

FEMALE BRITISH TRAVELLERS TO THE
OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

A Master's Thesis

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

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ABSTRACT

FEMALE BRITISH TRAVELLERS TO THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Travel writing about the Ottoman Empire is a subject that is already understudied but women's travel writing is even more so. Covering up the two understudied parts of travel writing, therefore, this thesis is a study of British women travellers who had been to the Ottoman Empire at different dates in the nineteenth-century. This thesis will attempt to see the extent to which female travellers were following an Orientalist narrative or not. It will do so, by first establishing patterns associated with Orientalism and reading the accounts of six female travellers against that background, namely Henrietta Liston, Julia Pardoe, Marianne Young Postans, Agnes Ramsay, Fanny Janet Blunt and an anonymous writer. It will also highlight the importance of reading travel accounts through gender, which create different tensions in women's accounts that were not experienced by male travellers.

Keywords: female travellers, nineteenth century, Ottoman Empire, Orientalism,
discourse analysis



ÖZET

19. YÜZYILDA OSMANLI'YA GELEN İNGİLİZ KADIN GEZGİNLER

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Osmanlı İmparatorluğu hakkında gezi yazıları halihazırda yeteri kadar çalışılmamıştır fakat kadınların gezi yazıları daha da az çalışılmış bir alandır. Gezi yazılarının az çalışılan iki alanını kapsayan bu tez, 19. Yüzyılda farklı tarihlerde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na gelmiş olan İngiliz kadın seyyahları konu alan bir çalışmadır. Bu tez, kadın seyyahların Oryantalist bir anlatıyı ne ölçüde takip ettiklerini veya etmediklerini ortaya koymaya çalışacaktır. Bunu yaparken öncelikle Oryantalizm ile ilişkili belirli anlatı kalıplarını ortaya koyacak ve bu bağlamda altı kadın seyyahın — Henrietta Liston, Julia Pardoe, Marianne Young Postans, Agnes Ramsay, Fanny Janet Blunt ve isimsiz bir yazarın— seyahat anlatılarını analiz edecektir. Aynı zamanda gezi yazılarını, kadınların anlatılarında erkeklerin deneyimlemediği farklılıklar yaratan cinsiyet üzerinden okumanın önemini vurgulayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kadın seyyahlar, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl, Osmanlı
İmparatorluğu, söylem analizi



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Travel writing is as personal and subjective as a historical document can get, but precisely because of that it may also offer some of the most unfiltered opinions about its object. Travel writing about the Ottoman Empire is a subject that is already understudied but women's travel writing is even more so. Surely, in the recent years with the rise of women's studies female travellers have attracted more attention but there are still women whose writings are not researched enough. Taking these two understudied aspects of travel writing, therefore, this thesis aims to examine the narrative of British female travellers who visited the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth-century. Each traveller, man or woman, has different motivations for travelling, different experiences during their travels and different parts of society that they are exposed to. Therefore, there is not a singular experience for travel writers but a multitude of voices. Female travellers, on the other hand, have been treated as not individuals who have experiences of their own but as extensions of the already existing male narratives. In this thesis, I will take the experiences of six women who travelled to the Ottoman Empire at different times in the nineteenth century as a point of reference, namely Henrietta Liston, Julia Pardoe, Marianne Young Postans, Agnes Ramsay, Fanny Janet Blunt and an anonymous writer. Through a discourse analysis of their travelogues, this thesis will attempt to

determine how they complied to or differed from the male-dominated orientalist narratives of travel writing.

Before moving on to building a connection between any of the big topics like orientalism and imperialism and their relationship with travel writing in the nineteenth century, an understanding of travel writing is necessary. This chapter will consider the motivations for travelling for both men and women, the involvement of women in travelling and travel writing in particular, and outline the value of travel writing as an historical source.

One of the most important things to keep in mind when reading travel accounts is that they are subjective. The first thing that sets out the context and the tone of the traveller is the reason for travelling in the first place. That reason determines what the traveller writes about. In her book *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources*, Suraiya Faruqi talks about making use of different kinds of historical documents about the Ottoman Empire, gives a clear list of what motivations there could be for a traveller to the Ottoman Empire, and what a historian using travel accounts should be aware of.¹ According to her classification, broadly, travellers travel for diplomatic (ambassadors), religious (pilgrimages and missionaries), political (warfare captives), and economical reasons (traders). Each of these motivations bring with them different concerns on the part of the traveller.

Other than Faruqi's classifications, the kind of travel this thesis is concerned with can be said to have its roots in the Grand Tour of the eighteenth

¹ Suraiya Faruqi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10.

century. This kind of travel was done for an educational purpose around Europe for the English upper-class male.² Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, Katherine Turner notes that “the overwhelming majority” of travel writing was “from the ranks of the middle classes.”³ Among these travellers, of course, as is the focus of this study, were female travellers who started to travel more often and freely. Especially after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, there was a considerable increase in the number of female travellers and their publications.⁴

For women, logically the most common methods for travelling were for religious and diplomatic travels where they often accompanied their husbands or a family member on a mission. However, as the female traveller emerged as an individual, separate from her husband, a different profile was made possible for women. In a general sense, the female traveller came to operate in the world of travelling and travel writing with a different set of rules than men. The dilemmas of the female traveller will be discussed in length in Chapters 1 and 2.

1.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Travel Writing

Working with travel writing has certain advantages along with disadvantages. Due to its subjective nature, travel writing has the potential to present its reader with information that may not necessarily reflect the situation in that particular place and time in the past. Rather, travel writers have the tendency to project their own motives and prejudices about a particular people onto their accounts. As Rana

² James A. Butler, “Travel Writing,” in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 394.

³ Katherine Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe 1750-1800: Authorship, Gender and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 14.

⁴ Butler, “Travel Writing,” 396.

Kabbani puts it, if the traveller wished “for racial purity, then they were racially pure. If he admired chivalry, then they were chivalrous. If he happened to loathe other religions, then they were fanatics who embodied the evils of religious heresy.”⁵ On the part of the historian, one must keep in mind these shortcomings to present a work of historical study that makes the best use of its sources. Therefore, before moving on to a deeper analysis of current literature on female travel accounts, it is important to go through the advantages and disadvantages of travel writing.

One of the first points to keep in mind, which travellers themselves sometimes admit, is the fact that travelling through a place for a short amount of time does not mean that the traveller gathers a good deal of information or understanding about the way of life in that place. One of the travellers analysed in this study, Julia Pardoe admits that in her book, while also criticising the male travellers who adopt an all-knowing attitude in their travelogues.⁶ This is an issue because most of the times, rather than trying to understand what something means for that specific culture, travellers tend to explain away the curiosities of a culture that they do not understand based on their own way of living life which is not always true for that particular place.

Another problem that leads to a similar misunderstanding in travel accounts is that travellers did not usually speak the language of the places they visited. This automatically limited any one-on-one encounters they could have with the locals

⁵ Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: McMillan Press, 1986), 116.

⁶ Julia Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan and the Domestic manner of the Turks* (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), 120.

which in turn leads to minimal cultural and information exchange. As a result, travellers could not understand the culture themselves, let alone convey it to an audience. This led to, and may very well explain the reason for, all the repetition that happens in travel accounts of travellers.

Ignorance on the part of the traveller leads to another common mistake in travel accounts: sometimes, they may unintentionally give false information. Faroqhi cites an example from sixteenth century where Pierre Gilles, or Petrus Gyllius as he called himself in Latin, attributed the bridge of Mostar to the Romans.⁷ Similar kind of mistakes are found in Henrietta Liston, for example, who is another traveller analysed in this study. In her writing, she mentions certain information about the number of concubines, the beheading of janissaries and the status of Hürrem Sultan all of which have been corrected by the editors.⁸ It may be that since some travellers were writing for an audience, they might have not cared about factuality. Excluding some travel accounts where the aim is doing research, in general, travel writing in itself is not a scientific study nor are all travellers researchers; therefore, mistakes are to be expected. However, this does not make the whole account invaluable but rather means that an historian using travel accounts must keep an open eye for such mistakes.

On the other hand, there are times when mistakes are made intentionally which can be catalogued as prejudice rather than mistake. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, travellers to the Orient had a lot of knowledge about the place, prior to

⁷ Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History*, 124

⁸ Patrick Hart, Valerie Kennedy, Dora Petherbridge and F. Özden Mercan. *Henrietta Liston's Travels: The Turkish Journals, 1812-1820* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 171, 172, 145.

their visit, whether that knowledge was true or false. While trying to pinpoint a specific date where this false information started circulating is difficult to do, it is true that “even in the Renaissance period, many texts available to the educated layman did not provide an even moderately accurate picture of Islam as a monotheistic religion.”⁹ So it is easy for all that false knowledge about the Orient to enforce these wrong ideas during the travels. Moreover, political, religious and ethnic biases are also important elements that play into such false information about the Orient.

Despite all the problems that one might encounter, travel writing also has much to offer, and not just on the lands being travelled, that makes it a valuable source of information. In fact, going through a travel account, one may find a lot of information about the traveller as well, and this will form the main focus of the present study. Despite any given travel writing being about the land visited, the way travellers talk about that land and the people, their descriptions, the choice of words, the choice of themes, what they include and exclude are all important factors that reveal information about the author, their background, and the time period they wrote in. In that sense, female travellers in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century are valuable sources to read not only about the Ottoman Empire or the British Empire respectively, but also about the interactions between these two cultures that produce perspectives about each other. Through a source that includes such interactions one can follow the influence of a thought that is produced in the West, like Orientalism, from its source to the other end of the spectrum, that is the East in the case of Orientalism. Even if the account offers information that may not

⁹ Norman Daniel as quoted in Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History*, 141.

be factually true, that also reveals something about the author. Their prejudices or their ignorance all help the historian form a picture of the mentality and the ideological framework of the time period.

One of the obvious advantages of a travel account is that, unlike an official document of a country or an institution, it is more concerned with the everyday life of regular people. Of course, as analysis of the travel accounts will show below, that depends on the author and the type of people they encounter. This study, too, includes analysis of many encounters that travellers had with ordinary people in addition to their interactions with the social and economic elite. In terms of cultural studies, this encounter with everyday life is such a valuable aspect of travel writing. Female travellers, too, have direct access to diverse group of people in the Ottoman society and reveal information about topics from governance and land use to wedding and burial ceremonies, childbirth, bathhouses and of course, the harem.

As mentioned above, every word written in a travel account is intentional. Like any other written work, travel accounts can be sources of criticism for the author to convey their ideas. In fact, if one finds it difficult to voice criticism of one's own society, it may be even easier to do so through travel writing. For example, for the authors included in this work, if they wish to criticise certain aspects of the British society or the ruling class, direct criticism could have consequences for the author since their target audience is British, especially since they are a woman. However, criticising the same qualities in a different society, that is the Ottoman Empire, automatically softens their negative comments and allows them a different context to talk about what they want. This point of travel writing will be discussed in depth in Chapter 1.

1.2 Orientalism

Orientalism is a natural part of travel writing concerning the Orient. Referring to the relationship between Orientalism and travel writing, Kabbani describes travelogues in the nineteenth century as “part of the Orientalism that abetted empire.”¹⁰ In order to search for patterns in travelogues that do not follow Orientalist narrative, there should be a clear understanding of what orientalism is and the patterns that it dictates. Therefore, a discussion of what Orientalism is and what it entails will be beneficial before moving forward. As Orientalism is a big topic that can easily make up a whole book on its own, this part will not be sufficient to cover all its aspects. However, a brief introduction covering certain stereotypes that it is encoded in should be enough for the purposes of this study.

A discussion of Orientalism cannot happen without mentioning Edward Said’s name. It is his take on Orientalism that has determined most scholarly discussion; therefore, his definition is a good place to start. According to him, Orientalism is:

discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.¹¹

In this view, what the Orient is and what it entails is decided by the West. By being able to talk about it, the West gains authority over the Orient. Travel writing, therefore, is very convenient as a medium for Orientalist thoughts to be voiced. Travellers visiting the Orient can easily learn about it and gain the authority to talk

¹⁰ Kabbani, *Europe’s Myth of the Orient*, 10.

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3.

about it. And this authority allowed Orientalists to create the Orient in their narrations.

Before moving on with the discussion of Orientalism, it is important to clarify the definition of Orientalism used in this thesis. Said's idea of it has been criticised by scholars such as Lisa Lowe for being a monolithic discourse.¹² Furthermore, Said himself mostly overlooks women as he builds his argument on male writers. Therefore, rather than take one definition of Orientalism, this thesis makes use of other scholarly work from writers like Rana Kabbani, Billie Melman, and John McLeod who also work on Orientalism in its relation to imperialism and how it functions at nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹³ However, some generalised definition that allows for comparison is bound to happen to make what this thesis attempts to do possible, which is to show that not all travellers, especially women, were Orientalist to the same extent. By looking for moments of hesitation in female travellers' accounts, it aims to show that there were strains in their narrative that revealed a reluctance for the Orientalist discourse.

Said's Orientalism is mostly concerned with how Orientalism was used in the twentieth century as a colonial tool to colonise other lands which may seem out of the scope of this thesis since it focuses on the nineteenth century. However, while the function of Orientalism may have been different across different time periods, as Rana Kabbani shows in her analysis of nineteenth century travellers, the elements

¹² Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), preface.

¹³ Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: McMillan Press, 1986); John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Billie Melman, *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

of Orientalism do not change drastically. That is to say, Orientalist stereotypes about the East were more or less the same in the nineteenth century.

