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# Assassins and Crusaders: Nietzsche After 9/11

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## Chapter Ten

# Assassins and Crusaders

### *Nietzsche after 9/11*

Gary Shapiro

Nietzsche describes his four *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* as *Attentate*, assassination attempts. The first of these, his self-described “duel” with David Friedrich Strauss, published in 1873, begins with the question of war and time. It is *untimely* or *out of season* insofar as it challenges the smugness of the cultural philistines who take Germany’s victory in the Franco-Prussian War to be a testament to the superiority of German culture. As those in the United States might have learned after the end of the Cold War and after the first Gulf War, “a great victory is a great danger,” and we might substitute the name of another nation state—or an emerging globalizing empire—when Nietzsche speaks of “the defeat, if not the extirpation, of the German spirit for the benefit of the ‘German Reich’” (*UM I*, § 1). Assassination is always untimely, an instrument of war and a response to war. Assassination interrupts the steady, sedentary time of the state.

It has never been easy to marginalize Nietzsche’s talk of war and his often violent rhetoric, which was misappropriated by the Nazis, and that misappropriation then deployed as a means for marginalizing him as a thinker. At least since Walter Kaufmann’s 1950 book, however, it has become more difficult to see Nietzsche as the evil genius who legitimized the idea of a Germanic master race. More recently scholarship has taken an increasingly nuanced approach to the question of Nietzsche’s politics. While acknowledging his advocacy of the transnational “good European,” his critique of the supremacy of the state, and even the possibility of deploying certain possibilities in his thought in the service of poststructuralist feminism, it has asked rightly, whether his praise of war and

warriors can be said to be merely rhetorical (this would be an odd claim with regard to a thinker for whom language is so crucial).<sup>1</sup> Today “after 9/11” these questions are reminiscent of the attempts of the “West” to understand the stakes of the “war on terror.” (All of these marked phrases are problematic, as I think will emerge from an exploration of Nietzsche’s own penetrating meditations on time, his odd calendrical fantasies, and his uncanny, if highly sketchy, articulation of a coming global conflict for which an exemplary precedent is the struggle between Christianity and Islam. If I proceed to use these and similar phrases without marking them, I trust that the reader will understand that this is done in anticipation of such problematization.)

The question of how to take Nietzsche on war bears a striking parallel to the dispute about the meaning of *jihad* within Islam: is it to be understood primarily as an internal, spiritual struggle to live, think, and feel in accordance with the divine will, or does it name a struggle on all fronts, necessarily involving military combat and terrorism, to eliminate all forms of infidelity and directed, at its extremes, to the establishment of a global caliphate under a radical form of Islamic law? Nietzsche, of course, was no scholar of Islam, but he had read more of its history than those who have fashioned the West’s recent “war on terror,” sometimes described as a “crusade,” sometimes said by George W. Bush to be guided by divine inspiration.<sup>2</sup> As we will see, Nietzsche was familiar with both some of the leading scholarship of his day on early Islam and its battles, both military and theological, as well as the semilegendary notions and fantasies of the Orientalism that was the ideological support of nineteenth-century European imperialism. It is striking, reading Nietzsche now in the wake of 9/11, war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and general concern with radical Islam, to see how much of Nietzsche’s attention, especially in the last two years of his writing, was directed to thinking about the fate of Europe and Christianity within a broad historical and geographical perspective in which Assassins and Crusaders are two of the most prominent players and Europe’s apparent victory over Islam is taken to be one of the reasons for launching a new “war to the death” against Christianity. The last phrase is taken from the “Decree (*Gesetz*) Against Christianity,” which Nietzsche originally appended to *The Antichrist* and which Colli and Montinari have restored in their edition (SW 6.254).<sup>3</sup> Together with the concluding paragraphs of that work, the “Decree” implies that Nietzsche has no war with Islam, whose culture is the subject of his extravagant praise. Of course Nietzsche was writing at a time when the tottering Ottoman Empire seemed no longer to offer any threat to the expanding imperial powers of Europe. While his predictions of a century of great wars might be taken in the broadest terms to prefigure the three World Wars (including the Cold War), he could not have suspected that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the great war in prospect would appear to be one between the West and resurgent Islam. Yet Nietzsche increasingly borrowed figures and examples from Europe’s conflict with Islam to attempt to make sense of the geopolitical past and future. What follows is a preliminary sketch of

some aspects of that attempt, an attempt that could lead Nietzsche toward the end of *The Antichrist* to celebrate the motto he attributes to Friedrich the Second: "War to the knife with Rome! Peace, friendship with Islam" (AC, § 60). I find this sketch disturbing, as I find much of Nietzsche's politics disturbing. Yet I think we can learn something about Nietzsche as well as about Crusaders and Assassins, past and present, by beginning to explore the uncanny resonances of these figures that appear at the margins of his texts. We are told that "everything is different after 9/11." This may be too facile a judgment; even worse, it may provide ideological cover for new imperial expansion and the further degradation of liberal democracy. Nietzsche also had ideas about breaking time in two and starting anew; the "Decree" proposes a new calendar to begin on the date of its composition or proclamation (the former September 30, 1888); it may be that his illusions about a new time scheme can teach us something about our own fantasies and fears (which is not to say that either is totally devoid of truth, for do we not speak justly in some contexts of thought before and after Nietzsche?).

