon as a Turkish sultana at her bath where she is both adorned and adored by an exotic array of servants.³⁰ Nattier employs a variety of symbolic devices that emerge from the popular notion of the Turkish harem to create this portrait *déguisé* of French royalty. Although the composition directly relates to his earlier portrait of her, *Mademoiselle de Clermont Taking the Waters of Chantilly* of 1729 (figure 4), the black servant as a sexual signifier introduces a new level of sensuality and exoticism into the work.

²⁹ Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France 1700-1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 188.

³⁰ Very little is known about the life of Anne Marie de Bourbon. She was the fifth child of Louis III, duc de Bourbon, Prince de Condé and granddaughter of Louis II, known as the Grand Condé. John Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection of Pictures III French before 1815* (London: The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1989), 265.

Never having traveled to the Middle East, Nattier's conception of the harem bath is most likely based on the various secondary sources available to him, although there is no record of any specific models he may have used. Nattier's depiction of the young Mademoiselle utilized a variety of standard devices that effectively create an allegory of sexuality and dominance.

In addition to the bath setting, sexual exoticism is symbolized by an array of iconographical tools, the most significant of which is the introduction of black servants. As previously discussed, the presence of African slaves in the harem was well known through the various accounts, reliability notwithstanding, of the inner workings of the Turkish seraglio or palace. In the case of Nattier's work, the four black servants and two inconspicuous white servants attending to the bath of the "Sultana" adhere to common conceptions of the exotic harem established by popular literary and visual accounts. Nattier underscores the sexual significance of the servants by employing a thinly encoded eroticism. The servants wear costumes, hats and jewels, enhancing the exotic ambiance. They openly admire their mistress and her possessions, serving as a surrogate for the male voyeur. The black servant seated to the sitter's right holds a string of pearls, often seen as a symbol of sexuality and vice in western

iconography.³¹ The exposed breast of the central mulatta servant focuses on the sexuality of the servant herself as an object of desire, introducing the taboo of miscegenation between the slave woman and the white male viewer. The adoring slave woman who pours a stream of water in the tub to the sitter's left, the two servants who kneel at her right elbow, and the curious peeping page in the background complete her exotic staff. They exhibit a passionate adoration that seems wasted on the rigid mistress. The black servants infuse the image with sexuality in spite of the lack-luster Mademoiselle.

The implied sexuality of the scene, while clearly the prominent theme, provides an arena where dominance, gender and race are mediated under the guise of exoticism. This work establishes hierarchies that are at work both within and without the picture. An overriding system of dominance is implied in this image as the entire concept of *turquerie* explores the European superiority over exotic, barbarian cultures.³² The Mademoiselle is portrayed as the highest

³¹ E. De Jongh, "Pearls of Virtue and Pearls of Vice," *Simiolus* 8, no. 2 (1975): 69-97.

³² The relationship of the *Ancien Régime* to the exotic "other" can be mapped out in the fashion for *chinoiserie* as well as *turquerie*. The French interest in eastern subjects as evidenced by works in The Wallace Collection, of which Nattier's portrait of Mademoiselle de Clermont is a part, is discussed in *Eighteenth-Century France and the East* by Peter Hughes. Peter Hughes, *Eighteenth-Century France and the East* (London: The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1981)7-31.

ranking wife of the Sultan, and as Sultana, implies the domination of her husband. The explicit relationship of dominance in this work is between Mademoiselle de Clermont and her entourage of servants. The depiction of the Sultana being served has dual implications. It demonstrates her status as the recipient of the intimate service of being bathed, and foreshadows the intimate service she will provide for the Sultan, locating her as both the served and the servant.

Within the ranks of the servants a hierarchy is clearly established. The two white servants in attendance would out rank the black slaves. Within the group of black slaves the range of skin tones from very dark to fair-skinned implies another type of stratification of the servant class of color in which the lighter-skinned servant was thought to be more valuable, and in this case more sexual. This is underscored as the only servant whose breast is exposed is the fairest of the group, thus the one most likely to arouse the passion of the viewer.

Inscribed in Nattier's portrait of Mademoiselle de Clermont is a complicated matrix of ideas about power and submission based on cultural, racial and sexual relationships. European dominance over the exotic other, male dominance over the sexualized woman, the privileged woman's status above her servants, racial superiority of whites over blacks and the hint of a hierarchy within the servant

community are ideas reflected in Nattier's portrait. These ideas articulated by Nattier early in the eighteenth century provide a blueprint for more than a hundred years of exoticism in France.

Race and *Turquerie* in the Decorative Arts

The idea of the eroticism of black servitude filtered out into all aspects of European cultural production in the eighteenth century. The image of the black servant appears in a variety of objects that adorn the spaces of wealth and refinement in *Ancien Régime* Europe. A typical rococo French table clock adorned with J.J. Kaendler's *Handkiss Group* by Meissen (figure 5) is an example of the domestication of the *turquerie* theme in which issues of race and sexuality are almost consumed in a swirl of filigree and flora. Relationships between the slave, his mistress, and her lover become marginalized, forefronting instead on the whimsy of the decorative elements and the romantic kiss. The black servant appeared in porcelain figurines, was painted on china plates and other objects (figure 6), and was woven into tapestry as part of the domestication of

rococo exoticism. The decorative arts provided fertile arena where *turquerie* flourished and black servitude was celebrated.³³

An important eighteenth-century example of the use of the woman of color to heighten the sexual nuance in a decorative program is found at the chateau Bellevue near Paris. The chateau was built between 1748 and 1751 as a residence for Madame de Pompadour, favorite mistress of Louis XV. Carle Van Loo, a prominent artist known for his treatment of Turkish themes, created a series of paintings for her boudoir. Madame de Pompadour's bedroom, linked to the king's chamber by a staircase, was known as the *chambre à la turque*, or Turkish room.³⁴ The room was decorated with fine French furnishings and exotic imports from Turkey. The taste for the "orient" was well established within the contemporary framework of fashionable French interior decor.³⁵ The room's lavish ambiance served to enhance Van Loo's three paintings, commissioned by Madame de Pompadour herself, depicting various scenes of women in a Turkish seraglio.

³³ Sheila Tabakoff points out that the prints from the widely circulated *Recueil de Cent Estampes...* by Compté de Ferriol can be cited repeatedly as a source for exotic porcelain figurines. Sheila K. Tabakoff, "Imitation or Invention: Sources for Eighteenth-Century Porcelain Figures," in *Figures From Life: Porcelain Sculpture from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York ca. 1740-1780* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Museum of Fine Arts, 1992).

³⁴ Perrin Stein, "Madame De Pompadour And The Harem Imagery At Bellevue," *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts* 123, no. 6 (1994): 29.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 22-32.

While all of the works depict exoticized women, in *A Sultana Taking Coffee* (figure 7) we find the image of the black female attending to Madame de Pompadour herself as Sultana. Van Loo uses many of the same devices employed by Nattier to create a metaphor for exotic sexuality. This scene can be read as a typical harem genre scene inspired by Vanmour's *Recueil de cent estampes...*³⁶ In this instance both the black servant and the Sultana wear pearls, the symbols of vice and lust. Instead of assisting in the bath of the Sultana, the two are pictured inside an enclosed space, presumably a harem, that is further secluded by heavy drapery. She is portrayed indulging in the activities believed by westerners to be major pastimes in the harem, smoking and drinking coffee.³⁷ The young black slave on bended-knee serving coffee to the reclining Sultana is a common gesture reminiscent of the Meissen figurine (figure 5).

The significance of a black slave serving coffee has implications beyond the everyday activities of the slave-owning class. Perrin Stein points out that the subject of an elegant woman being served coffee was an established tradition in Western painting, and coffee drinking

³⁶ Van Loo consulted Vanmour's engravings for the Bellevue harem series. Stein points out that both Van Loo and Madame de Pompadour owned copies of the Vanmour's engravings. Stein, *Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery at Bellevue*, 33.

³⁷ Ibid, 33-38.

was considered a fashionable accessory in portraiture. Stein discusses the celebrated portrait of Madame du Barry by Goutier-Dagoty, known through a mezzotint (figure 8), in which she is portrayed taking coffee from her black servant Zamour.³⁸ Alluding to the political significance of these types of images Stein states “Typically, having one’s portrait painted taking coffee bespoke a desire to emphasize rank and luxury - hence the prominence of the servants in these images.”³⁹ While Stein extracts the significance of rank in images where servants are portrayed, the analysis can extend to European rank and domination over “exotic” cultures in general, and blacks in particular.

Images of blacks serving coffee are abundant in eighteenth-century Europe and can be considered in light of the integral role of black slave labor in the growing sugar and coffee industries in the Caribbean colonies.⁴⁰ As previously discussed, the importance of the

³⁸ Perrin Stein, “Amédée Van Loo’s *Costume turc*: The French Sultana,” *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 3 (1996): 427.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 427-8.

⁴⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes the economic development slave-labor produced coffee in Saint-Domingue. From the middle of the eighteenth century onward, coffee consumption increases throughout Europe. France took the lead in the coffee trade by exporting Caribbean coffee. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Motion in the System: Coffee, Color and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue,” *Review* 3, no. Winter (1982): 340-341.

role of blacks in colonial enterprises that supported the wealth of the nation during this period cannot be separated from the prevalence of these images. The infusion of this type of imagery into the decorative arts reveals the naturalization of the economic and political structure of black servitude.

Turquerie was just one aspect of eighteenth-century French culture that characterized the frivolous excesses of the *Ancien Régime*. Based on unreliable reportage and fueled by fantasy, it provided a fashionable exotic setting in which the French nobility could represent themselves. The viability of *turquerie*, a style and attitude synonymous with the material culture, extravagance and wealth of the French court, dissipated with the French revolution. However, the interest in exoticism, particularly regarding the social and sexual microcosm of the harem, resurfaces at the end of the century as French imperial ambitions focus on the "Orient."

Chapter II - Race and the Orientalized Woman

Imperial Orientalism

The transition from *turquerie*, a construct for which the alleged source was Turkey, to Orientalism, whose boundaries expanded to the Near East and North Africa, took place over the last decades of the eighteenth century. French foreign policy shifted under Napoleon's leadership, modifying the undercurrents of exotic imagery. As these generalized approaches to exoticism evolved, the image of the black female, who continued to be relegated to the realm of exoticized imagery, began to change, both in frequency of depiction and in character of representation. The evolution of the image of the black female was part of the larger discourse of Orientalism that exploded on the cultural terrain of nineteenth-century France.

The context for nineteenth-century Orientalism took on increasingly varied dimensions as the French government became entangled in a complex relationship with the near Orient that would continue throughout the century and into the present day. Orientalist art resonated with a tenor qualitatively different from that of *turquerie*.

Imagery focusing on the Near East and North Africa began to carry messages of an imperialist agenda and/or to serve nationalist ideals. Extant ideas about the Orient that had been explored in literature, music and art during the eighteenth century shaped a vision of "Oriental" life that captivated Orientalists and animated canvases throughout the century. Ideas such as the sexual subservience of women, the violence and debauchery of Arab men and the stratification of Arab culture based on race, were among the perceived elements that drove the movement.

The push toward colonial conquest in North Africa by Napoleon's army in the late eighteenth century resulted in a renewed and intensified focus on the Mediterranean world. Scholars agree that Napoleon's Egyptian campaign marked a new era in pictorial exoticism centered around North Africa and the Middle East commonly referred to as Orientalism. Edward Said characterizes Orientalism as a nineteenth-century discourse of power, revolutionizing the way scholars currently approach all forms of exoticism. He claims that "...after Napoleon's Egyptian expedition, Europe came to know the Orient more scientifically, to live in it with greater authority and discipline than ever before. But what mattered to Europe was the expanded scope and the much greater refinement given its techniques

for receiving the Orient."⁴¹ Said underscores the importance of Napoleon's foray into North Africa, an event regarded as a turning point in Franco-Arab relations, giving impetus to the Orientalist movement.

