A Confined Amorous Being: The Eastern Woman between Travel Literature and English Drama

Dr. Mohammed Ahmed Rawashdeh*

Abstract

From the Middle Ages to the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Eastern and Western cultures lived in a state of estrangement from one another. This estrangement, which sometimes developed into military confrontation, was brought about by the differences in ideologies. The limited cultural interaction between the two civilizations was, in the main, carried out by politicians and merchants. Firsthand experience was not available to ordinary people from either side. Consequently, throughout these long centuries, history books, travel accounts, and the translations from Arabic to some European languages remained the European reader's main sources of knowledge about the East.

This paper explores the image of the Eastern woman in travel literature and the subsequent treatment of her in the Restoration and eighteenth century drama. The study shows that the travelers' stories and notions of the Eastern woman's lifestyle were adopted by the English dramatists and sometimes incorporated in their particulars. It argues that travel literature played a profound role in constructing the image of the Eastern woman on the English stage, in that period, as a subjugated lascivious 'being' and stresses that this very negative image was based on the misconceptions and often

ill-founded narrations of the travelers.

* Department of English Language and Literature- Yarmouk University -Irbid / Jordan

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Until the late eighteenth century, the Muslim East was to the Europeans, in general, and to the English, in particular, more of a mystery than of a different culture. The mystery could easily have been broken through the ordinary channels of interaction between cultures and nations, but lack of cultural communication created an unfamiliarity, or, more accurately, an estrangement. This estrangement was sustained, and oftentimes reinforced, by the political and religious institutions in both hemispheres. From the viewpoint of the Easterners, the Westerners led an insupportable, morally lax lifestyle and therefore social interaction with them meant endangering the conservative Eastern culture. Such a perception of the Western culture hindered the Easterners from constructing socio-cultural bridges with the West. For their part, the Westerners viewed the Eastern culture as despotic and Muslims as foes who held ideas and beliefs that were essentially anti-Christian.

Nevertheless, Naji Oueijan traces the Western contact with the East back to the fifth century when some Irish travelers sought the East for "pilgrimage." The objective of the Western travelers, however, extended in the late sixth century to include "trade" and "scholarship." The more extensive contact with the East took place in the Middle Ages, with the arrival of Western military expeditions to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims, or what is known as the crusades. The travel tradition continued, as Oueijan points out, even during the rule of the Ottomans, who posed a real threat to the West, motivated more by political and economic purposes than by scholarship or religious sentiments.[1] Hence, the cultural dimension was exempted despite the fact that Eastern social and religious issues were discussed frequently in Western writings. The English were particularly more aloof and rigid, in this regard, than the

[1] Naji B. Oueijan, *The Progress of an Image: The East in the English Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 1-3.

other European nations; "Until the reign of Amurath III," as J. Theodore Bent et al. state, "the English had been altogether strangers to Turkey."[2]

Since the English people did not have the opportunity to know the Eastern culture by means of direct interaction with the people there, their knowledge of the East came mainly from their writers— historians, travelers, and literary writers. The literary writers relied on history books, travel accounts, and translations from Arabic for information on the East because firsthand experience was as rare to those writers as it was to ordinary people in England.[3] The dramatists' "lack of first hand experience," as Naji B. Oueijan remarks, sometimes resulted in errors "in references to Eastern settings" and names of Turkish Sultans.[4] Thus, the East was virtually introduced to the English people through narrow as well as limited channels. This study investigates the treatment of the Eastern woman in travel literature and English drama and argues that travel literature functioned as a corner stone in constructing the image of the Eastern woman, in the drama of the period, as an amorous, confined woman turned, by such a lifestyle, into a promiscuous sexual being.