Since Germany is not so far a major player in the first great war of the new millennium, the one said to have been declared on September 11, 2001, and known by this date, so Nietzsche's name has not yet been invoked on the side of either the friends or the enemies of what are taken to be the identical causes of the West, democracy, freedom, and sexual equality. On the surface Osama bin Laden offers a striking example of Nietzsche's ascetic priest, who provides a meaning for the suffering of his flock. From the standpoint of radical Islam, as preached by bin Laden and Syed Qutub, a prominent recent theorist of violent *jihad*, the only virtue is total submission in this life, a submission predicated on the belief that all the deficiencies of this world will be compensated by the glories of the next.<sup>4</sup> There is no limit to the self-sacrifice called for by such submission; hence the supreme virtue of the suicide bomber or martyr. Yet this ascetic priest does not "alter the direction of *ressentiment*" by telling the faithful that they are the ones responsible for their own suffering.<sup>5</sup> There is an other, an evil enemy, a Satan, a society of infidels. This motivates a nomadic war machine with a spirit very different from the inward-turning nineteenth-century Protestantism and its secular variants that were the primary provocation of Nietzsche's critique. And rather than making their peace with the state, like most organized forms of Christianity, the radical Islamists are doctrinally committed to a total, global, theocratic community, the *umma*; along the way toward its realization, they countenance only temporary tactical truces with infidel powers. It has been suggested that the 9/11 hijackers and their allies could be characterized as nihilists, not simply as religious fanatics. Certainly, for Nietzsche the extreme otherworldliness involved in what we suppose to be the would-be martyrs' vision of paradise would itself be nihilism. And we can imagine Nietzsche, the "old philologist" whose analysis of Christianity benefits from the higher criticism of the Bible that flourished in the nineteenth century, being wickedly entertained by some recent critical readings of the Qur'an, according to which the "seventy dark-eyed virgins" promised

to martyrs in the gardens of the afterlife is a misreading of “seventy white raisins,” a rare delicacy in the Arabian peninsula.<sup>6</sup> Yet Nietzsche might once again be brought in as the intellectual godfather of the current war. Perhaps someone will discover that Western converts like John Walker Lindh or Richard Reid read Nietzsche’s *Antichrist*, in which he says “Islam is a thousand times right in despising Christianity: Islam presupposes men [*Männer*]” (*AC*, § 59).

Someone, somewhere, will drag out Nietzsche’s scattered comments in which he regrets Europe’s turning away from the crypto-Islamism of German emperor Friedrich the Second, speaks with approval of the military genius of Muhammad, and at the end of *The Antichrist* denounces Christianity because

it cheated us again out of the harvest of the culture of *Islam*. The wonderful world of the Moorish culture of Spain, really more closely related to us, more congenial to our senses and tastes than Rome and Greece, was *trampled down* (I do not say by what kind of feet). Why? Because it owed its origin to noble, to *male* instincts, because it said Yes to life even with the rare and refined luxuries of Moorish life. (*AC*, § 60)

Nietzsche’s nostalgia for the loss of Andalusia evokes that of bin Laden’s today as recorded on one of his video declarations of war. Neither acknowledges that it was internal conflict in Islam, spearheaded by Moroccan fundamentalists, that contributed at least as much as any Christian offensive to the dissolution of Moorish Spain. In this passage Nietzsche goes on to denounce the Crusades in a spirit that the ideologists of the September 11 attack would find appealing. Let us note parenthetically that Nietzsche does not praise all wars. If “it is the good war that hallows every cause,” then it also seems clear that a war against a higher form of culture is not a good war and that what makes a good war good is not military success, ferocity, looting, rapine, and destruction. “Really,” Nietzsche says,

there should not be any choice between Islam and Christianity, any more than between an Arab and a Jew. Either one *is* a chandala, or one *is not*. “War to the knife against Rome! Peace and friendship with Islam”—thus felt, thus *acted*, that great free spirit, the genius among German emperors, Friedrich the Second. (*AC*, § 60)

Nietzsche seems to have derived his (late) view of Jews as chandalas or untouchables from reading Louis Jacolliot’s annotated (and untrustworthy) translation of the Indian Law of Manu. His use of Jacolliot’s eccentric thesis is peculiar, since the former claims that both Jews and Arabs were descended from chandalas driven out of India.<sup>7</sup>

Where did Nietzsche find the resources for his vision of Islam and the ideal caliphate of Andalusia? It was of course a marginal fantasy running throughout Western history, the idea of a counter-world of tolerance and cosmopolitan learning, a world symbolized by Granada and the Alhambra. When Nietzsche longs for a great architecture, one that builds for the ages and lays the foundation

for a great culture, he may be thinking of these monuments. It is this world that is frequently invoked today as offering a very different version of Islam than the one of political and military *jihād* with biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons that the West fears now; it is an alternative to the image of radical Islam associated with September 11. So Nietzsche's enthusiasm for this cultural memory of Islam does not necessarily suggest that he would take the side of today's Islamic warriors. As early as March 1881 he had proposed to his old friend Gersdorff that they spend a year or two together in Tunis. It is not perhaps altogether accidental that Nietzsche had been somewhat alienated from this friend as a result of his marriage. But he writes, "I want to live among Muslims for a good long time, especially where their faith is most devout; in this way I expect to hone my appraisal and my eye for all that is European" (*B* 6.68; March 13, 1881). Nietzsche expresses the need for a marginal perspective on Europe. As here, many of Nietzsche's references to Islam are colored by a tone that is either antifeminist, homoerotic, or both. Later he will write to Paul Deussen, praising his work on Indian philosophy and speaking of his own "trans-European eye."<sup>8</sup>

The involvement with Islam and war goes further. In an unnerving passage in *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche refers to the original Assassins. This is perhaps his most explicit engagement with the possibility of a terrorist apparatus and its philosophical roots.

When the Christian crusaders in the Orient encountered the invincible order of the Assassins, that order of free spirits *par excellence*, whose lowest ranks followed a rule of obedience the like of which no order of monks has ever attained, they obtained in some way or other a hint concerning that symbol and tally-word reserved for the highest ranks as their *secretum*: "Nothing is true, everything is permitted."—Very well, *that was freedom of spirit*; in *that way* the faith in truth itself was abrogated. (*GM* III, § 24)