What is common for both Orientalism and travellers in the nineteenth century is that they are first and foremost worried about making a distinction between the Occident and the Orient. According to Said, the Orientalist “makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says,” and that cause is to make it clear that the Orient is different.¹⁴ This difference is basically expressed by some stereotypes attributed to the East which will be discussed below. Rabbani explains that this stereotyping has been an ongoing tradition in Europe but “it was in the nineteenth century that they found their most deliberate expression, since that period saw a new confrontation between West and East - an imperial confrontation.”¹⁵ According to Kabbani, the Orientalist stereotypes that suggest “Eastern peoples were slothful, preoccupied with sex, violent, and incapable of self-government” were used to justify the imperialist intervention even in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ As is the focus of this thesis, it should be noted that not all travel writers were misinterpreting the East but it is a fact of the nineteenth century that these stereotypes became commonplace, “thus, European culture came to be framed by warped representations of the East.”¹⁷ As a result of the dominance of such stereotypes, it is possible to name a few that will help when comparing female travellers’ narratives with the Orientalist one.

¹⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 20-21.

¹⁵ Kabbani, *Europe’s Myth of the Orient*, 6.

¹⁶ Kabbani, *Europe’s Myth of the Orient*, 6.

¹⁷ Kabbani, *Europe’s Myth of the Orient*, 10.

The biggest stereotype, and the most studied one, was the depiction of the Orient as a place of sexual fantasies which was often achieved by harem descriptions and images. It was mostly due to the secrecy surrounding it as men could not enter it. It was also this secrecy which allowed the fantasies about it to bloom. Because it was unknown, there was no way for the depictions to be falsified. That was until women started travelling and writing about the harem. With their involvement, the literature and the narrative around the harem changed, at least in their accounts. How women approached harem will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Some of the other stereotypes about the Orient are easily spotted by looking at key words used to describe it and the people in it. John McLeod also argues in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* that “in Orientalism, the East as a whole is ‘feminised’, deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and tempting; while the West is thought of in terms of the ‘masculine’ – that is, active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled and ascetic.”¹⁸ This wording also helped the depiction of the power dynamics between the East and West. Being the masculine side, the West had the power over East.

Another stereotype about the East was its backwardness. Travellers often implied that the Orient was undeveloped through certain methods. One of those methods was to refer back to earlier times while describing the Orient. Billie Melman describes this as inferring “from the medieval texts to contemporary societies.”¹⁹ The effect of doing such a thing was to show that East and the Oriental

¹⁸ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 54.

¹⁹ Melman, *Women's Orient*, 66.

customs did not change. As will be seen in the discussion in Chapter 4, travellers sometimes openly made remarks to that effect, too.

Finally, the people in the East were stereotyped as being lazy. Travellers often described the people in the Orient as passing time doing nothing. This was especially reserved for harem depictions, but in general, too, “definitive weaknesses” of people in the Orient were “cowardliness, laziness, untrustworthiness, fickleness, laxity, violence and lust.”²⁰ Such terms were used to refer to the people all together. Talking about the tendency of referring to people as Arabian or Indian, McLeod says that “such peoples are glibly homogenised and robbed of their individuality as Orientalism mobilised a set of generalised types.”²¹ The workings of these stereotypes will be discussed at length in Chapter 3 and 4, with examples from the travellers studied here.

1.3 Current Literature and The Method of the Study

The study of female travellers’ writing is a relatively new topic which now has solid works around important figures already, like that of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.²² However, just because Lady Montagu is a symbolic name that has become well known does not mean that every other travel writer has been studied to the same extent. One of those less studied accounts is Henrietta Liston’s *Turkish Journals*. Despite being discovered years earlier her accounts were only published in 2020 and even this situation shows the lack of interest in women’s writings. Having been

²⁰ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 55.

²¹ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 53.

²² Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O’Quinn (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012).

published four years ago, Liston's writings are revealed relatively recently, and her accounts deserve more analysis.

The problem with the current literature of travel writing is that its gender aspect has been disregarded for most of the time. Most of the work on travel writing about the Ottoman Empire read these accounts through a filter of British colonialism. In such a reading, authors such as Gerald Maclean see these travellers' writings as an effort of diplomacy between the two empires. For authors like Filiz Turhan, their writings become ways for them to criticise the British Empire through the Ottoman other.²³ While it is possible for both of these to be found in travel writing, there is another angle to it that is also true: travellers form the self rather than criticising the other. This is especially true for female travellers.

First of all, Ottoman Empire presents an interesting case because some of the places that used to belong to the Ottoman Empire ended up becoming British or French colonies, but the Empire at its heart, İstanbul, the capital, and Anatolia has not become a colony. That makes talking about colonialism in the framework of the Ottoman Empire difficult. However, it was part of the narrative as will be discussed below, and wishing for it to be colonised by the British was something that travellers readily admitted to. Nevertheless, even in the most studied aspect of travel writing, that part of the Empire is not studied much. Moreover, travellers themselves made distinctions about the people in the Empire based on religion and ethnicity. Often, their commentary about Christian women and Muslim (Turkish) women are significantly different. They often use the word Muslim and Turkish

²³ Filiz Turhan, *The Other Empire: British Romantic Writings about the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

interchangeably. This difference also necessitates the limitation of not only the lands but the people they talk about. Therefore, within the above-mentioned borders of the Empire, this work will focus on how female travellers approached Turkish culture and Turkish women who were mostly Muslim and therefore presented differences to a Christian traveller. Looking at travel writings that have been studied, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Julia Pardoe stand out as the most well-known travellers who visited Istanbul. Other than them, there is not much work on Anatolia. Rather, travellers to Syria or Egypt are studied more. By trying to include travellers who visited not the famous travel routes but the villages or cities in Anatolia as well, this research will try to cover a geographically understudied region in travel writing.

As for the other aspect, mentioned above as forming the self, the goal is to point out how, in their writings, female travel writers show that they are worried about their identities as women both at home and abroad. They were trying to balance travelling and publishing with the accepted norms of the society which showed itself as a strain in their writing and made them differ from the Orientalist narrative. This results in women finding a voice, in general, that is different from other travel accounts published around the same time. That is to say, while it is true that this work is still built around the overly studied orientalist and colonialist approaches in travel writing, unlike other studies, it is looking at elements of women's writings that are not so orientalist or colonialist and trying to see what it means for women to write the way they do.

The gender issue is hard to tackle. Despite being at the heart of both travel writing and orientalism, many of the books concerning travel writing do not

primarily consider female travellers in their analysis like Reinhold Schiffer's *Oriental Panorama: British Travellers in 19th Century Turkey* (1999) and Gerald MacLean's *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580–1720* (2004).²⁴ Already, women are excluded from most studies. However, women contribute valuable information to the genre. As is already mentioned as a symbolic name, Lady Montagu, for example, produced the first work that breaks the narrative of men who wrote about the empire before her. Not only did women offer a different perspective, but their being women also actually affected their whole experience. It played into their motivations for travelling and drew physical limitations – or freedoms in the case of harem – to their travels. Women had the advantage of getting into places that men could not – like the harem. Therefore, it is important to include women in cultural studies such as travel writing.

Moreover, female travellers reveal important aspects of travel writing. Despite being relatively less studied, the gendered aspect of travel writing reveals itself in female travellers. It creates a dichotomy in women's narrative that reflects the cultural and social concerns that shaped the nineteenth century Britain such as the discussions around the aesthetic beauty, public and private spheres in the society and women's rights. Therefore, studying female travellers has the potential to contribute to cultural studies about nineteenth-century Britain and even Europe.

There are important works that deserve recognition for the way they handle these two topics. Tim Youngs and Alasdair Pettinger's *Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* and Katrina O'Loughlin's *Women, Writing and*

²⁴ Reinhold Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama: British Travellers in 19th Century Turkey* (1999) and Gerald Maclean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720* (2004).

Travel in the Eighteenth Century are among those works.²⁵ Both of these books acknowledge the gender and imperialism issue in travel writing historiography and Youngs and Alasdair explain that this problem is due to the fact that people cannot think of travel writing outside of the framework of an empire.²⁶ Katrina O'Loughlin steps away from the imperialist mindset too and rather builds her arguments on the importance of individuality of the writers²⁷. What these works have in common is that they both mostly focus on the subjectivity of travel writing.

1.4 Thesis Structure

My contribution to the topic will be on the same ground of individuality. The number of travellers included in this study is decided on the same basis. Although the number of female travellers to the Middle East in general in the nineteenth century is very high, this thesis will focus on six of them who visited the Ottoman Empire, whose detailed personal information will be given in Chapter 2. The reason for limiting the number to six was to keep it at a manageable number while also making it possible to detect patterns in their accounts and allocating each traveller adequate space for detailed analysis. Each traveller analysed here is also decided on the basis of diversity in terms of their motivation for travelling and date of travelling. The six women here travelled at different times in the nineteenth century, covering the period from 1810s to 1890s. They also travelled for different purposes: while some, like Henrietta Liston, accompanied their husbands on a diplomatic

²⁵ Tim Youngs and Alasdair Pettinger, *Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2019); and Katrina O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁶ Youngs and Pettinger, *Routledge Research Companion*, 11.

²⁷ O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing and Travel*, 4.

mission, others like Julia Pardoe were simply travelling for recreation. While Marianne Young Postans was travelling at the time of the Crimean War to help English soldiers in İstanbul, Agnes Ramsay was accompanying her husband on an archaeological study. This diversity is important because it will affect their narrative. Both the time of their travel and the travellers' background affect their subject matter as they will all have different experiences based on these two factors. As a result, each travellers reveals different historical dynamics that help with understanding the world they travelled in.

Rather than a general picture of a female traveller, each traveller mentioned in this study has its own space of analysis. That is not to say that I will take these travellers separately from one another. They were not separated, in fact, they were affected by each other's writings. I do not aim to focus too much on the gender of the travellers and conduct a gender study; however, I will involve how their gender affected their experience. My focusing on women travellers comes from the same place; I do not focus on female travellers because of their gender, but because they have been understudied and even the understudied part of it has already revealed valuable information that redefined travel writing in comparison to men's writings. Looking at some of the readings of the general historiography so far, the question I want to ask is: how did women experience the Ottoman Empire and how did their experience differ from the orientalist, imperial understandings? Studying more female travellers has the potential to unravel more interesting information for cultural studies.

First chapter will form the background against which women were travelling and writing, that is, the nineteenth century Britain. The travel writing, its connection

with orientalism and colonialism and the British society that raised these travellers will be the focus of this chapter. I will describe and analyse the circumstances in Britain that affected female travellers in ways that both limited them and opened up space for them. Understanding these circumstances will help understanding the gendered nature of the conversation around travel writing and orientalism and the attention women paid to women in the Orient which will be the focus of chapter 2.

The harem shows up in this study as the first gendered place in the second chapter. Here, I will show where the interest in the harem comes from, which is a major component of both orientalism and travel writing, and analyse women's take on the harem narrative. This narrative deserves an analysis because it is the biggest sign of women breaking from the traditional orientalist narrative, and that is at the core of this paper. Whenever they defy orientalist ideas even at the slightest, female travellers, at least in the case of Ottoman women, do so with regards to women. Women and the harem, therefore, is a crucial part of this analysis for demonstrating the dichotomy in female traveller's writing because as much as they write outside the framework of orientalist limitations, women cannot completely let go of it.

The third chapter shows the dichotomy mentioned in female travellers' writing as it is not directly an example of women denying orientalist narratives. However, as analysis will show, even when following the orientalist stereotypes, women create a different space for themselves and again, the women in the Orient. Like the harem, this chapter focuses on another gendered space in travel writing that is the landscape. Although not literally a physical barrier, landscape and the language around it create a gendered world, not only for women in the orient but

for women in the west, as well. So, female travellers adopting an orientalist voice shows again how they navigate this narrative.



CHAPTER 2

Female Travellers and The Nineteenth Century England

In its simplest form, travel writing is a piece of writing where the traveller writes about their observations, experiences and whatever they wish to write about. Before it turned into a genre in and of itself, around the eighteenth century, travelling was not something that women did often or easily.²⁸ However, as the genre developed, and the circumstances changed in Europe, women started to be more involved in it. That being said, their involvement was not straightforward; that is, they faced certain restrictions that did not affecting male writers as much. In the nineteenth-century-Britain there were things that society demanded of women and men. Moreover, by then, there were certain concepts entangled with travel writing such as orientalism and colonialism. When women started travelling and publishing, they had to find a way to deal with all of these things which affected their writings. This chapter, while focusing on women, will explain the background against which women were operating. It will describe the genre in general, what was expected of the average travel writer and the problematic aspects of it while also looking into its relationship with orientalism and then show how women operated in this world as female travel writers.

²⁸ Faroghi, *Approaching Ottoman History*, 10.

2.1 The Average Traveller in the Nineteenth Century

One element of both the colonial and oriental discourses was the comparison of Britain with foreign lands, and travel presented a great opportunity for such a comparison to be made. It is not surprising then, that travellers, men or women, have been often analysed through their connection to colonial interests. Regardless of the gender of the author, travel writing has been read and interpreted by scholars as either supporting colonialism or defying it. But whether their travels and their narratives could have worked for or against colonialism, one thing is certain: that the travellers worked within that discourse.

When it comes to the average traveller, Rana Kabbani offers the very nicely put definition given by Byron Farwell who begins Richard Burton's biography with the following: "the explorer is always a civilised man; exploration is an advanced intellectual concept'. Therefore, she argues, it is a concept unknown to primitive peoples, and one that remains incomprehensible to women."²⁹ Travelling was something that was done for various reasons, and, by nature, it was a dangerous endeavour. Therefore, even without the ideological limitation of it, it is natural that there were not many women travelling long distances. And the average man had a profile.

