

The Other Empire

*British Romantic Writings about the
Ottoman Empire*



Filiz Turhan

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Preface

IN RECENT YEARS INCREASING SCHOLARLY ATTENTION HAS BEEN PAID TO THE connections between romanticism and imperial culture; indeed, several exemplary works have contributed greatly to our understanding of these developments.¹ These works have given us a new perspective which broadens our understanding of canonical texts and which sheds light on lesser-known works of fiction, travel literature, and history. They have also shown us the ways in which the processes of colonialism and modernization themselves cannot be fully understood apart from the study of romanticism.

The need for such critical attention is obvious when one considers the scope of change in the British Empire during the romantic period. Timothy Fulford and Peter J. Kitson have concisely presented the powerful historical events in English imperial history that occurred between the years 1785 and 1830. Such events include the loss of the American colonies, acquisition of colonies in the Mediterranean and Africa, and developments in Canada, Ireland, India, and Australia; given the weight of these changes, Fulford and Kitson conclude that:

Indeed, the Romantic period is a watershed in colonial history, witnessing a move from a protectionist colonial system, based upon mercantilist economic principles, to a free-trade empire with a political and moral agenda, proverbially described, after Kipling's poem, as 'the white man's burden.' (3)

The present study contributes to our understanding of how British romantic writers responded to this changing world by establishing the extent of their knowledge about the Ottoman Empire and by analyzing their rhetorical construction of it as a counterimage of imperialism. One of the reasons that the Ottomans proved to be such a useful counterimage of empire is that they too were going through a great number of social, political, and imperial changes in the years preceding and simultaneous with the romantic era.

The years between 1699 and 1830 were just as momentous for the Turks as they were for the British. The period is marked by the beginning of a slow but steady loss of territories; a great series of reform efforts by powerful sultans; and a concomitant redefinition of national character, all of which was witnessed and

reported by English writers. The Treaty of Carlowitz (1699), signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy League (Austria, Venice, Poland, Tuscany, and Malta) with mediation services by the British and Dutch, was the first peace signed by a defeated Ottoman Empire and a victorious Christian army. Although the treaty was not a total loss for the Turks, it did herald the retreat from European domains which would continue over the course of the next two centuries; in addition, the peoples of the Balkans, beginning with the Serbs in 1804, launched several indigenous efforts to free themselves from Turkish domination, and the Greeks fought a long and bloody war of independence, which finally ended with the Treaty of London in 1830.

While such losses were lamentable, the fact that they were in distant Christian lands made them relatively bearable. Losses, however, were not restricted to European, Christian holdings only. The treaty of Passarowitz (1718) affected the very spirit of the Ottoman Empire, perhaps in an even greater way than its borders, because it meant the crucial loss to the Russians of the Crimea, which had been a Turkish-speaking, Muslim territory since the Middle Ages.² In addition, the territory of Egypt was invaded by the French, and the Turks were incapable of mounting any resistance to speak of; in fact, it was the English who drove the French out. Matters did not fare much better in the East, since the Turks also lost ground to the Safavid Persians in several confrontations throughout the century. These territorial losses demanded that the Turks make fundamental changes to their political administration, which in turn meant challenges to what had been moral, religious, even ontological sureties for centuries.

It is my argument here that as the Turks were struggling to redefine themselves in a state of decline, the British were able to utilize the image of waning empire precisely because they were engaged in a similar project, though in reverse. They had to envisage what kind of imperial administrators they wanted to be, and using the failing image of the Ottomans was an exceptionally popular way of doing so. What is of particular interest here is that this counterimage of empire was deployed regularly both by those conservative writers who wished to point up the positive nature of British imperialism, as well as those who wanted to criticize it. Tracing just how this slippery signifier works in these texts is the focus of this study.

An understanding of the Western conception of the Ottoman Empire in this period continues to be relevant today given the exceptionally important role the Muslim Middle East plays in contemporary world politics. Today, Turkey is in a very different subject position with regard to Europe than it was in previous centuries. Not the seventeenth-century terrifying scourge of the Balkans and Greece, nor the nineteenth-century “sick man of Europe,” it is the only purely secular democracy in the Muslim world and is therefore frequently cited as a model for other nations. On the other hand, it is also viewed as the poor cousin of the West, perpetually seeking entry into the European Union.

Throughout this book I show that the wide variety of information about the Ottoman Empire is represented in British writings within three broad, primary

categories: the Turks' despotic treatment of minority populations; their backward commercial practices; and their poor treatment of women, most obviously caused by the seemingly repressive customs of Islam. Even today, these three major points of criticism yet persist, despite Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's efforts to redefine the image and spirit of Turkey with the establishment of the Republic in 1923. For instance, two recent books on Turkey by journalists Marvine Howe and Stephen Kinzer, describe the nation as a promising democracy that has yet to fulfill its destiny.³ They note that, ever since the establishment of the republic, Kemalists have been attempting to keep the country firmly facing Europe, sometimes sacrificing the very democratic principles they revere as a way to safeguard the secular state from religious fundamentalists, communists, or misguided liberals. According to these writers and others, the primary impediments to its attaining full democracy (and in turn acceptance into the European Union) are: oppression of its ethnic minorities (Greeks and Armenians in the past, Kurds in the present); restrictions on civil and religious freedom, (e.g., the rights of veiled women to attend universities); and its sputtering economy (currently it is approximately 1.3 million Turkish Lira to the US dollar). In short, with Turkey, the more things change, the more the discursive image stays the same.

My critical approach is to establish the context of the Ottoman Empire as a political and social entity to the degree that it was understood in the period: I therefore present the relevant histories, travel texts, and dramas which were available to the wider reading public as well as romantic authors. For instance, [chapter one](#) continues to draw out the historical context I have been sketching here by describing the reform efforts of three powerful sultans. Other chapters provide relevant information on military engagements, social issues, and religious customs as a means to contextualize the close readings of texts by Elizabeth Craven, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley. In turn, these close readings highlight the various ways these writers make use of the Turkish slippery signifier within the three categories listed above. The epilogue demonstrates the consistency of these rhetorical constructions in the mid-nineteenth century.

For this project, I have selected texts which deal explicitly with the Ottoman Empire as an entity which included not only Constantinople and Anatolia, but also Greece, Albania, Egypt, and Syria at various times. This is why, for instance, Byron is represented with a long chapter of his own, as well as a spot in [chapter five](#), but that Wordsworth and Blake (who figure very prominently in Makdisi's impressive study of romanticism and imperialism) are excluded. In addition, I have selected texts which yield an original contribution to the scholarly terrain. For this reason, I have written at length about Elizabeth Craven, but De Quincey (who is the subject of Barrel's masterful study) is excluded. Furthermore, I focus primarily on representations of the Turks in English writings, but necessarily include European and Western texts and subject positions at times. I make an effort therefore to refer specifically to the English

when appropriate, but frequently must expand the term to Europe or the West when the context necessitates.

A word on the lexicon also seems appropriate. In this study I use the words Ottoman/Turk; Ottoman Empire/Turkey interchangeably except in certain contexts where the distinction is relevant. At times “Ottoman” had connotations of urban, upper-class speakers of a more courtly Turkish inflected with Persian; while “Turk” had connotations of rural, lower-class speakers of a ruder dialect of Turkish inflected with Arabic. Indeed, since “Ottoman” was frequently a political designation and “Turk” an ethnic one, many “Ottomans” were not “Turkish” at all. Because some European writings refer to Ottoman domains as the Levant, that term also may be found occasionally. Turkish, Anglo-Turkish, Franco-Turkish, and Arabic words such as Harem, Odalisque, and Sublime Porte are defined and discussed as they appear.

And finally, a word on that most burdened of all words in this field, “Orientalism.” In the introduction to *Orientalism*, Edward Said defines the term in three related ways: as an academic discipline; as a “style of thought;” and as a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient.”⁴ Since the concept of Orientalism denotes the process of reducing the East to a source of study for the purpose of colonial management, the Turks provide an interesting case study. Although it was one of the first Muslim cultures to be a source of textual knowledge (primarily as seen in Venetian ambassadors’ reports of the sixteenth century), it was not, properly speaking, colonized by the West. It is true that at key moments in history there have been elaborate plans to carve up the entire Ottoman Empire among Western European powers, but no such plan was ever thoroughly implemented.⁵ Territories of the Ottoman Empire became fully independent or protectorates of the English or French, but the Turkish heartland of Anatolia never was ruled by colonial forces since the Turkish tribes first settled there in the eleventh century. Nevertheless, given its weakening position as an empire, it may not be inaccurate to say that scholarly knowledge of this empire was instrumental in the “managing” of it by Western politicians, diplomats, and merchants. As Turkey increasingly found itself in a subordinate position with regard to Western powers, it was more and more susceptible to influence and change. Writers of the period had varying responses to this weakening of Turkish power, seeing it alternatively as an opportunity to capture its territories for their own growing empires or as a cautionary tale against the abuses of despotism and greed.

This project has been made possible by the kind assistance of editors, faculty, colleagues, friends, and family. I would like first to thank Paul Foster Johnson of Routledge and Dr. William ECain of Wellesley College for their enthusiastic interest in this project and guidance in its revision. My dissertation advisor, Professor Paul Magnuson of New York University, provided me with the indispensable guidance necessary to bring it to life in the first place, and has continued to do so through its revision. In addition, many thanks are due to Professor Laurence Lockridge for first introducing me to the romantics back in

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THE OTHER EMPIRE

British Romantic Writings about the
Ottoman Empire

Chapter One

The Slippery Signifier

AT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE ACTED as a particular counterpoint in a growing repertoire of imaginative landscapes that included Catholic Europe, colonized India and the once-Edenic America. The way in which Romantic writers utilized Ottoman geography constitutes a specific kind of British self-fashioning that simultaneously exculpated and condemned revolutionary ambitions, reform philosophies, and commercial policies in a number of imperial pursuits throughout the world. This study traces the uses of the figure of the Turk and the Ottoman Empire by Romantic writers in a variety of literary genres. It particularizes the brand of Orientalism that British writers envisioned at a time when the British Empire was redefining its own status as an empire in the East.¹ By the early eighteenth century, knowledge of the Ottoman Empire was widely available as a way to figure despotism or ineffectual government for whatever reason the writer needed. Throughout this study, I focus on the three primary ways in which the Ottoman Empire represented despotism: its treatment of the Greeks; the institution of the Harem; and the failure of the empire to modernize itself commercially and industrially. In analyzing the literary uses of these aspects of empire I point out the fundamental instabilities in these issues and the characteristic difficulties writers run into when they try to control their connotations and associations.

What we find is that the Ottoman Empire was an Eastern Other whose Otherness was always subject to qualification and change, and easily manipulated by writers for their own rhetorical and political purposes. As a means to show some of the rhetorical strategies characteristic of *how* writers used the figure of the Turk as a metaphor for quintessential despotism, I begin this introduction with the presentation of excerpts from two Enlightenment writers, Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft. They show how the exposition of such despotism was sometimes used to defend Western ways and sometimes to condemn them, depending largely on the political needs of the writer.

After the illustrative reading of Burke and Wollstonecraft, I move backwards in time and present a few of the earliest histories of the Ottoman Empire written in English in order to trace how information about the Ottomans became available as shorthand allusion by the end of the eighteenth century. I

demonstrate how information first published in massive histories of the empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proliferated and expanded into more popular genres, finally rendering a kind of general “cultural capital” to the average British reader, writer or theatergoer at the turn of the nineteenth century.

In the chapters that follow, I analyze representations of the Ottoman Empire in British writings (poetry, novels, travel writing) from 1789 to 1846. As the readings of Burke and Wollstonecraft will indicate, both conservative and liberal writers alike used images of Turkish despotism in a rhetoric of differentiation and identification as a means to articulate often diametrically opposed worldviews. What we will see is that the manifest purpose of an author, whether to use the figure of the Turk and the image of the Ottoman Empire as a foil in order to praise British customs or as a similar figure in order to criticize them, tends to warp out of control and to present the author with a host of rhetorical and thematic problems.

The rhetorical construction of the Ottoman Empire in these texts is intimately connected to the developing discourses of Hellenism, republicanism, commercialism, racism, and feminism. Because of this complex interaction of social and political movements, I contextualize as needed readings of selected primary texts in their historical moment as a means to establish the wider relevance of these allusions. Furthermore, I demonstrate how writers in this period were able to envisage changes in their own milieu by broadly evoking a negative Turkish atmosphere in a “poetics of allusion” precisely because earlier generations of writers had made a great amount of information about Eastern customs available to a wide reading audience. To this end, I present the literary history of these texts as needed, often focusing on texts that make use of aspects or elements of the empire although they may not generally be considered “Eastern Tales” proper.

The second chapter, “Desire and Disdain: The Travels of Lady Elizabeth Craven,” begins with a concise presentation of the earliest text that I will consider in this study, Elizabeth Craven’s *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople* (1789). In this epistolary travel account, Elizabeth Craven describes her trip through Eastern Europe and Turkey. My analysis of Craven’s book illustrates my claim that there were three primary ways in which the Ottoman Empire was consistently viewed as an anti-image of empire as well as the ways in which these aspects of empire often reflect negatively on the British, despite the author’s intentions. First, Craven attacks Turkey’s cultural oppression of the Greeks, but betrays her own self-serving imperialist gaze when she imagines the British “helping” the Greeks to become civilized. Second, she criticizes Turkey’s indolent commercial practices, but in praising the successful commerce of the British, she expresses her own aristocratic fears of the rising mercantile classes.

Perhaps most crucial for Craven is the way in which she presents the harem system. Unlike later writers that I examine, Craven does not stage a critique of the harem system, but like her predecessor Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, she

describes the women of Turkey as the freest in the world. Motivated by her own domestic troubles, Craven praises the Turkish harem system as a means to critique British shortcomings in the rights of women. Nevertheless, Craven, unlike Montagu, does not praise the individual harem women she meets, but freely expresses her disgust and disdain of them. In discussing Craven's specifically ambivalent presentation of the harem, I make use of Homi Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry as a means to illuminate the complex rhetorical patterns that reflect Craven's own ambivalence.

Extending the paradoxical theme of desire and disdain begun in [chapter two](#), [chapter three](#), "Victim, Vixen, and Virago: The Odalisque in Byron's *Turkish Tales*," focuses on the rebellious women of the Byron's *Turkish Tales*. I argue that it is here in the Tales that we see characters who ambiguously contribute to the development of what Nancy Armstrong has called the "new domestic woman." In these tales, Byron repeatedly represents the harem as an unsatisfying domestic space against which a woman may justifiably rebel. However, the male protagonists in the tales struggle to interpret just how these acts of rebellion affect the feminine character of the odalisque. From one tale to another, Byron approaches the idea of female disobedience, attempting to break out of the binaries of innocence and experience, but he almost always presents an unsuccessful outcome to this endeavor.

A focus on the disobedient female figures in the East illuminates how the Ottoman domains allowed for a specific kind of literary fantasizing about revolutionary power that rendered safe what dangerously invoked the spirit of the French Revolution, and threatened the cultural and commercial needs of the expanding British Empire. Because the harem women rebel against the despotic treatment of the harem, they act as ambiguous models for British women living in repressive domestic situations. I argue that by portraying victimized harem women as subversive actors, Byron made their actions appear even more foreign, romantic, and perhaps, ineffectual, thus bypassing charges of libel, while still reaching a large popular audience with a radical message. As a means to foreground this discussion I present the four most prevalent types of harem women represented in literary and historical texts of the period.

[Chapter four](#), "The spoil of wild beasts and unlettered Tartars': Shelley's Uses of the Ottoman Empire and the Figure of the Turk" shifts the focus from harem women *per se* and traces Shelley's various poetic uses of the empire throughout the course of his literary career as a means to explore his poetic presentation of reformminded politics that would reach a large reading audience. In addition, I claim that an analysis of Shelley's uses of the Ottoman Empire as a trope is also a way to sketch out the complex evolution of his views of the cycles of history and social progress. In the early poem "Henry and Louisa" (1809), Shelley utilizes the British invasion of Egypt (a territory of the Ottoman Empire) as a means to critique foreign wars and express his burgeoning radical politics. In *The Revolt of Islam* (1817), he maps the French Revolution onto the Turkish sphere as a means to address the loss of faith in the aftermath of the failure of that

revolution. In *Hellas* (1821), Shelley writes a text that works on several levels of discourse and genre: lyrical drama, propaganda, and philosophical treatise. In each of these texts Shelley criticizes the Turks for the innate Otherness that renders them distasteful to the ideals of liberty to which he is devoted. But because he always writes about the Turks for the purpose of criticizing various British policies that render them *like* the Turks, he explicitly forges similitudes between this Turkish/Muslim Other and the representatives of the West. However, like Craven, Shelley's explicit comparison sometimes gets out of control, resulting in a rhetorical conundrum that appears unresolvable.

In order to discuss the themes and content of these specific poems, I provide contextualizing information regarding British engagements in Egypt, the start of the Greek War of Independence, and the economic and diplomatic policies which determined the British actions in the region and which Shelley so manifestly criticized.

Chapter five, "Figuring the End of Empire in the City of Constantinople" demonstrates how the very shape of the Ottoman Empire was a counterimage of the British. I focus specifically on the way in which Constantinople itself acted as a focal point both historically and geographically. Utilizing Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone as a space in which unequal forms of power are brought together, usually on the periphery of empire, I show how English travelers and observers of the Ottoman Empire were especially enthralled and disgusted by the Turkish capital.

The metaphorical value of Constantinople is explored in its uses by Byron, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley. I discuss how Percy Shelley and Byron both utilize the city as a location in which to stage the near-end of empire in *The Revolt of Islam* and *Don Juan*, respectively. This is followed by an analysis of Mary Shelley's novel of high romanticism, *The Last Man*. In this novel Shelley envisions the end of the world as a battle for the Greek recapture of that eternal city, Constantinople. But at the moment of what ought to be the central climax of the novel, Shelley instead unleashes the end of history itself as a devastating plague that erupts out of that city and spreads throughout the world. I argue that Shelley critiques the very notion of the Turkish Other by first establishing the seemingly stable ideal of the British Empire (the world of politics and commerce separated from domesticity and learning), and then renders it void by obliterating all sense of differentiation as the entire world sickens and dies of the "Turkish" plague. As with all of the texts that I have described above, the Turkish Other is therefore first presented as wholly Other, a counterimage of the individual, government, and social structure; however, the Otherness of that image is later exposed as illusory.

This book ends with an epilogue entitled "'To read the long, dark, interior life': Learning One's Lesson from the Lady Hester Stanhope," in which I draw out the tropological associations of the Ottoman Empire into the mid-nineteenth century by presenting the case of Lady Hester Stanhope. In her twenty-eight year residence in the Ottoman Empire, Stanhope explicitly forged a Turkish identity

that others found exceptionally intriguing, and she thus became the subject of many texts by a variety of writers. To understand her, writers had to negotiate the problems that such a similitude creates; their challenge was to render it safe, while at the same allowing it to remain strange because it was the *strangeness* of Stanhope's life that made it remarkable, and, in turn, made their books marketable. In so doing, these writers ascribe a series of fictional, racial, sexual, and authorial labels to the lady in order to categorize and understand her. An analysis of these labels reveals that the instability of knowledge about the Ottoman Empire persisted into the nineteenth century, despite the wealth of information in circulation in the West. Moreover, such an analysis also demonstrates the interesting ways in which writers who journeyed to the Ottoman Empire in the midcentury attempted to sell their experiences to readers at home.

“EXTINGUISHED” AND “UNFRUITFUL”: BURKE’S AND
WOLLSTONECRAFT’S RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION
OF TURKEY

In the middle of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Edmund Burke makes the following comparison as a means to illustrate the value of the French monarchy before the Revolution:

To hear some men speak of the late monarchy of France, you would imagine that they were talking of Persia bleeding under the ferocious sword of Taehmas Kouli Khan, or at least describing *the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey*, where the finest countries in the most genial climates in the world are wasted by peace more than any countries have been worried by war; where arts are unknown, where manufactures languish, where science is extinguished, where agriculture decays, where the human race itself melts away and perishes under the eye of the observer. Was this the case with France?² (my emphasis)

In this passage Burke uses the Turkish Empire as a kind of shorthand to throw the French monarchy into relief. The casual, off-hand reference to the Turks is nevertheless lengthy and a close reading of it illustrates some aspects of the way the Ottomans were read and thought of by a wide and varied population of British in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. First, it is noteworthy that the reference to Turkey comes after a reference to a farther Eastern land, Persia. Whereas the Persian leader is confidently presented with his “ferocious sword,” Turkey is invoked in a subjoinder, “or at least describing the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey.” The syntactical structure here illustrates two things: first, that Turkey is closer to Europe, less foreign and thus less disturbing than Persia, and second, that the barbarism of Turkey is somehow less ferocious than that invoked in the image of the “bleeding sword.” Its brand of

empire is “anarchic” as opposed to one of utter servitude to a single leader, like Taehmas Kouli Khan. In short, Burke’s view of the empire here is a counterimage not only of the French government, but also of those other Eastern empires that are ruled with an iron hand. It is not as thoroughly Other as points farther East, but its relative familiarity renders it perhaps even more contemptible.³

The relevance of the passage continues with the rhetorical flourish in which Burke indulges. Although he makes his point about the contrast between the East and France in the first four lines, the reference to Turkey generates another seven lines of contrasting images, all of which highlight the negative elements of Turkey. The idea of an Eastern domain that is merely withering away in luxuriant waste is not unusual to the time or the style of writing, but the implications of such ideas are exceptionally strong here. Everything in Turkey is backward: peace is worse than war; arts, manufactures, science, and agriculture “in the most genial climates of the world” (read: Greece) are wasted. The human race is passively “melting away” under the very gaze of the observer. The casual tone of Burke’s allusions suggests that the associations are manifest to his reader: while England engages in trade and development, the East lags behind; while England understands the value of Greece and its “genial climate” the Turks squander it; while England acts upon its observations, the Ottoman Sultan merely gazes ineffectually on the human race, not bothering to improve it at all.

By continuing to draw out the negative associations of Turkey after the initial point has been made Burke implies that the reader will understand and agree that it is a prime example of despotism and waste. With such examples as that of Turkey circulating broadly in his social milieu, Burke is well positioned logically to ask: “Was this the case with France?” Clearly, his answer is no. For him, utilizing the example of the Turks is an efficient and effective means of acknowledging the relative benefits of a Western monarchy.

Such a reference is echoed in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). As a matter of fact, Wollstonecraft refers to aspects of the Ottoman Empire and Islam throughout the *Vindications*. For instance, there are six separate references to the “seraglio” or “harem” alone.⁴ In a very similar way to Burke, Wollstonecraft uses the Ottoman Empire as a means to make a point about the way things are at home. However, in Wollstonecraft’s case, the rhetorical chain of signifiers works paradoxically to forge a *similitude* between Eastern despots and Western women who are made into “irrational monsters” by their lack of education. Wollstonecraft connects the self-indulgent and imperious behavior of such women to the Roman emperors “depraved by lawless powers” and in a remarkable chain of associations, she moves from equating modern women with ancient emperors, contrasting modern Kings (not as bad) and then contrasting them in turn with the despots of Turkey (much worse than all the rest):

Such a *woman* is not a more irrational monster than some of the *Roman emperors*, who were depraved by lawless power. Yet, since *kings* have

been under the restraint of law, and the curb, however weak, of honour, the records of history are not filled with such unnatural instances of folly and cruelty, nor does the despotism that kills virtue and genius in the bud, hover over Europe with that destructive blast which desolates *Turkey*, and renders men, as well as the soul, unfruitful. (132, my emphasis)

Like Burke's, this chain of signification begins with a Western image and rests rhetorically with a Turkish one. The two intervening elements (Roman emperors and Western kings) work to soften the similitude that is forged between them, and yet the implication is quite clear. Women who are denied education are like Turkish despots, and like them, such women will poison and desolate their homes the way that the Turks "kill virtue and genius." As Wollstonecraft asserts throughout the *Vindications*, the purpose of the education and moral development of women is to render them good mothers and useful citizens. Moreover, like Burke, she indulges in a rhetorical flourish that ends with the image of man as "unfruitful" which is equivalent to Burke's final image of man as "melting away." Although Burke and Wollstonecraft differ in their political views, they are able to use the same image of the Turk to make a similar point about the West. However, Burke uses it to show how different it is from Europe, whereas Wollstonecraft, how dangerously similar.

I have presented these two excerpts for the purpose of illustrating the way in which the Turkish Other was available to writers as a symbol of despotism that nevertheless was pliable enough to be deployed for a variety of purposes. Both Burke and Wollstonecraft control their uses of the image because it is so limited. However, what I show in this book is that when the uses of the Turkish Other are more complex than in these examples, the manifest purpose of the author to defend or critique the West often becomes obscured, and results in a subtext that paradoxically asserts the opposite point of view. In the section that follows, I step backward in time to trace *how* information about the Turks became widespread by the late-eighteenth century so that writers like Burke and Wollstonecraft (and later, Byron and the Shelleys) were able to make powerful political allusions to the Turks in popular literature.

"LET YOUR TURKISH HISTORY ONLY GOE A DAYES"

The reading of Turkish histories and travel literature provided a fascinating source of entertainment for the English public as early as the sixteenth century. By the late seventeenth century a range of Turkish histories, travel accounts, and religious books were widely available. Such books had a various readership and were considered informative and stimulating reading, as evidenced in the advice that Martha, Lady Giffard writes to her niece, Lady Berkeley in 1698:

I would faine advise about yr reading what I practice myself not to read anything very serious before you goe to bed; that would be a good time to read Virgil in, and let your Turkish history only goe a dayes.⁵

Turkish histories, Lady Giffard suggests, were too enthralling to be read before bed. One may wonder, what made them so exciting? To the seventeenth-century historian, the Turks appeared to be a thoroughly foreign and strange people whose amazing rise to power in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including the defeat of Constantinople in 1453, was the lament of the West. Exciting aspects of their empire continued in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially with the political movement known as the Sultanate of Women, which included the fascinating figure of the wife of Sultan Suleiman, known to the West as Roxana or Roxalana (discussed further in [chapter three](#)). Another element of excitement may be seen in the attempts of historians to argue that the decline of the empire already had begun and that its end was imminent. Inasmuch as the Western reader may have been happy to imagine the power and splendor of such an empire, the news that it was on the wane would have also been quite satisfying. What made all this so interesting, entertaining, and important to the West was not only the exoticism of the facts or the power of the Ottoman Empire; it was also the proximity of the empire to Europe, for it was the closest and most formidable Islamic power. At the height of the empire in the sixteenth century, it included the Caucasus, portions of the Arabian peninsula, Northern Africa, all of Greece, Serbia, Bosnia, and Hungary.

As the largest and closest Islamic power to the West, Turkey came to represent the East and Islam generally. However, relative to continental writers, English writers came late to the writing of Turkish histories. The texts dealing with the Ottoman Empire and Islam that proliferated in English from the sixteenth century onward provided an increasingly palpable sense of these details and facts to the English public at large. These sources came from a wide array of genres, including translations of ambassadors' reports, collections of letters and journals, general histories or accounts of specific events, written either by witnesses or scholars, and the literature of political analysis and pilgrimage. However, it was the writing of full-blown histories that drew on all these various sources and presented them in one central source. These earliest texts often connect the description of the political and military power of the Turks to the laws of Islam and translation of the Koran.⁶ As V.J.Parry has noted, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Europeans wrote extensively about the Turks but produced very little regarding other Middle Eastern, Islamic lands. After 1517, Egypt and Syria received attention primarily as parts of the Ottoman domains, and Persia as a foe of the Ottomans who might be able to check their power and expansion.⁷ In short, the production of such writings occurred as a result of much contact between Western ambassadors, merchants, sailors and the Turks specifically: "Almost all that Renaissance Europe knew about Islamic lands came to it coloured and filtered through an Ottoman medium. Muslim was now a

term synonymous with Turk” (Parry 280). The way in which “Turkey” signified a wide-ranging geography is even seen in the maps and globes of the time. It was commonplace to refer to large amounts of mixed-raced territories as “Turkey in Europe” and “Turkey in Asia” as a way to mark lands as widespread as modern Kosovo and modern Syria.⁸

Berna Moran has collected a bibliography of English texts (including translations from other languages) that demonstrates the remarkable variety and increase in texts published from 1482 to 1696. As publishing resources became more widespread, much of those resources were devoted to the production and dissemination of information about Turkey. A breakdown of the numbers of such texts published in England is astonishing: fifteenth century: 1; sixteenth century: 46; 1601–1650: 67; 1651–1700:188.⁹ Likewise, the texts produced throughout Europe indicate a similar increase. For instance, approximately 900 separate texts from the sixteenth century have been identified, 232 having been published between 1501 and 1525, with an astonishing increase to 669 texts having been published between 1526 and 1550.¹⁰ Furthermore, no less than 2,500 have been recorded from the second half of the sixteenth century.¹¹ With such a wide number of sources available, it would be difficult to pinpoint which Turkish history was keeping Lady Berkeley up late at night!

In what follows I would like to present a selection of the three most noteworthy and influential early histories available in English: Paulo Giovio’s *Shorte Treatise upon the Turkes Chronicles* (1546), Richard Knolles’s *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603), and Sir Paul Rycaut’s *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1666). These texts represent the earliest substantial sources of information regarding the Ottoman Empire in English; they were read by later writers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lord Byron and also used as sources by later historians of the Turks, such as Dimitri Can temir. ir. I will discuss some elements of the content and readership of these early works and link them to the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Oriental tales, histories, travelogues, and letters that would continue to disseminate information about the Turks to a wide audience.

In sum I will here illustrate how a general cultural knowledge and awareness of the Ottoman Empire and Islam became widespread among the English in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and therefore how it informed the works of such writers as Byron and Percy and Mary Shelley.

“SCARCE KNOWN UNTO THE WORLD”: THE HISTORY OF THE TURKS

One of the earliest substantial texts about the Turkish Empire to be available in English was a translation of the *Shorte Treatise upon the Turkes Chronicles* written in 1546 by Paulo Giovio, an Italian Bishop.¹² At 152 pages it chronicles the Ottoman dynasty from its earliest beginnings to the contemporary Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, devoting a separate chapter to each Sultan. Among

additional chapters, Giovio describes Turkish military discipline, the Janissaries (the elite military corp which would be destroyed in the nineteenth century after much corruption), and even the various languages spoken at the Imperial Palace. It was a crucial text because nothing else like it existed in English at the time: “For a time this work constituted a primary source of information regarding the Turks in England” (Moran, 17, my translation). Subsequently, Giovio produced a large book in which the Turks also figure prominently, *Historiarum Sui Temporis Libri XLV*.¹³ Although the scope of this work is wider than that of the Turkish Empire, Parry notes that the centrality of information of the Turks in this large text attests to their importance: “The fact that so much of the *Historia* is devoted to the Turks can be regarded as a sure indication of how imminent and real he felt the danger to be, and also as a sign of his respect and even admiration for the Ottoman achievement” (283).

The publication of Giovio’s works came decades before official ties between England and Turkey existed. Relations were soon spurred in 1580 when the Sultan granted the Capitulations (trade privileges) to England, making it possible for the Crown to create the “Turkey Company” in 1581, and to establish a permanent Diplomatic Mission in 1583, with William Harbonne as the first ambassador. These were the developments that inaugurated “into the English mind a consciousness of things Ottoman” (Heywood 35). The Capitulations of 1580 not only established trade, it also increased diplomatic communications between the British and the Ottoman Empires; for instance, Queen Elizabeth and the Turkish Queen Mother exchanged gifts and letters at this time. Letters from Safiye Sultan, the mother of Sultan Mahmud, were written to Queen Elizabeth in 1594 and 1599, and the letter from 1594 is reprinted among other documents in Hakluyt’s *Voyages*.¹⁴ The letters include the usual greetings and formalities as well as reference to the renewal of the Capitulations: “God-willing, action will be taken according to what you said. Be of good heart in this respect! We do not cease from admonishing our son, his majesty the Padishah, and from telling him: ‘Do act according to the treaty [Capitulations of 1580]!’”¹⁵ Presents were sent back and forth to accompany the letters, and it was at this time that Queen Elizabeth sent the gift of an organ to the palace, which was installed by Thomas Dallam.¹⁶ Because Giovio’s books predated these diplomatic and commercial ties, one might surmise that they were an important source of information for the diplomats, merchants, and politicians who forged this new connection.

Far more substantial in scope is Richard Knolles’s massive, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603). A schoolteacher from Sandwich, Knolles patiently pursued the compilation of his 400-page book from various Latin and continental sources, including the works of Paulo Giovio, over the course of ten years. The book was immensely popular and was reprinted many times: Knolles’s own second edition with corrections came out in 1610, and after his death it was reprinted with continuations by various authors such as Sir Thomas Roe and Sir Paul Rycaut.

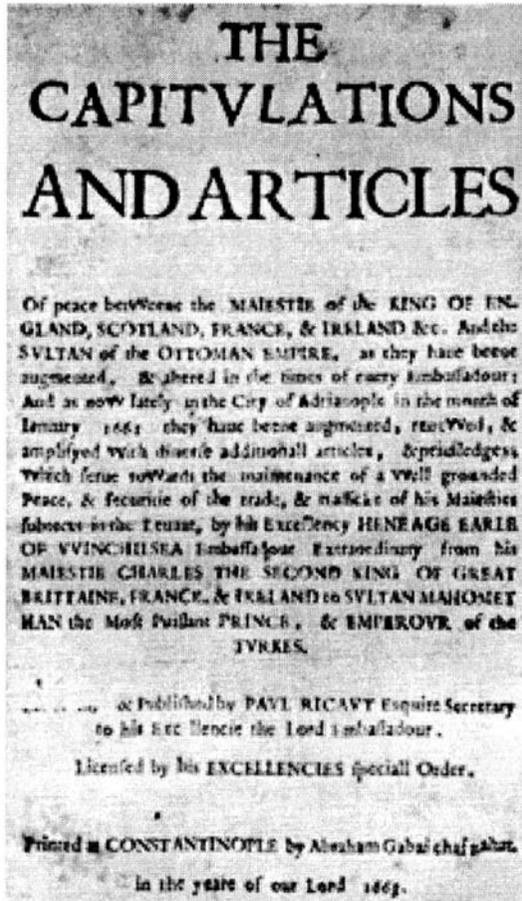


Figure 1. The Capitulations of 1663.

As with many other historians, Knolles attempts to understand the rise of the dynasty and actually devotes the first 128 pages of his history to the period preceding the first Ottoman Sultan in order to demonstrate how “the Turks, an obscure and base people, before scarce known unto the world, yet fierce and courageous” were able to accomplish the conquering of Constantinople and much of southeast Europe.¹⁷ The work is largely organized thereafter according to each Sultan’s reign; Knolles delineates the source of the Turks’ greatness as “an ardent and infinite desire of sovereignty...rare unity and agreement amongst them...temperance in their diet and other manner of living...ancient military discipline...incredible obedience unto their princes and sultan” (Epistle, n.p.). The tone of admiration and contempt with which Knolles recounts the strengths

and weaknesses of this Islamic Other anticipates the tone of many subsequent writings.

Knolles does not restrict himself to the explanation of the emergence and expansion of the Turks. As mentioned earlier, the rhetoric of decline is evident in the writings of many early writers and Knolles is no exception. He too suggests that the Ottomans are on the wane; as Moran points out: “After investigating the reasons for Turkish greatness, Knolles included a section at the end of his book in which he concludes that there are signs of Turkish weakness, and that they are not in fact, unconquerable” (43, my translation).

Just as Knolles made use of Giovio’s earlier, groundbreaking work, Sir Paul Rycaut continued the writing of Ottoman histories so assiduously begun by Knolles in English. Rycaut’s *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1666) was the first large-scale Turkish history published by a British subject who had actually lived and worked in Turkey. Rycaut was the personal secretary to the Earl of Winchelsea, ambassador to the Sublime Porte in 1660–67; from 1667–77 Rycaut acted as the Consul at Smyrna, a crucial port in Asia Minor for English trade.¹⁸ The first of Rycaut’s many publications on the Ottoman Empire was a translation of the Capitulations treaty, published at Constantinople in 1663; it is a document of some rarity (see [figure 1](#)). *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* differs from Knolles’s and many other histories in that it is not organized chronologically. Divided into three books, *The Present State* focuses on The Turkish Politics (Book One), The Turkish Religion (Book Two), and the Turkish Militia (Book Three); it is amply illustrated with depictions of Turkish men and women. Rycaut followed this work with *History of the Turkish Empire from 1623±1677* (1680), which was his continuation of Knolles’s history,

Rycaut’s *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* is characterized by a balanced tone and fair reporting. Inasmuch as Rycaut warns in the “Epistle Dedicatory” that the Turks have benefited from the Western misconception that they are “barbarians,” he also admonishes in the “Epistle to the Reader” that the Briton ought to “learn to know and prize thy freedom, by comparison with foreign servitude, that thou mayst ever bless, God and King, and make thy happiness breed thy content, without degenerating into wantonness, or desire of revolution.”¹⁹ In this sense the book delivers crucial information regarding the ways of life, religion, and war-making of the Turks to readers seeking such information. It also seeks to make other readers aware of the blessings of British ways by comparison: for both types of readers it is practical and entertaining.

Rycaut’s book is interesting as a text that gathers data from and echoes the tone of its predecessors and also anticipates the attitudes of the future. For instance, like Knolles and others, Rycaut addresses the question of the source and persistence of Turkish power. Despite the problems in the Turkish government that Rycaut recounts, he must yet account for its ongoing power and success. In order to do this, he turns to a mode of explanation whose roots go back centuries in writings by Western Christians about the Turks and other

Muslims. Rycaut concludes that, because their system is so irrational, one can only explain Turkish success as:

to some supernatural cause, than to the ordinary maxims of state, or wisdom of governors, as if the divine will of the all-knowing creator, had chosen for the good of his church, and chastisement of the sins and vices of Christians, to raise and support this mighty people. (3, my emphasis)

God's method, Rycaut asserts, is to punish his erring followers by raising their enemy. This view is not unlike that which was expressed frequently about the success of the prophet Mohammed himself as early as the fourteenth century. For instance, in *Piers Plowman*, William Langland presents the Muslims as perfect practitioners of an imperfect faith by forging an analogy between the "false prophet" Mohammed and Christian priests who dupe the unsuspecting, ignorant masses.²⁰ Similarly, in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* the author describes his interview with the sultan and then laments the strength of Muslim beliefs as a negative reflection of Christian ways:

It seemed to me then a cause for great shame that Saracens, who have neither a correct faith nor a perfect law, should in this way reprove us for our failings, *keeping their false law better than we do that of Jesus Christ*; and those who ought by our good example to be turned to the faith and Law of Jesus Christ are driven away by our wicked ways of living.²¹ (my emphasis)

Like these fourteenth-century writers, Rycaut had to explain the success of the Muslim Other to Christian Westerners. While these earlier writers utilized the opportunity to teach erring Christians and condemn corrupt church authorities, Rycaut's goal is a little different. His goal is to present a balanced view of the Turks, to show how they are reprehensible, and yet crucial to the growing British economy. It is in this attempt to balance a condemnation of Turkish barbarity with maintenance of diplomatic and commercial ties that he anticipates the policies of nineteenth-century England (this is particularly discussed in [chapter four](#)).

At once critical of and unsympathetic to Turkish ways, Rycaut nevertheless is fully aware of the crucial position of the empire and the role it plays in the development of the British economy. Although he hopes to enlighten and correct English misconceptions of the Turks, he also asserts that his goal is not, like other writers, to deliver a plan for its demise:

And some study several ways, and prescribe Rules by which a War may be most advantageously managed against the Turk, I on the contrary, am more inclinable to give my judgement in what manner our Peace and Trade may

best be secured and maintained; knowing that so considerable a welfare of our Nation depends upon it. (405–06)

Rycaut is a diplomat and merchant who sees Turkey realistically as a trade partner. Although he commiserates with the Christian peoples living on the borders of the Turkish Empire who are subject to their invasions and even living under their rule, he does not assert that the English ought to help these victims of Turkish barbarity. Instead, he suggests that the English be thankful for their good commercial relations with the Turks, and continue to cultivate this important trade, without which the “people [would be] sensible of the want of so great a vent to the Commodities of our Country” (406). Again, in Rycaut’s estimation, the moral/religious responsibilities that the British might be likely to feel with regard to the Christian subject peoples of the Turkish Empire (especially the Greeks) are subordinated to the economic imperatives of the burgeoning commercial empire. We will see such prioritizing of economic and trade imperatives over “moral” responsibilities in the early-nineteenth century, especially with regard to British responses to the plight of the Greeks.

In addition to these histories, other genres of writing disseminated valuable and entertaining information about the Ottoman Empire. Miscellaneous sources were collected and reprinted in anthologies, such as Hakluyt’s *Voyages* (1600) and *Purchas His Pilgrims* (1625), which made such information available to a learned segment of the population. Moreover, Moran separately documents twenty-seven plays dealing with Turks in one way or another that were written and produced in England between 1590 and 1696.²² These plays reached an even wider audience than the histories and anthologies just described. In sum, the texts produced throughout the seventeenth century fed like a tributary stream into the mighty river of histories, plays, travel reports, journals, and collections of letters that were produced in the eighteenth century in England and the continent.²³

It is the proliferation of these histories, plays, and travels in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that contributed immensely to the development of the Oriental tale in the eighteenth century, which in turn influenced the writers of the Romantic period. Because this affected the Oriental tale, which had such a wide popular readership, information about the Turks, the East and Islam that had been collected and published over the course of many years was thus filtered down to even more segments of Western society. Writers as diverse as Daniel Defoe (*Roxana*, 1724) and William Godwin (*St. Leon*, 1799) gained knowledge of the East (again, most often represented by the Turk) from the vast amount of work generated throughout the seventeenth century.

For instance, references to Knolles’s *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* made by later writers nicely illustrate how such an earlier text was read and utilized by these later writers. Firstly, it was widely available since it was reprinted throughout the century (see dates above), and was extremely popular with many readers. Heywood notes that: “This enormous folio achieved a great popularity and ran into five editions between 1603 and 1638” (36). In addition, in

her study that surveys the Oriental Tale in England in the eighteenth century, Martha Pike Conant recognizes Knolles's book as both "a result of the new interest in Turkey [...] and itself a notable factor in extending that interest for years to come."²⁴ Furthermore, it has been speculated that Knolles's work influenced one important literary text even before Knolles completed it. Christopher Marlowe and Richard Knolles were at Cambridge together as Knolles was writing his history. According to Irving Ribner, Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine* may have resulted from this acquaintance: "It is very likely that the two men knew one another, and it is possible that it was Knolles who first aroused Marlowe's interest in Islamic history, for he seems to have consulted a draft of Knolles's manuscript."²⁵

Although the accuracy and usefulness of the book was already being challenged in the eighteenth century, it continued to be read and discussed by historians and travelers alike. Gibbon wrote of the book:

In one of the Ramblers, Dr. Johnson praises Knolles (a General History of the Turks to the present Year. London, 1603) as the first of historians, unhappy only in the choice of his subject. Yet I much doubt whether a partial and verbose compilation from Latin writers, thirteen hundred folio pages of speeches and battles, can either instruct or amuse an enlightened age, which requires from the historian some tincture of philosophy and criticism.²⁶

In her *Turkish Embassy Letters*, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu refers to Knolles and Rycaut as sources of information: "I could also, with little trouble, turn over Knolles and Sir Paul Rycaut to give you a list of Turkish Emperours, but I will not tell you what you may find in every Author that has writ of this country."²⁷ However, Montagu invokes them as sources worth consulting while she simultaneously asserts that they are valuable only for such lists, and that she will be able to confirm or debunk their assertions with her own first-hand experiences. The letter above continues: "I am more enclin'd, out of a true female spirit of Contradiction, to tell you the falsehood of a great part of what you find in authors..." (168). Finally, Byron's humorous and casual reference to Knolles (as well as Demetrius Cantemir, an eighteenth-century historian), turns up in 1821: "[The sultan] was as good a sovereign of the sort/As any mention'd in the histories/Of Cantemir, or Knolles, where few shine" (*Don Juan* V:1173–5). These mixed comments show that, even if all subsequent writers did not wholly respect the historiography of Knolles's book, along with other early sources, it continued to be a widely used source, whether for entertainment or for historical data.

As noted above, English writers came late to the writing of Turkish histories in the seventeenth century, after first translating texts produced by continental writers and travelers. Similarly, in the eighteenth century, English writers also first borrowed the new Oriental tale from the French before developing their own

particular literature in that field.²⁸ Although there was much information available in English from which writers of imaginative works could adapt these sources, it wasn't until the Oriental tale developed and gained huge popular success in France that it made its way to England. For instance, the first English translation of *The Arabian Nights* (1707), so crucial in the development of the genre in England throughout the century, came through the French translation of Antoine Galland.

Martha Conant Pike has divided the eighteenth-century Oriental tale into four subcategories: the imaginative, moralistic, philosophic, and satirical. She attributes the enthusiasm for the genre in France, especially the satiric mode, to "a natural reaction from the dominant classicism of Boileau" and "colonial and commercial expansion of France in the reign of Louis XIV" (xxiii). As for England, Pike asserts that it was the moralistic vein of the Oriental tale that gained prominence because of the "fundamental instinct" of the British to moralize; in short, according to Pike: "The environment proved stronger than the new organism" (233). Interestingly, the Oriental tale may have been adapted to clear moralistic purposes by some more conservative writers, but Pike also acknowledges its contribution as an aspect of Romanticism, especially in its revolutionary nature: In the eighteenth century a special reason for the popularity of these tales lay in the fact that they offered to the reactionary spirit, always characteristic of romanticism, romantic themes and treatment, and voiced the romantic mood" (247).²⁹ It is this acknowledgment of the simultaneously opposite ideological (political and social) uses of the Oriental tale, conservative and revolutionary, that I see especially prevalent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fictional uses of the figure of the individual Turk and the institutions of the Ottoman Empire such as its harem system.

In time, English writers began to see that they need not be confined to translations of texts produced by others. English writers became increasingly familiar with the sources available to them and so began to produce their own tales of Oriental splendor, tyranny, or adventure.³⁰ Such texts might include a huge amount of cultural or religious information about various Eastern cultures, such as Southey's Oriental tales, *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) or *The Curse of Kehama* (1810). Or they might make casual reference to such information, such as Robert Bage's *The Fair Syrian* (1787). And there is the hard to categorize influence such as in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan."³¹ A text that makes obvious use of Turkish history is Godwin's *St. Leon* (1799), and one that uses contemporary Turkish politics is Thomas Hope's *Anastasius* (1836). By the turn of the century the various stances possible toward the empire and the East had already been well articulated and available to the writer depending on his or her needs. Whether invoking an erudite, casual, or satirical attitude, it was hard *not* to take a position.

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Because of the proliferation of such a vast amount of information about the Ottoman Empire, the writers covered in this book had a relatively good knowledge of the complex events occurring in the region throughout the eighteenth century. The century proved to be a crucial period for the Ottoman Empire in ways very like those of other European nations. It was marked by important battles, new kinds of relations with its neighbors, and also three important reforming sultans who helped to modernize and stabilize the empire in a very unstable period. The fact that the empire, like many European nations, was also engaged in a series of difficult political, commercial, and social reforms interested many writers. In what follows, I will briefly sketch out the most important events taking place at this time in the empire in order to contextualize further the works that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

The Ottomans made their final and unsuccessful assault on Vienna in the years between 1681 and 1683, and the Treaty of Carlowitz (1699) established a decisive peace among the various powers, settling new borders and domains. Lord Paget, the British ambassador to Constantinople (1693–1702), negotiated the treaty. This was a turning point in Turkish-British relations; whereas previously their relationship had been primarily commercial, Britain's role in negotiating the Treaty of Carlowitz inaugurated a new diplomatic relationship which would continue to grow in subsequent centuries. This shift in Britain's role in the East was not only spurred by Turkish weakness, but also because the English were again able to turn their attention to foreign policy following the English civil wars and the accession of William III.

Most historical treatments agree to varying extents that the Treaty of Carlowitz marks a definite turn for the Ottoman Empire. It is after this time that the empire began a long period of retraction from its Western domains in Europe and that it opened itself up more fully to Western influences, trade, and political involvement.³² Furthermore, in each of these characteristic stances it was positioned as a student to be helped, understood, and protected. By the 1820s it became "The Eastern Question" as the various European powers realized that a policy regarding the still-vast Ottoman Empire was crucial to the balance of powers in Europe and the stability of colonies in the East.

In terms of military engagement, Turkey was involved in four minor skirmishes with various repercussions. After an engagement with Turkey in 1709, Peter the Great lost his recent acquisition of Azov back to the Ottomans. Then, the Venetian-Austrian Alliance ended in 1718 with the Peace of Passarowitz, (also negotiated by Britain) which is widely considered to be a confirmation of the Ottoman's withdrawal from Europe as first established at Carlowitz. As a result of this treaty, the Ottomans won back territory from Venice but lost half of Serbia and a portion of Wallachia to the Austrians. Perhaps most devastating was the loss of the Turkish-inhabited Crimea to the Russians. On the opposite border,

the Ottomans fought with the Safavids of Persia; although this was an indecisive war it did lead to the Patrona Hill uprising, which led to the deposition of Ahmet III, the first of the important reforming sultans who will be discussed below. In addition, a minor war with Russia and Austria led to the Ottomans again regaining land from Austria in 1739. The Ottomans enjoyed relative peace for the next three decades before engaging in ongoing wars with Russia in 1774, 1792, and 1812. The French invasion of the nominal Ottoman province of Egypt and the beginning of the Greek War of Independence will be discussed in [chapter four](#).

REFORMING SULTANS

As the histories mentioned above attest, the sultan was himself a fascinating figure for Western audiences. At once completely autocratic and simultaneously at the mercy of his armies, the Turkish sultan could be utilized as a figure of power and prestige or ignominious weakness. With an image that fluctuated from terrifying soldier to lascivious sex-fiend to irrational despot, the Turkish sultan never fails to command some kind of opinion. In the eighteenth century perhaps the most famous sultans were Bayezit II, Mehmet the Conqueror, and Suleiman the Magnificent. Their lives were quite literally the stuff of drama: for example, Bayezit II was the subject of many plays. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* shows Sultan Bayezit in his famous showdown with the Tartar leader, Tamburlaine. Although he swaggers and shows off, Bayezit is defeated by the "Scythian thief" and humiliated by being dragged around in a cage. Even more relevant to our period is Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane, A Tragedy* (1701), one of the most widely performed plays throughout the eighteenth century.³³ In this version of the story, Bayezit is portrayed as a thoroughly tyrannical prince while Tamerlane is contrasted with the Turk as the figure of the enlightened monarch.

With a figure such as Rowe's Bajazet (*sic*) representing the Turkish sultanate so widely and for so long, it is little wonder that actual sultans were so fascinating as they struggled to modernize Turkey in ways that are associated with the West. As mentioned above, Ahmet III was deposed in 1730 ending the period of reform known as the Tulip Period (*Lale Devre*). This movement was in large part characterized by cultural pursuits that veered away from traditional Islamic modes of literature and architecture. Although there has been some scholarly disagreement on the nature of the coincidence between "modernization" and "Westernization," it is clear that in this period there was a concerted effort on the part of Ahmet III to collect information about the West. Ahmet Evin writes: "The innovations of the Tulip age attached great importance to the gathering of information on the history, geography, and even the social and political systems of different nations of the world."³⁴

Sultan Ahmet changed the way the Turks collected and disseminated information. He sent for the first time an ambassador, Celebi Mustafa Pasha, to France to collect information about Western ways and he encouraged the

establishment of the first printing press by the Hungarian convert Ibrahim Muteferrika. The press was open between 1729 and 1745 and published seventeen books, primarily dictionaries and histories. As Evin states, the purpose of all this printing was to understand and explain the state of affairs and to determine the needs of the empire: “The quest for secular knowledge was prompted by the need to assess the position of the Empire under new conditions resulting from a change in the balance of power” (136). This no doubt resulted from the decisive changes in Ottoman power structure following the treaties of Carlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718) discussed above. The radical nature of these changes in learning will be appreciated when one considers some of the dominant views of the religious establishment of the time: the Koran was the only book necessary; Muslims were naturally superior to non-believers; and in any case, Fate, not human effort, determined the outcome of any event. In addition to this theological reasoning, there was also the vested interest of the scribes whose livelihood was based on the copying of the Koran. To them, the potential repercussions of the spread of mechanical printing would be clearly devastating.

However, this spirit of investigation and innovation pursued in the Tulip Period was largely limited to the elites, i.e., any sense of Westernization that may have been connected with this renaissance was not part of a wider social and cultural movement, but only part of the first estate. As a matter of fact, it did not even include all the elites. There was a split among them between reformers and traditionalists. The complaints of the traditionalists clustered around a critique of the hedonistic, morally loose quality of the sultan’s retinue, including his powerful and savvy Grand Vizier, Damad Ibrahim Pasha. The basic liberalism in aesthetic preferences, and concern for learning and reforms were suspect to the conservative bureaucrats and the religious authorities (the *ulema*). Unfortunately, the gulf between the reformers and the traditionalists grew so that the nature of the unified “*din and devlet*” (religion and government) appeared to be in jeopardy. Conservatives took advantage of the fact that the sultan’s reforms were not trickling down to the masses, and played off their dissatisfaction with high taxes, runaway inflation, and far-reaching unemployment. They successfully deposed Sultan Ahmet III in 1730, and effectually ended the Tulip period.

Just as Sultan Ahmet is known for his attempts to modernize Turkey culturally, Sultan Selim (1789–1807) worked to modernize her political administration. During the course of the eighteenth century, the empire evolved from a military to a bureaucratic administration—and within this bureaucratic class there arose a split between reformers and conservatives. According to Thomas Naff the bureaucratic breed had “a disposition to admit to the reality of weakness and to treat with the Europeans rather than try to fight them.”³⁵ The reformers were headed by Sultan Selim III, described by Stanford Shaw as a “traditionalist reformer” whose philosophy of reform revolved around the ideas that the “empire was in difficulty because the traditional institutions were not being operated properly. Abuses and inefficiency had to be ended and discipline and

service restored.”³⁶ To this end, Selim focused his reform efforts on the military, utilizing Western knowledge and techniques to improve the artillery forces, the manufacture of modern weapons, and personnel training. He implemented major improvements in the navy’s inspectors, ships, and the education of sailors. Even the training of medical men was improved in this way. Selim’s reforming efforts were significantly curtailed by the actual military events of the time, yet he still accomplished a great deal in improving the training and life of the military.

Despite these seemingly positive developments, one eye-witness account nevertheless betrays a distinct distaste for the Turkish sultan. In a letter to her parents, Mary Nisbet, wife of the ambassador Lord Elgin, describes their audience with Sultan Selim III in 1799:

...[W]e entered the room where the G.S. [Grand Signor] was setting on his throne. It was a small room and dark, but of all the magnificent places in the world I suppose it is the first. His throne was like a good honest English bed, the counterpane on which the Monster sat was embroidered all over with immense large pearls. By him was an inkstand of one mass of large Diamonds, on his other side lay his saber studded all over with thumping Brilliants.³⁷

Nisbet’s account is characterized by a series of rhetorical contradictions: Grand Signor/monster; dark and small/magnificent; good honest English bed/counterpane with immense pearls. It is noteworthy that Nisbet’s language here actually reflects a very typical ambivalence toward these reforming sultans. Inasmuch as an awareness of their efforts to reform and modernize aspects of the empire was widespread, the persistence of corruption, poor administration and unfamiliar customs yet made the sultans and their empire appear as negative images of government and sovereignty even to fairly sympathetic English observers.