Here we have a bit of geophilosophy in miniature. Nietzsche believes—more or less accurately—that the Assassins, or properly the Nizari Ismailis, a branch of the Shia, had liberated themselves from the morality of truth and developed a culture of self-discipline that set itself goals no longer human, all-too-human. According to stories relayed by Marco Polo and others, the Assassins were organized in ultrahierarchical fashion and the "soldiers" of the movement would gladly sacrifice their own lives at the command of their master, "the old man of the mountain." In one story, several disciples threw themselves to their deaths from high towers simply so that the "old man" could demonstrate the obedience of his troops. Notice that this war-machine (in the term of Deleuze and Guattari) is very different from the contemporary European "free spirits" with whom Nietzsche contrasts them in this same passage. Those half-hearted thinkers are still caught up in the religion of truth that claims their ascetic allegiance. The free spirits do not have the daring, the imagination, to cast it aside and pursue other projects. They do not envision other possibilities of becoming but are content to remain

within the sedentary boundaries of the state, which they would like to alter just a little bit, replacing the church with the religion of science. But if *everything is permitted*, then what is permitted includes grand experiments in overcoming the human. It is the transhuman, posthuman, or *Übermensch* who looms on the horizon, if only today's free spirits could understand what was once the *secretum* of the Assassins, to whom Nietzsche could be linking himself in describing his books as assassination attempts. He also suggests that the Crusaders, whom he will denounce in *The Antichrist* and elsewhere, may have sensed at some deep, unconscious level the insight of the Assassins and carried it back to Europe with them. That suspicion is reflected in the shadowy legends of the extreme hierarchy, secret doctrines (like metempsychosis), and practices of the Knights Templar, as fictionalized in Klossowski's Nietzschean novel, *The Baphomet*.<sup>9</sup>

Following a genealogy with which Nietzsche was probably familiar, some have traced these connections back to the original Zoroaster or Zarathustra. Writing in *The New York Times* three months after 9/11, the historian Marina Warner said that we should understand the guiding ideology of Al Qaeda not as Islamic fundamentalism but as a resurgence of Zoroastrianism, that is, the teachings of the original Persian Zarathustra<sup>10</sup>; it is that extreme dualism that Nietzsche's version of the sage has come to renounce. Zoroastrianism so understood is a kind of gnosticism that sees an absolute opposition between a good and an evil principle. Such dualism lends itself to esotericism, so that the good stands in unmediated contrast with the evils and confusion of the world. This sets up the possibility of a transition from a secret truth that lays down rigid moral injunctions and prohibitions to the *secretum* of the Assassins: "nothing is true, everything is permitted." In a note of 1884 Nietzsche writes "Fundamental principle: So far as the public good goes, the Jesuits are right, and in the same way the order of the Assassins; and similarly the rule of the Chinese" (SW 11.101). And in the same year, he links the students of Brahma, those who take vows in temples, and the Assassins as exhibiting "the practice of obedience," and remarks on "the divinization of the feeling of power among the Brahmins: it is interesting that it arose in the warrior caste and only later was passed on to the priests" (SW 11.208–209). In *Zarathustra* it is the Shadow who says, "'Nothing is true, all is permitted,' thus I spoke to myself" (SW 4.340). In this context the Shadow is giving voice to a melancholy confession: he has followed Zarathustra into the most daring reaches of thought, but has turned into nothing but a ghost or shadow. He is *only* a shadow because he spoke only to himself, not like the Brahmins, Assassins, and Jesuits, to an organized order.

Let us look more carefully at *Genealogy* III, § 24, where Nietzsche contrasts the Assassins and the free spirits. He refers to the notorious formula of the *secretum* as a *Kerbholz-Wort*, or tally-word. The term is unusual enough in German to have received a detailed commentary in Maudmarie Clark's and Alan J. Swensen's notes to their translation of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. As they point out, it is Nietzsche's coinage, deriving from the rather rare *Kerbholz*. I quote at some

length from their commentary, since Nietzsche's language has implications for how we are to understand his repetition of the Assassins' formula:

The German word *Kerbholz* now survives only in the idiom: *etwas auf dem Kerbholz haben* (literally: "to have something on one's tally"), which now has a moral rather than a legal meaning—to have a sin or crime on one's conscience. The *Kerbholz* or "tally" [originally a stick notched to keep score or track of a debt, e.g. drinks consumed] was generally split lengthwise across the notches or "scores" and each party involved in the transaction was given one half. The correspondence between the two halves could then be used to confirm the size of the debt and the identity of the creditor.<sup>11</sup>

As Clark and Swensen note, Nietzsche uses *Kerbholz-Wort* one more time (his only other usage) in a notebook of 1885 to 1887 (previous to the composition of the *Genealogy*) when he writes: "'Paradise is under the shadow of swords'—also a symbolon and *Kerbholz-Wort* by which the souls of noble and warlike descent betray themselves and recognize each other."<sup>12</sup> Again, like the *secretum* of the Assassins, this sentence is placed in quotations. The external source, if there is one, has not been identified. However, as explained below, it could very well derive from Nietzsche's reading or imagination of the Assassins, since a basic part of their legend has to do with the promise of entrance into paradise for those who obeyed the master of the order. Some of the essential ingredients of the legend, then, that emerge in *Genealogy* III, § 24, are that the Assassins form a hierarchical order, demanding and achieving absolute obedience, whose degrees are marked by initiation into secret teachings, that the highest teaching involves the notorious secret *Kerbholz-Wort*, and that some inkling of this secret teaching was probably transmitted to the Crusaders. Clark and Swensen remark that Nietzsche's use of *Kerbholz-Wort* "is another example of a moral phenomenon evolving from an economic one."<sup>13</sup> The context renders this observation highly ironic, since the point of the *secretum* is the supermoral one that "everything is permitted." Yet while the usual reading of this passage takes Nietzsche to be authorizing a kind of unbridled individualism, it is precisely the obedience of the order and the startling, spectacular results that such obedience can achieve that are the focus of the legend to which Nietzsche alludes. The Assassins are not "existentialists" in the vulgar sense of individuals choosing their own way of life without regard to custom or authority but a disciplined order undertaking dramatic projects of political power and social transformation.

Following his citation of the Assassins' secret, Nietzsche inserts one of those ellipses by which he aims at provoking rather than pronouncing thought and turns to emphasizing the distinction between his reading of the famous sentence and the attitude of contemporary European free spirits:

... Now that was freedom of the spirit, with that, belief in truth itself was renounced. . . . Has any European, any Christian free spirit ever lost his



way in this proposition and its labyrinthine *consequences*? Does he know the Minotaur of this cave *from experience*? . . . precisely in their belief in truth they are more firm and unconditional than anyone else.