Napoleon initiated a systematic program to gain definitive information about the Orient. The efforts to control and administrate knowledge of the Orient resulted in the establishment of *L'Institut d'Égypte* soon after Napoleon's arrival in Egypt in 1798. One hundred and sixty-seven professionals, including scholars and artists, accompanied the French troops to Egypt and formed the core of *L'Institut*. They examined, researched, interpreted and recorded aspects of Egyptian life, culture, and history as well as science and language. Their findings were compiled in the *Description de l'Égypte*, published in twenty-three large volumes between 1809 and 1828. It is considered one of the most influential publications in the development of nineteenth-century Orientalism.⁴² Regarding the influence of Napoleon, *L'Institut* and the *Description*, Said writes:

Quite literally, the occupation gave birth to the entire modern experience of the Orient as interpreted from within the universe of discourse founded by Napoleon in Egypt, whose agencies of domination and dissemination included the Institut and the *Description*...After Napoleon, then, the very language of

⁴¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 22.

⁴² *Ibid*, 84.

Orientalism changed radically. Its descriptive realism was upgraded and became not merely a style of representation but a language, indeed a means of creation...the Orient was reconstructed, reassembled, crafted, in short, *born* out of the Orientalists' efforts. The *Description* became the master type of all further efforts to bring the Orient closer to Europe, thereafter to absorb it entirely and - centrally important - to cancel, or at least subdue and reduce, its strangeness and, in the case of Islam, its hostility. For the Islamic Orient would henceforth appear as a category denoting the Orientalists' power and not the Islamic people as humans nor their history as history.⁴³ Said contends that the theories spawned by the supposed

objectivity and descriptive realism of the savants were actually created by them, resulting in a fictitious Orient born out of a discourse of power. While Said's general framework has opened countless fruitful avenues of investigation, his polemical views of malignant European dominance have engendered criticism.⁴⁴ However, his core argument, that the Orientalist discourse is born out of European fantasy and sustained by political and economic power, remains a legitimate structure for analysis.

Despite the military disappointments of the Egyptian campaigns, the "scientific" ventures initiated in its wake had an enormous impact on the scholarship of western civilization. Out of this event the

⁴³ Ibid, 87.

⁴⁴ John M. MacKenzie criticizes Edward Said's theories as expressed in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. MacKenzie takes issue with the essentialization of European views of the Orient and warns against the frivolous use of imperialism out of historical context. John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)47.

science of Egyptology was born. Through the *Description de l'Égypte*, *l'Institut d'Égypte* and later the *Musée d'Égypte*, the French became the mediators of the glories of the ancient Egyptian past. Todd Porterfield points out that in spite of fact that Egyptomania emerged from the Napoleonic era, in 1826 the restored Bourbon monarchy sponsored the *Musée d'Égypte*, the first Egyptian department in the Louvre. He states that the *Musée d'Égypte* marked a fundamental change in the Louvre's history of civilization, and threw into question the status of classical Greece and Rome as it was inherited from the Enlightenment and Revolution.⁴⁵ Porterfield contends that Egypt became a bridge for differences between Napoleon's Empire and the Restoration, and was used to legitimize the new regime. He states:

The museum rationalized French stewardship of the arts and civilization, advanced the reactionary tenets of the regime, and expanded the scientific work of the Egyptian campaign. It defined French historical, scientific, military, religious, sexual and racial attributes and conscripted them in the cause of imperial expansion in the *proche Orient*. The creation and presentation of the *Musée d'Égypte* reveal that what had seemed dynastic (Napoleonic) was coopted and transformed by the succeeding and ostensibly opposing (Bourbon) regime. In short, the *Musée d'Égypte* marks the political turning point. The culture of imperialism becomes a national culture.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 81.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 82.

Thus, Orientalism as a nineteenth-century discourse is more than a renewed, intensified look at an old theme. It becomes part of a national identity; a legitimization of French cultural dominance in the West; a foil against which European political, cultural and moral superiority can be contrasted; and a removed arena within which notions of sexuality, race, slavery, violence and gender can be explored.

Literary Orientalism and the Topography of the Exotic

Orientalism as a theoretical construct is not easily divisible into discrete but parallel modes of expression, such as painting, sculpture, music, fiction, poetry, history, archaeology, and anthropology. The interplay of ideas among these related approaches to the Orient is material to the nature of Orientalism.

While the visual arts provided a panoramic view of the complexities of the Orient, literary Orientalism established a detailed topography of themes and ideas that fueled the movement. Romantic poets painted a lush picture of the exotic east. Lord Byron's poem *Sardanapalus* inspired Delacroix's famous painting of 1827-28 *The*

Death of Sardanapalus (figure 9).⁴⁷ Both the poem and the painting romanticized the luxury, sexual decadence and violence of the East in ways that allowed the audience to enjoy the sensual experience while maintaining a distance of cultural superiority.⁴⁸

Victor Hugo's 1829 publication of *Les Orientales*, a series of romantic poems, is often credited with characterizing the tenor of the early Orientalist movement.⁴⁹ *Les Orientales* is comprised of individual works with titles such as *La Captive*, *Cri De Guerre Du Mufti*, *La Sultane Favorite*, *Le Derviche* and *Sara La Baigneuse*.⁵⁰ The mosaic of themes and ideas explored by Hugo such as the female captive, the favorite sultana and the bathing woman, are paramount in both literary and visual Orientalist production and exemplify a shared dialogue of ideas.

⁴⁷ Jobert states that the subject of Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* was the artist's own invention entirely, inspired by reading Byron. Barthélémy Jobert, *Delacroix*, trans. Terry Grabar, Alexandra Bonfante-Warren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 81.

⁴⁸ Joanna De Groot, "'Sex' and 'Race': The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (London: Routledge, 1989), 104.

⁴⁹ Julian Robinson, "The Impact of the Orient on European Thought, 1770-1850," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 31 (1987): 102-133.

⁵⁰ Victor Hugo, "Les Orientales," in *Victor Hugo: Poésie* (Paris: Aux Éditions Du Seuil, 1972), 204-264.

In addition to decidedly fictitious treatments of the East, “documentary” texts such as Edward William Lane’s *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, first published in 1836, were highly influential throughout Europe. Lane’s work came to be known as the definitive text on how Muslims lived. Rana Kabbani states that Lane unsuccessfully strove to avoid the blatant exaggerations of less erudite narrators.⁵¹ She writes:

Yet Lane could not help falling victim to the common distortion of selectivity - of choosing to stress mainly what would interest a Western reader. Thus he wrote a great deal about magic, astrology and alchemy, about hemp and opium, serpent-charmers and public dancers, enumerating superstitions and recounting bizarre incidents of a sensual nature.⁵²

Lane also published a translation of the immensely popular *The Thousand and One Nights* in 1841. According to Kabbani, Lane’s version was constructed with a scholarly tone, blurring the boundaries between myth and history, confirming the portrayal of a decadent East.⁵³

The popular novel /travel narrative, a significant embodiment of Orientalist lore, flourished as writers who traveled to North Africa and the Near East recorded their experiences to the amazement of a large

⁵¹ Kabbani,38.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 37-65.

audience of nineteenth-century readers. Théophile Gautier's *Voyage Pittoresque en Algérie*, published in 1845, is said to be the writer's most famous work and a major contribution to literary Orientalism.⁵⁴ Gérard de Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* of 1851 followed Gautier's example of a literary travel narrative, providing graphic, salacious descriptions of a captivating, but debauched culture.⁵⁵ Although Gustave Flaubert never published a travel narrative, portions of his travel notes from his 1849-51 journey to Egypt are closely related to his exoticized novels, *Salammbô*, *Hérodias* and *Temptation of Saint Anthony*.⁵⁶ Towards the end of the century Pierre Loti's account of his experiences in Morocco, *Au Maroc*, first published in 1889, was an

⁵⁴ Elwood Hartman, *Three Nineteenth-Century French Writer/Artists and the Magreb: The Literary and Artistic Depictions of North Africa by Théophile Gautier, Eugène Fromentin, and Pierre Loti* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994), 9.

⁵⁵ Julian Robinson states "The *Voyage* was, in every sense, a *literary* work; a weaving together of his own experiences and tales with a copious utilization of his predecessors' writings on the East, especially Lane's *Modern Egyptians*...His travels produced perhaps the nearest thing to a literary masterpiece to come out of the direct experience of the Orient." Julian Robinson, "The Impact of the Orient on European Thought, 1770-1850," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 31 (1987): 102-133.

⁵⁶ Francis Steegmuller, ed., *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), foreword.

immediate success. It has been hailed as the first true introduction of Morocco into French literature.⁵⁷

While these and similar works written during the period certainly contributed to the overall landscape of ideas about the Orient, pertinent to our discussion of the exoticized black female, they also contain specific references to women of color that undoubtedly shaped her pictorial persona. The exotic *négresse* figured in the works of Hugo, Nevral, Flaubert and Lane. Ideas explored by these writers resonate in the canvases of some of the most important painters in nineteenth-century France

Race and the Art of the Orientalist

The body of Orientalist art of the nineteenth century provides a virtual map of imperialist agendas and racist assumptions. However, the response of the European artist to the lure of the East cannot be regarded as wholly malignant. There is a sincerity in the admiration that many Orientalists expressed for their "Orient." Although their approach to the subject is inextricable from the political and cultural milieu in which they operated, many of the artists successfully

⁵⁷ Hartman, 61.

communicated a passion for the East that mesmerized Western viewers for a century. Orientalism became a popular genre in the academy and commercial markets across Europe, and was practiced by artists from many different countries. Classicists and romantics alike employed Orientalism as it found its way into the major stylistic movements of the nineteenth century. The lure of the Orient, captivating artists, writers, travelers, patrons, scholars, scientists, viewers and readers, remained viable for nearly one hundred years.⁵⁸

Therefore, in attempting an analysis of any aspect of Orientalist art of the nineteenth century, one must be mindful of the dualities inherent in its nature. The great fascination and passion for the East held by Orientalists was often framed by an undeniable assumption of cultural, political and racial superiority, and a disdain for certain aspects of the culture thought to be uncivilized. The presence of black Africans in Orientalist painting becomes essential to the establishment

⁵⁸ John M. MacKenzie contends that the rise in demand for Orientalist paintings in the nineteenth century was linked to the shift from aristocratic to bourgeois patronage, particularly in England. He also states that the American *nouveaux riches* were important patrons of Orientalist works. MacKenzie implies that the proliferation of Orientalist painting was a response to the growing commercial demand. MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, 47-48. Roger Benjamin outlines the post-colonial taste for Orientalist art that developed in non-western markets. Roger Benjamin, "Post-Colonial Taste: Non-Western Markets for Orientalist Art," in *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, ed. Roger Bernamin (The Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997),32-39.

of negative elements that constitute an opposing force, binding the ideological structure of the works.

Black figures establish the lowest levels of the hierarchy that is balanced by their polar opposite, the European male. Black men, portrayed as violent servant/soldiers, or impotent eunuchs, represent a particularly barbaric aspect of "Oriental" culture. The black woman, firmly rooted in her longstanding role as a sexualized servant, becomes a symbol of what is uncivilized about the East, what is inferior about blacks, and what is degenerate about women. Her body is the physical proof of the inferiority of the black race and the lascivious nature of women of color. The black woman in Orientalist painting is integral to the stabilizing polarity inherent therein. Her attraction/repulsion factor reflects the yin/yang of Orientalism, the opposing forces that establish the whole.

The growing popularity of the harem scene in nineteenth-century France exponentially increased the quantity of images that incorporated women of color. Compared to her eighteenth-century ancestors, nineteenth-century women of color were treated with gradually increasing "realism" throughout the century. The proximity of the artist to their exotic subjects resulted in closer attention to costume, facial features and skin tones. Her duties increased substantially from eighteenth-century depictions. No longer the

demure slave who dutifully serves her mistress as seen in Van Loo's *A Sultana Taking Coffee* (figure 7), the black woman in nineteenth-century painting is an active participant in decadent harem culture. She can be found washing the nude body of the odalisque, dancing, lounging in languor with other harem women or involved in sexual interplay with her mistress.

