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EXPLORING TRANSIENT IDENTITIES: DECONSTRUCTING DEPICTIONS OF GENDER
AND IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY IN THE ORIENTAL TRAVEL NARRATIVES OF
ENGLISHWOMEN, 1831-1915

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

Englishwomen who traveled to the “Orient” in the Victorian era constructed an identity that was British in its bravery, middle-class in its refinement, feminine in appearance and speech and Christian in its intolerance of Oriental heathenism. Studying Victorian female travel narratives that described journeys to the Orient provides an excellent opportunity to reexamine the diaphanous nature of the boundaries of the public/private sphere dichotomy; the relationship between travel, overt nationalism, and gendered constructions of identity, the link between geographic location and self-definition; the power dynamics inherent in information gathering, organization and production.

Englishwomen projected gendered identities in their writings, which were both “imperial” masculine and “domestically” feminine, depending on the needs of a particular location and space. The travel narrative itself was also a gendered product that served as both a medium of cultural expression for Victorian women and a tool of restraint, encouraging them to conform to societal expectations to gain limited authority and recognition for their travels even while they embraced the freedom of movement.

The terms “imperial masculinity” and “domestic femininity” are employed throughout this analysis to categorize the transient manipulation of character traits associated in Victorian society with middle- and upper-class men abroad in the empire and middle- and upper-class women who remained within their homes in Great Britain. Also stressed is the decision by female travelers to co-assert feminine identities that legitimated their imperial freedom by alluding to equally important components of their transported domestic constructions of self. Contrary to scholarship solely viewing Victorian projections of the feminine ideal as negative,

the powers underlining social determinants of gender norms will be treated as “both regulatory and productive.” Englishwomen chose to amplify elements of their domestic femininity or newly obtained imperial masculinity depending on the situation encountered during their travels or the message they wished to communicate in their travel narratives. The travel narrative is a valuable tool not only for deconstructing transient constructions of gender, but also for discovering the foundations of race and class ideologies in which the Oriental and the Orient are subjugated to enhance Englishwomen’s Orientalist imperial status and position.

This thesis is modeled on the structure of the traveling experience. In reviewing first the intellectual expectations preceding travel, the events of travel and finally the emotional reaction to the first two, a metaphoric attempt to better understand meaning through mimicry has been made. Over twenty travel narratives published by Englishwomen of varying social backgrounds, economic classes and motivations for travel between 1830 and World War I were analyzed in conjunction with letters, diaries, fictional works, newspaper articles, advice manuals, travel guides and religious texts in an effort to study the uniquely gendered nature of the Preface in female travel narratives; definitions of “travelers” and “traveling;” the manner in which “new” forms of metaphysical identification formulated what Victorian lady travelers “pre-knew” the “East” to be; the gendered nature in which female travelers portrayed their encounters with the “realities” of travel; and the concept of “disconnect,” or the “distance” between a female traveler’s expectation and the portrayed “reality” of what she experienced in the Orient.

A number of people have made this work possible and though their contributions are deeply appreciated and invaluable, it is to my life's earnest traveling companion and our small crew that I dedicate my intellectual labor.

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CHAPTER ONE: PLANNING THE JOURNEY

Introduction

“X took a pencil and marked a straight line from Constantinople across the Anatolian Plateau and the Taurus Mountains to Tarsus. Then, having stopped within measurable distance of the sea, she drew her pencil eastwards across the Euphrates to a point on the Tigris high up in the Kurdistan mountains; from here she drew another line following the Tigris to Baghdad. At this point we were coming dangerously near the sea, so turning back she marked a line in the contrary direction across the Syrian Desert to Damascus.”

“That will do for a start ...we can fill in the details when we get there.”¹

Perhaps it is because historians secretly wish they were unfettered enough from worldly cares and responsibilities to pull their own pencils from their cluttered desk drawers and chart a path through the wilderness that we study travelers who cross mountain ranges and rivers with a vigor most can not muster to cross campus greens. If this first presumption has any truth to it, then it may also be possible that those of us who study Victorian female travelers do so because we are doubly intrigued, first by the imperial adventurer and secondly by what at first glance appears to be an historical enigma, a public persona that openly admitted transgressive behavior and survived public scrutiny to publish the tale.

¹ Louisa Jebb, *By Desert Ways to Baghdad*, (London: R. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 2.

Studying female travel narratives that described journeys to the Orient in the “age of empire” provides an excellent opportunity to reexamine the diaphanous nature of the boundaries of the public/private sphere dichotomy; the relationship between travel, overt nationalism, and gendered constructions of identity; the link between geographic location and self-definition and the power dynamics inherent in information gathering, organization and production. If “every document is layered with the received account of earlier events and the cultural semantics of a particular moment,” as Frederick Cooper² correctly asserts it is, a simple implementation of reflection theory in which “a straightforward pattern of cause and effect” is attempted with the travel narrative evaluated as “a more-or-less accurate reflection of an already existing social reality” will be theoretically inadequate.³ Instead, the Victorian travel narrative will be deconstructed and studied as a medium of cultural expression; product of intellectual effort; transmitter of imperial race, gender and class ideology; tool for obtaining authority and legitimacy and an account of historical events and observations. In such a way the complex and self-fashioned imperially and domestically gendered “hidden histories”⁴ of female travelers can be revealed.

Sara Mills argues that women travel writers were “caught between the conflicting demands of the discourse of femininity and that of imperialism.”⁵ I find the term “caught” alarmingly passive and representative of a view of Englishwomen as molded by external

² Laura Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 619.

³ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 7.

⁴ Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵ Sara Mills, *Discourse of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1991), 21.

historical forces, instead of as being active negotiators of their own gendered identities and imperial ideologies. The terms “imperial masculinity” and “domestic femininity” are employed throughout this analysis to describe the transient co-assertion of character traits associated in Victorian society with middle- and upper-class men abroad in the empire and middle- and upper-class women who remained within their homes in Great Britain. Much as Inderpal Grewal explains in the case of colonial India, the Orient to which Englishwomen traveled was a “liminal space” with the potential of being a “proving ground for Englishwomen’s attempts at equality with Englishmen, their superiority to colonized men, and their ability to be a part of the project of empire conceived of as a heterosexual and masculinist project.”⁶ However, I also stress that female travelers chose to co-assert feminine identities to legitimate their imperial freedom by alluding to equally important components of their transported domestic constructions of self. Contrary to scholarship solely viewing Victorian projections of the feminine ideal as negative, the powers underlining social determinants of gender norms will be treated as “both regulatory and productive.” Englishwomen chose to amplify elements of their domestic femininity or newly obtained imperial masculinity depending on the situation at hand in their travels or the message they wished to communicate in their travel narratives.

Central to any discussion of the “Orient” and imperial power discourses like those perpetuated in travel narratives is the theoretical framework delineated in Edward Said’s book, *Orientalism*. Orientalism, according to Said, is multi-faceted and exists as a theoretical “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between “the Orient” and “the

⁶ Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 63.

Occident."⁷ In order that the "Orient" would remain manageable, conquerable and unthreatening to Europeans attempting to enlarge their colonial dominions, the "Orientalist" reduced a myriad of cultures, languages, societies and religions into a homologous, boundary-less cultural and geographical entity encapsulated in the phrase, "the Orient." Orientalism was implemented and executed by several generations of Orientalists throughout European and later American history. Each generation built upon the work of their predecessors in a chain of self-verification, resulting in the societal view of the Orientalist as the expert speaking accurately for and about Oriental subject matter.⁸ Female traveler writers were wittingly and unwittingly Orientalists. Travel narratives referenced other narratives as Orientalist texts, adding material to the "chain of self-verification" while they perpetuated a number of stereotypes depicting the Orient and its people as unchangingly Biblical in nature, degraded in morality and backward in their "nativeness." The travel narrative is a valuable tool for not only deconstructing transient constructions of gender, but also for discovering the foundations of race and class ideologies in which the Oriental and the Orient are subjugated to enhance Englishwomen's imperial status and position.

This thesis is modeled on the structure of the traveling experience. In reviewing first the intellectual expectations preceding travel, then the events of travel and finally the emotional reaction to the first two, a metaphoric attempt to better understand meaning through mimicry has been made. Following a brief discussion of relevant historiography that closes this introduction, Chapter Two studies the unique nature of the Preface in female travel narratives. Within their

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2.

⁸ CarrieAnne S. DeLoach, "Orientalism: An Examination of the Importance of Fluid Discourse" (University of Central Florida, 2004), 1-2. This section discussing the components of Orientalism, set out in Said's book of the same name is contained in an earlier unpublished review of *Orientalism* written by myself.

Prefaces, Englishwomen debated the meaning of the terms “traveler,” “explorer” and “tourist” and universally identified and imbued the first term with a construction of self which was British in its bravery, middle-class in its refinement, feminine in appearance and speech and Christian in its intolerance of Oriental heathenism. Additionally, the Preface is examined in the manner in which it introduced a traveler’s motive for traveling, legitimated these reasons for traveling, established an imperial narrative tone, solidified a traveler’s claim to authority and uniqueness and apologized for scholastic aspirations. In “Packing her Intellectual Baggage,” the mass publication of the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, popularity of guide books and new theories of scripture study are examined for their role in the formation of an Englishwoman’s expectations and ‘preknowledge’ of the Orient. Understanding the manner in which these “new” forms of metaphysical identification formulated what Victorian lady travelers knew the “East” to be, before they had ever seen it, is crucial in determining why female travelers felt and wrote as they did. Chapter Four addresses the body of the travel narrative, and includes the events which consisted of the day-to-day encounters of the female traveler, or at least the traveler’s portrayal of these events. The majority of historical works on female travelers skip straight to an evaluation of ideology based on descriptions of people and places, and little if any attention is given to the gendered nature in which female travelers portrayed their encounters with the “realities” of travel. An attempt to rectify this omission is made here with an analysis of the public presentation of illness, limited or unfamiliar foods, thieves, rough trails and a variety of other unexpected discomforts, as well as the female travelers’ responses to “unfeminine” situations. Special attention is paid to differences in the representations of reaction between women accompanied by other Europeans, especially men, and those who traveled “alone.” The concept of “disconnect,” or the “distance” between a female traveler’s expectation and the

“reality” of what she experienced in the Orient, is the core point expounded in Chapter Five. Key among “distancing” elements were the disorientation perceived to be caused by the differences in European and Oriental concepts of time, language barriers and the failure of imagined Biblical tropes to materialize.

Several criteria were used to select the travelers and their accompanying narratives for this study. The trips described in the narratives and the narratives themselves had to have occurred and been published by Englishwomen after 1830 and before World War I.⁹ This loose periodization is intended to embrace the traditional definition of the “Victorian era,” while allowing intellectual flexibility in the form of a few years on either side of Victoria’s reign for the identification of cultural developments, similarities and differences. Every effort was made to have several narratives chosen from each decade including a mix of those better known travelers like Gertrude Bell and Lucy Duff Gordon and the more obscure like Annie Jane Harvey and Maude Holbach. Travelers of varying economic classes, motivations for travel, marital status and education level were selected in an attempt to analyze the influence of these factors in the gendered portrayal of travel and the formation of the travel narrative. The geographic region traversed by these Englishwomen need only to have been defined by the traveler herself as the “Orient” or the “East.” This decision was made in an attempt to better understand the cultural construction of geography and resulted in a selection of countries that roughly overlap with perceptions of what composes the twenty-first century “Middle East.” The application of these conditions resulted in over twenty travel narratives, many of them multi-volume, becoming the

⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s account dating from 1763 is the only exception, as her status as the ‘first’ among English lady travelers necessitated limited references and comparisons between her *Letters* and Victorian works.

primary source matter for this study. Recognizing the danger of relying too heavily on one source for conclusions encompassing broad cultural ideologies, additional perspective was garnered from letters, diaries, fictional works, newspaper articles, advice manuals, travel guides and religious texts. In many instances lengthy abstracts are employed to bring to surface words, which have long been forgotten and which best themselves articulate the point being made.

Historians who have Previously Traveled this Path

The historiography of the British Empire in the Victorian era (1837-1901) is rich in examinations of the political, economic, military and religious dynamics that led to the creation of a colonial superstructure upon which the “sun never set.” Yet, despite the era acquiring its name from a female monarch, until recent decades little research had been done as to the nature of women’s involvement in the creation and maintenance of the empire, their role in stabilizing Victorian society at home and abroad or the manner in which women negotiated imperial concepts of identity and legitimacy.

The first studies of women as participants in the imperial project centered on their traditionally “domestic” role as wives, mothers, authors of fiction and philanthropists. Long held stereotypes led historians to believe that the private sphere was the only sphere Victorian women were active in and early works in this field including *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-67*; *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*; *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* and *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* reflect this focus. As historians began to discover connections between “domestic” activities and the maintenance of the empire abroad, works like F.K. Prochaska’s *Women and Philanthropy in*

Nineteenth Century England, emerged and revealed the interconnectedness of the involvement of middle-class women in home visiting, charity bazaars and support for missionary work with their responsibility to convert the “heathen” at home and abroad. This mission placed women at the very nexus of imperial ideology while allowing them to remain “feminine” through the capitalization of women’s supposedly more compassionate nature.¹⁰

Prochaska also discusses the extensive participation of women in the mission field, a topic which recently has led to the creation of a new subfield. As the first scholars to critically examine women as both producers and subjects of imperial ideologies, mission-focused historians have generated volumes examining the role of female missionaries of a variety of locales, religious denominations and feminist viewpoints. Key amongst these is Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener’s excellent volume *Women and Missions: Past and Present Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*¹¹ in which female missionaries are positioned on a gradient between “feminist imperialists” and the “subjugated drudges” of male missionary colleagues.

With the advent of colonial studies, the role of gender in colonial discourse has come to the forefront in recent years, though the geographic focus has remained primarily on India and West Africa with works examining the Middle East still falling under the missionary studies category. Several historians including Antoinette Burton in *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians*

¹⁰ Francoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-67* (London: Allen Lane, 1974); Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975); D. Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Martha Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London: Methuen, 1980); and F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

and the Colonial Encounter in Late Victorian Britain, Helen Callaway in *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria*, Margaret Strobel in *European Women and the Second British Empire*, and Jane Haggis in “Gendering Colonialism or Colonizing Gender? Recent Women’s Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism,” have begun to pursue the part played by women as wives of colonial officials, independent in-country philanthropists, nurses, doctors, teachers, ethnologists, photographers and anthropologists in the colonial world.¹² The main thread of debate raging between these historians is the extent to which women were involved in the “ideological reproduction of empire.”¹³

An additional area of concern in colonial studies is the interaction of race and gender. Several important works have been published which note that British women were located in the imperial hierarchy above foreign men, as “Britishness” in a sense trumped gender, as long as British women remained firmly entrenched in subordination to British men of their equal or higher class. Texts focused on the links between race, gender and imperial power include Christine Bolt’s *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, Anita Levy’s *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race and Gender, 1832-1898*, and Mona Etienne’s *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives*. Visual representations of “native” races were an important tool for communicating

¹¹ Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener, *Women and Missions: Past and Present Anthropological and Historical Perspective* (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1994).

¹² Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1998); Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Margaret Strobel in *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) and Jane Haggis, “Gendering Colonialism or Colonizing Gender? Recent Women’s Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism,” *Women’s International Studies Forum*, 13 (1990): 105-15.

Victorian perceptions of race and Sarah Graham-Brown, Mark Alloula and Reina Lewis have analyzed Victorian paintings, photography and pieces of popular culture like postcards to explore these messages.¹⁴

The heart of this study is an examination of Victorian Englishwomen, their Oriental travel narratives and the manner in which they were affected by and contributed to a historically specific context, nineteenth-century, imperial Great Britain. Mine is of course not the first study in this field and a short review of relevant texts will serve to familiarize the non-specialist.

New topics in history are most often studied generally first and research concerned with Victorian traveling women is no different. Texts initially addressing female travelers emerged in the 1960s, but it was not until the 1980s that the number of publications truly began to increase. These early years were dominated by monographic biographies and anthologies compiling brief narrative descriptions of travel adventures and encounters with little space donated to analysis or the contextualization of the travel narratives upon which these biographies were based. Examples of such texts include: *Victorian Lady Travelers*, *Traveling Ladies: Victorian Adventuresses*, *An Anthology of Women Travelers*, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travelers and their World* and *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*.¹⁵

¹³ Strobel, 46.

¹⁴ Mark Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Sarah Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁵ Dorothy Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travelers* (London: Routledge, 1965); A. Allen, *Traveling Ladies: Victorian Adventuresses* (London: Jupiter, 1980); Jane Robinson, *An Anthology of Women Travelers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); M. Russel, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travelers and their World* (London: Collins, 1986); and Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

Dissenting from this tradition are the minority of works which critically examine the manner in which Middle Eastern women are treated in travel narratives and the meaning and role of the travel narrative in imperial British culture. In “Images of Middle-Eastern Women in Victorian Travel Books” by Charisse Gendron,¹⁶ the focus has been shifted from a play-by-play account of the traveler’s actions to the portrayal of the “other” in the text. Within this emerging sub-field a discussion is taking place as to the nature of the relationship between the active British observer and author, and the seemingly passive Middle Eastern object and subject. Billie Melman, the author of *Women’s Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918*,¹⁷ argues that women’s travel narratives depict sympathetic and anti-Orientalist descriptions of cross cultural encounters. Melman alleges that Victorian women, through the medium of the travel narrative, “present the most serious challenge to Orientalist and patriarchal authority. For what characterizes the women’s representation of the different is a sense of familiarity and sympathy with the other.”¹⁸ Reina Lewis in *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, Sara Mills in *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism*, Meyda Yegenoglu in *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* and Inderpal Grewal in *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* offer the most recent examinations of this subject and are also the most critical of female travel authors’ place in imperial discourse.¹⁹ In their use of literary techniques, which

¹⁶ Charisse Gendron, “Images of Middle-Eastern Women in Victorian Travel Books,” *The Victorian Newsletter* 79 (Spring 1991): 18-23.

¹⁷ Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

¹⁸ Melman, 44.

¹⁹ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1991); Meyda Yegenoglu *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

contributed to and enhanced the distinction between “the civilized” and “the degraded other,” female travel authors, in the view of these historians, were complicit agents in expanding the reach of British imperialism in their hierarchical relations with women of the East. Judy Mabro, on the other hand, chose to sidestep the debate in *Veiled Half-Truths: European Travelers’ Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women*²⁰ by focusing on the myriad of ways in which Middle Eastern women were depicted without ascribing to the authors duplicitous or good intentions.

The enigma of travel is its transient nature; therefore, the female traveler as the initiator of action must also exist in a transient and not binary state, a state in which conscious and unconscious actions both fortify imperialism and weaken it. Englishwomen were forced to construct gendered identities which were both “imperially” masculine and “domestically” feminine, depending on the needs of a particular location and space. The travel narrative itself was also a gendered product that served as both a medium of cultural expression for Victorian women and a tool of constraint, forcing women to conform to societal expectations to gain limited authority and recognition for their travels, even while they embraced a newfound freedom of movement. It is within this spectrum of critical inquiry, with the intent to analyze the social, economic, racial and gendered ideologies, that characterize narrative’s contents and the Victorian Englishwoman’s Oriental traveling experience that the current study locates itself.

Press, 1998); Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); and Inderpal Grewal, in *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Judy Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truths: European Travelers’ Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co., 1991).

CHAPTER TWO: THE NECESSITY OF A PREFACE: TRAVEL WRITING AND THE NEGOTIATION OF GENDERED IDENTITY

Defining the Female Traveler

Feminist and imperial scholars have debated the gendered and power laden meanings of the terms “tourist, traveler, and explorer.”²¹ In this study the use of these terms is dictated by the same logic that governs the employ of the labels “Oriental” and “Orient.” The words “tourist, traveler and explorer” were the signifiers British women selected and utilized to describe themselves and their transient surroundings. In using these words the intent is not to support Orientalist stereotypes or to ignore issues of authority and legitimacy, but to attempt to most clearly analyze what these terms meant to the female traveler by allowing them to be studied in their narrative context. The question then that is most relative here is not “were British women called tourists, travelers or explorers by others,” but “how did transient women characterize themselves and what did such self-naming define a tourist, traveler or explorer to be?” Granted, this approach begs questions regarding the internalization of cultural stigmas. For example, did women label themselves as they did to prevent social disdain and, if so, is this truly how they saw themselves? As far the women’s works reviewed here are concerned, British travelers made every attempt to “own” their labels, whether socially bestowed or self-proclaimed.

²¹ For a detailed discussion regarding the power politics of label and travel see Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1991) and Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).

Throughout their published travel narratives, British women referred to themselves mainly as “travelers.” They imbued this designation with a positive connotation and defined the term with a series of gendered juxtapositions reflecting the Victorian British female traveler’s precarious status as an European, pseudo-masculine “producer of imperial knowledge”²² and a product of imperial pressures of feminine, bourgeois conformity. The womanly possessor of the “traveler” appellation was imperial in her independence, British in her bravery, middle-class in her refinement, feminine in her appearance and speech and Christian in her intolerance of Oriental heathenism. Above all she stressed the unthreatening collocation of the femininity she fostered at “home” or “domestically” with the “imperial masculinity” she assumed when “away” or traveling. This meant that travel narrative authoresses were able to non-confrontationally legitimate to their reading audiences “at home” a new definition of self as a traveler, which necessitated the assumption of behaviors societally attributed to both genders in different spaces without creating gender confusion.

Isabel Burton saw herself as possessing attributes of both genders by labeling herself as both a traveler and a “traveler’s wife.” Reviewing her autobiographical list of requirements for such a person, Burton reveals that possessing the best attributes of both genders was necessary to be a successful traveler. Burton declared that the female traveler:

“must cultivate certain capabilities – ride well, walk, swim, shoot, and learn to defend herself if attacked, so as not to be entirely dependent upon the husband; also to make the bed, arrange the tent, cook the dinner if necessary, wash the clothes by the river side, mend and spread them to dry for his comfort; nurse the sick, bind and dress wounds, pick up a language, make a camp of

²² Cheryl McEwan, *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 5.

natives love, respect, and obey her; groom her own horse, saddle him, learn to wade him through rivers; sleep on the ground with the saddle for a pillow, and generally learn to rough it, and do without comforts. She must be thoroughly useful to her husband, and try never to want anything of him. She ought to be able to write, and to help him in taking his observations; and if she can sketch or paint, she is indeed a happy woman.”²³

For Burton, who traveled extensively with her husband during his Consulship in Damascus, traveling with a male companion did not change her need to assume both masculine and feminine character traits typically exhibited by women traveling “alone.” In order not to be a burden she was to be self-reliant to the extent of defending herself in an attack, without sacrificing her more traditional responsibilities of caring for the sick, making the bed and preparing meals. In the term “traveler” women found a liberating, if somewhat demanding space, in which they could assume freeing behaviors more masculine than those that were acceptable in Great Britain, while maintaining the best of what they deemed feminine.