European free spirits are identified here, it seems, as *Christians*, which at first seems paradoxical, since the typical free spirit, as Nietzsche presents such, identifies herself as an atheist or agnostic. But as the argument of the *Genealogy* proceeds, Nietzsche's point becomes clearer. Christianity believes in Truth, and that belief is transmitted to the free spirits who imagine themselves in rebellion against it. They oppose Christianity in the name of one of its highest values. They are Christians despite themselves. Since it is the relation between Assassins and Crusaders that introduces this reflection, implicit here is the thought that not all religions, not even all monotheisms, are committed to Truth in this sense. Islam, at least, was able to give rise to a different perspective. The proposition and its unspoken "labyrinthine *consequences*" remain unthought by the European free spirits. We could suggest that these consequences involve not only surrendering belief in the Truth, but also passivity in the face of the Truth, what Nietzsche goes on to call "philosopher's abstinence . . . fatalism of '*petits faits*' . . . renunciation of all interpretation," in short, a nihilistic positivism, one that would certainly preclude the adventurous possibilities of "everything is permitted." Given the opposition between the order of the Assassins and the unreflective individualism of the free spirits, we can surmise that the latter are Christian in an additional (Nietzschean) sense: they continue to believe, if not in the literal immortality of the soul, then at least in the autonomy of the individual as the source of action and value. The Assassins, in legend and in Nietzsche's allusion, were not so limited. Zarathustra's Shadow can repeat the verbal formula, but in his weakness he fails to work through its daring consequences and ends in the self-confessed impotence of his song "Among Daughters of the Desert" (SW 4.379–85). Since Nietzsche associates the Shadow with a degenerate understanding of the Assassins' *Kerbholz-Wort*, we can read his parody of European Orientalist poetry as the passive nihilist version of the sensual paradise with willing maidens promised to the lower orders of the faithful. The Shadow, then, is a mere free spirit, an impotent European individualist. He can repeat the verbal formula of the Assassins, but he fails to understand that it is a *Kerbholz-Wort* rather than a *Grundsatz*. It is not a principle, or not merely a principle. It is rather, or also, a symbol by which the adepts reveal and recognize one another. In this respect it is worth thinking of its similarities to the teaching of eternal recurrence, which appears in Nietzsche's notebooks of 1881 as a thought to be understood for its political implications; he notes that through the new teaching (including the self-education of its teachers) "in this way a new ruling caste forms itself" (SW 9.497).

Somewhere Nietzsche had heard of the Assassins, whose reputation entered European literature as early as the twelfth century and was given currency in the nineteenth in a relatively popular and sensational German account by the

Austrian Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *History of the Assassins*.<sup>14</sup> In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Nizari had established themselves in the mountain stronghold of Alamut, at 10,200 feet in the highlands of Persia, and from there they captured other fortresses in a series of surprise raids. The group grew out of a strain within the Ismaili tradition, itself a Shia heresy, which foresaw a form of Islam that would be freed from doctrine, prayer, and ritual. As Nietzsche's passage indicates, they were famed for a complex internal organization that allowed the grand master to transmit orders to highly disciplined cells. In Marco Polo's description, based on travels ten years after the final defeat and dispersal of the movement by the Mongols, the grand master was said to have used hashish to put his recruits to sleep; they would awake in his fabulous garden and be attended by beautiful women. This taste of paradise was then used to motivate them in their murderous missions with the promise that they could always return to the garden as miraculously as they had entered it for the first time. The traditional Western etymology of *Assassins* derives from the hashish that they supposedly smoked in order to work themselves up into a state of supreme fervor. The accuracy of this legend has been contested, quite sensibly, on the grounds that hashish is not good for discipline. It seems likely that the term was applied by outsiders to suggest that the Assassins were as mad as hashish addicts. After a series of startling successes over a period of sixty or seventy years, the Assassins were finally defeated by the Mongols around 1260 and all or almost all of their own books and records were destroyed. During their heyday the constant threat of secret attack and the absolutely fearless quality of their warriors spread terror throughout the territory from Persia to Syria. One estimate is that there were about 150,000 of the Ismaili "Assassin" sect scattered throughout northern Syria, Persia, Oman, Zanzibar, and India. The combination (actual or legendary) of hierarchical organization, fighters ready and willing to sacrifice themselves, terror and propaganda (they called themselves the new propagandists), drugs, hidden mountain strongholds, and a heretical use of Islamic tradition seems to have rooted itself in Western Orientalism. Also significant is the fact that the Assassins were eventually defeated and dispersed by another nomadic force, the Mongols, who swept aside everything in their path.

We can tentatively reconstruct some of the sources from which Nietzsche may have gained some knowledge or hearsay concerning the Assassins. He refers to August Müller's *Der Islam in Morgen- und Abendland*, a massive history published in 1885.<sup>15</sup> Müller gives a relatively straightforward account of the rise and fall of the Assassins (given the prejudices of his time), including their complex relations with the Crusaders, which included temporary alliances. He also had great respect for the scholarship of Julius Wellhausen, from whose writings he drew in his analysis of Judaism and early Christianity; Nietzsche knew and quoted from Wellhausen's writings on the theological-political history of early Islam.<sup>16</sup> In the fall of 1887 he copies these notes from Wellhausen's studies of Islam:

“In Islam community in battle is at the same time sacramental community: whoever takes part in our prayers and eats the meat of the battle is a Muslim.”  
“A command of the cult transforms itself into a command of the *culture*.”  
(SW 12.531)

Most intriguing is the question of whether he knew Von Hammer-Purgstall's *History of the Assassins*, for it includes a reverential treatment of Zarathustra/Zoroaster and the oldest Persian kingdoms, a quasi-philosophical analysis of the Assassins as nihilist revolutionaries, and an attempt to awaken Europe to what the author saw as the imminent danger posed by secret societies that were ideologically and perhaps organizationally descended from the Assassins, especially the Freemasons. While there seem to be no explicit references to the *History of the Assassins* in Nietzsche's writings, we should note that this book, published first in 1818, went through a number of editions and was translated into several languages; it was a mainstay of nineteenth-century Orientalism and played an important role in the anti-Masonic hysteria of the time. Only around 1848 did the specter haunting Europe begin to change its name from the Masons to the communists, but then, for von Hammer, both the Assassins and the Masons were revolutionaries, communists, and nihilists.