Due to the renewed colonial British interest in the East during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, travel literature received significant attention from the English throne and politicians. "The Royal Society," P. Marshal and Glyndwr Williams point out, "continued to act as patron of travelers" throughout the eighteenth century.[5] In addition to the writings of the English travelers, the English also translated the accounts of other European travelers, like those of Monsieur Sanson, Monsieur Pierre Belon, Monsieur de S. Olon, Dr. Leonhart Rauwolff, Ottaviano Bon, and

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[2] Amurath (Murad) III ruled from 1574-1595. J. Theodore Bent, E.S.A.,and E.R.G.S., Introduction, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (London, 1893), Eds. J. Bent Theodore, E.S.A., and E.R.G.S., p. 7.

[3] The *Holy Koran* and *Thousand and One Nights* (*The Arabian Nights Entertainments)* were the most popular translations from Arabic among the Westerners. The former was translated into Latin in the 11th century and into English in 1734. The latter was translated into French in the late seventeenth century and from French into English in 1704.

[4] Naji B. Oueijan, *The Progress of an Image: The East in the English Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 44.

[5] P. J. Marshal and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), p. 52.

Sieur du Mont.[6] The exciting and, sometimes, titillating tales of travelers made travel literature popular in the English coffeehouses and taverns; the printed accounts, certainly, reached a much larger audience. The popularity of travel literature is evident "not only from the number of travel-books," Samuel Chew notes, "but from the number of editions through which the more popular of them passed." [7]

Unfortunately, the English male travelers who wrote about the East were politically motivated, regardless of their careers or missions in the East. This probably explains why they enjoyed the financial support and protection of the English crown. For instance, Thomas Dallam, who wrote a diary of more than one hundred pages during his one-year journey in the East, was a herald of Queen Elizabeth, carrying a letter and an organ (a gift from the Queen), to Sultan Mahomet III. George Sandys, a prominent English traveler, was a statesman and son of Sir Edwin, archbishop of York. Sandys dedicated the voluminous book of his travels ***A Relation of a Journey Begun Anno Dom. 1610*** to Charles I. Aaron Hill, a writer who traveled in the East, dedicated his book ***A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire*** (1709) to Queen Anne. The supreme patronage such writers enjoyed shows how close those writers were to the English throne. Charles II, in his turn, was careful to keep the English people up to date on the conditions of both Christians and Turks, living in the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, under his direct instructions, Paul Rycaut, an English official and businessman in Constantinople in his reign, wrote ***The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches*** (1679), at the time Greece and Armenia were dominions of the Turkish Empire, and before that he had

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[6] Monsieur Sanson was a geographer to the French king in the sixties of the seventeenth century. An account of his travels, which included several maps, was rendered to English in the reign of Charles II and upon Charles II's request. Pierre Belon (1517-1564) is a French naturalist who traveled in the Levant as far as Syria and Egypt. His travels account was published in 1553 under the title *Les Observations de plusiers singularités et choses mémorables trouvées en Gréce, Asie, etc*. Monsieur de S. Olon (1640?-1720) was the French ambassador to Morocco and the author of *The Present State of Morocco*, translated to English and published in 1695. Dr. Leonhart Rauwolff, Ottaviano Bon, and Sieur du Mont will be introduced at a later stage since they are cited to serve the purpose of this study.

[7] Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc,. 1965), p.22.

written ***The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*** (1668), an elaborate work consisting of sixty chapters.[8] Undoubtedly, travel literature played a key role in shaping the image of the East in the minds of the English people, for it took the Eastern life as its province and covered almost all of its aspects— the political, economic, social, and religious. Travelers recorded their own observations, their interpretations of what they saw and heard, and the various stories reported to them by the Easterners themselves. The Eastern woman, of course, was always one of their points of interest as well as of their readers.