A major impulse that uniformly underscored the image of the black woman during this period was the scientific dogma of human differentiation that substantiated notions of the black female's inherent sexual degeneracy. Popularized early in the nineteenth century by the case of the Hottentot Venus, the sexual nature of the black woman is a fundamental aspect of theorizing her function in visual production of this era.

Scientific Racism and the Black Female

The articulation of the physical differences of black females in nineteenth-century art forefronts issues that were not evident in the domesticated black figures that populated *turquerie*. For centuries there existed scientific theories concerning the physical differences between blacks and Europeans, largely fueled by travel narratives and racist mythology. However, the nineteenth century saw the systematic

development of pseudo-scientific doctrine that located people of color as well as women at the bottom in a hierarchical ranking of the human species. Jan Nederveen Pieterse calls this doctrine the "Science of Race."⁵⁹ He claims that the formative period of the science of race coincided with the years 1790 to 1840. By 1859 when Darwin published the *Origin of the Species*, aspects of his theory of Evolution were already widely understood elements of scientific theory.⁶⁰ After describing various notions of race developed by French, British and German scientists, Pieterse concludes that:

What all of these notions have in common beyond their grounding in biology or skin color, is a *pathos of inequality* - articulated variously through a scriptural curse, in terms of the classical distinction between civilization and barbarism, or through evolutionist discourse and the distinction between "backward" and "advanced" peoples. The key notion underlying these discourses is not so much that of race as of hierarchy based on differences in religion, ethnicity, geography, nationality, culture or a combination of these.⁶¹

The notion of a hierarchy based on difference is material to the examination of nineteenth-century images of sexualized women in

⁵⁹ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 45.

⁶⁰ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 161.

⁶¹ Pieterse, 51.

general and women of color in particular. Pieterse's statement that the science of race is based more on religious, ethnic, national, geographical and cultural difference underscores Said's argument that Orientalism is a discourse of political power and cultural dominance exerted by the West over the East. Within this context, women of color represent not merely white against black racism, but a complicated ordering of the world where gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity are structured to support and substantiate the dominance of the European white male.

Specifically dealing with the black woman as an icon of sexual difference and deviance in the nineteenth century, Sander L. Gilman examined several scientific studies that attempted to document the sexual nature of black females. Gilman states that J.J. Virey was the author of the study of race standard in the early nineteenth century and contributed a major essay and black female sexuality to the widely cited *Dictionnaire des Sciences Medicales* of 1819.⁶² Virey concluded that the voluptuousness of the black woman was developed to a degree of lasciviousness unknown in the European climate. He also claimed that the sexual organs of the black female were more developed than whites.

⁶² Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 231.

Virey based his conclusions on a study of the “Hottentot” female published by Georges Cuvier in 1817. “Hottentot” was the colonial name given to a cultural group indigenous to South Africa called Kohikohi. Saartjie Baartman, the Kohikohi female, who came to be known as the “Hottentot Venus,” was a servant of Dutch farmers near Capetown and was taken to England by the brother of her employer. Baartman was promised wealth in return for allowing herself to be exhibited. In 1810 she arrived in London where she was displayed in Picadilly in a cage, toured the English provinces, and went on to Paris, where she was exhibited by an animal trainer.⁶³ She was visited by Cuvier and other naturalists and posed nude for scientific renderings at the Jardin Du Roi in 1815 (figure 10). She died prematurely that year and was autopsied by Cuvier. He claimed the results of the autopsy substantiated notions of the sub-human nature of the black female physiognomy. Gilman points out that it was specifically her steatopygia, or protruding buttocks, that European audiences found riveting. The pathological sexuality presumed to be represented by Saartje Baartman’s anatomy served to confirm ubiquitous beliefs

⁶³ Gould points out that the treatment of the “Hottentot Venus” was protested by British abolitionists but she reportedly told a judge that she was not under restraint and understood that she had been guaranteed half of the profits. Stephen Jay Gould, “The Hottentot Venus,” *Natural History* 91, no. 10 (1982): 20.

about black women. The tragic incident surrounding Baartman was not the first encounter the Europeans had with the “Hottentot” people, nor was it the last.⁶⁴ Yet the term “Hottentot Venus,” coined for her, became a synonym for black female sexual degeneracy and stigmatized the woman of color into the twentieth century. T.J. Clark points out that a critic called Manet’s *Olympia* of 1863 (figure 11) a “Hottentot Venus” by a critic, clearly a reference to the sexual degeneracy of the nude woman symbolized by her black servant.⁶⁵ The stigma of the woman of color was so powerful that her presence carried a sexual charge that informed ostensibly innocuous scenes of women well into the twentieth century.

Jules-Robert Auguste - Sensuality and the Woman of Color

⁶⁴ Mary Louise Pratt gives a detailed account of the major travel narratives that featured European encounters with the indigenous peoples of South African, particularly the “Hottentots,” from the 17th and 18th centuries. Sander Gilman pointed out that over the nineteenth century several “Hottentot” women were autopsied and presented as case studies of black female physical anomalies by scientists. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992)39-68; Gilman, 235.

⁶⁵ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 93.

Early in the nineteenth century the work of Jules-Robert Auguste not only marks an important transition in the approach to the black female in French painting, but echoes ideas framed by the scientific discourse on black females. Auguste was primarily known as the central figure in a salon of artists and writers, including Orientalists Eugène Delacroix and Theodore Géricault, who met regularly during the mid-1820's to discuss issues of cultural interest and political concern in the Near East.⁶⁶ He seems to have been the only artist to visit the Near East during the reign of Louis XVIII (1814-1824). During his undocumented trip, probably between 1815 and 1817, he began to amass his large collection of Orientalia. Auguste was considered an expert on the Arab world and he lent his authentic objects to artists, particularly Delacroix, as accessories for their Orientalist works.⁶⁷ Because of his influence on Delacroix and other young Orientalist painters, Auguste has been considered, after Gros, to be "le père de l'orientalisme en France."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Donald A. Rosenthal, *Orientalism: The Near East in French Painting 1800-1880* (Rochester, New York: Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, 1982), 28.

⁶⁷ Donald A. Rosenthal, "Jules-Robert Auguste and the Early Romantic Circle" (Dissertation, Columbia University, 1978), 145-159.

⁶⁸ Jean Alazard, *L'Orient et la Peinture Française au XIXe Siècle: d'Eugène Delacroix à Auguste Renoir* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1930), 13.

Auguste's approach to female sexuality is reminiscent of the short-lived neo-rococo movement of the 1820's. His pastoral nudes echo the light-hearted sensuality of François Boucher (figure 12) and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (figure 13). Yet his interest in the sexuality of the black female and the intimacy with which she interacts with the white females in his works foreshadow significant developments in nineteenth-century Orientalism. One scholar has described rococo art as a "...combination of rigidity and fluidity, of relentlessly repetitive forms and contents portrayed via an infinite sinuosity of line and a gentle luminescence of frequently pastel color...it is an art of near total unreason, a celebration of tremulous, fleeting, passionate encounters."⁶⁹ Auguste's works *Odalisques* (figure 14) and *Les Amies* (figure 15), both of the 1820's, embody this characterization of rococo art, yet the use of race and explicit sexuality add complex undertones to both works.

The pastel *Odalisques* (figure 14) depicts three nude women, two black and one white, in a landscape setting. The main figure in the work is a black female whose back is to the viewer as her front is displayed to the two seated women. The other black female is seated facing the main figure and flashes a suggestive look at the standing

⁶⁹ Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992),6.

woman. The third figure is a white female who gazes directly at the standing woman from a crouched position in the middle ground of the work. The sensuous gaze that both seated women focus on the standing nude infuses the image with an air of lesbian eroticism, a nuance addressed with increasing explicitness throughout the nineteenth-century Orientalist movement.

Auguste calls into question the hierarchies at work with respect to black women in eighteenth-century *turquerie*. All three of these women are referred to as Odalisques, or sexual servants, implying a similar status in the harem. Although black women typically occupied the lowest ranks of the harem as domestic workers, Auguste depicts them as equals.⁷⁰ He draws upon notions of rampant lesbianism within harems, an idea that was titillating to Western sensibility. Malek Alloula provides a framework for Western fascination for harem lesbianism, or sapphism, in the context of French colonial post cards of North African women. Alloula writes:

Sapphism would thus contribute to further eroticize the idea of the harem, at least as it is constituted in Western belief. It underscores its polysexuality: to male homosexuality, to zoophilia and other vices, one can now add female homosexuality...It is an erotic universe in which there are no men...⁷¹

⁷⁰ Hunwick, 299.

⁷¹ Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986),96.

Rosenthal designates Auguste's *Les Amies*, also titled *Europe and Africa* (figure 15), his most famous composition.⁷² In *Les Amies*, the black and white female are locked in sensuous embrace. The black woman is nude while her friend's torso is exposed. The pastoral setting and light, painterly style demonstrate a reference to the rococo eroticism of Boucher and Fragonard. Auguste includes a pet dog, a rococo symbol that Madelyn Gutwirth contends "represents a sensual playfulness close to bestiality."⁷³ Auguste's playful hand does not conceal the references to the degeneracy of the woman of color that are replete in these images and indeed throughout his oeuvre.

Auguste exploits the notion that the black female is physically voluptuous as both images focus on her buttocks. According to the pseudo-scientific thought developing at the first part of the nineteenth century, the voluptuousness of the black female was physical proof of her lascivious nature. The protruding buttocks in particular was a sign of animal-like sexuality and became an icon for the differences between blacks and Europeans as embodied by the Hottentot Venus.⁷⁴

⁷² Rosenthal, "Jules-Robert Auguste," 113.

⁷³ Gutwirth, 7.

⁷⁴ Gilman, 231-240.

The degeneracy of the black woman is additionally a reflection on the nature of her white female counterpart. Even before Darwin, scientists used similar patterns in the way they studied racial and sexual difference.⁷⁵ By the nineteenth century the science of gender difference was often blurred with the science of racial difference, resulting in a structural connection between the treatment of women and non-Europeans in the language, experience, and imaginations of western men.⁷⁶

In spite of the references to the sexual degeneracy of the women in Auguste's work, these images are not moral statements about the nature of black females or the dangers of lesbianism; they provide a voyeuristic peek into a provocatively taboo situation. What has surfaced in Auguste's treatment of the *Odalisques* and *Les Amies* is a fascination with lesbianism and the desirability of the voluptuous woman of color in the eyes of the European male. Auguste articulates the duality of attraction and repulsion inherent in the relationship between these two women, a notion that is central to the Orientalist view of female sexuality.

⁷⁵ Londa Scheibinger, "The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23, no. 4 (1990): 388.

⁷⁶ De Groot, 91.

Auguste's work was not exhibited at the Salon like that of most of the artists discussed here. The majority of his work was in his private collection or in friends' collections at the time of his death. Its importance resides in its potential influence on other Orientalists in his circle, and as a demonstration of how black women were considered in the cultural consciousness of his era.

Eugène Delacroix and "True" Orientalism

Eugène Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* and the circumstances surrounding its production represent a substantial transition in French exotic imagery. This shift can be viewed as the cultural legacy of the French invasion of Algeria in 1830.⁷⁷ The invasion transformed Algeria into a major center of artistic activity and prompted interest in neighboring Morocco as well. As France focused on colonial interests

⁷⁷ Lahouari Addi described France's reasons for the colonization of Algiers as multi-pronged. By 1814 France's overseas empire had dwindled and there was a desire to compete with Britain for supremacy in North Africa. Algeria would serve to boost feelings of national pride and reaffirm power in Europe. Addi also portrays France as having a self ascribed civilizing mission, to bring Christianity and enlightened living to a backwards people. Lahouari Addi, "Colonial Mythologies: Algeria in the French Imagination," in *Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*, ed. L. Carl Brown and Matthew S. Gordon (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1996), 93-105.

in the Magreb (an Arab term for North African Mediterranean states), an influx of artists, travelers and writers flocked to the region. Whereas the Ottoman capitol of Constantinople was once the central location of Western Oriental lore, after 1830 the epicenter of Orientalism shifted to Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt.⁷⁸

Donald Rosenthal calls the 1830's through the early 1840's the "golden age of French Orientalism."⁷⁹ Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leurs appartement* of 1834 (figure 16) has been crowned as the first "true" Orientalist painting.⁸⁰ The work, exhibited at the Salon of 1834, was accepted as an eyewitness account of a North African harem. Ostensibly impenetrable by Western men, the harem was the quintessential exotic subject long before Delacroix addressed it. A Western artist of the stature of Delacroix had never been invited into the cloistered quarters of the harem to record its interior. Thus his work was considered authentic, true to nature, even scientific.⁸¹ The

⁷⁸ Rosenthal states that focus was diverted from Constantinople due to the Westernization of the city and the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Rosenthal, *Orientalism*, 41. However Constantinople remained central to the work of some later Orientalists, the most important of which is Jean-Léon Gérôme.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Porterfield, 119.