Reading von Hammer after Nietzsche, we might be struck by some of these aspects of his narrative: He begins by praising the ancient kingdom of the Persians and the religion of Zoroaster, which in its “primeval purity” offered no support for rebellion. But some later Zoroastrian sects “preached universal liberty and equality, the indifference of all human actions, and community of goods and women.” When the Persian Empire was destroyed by Islamic Arabs they “sought the ruin of Islamism, not only by open war, but also by secret doctrines and pernicious dissensions.”<sup>17</sup> Von Hammer describes the emergence of various cults, culminating finally in the Assassins of Alamut. All of these are characterized by hierarchical orders among the Ismailite Shia in which adepts proceed through various degrees of secrecy. In one of the latter stages it becomes clear that philosophy takes precedence over all positive religion. Von Hammer translates the teaching of the final stage in a number of ways that closely resemble Nietzsche's *secretum*: “nothing was sacred and all was permitted,” “to believe nothing and to dare all,” “all was doubtful and nothing prohibited.”<sup>18</sup> He delights in telling stories of the bloody and grotesque exploits of the group, especially its grand masters, in their pursuit of power, which eventually extended over much of present-day Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Von Hammer relates that the Assassins conspired with the Crusaders when it suited their purposes and were capable of the most devious forms of disguise and betrayal. He reminds us of the resemblance of the Assassins to the Jesuits and Masons (Nietzsche associates Jesuits and Assassins also), and he describes the Ismailis as “nestled, like birds of prey, among the rocks” of their mountain stronghold, a metaphor that recalls many of Nietzsche's.<sup>19</sup>

(For example, in relating the composition of *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo*, he tells us that the “decisive chapter that bears the title ‘On Old and New Tablets’ was composed on the most onerous ascent from the station to the marvelous Moorish eyrie [*Felsenest*], Eza” [SW 6.341]. Zarathustra’s legislation is associated not only with his own unnamed [Persian?] mountain but with one of Islam’s former rocky strongholds in Europe.) One of the most interesting chapters of the story of the Assassins tells of the grand master Hassan, son of Mohammed. While the order typically kept up the appearances of Islamic faith and obedience among the population and the lower degrees of the order, Hassan openly preached their secrets, ordered feasting on Ramadan, and attempted to introduce a new calendar beginning with his reign.<sup>20</sup>

If Deleuze is right in seeing Nietzsche as a nomadic philosopher, then his theory and practice of war may owe something, at least on a symbolic level, to his vision of the war of Christianity and Islam and to the war within Islam waged by the Assassins. But here we should not forget that there is an apparent tension in Nietzsche’s praise of Islamic Andalusia and his possible sympathy with the Assassins. Nietzsche knew that there was a hierarchical system among the Assassins that was tied to levels of initiation. He saw the group as practicing an esoteric teaching, a *secretum*. This could give some force to Geoff Waite’s thesis in *Nietzsche’s Corps/e* that his work should be construed as an esoteric form of warfare.<sup>21</sup> But on Waite’s view, Nietzsche’s polemic is primarily directed against socialism and democracy. The associations with Islam and the Assassins, like much of Nietzsche’s writing, suggest that the struggle is primarily with religion, specifically with Christianity. Of course Nietzsche will sometimes link these together, as in the notorious passage of *Twilight* where he spells out one form of the warrior ideal:

The human being who has *become free*—and how much more the *spirit* who has become free—spits on the contemptible form of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, females, Englishmen, and other democrats. The free human being [*Mensch*] is a warrior. (*TI*, “Skirmishes,” 38)

Deleuze and Guattari, building on Nietzsche, argue that thinkers like Hegel and Marx fail to understand the nomads and specifically the nomadic war machine. Hegel, Marx, and almost all of western political philosophy has seen war as a conflict between states rather than between a state and forces of the outside. To the extent that these thinkers recognize the nomadic, or warrior, as such, they must make them primitive stages, long surpassed or existing only as fossils. Nevertheless, there is an aesthetic longing in Hegel’s discussion of the epic, Homeric world in his *Aesthetics* and in Marx and Engels’ sketches of hunter-gatherers. The failure to understand the nomadic (“nonstate agents” in official U.S. parlance) leads to initial and continuing bewilderment as U.S. mainstream news analysts attempt to comprehend Al Qaeda and similar organizations. We can learn more about the structure of the conflict from films about terrorist conspiracies than

from political philosophers like John Rawls or Robert Nozick, more from a few conservative political theorists and journalists like Samuel Huntington with his war of civilizations or Robert Kaplan with his talk of “the coming anarchy” than from Habermasian critical theory.

When Nietzsche declares war on Christianity he does so in a context shaped by admiration for Islam and the Assassins whose tally-word, he says, was “Nothing is true, everything is permitted.” The last formula, in his text, is not a license for individualism, arbitrary whim, or vulgar existentialism. It is a formula of military discipline. The last paragraph of the main text of *The Antichrist* promises a writing on the walls and a revision of the calendar based on Nietzsche’s declaration of war on Christianity.

Wherever there are walls I shall inscribe this eternal accusation against Christianity upon them—I can write in letters which make even the blind see. . . . And one calculates *time* from the *dies nefastus* on which this fatality arose—from the *first* day of Christianity! *Why not rather from its last?—From today?—*Revaluation of all values! (AC, § 62)

As we now know, this passage was followed immediately by the “Decree Against Christianity,” which proposes a “day one” (replacing September 30, 1888) marking the war against Christianity.

Deleuze has written of the profound structure that underlies this phantasm of the splitting of time in *Difference and Repetition*. He contrasts the Cartesian *cogito* and the Kantian “I think.” The *cogito* determines the I as a thinking being whose identity is dependent upon God. Kant saw that only the bare form of temporality was implied by the “I think,” and so consequently “time signifies a fault or a fracture in the I and a passivity in the self.”<sup>22</sup> Rational psychology must go the way of rational theology. Hölderlin and Nietzsche are the true heirs of Kant, rather than Fichte and Hegel. The time is out of joint and necessarily marked by a caesura. This “caesura, of whatever kind, must be determined in the image of a unique and tremendous event, an act which is adequate to time as a whole.”<sup>23</sup> So Nietzsche’s interruption of time, whether in the thought of eternal recurrence or in the introduction of a new calendar, is to be understood as a “symbolic image” of time out of joint.

