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Orientalist Camp

The Case of Allen Edwardes

This article seeks to recover and assess the work of Allen Edwardes, a sexologist, linguist, and biblical scholar who was part of the circle around R. E. L. Masters and Albert Ellis. The focus is on Edwardes's extraordinary *Erotica Judaica*. I argue that Edwardes may be seen in terms of 'orientalist camp'—two categories I introduce before situating Edwardes within the 1960s and sexual liberation. From there, the argument concerns the tensions within Edwardes's work between scholarly argument and ribald commentary, which appears in one's own bodily response, in the main text, and in the nature of the footnotes. In closing, I suggest that in this tension Edwardes challenges the polite conventions of scholarship.

ORIENTALIST CAMP: an orientalism that has gone over the top, suffused with a sense of too-muchness that ends up being a parody of itself. It is perhaps the best way to describe a number of books written in the 1960s

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by the enigmatic and now largely forgotten Allen Edwardes: the extraordinary *Erotica Judaica*,¹ as well as the once-popular *The Jewel in the Lotus*,² *The Cradle of Erotica*,³ and *Death Rides a Camel*.⁴ Breathing the prurient air of a sexual liberator, these works uncover an East and—especially for my purposes—a Bible and its interpreters teeming with all manner of sexual lusts and peccadilloes. Indeed, the impression one gains from reading these works is that an a-temporal East scarcely has time for vanilla sex, for with engorged vulvae and clitorises, castrated men (testicular or whole block and tackle), randy priests, prostitutes, gays, pederasts, necrophiliacs, and zoophiliacs, the East simply spends its time rubbing, stroking, exciting, teasing, nibbling, wriggling, sucking, slurping, moaning, leg-lifting, penetrating or being penetrated by any being with a pulse.

Erotica Judaica, my main concern in what follows, offers an occasionally insightful, at times outrageous, but always fascinating survey of the Bible and its rabbinic interpreters, all of which shows up the kinky earthiness of the biblical texts and the rabbis at their very best. However, in order to situate this study, let me ask two questions: why Edwardes? And why orientalist camp?

I am most interested in Edwardes for two reasons. First, he provides a very different peephole in the cubicle of the sixties, one in which the Bible and its interpretation plays the lead role. Others may have the occasional chapter, such as the superficial first chapter—“Sex and Seduction in the Scriptures”—of Oscar Meredith’s *The Lure of Lust*,⁵ but none give a singular and faithful devotion to the Bible and its queer interpreters. Second, Edwardes is an intriguing and disappearing character. Unlike Albert Ellis, who wrote the preface for *Jewel in the Lotus* and who went on to establish his own institute

¹ *Erotica Judaica: A Sexual History of the Jews* (New York: Julian Press, 1967).

² *The Jewel in the Lotus: A Historical Survey of the Sexual Culture of the East* (New York: Julian Press, 1965).

³ Allen Edwardes and R. E. L. Masters, *The Cradle of Erotica: A Study of Afro-Asian Sexual Expression and an Analysis of Erotic Freedom in Social Relationships* (New York: Julian Press, 1962).

⁴ *Death Rides a Camel: A Biography of Richard Burton* (New York: Julian Press, 1963). To open them and turn their thick pages reminds me above all of the experience of opening books in the 1980s in the Gillespie library at the University of Sydney. Now dispersed, it was then the library for students studying divinity at the university, with many thick-paged, luxuriantly printed, exotic works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At times I was the first to read these books, for in some the pages were still uncut.

⁵ Oscar Meredith, *The Lure of Lust: The Saga of Man’s Ceaseless Search for Sexual Excitement* (London: Tallis, 1969).

in New York and become one of the most influential and cited psychologists of the latter half of the twentieth century, or R. E. L. Masters, who also established an institute—the Foundation for Mind Research—but used it to promote the way of the five bodies of the goddess Sekhmet as the key to our psychic and spiritual wellbeing,⁶ Edwardes simply disappears without a trace after his books appeared. Some have suggested that Edwardes was a nom-de-plume for Robert Eduard L. Masters, just mentioned. Yet his oblivion now is in a directly inverse relation to his popularity in the sixties. So I am intrigued, my curiosity has been piqued, and I wish to explore what was appealing—for Edwardes and his readers—about the Bible in the sexual revolution of the sixties.

Orientalism and Camp

For the East was like a feverish woman with whom the unwary Occidental was having sexual congress. She gripped him in blind ecstasy and delirium that built to an intolerable pitch and then, just before the fiery second of release, plunged a knife into his heart.

ALLEN EDWARDES⁷

The answer to my second question takes me into the adjoining rooms of orientalism and camp. Keen to get onto Edwardes, we will not tarry long here. Glossing Edward Said, orientalism may be understood as a complex and largely false ideological construction of ‘the Orient’ based upon economic dependency and social exclusion. For Said, orientalism is clearly an instance of what Marxist analysts would call false consciousness: a mistaken and contradictory perception of reality that is generated out of and seeks to conceal alienated social and economic conditions. Marx’s great example is religion, which is the sign that things are not as they should be here on earth, with the upshot that we should not direct our critiques against religion—or indeed any ideological mystification—but against the conditions that produce it.⁸ Said is more interested in the mystification than the economic reality, in the way orientalism has been produced out of a distinct academic discourse (his

⁶ Masters had perhaps smoked one too many joints—see <http://www.robertmasters.com>.