One of the better known of the reforms in the empire involved the Janissary Corp. Selim had ambitions to reform the Janissaries, one of the most dreaded aspects in the Ottoman system. Historically, the Janissaries were recruited from among the sons of the Christian population: converted and trained in the palace of the sultan, they became his “slaves.” Like the tradition of taking harem girls from the various provinces of the empire, the practice appeared repugnant to the Christian West, but often proved to be the best means for rural peasants to receive an education, good food and shelter, and marketable skills. For centuries they were a well-disciplined, elite corp of military men, the scourge of Europe. However, from the mid-sixteenth century onward, the recruitment practices changed and new Janissaries were instead recruited from the sons of other Janissaries. Although it had once been an effective fighting force, by the eighteenth century few Janissaries were on active military service. Instead, they acted as personal guards and even tradesmen, and for this reason their connection to nearly every sector of social and economic life in Constantinople made them a

powerful yet corrupt influence on the empire. As Philip Mansel puts it: “Janissaries became part of the economic fabric of Constantinople, infiltrating guilds of boatmen, butchers or slave dealers. They were a ‘power group’ of the city.”³⁸ In short, while there was an obvious need for the Janissary Corp to be fundamentally reformed, their entrenched power made it extremely difficult to do so. Although their influence on the empire was very negative, too many people benefited from the status quo for reforms to be easy.

Because the Janissaries and their counterparts the *sipahis* (the rural cavalry), were so powerful and resistant to change, Selim compromised in his reforms by establishing a wholly new military group that would increase military prestige. This corp, known as “The New Order” (*nizam-I cedit*) was trained with Western-inspired methods and grew to an efficient fighting force from about 10,000 men in 1801 to 24,000 in 1806 (Shaw 262). This military corp attracted the attention of many British, including John Cam Hobhouse, Julia Pardoe, and Lord Byron. In his notes to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron notes “the books printed on the late military institution of the Nizam Gedidd” (103) when he praises the education of boys in the Turkish Empire.

Although the reforms of Selim were more traditionally Ottoman than Westernizing, it is also true that knowledge of the West increased among Ottomans because the military advisors used to train the New Order were not socially separated from the Turks: “the latter comprised the first Western social group ever thrust into Ottoman society without special arrangements to limit their contact with Ottomans” (Shaw 265). Shaw goes on to claim that although all Selim’s work was in essence Westernizing, they also “followed patterns of reform developed prior to the establishment of sustained and regular contact with Europe” (266). Thus we see the Ottomans attempting to integrate Western knowledge within their own way of life, as opposed to merely imitating it.

In the end however, the various entrenched groups of Turkish notables banded together for the overthrow of the New Order, and Selim, never quite as decisive and strong-willed as necessary, made concessions to the establishment that sowed the seeds of his own deposition. A coalition of the *ulema*, Janissaries and *ayans* (local notable citizens) successfully deposed him in May 1807. However, due to the efforts of a countergroup, Mustafa IV who had been placed in Selim’s position was also deposed in favor of Mahmud II, (the sultan of Shelley’s *Hellas*) who would prove to be an even more formidable reformer than Selim, and would finally be the one to abolish successfully the Janissaries in 1826.

Although the territories of the Ottoman Empire would shrink during the reign of Mahmud II (1808–39), the modernization and ensuing internal stability of the empire that he accomplished have earned him a place among the greatest of Ottoman princes. Having taken the throne following the dramatic events of the deposition of Selim III and the short reign of Mustafa IV, Mahmud would succeed in establishing himself and achieving his goals through an unprecedented willpower. Because of the dangerous situation that he had inherited regarding the Janissaries, Mahmud needed to be decisive and strong in

order to survive. For instance, the Janissaries had hunted down and assassinated the members of the New Order, and in retaliation, Mahmud had not spared using similarly strong measures to quell the Janissary revolt. Thus, according to Philip Mansel: “The first year of his reign was one of the most horrific in the history of Constantinople” (233–34).

Upon his accession Mahmud II was only 23 years old, and yet he appeared to possess a strength of will and determination that his predecessors had lacked. Lord Kinross has ascribed the success of Mahmud’s single-handed reforms to his:

outstanding personal qualities of resolution, persistence, and foresight; through his wide-ranging vision and the concentrated powers of a mind both realistic in its grasp of hard problems and systematic in its plans for their solution. Above all through his strength of character and unwavering energy in the subjection of such enemies, within the state, as had halted the reform plans of his predecessor.³⁹

It was also said that he looked every inch the part of the redoubtable monarch, (see [figure 2](#)). For instance, seeing him in 1810, John Cam Hobhouse described him thus: “His eyebrows, eyes, and beard, being of a glossy jet Black, did not appear natural, but added to that indescribable majesty which it would be difficult for any but an oriental sovereign to assume [...] his whole physiognomy was mild and benevolent, but expressive and full of dignity.”⁴⁰ And twenty-six years later, in 1836, Julia Pardoe describes a still-noble appearance: “...I saw before me, at the distance of fifteen or twenty yards at the utmost, a man of noble physiognomy and graceful bearing, who sat his horse with gentlemen-like ease, and whose countenance was decidedly prepossessing.”⁴¹

Although Mahmud hoped to destroy the Janissaries, he was well aware of their power and influence, and postponed efforts to engage them. Instead, he focused his energies on building and consolidating his own power before hoping to accomplish any reform of the Janissaries. For instance, he worked to dismiss unfaithful pashas in the provinces and fill the posts with loyal subjects. The need to abolish the Janissaries was confirmed but delayed by the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence; they were too weak to put down the uprisings, but still too strong to be replaced. In 1836, David Ross described the negative role played by the Janissaries in the Greek war in a book aimed at publicizing the modernizing reforms of Mahmud:

...Greece took up arms to effect similar reforms to those which then occupied the mind of the Sultan Mahmoud; she has contributed immensely to the happy change he effected. And if Greece be now separated from Turkey, it is only because the Ottoman people and government, during the first five years of the insurrection, were suffering beneath the withering and stationary domination of the janissaries.⁴²

Finally in 1826 Mahmud brought together a group of military, bureaucratic, and religious leaders for the purpose of hearing a proposal to train a select group of Janissaries as a means to improve discipline and performance. The proposal was passed on May 26, 1826, and training began immediately. However, the Janissaries as a group revolted against the new proposal, beginning the final showdown that would result in the total demise of the corp. The sultan, backed by members of the *ulema*, students, and with general public support, obliterated the Janissary barracks with cannon fire, an assault from which they could not recover. Mahmud officially decreed the end of the corp on June 17, 1826.

With the Janissaries gone, Mahmud had removed the biggest impediment to change and he was thus free to pursue his plans for widespread reforms and modernization in the thirteen years that remained to him. Indeed, his enthusiastic pursuit of reform was described by Julia Pardoe as a “mania for reform so active during the reign of the present Sultan, that the most extraordinary changes are constantly taking place, not only in the habits and feelings of the people, but in the very aspect of their city.”⁴³ He was now able, for instance, to build a new army that would be modernized in everything from its uniforms to its training, and to reduce the power of the *Ulema*, the religious authorities who had long been supporters of the Janissaries. The *sheikh ul-islam*, the highest religious office, was separated from the secular branch of government. At the same time, he managed to bureaucratize the administration of that office so that it actually had less independence from government control, and was thus less able to resist change and modernization.

Similarly, Mahmud worked on reforming the administration of his own central government. Changes to the office of the Grand Vizier also diluted the power at one time residing in one man to two separate ministries, those of finance and foreign and civil affairs. In addition, ministries of agriculture, commerce, industry, and education were established, each with advisory councils that would draft plans for reform and the enforcing of laws. Changes implemented by these various ministries included a fundamental overhaul of the education system, beginning with the military and medical sciences, and soon moving into other areas of learning, (including even European history and literature). In addition, Mahmud effected the complete wiping out of the old feudal land system known as *timars*, land grants to the *sipahi*, the feudal cavalry. He also modernized the legal system in the sense that he introduced the idea of justice, *adalet*, in the administration of law; for instance, he established a set of judicial codes that defined the responsibilities of judges, responsibilities which now included their monitoring of government officials. In effect, they became the guards of the guards (something that never existed in the days of the Janissaries). In this sense, power rested on an acknowledgment of rights and responsibilities and punishments were regulated by laws and not on the whim of the judge (Mansel 223–58 and Kinross 453–71).

Through many of these innovations, contact with and learning from the West were unavoidable. Turkish embassies were established in European capitals and



Figure 2. Portrait of Mahmud II by Hippolyte Bertaux.

young men were sent to be educated in the great universities of the West. Mahmud followed the models of the Western press, and established the first

Turkish newspaper (printed in several languages), *Le Moniteur Ottoman*; European dress and diplomatic protocols were also adopted.⁴⁴

As with the reforms of Sultan Ahmet, such innovations associated with the West were quite foreign to the average Turk, and therefore were difficult for many to abide. In addition, many of these changes brought about immediate results that adversely affected the lives of many Ottoman citizens; for instance, food prices increased, and European imports hurt local merchants. As Mansel writes: “Mahmud’s modernization programme was a revolution from above, which gave his subjects a feeling of insecurity and vulnerability” (258). Despite all these impediments to change, the sultan accomplished much and successfully ushered in the real age of Ottoman reform, the Tanzimat era of the nineteenth century.

As we can see, the eighteenth century proved to be a very turbulent time for the Turks, who were experiencing events very similar to those brewing in European countries. Efforts to modernize and industrialize were assailed by those powerful elites who benefited from the older systems, while the middle and lower classes found themselves buffeted by changes over which they had little or no control or understanding. While reform efforts may have proved beneficial in the long run, the immediate effects were often inconvenient or highly difficult for them to bear. As has been the case with many Muslim peoples since this time, resistance to reform efforts often comes from the uneasy association of “modernization” with “Westernization.” If the terms appear to be synonymous, such reform efforts become an easy target for religious or political conservatives and are easily feared by the uninformed.⁴⁵

The decades-long efforts of these sultans were reported through the writings of consuls, diplomats, historians, and even some travelers, and this information trickled down to a population of other readers. For instance, Hobhouse provides copious information on Selim’s failed reforms as well as Mahmud II’s efforts-in-progress. He recounts the reform efforts of Selim in great detail, concluding that: “Selim was unequal to the task, and although deficient neither in virtue, nor perhaps in power, he was not possessed of that commanding genius which alone can dare violate the habits of a whole nation” (II:378–9). Julia Pardoe also makes constant references to the changes wrought by Mahmud over the course of his reign, commenting for instance, on the public displays of his victory over the Janissaries:

...[H]ere and there scattered over the burial-ground, you may distinguish several head-stones from which the turbans have been recently struck off—so recently that the severed stone is not yet weather-stained; they mark the graves of the Janissaries, desecrated by order of the Sultan after the distinction of their body...(City 93)

The challenges facing these three sultans of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century point up the degree to which the Ottoman Empire was struggling to

remake itself in a viable way in the context of a Europe full of richer, more modernized, and industrialized nations whose own incentives for political stability in Europe as well as access to Eastern colonies, determined their often schizophrenic policies toward the Ottoman Empire.

Chapter Two

Desire and Disdain: The Travels of Lady Elizabeth Craven

IN 1783 LADY ELIZABETH CRAVEN EMBARKED ON A JOURNEY THAT WOULD eventually lead her to the grand city of Constantinople. In her *Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, the epistolary travel account that she published in 1789, Craven wrote: “you may think me very odd in saying a voyage is a better draught to me—...but you know why I travel...and as I do, I am determined to see that place where the capital of the world ought to be... [Constantinople].”¹

In this chapter, I present Lady Craven’s complex reactions to the Ottoman Empire and shed some light on why such travel was an elixir to her. Craven’s observations focus on the three primary ways that the Ottoman Empire appeared the antithesis of the British which I introduced in the previous chapter: Turkey’s backward commercial and industrial policies, its oppression of the Greeks and, most important for Craven, the institution of the harem. On a manifest level, Craven presents negative views of the first two categories and a positive view of the third. Although she considers Turkish industry and the treatment of their Greek subjects deplorable, Craven insists that women of the harem are the “freest of the world.” Despite these vociferous opinions, what I demonstrate here are the ways in which Craven also expresses inadvertently the diametrically opposite attitude to each of these issues. She betrays similitudes between England and Turkey that undercut her criticisms of the empire, as well as a complex racial discourse about Ottoman women that belies her statements about the superior position of such women. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire and its subjects appear to Craven to be stable signifiers that she can read and present for her own narrative purposes, but upon examination it becomes obvious that her own attitude is far more complex and even contradictory. At the heart of Craven’s letters is an attitude of desire and disdain for the people and customs she encounters that reflects her own vexed relationship with English society. Her own social position greatly determines what she chooses to say about the empire, and perhaps more important, *how* she says it. Therefore, in this chapter I further show how the multi-faceted and ever-changing literary persona that Craven presents proves to be one way for her to manage this vexed relationship. This heterogeneous literary persona also reflects and reifies the complex rhetorical attitudes she manifests toward her subject.

The difficulty that Craven encounters when she attempts to manipulate and control this unstable image of empire is characteristic of other texts engaged in similar rhetorical uses of the Ottoman Empire and the figure of the Turk. This brief presentation of Elizabeth Craven's engagements with these issues in *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, concisely introduces the working terms and issues which will be explored in greater historical detail in subsequent chapters.

“YOU KNOW WHY I TRAVEL”: THE MARRIAGE OF LORD AND LADY CRAVEN

Before focusing on her reactions to the Ottomans, it is important to establish a sense of who Elizabeth Craven was and why she traveled, because the reasons significantly inflect the perspective from which she views the Ottomans. Craven reports in her *Memoirs* that she was “born prematurely and left to die” to Elizabeth, daughter of Henry Drax, of Charborough Co., and wife of the fourth Earl of Berkeley.² Craven further claims that her mother was unloving toward her because she favored Elizabeth's older sister. In fact, when that sister eloped against family wishes, the mother lamented the loss of her “only child,” and although Craven says she made her mother “ashamed” of such speech, Craven was otherwise a dutiful and retiring child:

At all times my disposition was such that I was all obedience, unless desired to do a thing which the morality of my governess had taught me was wrong; and then all the powers on Earth could not have forced me into a measure which my conscience condemned. (*Memoirs* 1:24)

The contrasting image of the obedient and dutiful child with the shrill tone of self-vindication apparent in this quotation is illustrative of much of Craven's *Memoirs*, and a good portion of *A Journey* as well.

At the age of seventeen she married Lord Craven, and had several children in quick succession. From the start, there appears to have been financial problems due to her husband's profligacy, and she reports that although Lord Craven offered to put much of his estate into his wife's hands, she refused to accept out of feminine modesty. Most important, Elizabeth Craven and her husband indulged in adultery, but as a woman she was more vulnerable to public derision than he. The first of her romantic encounters to have been the subject of discussion seems to have occurred in 1773 when she had been caught by her husband in a compromising position with Duc de Guinges, the French ambassador. Evidently other incidents succeeded this one, and in 1783 Lady Craven and her husband finally separated. The terms of her separation were most unfavorable: she was forced to retreat to the continent, was separated from all but one of her children, and cut off from his financial support.



Figure 3. Elizabeth Berkeley, Countess of Craven. From an engraving by Ridly after Reynolds.

In her *Memoirs*, Craven describes her husband's long-standing affair with another woman (identified by others as a Mrs. Byrne), and his maniacal desire to be separated from his beautiful wife. Lord Craven did not himself publish any statements on this situation, but his version of the facts comes through in letters and the public press. Although Craven describes her husband's infidelities in detail in her *Memoirs*, and in clear allusion in *A Journey*, she does not recount her own entangled romances in either of these texts. Rather, both texts act in part as vehicles for her own public vindication against the gossip and popular journalism that occupied itself with her affairs. Susan Staves has shown how the conflicting reports of the Craven's marriage present:

[H]is and hers narratives: hers giving a rather mordant view of his intellectual limitations and character and an idealized view of her own; his representing him as a generous and kindly husband and her as an ungrateful woman of too easy virtue, shocked into madness by the enormity of her offence.³

Staves is right to remind us to read Craven's texts with circumspection if not suspicion, although the lady herself would have protested her veracity. Despite the fact that she blatantly suppressed crucial information about her own infidelities in her biographical writings, she was always adamant about her honesty and good motives. For instance, Craven defended her commitment to the truth by complimenting herself in a panegyric to her second husband, the Margrave of Anspach: "I think the quality for which he most esteemed me was, my abhorrence of lies" (*Memoirs* II:232).

Craven did, however, have ample justification for such protests and self-vindications. Throughout her life, she was the subject of much gossip, both private and public. Her various amorous adventures were reported in such diverse sources as *The Morning Chronicle* and *Town and Country*, and years later in *Bon Ton Magazine* and Charles Pigott's *The Jockey Club*. Although many damning details circulated in the presses and private letters, it is quite telling that she never mentions in the letters of *A Journey*, that she had a traveling companion in Henry Vernon. Although Craven herself omits such details from her text, (even to defend herself), copious references to these affairs are made in contemporary letters, especially those of Horace Walpole,⁴ e.g., in a letter of March 16, 1786 Walpole refers to the "adventures of a certain lady and her *cousin* Vernon." Walpole adds a little sarcastically: "I comfort myself that I have never dealt with my heroine but in compliments or good advice: but this comes of corresponding with strolling Roxanas."⁵ "Roxana" was the name by which the West knew the wife of the sixteenth-century Sultan Suleiman (she is discussed in some detail in the ensuing chapter); the name held connotations of Eastern sexuality, power, and intrigue, and would not have been lost on Walpole's correspondent. As we will see, by "complimenting" such a dubious figure as a "Roxana" Walpole is able simultaneously to criticize and yet praise Craven.

In an effort to meet and challenge the slanders of the press and private gossip, Craven does not hide on the continent, but rather, she wrote and published *A Journey* quite literally to publicize her every move. It is this complex personal context that, I argue, seriously affects Craven's narrative voice throughout *A Journey* as well as her reactions to the Ottoman Empire, especially its women. In *A Journey*, Craven constructs an elaborate literary persona that questions the notion of authenticity. Not only does she present a fictionalized portrait of herself as a romantic adventurer in a strange land, but she also paradoxically writes her text to verify and document her whereabouts: for as she traveled farther Eastward, into the exotic Land of Scheherazade, her husband was moving about publicly in England and Western Europe with his mistress, and identifying *her* as Lady Craven. In short, the publication of the letters written from the East in 1786 authenticate the fact that the woman seen to be Lady Craven in Great Britain was in fact an imposter. In the preface to *A Journey* she is absolutely clear on this issue:

Beside curiosity, my friends will in these Letters see at least for sometime where *the real Lady Craven* has been and where she is to be found—it having been a practice for some years past, for a Birmingham coin of myself to pass in most of the inns in France, Switzerland, and England for the wife of my husband— (Dedication, np, my emphasis)

This blatant laying bear of her domestic troubles as one of the motivations for the writing and publishing of this text finds expression throughout the text and therefore adds an important and complicating layer to its heterogeneous narrative voice. The necessity of the project to verify her identity was later confirmed in an anecdote she relates in her *Memoirs*. Craven describes an incident when an officer at a Paris concert claimed to have met Lady Elizabeth Craven years before, but that that lady and this lady were not the same. Elizabeth explains to her hostess, the Comtesse de Paravicini, that it was Lord Craven's mistress whom the officer had met, for she had been abroad in the Orient at the time (*Memoirs* II: 185–86). Craven therefore ironically posits the sphere of the exotic East as the realm of the *authentic Lady*, and the West as the terrain of the *masquerading strumpet*.

Thus, at the age of thirty-three, after sixteen years of marriage, Craven left behind her philandering husband, six of her seven children, and a flurry of scandal regarding her own romantic liaisons.⁶ Craven started her tour in Paris, traveled to the south of France, Italy, and up to Vienna. She then bent her way Eastward to Cracow and Petersburg. From there she spontaneously decided to shift downward to the Crimea, which had only lately been captured by the Empress Catherine, and then across the Black Sea to Constantinople. She made her way back to Europe via the overland route, and arrived back in Vienna after four years on the road. As Larry Wolf has written, Craven had thus “encompassed all three of the routes that defined Eastern Europe for the eighteenth-century traveler.”⁷ As such, Craven's itinerary was actually the Grand Tour and more: it was the same trajectory, though conducted in reverse, of that famed traveler Don Juan, approximately twenty five years before that hero's author ever set foot in Constantinople.

Despite these misadventures, Craven eventually reestablished her reputation in England. Upon her return to Europe she lived in what she called “sisterly affection” as part of the household of the Margrave of Anspach (to whom the letters of *A Journey* are addressed), and upon the death of both of their spouses, they were married in Lisbon in 1791. Soon after, they returned to England where Craven reinstated herself in society and built up a fabulous home, Brandenburg house, where she ran elaborate amateur theatricals, both writing and acting in them. These writings did elicit some public interest: she is primarily remembered in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as a dramatist, and is also included in the *Biographica Dramatica* (1812), and *Genest's History of the Stage* (1832). The Margrave died in 1806, and soon after Craven departed from England; after

travelling through Europe, she settled in Italy where she built an elaborate villa. She died there in 1827, and was interred in the British Cemetery in Naples.

This cursory background provides us with a sense of Craven's immediate mindset at the start of her journey: her anger at having to retreat from her country and her desire to vindicate herself in the eyes of society both inform her unfavorable view of Ottoman commercial and cultural practices and also affect her seemingly paradoxical praise of the harem system, which I will present shortly.

“YOU KNOW WHY I [WRITE]”: THE HYBRID LITERARY PERSONA IN A JOURNEY

From the beginning of *A Journey*, Craven creates a literary personality that fuses elements of the aristocratic heroine and the masculine adventurer. In addition to these romantic figures, she also plays the part of the aesthete and documentarian. Although Craven presents herself as a fine lady traveling in style, she also thwarts the typical attributes of this image by insisting on her independence. For instance, in describing how the Chateaux of En Touraine did not fulfill her romantic expectations, she acknowledges that neither did she herself fulfill such expectations of a romantic heroine: “Besides I was gravely seated in a comfortable coach, varnished and gilt, instead of being on a white palfry [sic]” (10). Craven modifies the image of the conventional romantic heroine “on a white palfry” in several subsequent letters by taking her off the ambling palfrey, and putting her on a galloping charger, thus masculinizing the figure. This romantic heroine does not trail behind a knight errant. Rather, it is she herself who gallops alone around Europe where the Pisans, for instance, thought that she was one-legged because they had never seen a side-saddle before, and through the Crimea, where her unveiled sallies both impressed and embarrassed the gaping Tartar soldiery. It may be said that this characterization of herself as a solitary and independent adventurer (and not the companion of Vernon) goes beyond the demands of feminine modesty and the need to protect her reputation. Craven pointedly remarks on the dangers and hardships of her journey, that no other lady traveled so widely and with so little comfort. Furthermore, she is always sure to report that she is received with honor and distinction among the notables of all her visited cities *on her own behalf*. She actually creates a literary persona who is authorized not only to make her own decisions and speak her own mind but also who is honored and esteemed by all those whom she encounters, from the lowly soldier to the Czarina Catherine.

In addition to presenting herself as a “masculinized heroine,” Craven also appropriates the usually male position of aesthetic observer and reflects it with a feminine sensibility. For instance, from Lyon she was impressed with the sublimity of the views: “The Fine prospect I was promised from the tower was immense indeed—Landscapes so various and objects so vast and innumerable; that the eye seeks in vain for resting place” (24). But perhaps what sets her apart from the conventional masculine aesthetic observer is that she is never content to

appraise the aesthetic object from a disinterested, morally neutral position; rather, she always invests it with a sense of her own or another's perspective. In this sense, Craven may be added to Elizabeth Bohls's study of eighteenth-century women, such as Mary Wortley Montagu and Ann Radcliffe, who engaged in the development of a feminine aesthetic discourse through such genres as travel writing and the novel. Bohls shows that although women were more often aesthetic objects than subjects, there yet was a group of women writers who made specific and hitherto unrecognized contributions to the development of modern aesthetic thought. These women writers attacked the foundation of Kantian aesthetics: the idea of the universal subject of aesthetic appreciation; the possibility of a disinterested contemplation with no stake in the object; and the autonomy of the aesthetic domain from morality and politics. In contrast, these women writers point out the inhumane nature of the act of severing the connection between "aesthetic practices and material, social and political conditions of human existence."⁸

Craven's intense interaction with the art that she views in Europe is certainly bound up with inescapable "conditions of human existence." She is sure to express her artistic responses in personal terms rather than in the disinterested vocabulary of aesthetics. This is evident in her reaction to statues in Florence:

I am at a loss how to give you an account of my feelings, otherwise than by telling you, that while I am in the Tribune, the vulgar idle talk of my real life never once comes into my mind, and I feel quite happy,—and if till now I have been sorry often, when I have felt conscious of having nice feelings, or what is commonly called taste, at this moment I am extremely glad of it. (78)

In this passage, Craven brings together and counterbalances aesthetic responses to art with allusions to her practical problems. In both the personal and aesthetic reflections, a sense of moderated interaction with the art object is necessary. By this I mean that Craven exercises a kind of restraint of sensibility, even while she acknowledges how easy and indeed satisfying it would be to allow herself to be overwhelmed by the aesthetic experience. Craven thrills in her sense of taste, but acknowledges that the same ability to experience pleasure in art may also render her more sensible of the pains of reality; therefore, this power must be controlled. For Craven, art provides a refuge from the slanders and gossip at home, to which she here demurely refers, and although she has the inner resources to be comforted by art, she has the common sense to balance that inner world with her worldly responsibilities. As she notes, were it not for her children, she would hide in the Tribune forever. She exercises well the lesson "to restrain her sensibility" that Emily St. Aubert's father will impart to her in a few years in that excessively sublime novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Craven's tendency to inflect her aesthetic observations with personal commentary serves a practical purpose as well. Throughout the text she

documents her own presence in the scene of observation. Indeed, Craven very carefully records the local responses that she garners. This tone of actuality not only complicates and enriches the romantic persona she cultivates, but it also operates as “evidence.” Craven is concerned with establishing the authenticity of her voice as the *true* Lady Craven as opposed to the doppelgänger her husband has created. Although she indulges in the creation of various “fictional” voices, (the romantic heroine, masculine adventurer, the aesthetic observer), she also insistently establishes her *authentic* voice as Lady Elizabeth Craven. Thus, she is absolutely determined to emphasize her own personal, physical presence in Pisa, Petersburg, or Pera, the European suburb of Constantinople. I will argue below, however, that when Craven attempts to deploy a favorable reading of the social status of the Ottoman woman as a means to criticize British customs regarding women, the “authenticity” of her colonial gaze is dangerously challenged.

CRAVEN IN THE EAST

Craven’s narrative becomes increasingly complex when she encounters the Ottoman Empire. What I would like to characterize now is the interrelationship between this literary persona and her ambivalent imperialist reactions to the Ottoman Empire, for she also relies on her presentation of it in order to vindicate herself as a loyal British subject and a moral woman.

Craven anticipates the critical discourse regarding the Ottoman Empire that arose during the rapid expansion of the second British Empire in the early-nineteenth century. She both celebrates and critiques British customs when she expresses strong opinions regarding Ottoman commerce, administration of subjects, and treatment of women, all of which would prove to be so central to the consciousness of other writers in the next century. Craven presents to us in an incipient version just how this Ottoman counterimage could work to reflect negatively on the British, sometimes as a conscious rhetorical strategy, and sometimes as an inadvertent byproduct of an author’s manifest purpose. She utilizes the same rhetorical strategies to prove her national pride as well as to criticize unsatisfactory elements of British social reality. And it is this simultaneous deployment of the same rhetorical strategy for opposite purposes that is so very difficult for her to control. I believe that the nature of Craven’s struggle with the recalcitrance of the Ottoman Empire as a counterimage can be understood in terms of Homi Bhabha’s notion of “colonial mimicry.”⁹

When Craven arrives in the East the aesthetic discourse that she had utilized in writing about Western art and landscapes combines with the commercial sensibility of an imperialist to form yet another hybrid. This begins in Russia, and culminates in her reactions to Turkey. Craven’s image of Russia pivots on its potential role as conqueror of the Ottomans; she notes with approval the similarities between Russian and English values, e.g., Peter the Great, like most Englishmen, “thought commerce an essential pillar to his empire, as the English trader was encouraged” (127). This stands in contrast to the Ottomans who do not

hold these values. It is in her assessment of the Ottoman Empire that we see the conflation of the language of aesthetics and commerce: “Can any rational being, dear sir, see nature, without the least assistance from art, in all her grace and beauty, stretching out her liberal hand to industry, and not wish to do her justice? Yes, I confess, I wish to see a colony of honest English families here” (188–89). It is clear that the Turks squander, in lavish refuse, the gifts of God, but Craven is also aware that this could be an advantage to the West:

Perhaps sir, it is lucky for Europe that the Turks are idle and ignorant—the immense power that Empire might have, were it peopled by the industrious and ambitious, would make it the ministers of the world—at present, it only serves as a *dead wall* to intercept the commerce and battles which other powers might create upon one another. (206–07, my emphasis)

In Craven’s assessment, the Ottoman Empire is far removed from its previous incarnation as the terrifying scourge on the frontiers of Eastern Europe, and is reduced to being a “dead wall” that separates England from India. Craven’s reactions to Turkish indolence do not attain the complex anxiety evident in some of De Quincey’s writings; rather, they at first suggest a practical and unambiguous nationalism that relies on commerce and colonialism for its livelihood.

However, Craven was a conservative aristocrat, and as such she lamented the ways in which “mere merchants” were ruining the lifestyles of the aristocrats at home. It is clear that this much-praised commercial exuberance overseas spurred middle-class growth and had dangerous and unappealing repercussions for many aristocrats. In fact, virulent criticism against the excesses of the aristocratic classes in favor of the modest, hard-working middle classes was increasing and came from such disparate sources as evangelical reformers and the caricaturists such as Gillray and others.¹⁰ Well aware of the backlash against the aristocratic class, Craven here assures her reader that the Russian peasants receive good treatment and protection and understand their good fortunes,¹¹ whereas the English lower classes are never satisfied: “It is very amusing to me to reflect, without prejudices of any kind, upon the ridiculous ideas of liberty and property that our English common people have” (142). Furthermore, it is clear from her *Memoirs* of 1826, that her opinions on this topic did not change with time. She regrets how gentry and nobles cannot live as they should because “we see some of the finest and prettiest places in England possessed by nabobs, bankers, and merchants” (II:102). In short, Craven’s fears of the rising class of merchants at home were only confirmed with time. Thus, Craven invokes the despotism of Ottoman rule as an impediment to good commerce, and yet she also implicitly suggests that the realignment of British class system, brought about by successful commerce, is unnatural and lamentable. Craven hints at the fact that the East was no simple landscape of virgin resources waiting for English industry to pluck it up—and as we know, it increasingly became a battle-ground for

missionary reformers, commercial developers, and cultural activists. For all of these interested parties, imperial and commercial policies abroad would change the domestic landscape, sometimes in fundamental ways.

In addition to Turkish mismanagement of commerce, their administration of subject people, particularly the Greeks, was a target for much British criticism. Although Craven was writing too early to have been inspired or repulsed by the philhellenic movement, when she arrives in Greece she naturally comments on the state of the Greek population and their ancient ruins. She attempts to juxtapose Greek civilization with Turkish tyranny, but there is, of course, a gap between the historical greatness of the ancient Greeks, and the wretchedness to which they have been reduced by Turkish ineptitude: “Tomorrow I set out again upon these seas, where at this hour Turkish ignorance presents different scenes to those than existed, when the Athenians gave encouragement to heroes and sages —” (265).

Because the Greeks cannot be the ancient heroes they once were, they must be recast in the role of Christian victims of Islamic oppression.¹² However, the oppression of the Greeks was more of a convenient means to vilify the Ottomans, and actually had little to do with really helping the Greeks to independence. Craven writes that she would like the English to come to Greece to help teach the descendants of the ancients the values of hard work that the English have cultivated:

Yes, I confess, I wish to see a colony of honest English families here; establishing manufactures, such as England produces, and returning the produce of this country to ours—establishing a fair and free trade from hence, and teaching industry and honesty to the insidious but oppressed Greeks, in their islands. (189)

As we can see, her altruistic concerns come at the end of this colonial vision and really suggest that England would simply make a “better” colonizer of Greece than the Ottomans. The conservative nationalistic attitude we saw in Craven with regard to commerce is duplicated here in the sphere of Greece, with Greek art also providing a motivation for the English civilizing mission.

Through the next decades, English government policy with regard to Turkey would continue to be dominated by economic and strategic imperatives, with the issue of Greek independence taking back seat. Details on these policies are explored in [chapter four](#) as they pertain to Shelley’s uses of the Ottoman Empire in his poetry of 1810–20s. In *A Journey* Craven anticipates the hypocritical and self-serving official government policy regarding Greece that would later be such a major source of annoyance for liberals such as Shelley who wrote in the preface to *Hellas* (1821): “The English permit their own oppressors to act according to their natural sympathy with the Turkish Tyrant, and to brand upon their name the indelible blot of an alliance with the enemies of domestic happiness, Christianity and civilization” (447). While Shelley quite explicitly

posits the notion that England's and Turkey's tyrants have a "natural sympathy," Craven's imperial gaze suggests that the goals of Britain's civilizing mission, to educate the "insidious Greeks," to conserve the ancient ruins, and to develop the lands industrially, are wholly opposing alternatives.

As we have seen, Craven expresses an emphatic dislike for various Turkish customs and simultaneously praises those of the British. Nevertheless, I have also alluded to the subtle ways in which the simple binary Ottoman-bad, English-good is unstable and subject instead to similitude and not distinction. What we will see in her view of the harem is that the instability of the image is even more dangerous and hard to handle because so much more relevant to her personally.

Despite her negative views of Turkish commerce and culture, she professes a great admiration of Turkish law and custom regarding women: "The Turks in their conduct toward our sex are an example to all Nations—a Turk has his head cut off, his papers seized, but the wife is provided for..." (234–35). This contrasts with the image of the harem woman as the victim of male despotic sexual and political power that would prove so powerful in the nineteenth century. In fact, later in the century it becomes one of the ways in which the Ottoman Empire might be said to exemplify an anti-English identity. For instance, in a letter of January 2, 1787 to Elizabeth Craven, Horace Walpole praised Craven's "genuine account of the seraglios," adding that: "your friends [the emperor and empress of Russia should] level Ottoman tyranny...[and] perform a still more Christian act in setting free so many useless sultanas" (IX: 86–7). Walpole expresses here the increasingly prevalent notion that idle harem women needed to be freed by a Christian savior. However, like her predecessor, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Julia Pardoe following her, Elizabeth Craven described the paradoxical "liberty behind the veil" that Turkish women enjoyed. Clearly motivated by her own dispossession at home, Craven was attracted not only to the anonymity of the veil, but also to the sacredness of the harem as a haven for women away from men: "I think I never saw a country where women may enjoy so much liberty, and free from all reproach, as in Turkey—a Turkish husband that sees a pair of slippers at the door of his harem must not enter..." (205). Add to this the official Islamic law that provided Turkish women with limited rights to property and divorce, and English women found themselves wondering how they too could achieve such advantages.

Although Craven shares these favorable reactions with Mary Wortley Montagu, the spirit of her admiration for the harem and the veil differs markedly from that of Montagu.¹³ Montagu admires the Turkish ladies for their good looks, good breeding, and hospitality. For instance, she describes the "gloriously beautiful Fatima" who "stood up to receive me, saluting me after their fashion, putting her hand upon her heart with a sweetness full of majesty, that no court breeding could ever give" (132). In addition to the perfection of Fatima, there is Montagu's famous bath scene in which she praises the charm with which the Turkish ladies welcome her into their surrounding, the naturalness of their nudity,



Figure 4. R.Rushworth, “The Supplemental Magazine” Published by S.W.Fores, 1786. British Museum, London.

and their good-willed commiseration with her when they think that her corset is a chastity device put into place by her jealous husband.

Elizabeth Craven reports a similar scene in which she found herself invited to join some Turkish and Greek women in the baths. However, she is far from charmed by the prospect; she describes the women’s fat and unappealing bodies, culminating with the emphatic: “such a disgusting sight as this would have put me in an ill humour with my sex...for ages” (265). In another scene, Craven visits the harem of a Captain Pasha in Constantinople. She records that the rooms of the harem were very clean, but that the women were very ugly. They all appeared to be prematurely old because of “[the frequent] hot-baths [that] destroy the solids.” They wore bad make-up and ugly ermine coats and their conversation was simple-minded and uninteresting. Craven is relieved to leave them, commenting on the apparently congenital stupidity of such women.

These anecdotes indicate that Craven only felt personal revulsion for the individual harem women whom she met, the women who were the products of the system she otherwise praised. She was repulsed by their “insipid, ignorant” intellects and by their “disgustingly flaccid” bodies. We can see that, unlike Montagu, Craven’s praise of Turkish women is based on how they are treated by men rather than for what they actually do. What can we make of this simultaneous praise and disdain?



Figure 5. "The Yashmak (Head Scarf)," by Warwick Goble (1906).

Because Craven presents her views of the harem for the purpose of staging a critique of British customs and laws regarding women, she also finds herself in dangerous rhetorical territory.¹⁴ What I would like to show is that Craven's presentation of Turkish women follows a rhetorical path described by Homi Bhabha as "colonial mimicry" that is, "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."¹⁵ Bhabha delineates three specific terms to describe the way this mimicry might work: the colonial subject is rendered a "partial presence" through the rhetorical device of a "metonymy of presence" and this in turn renders the imperialist gaze "authentic."

In the first place, by praising the system of the harem, Craven comes awfully close to saying that the women who come out of that system are "better" than British women. While she clearly wants to make that case in one sense, doing so also has fearful consequences. It is quite true in Craven's own situation that she could have benefited from some of these Turkish customs. Let us remember that she was assailed not only by her husband's ill treatment, but also by the attacks

in the press. Aristocratic ladies were often targeted by the press for their fashions and hair, and of course, the Turkish women's attire provides an interesting antidote to this dilemma, (see figures 3 and 4). The veil not only renders the wearer honorable, but does so while it camouflages her from view and criticism. As Montagu noted, a husband could not even recognize his own wife if he were to pass her in the streets.¹⁶

However, a too-close identification with Turkish women is a menacing prospect that, perhaps ironically, challenges Craven's position. And as we know, the authenticity of her textual identity is quite central to her project. In the face of this dangerous recognition with the harem women, it is as if they *need* to be disgusting in order to fix them in their place as Other, and the colonial gaze as authentic. To this end, the Turkish woman is rendered not as an individual, but through what Bhabha calls the "metonymy of presence," as the fat, idle odalisque; she is only a "partial presence," an incomplete, or virtual figure. In this way, the women are "seen" as both enjoying a certain kind of freedom that is attractive and desirable, but they are simultaneously seen as ugly and revolting. In either case, the authority of the colonizer is put into jeopardy by virtue of the proximity to the Other. Just as the colonizer attempts to assert an authentic presence he or she is also rendered "partial" and menaced by the resemblance to the colonial subject. It is this constant subtext of anxiety of authenticity that burdens colonial discourse with the rhetorical qualities of irony, mimicry, and repetition.

How strange is this coexistence of seemingly paradoxical attitudes? Bhabha has shown that such a coexistence is actually yet another characteristic of colonial mimicry: "two attitudes towards external reality persist; one takes reality into consideration while the other disavows it and replaces it by a product of desire that repeats, rearticulates 'reality' as mimicry" (91). And in fact, this brings us back to the hybrid literary persona that we have seen at work in *A Journey*, we see this coexistence of two realities as a constant rhetorical characteristic of Craven's letters. Craven is always simultaneously romantic heroine and masculine adventurer; aesthete, documentarian and enthusiastic imperialist. Moreover, her ambivalent rendering of Turkish women, along with the extra-literary presence of her Western double (i.e. her husband's mistress), enhances and complicates this literary identity. And, as mentioned earlier, by circulating her text publicly she renders herself authentic: as her husband travels around Europe with her doppelganger, the *true* Lady Craven simultaneously traverses the steppes of Russia to descend to Constantinople, to the imaginative realm of the lascivious odalisques. And still she portrays herself as the dutiful and accepting wife to her philandering husband. Craven's literary persona is therefore constantly shifting: swashbuckling and conservative; nationalistic and critical. And permeating this travel account is the self-serving and hypocritical tone of a woman vindicating her position as victim and denying her own sexual transgressions.

For Craven, the Eastern Muslim women are liminal figures of desire and disdain whose symbolic functions are exceptionally difficult to manage and contain. At worse, they are slothful odalisques, the objects of depraved sexual desire. At best, they are mistresses of their own private domestic space, unimplicated in their husband's public lives, the surviving victims of political intrigue. With these two images in mind, the Turkish woman is a figure of uncanny independence and action, providing an especially provocative counterimage to the British woman. This powerful ambivalence hints at the blurry line that separates Eastern feminine slavery and the semblance of Western freedom. Implicit in her presentation of the Turkish wife is an unfavorable comparison with the legal status of English women, with the specter of her own domestic troubles haunting her observations: how could she forget at such crucial moments her complete lack of legal redress in the face of her husbands wishes to separate her from her children, cut off her allowance, and parade another woman around in her stead? Craven implicitly criticizes the European standards that make his abuse possible when she compares those standards to the superior laws of the Turks, despite Turkey's otherwise backward culture as exemplified by the indolence that impedes commercial and industrial development and the oppression of the Greeks and their culture.

“DINING WITH THE GRAND SIGNOR”: CRITICAL RECEPTION OF A JOURNEY

Craven desired to publicize her husband's illicit affairs with his mistress, to portray herself as the wronged wife, and to celebrate the industry and morality of England (despite its shortfalls regarding women's rights) by comparing it positively with the Turkish Empire. However, the reception of the book did not bear out these hopes. The ambiguity of its hybrid literary persona elicited ambivalent reactions from some of its readers; Horace Walpole's double talk of praise and anxiety mentioned above is a good example of such mixed reactions. Indeed, Walpole always expresses ambivalent feelings about Craven's activities, and this extends to his reactions to her book. In a letter to Elizabeth Craven, he praised *A Journey*. “How proud I should be to register a noble authoress of my own country, who traveled over more regions and farther than any female in print” (IX:86–7). However, to another of his correspondents, Lady Ossory, he voiced concern for the embarrassment that the lady's daughters would experience upon the publication of their mother's travels, saying of Craven that he feared: “she may come to wish, or should, that *she* had not been born with a propensity to writing” (IX: 165). Walpole's reactions show that her strategy for self-vindication in the press was not a simple matter.

In addition to the ambivalence evident in Walpole's letters, we see a decidedly negative reading of Craven's morality and travels in Charles Pigott's *The Jockey Club* (1793). Craven continued to be the target of satirical invective upon her return to England in 1791 after her marriage to the Margrave. Although it seems

that by exposing the despotic, anachronistic and inept ways of the Ottoman government, Craven's book would be praised for its nationalistic outlook, Pigott does not do so. His desire to associate Western aristocratic luxury with Eastern decadence outstrips Craven's observations. Pigott begins by vilifying this aristocratic woman for her general preference for foreign men and foreign travel over the hardy stock of an honest English husband and landscape. He introduces Lady Craven thus:

Another proof of the infinite superiority of high birth. Behold this daughter of an Earl. She was young gay and handsome, when she married the late Lrd Cvn, but he was too rustic and bearish in his manners for so *fine a lady*, and she discovered that the Duc de G—nes Abssd from F—ce to the C-T of L—dn was far preferable to a plain downright British husband. No woman of true English *sensibility* can ever even resist the temptation of a distinguished Aristocratic seducer. So she was frail, and what is worse, she was detected.¹⁷

Clearly, Pigott is offended by Craven's lack of respect for Englishness. This extends to his reactions to her marriage to the Margrave (yet another foreigner) whom Pigott characterized as little more than an ineffectual dupe of the proud Baroness.

Pigott continues in his diatribe against Craven by recounting her trip abroad which produced her book; notice however how he prominently mentions that she traveled with a man:

...our discarded bness being now at liberty, went beyond sea in search of novelty, and there she took up a companion de voyage, the celebrated and *veracious* H—Y V—nn. They breakfasted with the empress of Russia, they dined with the Grand Signor and supped with the Great Mogul. (III:160)

Pigott associates the excesses of Western aristocracy with that of the East, thus naturalizing Craven's inclination in that direction and negating her attempts to praise English commerce and civilization. It is noteworthy that just such a twisting of her words and apparent intentions can actually be traced in the language of her own text.¹⁸

Elizabeth Craven continued to be a source of biographical and literary interest to the public well after her death in 1827. In *Little Memoirs of the Eighteenth Century* (1901), George Paston devotes a lengthy section to Elizabeth Craven's career as an aristocratic profligate and also as a woman writer. He is unsparing in his descriptions of Craven's illicit affairs, her unparalleled self-confidence, and her tenacity as a traveler. As with other writers, Paston highlights the contradictory impulses at play in Craven's life story: "Lady Craven must be credited with a large allowance of courage and enterprise; but it is a pity that a lady who was famed for her veracity of spirits and brilliant conversational

prohess should not have contrived to be more amusing on paper" (145). From his position writing in the early-twentieth century, Paston expresses little of Pigott's personal offence at Craven's escapades; indeed, he rather wishes at times that the correspondences were even *more* outrageous or explicit. Exercising a good deal of narrative suspicion, Paston begins Craven's portrait with an assertion that her work provides the biographer with a good deal of material to sift and weigh, since the bulk of it is so self-congratulating as to be highly questionable. He criticizes Craven's work explicitly for the narrative contrivance that was necessary in her self-presentation. In his estimation, the letters of *A Journey to Constantinople* were Craven's attempt to establish a literary reputation as solid as that of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, but he is especially unconvinced by the notion of Turkish women as being "the freest in the world."

As we have seen then, Craven presents negative views of Ottoman commercial and administrative policies as though they are thoroughly opposed to British ways, and yet she inadvertently exposes the dangerous ways in which they are not so different. Similarly, her favorable views of the harem are deployed for the purpose of exposing British shortcomings that nevertheless expose a very complex moral and racial stance toward these women. Her attempt in *A Journey* to vindicate herself both in terms of her personal, sexual integrity and her national pride, however, was not wholly successful. Given Charles Pigott's condemnation of her disregard for her "downright" English husband and his sarcastic vision of her dining with the Grand Signor, we see that such rhetorical strategies often had the exact opposite effect intended by the author. For Pigott, as for Shelley later, the similitude that obtains between the aristocracy and the Eastern Other far outstrips the protests of an enthusiastic imperialist. Indeed, the multi-layered literary persona that Craven puts forth only draws a sharper criticism for its artifice.

Through this brief discussion of Lady Elizabeth Craven's book of 1789, we have seen how the Ottoman Empire was an extremely unstable signifier when presented for the purposes of self-fashioning. In subsequent decades, the literary use of the Ottoman Empire as a counterimage became ubiquitous. Liberal writers of the romantic period who sought to gain rhetorical complexity in their works frequently played with the expectations of similarity and difference between the British and Turks; this was a strategy that frequently entailed a variety of interpretative challenges both for audiences and for writers alike. Byron's *Turkish Tales* outshine all others in terms of popularity and readership; his harem women appear to provide all women with models of justified rebellion, but they never get to enjoy the fruits of their rebellious actions. In his lyrical drama of the Greek revolution, *Hellas*, Shelley portrays the Turkish Sultan (Mahmud II) both as a dangerous and barbaric Other, and yet as one who goes through a philosophical education par excellence. Just as the Sultan is about to attain the self-knowledge that would "convert" him into a [Western] human being, Shelley has him exit the stage, avoiding the actual dramatization of that event, and the

difficulties generated by such a conversion. Lastly, in 1826 Mary Shelley envisioned the world, including the commercially and politically enlightened England, to be contaminated and killed by the “Turkish” plague that renders a devastating similitude among all inhabitants of the globe. In the epilogue, I return to the problem of narrative authenticity as I present several narratives of the life of Lady Hester Lucy Stanhope that envision her as the composite English/Ottoman Other.

British readers’ familiarity with Turkish histories, motifs, and legends aided these writers in achieving literal effects which were far more fraught with political, social, and religious critiques than were earlier texts. Elizabeth Craven’s letters from the Ottoman Empire are an example of the kind of transition that bridges the gap between those writing in the earlier stages of the British Empire, and those who were witnessing its expansion at the start of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Three

Victim, Vixen, and Virago: The Odalisque in Byron's *Turkish Tales*

THIS CHAPTER BUILDS UPON THE SIMPLE ASSERTION THAT THE ODALISQUE IN Byron's *Turkish Tales* is a political figure whose disobedient actions are cause for (ambiguously) alarm and celebration. I here suggest that in writing these tales in quick succession, Byron paradoxically explored the Turkish female body, its politically pivotal position, and the particular kind of anxiety that attended that centrality, despite the notion that she is powerless.¹ Indeed, the political dimension of the harem woman was well known to English audiences through many plays and histories from the seventeenth century onward. Byron's depiction of her as a figure capable of domestic and political disruption was thus a continuation and an evolution of a standard association.

I argue here that for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western reader, the power of the odalisque's disobedience hinges on the status of the Turkish harem as a counterimage of domesticity in a period when the roles of both men and women were being redefined because of the changing political, social, and commercial landscape that existed in the aftermath of the French Revolution; in the context of the Napoleonic Wars; and England's large scale imperial expansion in the East. As Nancy Armstrong has shown, the eighteenth century saw the rise of a new domestic woman, a figure whose textual representation necessarily antedated her actual existence.² This new middle-class woman was characterized by several qualities over and against her aristocratic counterpart. These characteristics include personal virtue, a retired lifestyle, domestic frugality, and the ability to supervise servants. I would like to extend Armstrong's argument by suggesting that the textual representation of the Turkish odalisque also contributes in a specific way to the emergence of this domestic woman. The harem woman was a particularly ambiguous figure because the customs of the harem as expressed by Western writers meant that she shared qualities of both the new domestic woman and the aristocratic woman. Indeed, the "absent presence" of the Muslim woman that the customs of the veil and harem made possible invoked an uncanny female figure whose resonances were particularly powerful for early nineteenth-century audiences. Sometimes hated, sometimes emulated, she was always immensely popular among the readers who themselves constituted this emerging class of woman.

Byron's *Turkish Tales* envision the veiled woman as one who does not consent to the custom and politics of the harem, and who actively disobeys its rules. What we see in the *Turkish Tales* is the best articulation of a kind of female disobedience in the popular "escape from the harem" motif. By violently breaking out of the harem system, Byron's heroines conflate the now familiar, but still complex Romantic terms "innocence" and "experience" in away that inevitably leads to questions about the moral status of such disobedience in Western culture. As Carol Houlihan Flynn has shown in her analysis of the writings of Daniel Defoe, a real gap existed between the ideal vision of marriage as portrayed in his conduct manuals and the realistic vision of its dangers as expressed in his novels. Despite claims for a companionate marriage, in reality, the domestic ideal still relied on the woman's subordination: "Insisting upon 'Justice' between men and women in marriage, he also reveals the strains that the fiction of justice exacts when domestic harmony and 'affective individualism' depend upon subordination of the woman in the house."³ Given this conflict, the question of how an English woman ought to react to an unequal or abusive marriage is obviously difficult to answer.

Enter the Turkish woman. Since the Turkish domestic scene is so far from the ideals of companionate marriage, the harem woman is justified in her violent reaction to it. However, if, as Defoe's novels suggest, the reality of marriage for British women also strayed from the ideal, should she too be applauded for asserting her rights? Although the Turkish harem may appear to be the opposite of the British home, similarities between them nevertheless persist, thereby suggesting repercussions for British women that are too complex and far-reaching to contain. This is not to say, however, that the role of the female is not problematic, or that Byron's own attitude toward her was clear. On the contrary, it is precisely the mixture of his ambivalent attitude towards Turkish ways with his complex attitude towards women that infuses the tales with their quality of exploration and innovation. Furthermore, it is clear that his imagination was fired by the odalisque's uncanny presence, and that he anticipated the evocative power that she could have for an English audience.

Therefore, I propose to trace the various ways Byron crafted the mysterious figure of the odalisque from "The Giaour" (May 1813) through "Lara" (June 1814).⁴ In my close readings I demonstrate that in each of these poems the disobedient acts of the female characters are objects of confused interpretation by their male counterparts. The anxiety of interpretation experienced by these men is doubled in the reader's experience of the text when that reader is compelled to judge the nature and quality of the odalisques' acts. This provocative position of an apparently powerless person is a paradox that Byron, fueled by his own fairly exhaustive knowledge of the East, explored in his *Turkish Tales*.⁵

In calling for a deeper appreciation of the crucial nature of the disobedient actions of Byron's heroines, I differ in degree and spirit with an earlier strain of criticism which characterized them as merely incidental actors of the poems.⁶ More recently, several critics have noted that Byron's uses of Turkish motifs

were indeed critical and complex. Malcolm Kelsall has acknowledged this complexity in the *Turkish Tales* with an emphasis on romance: “The romance genre, given the extreme conservatism of its usual sexual type casting (witness Scott and Southey), offers the revolutionary poet the opportunity to disrupt fictional commonplaces.”⁷ In his excellent study linking romanticism with the process of modernization, Saree Makdisi has argued, primarily with regard to *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, that Byron's East is not only a refuge from modernity but “a space from which to critique modernity and the West itself” (137). Moreover, my argument here regarding the *Turkish Tales* is in line with Alan Richardson's discussion of *Don Juan* as “an attempt to imagine—if only *en travestie*—the subject position of nineteenth-century women as sexual commodity, as object of the other's gaze, as marked in male-dominated representational system by lack or absence.”⁸

The biggest challenge to appreciating the active role of the Turkish heroines may be the failure of their disobedience to effect change in their lives. However, I find that Laurence Lockridge's characterization of the Byronic dilemma speaks to this problem: “though history insists that there can be no permanent change in our bad luck, it is necessary to act as if there could be.”⁹ The failure of the process to effect change is less important than the fact that it is continually attempted: this dislocates history from goal to process. As Lockridge explains further, Byron suggests that resolute human acts must be acts of exclusion; for example, Childe Harold cannot act because he cannot make choices. We can see that the odalisques, unlike Harold, do make difficult choices, and thus must live (or die) with the consequences. The dialectic of innocence and experience within which they act is a function of contrasting energies whose enduring state is one of conflict rather than resolution. My suggestion is that in the *Turkish Tales*, Byron hints at women who approach the possible coexistence of knowledge and love, innocence and experience and that their failure to maintain this combination points up the challenges that always threaten to undermine it. The heroines are destroyed, drowned, or literally written out of the poem and their male counterparts are left struggling to interpret the moral value of such struggles and failures. In addition, Byron's contemporary reader is left wondering if the odalisque's resolute acts of self-determination should be celebrated, and if so what precedent is set for the Western woman's demands of equality, power, and liberty? With examples of female sexual disobedience and punishment in texts like *The Thousand and One Nights* and *The Turkish Embassy Letters* that he knew so well, Byron made use of the harem as an ambiguous counterimage of domesticity, characterized by the disobedient activities of sexually experienced, yet victimized Eastern women.