It is worth noting that Nietzsche’s challenge to rethink time with the thought of eternal recurrence is “untimely,” that it goes contrary to the measuring of time, its *Zeitmass*, insofar as it coincides with the global standardization of time that was put into effect by the railroads and ratified by governments in the early 1880s.<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, perhaps the first railway philosopher, raises the question “who will be the lords of the earth?” in a context where it means, among other things, who will set the earth’s time and calendar. Geophilosophy must also be chronophilosophy. The striated space and time of the global transportation system is challenged by the time of the earth, the animal, the horizon, and the sun. It is Nietzsche’s anti-Copernican revolution.

War-time, the war against Christianity *and its false reckoning of time*, is time in the wake of God's death. In the parable of the madman (GS, § 125), time is out of joint because the true news of God's death, like the light from distant stars, is still on its way to the traders in the marketplace. What they do not see, in their all too easy and all too human atheism, is that the date of their *Wall Street Journal* is out of date and that the market is about to be engulfed in war. Nietzsche's war-time is the time in which "I is another," in which the Antichrist(ian) repeats the tragic age of the Greeks in its post-Christian and post-Cartesian difference.

The declaration of war, the "Decree Against Christianity," perhaps removed by his sister and early editors, was restored finally by Colli and Montinari. During his last year Nietzsche was obsessed with the question of law giving and found inspiration in Jacolliot's book *The Religious Lawgivers*, with its translation of the Law of Manu and its running commentary with comparisons to Moses and Muhammad. The "Decree," which was to form the last page of *The Antichrist*, could be the text of a poster to be put up in public places. (It was found in Nietzsche's papers glued to the last pages of *The Antichrist*; Colli and Montinari argue that it was intended to be the last page of that work.) It declares that priests should be imprisoned, that "every participation in a religious service is an attack on public morality," that Protestantism is worse than Catholicism and liberal Protestantism its worst variety, that all preaching of chastity or denigration of sexuality is to be condemned, that eating with a priest is forbidden, and that the words used in positive senses in the Bible like *God* and *redeemer* should be understood as insults. It is impossible to determine what in this decree is parody and what is meant in total seriousness. Nietzsche, who constantly tells his readers that he expects the most subtle, philologically attuned ear for his writings, offers something in the style of a comic book, a set of directives as shockingly simplified, if not more so, than the instructions and videotapes of the suicide bombers. However, I want to focus now, in the wake of September 11, and so in the era that takes its name from that date, on the line just below the title of the "Decree Against Christianity." That line reads "Proclaimed on the first day of the year one (on September 30, 1888) of the false time scheme." Of course the parallelism is not exact. Bin Laden and associates did not announce a new time scheme; they presumably accept the traditional Islamic calendar. Some of his pronouncements refer to events "eighty years ago," possibly the Balfour Declaration. In the months following September 11, there was speculation by intelligence services and journalists about whether that attack and feared future attacks were geared to some religious or esoteric calendar.<sup>25</sup>

Let us compare these two September dates: September 11, 2001, and September 30, 1888. Of course the last is expressed in what Nietzsche calls the old, false system of reckoning time. It should be day one, year one, of a time that has been newly divided in two—a new common era. Nietzsche's day one is put forward as an affirmative date, yet to the extent that it recognizes a prior time with which it contrasts itself, the question arises whether it can be completely

affirmative. For the war against Christianity time must be recalibrated with a new calendar, one unindebted to the enemy's system of values. But like Christianity and Islam, Nietzsche's calendar splits the history of humanity into two, unlike the Jewish calendar which begins with the creation of the world and so has nothing anterior to its basic date. Nietzsche's new way of reckoning time is tied up with wars and battles, like 9/11. In the Jewish and Christian imaginary, which Nietzsche probably shared on this point, there is a tendency to think of early Islam as defined by its wars. But the Islamic calendar begins with the Hijra, understood as an act of complete submission: Muhammad saves the faith and its revelation by leaving Mecca for Medina. Since Nietzsche praises the Islamic war on Christianity he may have felt some kinship with what he took to be its associated way of dividing time into two parts. And like Jewish and Islamic dates, when presented in Christian or in secular contexts, Nietzsche gives the other time scheme as a point of reference.

The use of September 11 as a watershed, although it is a military date, the beginning of a war, has a very different sense than any of these other primal dates. When used in politics and the media, it too has an absolute before and after. Before we were innocent and unsuspecting; after we are vigilant and fighting back. George W. Bush declared war on terrorism on that date, and it is the date of "Let's roll," flight 93 passenger Todd Beamer's answer to the "Allah Akbar" of the hijackers over Pennsylvania. September 11 is a date that in this context is thought to be *thrust upon us*. It is recorded in the prevailing calendar because it is an offense to that calendar (Christian, Jewish, and secular Americans will certainly not refer to it as the sixth day of Jumada II, 1422 A.H., its Islamic date). In this dating system, those who were attacked let themselves be defined by the aggressions of the other. Some, of course, will suggest that there is a certain subterfuge in this, whether conscious or unconscious. They might suggest that it is American or Israeli aggression, globalization, or the corrupt regimes of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, propped up by the West, that bear some major responsibility for September 11. The extreme form of this view is the one according to which the attacks were planned by the United States or Israel. That is absurd, although it would be supremely foolish to understand September 11 without attending to its geopolitical context.