⁷ Edwardes, *Jewel in the Lotus*, 176.

⁸ Karl Marx, “Thesen über Feuerbach,” in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Werke*, vol. 3 (1845; Berlin: Dietz, 1973), 5–7; Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach (Original version),” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5 (1845; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 3–5.

debts to Foucault come in at this point), and his analysis has had both the profound and field-changing effect that comes to few scholars and its share of logical problems. But my interest is in a somewhat different area, namely the way Said also draws on psychoanalysis to argue that the East becomes the repository of all that is Other, alien, and exotic, indeed, that Europe and the West defines itself by being everything that the East is not.

The East becomes a locus of sensuality and (often perverse) sex. Although Said laments that this is not “the province of my analysis here, alas,”⁹ others have felt the rising urge to take up the analysis. The East was one of the first destinations not merely for well-heeled nineteenth-century tourists, but also for sex tourists. Climate, food, culture, laziness, religious traditions—that is, a steamy versus a temperate climate, spicy versus plain food, open versus repressive culture in regards to sex, lax versus vigorous workdays, lascivious versus austere religions—these were seen to provide the conditions for a sexual overload, an exoticism that was both abhorrent to reserved Europeans and incredibly seductive.¹⁰ Richard Burton may have sought to localise these tendencies with his infamous “Sotadic Zone,” a varying band of the globe, comparable to an equatorial zone but now characterised by gay sex, which included lower France, the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Greece, the coastal regions of North Africa, through the Middle East to China and Japan.¹¹ Flaubert wrote about his visits to famous Egyptian brothels and acquired syphilis in Beirut in 1849–50,¹² the naturalist Gerald Durrell sought to fill his supposedly gargantuan sexual appetites in Egypt during the Second World War, André Gide lost his virginity on the dunes of Algeria in 1893, and my former Professor of Classics confessed in a lecture that he had had the best gay sex of his life in a street in Istanbul in the 1970s. As Boone points out, novelists, journalists, poets, artists, travel writers, sociologists, and ethnographers have all travelled to the East from the West in the search of whatever could not be found in Europe.¹³ At times the sex tourism itself became the story, as we

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1991).

¹⁰ “Finding a fatalistic and philosophic justification for free will and strong sensual inclinations, the Oriental, prodded by climate, spicy food, and custom, plunged headlong into the sea of diverse sexual pleasure” (Edwardes, *Jewel in the Lotus*, 200–1).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 201–2.

¹² Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 53–72.

¹³ Joseph Boone, “Vacation Cruises; or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism,” in *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, ed. John C. Hawley (1995; Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 43–44.

find with the journey of “Lorenzo” to India, Malaya, China, and Japan in *Oriental Love in Action*.¹⁴ Edwardes’s works clearly fit into this construct of an East falling over to have sex in more ways than one could possibly imagine (and then some).

But why camp? It seems to me that Edwardes overshoots his mark, offering a picture of the sensual and pumping East that goes way over the top. In order to understand this excess, I draw on the category of camp, which should be defined as both a strategy of interpretation and a form of cultural production. As interpretation, camp appropriates older ‘straight’ cultural products and reads them in a queer way, picking up moments when the text’s normality spills over to indicate its own instability. As production, camp becomes a strategy of artistic work, one that plays its hand openly in seeking to subvert cultural norms. A little history: Susan Sontag first identified camp as a distinct strategy, although she offered a curiously desexualized, depoliticized, and privatized definition with the connotations of homosexuality minimized.¹⁵ While Sontag argued that Camp (capital C) is an unintentional ‘sensibility’ rather than an intentional ‘idea,’ the study of camp has itself sought to overturn conventional readings of camp: initially the gay, lesbian, and bisexual dimensions of camp were seen as one, small aspect, but subsequent critics have argued that camp is primarily a queer activity that has been co-opted by straight society.¹⁶ Two points are worth making in relation to my analysis. First, although there has been some debate over the territory and ownership of camp—gay male,¹⁷ feminist,¹⁸ and/or straight—all agree that it is ultimately a queer strategy: “camp has the ability to ‘queer’ straight

¹⁴ Giovanni Comisso, *Oriental Love in Action* (London: Luxor Press, 1966). Among the ever-expanding literature on orientalism and sex, see especially the complex and informed studies of Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994), 275–92. For the debate over Sontag’s essay, see Moe Meyer, ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994); D. A. Miller, “Sontag’s Urbanity,” *October* 49 (Summer 1989): 91–101; Michael Moon, “Flaming Closets,” *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 19–54; Kim Michasiw, “Camp, Masculinity, Masquerade,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, nos. 2/3 (1994): 146–73; Jack Babuscio, “Camp and the Gay Sensibility,” in *Gays and Film*, ed. Richard Dyer (London: British Film Institute, 1977), 40–57.

¹⁶ See Pamela Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.

¹⁷ Meyer, *Politics and Poetics of Camp*.

¹⁸ Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures*.

culture by asserting that there is queerness at the core of mainstream culture even though that culture tirelessly insists that its images, ideologies, and readings were always only about heterosexuality.”¹⁹ Second, and most importantly, camp generates, according to Al LaValley, a “*sense of too-muchness, the excess, or inappropriateness* produces a sudden self-consciousness in the viewer, but one that needn’t dissolve the basic meaning of the gesture.”²⁰ Camp takes hold, either in cultural production or interpretation, when there is an overload, an unaccountable excess, a moment that snaps the unspoken contract between author and reader/viewer/listener, that estranges everything and makes it suddenly seem queer. So let us see how Edwardes embodies this orientalist camp.