In what follows I first present the main qualities which Westerners associated with these harem women and then go on to analyze the complex ways in which Byron's tales explore the space of the harem and utilize the figure of the odalisque as an ironic agent of political and domestic revolution.

SEX AND VIOLENCE IN THE TURKISH HAREM

Women in the Imperial Palace and the urban upper class played an interesting and complex role over the years in the Ottoman Empire. Historians from Richard Knolles to Vincent Mignot, and travelers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Julia Pardoe demonstrate that the various aspects of this role were not unknown to the British. This base of information about the Ottoman woman was distilled into four broad types represented in Western texts: the political virago who pulls the strings of the dissipated Turkish man; the sexually voracious odalisque; the oppressed victim of Muslim concubinage; and the “free” Ottoman woman who enjoys the harem as a “sanctuary” from male interference and the veil as a disguise from the male gaze.¹⁰ It is important to recall that although these categories may seem contradictory, they are not; instead, they are intimately related, blending and overlapping in ways that make it difficult for observers to adhere to a strictly negative or positive view of the harem. As we will see, Byron’s odalisques are prime examples of this flexibility.

The image of the politically active odalisque is very strongly tied to the Imperial Harem itself. Like the rest of the empire, it was a rigidly organized society with titles, occupational training, religious and language instruction and even a system of payment for the girls. Girls entered in from all over the empire, either taken in war, given as presents, or in some cases, voluntarily. At the top of the harem hierarchy was the royal family (designated by the word “sultan” following their names). This consisted of the *Valide Sultan*, or “Queen Mother,” the most powerful woman in the harem, and the only member of the royal family not of royal blood. The queen mother not only ran the harem, but also engaged in extensive charitable building and establishment of foundations. In some cases she carried out diplomatic activities (as in Safiye Sultan’s letters to Queen Elizabeth described in [chapter five](#)) or wielded very direct political power (as in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century so-called “Sultanate of Women,” discussed below). The Chief Black Eunuch was the “prime minister” of the queen mother and he acted as the liaison between her and the outside. Along with the queen mother, sisters and daughters of the sultan comprised the royal family. These women were often the most privileged women in the entire empire. They were better educated and enjoyed more autonomy than most other women. Their marriages were state festivals, and palaces were given and named for them.

The political power of Turkish women in the harem is most often associated with the period known as “The Sultanate of Women.” From 1520 to 1683 there emerged within the Imperial Harem a series of strong women who wielded a great deal of power, usually by manipulating their weak and lascivious husbands/sons. Although this image of politically active women in the harem contrasts with the image of passivity that otherwise dominates, it is equally negative. In fact, it is the rise of the political power of these women beginning with the wife of Sultan Suleiman that many historians (Westerners and Turks alike) pinpoint as the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire.



Figure 6. Mausoleum of Solyman the Magnificent and Roxalana, by W.H.Bartlett, from Julia Pardoe's *Beauties of the Bosphorus* (1839).

Although the mother of Sultan Suleiman (Hafsa Sultan) was a strong queen mother from 1520–34, it is his wife whose reputation fascinates.¹¹ Known to the West as Roxalana or Roxana, she is famous for her cunning and self-serving accomplishments. She is thought to have been a Russian or Ukrainian woman who caught the eye of Suleiman in the harem and convinced him to legally marry her. (This had not occurred among the Turkish Sultans for many years.) She thereafter bore Suleiman several children. Although an heir to the throne in his eldest son Mustapha already existed, it is for masterminding a plot to usurp Mustapha in favor of her own son that Roxalana becomes infamous not only in Turkish history but in English writings as well. Mustapha was a very popular leader among the army, and a successful governor in the provincial city of Amasya. Roxalana, together with her son-in-law Rustem Pasha, managed to incite an Othello-like jealousy in Suleiman such that the Sultan had his son assassinated. With Mustapha out of the way, Roxalana's sons were free to accede to the throne upon their father's death in 1566.

Knowledge of this strong and politically active woman was disseminated in the West through histories and plays from the seventeenth century onward. The fate of Mustapha became a popular subject for dramatic presentation in English theater, most notably in Fulke Greville's *Mustapha* (1603) and Roger Boyle's very popular and widely performed *Mustapha* (1668).¹² In both of these plays Roxalana is a symbol of the cunning and politically ambitious female. In



Figure 7. James Gillray, “The Blessings of Peace/The Curse of War” (1795). British Museum, London.

addition, Roxalana and subsequent strong sultanas were covered by all the important Turkish histories (all owned by Byron) over a broad range of time for similar reasons. For instance, in 1603 Richard Knolles writes: “This wicked woman labored cunningly” (512); and in 1787 Vincent Mignot painstakingly details her machinations, continually referring to “[a]ll the artifice so natural to [Roxalana]” and “[Soliman’s] weakness for an artful wife” (II:22–64). In a chapter of *Beauties of the Bosphorus*, Julia Pardoe simultaneously describes the tomb of Suleiman and Roxalana (see figure 5) as she details Roxalana’s plans to assassinate Mustapha for the benefit of her own sons, thus “turning the holiest of virtues a crime.” Pardoe uses phrases such as “far-famed,” “tiger-hearted,” and “inexorable” to describe Roxalana, and notes that, although the tomb is beautiful, it is nevertheless like the “records of the innocent blood shed to feed her ambition” (26).¹³

The dangerous power associated with these sultanas thus adds a political dimension to the already ambiguous domestic space of the harem. The peculiar nature of this sexual and political female space would have resonated powerfully for the British readers of the post-revolutionary period, for whom the issue of women’s public political speech was still controversial. Lawrence Stone has shown that despite widespread interest, the feminist movement of the late eighteenth century was quelled in an anxious backlash against French



Figure 8. J.L.Marks, “Much Wanted a Reform among Females!!!” (1819). British Museum, London.

Revolutionary sentiments in favor of renewed assertions for women’s traditional domestic roles.¹⁴ Many caricatures juxtaposed revolutionary violence in the home with the blessings of the stable English family (see figure 7). In addition, a caricature of J.L.Marks of 1819, for instance, nicely illustrates the sexual overtones associated with women’s public political speech. The caricature ridicules women not only by depicting their political speech as overloaded with absurd sexual innuendo, but also by rendering them with overemphasized sexual organs (see figure 8). Therefore, the image of the Turkish woman as political virago had powerful and complex implications for the British audience at the time (this type of harem woman will be further discussed in chapter five).

The second category involves the ubiquitous image of the voluptuous harem woman as promulgated in writings of fact and fiction, paintings and opera. While attitudes toward women living in the harem system may have ranged from disgust and disdain to sympathy and outrage, many agreed that the Eastern woman immured in a harem was a sexually oriented creature not above such practices as sapphism and masturbation.¹⁵ Such behaviors, it was believed, resulted directly from her condition of idleness, oppression, and ignorance concomitant with the religiously based custom of the harem.¹⁶

While it might have been possible for Westerners to view the harem as an ideal of separate spheres, the associations of perverse sexuality precluded this possibility. Inderpal Grewel has pointed out that part of the new ideal of the bourgeois English woman's life relied on her increased leisure-time which was made possible by the growing number of servants in the household. According to Grewel: "The discourse of race was thus refracted through that of labor."¹⁷ Nancy Armstrong also asserts a similar notion in her description of the domestic woman's "labor that is not labor," i.e. in her role as a supervisor rather than as a working drudge herself (75–81). Although Eastern women were also viewed as living "a life of leisure and submission to men" they did not draw similar approbation because the British ideal involved non-sexual wifeness and motherhood while the Eastern embodied that of sexuality and sensuality without motherhood.¹⁸ Since this vision of the harem woman's "work" involved primarily sexual activity, her life within the enclosed domestic space is not admirable or ideal.

Perhaps the earliest and strongest representation of the voracious and transgressive sexuality of the odalisque comes in *The Thousand and One Nights* itself, first published in England in 1707 in a translation from Antoine Galland's French version. The impact of the collection on British audiences is not to be underestimated. Although information about the East had been in circulation for a long while, the tales provided a provocative and imaginative vision of the East to an even wider audience. Its presentation of women was especially noteworthy. The frame tale of *The Thousand and One Nights* begins with the story of two brothers, kings who are disturbed not only by the infidelity of their wives, but also by their gross sensuality. After killing his offending wife, King Shahriyar begins his custom of "taking a virgin in marriage to his bed each night, and killing her the next morning" as the only means of assuring her sexual obedience.¹⁹ The image of female sexuality put forth in *The Thousand and One Nights* was so strong that it helped galvanize the image of the lascivious harem woman in the minds of European readers; for instance, in 1836 Edward Lane actually utilizes the tales as a quick and effective means to describe the licentious character of Egyptian women: "Some of the stories of the intrigues of women in 'The Thousand and One Nights' present faithful pictures of occurrences not unfrequent in the modern metropolis of Egypt."²⁰

The highly sexualized stereotype persists in many writers who see the harem as part of a decadent Islamic system whose whole intention is to make more than one woman sexually available to men.²¹ Whether she "obeys" the man's sexual demands, or "transgresses" against them by engaging in proscribed activities, she is still contemptible. The Western obsession with Eastern women's rampant sexuality is amply represented in a host of texts, including Elias Habeschi's *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* published in 1784:

The most infamous lasciviousness is likewise common in the chambers of the girls. Nor is it at all astonishing that handsome girls, well fed,

undergoing neither fatigue nor vexation; girls that have nothing to do but to prepare themselves for sensual pleasures, and who think of nothing but Venus and her son should give way to unnatural lasciviousness, for want of proper means of gratifying their amorous inclinations.²²

This disdainful (yet obviously titillated) moral attitude was very prevalent: the women described by Habeschi are both condemned as sexually monstrous and also victimized by a system over which they have no control. The simultaneous juxtaposition of “handsome girls” and “unnatural lasciviousness” is the same rhetoric (though perhaps in reverse) of Craven’s slothful yet free Turkish women.

The language of disdain often blurs with that of empathy, thus leading to the third image of the odalisque as victimized criminal. This ambiguity is perfectly expressed in a scene from Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters*. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu describes the naked bleeding body of a beautiful woman dumped near her house in Constantinople: “She was not yet quite cold, and so surprisingly beautiful, that there were very few men in Pera that did not go look upon her; but it was impossible for any body to know her, no woman’s face being known” (168). It was widely reported that in the Ottoman Empire the punishment for sexually disobedient women was murder without trial, a sentence often carried out by the woman’s father or brothers because of the dishonor wrought on their family by her act of transgression. It is thus to be assumed that the woman in Montagu’s anecdote is guilty of such a transgression, even though she may also be considered by the Western reader to be a victim of harsh and disproportionate punishment. Although she describes many Ottoman women in her letters, both in the harem and in public, Montagu here offers us the view of a publicly unveiled body. It is not merely the object of Montagu’s privileged female gaze but also available to public male scrutiny, and scrutinize they did. Furthermore, because Pera was a European quarter, we can assume that the men gazing at the woman were primarily Europeans.

The scene of these men gazing publicly at the unveiled face of the victimized Ottoman woman resonates because of the uncanny silence engendered by the naked face. The familiar effort of Western travelers to visually penetrate the veil in order to see the face hidden behind it and the “secret” lives of Eastern women can be seen in many travel texts and memoirs. Indeed, it has been argued by Meyda Yegenoglu that such an effort to pierce the secrets of the Eastern female other is constitutive of subjectivity itself: “The veil is one of those tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the inferiority of the other are fantasmically achieved.”²³ But, as Yegenoglu shows, the practice of veiling does not necessarily “hide” something that becomes visible once it is removed. This is evident in Montagu’s description of this unusual public scrutiny of the naked female face. What is demonstrated here is that neither the veiled woman nor her naked face is a simple signifier: although the face is exposed it says nothing because “no woman’s face [is] known.” The Western subject expects, hopes or fears to see behind the veil or

within the precincts of the harem a variety of images that often prove to be contradictory. The body of the victimized Eastern woman is a polysemous signifier that arouses conflicting emotions: fear and outrage alternate with sympathy and altruism.

Robert Bage's *The Fair Syrian* portrays both the victim and the monster in the harem in the Englishwoman Honoria Warren and her Georgian friend. The vicissitudes of fortune compel Honoria into a series of harems where she is constantly in fear of being deflowered by one lustful Turk after another; she attempts suicide with a knife and begins to hoard opium in an attempt to kill herself with her "unsullied chastity" intact.²⁴ Honoria's effort to protect herself against such attacks makes her worthy of sympathy as well as moral outrage. On the other hand, Bage represents the "willing" victim in a series of women whom Honoria meets, most notably a Georgian whose nine years of slavery in various harems have taught her to make the best of any situation, because, as she says, "When you yield to the oppression of an aching heart, you affect yourself more cruelly, than fortune can" (77). This rhetoric that combines the disdain for the harem woman as a criminal and sympathy for her as a victim may be seen in any number of texts well into the twentieth century; for instance, in *Islam and the Psychology of the Musulman*, (1924) Andre Servier writes: "Compared to the condition of women of other religions, she is a slave. A luxurious animal, a beast of pleasure to the rich; a beast of burden to the poor.... She is perpetually cloistered, an eternal slave."²⁵

The fourth category appears to be the opposite of the victimized woman: the free harem woman who enjoys an unprecedented "liberty behind the veil." Such figures are presented primarily in the writings of several notable women travelers who tend to eschew the binary categories of victim or vixen altogether. Although the meaning of "harem" as "women's quarters" may have been the best known among Westerners, the notion of this space as a *sanctuary* has not been prevalent. Technically speaking, it restricts entrance rather than impedes exit, and because Islam regulates the sexual contact between men and women, women may consider themselves safe from such unlawful contact when in a space described as a harem. Montagu, Craven, and Pardoe each note this aspect of the harem, and describe the freedom of Turkish women and the discretion men exercise before entering the harem. Nevertheless, their approbation of harem women's liberty is always tempered with a sense of their limitations; this is especially the case with Craven and Pardoe.²⁶

Women writing about the harem developed an idiosyncratic version of the language of authenticity because they were peculiarly qualified to report on such matters. We see Montagu, Craven, and Pardoe especially engaging in this rhetoric when debunking male writers' reports of the harem. They each take the opportunity to stake out a territory of rhetorical authority by showing the strength and power of women in the harem, as has been discussed in detail in [chapter two](#) with Craven. In seeing the harem women thus, Craven follows Montagu's famous

opinions and Pardoe reaffirms these sentiments 120 years after Montagu's trip to Constantinople:

If, as we are all prone to believe, freedom be happiness, then are Turkish women the happiest, for they are certainly the freest individuals in the Empire. It is the fashion in Europe to pity the women of the East; but it is ignorance of their real position alone which can engender so misplaced an exhibition of sentiment. (*City* 68)

Pardoe details the elements of this freedom as women's tendency to speak their minds, their right to leave the harem for visits or business without consulting their husbands, and, most notably, their ability to restrict their husbands' access to their quarters. She describes the custom (reported also by Montagu and Craven) that men cannot enter the harem if they see a pair of slippers at the door. The origin of this habit can be traced to the Turkish custom of removing one's shoes before entering a dwelling; thus, in order to avoid embarrassing a female visitor, a husband must be announced before entering a room. All three British women writers portray this custom as immensely beneficial for a woman who may seek to cultivate a private life inaccessible to her husband.

Despite her generally favorable view of such customs, Pardoe places her praise for Turkish female liberty in context when she writes: "How comparative is happiness! I never lay my head upon my pillow, but I am grateful to Providence that I was not born in Turkey; while the fair Osmanlis in their turn pity the Frank women with a depth of sentiment almost ludicrous" (*City* 78). Pardoe's description of the Osmanli's reasons for such pity sufficiently condemns it as absurd: they see Western women as being cursed with the trouble of travel, with the exposure to the male world of anxieties, and "the hardship of wearing our faces uncovered." Pardoe's ability both to approve highly of the liberty of Turkish women while also acknowledging their limited freedom, education, and sentiments shows how the categories listed above can actually blend within a single text. It is this blending which we see again and again confounding those writers who seek to contrast the harem with Western notions of domesticity.

Lord Byron's Conrad experiences just such an ambivalent reaction to the uncanny confrontation of the naked female face in the third of his so-called *Turkish Tales*, "The Corsair" (December 1813). In this poem, the odalisque Gulnare is responsible for saving Conrad's life, killing the Pasha Seyd, and inciting a rebellion among the troops that adds a good number of men to Conrad's private horde. Although Conrad has been captured precisely because he has saved the odalisques from the burning harem, he is deeply mortified when Gulnare expresses her desire to rescue Conrad and free herself through violent disobedience to the thralldom in which she is kept by the Pasha. Note the visual confusion Conrad experiences upon the moment that he realizes that Gulnare has murdered Seyd:

She stopp'd—threw back her dark far-floating hair,
 That nearly veil'd her face and bosom fair:
 As if she late had bent her leaning head
 Above some object of her doubt or dread.
 They meet—upon her brow, unknown, forgot,
 Her hurrying hand had left—'t was but a spot—
 Its hue was all he saw, and scarce withstood—
 Oh! Slight but certain pledge of crime—'tis blood!²⁷

What Conrad witnesses in the unveiled face is the stain of blood that marks Gulnare as a powerful woman engaging in violent acts of self-determination.²⁸ But because Gulnare is simultaneously victim of Turkish domestic oppression, a sexual criminal, and a murderer, it is unclear how one should judge her and it is this uncanny mixture of characteristics that forces Conrad into a tailspin of anxiety and confusion. As Gulnare finds and exercises her own violent power which has very real political ramifications, Conrad becomes increasingly disturbed by her transformation and is unable to respond to it.²⁹

The narrative of the pirate Conrad demonstrates how the veil and the harem both elicit ambiguous reactions from the Western subject even though they may appear to be the negative customs of Islamic society that ought to be heartily rebuked. While the veil's purpose according to Islam may have been to shield the woman from the unwanted male gaze, many Westerners viewed it as a form of oppression and as an object to pity. However, the veil did not only elicit sympathy but also anxiety. As we saw in [chapter two](#), many Westerners also saw it as a disguise that enabled women to carry out dangerous liaisons. More disturbing, perhaps, is that the veiled woman reverses the customary positions of subject and object of the gaze, as Yegenoglu writes: "her body completely invisible to the European observer except for her eyes, *the veiled woman can see without being seen*. The apparently calm rationalist discipline of the European subject goes awry in the fantasies of penetration as well as in the topological excess of the veil" (43). This reversal of agency reflects the same shift that appears in "The Corsair" with Conrad's passivity and Gulnare's act of violence. Conrad will be forced to decide the moral nature of the odalisque but this proves to be difficult because of the multiplicity of characteristics associated with the disobedient odalisque. It becomes clear that the veil and harem never establish comfortable binaries of innocence and guilt—for example, there is the veiled woman who might be up to no good *or* the disobedient, unveiled woman who is nevertheless virtuous. The terror of the veil consisted in the fact that one could never really know what was under it—every woman was potentially assailable to her own or another's temptations. And if she did transgress, she not only risked her own neck, but became an agent of disruption of the social structure and mores.

Byron's *Turkish Tales* invoke many of these aspects of the harem woman, and as a result, their male characters experience the difficult and often paralyzing confusion attended by the effort to interpret correctly the nature of such a woman. In each poem she is simultaneously portrayed as idle and lascivious yet disobedient and self-determining. The remainder of this chapter sketches out the characterization of the odalisque as an unstable signifier by showing what happens when she withdraws her consent from despotic authority through increasingly violent action against this authority.

A SPECK OF WHITE: THE BODY OF LEILA

Unlike the dead female described by Montagu in Constantinople in 1717, the body of Byron's Leila is not present, and yet her missing body engages in an uncanny dialectic between sexual and political innocence and experience. Leila's material body is a subject of dispute, the incentive to danger and violence, and yet, this body is nowhere in the text. It is her act of disobedience to the authority of Hassan that precipitates all the actions of the poem and yet we never see her act: Byron writes her out of the poem altogether. When she does appear, she is merely a speck of white floating to the bottom of the sea. Instead of her body, it is the idea of Leila, the ephemeral quality of her Self that wafts through the poem. This shift from material body to spirit is a subject of analysis for the Giaour. I argue that the poem essentially replicates the Giaour's journey from privileging the material possession of the female body to accepting a symbolic, yet uninterpretable, substitute for it. In the final lines of the poem, he gives over to the moral indeterminacy that immateriality occasions: "But, shape or shade!—whate'er thou art,/In mercy, ne'er again depart—Or farther with thee bear my soul,/Than winds can waft—or waters roll" (ll. 1315–18). This willingness to forgo interpretation dramatizes a significant shift in the Giaour's ideology. The impossibility of interpretation occasioned by the move from materiality to immateriality is mirrored in the unresolvability of the dialectic between innocence and experience. And it is this model of noninterpretation of the harem and the odalisque that I suggest Byron offers to his readership.

The difficulty of properly interpreting the harem woman is reflected in other aspects of the poem. In "The Giaour" (as well as in many of Byron's *Turkish Tales*), characters must rely on the readings of tone, gesture, and expression to understand one another's motivations and goals. For instance, Leila has most likely failed to read the situation surrounding her escape accurately, and has therefore been captured and murdered by Hassan. Furthermore, everyone throughout the poem "reads" the Giaour, he tries to read Hassan, even Hassan's mother attempts to read the messenger as he approaches with news of her son's death: "His swarthy visage spake distress, /But this might be from weariness;/His garb with sanguine spots was dyed, /But these might be from his courser's side" (ll. 711–14). Byron aligns the reader with Hassan's mother in as subtle a way as possible; he or she must go through the steps of interpretation with her. Perhaps

most important is the sustained theme of interpretation associated with the Giaour himself, e.g., he searches Hassan's face for remorse as he is dying; he reads in the priests face "abhorrence" (1161); he even reads his own past actions, noting his passivity: "I only watch'd and wish'd to weep." This reading and interpretation by careful observers suggests that one can get relatively close to the truth, because there are always clues in people's demeanors, and it is the person who best reads these clues who survives. In the end the Giaour's voice seems to wrench the narrative away from the poet, and delivers a confession that rejects the notion of a resolving dialectic because the terms "shape or shade" do remain separate and preclude any response from the priest whose usual terms of assessment are grounded in the clear distinction between innocence and guilt.

It is no wonder that interpretation is so relevant in "The Giaour" since nothing is presented directly. In addition to the split figure of Leila, the warring binaries represented by the Giaour and Hassan are variously constructed by the poem's narrators. Hassan is a good Muslim, a hospitable man, and a worthy foe. His mother awaits him at home (ll. 689–721) and there is an image of him playing around the fountain as a happy child which contrasts with his now empty house (ll. 288–351). His "funeral" (ll. 722–746) is quite honorable and there is a proper (although faded) Koranic verse on his grave. In short, he is a typically cruel and avaricious Turkish Pasha, a "true osmanli," who goes to Paradise, a fit end for a brave Muslim killed by a Christian.

But like that liminal figure of the veiled woman, the Giaour is a hybrid, ambiguous hero. Even the friar in the end of the poem is unable to describe his aspect: "By all my hope of sins forgiven/Such looks are not of earth nor heaven" (ll. 914–15). Although the look is not of heaven or earth the friar is unable to name a possible third term. This inability to name the Giaour makes sense given his position in the monastery: desexualized and demilitarized, he is a neutered figure endlessly reinterpreting the past. Presenting both Hassan and the Giaour ambiguously, the poem attempts to disrupt simple binary thinking in relation to its male, as well as its female, figures and resists explicitly positing any third term. In fact, Byron suggests the closeness between the two men by describing them as mirror images:

Fallen Hassan lies—his unclose'd eye
 Yet lowering on his enemy,
 As if the hour that seal'd his fate,
 Surviving left his quenchless hate;
*And o'er him bends that foe with brow
 As dark as this that bled below.* (ll. 669–74 emphasis mine)

This recognition of a fundamental sameness is echoed by the Giaour himself in his admission that he and Hassan share identical notions of female fidelity and the male prerogative necessary to protect it: "*Yet did he but what I had done/Had she*

been false to more than one;/Faithless to him—he gave the blow,/But true to me—I laid him low” (ll. 1062–65 emphasis mine).

Because there are crucial similarities between the two men that the Giaour finds repulsive, he strives to locate a way to differentiate himself from Hassan. He is finally able to accomplish this by emphasizing that although he himself is consumed by a sense of despair, Hassan never regretted anything. The Giaour is capable of feeling remorse for Leila’s loving him: “Yet sometimes with remorse in vain/I wish she had not lov’d again” (ll. 1054–55). By contrast, he has witnessed no remorse in the dying visage of Hassan: “Each feature of the sullen corse/Betrayed his rage, but no remorse./Oh, what had Vengeance given to trace Despair upon his dying face!” (ll. 1090–94). Thus, despite the fact that Hassan is presented as a more socially welladjusted individual, the Giaour finally is established as the more moral of the two through an elaborate interpretative system of his own.

In short, Byron’s main antagonists, the Giaour and Hassan the Turk, are involved in a complex figuration of the Other that plays with expectations and notions of morality and accountability.³⁰ The poem’s fractured narrative technique and register of voices work along with plot to confuse the reader’s notion of good and bad, Self and Other, guilt and innocence, inviting the reader to make responsible decisions about the story, rather than merely to accept a notion of morality that falls in line with current generic expectations. While Hassan is presented as exemplary of his social and religious heritage, he is perhaps only superficially moral; and the Giaour, who appears the most outcast, reaches a sense of ethical justification with regard to Leila. Just as the reader becomes accustomed to the idea that the Muslim is the “good guy” in this poem, and that the apostate, unattached Giaour is the outsider, Byron shakes it up, and leaves you thinking again, perhaps not. In the end, one feels that such appellations are wholly inadequate to describe even a fictional character; the absurd repercussions for ascribing such terms to actual real people are sufficiently obvious. Indeed, it was exactly the ambivalence of this moral stance for which contemporary reviewers lambasted Byron, and which I will discuss below.

The structure of my argument thus far is itself a meta-commentary on “The Giaour’s” structure: it invokes the reverberating absence of Leila’s body only to silence it in favor of a discussion of the poem’s male figures. And yet her act of rebellion is clearly crucial: “’Twas then she went as to the bath,/Which Hassan vainly search’d in wrath,/But she was flown her master’s rage/In likeness of a Georgian page;/And far beyond the Moslem’s power/Had wrong’d him with the faithless Giaour” (ll. 453–58). This implies several things: her dissatisfaction with her sexual status, a previous meeting with the Giaour, and a willingness to thwart Hassan’s will and subvert his rights. By breaking out of the harem, Leila transgresses its sanctity and exposes it to profane eyes; this would have been ethically repugnant to Muslim custom. It is clear that Leila has the sexual experience of the odalisque and also the experience of the transgressing woman:

having coordinated a clandestine meeting with the Giaour, she is a fallen woman (even in the Giaour's eyes).

This reminds us of the naked woman in Mary Montagu's anecdote. Her naked body was the token of her guilt—but does the punishment fit the crime? Again, the question is how do Western eyes read the dead female body? So too in "The Giaour." If this poem implies a rhetoric of female consent and disobedience that is at odds with the ideology of the harem as articulated by Eastern custom, then how does this comment on the ideology of the new domestic woman and the developing ideal of a separate sphere for her? Does it imply that the justifiable disobedience to Turkish despotism paradoxically reconfers innocence onto the harem woman? In other words, does Leila reachieve innocence through the trauma of victimization and resistance? And if so, what are the repercussions for Western women? How should a woman who seeks to adhere to the newly developing criteria for ideal womanhood, but whose attempts are thwarted by circumstances, react to a "bad" husband? What I suggest is that it is precisely this question that Byron embodied in the missing body of Leila, but he foreclosed the possibility of answering it. If Byron's sympathies were with Leila, he clearly did not choose to render a world in which she could live.³¹ The absent presence of Leila as the figure of a harem woman generally thus embodies the difficulty of truly establishing the ideal of companionate marriage that nevertheless relies on the submissive roles of women.

In addition to tracing the hints and echoes of Leila's action, we can also search out its corollaries, for the act of disobedience that we are not invited to witness resonates in other aspects of the poem. Interestingly, in each of these cases, ambiguity in presentation works to thwart ethical clarity. For example, Byron teases us by substituting a deliberately obscure account of Leila's drowning for one that would reflect its horror; he only lets us see a passive bag sink into the ocean: "I gaz'd, till vanishing from view, / Like lessening pebble it withdrew; / Still less and less, a speck of white, / That gemm'd the tide, then mocked the sight" (ll. 380–83). The rendering of her drowning is so obscured that it is easy to miss it on a first reading. Second, the poem provides information about the horrifying status of women in Islam, although the Turkish voice that speaks it also expresses disbelief in the doctrine: "Yea, soul, and should our prophet say, / That form was but breathing clay, / By Alla! I would answer nay; Though on Al-Sirat's arch I stood, / Which totters o'er the fiery flood" (ll. 480–84). Third, Byron sends us mixed messages about Greece. It is clear that, in an important sense, the body of Leila as a living corpse is a type of Greece herself.³²

'Tis Greece, but living Greece no more!
 So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
 We start, for soul is wanting there.
 Hers is the loveliness of death,
 That parts not quite with parting breath. (ll. 91–95)

Yet the apparent dichotomy between the greatness of Greece and the evil of Islam is undercut by the shifting narrative voices of the poem and even more by the poem's appended notes that clearly express Byron's knowledge about and respect for Turks.³³ And finally, the fragmentary nature of the poem is itself a violence perpetrated on the character of Leila, for it draws attention away from her and her act of disobedience and redirects it towards its male characters, Hassan and the Giaour. Each of these disruptions of the elements of the poem's style and content works to reinforce the ambiguous nature of Leila's characterization.

The body of the woman is drowned in more ways than one, and in this sense, Byron presents a double vision: his Giaour can condemn her loss, but his poem makes it impossible to recover her. Even the critical reading that seeks to recuperate Leila must approach her through a reading of the men and the shards of evidence surrounding her. That is why when the Giaour in the end sees the shade or shape, he must embrace the indeterminate vision, and follow her into the vortex. Like the contemporary reader of the *Turkish Tales*, the writers of Turkish histories, or the men in Montagu's anecdote viewing the body in 1717, the Giaour cannot know the woman in the harem either. Instead, he must create and accept his own ambiguous imaginative construction based on the evidence of what he sees processed through his own moral consciousness.

Because her narrative does not exist, the courage and strangeness of Leila's story is at first elided, and her murder is barely visible. As a disruptive element, she is exceptionally powerful and yet, in the poem itself she is rendered only as a speck of white. As an odalisque, she is expected to be an object of desire, but in this poem, she is also an implied agent of immense power and movement. In short, Leila's personal act of disobedience precipitates all the action and violence between the two men, but by making this central disobedient act a nonevent in the poem, the romance appears to go about its manly business. The fact that he *writes this part out* creates a vortex in the center of the poem that rips the narrative to its fragmentary shreds and eventually pulls its two other main characters in with it so that they all three are swallowed up by the narrative.³⁴ In the end, they are all written out of the story: Leila has no proper grave, Hassan's tombstone is overgrown and its Koranic verse is faded and the Giaour explicitly asks for no grave marker because he does not want to be the object of another's gaze: "by prying stranger to be read." It is our challenge to read past the generic expectation of a strong romantic ending, to engage this multivoiced fragment, and to recuperate the central position of its female figure.

THE DISOBEDIENT DAUGHTER

"The Bride of Abydos" begins with a deceptively simple act of disobedience to the domestic standards of Turkish patriarchy, an act of disobedience that elicits a series of confused misinterpretations of the Ottoman woman's actions by the male characters in the poem. Although the woman's act of disruption is staged

more explicitly than in “The Giaour,” the reader’s ability to assess it is also undercut because it is misinterpreted by the men in the poem. Byron explicitly uses the gendered space of the harem to stage this power play.

“The Bride of Abydos,” like “The Giaour,” is built on a conflict between two men with a woman in the center, but in terms of my discussion of female acts of disobedience in the *Turkish Tales*, I present both Zuleika and Selim as expressing different modes of female disobedience. Even though she is veiled and harem-enclosed, Zuleika clearly expresses a Western distaste for paternal authority in the form of Turkish despotism with an act of disobedience whose simplicity belies its centrality. Selim also expresses a kind of female disobedience because it is through him that the enervating nature of the harem is exposed and that the effeminate East is both heroicized and rejected. In an extreme contrast to Zuleika’s clarity of intention, Selim is engaged in a complicated journey of identity-discovery that explicitly grapples with issues of gender, paternity, and politics. As we shall see, the poem actually relies on a rhetoric of geographical transgression, specifically that of the gendered sphere of the harem, to articulate its ideas about gender and political power in the Ottoman sphere and the world at large.

“The Bride of Abydos” narrates a simple yet extremely destructive act of disobedience by Zuleika against her father Giaffir. When the pasha informs her of his having coordinated a politically savvy marriage between her and a kinsmen of the Bey Oglou, Giaffir adds: “‘Twas mine to teach obedience still—/the way to love, thy lord may show” (I:217–18). Unfortunately for him, his assessment of his daughter’s obedience is a little premature and not very accurate. Although Zuleika does not have the opportunity to talk over this marriage plan with her father, she makes a decision after he leaves the room. She is loath to allow an unknown husband possibly to jeopardize her companionship with her much-loved brother, Selim, and so she promises only to marry the sultan with *his* consent, not her father’s:

This kinsmen Bey of Carasman
Perhaps may prove some foe of thine;
If so, I swear by Mecca’s shrine...
Without thy free consent, command,
The Sultan should not have my hand!
Think’st thou that I could bear to part
With thee, and learn to halve my heart? (I:310–12...315–18, my emphasis)

In these lines Zuleika gestures towards the crucial issues of disobedience and consent. First, she anticipates her future husband’s irrational despotism, and second, she takes precautionary measures against this irrationality by saying that she will marry the Bey only if Selim, her brother, approves of the match. By transferring this power of marriage brokering from father to brother, Zuleika challenges the important notion of filial obedience as it is manifested in Islam

simultaneously as personal and public. She undermines a religious, political, and familial tradition of marriage when she ingenuously, yet powerfully, determines not to consent to the authority of her father and her future husband, and instead chooses her own representative in the world of men. The fact that Giaffir takes it for granted that he has successfully taught his daughter obedience points out the degree to which he relies on the custom of authority that is about to be challenged.³⁵ The Turkish setting of the poem and the fathers extremely despotic tone would have highlighted for Byron's British reader the abusive nature of the father's authority, and would have justified an appreciation of the daughter's disobedience.³⁶ In this way Byron figured filial disobedience as politically acceptable, justifiable, and heroic, even though a similar act of disobedience by an English daughter might have drawn a far more ambivalent response despite the ideal of the companionate marriage based on mutual affection and respect.³⁷

Caroline Franklin has impressively contextualized Byron's tales in their Regency setting but focuses on the form's general usage in the period: "Because Regency verse tales identify a return to chivalry as sexual propriety and sentimental loyalty to the patriarchal leaders of society, Byron countered by reinstituting courtly love as forbidden passion in the context of brutal Turkish patriarchy" (53). Although I admire Franklin's treatment of the poem, I would like to shift my focus away from Zuleika as a "romantic" heroine. She is not subject to undue sensibility, as are heroines of comparable gothic romances; instead, she is a rational, ingenuous woman who does not remove herself from the marriage market at all, but only shifts the power to make such a marriage in her name. By focusing on the actual textual presentation of Zuleika, I hope to highlight exactly how she is not a romantic heroine but an agent whose desire for self-determination has an explicitly political dimension, although she is nevertheless thwarted in her attempts to carve out a new political identity for herself.

By usurping her father's role as marriage broker, Zuleika performs an act of disobedience that could have immediate and devastating political repercussions for Giaffir and also for herself, because marriage provided the best means for a woman to have her own kind of public authority in Ottoman Turkey or Regency England. Given the context of political marriages in the East—Sultanas were often married (and widowed) several times before the age of ten—Zuleika's situation would not have been unusual. Such marriages were not only a source of political power brokering among men, but also had useful and desirable results for the bride. In a most real sense, women could be "political insiders" in their roles as wives.³⁸ While a bashful restraint may have been appropriate for a young virgin like Zuleika, her outright refusal to marry a politically connected powerful man that her father has chosen is extremely disruptive to her position in the *umma*, or the Islamic community, and by extension, her own political and personal well-being.³⁹ Whatever may have been the cruel facts of the negative status of unmarried ladies in Regency England, perhaps as voiced by *Pride and*

Prejudice's Charlotte Lucas, the lowly status of the same women would have been exponentially increased in Ottoman Turkey.

Zuleika's withdrawal of consent is the crucial, central act of disobedience in the poem that sets its ensuing events in motion. However, not unlike the role of Leila in "The Giaour," Zuleika's position in the poem has tended to be overlooked by contemporary reviewers, underappreciated by modern scholars, and most interesting, completely misread by the poem's hero, Selim. Zuleika's initial shift of power from father to brother is complicated by her brother's reaction to it. In their two important conversations, Selim misreads her words, her emotions and her intentions, and yet these interpretations are never exposed as misreadings because she never has a chance here, or in their subsequent encounter, to respond to Selim's sexual advances. Although there is no evidence that her pledge is sexually motivated, Selim instantly, and fatally, misreads Zuleika's challenge to Giaffir's authority as a commitment to be his *lover* rather than his daughter, even though she does not yet know that they are not siblings, but only cousins. She has a strong sentimental attachment to her brother Selim who has been reared in the harem along with her, and it is this sense of trust and respect born of their filial intimacy that Zuleika values and relies on. This is why she is so confused and somewhat titillated by his more passionate kisses: "sure thy lips are flame:/What fever in thy veins is flushing?/My own have nearly caught the same./At least I feel my cheek, too, blushing" (I:395–98). Selim not only avoids discussing this issue with her, he stops her from speaking directly with Giaffir. She has no shame in talking to either man in the same honest way: "Deep were my anguish, thus compell'd/To wed with one I ne'er beheld: /*This wherefore should I not reveal? /Why wilt thou urge me to conceal?*" (I:435–38, my emphasis). She wants to expose her feelings and decision explicitly to her father, but Selim is in a mode of dissimulation and disallows such a confrontation.

Selim's sexual gesture places Zuleika in a very awkward position. Although she is extremely savvy in her acknowledgment of her politically weak position, and courageous in her attempt to break out of the system by working within it, her reaction to Selim reminds us how sexually innocent and naive she is. It is true that "The Bride's" heroine is more fully rendered than "The Giaour's" Leila and that her disobedience is explicitly presented. However, Byron's poem again dramatizes the way women are capable of withdrawing consent from irrational male authority, yet are unable to parlay that gesture into their own political power because they are still subject to that male authority, which is explicitly represented here by the harem.

"The Bride of Abydos" is a site-specific poem. Extending the tone generally established by the poem as a "Turkish Tale," Byron utilizes nature and landscape as an important organizing principle. From the beginning we understand that there is a gap between the goodness of the landscape and the "spirit of man": "Tis the clime of the East; 't is the land of the Sun—/Can he smile on such deeds as his children have done?" (I:16–17). This immediately implies an ethical

dilemma in the human world that can be charted onto the geography of the poem, or as Daniel P. Watkins has described it, the poem's idealized primitive nature is nevertheless "riddled with violence" (54). Byron correlates various landscapes and architectural spaces to reflect the conflicts Zuleika and Selim experience and to indicate that their appreciation for natural beauty reflects their pure moral state. In contrast, Giaffir's negative attitude toward their appreciation for nature, and his own relationship with it (as a warrior and hunter), situates him explicitly on the other side of this issue.

The poem's title itself is of course geographically specific: "Abydos" not only reminds the reader of that set of ill-fated lovers, Hero and Leander, it also marks the fact that this story occurs on the other side of the Dardanelles in Asia.⁴⁰ Although this perhaps suggests an extra flavor of exoticism, *The British Critic's* reviewer questioned Byron's calling Anatolia the "land of the sun," claiming that that name ought to be reserved for Persia, the frontier of the civilized world. This reviewer's comment indicates that the sphere of Asia Minor was considered central; in fact, it is only a prelude to a border for it leads to Persia, which is here identified as the border of civilization. Therefore, Abydos is the kind of liminal space that is perfect for the shifting that will occur among its characters. According to Emily Haddad, the conventions of Orientalist poetics construes the Islamic Middle East as ontologically unnatural and thus constructs an unnatural landscape which mirrors its "dysfunctional" human relationships.⁴¹ It is just this kind of connection between the shifting landscape and the poem's characters that I also want to highlight in this discussion. Most specifically, Selim shifts between male-female; son-nephew; brother-cousin; prince-pirate. He is also responsible for Zuleika's secondary acts of transgression—that of compromising the boundaries of the harem. In fact, the space of a harem is not as clearly demarcated as we may think (Penzer 154). First he takes her to the Cypress Groves, and later, in Canto II, to the Grotto; these are two spaces that appear to be both within and outside the harem. All these liminal territories, first of Anatolia itself, second of these spaces in and out of the harem, provide an appropriately destabilized landscape for the disobedience of Zuleika and the identity shifting of Selim.

The Cypress grove and the grotto are presented as idealized spaces for intimacy between the two youths, and ultimately as a magical sphere; they are also evidently part of the harem. Although Selim reminds Giaffir "that none can pierce that secret bower/But those who watch the women's tower" (I:79–80) he also apologizes for taking Zuleika there: "Before the guardian slaves awoke/We to the cypress groves had flown, /And made earth, main, and heaven our own! / There linger'd we, beguiled too long" (II:68–71). These movements provide a kind of interaction with nature that Giaffir is not capable of and therefore is threatened by. The grotto of Canto II performs a function similar to that of the Cypress Grove. Zuleika frequently visits this place with her lute and Koran to be alone and reflect (II:100–13). Both of these areas are on the outer limits of Zuleika's territory, but it is never implied that she wants to go beyond them into

indisputably outside territories. This may be because the harem itself is not clearly demarcated. In Giaffir's speech it is presented as a prison, and when he sends for her, it sounds like an execution, "Hence, lead my daughter from her tower/Her fate is fix'd this very hour" (I:40–1). Yet later, when we catch a glimpse of Zuleika in her room at the start of Canto II, it seems to be a quiet, secluded study of a proper lady; she has fine fabrics, flowers, a Koran, a lute and an amulet of her mother's. Its gloomy quality may be a result of the fear that she now experiences in leaving the room at this late hour "on so rude a night." Therefore, the harem tower is both a quiet civilized retreat from the world of politics and violence, but also a prison. All this strangeness of status and blurriness of borders points up the fact that a harem is not so much an architectural space, but a spiritual one—its quality is conferred by the presence of the people who are themselves *haram* (defined in [chapter five](#)). Therefore the ambiguous nature of these spaces reflects and reinforces both Selim's ambivalent identity and Zuleika's two misread identities: Giaffir's misreading of her as an obedient daughter, and Selim's misreading of her as a lover.

For Giaffir, Selim's appreciation for natural beauty is contrary to the "manlier" pursuits of sport and warfare: "Thou, when thine arm should bend the bow, /And hurl the dart, and curb the steed, /Thou, Greek in heart if not in creed, / Must pore where babbling waters flow/And watch unfolding roses blow" (I:85–89). To Giaffir's way of thinking, this kind of interaction with nature precludes manliness and with this as justification he infantilizes and feminizes Selim by relegating him to the harem. But Selim's convenient access to the harem is of course a double bind. It simultaneously provides him with sexual access to (supposedly) lascivious women, but also implicates him as one of them. Selim expresses his frustrations to Zuleika:

Though oft—Oh, Mahomet! how oft!—
 In full Divan the despot scoff'd,
 As if my weak unwilling hand
 Refused the bridle or the brand.
 He ever went to war alone,
 And pent me here untried, unknown;
 To Haroun's care with women left,
 By hope unblest, of fame bereft. (II:325–32)

To live outside of the harem, Selim must create a wholly new identity. In an unexpected version of the idea that a Muslim woman can unveil and reveil, thereby eluding the authoritative gaze of men, in this poem Selim changes clothes and consequently his identity. The description of his new aspect as he unveils himself to Zuleika is quite lengthy. I here quote only its beginning and ending lines:

His robe of pride was thrown aside,
 His brow no high-crown'd turban bore,
 But in its stead a shawl of red,
 Wreathed lightly round, his temples wore....
 All that a careless eye could see
 In him was some Galiongé. (II: 131–34...149–50)

Although this change of costume has finalized Selim's shift of identity, Zuleika is left far behind in understanding. The signifier of appearances is not at all clear to her, and so she misreads Selim when he punctuates his strip tease with the emphatic, "I am not thy brother." By disavowing their filial connection, he intends to express sexual interest but Zuleika only understands it as a threat to her life. Her reaction to this information clearly indicates the enormous split between their two understandings:

Oh! thou wilt love me now no more!
 My sinking heart foreboded ill;
 But know me all I was before,
Thy sister—Zuleika still." (II:168–72 emphasis mine)

Her only claim and interest in devotion to him is as her kin, not as a lover.

Selim's goal is to escape with Zuleika from the harem and to assert his masculinity by challenging Giaffir's authority both as pasha and father. Armed with the knowledge that Giaffir is not his father, Selim blossoms into a new man complete with a whole new identity, costume, and ideology. In his new incarnation as Turkish Galiongé and avenging nephew of Giaffir he does *not* leave his creed or nationality. Unlike the triangle of Western and Eastern men with the Greek female in the middle, "The Bride of Abydos" is a family romance of Turks, father, daughter, and nephew, who must deal with the pressures that their politicized family matters represent. Unfortunately, their attempts result in general failure for all concerned. Daniel Watkins argues against the view that the unhappy ending of the poem implies that there is no hope in remedying the misfortunes of society: "While it is correct to stress this negative element in the poem, it does not follow that failure and doom are absolutely and eternally embedded in human nature" (67–8). Watkins claims instead that Byron, like many other artists before and since, rejected an overtly didactic mode as the only socially responsible voice, and instead, "transformed [social reality] into aesthetically and emotionally managed terms." As we will see in the continuing trajectory of the *Turkish Tales*, they also suggest that fighting is necessary and beneficial to the individual and society; even though they do not culminate in a strong moral voice that shows us how to be politically powerful, and effect positive change in this world.

As I suggested in the beginning, the poem has not typically elicited an appreciation of Zuleika as a powerful actor, nor has it been noted for the dangerous nature of Selim's love for Zuleika, despite her repeated commitment to him as a "sister and friend." This was especially true of the contemporary reviews which noticed Zuleika more for her supposed sexual aggressiveness than her disobedience to her fathers marriage plans. Following the huge success of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* all of the *Turkish Tales* were extensively reviewed in the literary newspapers. Zuleika is impugned for what was seen by many contemporary reviewers as her indelicateness, readings which I contend are similar to the misreadings of Selim himself. For instance, the *AntiJacobin Reviews* article on "The Bride of Abydos" and "The Corsair" expresses real indignation regarding her actions: "This hint has a singular effect of the virgin Zuleika for it induces her to make the strongest love to Selim, to proceed to a kind of practical illustration of her passion and to use language which would be indecent even in the mouth of her lover" (Reiman 223). Another example of this is in *The Champion*, one of the most important of the reviewing newspapers. The reviewer was outraged by the indelicate character of Zuleika and the hints of incest between the two youths. Although he ridicules its ending, he admits that there is some feeling in the poem: "It is a syren song that charms us in spite of its origin; and it is perhaps the greatest compliment we can pay to Lord Byron to affirm that his talent has been omnipotent, to overcome the defects of his subject, —that the rays of his genius have been able to form a halo round the head of deformity" (Reiman 253). This indemnification of Byron's talent, despite the condemnation of the subject matter was highly characteristic of many of the reviews, most likely a lingering effect of the huge praise garnered by *Childe Harold*. It is quite telling that these reviewers avoid commenting on Zuleika's disobedience to her fathers despotic wishes by focusing attention instead on her supposed sexual aggressiveness. The latter is a far less ambiguous issue to condemn, and still allows for a general praising of the poem. However, with the publication of subsequent *Turkish Tales* reviewers soon lost patience with Byron, and demanded his taking a strong moral stance as well as his changing from the *Turkish Tales* to a more properly "English" subject.

ODALISQUE UNBOUND

"The Corsair" twists the romantic triangles of the first two *Turkish Tales* by creating what is, in effect, a double triangle. On one level there is the Conrad-Seyd-Gulnare formation, with the two men appearing as vaguely overlapping, yet opposing, figures along the same lines as the Giaour and Hassan. Conrad and Seyd share certain qualities and characteristics, and in some ways their stereotyped characteristics are reversed (e.g., Conrad is "more than Muslim" in his temperance, while Seyd is seen to quaff "forbidden draughts.") Again, similar to "The Giaour," a woman, Gulnare, stands between them and becomes in a sense the center of the poem, for it is her evolution as a character and her blatant

act of disobedience to Seyd's rule that determine the flow of the story. What this poem does differently is to enact that event of attempted elopement that is written out of "The Giaour." This time, Byron brings us right into the bedrooms of his characters. We actually see Conrad save Gulnare from the harem, hear the conversation between her and Seyd, join in on her meetings with Conrad, and although Byron cannot quite bear to show us the actual murder of Seyd, we hear of it immediately.

As discussed in the opening of this chapter, however, the unveiled, bloodstained face of Gulnare is extremely distressful to the sentiments of the hero. He does not approve of the Ottoman woman's disobedience even though she fully and clearly articulates her justification for freeing herself from sexual enslavement. Byron indulges in the violent disobedience of woman against a domestic system she rejects and yet makes it morally ambiguous by virtue of his hero's reaction to it. The other triangle formed among Conrad, Gulnare, and Medora exposes the still lingering conflict that exists between the woman who enjoys an ideal domestic scene and the reality of a woman who escapes an abusive scene through violent revolution.

Ironically, it is not Conrad's piratical ambush that tears apart the fabric of Seyd's rule, but Gulnare's act of murder and her success in bringing the guards into rebellion. She takes advantage of incipient discontent, and organizes an open revolt by guards. These are the political consequences of disobedience, as Gulnare herself says so explicitly: "his blood must flow." She is a realist, and it has been her experience of Conrad's compassionate mercy to the women, and his tenderness to her, that has instigated her violent reaction against Seyd. What had been a sort of unacknowledged discontent that she likely would never have acted upon becomes an insupportable dissatisfaction with her luxuriant slavery that is transformed into violent action. Gulnare is moved by Conrad in her first encounter with him. As he safely deposits the women in the dome, she notes that even "gore bedew'd" he is nevertheless more gentle than Seyd in "fondest mood" because he behaves as if his actions are a woman's right, rather than a privilege. In their discussions, Gulnare comes to a more conscious understanding of her discontent and is led to act in order both to save herself and the man she now loves, despite his telling her that he loves another.

That Conrad has provided her with a clear example, motivation, and incentive to rebellion is irrelevant to him: her disobedient actions are anathema to his sensibility. In their last interview before the murder, Conrad attempts to dissuade Gulnare from helping him escape or from killing Seyd; in fact he encourages her not to act at all: "Who spares a woman's seeks not slumber's life/Thine saved I gladly, Lady not for this—/Let me not deem that mercy shown amiss. /Now fare thee well—more peace be with thy breast! /Night wears a pace, my last of earthly rest" (III:365–69). In addition, Conrad himself is frozen in inaction; his prison induces a harem-like idleness that reduces him to a feminine passivity in which he cannot act or even condone action. It is ironic that Gulnare, who has become a new woman determined to change her life, and has fallen in love with Conrad,

argues for the opposite of what Conrad thinks and feels, and in fact what makes him love Medora the most—the separation of feminine domesticity from the world of action. Gulnare says:

Thou lov'st another—and I love in vain;
 Though fond as mine her bosom, form more fair,
 I rush through peril which she would not dare.
 If that thy heart to hers were truly dear,
 Were I thine own, thou wert not lonely here:
 An outlaw's spouse—and leave her Lord to roam!
 What hath such gentle dame to do with home? (III:296–303)

Gulnare's suggestion that a woman moves out into the terrain of plunder, war, and politics is exactly what Conrad disdains the most. In contrast, the women on his island were seen in an idealized position of waiting at home for their men: "And woman's gentler anxious tone is heard—/Friends', husbands', lovers' names in each dear word: /Oh! are they safe? we ask not of success—/but shall we see them?" (I:109–12). Poor Gulnare is in the unenviable position of being on the brink of breaking out of a constraining domestic sphere that allows her no personal, political or sexual freedom, and the man who has engendered the immediate power to do so is in fact as supportive of the ideology of separate spheres as Seyd. His demeanor of tenderness and conciliation is irrelevant to her wider and more important concerns.

What I have been describing here is in fact the other love triangle: Gulnare-Medora-Conrad. Byron provides this contrast through the preliminary scenes in Canto I. Conrad, with his "Turkish" inscrutability and his tough demeanor, is immediately placed within the loving sphere of Medora's tower, where she is in apparently willful isolation far above the rabble. She is delicately beautiful, with fair hair and blue eyes, she sings, cooks, and supports him in his piratical endeavors. Despite his hard edge, Conrad is capable of loving her (a fact that contemporary reviewers actually found hard to believe). However, what is of crucial importance to an understanding of his love for Medora and his revulsion from Gulnare, is that Conrad's ability to love Medora contrasts not only with his tough edge, but that somehow, the two make each other possible:

Yet the same feeling which thou dost condemn,
 My very love to thee is hate to them,
 So closely mingling here, that disentwined
 I cease to love thee when I love mankind! (I:401–04)

Conrad explains that all his past experiences, perverse as they have been, have somehow created the man he is, the "villain" that he knows himself to be, and yet, the same man who loves Medora with an unsurpassed idealism. As he explains to Gulnare in his cell, it is a love that has been tried by time and

circumstance and is still strong. Conrad idealizes love and hate and keeps them in their separate spheres—and it is this dichotomized vision of coexisting good and evil that is disrupted by Gulnare, and that which sends Conrad into such a terror of inaction and crisis of interpretation.

Witnessing the sight of Gulnare crossing that gendered space from harem to homicide is the horror that was not possible in “The Giaour.” She is like the speaking and acting woman of Montagu’s anecdote *before* her murder. And in allowing himself to depict this central act of disobedient revolt Byron is left no choice but to kill off Medora in a mirror image.⁴² In stark contrast with Gulnare’s explicit act of violence, Medora’s death is a nonevent of passive wasting away. In fact, just as Conrad leaves the tower in the first Canto, Medora already seems dead: “And tottering to the couch his bride he bore, /One moment gazed—as if to gaze no more; /Felt—that for him earth held but her alone, /Kiss’d her cold forehead—turn’d—is Conrad gone?” (I:478–81).

In place of Medora the Good and Gulnare the Homicide, Byron kills off his fair-haired ideal and washes away the bloodstains of Gulnare; he allows Gulnare to live on after her disruptive act of murder as a fully articulated woman. Surprisingly, Gulnare evolves into that third figure: neither a wanton odalisque, nor a murderer. When she drops her veil before him on the shore, he finds that “[t]he worst of crimes had left her woman still!” (III:522). She is sufficiently “humble and meek” under his gaze to elicit Conrad’s recognition of her as a woman, and yet, he does not deny to himself that she has spilt blood. This is admittedly an uneasy resolution to the dialectic, but I would argue that Gulnare, for a brief moment, is given the chance to appear both the woman of innocence and experience, as one who has escaped from the confining prison of the harem through an act of murder, and becomes a lady. However, the danger of rewarding such an act of violence against even a negative domestic sphere like that of the harem is morally suspect and, I argue, that the uneasiness wrought by this danger leads directly to the figure of Kaled in “Lara.”