What I am attempting to focus on is the question of the date as a way of naming an event, dividing time, and marking the initiation of a war, a war that seems to open up a new kind of future, a war, as "we" are repeatedly told, that will be unlike all other wars, the war of the new millennium, the war of the future. The obviously parochial character of the before and after 9/11 system is marked by the fact that it seems almost impossible to use it, at least in an American context, without the use of the first person plural: it is "our" date. Those in the United States might think of December 7, 1941, "a day that will live in infamy," as Franklin Roosevelt said. But this became the war with the Axis powers and World War II. Because we could name the nation-states of Germany, Japan, and

their satellites and allies as enemies, the war did not have to be defined in terms of a date. September 11 remains so far the date that *names* the current war, because the enemy is otherwise nameless. This also opens up the possibility, noted by many observers, that there will be no way of marking the end of the war, since it cannot be defined in terms of the defeat and surrender of any sovereign state(s), as the end of World War II was marked by V-E and V-J days or the conclusion of the Cold War by the fall of the Berlin Wall or the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It stands in for a war against evil, sometimes characterized by George Bush as “the evil one” (bin Laden) or as the “axis of evil” (Iran, Iraq, North Korea) but most generally as a “war on terror.”

The United States military adventure in Iraq could be seen as an attempt to superimpose a traditional war against a sovereign state on the intrinsically indefinite calendar of the war on terror, but the misguided character of this attempt is evident from the staged character of the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s Baghdad statue and of George W. Bush’s announcement on May 1, 2003, of the cessation of “major combat operations” in Iraq. Here, Nietzsche the philosophical expert on masks and costumes, would find himself in one of his occasional alliances with Marx. The spectacle of Bush arriving in flight outfit and making his declaration under the banner “MISSION ACCOMPLISHED” on the deck of an aircraft carrier lends itself to Marx’s analysis of historical masquerade in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world-history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.<sup>26</sup>

Marx would have been amused by the borrowing of “names, battle cries and costumes” in the spectacles by which government and media attempt to say simultaneously both that everything is different and that a traditional victory has been accomplished. And Marx was no doubt more acute than Nietzsche at seeing through the illusions of the calendar, as his ironizing of the French revolutionary calendar in the title of *The 18th Brumaire* demonstrates.

Nietzsche, however, is the better analyst of the language of good and evil that drives the current war effort by both contemporary Assassins and Crusaders. The rhetoric of evil is reactive. September 11 is the sign of our victimization by the evil ones; we, in contrast, must be good. It is the mirror image of Al Qaeda’s calendar of good and evil in which it is dates like those of the Crusades themselves, the Spanish expulsion of the Moors, or the Balfour Declaration that mark corresponding events. *On the Genealogy of Morals* proposes a contrast between a sovereign language of “good and bad” and the reactive moral discourse of “good



and evil." The struggle against evil necessarily tends toward a metaphysical and theological hypostatization of evil and a similar faith in the transcendent purity of those who reactively designate themselves as the good. So Nietzsche would understand why the explicit appeal to theology by bin Laden and his kind is increasingly matched by parallel presidential invocations of "the Almighty" and by Christian apocalyptic fantasies centered on the Middle East. Even in Nietzsche's "Decree," which goes far in the direction of mimicking that which it opposes, Christianity is referred to as "depravity [*Laster*]" rather than as evil, and there is no suggestion of its total obliteration.

Is it not remarkable that the declaration of *The Antichrist* is directed only against Christianity, not against the other Abrahamic monotheisms and not against religion as such? Of course we are familiar with Nietzsche's comments in *Beyond Good and Evil* and elsewhere about how the philosophical legislator can and should make use of religion. So the limitation to Christianity here may appear as strategic. Nietzsche can declare himself the disciple of Dionysus, hope for an alliance between officers of the March Brandenburg and Jewish bankers, and side with Muslims resisting the Crusades. Since Islam did enter into armed conflict with Christianity and was its main geopolitical rival for at least one thousand years, say until the lifting of the siege of Vienna, on September 12, 1683, we can see why Nietzsche might have felt some sympathy with it.<sup>27</sup> Add to this the idealized version of Andalusian culture that he had absorbed, and it becomes intelligible how he could see a certain affinity with its *jihad* against Christianity.

In spring 1888, Nietzsche, apparently fresh from his reading of Jacolliot, produces this theological-political schema:

What a yes-saying Aryan religion, the product of the *ruling* class looks like:  
the Lawbook of Manu

What a yes-saying semitic religion, the product of the *ruling* class looks like:  
the Lawbook of Muhammad; the Old Testament, in its earlier parts

What a no-saying semitic religion, the product of the *oppressed* class looks like: According to Indian-Aryan concepts:  
the New Testament—a chandala religion

What a no-saying Aryan religion looks like, having developed among the ruling class:  
Buddhism

It is completely reasonable that there is no religion of the oppressed Aryan races: for that is a contradiction: a master race is either in charge or goes to ruin. (SW 13.380–381)

The schema is a useful guide to Nietzsche's meditations on the psychological and historical significance of the great religions. The Assassins, in his understanding (and in the nineteenth-century views that he adopted) clearly stand outside all

of these forms, for they used religion rather than practicing it. He would have had no sympathy with those who welcome death because they believe they are following a divine command and expect immediate translation to paradise. For Nietzsche, the Assassins were this-worldly and employed death and sacrifice for the sake of this-worldly ends. So far we have no reason to think that groups like Al Qaeda operate on the basis of a *secretum* like the one that tradition attributes to the masters of Alamut. We can only speculate about the ends that Nietzsche might have found appropriate for Assassins of the future, and we would probably be right to view them with horror and alarm.

Nietzsche's unremitting hostility to the Crusaders is quite another story. Crusaders are above all stupid, he says, as when he sketches a rhyme that speaks of "goats, geese, and other Crusaders" (SW 10.94; cf. 10.542, 630; 13.550). In those last pages of *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche explains the Crusades as the appropriation by the Christian church of the German military machine. Yes, they wanted booty (*Beute*), he says, in other words the medieval equivalent of oil and pipelines. The basic structure of the event is the deployment of a paid army in the service of ascetic Christianity:

The German knights, always the "Schweizer" [Swiss soldiers, guard] of the Church, always in the service of all the bad instincts of the Church—but *well paid*. . . . It is precisely with the aid of German swords, German blood and courage, that the Church has carried on its deadly war against everything noble on earth! (AC, § 60)

It is no longer the medieval Church and the German knights that play these roles. In the war in Iraq that began in 2003, we can substitute for these terms a born-again president, governing with the support of apocalyptic fundamentalists, career armies, and contractors lured by the booty. Unlike the Crusades, we do not know the outcome. Indeed, the current Assassins (bin Laden and allies) tell us that the war is a continuation of their struggle with the Crusaders. Nietzsche and Heraclitus would not have been surprised.