Edwardes and Company

When pondering this time in the sixties, for which no apology should be made²¹ and whose impact is still being felt, I imagine Edwardes, R. E. L. Masters, Albert Ellis, and sundry others sitting about of an afternoon, passing around a joint and a flagon of cheap wine, and spinning ever more elaborate and erotic yarns. “As for the origin of syphilis,” says Edwardes, “it found its origin not in female prostitution but in the sodomy and fellatio of ancient Syria (Esh-Shaum).” After some mutterings about the lascivious and perverse Syrians, he goes on: “Thence it was transmitted to Greece and Rome, infecting the entire Mediterranean region, and gradually ate its way around the globe.”²²

“How about this,” says Masters, after sucking deeply from a joint and quoting from Sheik Nefzawi’s *The Perfumed Garden*: “A man who would wish to acquire vigour for coition may likewise melt down fat from the hump of a camel, and rub his member with it just before the act; it will perform wonders, and the woman will praise it for its work.”²³

¹⁹ Cory K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty, “Introduction,” in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, ed. Cory K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 3.

²⁰ Al LaValley, “The Great Escape,” in Creekmur and Doty, *Out in Culture*, 63, emphasis added.

²¹ Sohnya Sayres et al., eds., *The 60s without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

²² Edwardes, *Jewel in the Lotus*, 124.

²³ Richard Burton, *The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi* (London: Luxor Press, 1963), 129.

“Ah, but nothing beats the cure for impotence in the East,” replies Edwardes. “The Persians were notorious for their use of the *m’yaujung* (anointed battle-root, or artificial phallus). This, generally made of wood, was first dipped in olive oil, then sprinkled with fine pepper and ground nettles. Worked into the anus, it produced instantaneous results.”²⁴

On they go, telling stories of brothels, massive cocks, engorged vulva, and protuberant clitorises, of anal sex, group sex, lesbianism (“tribadism” or “Saphism”), gay sex, bestiality, pederasty, and so on. As they do so, an amanuensis takes notes in shorthand—much like Gretel Adorno did during the discussions of her husband and Max Horkheimer, giving us the masterpiece *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²⁵ When sober, the rough manuscripts come back written out in full, ready for them to edit, add notes, references (should they wish to appear scholarly), and return to be typed up again.

The circle of already ageing hippies (Ellis was in his fifties and Masters in his forties), with the soft smoke of joints curling upwards only to be whisked off in the breeze, may be an imaginary construction, but the spate of books produced in this period is certainly not. Published by the Julian Press in New York²⁶ and Luxor in London (with its tell-tale yellow covers for the paperbacks), they covered all manner of topics relating to sex. Many were devoted to contemporary issues such as the unborn child and sex,²⁷ the homosexual revolution,²⁸ ‘forbidden’ sexual practices and morality,²⁹ sexual offences,³⁰ and above all, Ellis’s classic *Sex Without Guilt*,³¹ which became a textbook for the sexual revolution. A significant niche was found for both new books on Eastern erotica and the republication of older works that had been banned or repressed under the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, such as those by the brilliant, irascible and pugnacious nineteenth-century scholar-soldier-conman, Sir Richard Burton (1821–90), especially his translations of *One*

²⁴ Edwardes, *Jewel in the Lotus*, 80.

²⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

²⁶ By the late 1970s and 80s, the Julian Press went into orbit, publishing works on reincarnation, goddesses, and cracks in the cosmic egg, although as a true child of the sixties there was always a tendency for the press to deal with alternative spiritualities and psychologies.

²⁷ R. R. Limmer, *Sex and the Unborn Child* (New York: Julian Press, 1969).

²⁸ R. E. L. Masters, *The Homosexual Revolution* (New York: Julian Press, 1962).

²⁹ R. E. L. Masters, *The Hidden World of Erotica: Forbidden Sexual Behaviour and Morality* (New York: Julian Press, 1966).

³⁰ Benjamin Karpman, *The Sexual Offender and his Offence* (New York: Julian Press, 1954).

³¹ Albert Ellis, *Sex Without Guilt* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1958).

Thousand and One Nights,³² the *Kama Sutra*,³³ and, from the French translation, *The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi*. Burton himself, when not roughing up locals on his travels, annoying his Victorian imperial bosses, concocting tall tales, and alienating nearly everyone with whom he came into contact, had formed the “Kama Shastra Society,” which had the explicit purpose of circulating precisely those works which had been banned. Victorian pornography may be the best description for these early works, designed for the discerning gentleman who sensed that he might be doing something a little risqué, but they were republished in the 1960s as a sign that the old restrictions were being rolled away, although not without a sense of rebellion and liberation (some were still issued with a notice “for adults only”).

Riding their boards at the front of the sexual liberation wave, Ellis, Masters, and Edwardes produced a spate of new works. Ellis may have been the more sober of the three, always conscious of being academically reputable and often described now—after dying at ninety-three in 2006—as one of the three most influential psychologists in the history of the discipline. Masters may have gone into the goddess and other esoteric spiritual-sexual pursuits, but Edwardes achieved two things the others did not: he tackled what they all thought was the source of sexual repression head-on and he managed to tip over the edge to orientalist camp. As for the first point, Edwardes focused directly on the Bible to argue that even in matters of sex the Bible really is the church’s “bad conscience” (as Ernst Bloch would have it). The second achievement is the burden of what languorously stretches out before us.