First of all, travellers travelling to the Orient were already informed about it. To get to the beginning of this information flow is hard to do but by the nineteenth century, certainly there was information circulating regarding the Orient. Accounts of earlier travellers and fictional works like the *Arabian Nights* were well known to

²⁹ Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 86.

the British society.³⁰ So, the average traveller already had an idea in mind about the place he was visiting and what to expect from it. One of the criticisms towards travellers is born out of this situation because all of that end up affecting the traveller's "perception and influences him to select certain kinds of information, or to stress aspects of a country that find resonances in the culture of his own nation."³¹ The myth of the Orient was supported by this nature of travel writing. On top of that, travellers "quoted each other in their accounts... they could not help confirming certain myths to which their countrymen had grown accustomed"³² This quoting from each other was one way for travellers to gain credit and it also allowed for the travellers to conform to the demands of the readership. In such a state of echo chamber, certain myths about the Orient that were already in circulation due to Orientalism were repeated and published in travelogues.

These myths of Orientalism were usually about the character of the people in the Orient but also included general statements about the culture and the land itself. First of all, there was gendering of the East and West, with West being "masculine" and the East being "feminine".³³ Almost all other statements about the East and the character of the people in the Orient was based on this gendering. For example, the general understanding that the West was rational, and the Orient was irrational fits well with the gendered ideas about these two places. Again, based on this same reasoning words like "passions, possessed, ravished, embraced, domesticated" were used a lot while describing the Orient.³⁴

³⁰ Melman, *Women's Orient*, 63.

³¹ Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 1.

³² Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 2.

³³ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 54.

³⁴ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 54.

As a result of this general understanding, the character of the people in the East was described in terms of “cowardliness, laziness, untrustworthiness, fickleness, laxity, violence and lust.”³⁵ Within this narrative, the most interesting aspect of the Orient was the harem, which will be discussed below as to why it was so intriguing. More of these myths will be mentioned and analysed below, as well. The fact that painters in the nineteenth-century, like Eugene Delacroix and his work titled *La Mort de Sardanapale*, painted the Orient without ever visiting the place shows how these stereotypes were well-known and accepted.³⁶

These myths and the echoing of the same narrative goes to show that travel writing reveals more about the traveller than the place being travelled. From the topics of interest in travelogues to how travellers wrote about these things reveal not only the traveller but the society from which he comes. The culture that raised travellers also shaped them and taught them to perceive the world the way they do. And the average traveller in the nineteenth century perceived the Orient in line with Orientalist stereotypes. He travelled with this information and wrote under the influence of what he knows, what other travellers wrote, and his culture. Of course, that is not to say all travellers wrote the same way.

2.2 Female Travellers in the Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century travelling became available to not just the upper classes but the middle class as well.³⁷ The increased interest in travelling and reading travelogues can be attested by just the sheer number of travel writing published in

³⁵ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 55.

³⁶ Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 75.

³⁷ Melman, *Women's Orient*, 100.

the nineteenth century. For the purposes of this research alone, more than 60 female travellers have been found along with their publications. Moreover, it was towards the middle of the nineteenth century that John Murray's guides for travellers started to be published as well.³⁸ So, it is clear that there was an interest in travelling. However, travel writing has a whole other dynamic.

Women have been involved in writing and publishing way before nineteenth century, so it was not the female writer that was unusual but the female traveller. Interestingly, unlike other literary genres, travel writing was not regarded as a higher form of literary writing so women writing in this genre were more readily accepted than, poetry, for example.³⁹ Yet, Sara Mills draws attention to the fact that many women were also discouraged from writing "because it was seen to be sexually improper for a woman to enter into the realm of this public, high language."⁴⁰ With travel writing came different concerns such as the movement and leaving home that travelling required. As mentioned above, women travelling was not something that was seen very often. However, women like Lady Mary Montagu accompanied their husbands on their diplomatic travels and published their works. But what did it mean for a woman to travel in the nineteenth century?

To understand the implications of travelling for women, it is necessary to understand the time period they were travelling in. In the nineteenth century, as travel accounts show, there was an interest in the freedom and liberties. However,

³⁸ John Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers in The Ionian Islands, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor, and Constantinople* (London: John Murray, 1840).

³⁹ Butler, "Travel Writing," 393.

⁴⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 40.

these freedoms were not always extended to women.⁴¹ That is to say, certain rights that men had were not given to women. For example, they were excluded from the franchise in the 1832 Reform Act, and later with the Municipal Corporations Act of 1834.⁴² Moreover, married women were “subsumed in the legal personhood of their husband and thus held no property or wealth in their own right.”⁴³ This situation changed for the better with the Married Women’s Property Acts (1870-1908) that allowed married women to own their property.⁴⁴

The situation explained above does not mean that women did not get to work in the nineteenth-century. In fact, many of the conversations around topics like women’s legal rights and the women question are carried around women from the working class. Actually, working conditions also became a concern for nineteenth century society because “bad working conditions and underemployment drove thousands of women into prostitution, which in the nineteenth century became increasingly professionalised and the subject of an almost obsessive public concern.”⁴⁵ This situation also explains the obsession with morality in the nineteenth century.

The conversation of morals was interestingly connected to aesthetics. Talks of aesthetic beauty became popular during the Romantic period and among Romantic writers. Inderpal Grewal stresses the importance of transparency in

⁴¹ See Sandra Stanley Holton, “The Making of Suffrage History,” in *Votes for Women*, ed. June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2001).

⁴² Holton, “The Making of Suffrage History,” 14.

⁴³ Holton, “The Making of Suffrage History,” 1.

⁴⁴ *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9th ed., vol. 2, *The Romantic Period through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2012), 1031-32.

⁴⁵ *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9th ed., vol. 2, 1033.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century societies' understanding of what is beautiful.⁴⁶ With physiognomy, which Grewal describes as "the practice of seeing qualities of character on the face" there was a tendency to believe that the face was reflective of one's character and in fact, writers like Edmund Burke and John Ruskin saw a woman's beauty on her face.⁴⁷ This importance attributed to transparency will be discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to women in the Orient as well. For now, its relation to understanding of beauty and morals will be discussed.

Inderpal Grewal gives the example of how Louis Enault, a French visitor to London, talks about the prostitutes in London to show the importance of physiognomy. Speaking of the makeup on their face, he says that "their hideous features, objects of horror and disgust, bear the trace of their depravity and degradation."⁴⁸ It is clear from such examples that there was a strong belief that face was an indicator of one's morality, and makeup, and anything else that hides the face from view, was seen as trying to hide immorality.

According to Grewal, Edmand Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) was a defining work for the understanding of beauty in the nineteenth century. In Burke's discussion of beauty, one of the things that he draws attention to is submission. By stating that "we love what submits to us" Burke puts submission in the criteria for considering things beautiful.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he associates beauty with being small and soft when he says that things that are "pleasant to the touch, are so by the slowness of

⁴⁶ Inderpal, Grewal. *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 26.

⁴⁷ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 27.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 27.

⁴⁹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 103.

the resistance they make.”⁵⁰ This lack of resistance is, again, a hint at submission. According to this understanding, Grewal argues that “a beautiful woman belonged to home and offered relaxation and not the exercise of lustful passion” because for a woman working in factories or the fields, such softness is not possible to achieve.⁵¹

Discussing different approaches of different artists, Inderpal Grewal also gives John Ruskin’s definition of beauty where he claims that impressions of beauty are not “sensual or intellectual, but moral.”⁵² Ruskin, too, sees beauty in the face and not the body as the body could be represented in a sensual way.⁵³ Based on this discussion of beauty so far, in the nineteenth century, the beautiful was moral and it was submissive. This understanding of beauty and morality was reiterated in a number of works of art such as Coventry Patmore’s poem *Angel in The House* and Lord Alfred Tennyson’s poem *The Princess*. Both of these poems have become symbolic in their depiction of women.

“Angel in the house” became a phrase used to refer to women in the Victorian period, thanks to the poem by Patmore. This angel in the house was, according to Deborah Gorham, the result of capitalism. The value attributed to domestic life, she argues, comes from the tension between the values of a Christian life and the capitalist values. As a result, attributing such value to the home was “an efficient moral balance” for the Victorians.⁵⁴ There was a tendency to physically separate the home from the outside world which is more commonly referred to as

⁵⁰ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 229.

⁵¹ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 30.

⁵² Ruskin quoted in Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 37.

⁵³ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 27.

⁵⁴ Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 4.

the separate spheres where women had a role to play in private life while men had the public life.⁵⁵ In this understanding and glorifying of the angel in the house, ideally, women were expected to provide “a haven” for their family from the pressures of the outside world through “her sound household management and sweetness of temperament... meaning the angel’s domesticity, unworldliness, asexuality, innocence, even helplessness in matters outside the domestic sphere.”⁵⁶ The asexuality attributed to the angel also helps understanding the obsession with the harem literature and the insistence of descriptions of it as a sensual place. According to Rabbani, who analyses accounts of travellers like Burton, in the Victorian society talking about sexuality in terms of English women was a taboo, but travellers often projected their ideas to the Eastern women through whom it was acceptable to talk about sexuality.⁵⁷

The accepted understanding of beauty, angel in the house and the spheres idea all advertised a profile for women that was submissive, moral and pure. That was the acceptable woman in nineteenth-century England. However, it does not mean that this was the reality. First of all, attributing the private sphere to women did not make them wholly powerless. It may not be the ideal form of power, but through their management of the household, women could indeed help their family. Talking about the mobility in the nineteenth century, meaning the possibility of one’s social rank changing as a result of their effort, Gorham notes the importance of women. Even if a man could achieve success and economic power, his social

⁵⁵ Nan H. Dreher, “Redundancy and Emigration: The ‘Woman Question’ in Mid-Victorian Britain,” *Victorian Periodical Reviews* 26, no. 1 (Spring, 1993): 3-7.

⁵⁶ M. Jeanne Peterson, “No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women” in *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June, 1984): 677-708.

⁵⁷ Kabbani, *Europe’s Myth of the Orient*, 53.

status was reflected through his family and his style of family life.⁵⁸ As the figures managing the family, women, then, could determine their families' social standing. Moreover, Peterson argues that the angel in the house was not the reality for a majority of the women. Making a case through the life of Paget family's women, she argues that the angel in the house could only be the ideal for "the middle strata of Victorian society, where women had the leisure, privacy, and prosperity to aspire to the combination of innocence, piety, and dependency that she embodied."⁵⁹ As a result, she argues that angel in the house can only be an idealisation and not a reality. While it is true that this may not be the reality, the idealisation still matters as it reflects the expectations of the society from women; expectations that can create tensions and pressures on women travellers that are just as influential.

At a time like this, women, as figures of the private sphere, were defying some of the societal norms by simply travelling. One of the things that set them apart from men was this very fact. As the understanding of women discussed above shows, women were not depicted as adventurers. Travel writing, however, was an adventure on its own. According to Dea Birkett, by travelling, women "learned to brave dangers, to value being alone rather than feel lonely, and to have control over their lives."⁶⁰ Braving dangers is a difficult part of travelling for women. Not because of its physical dangers but because of the caution it required to portray it in an acceptable way to the public. According to Mills, women "may travel outside the home but they display all of the conventional characteristics of women within

⁵⁸ Gorham, *The Victorian Girl*, 8.

⁵⁹ Peterson, "No Angels in the House," 678.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 80.

the home.”⁶¹ They had to be careful in their accounts to show their audience that even as they travelled, they followed the social etiquette.

Moreover, as mentioned above, women’s writing and publishing were not readily accepted in the male-dominated world of publishing and travel writing. In their writing, many women were apologetic not only in terms of their subject matter, but also because of publishing their work.⁶² Turner points out that many women avoided stating strong or politically controversial opinions.⁶³ It is easy to see in some of the travellers analysed here. For example, Fanny Jant Blunt directly begins her book with a warning from the publisher, who says that as per the request of the author “the book was to be a collection of facts, not a vehicle for party views on the Eastern Question... Politically the book is entirely colourless.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Blunt makes sure that one must not expect to see “any expression of opinion on the wisdom or folly of the policy of Her Majesty’s Government.”⁶⁵ On some level, it is natural that they had to conform to some of society’s expectations, and one of those expectations was to write about what society deemed acceptable to write about. As Blunt’s warnings show, politics was not one of those topics. For women, morals and manners or other cultural topics were acceptable. As Turner explains, “the increased interest in ‘manners and customs’, art and landscape, and stories of human interest, all accommodated women writers.”⁶⁶ This allowed women a window of opportunity.

⁶¹ Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 34.

⁶² Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 309.

⁶³ Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 307.

⁶⁴ Fanny Janet Blunt, *The People of Turkey* (London: John Murray, 1878), preface.

⁶⁵ Blunt, *People of Turkey*, preface.

⁶⁶ Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 107.

Although they were doing it delicately, women getting out of the house and getting to travel was a way to break down “bourgeois ideals of the angel in the house.”⁶⁷ By proving to be useful in the colonisation process, women were, in a way, showing that they could “be a part of the project of empire conceived of as a heterosexual and masculinist project.”⁶⁸ That way, although still a very gendered narrative, women took the focus from gender to the empire which could be useful for the suffrage movement. Such a perspective could explain the dichotomy in women’s writing that will be discussed below.

Another thing about female travellers was that they had more of a freedom than men when it came to certain limitations of travel writing. What it means is that, often, travellers were part of societies or groups who had different goals.⁶⁹ When a traveller is a member of a society, their travels were defined by the goals of that society. However, Birkett argues that women “travelled without the definite goals that many male explorers had.”⁷⁰ Melman or Mills, too, argues that women were often not members of these societies. This allowed them to act individually.