Leading a significantly different lifestyle from that of the Western woman, the Eastern woman received special attention from Western travelers, especially the English ones. From its beginnings, Islam encouraged women to devote their time to their household affairs and not to leave their homes unless there was a necessity for that. Western travelers interpreted this cultural phenomenon as an appalling oppression and subjugation of women. Many travelers called it "confinement", some "imprisonment", and others "enslavement." Dr. Leonhart Rauwolff says, in his travel account, "You very seldom see any *Turkish* Women either in streets or in the Markets to buy Provision, or in their Churches."[9] George Sandys, an English traveler who visited the East in 1610, adds to Rauwolff's reports by saying that "the women are not permitted to come into their temples."[10] While Rauwollff observes that the streets, markets, and mosques are mostly frequented by men and that women are rarely seen in such places, Sandys goes farther to say that Eastern women are denied even the right to attend mosques for payers.

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[8] J. Theodore Bent, F. S. A., F. R. G. S., eds. "Master Thomas Dallam's Diary", *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (London, 1893), [microform]. See "Introduction" pp. i, v, vi , & xvi.

[9] John Ray, ed., "Dr. Leonhart Rauwolff's Travels", *A Collection of Curios Travels and Voyages* (London, 1693), [microform], Tome I, part 1, pp. 44, 45. Leonhart Rauwolff (also known by Leonhard Rauwolf) (1535 or 1540 – 1596) was a German physician, botanist, and traveler. He traveled in the Middle East from 1573-1576 and published an account of his travels in his travel journal *Aigentliche Beschreibung de RaiB inn die Morgen Länderin*, which was translated later to both English and Dutch.

[10] George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun an Dom 1610* (London, 1637 ed.), [microform], p. 55. Sandys (1578-1644) was also a poet. In the Levant, he visited Constantinople, Egypt, and Palestine. In 1624 he was appointed a member in the council of Virginia after it had become a crown colony.

Thomas Dallam raises the same point and tries to explain why the Turks deny their women the right of worshiping in congregation by stating that Turks believe that "women have no souls" and that is why women "never goo to churche, or other prayers."[11] Evidently, Dallam's conclusion springs from his unfamiliarity with the Islamic teaching which states that while a woman may pray in the mosque, she receives greater reward for praying at home.

This confinement, according to travelers, was not limited to lower or middle class women; it included the women of the Turkish Sultan himself. Their focus on the Sultan's women and the women of his dignitaries (viziers and pashas) exceeded by far their focus on the ordinary women, probably because they knew that their audiences would be more eager to know about the ruling elite than about the masses. Paul Rycaut, the English traveler who spent more than eleven years in the East, says that "The Ladys . . . of the Seraglio [the palace of the Turkish Sultan] . . . can only have the liberty of enjoying the air which passes through grates and lattices," indicating that Turkish women not only cannot leave the harem, but also cannot see the outside world from the windows of their chambers.[12] The windows of their chambers are provided with lattices and grates designed to allow the air to get into the chambers and prevent women from seeing through them. This confinement was strictly applied even when the Sultan's women, for whatever reason, had to leave the Seraglio, as Reverend Tho. Smith reveals. He says that when the Turkish Sultan and his government moved from Constantinople to Adrianople, the Sultana was "in a Coach much like our Carriage-wagons, but that they are latticed to let the Air."[13]

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[11] J. Theodore Bent, F. S. A., F. R. G. S., eds. "Master Thomas Dallam's Diary", *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (London, 1893), [microform]p. 16. Early travelers referred to the mosque using the terms used for places of worship in the West such as church and temple.

[12] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), p. 9.

[13] John Ray ed., "An Account of the City of Prusa in Bithynia, and Continuation of the Historical Observations Relating to Constantinople; by the Reverend and Learned Tho. Smith", *A Collection of Curios Travels and Voyages*, (London, 1693), [microform], tome II, p. 55. Reverend Tho. Smith was an English traveler and a fellow of the English Royal Society,

The Sultana's Coach, as Smith describes it, is more or less a portable harem or a closed box with some slanted narrow openings through which the air enters. Dallam, on his part, relates that he was able to see the Sultan's women through the "grait" of the wall of the harem which was "verrie thicke, and graited on bothe the sides with iron verrie strongly."[14] Dallam's description of the harem from outside invokes in the reader's mind the image of prison and hence indicates that life behind these walls, no matter how luxurious it could be, is undoubtedly a dismal one.