You Gotta Say Yes to Another Excess

A humid kiss is better than a hurried coitus.

RICHARD BURTON³⁴

Erotica Judaica is an extraordinary read. Most profitably read on a train or bus, with the bold and large letters of the title spread along its spine in order to attract attention, not a few fellow travellers will give you quizzical, sneering, bemused, and slightly-disgusted-you-dirty-old-man looks. From a close

³² Richard Burton, trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (1885; New York: Modern Library, 1959).

³³ Richard Burton and Foster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot, *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (1883; London: Luxor Press, 1964).

³⁴ *Perfumed Garden*, 71.

reading of this work, it is clear that Edwardes is not stupid, for his etymologies are often rather astute, picking up stray senses within the semantic clusters of words. His linguistic skills are not meagre, for he cites Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Persian, Greek, and Latin sources. And his smooth skill with written English even provides a series of arresting neologisms. I have now added to my arsenal terms such as bejerked, circumcisiophobic, deprepuccization and deprepuccized, antideprepuccization (analogous to antidisestablishmentarianism), prepucciophobes, and deforeskin'd.³⁵ And at times he makes proposals that would only appear in biblical scholarship decades later, such as the argument that Ezekiel's texts are at times pornographic,³⁶ or that a major feature of the close circle of David, Saul, Jonathan, Bathsheba, and Uriah is its deeply bi-sexual character,³⁷ or that scholars should be interested in the relics of the holy foreskin and the Virgin Mary's private parts.³⁸

But let us pay close attention to the text, for it reveals a tension that first manifests itself in the response of one's body. I mean not the rush of blood to the crotch, a rising towel rack, or a wet seat, but the transition between quiet attention and belly laugh, the poise of interested reader and ribald hoot of disbelief.

Bodily response, or, round-robin ...

Let me give an example. In dealing with the Golden Calf narrative of Exod 32,³⁹ Edwardes's analysis begins soberly enough. It argues that the cleanliness code, especially that pertaining to sex, was designed by Moses to encourage procreation. Physical and numerical strength would ward off the

³⁵ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 99, 134, 138, 143, 159, 186.

³⁶ Ibid., 91–92; Athalya Brenner, "On Prophetic Propaganda and the Politics of 'Love: the Case of Jeremiah," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1995), 256–74, 256–74; Athalya Brenner, "Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 70 (1996): 63–86; Robert Carroll, "Desire Under the Terebinths: On Pornographic Representation in the Prophets—A Response," in Brenner, *Feminist Companion*, 256–74, 275–307.

³⁷ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 79–83; Theodore W. Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homeroitic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

³⁸ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 186–87; Marc Shell, "The Holy Foreskin; or, Money, Relics, and Judeo-Christianity," in *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 345–59.

³⁹ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 7–10.

threats of stronger tribes, and so Moses forbade non-procreative activities among the Habiru (which Edwardes accepts as the basis for the Hebrews). Hence the various bans on onanism, bestiality, incest, adultery, prostitution, transvestitism, and abortion. Within the bounds of sober scholarship, is it not? It contains nothing that might not have been written in one of the deadpan journals in ‘mainstream’ biblical criticism. But now the text gives its first hint of excess, a flicker in the eyes to suggest the author is about to slip beyond such confines.

We read: “the superstitiously barren and the wantonly curious sought penetration and impregnation from the great prophet and his high-priest, awe-inspiring symbols of supervirility.”⁴⁰ What? Picking up a comment from Rabbi Samuel b. Isaac (albeit not cited in full, but more of that in a moment) on Ps 106: 16—“men in the camp were jealous of Moses and Aaron”—that “everyone suspected his wife of sexual intercourse with Moses,” Edwardes goes on to paint a picture of the leader and his priest with massive sexual appetites, lusted after by Israelite women. Divine sanction was, it seems, like dipping one’s dick in steroids.

But Aaron is the real culprit, for he tires of Moses’ consultations with the “Yahwic oracle” on the mountain and leads the people to worship a newly constructed statue of Apis, the Egyptian bull-god of fertility. At the feast’s climax:

A sacred autoerotic-homosexual ritual erupted when a vast number of males ... “cocked up to pound repeatedly” (*yiqqumû li-tzahiq*). Linked like huge chains of flesh about the idol, these zealots performed the circular dance (*hagg*) sanctified to arouse the procreative power of Apis with the seminal libations of repeated masturbation and round-robin sodomy.⁴¹

What an extraordinary image!⁴² I want to ask: is this physically possible? Would every male be able to keep his cock in the arse of the one in front,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9–10.

⁴² Edwardes has the ability to depict the most vivid of images with a few words. One of my favourites: “the Bashi-Bazouk, whose procedure on killing a man was to take full sexual advantage of the anal spasms. With horror, the Russians beheld that familiar flagrancy on a Turkish battlefield, the ‘bestial Toorks,’ their pantaloons down, working heatedly upon the freshly slain. When hesitantly asked about this ‘horrible desecration of human beings’ by a certain war correspondent, the indifferent Turk characteristically replied: ‘It is, to be sure, effendi, a most devilish matter of expert timing.’” (*Jewel in the Lotus*, 212–13).

and what of those whose dimensions do not quite help—the proverbial case of a five centimetre pipe in a two centimetre hole? Needless to say we have slipped out of the realm of quiet scholarship, where one struggles to find anything that comes close, and into something else. For my part, a text like this brings me up short, laughing out loud, and trying to find anyone who would like me to read this gem of scholarship to them.