Female travel writers reserved the terms “tourist” and “explorer” for the two types of transient personas on either side of their own imperially gendered location. Englishwomen universally condemned the “tourist.” Women who availed themselves of the pre-packaged tours of Thomas Cook and Son were derided as benefiting little from a hurried trip and doing a great deal of damage with their inaccurate tales of the East spread upon their return home. Julia Pardoe expressed little tolerance for the “passing traveller, possessed neither of the time nor the opportunity to form a more efficient judgment.” She further added that in addition to being poor

²³ Lady Isabel Arundell Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol. 1, (London: H.S. King, 1875), 232-233.

travelers, tourists were ill prepared to be “honest chroniclers” as the “hurried and superficial survey” was poorly suited to the task.²⁴

The disdain of the traveler for the tourist centered on the complete reliance of female travelers on their “domestic” gender attributes, including complete subservience to the male travel manager, anonymity in a crowd and the lack of the personal imperial exchange and civilizing opportunity they deemed available to them by leisurely one-on-one interaction with natives. A tourist “held none of the assumptions of racial privilege or masculine power”²⁵ that British women consciously took advantage of and valued in their voyages. Neither could the tourist truly grasp the freedom and sense of adventure travel offered if she knew “the exact hour at which (s)he will be gazing at the dome of St. Sophia on any particular day, with the number of courses specified, in the hotel the outside appearance of which is already depicted on the itinerary.”²⁶ Louisa Jebb gloried in an adventure, which had “not yet been ticketed and docketed for the tourist.”²⁷

The title “explorer,” on the other hand, denoted a completely masculine gendered identity. The “explorer” as an identity was less common in the Orient than in other regions traveled by British women like India, Asia and Africa, due to the long cultural familiarity with and easy commercial access to lands touching the Mediterranean Sea and its rich “Bible history.” The term was specifically reserved for those who entered desert regions little known or desired to be known by women generally in search of Biblical experiences and *Arabian Night* fantasies.

²⁴ Julia Pardoe, *City of the Sultans and Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836*, vol. 1, (London: Henry Colburn, 1837),vii.

²⁵ Birkett, 121.

²⁶ Jebb, 1.

²⁷ Jebb, 1.

Several women like Gertrude Bell, Lady Anne Blunt and Mabel Bent did “travel” through such deserts, but even they failed to take upon themselves the title “explorer.” Mabel Bent, who traversed much of Arabia with her husband, could only envision an “explorer” as a man, due to the weighty demands the position entailed. The “explorer” alone was responsible for the “life and health” of each member of the expedition and Bent described her own concerns regarding their expedition, its provisions, safety and crew as “fears” and “worries” rather than “responsibilities.”²⁸

Much as Inderpal Grewal explains in the case of colonial India, the locations to which Englishwomen traveled were “liminal spaces” with the potential of being “proving grounds for Englishwomen’s attempts at equality with Englishmen, their superiority to colonized men, and their ability to be a part of the project of empire conceived of as a heterosexual and masculinist project.”²⁹ I also, however, stress that female travelers chose to co-assert feminine identities to legitimate their imperial freedom by alluding to the equally important nature of their transported domestic constructions of self. Contrary to scholarship solely viewing Victorian projections of the feminine ideal as negative, the powers underlining social determinants of gender constructions must be seen as both regulatory and productive. By absorbing elements of respectable femininity into their traveling identities, women were able to translate the “unnaturalness” of their transient “independence” into an imperial form of trans-located

²⁸ Mabel Virginia Anna Bent and James Theodore Bent, *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith and Elder, 1900), 174.

²⁹ Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 63.

“dependency.”³⁰ This “dependency” was articulated through certain feminine attributes that female travelers ironically portrayed as empowering, positive and necessary to their civilizing mission and access to sites of gendered authority. The cornerstone of such assertions of domestic femininity is found in the Preface to the female travel narrative.

Prefacing the Preface

The Preface served a number of contradicting gendered purposes for English authoresses. It introduced her motive for traveling, legitimated her reason for writing about her travels, established the imperial narrative tone and solidified claims to authority and uniqueness while concurrently verifying her domestic femininity by apologizing for publicizing through publication the first four functions listed. The apology also asserted that the traveler’s writings were in fact unscholarly and therefore within the tradition of female literary production. Additionally, the Preface contains information valuable to the historian in analyzing issues regarding travel narrative production, including the sources used by the traveler in writing her text, the time frame in which the text was compiled and any external influence the authoress admits to having been involved in the writing process. This chapter will conclude with a brief comparison between the Preface written by Sir Wilfred Blunt for the narrative produced by his wife Lady Ann Blunt, and the Prefaces written by Englishwomen considered in this study. Such a comparison will reveal the gender dependent constructions of identity and justification written into the Preface and its description of a travel narrative’s purpose and authority.

³⁰ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 24, 28.

The female-authored travel narrative of nineteenth-century journeys to the Orient is a fascinating genre for its multi-layered complexity. Situated between the lines of seemingly innocuous descriptions of the Holy Land, its people and the traveler's reminiscences is a wealth of information awaiting deconstruction. The dynamic relationship between race, gender, imperialism and cultural production, and the changing definitions of the terms themselves, are revealed when "the autobiographic narrative" and authors claims to "authority" based on "observational detail"³¹ are viewed as purposeful representations of the worldview constructed by the nineteenth-century British women who availed themselves of the privilege to travel their nation's expanding realm. Meaningful expressions of power pervade each travel narrative reviewed here. In the eloquent phraseology of Edward Said "no experience that is interpreted or reflected on can be characterized as immediate, just as no critic or interpreter can be entirely believed if he or she claims to have achieved Archimedean perspective that is subject neither to history nor to a social setting."³² Overt and implied claims to such unobtainable perspective and objectivity are common in these texts and a brief discussion concerning issues of "accuracy" and "editing" is necessary to realize the completely unspontaneous birth that is the creation of a travel narrative.

In the briefest scenario envisioned between occurrence and narrative publication a number of opportunities for editing occur. As the female traveler witnesses an event or observes an individual, she immediately contextualizes the "signs"³³ she reads in her "foreign" surroundings to create a "meaning" which only makes sense in and is relative to that moment of

³¹ Blunt, 21.

³² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 32.

³³ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 143.

encounter. Later, as she wrote in her journal, that episode was influenced by the rest of her day's events, other memories of previous meanings which time had allowed to be called to mind and the act of recording words to paper that involved syntax choices. Such decisions included choosing to use shorter words to decrease the amount of time needed to render events and referencing and inserting Biblical verses to create a more 'accurate' picture. Emily Beaufort emphasized the difficulties of transient note taking and the importance of secondary sources in *Egyptian Sepulchers, and Syrian Shrines*:

“It is impossible for anyone who has no personal experience of it, to understand the physical difficulties and impediments under which one's journals, and notes, are written amidst the fatigues of such travelling: and mine have had the further disadvantage of being re-written in a foreign land, without books or help of any kind.”³⁴

In the event that the female traveler did not later revise her notes for publication, which she most certainly did removing embarrassing or too personal subject matter, her editor would have had influence in determining which anecdotes to include, the tone of the narrative voice, page length, type face selection, even whether or not to italicize a word. Each of these decisions weighed heavily in the cumulative evaluation of what becomes the final product versus what was the initial encounter.

Additionally, the “final” product, the published narrative, encounters a number of retellings as the reader, myself in this instance, engages a text that is over one hundred years old. As the historian I bring my own twenty-first century “signs” and “meanings,” ultimately creating

³⁴ Emily Anne Smythe Strangford Beaufort, *Egyptian Sepulchers, and Syrian Shrines, including some stay in Lebanon, at Palmyra and in Eastern Turkey* (London: Longman, 1861), vii.

a new narrative through my interpretation. The perils of perpetual deconstruction to the point of fictionalization are obvious, hence the importance of contextual analysis involving numerous travel narratives and additional primary sources, including Victorian university text books, advice manuals, newspaper articles, letters from female travelers, nineteenth century religious tracts on Islam and private journals.

In addition to concerns regarding reinterpretations, an analysis of travel narratives must also take into consideration the common use of the epistolary form, the conflated novel/narrative and the copious inclusion of non-original material without reference. Victorian middle- and upper-class women had the time and the means to be prolific letter writers. In using their diaries, letters and journals as the basis for travel narratives constructed as a series of letters sent to mythical or real life recipients, female travelers were only taking advantage of a literary format they were familiar with and that would also be favorably received as a legitimately feminine and domestic form of writing. Isabella Bird, who was an aficionado of the epistolary format, described letters as “the best mode of placing the reader in the position of the traveller, and of enabling him to share, not only first impressions in their original vividness, and the interests and enjoyment of traveling, but the hardships, difficulties and tedium which are their frequent accompaniments.”³⁵ The transfer of journal entries or notes into fictional letters may have been a writing strategy “which helped many women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century overcome anxiety over the public disclosure of authorship,”³⁶ but it was also one which created

³⁵ Isabella Bird; quoted in Sarah Searight ed., “Introduction,” in *Women Travellers in the Near East* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 7.

³⁶ Lila Marz Harper, *Solitary Travelers: Nineteenth Century Women’s Travel Narratives and the Scientific Vocation* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), 139-49.

an artificial timeline and heightened the “objective” distance between the reader and the persons or places observed by the traveler and then described to the letter’s recipient.

Isabella Romer went to great length in her Preface to *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6* to explain the purpose of her letters “addressed to no particular person” and never “destined for the post-office.”³⁷ Desperate to “add her mite to the general fund of knowledge or entertainment, to record some impression which may have escaped a mightier mind, or correct some mistake which may have been perpetrated by a more careless one,”³⁸ Romer creates an “invisible darling” who is a “perfect second edition of (her) very self” that allows her to “communicate to them our impressions, fresh as they rise to our minds, in letters of no ordinary dimensions.”³⁹ This tool of literary production eventually became her motivation for offering her text to the public as “on our return home” her fictional muse “entreated” Romer “*by all the pleasure they themselves have derived from their perusal,*” to “give them (her letters) to the public!”⁴⁰ Clearly in Romer’s case the humor is obvious, as is the self-reflection regarding the creative writing process, however, issues of clarity and objectivity are not always so cleverly or so plainly discussed.

In *Home in the Holy Land: A Tale Illustrating Customs and Incidents in Modern Jerusalem* and its sequel *A Third Year in Jerusalem*, Elizabeth Anne Finn places the “sketches of every-day life ... into the form of a Tale, in which the story, though slight, is useful as a thread upon which to hang the various illustrations gathered during a residence of many years in

³⁷ Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), v-vi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ix.

Jerusalem.”⁴¹ The benefit of one hundred and fifty years of hindsight and access to the Finn’s private diaries does indeed reveal the tale was slight, however contemporary audiences may not have been so convinced. Confusion must have been an issue as Finn felt the need to add the following disclaimer to *A Third Year in Jerusalem*, “in neither this book, nor in the former one, is the family history of Miss Russell and her relations identical with my own family history, or with that of my relations, which for obvious reason, I have not woven into the Tale.”⁴² Though Finn, stresses that such an explanation is “scarcely necessary,” its existence questions the veracity of a narrative form in which “portraits of persons still living” are substituted for fictional characters and “sketches . . . drawn from nature” are strung together to “illustrate manners and customs” which Finn herself observed and were “fresh” in “her memory.”⁴³ The issue lies in knowing exactly where the fiction ends and the fact begins, a division not demarcated in the work. One is simply expected to accept the overall tone and theme of the narrative as being accurate enough in the portrayal of Oriental persons and places. The collusion of fact and fiction at the expense of “truth” and accuracy reveal how little power those persons who Finn observed had in the creation of their historical record, and how little it mattered to Finn that her audience know the “real” Orient from the Orient she created for them.

If the line between fact and fiction was sometimes hazy when reading nineteenth-century travel narratives, the boundary between original text and the insertion of foreign “improvements” was occasionally blurred beyond recognition. More often than not the inclusion of texts by other authors or travelers meant the inclusion of descriptions well known and properly attributed to

⁴¹ Elizabeth Anne Finn, *A Third Year in Jerusalem* (London: Nisbet, 1869), v.

⁴² *Ibid.*, v.

famous male authors like René Chateaubriand, but in numerous Prefaces female travelers inform their readers that sections of their work were provided by male relatives, without specifying which sections. Mabel Bent incorporated articles and lectures given by her deceased husband, as well as his notebooks and her own “chronicles.”⁴⁴ While the dedicated reader may have been able to search out her spouses’ previously published works, he or she would certainly not have been able to separate those sections written from their respective private journals. Bent acknowledged that such an approach might cause confusion, so she initially attempted “trying to keep our several writings apart.” This approach met with little approval from her publisher, most likely because Mabel’s own words predominated, despite her disclaimer that the “least part of the writing” was her own.⁴⁵ Ambiguity of authorship allowed the reader to believe that Mabel’s own extremely articulate and academic text was that of her husband’s, most likely boosting sales by taking advantage of his reputation.

Traveling Stimuli

Leo Hamalian asserts in his introduction to *Ladies on the Loose*, “on the whole, discovery was not the aim of most women travelers.”⁴⁶ My own examination of Victorian female travelers, concurs with Hamalian’s, with the notable exceptions of Lady Anne Blunt’s unprecedented trip to the Nejd, Gertrude Bell’s own Nejd trip and Mabel Bent’s cartographic mission to central

⁴³ Ibid., v-vi.

⁴⁴ Bent, v.

⁴⁵ Ibid., vi.

⁴⁶ Leo Hamalian, *Ladies on the Loose: Women Travellers of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1981), xii.

Arabia.⁴⁷ If women were not traveling to fill in the map, the masculine justification for adventure seeking and imperial validation, why did they travel? British women who traveled to the Orient were not a homologous entity. They varied in their familial situations, religious affiliations, physical constitutions, economic classes and the level to which they were comfortable in the cumulative effect of these factors in the creation of their domestic social setting. Women traveled in response to dissatisfaction with some element of their life; a family crisis, declining health, unemployment, the need for spiritual fulfillment or boredom with their domestic situation. Women who left England to grieve the death of a spouse or parent, to regain their health, to seek out suitable employment or to complete a pilgrimage to Jerusalem had little to fear in the way of societal condemnation and were in fact encouraged to colonize the imperial superstructure as a cure. They were also aware that “excuses” must be offered in their Prefaces to explain their “unconfined” status. Gertrude Bell, lightly mocked this rhetorical strategy by openly discussing in her Preface the need of female traveler’s to explain themselves. Bell states, that unless a traveler was “of learning” or a “politician,” read here male, “those who venture to add a new volume to the vast literature of travel ... must be prepared with an excuse.” For Bell it was the desire “to write not so much a book of travel as an account of the people whom (she) met ... to

⁴⁷ It is important to note that these expeditions occurred at the latter end of the time period under consideration. Lady Blunt’s took place in 1878, Bell’s in 1893, and Bent’s in 1898 when women were wedging their way slowly into the scientific and academic societies, which granted female explorer’s “official” legitimacy and recognition, discussed later in this chapter. These three examples also challenged masculinist definitions of the term “exploration” as both Bent and Blunt traveled with spouses who for varying reasons failed to produce their own accounts claiming the title of “explorer” for themselves. Though the professed intent of Bell’s journey was cartographic she failed to take with her the entourage deemed by society necessary for a full blown expedition.

show what the world is like in which they live and how it appears to them.”⁴⁸ The inclusion of such justifications provides the historian with a rich record of why women publicly say they traveled.

The death of a family member was often the cause of a British woman’s exodus from her homeland. Emily Beaufort stated in the Preface to *Egyptian Sepulchers, and Syrian Shrines* that she and her sister sought out the “endless store of deeply interesting subjects for thought and study” believed to be contained on a Nile cruise as a diversion from mourning the death of their father in 1858.⁴⁹ Families also provided opportunities for Englishwomen to travel in their capacities as hostesses and companions to British government employees. As wives and sisters of consuls Isabel Burton, Elizabeth Finn, Ella Sykes and Mary Eliza Rogers often legitimated their enjoyment of their journey to their “exotic” new posts in terms expressing their devotion to their family and empire.⁵⁰ The family played a crucial role in the legitimation of a woman’s travels. Parental, spousal, or brotherly approval to a proposed adventure was essential for a female traveler’s maintenance of respectability. Gertrude Bell, even as mature adult, asked permission of her father before making a journey as evidenced in her February, 1900 letter to him before her first solo journey through the desert. She wrote to her father that “if you don’t mind” she would like to travel “with no but Arab-speaking people.”⁵¹

Close ties to extra-familial participants in the spread of imperial culture could also influence an Englishwoman’s travel plans. Lucy Duff Gordon traveled to Egypt in 1862 to

⁴⁸Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and Sown* (London: Beacon Pres, 1907), ix.

⁴⁹ Beaufort, vii.

⁵⁰ Birkett, 31.

escape the devastating toll the English climate was taking on her already tuberculosis labored body, but her initial desire to travel East was spurned by her network of male friends who had already made the journey and published literary accounts of their experiences. These companions included Alexander Kinglake, author of *Eothen*, William Thackeray, author of *Cornhill to Cairo*, and Elliott Warburton, author of *The Crescent and the Cross*.⁵²

Women in the 1860s were surrounded by the threat of being in “surplus.”⁵³ Organizations like the Female Middle Class Emigration Society were founded to aid women’s emigration to the colonies. When faced with the potentially negative stigmatization of a previously sanctioned domestic singularity, unmarried women looked to the Orient for opportunities of renewed acceptance. Emmeline Lott accepted a commission to be the Governess to the Grand Pasha of Egypt and Louisa Jebb’s journey through Persia was motivated by a personal need for employment, met in her role as lady’s travel companion to her employer’s “search” for health. Her job was to keep the accounts of their trip, settle bills, procure supplies and “deal with the male attendants” their voyage would require. Her membership in the “agricultural” community informs us of her lower economic status and her position as a traveling sidekick was probably the only manner in which she would have been able to leisurely float down the Tigris River.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Gertrude Bell, London, to Hugh Bell, February 1900, quoted in Elizabeth Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell. From her Personal Papers, 1889-1914* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1958), 56-7.

⁵² Sarah Searight, “A Woman’s Perception of Nineteenth Century Egypt: Lucie Duff Gordon” in *Women Travellers in the Near East* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 53.

⁵³ Alix Wilkinson, “Governess to the Grand Pasha of Egypt: Emmeline Lott” in *Women Travellers in the Near East* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 61.

⁵⁴ Jebb, 1.

The Holy Land offered women a particularly safe destination to aspire to. Leaving England as an expression of religious piety offered women the opportunity of a sanctioned adventure with the reward of both religious and imperial senses of accomplishment. Agnes Smith combined scholastic pursuits with pilgrimage in her 1895 and 1897 ventures to a remote monastery in search of early copies of the New Testament.⁵⁵ Louise Griswold and Margaret Thomas also traveled in pursuit of the “footsteps of the Saviour.”⁵⁶

While family loss or responsibilities, poor health and religious aspirations may have encouraged a number of British women to travel to the Orient, a survey of the works in this study reveals that a desire to escape “civilization” was also a prime catalyst for imperial migrations. Women struggling with certain elements in their lives as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and spinsters often used the terms “civilization” and “society” as euphemisms for their sense of frustration. However, the Prefaces of their narratives only occasionally give us glimpses into the freeing capacity travel had to allow “all the little accessories with which we have learnt to shield ourselves fall away” leaving the traveler free of heavy societal expectations with only her “stripped” self and the “naked realities” of life with which to reinvent her imperial identity.⁵⁷ It was left to the body of their texts to fully reveal the complex relationships they developed between their newfound sense of imperial masculine freedom and their obligations to domestic responsibility. Though women had a variety of different stimuli instigating their travels to the Orient, they had in common the opportunity imperial expansion offered them to address their

⁵⁵ Agnes Smith, *In the Shadows of Sinai: A Story of Travel and Research from 1895 to 1897* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Bowes, 1898).

⁵⁶ Margaret Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine and Syria* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1900) and Louise Griswold, *A Woman's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (Hartford: J.B. Burr and Hyde, 1871).

⁵⁷ Jebb, 3.

unique situations and the willingness to take advantage of this opportunity. They also shared a desire to communicate their experiences to the public in the form of the published travel narrative.

Motivations for Writing

The travel narrative was not the first genre scratched out by the Victorian female's pen to reflect the active role of imperialism in molding cultural mediums. Englishwomen like Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë had produced fictional works that engaged the empire as a setting and catalyst for their antagonists. Many of the women who would later produce travel narratives apprenticed their descriptive and observational skills by contributing articles to women's periodicals, translating texts in several languages and acting as scribes to fathers, husbands and brothers. Sarah Searight points to Lucy Duff Gordon's early work as a translator as central to Duff's mastery of the "the subtleties and nuances of description" in her letters peopled by fascinating Egyptian personalities and locations.⁵⁸

Thus the pen was a familiar tool to the female hand and English travelers attributed its employment for a variety of reasons in the Prefaces of their texts. Though there were variances, as in the case of Mabel Bent, who wrote to memorialize and complete her deceased husband's work,⁵⁹ and Emily Beaufort, who claimed to be "appeasing the general desire for further

⁵⁸ Sarah Searight, "A Woman's Perception of Nineteenth Century Egypt: Lucie Duff Gordon" in *Women Travellers in the Near East* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 59-60.

⁵⁹ Mabel Bent's case is truly tragic and her narrative is threaded throughout with references to her last journey leading to her companion's death via malaria. In her Preface she plaintively transcribed "if my fellow-traveller had lived, he intended to have put together in book form such

information” regarding Syria following its civil war,⁶⁰ female travelers broadly explained their motivations for writing in their Prefaces as a desire to encourage other women to travel, advise women who did intend to travel and entertain.

Englishwomen relished the opportunity to develop an imperial sense of authority and legitimacy based on their traveling experience by giving advice. Careful to identify female travelers as their targeted protégés and phrasing advice as information only “women will like to know,”⁶¹ traveling women created a niche in which their contested gender identity could be of particular value. Far from advocating the disempowering advice found in Lilius Campbell’s *Hints to Lady Travelers* to refrain from “interfering” and “hampering” a man’s ability to handle dangerous situations with “feminine physical weakness,” the women examined here “endeavored to supply ... practical information as to routes, points of interest, and other details” gathered from their “own experience” which would allow the female traveler to see “with what ease and security ladies may travel, even alone in those countries which have been frequently supposed to be open only to strong and energetic men.”⁶² Burton couched her voluminous advice to fellow female travelers by virtue of her having “followed her husband everywhere, gleaned only woman’s lore.” This “lore” provided what Burton deemed essential information to the untutored visitor, conveying “an idea of the life which an Englishwoman may make for herself in the East.”⁶³

information as we had gathered about Southern Arabia. Now, as he died four days after our return from our last journey there, I have had to undertake the task myself.” (Bent, v).