⁸¹ Porterfield cites several commentators who remarked on the "truths" of *Femmes d'Alger* when exhibited at the Salon of 1834. Ibid, 122.

“true to nature” designation given to the work was also due to the way he fashioned local color and light.⁸²

Delacroix’s masterpiece is not simply a factual account of a privileged encounter with a forbidden space, or a symphony of color and light; it represents the incarnation of a fantasy that was transferable among cultures, religions, time periods and social echelons. The harem, once the providence of the Turkish Sultan, the despotic ruler of the Ottoman empire, became a viable subject even if associated with a middle class household in Algeria.⁸³ *Les Femmes d’Alger dans leurs appartement* (figure 16), with no reference to a harem or an odalisque in the title, nevertheless has all of the trappings and encoded meanings of the notorious institution. Languid women in elaborate costumes, the hookah or pipe, the lavish interior setting and the requisite black female servant propel these Algerian women into the ongoing narrative of exotic sexuality.

Delacroix’s original watercolor sketches of the women he observed did not include the black servant. Hugh Honour states that his only known drawing for the black woman was made in Paris from a

⁸² Ibid, 127.

⁸³ According to James Thompson, the harem visited by Delacroix and depicted in *Femmes d’Alger* was Jewish. James Thompson, *The East Imagined, Experienced, Remembered: Orientalist Nineteenth Century Painting* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1988),70.

studio model.⁸⁴ Concerning the significance of Delacroix's later addition of the black servant Honour writes:

But the black servant standing on the right in the finished composition seems to have been an afterthought...Although such a figure was as much a constituent part of an Oriental interior as a nargileh, one may doubt whether that was the only or even the main reason for her inclusion. She provides a necessary upright to counterbalance the pose of the Algerian woman on the left, as well as adding a very gentle rustle of movement to the otherwise static scene. The darkness of her skin and the rough simplicity of her servant's dress also make a telling contrast with the seated figures. Such a black woman in an Algerian household would probably have been a slave, but in the painting she carries no burden of symbolism.⁸⁵

Honour has clearly overlooked the symbolic tradition of the black female attendant and the importance of her role in the fabrication of exotic sexuality.

Barthélémy Jobert lends more historical significance to the addition of the black female, but ignores the power of her symbolism:

The black servant who, at the right of the picture, draws a curtain to display the harem to the spectator, is, it appears, a complete invention of the artist, since she figures in none of the drawings done in Algiers. Delacroix could of course have seen her in North Africa, but this addition to the original scene appears not to have been dictated by considerations of a strictly realist kind. This figure simply adds to the exoticism of the painting, the verisimilitude of which she increases in the eyes of a spectator familiar with descriptions of Turkish harems. She is

⁸⁴ Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the American Revolution to World War I*, vol. IV (Houston: Menil Foundation, Inc., 1989), 148.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

thus a part of the tradition of European painting since the Renaissance, tying the work to the great Venetian masters, in particular Veronese.⁸⁶

Jobert's evocation of Veronese in relation to Delacroix circumvents confrontation with issues of race and exoticism that were developing in French imagery during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

If Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* is the first true Orientalist painting, then it is evident that the momentum of nineteenth-century Orientalism was propelled by a fascination with the perceived roles of exotic women, their sexual availability as well as the ideas inherent in the symbol of the black female. Perhaps Delacroix's conscious decision to include the black female in his "authentic" harem scene set the standard for "documentary" images of harem life that would spawn various combinations and permutations of this basic theme throughout the nineteenth century. The cumulative effect of the development of the black female in Western art, enhanced by Delacroix's reportage, conventionalized this combination such that "Oriental" women were rarely depicted without a black servant/slave in nineteenth-century painting. Delacroix's black woman literally and

⁸⁶ Barthélémy Jobert, *Delacroix*, trans. Terry Grabar and Alexandra Bonfante-Warren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 150.

figuratively unveils the construction of exotic female sexuality in the nineteenth century.

Another development in the imagery of the black woman made apparent in Delacroix's early work is the transferability of the black servant to other sub-sets of exotica that were popular in the nineteenth century. Delacroix was fascinated by the idea of the *belle juive* and created several images of North African Jewish women. His etching *Juive d'Alger* of 1833 (figure 17) portrays a Jewish woman with her black female servant.⁸⁷ The exoticized Jewish female was one of the various types that populated the Orientalist lexicon of imagery, both visual and literary. *La Sultane Favorite*, a poem in Hugo's *Les Orientales*, describes a "*belle juive*" implored by her sultan not to harbor jealousy against the other women of the harem. He asks her what kind of women she is afraid of:

Dis? Crains-tu les filles de Grèce?
Les lis pâles de Damanhour?
Ou l'oeil ardent de la négresse
Qui, comme une jeune tigresse,
Bondit, rugissante d'amour?⁸⁸

⁸⁷ According to Lee Johnson this print, originally titled *Juive d'Alger avec une négresse, assises dans un intérieur*, is actually the Moroccan bride whose wedding he attended and recorded in the watercolor *Visit to a Jewish bride in Tangier* of 1833, and *Noce Juive au Maroc* of 1837-41. Lee Johnson, "Delacroix's 'Jewish bride'," *The Burlington Magazine* 139, no. 1136 (1997): 755-759.

⁸⁸ Victor Hugo, "Les Orientales," in *Victor Hugo: Poésie* (Paris: Aux Éditions Du Seuil, 1972), 231.

Hugo characterizes the *négresse* as a young tigress, bounding, roaring with love. Hugo's juxtaposition of the beautiful, but greedy Jewish woman and the animalesque black female is yet another demonstration of extent to which the discourse on blackness plays a significant role in Orientalism, specifically in the realm of the sexualized concubine.

The Black Woman and the Biblical Jewess

The black woman as sexual signifier was so conventionalized by the nineteenth century that she was easily transferred back in time to an Orientalized Biblical past. The image of the black female added exotic sexuality to the lives of some of the nineteenth century's most notorious Biblical women.

Théodore Chasseriau's *Toilette of Esther* or *Esther Preparing Herself to Meet King Ahauserus* (figure 18), exhibited in the Salon of 1842, exemplifies how the trappings of Orientalism were fused with Biblical themes, particularly those with a sub-text of female sexuality, in the nineteenth century. Chasseriau (1819-1856) was a talented Orientalist whose work fused the linear classicism of his teacher

Ingres with Delacroix's use of color and vibrant brushwork.⁸⁹ This work depicts the moment in the Old Testament when Esther, a Jewish virgin who had been taken into the King's harem, is being prepared to go to him. King Ahasuerus, a Persian ruler, fell in love with her and made her his queen. As queen, Esther saved the Jews in the kingdom from extermination by Ahasuerus's forces.

According to the story, the King's eunuch Hegai befriended Esther and provided her with maiden servants, a clear indication that the relationship between the harem woman, the black eunuch and the servant has biblical roots. Chasseriau portrays Esther, a heroine, as a beguiling temptress flanked by exotic slaves. Hugh Honour convincingly argues that the black servant to the right of Chasseriau's Esther is Hegai, the androgynous eunuch.⁹⁰ The figure's muscular neck and arms, and his large hands belie his earrings and pearls, ascribing to him both masculine and feminine traits, and fortifying Honour's contention that he is the eunuch. The combination of the harem wife, the black eunuch, and female servant in Chasseriau's depiction of Esther, although consistent with the story, highlights a

⁸⁹ Robert Rosenblum and H.W. Janson, *19th Century Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984),150.

⁹⁰ Honour, 155.

relatively minor aspect of the narrative. Here the notion of eroticism is privileged over the concept of female heroism.

The shift of focus to the sensuality of the female heroine, rather than her act of bravery, is in keeping with the tradition of depicting Biblical women at the bath. Described as an “uneasy marriage of the spiritual and the sensual,” Orientalizing these familiar women adds an additional layer of meaning to their images.⁹¹ Sexuality and degradation are signified by both the oriental setting and the black attendants, and present a conflicting construction of the chaste heroine.

This duplicitous representation of the Jewish woman is paralleled in the nineteenth-century literary discourse. Janis Bergman-Carton describes the complexities apparent in the various incarnations of Jewish female identity in the nineteenth century. She states: “ Beginning in the July Monarchy, the saintly *belle juive*, with her undercurrent of sensuality, increasingly was transfigured into the

⁹¹ Carol Ockman discusses the rhetorical image of the oriental Jewess found in literature and art of the nineteenth century. She states that Old Testament scenes were by far the richest source for images of Jews in the nineteenth century. She describes the orientalized representations of Jewish women of the bible as an “uneasy marriage of the spiritual and the sensual.” Carol Ockman, *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 75.

carnal *belle juive* of understated saintliness.”⁹² Carton points out that the Jewish courtesans, Esther, of Honoré de Balzac’s 1844 *Harlot High and Low*, and Rachel of Guy de Maupassant’s 1882 *Mlle Fifi*, in spite of their station, demonstrated a strength of character.⁹³ Both literary courtesans, Esther and Rachel, have Biblical names, further demonstration of conflicting ideas surrounding the Jewess in nineteenth-century France.

Many artists underscored the duality of the Biblical heroine by depicting her with exoticized black servants. Léon Benouville’s Esther (figure 19), Salon of 1844, presents a more classicized, academic treatment of the theme. The adoring black female servant, with one breast exposed as she holds a cloth for her mistress, recalls the adoration of Mademoiselle de Clermont’s servants as depicted by Nattier (figure 3) more than one hundred years before.

The presence of black female attendants sexualize a painting of the daughter of Jephthah, an old testament Jew, by Edouard Debat-Ponsan. Debat-Ponsan’s *The Daughter of Jephthah* (figure 20) refers to the book of Judges story of Jephthah, who must sacrifice his daughter due to a vow he made to God in return for helping him to save Israel.

⁹² Janis Bergman-Carton, “Negotiating the Categories: Sarah Bernhardt and the Possibilities of Jewishness,” *Art Journal* 55, no. 2 (1996): 56.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

The painting illustrates the moment when the daughter goes to the hills to wander with her companions and lament her maidenhood before she is sacrificed. Debat-Ponsan depicts Jephthah's daughter as a bare breasted temptress accompanied by an entourage of sensuously lamenting maidens and adoring black servants. The Orientalization of Biblical scenes in the nineteenth century resulted in a projection of the notions of exotic female sexuality on to Biblical women, particularly Jewish women, such as Judith, Salome, Esther, and Ruth.⁹⁴

Le Bain Turque

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres has been hailed as the "quintessential armchair Orientalist."⁹⁵ Unlike his contemporary rival Delacroix, Ingres never traveled to Turkey or North Africa, and his oeuvre consists of only a few orientalized works that draw heavily on classical traditions.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, his *Le Bain Turque* of 1862/3

⁹⁴ Many aspects of the discourses surrounding race, sexuality and the Jewish woman intersect with those of the black woman. This is an area for further development.

⁹⁵ Benjamin, 15.

⁹⁶ Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)130-144.

(figure 21) is consistently included in the major analyses of nineteenth-century Orientalism, and is considered one of the movement's premier icons. However, upon close examination it is more in keeping with the ideas and sources of eighteenth-century *turqueries* than with those of the "true" Orientalist.