“LATENT FIERCENESS” IN THE FIGURE OF KALED

I have been tracing in Byron’s *Turkish Tales* the destructive acts of disobedience perpetrated by their female characters against a patriarchal despotism represented by Islamic customs and Ottoman political realities. The reasons that the actions in these poems have gone largely underappreciated by critics are manifold. Most specifically, the elaborate portrayal of their male characters has tended to attract whatever critical attention the tales have received. We see this kind of reading not only in the contemporary reviews, but also until very recently, in modern assessments of the tales. Given Byron’s own ambivalent stance with regard to women, it is no wonder that we see simultaneously this sustained presentation of the political dimension of women’s domestic life in a mode that seems to disavow its own seriousness and that obscures the role of its heroines.⁴³ Despite these obfuscations, the three tales that we have seen thus far, written between

May and December 1813, clearly repeat a pattern of active female disobedience to male despotism which is not well understood by their male counterparts. The instability of the odalisque as a signifier was most explicit in the haunting absence of Leila; in “The Bride of Abydos,” the poem pivoted on the disobedience of a daughter whose strategy for and goal of self-determination were misread by one and all. Finally, in “The Corsair” Byron portrayed an odalisque whose ambiguous characterization as a justified homicide was especially difficult for the poem’s hero to assess. However, Gulnare was finally allowed to overcome the “certain pledge of crime” and in the end drops her veil to present a spotless, innocent face.

As an exploration of female power in the sphere of despotism, the trajectory of the tales, from “The Giaour” to “The Corsair,” appears then to progress onward and upward. Because Gulnare brings together sexual experience, political self-determination, and even a moral sensibility, she appears to be the dramatization of an ideal figure. However, such a sequence would imply an ever-improving teleological view of history and romance that we know Byron did not favor; indeed, Byron does not allow Gulnare to be the last word on female power. If we look to the next tale, “Lara,” we encounter perhaps the strangest of Byron’s Turkish heroines.

According to Byron’s advertisement prefixed to the first edition of “Lara,” we know that the poem is a sequel to “The Corsair”:

The reader—if the tale of “Lara” has the fortune to meet with one—may probably regard it as a sequel to the *Corsair*,—the colouring is of a similar cast, and although the situations of the characters are changed, the stories are in some measure connected. The countenance is nearly the same—but with a different expression. (Byron, *Coleridge Edition*, 319)

Apart from this statement, there is no explicit link between “The Corsair” and “Lara” in the text of the tales. Nevertheless, it has been generally understood by critics that Conrad-Lara returns home to his feudal estate in Spain with Gulnare in disguise as a male page named Kaled.⁴⁴ Although the link between the tales is schematic we are perhaps justified by this preface to follow closely the transition between Gulnare and Kaled. At the close of “The Corsair” we see in Gulnare the successful coexistence of innocence and experience for she is “at once above and beneath her sex” (III:514). However, the odalisque is not allowed to remain long in this state of being. Instead, Kaled is an uncanny, residual figure who parodies this amalgamation. Throughout most of the poem Kaled is a mysterious figure, disguised as a male, and her primary function is as an agent of violent revenge.

Bearing in mind Gulnare’s transformation from a sexually and criminally experienced woman into a vision of feminine modesty, the gender-bending, actionenacting figure of Kaled is a very compelling element in an otherwise somewhat run-of-the-mill narrative of feudal discord. As an Eastern woman disguised as a man she is yet another articulation of the instability of the

odalisque as a signifier. What are the repercussions of envisioning Gulnare as a caricature of her former state? Was Gulnare an ideal woman, or was she a dangerous figure who had to be unsexed—recast in male garb and brought out of the East? Are Kaled's violent propensities neutralized because we are never really sure for most of the poem if she is a man or a woman. The ambiguity of Kaled's gender, along with the nature of her actions, and the overwhelming mystery of her untold past invert the poetic function of the original figure of Leila. In this case, the *only* evidence we have is the presence of a living, active body; yet we still do not hear her story, nor is there even a hint of how it can be recovered.⁴⁵

It is not until after the confrontation between Lara and Ezzelin that we are treated to a detailed description of Kaled's demeanor. Byron is careful to embed references to Kaled's youth, lightness, and a hand that is:

So femininely white it might bespeak
 Another sex, when match'd with that smooth cheek,
 But for his garb, and something in his gaze,
 More wild and high than woman's eye betrays
 A *latent fierceness* that far more became
 His fiery climate than his tender frame. (I:576–81, my emphasis)

Byron's version of the odalisque in "Lara" both undercuts and reaffirms the obsession of the Western subject with penetrating the veil or the space of the harem in order to read the inner life of the Eastern woman. By showing her as a male, Byron seems to eschew the necessity of dealing with women's disobedience; Caroline Franklin expresses this sentiment thus: "[Kaled's] lack of a social and family background, her lack of a 'feminine' domestic role, absolves the poet from the convention of showing the detrimental effect of female passion on society" (87). On the other hand, there are ample early hints about Kaled's identity and in the end she is identified as a woman. Like the various characters who are challenged to interpret the odalisque's activities in all the *Turkish Tales*, the narrator of "Lara" must work only with physical evidence, and speculates about: the family Kaled might have left behind for the sake of Lara (l. 524), the complex nature of his blush characterized as a "hectic tint of secret care" (l. 534) and generally the melancholy tinge to his aspect (l. 539). The narrator of the poem is not "in the know" about what sex Kaled is, and must "read" the evidence just as the other characters must. Thus the fact that her "gaze" expresses a "latent fierceness" that is wholly uninterpretable by the narrator or other characters in the poem exactly replicates both the fact that the veiled woman's gaze penetrates without exposing herself to a similar scrutiny, as well as the Western subjects anxiety (or fantasy) that what is under the veil is a female "latent fierceness" which at any moment might manifest itself and thus tear apart the fabric of a male-run world.

For all the unusualness of Kaled's character, and her mysterious past, hers is a standard heroine's end. After lingering by Lara's grave, she eventually dies too, and is buried beside him. In contrast with the final ever-expanding speech of the mourning Giaour, Kaled's story remains untold because she speaks in a language the narrator can't understand, in a fragmentary narrative that makes no sense to him:

She talk'd all idly unto shapes of air,
Such as the busy brain of Sorrow paints,
And woos to listen to her fond complaints. (II:609–11)

In contrast to this image of Kaled's incessant, ineffectual chatter, and her writing on the sands (l. 625), the last lines of the poem are clear: Kaled *has* a story, but it is not told or recorded: "Her tale untold, her truth too dearly proved" (II:627). The narrative voice which has only ever been working with limited information, laments that we cannot know the story. As Mark Phillipson has written regarding "Lara:" "nothing escapes the vortex of negation and, finally, Silence."⁴⁶

As we have seen in each of the Tales, Byron does not tell his Turkish heroine's stories, but he also can't tell a Turkish Tale *without* the specter of the female story haunting the circumference of it. He continuously presents an active, disobedient female who attempts to fulfill her own political and personal desires, despite the customs of religion and government. Through acts of disobedience, women always become experienced and their acts result in annihilation: in this way they are not unlike their male counterparts throughout Byron's poetry who act as if their efforts could make a difference in this world, despite all evidence to the contrary. The thematization of interpretation and its impossibility within each of these tales strongly emphasizes the dangerous power inherent within the "escape from the harem" motif. Although his protagonists fail to properly interpret the nature of the women (whether daughter, sister, cousin, or lover), Byron represents them as desperate actors working against impossible odds. This is finally evidenced in the "The Siege of Corinth" (1816), the last of the *Turkish Tales*, that presents briefly the ghost of Francesca, a woman eminently disobedient to her lover's (a Muslim convert) despotic demands.

Chapter Four

“The spoil of wild beasts and unlettered Tartars”: Shelley’s Uses of the Ottoman Empire and the Figure of the Turk

PERCY SHELLEY UTILIZED THE FIGURE OF THE TURK AND THE IMAGE OF THE Ottoman Empire as an element in several philosophically and politically reform-minded poems throughout his life. Rarely did he engage with the figure of the Turk as intimately as did Byron, but the presence of the Ottoman Empire as a political entity in these poems pivots on an ironic representation of it as both wholly Other and yet dangerously the Same. Not only is it often a necessary element in Shelley’s Hellenism (which evolved over the years), it exemplifies a certain kind of despotic political system with concomitant repercussions for its population. As Shelley was to assert numerous times, it is the institutions within a society and its government that distinguish one people from another.¹

In this chapter I focus on three of Shelley’s poems that invoke, either obliquely or directly, the Ottoman Empire as a political entity. Each poem is taken from a distinct period in Shelley’s literary career, and each helps to trace the evolution of his uses of literary tradition, his political and philosophical thought, and his vision of the nature of historical change. “Henry and Louisa” (composed in 1809) takes as its subject the British invasion of Egypt; *The Revolt of Islam* (composed in 1817) allegorizes the French Revolution in a Greek-Turkish terrain to argue for hope and faith in the face of downward cycles in history; and *Hellas* (composed in 1821) seeks to inspire European support at the start of the Greek War of Independence but also focuses on the problems of ideals and Utopian language in actual historical events. In each poem, Shelley approached the Ottoman position more closely. “Henry and Louisa,” Shelley’s first long poem, merely gestures towards the Ottoman Empire obliquely and for the purpose of decrying foreign wars and religious motivations for war. *The Revolt of Islam* specifically envisions the near-success of a nonviolent revolution of the Greeks against their Turkish oppressors, and yet in the poem’s preface Shelley seems to disavow the relevance of the setting. Finally, in the lyrical drama *Hellas*, Shelley takes us directly into the Imperial Harem and introduces us to his version of the Sultan Mahmud who becomes the subject of a philosophical education *par excellence*. Like Byron, Shelley eventually pierces the city of Constantinople and the Imperial Palace itself in order to “get to the center” of things.

In each of these poems, Shelley makes varying use of the characteristics and associations of the Turks: their “Otherness” as Muslims which is manifested in the often contradictory pull between lascivious passivity and barbarous cruelty; their oppressive treatment of women in the institution of the harem; and the subjugation of the Greeks. He characteristically sketches the scenery with just enough detail to render the Eastern landscape for his reader but avoids a too-close delineation that might distract attention from the reforms he poetically envisions. Given the prevalence and popularity of Eastern tales, it was easy for Shelley to take advantage of the cultural and religious knowledge that his audience would already possess about the Muslim East.

Nevertheless, Shelley always views the Turks in order to critique English (and sometimes European) policy toward that empire in a way that forges dangerous similitudes between English and Turkish ways even as he asserts their Otherness. Economic and political imperatives of the English determined a course of diplomatic ties and support for the Ottoman Empire that, according to liberals like Shelley, exposed the baseness of English motivations and rendered a similitude between the Turkish Other and the English establishment. Whether Shelley’s primary interest is to explore the possibilities of Greek ideals in contemporary life, to criticize the British role in the East, or to dramatize his general philosophical concerns, the Ottoman Empire acts as a useful trope. Indeed, Shelley’s ways of portraying the Ottoman Empire show the difficulties of testing the abstract, universal ideals of Hellenism against the realities of the political movement known as philhellenism. Although there is little of the complex psychological attraction that Byron displays toward the imperious figure of the Turk, like Byron’s, Shelley’s use of the figure of the individual Sultan and of the Empire as a whole are subject to instability. Because he often uses the Turkish despot to figure the despot at home, Shelley manifestly implies that all tyrants (i.e. Kings) are the same. However, the repercussions of such an identification are not easy to contain. From the King to the lowly soldier to the cleric and the uneducated peasant, similarities persist and multiply. Thus, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Hellas* end in an unsatisfying withdrawal from conflict or confrontation that mirrors Shelley’s wider dilemma of articulating his evolving view of the cyclical pattern of history.

“HENRY AND LOUISA” AND THE INVASION OF EGYPT

“Henry and Louisa” was Shelley’s first long poem, composed in 1809 and included in the *Esdaile Notebook*, a collection of poems written from approximately 1809 to 1813. Written in two parts, “Henry and Louisa” is of interest for its treatment of many of Shelley’s life-long themes. The poem utilizes recent conflicts in Egypt, an unstable territory of the Ottoman Empire, to condemn the false glory of war, to expose its truly destructive futility, and to implicate religion as a major force in justifying war. As we shall see, this region of the Ottoman Empire was the site of continual conflicts which would make it a

very attractive target for Shelley’s political critique. As with later poems, Shelley utilizes just enough historical detail to allude to contemporary events but does not identify it specifically.

The poem begins with an attack on the false justifications of war: “Where are the Heroes? Sunk in death they lie/What toiled they for? Titles and wealth and fame. /But the wide heaven is now their canopy, /And legal murderers their loftiest name” (ll. 1–4). Despite this voice of indignation, both the poem’s title characters express support for and national pride in war, e.g., Louisa sadly but bravely sends Henry off to his war, awaiting his return in “Victor-pride.” For his part, Henry expresses grief upon leaving Louisa, but finds justification and motivation in the fact that “religion sanctifies the cause” (l. 67). Although Louisa expresses a slight disdain of religions role in this activity, the two characters patriotically support the war. The first part ends as Henry sets off on his “war steed” for “Egypt’s shore.”

The second part of the poem moves to a battlefield in Egypt and presents the gross destructiveness of war. Shelley reinforces the appearance of Egypt as a victim and Britain as a self-serving aggressor: “Sees hostile flags on Egypt’s strand unfurled, /Brings Egypt’s faintest groan to waste and ruin hurled” (ll. 174–75). In the midst of this scene of desolation Louisa searches for her lover on the shores. (How she has gotten to Egypt is left unaddressed.) Her wanderings through the battlefield and discussion with a soldier provide the narrator with the opportunity to paint the scene of carnage and to critique Britain’s entire war effort. Louisa finally finds the dying Henry and commits suicide in an act of virtuous self-sacrifice.

“Henry and Louisa” is important as an early specimen of Shelley’s technique, e.g., he writes in the same Spenserian stanza that he would later use in *The Revolt of Islam*. According to Kenneth Neill Cameron, “It shows that both Shelley’s radical social philosophy and his technical skills had developed earlier than had been thought.”² The poem demonstrates how Shelley critiques war and religion by referring to a current political situation, but without mirroring the poem in excessive details as was customary in some of the Eastern tales he admired so much, most notably, Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801). In this way, Shelley gestures widely toward the problematic English policies in Egypt in particular and the East in general. The fact that he condemns a conflict in the Ottoman Empire through a scene between two lovers at home in an English country house attests to the centrality and significance of that part of the world as an element in contemporary British *domestic* life. But which conflict is it? England was involved in Egypt twice in the period. First, between 1798 and 1801, England fought along with the Turks to eject Napoleon’s troops from Egypt, and later in 1807 England invaded Egypt against the Turkish forces but was subsequently repelled. In reviewing the historical details of each conflict we see that the different circumstances of each conflict would nevertheless result in Shelley’s condemning England’s military and economic policies.

The poem's focus on "titles, wealth, and fame" (l. 2) as inducements to empire and foreign wars is not exaggerated. When Shelley composed "Henry and Louisa" at the age of seventeen in 1809, the British Empire in the East had been expanding steadily for decades. It may be said that the British interest in points East was confirmed with the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and the acquisition of Indian territories. The British were primarily utilizing the water route around the Cape of Good Hope to get to India and thus did not have more than a mild presence in the Levant or the Mediterranean. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 brought about a more active diplomatic and military role for the British in the region, solidifying the connection between the European balance of power and the Eastern trade. It also interrupted what had been an otherwise good relationship between the French and the Turks for many years. Napoleon attempted to maintain the impression that he was defending the Sultan's rights against the Mameluks (members of a military caste who ruled Egypt, ostensibly for the Turkish Sultan, from the thirteenth century until 1811). However, Sultan Selim aligned the empire with the British and Russians in September 1798, removing pro-French ministers from his council and confiscating French commercial property around the Empire (Shaw 269 and Thomson 120).

Napoleon's forces occupied Cairo on July 25, 1798. Believing that the Ottoman Empire was vulnerable, and on the point of further decline, Napoleon took the opportunity to seize a portion of the empire to aggrandize his own territories in the East and simultaneously to challenge England's position in India. The French orders were "to expel the British from all their possessions in the East."³ However, Napoleon's success in Cairo was not paralleled elsewhere: he was unable to defeat the joint forces of the Turks, British, and Mameluks of Egypt and failed to secure upper Egypt or Syria. He left his troops under the command of General Kleber shortly thereafter, and left Egypt himself in August 1799.

A peace treaty and evacuation plan was signed by General Kleber, the Grand Vizier, and Sir Sidney Smith on January 24, 1800, at Al-Arish. Smith wrote to General Nelson of the agreement: "The great object...(is)...the recovery of Egypt for our allies and the security of the British position in India, advantages not to be compared to trifling sacrifices.... The utmost has been obtained by negotiations that could have been acquired by victory" (as quoted by Marlowe 70). Sadly, Smith was unaware that the Foreign Office's orders were to safeguard Europe from any rogue French troops, and so the treaty was impeded. This extended the fighting in Egypt for another year and a half, resulting in short-term French gains, but finally resolving on August 31, 1801, in an agreement largely like that originally forged at Al-Arish.

The French invasion of Egypt thus inaugurated a period of British naval presence in the Mediterranean, and eventually the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The British fought for the integrity of the Ottoman Empire in an effort to check the expansion of French and Russian influence in the area, to protect the route to India and, what became increasingly important, to protect the Turkish market for

British manufactured goods. Various dispatches and instructions confirm this policy, e.g., one from Lord Elgin to Stratton, the first secretary at the embassy to Egypt reads: “Use every means in your power to effectuate such an arrangement as may serve the objects of the Porte and of the British Government” (as quoted by Marlowe 91).

Although the British were continually concerned about Turkish ability to maintain control in Egypt (the British evacuated Egypt on April 7, 1803, as one of the stipulations of the Peace of Amiens) they were satisfied if a strong governor was in charge, and this proved to be the Albanian Mehmet Ali. In fact, political fragmentation, without complete disintegration was an effective element of British imperialism. They accomplished maximum political and commercial involvement through agreements and treaties and reverted to direct administration only when necessary. And it was true that the maintenance of “military weakness, administrative fragmentation, and local rivalries” as a way to achieve favorable treaties was a highly successful endeavor (Marlowe 132–33).

Therefore, the nominal sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire was beneficial for the British. They enjoyed the expanded Capitulations (trade laws) that they had gained as a result of all the military and diplomatic involvements after the French offensive, and were thus able to exploit the vast commercial possibilities of the Ottoman domains. Indeed, because Turkey never restricted British trade as did China in the nineteenth century, the British were never seriously inspired to take decisive military action against them. Later in the nineteenth century Turkey was a crucial importer of manufactured goods and supplier of cheap raw materials.⁴

The second of the two possible events upon which “Henry and Louisa” may be based is far less memorable and complex. Although the British and Turks were trade partners and diplomatic allies, the British invasion of 1807 resulted from an attempt on the part of the English to support their then-ally Russia and to drive a wedge between the Porte and the French. The attack included a sailing expedition up the Dardanelles and toward Constantinople itself as well as a landing in Alexandria. However, it was ill conceived from the start and poorly implemented, resulting in British troop withdrawal in September 1807.⁵ In this conflict the enemy was the Turk, while in 1798, the British were fighting the French.

Kenneth Neill Cameron writes that “there can be no doubt” that the subject of “Henry and Louisa” is the war of 1807. He bases this on two observations: first, that writing in 1809, Shelley would be more likely to have thoughts about the campaign of 1807, and second, that “Henry’s remarks on religion sanctifying ‘the cause’ and the enemy’s flag being ‘impious’ also make more sense if the foes were the Turks and not the French” (266). On the other hand, Carl Woodring suggests that although Shelley seems to conflate the two campaigns, that it’s more in the spirit of 1801 because “Britannia’s hired assassins” implies victory over Napoleon’s forces.⁶ Although they appear here to be two totally separate incidents, events in the region of the Ottoman Empire, including the status of Egypt and Greece, from 1798 well into the nineteenth century soon

became known collectively as “The Eastern Question,” and thus took on a long-term evolutionary significance. In short, as a strategic location, Egypt would generally be considered a focal point of activities for a long time to come.

England’s engagements in Egypt at this time were really based on economic and diplomatic imperatives, although religious considerations would provide the crucial moral justification.⁷ In fact, whether the “Tyrant of the World” in line 72 is Napoleon or the Sultan makes little difference. The scene is rendered such that Shelley can attack the notion of fighting in Egypt (and by implication, anywhere) for “Title and wealth and fame” (l. 2) by broadly alluding to a region of the world where such clashes are common experience and where Britain’s role is easily criticized. Although in later poetry Shelley would target the unhealthy lust for gold as a major component in inhuman war, “Henry and Louisa” focuses primarily on the false sanctity of religion and the power of personal glory as justification for the individual soldier. He investigates these false inducements by modulating voices of support and condemnation. Thus, Shelley manages to contrast various perspectives, obviously putting the weight of the poem on the moral indignation that ought to obtain upon a clear analysis of England’s selfish policies.⁸

This early poem was Shelley’s first major attempt to write about an immediate political event in such a way as to abstract relevant truths from it; he critiques the hypocrisy and futility of foreign wars within a narrative structure of “human passions.” It is clear that this was a strategy that fascinated him, since he was to retool it in several subsequent poems. Shelley’s attack on England’s political and economic policies with regard to Turkey would gain prominence in later poems that envisioned that empire’s treatment of the Greeks and women in greater detail. That the identity of the specific incident in “Henry and Louisa” is left ambiguous invokes the fact that there were multiple such events and that one was much like another. The point is that the sphere of Turkish influence was and would continue to be the site of ongoing but always ineffectual conflict. As Carl Woodring has written: “If the choice of sites of renewed shame, as in ‘Henry and Louisa,’ does not represent the cyclic view of history that Shelley was soon to adumbrate in longer poems, it points to a less inclusive theory that he was never to abandon: the pendulum or dialectic of needless struggle” (239).

The struggle between a conceptualization of history as progressive or hopelessly repetitive would be a concern of Shelley’s throughout his intellectual life and one which gained important attention in *The Revolt of Islam* and *Hellas*. He had the opportunity to develop this theory of history over the following years by testing it out against the dramatic political events of his era. The role that England played in the Turkish sphere that is criticized in “Henry and Louisa” would also be a target in the imagined struggle of *The Revolt of Islam* and in the actual political events of *Hellas*.

THE *BEAU IDEAL* OF A FAILED REVOLUTION: *THE REVOLT OF ISLAM*

In a letter to a prospective publisher, Shelley described his poem *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century* (later, *The Revolt of Islam*) as the “beau ideal” of the French Revolution. This poem dramatizes the near end of colonial empire, envisioned as the Ottoman Empire, that perennially nasty Other. The fall of empire provides for the culmination of human progress, political and sexual liberation, nonviolence, and even vegetarianism. Cast in the Golden City of Constantinople, the poem narrates the revolutionary efforts of Greeks against the Turks, led by Laon and Cythna. These leaders are able to effect a bloodless coup through the powerful effect of Laon’s revolutionary poetry. Unfortunately, with the military help of European allies, and the religious threats of one Priest, the Turks successfully obliterate the revolution, and the poem ends with the execution by fire of the two heroes. The original draft of *Laon and Cythna*, as well as its modified version *The Revolt of Islam*, refers enthusiastically to the endings of governments, the perversion of religion, and the negative influences of custom. Alternatively, the poem offers the doctrines of Necessity, perfectibility of the human race, and liberty through love as a means to happiness. *The Revolt of Islam* narrates as perfect a revolution as possible, and yet it fails. Although Laon and Cythna are idealized throughout the poem, and are welcomed into eternity after their execution in Canto XII, Shelley hints that the failure of the revolution may be attributed to the premature efforts of its leaders and the relative unreadiness of the people.⁹

In contrast with other critics, I argue in this section that Shelley’s relocation of the French Revolution in the Ottoman sphere was a deliberate choice based on philosophical and literary considerations. I will show that by envisioning a nonviolent revolution against a despotic government in the age of the Holy Alliance as Turkish, Shelley challenges conservative critics to defend that Muslim despotic Other. He achieves this end not by a “minute delineation of Mohammedan manners” but by utilizing what I call a poetics of allusion. Shelley exploits widely available knowledge about Turkish despotic treatment of the Greeks and of women both as a way to entertain and educate his (hoped for) readers and to bypass repressive censors. An analysis of *The Revolt* not only shows Shelley using the Ottoman Empire to assert a radical politics in an age of conservative retrenchment, it also sheds light on his evolving understanding of the cycles of history: in what way decline nevertheless can equal progress.

“WE ASK MR. SHELLEY HOW HIS CASE APPLIES TO
US?”

Although *The Revolt of Islam* has not been a favorite among scholars, in recent years the poem has attracted more critical attention than it has virtually since its

publication. Whereas it had been considered too long and utterly confused, Richard Haswell demonstrated the structural unity of the poem in an article for the *Keats-Shelley Journal* in 1975. Since then, it has been considered as a political allegory, political manifesto, and biographical allegory; it has also been studied for its use of sexual imagery, in the context of contemporary censorship, and as a stage in Shelley's poetic development.¹⁰

More recently, *The Revolt* has attracted additional critical attention as scholars continue to study the subject of romantic orientalism and rhetorics of empire in the period. In *British Romantic Writers and the East*, Nigel Leask investigates the nature of Shelley's liberal imperialism, particularly with regard to the British mission in India. Because Shelley only wrote explicitly about India in a short passage in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, Leask sets out to expose the *suppressed* Indian preoccupations in several of Shelley's works. Thus, with regard to *The Revolt of Islam* Leask states:

Shelley's use of the word 'Islam' in *The Revolt of Islam*, a poem which makes a point of *eschewing the cultural and topographical details* of much contemporary orientalism in order to free the narrative for a more universalist reading, might as well refer to any people East of the Mediterranean. But my concern here is with showing how these dislocated poems are specifically interested in the question of British India, and why they need at the same time to *disavow* such an interest. (72, my emphasis)

Because Leask's goal is to point out the disavowal of an *Indian* context Leask himself disavows the relevance of the Turkish/Greek context. Without challenging the claim that *The Revolt* may have implications for an understanding of Shelley's attitude toward the colonization of India, I would like to clarify how Shelley made use of the general cultural capital of the Ottoman Empire in a very deliberate way to critique Western governments and to show their need for reform.

Far from referring to "any people East of the Mediterranean," *The Revolt* works specifically with the political realities of the Ottoman Empire. It is true, as Leask suggests, that Shelley wanted to avoid a detailed rendering of this context for his poem in the hopes of achieving a universal application. However, just because he intended wide-ranging implications for his poem, does not mean that the plight of Turkish subjects was irrelevant to him, and just because he chose to render the scene broadly does not mean that he actually "eschews cultural and topographical details." From the same letter to a publisher quoted above Shelley addresses the issue of context: "The scene is supposed to be laid in Constantinople and modern Greece, but without much attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is in fact a tale illustrative of such a Revolution as might be supposed to take place in an European nation."¹¹ In order for the tale to be "illustrative," Shelley is quite careful to invoke the most recognizable and quintessentially negative elements of the Turks without it being

necessary to draw the scene minutely. Everyone would anticipate the Turks’ disintegrating empire, the enslavement of the Greeks, and the domestic oppression of women. These elements were well known and need only be hinted at to make their impact on an English reader. So for instance, Shelley uses associations, but is sparing with proper names; e.g., he uses the word “King” throughout as opposed to “Sultan,” and a “Christian” (changed to “Iberian” for *The Revolt*) priest as opposed to the Greek Patriarch or a Muslim cleric. In this way, Shelley’s use of the Ottoman Other is perhaps more insidious than the overtly expressed good Arabs of Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* or the complex identity shifting between Hassan and the Giaour. By invoking the quintessential despotism of the Turks, but implying a universal application in Europe, Shelley sets out to achieve “didactic” ends for an English audience in a “narrative” poem about Turks. Hence, the style and structure of *The Revolt* is not a disavowal of an Indian or a Middle Eastern setting, but one that exploits associations in a general way so that it will have implications for many of Shelley’s concerns: the French Revolution, the Irish under English rule, and the development of England into a global empire. That the poem provides us with evidence that Shelley did not extend such universal, free, liberated lifestyle to the Turks, the natives of India, and other “backward” Asian lands, is quite true, as Leask shows. But the question Shelley poses to Britain is, will your empire be civilized or will it be like that of the Ottomans?

Contemporary reviews demonstrate that such a reading was possible, for this is exactly the application that John Taylor Coleridge, writing for the *Quarterly Review*, makes, although he is unwilling to admit its validity:

The laws and government on which Mr. Shelley’s reasoning proceeds, are the Turkish, administered by a lawless despot; his religion is the Mohammedan, maintained by servile hypocrites; and his scene for their joint operations Greece, the land full beyond all others of recollection of former glory and independence, now covered with shame and such in slavery. We are Englishmen, Christians, free and independent; we ask Mr. Shelley how his case applies to *us*? Or what we learn from it to the prejudice of our own institutions? (Reiman 773)

Even despite the broad strokes that Shelley uses to render the Turkish setting, Coleridge sees the context and brings all his knowledge from other sources to bear on it. He recognizes the fact that Shelley is not out merely to tell an adventure story of human passion, and a fantasy of Greek liberation, but to imply political and social reforms at home by so doing. Leask refers to Coleridge’s review as a misreading, again because he wants to appropriate *The Revolt* solely as a poem that disavows an Indian context. This seems to be an unnecessary limitation. Coleridge reads Shelley’s intention quite explicitly, but his own political position makes him disallow the validity of any analogy between the Ottomans and British. Instead, he focuses on the Otherness of the Ottomans, and

does not admit even the possibility that that empire may be similar to the British in any way. In fact, he challenges Shelley to justify the connection in even greater detail than he does. This may be a misreading only in the sense that Shelley's poetic strategy of general allusion for didactic purposes was still too specific for Coleridge, and thus unconvincing to him as a conservative reader.

Although Coleridge was unwilling to admit any similarities between the Turks and the English, Shelley clearly meant for such applications to be made and he hoped to achieve it by taking advantage of certain stylistic commonplaces. Because it was the last major poem for which he would maintain major popular ambition, Shelley chose the most popular genre of the day in the hope that he could thus reach a large reading audience. In style and structure it is basically a gothic romance in an Eastern setting and written in Spenserian stanza. Utilizing this hybrid of popular forms raises specific problems for Shelley. Although he expresses a desire for the poem to be "narrative" and not "didactic," he obviously had didactic goals in mind, and the uneven match between the story and the discursive, philosophical sections makes it tough reading, as Stuart Curran and Greg Kucich have commented. The distinct tension between the claims of a radical politics and the demands of this genre has compromised the poem's success in a fundamental way; according to Curran, "The claims of Shelley's ideology are ultimately antithetical to the generic properties in which he envelops them" (29). Kucich has described the uneasy mixture as an outgrowth of Shelley's philosophical differences from Spenser: "The more deeply he engages in Spenserian allegory throughout *The Revolt*, the more he feels the need to distance himself from it, which he does by relapsing into the hectoring style of *Queen Mab*."¹² More recently, Emily Haddad has explored *The Revolt's* problematic mixture of didacticism and narrative within the context of Orientalist poetics, asserting that Shelley could gain didactic ends through a narrative form because of "the presumption that the Orient is a place where the excitingly implausible—even the impossible—can appear unproblematically verisimilar" (26). Haddad's idea is that writers could render an impossible, unbelievable world and yet make claims for its mimetic quality simply because its accuracy could not be checked by most of its (especially popular) readers.

It is ironic that Shelley's carefully chosen and deliberately crafted narrative technique has been identified as the crucial error that introduced major problems into the text. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the associations and allusions of his generic hybrid do work efficiently to carry his "narrative of human passion" into the critical ideological position that the poem seeks to establish. One of the most important elements of the hybrid is Shelley's specific uses of the Greek-Turkish sphere for his poem. Shelley's poetics of allusion utilizes its associations and issues and relies on the common cultural knowledge of the reader to make sense of the broad allusions. These main allusions give *The Revolt* the atmospheric color of the Ottoman Empire that establishes it as a necessary space for the revolutionary reform efforts of its heroes. This strategy could only work because of the huge popularity of earlier texts such as

Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786), Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), and Byron’s *Turkish Tales* (1813). Although Shelley wanted to benefit from the Eastern craze, he was also at pains to claim originality for himself: “I have avoided...the imitation of any contemporary style. But there must be a resemblance, which does not depend upon their own will, between all the writers of any particular age” (*Preface* 35). Rewriting the popular forms of the Spenserian and Eastern romance in his own image, Shelley implements a strategy for *The Revolt of Islam* that is similar to his idiosyncratic appropriation of myth in *Prometheus Unbound*.

The Revolt dramatizes the condition of dispossessed Greeks by showing how their homeland is occupied by enemy Turks, and how the Greeks are subsequently rendered strangers in their own lands. The impact of such a situation on English readers will be obvious when one considers that the consonance between the structures of home and government was critical to English thought. Such a belief was perhaps most strongly asserted in this period by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and in the caricatures that highlighted the desolation of revolutionary homes versus the domestic bliss of British ones, as seen in [figure 7](#) of the previous chapter. These sources contended that in England both the home and the state are governed for the greatest good by its patriarchal head. This clearly indicates how deplorable a state the Greeks are in since their homes and the state are occupied by the Other. However, because Shelley will ultimately assert more of a similarity than a difference between the Turkish Tyrant and the English Tyrant, he not only echoes Burke’s sentiment but implicitly criticizes it as far too limited in scope.

Shelley connects this contemporary reality of the dispossessed Greeks to the stylistic elements of the Spenserian quest narrative, whose structure and stanza *The Revolt* borrows. Like *The Faerie Queene*, *The Revolt* consistently juxtaposes domestic spheres of oppression with those of the wilderness.¹³ The hero must leave his besieged home, pass through the world of experience, and prove himself worthy of a recuperated home through heroic deeds. Indeed, all of the domestic spaces in *The Revolt* are spheres of private safety thrown into chaos by a violent upheaval from the outside world. Home is a place both of comfort and alienation. From the beginning of *The Revolt* the home of Argolis is described as an ambivalent place because of its status as occupied territory: “Tyrants dwelt side by side, /And stabled in our homes” (ll. 695–96). As a result, the Greeks have degenerated from the humanistic glory of their ancestors, to a state of abject servility. They are alienated from their homes, their history, and from nature itself. Therefore Laon says: “This vital world, this home of happy spirits, /Was as a dungeon to my blasted kind” (ll. 713–14). The contemporary state of the modern Greek was widely commented on and lamented in the period. In the preface to *Hellas* Shelley wrote, “If in many instances he is degraded, by moral and political slavery to the practice of the basest vices it engenders, and that below the level of ordinary degradation; let us reflect that the corruption of the best produces the worst” (447).

In each of the important stages of Laon's story Shelley shows Laon connecting with the surrounding ancient monuments, thus forging a sense of cultural legacy. First, the monuments of his ancestors whisper to him of their past greatness (ll. 754–62), and later, he transforms into the revolutionary hero, “amid those ruins gray” (ll. 793–801). The dramatization of Laon's education through an experience of ancient monuments and history leads him to recognize the social ills and the efficacy of poetry to palliate them. This is a history and a mode of telling history that the Turks later attack when the counter-revolutionaries claim that democratic Athens was a perversion of the natural order: “How glorious Athens in her splendour fell,/Because her sons were free,—and that among/Mankind, the many to the few belong, /By God, and Nature and Necessity” (ll. 3588–91). After the counterrevolution has blasted their hopes, Laon and Cythna are finally reunited among the “ruins of ancient monuments” where they make love as a panacea for the bloodshed below, for lovemaking is the “solace of mankind” (ll. 2569–77).

Therefore, Greek monumental sculpture is present throughout *The Revolt* as a trope by which Shelley illustrates for his reader how the ancient greatness of Greece will still be accessible to the modern Greek hero. However, let us not forget that this is the narrative of a triumphant failure. The allusion to the elegiac monumentalization of Laon in Canto II is explicitly dramatized in the end of the poem when the dead heroes arrive at the Temple of the Spirit: “On the sound/Which issued thence, drawn nearer and more near, /Like the swift moon this glorious earth around, /The charmed boat approached, and there its haven found (ll. 4815–18). These final lines of this long and arduous poem surely describe a long-awaited homecoming, especially evidenced by the presence of Cythna's child. In Shelley's narrative the monumental martyrdom of the protagonists suggests finally an intersection of aesthetics and ethics that is really central to the understanding of the poem. The message of beauty and truth that first comes to Laon from ancient Greece through its monuments must always be communicated and lived out by its recipients, despite the relative success or failure of each of us in successfully carrying out our ethical imperatives. Shelley presents such ethical challenges to British readers in their own home, their empire or their allies' homes. But as long as an oppressive government such as the Ottoman Empire continues to suppress the glorious past of the Greeks, such ethical challenges will go unacknowledged by its degraded population. The associations of the Turks and their unjustified occupation of Greek lands that are still punctuated with monuments of the past clearly carry much weight. And by envisioning Western countries' military support of the Ottoman Empire in Canto X Shelley implicates them as active participants in this ethical dilemma.

Just as the greater sphere of Argolis is an uncanny mixture of ancestral legacy as well as alienated oppression, the individual home of Laon and Cythna is a place of early nurturing and later violence. With the kidnapping of Cythna for the Sultan's harem, Shelley connects the sexual assault on Greek women by Turkish men to the gothic tendency to dramatize such domestic attacks. His readership

would have been quite familiar with the fact that Turkish harems were full of Greek, Armenian, and Circassian women taken in war, kidnapped or sold on the slave market as well as with the scenes of sexual horror as dramatized for instance in such gothic novels as *The Recess* (1783–85) or *The Monk* (1796). Although Shelley wholeheartedly presents the harem as a negative, oppressive sphere, its rhetorical use in *The Revolt* nevertheless proves to have ambiguous and complex repercussions because it is not merely a negative counterimage of a stable Western home. Since “home” in *The Revolt* is also a negative space, what we have is a continuum of dissatisfying domestic spaces as opposed to simple binaries that might engender a sense of comfort and self-complacency in the reader. He utilizes the prevalent element of the Oriental tale that builds on common contemporary Turkish habits, inflects it with the machinery of the Gothic novel, and exploits it for the opportunity of expressing a radical humanism (and feminism).

Kate Ferguson Ellis has shown how the gothic presents an ambivalent vision of home as a separate sphere of safety: “I propose to show how a popular form which claims to support a typologizing reading of home, the only place where the bliss of paradise has survived the fall, in fact undermines and subverts that claim.”¹⁴ Building on the work of Ellen Moers, Ellis points out that the home not only proves to be unstable, but it is the work of the heroine in the narrative to reestablish the domestic sphere as a true home. Although Shelley sacrifices narrative plausibility, this generic precedent may explain his choice of rendering Cythna “ready” for captivity: “it was my scope/The slavery where they drag me now, to share, /And among captives willing chains to wear” (ll. 1179–81). She knows she must live through and overcome the violation of home in order to effect her feminist revolution.

For Shelley’s purposes, the victimization of Cythna by Turkish custom, so obviously reprehensible, will fully justify her vehement expression of radical outrage in Canto VIII. In fact, throughout the poem Cythna bears the weight of activating events which Laon subsequently takes over. Her role is public, decisive, and always radical. As we know, this kind of public political speech and activity was hardly encouraged or approved in British society. As we saw in [chapter three](#), the harem woman’s disobedience has implications for the Western reader even though women’s political speech was frowned upon at home as a product of dangerous revolutionary sentiments. Cythna delivers her harangue to the slaves of Turkish oppression and thus simultaneously addresses Western readers because her speech has universal implications that reach beyond her own immediate experience. Her political speech seeks to renovate not only the Turkish Other, but the Western self as well.¹⁵ The fact that a conservative reader such as J.T. Coleridge would disavow the justification for such an application shows that Shelley’s conception of the Turkish Other in this way was highly offensive to certain readers.

DECLINE EQUALS PROGRESS IN *THE REVOLT OF ISLAM*

Shelley's use of the Ottoman Empire in *The Revolt* also shows a stage in his thinking about the cycles of historic progress. In what sense can a failed revolution be an ideal? For Shelley, writing in the years immediately following Waterloo, the "gloom and misanthropy" that had been pervading "the times, literature, and metaphysics," were beginning to fade away, as he writes in the preface to *The Revolt*: "[M]ankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks of a slow, gradual, silent change" (34). For this reason, Shelley composed a poem that shows a nonviolent, though *failed* revolution where the people still can maintain hope that improvement will be attained. This strange trajectory of progress-in-failure is prevalent throughout Shelley's work and the way in which he attempts to narrate such a downward turn as an ideal in *The Revolt* sheds light on Shelley's evolving historiographical theory. Shelley's view of the cyclical form of historical progress has been discussed very insightfully by Greg Kucich: "Shelley seeks to refashion the linear conflicts of history's master narratives into a wavelike or cyclical pattern of contrariety that offers a more inspiring vision of cultural and political process."¹⁶ Kucich shows this pattern at work unevenly in Shelley's early texts, and in its full articulation in the *Defence of Poetry* as the transhistorical "eternal" work of the great poets who are all nevertheless human, and therefore, subject to the errors and limits implicit in their times. Even great poets must express themselves in "time" in order to communicate with people, and therefore Time, Kucich writes, "becomes not the enemy but the agent of eternity, the cooperating vehicle through which the 'great poem' of history acquires form" ("Eternity" 28). Because any low-point in history may immediately precede an upturn, it is crucial for poets to "inspire" the people in order to make the upturn possible, and this is Shelley's self-proclaimed intention in *The Revolt*, "[to kindle] within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish from mankind" (*Preface* 32). In this sense *The Revolt* explicitly dramatizes history as recurrent patterns of occasional progress, a notion that is implicit and inchoate in "Henry and Louisa" because of that poem's setting in the Ottoman Empire, a place of seemingly futile, recurrent military strife.

Although the struggle described in *The Revolt* is modeled on the French Revolution, Shelley relocates the narrative as a revolution against the Ottoman Empire and banks on the fact that, unlike with the French monarchy, all Europeans can agree (at least morally) that the fall of the Turkish Empire would be desirable and that it may be an opportunity for progress and human renewal. By this simple substitution Shelley hopes to solve the "decline equals progress" conundrum. There can be little doubt that Shelley saw no positive elements in the Ottoman Empire. The year following the composition of *The Revolt*, Shelley wrote

another history of human political and cultural development in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. In this text, Shelley sees the revolutionary spirit inexorably traveling eastward from America to Europe. But progress is not restricted to Europe. *A Philosophical View of Reform* envisions the progress of the Indians in India, of Persians in Persia and free Negroes in the West Indies; however, such progress does not extend to the Ottoman Empire:

The Turkish Empire is in its last stage of ruin, and it cannot be doubted but that the time is approaching when the deserts of Asia Minor and of Greece will be colonized by the overflowing population of countries less enslaved and debased, and that the climate and the scenery which was the birthplace of all that is wise and beautiful will not remain for ever the spoil of wild beasts and unlettered Tartars. (18)

Because the Ottomans have no redeeming social institutions, Shelley can reduce the population to “unlettered Tartars” and can envision the whole of Asia Minor as an empty desert so that it can be colonized without the fuss of dislocating a deserving native population. In *Romantic Imperialism*, Saree Makdisi’s overall reading of Shelley emphasizes this point: “[the East] is a cleaned out slate ready for European colonization and inscription” (152) Since the Ottoman Empire’s power base in Europe is illegitimate, it may be critiqued by conservatives and liberals alike in a way that other monarchies in Europe would not be.

Nevertheless, the moral implications of the fall of the Ottoman Empire extend to the question of political despotism in Great Britain. Terence Hoagwood has described the political and moral implications of Shelley’s philosophical skepticism: “One obvious point of contact between skeptical metaphysical arguments, and, for example, the French Revolution has been suggested already: both challenge authority.... Monarchy and dogma rest alike upon a claim for absolute certainty and right.”¹⁷ And so Shelley can attack both political and philosophical bases of authority because they are interrelated. Shelley’s use of the Ottoman Empire as a target for liberal attack and analogy to other nations is “safe” because the Ottoman Empire is widely considered to be illegitimate, and anyway, in the last stages of a natural decline. Although the conservative political powers were loath to defend the Ottoman Empire morally or religiously, the Greek revolt in 1821 would not be so welcome by Europe because it was seen to pose a threat to the Holy Alliance, which was established to maintain the balance of power in Europe and to reinstitute the *ancien regimes*. Shelley’s vision in *The Revolt of Islam* of European nations thwarting the Greek cause in favor of political and commercial stability in the region was thus notably prescient.

THE GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The Revolt of Islam envisioned an allegorized Greek revolt against Turkish oppression that was not supported by Western European powers; ironically, just

such a situation came to pass in 1821. The Greek Nationalist movement was considered dangerous by European governments because it seemed to endanger the Holy Alliance which was meant to quell dangerous republican movements and to maintain a balance of power that included stabilizing their commercial interests. But many passionately argued that the Greek nationalist movement was fundamentally different. Although the Greeks had no unified national identity, (subgroups allied themselves along tribal and religious lines), they were definitely a separate group from the invading, occupying Turks. That the insurgence was immediately inspired more by the various tribal leaders vying for personal power than by the average Greek seeking to reestablish the grandeur of “Hellas,” was either not understood or not considered relevant by Europeans who supported independence for the descendants of the Ancient Greeks.¹⁸ When the Greek insurgency began in 1821 it forced concerned English citizens (and other Europeans) to consolidate the rediscovery of ancient Greece which for decades had been a loose movement in art, literature, and philosophy with a current foreign policy. For the liberal artist like Shelley, the Greek cause was a rallying cry to test one’s concepts about liberty. For a government whose policy in the region was driven by financial concerns, it was an untimely annoyance. Such a government therefore needed to envision and implement a plan that would be morally defensible and still not threaten its growing interests.¹⁹

As always, English political and diplomatic policy continued to be determined by economic imperatives. The Turkish Capitulations (trade agreements) as they evolved out of the Egyptian debacle earlier in the century, proved to be increasingly advantageous to the British. Soon the Ottoman Empire was flooded with cheap European manufactured goods and the Sultan was unable or unwilling to do anything about it. While the Capitulations had once been an indulgence granted to the Europeans, revocable upon the Sultan’s whim, they were no longer the expression of that sublime will, but a treaty negotiated by powerful “allies” who could very well dictate terms. In addition, the inefficient or disintegrating Turkish infrastructure was also culpable, e.g., Thomas Naff explains that Turkish “industry declined not only because of European competition; the restrictive feudal practices of the Ottoman government and the guilds were even more to blame.”²⁰ Negative trends included the outdated tax farming system, the unsafe countryside, and a growing depopulation. In short, “The conditions prevalent after the middle of the eighteenth century steadily moved the Empire into a position of economic subordination to Europe: economic dependence was joined to political dependence” (Naff 92–3). Bruce McGowan agrees that the Ottoman Empire’s lag in trade resulted when it failed to benefit from the European innovations in industry, finance, and political economy. Although some innovations were attempted among the Ottomans, ancient traditions prevailed and nothing like the new forms of patent law, private land property, free trade, or the credit system were implemented among them.²¹

While markets in other industrializing countries were closely regulated to safeguard the native workers, the Ottomans encouraged a policy of increased

imports, and made expanding exports even harder for their own merchants. Charles Issawi has speculated that this seemingly backward policy resulted from the huge gap between the needs of the capital and the needs of the countryside: “[It is] explained by Turkey’s social and political structure and the predominance of the interests of the army and bureaucracy over those of the farmers, craftsmen, and merchants; by the desire to ensure the provisioning of Istanbul and other cities which had potentially unruly mobs” (74). If it were not for their agricultural output, the Turks would have likely buckled under these economic pressures.²² Although accurate trade statistics are difficult to ascertain, Issawi asserts that before the Revolution France accounted for a large majority of the Turkish trade, but that England took that position thereafter (see trade statistics quoted above). Within the next few decades this trend became firmly established so that British merchants demanded a strong policy to safeguard these markets (especially against Russian expansion).

For decades the English had worked to achieve just such favorable economic conditions, and cultural and religious imperatives were always considered secondary, even if that meant the political freedom of Greece. Nevertheless, in “The Orientalism of Byron’s *Giaour*,” Marilyn Butler has pointed out that there were early-nineteenth century moves to evangelize in India, and that the debate surrounding cultural and religious involvement in the East was going on outside of and reflected in literature. In contrast, Marlowe notes that at this time there was no major “moral mission” among the English comparable to that of the French or even England’s own “white man’s burden” of the mid-nineteenth century. First, Europe was more immediately concerned with the French wars and, after Waterloo, with the maintenance of European colonial possessions. Everyone desired the status quo. Marlowe describes it thus: “None of the Powers welcomed the Greek rebellion.... The solution, from the point of view of all the European governments, would have been for the Turks to deal successfully with the rebellion themselves either by concession or conquest...” (148). England was happily conducting its Eastern trade and continuing to expand, with a well-established presence in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf to safeguard its activities. In short, there was, over the course of many decades and culminating in the Holy Alliance, a great disinclination among England and the other European nations, in becoming embroiled in Greek/Turkish hostilities.²³

But the spontaneous uprising in Greece in 1821 circumvented European desires and forced the issue. European governments could try to stay neutral, but the public was appealed to for direct involvement by Greek supporters both in the name of Christianity and Classicism.²⁴ From the beginning there was a split between the official government policies with regard to the situation and the opinions and efforts of private individuals. In contrast with Italy and Germany, there was little early interest in the Greek cause in England, despite much news and propaganda. And, as William St. Clair notes, Castlereagh’s early policies were conservative and in favor of Turkish Treaties: “While Castlereagh was at the head of affairs, no open support for rebels could be tolerable to the

Government and most moderates, even if sympathetic to the Greek cause, were not inclined to oppose the official policy.”²⁵ St. Clair further suggests that the Greek rebels were therefore viewed as extremists.

Upon the death of Castlereagh in September 1822, Canning’s government shifted itself to a more liberal policy. Canning attempted a very diplomatic middle ground, writing to the Head of the Greek Provisional Government, he assured him that the English would not try to persuade the Greeks to an unwanted peace, but if they were asked the English would offer the Porte mediation services. Canning added that the English have been “connected with the Porte by the established relations of amity and by the ancient obligation of treaties which the Porte has not violated [and so they would not] engage in unprovoked hostilities against that power” (as quoted by Marlowe 150).

In March 1823 various interested parties in England were consolidated as the London Greek Committee and quickly became more important than any of the other, older national committees and ultimately had the largest influence on the outcome of the war. St. Clair argues that it transformed the original ideas of “regenerating” Ancient Greece into something more sophisticated. The Committee was heavily involved in publishing and raising funds for arms: its first circular appeared on March 3 and its first public meeting was held on May 15. One of its leading founders, Edward Blaquiere, helped involve Byron, whose support was instrumental in increasing committee membership to 85 and its coffers to £11,241 (St. Clair 145). Blaquiere also published books on the subject of the Greek insurgency, including *The Greek Revolution: Its Origin and Progress* (1824), in which he argues that the Greek revolt should not be associated with popular uprisings in European nations because the Ottoman Empire is “a professedly anti-Christian system of government, [with] a despot whose most solemn obligations, religious and political, forbid him from regarding the followers of Christ in any other light than tributary slaves” (3–4).

Although the government officially remained neutral in the conflict, it used the London Committee when possible; according to St. Clair, “it was not the independent charitable institution that it may have appeared” (143). As a matter of fact, among its original twenty-six members, nearly all were members of Parliament. St. Clair quotes the following motion, in the name of Lord John Russell, “That the liberation of that unhappy country affords the most cheering prospects of being able to enlarge the limit of Christianity and civilization” (145) Yet, the philhellenes outwardly worked independently while government maintained its official policies. Salt writes (perhaps disingenuously) in November 1825: “The Turks are too removed from civilization to understand the nice distinction between a neutral being at peace and its subjects being permitted to carry out a war” (as quoted by Marlowe 152).

One of the crucial “private” inducements to war was in the poetic output of the period. Byron’s previously written *Turkish Tales* (and his subsequent death in Missolonghi) were pivotal in inspiring many young philhellenes from all across

Europe and Shelley’s poem *Hellas* was intended, as was *The Revolt of Islam*, to reach a large reading audience for the purpose of inspiring support for the cause.

HELLAS ON EARTH

In his lyrical drama *Hellas*, Shelley ascribes an originary historical moment to both Ancient Greece and the Ottoman Empire upon which their fates depend, and not surprisingly, the very nature of these nativities are diametrically opposed. Greece was “[b]uilt below the tide of war, /Based on the crystalline sea/Of thought and its eternity” (ll. 697–99), while Turkey was born in the violent thrust of war: “The sound/ As on the assault of an imperial city, /The hiss of inextinguishable fire, /The roar of giant cannon” (ll. 814–17). Based on the continuity between these origins and the present, *Hellas* associates Greece with peace and the eternal and it associates Turkey with war and the flux of the transient.²⁶ It is in Ahasuerus’s teaching of the Sultan Mahmud that Shelley expresses the notion that: “All is contained in each” (l. 792) and by extension, that “The Past/Now stands before thee like an incarnation/Of the To-come” (ll. 852–54): the past is a type of the future and each empire will reap the benefits of its origination in time. There is a clear-cut advantage to asserting such an equation of the past and the present/future given Shelley’s practical, propagandistic aims in *Hellas*. By explicitly contrasting for his readers the beauties of Ancient Greek culture and the brutality of Turkish oppression, Shelley seeks to change British policy with regard to Greece, which he says in the preface should ideally be “[to establish] the independence of Greece, and [to maintain] it both against Russia and the Turks” (448). He shows that although Greece needs European help to attain its goals, each empire is dominated by an ideal fate that makes its final status inevitable.

However, Shelley himself did not have such unalloyed faith in the equation between poetically imagined idealisms and their fruition in historical contingency, and for this reason several cracks appear within the poem on the levels of form, immediate political goals, and wider philosophical concepts. Although he tries to portray the Greek conflict in stark terms in order to inspire military support, his own knowledge of the complexities of the situation comes through in the poem. In addition to the problematic vision of historical change, this dangerous complexity is seen in the portrayal of the Sultan’s education and the chorus’s pursuit of the rebirth of an idealized Greece. The weight of these imperfect relationships adds up to render the poem deeply ambivalent about its original goal to raise support for the war.

In recent years, critics have generally explored Shelley’s ambivalent attitudes toward Greece as a cultural model and they have particularly noted the prevalence of such varying attitudes in *Hellas*.²⁷ Not only does the poem appear to articulate opposing values thematically, it is based linguistically on patterns of antitheses and paradoxes that help reinforce the dialectics upon which it works. Critics are split, however, on a number of specific questions in the poem as well

as the more fundamental question of Shelley's intentions and the effects of his choices. For some, the difficulties of the poem appear in spite of Shelley's purported aims; they note structural and thematic problems which persist in spite of his efforts to quell them. For others, the contrasting elements of the poem are carefully planned and fully deliberated intentions that show two differing ways to live in the world and the need for man to exert a special kind of energy to improve society.²⁸ My own sense is that Shelley's devotion to perhaps two mutually exclusive ends produces a split which ultimately points to an irresolvable conflict. The structure of antithesis is clearly deliberate, but Shelley's project is hopelessly divided against itself. He pursues his immediate political goals through a nostalgic depiction of Greece and a sensational depiction of Turkey, and yet he attempts to foster a philosophical circumspection and sobriety of activity that inhibits his practical aims. In this section I hope to show that one of the reasons for Shelley's failure to maintain the balance that he seeks in *Hellas* is the tenuousness of the crucial first dichotomy upon which all the others are based: Greek/Turk (and by implication, liberty/despotism; eternal/mutable). For when the rigid lines between Same and Other begin to blur, the other dichotomies also falter, causing a rift in the poem which ends with the frustrated, "Cease! Drain not to its dregs the urn of bitter prophecy" (ll. 1098–99).