2.3 The Female Travellers Discussed in the Study

After general characteristics of female travellers in the nineteenth century, travellers included here in this study require an introduction of their own. The travellers included here in this study are chosen based on two criteria. Among the more than 60 nineteenth-century published the female travellers, the ones that are analysed in

⁶⁷ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 61.

⁶⁸ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 63.

⁶⁹ Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 8-9.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 80.

depth are Henrietta Liston, the anonymous writer, Julia Pardoe, Marianne Young Postans, W. M. Ramsay, and Fanny Janet Blunt. These names basically cover the whole period with Henrietta Liston being the first to travel, around 1812. Then comes the anonymous writer who was published in 1837, at the same time as Julia Pardoe whose book chosen for this study was published in 1837. Marianne Young Postans was published in 1854 around the time of the Crimean War. Fanny Janet Blunt was published in 1878 and finally Mrs. Ramsay, or Agnes Ramsay, was published in 1897. Moreover, the travellers have different purposes for travelling to the Ottoman Empire which adds to the diversity.

Henrietta Liston's journals were recently published by Edinburgh University Press. National Library of Scotland has put together some bibliographical information on Henrietta, mostly obtained from her own journals and letters. According to that information, Henrietta Liston was born on 19 December 1751 in Antigua as Henrietta Marchant.⁷¹ She was born to a family of planters and merchants, was the only surviving daughter of her parents and had five brothers. After the death of her parents, Henrietta was sent to Glasgow where she lived with her relatives. She was a botanist. She had known Mr Liston for more than a decade before they married at when she was 44, and he 53. The archives depict a relationship based on love and friendship.

Before his mission to the Ottoman Empire, the Listons were first appointed to the America. According to the archives, Henrietta played a major role for her

⁷¹ Following statements about Henrietta Liston's life are all put together from the information that the National Library of Scotland provides. Accessed May 16, 2025. <https://digital.nls.uk/travels-of-henrietta-liston/listons/henrietta.html>

husband's success through "her soft power."⁷² After subsequent posts at The Hague and Copenhagen they retired from public duty for some time. In 1812, Robert Liston was finally appointed as ambassador to the Sublime Porte. It is her observations here at İstanbul that are the focus of this study. Here, Liston writes about pretty much what many travellers before and after her write about. However, she has certain interests that sets her apart from other travellers, like her interest in botany, which shows itself in her giving the Latin name of almost every species of plants she sees. In fact, while living in İstanbul, Henrietta even cultivated the British Embassy's garden. Among the travellers analysed here, Liston stands out as the only one who seems to have written without an intention to publish. This lack of interest in publication shows itself in Liston's being freer in terms of her subject matter, as she allocates more space to plants and eating habits than other travellers in line with her interest. After their time in the Ottoman Empire, the Listons retired permanently and returned to Scotland. After Robert Liston was knighted, Henrietta became Lady Liston and on 6 October 1828, Henrietta died at age 77.

The anonymous writer of *My Travels* unfortunately remains anonymous. However, University of Wolverhampton's database British Travel Writing attributes many works to this anonymous writer.⁷³ Based on the preface of her book, *My Travels: A Series of Conversations with a Younger Sister, after Returning from Journeys in France, Italy, Malta, and Turkey*, she is writing from first-hand experience and at times making use of other travelogues such as W. Thomson's *Tour through Switzerland and Italy*, and Boyd's *Guide through Italy*. In addition to

⁷² Henrietta Liston, National Library of Scotland, accessed May 16, 2025, <https://digital.nls.uk/travels-of-henrietta-liston/listons/henrietta.html>

⁷³ *My Travels*, University of Wolverhampton British Travel Writing, accessed May 16, 2025, <https://btw.wlv.ac.uk/texts/1003>

an account of her travels, the author shares a lot of historical, cultural and literary information about the places she mentions.

Julia Pardoe is the most well-known traveller among the writers in this study. She was born in c. 1804, daughter of Thomas Pardoe, an army officer, and Elizabeth Pardoe.⁷⁴ Before her publications in travel writing, she wrote a poetical romance and a novel. Her first travel book was *Traits and Traditions of Portugal* which was published in 1833. When she visited İstanbul, she was accompanying her father and according to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, her books about Turkey seemed second only to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in terms of its “intimate knowledge” of Turkey.⁷⁵ Her book *The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks*, which is also the one analysed in this study, received considerable success. The most important thing that sets Pardoe apart from other travellers is her explicit awareness of her being an outsider as a European, to the people in the Ottoman Empire. As analysis in Chapter 3 will show, Pardoe recognizes the Orientalist tendencies in her writing, and other Europeans’ accounts and makes determined statements to work against it. Sometimes, she openly criticises men who visited and published before her on their false claims.⁷⁶ Both at the time of publishing and today among scholars like Billie Melman, her works are praised and appreciated.

In about 1842, Pardoe left London and started living with her parents at Perry Street, near Gravesend in Kent. She continued writing short stories,

⁷⁴ All of the information about Julia Pardoe has been obtained from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Elizabeth Lee, and Joanne Wilkes “Pardoe, Julia (bap. 1804, d. 1862), Writer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, accessed May 17, 2025.

⁷⁵ Lee, “Pardoe, Julia, bap. (1804, d. 1862), Writer”

⁷⁶ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 120.

contributed to *Fraser's Magazine* and the *Illuminated Magazine*, and edited and wrote for other publications. She wrote a number of historical works regarding court life in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, which were reprinted in the twentieth century. Pardoe died in London in 1862 from a long-standing chronic disease of the liver.

Marianne Young Postans was born in London, on 4 January 1811, the daughter of Richard Bowling Hunter Ridgway and his wife Elizabeth Wells Fortescue.⁷⁷ Her father Richard was a wine merchant. Marianne married Thomas Postans in 1833, who was an officer in the Bombay native infantry. Her first works of travel was from her time in India as she accompanied her husband there. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Postans was fond of travelling. *Oxford Dictionary* notes the fact that she was “clothing in more alluring form the facts which she had obtained through firsthand experience” about India.⁷⁸ She also wrote fictions where she made use of the information, she obtained about Indian women. As the *Oxford Dictionary* also notes, Postans “did not restrict her views to ‘feminine’ issues” in India, and later in the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁹ She has a similar kind of approach both to Indian and Ottoman lands in terms of describing the lands as needing reform and saving by the Christian West.

When her husband died, Postans returned to England and there, she married an army surgeon, William Henry Young. She accompanied him to the Crimea in 1854, and her account of her experiences are narrated in *Our Camp in Turkey and*

⁷⁷ Following information is taken from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Rosemary Cargill Raza, “Young [née Ridgway; other married name Postans], Marianne (1811–1897), Writer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, accessed May 17, 2025.

⁷⁸ Raza, “Young [née Ridgway; other married name Postans], Marianne (1811–1897), Writer.”

⁷⁹ Raza, “Young [née Ridgway; other married name Postans], Marianne (1811–1897), Writer.”

the Way to It is the book that this study analyses. She travelled with her husband to the British military camps on the Gallipoli peninsula and in Varna where she attended the sick. The Youngs returned to Somerset before 1861 and Postans died there in 1897.

Unfortunately, there is not much information on Mrs. Agnes Ramsay, other than what she shares in the book. Her husband Sir William Mitchell Ramsay, on the other hand, is well-known for his work on Asia Minor and her name is mentioned along with him in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.⁸⁰ Of course, Mrs. Ramsay was accompanying him on his journey there. The couple married in 1878 and had two sons and four daughters, whom Mrs. Ramsay mentions in her book. Again, as can be seen from the book, the couple travelled through Asia Minor for Mr. Ramsay's research. Mrs. Ramsay accompanied him on his quest for ruins and artefacts and when she did not, she stayed with the women in the villages that they travelled through. Therefore, she had many encounters with the local women and got to witness a big part of their daily life.

Fanny Janet Blunt, unlike other travellers, was born in Therapia, a suburb of İstanbul in 1839.⁸¹ Her father was Donald Sandison who had gone to Turkey as a representative of British East India Company and became British consul in Bursa. She married British vice-consul Sir John Elijah Blunt in Monastir in 1858. She started living in Malta, in 1902 and died there in 1926. Her book *The People of*

⁸⁰ Following information about W. M. Ramsay has been obtained from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and combined with the information from Mrs. Ramsay's book. J. G. C. Anderson and Peter W. Lock, "Ramsay, Sir William Mitchell (1851–1939), Classical Scholar and Archaeologist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, accessed May 17, 2025.

⁸¹ Following information is taken from Emine Zeytinli, "A British Merchant in Turkey: Freeman of the Levant Company and Consul, Donald Sandison at Bursa, 1875-1868," *Tarih Dergisi*, no. 68 (December 2018): 31-56.

Turkey is a two-volume work describing the people from different ethnicities as well as Turkish people, the way of the country, the land and many more aspects of life in Turkey.

2.4 The Myth of the Orient

It is hard to tell exactly how the myths about the Orient took root. It is probably a long process defined by the dynamics of power between the East and the West. But by the nineteenth century, the word Orient brought with it certain images, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. At least for the nineteenth century, there can be an explanation as to where those images came from.

According to Billie Melman, it was Antoine Galland's *Mille et une nuits* that became extremely popular which was first published in twelve volumes between 1707-14 that started an interest in the oriental literature.⁸² In the nineteenth century, Stanley Lane Poole published a new and cleaner version which was mostly censored to fit the Victorian society's moral expectations.⁸³ These publications helped create "female stereotypes which had great effect on Victorian readers."⁸⁴ Melman also mentions that women reading them is not likely but some of the travellers studied here mention reading them or compare some of the things they see with the stories told in *Arabian Nights*.⁸⁵

⁸² Melman, *Women's Orient*, 63.

⁸³ Melman, *Women's Orient*, 64-65.

⁸⁴ Melman, *Women's Orient*, 64-65.

⁸⁵ See W. M. Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 151; Julia Pardoe, *City of the Sultan*, 89; and Anonymous, *My Travels: A Series of Conversations with a Younger Sister After Returning from Journeys in France, Italy, Malta and Turkey* (London: P. Westley and A.H. Davis, 1837), 223.

Furthermore, Edward Said also mentions an increase in the interest in the Orient in the nineteenth century. He mentions some societies, such as Societe asiatique, the Royal Asiatic Society, the Deutsche Morgenlandische Gesellschaft, and the American Oriental Society that added to the prestige of Oriental studies.⁸⁶ Additionally, he mentions some periodicals, too, like Fundgraben des Orients that added to the accumulation of knowledge about the Orient.⁸⁷ With such societies and periodicals, Said argues, means for disseminating Orientalism increased.⁸⁸

This chapter focused on giving a picture of the state of England in the nineteenth century. The society that was concerned with morals, the understanding of women in that society, the popularity of travel writing and women's way of fitting into that genre, and the fantasies about the east were explained briefly to pave the way for better understanding the discussion of women's narratives. When reading women's work and connecting it to the pressures that they felt in the following chapters, the background, the culture that they were raised in will help understand why women responded the way they did. It was in such a time period that these travellers were travelling and publishing.

⁸⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 43.

⁸⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 43.

⁸⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 43.

CHAPTER 3

Women and Harem

There are a number of topics that recur in travel writings regardless of the gender of the author as well as topics that are less frequent. It is possible to point out certain subjects that men work on and certain others that were left to women. Especially in the eighteenth century, this division between subject matter was more distinct and women usually did not write about economics, politics, science or military affairs, for example. According to Shirley Foster, a publisher asked Sydney, Lady Morgan to write on the morals and manners of Italy, whilst her husband was to write on the laws and government institutions.⁸⁹ In fact, Sara Mills notes that, Isabella Bishop-Bird had to take out some material from her account *The Golden Chersonese* “because the publishers considered it to be unfeminine.”⁹⁰ This clearly demonstrates the tendency to divide topics between men and women as the publishers or society deemed suitable. That being said, this was not always the case, certainly not as much in the nineteenth century. In fact, there are some topics that are seen in almost all travellers, men or women. One of those topics is women and the harem in the Oriental world. It is interesting that these two topics show up in all accounts throughout the nineteenth century while there are changes in the overall planning of the writers. Slavery, for example, was a big concern for nineteenth-century society in Britain, with its gradual abolition and the efforts to abolish it in

⁸⁹ Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 113.

⁹⁰ Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 114-15.

the Ottoman Empire as well.⁹¹ However, that is not a topic that takes up as much space in travel accounts as women or the harem. Indeed, as Reina Lewis points out, harem was so popular that “any book that had anything to do with the harem sold.”⁹² While other topics change over time according to the concerns of the age, women and harem stay constant in writings, and this begs the question of why. Why are women in the Orient so intriguing to write about? For female travel writers, there are a number of reasons.

Surely, manners and customs do not equate to women and the harem, but women and especially the harem did present a great opportunity for witnessing the manners and customs of the local people in the travelled lands. It also makes women writers valuable as they write on subjects that men could not really write about authentically because men were not allowed into the private houses into which women are usually were invited. As Billie Melman points out, this situation was not specific to Muslim people in the Ottoman Empire. It was also the case for “non-Muslim household” that was still “closed” to the outsiders despite not being segregated and gave women authority on information about Oriental life.⁹³ Women were certainly aware of this situation and took advantage of it as well. Travellers often acknowledged the fact that getting to know a different culture in a short amount of time is not easy to do.⁹⁴ They, therefore, argued that their accounts should be read based on their ability to write something new about known topics or on the

⁹¹ See Hakan Erdem’s discussion of Britain’s involvement in the abolition of slavery in the Ottoman Empire. Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800-1909* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996).

⁹² Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 12.

⁹³ Melman, *Women’s Orient*, 47.