My bodily response is the first in a series of tensions, one piling upon the other. On top of my own visceral response comes a generic tension, an affront to careful training in the genres and practices of scholarship. And this generic tension is itself a marker of the tension between scholarship and pornographic fantasy, between the boring, formal, flat-footed, and mind-numbing texts of nerdy scholars and the outrageously ribald. This pattern works in two ways.

Clash of genres: From “I am the erect one” to “asquat upon his loins”

The first is episodic: Edwardes offers us a narrative of sorts that sets the scene, fills in a gap, or provides a quiet lull before his next stunning insight into biblical terms, ancient sexual practices or prurient rabbinic commentary. I have already provided one example with the episode of the Golden Calf, but the rhythm repeats itself with sufficient regularity throughout the book (and a read of his other works provides a similar episodic structure). For example, the treatment of theories concerning Moses’ origins climaxes with a pumping interpretation of Exod 3:14, or the prelude to the mass circumcision in Josh 5 sets the narrative scene of the passage into Canaan before the raising of a massive mound of foreskins, or the story of Jael’s murder of Sisera in Judg 4 has both its own necessary preamble before a dip into a stunning piece of rabbinic commentary, or the string of bravura readings of Canaanite encounters—Samson, Goliath, the ark of the covenant’s capture and so on—must have its own preface in which the situation for such conflicts is established, or, to extend my list of examples to other works, in a relatively sober discussion of marriage customs among Arabs and Indians, he notes that the preference within polyandrous societies for a woman to have three husbands is determined by the fact that with three she fills all her orifices.⁴³

⁴³ “If there were only three, she was capable of gratifying each simultaneously by lying on her side and offering fellatio ... and vulvar and anal coition. Hence, the popular feeling that woman is insatiable” (Ibid., 32).

So we roll from scholarly discussion to perverse sex, from the consideration of hypotheses concerning Israelite history to breathtakingly kinky readings of the text and back again.⁴⁴ For example, the opening moment of *Erotica Judaica* is not with the narrative origins in Genesis, but with what was regarded in mainstream scholarship at the time⁴⁵ as one of the plausible theories for the emergence of Israel: the Habiru, or better ‘Apiru, mentioned in the Amarna Letters.⁴⁶ In all their clannish diversity, they were trapped in Egypt, a threat to Pharaonic absolutism. In the midst of their distress appears Moses, most likely an Egyptian, but possibly Habiru (Levite)—the presence of various considered opinions enhances the scholarly feel of the text. But now the text turns, teetering on the edge of a plunge into a very different type of analysis. Forewarned by the suggestion that the pillar of cloud by day was a “nebulous phallus” and the one of fire an “igneous phallus,” we suddenly come across a rollicking interpretation of Exod 3:14. It is, of course, the famous “I am that I am [*’ehyeh asher ’ehyeh*],” transliterated in a curious but internally consistent pattern as “*Ahyih Āshir ahyih*.”

Now we get scholarly sleight of hand, moving rapidly from a translation as “I am Ashir, I am” (taking the relative *asher* as a divine appellation) to the simple “I am the Erect One.”⁴⁷ I must confess to not being able to find any meaning with this sense, even if I explore the various meanings of the two verbs with the same spelling (to lead and to be happy) or the name of the tribe Asher. Of course, I am hardly one to criticise some creative etymology, for it is simply a shame to allow the facts to get in the way of a sentence like this: “Ashir was the ‘Ever-Erect-One,’ the Lord Lingam of the Canaanites, the omnipotent archetype of every *penis erectus* in the Land of Merchants.”⁴⁸ Yet Edwardes seems to have hit upon something, in a curiously round-about if not lateral fashion. The confirmation appears in Ilona Rashkow’s detailed consideration of the names of God in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁹ Although she

⁴⁴ *Jewel in the Lotus* shows another dimension of this pattern, moving from sexological concerns with lists—traditional characterisations of women, names for sex organs, terminology for masturbation, history of the condom, terminology for the sexual skills of prostitutes (59–61, 68–9, 112–15, 123–4, 154–62)—to explicit discussions of excessive sexual practices.

⁴⁵ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (1959; London: SCM, 1980), 93–6, 134–43.

⁴⁶ James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 483–90.

⁴⁷ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 6–7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁹ “What’s in a Name? That Which We Call a Rose by Any Other Name Would Smell as Sweet: God’s Name, Lacan, and the Ultimate Phallus,” in *Psychology and the Bible: A New*

does not find the specific meaning Edwardes identifies in Exod 3:14, she *does* conclude in a way that confirms Edwardes's insight: "Ultimately, only God can possess the Phallus."⁵⁰

Equally swift is the suggestion that *Yahweh zikro* (Edwardes has *zakrú*) in Hos 12:6 means "Yahweh is the universal phallus," although in this case there is a reasonable possibility. Usually taken as the equivalent to "name"—giving us "Yahweh is his name"—*zeke*'s verbal root means to remember. But if we take the consonantal text, it is no different from *zakar*, male, or as some have argued, phallus. Ezekiel 16:17 pushes in this direction, with its accusation that Jerusalem had made "images of phalluses" (*tsalme-zakar*)—that is, dildos—with gold and silver and then "played the harlot" with them.⁵¹ Given the phallic hegemony of the ancient world, it would come as no surprise at all that the basic sense of the male was simply "cock." Or rather, to use terms I have deployed elsewhere, the key to the semantic cluster of maleness inevitably focused on a man's dong. In Yahweh's case, that would make him "omnipotent phallus."