Hellas's dialogue scenes and the choral passages alike expose a violent split in conception and execution; for instance, although Mahmud senses the demise of his empire and desires an education to understand and deal with this fact, it is still prophesied by his forebear, Mehmet the Conqueror, that he will "reign in Hell." In Mahmud's final scene it is unclear what the status of his learning has been; he leaves the scene asserting that he has reached an understanding and that he will act on it: "I must rebuke/This drunkenness of triumph ere it die. /And dying, bring despair. Victory! Poor slaves" (ll. 928–30). Shelley builds sympathy for his reformed Sultan, and yet subsequent passages only focus on Turkish atrocities, seemingly undermining any notion of Turkish improvement, and further inciting Western repugnance to the Turkish Empire in support of Greek insurgence. This split in sentiment means that the "Otherness" of the Turkish Sultan and the empire at large is both invoked and displaced in a way that undermines Shelley's practical aims to garner military support for Greece and still to adhere to a philosophical position that views history as progressive.

Inasmuch as Mahmud's learning seems to throw the question of the "fate" of the Ottoman Empire into doubt, the choral passages also betray contradictions that make it difficult to assess Shelley's view of historical progress in this poem. The chorus continually focuses on the eternal perfection of Greece, (eliding Shelley's own awareness of many of Greece's uncongenial habits),²⁹ although she is subject to the vicissitudes of human history. She was born in freedom, has been subjected to tyranny, but one day will be reborn into freedom. In describing the "historical uncanniness" of *Hellas*, William Ulmer has written that: "*Hellas* can accordingly view history as eternity's self-alienating lapse from unity, a

lapse teleologically faced to return upon itself in an ultimate identity of origin and end, Hellas and Greece.”³⁰ However, Shelley is unable to maintain such a teleologically stable identification. Although the final chorus announces that: “The world’s great age begins anew /The golden years return” (l. 1060), the lyric culminates in a shocking turning away from the origins of Greek Freedom: “the world is weary of the past. /Oh, might it die or rest at last” (ll. 1100–01). This exposes a split between envisioning Ancient Greece as a Utopian landscape to be recreated, and the problems of inheriting the imperfections of the past and revisiting the same cycles of progress and decay onto a world that does not truly progress. Upon learning that the world will not experience the perfect recreation of “Hellas” (in part because it never really was perfect), the chorus rejects historicity altogether, in sharp contrast with the renovation that the Sultan undergoes.

Just as “Henry and Louisa” invoked Egypt as the scene of repetitive and futile power struggles among England, France, and Turkey, and as *The Revolt of Islam* presented the role of European powers thwarting Greek independence, *Hellas* attempts to counsel both the British and the Greeks in the way not to become the Turkish Other by taking on their warlike qualities. But because the “Queen of Ocean” (l. 304) has already implicated herself on the side of error, and the stability of the Turkish Other and the Greek ideal are both undercut, *Hellas* exposes the complexity and conflict in the Ottoman Empire and the Greek cause in particular.

THE EXEMPLARY TYRANT

What happens when the exemplary Tyrant gets an exemplary education? At the heart of *Hellas* is a split that is foreshadowed in its preface: in announcing that “We are all Greeks,” Shelley implicitly says “We are *not* Turks.” But what if the Turk gets the right education? Will he become one of us? Although Shelley’s plot cultivates the transformation of the Sultan from Other to the Same through philosophy, Shelley avoids dealing with it by focusing attention on a number of important negative elements: presenting Mahmud’s unavoidable fate via Mehmet’s prophecy; reporting on Turkish atrocities which keeps Turkish brutality and Otherness central; including the chorus of Greek Captive women which reminds us that the Turks are, as he writes in the preface, the “enemies of domestic happiness” (447); and, polarizing the Empire religiously, associating Islam with error and transience, and Christianity with eternity. However, in his footnote Shelley clarifies his idea that Christianity is universal only inasmuch as it supersedes other forms of belief and worship such as Islam.

Through these elements, a formal and thematic split persists throughout the poem which keeps the Other in its place, even as the Sultan views and learns about Western philosophy and seems to be converted into the Same. E.Douka Kabitoglou goes so far as to suggest that both *Hellas* and its model, Aeschylus’s *Persians*, pivot on this question: “The transformation of sameness into otherness

lies at the core of this controversial compound that calls itself a lyrical drama and is the key even in both the dramatic and lyric parts.”³¹ I would only reorder the operative terms to say that it transforms Otherness into Sameness but thwarts that process when it goes too far. Although Mahmud may represent on one level the generic Tyrant of Shelleyan invective, (regardless of race or national origin), in this text, it would be unwise if not impossible to deny that he is the specific head of a specific empire, oppressing a definite group. For this reason, the identity of Greek versus Turk, and more widely, West versus East cannot be ignored in the reading of the play’s characters, and how this specificity in turn affects Shelley’s wider philosophical and political position. One attitude shows an education that ought to result in personal perfectibility, and which makes Mahmud a sympathetic character evidently to Shelley as well as his reader; such an attitude is supported by the play’s repeated admonitions to Greece not to become subject to imperialism, hatred, and revenge. However, another attitude is at odds with this one: Shelley’s poem remains a call to action because he yet implies that Mahmud’s education does not result in a change of political or military *policy*. In addition, Shelley’s continual references to Turkish barbarity remind his reader that Greece needs real military support to overthrow the Turks. Whereas that other “Turkish” poem *The Revolt of Islam* and *Hellas’s* near-contemporary “The Mask of Anarchy” envision nonviolent revolution, *Hellas* portrays a war that must be won by force of arms.³² Although the Sultan of *Hellas*, Mahmud II, is quite the opposite of his sneering and scheming counterpart in *The Revolt of Islam*, his end is no better.³³

In the beginning, Mahmud desires a deeper understanding of his own dreams as well as of the wider world. He expresses an awareness of the transience of the world, and yet he has no sympathy for his own men or their victims, even though he knows that his empire is spiraling to doom, and that his men are “mutineers — that drunken crew” (l. 191). His desire for the arrival of Ahaseurus while honest, also appears to be self-serving rather than for the benefit of the Good or even for his own soldiers or people. Mahmud and the Ottoman Empire in general are thus set up as the embodiment of transience and error both on a political and a philosophical level. The fact that Shelley makes the Sultan aware of this error and searching for its antidote puts him in this vexed position. In contrast, Aeschylus shows his Persians recognizing error *after* their defeat; there is little that can be done to turn back time. In contrast, Shelley makes his Tyrant search for truth *before* it is too late to make reparations; however, Shelley does not pursue the possibilities of a changed or renovated Turkish Empire.³⁴

Shelley is careful to extend the characterization of Mahmud primarily as barbaric in the second dialogue scene, as the Sultan gives instructions to the Janissaries:

Go! Bid them pay themselves
With Christian blood! Are there no Grecian virgins

Whose shrieks and spasms and tears they may enjoy?
 No infidel children to impale on spears?
 No hoary Priests after that Patriarch
 Who bent the curse against his country's heart,
 Blood is the seed of gold (ll. 241–49)

What is most interesting here is that the language of violence and disdain extends both to the Janissaries and the helpless Greeks who will be the victims of these violations. Shelley of course refers to the execution of the Patriarch of Constantinople here, and invokes the usual virgins and children to rile up his reader, so that whether he be Hellenist or Christian, he will be moved to defend Greece. Showing Mahmud to be aware of the irony of his position indicates that he is both intelligent and inherently debased. In hearing the ambivalent news delivered by the messengers, and in anticipation of the arrival of Ahaseurus, Mahmud announces that: “We gaze on danger through the mist of fear, /And multiply upon our shattered hopes/The image of ruin” (ll. 641–43). He is unable to understand and assess the situation because he is now in a state of bewildered ignorance which is here described as “fear.” In short, he is ready for the philosophical education that he is about to receive and even expresses a fairly good sense of the relationship between Necessity and Free Will when he says, “To-morrow and to-morrow are as lamps/Set in our path to light us to the edge” (ll. 644–45) because this expresses simultaneously a well-lit path, and still demands the volition of the person to tread that path to its very edge. Shelley goes to great lengths to characterize the Sultan in these first two dialogue scenes as in great need of the kind of philosophical education that he will gain from Ahaseurus.

Not only does this scene characterize Mahmud as barbaric, Shelley here implicates England as one with the Turks. Because Greece was perceived at the time as the ancestor of England, as evidenced in the preface's claim that “We are all Greeks,” the binary Turk/Greek, Self/Other ought to have England on the side of Greece. Unfortunately, the “Queen of Ocean” (l. 304) has disrupted that binary by fighting on the side of error against the Greeks. As we saw earlier in “Henry and Louisa” and *The Revolt of Islam*, Shelley is always concerned about the role that Great Britain plays on the global scene, and strives to persuade his reader to change the government so that it reflects the will of the people. He voices this succinctly in the preface to *Hellas*: “The English permit their own oppressors to act according to their natural sympathy with the Turkish Tyrant, and to brand upon their names the indelible blot of an alliance” (447). As *Hellas* portrays the fall of one negative image of empire, it challenges the English to decide on the nature of their empire's future. In an article arguing for the subversive nature of Shelley's idealism, Mark Kipperman writes: “*Hellas* emphasizes the critical nature of this instant—when the British themselves must choose empire or liberation” (163). This otherwise abstract choice is rendered

real by Hassan's description of the battle of Bucharest and the reports of the messengers. Providing information about the war from all regions of the empire, the messengers deliver news that is neither wholly good nor bad, illustrating for Western audiences that the cause is a worthy one but in great need of military and moral support if it is to succeed. Most important, Shelley also suggests that England's moral status will be improved by the right decision.

Mahmud and Ahaseurus finally meet in the third dialogue scene. Ahaseurus teaches the Sultan to recognize that the material world is a world of flux and illusion, and to begin to conceive of the world as thought itself. This teaching also encompasses a way of thinking about temporal reality that has huge repercussions for Mahmud and the play as a whole. In showing the Sultan that the material world is not the world of linear objective reality, Ahaseurus indicates that time also is merely subject to the power of thought. Ahaseurus's lesson is repeated and clear. Because there is such a thing as "the One, /The unborn and the undying" (l. 768–69) and because "All is contained in each" (l. 792) it is yet possible for Mahmud to understand the future because "the coming age is shadowed on the Past/As on a glass" (ll. 805–06). Shelley illustrates this abstract notion by having Mahmud revisit the early victory of his Ottoman Empire. It is a simple equation. Because Constantinople was taken by bloody force by Mehmet the Conqueror, it must also fall by bloody force. The past casts itself into the future in an equation that leaves no doubt:

Inheritor of glory,
 Conceived in darkness, born in blood, and nourished
 With tears and toil, thou seest the mortal throes
 Of that whose birth was but the same. The Past
 Now stands before thee like an Incarnation
 Of the to come. (ll. 849–54)

In this sense the Ottoman Empire is contrasted by virtue of its birth into power with the birth of Greece. The Ottomans wrest power away from others, while in Greece the spirit of Liberty was born, and the name of Freedom was first heard. By bring-ing the originary moment of Ottoman justification down to the siege of Constantinople and the figure of Mehmet the Conqueror, Shelley takes the triumphant Turkish victory and flips it around so that it is the symbol of invalid occupation and transient error, and although that victory was gained 386 years earlier, it is still part of a cycle of mutability that will pass away.

Shelley invokes the two greatest Sultans, Mehmet the Conqueror and Suleiman the Magnificent, for the purpose of showing how their victories are the seeds of destruction rather than moments of triumph. In showing the past to be an incarnation of the future, Shelley's equation is perhaps disturbingly restricted. Not only does it imply that violent empires will always fall (and what empire or modern nation could pass that test?) it also suggests that Mahmud could do nothing to redress his personal situation because of his uncontrollable inscription

in history. For as Mehmet says, “The Anarchs of the world of darkness keep/A throne for thee, round which thine empire lies/Boundless and mute” (ll. 879–81). Mahmud is inscribed in the history of the empire and the “to come,” so that his “philosophical education” is only for the purpose of showing him a fate he cannot escape. This shows the split in the poem between the possibilities of learning and perfectibility and the necessity of showing the empire to be doomed. Indeed, Jerome McGann reads the poem as a complete break with the “mythic sensibility based upon a monolithic Promethean dream of perfection.”³⁵ This kind of belated recognition might be the usual stuff of Greek tragedy, but in *Persians* the recognition of Xerxes comes *after* defeat. Unlike Prometheus of *Prometheus Unbound*, whose disavowal of hate renovates not only himself but also the wider world, Mahmud’s disavowal of power does not seem to have any impact at all.

In the end the nature and goal of Mahmud’s education is ambiguous. It is clear that he now sees objective reality and the material world as Ahaseurus has taught him, in the context of eternity: “This gloomy crag of time to which I cling, / Seemed an Elysian isle of peace and joy/Never to be attained” (ll. 925–27). As the voice of Turkish “victory” calls off stage, Mahmud realizes that this is not a true victory. He now has a more visceral understanding of the necessity of the fall of Islam, and makes a personal commitment to do something about this understanding of reality: “I must rebuke/This drunkenness of triumph ere it die, / And dying, bring despair. Victory! Poor slaves!” (ll. 928–30). In so describing this rebuke, he implies that he will need to accomplish the task before time proves herself. This suggests that Mahmud’s education may lead to action on his part that will have actual political or personal repercussions. Armed with a new understanding of the nature of time, reality and power, the Turkish Tyrant has been transformed from the exemplary Other into...one who simply walks offstage. Because rehabilitating the enemy through philosophy is itself antithetical to the propagandistic goals of the play, Shelley must dismiss his reformed Sultan who has become dangerously like the Self.

“PANTING LOUD AND FAST”: THE CHORUS

Just as the Self/Other binary is threatened when the Ottoman Sultan is reformed, the stability of an idealized Hellas is also undercut when the chorus pursues the possibility of its rebirth. The pattern of rhetorical antitheses is prevalent in the poem’s opening lines, focusing attention on the pervasiveness of such binaries in this world, and of Greece as somehow outside of such fluctuations. Although later in the poem such assertions about Greece’s universal nature will become rhetorically problematic, in its opening scene the notion of Greece’s rebirth from its past greatness is presented as stable and inevitable. Constance Walker has asserted that the pervasiveness of such binaries in this world renders them meaningless: “The interchangeability of monarch and slave, or victory and defeat, reinforces the central idea that such dichotomies are both falsely imposed and meaningless” (38–39). Walker goes on to argue that Shelley’s vision of

“Hellas” is set up over and against this world of false binaries as the very “antithesis of antitheses.” Although this assessment of *Hellas* may be justified in the opening scene, I believe that such a reading fails to account for the ways in which *Hellas* generates internal difficulties when it seeks to deal with the imperfect equation between Greece and Hellas.

The opening of the play describes the reawakening of Freedom in Greece while “Tyrants sleep.” This is a world of flux, an ongoing death-in-life, except when “Liberty” infuses it with meaning and quality: “If Liberty/Lent not life its soul of light, /Hope its iris of delight, /Truth its prophet’s robe to wear, /Love its power to give and bear” (ll. 42–5). Shelley is careful in this poem not to compromise his vision of historical progress as subject to unforeseen disappointments, and so expresses a skeptical disavowal of the various results of such attempts at Liberty: “Let Freedom leave—wher’er she flies/A Desert or a Paradise; /Let the beautiful and the brave share her glory or a grave” (ll. 89–92). These disavowals not only support Shelley’s philosophical point of view, they are fully justified by the immediate conditions of the war that he is both reporting and imagining. In order to inspire support among the English for the Greek cause, he must paint it as promising but not immediately inevitable. The Turkish tyrant could awaken to find the world of Hellas still subject to his own will instead of being free. Indeed, the Sultan awakens precisely in the moment of flux between freedom and tyranny: it is the “panting loud and fast” of the Greek captive women’s song of liberty and freedom that has awakened him.³⁶

The second choral song (ll. 196–238) shows Shelley juggling two opposing perspectives as he attempts to take advantage of the Greeks’ Christianity to inspire support for the war, while staying true to his own beliefs about Christianity. His presentation of Jesus, the “Promethean conqueror,” is strengthened by contrast with the worship of the Olympian Gods, who, although associated with a Golden Age, are yet only temporal, for it is the glare of “Time” that kills them. Shelley makes a similar point by saying that Islam is a transience that is now passing from the earth, for “the moon of Mahomet/Arose, and it shall set: /While blazoned as on Heaven’s immortal noon/The cross leads generations on” (ll. 221–24). By associating Islam and the Ottoman political structure with transience, and Christianity with the eternal, and yet placing all of that in a skeptical disavowal, Shelley has it both ways. Although he does not categorically assert the immortal truth of Christianity, the immediate juxtaposition of the setting “moon of Mahomet” with the cross leading “generations” on indicates the relative worth of the two religions. Indeed, the preface reminds us explicitly that the Turkish tyrant is the enemy of “Christianity and civilization” (447). The ambivalence is thus expressed on the level of diction here, for “generations” implies a long time, yet is nevertheless, the language of the temporal. Knowing that the associations of the Greeks with Christianity would be a powerful tool to gain Western support for Greek independence, Shelley exploits it but struggles to maintain his own philosophical integrity.³⁷

The third choral song moves away from these religious and metaphysical issues and presents the rebirth of Hellas as a reemergence of the eternal. The focus on the chorus as “Greek captive women” is reasserted when they lament that they are not free to go out and join the tempest of Freedom that Kings cannot hold back. And by extension, this refers to the whole of the Greek people who have been under Turkish dominion but who are now answering the spirit of Liberty as it sweeps through the lands. The famous lines from the chorus show a shift from the individual Greek responding to the rebirth of Greece to a description of that rebirth:

But Greece and her foundations are
 Built below the tide of war,
 Based on the crystalline sea
 Of thought and its eternity;
 Her citizens, imperial spirits,
 Rule the present from the past,
 On all this world of men inherits
 Their seal is set. (ll. 696–702)

In what sense is this assertion true? In the sense that the attitudes and spirit exemplified by Greece, e.g., liberty, freedom, beauty, are eternal and were best manifested in Greece, although not exclusive to them. The “seal” of these citizens is available to the “world of men.” Read in this way it is a gesture of inclusivity: the spirit of Greece is for everyone, and this reflects the “We are all Greeks” of the preface as including not just Europeans whose governments are in some way Greek-inspired, but all people, regardless of their present situation.³⁸ In this sense it appears that Shelley seeks a universalistic application. However, a more narrow reading of the passage is possible: Shelley posits Greece in the restricted sense as an ideal, despite his own acknowledgments elsewhere of its uncongenial ways, and asserts that it is the basis of all civilizations specifically in order to characterize it as a perfect predecessor, and to raise immediate support for its endeavors. By saying that the citizens of Greece “rule the present from the past” (l. 700) Shelley echoes Ahasuerus’s lesson to Mahmud. But such an equation between the greatness of the past and the greatness of the present is even more of a bind here because he implies that the past is *better* than the present, which seems to introduce a paradox into the theory of social progress. If time is moving forward how can the past “rule” the present? It is a harsh language of subordination that also appears to be contradicted in the subsequent image of “the world’s eyeless charioteer” which rolls unproblematically over the bleeding empire of “Ruin and renovation” because the eyeless charioteer knows no sympathies.

This problematic conception of the role of the past in determining the future and in the conception of Ancient Greece as perfect is reinforced by another kind of split intention in this passage. Shelley describes the chaos of blood and

revenge in the image of the falling of the Ottomans and he admonishes the Greeks not to carry out a war of revenge and violence that will make the Greeks just like their enemies:

In sacred Athens, near the fane
 Of wisdom, Pity's altar stood:
 Serve not the unknown God in vain,
 But pay that broken shrine again,
 Love for hate and tears for blood. (ll. 733–37)

While this language may bring us back to the nonviolence of *The Revolt of Islam*, here in *Hellas* it is at odds with the language that reminds us of Turkish atrocities and incites our support for military intervention. Although such warnings to Greece may be well advised, it sits uncomfortably in *Hellas* alongside the vision of Turkish atrocities, and idealized Greek “Freedom,” i.e. if it is the perfect birthplace of freedom, why would it need such warnings in the first place? One wonders too if the primary audience for the poem is the English readership whose support for the cause he hopes to inspire, why include such warnings against revenge?

The final choral song must accomplish several tasks which seem at odds with each other and the generally hopeful tone of the poem. Shelley must include information about the Greek military losses and reassert the atrocities of the Turks in order to garner immediate Western support of the Greek cause. Thus, “the voice without” announces three times facts about Turkish victory with European support, each of which is punctuated with a sensational and explicit ending: “Impale the remnant of the Greeks! Despoil! /Violate! Make their flesh cheaper than dust” (ll. 949–50); “bring torches, sharpen those red stakes, /These chains are light, fitter for slaves and poisoners/Than Greeks. Kill! Plunder! Burn! Let none remain” (ll. 970–72); “Oh keep holy/This jubilee of unrevenged blood! / Kill! Crush! Despoil! Let not a Greek escape!” (ll. 1019–21). Given the harshness of this language, it is unclear how the call from the previous choral song not to engage in hate and revenge will be enacted. While in “The Mask of Anarchy” Shelley envisions an entirely nonviolent reaction to the violent repression by British officials, here, Shelley calls for foreign military support of a domestic military endeavor, dramatizing the brutality of the enemy and yet preaching understanding because this is more truly “Greek.” That such a view of the peaceful Greeks is illusory was well known to Shelley, and appears to explain part of the dramatization of the chorus’s final lines.

Perhaps for this very reason, the immediate political situation must be placed in a philosophical context. Even if the rebirth and independence of Greece is not effected in this current insurrection, the spirit of liberty that is embodied in Greece will at some future time live again because Greece is “above the idle foam of Time” (l. 1007). Although the structure of the image is the opposite (“above” versus “below” in “below the tide of war,” in l. 697) it amounts to the

same thing: Greece is eternal, not part of the temporal world. The final chorus reasserts the coming of the New Golden Age. It is a throwback to the old world, for Shelley envisions the future as a reiteration of classical Greece, “a new Argo,” “another Orpheus,” and “another Athens” will arise. And yet the concluding stanza unexpectedly rejects the entire equation of past and future and the prophecy enacted by a reading of the past. There has been considerable disagreement among scholars as to the meaning of the closing lines of the play:

Oh cease! Must hate and death return?
 Cease! Must men kill and die?
 Cease! Drain not to its dregs the urn
 Of bitter prophecy.
 The world is weary of the past,
 Oh, might it die or rest at last! (ll. 1096–1101)

Just when he expresses the hope and belief that Athens will rise again, Shelley abruptly interrupts the celebration of rebirth in the choral song in favor of a rejection of this engagement with the past and the power of prophecy. Just as we saw the Ottoman Empire based on the bloody overthrow of Constantinople, which determines its future fall, we also see the liberty-loving Athens which will, by virtue of its naming of liberty, return to liberty, even if it is again postponed by seeing Greece a wreck. Thus, the past of Greece determines its future status. Given the weight with which the past has been inflected through the discussion of time of Ahaseurus and the chorus’s assertion that the “past rules the present,” it seems that the chorus has not learned the lesson that was taught to Mahmud, for they see it as something that can be postponed or made to die. Ahaseurus seems to teach that as long as there is consciousness, there is a consciousness of time, but the chorus, when it has envisioned the fullness (good and bad) of the Hellenic past, turns away from it. For many scholars the way one reconciles these last lines with the poem as a whole determines whether one ultimately reads it as a unified and successful text or one that becomes entangled in a variety of compositional problems.³⁹

The chorus’s rejection of the “urn of bitter prophecy” may be compared to Mahmud’s unwilling devotion to the “chalice of destruction” in the second dialogue passage. Despite his knowledge that power is destruction itself, he suffers from the despot’s inability to relinquish power: “The Chalice of destruction full, and all/ Thirsting to drink; and who among us dares/To dash it from his lips?” (ll. 270–72). Despite this, Mahmud constantly approaches a deeper awareness of history’s moment of change: he sees the crescent moon as the: “Wan emblem of an empire fading now,” and even more to the point: “Far other bark than ours were needed now/To stem the torrent of descending Time” (l. 350). He is ruled by historical events which will see the end of his temporal empire. Thus, in the third dialogue he learns to reject the chalice of destruction when he promises to “rebuke/This drunkenness of triumph ere it die.” Although

Shelley's dramatization of the Sultan ends there, it is important to note that Mahmud's recognition of the destructive seduction of the chalice is fully effected in the third dialogue scene with Ahaseurus. Instead, for the chorus, the disavowal and refusal of the urn comes simultaneously with knowledge. It rejects the role that the past plays in determining the future just when it learns about its fullness and dangerousness. "Hellas" was never perfect, nor will it experience a mythic apotheosis. The Sultan recognizes and rejects the "chalice of destruction," while the chorus of Greek captive women turns away from the challenge of the past and the vision of the future, and dashes the "urn of bitter prophecy" from their lips, disrupting the Self/Other (Greek/Turk) conceptualization upon which Shelley's enthusiastic call to arms depends.

Despite his attempt to contrast the Turkish Other as a fallen temporal tyrant with eternal Hellas, Shelley's vision of a renewed eternal Hellas is disrupted by the temporal reality of Greece itself. In contrast with Byron's assertion that Greece would never be self-governing, Shelley's insistence on the reestablishment of its independence and grandeur was seriously buffeted by the messiness of war and violent historical contingency.⁴⁰ The challenges of history notwithstanding, both Byron and Shelley believed in striving for the improvement of society, in spite of all evidence that suggests its impossibility.

Chapter Five

Figuring the End of Empire in the City of Constantinople

“Constantinople! Constantinople!...C’est l’empire du monde.”

Napoleon I (1807)

THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY I HAVE BEEN TRACING THE THREE PRIMARY ASPECTS of the Ottoman Empire that appeared contrary to the ideal of the growing British Empire. We have seen how the world of the harem provided a complex counterimage of domesticity; how the treatment of the Greeks inspired ambivalent reactions to similar British systems; and how Turkey’s failure to industrialize and modernize exposed a persistent anxiety as well as pride in Britain’s changing economy. In addition to these characteristics, the capital city of Constantinople itself acted as a rich locus around which resonant images of empire clustered. As with the other elements of the Ottomans identified above, many Westerners found the real city of Constantinople, as well as its historical associations, both attractive and repulsive. With its famous geography straddling two continents and its Byzantine and Turkish historical associations, Constantinople provided writers, travelers, and antiquarians with a host of topics about which to think and write.

In this chapter I argue that the city of Constantinople acted as a fruitful counterimage of empire because the very shape of the empire, exemplified in the administration of its capital city, fundamentally differed from that of the English. This can be seen in two distinct ways. The first is in the ambiguous domestic/political space of the Imperial Harem. As discussed in [chapter three](#), this aspect of the Ottomans exemplified the opposite of the increasingly pervasive ideal of separate spheres of commerce and politics versus domesticity in England. The second is in the city’s status as crossroads of race, culture, and religion. Utilizing Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of the contact zone, I show how this aspect of the city was particularly disturbing to Western observers. What is of utmost uncanniness is that the capital itself (not just the frontiers of the empire) is a contact zone organized along racial, religious, and national lines.

A focus on Constantinople can be seen in a variety of writings at the turn of the nineteenth century: while histories and travelogues had been popular genres for many years, the period saw the genesis and growth of writings in other genres

as well. For instance, the philhellenic movement generated a proliferation of “politicized texts” dealing with the city, such as speeches and manifestoes (e.g., Edward Blaquiére’s writings), novels (e.g., Thomas Hopes *Anastatius*) and poems (e.g., Felicia Hemans’s *Modern Greece*) while the Napoleonic wars in Europe created a demand for guidebooks as tourism to the Ottoman domains increased.¹ In addition, developments in the study of Greek antiquities, most famously spurred by Johann Winckelmann, inspired books devoted to that topic, as in James Dallaway’s *Constantinople Ancient and Modern* (1787).² Therefore, new forms of writing were added to the long list of histories and travelogues that had been produced steadily since the seventeenth century; these new books ensured that Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire were well represented in many discourses aimed at a varied audience. These texts alternatively express admiration, anxiety, confusion, or contempt for this enduring empire, and especially its “occupation” of the city of Constantine.

In the section that follows I provide background on Constantinople, its shape and administration, and delineate the ways in which Westerners, especially British observers, were fascinated and distressed by it. Next, I analyze several fictional depictions of the city in its role as the center of a crumbling, but still powerful and dangerous empire. I am particularly interested in demonstrating how writers envisioned the city of Constantinople as a metaphorical locus for the literary presentation of the end of empire. To this end I briefly discuss Percy Shelley’s presentation of the city in his political allegory *The Revolt of Islam*; Byron’s portrayal of the infiltration of the Imperial Harem in the burlesque of the fifth Canto of *Don Juan*; and Mary Shelley’s use of the city as the source of the plague in *The Last Man*. Shelley’s novel explicitly projects the climax of history as the re-conquering of the city of Constantinople by a Western hero for the Greeks. However, instead of accomplishing this victory, the novel envisions the fall of that city as not only the end of Turkish history, but also the end of *all* history. It first shows the destruction of the empire as its capital falls, and then narrates the spread of the deadly plague throughout the world. This not only results in the contamination of the commercial and political segments of British society, but also of the inviolable domestic space as well. Shelley thus forges a final, reverberating similarity between the two empires, despite all the seeming differences. I believe that in doing so Shelley explicitly criticizes the false ideals of domesticity and imperial culture that were becoming entrenched in the society in which she lived.

A PART FOR THE WHOLE: CONSTANTINOPLE AS THE CENTER OF EMPIRE

Over the centuries, the city of Constantinople has inspired the admiration and the longing of many observers; obviously, the Turkish sultans admired it sufficiently to make it the new capital of their growing empire. Long before Mehmet II conquered Constantinople in 1453, the Turks had ambitions to possess the great

Eastern capital of the Holy Roman Empire. In the early-fifteenth century they already controlled much of Thrace and Asia Minor, the area surrounding the city, and had attempted to take the capital more than once. There had been two failed sieges of the city: one in 1395 by Mehmet's great-grandfather, Beyazid I, and again in 1430 by his father, Murad II. When Mehmet II took the throne in 1451 he made the capture of the city his first priority, accomplishing his task on May 29, 1453.³ He immediately made the city the new capital of his empire, and considered himself now not only the Padishah, (God's viceroy on Earth, in the Persian tradition), but also heir to the Roman Caesars. The transformation of the city from capital of the Byzantine Empire to that of the Ottoman Empire was effected with the ritual conversion of the Hagia Sophia Church into the Ayasofya Mosque. Although disparaged for its contemporary problems, (constant fires, poor plague-precautions and narrow, chaotic streets), the city had grand historical associations and a geographical location that made it a world-class city. In 1603, Richard Knolles described it as that "noble city (of all others most fitly seated for the Empire of the world, and with great majesty overlooking both Europe and Asia)..." (231). In 1789, Elizabeth Craven wrote: "I am determined to see that place where the capital of the world ought to be.... [Constantinople]" (*Journey* 195). And in 1839, perhaps the most enthusiastic of all these observers, Julia Pardoe wrote: "Constantinople needs no aid from the imagination to make it one of the brightest gems in the diadem of nature" (*Beauties* 3–4). She lists among its many benefits its geographical position and its political importance.

Over the years the city became a powerful synecdoche for the Empire itself. This relationship was reinforced by the fact that, from the seventeenth century onward, the outer borders of the empire were in almost constant flux. Areas of the Balkans, the Arabian Peninsula, even Egypt might be a solid part of the empire, a nominal province, or perhaps even lost to the control of another power. However the outer borders might shift, the city of Constantinople, with its famous Golden Horn, and crucial strategic control of the Bosphorus, was always the seat of imperial power and the progenitor of culture. The center of Constantinople, referred to sometimes as Seraglio Point (see [figure 9](#)), is a landmass sticking out into the Bosphorus on which stands the Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, and the Imperial Palace (Topkapi). The importance of the Imperial Palace increased in the seventeenth century when the tradition of sending princes to provincial cities for training was discontinued and when sultans stopped accompanying armies on campaign. As a result, all princes and sultans were in almost constant residence in the city.⁴

Any discussion of the Imperial Harem might well begin by establishing a definition of the Arabic word *haram*. The first definition refers to that which is forbidden and unlawful and also that which is sacred, inviolable, taboo. It is used to refer to places that are considered a sanctuary (e.g., the cities of Mecca and Medina are themselves *haram*) and that therefore are restricted to limited access and certain kinds of behavior. In her excellent study *The Imperial Harem*, Leslie Peirce further explains that the very presence of the sultan would render any



Figure 9. Seraglio Point, by William E. Bartlett, from Julia Pardoe's *The Beauties of the Bosphorous* (1839).

place *haram*. Therefore, even before the women's quarters were moved into the Imperial Palace by Sultan Suleiman in the sixteenth century, the inner precincts of the seraglio, which were only inhabited by the sultan and his male companions, were already *haram*. Nevertheless, it is also true that the word refers to the restricted quarters of women or even the women themselves. Given the various related connotations of this word and the practices surrounding it, it is clear that Peirce is correct when she notes that, "The word *haram* is a term of respect, redolent of religious purity and honor and evocative of the requisite obeisance" (5).

In addition to the fact that the word "harem" has a complex of meanings likely unknown to the Western reader, the physical layout of the palace structure may be equally mysterious. While the "harem" only refers properly to the inner (third) court, the palace was actually a vast complex of courts and buildings that provided a myriad of services. In his study of the palace complex published in 1937 upon its early opening to scholars and foreigners, N.M. Penzer noted the fact that the fame of the harem overwhelmed any other awareness of the palace structure: "the fact that the palace contained a great military School of State, over a dozen mosques, ten double kitchens, two bakeries, a flour-mill, two

hospitals, and various baths, storerooms, sports fields, etc. is almost wholly ignored.”⁵ The first court was public and the second was a semipublic space where government business, including the reception of ambassadors, was carried out. One then passed through the *Babi sa'adet*, or the “gates of felicity,” into the women’s harem. No one went beyond that point but the women, the sultan, and the black eunuchs (and the occasional interloper, such as Don Juan, who will be discussed shortly).

The physical structure of the Imperial Harem reflects a characteristic conceptualization of power in Islamic thinking. In *The Political Language of Islam*, Bernard Lewis explains that Western and Islamic thought both make use of spatial metaphors, denoting position and direction in space in order to envision how power operates. However, Western conceptualizations make copious use of up-down and front-back language, while Islamic metaphors figure power relations more often as in-out relationships. Lewis further shows that these metaphors have their manifestation in the technologies of power: “The nearer to the center, the greater the power; the further from the center, the less the power. In the Ottoman Imperial Palace, the entire complex of buildings was divided into three zones known as the Inside, the Inbetween, and the Outside.”⁶ Thus the physical penetration of the very center of the palace structure would equal the penetration of the very heart of the Ottoman Empire as a political entity, which is why Don Juan’s penetration is so suggestive.

Because Constantinople was the center of the Ottoman Empire it is also the center of the histories written about the empire. Even when a book is not describing the city explicitly, the city is still a strong presence in the text. Everything pivots on Constantinople: to describe the social structures of the Turks, the architecture and running of the Imperial Harem, or the lives of the sultans, always means that one is invoking the city as the focal point of all that activity. It is thus always the core of empire, the locus of historical events, and the metaphorical center of the historical studies about the empire. This information helps to establish why Mary Shelley’s fictional link of the fall of Constantinople with the end of history itself works so well.

Of course, the history of Constantinople begins long before the Ottoman period, and foreigners were interested in it as the former capital of the Byzantine Empire, the city of Justinian, famous in its own right for antiquarian and historical reasons. They therefore began to focus with increasing verve in the nineteenth century on the idea of reconquering this once-Greek city. The philhellenes saw it as the birthright of all modern Greeks to save the city from Turkish oppression and restore it as the center of a revitalized Hellenic world. Such sentiments were well expressed in political speeches as well as fiction. The spirit of estranged homecoming (akin to that forged in Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam*) may be seen in Thomas Hope’s novel *Anastatius* (1817):

In a few hours I was to behold that celebrated city, whose origins lay hid in obscurity of ages, whose ancient greatness had often been the theme of my

infant wonder, and whose humiliation under the Othman yoke I had, in concert with my *didaskalos* of Chios, frequently lamented with tears; but which—even in its present degraded state, and groaning under the despotism of the Turks—had from a child been the final object of all my views and wishes. (51)

As Hope's novel presents it, the city is a faded version of its former glory; it has an ancient grandeur that is only half understood, and is the object of a young Greek's admiration and ambition. Existing both in a state of degradation and yet the object of all hopes, the city is an uncanny blend of Greek/Turkish cultures.⁷

Such philhellenes saw the reconquest of the city as coterminous with the final fall of the Ottoman Empire, and by extension, the end of history in the sense that Turkish history could finally be written, with a beginning, middle *and* end. Actually being able to narrate the fall of the empire would be better than indulging in the speculative rhetoric of continual decline that characterizes so much of the later histories. For the philhellenes, the fall of the city would mean the fall of the Ottoman Empire itself, which would be a cultural, political, and romantic accomplishment to envisage and attain. Although the final end to that empire might fulfill the longings of many philhellenes in terms of culture, romance, and legend, as we saw in chapter four, maintaining the integrity of it following Waterloo, was the official policy among many Western governments. The dangers of republican movements and Russian expansion were palpable threats to the power of Western nations, and thus outweighed the humanistic value of freeing Greece. Despite official policies to help maintain the Ottoman Empire, public sentiment often expressed some level of sympathy or support for the Greek cause and disdain for Ottoman weakness and oppression of non-Turks.

ANXIETIES OF THE CONTACT ZONE

Whether one experienced the city as a tourist viewing the Hagia Sophia or as a philhellene envisioning the fall of the Ottomans, Constantinople was a cultural and religious hybrid, and perhaps, most important, a racial hybrid. Indeed, Westerners' fascination with the city is almost always bound up with its status as crossroads, where East meets West, and where Islam confronts Christianity. As is still the case today, one feels a movement into the East upon viewing Istanbul's skyline of minarets, hearing the voice of the muezzin calling prayers, and experiencing the bustle of the quays along the Bosphorus. Despite the Muslim character of the city, there is a familiarity that makes it not wholly unlike European cities. In his *Travels in Various Countries* (1814), E.D. Clarke writes of the timeless quality of the city of Constantinople because the Turks adapted so many Greek customs: "There is every reason to believe, that the Turks themselves, at the conquest of Constantinople, adopted many of the customs, and embraced the refinements of a people they had subdued."⁸ A similar reaction is noted by Dr. Charles Lewis Meryon (physician of Lady Hester Stanhope). Upon

arriving in Constantinople in August 1810, he immediately notes the ineffable oddity of Constantinople: “all that one sees is odd and strange, but it is difficult to make another person understand in which that strangeness consists” (*Travels*, I:51). Ultimately, Meryon identifies that strangeness as in part caused by the mixture of so many different people in one place, by the way the city represents both East and West. For some observers the increasing influence of Europe in the city was quite distressing. In *The Beauties of the Bosphorus* Julia Pardoe lamented the way in which the much-needed reforms of Sultan Mahmud II were affecting “the very aspect of the city.” Recognizing the proliferation of European architecture, she feared that it would soon be “a mere city of European palaces, and marts, and manufacturies” (5).

More than just a crossroads of cultures and religion, the city of Constantinople is a version of the contact zone, defined by Mary Louise Pratt as: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery.”⁹ It is obvious that any empire, including that of the Ottomans, has outer-lying geographical territories where the meeting between conquerors and subjects is first made, and where the ongoing interaction between such outside colonizing forces and indigenous peoples will be carried out. But it is also true in the case of the Ottomans that their capital city of Constantinople is a contact zone as well. This is so because the very structure of the Ottoman Empire as a multiracial and multireligious empire allowed for widespread immigration and included some of its subject people in government, naturally making it a contact zone. It is a distinctive feature of this contact zone that the subject peoples simultaneously engaged in the administration of the empire in very powerful positions although their status was always unstable and thus subject to abrupt reversals of fortune.

The particular brand of colonial contact that existed in Constantinople differed from the colonial experience of most European nations. Pratt describes the contact zone of Western nations as

often synonymous with ‘colonial frontier.’ But while the latter term is grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe) ‘contact zone’ is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. (7)

What is significant about Constantinople as a contact zone is that the domestic center of the powerful and expansionist empire, is the *same* as the colonial frontier. Instead of the colonial frontier being far removed, the “copresence of subjects” occurs just under the noses of the colonizing powers. Furthermore, despite racial and religious preferences to Muslims and Turks, these subjects were also powerful and socially mobile. Although Pratt’s description of contact

zone is thus different from that present in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, I adapt it for use here tak-ing my cue from Pratt's own suggestion: "I hope that some of the readings and ways of readings I propose will be suggestive for people thinking about similar materials from other times and places" (11). Furthermore, the testimonials of visitors and imaginative uses of the city by Western writers at the time suggest that these aspects of the empire were of significant interest to them.

Due to the geographical mixture of peoples in this contact zone, a method for distinguishing them from one another was necessary. Along with specific quarters, the city was demarcated by population along racial and religious lines. The physical structure of imperial power has already been discussed; we have seen that the farther one travels to the center, the closer one is to the source of power (it is because women are also at the center that the space is both political and domestic). In addition, there is a hierarchy of peoples in the Ottoman Empire; in fact, it is a common Islamic belief that to maintain order per rigid definitions is the very nature of justice itself, for innovation is looked upon with skepticism. The breakdown of the social pyramid is as follows: *Padishah* (Sultan), *Sadrazam* (Grand Vizier), *Ulema* (religious judges) and civil judiciary, military, and finally the *Awamm* (the ruled), made up of the artisans and traders, the *Rayah* (peasants) divided into Muslims (a politically amorphous group) and non-Muslims (divided into *millets* by religious denomination). The internal affairs of the various *millets* were administered by their own courts and religious authorities.¹⁰ The only groups of people outside of this system were those of the imperial court itself. Boys were taken from subject populations for imperial service because it was hoped that a separation from their families and old allegiances would ensure their total devotion to the sultan. This too was the justification for bringing non-Turkish women into the Imperial Harem. Because women were taken from non-Muslim populations, there would be little chance of competing dynastic claims for the crown. Of the way this social structure worked, Niyazi Berkes writes:

Through the application of certain principles implied in this concept of society, a great degree of unity was realized over a long period of time. Disorder broke out only when principles ceased to be applied and the various groups began to develop tendencies that were incompatible with these principles.¹¹

The fortunes of non-Turks within the city could fluctuate widely. While there was no forced conversion of non-Muslims, they had to pay special taxes; although the *millets* had their own private courts, such courts were answerable to the central administration for the overall conduct of their peoples; although their internal ways of educating their children or worshipping in churches was unhindered, they were not free to make changes that would compromise the integrity of their institutions. For instance, Catholic influence in the Armenian Church was discouraged.

But because Turks were themselves few in number, other people were encouraged to seek out and succeed in the powerful realms of business and politics. The empire was ostensibly a meritocracy where anyone, regardless of birth, religion or race, could rise to power and wealth by virtue of talent and hard work. This policy was also designed to militate against the rise of competing Turkish dynasties and to ensure the stability of Ottoman rule. However, Westerners saw this as a hopelessly corrupt and irrational system. In later years it seemed more often not to reward the just and wise, but to elevate the abject by the irrational favoritism of one man, the sultan. The typical example of this is the story of a seventeenth-century barber who was elevated to the position of Grand Vizier in a single day. Although there was no aristocracy in the Ottoman Empire as such, dynastic families (often Greek, Albanian, and Armenian) maintained posts of honor, wealth and power for centuries.¹² For example, the Balian family members were the imperial architects from 1727 to the twentieth century; the Druzian family provided the superintendents of the imperial mint from 1757 to 1880; and the Dadian family were prominent factory owners and political advisors.¹³ Although the presence of subject peoples in the government, business, and administrative posts was widespread, the position of such individuals and families was always marked by a simultaneous and paradoxical asymmetry of power. In effect, because they were non-Muslim and non-Turkish they were subject to shifts of power that could be either favorable or damaging to their position.¹⁴

While the Ottoman experience with its subject peoples is unlike that of European nations, it is somewhat akin to the spatial proximity of the black slaves and white slave owners in America. The multiracial populations of the cities of the Ottoman Empire were stratified and codified in ways similar to those of the growing American states. However, such an experience of diverse racial and religious populations living in such close proximity never existed on the domestic side of the British Empire. This is not to say that there was no international presence in London. Wordsworth specifically enumerates the many races that can be found there: “The Swede, the Russian; from the genial South, / The Frenchman and the Spaniard; from remote/America, the hunter Indian; Moors, /Malays, Lascars, the Tartar and Chinese, /And Negro ladies in white muslin gowns” (*The Prelude*, VII:239–43). Furthermore, Byron acknowledged the similarity between British treatment of the Irish and Turkish treatment of the Greeks in the notes to *Childe Harold* Canto II; nevertheless, the English domestic sense of empire was quite different from that of the Turks. The British were becoming increasingly responsible for the occupation and administration of vast numbers of racially and religiously diverse populations, but for them the contact zone with these people was far from the domestic center of home. As Anne McClintock has shown, the presence of the empire came home through such forms as the imagery of commercial products and the material benefits of wealth.¹⁵ However, the reality of personal daily contact was not part of its social structure or consciousness. As James Baldwin succinctly put it, “in effect, the

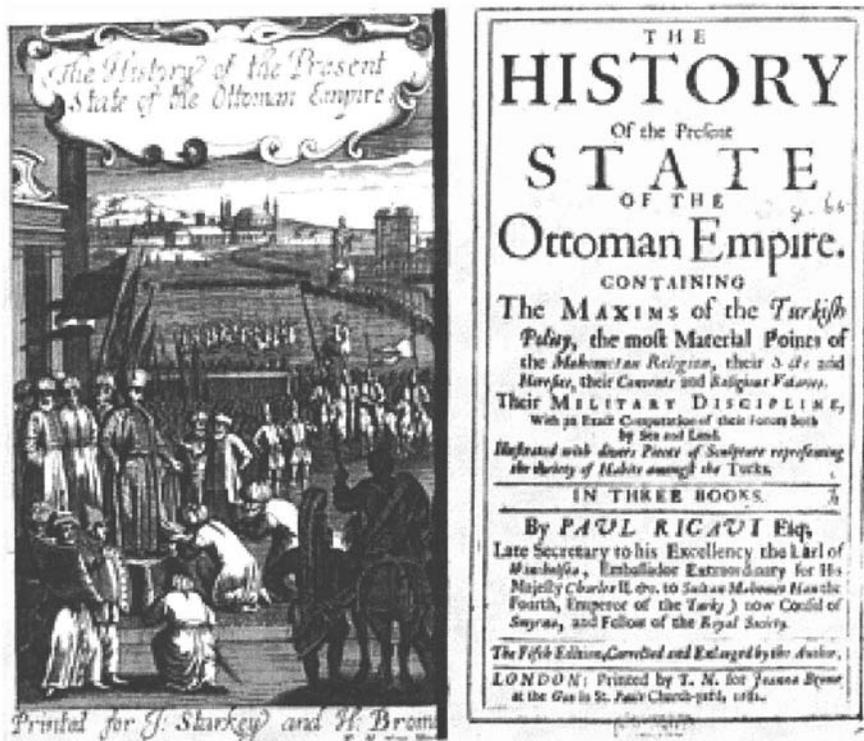


Figure 10. Frontispiece to Paul Rycaut, *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1682).

black man, *as a man*, did not exist for Europe.”¹⁶ It is not surprising therefore that the British response to the Ottoman capital, especially because its subject people were often white and Christian, was one of fascination and disdain.

An early example of an anxious British response to the city’s racial and religious mixture can be seen in Sir Paul Rycaut’s *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1666). The mixture of admiration and contempt in Rycaut’s conception of the Turks was described in the introduction of this book; he expresses a similar attitude in his views of their capital. In the frontispiece to his book the sultan is pictured in the foreground receiving obeisance from two men; he is surrounded by officials, soldiers, and flying banners; he looks very royal and the city flourishes, complete with mosque, in the background, (see [figure 10](#)). Despite this evidently glorious scene, to Rycaut, Constantinople was a disconcerting mixture of races and religions that was most thoroughly characterized by the slave mentality of its inhabitants:

...[T]he continual supply of slaves sent in by the Tartars...fills Constantinople with such a strange race, mixture, and medley of different

sorts of blood, that it is hard to find many who that can derive a clear line from ingenuous parents; so that it is no wonder that amongst the Turks a disposition be found fitted and disposed to servitude, and that it is better governed with a severe and tyrannical hand, than with sweetness, and lenity which is unknown to them and their forefathers. (17)

In Rycaut's estimation, the institutional mixture of races creates an atmosphere of impurity that pervades the city. This in turn breeds a spirit of servitude in the hearts of Constantinople's inhabitants that serves the end of the sultan: he benefits from a population that is biologically predisposed to servitude because the *only* way that such people can be governed is with tyranny. As negative as this is, Rycaut's verbal description is at odds with the pictorial depiction. Those giving such obeisance to the sultan in the frontispiece do not appear as cringing sycophants, nor does he appear as a monster.

In addition to Rycaut, many later observers were equally disturbed by the mixture of the races in the empire. For instance, in the rhetoric of the philhellenic movement, writers worked to deny that any similarities between Greeks and Turks have been forged by their proximity, and encouraged the Greeks to reassert their own racial purity in contrast to Turkish barbarism. The philhellene Reverend Thomas Smart Hughes is an interesting example of one who grappled with the issue of the racial purity of the Greeks in their fight for independence. Hughes makes a point of denying any correspondence between the Turks and Greeks; for example he asserts that: "In Turkey the distinction between Mussulman and Christian is as strongly marked as at the first: it is the distinction, as Mr. Eton says, of 'conqueror and conquered, oppressed and oppressor.'" ¹⁷ Hughes had earlier expressed this sentiment when news of Greek atrocities against Turkish peasants in the uprising was circulating in England. His denial of the veracity of the reports rests on racial criteria: "But the most atrocious part of all to be played, is the endeavor by some persons to assimilate the *Greek character* in point of systematic cruelty, as they call it, with that of the Turks themselves...." ¹⁸ Hughes' staunch defense of the Greek character changed only later, upon his travels to the region. In his *Travels in Greece and Albania* (1830), Hughes not only addressed the problem of the gap between the modern Greek and the idealized vision of the ancients, he actually questions their lineage: "that unfortunate race, occupants of that soil, if not the legitimate descendants of those heroes, whose names still shed a blaze of glory over the land which contains their ashes." ¹⁹ Confronted with the "Greek character" in person, Hughes stops denying their similarity to the Turks, and addresses instead their departure from the ideal of their ancestors. Hughes acknowledges that, living in such close proximity to the Turks and under their oppressive regime, the Greeks have actually been compromised racially; therefore, he reduces them rhetorically to "occupants of the soil."

This awareness of the racial compromise of the modern Greeks circulated widely in the period. Leigh Hunt is even less generous to the Greeks than

Hughes, asserting that their racial degradation is an even more extensive problem: “now we see an effort made against their oppressors even by that *mixed and degraded race*, the descendants of the effeminate population of the Lower Roman Empire....”²⁰ Furthermore, such sentiments were echoed by the Greek leaders as well; writing in *The Morning Chronicle*, Prince Ypsilanti specifically challenges the Greeks to line up racially either with the Greeks or the Turks:

The country will recompense her true children who obey her voice, by the price of glory and honour. But she will reprove as *illegitimate, and as Asiatic bastards*, those who shew themselves dead and disobedient to her will, abandoning their names, like that of traitors, to the malediction of posterity. (21, my emphasis)

Thus, the recognition of the effects of the racial proximity engendered in the Ottoman contact zone cuts both ways. The Turkish system itself is criticized, as are its Greek victims if they betray any congenital similarity to their barbaric oppressors.²²

One last example of this indicates the way in which some observers were quite willing to accept the decline of Greek life as a historical necessity. In his very popular *Letters from the Levant* (Byron was a fan) John Galt, writes:

It is impossible to witness the degraded state of the Greeks, and to remember their antient [*sic*], elevation and glory, without feelings of indignation; and yet, if they had not themselves fallen from their former greatness they would not have been in the miserable situation which they now hold. It is useless to grieve for their condition. Nations, like individuals, must die; the enterprizing [*sic*] and speculating spirit must depart from them, and the carcase [*sic*] become rotten, and moulder away. The Greeks of these times, as seen among the ruins of antient temples [*sic*], are but the vermin that inhabit the skeleton of a deceased hero. (23)

The tone and imagery of Galt’s text is not to be misread: there is a resigned acceptance of the fact that a civilization’s decline is a natural occurrence over which one need not brood, unlike Shelley’s struggle (discussed in [chapter four](#)) to make the decline of Hellas equal the progress of world civilization. Furthermore, the imagery of the modern Greeks as “vermin” is cruelly stark and unmitigated.

The uncanny nature of the Ottoman Empire as exemplified in the quintessential locus of the city of Constantinople thus acted as a provocative image of empire for the British in the age of its expanding Eastern Empire. Even as the British government was actively engaged in the slave trade, the slow colonization of India, and the expansion of West Indian plantations, all of which were activities that required the systemized codification of native peoples, Britons were able to view the Ottoman imperial system as wholly Other. This

was possible at least in part because of the distance between British imperial holdings and its domestic capital, making the effects of empire at home far more subtle than those of the Ottoman capital. It is precisely because of the way the city projected the familiar face of the Other Empire that liberal writers were able to utilize it to dramatize the end of empire. The city provided the perfect terrain with which to critique subtly aspects of British imperial culture that were uncongenial to liberal viewpoints.

THE GOLDEN CITY OF *THE REVOLT OF ISLAM*

Shelley's treatment of the city of Constantinople in *The Revolt of Islam* follows the poetics of allusion I described in [chapter four](#). With the myriad of Turkish associations floating in the culture, Shelley was able to make effective metaphorical use of the city itself as the site of revolution. With the basic context of a Greek fight for liberation having been established, Shelley could justifiably portray the end of empire as the non-violent entry into Constantinople and the dethroning of the sultan. Shelley never names the city but refers to it instead as the Golden City; the importance of the location is reinforced by the original subtitle, *The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*. Maintaining the focus on feelings of alienation in one's own homeland established in earlier cantos, Shelley describes the Greek entry into that city as only momentarily a happy homecoming before the Turks reassert their power over the city and the populace. The failure of the effort to end empire therefore becomes lamentable, despite the contemporary political policy of maintaining the stability of existing monarchies and empires. Furthermore, Shelley invokes the city as a contact zone when he refers to the many different races and religions therein, and when he dramatizes the counterrevolution as international in nature.