⁹⁴ Blunt, *The People of Turkey*, viii.

authenticity of their accounts. While such comparisons do not necessarily follow a gendered discussion, women writers had the advantage of gender for the gendered spaces like the harem. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's account was mostly celebrated for its novel information on the harem.⁹⁵ In the nineteenth century, Julia Pardoe was the most outspoken traveller to make a similar contrast between her accounts and men's, especially when she mentions a French traveller, whom she does not name, and says that his assertions on the harem life "like many others in which he has indulged, would be comic were it not wicked"⁹⁶

Travelling as a genre was not static; it changed over time not only in narrative style but also in subject matter. In the eighteenth century, travellers were appreciated on the condition that they bring home useful information about the foreign world.⁹⁷ As the genre developed, what constituted "useful" information changed. It has already been mentioned above that within the scope of useful information, women were given the customs and manners, but this was not the only reason that women wrote about them. There was also a demand for such information. Women being allowed to write about it is one half of the equation but moreover, it was also a topic that publishers as well as the readership demanded to read about. Fanny Janet Blunt, as a writer who published towards the end of the nineteenth century, wrote about many topics from administration to agriculture which shows that certain limitations on women's writing were not operating as strongly by that time, compared to the eighteenth century. However, Blunt also dedicates a chapter to women in Turkey and she makes the demand she received

⁹⁵ Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 276.

⁹⁶ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 120.

⁹⁷ Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 63-64.

for it explicit in the book.⁹⁸ This brings forth another side of travel writing which is that it was a business. These people were travellers, but they were also writers who wanted to get published. With the pressure of publishing comes the need to conform to what the public wants to read about, and the public wanted to read about the women and the harem in the Oriental world.

To see the public's ever-present interest in women, it is enough to browse through a couple of travel books from the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. To understand the reason for it, however, requires a more in-depth analysis of the different pressures and discourses at work in the nineteenth-century Britain. In the comparisons of the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries, women had a big part, mostly, not as actors of such conversation but as objects of it. That is to say, the state of women in other parts of the world and what rights they had become important to the public in Britain because it was considered an indicator of the civilisation or development of the nations. Britain, more often than not, came up superior as opposed to other parts of the world.

The subject of women was a medium for a broader talk of morality. As Turner explains:

the dominant theme of this discourse is sexual morality, and its prevailing tendency is to associate Britain's international supremacy with the allegedly superior position of British women, who demonstrate more virtue and generate more respect than women in any other country.⁹⁹

Through women, there was a tendency to make remarks on the whole of society in order to make a case for or against that nation and usually to prove British

⁹⁸ Blunt, *The People of Turkey*, 110.

⁹⁹ Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 102.

superiority. The harem, as accepted by the Orientalist discourse, was a place of sexual fantasies so it proved the most fruitful example for this discussion.

An interesting diversion here is the fact that this is not strictly an Orientalist approach. That is to say, there was a tendency to make this comparison not only with women in the Orient but with women elsewhere in the world as well. Turner refers to Wollstonecraft's experience in Scandinavia where she expresses her concerns for the "oppression" and "ignorance" of Scandinavians and defines them as "brutish" and "promiscuous."¹⁰⁰ Using a similar language both for Oriental and Scandinavian women shows that this pride in British morality is not strictly orientalist. In fact, it is related to national identity. However, Daniel and Hourani argue that there is a different reason for the interest in the harem when it came to the Orient. According to them, "the harem was appealing and, at the same time, threatening because it seemed an alternative to the Western ...model of sexuality."¹⁰¹

Additionally, women were central to the talks of morality which was seen central to civilisation. The connection between a woman's face and her morality was explained in Chapter 2. With that understanding, the face of a woman gained a different importance. The face of a woman was telling of her morality. To such an understanding of beauty and morality, oriental women were confusing which is one of the reasons nineteenth century travellers spent so much time and effort focusing on women and the harem. According to Grewal:

The veil and the harem were fascinating to European culture because they stood for the opacity that they believed marked what was radically different

¹⁰⁰ Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 487.

¹⁰¹ Melman, *Women's Orient*, 61.

from Western culture. To remove these was to civilise the colonies, the first step toward creating a pacified, unthreatening, transparent populace...¹⁰²

The veils (*yaşamaklık*) covering women's faces, and the harem literally keeping Western men out makes the transparency disappear. For the western society, the unknown is not understandable.

Furthermore, in the context of colonialism, the veil and the harem add to the power dynamics between the East and the West. From a psychological understanding, keeping the East unknown and unseen not only makes it threatening but also powerful. In a discussion about the controversial ban of the veil in France, Joan Scott draws attention to this psychological aspect of women wearing the veil in the context of colonialism. While making a point of connecting the present sentiments in France about the veil with its colonial past in Algeria, Scott points out that the veil stands for the failure on the part of the colonial powers. Quoting from psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, Scott points out this power dynamics with the following: "This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the coloniser. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself."¹⁰³ From the same perspective, and in line with the orientalist narrative, Scott quotes General Bugeaud, who complains that "The Arabs elude us ... because they conceal their women from our gaze."¹⁰⁴

In orientalism, too, similar kind of connections are made between the East and West in terms of going beyond that imaginary limit where the East presents itself to the Westerner. The stereotypical narrative includes words like penetration,

¹⁰² Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 50.

¹⁰³ Frantz Fanon qtd in Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 160.

¹⁰⁴ Scott, *Politics of the Veil*, 55.

passions, possessed, ravished, embraced, and domesticated while describing the Orient.¹⁰⁵ Joan Scott draws attention to the same situation in the case of France where words like disrobing, unveiling, and penetration were used in relation to Algeria.¹⁰⁶ The sexual undertones of these words are ever present in such descriptions. Therefore, aesthetics, women and morality are themes that are so interwoven that it becomes difficult to talk about one without the other.

While there were comparisons with the states of women in other parts of the world, the state of women in England was as explained in Chapter 2. In such a state, and along with the already established tradition of comparison, it is not surprising that women travellers themselves were also interested in the state of women. So, while there may be pressure from the public to write about Oriental women, there was also an interest on the part of the travellers themselves. They also wanted to know what rights Oriental women had and usually it was the sexual freedom that drew their attention the most.

So far, as a continuous subject of interest to women travellers, why they chose to write about women has been discussed. A more important question of how they wrote about them will be discussed below. In terms of gender discussions for travel writing, this narrative style presents one of the biggest differences between men and female travellers. As discussed above, the topics they chose to talk about may be the same for men and women, but the way of their individual discussion gives more insight into the differences between them and allows us to see how women operated within the colonial and oriental discourses in comparison to men.

¹⁰⁵ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 54.

¹⁰⁶ Scott, *Politics of the Veil*, 55.

One of the first aspects of interest for women travellers is the harem and all the sexual implications it carries. However, women's descriptions of the harem are often different than typical oriental depiction and they offer a less sensual picture of it. For women travellers, harem is where they were received by the lady of the house where they got a glimpse into their private life. It mostly involved the lady of the house, other wives of the husband, if he had more than one wife, children, and slaves. The women dined and chatted in the harem while the men were received in the *selamlık* part of the house. Such instances and descriptions are found in almost all women travellers from Henrietta Liston to Julia Pardoe to Agnes Ramsay.

In one of Henrietta Liston's visits, she is invited to the *Kaimakam*'s harem. Liston carefully observes the women that she comes in contact with, as they do the same. Her account perfectly portrays the curiosity that both parties have about the other. As the Turkish ladies in the harem pay attention to Liston's corset, Liston also describes their dress in detail. As one of the earliest travellers who visited Turkey after Lady Wortley Montagu, Liston is the traveller who refers to her the most. True to that habit of hers, she refers to Lay Montagu here as she compares the lady of the harem to that of Lady Montagu's Fatima but finds her less than: "she was neither young, nor handsome – but she was superbly dressed."¹⁰⁷

Agnes Ramsay, on the other hand, visited less aristocratic places as she mostly travelled through villages. But of course, she got invitations to the harems as well. In one of her visits, she meets the son of the house in the harem, along with his wife. Like Liston, Ramsay pays attention to their dress as well and notes the "ugly red dressing-gowns" they had on top of their usual Turkish dress which was

¹⁰⁷ Liston, *The Turkish Journals*, 165.

“evidently European importations.”¹⁰⁸ As they are invited to a sort of gathering at another house, Ramsay witnesses an elder lady getting ready as she puts on eye make-up and makes note of her jewellery too. At some point, children, who had been vaccinated for smallpox by an elderly woman, are checked for progress. Perhaps the most stereotypically oriental example of a harem visit might come from Ramsay as she witnesses the dance performance of a dancing girl in the harem at the women’s gathering. But even then, the dancing girl does not live up to the oriental descriptions she has received as she says that “...anything less like the Oriental dancing girl of my imagination it would be difficult to conceive.”¹⁰⁹ Noting that she does not find Turkish dancing girls talented, Ramsay finally describes a dinner scene where she gets close to oriental narrative and that is when she refers to the amount of food consumed at the table. At one point, she says to herself “only one thing now is lacking to my satisfaction ... and that is the cream tart of the *Arabian Nights*.”¹¹⁰ After a very long dinner of eight to nine courses, which she makes sure to point out, Ramsay takes her leave.

While observing and writing about harem, women travellers are concerned with other aspects of the life of Turkish women and that is freedom and rights that they have. They pay attention to the dynamics of the relationship between husband and wife and children. It is true that while doing that, they fall victim to some of the same classic Orientalist discourses. For example, Julia Pardoe gives the impression that the women in harem do not have much to do:

[They] sit under the covering of the *tandour*, passing the beads of a perfumed chaplet rapidly through the fingers arranging and re-arranging the head-dress

¹⁰⁸ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 132.

¹⁰⁹ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 138.

¹¹⁰ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 151.

and ornaments—or to put on the *yashmac* and *feridjhe*, and sally forth, accompanied by two or three slaves, to pay visits to favourite friends.¹¹¹

The familiar concept of seeing the people in the East as lazy people who have nothing productive to do is a classic example of Orientalist and imperialist narrative, and Pardoe cannot help but add to that herself. However, overall, she is a very careful observer and is very aware of the fallacies that are spread by the Europeans which she herself criticises time and again. She continues her description of women in the harem by likening them to “caged birds occasionally set free” and therefore they “do not know how to use their liberty” even when they have it.¹¹² Here, what she refers to is a physical sense of liberty in that women rarely leave the harem, which is similar, in a sense, to that of English women who are also given the private sphere of social life.

There is another sense to the liberty for women travellers and instead of the physical meaning, this time it refers to the rights that Turkish women have or do not have. They compare and contrast those rights with men and women in England since comparison was a big part of travel writing, as it was explained above. For the women in the harem, there is one freedom that Pardoe draws attention to and that is the women’s right to deny her husband entrance to harem. While acknowledging that a man has the right to enter his wife’s apartments anytime he wishes, Pardoe notes that “should he, on passing to his apartment, see slippers at the foot of the stairs, he cannot, under any pretence, intrude himself in the harem: it is a liberty that every woman in the Empire would resent.”¹¹³ The same liberty is a topic of particular interest to female travellers because most of them makes sure

¹¹¹ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 32-33.

¹¹² Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 34-35.

¹¹³ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 101.

to mention it. Agnes Ramsay also notes that putting pair of shoes at the door “implying that there are visitors within, is usually a sufficient bar” to the entrance of the husband.¹¹⁴ This example of a woman denying her own husband is a stark contrast to the constructed version of the harem, especially in most paintings of the time, where the despotic Turkish men rule.

On the subject of freedom, Pardoe goes on to contradict herself. Even though she thinks Turkish women resemble caged birds, she then claims them to be the “freest individuals in the Empire.”¹¹⁵ However, reading liberty in two senses, one being physical and the other more metaphorical, makes it more logical. Pardoe expresses this other sense of liberty as “the real position” of Turkish women.¹¹⁶ This position is not one that is always protected by law, although there are certain rights given to Turkish women by law. Pardoe is more concerned with the socially accepted behaviour for Turkish women and what they can and cannot do in their interactions with their husbands. She draws attention to being permitted “to expostulate, to urge, even to insist on any point wherein they may feel an interest; nor does an Osmanli husband ever resent the expressions of his wife” and the fact that “a Turkish woman consults no pleasure save her own when she wishes to walk or drive, or even to pass a short time with a friend.”¹¹⁷

Other travellers, too, comment on the freedom that Turkish women have. Fanny Janet Blunt generally mentions that a Turkish woman has a will of her own and is generally free.¹¹⁸ Agnes Ramsay was often invited into houses of villagers in

¹¹⁴ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 100.

¹¹⁶ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 100.

¹¹⁷ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 100-101.

¹¹⁸ Blunt, *The People of Turkey*, 110.

Anatolia and lists many interactions showing the family dynamics. In one of them, the husband comes home and delivers the day's earning to his wife.¹¹⁹ In another, she mentions that sometimes wife is "master of her husband" while also noting that it is exceptional.¹²⁰

Descriptions of Turkish women and harem by women travellers give the place a new understanding. In women's descriptions, instead of becoming a place to fulfil fantasies it becomes a place of social interaction which is divided based on gender. Almost all female travellers have an account of a visit to the harem of one pasha or another and all of them depict it as a domestic place. Henrietta Liston, for example, talks about exchanging presents with women in her visit to a harem.¹²¹ The fact that many travellers like Fanny Janet Blunt, W. M. Ramsay and Julia Pardoe attest that polygamy is not a common practice also adds to this normalising of the harem.

The normalising process is a nineteenth-century feature of travel writing and according to Billie Melman this process "banished the exotic, to recreate the harem in the image of the middle-class 'home': domestic, feminine and autonomous."¹²² It is true that by seeing the harem in this new light it creates a familiarity between the Orient and the West and this familiarity is put forward by women travellers. Melman also argues that this is the strongest challenge that women travellers present to Orientalist and patriarchal rhetoric because women represent a familiarity and sympathy with the other.¹²³ The sympathy that they feel towards Turkish

¹¹⁹ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 31.