⁶⁰ Beaufort, vii.

⁶¹ Burton, vii.

⁶² Beaufort, vii-viii.

⁶³ Burton, vii.

Isabella Romer felt a strong sense of duty to dwell “upon the details” that female travelers should know before they dared to undertake the dangerous journey to Syria. In her opinion “tourists in general have heretofore made too light of the perils of traveling in this country” and women who chose to do so must not be “delicate.” Instead, a female traveler

“must forget that such things as carriages and carriage-roads exist; she must ride all day over execrable roads and under a burning sun; she must sleep at night in a tent, which is either the hottest or the coldest of all shelters; and if fever or accident overtake her on her way, she must trust in God and her own constitution to help her through, for neither physician nor apothecary, nor a roof to shelter her suffering head, will be forthcoming, even should thousands be offered for them.”⁶⁴

Romer felt strongly that women could make the journey to Syria as she had done, but the likelihood of success would be diminished if women who read *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine* failed to heed her advice.

The Preface to women’s travel narratives often contained advice for other potential female travelers. In doing so British women who had already assumed a geographically linked and limited measure of independence were able to encourage other women to assume the same masculinist character through a domestically feminized medium – the giving and sharing of information in a female community, in this case the growing community of female travelers and their reading audiences. In this manner women situated their own travel experiences and the potential experiences of other women within a “familiar” form of domestication, female advice

⁶⁴ Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 337.

giving, while at the same time “defamiliarizing”⁶⁵ the domestic by centering the advice on a subject in the imperial masculine sphere. Locating the apprenticeship of transgressive behaviors in a non-transgressive form of communication is an example of the manner in which female travelers attempted to reconcile the contradicting masculine and feminine natures of their traveling identities.

A number of references are also made in the Prefaces of travel narratives to that less serious and more stationary form of British traveler, the voyeur of British upholstery – the “armchair traveler.” Englishwomen often framed the purpose of their writings as entertainment, for those who loved a journey, but hated its rigor. Providing entertainment was traditionally a female task and categorized female literary works as insubstantial and unthreatening. Therefore framing a narrative for this purpose was not unusual, what was significant was the targeting of a potential reading audience with an ambivalent gender. Englishwomen did not assume or connotatively indicate that the non-traveling reader was a woman. Annie Jane Harvey, hoped her “record of a past summer” would “interest those who prefer traveling for half-an-hour when seated in their arm-chairs,”⁶⁶ while Emily Beaufort wrote “chiefly for those who, compelled to stay at home, like(d) ... to follow in fancy the footsteps of those who have enjoyed the realities of travel.”⁶⁷ Elizabeth Finn’s “great wish was to try and share with others ... the happiness and advantages enjoyed while living in the Holy Land.”⁶⁸ The “others” she referred to were left genderless, indicating they could be male or female. The interest I find in this ambiguity relates

⁶⁵ Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (New York: the Guilford Press, 1994), 17.

⁶⁶ Annie Jane Harvey, *Turkish Harems and Circassian Homes* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1871), ix.

⁶⁷ Beaufort, vii.

to the willingness female travel authors exhibited in “entertaining” both a male and female audience when they were, as has been discussed and will be discussed in detail later, blatant in their self proclaimed inadequacy to “educate” Englishmen. English authoresses were only comfortable in establishing potential readers as male and female in the instance of entertainment where their domestic authority was already established, and yet the mode of entertainment selected recalling their imperial journeys was rooted in their imperially masculine identity.

Advising and entertaining Englishwomen and Englishmen were compelling motivations for publishing one’s adventures, but the most obvious reason for writing a travel book was the one never mentioned in an Englishwoman’s Preface. The need to cover the expenses of the trip described or fund a future trip was a major impetus for travel writing. Without the financial backing of academic societies, government sponsorship or wealthy patrons enjoyed by Englishmen, female travelers without independent means found themselves in need of a tool to generate traveling capital.⁶⁹ This was certainly the case for Lucie Gordon whose seven-year residency in Luxor, Egypt was a serious strain to her family’s finances.⁷⁰ Lucinda Griffith was forced to subsidize her early return from her husband’s military post in Ceylon. After she fell ill, her husband chose to accept unsubstantial half-pay rather than have her return to Great Britain alone.⁷¹ While discussing the need to raise funds for personal expenses was a social taboo, indicating the sales of ones book would benefit others, fit into the accepted characterization of women as philanthropists. Isabel Burton hoped in the Preface of *The Inner Life of Syria*,

⁶⁸ Finn, vi.

⁶⁹ Blunt, 71.

⁷⁰ Lady Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1903).

⁷¹ Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travelers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 282.

Palestine, and the Holy Land, that her account of life as a consul's wife and traveler would "prove to be the humble instrument that launches and prospers any one of (her) philanthropic projects for the Land of (her) heart."⁷² Just as women were motivated to conduct their travels by a variety of factors dependent upon their gendered responses to personal situations, they also explained their desire to publish accounts that would be read in Great Britain through terms that confirmed their domestic feminine roles as entertainers, supporters and educators. In such a manner they were able to reconcile the seemingly unfeminine action of publishing personal accounts with the independence they had acquired in executing their travels.

Imperial Narration and Gendered Authority

A number of scholars have studied the power inherent in the writing process and come to conclusions valuable in analyzing the imperial voice exercised by travel writing women. Edward Said argued that "the capacity to represent, portray, characterize, and depict is not easily available to just any member of just any society,"⁷³ while Margaret Strobel honed in on the power dynamic in the information gathering process, wherein the "control of information" was dramatically one-sided in favor of European domination of the formation and dissemination of knowledge.⁷⁴ David Spurr admirably links Strobel's and Said's points and the position of the female travel writer with his concept of "self-inscription," in which both colonizers and writers

⁷² Burton, viii.

⁷³ Said, 80.

⁷⁴ Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 35.

must establish “authority through the demarcation of identity and difference.”⁷⁵ Traveling women existed in their journeys in a dually gendered state, one in which they balanced elements of their domestic feminine persona with their newly acquired imperial masculine characteristics. In translating their Oriental experiences from encounter to memory to words on the blank page, they did not relinquish the “observer” status they assumed as European imperial purveyors of “others,” nor did they completely abandon their socially approved femininity. Instead, they created a hybrid form of authority, imbuing their texts with value and expertise resulting from their access to unique Oriental experiences, locations and people. To be an authority a female traveler could not compete with men on the same playing field, instead they had to find instances in which their own travels encompassed territories, personalities and experiences men could not share. On many occasions women claimed this authority via their gender, as they entered harems and conversed with Oriental women.

Emmeline Lott’s Preface is a self-congratulating ode to her crusading spirit. She claims her employment as governess to His Highness the Grand Pacha Ibrahim, the infant son of H.H. Ismael Pacha, the Viceroy of Egypt, in the Imperial Harem in Cairo allowed her “to become the unheard of instance in the annals of the Turkish Empire, of residing within those foci of intrigue, the Imperial and Viceregal Harems of Turkey and Egypt.”⁷⁶ Her self professed opportunity to “uplift” the “impenetrable veil” and “accomplish that which had hitherto baffled all exertions of Eastern travelers” provided her alone the singular chance through her text *Life in the Harems of Egypt and Constantinople* “to give a concise yet impartial and sympathetic account of the daily

⁷⁵ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 7.

life of the far-famed Odaliskues of the nineteenth century – those mysterious impersonifications of Eastern loveliness.”⁷⁷

Lott was obviously a master of propaganda and enticement. She understood the fascination harems held in the culture of her society and structured her narrative’s Preface solely on the sensational and sexual. Fearful that her claims to be “the” authority on harem life might be challenged by Lady Mary Montagu’s eighteenth-century account of a harem visit, Lott carefully delineates why the Lady Mary’s *Letters* were weak competition. First, “upwards of a century has rolled away” since the Lady Mary visited the Sublime Porte, a temporal distance which begged the contemporary relevance of her observations. Secondly, Lady Mary traveled *cara sposo*, and her marital status as a wife and mother led her to be “perhaps too scrupulous.” Lott assured her readers through her descriptions of “lavasciousness” and her choice of subjects that she was neither married nor scrupulous. Third, Lott claimed Montague’s upper class status shielded her from the true depravity that filled the Oriental harem. Her husband’s diplomatic position left her with “no need to propitiate that all-powerful Sovereign Prince of the Ottoman Empire, “Baksheesh,” the culprit to which Lott attributes the greater part of the harem’s “corruption.” Lady Mary’s nobility also assured that the harems had been “swept and garnished” for her reception. Lott concluded her argument with the reassertion of the uniqueness of her access to harem life. Where Lady Mary had “not been allowed to penetrate beyond the reception halls, nor to pollute the floors of the chambers of those ‘Castles of Indolence,’” the social manners, habits and customs of the *Crème de la Crème* of both Turkish and Egyptian noblesse,

⁷⁶ Emmeline Lott, *The English Governess in Egypt. Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), ix.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

and the Star chamber of Ottoman intrigue, were to Lott an open book,⁷⁸ and via Lott's expertise they were made accessible to her readers.

Claims of one-on-one interaction with Oriental people encouraged a view of authenticity of detail via proximity to the source. Mary Eliza Rogers did not merely watch people during her tenure as hostess to her brother the British consul at Haifa, she claimed to have "mingled freely with the people, of all creeds and classes" whereby she was able to obtain her authoritative knowledge by becoming "better acquainted with their habits and modes of thought." Rogers also stressed her exclusive access to Oriental women that "especially interested" her and from whom she "gleaned many facts concerning them, which have never hitherto been published, and probably have never been collected."⁷⁹

While it is certainly true that female travelers attempted to derive maximum legitimation mileage from such encounters, female-to-female contacts were not the only claims to uniqueness proffered in the Prefaces of their travel narratives. Englishwomen in the Orient in the Victorian era were traversing a region in political flux. The civil war in Syria, skirmishes between Bedouins tribes and open revolts against city governors were a few of the political scenes witnessed by British women. Unrelated to the descriptions of harem scenes, wedding feasts and bazaar merchandise normally attributed to feminine expertise, the recounting of these political and military episodes solidified female traveler's authoritative status, not based on gender, but on their having witnessed events normally described by men when men were unable to do so for

⁷⁸ Ibid., v-viii.

⁷⁹ Mary Eliza Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine* (London: Paul Keagan International Limited, 1862), vii.

themselves. Emily Beaufort documented one such instance in her account of the role Druze and Christian women played in the opening skirmishes of the Lebanese civil war of 1863:

“Many others followed their husbands with pitchers of water on their shoulders giving them drink ever and anon in the heat of the burning sun, standing beside them when they took aim, and every moment shrieking out the fierce shrill scream which excited every man to do his utmost in shedding blood.”⁸⁰

In contrast to the majority of observations decrying the laziness and uselessness of Oriental women, Beaufort’s portrayal of them in this instance was dominated by activity. The Druze and Christian women “raise war-cries, urge on their men, eagerly gesticulate, and mourn the fallen.” Though they are still reduced by racial comparisons to “frenzied demons,” Beaufort was able to respect what appeared to her to be overt expressions of nationalist pride. Allusions to political situations affecting British imperial interests in the Orient were also used to buttress the claim to authority via proximity, as subtly suggested by Elizabeth Finn when she links her text’s periodization to “about the year 1845, when the recent British operations in Syria had directed attention anew to the Holy Land.”⁸¹

Women could also take advantage of being “the first” to achieve a traveling feat to gain legitimacy. Ella Sykes did so by claiming to be the “first European woman who has visited Kerman and Persian Baluchistan.”⁸² In some instances accomplishing a “first” had to be stretched, due to the fact that the woman traveler wasn’t actually achieving one. Both Emily Beaufort and Gertrude Bell sensationalized journeys over previously trodden ground. Beaufort

⁸⁰ Beaufort, 157-8.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Anne Finn, *A Home in the Holy Land: A Tale Illustrating Customs and Incidents in Modern Jerusalem* (London: Nisbet, 1866), vi.

⁸² Ella Sykes, *Through Persia on a Side Saddle* (London: Long Riders’ Guild Press, 1898).

“could not but wish to share (her) experiences with the public” following an “unusual visit” to Palmyra and unclarified “opportunities of observation” that she deemed “did not fall to the lot of every traveller.”⁸³ Gertrude Bell’s claim to uniqueness in the Preface to her description of her journey through the Nejd acknowledged that “none of the country through which I went is ground virgin to the traveller, though parts of it have been visited but seldom.” She further claimed ownership of this first by making the public’s awareness of it manifest, as the few who had previously completed the same trek had left evidence of it “only in works that are costly and often difficult to obtain.”⁸⁴

Gertrude Bell took authority via proximity to the next level by sacrificing her own position as the narrator to allow Orientals she encountered control “as far as possible” to “tell their own tale.” She claimed to have merely “strung their words upon the thread of the road.” Her own involvement in the formation of the narrative is seemingly silenced as she used her imperial power to give the voiceless native the opportunity to narrate his “own tale.” Bell, of course, is unable to step outside of her historical situation to realize that her assumption of “native silence” and her own assumption of the ability to adequately inscribe Oriental thoughts with European meaning were innately disempowering.⁸⁵

⁸³ Beaufort, vii.

⁸⁴ Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and the Sown* (London: Beacon Press, 1907), x.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

The Necessity of the Apology

The genre of travel writing provided Englishwomen with an avenue in which to participate in the discourse of empire. Utilizing their “power to narrate,”⁸⁶ women were able to socially and economically capitalize on their travels. The exercise of this power was not however, unlimited or without risk. Englishwomen were aware of the uniquely gendered nature of their authority’s legitimacy and the majority of female travel writers examined here went to excessive lengths in the Prefaces of their texts to deny a scholarly tone or assertion that their writing was of a superior quality. Their self-abnegation, described by some historians as “the only me mode,”⁸⁷ may have reflected an internalized sense of feminine weakness in the proliferation of information, but when compared to the confident assertions of their own racial, religious and cultural superiority versus the Orientals they encountered, one is forced to question its sincerity. The more likely explanation for the demure denials of scholarly aspiration found in Englishwomen’s Prefaces was their understanding of the gendered power dynamics that prevailed in their own society.

The morally elevated status attributed to English womanhood situated a woman’s power in the form of “influence” and in specifically female environments, like the harem.⁸⁸ Aspirations to gain authority in masculine spaces would have been unacceptable. The need to control female sexuality, primarily through chastity before marriage and monogamous heterosexual unions resulting from marriage “was an important aspect of bourgeois ideologies of home and

⁸⁶ Said, xiii.

⁸⁷ Strobel, 37.

⁸⁸ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 183.

marriage.”⁸⁹ Women were rewarded for chaste behavior resulting from the internalization of the feminine ideal with “a special status, moral significance and responsibility.”⁹⁰ Women were above all to be “dependent, contained and domesticated.”⁹¹ To maintain their authenticity as respectable veteran travelers of the Orient, English women were forced to offer apologies for weaknesses in their works that did not exist, and deny aspirations to academic validation that did.

The preliminary to the apology was expressing an unwillingness to publish a travel narrative in the first place. After being approached to publish her diary of her first trip to Persia, Gertrude Bell wrote to her cousin

“Bentley wishes to publish my Persian things, but wants more of them, so after much hesitation I have decided to let him and I am writing him another six chapters. It’s rather a bore and what’s more I would vastly prefer them to remain unpublished. I wrote them you see to amuse myself and I have got all the fun out of them I ever expect to have, for modesty apart they are extraordinarily feeble. Moreover I do so loathe people who rush into print and fill the world with their cheap and nasty work – and now I am going to be one of them.”⁹²

It was only after her parents expressed their disappointment in her timidity, and her editor agreed to publish *The Persian Pictures* anonymously that Bell claims to have relented.⁹³ This “reluctant,” “demure” portrayal of herself contrasts sharply with the mature Bell who in the following two decades would be awarded the Royal Geographic Society’s Gill Memorial Prize

⁸⁹ Nead, 6.

⁹⁰ Nead, 24.

⁹¹ Davidoff and Hall, 114, 192.

⁹² Gertrude Bell, December 1892 Letter, quoted in Sir E. Denison Ross, “Preface,” in *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures* (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1894), 5.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 6.

for her geographic and archaeological ventures discussing Syria, Mesopotamia and Turkey, and who published a number of texts and articles boldly under her own name.⁹⁴

Maude Holbach mitigated the complete abnegation of her literary skills, by first admitting that though the sights of the Holy Land “have been often before described by abler pens than mine,” her “distinct, separate gift of sight” might still allow her to “see” that which “the most learned” did not.⁹⁵ Her feelings of “unworthiness,” however, had more to do with religious reverence in “venturing on sacred ground” than narrative prowess.⁹⁶ Isabella Romer steeled herself for the “nettles of criticism” that were sure to be employed in critiquing her collection of “womanish gossip” in which “all political questions were eschewed” and only “a plain unvarnished detail of passing scenes” remained that was ultimately “all too flimsy to satisfy the solid cravings of the public.”⁹⁷

Having apologized for even daring to publicly write the accounts of their Oriental sojourns, British women had to ensure their target audiences knew they were content with compiling “womanish gossip” and not aspiring to legitimate scholarship. Though as Lila Harper argues “literature and science were richly interwoven”⁹⁸ there was little benefit, outside of a personal sense of academic worth, and much to be lost by women who linked their observations to any of the social sciences emerging in the nineteenth-century. The hostility expressed against

⁹⁴ Morag Bell and Cheryl McEwan, “The Admission of Women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892 -1914; the Controversy and the Outcome,” *The Geographical Journal* 162, no. 3 (November 1996), 304.

⁹⁵ Maude M. Holbach, *Bible Ways in Bible Lands: An Impression of Palestine* (London: Paul Keagan, Trench and Trubner and Co., 1912), xii.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁹⁷ Isabella Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), ix–x.

women who aspired to scientific and academic recognition is exemplified by the battle that raged within the Royal Geographic Society between 1847, when the issue of admitting female fellows was first raised, and 1913 when 211 ladies were selected to be fellows.⁹⁹

Scientific societies were a component of an emerging masculine civil society in Victorian Great Britain. Whereas women were allotted the philanthropic arena as their proper “sphere,” men who were “vigorous, intelligent and wealthy” created their own space in the form of clubs where academic advances and theories could be discussed.¹⁰⁰ The Royal Geographic Society was founded by a particularly testosterone charged group of “men’s men.” Its membership included travelers, explorers and noble military men, with an increasingly strong focus on the professionalization of “geography as a formal academic field”¹⁰¹ towards the end of the nineteenth-century. Though women were allowed to donate funds, utilize the map room and have their talks read by men to the membership,¹⁰² they were not allowed to be fellows. It should be noted that some societies, like the Zoological Society of London and the Royal Entomological Society, which were incorporated respectively in 1829 and 1833 had admitted women members prior to 1911.¹⁰³ Membership to these select organizations, however, did not diminish an

⁹⁸ Lila Marz Harper, *Solitary Travelers: Nineteenth-Century Women’s Travel Narratives and the Scientific Vocation* (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 7.

⁹⁹ Bell and McEwan, 295.

¹⁰⁰ Dorothy Middleton, “Some Victorian Lady Travelers,” *The Geographical Journal* 139, no. 1 (February 1973), 65-75.

¹⁰¹ Alison Blunt, *Travel Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (New York: the Guilford Press, 1994), 7.

¹⁰² Though it was not yet admitting female fellows the Royal Geographic Society published Gertrude Bell’s 1910 paper ‘The East Bank of the Euphrates from Teln Ahmar to Hit’ and recommended Ella Sykes’ book *Through Persia on Side Saddle*, discussed in this paper, for its ‘social’ information obtained by Sykes ability to ‘mix with people and speak their language,’ (McEwan and Bell, 304-6).

¹⁰³ Bell and McEwan, 297.

overarching societal condemnation of female academics. The opposition to female fellowship in the Society was vanguarded by Colonel Prideaux, a sitting council member, who maintained that members should prove their mastery of “geographical knowledge through publishing and discovery” and their dedication to the empire by “public service in India or the colonies.” Women could obviously not enter into government service and those that still aspired to Society membership without checking these imperial blocks were harshly rebuffed. Lord Curzon summarized the threat the female geographer posed most succinctly in his 1893 letter to *The Times*:

“We contest *in toto* the general capacity of women to contribute to scientific geographical knowledge. Their sex and training render them equally unfitted for exploration, and the genus of professional female globe-trotters with which America has lately familiarized us is one of the horrors of the latter end of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰⁴

Female travel writers who wanted to maintain their respectability, and avoid “horrifying” their domestic readers, would clearly have to demarcate as quickly as possible, hence the discussion of the tone of the narrative in the Preface that their works were unscholarly. Isabel Burton assured her readers that despite accusations of “quasi-professionalism” aimed at her previous literary efforts, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land* contained “little History, Geography, or Politics; no Science, Ethnography, Botany, Geology, Zoology, Mineralogy, or Antiquities.”¹⁰⁵ Emily Beaufort calmed apprehensions by informing scholars they would learn nothing but a few facts “she herself was incapable” of “drawing deductions from,”

¹⁰⁴ Lord Curzon, 1893 Letter to “The Times,” quoted in R.H. Mill, *The Record of the Royal Geographic Society, 1830-1930*. (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1930).

though she felt herself obviously capable of seeking them out and compiling them.¹⁰⁶ Ella Sykes' text received rave reviews from a number of geographical associations despite her disclaimer that it had "no pretensions to be either historical, scientific, or political."¹⁰⁷ Louisa Jebb attempted to "pass on ... a vivid idea of the appearance of things" because as she was not "a scientist or an archaeologist or a politician striving to catalogue each new acquisition on your particular subject" she possessed "no particular knowledge of any sort."¹⁰⁸

The Victorian era witnessed increasing numbers of women leaving their sitting rooms for steamships and their contained domestic sphere for the seemingly boundary less space of the imperial expanse. While physical mobility may have become more acceptable for certain women in specific situations, the intelligence of women as a species, especially "intrepid" female travelers, remained under attack by leaders in civil societies and the new sciences.¹⁰⁹ Those Englishwomen who were brave enough to publish their travel narratives under their own names mitigated the risks to their domestic reputations by including apologies and disclaimers assuring their readers that the contents of there texts were non-academic, not "serious" and therefore unthreatening.