It is well known that *Le Bain Turque* was partly inspired by the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the wife of an eighteenth-century British ambassador to Constantinople.⁹⁷ Ingres also used a variety of early visual sources such as *Discours et histoire véritable des navigations, pérégrinations, et voyages faits en Turquie* of 1567 and *Recueil de cent Estampes représentant différentes Nations du Levant* of 1713, both discussed in chapter one of this thesis.⁹⁸ Even Ingres's choice of Turkey as an exotic local for his harem fantasy was somewhat *retardataire*, considering the focus of the contemporary Orientalist had largely shifted from Turkey to North Africa.

Relevant to this analysis are the strong links and parallels found in Ingres's treatment of the black female in *Le Bain Turque* to visual sources that date back as far as the sixteenth century. Ingres's

⁹⁷Marilyn Brown discusses Ingres' debt to Montagu's letters, first published in 1762. For more on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters see Joseph W. Lew, "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 4 (1991): 432-450.

⁹⁸ Marilyn R. Brown, "The Harem Dehistoricized: Ingres' Turkish Bath," *Arts Magazine* 61 (1987): 60.

reliance on these materials for the women of color, in lieu of more current sources, testifies to the continuing vitality of antiquated materials that perpetuate racist fantasies and misconceptions.

Immediately striking is Ingres's direct quotation of the two women in *Turque Allant au Bain* (figure 1) by Nicolas de Nicolay, first published in 1567. Ingres translates Nicolay's Turkish woman, fully clothed with the distinctive headdress and shawl, into the woman walking through the central area of the circular image (figure 22). She has dropped her drapery to reveal her nude torso. The dark, shadowy figure entering the bath through the rear door is indistinguishable except for the large red object she carries on her head. This is a direct copy of the tasseled bowl that the black servant carries in Nicolay's print, leading to the conclusion that the figure entering the bath is also a black servant. The scowl on the face of Nicolay's servant woman is not lost on the shadowy figure as it resurfaces in the black attendant who stands behind the woman having her hair perfumed (figure 22).

The middle-ground figure of the brown woman serving coffee to the reclining nude bather recalls the popularity of coffee service in eighteenth-century *turquerie* (figure 23). Ingres's pair, although nude and in a bath house setting, echoes the image of Madame de

Pompadour and her black servant in Van Loo's 1755 painting *A Sultana Taking Coffee* (figure 7). The reclining woman takes the coffee cup from her kneeling servant of color in a scene that, in the case of Van Loo and other rococo artists, was suggestive of sexuality and power. Yet in Ingres's compilation it also signifies the interdependence of sexuality and servitude in the construction of the exotic environment.

In addition to exploiting existing stereotypes of black servants, Ingres articulates the idea of a hierarchy of races based on physical differences and skin color. As discussed earlier, the "science" of race was well understood in the nineteenth century. Europeans considered themselves at the pinnacle of a human structure based on physiological characteristics. The nineteenth century saw the development of the science of phrenology through which it was asserted that the abilities and characteristics of an individual could be ascertained by analyzing the size of his or her brain and the shape of his or her skull. By highlighting the supposed differences between the size and shape of the negroid skull, scientists were able to profess the inferiority of blacks and other races (figure 25).⁹⁹ The theory of

⁹⁹ Cohen contends that the theories of the German physician Franz Gall were influential in popularizing phrenology in nineteenth-century France. Gall claimed that blacks' heads and brains were smaller than those of Europeans, therefore they were inferior. Cohen, 224-225.

polygenism, a concept that germinated in the sixteenth century, contended that blacks were among the non-white races that were separate biological species all together, and could not be considered on equal terms with whites.¹⁰⁰ Degenerationism, or geographical determinism, charted human development as a factor of location and climate. These and other approaches to race served as a justification for slavery based on the grounds of human differentiation.¹⁰¹

Paul Broca, founder of the *Société d'anthropologie de Paris*, applied the scientific approach to race to characterize superficial differences, attempting to provide objective evidence of European superiority.

Prognathism, a more or less black coloring of the skin, wooly hair and intellectual and social inferiority are frequently interconnected. A white skin, straight hair and non-prognathic face belong ordinarily to the most advanced peoples.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Richard H. Popkin, "The Philosophical Bases of Modern Racism," in *Philosophy and the Civilizing Arts*, ed. Craig Walton and John P. Anton (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974), 126-165. Stephen Jay Gould, "American Polygeny and Crainometry Before Darwin: Blacks and Indians as Separate, Inferior Species," in *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 90-91.

¹⁰¹ Pieterse, 45-47.

¹⁰² As quoted by Cohen, 226.

Ingres's bath is filled with mostly white women, many of whom resemble the idealized female type that populates his body of work.¹⁰³ Their pale white skin and classicized features provide a stark contrast to the dark skin of the servant women. One black servant with a broad, rounded nose, full lips, and dark skin is juxtaposed with the creamy white skin and aquiline nose of the woman she is assisting. The differences represented by this pair demonstrate the polar opposites of the continuum of European standards of beauty, as delineated above by Broca. Ingres certainly alludes to a spectrum of beauty, a concept that would be spelled out in detail by British artist Edwin Long in the 1875 painting *The Babylonian Marriage Market* (figure 26). Long depicts the range of females for sale, ranked in the order of their beauty, from the pale woman on the auction block to the darkest woman seated at the end of the line, covering her face in shame. Long, like Ingres, glorifies the European standard of beauty by pitting it against the woman of color naturalized within the sexual mythology of eastern decadence.

Similarly, Gérard de Nerval's visceral reaction to a group of *négresses* for sale at an Egyptian slave market is a powerful demonstration of how the scientific discourse on racial difference framed the conception of beauty in the eye of the European male. In

¹⁰³ Ibid, 58-68.

his 1851 publication of *Voyage en Orient*, Nerval's narrator described the black women he encountered during his visit to a Cairo slave merchant:

They were Negresses from Senaar, and indeed no species could be so far removed from our standard conceptions of beauty. The prominence of their jaws, their flattened foreheads, and their thick lips are characteristics which class these poor creatures in an almost bestial category; nevertheless, apart from this strange physiognomy which nature had endowed them with, their bodies were of a rare and exceptional beauty; pure and virginal forms were clearly visible under their tunics; their voices were sweet and vibrant like the shrill but subdued sounds of fresh mountain springs. All the same, I was hardly inflamed by these lovely monsters, and I asked to see other women with a more open facial angle and a less pronounced shade of black.¹⁰⁴

Ingres's juxtaposition of the desirable European-like harem woman and the degenerate black woman set the limits of exotic sexuality. The spectrum of exotic women that populated the European visual and literary arena of the nineteenth century inhabit the continuum between these two poles.

¹⁰⁴ Gérard de Nerval, *Journey to the Orient*, trans. Norman Glass (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 33-34.

Jean-Léon Gérôme: Black Women and the Conquerors' Gaze

Ideological currents of race, sexuality, gender, power and nationalism that, to varying degrees, run through French exoticism, dramatically converge in the work of master Orientalist Jean-Léon Gérôme. Gérôme was one of the most powerful and influential artists of the nineteenth century. His Orientalist works are often considered the quintessential representatives of the genre. During his lifetime he became a world-renowned painter, and was widely collected by individuals and institutions in Europe and America.¹⁰⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, Gérôme's works had fallen out of favor, perhaps overshadowed by the development of modernism, a movement that he actively tried to thwart.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Jack Perry Brown, "The Return of the Salon: Jean Léon Gérôme in the Art Institute," *The Art Institute of Chicago: Museum Studies* 15, no. 2: 156.

¹⁰⁶ Gerald Ackerman points out that Gérôme actively worked against avant- guard artists. He continually voted against Impressionist entries to the salon, he fought against the installation of the Manet Memorial exhibition at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and he led to opposition to the acceptance by the government of a large Caillebotte bequest. Ackerman contends that his unsuccessful efforts to stamp out the avant guard distorted his legacy as an artist. His popularity began to drop in his own lifetime. Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904)* (Dayton, Ohio: Dayton Art Institute, 1972),14-15.

Although Gérôme depicted *neo-grec* subjects and produced some portraiture, the majority of his paintings were of Orientalist themes.¹⁰⁷ In the mid 1850's Gérôme made the first of many trips to North Africa and the Near East. Consequently, his Orientalism developed out of "continually renewed visual impressions which he kept alive by the sketches, photographs, and properties he brought back with him, and by careful selection of ethnic models in Paris."¹⁰⁸

Since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, France had maintained some form of political and/or diplomatic leadership in the Arab world, and 1830 saw the beginning of 132 years of French control in Algeria.¹⁰⁹ Gérôme's position as a Frenchman in North Africa was cloaked by the cultural authority and political power that was France in the mid-nineteenth century. The tenor of French authority in the region is acutely captured in Gérôme's 1867-8 painting *Le Général Bonaparte au Caire* (figure 27). Bonaparte, representative of the ideals of the French Revolution, exudes militaristic power and composed authority over the exotic and ancient

¹⁰⁷ Gerald M. Ackerman, "Gérôme's Oriental Paintings and the Western Genre Tradition," *Arts Magazine* 60, no. 7 (1986): 75.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁰⁹ L. Carl Brown, "France and the Arabs: An Overview," in *Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*, ed. L. Carl Brown and Matthw S. Gordon (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1996),11.

landscape of Cairo.¹¹⁰ As the father of *L'Institut d'Égypte*, Napoleon also embodies the objectivity of scientific inquiry, a point of view that framed much of Gérôme's Orientalist works. The authority with which Napoleon gazes out over his conquered lands is omnipresent in Gérôme's oeuvre. With a conquering gaze, and objective distance, Gérôme navigates the streets of Cairo, traverses the deserts of Egypt, observes the sacred halls of the Mosque and peers in cloistered quarters of the women's baths.¹¹¹

An intriguing aspect of Gérôme's Orientalism is his skill at incorporating different ethnic types into his vision of the East, and the care he attends to differentiating among them. The figures that populate Gérôme's canvases have been identified as Egyptian, Turkish, Moorish, Arnauts (Albanian warriors), Bashi-Bazouk (mercenaries of differing ethnicities), Nubian and Sudanese, among many others.

¹¹⁰ The declaration of the Second Empire in 1852 under Louis-Napoleon fuelled a renewed interest in the Napoleon's First Empire and depictions of battles and conquests of the Napoleonic era served to help establish the new regime's legitimacy. Mary Anne Stevens, ed., *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1984), 140.

¹¹¹ Linda Nochlin points out that one of the defining features of Orientalist painting is its dependence for its existence on a presence that is always absent - the Western colonial or touristic presence.

Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 36-37.

Gérôme demonstrated particular interest in distinguishing among his many depictions of black female servants. They wear costumes that denote differing ethnic backgrounds, and seem to be derived from individual models.¹¹² This interest in accurately portraying his servants is in marked contrast to his consistent use of the generic nude white female. Gérôme's nude women, generally considered to be European models, could be easily interchanged between his *neo-grec* works and his Orientalist themes. The attention bestowed upon the black female servant by Gérôme is in keeping with the exacting details with which he depicts architecture, decorative objects and other supporting materials, and possesses an air of ethnographic documentation.¹¹³

¹¹² Gerald Ackerman points out that Gérôme began work on his Moorish Bath of 1870 in London but returned to Paris to finish it because there was no model for the Nubian slave. Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1986), 226.

¹¹³ Gérôme's attention to detail of both objects and individual types meets an increasing demand for this manner of reportage established by the ethnographic exhibition. The popular ethnographic exhibition of the late nineteenth century played a significant role in shaping attitudes towards the East. Entire architectural complexes filled with people and objects from exotic civilizations such as Egypt and West Africa were assembled for the entertainment and edification of the European viewer. The relationship between Gérôme's commercial success and late-nineteenth-century popular ethnography is an area for further development. On nineteenth-century popular ethnography see: Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995), 59-88; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Peter

activity and passivity, Africa and Europe, East and West to formulate his symmetrical whole. His timeless depiction of mistress and slave is so seductive that it comes close to persuading the viewer that servitude is indeed erotic.