¹²⁰ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 111.

¹²¹ Liston, *The Turkish Journals*, 195.

¹²² Melman, *Women's Orient*, 101.

¹²³ Melman, *Women's Orient*, 17.

women is clear in the way they talk about them and the words that they choose when it comes to Turkish women because they clearly make distinctions between Turkish men and women.

Ever present in their writing, there is a dichotomy in their narrative when it comes to how they refer to Turkish women. While they feel a sense of sympathy and bond with Turkish women, they follow an Orientalist narrative as well. The tendency to generalise the characteristics of a people in the first place is an Orientalist approach in and of itself but that is what makes women travellers interesting. They hold two contrasting narratives at the same time. Most of the times, the good qualities they want to emphasise in Turkish people are mentioned via Turkish women while men get the criticism or there is no gender implied in more general comments. Marianne Young Postans' writings in *Our Camp in Turkey and the Way to It* is by far the most imperialist and orientalist example among female writers. She explicitly dedicates a chapter of her commentary on Turkey and makes general remarks about the 'Turk'. Writing at the time of the Crimean War and commenting on the state of the country, she says that "the Turk, indolent by habit, with his intelligence dormant ... is not easily to be awakened from his lethargy."¹²⁴ The remarks about the so-called lethargy of the people are found all over her writings, often repeating the same adjectives to describe people as "stolid" or "apathetic."¹²⁵ The use of 'he' pronouns here is clearly not a gender specific term; however, Postans makes sure to make a differentiation later on to keep women apart from men. Therefore, it is clear that what she refers to as the 'Turk' is generally

¹²⁴ Marianne Young Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey and the Way to It* (London: John Edward Taylor, 1854), 304.

¹²⁵ Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 69, 303.

referring to the men among the ‘Turk’. The way she sees it, with many westerners coming into İstanbul due to war:

Between the Turkish ladies and our generous-hearted Englishwomen intercourse will arise, friendships commence. The Mussulmans and Circassians will see, wonder at, and at length desire, not only to enjoy the freedom, but to imitate the habits of these Christian ladies.¹²⁶

The most important point here is the fact that she sees this change coming from women, both English and Turkish. She sees a connection forming between Turkish and English women and, true to her imperialist views, believes that English women will better the lives of Turkish women to the point that “the force and pressure from without will change the character of the Turk.”¹²⁷ While other travellers usually carry imperialist and orientalist notions, they do not usually outright mention them like Postans; rather, it shows in smaller nuances. It is because she is so direct with the connections she makes between the influence of English women on Turkish women that the sentence above presents a very good example of how women travel writers operated within the orientalist narrative of travel writing but also found ways to go around the patriarchal elements of it.

The best example of the sympathy British travellers felt for Turkish women comes from Julia Pardoe. For the most part, Pardoe has a sympathetic view of Turkish people anyway, although, that is not to say she does not have her criticism. Throughout her writing Pardoe pays attention to the dynamics of the interaction between a European traveller and the Eastern people. That is why she understands it the best. For instance, she is aware of the different point of views between a westerner and an easterner when she says that “I never lay my head upon my pillow,

¹²⁶ Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 309.

¹²⁷ Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 311.

but I am grateful to Providence that I was not born in Turkey, while the fair Osmanlis in their turn pity the Frank women.”¹²⁸ She is acknowledging the fact that people from these two cultures do not understand one another’s culture fully and that is why they are grateful to not be like the ‘other’. Unlike most other travellers, Pardoe understands that it goes both ways.

Pardoe also acknowledges the differences between her culture and the Turkish culture, and she immediately sets herself apart from the culture she observes when she starts her observations by referring to herself as “a European eye.”¹²⁹ However, this does not stop her from forming connections between herself along with European women in general, and Turkish ones. This is most explicitly seen when she refers to them as “the eastern ladies ... with their fair European sister.”¹³⁰ The connection of the kind of a sisterhood is never as explicitly voiced as Pardoe does here. While other women may feel sympathy for the Turkish women, find them “polite” as W. M. Ramsay does Pardoe almost accepts them as one of her own.¹³¹

Not all travellers had the same tendency to form connections. Some of them, like Fanny Janet Blunt chose to point out the differences between them. Blunt makes a similar comment with Marianne Young Postans when she says that “the women are content with their lot and in their ignorance and helplessness do not try, like the Christian women, to better their condition by their individual exertions.”¹³² While she and Postans point out the same difference between Turkish women and

¹²⁸ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 119.

¹²⁹ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 3.

¹³⁰ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 33.

¹³¹ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 59.

¹³² Blunt, *The People of Turkey*, 91.

English women, Postans is looking at a future where she sees Turkish women eventually resembling English ones. Blunt, on the other hand, stops her commentary on the clear difference that she sees between them and does not try to find some way around it where a connection might be formed.

The way these female travellers talk about the women and harem may differ from individual to individual; that is the nature of travel writing. It is already an individual experience where that much is expected. What remains the same is that by talking about women the way they do they form a common narrative on some level that differs from stereotypical orientalist narrative. The dynamics of travel writing and how women were operating in it have been explained above and the way they talk about women is an example of how they go back and forth. On one hand, they cannot help but write with an orientalist mindset. Whether they do so because they also feel that way or because it's the only way they are allowed to write at all is a hard question to answer. On some level, they must all feel a sort of superiority. In all of their comparisons, even in their most sympathetic approach, they end up having the upper hand, like being the object of envy for the Easterners, being their educators and saviours and so on. On the other hand, female travellers themselves feel a similar kind of oppression at home that they can relate to. It does not mean to say that they live in similar conditions, the two cultures are different from one another in many ways. However, a similar kind of patriarchal rule applies both in the Ottoman Empire and in England. Women already live in a world of hierarchy where they are seen as inferior to men and what travelling does is allow travellers to extend this hierarchy to people of the foreign lands that they visit. Hence, the women inferior at home become superior in the Orient. That is why the

feeling of superiority and orientalist narratives are almost inevitable in all travel writers, no matter how sympathetic they feel. And that also explains how women cannot escape orientalism no matter how much sympathy they feel towards women in the East.

Women travellers still recognise the women in the Orient as experiencing similar limitations, which helps form the bond between each other. Those limitations are what Blunt is referring to when she says that Christian women are trying to better their circumstances. The fact that she thinks Turkish women are not trying, which is an idea fed by orientalist narratives which, paradoxically, in turns causes her to feed her own orientalist thoughts, is what opens the space for that feeling of superiority. The sympathy towards and superiority over the people of the Ottoman Empire that the women travellers feel, put them in a contradictory position again. These two opposite experiences act on them and create this tension in their writing where they cannot decidedly become one or the other.

CHAPTER 4

Landscape and Aesthetics

Landscape does not become a central topic to travel writers, but it is ever present in their writings and in small commentary made in passings to the point that it stands out as a continuous element of travellers' narratives. It does not take up as much space as other topics such as the harem, religion or manners but its continuous presence opens up space to reveal more about the imperialist and orientalist ideas and women's relation with them than these bigger topics. It operates as the setting where the East is located as opposed to the West, as an extension of timelessness where the superiority of the West is reiterated, and as a place to be occupied by the West. That being said, for female travellers it turns into a whole other dynamic through which women gain authority. Nature and aesthetic discussions continue the gendered nature of romanticism, travel writing and orientalist narratives, thus allowing a different discourse to take place for women. By using the landscape as such, women make up space for themselves in a rhetoric that was, as expected, originally designated for men.

Romanticism, travel, women and landscape are intertwined in ways that develop so naturally as a concept that it is hard to set them apart. The concepts of the picturesque, sublime and beautiful, and the search for them was central to Romantic literature.¹³³ The nostalgia of the ancient ruins, the nature, and the landscape become the poet's sources of muse. The feeling of nostalgia, the

¹³³ Butler, "Travel Writing," 395.

experience of sublime and the picturesque are at the core of this genre.¹³⁴ What starts out as an element of a literary genre finds its way into travel accounts of the nineteenth-century as well.

In romanticism, travelling was done for an artistic purpose, in pursuit of a sublime feeling as nature inspired the poet. In travel writing, coupled with orientalism, the source of inspiration became the East, so much so that it was seen as if it existed for the Western artist. Flaubert talks of Egypt as having an “immense décor of theatre, made for us.”¹³⁵ Kabbani also describes the way Romantics saw the East as a “landscape through which their heroes could move.”¹³⁶

Towards the nineteenth century, travel became available for a larger part of society but even as the genre kept changing, the search for the picturesque remained the same. It is seen in the way almost every little scenery is described. ‘Picturesque’ and ‘sublime’ are popular words that are repeated over and over again to describe landscapes and even people. Surely, the terminology might have stayed in use, but their implications are bigger than the words themselves. In the way they are used, they become part of the orientalist and colonialist discourse of travel writing in the nineteenth century.

One of the first functions of such descriptions is that they romanticise the landscape, in this case, the East. Considering the starting point of the terminology in Romanticism, a picturesque landscape is a place of inspiration, emotion and

¹³⁴ See Inderpal Grewal’s discussion of the features of nostalgia, sublime and the aesthetic in relation to travel writing in *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996) and *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

¹³⁵ Kabbani, *Women’s Orient*, 72.

¹³⁶ Kabbani, *Women’s Orient*, 30.

escapism which is very convenient for the traveller. By describing the East as a picturesque place, they are romanticising it in the same way a poet would romanticise nature. Romantic poets did that as a celebration of nature over industrialisation, emotion over strict rationality and were criticised for escaping into nature from real life problems.¹³⁷ Aligning the East with nature adds to the stereotypical perception of it as a mystic place. In orientalism East is already seen as “‘feminised’, deemed passive, submissive, exotic...”¹³⁸ Travellers do not hold back when talking about the East anyway but by such descriptions they get to deliver the same message without having to not need to spell it out. They reiterate the conception of an irrational East where men act on their desires rather than logic.

Romanticising or mystifying the landscape happens in two ways: they can be subtle about by keeping to ‘picturesque’ descriptions or they can be more direct in admitting to the mystic air of the place. In Pardoe’s account, for example, the picturesque scenery begins from the beginning of the book as she describes the port of İstanbul. But even before that Pardoe does not try to hide the admiration she already feels towards the city before arriving there. Throughout her book, such descriptions come up over and over again. The remains of a palace that she sees are picturesque; the crowd of people as she watches the ceremony of Imperial procession is picturesque; the Maiden’s Tower in Scutari (Üsküdar) is picturesque; the Turkish cemetery that she visits and even the headstones are picturesque; and finally, the men at the festivities for The Feast of Sacrifice (Kurban Bayramı) are picturesque.¹³⁹ Many more examples can be added and almost anything in the East

¹³⁷ Seamus Perry, “Romanticism: The Brief History of a Concept,” in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 8.

¹³⁸ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 54.

¹³⁹ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 66, 124, 143, 153, 173.

can be described as picturesque. Landscape being picturesque is not an odd thing but the fact that even people become picturesque is as if placing not only the physical place but even people in this out-of-reality existence.

Pardoe's more direct references are even more striking than her subtle ones. In the very first chapter of her book, she sets the scene right away by describing the sea in İstanbul that she sees as she approaches the coast as "nothing less delightful than poetry put into action."¹⁴⁰ All of the picturesque description above could not have the same effect on the reader as this one sentence. Moreover, as she sees an interesting man on the street, she comments that "I involuntarily thought of the Jew of Shakespeare."¹⁴¹ All these constant references to poetry and plays make it so that the city and the people are unreal. However, for all her commentary, Pardoe is interestingly aware of her tendency to mystify the East along with the Orientalist narratives that travellers fall victim to. In a very direct criticism towards travellers Pardoe says that:

... the tissue of fables which, like those of Scheherazade, have created genii and enchanters *ab ovo usque ad mala*, in every account of the East. The European mind has become so imbued with ideas of Oriental mysteriousness, mysticism, and magnificence, and it has been so long accustomed to pillow its faith on the marvels and metaphors of tourists, that it is to be doubted whether it will willingly cast off its old associations and suffer itself to be undeceived.¹⁴²

While she herself keeps adding to the kind of metaphors that she complains of, Pardoe criticises the issue of mystifying the East. It is clear from her narrative that Pardoe is trying to stand out among the travellers that came before her. And she actually manages to do so because with such criticism she shows that she is not

¹⁴⁰ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 8.

¹⁴¹ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 15.

¹⁴² Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 89.

an idle traveller, and she consciously tries to break from the orientalist narrative.

She also openly explains her efforts when she says that:

The very term “Oriental” implies to European ears the concentration of romance; and I was long in the East ere I could divest myself of the same feeling. It would have been easy for me to have continued the illusion, for Oriental habits lend themselves greatly to the deceit, when the looker-on is satisfied with glancing over the surface of things; but with a conscientious chronicler this does not suffice; and, consequently, I rather sought to be instructed than to be amused and preferred the veracious to the entertaining.¹⁴³

Pardoe is constantly walking this line between orientalist traveller who does not care for the truth that is found in a deeper understanding of the orient and so deceives the reader and the one who chooses to give the truth at the risk of losing her audience. In the meantime, she herself switches between the orientalist and the critic. Such dilemma shows itself in commentary like “I would not remove one-fold of the graceful drapery which veils the time-hallowed statue of Eastern power and beauty.”¹⁴⁴

Other travellers are not as direct as Pardoe in their commentary but then again, they are not as ambitious as Pardoe in trying to stand out. Beginning by describing the sea as “picturesque” upon her arrival, Marianne Young Postans achieves a similar effect throughout her book. It is not just picturesque but the way she romanticises the countryside that draws attention. Searching for the Sweet Waters of Europe (Kağıthane), she describes what she sees as “a dream from Boccaccio...” and continues that since her words are not enough to do it justice the reader should fill in the blank spots “with the full force of poetic fancy.”¹⁴⁵ The fact that a poetic imagination is required to understand the kind of beauty she is talking

¹⁴³ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 106-07.