¹⁰⁵ Burton, vii-viii.

¹⁰⁶ Beaufort, vii.

¹⁰⁷ Bell and McEwan, 295.

¹⁰⁸ Jebb, 4.

¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that the height of the Royal Geographic Society debate occurred concurrently with the development of new theories of sexual difference by innovators like Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton. Spencer's work was "riddled" with evidence that "the heavy handicap nature had imposed upon women" prevented them from achieving intellectual equality with men, instead they were in "a virtually permanent state of arrested development." Galton founded an "anthropometric" laboratory in London, which conducted experiments that ultimately "proved" that "a deficiency of brain weight ... hopelessly deprived (women) of the mental resources for effective competition with men." Flavia Alaya, "Victorian Science and the "Genius of Women," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38, no. 2 (April – June 1977): 264, 267.

Comparing Gendered Prefaces

In an interesting deviation from the norm, in which wives who were significant contributors to their husbands' expeditions were only referenced in the Prefaces of travel narratives,¹¹⁰ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt was the author of the Preface to his wife's travel narrative, *A Pilgrimage to the Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race*. Lady Anne and Sir Wilfred Blunt were married in 1869. Anne was the daughter of William Noel, the first Earl of Lovelace, and Ada Byron, Lord Byron's only legitimate daughter. Together the professedly "anti-imperialist" couple retired from the diplomatic service to establish a base for their travels in Egypt. *A Pilgrimage to the Nejd* was Anne Blunt's second published travel narrative, her description of their 1878 exploration of the Euphrates, being her first. *A Pilgrimage to the Nejd* rapidly went through three editions shortly following its release and its popularity and use as the foremost source on the interior of Arabia makes its Preface an excellent choice for a comparison of rhetorical strategies used by male and female travel writers.¹¹¹

The purpose of the couple's trip was in reality a search for Arabian horses to stock their English estate, though in the Preface Wilfrid's poetic background shined through as he waxed more sentimental than any of the Prefaces written by female travelers. For him the Nejd was filled with "romantic interest" and was an object worthy of "religious feeling, such as might prompt the visit to a shrine" or more succinctly "a holy land."¹¹² Wilfred referred throughout the Preface to both himself and his wife with the pronoun "us." Unlike female travelers who were

¹¹⁰ Strobel, 43.

¹¹¹ Hamalian, 313, xii, 314.

¹¹² Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir, and 'Our Perisan Campaign*, vol. 1, (London: John Murray, 1881), ix-x.

careful to assert that their words reflected only their own experiences, Wilfrid Blunt wrote with a sense of self-assuredness that allowed him to speak poetically and share the limelight with his wife without the need to justify his actions.

Sir Blunt was quick to point out the accomplishments of their journey and the political and academic accolades these accomplishments should garner. He described their essential “firsts” as “profit” and enumerated them as follows. He and his wife were the first to visit the Jebel Shammar “openly and at (their) leisure.” They had with them a compass and barometer which they used to “take note of all (they) saw” and which had previously been unrecorded.¹¹³ Despite their professedly “superficial” knowledge of geology, the pair was still able to “correct a few mistakes,”¹¹⁴ but Wilfrid maintained that their most important “contribution to knowledge” was to be found in their description of “Shepherd rule,” their term for the familial based political system which predominated in Central Arabia.¹¹⁵ Not even in the later works of Gertrude Bell, do you find an Englishwoman’s travel narrative introduced by such overt claims to academic and political achievement. Not satisfied with merely presenting new information, Wilfrid had also taken upon himself the task of disapproving the notion that an “Indo-Mediterranean” railroad could successfully run from Baghdad to Bushire. Sir Blunt felt dispelling this myth was a matter of British pride and as he could conceive of no “country more absolutely unsuited for railway enterprise” he dedicated himself in the Preface to doing all in his power to “deter (his) countrymen from embarking their capital in an enterprise financially absurd.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid., xvii.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., xx.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., xxi.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., xxii.

If his self-congratulatory tone and nationalist protectionism were not enough to mark Blunt's Preface as having a male author, his inclusion of a disagreement with the Royal Geographical Society, in which he maintained he was in the right, does. Blunt was apparently challenged as to the accuracy of his use of the term "Nejd" to describe the land he and his wife had explored following a presentation of a paper discussing the trip. The insult to his character was apparently severe enough that he defended his stance in writing. He rebutted the challenger who was informed by the "best authority" that he and his wife had only visited the region surrounding the great desert by referring to the actual people who lived in the land. Blunt acidly remarked "the inhabitants of the districts in question had always called them so, ... Hail is not only an integral part of Nejd, but Nejd *par excellence*."¹¹⁷ He concluded, in a tone which only glancingly resembles female demureness, by "hold(ing) then, to the correctness of our title, though in this matter, as in the rest, craving indulgence of the learned."¹¹⁸

Wilfrid Blunt's gender allowed him to author a Preface for his wife's travel narrative with a confidence bordering on arrogance that is absent from the introductions written by women. Instead of an apology and efforts to distance himself and his wife from scholarly opinions and political issues, he situated Lady Anne's text squarely in purpose and result in the political and scientific arena. When threatened he responded as his gender both allowed and encouraged with masculine aggressiveness. Had his wife written the Preface, instead of Wilfrid with no changes made to the text, one wonders if it would not have run through six editions in rapid succession for its singularity, or if it would have failed to even find a publisher for its assumed masculinity and inappropriate aspirations.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., xxiii.

The Preface, though a valuable source for the historian, contains within its few pages only the introduction to the Victorian female traveler's worldview. Much as the Preface, once deconstructed, revealed the underlying connections between power, authority, gender and cultural transmission, the remainder of this paper will analyze the body of the travel narrative as an equally valuable site of contested imperial discourses.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xxviii.

CHAPTER THREE: PACKING HER INTELLECTUAL BAGGAGE

Long before the Victorian traveler had taken her first step onto “holy land,” she had formulated an expectation of what she would encounter on her travels through Turkey, North Africa and the Levant. Additionally, her own responses to this pre-imagined geography were thought to be equally predetermined by her race, class and gender. Both sets of expectations derived from the conglomeration of specific cultural innovations in the Victorian era that led to a world viewed and experienced in a fundamentally different manner than it previously had been. The mass publication of *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*, popularity of guide books, the advent of new theories of scripture study, the founding of public museums and private collections and the dissemination of general principles for the new social sciences combined to create an environment in which information collection and organization in the Victorian world revolved on an “ontological distinction between physical reality and representation”.¹¹⁹ Female travelers engaging these mediums of cultural exchange were thus able to “know by heart” the Middle East before they had ever entered it and upon arrival were then only able to “rediscover” a place they had already visited with the “map one already carried in one’s head, as the reiteration of an earlier description.”¹²⁰ This rediscovery or affirmation of their expectations further strengthened their sense of control over their new surroundings, including the “native” people residing in the lands they traveled to. Understanding the manner in which these “new” forms of metaphysical identification formulated what Victorian lady travelers knew the “East”

¹¹⁹ Mitchell, xiii.

¹²⁰ Mitchell, 30.

to be before they had ever seen it is crucial in determining why female travelers felt and wrote as they did.

The Arabian Nights' Entertainments

Florence Nightingale, in a letter written on her 1849 voyage up the Nile, remarked on the element of peculiarly Oriental fantasy involved in expectation formation and travel to Egypt: "I had that strange feeling as if I had been here before, - it was so exactly what I had imagined, - a coincidence between the reality and the previous fancy"¹²¹ One, if not, perhaps, the most important cultural agent fueling Nightingale's and many other women travelers' imaginations regarding the "Orient" was the mass publication of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.

Allusions to *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* or *Alf Layla wa-Layla* as a reference to understanding the "true" Orient were present in the travel narratives of British women in the genre's earliest publications. In describing a dinner in Constantinople to her sister, the Countess of Mar, Lady Mary Montagu, the wife of the first British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, utilized the tales to create a system of reference to describe her surroundings and the customs of the Turkish people. She wrote, "this you will say, is but too like the Arabian tales. You forget, dear sister, those very tales were written by an author of this country, and (excepting the enchantments) are a real representation of the manners here."¹²²

¹²¹ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, to an unknown addressee, 22 December 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Sattin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 61.

¹²² Lady Mary Montagu, Pera of Constantinople, to the Countess of Mar, 10 March 1717, as reproduced in Christopher Pick, ed., *Embassy to Constantinople: The Travels of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1988), 167.

The *Entertainments* were first published in Europe by Antoine Galland. In his extensive travels throughout the Levant and North Africa Galland accumulated a fourteenth-century collection of Arabic folklore, known as the *Alf Layla wa Layla*, that he later edited and translated into French.¹²³ His editorial style involved problematic decisions including abridging fables original to the sagas oral retelling, transcribing and including orally transmitted Arab tales not originally in the traditional recounting of the *Layla wa Layla*, and inserting his own creations which obviously had no basis in the original oral tradition. Ironically, those tales such as Aladdin and Sinbad the Sailor, which would prove to the present day to be the most beloved of *The Entertainments* and the basis for a number of *Arabian Night* references by travel writing women, fell into the final category.¹²⁴ It is important then to realize that in basing their expectations of what the East would be like on *The Arabian Nights*, Victorian female travelers had grounded their assumptions on two layers of fantasy, the East as created in Arab folklore to entertain and the Orient invented, shaped and organized by Europeans editors, first Galland and later and more predominantly Edward Lane.

The Lady Mary was most likely citing Galland's edition of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, as her residence in Turkey predated the first English translation of the work produced in 1721, by an editor oddly known only as the 'Grub Street' translator.¹²⁵ For the time period particularly of interest here, 1837-1914, of the eighteen versions of *The Entertainments* in

¹²³ Robert L. Mack, "Introduction," in *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, Antoine Galland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), xiv.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi.

circulation by 1840¹²⁶ Edward Lane's 1838 revision of Galland's edition is the most relevant and most likely the most well read.¹²⁷ In his rendition of this classic, Lane was not simply seeking perfection of translation; he was primarily concerned with contextualizing the fables with his contemporary ethnographic knowledge of modern Egypt, especially Cairo. By interweaving the traditional Arab story that provided "admirable pictures of the manners and customs of the Arabs"¹²⁸ and his own ethnographic expertise, as proved in his 1836 publication *Egyptian Culture, Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, Lane created a travel guide and reference which implied that the fantasy world of a five hundred year old collection of fables and the world that he had "scientifically" observed and recorded in his 1830s residence in Egypt were one and the same.

The Arabian Nights were also frequently reformatted to target the juvenile reader, often in a moralistic trope. Beginning in the 1790s titles like *The Oriental Moralist*, or *The Beauties of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (1790), *Oriental Tales, Being Moral Selections from the Arabian Nights Entertainments calculated both to Amuse and Improve the Minds of Youth* (1829), and *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments, Arranged for the Perusal of Youthful Readers* (1863) capitalized on the growing children's literature market.¹²⁹ The existence of such works

¹²⁶ Jennifer Schacker-Mill, "Otherness and Otherworldliness: Edward W. Lane's Ethnographic Treatment of the Arabian Nights," *The Journal of American Folklore* 113, no. 448 (Spring, 2000): 167.

¹²⁷ Lane's work was commissioned by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 32 periodic installments from 1838 to 1840. It was later edited and produced into three inclusive volumes. For a discussion on the widely available nature of this work to a variety of classes in England please see Jennifer Schacker-Mill's previously cited article.

¹²⁸ Edward William Lane, trans. and ed. *The Thousand and One Nights, Commonly called in England The Arabian Nights' Entertainment. A new translation from the Arabic with copious notes*, Vol. I, (London: Charles Knight, 1838), xxiv.

¹²⁹ Mack, xviii.

explains the recollections in travel narratives in which authoresses like Julia Pardoe recall growing up with *The Arabian Nights* from youth: “How often I have entranced over the sparkling pages of the “Hundred and One Nights.” When a mere girl, I remember once to have laid the volume on my knees; and, with my head pillowed on my hand, and my eyes closed, to have attempted to bring clearly before my mental vision the Caravan of the Merchant Abdullah.”¹³⁰

As they matured to womanhood, travelers read Lane’s work and felt that they were in fact studying and learning about the “true Orient.” His account is attributed by many, like Gertrude Bell, to have sparked their interest in the East from their childhood by “keep(ing) generations of English children on wakeful pillows” and “throw(ing) the first glamour of mystery and wonder over the unknown East.”¹³¹ Upon their return from their own travels Englishwomen took part in what Edward Said has termed literary re-affirmation by describing their own eastern experiences in reference to and reaffirmation of the accuracy of Lane’s own work¹³² and the *Arabian Nights* in general. These references generally fall into one of three overlapping categories of fantasy transference; *The Arabian Nights* coming to life via the presence of the traveler as observer; the timelessness of the East as proved by the lack of “progress” achieved by Easterners who live just as those who are portrayed in *The Arabian Nights* did; and the “foreignness” or different nature

¹³⁰ Pardoe, 255-56.

¹³¹ Bell, 133.

¹³² Isabella Romer proclaimed “The more I see of the “Victorious City,” the better I like it, and the more am I struck by the extraordinary accuracy of Mr. Lane’s descriptions of men, manners and things, in this most picturesque of all Oriental capitals. Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 30.

of the East which separates and lowers it from the West as depicted in its magical and mysterious qualities peculiar to the theme of the fantastic which runs throughout *The Arabian Nights*.

Many women's travel narratives positioned themselves within their strange Oriental surroundings as observers or audiences to a play to which they had little or no physical attachment. They would encounter a cultural event and proceed to describe it as if their observation had caused a scene from *The Arabian Nights* to be resuscitated. Weddings were a favorite practice to encapsulate in fairy tale imagery. An occasion when "slaves and women were gorgeously appareled ... precious stones quite dazzled the eye ... in very earnest a scene from the "Arabian Nights,"¹³³ wherein the female travel could be for "a few moments ... lost in admiration."¹³⁴ A trip to the bazaar involved a variety of unfamiliar stimuli to the Victorian traveler. Vendors shouting in a foreign tongue, oddly dressed women, unfamiliar foods on display and the presence of a throng of people of a social class most likely not to have been thought pleasant in her home country encouraged the female traveler to negotiate this cross-cultural encounter within a familiar and comforting framework. Annie Harvey did so by comparing her market visit to "a living picture of the "Arabian Nights' Tales" where "like Amine in the story of "The Three Calenders," many a veiled figure attended by her black slave may be seen making her purchases of drugs and spices."¹³⁵ Elizabeth Anne Finn domesticated the same experience by taming the unsettling sight of real-life beggars in a crowded Friday

¹³³ Harvey, 60.

¹³⁴ Julia Pardoe, *City of the Sultans: And Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836*, vol. 2, (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), 213.

¹³⁵ Harvey, 6-7.

bazaar with a comparison between the “plenty of one-eyed people” and “the three brothers of the Nights’ Entertainments.”¹³⁶

In order for the East to appear timeless it could have no intrusion from “modern” or “European” influences. In her fictional novel based on events she witnessed as the Consul’s wife in Jerusalem, Elizabeth Anne Finn pointed out that “Jaffa is a different world from Jerusalem – far more Oriental.” It is in Jaffa where the European “has made but little way” that she would illustrate a copy of *The Arabian Nights* as it would be unimpeded by the non-picturesque encroachment of western society there.¹³⁷ For *The Arabian Nights* to continue to capture the essence of the true Orient, for it and the Orient to continue to serve its purpose as a book and place of European entertainment and sanctuary it could not be tainted by the myriad of unsettling social, political and technological changes raging in the Victorian world.

The mysterious and magical qualities the East possessed and which were expressed in the many supernatural facets of *The Arabian Nights* were the traveling companions of many English women both figuratively and emotionally. Florence Nightingale, who detested the constriction of her freedom by the necessity of having a dragoman to be her constant companion, nicknamed him “Efreet”¹³⁸ and Mary Eliza Rogers described her Arabic teacher as “the *beau ideal* of an Oriental tailor, and looked as if you had just walked out of one of the pages of the “Arabian Nights’ Entertainments.”¹³⁹ If people were no challenge to transform, neither was a mundane

¹³⁶ Elizabeth Anne Finn, *A Third Year in Jerusalem* (London: Nisbet, 1869), 50.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Anne Finn, *Home in the Holy Land: A Tale Illustrating Customs and Incidents in Modern Jerusalem* (London: Nisbet, 1866), 263.

¹³⁸ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, to an unknown addressee, 9 December 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 47.

¹³⁹ Rogers, 149.

social call. Summoning her knowledge of *The Arabian Nights*, Lucinda Griffith transformed her visit to a small harem into an adventure where “an air of mystery and adventure” saturated “the labyrinth of crooked passages” at the home’s entryway.¹⁴⁰ A foreign religion, however, was a bit more complicated and Nightingale was required to call in a genii to explain the relationship between a Muslim and his religion. For it is “the most dreamy, the most fantastic, the most airy, and yet sensuous religion” and it is only through a visit to a Cairene mosque that you can gain “insight into the Oriental mind” which shares his religion with the *Arabian Nights* and its geniis.¹⁴¹

Gertrude Bell may well have been embarrassed later in life by the romantic sentiments pronounced in her first published work *Safar Nameh, Persian Pictures*. It exuded a youthful light-heartedness and delight in the “otherness” of Turkey largely missing from the more academic archaeological treatises she authored almost a decade later. The text, however, is valuable as it provides an excellent example of the three aforementioned narrative techniques woven together to create an Orient for her reader that has much more in common with the fiction of *The Arabian Nights* than “reality.”

The East derived its “charm” primarily because “it has none of it changed” and that it presented itself just “like the Arabian Nights!”¹⁴² In fact, Bell asserted that Turkey was the genesis of that “fairy region full of wild and magical possibilities; imprisoned efreets and obedient djinns, luckless princesses and fortunate fishermen,” where magical elements “fall into

¹⁴⁰ Griffith, 175.

¹⁴¹ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, to an unknown addressee, March 1850, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 192.

¹⁴² Bell, 10.

their appointed places as naturally as policemen and engine-drivers, female orators, and members of the Stock Exchange” do so in England.¹⁴³ For Bell the “the magic influence which the *Arabian Nights* exercise(s) over us all ... Colours the Islamic East with romance.”¹⁴⁴ For those less fortunate than herself in their ability to travel personally to Turkey, she offered comfort: “it is sufficient that he should have read the *Nights* for him to find at every turn the scenario of familiar tales or an approximate setting for imaginary adventures.”¹⁴⁵ This last remark assured her armchair bound reader that travel to the East was in fact not necessary at all; if one had read *The Arabian Nights* one would know all there was to experience, without the dangers of a sea voyage or the inconvenience of being eaten alive by bed bugs.

While her later public works do not contain such allusions to the magical properties found in the Orient, her personal diaries as late as 1914 reveal the lasting hold the saga had on her associations with those she met on her travels. Following a dangerous journey through the Nejd, Bell found herself captive in the fortified city of Hayyil. She recorded her trial in an *Arabian Nights* allegory in which she “lived through a chapter of the *Arabian Nights* during this last week” in a place “unadulterated” in “its habit as it has lived for centuries and centuries.”¹⁴⁶ The women of the harem she was retained in and the local officials of the city took on the characteristics of the tale’s characters “weaving their plots behind the qasr walls” with their

¹⁴³ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁶ Gertrude Bell, 6 March 1914 diary entry, as reproduced in Rosemary O’Brien, ed., *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 83.

“smiling lips and restless shifting eyes,” while the entire palace was pervaded by “smells of blood.”¹⁴⁷

Not every traveler nor every travel narrative, however, was so deeply steeped in the mythology of Arab folklore as a means of experiencing a contemporary Arab world. But few travelers, even those like Julia Pardoe who recognized that “the European mind has become so imbued with ideas of Oriental mysteriousness, mysticism, and magnificence ... that it is to be doubted whether it will willingly cast off its old associations, and suffer itself to be undeceived,” could escape the position of authority *The Arabian Nights* had obtained in English literary culture. For even she could not keep herself from resorting to the following description of her 1836 cruise on the Bosphorus in *The City of the Sultan*, “I began to think that the tales of Eastern enchantment that I had read in my girlhood were now realized” and “I should have fancied myself a spectator of one of the scenes described by the tale-telling Schererazade.”¹⁴⁸

The cultural role played by *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment* in the process of “pre-knowing” the East was significant. The work was referenced by every female British traveler in this study with no significant decrease into the first decade of the twentieth-century. Galland’s introduction of the stories of Oriental exoticism and magic and Lane’s later ethnographic revision laid the cornerstone for a literary tradition which became the standard upon which British travel experiences in the imperial age would be measured. When these women entered the East and the people, places and customs they observed did not agree with Scheherazade’s Europeanized and temporally relocated descriptions they suffered from a sense of

¹⁴⁷ Gertrude Bell, 2 March 1914 diary entry, as reproduced in Rosemary O’Brien, ed., *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 82.

disappointment and disillusionment. This sense of “failure” was attributed to the slothful and ignorant “natives” who were unable to represent themselves in the manner that best suited them, a phenomenon rich with racial and economic undertones discussed in detail later in this study.

Travel Guides

The tales of Scheherazade were not the only cultural mediums upon which expectations of the East were built. Literary works designated by female explorers as travel guides, both those read by women before they left for the Orient and those they used during their trips, evidenced the serious scholastic and religious nature of these voyages. Not seen as merely a pleasure cruise, a journey to the Orient, and especially one to the Holy Land, was a serious affair requiring arduous intellectual preparation. In an age before the organized packages of Cook and Son, a female traveler would have had to acquire all of the information needed to understand and appreciate the sites she visited by herself. Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, author of the 1843 travel guide *Modern Egypt and Thebes* which was published later by its better known name *Murray's Handbook of Egypt*, became regarded as perhaps ‘the authority’ on Oriental travel and recommended “an essential library of about thirty volumes for a trip up the Nile.”¹⁴⁹ Both Isabella Romer and Florence Nightingale supplemented their own considerable libraries with texts from leading Arab scholars to ensure they had the most authoritative collection at their

¹⁴⁸ Julia Pardoe, *City of the Sultans and Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836*, vol. 1, (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), 62, 137, 170.

¹⁴⁹ Anthony Satin, “Introduction,” in *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 12.

disposal.¹⁵⁰ Travel guides, the copious notes women took from them¹⁵¹ and their own reflections women recorded after visiting a location were deemed so valuable and important to female voyagers that when Emily Beaufort's dahabieh was completely destroyed by a fire on the Nile she deemed her most "grave" loss her "books, and the notes we had made in preparation for seeing the realities themselves, as well as various useful maps, plans &c., with which we had been amply provided. From the want of books it was hard, more than hard, to profit even by what we saw."¹⁵² It is obvious from this statement and the aforementioned preparation that it was not enough for women to see ancient Egyptian tombs or places mentioned in the Scriptures, it was also crucial that they understand their historical and spiritual value. Such information could only be gleaned by focused study.