By the nineteenth century, the concept of the bathing woman came to represent increasingly complex ideas about hygiene and the female body. As a result of concerns over public hygiene and disease, the bourgeoisie began to associate cleanliness with virtue and respectability, placing themselves above the unwashed lower classes.¹¹⁵ Yet there were arguments against the concept of a woman touching her genitalia on the grounds that it “promoted indecent bodily self-awareness and masturbation”¹¹⁶ Additionally, bathing was directly associated with the sexual activity of the prostitute.¹¹⁷ These conflicting ideas informed the perception of the bathing woman. The intimacy between the black and white woman in the contested space of the bath heightened the problematic notions surrounding the bathing woman that framed Gérôme’s series of bathers.

Gérôme did not limit his treatment of mistress and exotic slave to the interior of the bath. Like the slave-market descriptions of

¹¹⁵ Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 140.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 148.

hands and legs, no doubt providing clues to her specific cultural affiliation. Her dirty feet reiterate her soiled nature. The small monkey that sits between the pair echoes the bestiality of both females, as well as the culture in which this type of behavior flourishes.¹¹⁸

Gérôme's marketplace *négress* mirrors Gerard de Nerval's description of black women at a Cairo bazaar.

Most of them were disfigured by a mass of tattoos, grotesque incisions, blue stars and suns cut into the greyish black of their skin. Moreover, I noticed that their gestures, their attitudes and their feet, which were elongated and expanded, probably from their practice at climbing trees, made them bear a close resemblance to the monkey, that disowned relative whom we insist on spurning through our racial pride.¹¹⁹

It is probable that the late-nineteenth century viewer/reader, familiar with the scientific discourse on race, would recognize the analogy between the black female and the monkey established by both Gérôme and Nerval.

A Vendre and its 1871 predecessor *A Vendre* (figure 30) reveal a sense of despair atypical of Gérôme's objectified women. These works are the nearest Gérôme approaches a critical view of female slavery in Egypt.

¹¹⁸ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 290.

¹¹⁹ Nerval, 35.

In his travel notes, Gustave Flaubert articulated a similar sense of pity as he described a Sunday morning at an Egyptian bazaar:

The bazaars smell of coffee and sandalwood. At the bend of one of the streets, to the right we suddenly find ourselves in the quarter of the *almehs* [prostitutes]...The women are sitting in their doorways on mats, or standing. Light colored robes, one over the other, hang loosely in the hot wind; blue robes around the bodies of the negresses. The clothes are sky-blue, bright yellow, pink, red - all contrasting with different colored skins...The negresses have vertical knife-marks on their cheeks, usually three on each cheek: this is done in infancy with a red-hot knife...We return to the street of the *almehs*. I walk along it deliberately; they call out to me: "Cawadja, cawadja, baksheesh! Baksheesh! Cawadja!" I give some of them a few piastres; a few put their arms around me and try to pull me inside; I deliberately abstain from going with them, lest it spoil the sweet sadness of it all, and I walk away.¹²⁰

Flaubert is fascinated with the sensual experience of the bazaar; the smells, the impression of the women's skin as it contrasts with their clothing, the strangeness of the black women's scarification. Yet he cannot indulge in their offerings "lest it spoil the sweet sadness" of his objectivity.

More successfully than Flaubert, who would soon succumb to temptation and purchase the services of a woman for hire, G r me upholds the distance between himself and his subjects, and maintains

¹²⁰ Steegmuller, 110-111.

objectivity with his exacting brush and photo-realistic detail.¹²¹ Yet his approach to detail can be misleading. Linda Nochlin wrote:

A “naturalist” or “authenticist” like Gérôme tries to make us forget that his art is really art, both by concealing the evidence of this touch, and, at the same time, by insisting on a plethora of authenticating details, especially on what might be called unnecessary ones...If I seem to dwell on the issue of authenticating details, it is because not only Gérôme’s contemporaries, but some present-day revisionist reviewers of Gérôme and of Orientalist painting in general, insist so strongly on the objectivity and credibility of Gérôme’s view of the near East, using this sort of detail as evidence for their claims.¹²²

Gérôme’s “authenticating” treatment of the black female lent her credibility unparalleled in the nineteenth century. His frigid detachment offered none of the lust inherent in Flaubert’s and Nerval’s views of Eastern women, undergirding his apparent credibility as an observer of fact. Yet it is clear that Gérôme built his vision of exotic female sexuality on a long tradition of racial and sexual mythology that permeated the idea of the “Orient.”

The theme of the sexualized woman and slave recurs throughout Gérôme’s long career. A popular image, *Femmes au Bain* of 1876 (figure 31) was purchased by Czar Alexander III, and *Grande Piscine de*

¹²¹ Flaubert’s relationship with the prostitute Kuchuk Hanem is described in detail in his letters and travel notes. See Steegmuller, 114-115.

¹²² Nochlin, 38-39.

Brousse, 1885 (figure 32) was exhibited at the 1885 Salon. These works, typical of Gérôme's highly atmospheric renderings of bathing woman accompanied by their black servants, can be viewed as a synthesis of the role of the black woman in French academic exoticism. Gérôme's black female servants are active participants in the construction of the sexualized white female. They prepare her bath, scrub her body, tend to her children, serve her food, coffee and smokes, and support her, both literally and figuratively. The black female servant not only insures that her mistress is prepared for her Sultan, husband or customer, but embodies the underlying notions of sexuality and servitude, integral to the construction of the exotic woman.

Conclusion

The black female remained a powerful symbol of eroticism and decadence for two centuries: from the Turkish harem to the *Ancien Régime* court; from the Old Testament to the French Salon; and from Constantinople to Paris, she embodies the role that racism played in the shaping of visual culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The woman of color was essential to the fabrication of binary

relationships between black and white, East and West, Orient and Occident, pervasive in all forms of cultural production in which European hegemony was celebrated.

This survey of the black female in French painting has charted the degree to which a convention in art can carry overt and covert messages. Often given little significance in the larger art historical narrative, such a convention reflects complex ideas that permeate the consciousness of an era. The image of the woman of color has currency beyond the parameters of exoticism in French painting. The black woman as a symbol of forbidden desire was employed by a new generation of avant-garde and modernist painters whose treatment of contemporary sexuality and race often intersected traditional Orientalists such as Gérôme and Chasseriau.

The importance of the *négress* in the fashioning of modern life in Paris will be explored in the next phase of the research begun in this thesis. As artists grappled with the issues of modern life, the black female found a place within the world of prostitution that flourished in Paris during the nineteenth century.¹²³ The prostitute was particularly attractive to avant-garde painters as she represented the

¹²³ For more on prostitution in nineteenth-century France see Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

quintessentially sexualized and objectified woman.¹²⁴ In spite of their attempts to break away from tradition and find value in the contemporary, modern painters used the conventional tool of the subservient *négress* to signify the deviancy of the prostitute. Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (figure 15) of 1863 sparked an outrage by brandishing a courtesan and black servant in the face of respectable society.¹²⁵ Paul Cézanne, profoundly inspired by Manet's *Olympia*, created several works, such as *Afternoon in Naples* (figure 33) of 1866, and *A Modern Olympia* (figure 34) of 1872/3, that located the icon of the black servant in a contemporary sexualized situation.¹²⁶

Regarding the Orientalist trope of the woman of color in modernist paintings, Griselda Pollock contends that the legacy of sex and servitude in a colonial economy is part of Western modernity.¹²⁷

She writes:

¹²⁴ Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 9.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 89-128.

¹²⁶ Françoise Cachin et al., *Cézanne* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996), 132-133, 154.

¹²⁷ Pollock's work on the black figure in constructing modernism in nineteenth century France was published after this thesis was completed, therefore the ideas expressed in this thesis were arrived at independently of this publication. Griselda Pollock, *Differencing The Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), 294.

Painters ambitious to negotiate modernity's representation would have to pass through the defile of Orientalism, which repeatedly occurs as the site of this specific configuration of power as sexuality and desire, whether imagined on visits to harems abroad (were they indeed permitted?) or mimicked in brothel mock-ups and courtesans' workrooms in metropolitan capitals. The painting *Olympia*, I suggest, also works with and works over such Orientalist material, and that is why there are two women of different ethnicities in this painting. This is why Africa - and its histories, complexly woven like the sign of the headwrap itself- is at the center of modernity¹²⁸

While Africa, obliquely referred to by Manet, figures in the construction of modernism of the 1860's, by the turn of the twentieth century she is on the front lines of a revolution in representation.

Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* (figure 35) of 1907 ignited a new era of painting. *Les Femmes d'Alger* has been credited with precipitating "...the demise of the old visual order and the advent of the new."¹²⁹ Stylistically, Picasso fractured conventional modes of representation, yet aspects of his narrative remained grounded in the old order, particularly, the alliance of the sex and race. *Les Femmes d'Alger*, bold, confrontational prostitutes, belong to a long line of fallen women. The faces of two of the figures are treated as African masks, alluding to the conventional black servant, companion to the woman of ill repute. The "africanesque" prostitutes are the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Anna C. Chave, "New Encounters with *Les Femmes d'Alger*: Gender, Race and the Origins of Cubism," *The Art Bulletin* 76 (1994),597.

culmination of two centuries of equating primitive African-ness with the “darker” side of white female sexuality.¹³⁰ Picasso fuses notions of race and gender to form one hybrid being who embodies the totality of degeneracy and secures a place for Africa at the epicenter of the modernist movement.

Although styles of painting and attitudes about its role in society drastically change over the span of years covered in this thesis, in many respects the role of the woman of color remains consistent. By charting her development over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and placing her within a larger context of literary, historical and scientific discourses, we are able to map the development of attitudes toward race and gender as they are mediated through the translucent veil of exoticism. The sexualized black woman, clearly a vital character in the cultural constellation of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, endures new directions in the development of modernism, and remains a trademark of illicit sexuality well into the twentieth century.

¹³⁰ Ibid,606.