¹⁴⁴ Pardoe, *The City of the Sultan*, 108.

¹⁴⁵ Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 44.

about is telling on its own but also the scene she sees is again likened to not real life but a literary element. She continues this narrative of a mythical place.

Spending years in Turkey on an archaeological quest with her husband, Agnes Ramsay offers the most pastoral imagery as she travels through the villages of Anatolia the most. She has a more informative approach compared to other travellers but even she begins her narrative with a note to the reader in the preface, saying that "... the great charm of Turkish travel is that romantic and quaint experiences come almost daily to those who look for them."¹⁴⁶ Even if she does not use such a poetic language as others, she makes sure to make up for the lack of it by this small reminder to the reader. The most notable example comes from her experience at the river of Ibriz which comes from a chapter titled 'The God in Glen'. She recounts a mystic experience with the "spirit of the waters" who almost materialises out of nowhere and when she asks about rag-covered bushes that she sees the old woman tells her that "it is a holy place."¹⁴⁷ While the old woman disappears, she continues to quote from a ninth-century Arab geographer to talk about the importance of the place. She concludes the whole chapter with a mysterious closing. Speaking of rock graves, she says that there hangs an "atmosphere of awe and mystery" where you feel "a shiver down your neck."¹⁴⁸ This is not romanticising the landscape, but she is definitely playing on the mystery of the place although this is not so unusual or unexpected for a description of an ancient tomb.

¹⁴⁶ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, preface.

¹⁴⁷ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 163.

¹⁴⁸ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 167.

Perhaps the most striking example of romanticising the land comes from Fanny Janet Blunt. It becomes noteworthy in her writing because for the most part of her book, Blunt avoids literary elements or a distinctly metaphorical narrative. She is mostly very straight in giving the information she wishes to give and keeps it simple. However, a change occurs in her voice whenever she starts talking about either the harem or the Eastern lands. At one time, when describing a rose-harvest in the town of Kezanlık, admittedly talking about not the Turkish but Bulgarian inhabitants, Blunt uncharacteristically makes a reference to the rose and the nightingale imagery that is such a classic example of romanticism in Turkish literature which is said to be carried to English literature by Lady Mary Montagu¹⁴⁹. The exact description goes as follows: “The field was thickly planted with rose bushes, with their rich harvest of half-open dew-laden buds. The nightingales, in flights, hovered over them, disputing their possession with the light-hearted Bulgarian harvester.”¹⁵⁰ She goes on romanticising the land along with the people in it when she describes a scene as follows:

The whole picture was so bright, and happy, in such harmony with the luxuriant beauty surrounding it, that I was perfectly fascinated by it, and felt almost envious of those happy beings (as I then thought them) the careless simple children of nature. Their happiness was not for long.¹⁵¹

The “happiness not being for long” is a reference to the events in the Balkans at the end of the nineteenth century. It could be that such a romantic narrative adds to the impact on the reader of the destruction she then hints at. But it is certainly out of the ordinary for a writer like Blunt to do.

¹⁴⁹ Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 30.

¹⁵⁰ Blunt, *The People of Turkey*, 197.

¹⁵¹ Blunt, *The People of Turkey*, 198.

By turning the East into a romantic place, the travellers are also placing it at a distance from industrialisation and from development, which is understood as civilisation. As mentioned above, in romanticism, picturesque and sublime were terms that were used for describing nature which was placed in opposition to industrialisation. Instead of industrial developments, romantic poets appreciated the aesthetic beauty of nature. Ancient ruins were also celebrated as nostalgia was a big part of romanticism. Once again, placing the East in a picturesque nature implies the same kind of relativity with the nostalgia of the poets and the backwardness that the Orientalists attributed to the East. Johannes Fabian explains this behaviour as Western travellers denying “the contemporaneity of different cultures, coexisting in the same historical moment, and instead imagine the alien cultures they encounter as inhabiting the distant past of their own culture’s history or prehistory.”¹⁵² Describing the landscape as picturesque is a more subtle way of implying the same kind of denial of the traveller.

Another way of achieving a sense of backwards-East was to suggest that it was ever static. In orientalism “the Orient is considered to be essentially no different in the eighteenth century than it was in the twelfth, trapped in antiquity far behind the modern developments of the ‘enlightened’ West.”¹⁵³ This is true for the travellers who behave within the orientalist framework, not only in terms of scientific developments or cultural changes as McLeod considers, but also in terms of physical space. East was seen and described as being the same throughout centuries. This is partly due to the travellers’ tendency to refer to or quote from

¹⁵² Johannes Fabian quoted in Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 335.

¹⁵³ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 52.

other known travellers who came before them, but it is also explicitly stated as such. Such description worked in a way to present an East that would not change at all as if it was literally frozen in time.

Blunt presents a nice example to the kind of situation mentioned above. When talking about the seraglio, Blunt dedicates a lot of time and space to the “pleasure-grounds” that is the gardens. In a lengthy description Blunt draws the picture as follows:

... here orchards and vineyards, weighed down with their rich burdens, lend colour to the scene... Banks of flowers carry the thoughts back to the hanging gardens of Babylon. Nature and art have ornamented these delightful spots with lakes, fountains, cascades, aviaries, menageries, and pavilions. ‘Here in cool grot’ every opportunity is offered for love-making, and if this one is already engaged, there are highly romantic nooks, concealed by over-hanging boughs, that will answer the purpose as well.¹⁵⁴

With one single description, Blunt actually manages to refer to two cliches of orientalist narrative. By referring to the gardens of Babylon she creates a time frame for the reader that is outside their contemporary world and places the East back in time. The rest of the description then adds to the irrational nature of the orient. “Love-making nooks” hint at the lustful sultans and the fact that this is the garden of the Seraglio makes the connection even stronger.

A similar example comes from the anonymous writer of the book titled *My Travels*. While describing the hill with a view of the plain of Troy as she calls it, she compares the scene that is before her with the Trojan War. Interestingly she notes that the scene she witnesses must have been “different from what this plain must have presented three thousand years ago!” However, she continues by saying

¹⁵⁴ Blunt, *The People of Turkey*, 245.

that “the women were washing their clothes at the river, just as they are described by Homer.”¹⁵⁵ Considering the writer of this account has a tendency to show off her knowledge of history, it does not sound surprising that she keeps referring to the Trojan War throughout her description of this hill. It is noteworthy, however, that the women in this village, indirectly life in this village, still go on as described by Homer thousands of years ago. As fitting to orientalist narrative, oriental life shows no sign of progress to the traveller.

Henrietta Liston stands out when it comes to landscape because unlike other female travellers, her portrayal of the land is cultivated, filled with trees and greenery. What Liston does instead, is refer to Lady Wortley Montagu and her observations. While describing Belgrade, for example, she refers to her saying that “the waving country, the smiling vineyard, beautiful fountain, and deep green verdure, so well described by Lady Wortley Montagu, still exist...” and then continues the description of the scenery by adding that “Lady Wortley Montagu was right.”¹⁵⁶ Montagu’s description of the place being right is essentially implying that it has not changed since Montagu’s visit.

There is similar kind of reference in Marianne Postans’ account but while Liston is more subtle in her tone, Postans, again, takes a more direct approach. Talking about Büyükdere, Postans, too refers to Lady Montagu. She comments that “Lady Wortley's letters are always charming; and as Oriental life for ages knows no progression, her pictures are as true to reality now as when she sketched

¹⁵⁵ Anonymous, *My Travels*, 155.

¹⁵⁶ Liston, *Turkish Journals*, 138.

them.”¹⁵⁷ It is worth mentioning that while Lady Montagu travelled in 1716 and was published in 1763, Postans’ accounts are published in 1854. There is a considerable time difference between the two publications.

While landscape helps portray the East as an archaic place, it does not always have to be in the literal sense of the word. The earlier quote from Pardoe where she talks about the “time-hallowed statue of Eastern power and beauty” is a perfect example of this kind of narrative. Here, although she does not necessarily describe a landscape, Pardoe quite literally calls the East a statue that is void of time. Just as statues remain the same in time, East, too, stays the same both in physical sense and development-wise.

Apart from its association with romanticism, descriptions of the land and scenery in travel writing can be more direct in their colonial implications. As mentioned above, travellers were inclined to appreciate the beauty of the landscape in the lands that they travelled. However, that appreciation was an extension of colonial interests. According to Grewal, travellers’ appreciation of the beauty of the landscape is related to its potential for colonisation. By the logic that “no object could be beautiful that did not conform to the English ideals of usefulness and order or submission to such order” Grewal argues that calling a landscape beautiful was suggesting domesticating and colonising that land.¹⁵⁸ In line with Grewal’s argument, travellers freely admit their wish to see a particular place occupied by

¹⁵⁷ Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 77.

¹⁵⁸ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 44.

the English or that they pity that the potential of the lands is being wasted by the lazy people of the East.

Another argument of Grewal's is the nakedness of the landscape that is, the lack of people in it. Description of landscapes often had no people in it, again, emphasising the wasted potential of the land. Grewal rightly makes the conclusion that "there were far fewer representations in nineteenth-century travel narratives of 'Eastern' women working on farms and fields than there were of Englishwomen, although such work was done by peasant women all over the world."¹⁵⁹ By giving such description of the landscape travellers were both portraying the 'laziness' of the Eastern people and showing to their readers that the potential of the land is wasting away. This kind of narrative was central to colonialism. It was a way of justifying the intervention of the colonists. Supporters of colonialism, including travellers, saw the West as a saviour and a champion for development. They were coming in to rescue both the people living in these lands and the lands themselves from the people living there.

Liston's work has its share of this kind of narrative. Liston's interest in the scenery is give or take the same as the next traveller. What sets her apart is her interest in botany. In one instance, she lists the names of different species she sees on her walk around Belgrade. With Liston, the landscape does not become orientalist by romanticising but by how people are added or taken out from the scenery. Here for example, while talking about the scenery she mentions:

parties of Turks, in the heat of the day, and even Greeks and Armenians, sitting beneath the shade of the *Platanus*, often near a fountain, smoking and looking

¹⁵⁹ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 44.

at the water, without appearing to have any further idea than that of passing time.¹⁶⁰

In another example when talking about Sariyer, she mentions how “the whole of this tract of country” is “very thinly inhabited, presented a beautiful and fruitful scenery, diversified by hills, dales, and streams and producing the best crops of grain we had seen.”¹⁶¹ By such descriptions, Liston is adding to the narrative of lazy people who do not know the value of their land.

There are, of course, other examples of this. Marianne Young Postans is among the more direct travellers. According to her “one of the finest scenes” in Turkey was “the great encampment of the British forces.”¹⁶² It is interesting that of all the scenery she sees in Turkey, seeing British forces in Scutari is among the finest. She later becomes even more direct in her wish to see the land occupied by British. In the closing chapter where she shares some of her thoughts about Turkey, she talks about the lands saying that:

...the soil teems with the capabilities of produce; where wild herbs and flowers now carpet the earth with their brightness, crops could be produced in far greater abundance than would be required for the use of Turkey... the peasant-agriculturist cares only to labour for the supply of actual want.¹⁶³

Following on her commentary she expresses her wish to see the land colonised:

... we may now look at no very distant epoch to the settlement of French and English as colonists in Turkey, and that, under their efforts and enterprise, her lands, rich and beautiful as they are, will develop to the full their long-treasured resources.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Liston, *The Turkish Journals*, 130.

¹⁶¹ Liston, *The Turkish Journals*, 161.

¹⁶² Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 57.

¹⁶³ Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 303.

¹⁶⁴ Postans, *Our Camp in Turkey*, 308.

Postan's commentary here is a great example of Grewal's observation about orientalist and colonialist narrative of travellers. She describes the landscape as being uncultivated since wild herbs cover the earth, just like Grewal's argument with orientalist narrative. There are no people pictured here making use of the land and even when they do, as Postans continues, they do not care to produce more than they need. People in the East do not use the potential of the land to its full length, therefore wasting it which adds to the colonialist narrative of justifying the act of colonising.

4.1 Women as Orientalist Travellers

All of the talk about the orientalist and colonialist implications of the description of the lands, landscape and aesthetic beauty in travel writing so far has been general information. In this half of the chapter what it means for women will be discussed because as with everything else, the gender difference implies different dynamics and meanings for women. In assuming the orientalist voice, women seemingly do not hesitate, and it is possible to find many examples of how they voice their orientalist ideas. Romanticising the landscape, placing the East in archaic times and outright wishing for it to be occupied by the West are all as common occurrences in women's writings as they are in any other orientalist writing. However, just as with the women and the harem topic, here too, female travel writers have different dynamics at play.

What makes landscape an important topic for women is that they were linked to it in ways that made them the object of aesthetic beauty and not the subject who enjoyed it. Like travel writing, the appreciation of the beauty of nature

developed as a concept in the Romantic genre and it emerged as a gendered concept. The gendering comes first of all from the fact that it was not the women who appreciated or were expected to appreciate nature. The whole discussion of aesthetics and beauty is one that is tangled up with women from the beginning, at least in the eighteenth century and according to prominent figures such Edmund Burke and William Wordsworth. This idea of a feminine aesthetic regarding what features to consider beautiful in women is the part that is mostly related to the earlier chapter discussing women in the orient. However, the conversation continues with regards to nature and natural aesthetic.