Englishwomen included a variety of literary sources as "travel guides." These included the forerunners of present day *Lonely Planet* guides, texts like Henry Bartlett's self proclaimed guide for Jerusalem, *Walks about the City and Environs of Jerusalem*,¹⁵³ classics which described the region as it appeared in antiquity¹⁵⁴ and most importantly, for its influence on cross cultural encounters between European women and "natives," the *Bible*.

¹⁵⁰ Satin, 12; Romer, 13.

¹⁵¹ These notes were so extensive as to include interior diagrams of the pyramids, plans of Egyptian temples, and architectural sketches. Florence Nightingale, Cairo, to my dearest people, November 29, 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 39; Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 76.

¹⁵² Beaufort, 52-3.

¹⁵³ William Henry Bartlett, *Walks about the City and Environs of Jerusalem* (London: George Virtue, 1844).

¹⁵⁴ It should also be noted that one British authoress included a "modern" classic in her repertoire of references, Mark Twain's *New Pilgrims' Progress*. Isabella Burton pronounced Mark Twain the "only tourist in Syria who has spoken the plain truth about the country." Burton, 48.

Guidebooks were not a genre custom designed for magic carpet rides to the mystical Orient. Works espousing the wonders of locales closer to Great Britain, including France, Italy, Spain and Switzerland, were being produced by the firm of John Murray from the beginning of the nineteenth-century. The *Hand-book to the Holy Land*, referenced by many of the women in this study, was published in 1850 and advised for travel in Palestine, Syria and the Sinai. As the numbers of English travelers continued to increase during the next half century, Murray re-released an expanded tome bearing the not inconsiderable title, *A Short Account of the Geography, History, and Religious and Political Divisions of these Countries, together with Detailed Descriptions of Jerusalem, Damascus, Palmyra, Baalbek, and the Most Interesting Ruined Cities of Moab, Gilead, and Bashan*.¹⁵⁵ The verbosity of this heading announces the broad-ranging goals of the text. Much like Edward Lane intended to do more than entertain with his anthology of Egyptian folktales, guidebooks contained more than detailed descriptions, estimated travel costs and directions – they also proffered social and moral advice. After reading Karl Baedeker’s *Palestine and Syria: Handbook for Travellers*, a British woman would be familiar with both the historical importance of the Jordan River and the most polite way to have tea with a Bedouin Sheikh.¹⁵⁶ Much as the presence of female travelers animated “natives” to perform scenes from *The Arabian Nights*, guidebooks always assumed the traveler would be in the superior position of observer to a static Oriental diorama. The very nature of travel proved to underscore the superiority of Europeans, as according to these guides the British traveler was

¹⁵⁵ Edmund Bosworth, “The Land of Palestine in the late Ottoman Period as Mirrored in Western Guide Books,” *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 13, no. 1 (1986): 38-39.

¹⁵⁶ Karl Baedeker, ed. *Palestine and Syria: Handbook for Travellers*, 3d ed. (Leipsic: Karl Baedeker Publisher, 1898), v.

considered by the primitive Ottoman subject to be “a madman – so unintelligible to them are the objects and pleasures of traveling.”¹⁵⁷

So authoritative and male dominated was this category of guidebook that many female travel writers felt inadequate to challenge these “experts” if their own experiences or opinions differed from those advocated by male authors. While many women may have simply expedited the writing process by saving creative energy, as did Lady Anne Blunt who did not want to “waste time” in repeating a description “no doubt, described by Mr. Murray,”¹⁵⁸ some British authoresses were too humble (or fearful of being labeled presumptuous) and demurred completely from engaging a topic by freely inserting large sections of descriptions from previously acclaimed texts. An example of the later can be found in Emmeline Lott’s *The English Governess in Egypt* where she utilized Theophile Gautier’s “fidelitious” description of Constantinople in place of her own.¹⁵⁹ Others, including Mary Rogers referred readers to “Mr. Bartlett (who) has made the streets of the Holy City so familiar in his “Walks about Jerusalem,” and “Jerusalem Revisited,” and Mr. Murray’s invaluable Hand-book” which “gives its topography and statistics so perfectly” while still providing a “slight account of the city” as she experienced it.¹⁶⁰ It was the rare female adventurer, like Isabella Romer, who took issue with the accuracy of established male travel writers like, Francoise-René Chateaubriand in his *Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem*. For though she “felt almost angry” that she “could dare to doubt when such a mind as Chateaubriand’s had unhesitatingly” identified several statues in an Egyptian

¹⁵⁷ Baedeker, xxxii.

¹⁵⁸ Blunt, 51.

¹⁵⁹ Emmeline Lott, *The English Governess in Egypt. Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 172.

¹⁶⁰ Rogers, 25.

temple, she felt “bound to give you (her) impressions.”¹⁶¹ Further in her journey when she found her opinion in complete difference to his regarding the quality of art in the Esneh temple she rationalized without apology “what his learning taught him to despise, my ignorance led me to delight in.”¹⁶²

Spiritual and Philosophical Classics: Strabo and the Bible

None of the women’s travel narratives examined questioned the veracity of the classics or the *Bible*. Strabo was recommended by Isabella Romer and Gertrude Bell for his clarity and detail.¹⁶³ Bell so favored its use in Turkey that she attested “you may journey here with the latest guide-book in one hand and Strabo in the other, and the Murray of the first century will furnish you with more minute information than he of the nineteenth.”¹⁶⁴ Emily Beaufort encouraged utilizing Josephus in conjunction with the *Bible* as the “most trustworthy method for a scholar” to study the “ground” of Jerusalem.¹⁶⁵ As the overwhelming majority of British Victorians traveled to the Orient to partake in a Christian pilgrimage, the *Bible* multitasked as the unparalleled spiritual, historical, moral and geographic authority and reference. Even for those like Louisa Jebb, whose trip through Persia was anything but religious, the *Bible* was “one of the few books that one can read in this sort of wandering life” as she was in “the land where people

¹⁶¹ Romer, 210.

¹⁶² Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 154.

¹⁶³ Romer, 146.

¹⁶⁴ Gertrude Bell, *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures* (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1894), 180.

¹⁶⁵ Beaufort, 364.

live in rock houses, and hew their tombs in rocks, and wear girdles, and say “Aha,” eat honey a lot, and go out to desolate lands, and say their prayers on the housetop.”¹⁶⁶

The surge in the number of travelers from Great Britain visiting the Orient was prefaced by the development of a radically different method of studying the scriptures that would have a decisive effect on the way in which women related to and expressed their feelings about their travels in the Holy Land. Bishop Robert Lowth orated a series of lectures at Oxford in the 1740s that were later published in Latin in 1753 and translated in English in 1787. The core of his work was “his treatment of the Old Testament as a form of poetry, and his insistence that one must understand the material culture, customs, and even the mentality of a culture in order to appreciate its discursive traditions.”¹⁶⁷ Lowth further postulated that in order to best study the Old Testament one had to possess a “a thorough appreciation of the time and place of entextualization.” His lectures suggested the best means to accomplish this was to develop “total empathy of sentiment and mentality with the Old Testament-era Hebrews.”¹⁶⁸

British women who journeyed to Palestine, Syria and Egypt believed that in order to “know” the scriptures, as Lowth recommended, they had to have a spiritually emotional connection to the locations, people and customs they encountered. Such a connection based upon “entextualization” required the repositioning of the modern Orient in a Victorian conceptualization of what the Biblical Orient was, or to rephrase, the need for female travelers to acquire Biblical empathy prevented them from seeing the Holy Land as a dynamic region populated by people living non-biblical lives. For these women, the Holy Land existed to fulfill

¹⁶⁶ Jebb, 143-4.

¹⁶⁷ Schacker-Mill, 166.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 170.

their desire for a living divine tableau. The “land of God’s chosen people” existed to be “penetrated” so that as Isabel Burton intimated the “marvelous workings out of people and things in this once prosperous territory”¹⁶⁹ could be revealed. This “metaphoric colonialism”¹⁷⁰ trapped the Orient, its people and culture in an unchanging and torpid state.

For the British Christian (the two terms could be used interchangeably to describe the female travelers discussed here) the *Bible* acted in a capacity similar to that of *The Arabian Nights*, reinforcing the conceptions these women formed prior to their visit to the Holy Land and acting as a cultural interpreter upon their arrival, mitigating the strange and translating it comfortably into a preconceived framework of Biblically specific Orientalism. A lifetime of *Bible* reading, Sunday school attendance¹⁷¹ and spiritual imagining led women to “know” what the Holy Land was like, before seeing it. Isabel Burton described this process in her travel narrative, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*: “I cannot tell you how strange it is to see, to think and to pray by, and touch, the very scenes and monuments of which you learned at your mother’s knee, of which you read every morning in your childish lesson, and in

¹⁶⁹ Romer Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 188.

¹⁷⁰ Nancy L. Stockdale, “Gender and Colonialism in Palestine 1800-1948: Encounters among English, Arab and Jewish Women” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2000), 24.

¹⁷¹ Susan Thorne has discussed the “evangelical contribution to British political culture,” in her article “The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable: Missionary Imperialism and the Language of class in Early Industrial Britain.” Thorne points out that almost half of the adult population was regular churchgoers and more than a majority of the English attended “Britain’s massively popular Sunday schools.” This article can be found in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 238-282.

which you were examined upon Sunday by your parish priest.”¹⁷² Transforming the reality that was nineteenth-century Ottoman Syria, Palestine and Egypt into a Victorian projection of temporally transient living scripture centered on three imaginative axes: historically retrogressing Holy Land peoples and their behaviors, spiritually remapping the geography and elucidating scripture meaning.

Shepherds, prophets, wise men and water drawing women were key protagonists in the *Bible* and are recorded with equal frequency in the descriptions of Holy Land inhabitants in traveling women’s narratives. From simple comparisons “the sheikh ... would have afforded an admirable model to an artist for an Ishmael,”¹⁷³ to becoming the narrator within an imaginary biblical scene “and it was the time of the evening, the time that the women go out to draw the water, and we drew rein and watched them, even as Jacob watched Rachel,”¹⁷⁴ attaching Old Testament identities to nineteenth-century Arabs and associating their clothing and behavior as that representative of Biblical costume and actions stripped individual Arabs of their essential uniqueness.

Florence Nightingale, Isabella Romer and Gertrude Bell availed themselves of what Sara Suleri has called “the feminine picturesque,” a form of observation that allowed travelers to describe their surroundings while remaining “immune to the sociological conclusions of their own data.”¹⁷⁵ Nightingale’s and Romer’s observations of the agricultural life of the Arab peasantry replaced the border-line survival reality with the picturesque “the people pasture their

¹⁷² Lady Isabel Arundell Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol. 2, (London: H.S. King, 1875), 36.

¹⁷³ Romer, 245.

¹⁷⁴ Jebb, 73.

flocks and herds, and the women walk, spinning ... and it is more like the old life in the Bible, than any very sordid life of poverty.”¹⁷⁶ “Primitive” farming methods and “ragged” shepherds were idyllic in the midst of famine as they were “exactly the same ... as in the days of the pastoral patriarchs”¹⁷⁷ and “reminds one of the shepherds to whom angel voices announced the glad tidings of the Nativity.”¹⁷⁸ Gertrude Bell compared the terror-filled fleeing people of cholera stricken Damascus to an “endless procession of Holy Families ... the women mounted on donkeys and holding their babes in front of them wrapped in the folds of their cloaks, the men hurrying on foot by their side.”¹⁷⁹ In each of these instances, and others too numerous to mention, serious social ills with life and death consequences for the lowest order of the Arab poor are idealized as scenes of a Biblical pageant played out for the traveler/viewer. The underlying political and social causes of these problems are neither questioned nor deemed important.

Helen Gordon takes this debasing categorization one step further by disallowing North Africans even the quality of life. In observing a group of African men walking in the Sahara, her gaze immediately transformed them from “stones of the wayside” not “growing with years,” but “fashioned at once as they stood,” into the “children of Abraham.” Her attention to their progress having caused the “breath of life breathed into their nostrils” so that sub-human “beasts” could

¹⁷⁵ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, with an introduction by Anita Desai (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), xxxi.

¹⁷⁶ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, to my dearest people, February 6, 1850, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 128.

¹⁷⁷ Romer, 27-8.

¹⁷⁸ Romer, 221.

¹⁷⁹ Bell, 61.

be “moulded” into men, as was Adam “suddenly out of the earth.”¹⁸⁰ Every action of a Holy Land inhabitant was run through the imperialist sieve and sorted for spiritual significance. What could be used for the edification of the traveler spirituality was taken, and what was caught in the sorting process as unacceptable was deemed “backward, barbaric, dirty, senseless, degenerate, despotic, and heathenistic.” Believing nineteenth-century Arabs, Africans and Ottoman subjects were in fact a similitude of Biblical characters had serious consequences for the “metaphorically colonized.” Wherever “the modern forms and ideas of European society were brought into immediate contact with customs of the time of Abraham” the “descendants” of Abraham were deemed to be in a “state of transition from primitive barbarism,”¹⁸¹ a transition that prior to British involvement had stagnated, and therefore was in desperate need of European intervention to progress.

Spiritually Remapping Geography

Much as the fellahin were transformed into Biblical characters, the land of Palestine, Syria and Persia could also be imaginatively reworked into a Garden of Eden.¹⁸² British women explored every recess of the Holy Land on horse – and camelback. Undeterred by treacherous cliffs, stifling heat or marauding Bedouin raiders, they cantered from Mount Caramel to the Dead Sea strictly adhering to the *Bible* as their map, planning what they should visit based on spiritual significance. This viewpoint resulted in a spiritual replotting of Holy Land cartography. It

¹⁸⁰ Helen C. Gordon, *A Woman in the Sahara* (London: William Heinemann, 1915), 6.

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth Anne Finn, *Home in the Holy Land: A Tale Illustrating Customs and Incidents in Modern Jerusalem* (London: Nisbet, 1866) v.

required designating contemporary cities and villages unfounded in biblical times as insignificant and promoting an arid wasteland to prominence because it “possesses no interest beyond the fact of its sites being ... the utmost limit of our Saviour’s wanderings.”¹⁸³ A location became important not for its contemporary productivity, population concentration or cultural attributes, but for its “travelin(g) with the history of our Saviour”¹⁸⁴ and its ability to increase the spirituality of the traveler. Desolate fields, once the sites of Biblical cities long destroyed by war or the forces of nature were resurrected. Thriving cities with active economies, cultural centers and non-Judeo-Christian religious hubs were reduced in significance to their Christian scriptural affiliations. For example, Cairo became merely a way station for the infant Christ’s escape from Herod’s wraith “the very way Mary and the baby must have come.”¹⁸⁵ Several geographic locales were so steeped in spiritual meaning that the mere sight of them rendered travel writers overcome with religious ecstasy. The Nile River as described in the Old Testament and the Jerusalem of the New Testament were two such sites where “identification with the Bible” intertwined with a British woman’s “own hopes and feelings.”¹⁸⁶

Female travelers reduced the Nile River, whose water cycle, including its annual flood, was crucial to the Egyptian economy, as well as the religious and cultural life of large sections of the agricultural population to its relevancy, to Biblical events that occurred in the Old Testament. Lucinda Griffith “could not look upon it without conjuring up ... the tales of ancient glory, of

¹⁸² Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to the Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Emir, and ‘Our Persian Campaign,’* vol. 2, (London: John Murray, 1881), 147.

¹⁸³ Romer, 59.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-5.

¹⁸⁵ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, no addressee, Palm Sunday 1850, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 185.

warlike deeds, and above all, of Scripture interest, that derive their origin from Egypt and her mighty river.”¹⁸⁷ A litany of stories flooded the minds of travelers removing all room for a contemporary meaning and purpose for the river. Imagining “Joseph talking to his brethren in the field, the sons of Jacob journeying with their asses and their sacks of provender (to) buy corn in Egypt; Boaz sitting at the gate, ... and Rachel coming out at even to water the flock,”¹⁸⁸ along the river’s banks sanctified it and removed it from being able to have any such mundane purpose that nineteenth-century commerce or agriculture could demand of it.

Maude Holbach’s reaction to seeing the Nile River for the first time was so strong that though she “had much neglected to study it for many years, Bible language flowed to (her) lips” to express the common scenes of everyday life. How neglected her studies in reality were is somewhat dubious as the title of her book *Bible Ways in Bible Lands* accurately describes her work’s content and purpose. Where some travel narratives contain many instances of biblical allegory or examples of British women taking up the “feminine picturesque,” Holbach’s self-proclaimed intent was to “show the unchangingness of the East, and to sketch for those who cannot visit Bible lands the landscapes, the people, and the customs that our master drew upon to illustrate His spiritual teachings as they are to-day, that is almost exactly as they were nineteen hundred years ago.”¹⁸⁹ Her text reads like a handbook of Edward Said’s greatest hits of Orientalism,¹⁹⁰ an imperial reinterpretation of life in Ottoman Palestine filled with Victorian saints, mystics, baptizing hermits, prophets and judges who like Saul “stamp out new heresy,”

¹⁸⁶ Finn, 27.

¹⁸⁷ Griffith, 136.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 136.

¹⁸⁹ Holbach, ix, xi.

¹⁹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

walks “in the footsteps of Jesus,” travelers who reunite as did the Prodigal Son and his father, Arabs who replay the procession of Palm Sunday, (over and over again) “unchanging customs of the East” and well water fetching women, all culminating in the entertainment of an “imagination busy with a Bible picture.”¹⁹¹

While the Nile’s waters might be sacred and venerable,¹⁹² Jerusalem, as the scene of the crucifixion of Christ, was geographically situated at the very nexus of the evangelical Christian belief system. It was the location at which mankind, if it lived worthily, would be redeemed from its corrupt and fallen state. As Jerusalem first came within the sight of travelers, the most common reaction was speechlessness.¹⁹³ Even the extremely confident Isabel Burton felt “almost unworthy” to write about her impressions of Jerusalem without serious spiritual preparation, including “prayer and fasting.”¹⁹⁴ The holy city was the capstone to every traveler’s itinerary, a pivotal moment in the life of the pilgrim. For some women like Emily Beaufort, a new era of their lives was begun from the date they entered the “Holy City.”¹⁹⁵

The land or the location served a concrete purpose, touching it linked a Christian woman to her religious heritage. By crossing a mountain range¹⁹⁶ into “Bible space,” a traveler could alter time and “compress – past and present” so that “Jonah and St. Peter and ourselves” were “brought into one” with the land “as the link.”¹⁹⁷ By reading her scriptures “upon the spot where

¹⁹¹ Holbach 18, 148, 56-7, 32, 55-56, 39, 84, 169, 42-43.

¹⁹² Griffith, 197.

¹⁹³ Beaufort, 328.

¹⁹⁴ Lady Isabel Arundell Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol., 2 (London: H.S. King, 1875), 31.

¹⁹⁵ Beaufort, 328.

¹⁹⁶ Lady Isabel Arundell Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol., 1 (London: H.S. King, 1875), 18.

¹⁹⁷ Finn, 8.

the events referred to took place”¹⁹⁸ the traveler could finally understand the *Bible* as she had not been able to do so before entering its sacred space.¹⁹⁹ To the Christian traveler only a barbaric and primitive atheist was “unmoved while beholding” the “hallowed ground” of Christianity.²⁰⁰ Unbelievers were an additional justification for European intervention, this time most likely in the shape of missionaries or benevolent female travelers learned in the Gospel who could make the non-Christian aware of the error of his or her ways.

Elucidating Scripture Meaning

To “entextualize” the scriptures as Robert Lowth recommended, female travelers re-read them “on the spot” of important *Bible* moments. By “look(ing) round at the very mountains and Lake that had met His own human eyes, ... seeing the same objects, breathing the same air, and treading the same shell-covered shore that our blessed Saviour Himself had done”²⁰¹ these Christian travelers felt they could “know” Jesus Christ and his teachings more – more personally, more deeply, more spiritually and more relevantly. Even the ink on the *Bible*’s pages seemed sympathetic as “the scripture narrative acquired new life and reality” and the verses “only half expressed to the reader at home, unfolded themselves one by one.”²⁰² While concentrated study, the sort unavailable due to demands on their time and attention in their home country, might

¹⁹⁸ Lady Isabel Arundell Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol., 2 (London: H.S. King, 1875), 25.

¹⁹⁹ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, my dearest people, 17 January 1850, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 104.

²⁰⁰ Griffith, 80.

²⁰¹ Beaufort, 304.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 461.

render any subject clearer to the student, Englishwomen were attempting to create a cultural vacuum, free of what they termed “progress” in which to define their spirituality and strengthen their faith.

Around each bend in the road and in the appearance of each veiled woman, British travelers were “excited by scenes and individuals which ... threw new light on the Hebrew chronicle and Gospel story.”²⁰³ Lucinda Griffith was only able to grasp the miraculous nature of the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus when she “was sailing over the very theatre of this great miracle”²⁰⁴ and when Mary Rogers visited Cesarea, “the port from which Paul embarked,” her brother’s narration of the 27th chapter of Acts made even the contrary weather seem biblical as it was recorded in verse that Paul, too, found “the sailing was dangerous.”²⁰⁵ The very language of “Easterners” was to early traveler Lady Mary Montagu an invaluable tool to understanding Scripture passages. Instead of speaking Arabic or Turkish, “Easterners” in her opinion spoke “what we should call Scripture language.”²⁰⁶

Though on many occasions travelers rejoiced in previously indecipherable chapters from Isaiah becoming clear; they also found delight in bringing relatively simple passages to life in the course of their pilgrimages. In riding through a desolate part of Syria, Lucinda Griffith acknowledged the accuracy of the prophet Jeremiah’s own description of the region as “a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death, a land that no man passed

²⁰³ Rogers, 325.

²⁰⁴ Griffith, 82-83.

²⁰⁵ Rogers, 72.