In line with the episodic structure of Edwardes's argument, the text falls back into providing the scholarly context for the next phase, now concerning Moses and the law code. But let us leap ahead and consider one other example, this time in the treatments of Jael's hospitality towards Sisera.⁵² After the obligatory chatter about Hebrew conquest, harassment by Jabin of Hazor and his Hittite general, Sisera, the defeat of these forces by Deborah and Barak (Judg 4 and 5), we come across this reading—although now with the assistance of Rabbi Johanan in the Talmud—of the killing by Jael of Sisera as he fled. Other early commentators may have suggested Jael was extremely seductive, beautiful in appearance and dress, or that she scattered roses on her bed and thereby won Sisera's heart, or that her voice inspired lust,⁵³ but none

Way to Read the Scriptures, ed. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins, vol. 2. From Genesis to Apocalyptic Vision (1996; Westport: Praeger, 2004), 260–62.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 263; see also Ilona Rashkow, "Oedipus Wrecks: Moses and God's Rod," in *Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner, A Feminist Companion to the Bible. Second series 5 (1996; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 59–78.

⁵¹ See also S. Tamar Kamionkowski, "Gender Reversal in Ezekiel 16," in *Prophets and Daniel*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 177; David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 147.

⁵² Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 49–51.

⁵³ David M. Gunn, *Judges*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 56–57.

are as explicit as our friend Johanan. In the tradition of Arabian hospitality, the fleeing Sisera is given the hospitality of Heber and his wife Jael:

Jael, Heber's comely wife, gave Sisera to drink of the milk of refuge, she invited him to share her carpet bed in physical rest and restorative emotional release. Talmudic Rabbi Johanan deduced, from the text of Judg 5:27, that Sisera had seven sexual connections with Jael:

Between her legs he squat, he lay, he spurted;
between her legs he squat, he lay;
where he squat, there he lay stiff.⁵⁴

There follows a long footnote in Edwardes's text, explaining each of the terms:

R. Johanan deduced seven bouts from the threefold occurrence of *kara'* and *nafal* plus *shakab* ... This highly erotic passage was better understood by Talmudists than by subsequent scholars ... The verb *kara'* (to squat) expresses a coital posture common to Easterners ... The pregnant verb *nafal* (to fall, to lie prostrate) is used in the sense of a man allowing a woman to mount and ride him, which in the patriarchal East is indicative of feminine domination ... *Shakab* (to lie with a woman) is literally the Arabic *sakab*: to pour out, to ejaculate (semen) ... *Bayn ragliyah*, consistently mistranslated "at her feet," is too clear for comment ... *Shadûd* ... derives from the root *shadad* (to be hard, stiff), hence strikes a pun: "erect-dead."⁵⁵

Not such a bad way to go it seems, for Sisera was given the full hospitality treatment, at least until he, "with Jael sexually asquat upon his loins,"⁵⁶ finds a tent-peg hammered into his temple.

⁵⁴ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

⁵⁶ Mieke Bal is, strangely, far more prudish, venturing the possibility that Jael "probably lures him into love" and then, with a sigh of relief, moving on (*Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 24). Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes also makes the briefest of mentions (*The Double Voice of Her Desire*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 96), not least because a comprehensive fuck with the enemy does not become a female hero. Bal's book-length study of this episode (*Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (1988;

Clash of footnotes: Baal-Peor, unsatisfied clitorises, Jeremiah the Bejerked

Indeed, this extended footnote to the story of Jael and Sisera leads me to the second manifestation of this vigorous rubbing together of two different genres, for we find in the footnotes a tension comparable to that between the genres of the main texts. On the one hand, Edwardes provides in his footnotes regular lists of sources, works he has consulted in order to develop his argument. The notes include scholars like Herman Gunkel, Roland de Vaux, Max Weber, Julius Wellhausen, and Victor Tcherikover,⁵⁷ as well as extensive references to ancient sources in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin—a feature of the main text as well, for Edwardes constantly supplies terms in the original language, albeit transliterated in his idiosyncratic manner.

On the other hand, he offers a series of riveting and not unknowledgeable etymological proposals. For instance, in the treatment of the episode of Baal-Peor in Numb 25, a footnote speculates that the god in question (albeit now listed as Baal-Fa'ûr) was a Syrian deity “on whose phallus every Midianite maiden was obliged to rupture her hymen.”⁵⁸ *Fa'ûr* itself, opines Edwardes, derives from *fa'ar* (as indeed it does—I have checked this closely) and may either mean “gape greedily” and thereby signify a ravenous vagina, or it may designate “opener,” giving us “Lord of the Cunnus-Openers.” All of which means that when the Israelites, most notable among them being Zimri, took Midianite wives, they were worshipping this intriguing deity.⁵⁹

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 102–4), devotes a scant couple of pages to the possible sexual connotation of some of the verbs, but our helpful R. Johanan does not even make an appearance. Indeed, Bal prefers to discuss the matter with Yair Zakovitch (“Siseras Tod,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 93, no. 3 (1981): 364–74), and J. Cheryl Exum in her turn relies on Bal (“Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (1995; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 72). David Gunn at least does acknowledge Johanan, but in a commentary dealing with the reception of a text, it would have been remiss of him not to do so (*Judges*, 56–57). Neither Robert J. Boling (*Judges*, The Anchor Bible, 6A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 115–20) nor Robert Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part One: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 167) dare breathe a mention of such possibilities.