The idea of Burke's feminine beauty was discussed earlier. According to Burke, people admired great objects and they loved the things that submitted to them.¹⁶⁵ Such a description actually makes nature the 'great' object, that is the sublime, that people submit to. But there are two important points to pay attention to here. One is that, even with nature as the great object we submit to, women are automatically put in the submissive position as per Burke's earlier definition of what is considered beautiful. If men submit to nature, women submit to men because women were seen and only considered beautiful as long as they submitted, which is also discussed above along with the angel in the house trope. Second point is that the power dynamics at play here come from the fact that nature is the object of man's gaze. That automatically puts the object in a passive position.

In romanticism, what Burke describes for women, beauty, is being attributed to natural landscapes and what landscape is considered beautiful or not. Burke and Wordsworth admittedly have different ideas about this but at least for Wordsworth,

¹⁶⁵ Burke, *An Inquiry*, 229.

the beauty of the landscape comes from the connection it helps make “between men and nature.”¹⁶⁶ As such women play a similar role for Wordsworth:

...they are... the transparent medium through which the poet can reach a higher Self. Wordsworth's Lucy poems illustrate the use of the female as mediator between man and nature, helping man reach self-identity. In Wordsworth's landscape, women are often identified with nature, and they belong to this natural landscape. Landscape and women are both fertile and nurturing and exist for the same purpose as the fields, lakes, and rivers: to lead Wordsworth to a higher and more civilized Self.¹⁶⁷

Already from the beginning of the formulation of such ideas of aesthetic beauty, women are intertwined and sided with the passive nature that gets to be seen by the poet.

There is also the fact that in romanticism, it is the nature that is the object of aesthetic beauty and the subjects who get to appreciate that were men. It was the men who did the travelling and men who wrote about it. That is not to say there were no female romantic poets or travellers or to minimise their contribution to the genre, on the contrary, this paper tried to bring forward female traveller writers but as with travel writing, at the time, it was a male dominated area. Women writers and poets did exist, and even opposed to male ideas of beauty and aesthetic as is discussed by Fiona Price. But as discussed above with travel writing, women had to find their way into this genre as well. Therefore, already from the beginning women are set apart from the position of power, the position of the one who has the narrative, in relation to aesthetic appreciation.

With women's involvement in travel, this dynamic between the object and subject began to change. This change is something that Mary Pratt calls “monarch

¹⁶⁶ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 34.

¹⁶⁷ Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 34.

of all I see” trope that is attributed to the traveller regardless of gender .¹⁶⁸ According to this trope, just as with the dynamic that the veil creates, there is a “relation of domination between the seer and seen.”¹⁶⁹ Before, the seer was mostly men whether with regards to landscape or travelling. As women became travellers, they became the seer and therefore gained superiority over the object of their gaze, which is in this case the Eastern people and the landscape. Being the narrator, having the words to speak meant that their object was mute to their audience hence they could shape it into anything they wanted it to be which is the main critic towards orientalist narrative.

In their narrative women became the ‘poets’. The landscape, the East, merely became a tool to make use of, only there for the poet to appreciate and the traveller to take advantage of. In travelling and writing about the landscape women actually turned the gender dynamics of the genre around. So, for women, this orientalist and colonialist narrative has a different meaning. It is this narrative that makes them active participants of the genre. And even in that, there is some element that works against the stereotypical orientalist approach.

Women do not stay within very clear-cut boundaries. Just as with the harem narrative, in female travellers’ talk of the landscape, women in the East break out of the stereotype. That is to say, while the landscape is often described unpopulated, at times where it is populated, it is usually women working the fields and not the men. Agnes Ramsay, for example, while describing the village life that she saw, says that “the field labour, ploughing, sowing, reaping, etc., is done by the women”

¹⁶⁸ Qtd in Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 23.

¹⁶⁹ Qtd in Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 23.

and that “it is not uncommon to see the less indolent men strolling about, or sitting on a log or stone.”¹⁷⁰ According to her account, “the women commence work at daylight, and by-and-by their lords stroll into the field in a leisurely way, and begin to help.”¹⁷¹ In her description, women are seen doing the work and even when men do any work they are described as doing it in a ‘leisurely way’. Moreover, Ramsay goes to call women hard-working in another account when talking about Yuruk women:

The Yuruk women work hard and waste no time, even at their meals. Several of them have babies on their backs all the time they are shearing the corn. ... One of them has had a baby since we came here. She was working with the others all day, the baby was born at night, and next day she was back working in the fields as usual, with the little creature slung in a cloth on her back.¹⁷²

Other travellers admittedly encounter less rural life, so it is less common to find such descriptions from their writings. Nevertheless, there are still some instances where they describe Turkish women working in the fields. Fanny Janet Blunt, for example, does not really depict the landscape or an act of working the field but she does mention that kind of work being carried out by women. For example, when talking about silk-worm nurseries in mulberry gardens she mentions that “it is a very tedious and laborious work, requiring great neatness and attention, and is generally undertaken by the women.”¹⁷³ In another instance, she mentions “much of the harvest” being done “by young women and girls in Roumelia and Macedonia.”¹⁷⁴ Blunt does not differentiate whether these young girls and women are Turkish women but earlier in the same chapter she does mention there are more

¹⁷⁰ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 54.

¹⁷¹ Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 55.

¹⁷² Ramsay, *Everyday Life in Turkey*, 228-29.

¹⁷³ Blunt, *People of Turkey*, 214.

¹⁷⁴ Blunt, *People of Turkey*, 213.

Muslims among them than, say Bulgaria. Therefore, it is safe to assume the women she mentions are Muslim Turkish women.

In general, however, Blunt has a different approach to Turkish women. In that, among the travellers mentioned here, she is the only one who consistently sees Turkish women as passive people, doing nothing. Despite the examples above, that approach of hers does not change when it comes to working the fields. In Blunt's view the most agricultural work that they do is in their private gardens at home rather than out in the actual fields. She describes their gardens as being "more or less cultivated... planted with roses, lettuces, and garlic; and in the gardens of the better class of houses, one may often see pretty fountains."¹⁷⁵ So, according to Blunt, Turkish women have very restricted worlds anyway, confined in their houses. She can only consider them in this private world, which at least the quotes from Ramsay show that was not always true, and that world is still described as cultivated and taken good care of.

Another example of agricultural work being done comes from the Anonymous writer of *My Travels*. While describing her journey through Dardanelles, she mentions seeing "a few quiet peasants tilling the ground."¹⁷⁶ She does not specify whether those peasants consist of women but even without mentioning them being women, the author shows the inhabitants working the field, contrary to orientalist ideas. Therefore, it is worth considering as part of this narrative.

¹⁷⁵ Blunt, *People of Turkey*, 216-17.

¹⁷⁶ Anonymous, *My Travels*, 155.

In women's writing of the oriental women in the landscape, there is an element that works against the stereotypical orientalist approach. It is true that women turn the power dynamics around and become the seer and women and the landscape in the orient become their object, but Elizabeth Bohls argues that this objectification is still something different from the stereotypes of orientalism: This time, women are not described by female travellers as erotic objects. According to Bohls, women's aestheticizing of the landscape and the women in it helps to take the focus of the conversation away from the erotic or sensual undertones of it. While presenting themselves as aesthetic subjects, female travel writers are "neutralizing Orientalist stereotypes of women, and ... re-presenting them as aesthetic rather than erotic objects."¹⁷⁷ This is actually similar to the hierarchy that was presented in the earlier chapter with regards to female travellers' role in their society and in the Orient. While they were in a subordinate position with respect to their own society, they could hold a dominant position in the Orient. A similar hierarchy applies here again where women become subjects of aesthetics only to replace oriental women with their position of being the object of male gaze.

As seen in the discussion above, while it is not a central theme, landscape can become an important tool for its underlying orientalist and colonialist implications. The existing narratives of orientalism and colonialism could be supported by travellers' descriptions of the landscape. Romanticising it, showing it as unchanging and at last seeing it as if it were waiting for occupation were ways through which travellers achieved that. Examples of female travellers doing just that were discussed above. Women could embrace this narrative in their writings to

¹⁷⁷ Qtd in Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe*, 328-29.

different degrees. Some did it in subtle descriptions of the landscape while some were more open in their wish to see the land occupied. This difference is due to the nature of the genre of travel writing as well as the nature of orientalism. In such a subjective genre, it would not be realistic to expect to see the same tendency in every writer. However, there is enough of a repetition to draw attention to the way women make use of it and the women make use of it in ways that serve them as writers. They follow the orientalist and colonialist narrative at times and choose to turn away from it at others. By doing so, women turn the power dynamics of aesthetics around to become the active participants of it rather than passive objects. In that sense, this orientalist and colonialist discourse gains a different meaning when it comes to female writers. Even then, women of the Orient add another twist to that in the way female travellers draw exceptions when it comes to them.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Studying travel writing is not an easy endeavour. It is entangled with many other topics, all of which deserve as much space in the study as travelling itself occupies. However, it is not possible to allocate the same amount of time and energy to each of them. Despite being the building blocks of the main topic and the question of this study, romanticism and aesthetics understandings of the nineteenth century are all crucial to the understanding of female travellers' writings. Topics like orientalism and colonialism are almost given in every study of travel writing, too. This study aimed at studying a selection of travellers, that are the female travellers that were understudied, while building its case on other topics like romanticism, aesthetic understanding and orientalism. The main goal was to answer the question whether female travellers reproduced or resisted orientalist narratives in their writings. Just like the problem with the entanglement of too many big topics, the answer, too, is not straight-forward. Because of the nature of travel writing, it is not possible to reach a conclusion that points to a consistent attitude. However, it is possible to find patterns that repeat themselves often enough, like the pattern found in this study where women tend to break their habits for Turkish women.

The question of female travellers' orientalist and non-orientalist tendencies is an important one whose answer could change our understanding of colonial and oriental discourse. For one, it integrates women into it, who have been, for the most part, excluded. Even Said's *Orientalism*, as significant as it was, disregarded

women for which it was criticised.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, it ignored the discrepancies in orientalist narratives which would be easier to see had women been included all along because women's writings reveal such dichotomies.¹⁷⁹ Even in men's accounts, who, as building blocks of Said's argument are more readily Orientalist in their narrative, there can be points where they go against the Orientalist norm. Women, however, are more interesting as figures operating within a dual framework between home and the Orient, and, when compared to men, perhaps more consistent in resisting the Orientalist voice. This resistance, as explained above, comes from their being women.

Female travellers, in fact all travellers, are very subjective in their choice of subject matter, travel routes, and how they choose to talk about the things they write about. Therefore, it is impossible to find unity in whatever they do, including adopting or resisting the Orientalist voice, and adopting the Orientalist voice is something that female travellers often did. As seen in the discussion above, women are no less Orientalist than any other Orientalist: they give descriptions of the people in the Orient with words borrowed from Orientalist discourse, they make use of the stereotypical Orientalist imagery and travel through the lands with an air of superiority and ignorance that is often found in Orientalists. In that sense, they do become complicit in Orientalist voice. In fact, among the women in this study people like Fanny Janet Blunt present more Orientalist approaches than not. That is to say, there is not a balanced distribution among women either.

¹⁷⁸ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 63-64.

¹⁷⁹ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 57.

Resisting the Orientalist ideas is something that is encountered from time to time, often in relation to women in the Orient. Like with the harem literature, by simply being able to engage with women, female travellers can prove Orientalist stereotypes wrong. Their description of the landscape, too, breaks the Orientalist stereotype by simply putting women in the fields. In that sense, this resistance is not done with an explicit intention to break away from Orientalist discourse; it is something that comes naturally. In other instances, it can be more intentional because despite all the Orientalist description, women cannot help and sympathise with their Oriental counterparts. They pay close attention to their rights, their clothes, their houses and daily interactions. Often, any positive trait they want to express, they do so through women while the negative ones are expressed through men. This way of describing the people is a choice that female travellers make. It is important to note that this choice and sympathy does not automatically make female travel writers anti-Orientalist. The times they do adopt an orientalist voice shows that it is not their intention to do so. They do not set out on a journey with the intention of breaking Orientalist stereotypes down. What leads them to that resistance is not the intention, but the sympathy, which leaves them in a position in between Orientalist and non-Orientalist.

The analysis of female travellers' writings shows that gender plays into Orientalism and that it can subvert orientalist logic. Just by participating in travel writing, women change the dynamics of power not only between the West and the East but also as women in a patriarchal society and literary culture. They switch positions from being passive to active participants. As a result, they not only change their position but also the position of women in the Orient. This change challenges

the existence of a unified Orientalist voice. By operating in an Orientalist system while sometimes turning away from it, women show that it is possible to simultaneously participate and to destabilise this thought. This dichotomy is the result of women's position changing between the West and the East. Therefore, reading female travellers' writings can reveal more about how gender shapes the representation of the Orient.

This research has focused on six female travellers, trying to cover a hundred-year-period with as much diversity as possible. It did so, with the intention of keeping the number to a manageable amount. However, six people cannot represent the whole century, especially considering the increased number of travellers at the time. Therefore, for a fuller picture of women's perspective of the Orient, studies should include more women from more diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the study could be furthered by taking into account the women in the Orient: it is important to see how they responded to the way they were represented in these writings.

In conclusion, female travel writing is not easy to categorise as Orientalist or not. By its very nature, it shows the complexity of the relationship between gender, culture and the other. In addition to revealing how the Orient was perceived by female travellers, these writings reveal how female travellers themselves operated in this space as themselves. Therefore, this duality reiterates the importance of travel writing as revealing as much about the travelled land, as the traveller.

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