²⁰⁶ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Adrianople, to Mr. Pope, 1 April 1717, as reproduced in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, with an introduction by Anita Desai (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 139.

through.”²⁰⁷ The main character of Elizabeth Finn’s autobiographical novel, *Miss Russell*, observed that corn, olives and figs were grown in accordance with verses from the Bible describing the “the valleys are covered over with corn, the mountains shall drop down new wine, the mountains shall drop sweet wine.”²⁰⁸ In her scholarly quest to discover previously unknown editions of early scripture known as codices, Margaret Dunlop inconveniently wore through a pair of shoes and had an inspirational moment regarding a passage in Exodus in which the Lord blessed the Israelites to be freed of such inconveniences.²⁰⁹

The “pert innovations of modern times” could “dispel the momentary illusion”²¹⁰ created in the moment of spiritual epiphany. This required the behavior and actions of “Orientals” and the topography of the Orient to be once more stripped of their contemporary context and used solely for the purpose of the spiritual edification of the female traveler.

Order, distance and boundaries as “mechanisms of representation”²¹¹ were central concepts in the Victorian worldview. The information and imagery contained in guidebooks and the *Bible* aided travelers as transplanted persons by organizing unfamiliar people, places and behaviors into the familiar structure of viewer and viewed, observer and observed or exhibitor and exhibited.²¹² Much as the glass in recently invented department stores distanced the shopper without obscuring her powers of observation, the travel guide provided antiseptic access to the

²⁰⁷ Jeremiah 2:6., Griffith, 68.

²⁰⁸ Finn, 127.

²⁰⁹ Though the exact verse and chapter are not cited, the following text is: “Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell these forty years.” Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *How the Codex was Found: A Narrative of Two Visits to Sinai from Mrs. Lewis’s Journals 1892-3* (Cambridge: Sussex Academic Press, 1893), 68-69.

²¹⁰ Romer, 27-8.

²¹¹ Mitchell, xiv.

²¹² *Ibid.*, xiv.

“true” Orient with every effort exerted to maintain the picturesque nature of the voyage. As patrons in their own living museum, British female travelers “arrived in the Orient after seeing plans and copies – in pictures, exhibitions and books – of which they were seeking the original; and their purpose was always explained in these terms.”²¹³ On their journey value-laden judgments were passed on every cross-cultural encounter and topographic scene observed. Those which supported travelers’ “biblical” depictions were celebrated, and instances denigrating their spiritual experience by disagreeing with travelers’ preconceived notions of what was acceptably biblical were seen as aberrations and created disorienting moments where the gap between expectation and reality confounded the traveler.

²¹³ Ibid., 28.

CHAPTER FOUR: ARTICULATING TRAVEL DANGERS: ILLNESS, HUNGER AND VIOLENCE

Submersion in the Orientalist literary and scientific culture of Victorian England provided female travelers with an arsenal of evangelical spiritualities, geographical expectations, social theories and imperial power paradigms from which to choose to successfully navigate cross cultural encounters and Oriental experiences. The extensive intellectual groundwork of “preconceiving” the Orient, however, did little to prepare British women for the physical realities and hardships of nineteenth-century travel. Despite the appearance of preparedness belied by extensive baggage trains, traveling women were besieged on every front by elements that had failed to make it into the formation of their *Arabian Nights* fantasies. The definition of “domestic femininity” and the decision to accept or reject its requirements at any given moment were at the heart of choosing which challenges to emphasize in travel narratives and the described reactions to these difficulties. Women were most unnerved in instances in which their personal space and hygiene were threatened and the necessity of relying on non-Europeans was enhanced. In dealing with insects, illness, limited or unfamiliar food, thieves, rough trails and a variety of other unexpected discomforts Victorian women, whether traveling alone or with others, found they were forced to confront “unfeminine” situations. In articulating these adversities travelers made a choice to sacrifice womanly decorum in order to maintain the dignity of middle- and upper-class British subjects. In nearly every instance in which gender, class and nationality were contested, nationality and class emerged victorious. The female traveler found it was easier to assume the masculine gender than to abandon her economic and imperial posture.

When Baggage is more than Luggage

The amount and type of baggage that accompanied female travelers varied significantly based on the purpose and duration of the trip. Those setting out on expeditions with geographic or scientific discovery as their explicit goal as did Mabel Bent, Gertrude Bell and Margaret Dunlop, and those traveling enroute to Consulships or lengthy sojourns, as did Ella Sykes, Mary Rogers, Isabel Burton and Emmeline Lott, possessed the accoutrements relative to the greater demands and durations of their trips. Mabel Bent framed her medium sized entourage in light of scientific need. It was as “excavators on the way to the scene of our labours” that her convoy of seven camels, four assess “groaning” under the weight of her “personal effects,” livestock needed for consumption, six policemen, and “ore peons,”²¹⁴ was justified. The excessive nature of her baggage train was at times deplored by the archaeologist “as a great drag and extra anxiety.”²¹⁵ Bulky and sometimes unused items like large specimen jars and distilling alcohol were the root of many delays and the source of a number of fights amongst servants unhappy with loading and unloading the excess each day.

Gertrude Bell’s exploration of the Nejd required her to transverse a particularly dangerous trek of desert known for its few and far between sources of water. The threat of a thirsty death did not, however, prevent her from loading her camels with “a set of dishes, silverware, linens, the complete Shakespeare and other books, at least two cameras, binoculars,

²¹⁴ Bent, 16.

²¹⁵ Bent, 174.

cosmetics, and medicines for various contingencies ... a tent, a portable bathtub, a folding chair and desk, guns and surveying instruments provided by the Royal Geographical Society.”²¹⁶

The act of choosing to take or not to take items and the manner in which the traveler traveled were expressions of class and the attitude the traveler possessed toward Victorian material culture. Though her lengthy tour through Syria had no stated political or scientific aspirations Emily Beaufort’s luggage included no less than

“a large tent for ourselves, with double carpets, beds, dinner-table, and two folding arm-chairs, with another tent for our maid, and the kitchen tent; our personal luggage, which was packed in two tin traveling-baths in stout wicker coverings (a luxury with which I recommend every lady-traveller in this climate to provide herself) and a couple of portmanteaus.”²¹⁷

For Beaufort, traveling according to her economic and social status as Vicountess of Strangford was essential to communicating the “proper” image of a British lady and an essential component of her “civilizing mission.” Making the right impression had everything to do with the “provisions” Ella Sykes’ ensured her caravan contained. “Clothing to last for a year, ... complete camp equipment, ... stock of furniture, linen, glass, and crockery”²¹⁸ were considered essentials for the newly appointed Consul to Kerman’s sister. As the representative of English manners and hospitality Sykes asserted a certain standard of material imperialism was necessary. “Setting up” her brother’s home also meant making an enclave where imperial standards could

²¹⁶ Rosemary O’Brien, ed., “Introduction” in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 18.

²¹⁷ Beaufort, 111-12.

²¹⁸ Sykes, 2.

be maintained and a protected niche of British domesticity for herself and her brother could be protected.

Maintaining outward appearances also included modes of travel. Many of the female travelers lamented the necessity of their riding an “English saddle.” The disadvantages, as articulated by Ella Sykes, were many. It was “difficult to mount into it from the ground; ... dangerous in riding among hills to be unable to spring off on either side in case of accident, the habit ... very apt to be caught on the pommels if the rider falls, and the position in which she sits cramps her much if persisted in from many hours at a slow walk.”²¹⁹ Despite such difficulties not one of the women studied here reported riding astride. The belief that such an assumption of masculine behavior would have negative effects, overriding concern for injury and comfort, says much regarding the need to maintain appropriate gender behaviors of appearance, even when the act of traveling itself transgressed the gender norms regarding mobility and spatial concepts of separate spheres.

While the sidesaddle may have been uncomfortable, traveling by dahabieh up the Nile was experiencing the Orient at the other end of the spectrum, luxury. For those who could afford it in time and monetary resources, the dahabieh, an Egyptian type of river yacht, was rented for the duration of a Nile voyage. It most often departed from Cairo, sailing to one of the cataracts and ending at the Pyramids. Both Florence Nightingale and Emily Beaufort had the means and the time to leisurely tour ancient Egyptian temples and ruins in this manner. Nightingale so preferred the dahabieh to the increasingly popular and more “common” steamer that she stated

²¹⁹ Sykes, 248.

she would never travel by steamer on the Nile if it would mean she would never see the Nile.

Emily Beaufort described at great length her floating accommodation:

“She had six cabins first a saloon, fifteen feet by twelve, containing two divans, fitted with presses underneath them along each side, two book-cases, and a large table; four sleeping cabins, large enough for comfortable washing apparatus; and a good-sized back cabin, which we used as a store-room, and a sitting-room for our maid. We had nine windows at each side of the dahabieh, with glass, green wooden shutters, and curtains; and plenty of shelves, cupboards and drawers enough to house everything.”²²⁰

Christened the *Wandering Maiden*, Beaufort’s dahabieh provided her with a private space, protected from the many “dirty natives” surrounding historical sites and from her Egyptian crew. By creating a floating Victorian English home with separate space for her working class maid, her peasant class crew and herself, Beaufort was able to replicate class and race distinctions not possible on the more public options of travel: camel expedition or steamer.

The Gendered Nature of Danger

The female traveler may have packed her bags in an attempt to plan for every contingency, yet nineteenth-century travel through the mountainous and desert territories of largely unregulated Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Lebanon remained a dangerous venture. While both male and female travelers could be robbed, run out of provisions, fall ill or be pestered by innumerable insects, these adversities affected the two genders in dramatically different ways.

²²⁰ Beaufort, 3.

Though many female travelers left Great Britain in “search of health,” their travels exposed them to a variety of illnesses, ranging from mild stomach complaints contracted from drinking brackish water, to the more serious, including cholera, typhoid and plague. Illness was an adversary not to be considered lightly. The fear of it and its realization are a reoccurring trope in women’s travel narratives and help to explain the relationship between accompaniment, independence and vulnerability. Solitary British women and those accompanied by a male or female companion experienced the threat of illness differently. Women traveling with male companions were constantly fearful of losing their spouse or brother to illness or violence. Unable to speak an Oriental language, fearful of the “subordinate” status held by women in the lands they journeyed through and unfamiliar with the logistics of travel, these women depended on their male companions for moral, physical and economic support.

Lady Anne Blunt published her travels through Persia and Arabia in a diary format. Editing her notes and personal journal, she retold the events of her trip day-by-day. On the 9th of April she noticed her husband did not look well. On the 10th her concerns were amplified; she recorded that Wilfrid was “extremely tired” and complaining of “his head and pains all over.” Fearing the worst she clung to the hope that “fatigue and the heat are sufficient to account for his feeling ill.”²²¹ Her husband had been seized by a period of convulsions and unconsciousness a week earlier and she dreaded “a return of the attack.” Far from a city or large village that could provide medical assistance, quick transport or communication to a city with a consul’s office, she recognized the potential danger of being stranded with a dangerously ill husband in a “forlorn spot.” Her fear was tangible in its poignancy: “if he gets worse we shall be in an almost helpless

position. Every place seems frightfully far off at the moment.”²²² Blunt closed the day’s entry with the plea “if only Wilfrid would get better, and he seems not better.”²²³ After passing a night in which “Wilfrid was alarmingly ill,” Lady Blunt seemed cautious that the “worst is over.”

Blunt then described the demand by her camel drivers for higher wages as taking advantage of her husband’s weakened condition.²²⁴ Recognizing the necessity of keeping the camel drivers and her camels firmly in control, Blunt acknowledged in her journal she was “in a false position, too weak to insist upon our own terms.”²²⁵ She provided the hired hands with the additional funds demanded and determined to preserve a strong face to prevent further such opportunistic incidents. Outwardly Blunt attempted to exude confidence and maintain order by “not look(ing) beyond the necessity of the moment,”²²⁶ though inwardly her journal reflected that she was so consumed by fear that she pondered abandoning her record as it would serve little purpose should she not survive to publish it.

Sir Wilfrid Blunt survived, but not every married set of travelers was this fortunate. Mabel Bent, mentioned earlier for her prodigious baggage train, and her husband Theodore undertook a second trip through central Arabia in 1899 in an effort to improve government maps of the region. As their journey came to a successful close, she, her husband and two other

²²¹ Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir, and ‘Our Persian Campaign’* vol. 2, (London: John Murray, 1881), 197-98.

²²² Blunt, 197-98.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 199.

²²⁴ Given her inability to communicate with her hired labor, this could have been a misunderstanding as opposed to a nefarious plot. Her husband’s weakened state prevented the group from traveling further. The several day delay extended this section of their journey beyond the original labor contract stipulations. The camel drivers could have been simply asking for their rightfully earned wages.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

Europeans became incapacitated with malaria. Unable to communicate to her Bedouin guide their need for medication tantalizingly close in her medicine chest, “she lost her strength completely” was “dragged from (her) camel” and then “carried to the sea, seventeen miles, on my bed, which was strengthened with tent-pegs and slung on tent poles.”²²⁷ Her husband never recovered from the ordeal and in her conclusion she articulated her abandonment in an expression of authorial inadequacy: “This is all I can write about this journey. It would have been better told, but that I only am left to tell it.”²²⁸

Neither Ella Sykes nor her brother fell seriously ill in their two-year sojourn in Kerman, Persia and she attributed her “love of the East” partly to “the fact that (she) had never been so well in all (her) life before.”²²⁹ Yet her perfect health, did not keep her from fearing illness in “the uncivilized parts of the East” where “one of us might be ill or injured far away from any medical aid.”²³⁰

The fears of women traveling with men were greater than worries about surviving “alone.” Their European servants, a dragoman or guide, and a vanguard of other forms of native labor often accompanied traveling women. They feared not being alone, but being the only woman amidst a caravan of men, the only European Christian amongst “native heathens” and the only member of their class left to command a crew of subordinates.

Single women or women traveling with other women also experienced and feared sickness. The very fear of illness was thought to bring about its actualization, as experienced by Isabella Romer in her exploration of the Great Pyramids of Gizeh. Assaulted by an

²²⁷ Bent, 427.

²²⁸ Ibid., 429.

²²⁹ Sykes, 43.

overwhelming case of claustrophobia, Romer imagined herself suffocating to death within the pyramid's shaft. "The very dread I felt of such a casualty precipitated it" and she found herself "breathless, powerless, unable to proceed." Her "ignorant" Arab guides proceeded to treat her against her advice and contrary to the manner she felt appropriate. This negligence "put the finishing stroke" to her "wretchedness" and she swooned.²³¹ Her guides dragged her out of the pyramid, profusely doused her with water and no doubt had a good laugh at her expense.

As the governess to the five-year old son of Ismail Pacha, the viceroy of Egypt from 1863 to 1879, and an inhabitant of the Imperial Harem, Emmeline Lott best represented the vulnerability and precarious situation of the ill, solitary female traveler. Though spatially stationary, Lott's three autobiographical narratives are written in the same voyeuristic style and she most certainly viewed herself as a "visitor" and not a "member" of her palatial surroundings. From her initial experience with what she termed "unpalatable" Arab cuisine Lott foreshadowed, much as Romer had done, an impending illness. She wrote that "it would be utterly impossible for me to keep body and soul together with such nourishment" and quite ethnocentrically that "it was really unpardonable and unfeeling in the extreme" that special English foods and meals were not provided for her.²³² Such a demand from a foreign domestic in a British home would have most certainly met with the same negative response. Her "malnourished" condition was accentuated by several bouts of cholera and she initially attempted to "doctor" herself.²³³ Her condition deteriorated, which she attributed again to poor native foods and ineffective Egyptian

²³⁰ Ibid., 208.

²³¹ Romer, 85.

²³² Emmeline Lott, *The English Governess in Egypt. Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 140.

doctoring. After falling prey to “a thorough prostration of body, loss of appetite, spinal complaint, and nervous fever” Lott was “reduced to a mere skeleton” and her requests for three months sabbatical in Cairo to receive care from Dr. Ogilive, the physician of the British Consulate, was rejected. The Heim Bachi, harem doctor, did not believe that Lott was truly ill and his report that she was being difficult and only suffered from a cold overrode Lott’s complaints to her immediate employer, the mother of her charge, and prevented her continued insistence on a sabbatical from reaching the Viceroy himself. After examining her “attenuated frame, sunken eyes and blanched cheek,” and thinking of “the misery and discomfort” she had long “suffered,”²³⁴ Emmeline Lott chose to “to save my life and release myself from perpetual imprisonment” by resigning her post.²³⁵

Lott found herself, much like Isabella Romer, unable to effectively communicate her demands. Despite her growing Arabic vocabulary Lott’s requests were unchampioned by an Egyptian or European male benefactor and were ignored. Her progressively worsening condition eroded her ability to use European medical means to cure her ailments. Clinging stubbornly to her national identity, Lott was unable to build bridges or find common ground with any of the over two hundred women residing in the harem. She scorned the attempts by the only other Europeans in the palace to become friends, deeming the two German laundry women beneath her social status. Unable to acculturate to native foods, medical practices or familial overtures, Lott isolated herself further than her initial independent condition required and discovered that her only alternative to acculturation was capitulation in resignation.

²³³ Emmeline Lott, *The English Governess in Egypt. Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 39.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

The English governess' response to her illness was not, however, unusual given her cultural context. Had any of the other women studied here contracted cholera or fallen seriously ill while alone, it is most likely they would have reacted in the same manner, preserving national and class distance at the expense of recovery. For a woman traveling via horseback through the mountains of the Holy Land, however, the results could have been dire.

Illness was not a gender discriminating enemy, though its attack as seen above had gendered consequences for women. A woman unprepared to travel alone lost a provider and protector if her male companion died, while a man, though potentially devastated by the loss of a sister or wife, would not have been impaired in the continuation of his journey. The female traveling without male companionship, as did Emmeline Lott, had no one to intercede on her behalf or with sufficient cultural authority to ensure her illness was attended to in the fashion she was accustomed. Health and diet were intrinsically linked in the Englishwoman's mentality. Where and when possible every effort was made to provide for foods and beverages familiar to the diet an Englishwoman would have partaken of at home. Isabella Romer's "commissariat preparations" for her ascent of the Nile included "portable soup, bottled porte, soda water, potted meats, macaroni, rice, hams, tongues, pickles, fish-sauces, sugar, tea, and wine." Such extensive preparation was essential for though the country she would be traveling through was "fertile," it had not the ability, most likely attributed to Egyptian laziness, to provide "Christian comforts."²³⁶ The ability of the traveler to ameliorate herself to native cooking methods and dishes was essential for her continued good health. Those who viewed 'cuisine al a Arabe' as

²³⁵ Ibid., 298-99.

²³⁶ Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 11.

revolting as did Emmeline Lott, inevitable fell ill, while others like the more open-minded Ella Sykes found the “great ... variety of dishes”²³⁷ the “most delicious ... ever tasted”²³⁸ and remained healthy while creating a point of cultural accommodation. Few women were forced to make fried locusts a central part of their diet, as was Lady Anne Blunt,²³⁹ though for all traveling in the arid region obtaining a sufficient water supply for drinking, bathing and caring for livestock was crucial. Gertrude Bell noted nervously that after a five day march from the last utilized well she “had come to the end of (her) water.”²⁴⁰ On another occasion she contextualized the value of clean and abundant water by humorously informing her readers that “the traveller may consider himself fortunate if he be not asked to drink a liquid in which he has seen the mules and camels wallowing,” as “under the most favourable conditions it is sure to be heavily laden with foreign ingredients which boilings will not remove, though it renders them comparatively innocuous.”²⁴¹

Poor food and illness were only two of the hardships British women encountered on their journeys. The threat of physical violence in the form of Bedouin raids, local conflicts or fanatical Muslims loomed equally large in travelers’ concerns. The risk of encountering a raiding party was high throughout Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Arabia where centralized Ottoman rule was either irrelevant or ineffective for much of the nineteenth-century. The predominant system of rule was described by travelers as shepherd government, characterized by family based communities or tribes controlling small sections of territory due to strength and hereditary land

²³⁷ Beaufort, 175.

²³⁸ Gordon, 19.

²³⁹ Blunt, 57.

²⁴⁰ Gertrude Bell, 26 March 1914 diary entry, Rosemary O’Brien, ed., as reproduced in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 94.

claims. Travelers wishing to transverse multiple tribe boundaries were required to hire multiple guides to ensure their safe passage. Though in the majority of cases only one member of a family need accompany a traveling caravan within its territory, agreements between tribes and families were unregulated and made on an individual basis. Sheiks and heads of households were aware of the traveler's dependence upon them for security and the unlikelihood of their being desirous or able to circumnavigate their own territories even if the demanded payment was high. Isabella Romer was forced to pay for "a Bedouin Sheikh and twenty-five of his tribe well armed" to save herself and her servants from the "depredations on the road."²⁴² Whether such a large contingent was truly necessary or the particular tribe in question had discovered and taken advantage of an opportunity to scam a naïve European for the costs of supplying so many men, is up for debate. Lucinda Griffith, saw many "warlike tribes ... armed with spears, pistols, guns, and swords" while she traveled with the appropriate escort through Egypt. She was sure that had her guides not been present and these "fierce" Bedouins not feared the increasingly long arm of Mohammad Ali, she would not have been able to "tread the sands of their desert with impunity."²⁴³

The extent to which this system of protection was necessary decreased as centralized control in the various countries of the region increased toward the end of the nineteenth-century. Gertrude Bell noted in the *Desert and the Sown* that 'security has traveled a few miles eastward' in the decade since she had last traveled the Jericho road. What had once been a "lawless track"

²⁴¹ Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and the Sown* (London: Beacon Press, 1907), 16.

²⁴² Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 244.

²⁴³ Griffith, 107-08.

had been pushed “beyond the Jordan” by a stronger Turkish presence along the main traveling thoroughfare.²⁴⁴

Though injuries and deaths did occur, the primary goal of Bedouin raids in the desert was to gain material wealth in the shape of stolen weapons, possessions, currency and livestock, especially camels and horses. In many instances raiders staked out a traveling party for several days and if they discerned the group to be vigilant in keeping a guard or better armed than they were, they would “turn in as guests.”²⁴⁵ In the case of an attempted *ghazú* experienced by Lady Anne Blunt and her husband, her knowledge of Arabic allowed her to surrender in accordance with local customs, and prevent harm from coming to her husband.²⁴⁶ Ultimately her husband was apologized to and her horses and possessions returned as one of the members of her caravan was related to the family which had conducted the attack.²⁴⁷ In this instance Blunt’s gender and gendered response were both key to her and her caravan’s survival. As “resistance seemed useless” in their outnumbered and unprepared state, Blunt took upon herself to surrender saving face for her husband and taking advantage of Arab views regarding the protection of the female gender.

Travelers on the move may have felt they had much to worry about, but the large area of land to be covered, the desire of most of the women in this study to keep “off the beaten” track and the employment of tribal representatives to ensure security meant that actual clashes were few and fatalities or injuries far between. A native interlocutor could not mitigate the second type

²⁴⁴ Bell, 10.