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Figure 1

Nicolas de Nicolay

Turque Allant au Bain

1567



Figure 2

Jean-Baptiste Vanmour

Fille Turque

1713



Figure 3

Jean-Marc Nattier

Mademoiselle de Clermont en Sultane

1733

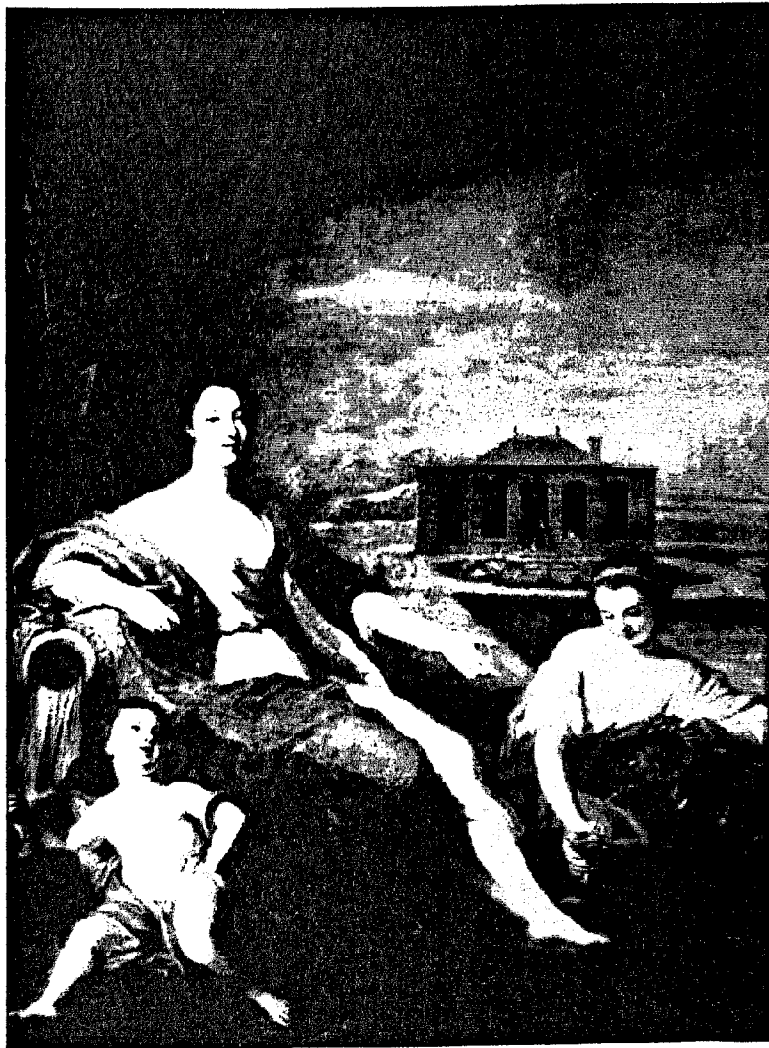


Figure 4

Jean-Marc Nattier

Mademoiselle de Clermont Taking the Waters of Chantilly

1729

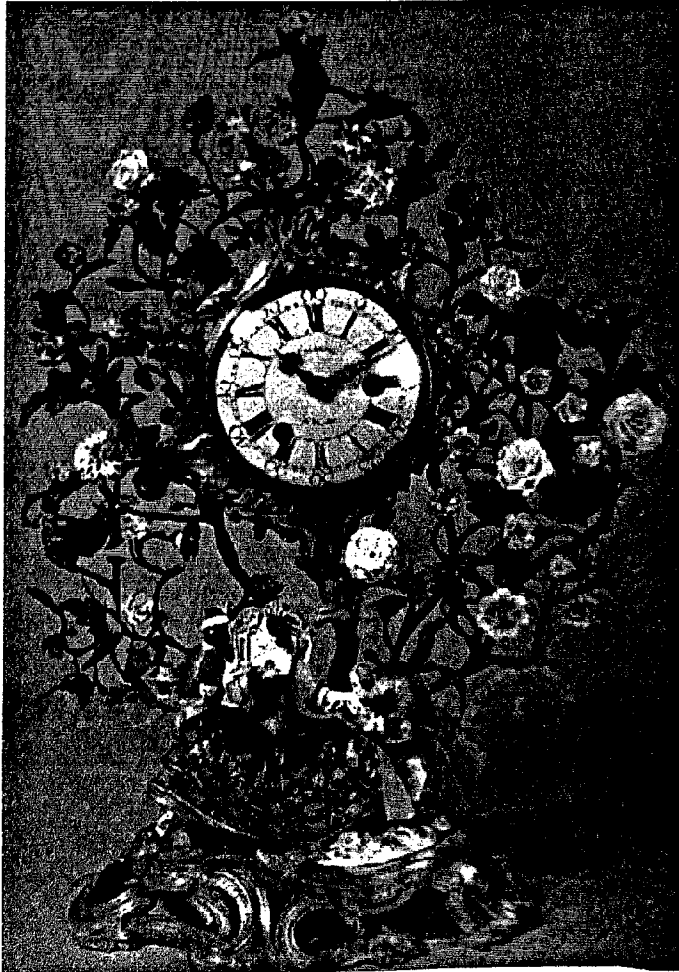


Figure 5

J.J. Kaendler

Meissen
Handkiss Group

Eighteenth Century



Figure 6

F.N. Genard

Gold Box with Painted Enamel Decoration

Eighteenth Century



Figure 7

Carle Van Loo

A Sultana Taking Coffee

1755



Figure 8

Jean-Baptiste-André Gautier-Dagoty

Madame du Barry Zamour lui apportant une tasse de café

1771

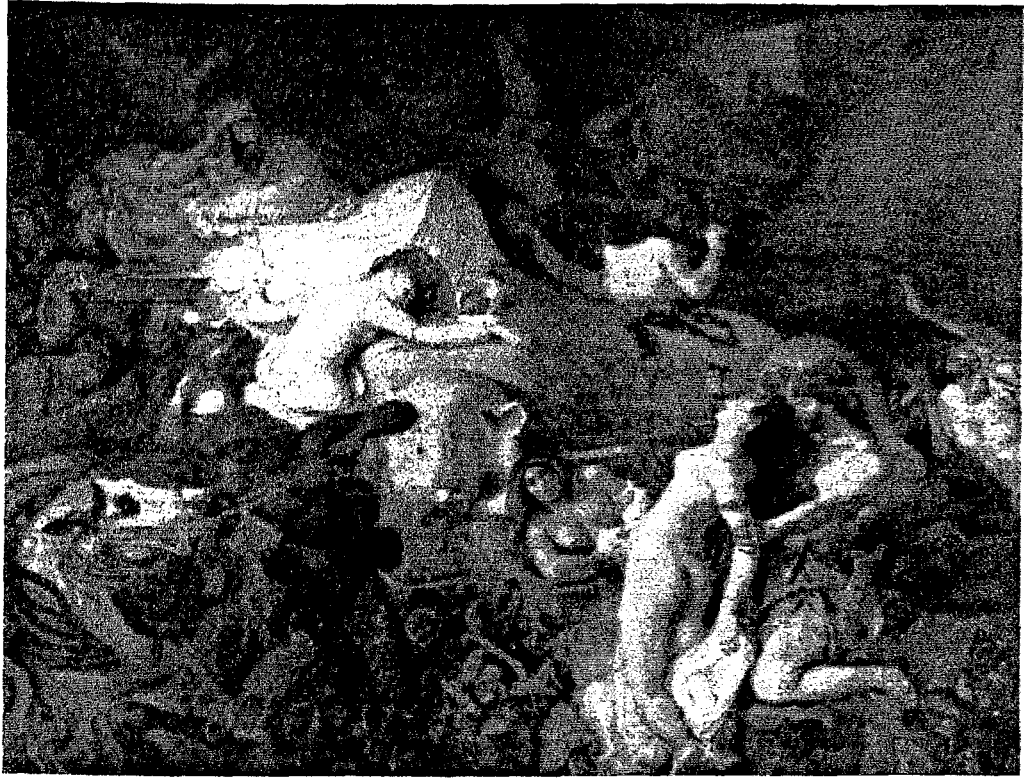


Figure 9

Eugène Delacroix

Death of Sardanapalus

1827/28

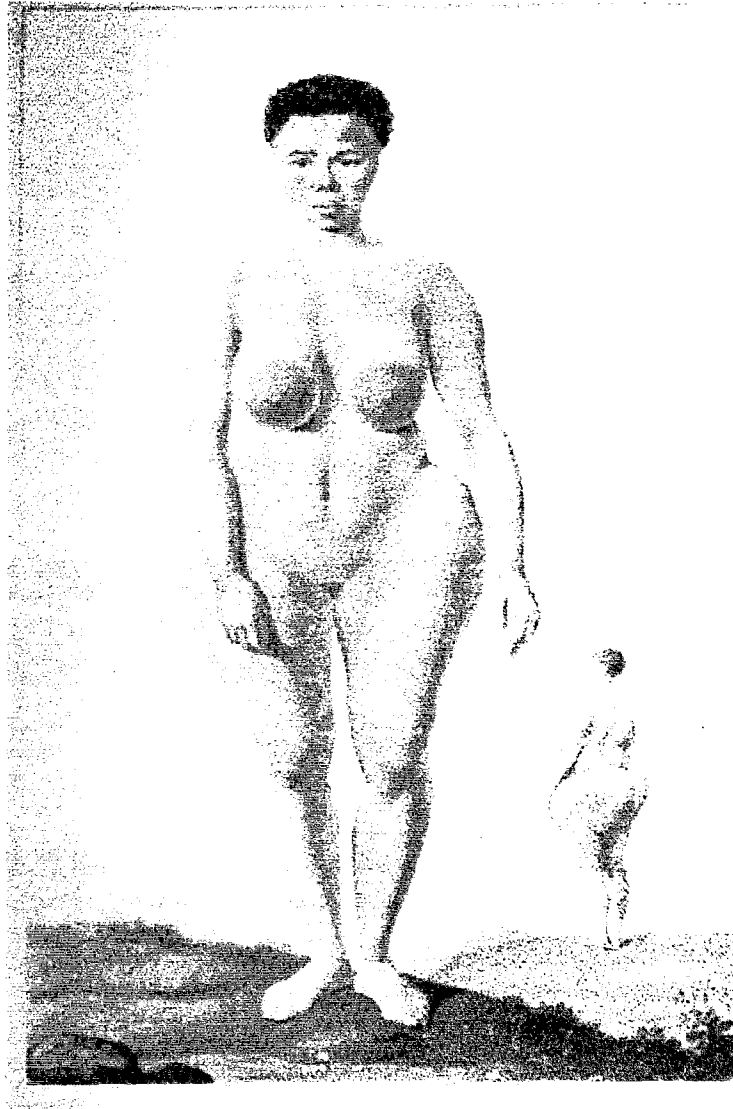


Figure 10

Léon de Wailly

Frontal View of Saartjie Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus"