The harem of the Turkish Seraglio in English drama has become the iconographic image of the Eastern harem since the East was depicted only in tragedy, a genre the realms of which, at that time, were mostly the courts of kings and castles of princes. The scenario of confinement, as focused on in travel accounts, was transferred on to the stage by English dramatists with equal vehemence. Influenced by the travelers' portrayals, dramatists depicted the harem as a horrible prison for women. In Isaac Bickerstaff's play, ***The Sultan; Or a Peep into the Seraglio*** (1775), Elmira, the Georgian concubine, says to Osmyn, "when first I came within these walls . . . the thoughts of being shut up for ever here, terrified me to death."[15] Elmira seems familiar with the harem life, however, from a Western perspective, and she is aware that once she becomes a member of the Sultan household, she would not be able to live an ordinary life. Her youth would be consumed, as she thinks, within the walls of her chamber. Through Elmira, Bickerstaff draws a dark picture of the Seraglio, depicting it a prison designated for females.

Another aspect of the Seraglio is portrayed in ***The Siege of Constantinople*** (1675) by Henry Neville Payne. Irene, a Greek captive in Payne's play, says to her father Theophilus after being freed from the Seraglio, "we were / Ne'er seen by any person but the Mutes; / The Sultan, and two Bassas, since we came."[16] Payne highlights the notion

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[14] J. Theodore Bent, F. S. A., F. R. G. S., eds., "The Diary of Master Thomas Dallam", *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (London, 1893), [microform], part 1, p. 74.
[15] Isaac Bickerstaff, "*The Sultan: Or, A Peep into the Seraglio*" , *The Select London Stage: A Collection of the Most Reputed Tragedies, Comedies, Operas, Melodramas, Farces, and Interludes* (London 1824-1827), [microform], act I, scene 1, p. 8.
[16] Henry Neville Payne, *The Siege of Constantinople* (London 1696), [microform], act V, p. 87. This act is not divided into scenes.

that the women in the Seraglio lead no real social life since they only see the unfriendly men of the Sultan. A similar picture of the harem is drawn by Hannah Cowley, in her play ***A Day in Turkey*** (1791), when Alexina, the Russian concubine, describes the mansion of Pasha Ibrahim as a "prison," and her friend Paulina says to the Pasha that she "hate[s] the life people lead in harems"[17] Again the image of the prison is emphasized here; a picture of gloominess and isolation is assigned to the harem. Aaron Hill, in his play ***Zara*** (1760), shows that even Eastern women hate the harem life. Selima asks Zara, the Western captive, in astonishment, why "A barr'd seraglio! ---sad, unsocial life! ….. lost its terror!" and became agreeable to her.[18] Hill puts in the mouth of Selima, the Eastern woman, what the audience actually expects to hear from Zara, the Western woman. Joseph Trapp does almost the same thing in his play ***Abra-Mule*** (1735, for Pyrrhus, the General of the Sultan's army, entreats Kisler Aga, the Superintendent of the Seraglio, to help him "secretly free" his beloved Abra "from this new confinement."[19] What is thought provoking is that Selima and Pyrrhus, both Easterners, view the harem as a prison, the way Westerners view it. Such declarations by Easterners are no more than a strategy used by the two English dramatists, Hill and Trapp, to make the horrible image they draw of the harem more convincing to the English people, for when the harem life is condemned by the Easterners themselves, the English audience is compelled to believe that what is being said about the harem is true.