²⁴⁵ Gertrude Bell, 20 January 1914 diary entry, Rosemary O’Brien, ed., as reproduced in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 48.

²⁴⁶ Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir, and ‘Our Persian Campaign,’* vol. 1, (London: John Murray, 1881), 103-04.

of physical violence feared by travelers, the vengeful wraith of fanatical Muslims. Closely linked to theories regarding “primitive” Arabs and Turks as animalistic and base in nature was the viewpoint that Muslims unrighteously occupied land that should by divine right be held by Christian hands. The ferocious Muslim who killed Christians for entertainment was an active figment of the European imagination. While a “massacre” of Christians did occur in Damascus, Syria in 1843, it was an isolated incident with reports of carnage in Jerusalem or Haifa being products of a tireless rumor mill.

The instability created by attempts of both the Ottoman and British Empires to centralize power through influence and military action led to a number of small clashes between both “rebels” and Ottoman forces and “malcontents” and the representatives of the British government. When visiting the Consuls’ summer home outside of Damascus, Isabel Burton and her husband received word that a massacre of Christians to rival that of 1843 was planned, and that their summer residence was also a target. Determined to head off the Damascene revolt, Consul Burton returned to the city leaving his wife to organize the defense of their home. Her willingness to do so says much about her husband’s view of her capabilities and Burton’s own expectation that such an event was likely. She narrated the following in the *Inner Life of Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon*:

“Firstly, I collected every available weapon, and all the ammunition. I had five men in the house: to each one I gave a gun, a revolver, and a bowie knife. I put one on the roof with a pair of elephant guns, carrying four ounce balls, and a man to each of the four sides of the house, taking the terrace myself. I planted the

²⁴⁷ Blunt, 105.

Union jack on the flag-staff at the house-top. I turned my bull terriers into the garden to give notice of any approach. I locked up my little Syrian girl, who was naturally frightened, being a Christian and very young, in the safest room. My English maid, who was as brave as any man, was to supply us with provisions, attend to our wants, and be generally useful.”²⁴⁸

Isabel Burton’s response to the threatened attack reveals several interesting points of imperial power projection. The dominant and masculine tone assumed by her narration of events contradicts much of what Burton previously preached a woman should be. Obviously in charge by virtue of her race and relation to the Consul, she established the conditions upon which her spot of British territory, denoted by the Union Jack she herself planted, would be defended. She positioned herself at the forefront of the anticipated battle, on the terrace, where she could both see anticipated attackers and give orders to those inside. The final confirmation that nationality overcame traditional gender roles and established a racial hierarchy in the Orient was her description of her maid. Burton was careful to point out the maid’s English nationality, which endowed her with bravery and usefulness, as contrasted to her useless and frightened “Syrian girl” who was locked up, her conversion to Christianity having rendered her position extremely precarious to fanatical revenge.

Both Lady Anne Blunt, the earlier object of a *ghazú*, and Gertrude Bell fell prisoner of the “fanatic” inhabitants of the Hayill. While neither woman was molested or unburdened of her possessions, both were unnerved by their retention. Though traveling twenty-five years apart,

²⁴⁸ Lady Isabel Arundell Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol. 1, (London: H.S. King, 1875), 309.

both travelers identified Hayill as a bastion of Muslim conservatism, like Damascus,²⁴⁹ but far worse and yet the unfavorable reaction to their unannounced trips came as something of a surprise. Bell was held for eleven days in the harem of the town's second in command, while her allies from a neighboring tribe negotiated her freedom and life. She experienced "hours of considerable anxiety" and spent her nights "contriving ... schemes of escape if things went wrong."²⁵⁰

Lady and Lord Blunt were initially received with a friendliness that their noble status warranted, but found their reception cooled, accommodations reduced and mobility limited when a member of their caravan spread rumors throughout the city that they were in fact commoners posing greatness. The misunderstanding was cleared up, but the exploring couple felt it was time to move on as soon as the Emir of the fortified city thought it acceptable for them to do so. The encounter served as "a lesson that we were Europeans still among Asiatics" and "a warning that Hayill was a lion's den, though fortunately we were friends with the lion."²⁵¹

British women encountered a variety of dangers on their travels. Their own analysis of fear reveals a relationship between danger, proximity and vulnerability. Following the attempted

²⁴⁹Unalterably linked to the Massacre of 1843, Damascus was always described as a city hostile to Europeans. Isabella Romer's description was typical: "no Christian wearing the European dress could appear in the streets with safety; and even now...precautions must be taken by Europeans to avoid insult, which are not necessary in other Mahometan towns. For instance, if an European woman were to take the arm even of her husband in the streets, she would be pelted and hooted at by the populace; and woe betide the Western Christian who lingers at the door of a mosque to catch a glimpse of the interior, or even slackens his pace in passing before it! His life would surely pay the forfeit of such imprudent curiosity. Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 344-5.

²⁵⁰ Gertrude Bell, 14 March 1914 diary entry, Rosemary O'Brien, ed., as reproduced in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 81-2.

raid on her caravan, an injured Lady Blunt reflected upon the experience and recorded her impressions in her travel narrative. A sprained knee had prevented Blunt from mounting her horse and allowing her own party to outrun the Bedouin raiders. In the heat of the moment she realized that there was “first not time” for fear. Subsequent to the fray feelings of impotence and responsibility resulting from not being able to fight her attackers, and for being its cause, led Blunt to “rage” that “swallowed up every other feeling.” It was only in retrospect that the incident “seems alarming,” most likely because Blunt was newly aware of her vulnerability in repulsing personal threats.²⁵² While her own heroism may have been enlarged for the sake of the enjoyment of her reading audience, one, never the less, is able to see that what Lady Blunt most feared was not her attackers, but her inability to protect herself and the risk she posed in endangering others.

In a visit to a rural harem Isabella Romer encountered her own brigands. In concluding her social call, Romer handed out gifts to the senior women of the harem and the chief eunuch. Several male slaves demanded similar presents and when Romer resisted at their “impertinence” they blocked the exit way. Though one wonders if any real danger existed to her person while her servants and dragoman awaited her return in the neighboring compartments and to what purpose detaining her indefinitely could have served her hosts, the event’s importance lies in Romer’s belief in her proximity to danger. Believing she was “beyond the reach of making myself heard by any one belonging to my party,” Romer allowed herself to be “extremely terrified” for only a moment. The “lawless-looking men” could not however cause her to lose her

²⁵¹ Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir, and ‘Our Persian Campaign,’* vol. 2, (London: John Murray, 1881), 21.

²⁵² Blunt, 107-8.

“self-possession” and in searching out the nearest female harem member she procured her release. Romer believed herself to be imminently at risk of harm. She declared that she was “quite alone,” despite being surrounded by people. This was a vulnerability based not on numeric reality, but on racial difference. She was the sole “civilized” person surrounded by “fierce” and uncivilized men. It was only her use of civilized self-control that allowed her to escape, by returning order to chaos.²⁵³

Gertrude Bell attempted an equivocal stance in her private diary regarding the dangers she encountered in crossing the Nejd. In January of 1914 she expressed “profound indifference” at whether she would “come out of this adventure alive.”²⁵⁴ While only two months later, in March after “careful analysis” of her feelings, she concluded that fear was “exciting.” The exhilaration she experienced waiting to see if a raid was going to occur allowed her to feel alive in a “singular” manner that she enjoyed.²⁵⁵ Bell was subject to innumerable false alarms in her six-month trek, and at times wished that “something would happen – something exciting, a raid, or a battle!”²⁵⁶ Her romanticized view of violence was directly related to her proximity to danger, which after months of false alarms and an overriding mood of boredom seemed remote.

The writing process itself, could act as a distancing agent in mitigating fear. Louisa Jebb described in the early days of her trip through Persia being awakened in the middle of the night by a man entering her tent. “In one moment” she had grabbed her revolver kept at the head of her

²⁵³ Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 223.

²⁵⁴ Gertrude Bell, 21 January 1914 diary entry, Rosemary O’Brien, ed., as reproduced in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 50.

²⁵⁵ Gertrude Bell, 26 March 1914 diary entry, Rosemary O’Brien, ed., as reproduced in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 93.

bed²⁵⁷ and pointed it at him. In the same moment she wondered “when the psychological moment for pulling the trigger would occur and whether I should manage to live up to its requirements.”²⁵⁸ Either the moment was both long and ponderous, or this passage was born of a reflective literary pause.

Fear and uncertainty were deemed by British women as inherent components of travel and contributed to the categorization of the Orient as uncivilized and primitive. Regardless of the planning and attention paid to detail sickness or random disaster could strike. When it did, female travelers often blamed backward native behaviors, laziness or fanaticism. Emily Beaufort combined all three of these lines of logic when her dahabieh was destroyed by fire on the Nile. Beaufort blamed the fire on the carelessness of a cabin boy who was drawn to her vacant room with a desire to examine her bedazzling European possessions. According to Beaufort, the startled boy dropped a candle igniting the fire. Much as in the case of Isabel Burton’s attack preparations, Beaufort’s British maid was valorized for her “English courage” exhibited when she “attempted to rush into the burning vessel to secure my sister’s desk ... containing money

²⁵⁶ Gertrude Bell, 16 February 1914 diary entry, Rosemary O’Brien, ed., as reproduced in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 74.

²⁵⁷ A number of British women recorded that they carried handguns and hunting weapons on their travels. In at least one instance the ability to successfully prove her marksmanship was crucial to gaining legitimacy and a position of authority amongst the male members of her crew, as this excerpt from *Southern Arabia* by Mabel Bent demonstrates: “Sheikh Mohammed was very anxious to see how I could shoot with my revolver, so a brown pot containing about half a pint of water was put on a lump of rock as a mark. I was terrified; for I knew if I missed, as I surely expected, I should bring great discredit on myself and my nation, and there was such a crowd! My husband said I must try, and I am sure no one was more astonished than I was that I shattered the pot. If I had not it would have been said that I only carried the revolver for show.” Mabel Virginia Bent and James Theodore Bent, *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith and Elder, 1900), 31.

²⁵⁸ Jebb, 19.

and some valuables.”²⁵⁹ This action attributed to common sense and bravery was prevented by the ignorant Egyptian crew which had carelessly only saved their own possessions leaving Beaufort “absolutely bereft of everything – without home, food, clothes, or money, among a strange and savage people, three thousand miles away from home, ... without friends” and with “sinking hearts.”²⁶⁰

Like many other British women discussed here, Emily Beaufort’s encounter with danger, lack of creature comforts and desired provisions and natives who simply would not provide expected scenes of Biblical picturesqueness or European orderliness created a “forlornness” highlighting the disconnect between the preconceived Orient as the magical and spiritual haven and the reality of the complex cultural, political, religious and social forces which constituted the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. The Orient as experienced by Englishwomen in the nineteenth-century was, in many ways, quite similar to the description offered by Deborah Nord, of metropolitan London, at the end of the same century. It “offered anonymity, community and distance from provincial and familial expectations,” but it also “proved a tremendously difficult and threatening place to be a woman alone.”²⁶¹ The “difficulties” and “threats” encountered by women in the Orient were in large part a result of the disconnect between the fantasia and the Biblical paradise of their expectations and what British women deemed the harsh and disappointing reality of a region filled with lazy, backward servants, corrupt governments and sensual women.

²⁵⁹ Beaufort, 47.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 46-48.

CHAPTER FIVE: “DISTANCE” AND THE VICTORIAN TRAVELER: TIME CHANGE, LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND UNMET EXPECTATIONS

Historians of imperialism, colonialism, missionary work and travel who focus on Great Britain in the “Age of Empire” have extensively debated and revealed the racist nature of imperial politics, power relations between colonizer and colonized and the use of the “imprisoned other” female as a staging platform for British women’s assertions of their own superiority and their campaign to acquire greater recognition within their domestic communities.²⁶² Though these studies are essential to understanding the importance of race relations in imperial rhetoric and mechanisms of control and resistance, they are also heavily moralized and utilize the benefit of historical hindsight to portray British travelers, colonial officials and cultural producers as hatefully bigoted automats. Such a homogenizing overlay of judgement based on twenty-first century cultural norms and perspectives obscures the intricacies involved in individual cross-cultural encounters and decontextualizes the nineteenth-century historical experience. It is to be made clear that my desire is not to offer an apology for the

²⁶¹ Deborah Epstein Nord, “Neither Pairs nor Odd”: Female Community in Late Nineteenth-Century London,” *Signs*, 15, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 734.

²⁶² Nancy L. Stockdale, “Gender and Colonialism in Palestine 1800-1948: Encounters among English, Arab and Jewish Women” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2000); Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996); Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: the Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Jordana Pomeroy, ed., *Intrepid Women: Victorian Artists Travel* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005); Clare Midgley, ed., *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Silvia Federici, ed., *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its “Others”* (Westport: Praeger, 1995); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

“evils” of colonialism or indulge proponents of extreme relativism in which no historical agents are “held accountable” for their actions. It is my intent to try to better *contextually* understand English women who traveled to the Orient and their motivations and justifications for categorizing the people and places they interacted with, without the hindrance of moral outrage. This chapter will expand on the previously introduced concept of “disconnect,” as the distance between expectation and reality, by focusing on factors that increased the “distance” between the traveler and the people and places she encountered. Key among these “distancing” elements were the disorientation perceived to be caused by the differences in European and Oriental concepts of time, language barriers and the failure of imagined biblical tropes to materialize.

Disruptions in the Time Continuum

Timothy Mitchell, in his excellent work, *Colonising Egypt*, argues that Europeans who visited Cairo and other Oriental cities found it disconcerting as “unlike London or Paris” the cities of the Orient “had not yet been rearranged in terms of ... absolute distinction.”²⁶³ Englishwomen traveling to the Orient also experienced a similar sense of disorder in the Oriental construction of time. When they stepped off their steamships and railway cars they felt as though they had not only entered a different country, but also a strange time. Travelers were uncertain where exactly the Orient should be positioned in the timeline of progressive history and they were equally disoriented by the contemporary Oriental construction of the day.

Having predetermined the East to be an extension of Biblical times, with its people being representatives of Biblical actors and their behavior epitomizing Biblical actions, female

travelers created a false reality that could not stand up to their own inability to see the Orient as stagnant and unchanging. Gertrude Bell asked, “Where is the progress? Where is the march of civilization? Where is the evolution of the race?”²⁶⁴ These questions would be unnecessary if Bell was content leaving the Orient in its Biblical infancy. In contrast to Bell, Florence Nightingale was able to firmly implant the Orient in its ancient history and simply discarded evidences of the passage of time, though she exhibited another form of chronological ambivalence by inserting Egyptian historical events and ruins into her own familiar Judaeo-Christian timeline. A statue of Ramses III was not from a certain century, but dated “about sixty years before Samuel,”²⁶⁵ and a cartouche of Osirtasen I was more interesting for its coincidence with the life of Joseph than its own XVI dynasty.²⁶⁶ Nightingale could only find the value of Egyptian society in associations with Judeo-Christian traditions. When contrasting what she deemed to be the superb “accomplishments” of the “Eastern past” to its “present” failures, Florence Nightingale could see no future for the region, only “the hope for extinction.”²⁶⁷

A trip to the Orient reordered the chronology of history for many women. It simply changed the way they thought about the passage of time. It caused Elizabeth Finn to question British “ideas and measurements of antiquity,” for while in “England, undoubted remains of

²⁶³ Mitchell, xiv.

²⁶⁴ Gertrude Bell, *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures* (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1894), 179.

²⁶⁵ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, no addressee, 11 December 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

²⁶⁶ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, no addressee, 14 December 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

²⁶⁷ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, no addressee, 29 December 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

Norman times are considered old, Saxon relics ancient, and remains of the Druids and early Britons most venerable,” these estimations of age were in fact the reflection of a “differently graduated scale” when compared to the passage of time in the ancient Orient.²⁶⁸ For Finn and the majority of women studied here, the ability to see history as culturally determined did not allow them to appreciate contemporary differences in the definition of time.

Women traveling to the Orient discovered that the day itself was not “ordered” properly. A number of female travelers came from families which had gained their fortunes in manufacturing and production factories born of the industrial revolution. To them in particular the ordering of the day into hourly units, with wealth and productivity being incrementally linked to time and production, was vital to conceptions of class and economic security. Though the domestication of one’s day in Great Britain was a fairly recent innovation, Englishwomen traveling in the Orient were disturbed by constructions of time based on alternative motivations. Instead of basing chronology on the reference point of production, Orientals structured time in terms of the solar calendar and religious needs. Elizabeth Finn found the reordering of time significant enough to include it in her fictional narratives that described “life in the Holy Land.” She informed her readers “the people here do not seem to say twelve o’clock, six o’clock, five o’clock, but noon, sunset, sunrise.”²⁶⁹ She characterized such a practice as “odd” and those Orientals who carried watches to keep European time as comical. It was the confluence of solar and religious time in the relative setting of one’s watch to “noon” which was determined by the position of the sun and the muezzins declaration of the day’s end, however that Finn found particularly “difficult to accustom to.” In her narrative she attempted “in vain” to explain to

²⁶⁸ Finn, 280.

locals that the sun set at different times each day, making the relocation of time and carrying a watch to “keep time” ridiculous.²⁷⁰ In her early travels Gertrude Bell, decided her British civility and Oriental disorderliness could not be reconciled. Instead, she felt that “smooth paths and ordered lives” were “carrying” her with the “stream of civilization” far from those “not of (her) kindred.”²⁷¹

While some English authoresses like Maude Holbach advised the “wise” traveler “to do in Rome as the Romans do” and “adjust his life to suit the country,”²⁷² others like Louisa Jebb embraced what she deemed an idyllic practice. Jebb openly shunned the “confining habits” of European orderliness throughout her text, *By Desert Ways to Baghdad*. Central to her liberating concept of travel was its timelessness. She repeatedly expressed delight in traveling to places where “there is no need to go about securely chained to a gold watch which metes out with inexorable exactitude the dictates of railway timetables, steamers, diligences and the *table d’hotel* summonses.”²⁷³ Jebb decried the potential threat of Europeanization in the symbolic form the railroad posed to the East. She used the railway a number of times as a metaphor for the harmful effect “progress” would have on the Eastern way of life. To Jebb, the train was a “monster” that would not allow for the vagaries of sunset or the time it took to load a camel as measures of time. There was no way to cheat the monster, as Easterners “unconscious of the time they lose” cheated fate. Once westernized the Oriental would no longer “master time ...

²⁶⁹ Finn, 11.

²⁷⁰ Finn, 277-78.

²⁷¹ Bell, 76.

²⁷² Holbach, 168-69.

²⁷³ Jebb, 2.

absorbing the present,”²⁷⁴ instead, according to Jebb, he would be as miserable as every European, who in treating time with respect, became its slave.²⁷⁵

Unlike Louisa Jebb, the majority of Englishwomen were unable to see the benefits of an alternative form of chronology. Most could not even, as Maude Holbach suggested, adapt to their temporary surroundings. Instead they applied their discomfiture regarding the measurement of time to the behavior of those they deemed had unorganized it. Emily Beaufort described the sentiment as “from the first to last, throughout Syria and Palestine, the one great feeling ever present to one’s mind as one’s eyes journey on, mile by mile, is the deplorable waste.”²⁷⁶ Female travelers developed a racialized line of thought to justify the poverty that they deemed to be corrupting the Holy Land. Its logic went something like, “Orientals don’t understand time, therefore they don’t use it properly and waste it and this explains the wasteland, which biblically was described as the ‘land of milk and honey,’ that now constitutes the Holy Land.” Ultimately, the disconnect between cultural interpretations of time contributed to Englishwomen’s construction of Oriental degeneracy.

(Mis)Translating Cultures

The distance between reality and expectation and between the female traveler and the Oriental was only increased when it came to issues of language. Agnes Gibson, Gertrude Bell, Emmeline Lott, Isabel Burton and Lucie Duff Gordon were in the minority in claiming an ability to communicate in an Oriental language. Even in this small group however fluency and

²⁷⁴ Jebb, 28, 136-7.

²⁷⁵ Jebb, 2.

knowledge of a language prior to travel were not the norm. Only Gertrude Bell and Agnes Gibson had formal academic linguistic training, and Bell's studies focused on Persian, which was fairly useless as she oriented her travels more centrally in the region.²⁷⁷ It was not until 1914 that she was able to communicate in Arabic without a translator, more than ten years after she had started her travels in the Orient. Lott, Burton and Gordon spoke "continental" languages and learned Arabic in the course of their extended stays, though Burton admitted to only being a "beginner" who could "speak broken Arabic intelligible to the servants and commoner class."²⁷⁸ The inability to communicate with the majority of people surrounding them amplified Englishwomen's sense of distance from their Oriental surroundings, while paradoxically increasing their closeness to and dependence on native translators.

The necessity of a translator accentuated an Englishwoman's weakness and dependence on a man, behaviors that were sanctioned by traditional concepts of Victorian domestic femininity, but chafed at when women were abroad. The explanations for this could be multiple. Female travelers may have resented the re-imposition of a dynamic in gender power relations they thought they had escaped. Evidence for this theory can be found in Gertrude Bell's satisfaction derived from "run(ning) her own show" the first time she had no one to be her "voice and tongue."²⁷⁹ A second possibility for the negative portrayal of translators could have been a reaction dictated by the reshuffling of the imperial social structure in which native men temporarily superseded European women in position based on linguistic ability. Whatever the

²⁷⁶ Beaufort, 131.

²⁷⁷ Gertrude Bell, *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures* (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1894), 6.

²⁷⁸ Burton, 263.

²⁷⁹ Gertrude Bell, 20 April 1914 diary entry, Rosemary O'Brien, ed., as reproduced in *Gertrude Bell: The Arabian Diaries, 1913-1914* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 120-1.

motivation, British women rarely portrayed translators in a positive light. Most often they were “willful perverters” who “fritter(ed) away the soul of the conversation.”²⁸⁰

Translators inhabited a murky position in the discourse of travel. Upon reflection it would have been obvious that an interlocutor would be necessary to facilitate even the most basic of encounters, but by referring only in passing to the dragoman or linguist, the female traveler circumnavigated the distance she experienced in favor of a sense of proximity for her reader. This literary tactic enhanced the traveler’s own authority, while allowing the reader to be “part” of the action. When translators were referenced it was to heighten the disconnectedness between the traveler and her message. Mabel Bent demonstrated the humor which could be found in a potentially frustrating situation when she described how she and her husband were forced to speak “English to Imam Sharif” who spoke “Hindustani to his Afghan servant Majid” who spoke an unidentified language to an “Afghan annexed at Sheher” who could speak Arabic, to Arabs the couple wished to trade with.²⁸¹ Bent and her husband were not one person, but five people removed from their original message, one is left wondering if they did in fact obtain the items they were seeking.