⁵⁷ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 13, 41, 43, 108, 133–34, 140, 142, 144, 182, 188, 192, 198, 204, 207, 209.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹ Edwardes's text goes on to cite the rabbinic fantasies concerning the sex of Zimri and Cozbi, before Phinehas spears them in a lethal threesome: “424 times; no 60 will do, for her vagina was like a silo, its opening a cubit, and thereby Zimri's member was fearsome” (*ibid.*, 17).

One more example out of a tempting range, this one a bravura piece of interpretation.⁶⁰ At the end of his brief dalliance with Solomon, Edwardes notes the traditional interpretive move in which the Song of Songs may be a product of Solomon's lusty youth, but that Proverbs speaks of his age and experience:

Who can find an honest female? Her value is greater than gems.
... Four things never say "Enough!": the grave, the clitoris, the
desert, and the fire.⁶¹

Clitoris? Is it not "barren womb," as *'otser raham* suggests? Edwardes has the obligatory footnote, citing the Hebrew as *ghutzr rahim*. It is indeed a closure (from *'tsr*, to hold back or lock up) and womb (*rhim*), leading most interpreters to see here "barren womb," especially since the first word appears regularly as a marker of barrenness (for example, Gen 16:2; 20:18; Isa 66:9). But Edwardes has much more in mind: the term *'otser raham* is, he adds, the:

Hebraic equivalent of the Greek *kleitoris*, from *kleiein* (to shut), meaning "that which is enclosed by the labia." The Vulgate reads "*os vulva*" or "mouth of the skinbag" (vulva). Aristotle defined the clitoris as "the foundation and fountain of sexual love."

He need not have raced off to Greek and Latin terms, for the Hebrew itself has its own folds of meaning. Within the semantic cluster of *rhim* we find not only womb, but also love and compassion (especially in the verbal and dual forms), as well as the vulture that devours, two millstones that grind together (in a hand-mill), and, of course, cunt. The tell-tale signal of vagina comes in Judg 5:30, where *raham rahamatayim* may well be soldier-talk for either a threesome—one or two cunts⁶²—or for the two lips of the vagina itself—one or two flaps. In this light the previous senses, especially the dual forms as well as the senses of millstones, vulture, and 'love' gain a whole new meaning.⁶³

⁶⁰ And an example that makes me feel that I have encountered my double, for I too am interested in such etymologies (see *Knockin' on Heaven's Door: The Bible and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 30–31; "The Patriarch's Nuts: Concerning the Testicular Logic of Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Men, Masculinities, and Spirituality* 5, no. 2 (2011): 41–52).

⁶¹ Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 84, citing Prov 31:10, 30:15–16.

⁶² John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1967), 293.

⁶³ See further examples in Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 16, 23, 40, 42, 53, 55–56, 58, 61, 63, 67, 70, 72–73, 76, 84–87, 89–90, 95–96, 98, 102, 104, 130, 132, 146, 188.

The temptation is too great, for I cannot resist one further instance of these stunning and, I must admit, insightful readings. It comes in what is perhaps the best title for a subsection one could wish for—“Jeremiah the Bejerked.”⁶⁴ The key term is *sahūq*, which Edwardes takes as masturbator or wanker. Apparently, Jeremiah laments the fact that he has been made a compulsive masturbator. How? In Jer 20:7 we read: “I have become a laughingstock [*shq*] all day long; everyone mocks me.” For Edwardes, laughingstock is “equivalent to our modern ‘jerk,’ ‘jerkoff,’ or ‘jackoff,’ equally abusive.”⁶⁵ The key here is that *shq*, to laugh at or mock, is linked with *shhq*, with the sense of rubbing or beating, to pound repeatedly, and thereby to practice masturbation. The term also appears in Judg 16:25, when Samson is brought out to “amuse” the Philistines during the feat at the temple of Dagon, that is, to masturbate before the idol. And we find the term in Job 12:4: “I am a wanker to my friends; I, who called upon God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, I am a wanker.”⁶⁶

However, the story of Jeremiah gains an extra load with the elaborations in both Jewish and Arabic sources: Jeremiah came across some Ephraimites jerking off in the public baths. His thunder at such a practice, telling them that their gross immorality has led to the fall of Jerusalem, only entices them to suggest he join them; if not, they would all enjoy bugging him. Cornered, Jeremiah jerks off, to his own shame and the amusement of the onlookers—hence his status as a “laughingstock” (*sahq*)—or rather—jerkoff, wanker. From then on, he was hooked, becoming a chronic masturbator with its mix of guilty pleasure and personal disgust. This story certainly makes sense of Jeremiah’s foul temper, if not his occasional crude language.