1815



Figure 11

Edouard Manet

Olympia

1863



069. François Boucher: *Sylvie guérit Philis d'une piqûre d'abeille*, 1755. Paris.

Figure 12

François Boucher

Sylvie guérit Philis d'une piqûre d'abeille

1755



Figure 13

Jean-Honoré Fragonard

Women Bathing

c. 1765-1770



Figure 14

Jules-Robert Auguste

Odalisques

1820's



Figure 15

Jules-Robert Auguste

Les Amies

1820's



Figure 16

Eugène Delacroix

Femmes d'Alger dans leurs appartement

1834



Figure 17

Eugène Delacroix

Juive D'Alger

1833

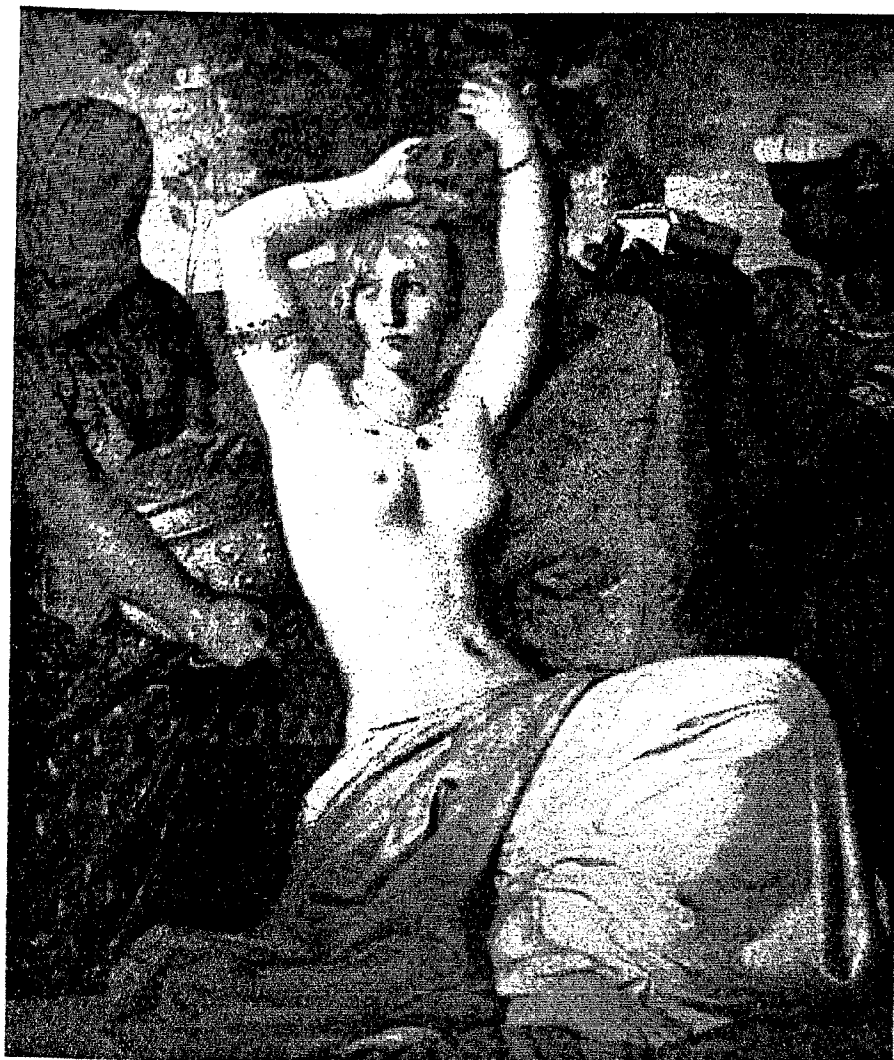


Figure 18

Théodore Chasseriau

Toilette of Esther

1841



Figure 19

Leon Bénouville

Esther

1844



Figure 20

Edouard Debat-Ponsan

The Daughter of Jephthah

1876



Figure 21

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

Le Bain Turque

1862/3



Figure 22

Ingres

Le Bain Turque, Detail

1862/3

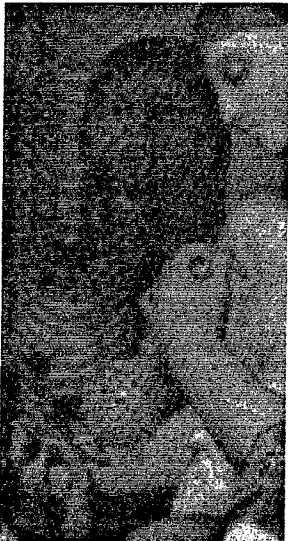


Figure 23

Ingres

Le Bain Turque, Detail

1862/3



Figure 24

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

Le Bain Turque, Detail

1862/3



Figure 25

Hierarchy of Races

1850



Figure 26
Edwin Long
The Babylonian Marriage Market
1875



Figure 27

Jean-Léon Gérôme

Le Général Bonaparte au Caire

1867/8



Figure 28

Jean-Léon Gérôme

Moorish Bath

1870

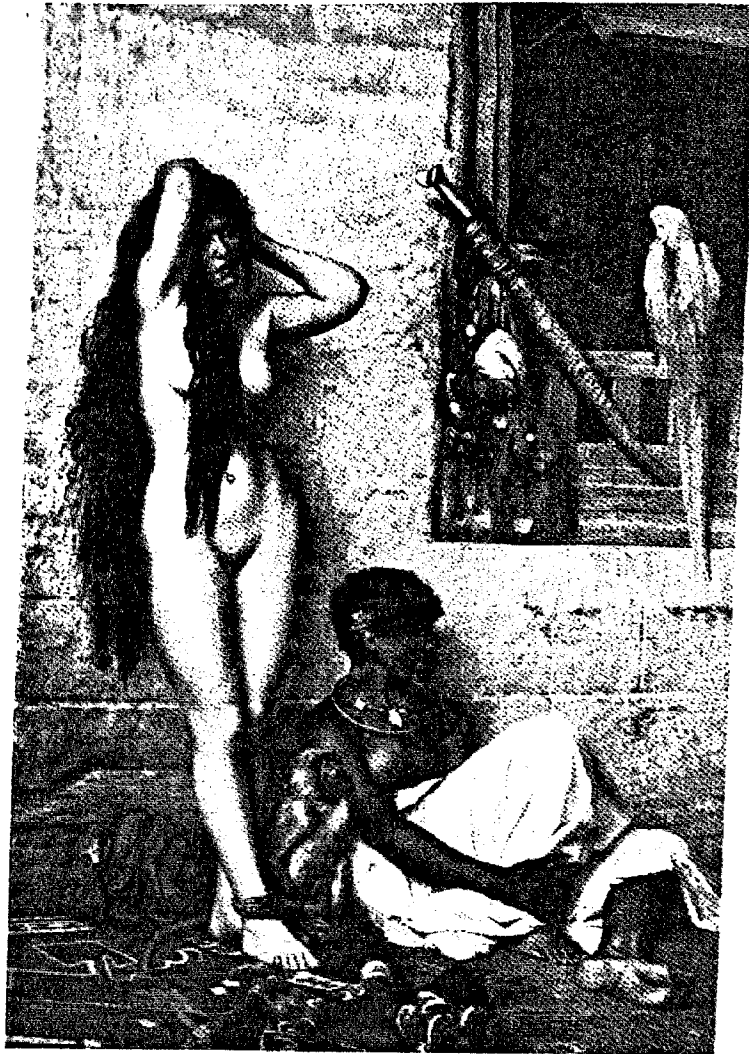


Figure 29

Jean-Léon Gérôme

A Vendre (Esclaves Au Caire)

1873

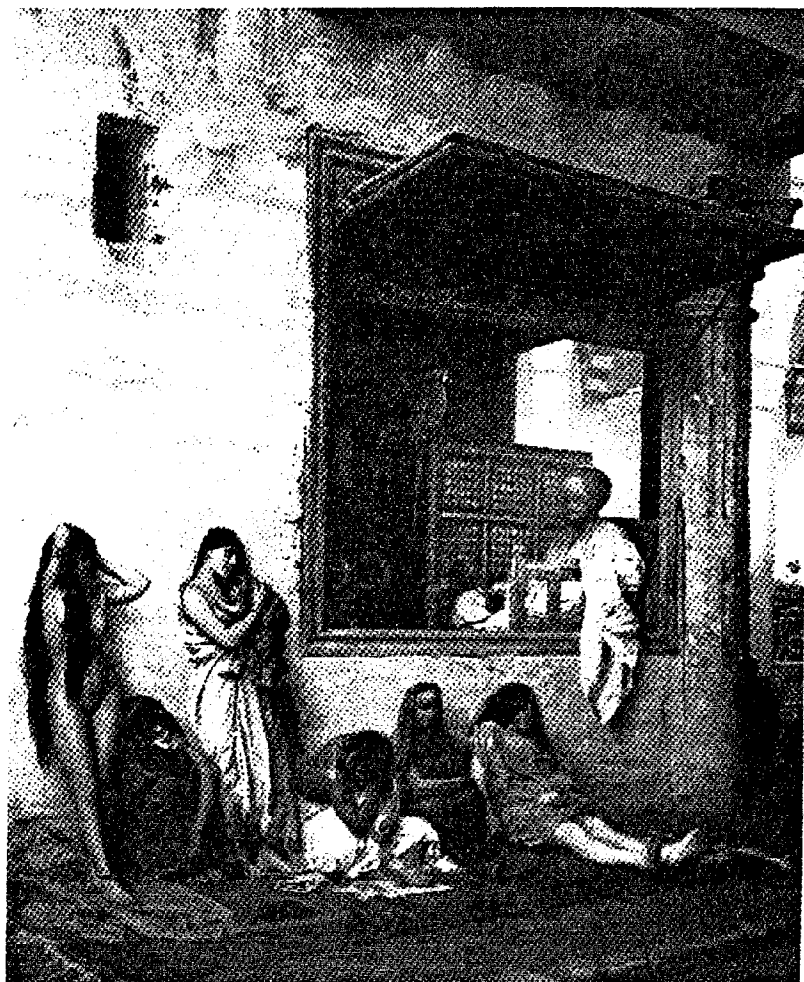


Figure 30

Jean-Léon Gérôme

A Vendre

1871

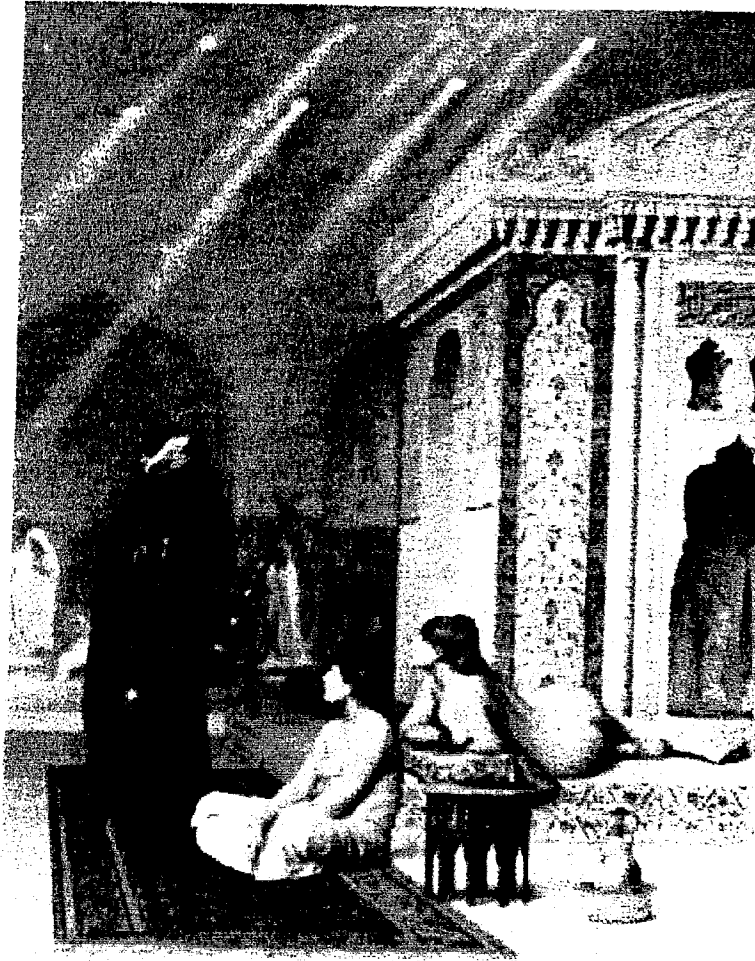


Figure 31

Jean-Léon Gérôme

Femmes au Bain

1876



Figure 32
Jean-Léon Gérôme
Grande Piscine de Brousse
1885



Figure 33

Paul Cézanne

Afternoon in Naples

1866

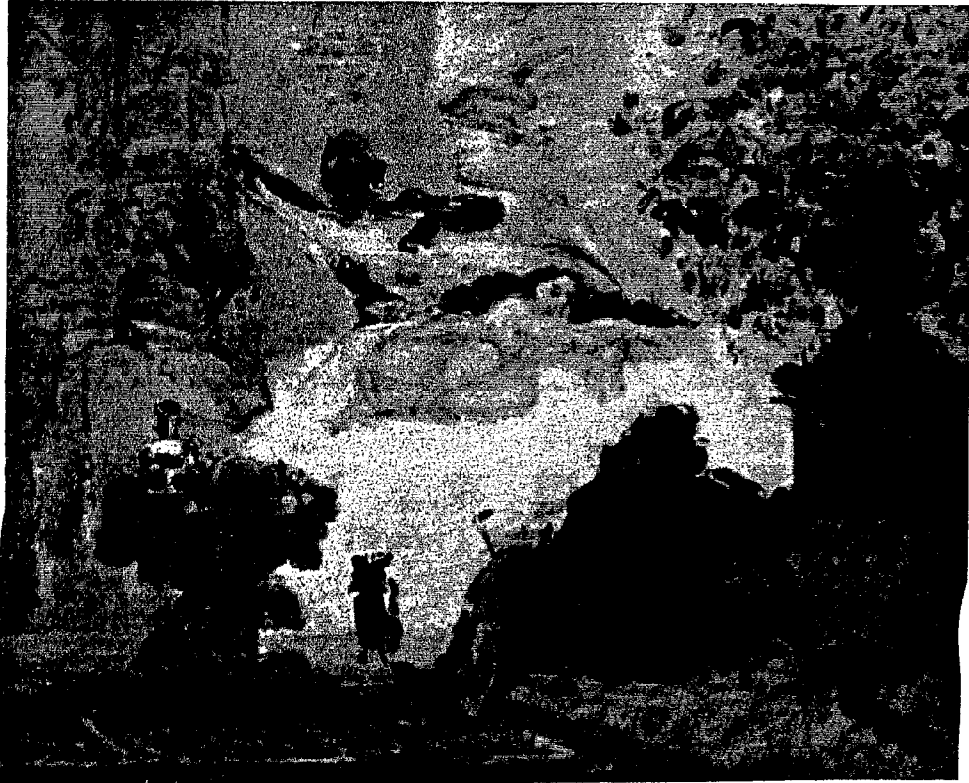


Figure 34

Paul Cézanne

A Modern Olympia

1872/3



Figure 35

Pablo Picasso

Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)

1907