To highlight the basic nature of the city under Turkish control, Shelley juxtaposes the field outside the Golden City with the Golden City itself. The field is a wilderness of redeemed humanity while the city represents the wilds of perverted civilization. Both are sites of momentary harmony, but then violence and distress. Three crucial events are staged in the plain: first, Laon's initial joining of the revolution and teachings of the people; second, the Festival of Brotherhood after the nonviolent entry into the city; and third, the counterrevolutionary massacre. The shift between the ideal of the Festival and the devastation of the massacre marks the extreme failure of this attempt to end an empire. But what is responsible for this abrupt and devastating shift from the total idealism of the Festival of Brotherhood to the utter annihilation of the movement? From the general joy of the public scene to the private, desperate solace of the two heroes alone?

Shelley's allegory is obviously working in extremes: figuring the revolution as nearly perfect, it also fails in the extreme. Donna Richardson has suggested that the problems of the self and Whole hinge on what Cythna eventually identifies as a "dark idolatry of self" (l. 3390). Richardson writes: "The story of Laon and

Cythna illustrates how much more difficult it is for those enmeshed in a particular historical situation to untangle self-idolatry from those desires of the ego that are entwined in the larger context of human experience" (76). The depths of this misconception of the role of the self, this admittedly human error, are such that it is a greater source of evil than the seemingly inscrutable movements of Necessity itself. In the end, this revolution does not fail because the Greek cause was unjust or because Turkish authority deserved to be maintained. In this case, the masses were unable to rise to the level of their leaders because the leaders positioned themselves so highly as not to see the realities of the situation below them.²⁴ For this reason, the heroes and the revolutionary poetry are themselves implicated as destructive.²⁵ Shelley makes a point about the necessity for slow, steady progress over premature, violent revolution if the masses are not thoroughly prepared for such radical change. The fact that the abject ignorance of the oppressed Greeks was continually reported at the time by other Europeans made them the perfect representative of this phenomenon. By projecting this vision of a failed violent revolution on the sphere of the Ottoman Empire, Shelley is able to critique both irresponsible revolutionaries as well as the tyrannical forces of counterrevolution. In the end, Shelley argues that all are guilty of such crimes, and the victims are the people, just as is currently the case for the actual Greeks living under Turkish oppression, both in the villages of Greece and the city of Constantinople and by extension, all peoples living under oppressive regimes around the world.

Equally important to Shelley's imaginative construction of the effort to end empire in *The Revolt* is his use of the site of the Golden City itself. Whereas the plain outside the city walls is the wilderness of redeemed humanity, the city is the battleground of tyranny and oppression. Four important events occur within the city: Cythna begins the entire freedom movement by preaching throughout the city, and later it is the crucial scene of the dethroning of Othman the Turkish Sultan. At the end of the poem Shelley returns to the city in order to stage the violent counter-revolution, and finally to dramatize Laon's self-sacrificing surrender to the tyrant.

Shelley dramatizes Othman's successful and very bloody counterrevolution as a kind of international contact zone when he uses the specific terms "Tartar and Frank" to describe those who make up the military power. As was well known, Tartars were long part of the Turkish military machine, and "Frank" was the general Turkish term used to signify Europeans. First the armies of the nations come to quell the revolution: the desert savage and "Europe's subtler sons" all help each other because: "they knew his cause their own, and swore/Like wolves, and serpents to their mutual wars/Strange truce, with many a rite which Earth and Heaven abhors. (ll. 3853–55). However, the paid military dupes of the "legitimate despots" are nothing compared to the priests. Othman uses a Christian/Iberian priest to talk to the people, which is in line with the fact that the administration of subject peoples was delegated directly to their own religious authorities.²⁶ Christian priests would have been used to communicate with their

people (or be executed for failing to do so.) The names of many gods are also invoked here: Mahomet, Moses, Buddh, Brahm, Foh, Christ (changed in *The Revolt to* Joshua), Ormuzd, and Zerjusht (both associated with Zoroastrianism) and everyone shouts, "Our god is the only one." Shelley makes little attempt to delineate any religion as better or worse than another.²⁷ Both the names of the countries who send troops as well as this survey of religions is an inclusive rather than restricted condemnation of the policies of any one country. Shelley implicates them all for their part in fighting against the peaceful revolution. The space of Constantinople as a contact zone and a crossroads of cultures and religions provides him with the perfect location for such a critique of multiple races, religions, and nations.

Finally, Shelley effects a deadly criticism of Constantinople as a tyrannical city by juxtaposing it with America as the exemplary liberated land. In the end of *The Revolt* Laon reenters the Golden City in the guise of a hermit in an attempt to sacrifice himself while securing for Cythna safe passage to America:

Yes, in the desert there is *built a home*
For Freedom. Genius is made strong to rear
 The monuments of man beneath the dome
 Of a new heaven; myriads assemble there,
 Whom the proud lords of man, in rage of fear,
 Drive from their *wasted home*, the boon I pray
 Is this—That Cythna shall be convoyed there—
 Nay, start not at the name—America!
 And then to you this night Laon will I betray. (ll. 4432–40, my emphasis)

The mythic land of America is a counter-balance to despotic Turkey. This idealized vision of America as the "home/for Freedom" is a new Greece, free from the oppression of the Turks as exemplified in their occupation of Constantinople. Laon's effort to see Cythna in this idealized America prefigures the perfect homecoming in the Temple of the Spirit with which the poem ends. This thoroughly and finally establishes the trope of home and alienation that is exemplified by the plight of the Greeks oppressed in their once-great city of Constantinople.

In *The Revolt* Shelley envisions the near-end of empire in that politically volatile space of the Ottoman Empire. Whereas the poem begins with a vision of the Greeks as alienated in their own homes, it portrays their peaceful recapturing of the great city of Constantinople as a short-lived homecoming. Although he imagines the Greeks as ideally as possible, the failure of the revolution hinges on the fact that the oppressed Greeks are really not ready for this kind of revolution. He hints that such an idealized vision is itself partly responsible for the failure of the revolution because the people as a whole are not equally prepared to retake the city and reestablish their glory.

DON JUAN IN THE IMPERIAL PALACE

Although Byron traveled to Turkey, achieved fame and notoriety with the *Turkish Tales* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, (which included the second canto set in Ottoman domains), he did not write anything that dealt significantly with Constantinople until *Don Juan* (1821). Byron's life-long interest in the empire is well known: he read books at an early age, collected histories avidly and prided himself on the first-hand experiences that enhanced his academic knowledge.²⁸ He often debunked the false ideals of Greece propagated by those without such experience.²⁹ Such a long-term interest in the region, however, seems to have resulted in a disappointment upon his actual arrival in Constantinople in 1810. In the letters from his first tour he often expresses a self-consciousness of his role as a tourist and he continually defers the act of full narration to his traveling companion, John Cam Hobhouse, or even other travelers and historians, such as Mary Wortley Montagu and Edward Gibbon.³⁰ This tendency persists when he arrives in Constantinople. For instance, Byron wrote to John Hanson (May 23, 1810): "Here I am at last, I refer you for descriptions of Constantinople to the various travelers who have scribbled on the subject" (Marchand I:243). Rather than recording details about the city in his letters, Byron reports his big adventure of swimming the Hellespont (even retelling it to the same person) and asks for information about home. J.P.Donovan has discussed Byron's strange quietness regarding the city and calls it a "creative lacuna" of which Byron was aware and anxious.³¹

In this chapter I have been delineating the cluster of associations around the city of Constantinople, which made it a fruitful location for the imaginative staging of the fall of empire. In *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley used the trope of Greek alienation when he staged the near-end of the Turkish Empire as the peaceful penetration of the "Imperial House" by the pacifist Greeks. We see a similar penetration of the Imperial Harem in Canto V of *Don Juan*, which constitutes Byron's long-anticipated imaginative engagement with the city. In contrast to Shelley's serious political allegory, Byron's poem utilizes the satiric mode to stage the comic subversion of the Ottoman Empire as the sexual infiltration of the harem. Although it may at first appear merely as a comic sexual interlude, as Byron well knew, such an infiltration would carry a great deal of politico-religious value in the Islamic system of government. He ridicules the solemn political identity of the Imperial Harem by showing it to be just as vulnerable to attack as the average home.

This vision of the harem in *Don Juan* (1821) may be seen as the culmination of Byron's engagement of similar themes in the *Turkish Tales*. As we saw in [chapter three](#), disobedient actions had decisive consequences for all the heroines of the *Turkish Tales*; in fact, I argued there that resistance to despotism through action is their defining characteristic, despite the failure in which that action almost always results. This trend ended, however, on a humble note in the final parodic figure of Kaled and the ghostly figure of Francesca. As a final note to

this discussion, I turn briefly to the way that Byron re-reflects this concern years later, when in the satiric portrayal of the Sultana Gulbeyaz in *Don Juan*, the subversive power of the female actually threatens the very heart of the empire, the Imperial Palace of Constantinople. The sultana's actions are a political act of subversion which is masked only slightly as sexual comedy. The implication for husbands or governments from Spain to Russia to England is clear in the end when the narrator announces that "Emperors are only husbands in wives eyes" (V:917).

In contrast to the *Turkish Tales* which were lambasted for not having a clear moral stance, Canto V opens with a promise to write about love in order to be moral and to instruct: "Now, if my pegasus should not be shod ill, /This poem will become a moral model" (V:15–16). Furthermore, the tales of 1813 and 1814 all dealt with pashas in such outlying territories as Albania and Anatolia, but in *Don Juan* Byron finally pierced the inner sanctum of the Imperial Harem itself, the most holy and secret place in the entire Ottoman Empire.³² Byron is careful and economic in the choice of detail used to render the harem. Echoing his refusal to describe sights and events in his letters from the East, Byron eschews the detailed depiction of what Juan sees: "I won't describe; description is my forte, /But every fool describes in these bright days/His wond'rous journey to some foreign court" (V: 409–11). Nevertheless, even in the midst of these protests, Byron renders the interior of the harem per its customary associations with the monstrous by detailing the presence of the eunuchs, dwarves, mutes, the sexually aggressive Sultana and even the cross-dressing Juan. In addition, he slows down long enough to show the quiet power of Juan's entry into the harem: "It seem'd as though they came upon a shrine, /For all was vast, still, fragrant and divine" (V: 679–80). It is important for Byron to invoke the solemn grandeur of the harem so that the funniest part of the satire can be effective: the ease with which our hero is brought within its hallowed halls. Despite the complex institution of the harem, with its eunuchs and its dwarfs, it is absurdly easy to infiltrate. Furthermore, a simpleton like Gulbeyaz easily carries on affairs practically under the sultan's very nose. Not only does Juan get past the dwarves and the other women, but the sultan himself, in looking at Juan in drag, simply comments: "I see you've bought another girl; 'tis pity/That a mere Christian should be half so pretty" (V: 1239–40).

Not only does Byron refer to the standard figures of the harem, he also characterizes his sultana in a way that highlights the ambiguities of the odalisque as described in [chapter three](#). To begin with, he ironically names her "Gulbeyaz," "White Rose," although she is clearly not of untarnished reputation. Gulbeyaz at first appears to be willfully disobedient to tradition by virtue of her unlawful sexual exploits. At the same time, she also reflects tradition because she is herself an Eastern despot. As such, she is satirized by the ineffectiveness of her rule. Although she appears to have all the power in the situation Juan totally disarms her, leaving her unable to make decisions at all:

Her first thought was to cut off Juan's head;
 Her second, to cut only his—acquaintance;
 Her third, to ask him where he had been bred;
 Her fourth, to rally him into repentance;
 Her fifth, to call her maids and go to bed;
 Her sixth, to stab herself; her seventh, to sentence
 The lash to Baba:—but her grand resource
 Was to sit down again, and cry of course. (V st. 139)

Her inability to make a decision contrasts with the decisive and dangerous act of purchasing him in the first place. Byron quickly manages to suggest the polysemous nature of the odalisque: she is powerful and imperious, sexually voracious, and yet weak and indecisive. She is a victim of violent Turkish lust, of repressive Islamic concubinage, but also the monstrous sexual product of such a system. She is completely unable to combat the passionate resistance of a free man because she is the prod-uct of a system of slavery and oppression. This is clear not only from the context of the poem, but from our general knowledge of the Turkish system: let us recall the notion that the entire population was in theory the slaves of the sultan, as lamented by Sir Paul Rycout above.

Rather like the “Byronic hero” himself, Gulbeyaz’s faults and shortcomings have resulted from nature and circumstance. Although God may have naturally blessed her with the tendency to cheat, lie, and command, no doubt they were cultivated by the harem system: “‘To heare and to obey’ had been from birth/The law of all around her” (V:889–90). The combination of imperious command and pathetic tears in her tête-à-tête with Juan indicates that she does not have a full emotional and intellectual repertoire and is wholly incapable of dealing with the very strange behavior exhibited by Juan.³³ “Christian, canst thou love?” is the one line she speaks. But it is precisely this mixture of sensuality and power, “half-voluptuous and half command” that Juan finds intolerable and counters simply but effectively with, “love is for the free!” (V:1012).

In “The Corsair” Gulnare’s murder of Seyd was an undeniable act of violence with very obvious political repercussions. The sexual transgression of Gulbeyaz is far more ambiguous in the way it critiques the domestic and political space of the Imperial Harem. At first Gulbeyaz’s actions appear to be merely the frivolous and irrelevant sexual pastime of a bored aristocrat. However, this vision of aristocratic luxury and dissipation is precisely Montesquieu’s defining characteristic of an Eastern despot. Although Byron does not present it as overtly political, the cultural associations of the harem as well as the satiric mode itself speaks on two levels. Because satire can utilize an ironic rhetoric that embeds within itself its own opposite, Byron is able to achieve an effect of dismissal and criticism simultaneously. He is able to make it seem that there are no consequences to Gulbeyaz’s actions while the poetic context hints that there are. Because of the importance of the harem as the symbolic center of the Ottoman

Empire, the satiric manipulation of its sexual fidelity is actually an explicitly political overture that points up the political and moral emptiness at the heart of the empire. Despite Juan's entrance into its solemn grandeur, the Imperial Harem is represented as a hollow center of a crumbling empire, a vision later confirmed in the gruesome Battle at Ishmael in Canto VI. At first then, Gulbeyaz's brand of disobedience may appear without political ramification, merely the sexual escapades of a figure who lacks political power and influence. She appears to be merely a pawn in the machinations of an ancient, despotic institution. However, it is precisely for these reasons, that there are very real political repercussions to these activities.

If we apprehend the symbolism and the relevance of the Imperial Harem as a type for the central power, stability and core of the empire's power (as Byron surely realized it was), then the notion of its infiltration and sexual impurity is a political act *par excellence*, one in which the power is not only called into question, but in Byron's current satiric mode, is also exposed as a useless institution. Furthermore, Byron deconstructs the Imperial Harem as the embodiment of political and *domestic* ideal, for we learn after all these escapades that, "Emperors are only husbands in wives eyes" (V:917). The sexual infiltration of the Sultan's harem is clearly an echo of the Dona Julia and the Haidee episodes. It is already the third time he must hide in an inner sanctum, found out by an angry father/husband, and must run away. Homes break up everywhere Juan goes, and the seraglio as a home is no different. The point may very well be then that every household, from Spain to Turkey and back again, is fundamentally the same. To figure it as an inviolable space will inevitably result in disappointment because it is a false ideal. Thus, Byron takes advantage of the Imperial Harem as the double articulation of a political-and-domestic-space-in-one to present satirically the fall of empire as a *domestic* problem despite the trend to posit the supposedly fundamental separation between these spheres in his era. It is this critique of the ideology of separate spheres that I will argue is also a basic component in Mary Shelley's rendering of the Turkish plague in *The Last Man*.

In *Don Juan* and the *Turkish Tales*, Byron's women's acts of disobedience have implied political consequences: they destroy the Islamic way of life and worldview. This view of Islam as disrupted by an Eastern woman at the instigation of a Western man seems to suggest a justifiable cultural imperialism; on the other hand, the disruption is contained and the long-term implications are left ambivalent, and Byron thereby eschews positing any one sphere, East or West, as inherently better than the other. By figuring the fall of empire in this way, Byron reminds us that all elements of it, from the domestic to the public, are vulnerable.³⁴ Both Byron and Shelley thus make use of the general knowledge and associations their audience would have of the Imperial Harem in particular, and the city of Constantinople in general, in order to figure the emptiness of power and the difficulties of fighting against tyranny.

THE LONG-DRAWN HISTORY OF *THE LAST MAN*

One of the most fascinating uses of Constantinople as a political and literary trope is in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*. Framed as a nineteenth-century editor's reconstruction of an ancient prophecy, the novel is set in the year 2073, and narrates the death of humanity from a relentless plague that erupts out of Constantinople. Sweeping throughout the world, the plague seems to kill everyone except our narrator, Lionel Verney. Shelley's novel is ambitious: not only does it seek to appeal to an audience's desire for popular romance and adventure, it also seriously grapples with the political issues of the day and with the question of aesthetic efficacy in the face of tragic reality.

This section explores two facets of Shelley's novel: first, the role of Constantinople as radically subversive of the idealized but fragile British home that *The Last Man* figures as outside the sphere of British domestic politics and international commerce. Although the novel concerns itself with England's domestic political reforms, and with its international role as a trader, the domestic sphere of Windsor is posited as a realm separated from such public concerns. However, the plague from Constantinople not only impedes England's commercial habits and renders its reform efforts pointless, it also infiltrates that inviolable English home. In fact, the Turkish Plague is the means by which the entire world is in effect "orientalized." It is a sweeping, unstoppable infection out of the East that causes a great crisis in personal and national identity. I suggest that, in addition to the plague itself, Shelley accomplishes her most intense critique of domestic and national ideologies through the pivotal characters of the Greek princess Evadne and the Byronic Raymond, both of whom dangerously integrate Eastern and Western characteristics. Given that Raymond is the Lord Protector of England and that the Greek-Turkish Evadne usurps his political and personal world, the novel presents even Greek influence from the East as negative.

Second, I trace Lionel Verney's arduous task of finishing what he calls "the long-drawn history of Grecian and Turkish Warfare."³⁵ I argue that his ambivalent identity as a writer of history reinforces Shelley's use of the plague of Constantinople as a means to disrupt the flow of English domestic and imperial history. Inextricably bound into Lionel's narrative of doom is the self-reflexive question of the ability of the narrative arts, whether historical or poetic, to make meaning out of life. What I will argue is that Shelley has it both ways since the aesthetic experiences of her two narrators, the nineteenth-century editor and Lionel Verney, the twenty-first-century historian, are fundamentally at odds.

In considering these issues my reading is influenced by the distinction that Leslie Rabine has made between "feminine historicity" and "androcentric romance." The suspended historical narrative of the war at Constantinople has affinity to Rabine's notion of feminine historicity in which the fragmentary voice of the feminine disrupts the "totalizing effect of representation."³⁶ In contrast, Rabine describes traditional romantic (androcentric) quest narrative, with its

strong teleological form, as the same conceptual framework in which history is thought to occur. I find this kind of feminine historicity reflected on the level of plot in the anticlimactic siege of Constantinople; on the level of character in the disruptive figure of Evadne Zaimi; and on the level of language in the register of voice of our two narrators. Both Lionel and the nineteenth-century editor are arguably feminine voices, a fact which is alluded to for different reasons by one contemporary reviewer who wrote: "Why not the last woman? She would have known better how to paint her distress at having nobody left to talk to."³⁷ Shelley's whispering feminine voice does not seem to suggest an alternative, but cautions equally against imperial expansion, revolutionary hubris, and liberal reform. Nevertheless, Michael Eberle-Sinatra has emphasized the novel's concern with imagining a new future where women's voices are fully integrated into history.³⁸

These various disruptive elements of Shelley's novel that I have identified also establish the text as what Kate Ferguson Ellis has called "ideologies in the making." Ellis suggests that we reevaluate the traditional view of Mary Shelley as a radical apostate desperate for conservative legitimacy upon her return to England after Percy Shelley's death.³⁹ She challenges us to read Shelley's novels as "ideologies in the making," in order to recognize the ways in which Shelley dealt with the loss of radical idealism: "Confronted with political reaction and personal disappointment she explored the pitfalls of revolutionary idealism by looking to its institutional sources in a set of relations that are supposed to stand apart from politics."⁴⁰ One of Ellis's concerns is to demonstrate how Shelley's supposedly "flawed" presentation of the bourgeois home actually informed her critique of what Ellis calls the "ideology of separate spheres" in which the promises of domesticity are seen to have ambiguous effects on women. Although Ellis is concerned mainly with Idris, Lionel Verney's wife, I believe that adopting such a perspective would also be fruitful in a more general reading of *The Last Man*.

In this novel the fall of empire breeds an infection that cuts into the idealism of the *domestic sphere* and makes it vulnerable to the same destructive forces as the *public sphere*. Whereas earlier in the novel the domestic sphere is idealized and separated from the scenes of politics and business, the plague exposes this distinction as illusory. For both, a counterattack, cultural, military or political is ineffective. All that is left is the voice of history as a monument among ruins. As the last man in the world, Lionel Verney's voice of radical subjectivity is bound within itself but calls out in vain for an interlocutor. It is akin to Rabine's "whispering feminine voice" after the restraints of the teleological plot have been undone. We are left wondering if Shelley's aesthetic mediates this doom, or are the scattered leaves of Lionel Verney's history recoverable only as an irreversible prophecy? My reading of the novel's thematic concern with time and its stylistic experimentation with this theme is thus in line with Eve Tavor Banner's description of the novel as a "[construction] of the present as women's

time” by which she means its “alternative constructions of temporality lying behind, beneath, and within, which are identified in the novel with women.”⁴¹

SEPARATE SPHERES/SEPARATE EMPIRES

Mary Shelley creates a volatile geography in which her characters must live and love.⁴² In *The Last Man*, London, Windsor, Constantinople, Athens, and eventually Rome all figure prominently, and each city has a distinct character that is soon undercut by the leveling influence of the plague. Although the novel utilizes elements of historical romance and the stylistics of high romanticism, the radical element of the plague forces it to break out of a strong teleological plot associated with romance. This blatant thwarting of generic commonplaces exposes the kind of ideological critique that Ellis says Shelley stages “without the disguises we have learned to call art” (223). The novel does not seek to assert in the end the superiority of one sphere over another, as for instance *The Mysteries of Udolpho* does when Emily St. Aubert finally returns to La Vallée after her adventures. Instead, *The Last Man* equally critiques the associations and limitations of both. This stylistic blend works as ideology by invoking literary expectations that are thwarted and then exposed as dangerous and illusory.

Shelley juxtaposes Windsor as the scene of refined apolitical retirement with London as the sphere of dangerous liaisons. This contrast is established by the personal and public concerns of the main characters and of England generally: London is the original scene of Lionel Verney’s fathers negative public actions, the cut-throat world of parliamentary reform politics and commerce and, later in the novel, through the story of Raymond and Evadne, it is the site of marital infidelity and doom. In contrast, Lionel continues to live in bliss in Windsor.

Lionel Verney’s relationship with Adrian and Idris brings him out of his wild youth in the “fells of Cumberland” into an adulthood marked by learning and sentiment. Lionel continually presents the domestic bliss of Windsor, and yet he also travels to London where he witnesses and chronicles all England’s public, political events. In the beginning of his memoir, Lionel Verney remembers pre-plague England as “a vast and well-manned ship, which mastered the winds and rode proudly over the waves” (5). In doing so Lionel engages in a kind of revisionist history because this imagery unproblematically conflates the elements of commerce and politics within traditional English national identity. However, such a conflation was not unproblematic in England at the time, nor is it presented as such in the novel. Rather, *The Last Man* explores both the dangerous and beneficial effects of international commerce on the very spirit and nature of English identity. As we saw in the previous chapter, Britain’s economic and diplomatic policies in the East often introduced difficult moral issues into public debate. Just so, *The Last Man* recognizes how economic imperatives influence and change English domestic life for the better, but at a cost to tradition that is not easy to assess.⁴³

The public efforts to decide these issues take place in London, and Lionel travels from Windsor thence in order to report on these events. For instance, the issue of the abolition of hereditary rank is debated in one of several separate parliamentary scenes in the novel. As the British increase their international power and wealth through the middle-class efforts of trade, the question of ancient privilege becomes crucial; Lionel wonders, "Yet could England indeed doff her lordly trappings, and be content with the democratic style of America?" (161). For some, the dangerous inroads that commerce makes into the higher classes threaten to erase the very "Englishness" of England, and to reduce it to the ignominious business of buying and selling. Ironically, the argument in favor of abolishing the aristocracy is that all Englishmen will achieve true nobility of spirit simply by virtue of being Englishmen: "We were assured that, when the name and title of Englishman was the sole patent of nobility, we should all be noble...." (161).

Lionel's memoir sounds pro-reform when he invokes "nature's true nobility" as that which will replace the pomp of tradition, but the figure of Ryland as representative of this bourgeois political trend dispels the positivity. He is "of obscure birth and immense wealth" and the main counterweight to Raymond's ambitions to reinstate the crown. In an earlier part of the novel Ryland spearheads the effort to make it treason "to attempt to re-erect the kingly power" (42). Although the English have apparently enjoyed the benefits of republicanism, there is a spirit of change among them that threatens to return them to the ancient pomp (and oppression) of monarchy. This backlash cuts across class lines: the aristocrat Raymond desires the rein-statement of the Crown because he hopes to regain the power for himself; the "poorer nobility" are "willing slaves, self-constituted subjects;" and the lower classes also register a change, as Lionel notes, "the word republic had grown stale to the vulgar ear" (41). Ryland's proposal to safeguard the republic from such incursions is shown to be necessary and correct, and yet Raymond's charismatic counterspeech wins the day.

Although both of his reform efforts to reinforce the republic fail, Ryland will later take over the reigns of power upon the resignation of Raymond. It is the middle class Ryland who is Lord Protector just as the plague threatens England, but instead of letting his "nature's true nobility" guide him in the care of the nation, he flees London in self-interested terror, leaving Adrian, the Earl of Windsor and offspring of the last King, to take over. Ryland is later discovered, like a miser guarding his gold, "dead and half devoured by insects, in a house many miles from any other, with piles of food laid up in useless superfluity" (232). With characteristic noble courage, Adrian, despite his own egalitarian beliefs, strongly implies that nobility is inbred and that the commercial values of the middle class make them unfit for leadership because they are simply interested in their own self-aggrandizement.

London is not only the messy site of political action, it is also the place where personal lives are vulnerable to contaminating influences. As Lionel goes back and forth from London to Windsor, the superior status of Windsor as the scene

of family warmth and intellectual honesty is clear: "And now let the reader, passing over some short period of time, be introduced to our happy circle. Adrian, Idris and I, were established in Windsor castle; Lord Raymond and my sister, inhabited a house which the former had built on the borders of the great Park, near Perdita's cottage" (64). This happy vision of domestic bliss is wholly separate from any dangerous outside influence. Even when Perdita is later in London suffering through her marital problems with Raymond, Lionel is still happily ensconced at Windsor, unaware of his sister's problems: "in our retirement, [we] remained long in ignorance of her misfortune" (98).

However, this separation of domestic and public spheres soon collapses. Lionel's movement back and forth between Windsor and London continues after the plague erupts, but the characteristics of the two spheres are now intertwined and interchangeable. Whereas Windsor and rural England were the sites of brotherhood, family bliss, and intellectual pursuit, it becomes an isolated hell later: "When once disease was introduced into the rural districts, its effects appeared more horrible, more exigent, and more difficult to cure, than in towns" (193). Oddly enough, there is a greater companionship in the towns that makes the suffering easier. The novel thus established a contrast between the spheres of domestic retreat as seen in Windsor and political action as seen in London, but the split between the two spheres is confused and undercut by the plague.⁴⁴

While England is engaged in delineating the nature of its democracy and Lionel is enjoying the benefits of rural nature, Constantinople is presented as the site of medieval tyranny. The long-drawn history of *The Last Man* posits Constantinople as the site of the ultimate struggle between "civilization and barbarism" (110). However, the promise to inaugurate a new world order accorded to this struggle proves to be empty. This ambivalence is first established by Raymond's and Adrian's opposing attitudes to the war, and is later reinforced when the plague interrupts the invasion of Constantinople and renders not only the entire war null and void but also the larger context of human history. Through a long and circuitous journey, the plague from Constantinople eventually reaches England and contaminates English national identity at its very root.

The possibility of recovering the city for the Greeks is introduced early in the novel in references to the previous career of Raymond and when he expresses his future ambitions as King of England: "My first act when I become king of England, will be to unite with the Greeks, take Constantinople, and subdue all Asia. I intend to be a warrior, a conqueror" (40). Clearly his ambitions are for personal and imperial glory. If Raymond's motives are at all inspired by the glory of Greece, they are of the military sort and not in the spirit of humanism. Raymond later repeats his somewhat self-serving attitude when he asks Adrian to accompany him to Greece: "Adrian, I am about to return to Greece, to become again a soldier, perhaps a conqueror. Will you accompany me?" (110). Although Adrian immediately accepts Raymond's offer and gladly goes to fight for the Greeks, his own attitude toward the historical struggle is more circumspect than

that of Raymond, and he thus voices the Greek-Turkish conflict in other than binary terms. After reasserting his belief in the justness of the Greek cause, he describes the Greek assault on a city of Turks:

Every breathing creature within the walls was massacred. Think you, amidst the shrieks of violated innocence and helpless infancy, I did not feel in every nerve the cry of a fellow being? They were men and women, the sufferers, before they were Mahometans, and when they rise turbanless from the grave, in what except their good or evil actions will they be the better of worse than we? (116)

Adrian's narration and reflection of the conflict breaks the novel's presentation out of a strict Greek-good, Turk-evil binary that Raymond's rhetoric reinforces. In so doing, Adrian's speech prepares us for the catastrophic outcome of the siege of Constantinople that will eventually render any kind of distinction among humans irrelevant.⁴⁵

Throughout volume one the contrast between Windsor (domesticity) and London (commerce) is a powerful and defining characteristic of the British. At the start of volume two the action shifts to Athens and Constantinople; at first the two are also contrasted, but soon the Turkish plague disrupts all binary thinking. The opening of the second volume presents the journey of Lionel and Perdita in quest of the captured Raymond in Turkey. In contrast with Constantinople, Athens is home to all the humanist values that seem to rule the West; its inhabitants revere and respect their hero Raymond and fight for the independence of Greece. Upon Raymond's recovery, a new siege of Thrace and the city of Constantinople is planned. It is here that Shelley includes the historical, geographical details of the area to render a limited sense of verisimilitude to the scene.⁴⁶ Although the army is warned that the plague is raging in the city, Raymond insists on carrying out the valiant attack and making a triumphant entry into Constantinople.

However, what has the potential for being the central climax of this novel is in fact an anti-climax: it occurs just as Raymond, leading the irregular remnants of the Greek Army, enters Constantinople. The plague already has leveled the city, and its only inhabitants are a few typically infidel-cursing Turkish soldiers. Although Shelley envisions the death-grip of Ottoman-Greek conflict as the central political and moral dilemma of the global world in the twenty-first century, she transforms it into something wholly different from the triumphant homecoming that one is led to expect. Instead of a victorious re-Hellenization of Constantinople, we experience only the slow contamination of the Western world with the Oriental plague.

Truly other in its mode of administration, its culture, religion, and laws, the Ottoman Empire seemed the antithesis of the commercially minded, but nobility-obsessed British. And yet, *The Last Man*, as we have seen in such diverse texts as Elizabeth Craven's letters in *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*

and in Percy Shelley's *Hellas*, registers dangerous similarities between the figure of the Turk and the English that are difficult to control. *The Last Man* explicitly renders such a similitude, first in the figures of Raymond and Evadne, and later in the leveling effects of the plague.

Although from the beginning Raymond is presented as the champion of the Greeks, he is always described as elitist, egotistical and temperamental, all characteristics typically associated with the imperious and lascivious Turk. As mentioned earlier, Raymond's desire to help Greece has a specifically self-serving and blatantly imperialistic element to it. Later, when he believes he will die, he devotes himself with Islamic fatalism to the idea of "making history" in Constantinople: "in his hope of conquest of Constantinople, he counted on an event which would be as a landmark in the waste of ages, an exploit unequalled in the annals of man" (128). Despite all logic, he pursues his single-minded quest, expressing it as a desire for self-glory: "The prayer of my youth was to be one among those who render the pages of earth's history splendid" (141). Raymond's obsession with being written into the history books as the ultimate hero reinforces the similitude between romance and history, both of which construct plots that are strongly teleologically oriented. This is later contrasted with Lionel's unwillingness to write this kind of logically end-oriented history.

While such characteristics may obliquely render Raymond psychologically similar to the stereotype of the Turkish male, his entry into Constantinople pursues such a similitude more explicitly. As Lionel watches the city siege from a hilltop prospect, he has a historical vision of Mehmet, the Ottoman sultan who conquered Constantinople in 1453: "Immediately before me was the Top Kapou, the gate near which Mahomet had made the breach of which he entered the city" (143). This observation is followed by the real image of Raymond, literally battering down the gates of the city with a hatchet:

I saw Lord Raymond on his charger.... With angry gestures he leapt from his horse, and seizing a hatchet that hung from his saddle-bow, went with the apparent intention of battering down the opposing gate. A few men came to his aid; their numbers increased; under their united blows the obstacle was vanquished, gate, portcullis, and fence were demolished; and the wide sun-lit way, leading to the heart of the city, now lay open before them. (143)

With this rhetorical movement from Mehmet to Raymond, it is as though all the city were cast in the same stone as the Hagia Sophia, and nothing has changed in the ensuing six hundred years. There is no difference between one conqueror and another. This is the most explicit of a series of similitudes that portray Raymond as "Turkish" in his despotic and imperious ways.

The Greek princess Evadne is perhaps more dangerous to the stability of the racial binary of Turk and British/Greek. Despite the general notion of Greece as the ancestor of the British, the Greek figure, epitomized in the character of

Evadne, is an unstable signifier, implicated as Other and subversive of the ideals of English domestic virtues and political progress. This subversion occurs many times in the novel through the trope of the usurped soul, first established innocently enough when Adrian discovers and educates Lionel, which will be discussed later. But it is the story of Raymond and Evadne that thematizes this trope and that largely determines the narrative thrust of the novel.

Although he abandons his earlier political ambitions when he chooses to marry Perdita, Raymond is later violently seduced by the Greek Evadne. The various political reform efforts in England result in Raymond's election as Lord Protector. He and his wife Perdita abandon their retired lives, and enter public service, while the bucolic happiness of the Windsor set, including our narrator, continues. As Lord Protector, Raymond has ambitious plans for the improvement of his nation. While science and technology have improved people's quality of life, there is still a tendency on man's part to be thwarted by "self-raised obstacles" and it becomes Raymond's aim to conquer this tendency. Although as Lord Protector Raymond lays aside his war-like ambitions, earlier articulated as greater than those of Napoleon (40), it is clear that his personality is fundamentally unchanged. Lionel writes: "peace and its enduring glories became his aim—the title he coveted was that of the benefactor of his country" (76). In short, Raymond's new ambitions are equally self-serving and egotistical as his warlike career had been.

All Raymond's altruistic efforts come to a crashing halt when Evadne returns to England. Through a separate set of unusual circumstances, Raymond discovers Evadne in an abject condition and is drawn into a clandestine affair with her. This soon ends in disaster, for he fails to maintain the thick veil of "Turkish jealousy" (87) that he attempts to create. When Perdita discovers his infidelities, he abandons both his personal and political commitments at home in favor of a return to his warrior ways in Greece, leaving the rest of the family to recover from the shock. As soon as his humanitarian efforts are thwarted and his pride is compromised, he returns to his previous *modus operandi* as soldier.

Evadne is a fascinatingly unstable signifier; she perfectly illustrates the paradoxical nature of qualities inherent within the odalisque as described in [chapter three](#). At first she appears to be the victim of war and politics, but she is not wholly innocent. In fact, her dangerous qualities are characterized as crossing the line between Greek and Turk. From the "small Turkish slippers" (78) that stand outside her door, to her description as "Sultana of the East," (132) she is a liminal figure of racial ambiguity. Whereas earlier in the novel she was the victim of Raymond's imperious charisma, it is she who later infiltrates and overtakes him. When Evadne leaves England for Greece her unrequited love of Raymond turns into a perverse ambition for power and prestige. She marries a rich Greek, and hatches a plan to seize the principedom of Wallachia. However, when her political machinations, which included an unholy pact with the Russians, make her a traitor both to the Greeks and the Turks, she and her husband are ruined and flee to England. Her husband dies shortly thereafter, leaving her alone and

destitute. In reality, her desire not to seek help in England from other Greeks is not a result of pride, as she tells Raymond, but of embarrassment as well.

In addition to these dangerously “Turkish” qualities that make her appear a disruptive force, it is as an artist that Evadne further appears as a liminal figure. Although untrained, she submits architectural sketches to Raymond for consideration in the creation of a national gallery. It is through these sketches that she seduces Raymond culturally, recalling to us the fears of some eighteenth-century writers of the barbaric potential for a wholly foreign Greek aesthetics to swallow and subsume a more properly British cultural identity.⁴⁷ The artistic quality of the sketches spurs Raymond on to a path of discovery that first draws him to Evadne and ultimately to his complete political and personal downfall in England.

Vacillating between victim and virago, modesty and ambition, Evadne points up the dangerous similitude among peoples. She illustrates the contemporary fear that the Greeks are not a pure, unadulterated race of liberty-loving, Arcadian-minded poets. Furthermore, the masculine qualities of her public career align her more with the fearful moral ambiguities of the political odalisque than as a victim of Turkish oppression. As we saw in our discussion of harem women in [chapter three](#), the political power of such women, (who, although “Ottoman,” were often Greeks, Armenians, and Circassians by birth), especially as it existed in the so-called “sultanate of women,” was seen by Western historians and writers as a major negative element of the Turkish system. Thus, the associations of political women in this realm are at best highly suspicious. Just as Evadne’s political machinations are seen to be confusing and disastrous, so too her military efforts are equally complex. Having returned to Greece to fight in the siege of Constantinople, she dies a patriot’s death, but with these horrifying words on her lips: “I have sold myself to death, with the sole condition that thou shouldst follow me—Fire, and war, and plague, unite for thy destruction—O my Raymond, there is no safety for thee!” (131). Love, it seems, has never humbled Evadne, but inspired her with the passion for total control, or total destruction. When Lionel repeats her prophecy to Raymond, the curse goes straight to his heart, and living her words as an incontrovertible sentence, he sacrifices himself with Islamic fatalism to the plague already raging in Constantinople. Thus, in an oblique way, Evadne directs the course of history because her utterance drives Raymond to his own historic actions. The quest romance of Raymond and Evadne disrupts the personal and political lives of everyone within the novel, but it is actually a parody of a romance as it does not reach the kind of conclusion one might expect. Rather, the anticipated tragic ending is interrupted by the even greater subversive force of the plague.

This proves to be a subversion of all the discreet, separate elements of the novel. The distinctions between Windsor and London (private and public) and between Athens and Constantinople (civilization and barbarism), are all erased in an arduous, painstakingly lengthy narrative. Unlike the chorus of *Hellas* who quickly dash the “urn of bitter prophecy” from their lips when the gulf between

Turkish and Greek atrocities is bridged, *The Last Man* unravels its bitter tale to the very end of human history.⁴⁸

“TO READ WERE FUTILE—TO WRITE, VANITY
INDEED”

Lionel is the witness and chronicler of these historic events as they unfold in London and Constantinople. I argue that the specific nature of Lionel’s development as a writer is, along with the interrupted plot and the figure of Evadne, a disruptive element of the novel that functions to critique the strain of British society which viewed the growth of empire to be natural and inevitable.

The first part of the novel is a bildungsroman in which Shelley uses the trope of the usurped soul, mentioned above, to present Lionel’s evolution from barbarian to civilized man. In his early years, he is a wild, lawless youth, succinctly described by Morton Paley as “a travesty of the Wordsworthian ideal.”⁴⁹ The premature deaths of both their parents leave Lionel and Perdita hapless orphans, struggling to make their way in the world, their only inheritance the faded memory of their father’s onetime friendship with the king. Whereas Lionel will end up the “last man,” his father had been a “lost man.” Soon however, this wild and free orphan is enchained intellectually and socially when he is discovered and educated by Adrian, the ex-King’s son: “As he spoke, his earnest eyes, fixed on me, seemed to read my very soul: my heart, my savage revengeful heart, felt the influence of sweet benignity sink upon it” (17). As the beneficent colonizer of the outlaw, Adrian is the epitome of the civilizing mission of the English. Lionel replays this dynamic later when he realizes that he is in love with Adrian’s sister Idris: he says to himself emphatically, “my limbs quivered beneath the tormenting power; soon, too soon, I knew myself a slave” (44). Much later, when Lionel is at the height of his retired, intellectual lifestyle, he revels in the “silver net of love and civilization” that binds him to humanity (189). Under Adrian’s tutelage, he learns that the study of books replaces an active public career, giving him instead the sense that he has become “the father of all mankind,” and reinforcing his love of retired life in Windsor over the public sphere of London.

As discussed earlier, Lionel always acts as an enthusiastic reporter of events both personal and political as they take place in Windsor and London. However, after Raymond is captured by the Turks and Lionel and Perdita follow him to Constantinople, the novel moves more properly into the realm of historical romance. It is here that Lionel witnesses history in the making in the imminent end of the antique barbarism of the Ottoman Empire and it is along with the emergence of this new role of historian that his ambivalent status as unwilling narrator is born.

Lionel is primarily a witness and chronicler during the war: he describes the return of Raymond from Turkish captivity, the battle on the plains of Thrace, and the brief siege of Constantinople. But when he searches Constantinople for the

dead body of Raymond, that “hero of unwritten story,” Lionel’s ability to communicate is eclipsed.⁵⁰ In a moment that foreshadows Lionel’s lonely plight in Rome, he first “[calls] aloud for [Raymond]—through the darkness of night, over the scorching ruins of fallen Constantinople, his name was heard; no voice replied—echo even was mute” (145). However, the search for Raymond among the smoldering ruins of Constantinople does not move Lionel to heights of narrative sublimity; rather, he literally falls asleep, much like a gothic heroine who faints in the face of a crisis.⁵¹ Lionel’s inability to narrate the conclusion of Raymond’s romantic adventure anticipates the similar interruption to history that is concomitant with the spread of the plague.

Raymond’s quest romance has disrupted the personal and political lives of everyone within the novel, but it does not reach a conclusion. Rather, the anticipated end is interrupted by the even greater subversive force of the plague, rendering the romance at best a parody of itself. The novel’s central climactic moment proves to be the anticlimax from which the narrative never recovers. When the plague attacks the romantic narrative of *The Last Man* it prevents its logical termination, interrupts the anticipated reconquering of Constantinople, and replaces it with an irrational and inexplicable course of death which becomes increasingly difficult for Lionel to narrate as rational, historical development. By not narrating the story as if it were rationally ordered, he emphasizes the contingency of historical events.

After staging the battle at Constantinople then, the novel fundamentally changes. It is from this point on that Lionel interrupts his own narration to reflect self-consciously on the act of composition, and his unwillingness to continue with it. Whereas he earlier seemed to take solace in writing, he now continues it compulsively, even though he associates the end of the story with his own death: “I am not immortal and the thread of my history might be spun out to the limits of my existence” (173). In another self-conscious moment, he takes a masochistic pleasure in the pain of narration. Although at one time he “had used this history as an opiate,” he now feels a “more melancholy pleasure in painting the end of all” (192). Moreover, even as all this was unfolding, Lionel could feel his once-beloved intellectual and writing endeavors lose meaning: “I longed to return to my old occupations, but of what use were they? To read were futile—to write, vanity indeed” (222). Although he is an unwilling chronicler in the midst of the crisis, after he is left the sole survivor, he is compelled to narrate his steps in minute detail. The question at the end of the novel is whether history is just something that Lionel writes, or if it is also a possible antidote to the plague’s leveling influence.

Thus, the early portion of the novel idealizes the domestic peace of England’s home-life, the glory of England’s commercial powers, and the growth of Lionel’s artistic sensibility, and the second half presents a crisis in each of these. As the world sickens with this Oriental plague, England’s identity implodes. At first there is little concern among the general English population: “The English for the most part talked of Thrace and Macedonia, as they would of a lunar territory,

which unknown to them, presented no distinct idea or interest to the mind" (160). As a commercial people, they must rely on international travel but all too soon it is reported that instead of trading with the East, the English are now receiving an unwanted Oriental export that precipitates a crisis in national identity.⁵² While previous experience tells them that plague is "an old native of the East" and uninterested in "the pale-faced celt" it slowly becomes clear that this is the case no longer. It is the plague that ultimately unites them all: this meaningless specter does nothing but equalize men. Unfortunately, as the ex-queen and the warring English factions demonstrate, this does not erase prejudice, fear, or anxiety. In fact, with nothing to live for, the people are reduced to the basest superstitions and petty bickering, allowing the minutiae of difference to make them mortal enemies. For instance, one influence of the plague that renders an important similitude between England and Turkey occurs when the Irish attack London to redress old grievances. Originally driven by hunger and plague, the Irish add a political dimension to their incursion: "They talked of taking London, conquering England—calling to mind the long details of injuries which had for many years been forgotten" (215). This reminds the reader that the Turkish oppression of the Greeks had its counterpart in the English domination of Ireland and Scotland that again fills in the binary polarities with a dangerous gray area.

Toward the end of their time in England, the survivors make a fantasy retreat into the earliest mythical hopes of history: the discovery of a Garden of Paradise. The majority of the English population have fallen victim to the plague and the remnant returns to the patriarchal mode of ancient times and speaks of finding another paradise, a new "garden of the earth" (226). However, this retreat into history is also merely a false ideal, for it provides little freedom or independence of thought; in fact, with hindsight, Lionel describes himself feeling as though he had been "enchained to the car of fate over whose coursers [I] had no control" (226), a disturbing inversion of his previous reveling in the "sweet chains of civilization."

After a futile attempt to fight the plague at home, Adrian proposes that they return to Rome, where its humanist values will bolster their spirits: "If we went to Italy, to sacred and eternal Rome, we might with greater patience submit to the decree, which had laid her mighty towers low" (237). Thus, Rome is the final geo-graphical location within this novel that moves throughout the great cities of the world. Unfortunately, Lionel alone survives the journey. In Rome he attempts to escape his own maddening consciousness in reading, gazing at statues, and writing his history, but finds that art only provides a momentary respite. In the end, Lionel's experience of narrating the story, originally inspired by a hope of communication and self-solace, proves to be an unsatisfying endeavor. As with Keats's nightingale, one is too soon tolled back to one's soul self: "the soul wearies of a pauseless flight and, suddenly it fell ten thousand fathom deep, into the abyss of the present—into self-knowledge—into tenfold sadness" (337).

Despite the benefits of the eternal city, Lionel eventually decides to abandon Rome. He imagines the route he will sail, around the Mediterranean, carefully avoiding Constantinople, down the coast of Africa, past the Cape of Good Hope, and soon into the Indian Ocean. The last words of the last man are: "Thus around the shores of deserted earth, while the sun is high, and the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirit of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold the tiny bark, freighted with Verney, the Last Man" (342). The novel envisions an apocalypse devoid of regeneration, where the plague of Constantinople ruthlessly reduces the modern commercial and political world of the English to the same status as the retrograde Turk.⁵³ It may be wise to note here that Shelley's novel follows in a tradition of "Last Man" narratives, including Byron's short poem "Darkness," but it also has much in common with her husband's narrative poem *The Revolt of Islam*. In this poem we find a similar end to the heroes, but with an important difference. The success of that poem's revolution against the Golden City of Constantinople is thwarted by the actions of the united tyrants, and the leaders Laon and Cythna are martyred. In their death they retreat into the terrain of the medieval dream vision with which the poem began. The two lovers, together with their spiritual child, float toward the Temple of the Spirit in their tiny bark, contemplating the vicissitudes of life, and the power of the narrative arts to make meaning out of it all. In contrast, *The Last Man* tenaciously hangs on to the narrative after the death of its warriors, illustrating in a montage of Wordsworthian visionary dreariness, an inexorably decaying English population. By the end of the novel Lionel Verney embarks on an imaginative journey into the Indian Ocean with a very different idea of the efficacy of art to palliate the problems of life. The fall of empire that occurs in *The Last Man* is an infection that spreads to the West, a horrifying inversion of Percy Shelley's promised rejuvenating spirit of reform.

In this final scene, Lionel Verney finally transforms himself from unwilling historian and subject of aesthetic contemplation, to the perpetual object of the gaze of nature and god. This inversion I believe epitomizes both the politics and aesthetics of this novel. By this I mean Shelley's own inverse negotiation of radical sensibility in an era of increasing conservatism. By utilizing the volatile space of Constantinople, she is able to cast her story of interrupted political and social warfare in a sphere that seems to elide immediate applicability, but inevitably, points directly at her own culture and time. In this way Shelley shines her peculiar spot-light backward onto English political and commercial life. The fall of the Turkish Empire is not the success that Raymond expects; instead, it breeds an infection that nullifies all the enlightened efforts of the English. Soon enough we are left wondering: what is the nature of this prophetic history? What, if any, political message does it deliver? As a narrative that tells of the future end of the world does it offer an escape? Should the British abandon or accelerate their political reform efforts? Should they start working on an inoculation or just look for a safe hiding place? Just as Percy Shelley's philosophical perspective was seen to have political implications, we may ask what this novel, given its

status as “prophecy,” suggests is possible in terms of human progress. Is there a way to mediate this nightmare, or are the scattered leaves of Lionel Verney’s history recoverable only as a prophecy of doom?

In closing, I would like to return with hindsight and in the prophetic spirit of the novel itself, to the nineteenth-century editor’s introduction and to compare the latter’s experience of the aesthetic with that of Lionel.⁵⁴ This narrator literally unearths the text from the cave of the Sibyl, takes these disparate leaves and translates, compiles and rewrites them into cohesion. This act of re-creation is described as a means to overcome some nameless sorrow that follows the initial discovery, the work has “cheered long hours of solitude” (4). In contrast with Lionel’s experience of the aesthetic as a limited source of relief, our nineteenth-century speaker yet maintains a faith in the efficacy of art, the mysterious ability of our souls to take solace in even tragic stories.⁵⁵ For this speaker, as for the characters in the novel, the soul is terra incognita that must be traversed and excavated. And while this act is never easy, and rarely successful, it is yet an integral part of the human spirit. The dead city of Constantinople is an imaginative landscape that challenges us to attempt the excavation in spite of these hardships. In Shelley’s hand, history, as epitomized in the struggle between the Turk and Greek, is paradoxically written, edited, published, and also erased, for Verney’s text in the twenty-first century is unread.⁵⁶ Since he is the last man, there is no one there to read his text. As such, the novel is a complex web of readings that is the last word of a long history in the form of an ambitious, genre-crossing novel.

Epilogue

“To read the long, dark, interior life”: Learning One’s Lesson from the Lady Hester Stanhope

LADY HESTER STANHOPE JOURNEYED TO THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN 1810 AND never returned to England. Living independently in Syria until her death in 1839, she became the subject of many travel and biographical texts by a variety of authors. For these writers, rendering a “true” portrait of Stanhope is predicated upon answering the central question: Why would an aristocratic English woman spurn her native country and live as a despotic Turkish pasha among the wild Arabs of the Ottoman Empire? They strived to make sense of Stanhope’s uncanny image as an English/Turkish despot by applying a series of labels to her.¹ However, in doing so, they introduced a range of problematic issues regarding Stanhope’s authorial, sexual, racial, and literary identity. In what follows I briefly analyze this tendency in order to show how representations of Stanhope written at midcentury partake of a similar instability that we saw in the primary associations of the Ottoman Empire in the romantic period. Although I present these issues separately, it is important to note that they are not discrete; instead, they overlap and blend into one another in ways that show the intimate connections among discourses of gender, class, and race.

Representations of Stanhope’s life in the East reflect the ways in which the figure of the Turkish despot could be a malleable counterimage of the British imperial administrator into the mid-nineteenth century. Sometimes terrifying, sometimes ridiculous, the Turkish despot nevertheless often inspires a sense of anxiety in midcentury writers, which demands their attention. There is a negative and positive dimension to the familiarity and foreignness of the Ottoman Empire throughout the century. The familiarity of the empire could be positive because knowledge of it equals a power over it in the sense that Edward Said defines the very nature of “Orientalism.”² On the other hand, this familiarity could be dangerous and negative because it is often based on an unsavory recognition of the Self in the Other. Furthermore, the ways in which the Ottoman Empire nevertheless remains odd is similarly fraught with instability. For writers hoping to reach a large reading audience, the incentive to experience and represent an intriguing, inscrutable East is strong. A good story must involve some mystery, adventure, and exoticism. However, allowing it to remain fundamentally mysterious seems to admit that it has an essential power that cannot be mastered and manipulated, and for most writers this is not acceptable.

This fluctuation in attitude toward the Turks and the British in the East was significantly determined by the strategic position of the Ottoman Empire in the changing world of imperial expansion. During the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars (1793–1815), England’s imperial expansion was most often based on strategic importance, e.g., the taking of the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Thereafter, economic, military and moral imperatives continued to drive expansion. Although the Ottoman Empire had been a presence in British public domain for over three hundred years, developments in the period made it difficult to maintain accurate knowledge of it. Writers were aware that an accurate knowledge of the empire was crucial to the success of European imperialism in the East, e.g., in 1836 David Ross sought to counter the misinformation about the Turks by translating articles from the Turkish and European presses. Ross writes: “The nineteenth century commenced its crusade of civilization against the Ottoman Empire, like the eleventh, with blind hatred, prejudice and condemnation without reason; but it terminates like the thirteenth century, in unbiassed inquiry, sympathy and justice” (27). Ross is most concerned with rendering “a true” portrait of the Ottoman Empire as a modern government whose ability to reform and modernize is crucial to English interests because of the threat of Russian expansion. Twenty years later, in his *Letters on Turkey* (1856), Jean Ubicini addressed the importance of thoroughly understanding Turkey in order to successfully address “the Eastern Question”:

What is called the eastern question occupies the attention, not only of the cabinets of Europe, but of most private individuals, who, on one side, hail the present as an opportunity of driving the Turks back into Asia, and on the other, allege the importance of maintaining and consolidating the Turkish Empire in Europe. But what is this Turkey, now trembling in the balance of so terrible a “to be or not to be?” What are her component parts? What arguments, as to her probable preservation or downfall, may be drawn from her political constitution, her internal organization her military strengths, her finances, her resources of all kinds. On all these parts, we are ignorant.³

Given the long and varied history of Western writings about the Ottoman Empire outlined in the introduction to this book, Ubicini’s final assertion that “we are ignorant” of Turkey’s basic nature is quite astonishing. After so many years of contact, Western writers still sensed that their comprehension of this region was only partial, unstable, or even impossible to achieve. The anxiety that attends this realization has far-reaching repercussions for a society that was striving to extend its influence, trade, and knowledge of the East.