What are we to make of these overlapping tensions in Edwardes’s work? I have traced them through from a bodily response to reading these texts to a double tension: one between the episodic pattern of quiet scholarship and sexual excess; the other between footnotes that cite ‘respectable’ scholarly sources and those that offer extraordinary etymologies of terms. On one

⁶⁴ Ibid., 99–101.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁶ Edwardes also sees the semantic cluster spill over into *tzhq*, especially in the story of Ishmael and Isaac, for Ishmael “mocks” (*mtzhq*), or rather “rubs”—with Isaac (as the Greek and Latin would have it)—Isaac’s name refers not so much to the fact that Sarah laughed at the suggestion she would bear a son in her old age (Gen 18:10–15 and 21:1–7) but to Ishmael’s rubbing of Isaac, whose name actually means “Phallus-Beater” or “Phallus-Beaten” (ibid., 94–95).

count—that of the episodic pattern in the main text—it may well be argued that Edwardes sidles up to the rhythms of porn itself, understood here in terms of both literature and film. The sex acts, in all their variety (or lack) require narrative scene setting, a lead-up in terms of more-or-less fantasy situation (office, sports fields, alley way, school room, gym locker, weight bench, and so on), initial encounter that usually requires a reason for the sex and then the act itself. In other words, the story becomes the pretext for the fucking, a vehicle for the sexual numbers that roll out with predictable regularity.⁶⁷ While some have argued that narrative and sex act are mutually exclusive,⁶⁸ the narrative delaying access to the real thing in the book, film, porn magazine, or website,⁶⁹ I would suggest that the episodic nature of porn is part of its generic identity. For even if one removes all the supposed fill-in, the sequence of sex acts is itself a narrative pattern, simultaneously mimicking and determining the episodic nature of sex, for which each closure or (at times) orgasm is but a prelude to the next.

Does Edwardes's work, then, really qualify as a form of intellectual pornography, an academic wank which can thereby be written off? At some moments, particularly in a work like *The Jewel in the Lotus*, one gains this distinct impression. In that work, he occasionally constructs a narrative, retells a story or recounts an experience which then rises to a climactic sexual romp. One such instance is the ritual of the *Shukteh-Poojah* in nineteenth-century India, with its supposed propitiation of the lingam-yoni, the gathering of strength to overthrow the East India Company and the revival of human sacrifice. Taking a POV (point-of-view) approach characteristic of porn, we descend with Edwardes into the underground caverns where the ritual takes place, only to witness a massive orgiastic rite that resembles most closely scenes from the Indiana Jones series of films.⁷⁰ Of course, Edwardes supplies what one can only assume has been excised from Indiana Jones—the massive cocks and hungry cunts of ecstatic worship.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 130.

⁶⁸ Jean Marie Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts: Erotic Literature and Its Readers in Eighteenth-Century France* (1991; London: Polity, 1994), 141; Peter Michelson, *Speaking the Unspeakable: A Poetics of Obscenity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 43–44; Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 111.

⁶⁹ So much so that some porn films promote themselves by promising 'pure sex' from the beginning without all the narrative filling.

⁷⁰ I am reminded above all of the climax in *The Temple of Doom*, in which Jones rescues from the underground cavern the leading lady, the worshippers, and countless slaves.

⁷¹ Edwardes, *Jewel in the Lotus*, 48–55.

Instead of denying that Edwardes's work evinces elements of porn, I prefer a more dialectical argument: of course it does, but in doing so it shows up the pretensions of 'conventional' scholarship. Edwardes hints as much in what may be called the dialectic of porn:

A prime characteristic of Oriental literature is its didactic shock value. The highest morality is hammered home in the lowest of language, in an orgy of exaggeration devised to shame even the most shameless into a revulsion of conscience. Hence, the therapeutic and redeeming function of "pornography" has ever been recognized by Eastern philosophers.⁷²

This is really another way of describing the orientalist camp I outlined earlier: this "orgy of exaggeration" has its own political point to make, in this case with specific reference to biblical scholarship. With its superficial niceness and brittle politeness, scholarship on the Bible would put even the most pompous Victorian to shame. To do something like Edwardes is to 'risk' one's career, to have colleagues not take one seriously, and to send more than one red-nosed scholar into fits of anger at treating the Bible so. In response, Edwardes takes the language and approaches of scholarship and turns them on their head. In juxtaposing the two genres of analysis and the two styles of footnote, he shows that they are not so much poles apart as two sides of the same scholarly discourse. No matter how much scholarship tries to police its 'seriousness,' the riff-raff from the wrong side of the tracks, shirt torn, pants filthy, a scrounged cigarette on the lips, somehow seems close behind. Who has not heard of what goes on beneath the veneer of niceness—scholars masturbating in the toilets at conferences, those with private likings for pornography, the ones who have an eye for extra-curricular activities with students, and so on? And since I am as suspicious of such hypocritical guardians as I am of the overtly pious, I prefer one like Edwardes who at least attempts to cut through the crap. In other words, Edwardes's orientalist camp is a way of showing up the pretensions of what passes for conventional, polite scholarship: here is an earthy text, he says, here is the sex in all its glorious diversity, so "fuck you!"⁷³

⁷² Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica*, 91.

⁷³ This article is reprinted from Roland Boer, *The Earthy Nature of the Bible: Fleshy Readings in Sex, Masculinity, and Carnality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan. <http://us.macmillan.com/theearthynatureofthebible/RolandBoer>.