In travel narratives, problems of conversational understanding and a desire for empathy were closely linked in the accounts of those women who desired to bridge at least part of the gap between ‘self’ and ‘other.’ Ella Sykes “should have much liked to have talked” with the Persians she meet in her journey to Kerman, but was “confined to salutations and smiles,”²⁸² and Lady Anne Blunt was “sure (she) might make friends with people if only (she) spoke their

²⁸⁰ Burton, 263.

²⁸¹ Bent, 209.

²⁸² Sykes, 64.

language.”²⁸³ Julia Pardoe regretted her inability to engage in “a free and full intercourse with ... natives” and was “irritated and annoyed” by the necessity of a “third person” to remove the “serious impediment” Turkish was.²⁸⁴ The fact that Pardoe still identified Turkish, and not her own linguistic inadequacy, as the culprit demonstrated the limited ability of empathy to overcome the ever-present defects in native culture.

The necessity of accurately representing European ideas and thoughts to natives through the competent and moral translator was closely linked to class and the traveler’s sense of self-importance. Burton, previously cited for her beginner language skills, was forced to rely on a translator when her status as a consul’s wife had to be maintained in “good society.” Even with her professed inadequacy, however, Burton was always “aware” of what the translator was saying so that she could “set things right” if “translated wrongly.”²⁸⁵ Agnes Gibson was also concerned with the accuracy of translation as she ascribed the lack of “respect” shown to Protestant travelers by “primitive people” to the “misrepresentations of dragomen.” She was convinced if the primitive had the benefit of Christian “confessions of faith” that were not edited by translators, relations between Europeans and heathens would take a turn for the better.²⁸⁶ The obvious deterrent to friendlier relations inherent in the primitive heathen versus enlightened Christian dichotomy failed to impress itself upon her, causing Gibson to look for an outside and foreign cause of her poor relationships with those she met in the Sinai.

In cases where the traveler and the native were capable of speaking to one another freely, empathy was, in fact, common. Gertrude Bell found that once her Arabic was good enough to no

²⁸³ Blunt, 209.

²⁸⁴ Pardoe, v.

²⁸⁵ Burton, 263.

longer necessitate assistance, interacting with natives was little different than speaking with people back home. She described such a juxtaposition of domestic and traveling conversations in her trip to the Hayill:

“I offered him sympathy and praise at suitable points and could have laughed to find myself talking the same agreeable rubbish in Arabic that we all talk so often in English. I might have been sitting in a London drawing-room, instead of between the bare walls of a Crusader tower, and the world is after all made of the one stuff throughout.”²⁸⁷

Englishwomen ultimately felt their inability or poor ability to speak Arabic, Turkish or Persian affected negatively their ability to completely “know” the Orient, or as Gertrude Bell phrased it, to be in “close touch with the country.”²⁸⁸ How could one be sure of what a native was thinking or doing if what they were saying was shrouded in mystery? In this instance mystery did not add to the ambience. Frustration with the situation could result in an external projection of inner weakness, as was the case when Emmeline Lott, when surrounded by “nearly one hundred women without being able to speak a word of their language,” categorized the one hundred as “strange” for speaking only Arabic and Turkish and herself as normal for knowing “several continental languages.”²⁸⁹ If the most comfortable position for the Englishwoman traveler in which to frame her observations of the Orient was “panoptic,”²⁹⁰ then Lady Anne

²⁸⁶ Gibson, 24-25.

²⁸⁷ Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and the Sown* (London: Beacon Press, 1907), 208-9.

²⁸⁸ Bell, xi.

²⁸⁹ Emmeline Lott, *The English Governess in Egypt. Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1866), 142.

²⁹⁰ Mitchell, 24.

Blunt's reflection that "traveling without knowing the language, is like walking with one's eyes shut,"²⁹¹ becomes much clearer.

The Not-So-Holy Land

Female travelers to the Orient were not a homologous entity. Though they exhibited many common behaviors, such as an inability to speak an Oriental language and culturally similar expectations that the Orient would be a magical and spiritual space, they did not necessarily define what they encountered in terms of universal satisfaction. While, many Englishwomen found rapturous delight in their discovery of an "authentic Holy Land" complete with shepherds, virtuous virgins and noble prophets as was discussed in chapter three, others encountered only devastating and isolating disappointment.

Once more, the organization of cities and villages played a role in the interaction of the British female traveler and the Orient. Visitors, like Florence Nightingale, deplored the unsaintly appearance of sprawling villages with their "guts all tumbled together up and down, as animals build their nests, without regularity or plan,"²⁹² and yet they acknowledged that "organized" and "orderly" towns were a "civilized" European development. If organization and progress went hand and hand with Victorian English ingenuity, British women were unwittingly establishing unachievable standards for "ancient" Biblical locales to meet. Isabella Romer described Jerusalem as looking "like the illustration of an awful curse," the first sight of which caused her

²⁹¹ Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to the Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Emir, and 'Our Persian Campaign,'* vol. 2, (London: John Murray, 1881), 209.

to fling herself upon her bed and weep “unrestrainedly.”²⁹³ Maude Holbach found Bethany a “disappointment” and described it as a “rather unattractive village” far from the “sweet peaceful spot one pictures as the home of Martha and Mary, and the loved resort of Jesus.”²⁹⁴ Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, was also found “wanting,” but this time for its lack of “naturalness.” The grotto, revered by many to be the actual site of the miracle, appeared “artificial” and without a “sense of reality” when “perfumed with incense” and “lighted with jeweled lamps.”²⁹⁵ Emily Beaufort was “pleased little” by Bethlehem and Nazareth and “was most glad to leave them” as quickly as possible, though she was able after “weeks and months” to come to grip with the “mixture of Past and Present” she discovered in Jerusalem.²⁹⁶

An overwhelming sense of disappointment led Elizabeth Finn’s fictional character, Miss Russell, to question whether the region she had pilgrimaged to “really was the Holy Land.” As “all the feelings with which (she) had expected to set foot in Palestine were gone,” Miss Russell “felt disappointed – strange, and in a strange place.”²⁹⁷ Such feelings were disorienting in their distance from the confident stance of “knowing” the Orient women, expressed prior to their having actually seeing it.

When confronted with the widespread poverty and disease resulting from a series of famines and increased taxation, Oriental people also failed, in large, part to measure up to their

²⁹² Florence Nightingale, Nile River, no addressee, 9 December 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 44.

²⁹³ Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 2, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 184-5.

²⁹⁴ Holbach, 88.

²⁹⁵ Finn, 150.

²⁹⁶ Beaufort, 352, 364.

²⁹⁷ Finn, 6-7.

Biblical fore runners. Elizabeth Finn was depressed after searching crowds of Jewish beggars for representatives of religious figures. A disappointing end to her quest caused her to ask, “Were these depressed, ignorant women the representatives of the Deborahs and Esthers? Where were the warriors and the heroes? Alas! Alas! Could there be a Joshua or a Judas Maccabaeus in disguise among these poor creatures?”²⁹⁸ Emily Beaufort also went in search of a living Bible figure, in her case, the Virgin Mary, and though she did encounter Greek Christians who were the “best-looking,” their “untidy and rather dirty” appearance failed to replicate “one’s idea of the Blessed Virgin.”²⁹⁹

A more common literary device for demonstrating the “unholy” nature of the Holy Land was akin to a zoom in. Female narrative authors described a picturesque scene from an objective distance, and then revealed its “true” grotesqueness upon closer examination. A fine example of this was provided in *Domestic Life in Palestine*. Eliza Rogers established the contrast by describing a “group of dirty-looking Arabs, in picturesque rags ... under a clump of tamarisk-tress” outside of Jerusalem. As she rode passed them and noticed their alms cups, “the poor creatures” were discovered to be lepers, and “their faces were so disfigured, that they scarcely looked human.” They had become the “saddest sight” the traveler had ever seen.³⁰⁰ Lucinda Griffith employed this strategy in reverse to attempt to make a disturbing situation pleasant. Upon being “surrounded by all the beggars of Suez,” Griffith was shocked by the number of peasants, especially children, who were blind in one eye. She could not “imagine any thing more

²⁹⁸ Finn, 185.

²⁹⁹ Beaufort, 313.

³⁰⁰ Rogers, 16.

disgusting than the sight they presented,” that is of course until “forgetting for a moment what immediately surrounded (her),” she was “struck with the picturesqueness of the scene.”³⁰¹

When faced with such bitter disappointment, female travelers seemed compelled to find the cause for the discrepancy between expectation and perceived reality. While lamenting the “loss” of the authentic East, they also searched for the culprit who had stolen their spiritual affirmation from them. In many instances English female travelers targeted an unnecessary “progress toward civilization” as the cause for the “loss of the ‘real’ and ‘primitive.’”³⁰² In innumerable spots seemingly custom designed for Biblical accuracy, sketches were ruined by the replacement of “picturesque native costumes” with “ugly European clothes.” Maude Holbach informed her readers “the Jew of Jerusalem ... like all Orientals ... looks vastly better in his Eastern dress.”³⁰³ Oriental men demeaned their “noble savagery” by wearing “trousers from Manchester” and opportunities for observing native customs were on the decrease as native women who spent more on European dress were now spending less on “old-fashioned wedding feasts.” Louisa Jebb mourned the loss of mysticism found in the bazaars of *The Arabian Night’s Entertainment* when she herself encountered only “cheap trinkets from England and loud flannelettes from Italy.”³⁰⁴ In addition to the tarnished appearance of the East, progressive Orientals could also be blamed for its diminished ambience. Natives who assumed European dress were also shockingly assuming European attitudes. Emily Beaufort thought of “town Arabs” as “pretentious and impertinent”³⁰⁵ and Isabel Burton claimed that when “Europeans put

³⁰¹ Griffith, 102.

³⁰² Grewal, 99.

³⁰³ Holbach, 48.

³⁰⁴ Jebb, 28.

³⁰⁵ Beaufort, 154.

them (Orientals) on an equality” with other Europeans based on appearances alone the results were “not pleasant.”³⁰⁶

Where “demi-semi Europeanized, Christianized, civilized natives”³⁰⁷ were in short supply, the common ignorant and backward type would do as suitable candidates upon which to lay an Englishwoman’s dissatisfaction. In cases in which ancient sites were not “encumbered with any of those filthy Arab accessories that generally degrade the ruins”³⁰⁸ and by this, Isabella Romer was referring to the local populations which lived amidst them, Oriental “indolence” and “apathy” were blamed for the dismal maintenance of locations sacred to Christians. Only Europeans with their superior sense of spirituality and enlightened worth could “put a stop to the destruction” of the remnants of the past and instead “point out” their “value and interest.”³⁰⁹

Female travelers who had spent a lifetime accruing hopes of entering the “true” Holy Land were shocked when Jerusalem turned out to have littered streets, Cairo possessed leprous beggars and Bethany, though a favorite haunt of the Christian Savior, was but an ordinary village. Their outrage and disappointment prompted racially based proclamations of guilt, and encouraged further distancing of Christian concepts of Biblical purity and perceived heathen putrefactions of that ideal.

³⁰⁶ Lady Isabel Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol. 2, (London: H.S. King, 1875), 299.

³⁰⁷ Burton, 299.

³⁰⁸ Isabella Frances Romer, *A Pilgrimage to the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia and Palestine in 1845-6*, vol. 1, (London: Richard Bentley, 1846), 232.

³⁰⁹ Rogers, 42.

Maintaining Distance

The issues arising from differing conceptions of time, the necessity for translators and the rejection of a corporally appearing Holy Land were essentially based on the English female traveler's need for existential and physical distance from the Oriental subject. It was impossible for her to maintain her imperial objectivity and masculinity if she were too close to the "other." The fear of getting too close was captured in travel narratives' condemnation of "going native." Female travelers' fascination with this danger was best epitomized in their obsession with proper standards of dress and appearance.

In assuming Oriental styles of dress, it was acceptable for British women to "play" at being a native, as long as it was clearly expressed that wearing the veil, yashmak or feredje was indeed an expression of choice, and not submission to force. Harem visits were often capped by the donning of Oriental clothing. Annie Jane Harvey "expressed a wish to know how the yashmak or veil, was arranged" and instantly her personal geniis granted the wish with a "good-naturedly" offer to "array" the women in the "most beautiful dresses."³¹⁰ The acceptability of this "game" was founded on the superior position of power held by the traveler, as Edward Said argues, "no one – least of all actual whites and non-whites in the colonies – ever forgets that "going native" or playing the Great Game depends on the rock-like foundations of European power."³¹¹

Outside of a harem visit the unspoken rules of traveling fashion were explicit, maintain your British and feminine identity to the last hook and eye, petticoat, bustle and heeled boot.

³¹⁰ Harvey, 65.

³¹¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 161.

Female travelers often pondered whether or not it would be safer to travel disguised as a man or at least as a native. Gertrude Bell answered these probes with an emphatic double no:

“He will be wiser if he does not seek to ingratiate himself with Orientals by trying to ape their habits, unless he is so skillful that he can pass as one of themselves ... but he himself will meet with a far greater respect if he adheres strictly to his own. For a woman this rule is of first importance, since a woman can never disguise herself effectually. That she should be known to come of a great and honoured stock, whose customs are inviolable, is her best claim to consideration.”³¹²

“Fastidious attention to British middle-class propriety”³¹³ differing as little as possible from what was expected at home provided female travelers with a suit of armor to prevent the “otherness” of the Orient from getting too close. It was their last defense if all previous stratagems of distancing had failed, and the first symptom that they were disconnected from their surroundings. Lady Anne Blunt and her husband stressed being the first Europeans to complete the journey to Hayill in European dress, as Europeans. To maintain appropriate standards Blunt assured the reader that though her husband, Wilfrid, chose to wear a “complete suit of Bedouin clothes” it was not “as disguise,” but “in order to avoid attracting more notice than was necessary.” Blunt herself, found it “unnecessary to make any change” excepting for protective headwear and a Bedouin cloak over her “ordinary traveling ulster.”³¹⁴

It was also necessary to take every precaution to protect what was underneath the clothes, the Englishwoman’s white complexion. The complexion of a British woman was, at first glance,

³¹² Bell, x.

³¹³ Birkett, 91.

a superficial seeming problem in a region where carrying enough water and avoiding marauding thieves were realistic concerns. This is until the color of one's skin as a signifier of imperial power politics was taken into consideration. Comical and almost ridiculous costumes and layers were assumed by female travelers to protect their "whiteness." Ella Sykes was very concerned that her face was "scorched," in spite of the "huge pith of (her) huge pith hat, two gossamer veils, and a cosmetic for (her) face."³¹⁵ Emily Beaufort's apparel must have been incredibly uncomfortable for summer travel in heat that regularly exceeded 30 degrees Celsius. She wore:

"a silk shawl folded thickly above my dress over my shoulders, then the white mash'lah, underneath a very thick, grey tweed cloak with a large hood, and our huge felt hats were covered with some yards of muslin hanging down, kefiyeh fashion, all round, the front part of which could be folded over the face; and in the middle of the day I always bound a blue veil several times over my lips and nose."³¹⁶

The protection of a traveler's whiteness was a means of defining oneself both racially and economically. As Inderpal Grewal clarifies, "to judge women by their physical beauty was central to class formation, especially since working women, worn out by hard work, childbearing, and undernourishment, could not possess the kind of beauty that the more comfortable life of upper-class women allowed."³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Lady Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd, the Cradle of the Arab Race. A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir, and 'Our Persian Campaign,'* vol. 1, (London: John Murray, 1881), 22, 23.

³¹⁵ Sykes, 245.

³¹⁶ Beaufort, 222.

³¹⁷ Grewal, 39.

Occasionally a female traveler revealed that she had gone into public in “native costume,” most likely to complete an adventure, like “penetrating” a mosque, but the consequences of her indiscretion always brought into question the cost/benefit ratio of the transgression. Isabel Burton warns that “nobody knows you are a European in this dress” because she “remember(s) how ashamed and miserable” she felt the first time she “dressed and rode like a native.”³¹⁸ Florence Nightingale was so “anxious to see the inside of a mosque” and consummate “an unprecedented act in Alexandria” that she agreed to put on “Egyptian dress for the outing.” Once attired, Nightingale claimed to have “never felt so uncomfortable in all (her) life.” After entering the mosque her spatial location and attire caused her “to be uncertain whether (she) was a Christian woman” and she felt as though she was a “hypocrite in Dante’s hell.” After escaping the mosque and her native outfit, Nightingale expressed relief as she had “never been so thankful” for being “free” as she was at the moment of her release. Women who had to wear native “costume” and who proscribed to the Islamic faith, in Nightingale’s eyes, led a “hopeless life.”³¹⁹ For an Oriental women to wear “traditional” garb was oppressive, and yet to assume European fashions was “tut-tutted by women travelers for its inappropriateness.”³²⁰ Such blatant hypocrisy begs the question of what Oriental women would have worn if the female travelers had their way in “freeing” them from their “oppressive gilded cages?”

At the same time that Englishwomen who traveled to the Orient were baffled, confused and annoyed by the factors leading to the disconnect between the expectations they had created

³¹⁸ Burton, 77.

³¹⁹ Florence Nightingale, Nile River, no addressee, 24 November 1849, as reproduced in Anthony Satin, ed., *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 26.

³²⁰ Birkett, 150.

of a Biblical and magical Orient and the “reality” they encountered, they chose to maintain, heighten and diversify new mechanisms of distancing. Prejudices of race, gender, religion and class were based in intellectual baggage no less weighty than the steamer trunks and carpet bags they brought with them, and with more devastating consequences for the stereotyping of those they encountered in publications which long outlived their original journeys. In each instance in which a cultural encounter resulted in an outcome deemed unpleasant by the European traveler, an Oriental was conveniently found and blamed. The destruction of Biblical prosperity was blamed on Arab laziness, a misunderstanding in a conversation became the fault of a corrupt translator and the failure of the Holy Land to appear authentic was attributed to socially overreaching natives; the list had endless addendums.

CHAPTER SIX: THE JOURNEY'S END

“Are we the same people I wonder when all our surroundings, associations, acquaintances are changed?”³²¹

It has been the purpose of this thesis to answer Gertrude Bell's question, at least as posed to Victorian Englishwomen who traveled to the Orient and published accounts of these travels, with a resounding no. Over twenty travel narratives of governesses, consul's wives and sisters, pilgrims, adventure seekers, archaeologists and ethnographers attest to the contested nature of gendered self portrayal in imperial Great Britain between 1830 and 1915. Female travelers portrayed themselves as different people in the Empire than they were in the sanctity of the British home.

In *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers*, Jane Robinson describes a fundamental flaw in historical treatments of women's history, “retrospective overgeneralization.”³²² Every attempt has been made in this thesis to focus on the specifics of travel and travel narrative production as they contributed to the formation of Victorian women's conceptions of gender, identity and imperial ideology. In “The Necessity of a Preface,” the question of how transient women characterized themselves and their travels was answered in a review of the Preface. The Preface was deconstructed as a historical source, which revealed the reasons women traveled, why they wrote about their travels and how the writing process itself was gendered. Female travel authors used the Preface to solidify claims to authority and

³²¹ Gertrude Bell, *Safar Nameh: Persian Pictures* (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1894), 8.

³²² Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travelers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990),viii.

uniqueness based in their newly acquired imperial masculinity, while verifying their domestic femininity by apologizing for the publications of their texts and any appearance of scholarly aspirations. A case study comparing the narrative tone and gendered authority in a Preface authored by Wilfrid Blunt and the Prefaces of traveling women in general concluded the chapter. Blunt's introduction demonstrated the literary confidence of male authors in defending academic assertions and claims of political and geographic accomplishment when compared to female acts of literary attrition.

Chapter Three moves beyond the structure of the travel narrative itself, to scrutinize the cultural developments which led to the Victorian female travelers "pre-knowing" the Orient and Orientals. Widespread comparisons of cross-cultural experiences to *The Arabian Nights'* *Entertainments*, travel guides and the *Bible* exposed female travelers engaging these mediums of cultural exchange to organize unfamiliar people, places and behaviors into the familiar structure of viewer and viewed, observer and observed and exhibitor and exhibited. Ultimately, expectation and organization were combined in an imperial subjugation of people and geography, as both land and individuals were remapped and transformed to meet the "entextually" spiritual needs of Christian British women.

The "realities of travel" were the subject of examinations of class, gender and race analysis in Chapter Four. An area of travel history that is often overlooked, it was asserted here that the preparations for and dangers encountered during travel exhibit conscious gender, race and class ideologies in their representation in travel narratives. The amount and type of luggage packed and modes of travel held serious connotations for expressions of class membership and social propriety for traveling women. Danger, as it posed a threat in the form of illness and physical violence, was studied and determined to have remarkably different consequences for

those women who viewed themselves as traveling “alone” and those who felt responsible for the health and well being of other travelers, especially husbands and brothers. Assessments of female travelers own feelings on fear concluded the chapter identifying a relationship between danger, vulnerability and existential and physical proximity.

This thesis draws to a close with a second look at cultural expectations, but this time from the perspective of their unfulfillment and the contributions such disappointments made to the formation of ideologies of race in the narratives of Victorian women. “Distancing” strategies were also studied in an attempt to identify the factors that further contributed to disappointed expectation by increasing the “distance” between the traveler and the people and places she encountered. Key amongst these were the disorientation perceived to be caused by the differences in European and Oriental concepts of time, language barriers and the failure of imagined biblical tropes to materialize.

Though it has been my goal to offer an extensive and thorough study of the travel narrative and the female traveler, much work remains to be done. The creation of “transient communities” consisting of travelers, their European servants and Oriental assistants and the class and gender power hierarchies inherent to such conglomerates has yet to be examined. Case studies highlighting individual travelers in depth and the points of agreement and disagreement between personal notes, diaries and letters and published accounts are necessary to identify the purpose of specific constructions of self and the perpetuation of imperial ideologies regarding race, class and gender. Finally, in order to assess the reception of projections of the self by the traveling Englishwoman as being both “domestically feminine” and “imperially masculine,” the field would benefit from studies which examined depictions of traveling women in popular culture, including the mediums of the novel, painting, advertising and music. My anticipation of

a continued proliferation of works examining the Victorian female traveler, her perception of herself and the development of the travel narrative emphasizes the importance of this study to the field of history through its ability to provide a profile of womanhood in conflict, torn between propriety and adventure, feminist openness and racist exclusivity, domesticity and individualism and activity and passivity. Such a reexamination of women as active agents, even participants, in the imperial era can only lead to a greater understanding of the complexity inherent in the human character, even when that character is female.

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