Although some of Stanhope’s own letters were published in 1914 by her niece, the Duchess of Cleveland, for the most part what we know of her is not from Stanhope’s own hand, but has been written by others. The books to which I refer in this chapter include, Alphonse Lamartine’s *Voyage en Orient* (1838),

A.W. Kinglake's *Eothen* (1845), Eliot Warburton's *The Cross and the Crescent* (1845), Dr. Charles Lewis Meryon's *Memoirs of Lady Hester Stanhope* (1846) and *Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope* (1846), and W.H.Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (1877). When he met Stanhope, Lamartine was already a well-known poet and religious thinker, having already published his *Meditations* (1820) and *Harmonies* (1830). Warburton and Kinglake were young men on the grand tour; Thomson was an American missionary and as mentioned above, Meryon was Stanhope's doctor. These books focus on Lady Hester Stanhope precisely because her story proved to be so riveting for English audiences. She was an aristocratic Englishwoman who turned her back on England: she "went native" in the wilds of Syria and was reportedly crowned Queen of the desert, "a second Zenobia," the famous queen of Palmyra. In her final years, she was a perverse Scheherazade, a "talking despot," who commands and punishes with her lacerating tongue and who eventually died a lonely and embittered hermit. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that the rhetoric of contemporaneous and modern accounts of Stanhope is one of incredulity: at the height of her career she is the "strange" Lady Hester, dressed as a Turkish man, the uncanny figure of a Turkish despot commanding the wild Arabs of the desert. Yet she also represents the decline of such a figure, the inevitable decay of the despot. The way these books present Stanhope's life in the Ottoman Empire shows that the dangers inherent in the slippery figure of the Turk as seen in the romantic texts that I have discussed persist into the midcentury. Because Stanhope actually lived and ruled in the East, her decay as an English despot gone native anticipates the anxiety of the later imperial experience as exemplified in such figures as Conrad's Kurtz and the "hollow posing dummy" of Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant."

LIFE IN ENGLAND

Lady Hester Stanhope was the product of two illustrious English families, the Chathams and the Stanhopes. Born on March 12, 1776, she was the eldest of three daughters; after her mother's death, her father's second wife bore him three sons. Despite this large family, there was evidently little nurturing available for the children. Her stepmother was a fashionable lady who involved herself little with the children, and her father, an infamous eccentric, was cold and distant. His republican sympathies led him to rename his home Democracy Hall and he insisted on being called Citizen Stanhope. Unfortunately, he did not practice his egalitarian beliefs with his children, and Hester Stanhope was the only one of them able to communicate with him on any level.

In the ensuing years, Stanhope was to lose many of those dear to her, and for her this often entailed the loss of a home. She went to live with her grandmother Chatham in 1801 and enjoyed the country very much. Unfortunately, the lady died in 1803, leaving Stanhope again homeless. From here she was taken in by her Uncle William Pitt, for whom she acted as housekeeper, confidante, and

hostess until his death in 1806. It was during his final two years when he served his second term as Prime Minister that Stanhope enjoyed the pinnacle of her success and fame. Although she was not a great beauty, she was of striking appearance and personality. She had an alabaster complexion and stood nearly six feet tall; she had an incisive wit, which she was not afraid to use in public, and was extremely commanding in her presence. As one may imagine, her forceful personality won her many admirers and enemies alike.

Upon the death of Pitt, Stanhope was again left homeless. Although she had a government pension of £1200 per annum, it was not enough to maintain an independent household in London in the manner her class required. She briefly moved to a country location which she enjoyed, but upon the deaths in battle of her favorite brother, Charles, and the man who may have become her husband had he lived (John Moore), she decided to embark on a journey to the East. She was initially accompanied on this trip by her brother James and his friend Nassau Sutton, her maid, Miss Williams, a manservant, and her physician Dr. Charles Lewis Meryon, who would be the author of her memoirs and travels after her death.

James and Sutton separated from the traveling party in Gibraltar and Stanhope continued on with her retinue. It was at this time that she met and began her love affair with Michael Bruce, a twenty-one-year-old Englishman on the Grand Tour. They traveled together until his return to England in 1813. Her letters to his father informing him of their liaison are a good example of Stanhope's forthright, intrepid character.⁴

Stanhope arrived in Constantinople in 1810, from there she visited Egypt and Syria, and after many interesting adventures she settled in two different locations atop Mount Lebanon. The first was the convent of Mar Elias, where she was to live for several years before finally repairing to the compound of Dar Djoun higher up the mountain, where she was to live for the last twenty years of her life. She became increasingly embroiled in the local politics involving the Emir Beshyr, (the ruler of a local Arab tribe known as the Druzes), the Sheik Beshyr, other local pashas, and even Mehmet Ali, the renegade Pasha of Egypt. During the many and various civil wars that occurred in subsequent years, Stanhope's home would serve as refugee camp, hiding place and hospital to sometimes up to two hundred displaced peasants or political refugees. It was as a result of her great generosity and hospitality in this period that her position in the community seems to have become solidified, that she truly became a “native” and that she also, unfortunately, fell into the terrifying debt from which she never escaped.

Stanhope lived an exceptional life for her generation. Although there had been official diplomatic and commercial relations between the English and Turks for three hundred years, her gender and class, together with the decisions she made and lived by, placed her in a category of her own. For this reason, she was the subject of much curiosity, and became a site to visit in the East akin to the great mosques of Constantinople and the pyramids of Egypt.

MASQUERADING AND MARKETING: AUTHORIAL IDENTITY

The *Memoirs of Lady Hester Stanhope*, and the subsequently published *Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope* were not written by Hester Stanhope, but by her physician Dr. Charles Lewis Meryon shortly after her death. Meryon's books exemplify the tendency to label this strange English woman in the East as mad. By masquerading as his subject, Meryon authorizes himself as biographer, thus finally gaining rhetorical power over the aristocratic "despot" who exercised her will over him while she had lived. In turn, he gains a market value for his text that his own name would not have authorized.

Meryon worked for Stanhope on and off for thirty years. He accompanied her on her initial departure from England in February 1810 and remained with her until January 1817. After two short visits to Stanhope, Meryon returned to Syria with his new family in May 1837 and served the Lady again until August 6, 1838. During his attendance upon Stanhope, especially on his final visit, Meryon maintained detailed journals of Stanhope's conversations, hence the full title of the Memoirs: *Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope; As Related by Herself in conversations with her physician; comprising her opinions and anecdotes of some of the most remarkable persons of her time*. It was after her death in 1839 that he set about writing the *Memoirs* and then the *Travels*. But rather than write his own Memoirs or Travels (like the other writers discussed here) Meryon made use of his copious notes, and capitalized on the infamy of her name (in fact, his own name appears nowhere in either of the books).⁵ Meryon cultivates this narrative illusion by quoting her speeches and sometimes Stanhope's letters from his transcriptions at such length, that one is led to believe that it is a first-person narrative. Because these texts were not written at all by Lady Hester Stanhope, they work to disconcert our sense of Stanhope as a woman, traveler, and writer.

Although in the preface to the *Travels*, Meryon promises that Stanhope will be a marvelous figure, he actually narrates long stretches of events where he traveled independently, either because he was sent ahead to reconnoiter a location before Stanhope's arrival or because he went off on a side trip to offer his medical services to someone. Because he was a doctor, he too gained access to important Turkish men and their harems. He is thereby able to describe the women of the country, still a crucial and interesting chapter in any book of Eastern travel. Meryon presents himself as quite a native traveler, one who can pass for a Turk in appearance if not in accent. In short, titling the book *The Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope* was an obvious ploy to set the book apart and to improve sales in a way that *The Travels of Dr. Meryon* could not have.

Even at the time of publication, the *Memoirs* were blasted for this masquerade. In the preface to the subsequently published *Travels*, Meryon writes that the *Memoirs* were criticized for his "total abnegation of self" but he defends himself by saying that he certainly could have, "arrayed himself in a garb of

Eastern glitter as imposing as the most vivid fancy could desire."⁶ At the end of the *Memoirs*, Meryon justifies his actions in publishing these conversations because he believed he was following Stanhope's own desires: "Had her health been good, and had the course of events gone on peaceably, I am inclined to think she would have listened to my suggestion, and have dictated her memoirs to me."⁷ Although Stanhope's niece, the Duchess of Cleveland, benefited immensely from the material narrated in Meryon's books, her offense at the Doctors' impudence is explicitly stated in *The Life and Letters of Lady Hester Stanhope*: "He adopted the practice—unprecedented, as I hope and believe, in the case of a physician—of writing down all she said to him with a view to publication."⁸

While Meryon's books may be immensely helpful in reconstructing Stanhope's life, his authoritative narrative voice has been absorbed wholesale as factual detail by several twentieth-century biographers. For instance, despite Cleveland's complaint about Meryon's books, hers is largely a condensed version of them, merely supplemented by Stanhope's letters. Without Meryon's material, very little would be known of Stanhope's life in the East. Cleveland herself admits, just a few short pages before the quotation above, that upon Meryon's departure from Stanhope in 1815, we "lose sight of her till 1830," that is, when Meryon returns to Dar Djoun. Lytton Strachey's portrait of Stanhope coheres to the earlier sources both in detail and the general impression of her as "inexplicable." Although Strachey does not refer to his sources either way, he implicitly acknowledges Meryon's role when he writes: "She lived for nearly a year after [Meryon] left her—we know no more." He doesn't explicitly acknowledge it, but the reason we know no more is that the portrait closely summarizes Meryon's writings.⁹ In a more recent biography Virginia Childs lists Meryon as the editor of the *Memoirs* and *Travels* although he was their sole author. In her copious quotations from the texts she does not cite them at all, making it impossible to tell when she is quoting Stanhope's letters or Meryon's transcriptions of her conversation.¹⁰ While I acknowledge the value of Meryon's books in gaining insight into Stanhope's life, the uncritical absorption of his texts by other writers is highly problematic. I believe that attending to the *Memoirs* and *Travels* as the reconstruction of Stanhope by a not-disinterested third party is a far more realistic and fruitful reading strategy. In so doing we not only gain insight as much as possible into the life of a woman, but also begin to analyze the rhetorical strategies that writers used both to render safe the strange Lady Hester Stanhope and to tell an interesting and marketable story with the added benefit that "it is all true." The masquerade inherent in the *Memoirs* and the *Travels*, however, reminds us of Said's model of the East as a "congeries of characteristics" (177), i.e. a heterogeneous image of the East based on the subject's perspective more than on an authentic object of study.

GENDER BENDING IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: SEXUAL IDENTITY

Hester Stanhope's independent life in the East thwarted the stereotype that Western countries necessarily provided more freedom and respect to women. One way for writers to make sense of this paradox was to describe how Stanhope was anomalous as a woman. For instance, it was often remarked that Stanhope was not a feminine woman: at six feet tall she had the stature and perceived intellectual capacity of a man and was herself impatient with the society of other women. From 1813 onward, she dressed as a Turkish man and engaged in the (male) political world which had become closed to her at home upon the death of Pitt.

Stanhope's gender-bending activities can be seen in some important events narrated by Meryon in the *Travels*: her initial arrival in Constantinople; a dramatic shipwreck on the way to Egypt (see [figure 11](#)); her arrival in Damascus; and a treasure hunting expedition enacted for the Sublime Porte. Throughout these events, Stanhope is strong, egotistical, and much praised by British and Turks alike. We can see why she ultimately felt that the East provided her with the personal freedom and political power that she so earnestly desired, and from which she was barred as an unmarried, financially dependent female in upper-class English Society. Although the gender roles in the East were far from flexible, Stanhope managed by virtue of her physical stature, mental powers, religion, and class position to carve out her own identity in the East. Meryon is always sure to exploit this engaging paradox as a means of heroicizing Stanhope.

From the beginning of her arrival at Constantinople, Stanhope made a point of pursuing as much public approval as any European, male or female, could boast. Despite the strangeness of the atmosphere, Stanhope lost no time in becoming accustomed to the city and meeting with people. While there, they visited with other English people (e.g., Byron), and prominent Turks, quarreled with the English ambassador (Stratford Canning), and watched Sultan Mahmud II's procession to the mosque. It was in Constantinople that Stanhope immediately began her habit of riding publicly on horseback, having developed very strong horsemanship skills in her youth. However, in Turkey, women of rank were rarely seen in the streets, and when they were, they certainly did not travel on horseback. Stanhope's insistence on thwarting this custom and yet still succeeding in visiting regularly with a number of Turkish men of power and rank is a remarkable accomplishment.

Stanhope and company sojourned in Constantinople and the nearby city of Bursa (known for its hot springs) for over a year, and sailed for Egypt on October 23, 1811. However, a storm stopped their progress and after a remarkable effort, they all managed an escape to a barren, rocky island. Stanhope lost everything but the proverbial clothes on her back. It is perhaps most

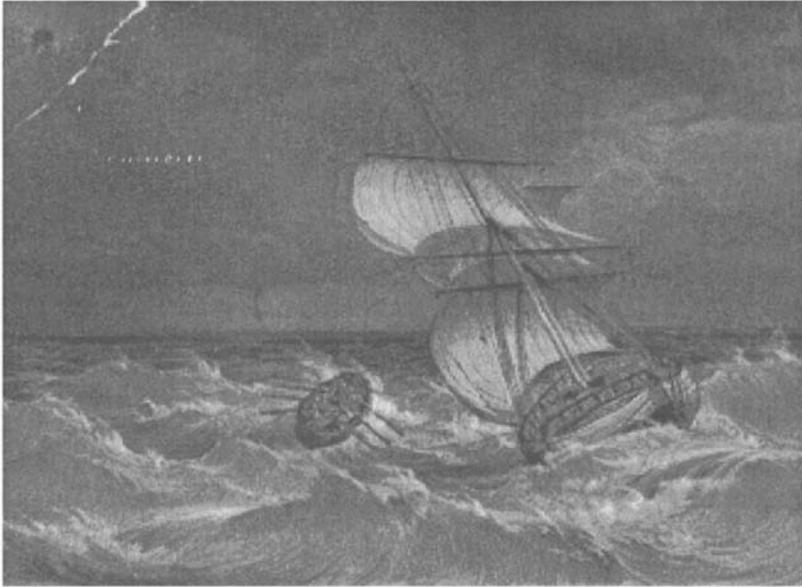


Figure 11. Storm at sea en route to Egypt, *The Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope*.

reflective of her truly adventurous spirit that this disaster did not seem to thwart her enthusiasm for travel. Instead, she seemed rejuvenated by it. Meryon was dispatched to obtain provisions and assistance, and returned with replacement clothes for everyone. It was at this time that Stanhope first began to wear Turkish men’s clothes, which she did for the rest of her life. It was as if she truly emerged from the trial and hardship of the shipwreck as a man, with all the rights and privileges that attend upon men. Meryon may be alluding to the notion of a feminized Eastern male identity when he notes that her wearing of Turkish male attire was not so strange, given that it was more like Western women’s wear than anything else.

After a good time in Egypt, the party moved on to Damascus, where Stanhope made a triumphant and infamous entry. Against all advice, she entered that reportedly “most fanatic of all Turkish cities” on horseback, unveiled and in broad daylight.¹¹ It was to Stanhope’s credit that she not only got away with doing this, but also succeeded in getting herself lodged in a most perfect house in the Turkish quarter, which was quite unusual, since there was a separate designated quarter for European visitors and residents. Meryon writes that “she was determined by a strong measure, at once to give herself a title to consequence beyond any other European who had before visited Damascus” (*Travels* II:4).

All this indulgence in power and prestige contrasted greatly with her sense of disappointment in her life in Great Britain. There she seemed to inspire little interest from people after the death of Pitt and in fact the enemies she had made during that time now had the upper hand. Stanhope further lamented the lack of mobility she had in London because of her finances. Fashion being what it was, travel in town without a carriage and livery was out of the question, but her income made such accoutrements impossible and she therefore found herself stranded at home much of the time. It is no wonder then that she reveled in her public horse-back riding events and was so well pleased by the enthusiastic cheers of the common people who came to see her in public, and by the respectful visits she received from various powerful Turks. In two letters to Lord Sligo, she describes both aspects of her new life: "I must first mention my entry into Damascus, which was one of the most singular and not one of my least exploits, as it was reckoned so dangerous, from the fanaticism of the Turks in that town. However, we made a triumphal entry" (Cleveland 127). In another letter she describes her feelings in more detail:

All I can say about myself sounds like conceit, but others could tell you I am the oracle of the place, and the darling of all the troops, who seem to think I am a deity because I can ride, and because I wear arms; and the fanatics all bow before me, because the Dervishes think me a wonder, and have given me a piece of Mahomet's tomb. (Cleveland 127)

In this excerpt we may sense the thrill that Stanhope experienced at the drama of her new identity and most especially, the attention and respect that she garnered from all. This was the kind of power that she only briefly experienced and reveled in as Pitt's hostess. Here she enjoyed it all over again, and found it to be crucial to her happiness. Because Turkish women were traditionally bound to less public displays of influence and power, Stanhope thus exceeded the socially sanctioned position of both Eastern and Western women.

But the peculiar success of Stanhope's gender bending is most decidedly established in an event that Meryon describes in the *Travels*. Early in her residence at the convent of Mar Elias (1815), Stanhope first demonstrated an active and reciprocal allegiance to the Sublime Porte. It seems that she had discovered a document that recorded the hiding place of a substantial treasure in the ruins of an ancient temple (later Church and Mosque) in the town of Ascalon. Without telling anyone, she wrote to the Sublime Porte of the matter and offered to oversee the recovery of the treasure for the Sultan. Thus, when an official called a Capughi Bashi arrived at Mar Elias on January 28, 1815 to see Stanhope, everyone, Meryon included, thought he was there to apply the bowstring (the standard means of ignominious execution), as the arrival of such an official rarely heralded good news. To everyone's amazement, the Capughi Bashi instead presented firmans (equivalent to the Sultan's law) to the pashas and governors of the surrounding cities, thereby investing Stanhope with

complete power in the enterprise. Even the Capughi Bashi was to be under her direction.

The arrangements were made for this costly and complex venture, and soon an expedition set off for Ascalon. Taking a real scientific and aesthetic interest in the antiquities of the city, Meryon recounts the details of the site and the actions that took place therein, seeming quite thrilled at the entire event. Upon viewing the site of the excavation, Meryon notes how remarkable it all was: “the scene of operations of a singular and surprising nature, if it be considered that Mahometan governors were to act *under the commands of a helpless Christian woman*, in a barbarous and fanatic country” (*Travels* III:150–51, my emphasis). Meryon’s image of Stanhope as “helpless Christian woman” contrasted with the “barbarism” of the Capughi Bashi and the governors clearly accentuates the degree to which power relations had been inverted. One might expect the three signifiers, “helpless,” “Christian,” and “woman,” to fix Stanhope at the bottom of the Turkish hierarchy of power, and yet she paradoxically and successfully wields a great deal of power.

After fourteen days of digging, it became apparent that the treasure was not in the spot that the document specified and that it had already been discovered and removed. The expedition was a failure. However, because several days earlier an ancient and “colossal” statue was uncovered, Meryon thought that their efforts had not been in vain. He includes in his book a sketch that he had made of the statue and writes that when it was first found: “I felt exultation at the sight of a relic of antiquity, which I thought might give celebrity to our labours” (*Travels* III:161). Unfortunately, Stanhope decided to have the statue destroyed so that she would not “lose with the Porte all the merit of my disinterestedness.” Meryon begged her to reconsider the decision, invoking the “tears of the virtuosi” but she would not hear of it. Stanhope described the scene in a letter to Lord Bathurst, Secretary of State:

Knowing how much it would be prized by the English travelers, I ordered it to be broken into a thousand pieces, that malicious people might not say I came to look for statues for my countrymen and not for treasures for the Porte.... Had it [the treasure] escaped observation, in the same way the statue did the eyes of the Turks, when this spot was converted into a mosque, it would have been a fine thing for the Turkish government. (*Travels* III: 168–69 and Cleveland 174–75)

Thus we see Stanhope placing Turkish interests above those of the British, for the practice of bringing back artifacts was becoming increasingly prevalent. From the year 1801 through 1812, with the permission of the Turkish authorities, Lord Elgin had removed bas-reliefs and marbles from the Parthenon and shipped them to England. It was just at this time in 1816 that the marbles were put on public display at the British Museum. But Stanhope’s interests were far different. She reasoned that she could increase the prestige of Great Britain among the Turks by

faithfully playing her role as Queen of the desert, serving the Sultan according to Turkish customs, and playing local politics for the benefit of the Porte. To this end, Stanhope sent the bill for the expedition to the British ambassador. Although the funds to finance the expedition were not immediately forthcoming, the reciprocally respectful relationship established between her and the Porte kept her in good stead for the next twenty-four years.

One of the reasons why Stanhope's early adventures in the Ottoman Empire are so compelling is the way she overcomes sexual limitations and successfully maneuvers Eastern politics. However, a sensitive reading of Meryon's accounts of Stanhope's adventures must be accompanied by a healthy dose of circumspection. To what degree is it a faithful representation of actual events? To what degree might it be exaggerated? Although the answers to such questions may be impossible to ascertain, the fact that Meryon rendered Stanhope thwarting such sexual stereotypes reveals his own awareness of the East as a sphere that permits just this kind of imaginative play, if not for its actual success. By highlighting Stanhope's shifting sexual identity he writes an intriguing story, but when in the *Memoirs* he further characterizes her as a Turkish despot, the effect on Stanhope's image is not only enthralling but also damning.¹²

KISSING THE SABER: RACIAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Ottoman East not only gives Stanhope the freedom to experiment with gender roles but also to cross over in racial terms. Stanhope "turns Turk" and renounces her English citizenship, blurring the line between imperious "English aristocrat" and "Despotic Turk." Ironically, Stanhope feels that she can be "most English" only in the Ottoman Empire. This of course uncannily reflects back the question, is there anything "Turkish" about the "English?" Stanhope embodies Shelley's assertions that the English tyrant and the Turkish are more alike than different. The dangerous implications of contamination for other Westerners traveling in the East are obvious. "Going native" in the Ottoman Empire means indulging in Eastern despotism and backwardness, and in this way Stanhope ironically exhibits more of her "Englishness" than writers can comfortably acknowledge without pathologizing it. Dr. Meryon's *Memoirs of Lady Hester Stanhope* presents the last years of her life and tells the story of a woman who became well entrenched in Eastern customs, who had quite "turned Turk," yet who retained the worst aspects of the English aristocratic.¹³ In this book he asserts several times that there can be no meeting of East and West: "no amalgamation ever can be formed between nations so opposite in climate, habits, religion and dress, as the Europeans and Orientals" (*Memoirs* III:57-8). Nevertheless, Meryon sketches a Lady Hester Stanhope who effectively mixes the two cultures.

When Meryon returned to Dar Djoun in 1837 he found Stanhope still dressing in Turkish men's clothes, incessantly smoking Turkish pipes, and maintaining her

interest in local politics. The overwhelming image that he presents of the lady is that of a self-indulgent, self-deluding despot who talks ceaselessly, a nightmare amalgamation of the storytelling figure of Scheherazade and her interlocutor, the despotic sultan. It is not far into the *Memoirs* when he paints this picture of himself and his wife that is reminiscent of some Eastern tale:

[My wife and I] took long walks every day, talking over our troubles, and contriving how we should free ourselves from the thralldom under which we were suffering; for we were as effectually in prison as if we had been under bars and bolts...in the East, where the will of a powerful chieftain hangs like a spell over every individual within his reach, it is in vain to argue about people's rights. (I:3)

Ironically, the tyrant of this passage is no Vathek; instead, Lady Hester Stanhope herself is the chieftain to whom he refers. Although Meryon was already well aware of Stanhope's imperious nature, during his absence from her, Stanhope's condition and lifestyle had taken a decided turn for the worse and her customary British superiority had become inflated into the stereotype of an Eastern tyrant. Indeed, the references to Stanhope's despotism in the *Memoirs* are so prevalent that quotations can be found on nearly every page of the book.

There were definitely sources of stress in Stanhope's life that well incited her volatile temper and turned her conversation into ranting: her always indifferent health was becoming increasingly unstable and she was almost completely bedridden. Moreover, she was surrounded by servants whom she did not trust, and who only caused her increasing anxiety. Unfortunately, she dealt with these frustrations by exercising an active and increasing tyranny over them all.

But the biggest source of anxiety in her final years was the suspension, by Colonel Campbell, the Consul-General of Syria, of the government pension that her Uncle had secured for her before his death.¹⁴ She was not only angry and embittered about it, but in real financial crisis. As a result of this she actually and repeatedly renounced her English citizenship, putting into words and writing what for all intents and purposes was already a reality. In her unsuccessful attempts to rectify this conflict, she was often incited to compare unfavorably the British to the Turkish governments. For example, Meryon reports her saying: "In Turkey, a Sultan's firmans are respected, even down to a grant of five piasters, though they may kill him afterwards on his throne; but nothing in England is safe" (*Memoirs* III: 82). In another conversation quoted by Meryon, Stanhope contrasts her own identity as Queen of the East with the Queen of England: "I would not be queen of England, nor of twenty Englands, if you could place me there:—all that is too low for me. I prefer my corner of the earth, with my own wild ideas, to being a shackled sovereign, with a pack of fools about me" (*Memoirs* III:126). The circumscribed power of a Western sovereign compared with the arbitrary power of an Eastern despot is here converted from being the pride of the progressive West to a negatively "shackled sovereign." Meryon's tendency to

present such quotations were no doubt intended to shock the English reader into a recognition of the “strange” opinions of the lady.

However, what is of great interest is that Stanhope justifies her powerful denunciation of England in favor of Turkey as an allegiance to her heritage as an English aristocrat rather than as a converted Turk. For instance, in describing a conflict with the Sultan regarding the housing of refugees, Stanhope says that if her defiance of the Sultan resulted in her execution, she “should kiss the sabre wielded by so mighty a hand.” But when it comes to her conflict with Colonel Campbell, she would not lower herself one inch: “[I will] treat with the most ineffable contempt your trumpety agents, as I shall never admit of their having the smallest power over me— if I did, I should *believe my origin*” (*Memoirs* III: 252, my emphasis). Thus we see that Stanhope’s defiance is not in spite of her English heritage but the only true fulfillment of it. For her, the natural landscape of its flourishing is the Ottoman East.¹⁵

In these final years, Stanhope’s tyranny was most effectively exercised in her ceaseless talk and smothering advice, the weapon that she wielded upon many. Meryon narrates the frequent nights that he sat up with Stanhope till dawn listening to her ceaseless talk on all topics, as well as her bitter lamentations and complaints of her life, her pains, and her frustrations. Stanhope’s conversation runs the gamut of old gossip from England, current Eastern politics, health complaints, and especially a concern for her finances.

Despite the clear connections between Eastern despotism and English aristocratic power, Meryon also implies that Stanhope is most able to fulfill her despotic needs because of the innate willingness of the Eastern population to submit to such authority. Whereas Meryon suggests that his own submission to her tyrannous talk came from avoiding “accusations of ingratitude and bad breeding” (*Memoirs* I:44) the attitude of the natives is one of “oriental humility”:

Her greatest delight was to sit and harangue when her hearers stood around her: it fostered the dreams of greatness which floated in her brain; and, when she saw the homage the natives paid her, and looked on their oriental humility, she fancied herself, for a moment, the Queen of the East. (*Memoirs* III:106)

Although her attitude of power may be associated with the customary attributes of the aristocratic class of England, Meryon nonetheless asserts that it is perfectly matched by Eastern subservience. While his racial justification for his behavior (an innate desire to show gratitude and breeding) and for Eastern behavior (an innate capacity to worship tyrants) maintains a clear-cut dichotomy between otherwise identical behaviors, the English and Turkish despotism in Stanhope herself is rhetorically fused. By essentializing the characteristics of the English and Turks in this way, Meryon raises the level of discourse from merely national to racial identity. This intensification has the paradoxical effect of both defending and damning the lady, and his apologies for this negative image are

undercut by the incessant details with which he delineates it. A similar connection will be seen in other books as well: W. H. Thomson attempts to bridge the gap between the young English girl and the “fallen star” of Stanhope’s later life in *The Land and the Book* and A.W. Kinglake recognizes the East as the natural environment for the prideful Englishmen in *Eothen*.

Meryon’s negotiation of his employer’s English racial identity and her Turkish racial identity is influenced by a set of often contradictory priorities. Although he purports to describe Stanhope’s many acts of kindness, his portrait of her as an Eastern despot exercising her irrational will over him, his family and even her willing Eastern servants overwhelms such promises. He does not hesitate to court the very dangerous identification between English and Turkish tyranny that I have been describing. It is in reporting these and far more unflattering aspects of Stanhope’s character that Meryon’s portrait of Stanhope reaches sensational levels of rhetoric. Although his stated aim has been to exhibit the good works and generosity of Stanhope in her life in the East, he admits that the report he has submitted of the Lady has not been particularly flattering:

...[B]ut who could write down all she said? nay, it were better, perhaps that even the little I have recorded should have died with her, and have never met the public eye: for, in endeavoring to rescue her memory from the many unjust imputations cast upon her actions during her life, I may unwittingly have entailed much odium, trouble and reproach upon myself. (*Memoirs* III:127)

This too points to the unspoken priority behind Meryon’s portrait of Stanhope: to sell books. Meryon is not a little disingenuous when he laments exposing these experiences to public scrutiny. Even when he is deploring, protesting and fearing what he should do about his thralldom, one feels that he was aware the entire time that his witnessing and recording Stanhope’s condition was well worth the effort. Although Meryon appears to be the victim of her one-sided rants, like the Sultan of the *Thousand and One Nights*, he actually sits in judgment of the stories’ entertainment value. After returning to his dwelling, he would transcribe Stanhope’s conversation in minute detail, no doubt already intending to publish them after her death.

It is Meryon’s own understated awareness of the market value of his “devoted” service to Stanhope that so offended Stanhope’s family. Cleveland is quite right to remark that Meryon protests too much in his complaints of Stanhope’s never-ending chatter: “No wonder the doctor felt that to spend a couple of hours with her was to go to school, even while mentally appraising the market value of what he had heard” (271). In the remainder of this epilogue, I will pursue the connections between the market value of Stanhope’s life and the various fictional labels ascribed to Stanhope by the writers who visited her home both before and after her death.

“THE SHAPE OF THE MIRACULOUS”: LITERARY
IDENTITIES

Is Stanhope a real woman or a fictional character out of an exotic storybook? Having been the primary subject of Meryon's *Memoirs* and *Travels*, a necessary chapter in a score of travelogues throughout the nineteenth century, a collection of Letters, and several twentieth-century biographies, she assumes the status of legend. This trend was recognized as early as 1825, when James Silk Buckingham wrote that the stories about her “have been magnified by every successive narrator through whom the recital has passed, till it has at last assumed the shape of the miraculous, and surpassed even the extravagance of the Arabian Tales.”¹⁶ In these anecdotes, Stanhope is constantly described in a “rhetoric of strangeness.” She is “unbelievable” as a real woman, and only makes sense as a second Scheherazade or a Zenobia (the famous queen of Palmyra who conquered and ruled several of Rome's Eastern provinces in the third century CE) from whom some lesson must be gleaned about the experience in the East. In her own letters, not published until 1914, Stanhope herself pursues these same labels, but not in order to highlight the strangeness of her situation. Instead, Stanhope utilizes them to establish an Eastern precedent for her otherwise extraordinary accomplishments. The literary figures with whom she is associated involve a series of characteristics that overlap with the sexual, racial, and authorial identities that I have discussed. However, the wide-ranging uses of these literary epithets make them worthy of separate consideration.

The tendency to invoke a fictional character or text in order to understand Stanhope is evident when writers describe the moment of her initial departure from England on February 2, 1810. The Duchess of Cleveland highlighted Stanhope's innocent ignorance of the fate that awaited her: “What would she have felt if she had known where she was going for the rest of her life? Would she have imagined it possible that she was to end her days as a hermit on a Syrian mountain-top? No *fairy tale* ever invented could have sounded more wildly improbable” (93–4 my emphasis). The fairy tale has a cautionary function: it implies that a character willingly, but unknowingly, makes her own devastating fate. Of course, we read such tales in order to learn a lesson and not to make the same mistakes, perhaps even to sit in smug judgment of the selfish flaws of its characters. Because of the gender and class of our protagonist, Hester Stanhope, and the realities of life in the Ottoman Empire, her story only makes sense if it is associated with the generic expectation of a fairy tale. It is certainly not a “normal” biography of a woman. Cleveland clearly wants to describe the passion and strength of her kinswoman, but also to understand why Stanhope made such strange decisions about her life, thereby enabling her to teach us to avoid a similar fate.

In order to make such lessons clear, it is not only useful to note the “fateful” moment of departure from England, but also to describe and reflect on

Stanhope's death, imagining what her own reflections must have been at the end of her life. This is true of Cleveland's book, and is also especially apparent in one of the many contemporary accounts, Dr. W.H.Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (1877). Although this American missionary did not know Stanhope in life, it was he who conducted her funeral services in 1839. In returning to Dar Djoun years later, Thomson sat reflecting on Stanhope's life, trying to make a connection between the English girl and the dead expatriate. Thomson first draws attention to the incredible break between her early and later life: "...alone, on the tops of this bleak mountain, her lamp of life grew dimmer and more dim, until it went quite out in hopeless, rayless night. Such was the end of the once gay and brilliant niece of Pitt, presiding in the saloons of the master-spirit of Europe, familiar with the intrigues of kings and cabinets."¹⁷ Thomson's glaring contrast between her life of splendor and influence in Britain and her final years of decay in Syria is further emphasized: "Poor wandering star, struck from the bright galaxy of England's happy daughters to fall and expire on this solitary summit of Lebanon" (81). Bridging the gap between these two poles is the implicit purpose of Thomson's short sketch of Stanhope's career. Writing as a clergyman, he seeks to communicate a moral lesson from it.¹⁸

Like Meryon, Thomson notes her bizarre mixture of Turkish and English habits: she maintains the "English taste for beautiful grounds" and an English "haughty and stubborn independence." However, he also reminds us of the Eastern Stanhope who "wore the dress of an emeer, weapon and pipe and all" and he invokes the standard associations as well, "Now riding at the head of wild Arabs, queen of the desert on a trip to Palmyra." Thomson expresses his purpose when he turns the anecdote of Stanhope's life into a moral lesson that could just as well be Marlowe describing Kurtz:

I should like to read the long, dark, interior life of such a being, but not to live it... Let those who are tempted to revolt against society, and war with nature, God and man, come to Dahr June—sit on the fragments of this broken tomb, amid ruins without beauty to charm or age to make venerable—itself a ruin of yesterday and sinking fast to hopeless oblivion. (81, my emphasis)

Of course, the "revolt against society" to which Thomson refers is Stanhope's move to the East from West and her indulgence in the tyrannical and selfish rule for which she became infamous. For him, reflecting on her lesson is not an idle task for the faint of heart but a real moral endeavor for which there are no easy answers, but which is necessary if the British are to make sense of their position in the East. In his viewing her as a figure with a "long, dark, interior life," Thomson hopes to analyze this phenomenon of "going native" and to be able to diagnose and treat what he regards as pathological.

But not all accounts of Stanhope take such an acutely moral stance with regard to her legacy. In contrast with Thomson's project of making Stanhope an

exemplum of pride and tyranny, Eliot Warburton provides a more admiring and credulous reading of her career in his immensely popular book *The Cross and the Crescent* (1845), aptly subtitled “Romance and Realities of Eastern Travel.”¹⁹ Warburton indulges in romantic fantasies about Stanhope’s life, but he too engages in the rhetoric of strangeness so prevalent in writings about her. Describing the dramatic and sublime landscape of the area, Warburton is moved by the approach to “Djouni”: “It was one of those most striking and interesting spots I ever witnessed: its structure and silence and beauty; its richness and desolation, lent to it a touching and mysterious character, that suited well the memory of that *strange* hermit-lady, who made it a place of pilgrimage even in Palestine.”²⁰ (my emphasis). Warburton, like Thomson, visited Dar Djoun after Stanhope’s death, simply for the purpose of “soaking up” her atmosphere. For this reason, his descriptions and reflections are all hypothetical or even fictional. Warburton describes everything that he does not actually see, e.g., Stanhope’s infamous mare said to be born with a natural saddle (described in detail by Lamartine and Kinglake), and he reports a history that he cannot confirm, e.g., he mistakes Dar Djoun for Mar Elias. And although he admits that public rumors always exaggerate, he nevertheless repeats the rumors without disputing them: “It was even said that she was crowned queen of Palmyra by 50,000 Arabs. She certainly exercised almost despotic power in the neighborhood on the mountain” (27). In *The Land and the Book*, the missionary Thomson retrospectively described Stanhope’s funeral and also reflected upon her imagined presence there at Dar Djoun, years after she died. Similarly, when Warburton arrives there, he too imagines the funeral of Stanhope and includes Thomson as a character in the rendering. Warburton revels in the imaginative description of Thomson’s discovery of Stanhope’s corpse in the deserted compound. For Warburton, sitting and imagining the discovery is part of Stanhope’s mythology.

Whereas Thomson seeks a moral interpretation, Warburton visualizes Stanhope as a heroic rebel: “To the last she held on gallantly; and, even when confined to her bed and dying, she sought for no companionship or comfort but such as she could find in her own powerful; though unmanageable mind” (28). Rather than explicitly drawing a moral lesson from Stanhope that will steer others away from emulating her, Warburton envisions the Lady as one who remained stalwart and proud. However, he still implies that the choices of this “unmanageable” mind ought to be avoided. This term, relatively innocuous here, is merely a variation of the “strangeness” rhetoric to which I have been alluding: the language of pseudo-madness. Despite the differences between these two writers’ attitudes toward Stanhope, they are both challenged to ascertain whether she is mad or sane, Turkish or English, romantic or immoral. In order to explain why such a woman would live for thirty years in the Ottoman Empire, dress like a Turkish emir, smoke a Turkish pipe, get involved in Eastern politics and astrology, and even renounce her British citizenship, it is essential that they provide an explanation that locates the source of trouble in the madness of an individual mind and not as a general trend.

Because so many of the Eastern travelers were personal friends who knew of each other's work, there is an interesting intertextuality among their several books that no doubt accounts for the repetition of material in them and the establishment of Stanhope's legend. For instance, Warburton arrived at Dar Djoun in May 1843, nearly ten years after his friend A.W.Kinglake had been there, but before Kinglake's book *Eothen* (1844) was published. Unlike Warburton and Thomson, Kinglake actually visited Dar Djoun before Stanhope's death and had won a rare interview with her. Warburton wrote a reflective letter to Kinglake describing the atmosphere of Dar Djoun, especially how it must have changed since Kinglake's visit in 1834. Kinglake liked it so much that he reproduced it in his book which was published in 1844. However, just one year later in 1845, when Warburton was ready to publish his own book, the letter was removed from Kinglake's, and reprinted in Warburton's *The Crescent and the Cross*. The notes that explain this swap in the second edition of Kinglake's book and the first edition of Warburton's, gloss the fact that these were two friends who visited the same sites and monuments on their trip to Syria, and were "sharing and comparing" their experiences. Stanhope's home was truly a site to be visited that travelers were eager to share with one another and the public. And although they might take a more or less moral, romantic, or ironic perspective on Stanhope, they all grapple with the uncanniness of the familiar English figure in the alien Turkish scenery, by comparing her to fictional or legendary characters and seeking thereby to learn a lesson from her.

A.W.Kinglake's book provides an interesting counterpoint to the majority of serious travelogues written in the period, both in stylistics and in his treatment of Stanhope. *Eothen* is desultory in style, unscholarly, and extremely humorous. In his preface, Kinglake explains that his adoption of this idiosyncratic writing style was necessary for his ability to write such a book. As he puts it, the text must above all *interest* him (unlike most other travelers, Kinglake did not publish immediately upon his return home, which suggests that he truly did need to convince himself to write it). However, he also claims that he only departed from this strategy once: and this is in the bit on Stanhope. He states that he will tell her story once and for all because he has been questioned so much about her by the English: "The result is, that my account of the lady goes to a length which is not justified either by the importance of the subject or by the extent to which it interested the narrator."²¹ Although Kinglake's portrait of her is gently satirical, the rhetoric and reflection on Stanhope falls well within the parameters described above. At no time does he present Stanhope as a woman whose lifestyle choices were understandable or justified. And in fact, he utilizes a wider variety of epithets than any other writer described here.

Kinglake was well aware of Lady Hester Stanhope long before his travels, since she and his mother were acquainted during the time when Stanhope lived with her grandmother, Lady Chatham. It is quite telling that from his youth Kinglake had always envisioned Stanhope as a *fictional* character. She was the intrepid girl

...reigning sovereignty over the wandering tribes of Western Asia. I know that her name was made almost as familiar to me in my childhood as the name of *Robinson Crusoe*; both were associated with the spirit of adventure: but whilst the imagined life of the castaway mariner never failed to seem glaringly real, the true story of the Englishwoman ruling over the Arabs always sounded to me *like a fable*. (80, my emphasis)

That the figure of Crusoe should be infused with reality and Stanhope's should ring with fiction emphasizes the fundamental strangeness of Stanhope's situation. Kinglake's reaction to Crusoe suggests the degree to which audiences had become accustomed to the idea that fantastic and faraway travel was real. However, because this vision of the intrepid girl is so utterly unprecedented, as a youth Kinglake could not conceive of it as a reality. Furthermore, seeing her in reality did not seem to make the task any easier. In the depiction of his visit to Dar Djoun, Kinglake actively strives to understand her. To this end, he used numerous epithets to describe Stanhope, as if the application of the correct label would render her a type that could be properly categorized and thus understood. Among these titles are: Chatham's granddaughter; Queen of the Desert; superhuman being; white woman; Princess of Djoun. These titles are sprinkled throughout the interview and it is clear that he is both fascinated by seeing this figure from his childhood imagination and also feeling sarcastic and judgmental about her.

Kinglake sketches out a biography of Stanhope in which he invokes the strangeness of her fate and posits a reason for it: "there is a longing for the East, very commonly felt by proud people when goaded by sorrow" (86). Kinglake's answer is thus a psychology of wounded pride: he describes why a person suffering from psychic pressure would retreat from the civilized world to a place where such a person could unleash that energy on a willing populace. After all, what could be more dangerous than the wounded pride of a powerful English aristocrat and where else to unleash it but upon subservient Easterners who are bred to such servility? Because in her early life in England Stanhope had much political and social influence fueled by her "imperious and dauntless character" she craved the kind of power that she could attain in the East. Hence, Kinglake writes, she "exercised something like sovereignty over the wandering tribes." This is the same connection between English and Turkish despotism that we saw in the *Memoirs* as written by Dr. Meryon.

However, by the time Kinglake met her in 1834, Stanhope was reduced merely to a "spiritual power" (86). Her political power on the wane, quite penniless and suffering from ill health, Stanhope stayed in touch with the local politics and doings at Constantinople with the aid of informants and spies, but she increasingly turned her attention to spiritual matters. Thus, another set of titles that Kinglake applies to Stanhope includes: renowned prophetess; Lady Prophetess; practical prophetess; unbelieved Cassandra; "more than a prophet."

All this suggests Stanhope’s hybrid religious thinking. Although her conversation is random, she talks to him mainly about the occult and her strange religious beliefs. Thus, not only were Stanhope’s political and despotic tendencies allowed to flourish in this region of the Ottoman Empire, she was also influenced by the frightful mixture of the various religions that occurs in that part of the world. Not only were Judaism, Christianity, and Islam present, but also the confusing and mysterious worship practices of such Arab tribes as the Druzes. For instance, Kinglake reports the double sacrilege evident in Stanhope’s denial of the messiah and creeds and in her hinting at her own “heavenly rank.” His impression of her “unholy claim to supremacy in the spiritual kingdom” is that it is akin to madness, yet she was not wholly mad. Again, Kinglake notes that this blasphemy is made possible by the credulity of the native population. The people in her employ think of her as a divinity too: “the general belief in the superhuman power of this wonderful white lady—her resolute and imperious character...inspired sincere respect amongst the surrounding inhabitants” (95–6).

Kinglake is sure to describe Stanhope as a strange figure, more fictional than real, who has an incomprehensible sense of her own greatness which is evident not only in her despotic treatment of her servants, but also in her religious practices. Both of these qualities make her seem “strangely” despotic and Eastern, although Kinglake hesitates to call her insane because he wants instead to render her aware of and responsible for these outrageous activities.

The French poet Alphonse de Lamartine traveled in the area in 1832–33, earlier than any of the other travelers described above. It was his portrait of Stanhope which reportedly angered her so much that she began her habit of not receiving most traveling Europeans who wanted to visit Dar Djoun. As a poet concerned with a progressive Christianity, Lamartine was very much interested in meeting Stanhope because of the rumors of her idiosyncratic religious beliefs and so he devotes more attention to describing them than does Kinglake. Note too that this description leads Lamartine to a consideration of Stanhope’s madness:

Inscrutable as the Druzes, of whose faith, perhaps, she alone in the world really knows the mystic secret; resigned as a Mussulman, and a fatalist, like him; expecting, with the Jew, the Messiah; and with the Christian professing the adoration of Christ, and practicing his charitable morality. Add to this the fantastic colours and supernatural dreams of an imagination of oriental tint, and heated by solitude and meditations with the effect of some revelations, perhaps, of Arab astrologers,—and you will have an idea of the *sublime and strange compound which it is more easy to call madness*, than it is to analyse and comprehend it. (22)

The analysis to which Lamartine alludes above results in his own sense that Stanhope is not mad, rather it is a “studded [*sic*], voluntary” madness an

“affected madness,” a “pretense.” However, she is also a victim of this pretense: “She deceived herself and others, and became the first neophyte of the faith she had created for them” (112). In the end, her inflated sense of self and her strange religious beliefs are exemplified by her treatment of a specific mare that she possessed. Each of the travelers mentioned herein describes this famous mare, whether they saw the horse or merely heard tell of it. It was reportedly born with a strange protruding backbone that formed a “natural saddle.” Because there had been a prophecy that the returned Messiah would enter Jerusalem on such a horse, Stanhope pampered it in expectation of that day. She also kept a special horse for herself so that she could accompany the Messiah on his rounds. This daughter of British aristocracy became a monument of Eastern despotism, as necessary a site to visit as the Great Pyramids. As Lamartine put it, “She is a statue of gigantic proportions” (112).

Dr. Meryon’s vision of Stanhope in the *Memoirs* and *Travels* shares some of the more important aspects evident in these other travel books. He often shifts among various epithets for the purpose of describing her. These epithets refer to fictional characters who play within the realm of fixed categories, from the merely intrepid English lady traveler to a facsimile of a Turkish Tyrant ruling her compound on the mountain, and finally, to the weak, and wailing vision of a dying woman who bitterly and incessantly complains with her last breath. In the *Travels*, which chronicles the earlier years, Stanhope is Zenobia, queen of the desert, but in the *Memoirs*, which covers her later years, she is a ceaseless speaker; so Meryon begins the *Memoirs* by invoking the figure of Scheherazade, “The following pages are a faithful transcript of Lady Hester Stanhope’s conversations. *In the thousand and one nights* that I have sat and listened to them...” Not only does this ironically place him in the position of the Sultan (as the recipient of the stories) but it also powerfully associates Stanhope’s ceaseless chatter with a mode of survival. As I demonstrated above, Meryon’s Stanhope/Scheherazade is a despot over whom he eventually exercises his rhetorical will when he takes it upon himself to publish her memoirs and travels.

It is perhaps not shocking that Hester Stanhope herself indulged in similar associations with legendary characters in seeking to establish her own identity upon her decision to stay in the East. This tendency is especially prevalent in the letters she wrote describing her visit to the ruins of Palmyra. Although such comparisons no doubt flattered her ego, they also fulfilled a practical purpose. Stanhope’s motivation for such rhetorical strategies stemmed from a need to establish herself in a tradition of powerful Eastern females, rather than as a means to draw moral lessons for the dangers of going native.

In March 1813, three years after her arrival at Constantinople, Stanhope traveled to Syria from whence she embarked on a journey to visit the ruins of Palmyra. Up to that point Stanhope had enjoyed meeting with prominent Turks, visiting various places and pushing the limits of sexual propriety. Perhaps fired by the success of her journey thus far, and rendered confident by the power and respect she commanded, Stanhope insisted on making the difficult journey to the

ruins of Palmyra. The city was reported to be quite out of the jurisdiction of the pasha of Damascus, so that the Turkish government would be unable to guarantee her safety. Dr. Meryon was sent ahead to scout the condition of the journey, and in the *Travels* he narrates his own trip there in great detail; then again, but more briefly, he details Stanhope's subsequent arrival. After making all the necessary arrangements with the man in control of that part of the desert, the Prince of the Anazi Arabs, Mohanna el-Fadel, they set off on the journey, and once arriving, stayed for a month. Legend had it that during this visit Stanhope was quite literally crowned Queen of the Desert, a second Zenobia, by 10,000 (or 50,000!) wild Bedouin Arabs. Stanhope exulted in this epithet and passionately cultivated this role, which, according to others, later devolved to a despotism akin to the great and infamous stereotype of other Eastern leaders.

In the *Travels* Meryon theorized that it was Stanhope's fixation on Zenobia even more than her interest in “broken columns and dilapidated temples” that motivated her interest in Palmyra:

These columns and temples owed the greatest part of their magnificence to one of her own sex, whose talents and whose fate, remotely akin to her own, no doubt might move her sympathy so far as to promote her to visit the spot which a celebrated woman had governed. She sought the remains of Zenobia's greatness, as well as the remains of Palmyra. (*Travels* II:174–75)

Meryon's notion that Stanhope's desire to visit the city was enhanced by her interest in the famous Queen is verified in several of her own letters where she repeatedly refers to her newly established prominence among the Turks and Bedouin Arabs as a *meleki* or queen. In a letter of January 25, 1813, to General Oakes of Malta she writes: “I have every reason to be perfectly contented with their conduct towards me, and I am the Queen with them all.”²³ In addition, Michael Bruce makes an explicit connection between Stanhope and Zenobia: “Who knows but she may prove another Zenobia, and be destined to restore it to its ancient splendour?—perhaps she may form a matrimonial alliance with Ebn Seod, the great chief of the Wahabees” (Cleveland 152). And finally, in another letter to H.W.Wynn, written by Stanhope from the city of Latakia, June 30, 1813, after the completion of the trip, she not only again refers to herself as the Queen, but also to the many other names applied to her by the locals:

Without joking, I have been crowned Queen of the Desert under the triumphal arch at Palmyra!... I shall soon have as many names as Apollo. I am the sun, the star, the pearl, the lion, the light from Heaven and the Queen, which all sound good in its way. (Cleveland 159)

It is portentous that Stanhope here invokes the very issue of names and labels proliferating around her as her reputation grows. Thus, the report that she had

been crowned Queen and a second Zenobia was first circulated by Stanhope herself and her retinue in letters to their personal correspondents, and only later was it repeated by others. In this way the story became legend in the territory and so well entrenched that there is hardly an account of Stanhope in any subsequent traveler's text that does not refer to her thus. In fact, the connection between Stanhope and Zenobia would only increase with time, although the reference is occasionally ironic, and extends even to the fact that a biography published by Jean Hughes as recently as 1967 is entitled *Queen of the Desert*.

The trip to Palmyra proved to be one of the high points of Stanhope's entire career. Not only did she reach and view the legendary city but she did so by securing independent agreements with "wild" Arabs who were outside of Turkish law. This was Stanhope's first attempt at conducting negotiations, treaties, and plans along the lines of Eastern laws, and she proved herself to be willing and capable of such adventures. Although she sought relations with such renegade Arab tribes, Stanhope was loyal to the Porte. In fact, in subsequent decades, she would continue to express an increasing sense of allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan over the regional, rebellious pashas, and over the British King. Even at this stage Stanhope was already adamant about the fact that the Turks were more important to her sense of self-worth and identity than the Christians, and with good reason: "I am a queer animal, it is true, but very popular with the Turks at least. What I am with the Christians is of little consequence to me here, as they have no weight in this country" (Cleveland 147). She worked hard over the years to maintain politically savvy relations with the Porte, as well as the local tribes in Syria, and utilizing legendary figures of powerful Eastern females was one way for Stanhope to establish a precedent and justification for her actions. Thus, although she too applies such epithets, it is not in the spirit of a rhetoric of madness, as utilized by other writers. Rather it is a means to justify and establish her new political and public role in a land ruled by tradition and which spurned innovation.

I have presented above various accounts of travelers who visited Hester Stanhope herself or her home after her death. Each of them ruminated on the strange figure of Stanhope by attempting to place her in a category through the application of fictional or legendary figures or genres that would fix her in our understanding. Ideally, with the hybrid English/Turkish despot firmly established as a separate category, she would cease to fluctuate between the familiar and foreign and become instead the figure of a cautionary tale about the dangers that await the Western individual who chooses to live for many years in the East. Each of the travelers sketched here comments on the same aspects of Stanhope's character, history, and beliefs, whether or not they actually met her in person. The intertextuality among the texts and the rumors that float around her inform all of these sketches, already perpetuating a standard rhetoric around this woman that was so strong as to continue well into the next century's biographies.²⁴ Stanhope is always the strange woman who could not have foreseen her fate in the East, whose life as a "second Zenobia" may have been grand and who may

have worked the Ottoman system like a native professional, but whose lonely death as an ineffectual despot and unheeded prophetess is a cautionary tale to all those who would lose their “Englishness” in favor of Eastern dress, customs, and religion.

CONCLUSION

In addition to reflecting a similar instability, representations of Lady Hester Stanhope demonstrate the ongoing relevance of the three major associations of the Turks that have been the overall focus of this study. As we have seen, policies and attitudes toward the empire were often ruled by economic imperatives. Commerce and trade in the region was crucial, whether of raw materials such as cotton, or of cultural capital, such as *The Thousand and One Nights*. Thus, the strategy of travelers to write about Stanhope as a way to bolster sales in a saturated market is a latterday version of the same impulse that induced Percy Shelley, for instance, to utilize the popular stylistics of the Eastern tale in *The Revolt of Islam* as a means of reaching a large audience. Second, Stanhope assumed the role of an imperious Turkish despot and achieved a kind of infamy for her treatment of her local servants, English officials, and English travelers. This attitude echoes the long-standing image of the Turk as the oppressor of subject populations such as the Greeks. Finally, Stanhope’s bending of sexual standards in the East is itself a counterimage of Western domesticity. Ironically, she not only breaks the mold of the female harem, but also crushes the associations and limitations of English women at home by establishing her own version of an Eastern palace. Stanhope’s story perfectly illustrates how these associations persisted well into the nineteenth century as the balance of power between the British Empire and the Ottoman Empire shifted significantly in favor of the British. In the 1840s, the Ottoman Empire had changed dramatically from its incarnation at the time of the publication of Peter Ashton’s translation of Paulo Giovio’s *A Shorte Treatise upon the Turkes Chronicles* (1546) the first history of Turkey in English.

I have argued that during the years in which the British Empire was expanding its holdings in the East and defining its role as a world empire, the Ottoman Empire acted as a provocative counterpoint in a way that differed from other regions in the East or from other European nations. Turkey’s position as a disintegrating, medieval empire that was both incredibly familiar (due to the exhaustive writing about it, as well as its physical proximity to Europe) and yet still foreign (unmistakably Muslim and Asiatic), established it for decades as a pliable trope for writers who sought to understand England’s evolving policies in the global scene. As England gained power in the nineteenth century, its role as powerbroker, diplomat, trade partner and military machine increasingly eclipsed the power and influence of the Ottoman Empire. Sometimes ally, sometimes enemy, the British generally continued with a policy that sought to maintain the integrity of the empire as a way to stabilize the region. It is true that similar

political and economic policies of England and the U.S. toward the republic of Turkey continue today. Turkey's vexed status as a third-world economy striving to negotiate its drive to join the European Union and yet to retain a modern Muslim identity continues to render it both a familiar and a foreign presence to Western minds.