May 1, 2004 (first anniversary of George W. Bush's declaring the end of "major combat operations" in Iraq)

### Notes

1. See Nietzsche, *Godfather of Fascism?* Ed. Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) for a series of recent essays on this topic, with references to the literature since the 1930s.
2. For a review of Nietzsche's knowledge of Islam and further references, see Ian Almond, "Nietzsche's Peace with Islam: My Enemy's Enemy Is My Friend," *German Life and Letters*, January 2003, pp. 43–55.
3. For a translation of the "Decree," see Gary Shapiro, *Nietzschean Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 146; for the textual background see the editors' commentary in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studien-*

*ausgabe* (SW), ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 14, pp. 450–453.

4. See, e.g., Syed Qutub, *Milestones* (Lahore: Kazi, n.d.).
5. The Shia, who hold themselves responsible for the betrayal and death of Ali, are another story; the Assassins were a sect that arose among the Ismailite branch of the Shia.
6. *The New York Times*, March 2, 2002, p. A1.
7. Louis Jacolliot, *Les législateurs religieux: Manou, Moïse, Mahomet* (Paris: A. Lacroix, 1876). I am indebted to my colleague Thomas Bonfiglio for discussions of this strange text. Jacolliot was a judge in French India who wrote on diverse subjects, including the occult sciences and his experiences as a big game hunter. He claims to have witnessed scenes of levitation by spiritual adepts in India.
8. Letter to Paul Deussen, January 3, 1888; Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), vol. 8, p. 222. Abbreviated as *B*.
9. Pierre Klossowski, *The Baphomet*, trans. Sophie Hawkes and Stephen Sartarelli (Hygiene, CO: Eridanos Press, 1988).
10. December 16, 2001.
11. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudmarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), editors' note, p. 163.
12. SW 12.75.
13. Clark and Swensen, p. 163.
14. See Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 12–13, for the reference to Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's *Geschichte der Assassinen aus morgenländischen Quellen* (Stuttgart: 1818); *The History of the Assassins*, trans. Oswald Charles Wood (New York: Burt Franklin, 1967 [reprint]; references below are to this edition). Von Hammer's book, as Lewis notes, was meant as a cautionary work warning against the dangers of secret societies in Europe, such as the Freemasons. Only in recent years has there been a serious scholarly history of Ismaili practice and doctrine, including what is called Nizari Ismailism of the Alamut period, due largely to the Center for Ismaili Studies in London, financed by the Aga Khan, whom most of the world's Ismailis acknowledge as their leader and to whom they pay tribute. For a recent and comprehensive history, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially ch. 1, "Western Progress in Ismaili Studies," pp. 1–31, and ch. 6, "Nizari Ismailism of the Alamut period," pp. 324–434.
15. August Müller, *Der Islam im Morgen- und Abendland* (Berlin: G. Grot'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1885–87), 2 vols. Nietzsche cites Müller at SW 13.579 in one of his late notebooks of 1888 from the time when he was working on *The Antichrist*. In his commentary on the latter, Andreas Sommer notes that Nietzsche would not have derived his idealized vision of medieval Andalusia from Müller, who describes the complexity of the historical situation.
16. Nietzsche refers to Wellhausen's *Reste arabischen Heidentums* 11.352 (in SW). He studied and made excerpts from this book and from Wellhausen's *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, which deals with Islamic subjects; see SW 12. 530; 14.441, 747, 755.

17. Von Hammer, pp. 24–25.
18. Von Hammer, pp. 33, 61.
19. Von Hammer, pp. 106, 76.
20. Von Hammer, pp. 106ff.
21. Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
22. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 86.
23. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 89.
24. See Clark Blaise, *Time Lord: Sir Sandford Fleming and the Creation of Standard Time* (New York: Random House, 2002).
25. There is an interesting date in the Western calendar—the false time scheme for both Islam and Nietzsche—of September 12, 1683. This was the lifting of the siege of Vienna. The farthest military advance of the Ottoman Empire into the West was halted on that day. For two months the city of Vienna was under siege by the Ottoman forces, which at that time held what is now Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and most of the former Yugoslavia, as well as its base in Turkey and lands held to the east. A coalition of Polish, Bavarian, and Bohemian forces slowly came together, and the siege was broken on September 12. Over the next century the Habsburgs and Russia pushed back the western boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, which continued its decline until its dissolution in the general crisis of World War I. We might wonder if the terrorists could be thinking that an assault on the financial and political capitals of the United States could be revenge for the loss of three centuries ago. But the Islamic lunar calendar, whose year is eleven days shorter than the Christian one, and so more loosely connected with the earth's movement around the sun and the seasons, would find no obvious link between September 11, 2001, and September 12, 1683.
26. Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 15.
27. Perhaps it is time to give serious thought to understanding modern philosophy, roughly the standard Descartes to Kant and Hegel story, in terms of the European response to Islam. European states lived at least the first half of that period in struggle with a powerful civilization. The expulsion of the Moors (and Jews) from Spain in 1492 and the subsequent colonization of the western hemisphere marked a turn in the fortunes of the Christian states, one that reached an apparently definitive turning point with the lifting of the siege of Vienna on September 12, 1683. Could the classical rationalism of Descartes and Leibniz be seen not only as a response to the scientific revolution but as an attempt to bolster European reason against the threat of the oriental and Islamic other? And might the rise of German idealism culminating in Hegel's Eurocentrism be understood as the triumphalist ideology of a civilization that is confident of its political and military superiority as well as its cultural hegemony? In contrast Nietzsche's geopolitical vision, his "trans-European eye," suspects that the rise of Europe, "this little cape of Asia," is not necessarily permanent. One day Europe will survive, he suggests, simply in the form of a collection of thirty or so great books.