Notes

NOTES TO THE PREFACE

- 1 Three noteworthy book-length studies are Saree Makdisi's *Romantic Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999); Nigel Leask's *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Great Britain: Oxford UP, 1992); and John Barrel's *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991); and two important collections of essays are Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson's *Romanticism and Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); and Sonia Hofkosh and Alan Richardson's *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780±1834* (Indiana: Indiana UP, 1996).
- 2 Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2002) 21.
- 3 Marvin Howe, *Turkey Today: A Nation Divided Over Islam's Revival* (New York: Westview Press, 2000). Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent and Star* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).
- 4 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) 2–3.
- 5 Certainly the most important is the plan that immediately followed World War I and preceded the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

- 1 I use the term "Orientalism" here in the spirit with which Edward Said has defined it: "In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these." Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) 177. Although many of the writers that are analyzed in what follows actually traveled to the east, their version of the Ottoman Empire is almost always a rhetorical construction that is deployed for the purpose of critiquing or praising issues at home.
- 2 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) 231.

- 3 This is akin to the gradations of “this that and the other” described by John Barrel in *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey, A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1991).
- 4 See pages 83, 113, 185, 191, 300, 319. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Miriam Brody (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).
- 5 As quoted by Margaret J.M.Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) 15.
- 6 For example, Theodoros Bibliander, *A Godly consultation unto the brethren and companions of the Christen religyon. By what means the cruell power of the Turkes, both may and ought for to be repelled of the Christen people (translated oute of Latine)* Theodore Bibliander beinge the author. (Basil, Raduple Bonifante, 1542).
- 7 V.J.Parry, “Renaissance Historical Literature in Relation to the Near and Middle East (with special reference to Paolo Giovio),” *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P.M.Holt (London: Oxford UP, 1962) 279.
- 8 For an example of a globe see John Senex, *Terrestrial Globe*, (1720) and for a map see William Berry, *Map of the World*, (London: 1680). An illustrative textual reference is seen in Byron’s letters, e.g., “I have since my departure from your country (one year ago) been in Portugal, Spain, Sardinia, Sicily, Malta, all the most interesting parts of Turkey in Europe and Asia Minor, including Athens, &c. in the former, and the Troad and Ephesus in the latter, and have at last reached my headquarters, the capital.” Letter to Robert Charles Dallas, June 23, 1810. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, Vol. 2. ed. Leslie Marchand (Cambridge Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1973) 247.
- 9 Berna Moran, *Turklerle Ilgili Ingilizce Yayinlar Bibliografyasi. From the Fifteenth-Seventeenth Century* (Istanbul, Turkey: Istanbul Matbaasi, 1964).
- 10 Carl Gollner, *Tunica* (Berlin, 1961).
- 11 C.J.Heywood, “Sir Paul Rycout, A seventeenth century observer of the Ottoman State: Notes for a Study,” *English and Continental Views of the Ottoman Empire, 1500±1800*(Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Press, 1972) 34.
- 12 Paulo Giovio, *A Shorte Treatise upon the Turkes Chronicles*, trans. Peter Ashton (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1546).
- 13 Paulo Giovio, *Historiarum Sui Temporis Libri XLV* (Florence, 1550–52; Paris, 1558–60).
- 14 Richard Hakluyt, *Voyages*. Second ed. (London: George Bishop, Ralph Newberie and Robert Barker, 1598–1600) Book II.i.311.
- 15 S.A.Skilliter, “Three Letters from the Ottoman ‘Sultana’ Safiye to Queen Elizabeth I,” *Documents from Islamic Chanceries*, ed. S.M.Stern (Columbia, SC: 1965) 119–57.
- 16 Dallam’s manuscript diary was written too late to have been included in Hakluyt’s *Voyages* but was published later by the Hakluyt Society. Master Thomas Dallam’s Diary in *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, ed. J.Theodore Bent. no. 87 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1893) 1–99.
- 17 Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes, from The first beginning of that nation to the rising of the Othoman Familie: with all the notable expeditions of the Christian Princes against them. Together with The Lives And Conquests of the Othoman Kings and Emperours Faithfullie collected out of the best Histories⁴and*

- digested into one continuat Historie vntill this present Yeare* (London: Printed by Adam Islip, 1603) Epistle to the Reader, n.p.
- 18 “The Sublime Porte” is a term used to refer to the government of the Turks.
 - 19 Sir Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Joanne Brome, 1682).
 - 20 “If the priesthood were sound, all those people that oppose Christ’s law and despise Christendom would be converted. For the Saracens all pray to the same Almighty God, fully believing in Him and asking His grace; only they beseech Mohammed, to intercede for them. Thus they live with a true faith, but a false mediator, and this is a sad thing for the righteous ones who belong to God’s kingdom....” William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, trans. J.F. Goodridge (New York: Penguin Books, 1966) 195.
 - 21 *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. C.W.R.D. Moseley. (New York: Penguin Books, 1983) 108.
 - 22 For an informative introduction to Turkish motifs in Elizabethan drama, see Ton Honselaars, “The Elizabethan and the Turk at Constantinople,” *Oriental Prospects: Western Literature and the Lure of the East*, ed. C.C. Barfoot and Theo D’Haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 9–26.
 - 23 *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* lists 235 Middle Eastern travel texts alone published in the eighteenth century. *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George Watson, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971).
 - 24 Martha Pike Conant, *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966; orig. Columbia UP, 1908) xxi.
 - 25 Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Parts One and Two: Text and Major Criticism*, ed. Irving Ribner (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1974) ix-x.
 - 26 Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin, 1994) Vol III:810–811, note 41.
 - 27 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) 168.
 - 28 For a concise and focused review of eighteenth-century Oriental tales see C. C. Barfoot, “English Romantic Poets and the ‘Free-Floating Orient,’” *Oriental Prospects: Western Literature and the Lure of the East*, ed. C.C. Barfoot and Theo D’Haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 65–96.
 - 29 For Pike the influences of the Eastern Tale are superficial when compared to the “highest standards of romanticism,” and yet this early study nevertheless identifies the Oriental as an important strain in its development.
 - 30 A recent article by Diego Saglia demonstrates how Beckford’s experiences with the Turkish ambassador in Spain informed his discursive construction of the Orient in his early travel book about Portugal and Spain, as well as the later *Vathek*. Diego Saglia, “Beckford’s ‘Sparks of orientalism’ and the material-discursive orient of British Romanticism,” *Textual Practice* 16.1 (2002):75–92.
 - 31 It may be well to recall here that in the preface to “Kubla Khan,” Coleridge identifies a story in *Purchas His Pilgrim* as the source of the fateful dream.
 - 32 For a concise and insightful explication of Muslim attitudes towards the West following Carlowitz and Passarowitz, see Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).
 - 33 For information on the history of the play’s performance see the introduction by Landon C. Burns, Jr., in *Tamerlane, A Tragedy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966) 5–10.

- 34 Ahmet Evin, "The Tulip Age and Definitions of 'Westernization,'" *Social and Economic History of Turkey, 1071±1920. Papers Presented to the First International Congress on the Social and Economic History of Turkey*, ed. Osman Okyar and Halil Inalcik (Ankara: Meteksan Limited, 1980) 134
- 35 Thomas Naff, "Ottoman Diplomatic Relations with Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Patterns and Trends," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. Thomas Naff and Roger Owen. (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977) 90.
- 36 Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*. Two Volumes. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) 260.
- 37 Letter from Constantinople Nov. 27, 1799. Mary Nisbet, *The Letters of Mary Nisbet of Direleton, Countess of Elgin* (New York: D.Appelton and Co. 1928) 56.
- 38 Philip Mansel, *Constantinople* (London: John Murray, 1995) 223.
- 39 Lord Kinross, *Ottoman Centuries* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1977) 453.
- 40 John Cam Hobhouse, *A Journey through Albania and other Provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia to Constantinople During the years 1809±10* (Philadelphia: M. Carey and Son, 1817) II:369–70.
- 41 Julia Pardoe, *City of the Sultan* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard: 1837) 111.
- 42 David Ross, *Opinions of the European Press on the Eastern Question* (London: James Ridgeway and Sons, 1836) 23.
- 43 Julia Pardoe, *The Beauties of the Bosphorus* (London: G.Virtue, 1839; rpt. 1854, 1874) 5.
- 44 Of Mahmud's use of the Turkish press to effect change David Ross writes: "It is singular to see the government styled despotic availing itself of the press as the most powerful means of acting on its subjects" (xi).
- 45 This is the contention that Fatima Mernissi makes, for instance, in *The Veil and the Male Elite*, when she points out that Muslim men often decry anything that smacks of feminism in Islamic society as a contaminating Western import. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1991).

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

- 1 Elizabeth Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople in a series of letters from the Right honourable Elizabeth Lady Craven, to his serene highness, The Margrave of Brandenboug, Anspach and Bareith written in 1786* (London: J. Robinson, 1789) 195. Although Elizabeth Craven had earlier displayed literary pretensions, and even had a play publicly produced, this was her first full scale publication.
- 2 Elizabeth Craven, *The Beautiful Lady Craven: the Original Memoirs of Elizabeth, Baroness Craven*. 2 vols. Eds. A.M.Broadley and Lewis Melville (London: John Lane, 1914).
- 3 Susan Staves, "Where is History but in Texts? Reading the History of Marriage," *The Golden and the Brazen World. Papers in Literature and History 1650±1800*ed.

- John M. Wallace (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985) 136.
- 4 Horace Walpole, her friend and correspondent was an early supporter of Craven's writing. He printed one of her books on his private press in Strawberry Hill, and also addressed impromptu lines to her.
 - 5 Horace Walpole, *Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis (New Haven: Yale UP, 1973) xxxviii
 - 6 The complex financial and legal reasons for this decision, and its repercussions, are summarized both by George Paston, *Little Memoirs of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1901) and by Broadley and Lewis (*The Beautiful Lady Craven*).
 - 7 Larry Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of the Civilization of the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1994) 122.
 - 8 Elizabeth A Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716± 1818* (England: Cambridge UP, 1995) 10.
 - 9 Katherine H.S. Turner makes a similar connection. Her goal, however, is to describe the rhetoric of Montagu and distinguish it from Craven's, whereas my concern is to extend this point by characterizing the nature of the colonial discourse as it is present in Craven and as it develops into the nineteenth century. Katherine H.S. Turner, "From Classical to Imperial: Changing Visions of Turkey in the Eighteenth Century," *Travel Writing and Empire* ed. Steve Clark (London: Zed, 1999) 113–28.
 - 10 "But in the decade following the revolution there is the unmistakable sense, confirmed by contemporaries themselves, that now, for the first time, the aristocracy *as a caste* was under concerted satirical attack." Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1996) 99.
 - 11 Concerned with England's need to support the Turks against Russian expansion in 1836, David Ross writes: "A single glance at the Russian Serf and the Turkish peasant can leave no doubt as to who is best entitled to the possession of this empire, on the abstract ground of humanity, the sultan or the czar. But humanity is a luxury, national interest a necessity. If Mahmoud were the despot, and Nicholas the humane reformer, our interests would remain the same, our policy imperative" (Ross xxi).
 - 12 Contemporary attitudes to the modern Greeks are described in [Chapter five](#). In regard to women travel writers' response to the Greeks, Efterpi Mitsi has written: "However, being part not of the British Empire but of a non-Western power, the Ottoman Empire, Greece complicates the 'typical' postcolonial model. The nineteenth-century British travelers blended colonial attitude with the Romantic vision, both confused and enchanted by the hybridity of contemporary Greece (classical, 'oriental,' Balkan, and European.)" Efterpi Mitsi, "'Roving Englishwomen': Greece in Women's Travel Writing," *Mosaic* 35.2 (2002):133.
 - 13 It is interesting to note that in *A Journey* Craven challenges the authenticity of Montagu's letters and in the *Memoirs* reports that Montagu's daughter Lady Bute told her years later that Horace Walpole had actually written them as a hoax.
 - 14 This is not to say that Craven was a feminist, for in her *Memoirs* she writes that the notion of women in politics and Parliament was: "A thing which I always said I

- detested and considered as being out of the province of a woman" (1:38). Her interest in women's rights is purely personal, and most likely for the upper classes.
- 15 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 86.
 - 16 For Montagu, and most other Europeans observers, the camouflage of the veil always suggests the impunity with which an Ottoman woman might engage in illicit affairs, quite the opposite of the custom's intention.
 - 17 Charles Pigott, *The Jockey Club; or a Sketch of the Manners of the Age* (1793) III: 158.
 - 18 Like Pigott, Shelley would later identify the English and the Turkish tyrants as similar in *The Revolt of Islam*; it is therefore ironic that, like Pigott's rejection of Craven's nationalistic pride, J.T.Coleridge vehemently challenged Shelley's notion of the similarities between the two rulers in his review of the poem in *The Quarterly Review* (see [chapter four](#) of this book for more on Coleridge's review).

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

- 1 Whereas criticism has historically tended to characterize the *Turkish Tales* as juvenile romances, more recently they have been recognized both for their compositional interest and the way in which they engage in public debates of the day. For example, for a discussion of the compositional development of the *Turkish Tales*, see Robert F.Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967). For a connection between Byron's "The Giaour" and the contempo rary debates on evangelism in India see Marilyn Butler, "The Orientalism of Byron's Giaour," *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, ed. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1988) 78–95. For a discussion of the development of Byron's heroines see Caroline Franklin, *Byron's Heroines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). And for a general introduction to the historical accuracy of the tales see Daniel P.Watkins, *The Social Context of Byron's Eastern Tales* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1984).
- 2 Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).
- 3 Carol Houlihan Flynn, "Defoe's Idea of Conduct: Ideological Fictions and Fictional Reality," *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*, eds. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York and London: Methuen, 1987) 73.
- 4 Although Anahid Melikian focuses on all the tales, the overall purpose is not to uncover a sustained thematic interest within them, but to suggest that: "Writing the oriental tales helped Byron get rid of many ideas, impressions and memories which were extraneous to his real genius and his real understanding of foreign lands and people." Anahid Melikan, *Byron and the East* (American University: Beirut Press, 1977) 74.
- 5 The extent of Byron's reading can be seen when Thomas Moore reports the following marginal note of Byron's: "Knolles, Cantimir, De Tott, [i.e. *Memoirs of the Baron de Tott, on the Turks and Tartars*, trans. from French, London, 1785], Lady M.W.Montagu, Hawkins's Translation from Mignot's History of the Turks, [i.e. Vincent Mignot, *The History of the Turkish, or Ottoman Empire*, trans. A.Hawkins, London 1787], The Arabian Tales, all travels, or histories, or books upon the East I could meet with, I had read, as well as Ricaut, before I was ten

- years old." Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of His Life* (London, 1830) I, 225n. Detailed presentations on the relationship between Byron's readings in Turkish and Islamic history and his poetry can be found in Bernard Blackstone, "Byron and Islam: The Triple Eros," *Journal of European Studies* 4 (1974):325–63; Harold Weiner, "Byron and the East: Literary Sources of the 'Turkish Tales,'" *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, Ed. Herbert Davis (1940; Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP; New York: Greenwood Press, 1968) 89–129; Wallace Cable Brown, "Byron and English Interest in the Near East," *Studies in Philology* 34 (1937):55–64.
- 6 For instance, I believe that Jerome McGann's description of Byron's heroines as "allegorical" and as "corresponding" to the heroes belies a more complex relationship (*Fiery Dust*). Jenni Calder has described the heroines as fundamentally passive, claiming that they are "pivots of action rather than actors." This seems to me a false dichotomy. One pivotal act of disobedience is crucial, even if the heroine is later drowned. Without it, we would have no narrative.
 - 7 Malcolm Kelsall, "Byron and the Women of the Harem," *Rereading Byron Essays selected from Hofstra University's Byron Bicentennial Conference*, eds. Alice Levine and Robert N.Keane (New York: Garland, 1993) 168.
 - 8 Alan Richardson, "Escape from the Seraglio: Cultural Transvestism in *Don Juan*," *Rereading Byron Essays selected from Hofstra University's Byron Bicentennial Conference*, eds. Alice Levine and Robert N.Keane, (New York: Garland, 1993) 182.
 - 9 Laurence Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 431.
 - 10 This paradoxical conflation of images is mirrored in Fatima Mernissi's explanation of the origin and perversion of the *hijab* (curtain) itself. She explains the origin of women's seclusion in Islam as simply an effort on the part of the Prophet to shield his wife from a visitor to his home. Thus it was an attempt to gain personal privacy from an aggressive visitor. It is Mernissi's argument that this personal gesture was erroneously applied to all households in Islam, thereby oppressing, rather than protecting, women: "If the hijab is a response to sexual aggression, to *ta'arud*, it is also its mirror image" (182).
 - 11 The other powerful queen mothers (with the dates of their reign) include: Nurbanu (1574–83); Safiye, who was a Venetian of the noble Baffo family, (1595–1603); Kosem (1623–51); and Turhan (1651–83).
 - 12 *Mustapha, Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville, Lord Brook*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough. Vol. 2. (NY: Oxford UP, 1945). And *Mustapha. Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle*, ed. William Smith Clarke II. Vol. 1. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1937). Clarke identifies Richard Knolles as the major source of Boyle's play, although Boyle embellished the story freely.
 - 13 In *City of the Sultan* Pardoe also invokes the figure of Roxalana as an economic way to describe the refusal of a young lady to bow to the demands of the Sultan: "His Sublime Highness has thrice demanded Nazip Hanoum, but has been thrice refused; an occurrence so unprecedented in the East, that he has finished by persuading himself that he is actually attached to the lively girl who dared to play the part of a modern Roxalana, and to defy his power" (179).
 - 14 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1977) 342–43.

- 15 In *The Persian Letters* Usbek's wife defends herself against the charges of lesbianism of the Chief Black Eunuch, "The brute refuses to regard my motives for trust [of the slave girl Zelid] as innocent, and because I always send him outside the door and he gets bored, he boldly assumes that he has heard or seen things that I could not even imagine. How miserable I am! My virtue and my retiring habits are powerless to preserve me from his fantastic suspicions; this mere slave carries his attacks on me right into your heart and I have to defend myself there!" Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, Trans. C.J.Betts (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993) 44.
- 16 "The West had always known that the origin of all this voluptuousness and depravity was Islam." Mabro goes on to quote Reverend Charles Bell's *A Winter on the Nile* (1888): "Islam cannot foster chastity." Judy Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths* (London: Tauris, 1991) 147.
- 17 Inderpal Grewel, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, NC and London: Duke UP, 1996) 45.
- 18 One noteworthy vision of harem women as mothers is in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

Here woman's voice is never heard: apart,
 And scarce permitted, guarded, veil'd, to move,
 She yields to one her person and her heart,
 Tam'd to her cage, nor feels a wish to rove:
 For, not unhappy in her master's love,
 And joyful in a mothers gentlest cares,
 Blest cares! all other feelings far above!
 Herself more sweetly rears the babe she bears,
 Who never quits the breast, no meaner passion shares. (II: st. 61)

Although he does not forego the language of incarceration in "Tam'd to her cage," it is followed immediately with the ambivalent information that she "nor feels a wish to rove." Moreover, the addition of the imagery of happy motherhood further serves to confuse matters. It is interesting to note that in the *Turkish Tales* there is only one mother (that of Hassan in the "Giaour".)

- 19 *The Thousand and One Nights*. Trans. N.J.Dawood (New York: Penguin, 1973) 19.
- 20 Edward William Lane, *The Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* (London: 1836; rpt. 1860) 303–04.
- 21 "In contrast, Leila Ahmed has described it as: "a system whereby the female relatives of a man—wives, sisters, mother, aunts, daughters—share much of the their time and their living space, and further, which enables women to have frequent and easy access to other women in their community, vertically, across class lines, as well as horizontally." Inasmuch as men have been aware of the harem as a community of women, Ahmed points out that their accounts are characterized by prurient speculation and spurious assertions about what occurred in a place to which they never had access. Early examples of this may be seen in the writings of Thomas

- Dallam, George Sandys, and Robert Withers. Leila Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982) 524.
- 22 Elias Habeschi, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: R. Baldwin, 1784) 177.
- 23 Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 39.
- 24 Robert Bage, *The Fair Syrian*. 2 vols. (London: Walter, Bew, and Sandford, 1787) 89.
- 25 Andre Servier, *Islam and the Psychology of the Musulman*, trans. A.S. Moss-Blundell (New York: Scribner, 1924).
- 26 Studies which demonstrate the active roles of middle and lower class women in various aspects of Turkish society include: Ian C.Dengler, "Turkish Women in the Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age," *Women in the Muslim World*, eds. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978) 229–37; Haim Gerber, "Social and Economic Position of Women in an Ottoman City, Bursa, 1600–1700," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980):231–44; Ronald C.Jennings, "Women in Early Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Judicial Records: Sharia Court of Anatolian Kayseri," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol. 18 Part I (1975):54–114.
- 27 "The Corsair," *Lord Byron*, ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) III:410–17.
- 28 J.H.Reynolds's noteworthy imitation of Byron's tales *Safie: An Eastern Tale* (London: James Cawthorn, 1814) also uses the face of the odalisque as a signifier of transgression. In Reynolds's version, the title character does not escape from the harem, but is kidnapped into one. When her lover Assad finally finds her, he is shocked to discover that she has adapted to her new environment and is enjoying comparative happiness within it. The final message that he writes to her from his prison cell in the Turkish kidnapper's palace recalls the identical terms Byron utilizes in describing Conrad's dilemma. Assad writes to Safie:

I cannot now receive again
 A heart, defaced with such a stain
 As rests on and disfigures thine;—
 Thou hast been false to me and mine!
 And should I once again regain
 I should not covet to retain.
 'Twould be but madness to recall
 Thy fondness, that could once sustain
 That heartless and degrading fall,
 That thrills and throbs my brain...(p. 64–5)

The stain of falsehood on the lady's heart has its counterpart in her face. Now that her heart has proven to be guilty, Assad asserts that there is no reason any longer to shield the face from the public scrutiny of other men:

I care not now what eye beholds
 The charms rhy lifted veil unfolds
 Which ne'er was cast aside before
 For strangers eye to wander o'er
 But hung like silver mist of even
 That dims the starry front of heaven. (p. 71)

- 29 Conrad's odd mixture of sympathy and repulsion has also been recently discussed by George Rishmawi in "Islam and Muslims in Byron's 'The Corsair,'" *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies* 2.2 (2002):299–312.
- 30 A number of recent articles discuss connection between Hassan and the Giaour from various angles which are obvious from their titles: Jeffrey L. Schneider, "Secret Sins of the Orient: Creating a (Homo)Textual Context for Reading Byron's 'The Giaour.'" *College English* 65.1 (2002):81–95; Daryl Ogden, "Byron, Italy, and the Poetics of Liberal Imperialism," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 49 (2000):114–37; Bernard Beatty, "Calvin in Islam: A Reading of 'Lara' and the 'Giaour.'" *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism* 5.1 (1999):80–86.
- 31 William Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793) provides a similar but inverted view of women's power. In that poem Oothoon does not act, but is acted upon; she is raped by Bromion and then bound by her lover Theotormon. From her bound position she speaks eloquently against many abuses of the day, but is left wailing on the "margin of non-entity" with the Daughters of Albion only "echoing back her sighs." She is never released to enact her vision.
- 32 For more on the connection see Butler: "The Orientalism of Byron's Giaour," *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, eds. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1988).
- 33 For example one note explains the call to prayer: "On a still evening, when the Muezzin has a fine voice, which is frequently the case, the effect is solemn and beautiful beyond all the bells in Christendom" (Byron 244). The notes to Cantos I and II of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* engage in this kind of double talk even more blatantly.
- 34 This is also paradoxical, given the ever-expanding composition of the poem.
- 35 Giaffir's reliance on Zuleika's obedience has been noted by Caroline Franklin: "Giaffir's love for Zuleika is based on her obedience" (51).
- 36 The literary commonplace of the despotic Eastern father can be seen in Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). In this novel, Emma indulges in reading primarily romances, such as *The Arabian Nights and Turkish Tales*. Her father decides to restrict his daughter's reading matter and anticipates her reactions: "It is as I apprehended," said he: "your fancy requires a rein rather than a spur. Your studies, for the future, must be of a soberer nature, or I shall have you mistake my valet for a prince in disguise, my house for a haunted castle, and my rational care for your future welfare for barbarous tyranny." Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 21.
- 37 *Frankenstein's* Safie's act of disobedience is of course presented as highly commendable since she is actually obedient to the father's initial promise that she will marry De Lacey, and only disobedient to his ignoble deceit. It is noteworthy that although her father is Turkish she is called the "Arabian" throughout the text,

- for she is identified (spiritually) more as the daughter of her Arabian (Christian) mother than of her Turkish (despotic, lying, ungrateful) father.
- 38 One text which makes this kind of influence apparent is Melek Hanum's *Thirty Years in the Harem*. As the wife of the important Pasha of Jerusalem, she describes her daily meetings with female visitors who frequently sought her aid in securing promotions for their "protégés." In response to such petitions, she writes: "the next day I would call the steward or secretary. 'Such a person,' I would say, 'has been recommended to me, and I have a promise that my good offices shall not go unrequited; do what you can to procure a favorable exchange and you shall have your share of whatever I may receive.'" The steward in turn would discuss the matter with the Pasha, and, Melek Hanum concludes, "In two years I disposed in this manner of more than fifteen important posts in favor of persons whom I had never even set eyes on." Melek Hanum, *Thirty Years in the Harem* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1872) 69–70.
- 39 According to Ian Dengler: "Marriage gave not only a formal position for women in the community at large but also legal control over their property" (232). Because a woman retained personal control of her assets, was given her dowry directly, and was not compelled to expend it in the support of herself or her children, the married Muslim woman of means could actually be directly in control of a good deal of money, quite unlike English women until the Married Woman's Property Act of 1872. Turkish women at the top of society really had few restrictions: "They had come to possess most of the advantages that Ottoman society could confer on individuals of either sex: wealth, power and virtually unlimited control over self, property, and leisure time" (237).
- 40 One difference is that Leander swims to the European side.
- 41 Emily Haddad, *Orientalist Poetics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishers, 2002) 140.
- 42 "Gulnare's transgression, in the name of liberty and life, has cancelled out the sepulchral sign of femininity, destroying both Medora and the one virtue in her husband." Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 52.
- 43 During the period of the *Turkish Tales'* composition, Byron had stormy relations with Caroline Lamb, his sister Augusta, and Lady Catherine Oxford.
- 44 There has been some critical reflection on whether Lara is aware of Kaled's identity. For instance, Franklin agrees with Gleckner that Kaled's disguise implies that Lara does not know her identity. It is my own feeling that Conrad's acceptance of Gulnare at the end of "The Corsair," and that Lara and Kaled's intimacy in "Lara," suggest that he knows fully Kaled's identity.
- 45 Other elements, in addition to the "action-oriented" character of Kaled, contribute to the reification of action in "Lara." The question of Lara's past, of what he has done is a central concern and mystery in the poem. The voice of the narrator stands in for the questioning characters in the poem, who have only the scanty evidence of Lara's present self to recreate a narrative of his past adventures. What is specifically acknowledged however, is that he has changed: "Whate'er he be, 'twas not what he had been" (l. 66). Furthermore, it is the assumption that Sir Ezzelin knows what Lara has done in the East, that makes him a pivotal character in the poem and leads to the single most critical action that drives the narrative: the mysterious disappearance/murder of Sir Ezzelin. Because of the weight of Lara's mysterious past, the poem works consistently within a rhetoric of questions never ans

ered. Although the answers go unconfirmed, Daniel P. Watkins has rightly pointed out that they are secondary to the fact that “in the case of Lara, while we do not learn about his past, we do learn about the values, attitudes, and demands of the culture that assume the importance of his past” (106). And by extension, this culture is ever curious about Kaled as well.

- 46 Mark Phillipson, “Byron’s Revisited Haunts,” *Studies in Romanticism* 39.2 (2000): 314.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 For instance, in “A Philosophical View of Reform,” Shelley asserts that the “prosperity and happiness of the United States” would be compromised if it were “subjected to such institutions” as exist in England. “A Philosophical View of Reform,” *Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. Vol. 7 (New York: Gordian Press, 1965) 13.
- 2 *The Esdaile Notebook*, ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963) 261.
- 3 John Marlowe, *Perfidious Albion: The Origins of Anglo-French Rivalry in the Levant* (London: Elek Books, 1971) 53–4.
- 4 Selected statistics will illustrate the exponential increase in trade with the Ottoman Empire. British imports and exports in pounds: 1792: imports=291,000; exports=274,000; 1818: imports=369,000; exports=807,000; 1840–43: imports= 1, 205,000; exports=4,358,000. Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800±1914* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 74. According to Issawi the British imported such foodstuffs as cotton, silk, leather, tobacco, and fruit, and exported manufactured textiles and colonial goods such as sugar and coffee (77; 271).
- 5 George C. Brodrick, *The Political History of England, 1801±1837*, Vol.11. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906) 57.
- 6 Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1970) 239.
- 7 For a sustained discussion of Egypt’s cultural influence in the period see Nigel Leask’s “Young Memnon and Romantic Egyptomania,” which offers an excellent context for reading Shelley’s “Ozymandias.” Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 8 There are three distinct attitudes towards religion expressed in the poem. Henry wholeheartedly goes off to war, with religion as a moral justification (ll. 68–71). Although Louisa agrees with Henry about the importance of going to war, she places human affection over the claims of religion, making a home for his soul in her bosom, “I will thine empire be. My heart shall be thy throne” (l. 52). The third distinct voice of the narrator attacks both Religion and War: “Religion! hated cause of all the woe/That makes the world this wilderness” (ll. 144–45).

Like the various voices that comment on religion, three distinct voices express a rhetoric of “fame” as the main incentive in the activity of war. The soldier with whom Louisa speaks when searching for her lover is unaware of any unpleasant element in his pursuit of fame (ll. 204–09). In contrast, Louisa has been searching for Henry all the way from home “to this stern scene of fame-aspiring war” (l. 247). The

register of diction shifts slightly from the soldiers wholehearted belief to Louisa's equivocation, since "fame-aspiring" only suggests that war looks for Fame, not that it deserves it. Another modulation occurs when the narrators voice bitterly laments: "Britannia's legions swiftly sweeping, /Glory's ensanguined harvest reaping,/ Mowed down the field of men" (ll. 264–66).

- 9 Godwin had been trying to inculcate this lesson in him since their early correspondences, and Shelley expresses such sentiments quite clearly in "A Philosophical View of Reform."
- 10 A short list of relevant articles should include: Kyle Grimes, "Censorship, Violence, and Political Rhetoric: *The Revolt of Islam* in Its Time," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 43 (1994):98–116. Donna Richardson, "'The Dark Idolatry of Self': The Dialectic of Imagination in Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 40 (1991): 73–98. Stuart Sperry, "The Sexual Theme in Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*," *Journal of English and German Philology* 82.1 (1983) 32–49. Douglas Thorpe, "Shelley's Golden Verbal City," *Journal of English and German Philology* 86.2 (1987): 215–227. Two of the few book-length studies in past years that include significant focus on *The Revolt* are Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 1975) and Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).
- 11 *Shelley's Letters*, (volumes 8, 9, 10) ed. by Robert Ingpen, and Walter E Peck (New York: Julian Edition, 1926) 246.
- 12 Greg Kucich, *Romantic Spenserianism* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991) 280.
- 13 Most notably, the vexed domestic space of Argolis and Greece in general is juxtaposed within the earlier parts of the poem with Ancient Greece. Later, the plain outside the Golden City is juxtaposed as a sphere of redeemed nature with the inner corruption of the City itself. The latter is discussed in [chapter five](#).
- 14 Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of the Domestic Ideal* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1989) xvi.
- 15 For a recent study of Cythna's language and its political/historical context, see William Keach, "Cythna's Subtler Language," *Studies in Romanticism* 37.1 (1998): 7–16.
- 16 Greg Kucich, "Eternity and the Ruins of Time: Shelley and the Construction of Cultural History," *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, eds. Betty T.Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 25.
- 17 Terence Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988) 30.
- 18 "The belief that Greece should be free was not based solely on political reasons, on beliefs about independence and liberty, as were the other nationalist movements, but crucially it was also associated with classical culture, with education and with art, and so it could be seen to transcend politics." Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Philhellenism* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1997) 184.
- 19 Mark Kipperman points out the importance that the Ottoman Empire played in maintaining the European balance of power and therefore disagrees with McGann's assertion in *Romantic Ideology* that Shelley's utopian language in *Hellas* is "open to exploitation by Europe's imperialist powers" because the Greek War of Independence was the first stage in the fall of Ottoman Empire and therefore an

- open door to British Imperialism. Mark Kipperman, "History and Ideality: The Politics of Shelley's *Hellas*," *Studies in Romanticism* 30 (1991):149–50.
- 20 Thomas Naff, "Ottoman Relations with Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Patterns and Trends," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Islamic History*, eds. Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (Carbondale and Evanston, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977) 92–3.
 - 21 Bruce McGowan, "The Age of the Ayans, 1699–1812," *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300±1914*, ed. Halil Inalcik with Donald Quataert (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994) 713.
 - 22 Frank Edgar Bailey, *British Policy and the Turkish Reform Movement: A Study in Anglo-Turkish Relations, 1826±1855* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970. Orig. Harvard UP, 1942) 78.
 - 23 Arnold Toynbee compares it to the same disinclination for involvement following World War I in *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilizations* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970. Rpt of second edition, 1923. First ed. 1922).
 - 24 See for instance Edward Blaquiere, *The Greek Revolution: Its Origin and Progress* (London, 1824).
 - 25 William St. Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free. The Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (London: Oxford UP, 1972) 139.
 - 26 Henry Scrivener makes a similar observation: "*Hellas* presents the same argument [as that in "Ode to Naples"], translating the conflict between Greece and the Turkish Empire into the philosophical language of liberty and despotism." Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1982) 292.
 - 27 Just to name a few sources: Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Philhellenism*, (St. Martin's Press, 1997). Timothy Webb, "Romantic Hellenism," *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993). Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism, 1700±1824*, (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1982).
 - 28 Although articles are of course complex and multifaceted, many tend strongly in one direction or another. Those who envision the poem's end as negative include McGann, Ulmer, Kabitoglou. Critics who argue for the efficacy of social change are Walker, Scrivener, and Kipperman.
 - 29 In "On the Customs and Habits of the Ancient Greeks," Shelley primarily identifies the main faults of the Ancient Greek government as the institution of slavery and its treatment of women.
 - 30 William Ulmer, "Hellas and the Historical Uncanny," *ELH* 58 (1991):614.
 - 31 E.Douka Kabitoglou, "The Name of Freedom: A Hermeneutic Reading of *Hellas*," *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, eds. Betty T.Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996) 133.
 - 32 Critics have noted the problem of the portrayal of violence in *Hellas*, e.g., "The principal question is not whether *Hellas* endorses violence or nonviolence; the important problem is maintaining an ethical idealism. *Hellas* advocates using enough force to conquer the Turks but at the same time opposes a degree of violence that would turn the Greeks into tyrants" (Scrivener 293). "*Hellas*...was written by a would-be pacifist who has now chosen to praise 'wars and fighting.' Pacifism turns out to have been a limiting rule of reason" (Woodring 316).

- 33 It is ironic that Sultan Mahmud II was one of the strongest reforming Sultans in Ottoman history and was successful in finally obliterating the Janissary Corp in 1824 after several other Sultans had failed to do so in the eighteenth century.
- 34 Michael Erkelenz argues that Shelley highlights the tragic possibilities of Aeschylus's *Persians* by putting Mahmud center stage and building tension by having him call for Ahaseurus before receiving the messengers reports. Michael Erkelenz, "Inspecting the Tragedy of Empire: Shelley's *Hellas* and Aeschylus's *Persians*," *Philological Quarterly* 76 (1997):320.
- 35 Jerome McGann, "The Secret of an Elder Day: Shelley after *Hellas*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 15 (1966):26.
- 36 In the first dialogue section of *Hellas* Hassan announces the coming of Ahaseurus who will be the teacher of Mahmud. Hassan describes the difficulty of finding Ahaseurus for he is "less accessible/Than thou or God!" (ll. 164–65). Given that inaccessibility is a benchmark of one's power in Islamic culture, the distinction of Ahaseurus as more inaccessible than Sultan or God sets up a power hierarchy that puts philosophy over religion and political power.
- 37 In a similar way, Marilyn Butler argues that in "The Giaour" Byron argued for Western interference in the Middle East, but sought to recast the debate in secular terms. Marilyn Butler, "The Orientalism of Byron's *Giaour*."
- 38 This view is in the vein of Woodring's assertion that Hellenism is not limited to a place or time: "Hellenism is the freedom to improve on Hellenic history and legend" (318).
- 39 At the extremes of such readings are Walker (positive) and Kabitoglou and McGann (negative).
- 40 In the notes to *Childe Harold*, Canto II, Byron writes: "The Greeks will never be independent; they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they ever should!" (95).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 While not advertised as a guidebook, Julia Pardoe's *Beauties of the Bosphorus* (1839) is organized in short sections describing all the sites of Constantinople. A later example of a book that falls distinctly into the guidebook genre is Demetrius Coufopoulous, *A Guide to Constantinople* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895).
- 2 For an excellent account of the development of archeology in Asia Minor see Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996).
- 3 Of the fall of Constantinople Knolles writes: "The glory of the famous City of Constantinople continued many hundred years, until...it was by this Turkish king Mahomet so quickly taken, and the Christian Empire of the East there utterly overthrown, which happened on the nine and twentieth day of May, in the year of our Lord, 1453. Constantinius Paleologus, the son of Helena, and last Christian Emperor, being then slain, when he had reigned eight years. Since which time it hath continued the Imperial seat of the Turkish Emperors, and so remaineth at this day" (237).
- 4 The custom of the so-called cage began in 1595. Ottoman princes were virtual prisoners in the Harem, kept there in the event that an unexpected fatality (or coup)

- should befall the reigning sovereign. However, to fend off the possibility of their plotting against the Sultan, they were “locked in the cage.” It is noteworthy that the genesis of this custom is traced to the influence of the Queen Mother Safiye, the Venetian-born mother of Mehmed III (1595–1603), who wielded an enormous amount of control over her son.
- 5 N.M.Penzer, *The Harem* (New York: AMS Press, 1975. Orig. 1937) 15.
 - 6 Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 13
 - 7 Of Hope’s novel, Shelley wrote in the preface to *Hellas*, that it showed a “faithful picture of Greek manners” (409).
 - 8 E.D.Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries*. 2 Vols (New York: D.Huntington, 1814) 3.
 - 9 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 4.
 - 10 In the Ottoman Empire [millet] became a technical term, and was used for the organized, recognized, religio-political communities enjoying certain rights of autonomy under their own religious chiefs” (Lewis, *Political Language* 39).
 - 11 Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964) 11.
 - 12 Pardoe at least comments positively thus: “[The Turk] also suffers less morally than Europeans, from the fact that there exists no aristocracy in the country, either of birth or wealth, to ride rough-shod over their less fortunate fellow men” (*City* 63).
 - 13 For more information on these families see Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453±1924* (London: John Murray, 1995).
 - 14 For instance, by the turn of the twentieth century the Turkish nationalist movement sought to establish a more thoroughly ethnically Turkish government and nation-state.
 - 15 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
 - 16 “Europe’s Black possessions remained—and do remain—in Europe’s colonies, at which remove they represented no threat to European identity. If they posed any problem at all for the European conscience, it was a problem which remained comfortably abstract: in effect, the black man, *as a man*, did not exist for Europe. But in America, even as a slave, he was an inescapable part of the general social fabric and no American could escape having an attitude toward him.” James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Dial Press, 1963) 153.
 - 17 T.S.Hughes, *An Appeal in Behalf of the Greeks* (London: 1824).
 - 18 T.S.Hughes, *An Address to the People of England in the Cause of the Greeks, occasioned by the late inhuman massacre in the isle of Scio* (London: 1822) 182.
 - 19 T.S.Hughes, *Travels in Greece and Albania* (London: 1830).
 - 20 Leigh Hunt, *Examiner*, 15 April 1821.
 - 21 Hypsilanti, *The Morning Chronicle*, 13 April 1821.
 - 22 Julia Pardoe also notes the mixture of peoples in the capital, but rather than expressing fear of it, she celebrates it: “...while the varying character of the native population, constituted as it is of such anomalous materials—the truthful Turk, the wily Greek, the stately Armenian, and the timid Jew—coupled with the blended air of mystery and of magnificence which pervades the whole locality, suffice to render the Turkish metropolis a sojourn of unwearied and exciting delight” (*Beauties* 4).

- 23 John Galt, *Letters from the Levant* (London: T.Cadwell and W.Davis, 1813) 77–8. Later in the same text, Galt adds that the Turks are “idle and insolent” lordly masters whereas the Greeks are “all activity and industry. The oppression and injustice with which they are treated by the Turks at once sharpen their spirits and stimulate their address” (140–41).
- 24 In this regard I concur with Laurence Lockridge, who in noting the moral enlightenment of Laon and Cythna, adds that: “The French Revolution failed of immediate success because the moral development of the masses lagged behind the clear prophetic insights of the intelligentsia” (328).
- 25 In an article that investigates the politics of reception in Shelley’s *London*, Kyle Grimes suggests that the citizens of the Golden City are the same audience as Shelley’s, so that the aim of both poetry and tyranny is to gain rhetorical control over the mass reading public. Thus, the people of the Golden City may choose between a “spiritual and emotional slavery to Laon’s poetry and a social and physical slavery to Othman.” (109). Both the philosophical reading of Richardson and the reader response approach of Grimes point in the direction of hero-worship that I have isolated as the flawed undertone of the otherwise idealized vision of the Festival of Brotherhood.
- 26 In the original *Laon and Cyntha*, he was a Christian priest, but in *The Revolt of Islam* this was changed to an Iberian Priest, no doubt attempting to associate him with Catholicism specifically. In either case, the figure of the Christian Priest was likely inspired by the Inquisitors who torment Hilarion and Luxima in one of Shelley’s favorite novels, Sydney Owenson’s *The Missionary*.
- 27 During the counterrevolution, the land is thoroughly desolate: famine, plague, thirst, and madness have taken over, creating just the kind of desperate landscape that is most vulnerable to religious fanaticism and witch-hunting. In saying that the angels of revenge were well turned on the impious city, the priests induce the people to revile the revolutionaries as the cause of destruction, rather than the nearly successful cause of rejuvenation. The priest who leads the legioned West to this fight is twisted by hate and fear of God and the light of reason. His impetus for fighting on the Islamic side is that his zeal for torture and violence can there be sated, while in the West, legal tortures move too slowly. “Pestilence,” according to the priest, “walks upon the earth to judge his foes” and only with the death of Laone and Laon may “God be appeased.”
- 28 Some of Byron’s books included: Richard Knolles, *The Turkish History with a Continuation by Sir Paul Rycaut*, Demetrius Cantemir, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, and David Jones, *A Compleat History of the Turks*. These are just a few of a larger collection of histories, travels, and literature. See A. R.Kidwai, “A Bibliography of Byron’s Oriental Reading,” *Notes and Queries* 39.2 (1992):167–68.
- 29 For instance, regarding Wordsworth’s lines in the *Excursion* describing Greece as having “rivers—fertile plains—and sounding shores under a cope of variegated sky” (Book IV) Byron wrote: “The rivers are dry half the year—the plains are barren—and the shores still and tideless as the Mediterranean can make them—the sky is anything but variegated—being for months and months—but ‘darkly deeply—beautifully blue....’ These things I was struck with as coming peculiarly in my way—and in both of these [Wordsworth] is wrong” (Marchand, *Letters and Journals* Vol. 4:325).

- 30 See the detail with which Hobhouse recounts his excursions in the city in letters 48–50 of the second volume of *A Journey through Albania*.
- 31 J.P.Donovan, “Don Juan in Constantinople: Waiting and Watching,” *Byron Journal* 21 (1993):17.
- 32 Of *Don Juan*, canto five, Susan J.Wolfson writes: “Byron’s representations of heterosexual politics, which, sensitized by his homosexuality, turn personal experience outward into a critical reading of the discourses of sexual difference and sexual ideology that permeate his age.” Susan J.Wolfson, “‘Their She Condition’: Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*,” *ELH* 54.3 (1987):586.
- 33 In a sense, Gulbeyaz is rather like *Pride and Prejudices* Lydia Bennett because they both do not seem to appreciate the weight of their actions in the greater social balance. They both rationalize their disobedient actions to satisfy their sexual impulses. Byron describes Gulbeyaz thus: “her reason was weak, her passions strong, /she thought that her lord’s heart (even if she could claim it)/Was scarce enough; for he had fifty-nine/Years, and a fifteen-hundredth concubine” (V: 61–64).
- 34 I am therefore in strong agreement with Alan Richardson’s discussion of *Don Juan* as a text which “seems bent on exposing the arbitrariness of the binary discursive system on which the ‘phallic imperialism’ of the West is itself based.” Alan Richardson, “Escape from the Seraglio: Cultural Transvestism in *Don Juan*,” *Rereading Byron Essays selected from Hofstra University’s Byron Bicentennial Conference*, eds. Alice Levine and Robert N.Keane (New York: Garland, 1993) 184.
- 35 Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. Hugh J.Luke, with an introduction by Anne K.Mellor (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) 127.
- 36 Leslie W.Rabine, *Reading the Romantic Heroine: Text, History, Ideology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985) 8.
- 37 *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres*, in Donald Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*.
- 38 Michael Eberle-Sinatra, “Gender Authorship and Male Domination,” *Mary Shelley’s Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (New York: Macmillan, 2000) 102.
- 39 Emily Sunstein pursues this quite thoroughly in *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1989).
- 40 Kate Ferguson Ellis, “Subversive Surfaces: The Limits of Domestic Affection in Mary Shelley’s Later Fiction,” *The Other Mary Shelley*, eds. Audrey A.Fisch, Anne K.Mellor, and Esther H.Schor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 223.
- 41 Bannet’s discussion of Women’s Time is influenced by Julia Kristeva. Eve Tavor Bannet, “The ‘Abyss of the Present’: And Women’s Time in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*,” *The Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Vol. 2 ed. Albert J.Rivero (New York: AMS Press, 2002) 354.
- 42 According to Lisa Hopkins the novel’s use of landscape is the “perfect metaphor” to chart the process of how individuals are affected and conditioned by others; she writes: “apprehension of the internal landscape goes hand-in-hand with apprehension of the external.” Lisa Hopkins, “*The Last Man* and the Language of the Heart,” *Romanticism on the Net* 22 (May 2001) [January 10, 2003] <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/22hopkins.html>> 4.

- 43 Julia Wright points out that feelings of insecurity about England's physical size grew as its empire did. She comments that the novel "Echoes and implicitly critiques key discursive strategies for coping with imperial spaces as England turned outward to establish what would become the Victorian empire." Julia Wright, "Little England: Anxieties of Space in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*," *Mary Shelley's Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (New York: Macmillan, 2000) 131.
- 44 Although she does not engage in a detailed reading of *The Last Man*, Ellis points out how Idris's idealized domestic ways are powerless in the face of the plague: "Women cannot even 'rule' in their proper sphere, Shelley is saying, because the evil that supposedly originates outside its walls has no respect for those man-made boundaries" (227).
- 45 Adrian is of course an idealized portrait of Percy Shelley, which explains in part his more philosophical attitude toward human rights.
- 46 "Oilier...filled Mary's need for books describing 'minutely' the environs of Constantinople for her scenes of Greek-Turkish battle." Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1989) 269.
- 47 Timothy Webb numbers Coleridge and Wordsworth among such writers. Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism, 1700±1824* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press: 1982) 17–27. Webb also notes how Greece could appear to be both a foreign import as well as an ancestor of the British, resulting in the difficulties of "how [writers] should relate to a tradition that, for all its appearances of comforting familiarity, might often have been 'unimaginably different' and that gave expression to a system of values that might be uncongenial, if it could be reconstructed." Timothy Webb, "Romantic Hellenism," *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 151.
- 48 "The monsterlike holocaust that descends upon the Greek revolution in *The Last Man* is a graphic fictional rebuttal of Percy's political view." Lee Sterrenburg, "*The Last Man*: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1978–79):345.
- 49 Morton Paley, "The Last Man: Apocalypse without Millennium," *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, eds. Audrey A.Fisch, Anne K.Mellor, Esther H. Schor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 111.
- 50 The quoted phrase is from Percy Shelley's "The Mask of Anarchy."
- 51 For this trope in Ann Radcliffe see, Daniel Cottom, *The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 52 Two other recent articles connect here but they discuss the novel in very different contexts. Anne McWhir's excellent study of contagion theory points out that the "... plague seems to be generated through the importation of cultural ideals significantly at Constantinople on the boundary of Europe and Asia, where Greek idealism and English militarism join forces." Anne McWhir, "Mary Shelley's Anti-Contagionism: *The Last Man* as 'Fatal Narrative,'" *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 35.2 (2002):33. And George Haggerty explores the novel as a challenge to "enlightenment notions of history" and refers to the end of civilization as a result of "imperial desires, racist cultural encounters, and a refusal to check the forces of emerging capitalism." George E.Haggerty, "The End

of History': Identity and Dissolution in Apocalyptic Gothic," *Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation* 41.3 (2000):2225–46.

- 53 This is the focus of Paley's essay, cited above. "My own concern is the manner in which *The Last Man*, culminating a tradition in which *Omegarus and Syderia* and "Darkness" are prominent, denies the linkage of apocalypse and millennium that had previously been celebrated in some of the great works of the Romantic epoch, perhaps most fully in *Prometheus Unbound*' (110).
- 54 For a focused discussion of the relationship between the preface and the novel see Sophia Thomas, "Proliferation and Finality in *The Last Man*," *Mary Shelley's Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, ed. Michael Eberle-Sinatra (New York: Macmillan, 2000) 22–38.
- 55 Albert Albright takes a very balanced approach to this issue, characterizing it as a powerful pleasure, if not an opiate. Albert Albright, "'In the mean time, what did Perdita?': Rhythms and Reversals in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*," *Romanticism on the Net* 13 (February 1999) [January 10, 2003] <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/perdita.html>>
- 56 "The end of man, in other words, will have always already coincided with the moment of predicting, the moment of translating, and the moment of writing. Unless, however, this is an error of translation." Barbara Johnson, "*The Last Man*," *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, eds. Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 266.

NOTES TO THE EPILOGUE

- 1 I use the term "uncanny" in Freud's sense of *unheimlich*, something that is both familiar and foreign at the same time because both Stanhope and the Ottoman Empire were characterized by a blending of the commonplace and the odd.
- 2 Said writes that by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the West made an assumption that "the Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West.... Orientalism, then, is knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for the scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing" (40–41).
- 3 Jean Ubcini, *Letters on Turkey* (New York: Arno Press, 1973; orig. 1856) 2.
- 4 Stanhope and Bruce wrote to his father in June simply to inform him of their mutual sentiments, but not to announce an official liaison, as Stanhope's note attests, "I look forward to the period when I must resign him to some thrice happy woman really worthy of him" (63). In August, Bruce's father also received an anonymous letter: "Your son is gone to Constantinople with an artful woman as his *mistress* Lady Hester Stanhope. She means to make him marry her, he knew her first criminally at Malta" (67). *The Nun of Lebanon: The Love Affair between Lady Hester Stanhope and Michael Bruce*, ed. Ian Bruce (London: Collins, 1951).
- 5 Both books are even catalogued under Stanhope's, rather than Meryon's, name as author.
- 6 *Travels of Lady Hester Lucy Stanhope; Forming the completion of her Memoirs; Narrated by Her Physician*. In Three Volumes. (London: Henry Colburn, 1846) x.
- 7 *Memoirs of Lady Hester Lucy Stanhope; Narrated by Her Physician*, In Three Volumes (London: Henry Colburn, 1846) III:275.

- 8 Catherine Lucy Wilhemenia Cleveland, (The Duchess of Cleveland), *The Life and Letters of Lady Hester Stanhope* (London: John Murray, 1914) 209.
- 9 Lytton Strachey, *Books and Characters* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922) 304.
- 10 Virginia Childs, *Lady Hester Stanhope: Queen of the Desert* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990). The only source that discusses the *Travels* and *Memoirs* as the writing of Dr. Meryon that has come to my attention is Michael H. Begnal's article, "Molly Bloom and Lady Hester Stanhope," *Joyce and Popular Culture*, ed. R.B.Kershner (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996) 64–73.
- 11 One is reminded of Craven doing the same thing twenty years earlier before the Tartar soldiers.
- 12 The sexual ambiguity of the physical body of Hester Stanhope was so pervasive in biographical accounts of her that it appeared as an element of the *Gabriel Hounds* (1967), a novel by Mary Stewart. In this popular mystery novel, an eccentric Englishwoman sets up house atop a mountain outside Damascus in direct imitation of the famous Lady Hester Stanhope. She lives alone with only local servants and never accepts visitors, becoming a local legend just as Stanhope had been. Unbeknownst to the lady, her servants are carrying out a lucrative drug smuggling operation from her compound. When the lady unexpectedly dies, her servants conceal the news and continue their business. Their safety is threatened when the lady's niece arrives in the area and seeks out a meeting with her aunt. So as not to stimulate her curiosity, one of the smugglers dresses up as the aunt and meets with the young lady. Like Lady Hester Stanhope, the lady of the novel is tall and masculine, so that lying in bed, beturbaned and berobed, "he" passes as "she" without a problem.
- 13 "Although Lady Hester Stanhope had adopted almost all the customs of the East, she still retained many of her own; and to condemn the slaves to learn the usages of Franks was like obliging an English housemaid to fall into those of the Turks" (*Memoirs* II:148).
- 14 For details see Cleveland 340–45.
- 15 Strachey also focuses on Stanhope's genetic heritage by beginning his portrait most humorously with a description of the family nose: "The Pitt nose has a curious history," he writes, "Lady Hester's was a nose of wild ambitions, of pride grown fantastical, a nose that scorned the Earth, shooting off, one fancies, towards some eternally eccentric heaven" (297). It seems such a nose could only hold itself high enough among the "ignorant and superstitious populations" of the East (304). Strachey himself seemed so well pleased with Stanhope's nose that he extended his focus on it to his description of her corpse: "She was lying in bed, inexplicable, grand, preposterous, with her nose in the air" (307).
- 16 James Silk Buckingham, *Travels among the Arab Tribes inhabiting the countries East of Syria and Palestine* (London: Longman, 1825) 425–26.
- 17 W.H.Thomson, *The Land and the Book; or, biblical illustrations drawn from the manners, and customs, the scenes and scenery of the Holy Land* (London: Darf, 1985; Orig.1877) 80.
- 18 Strachey uses a similar image to account for the movement of her life in England to her life in the East: "She ruled imaginatively, transcendently; the solid glory of Chatham had been transmuted into the phantasy of an Arabian Night" (304).
- 19 Warburton's book went to seventeen editions between 1845 and 1888.

- 20 Eliot Warburton, *The Crescent and the Cross*. 2 Parts (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1845) 25.
- 21 A.W.Kinglake, *Eothen* (London: John Lehman, 1848; orig. 1844) xviii.
- 22 Alphonse de Lamartine. *Voyage en Orient*. Intro. Charles M.Lombard (Delmor, NY: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1978 rpt. of 1838 edition) 112, my emphasis.
- 23 And to another acquaintance in Malta, she writes (January 22, 1813): “The Pacha of Egypt, the Pachas of Acre and Damascus, have all treated me as if I had been the Grand Vizier himself, which makes all the common people imagine that I am a *queen*” (Cleveland 146).
- 24 In addition to the various nineteenth-century sources, there are approximately ten distinct twentieth-century biographies about Stanhope, in English, French, German, and Spanish.

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