The English dramatists bring the image of the harem even closer to that of the prison when they include in their plays the guards, who where assigned to watch the women in the harem. The women of the Sultan and the women of the Turkish dignitaries in English drama are closely watched, just like prisoners. But instead of the ordinary guards that watch prisoners, the women are watched by eunuchs and mutes whose task lies in ensuring that the women do not violate the

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[17] Hannah Cowley, "*A Day in Turkey*", *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 2 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), Frederick M. Link, ed., act IV, scene 3, p. 59.
[18] Aaron Hill, "*Zara*", *The Plays of Aaron Hill* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981) Calhoun Winton, ed., act I, scene 1, p. 31. This play is a reworking of Voltaire's "Zaïre" (1732).
[19] Joseph Trapp, *Abra-Mule: Or, Love and Empire* (London 1735), [microform], act II, scene 1, p. 28.

conventions, or rules, of the harem. Alphonso, a Spaniard of noble birth in Eliza Heywood's ***The Fair Captive*** (1721), threatens to use force to liberate his beloved Isabella from the Turkish Seraglio if diplomacy fails. However, his friend Pedro tells him that liberating her by force is far from being a feasible choice, if not an impossible one, reminding him that in addition to the impenetrable walls of the Seraglio, his beloved is watched by "Guards of Eunuchs [who] watch her every Motion?"[20] Heywood, in this depiction, not only sustains the Seraglio's image as a prison, but also exaggerates it to make the Seraglio look like a very fortified prison, like the ones used to keep dangerous criminals. Roxolana, the English concubine in Bickerstaff's ***The Sultan*** (1775), protests because the Eunuch Pasha, who is in charge of the Sultan's women, is always at their elbows, following them like their shadows. "We can't step one step but he is after us; by-and-by, I suppose he will weigh out air and measure out light to us," she complains to the Sultan.[21] The situation Roxolana describes reveals that women in the harem are watched much more closely than prisoners in actual prisons; the Eunuch Pasha oversees everything the women do and notes every single word they utter.

What makes these guards more annoying to the women is that they are selected from the ugliest in complexion. Paulina, the one whom Pasha Ibrahim is fascinated with and plans to marry, in Cowley's ***A Day in Turkey*** (1791), tells Pasha Ibrahim that one of the things that makes the harem life a dismal one is that there is nothing to see but "great whiskers, and black slaves," that is to say, ugly men.[22] These ugly men are mainly eunuchs and mutes who are assigned by the Pasha to attend as well as watch his women. The notion of keeping ugly men to watch the women seems to have found its way to drama from travel literature. The playwrights' knowledge of this matter must have come from accounts of travelers like Rycaut who relates that the women of the Sultan have

[20] Eliza Haywood, *The Fair Captive* (London 1721), [microform], act I, scene 1, p. 4.
[21] Isaac Bickerstaff, "*The Sultan: Or, A Peep into the Seraglio*" , *The Select London Stage: A Collection of the Most Reputed Tragedies, Comedies, Operas, Melodramas, Farces, and Interludes* (London 1824-1827), [microform], act I, scene 1, p. 9.
[22] Hannah Cowley, "*A Day in Turkey*", *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 2 (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), Frederick M. Link, ed., act V, scene 1, p. 62.

"black guards to attend them."[23] He adds that these black guards are "not only castrated, but . . . chosen with the worst features." The purpose, as he explains, is "to create abhorrency in them."[24] In other words, in doing so, the Sultan means to prevent any form of lewdness that could take place between these eunuchs and his women.

What is astonishing is that the travelers do not even view the harem lifestyle with its conventions in the light of the cultural strata of the Eastern societies; rather, they attribute it to man's tyranny and selfishness. They maintain that the confinement of women is motivated by the Eastern man's jealousy. Rauwolff thinks that "because the *Turks* are very Jealous . . . their wives seldom meet in the Streets or Markets."[25] In other words, women scarcely leave the harem, from Rauwolff's point of view, because their men are jealous, not because their culture admonishes them not to do so unless there is a real need for that. He also explains the exasperation of the Turkish men over seeing foreigners passing by the Turkish cemeteries from the same perspective: "if one [foreigner] or more should . . . go to them [cemeteries], the *Turks* would be very much offended at it . . . partly because they are very jealous of their wives," since women are expected to be at cemeteries visiting the graves of their relatives.[26] Reverend Tho. Smith, after living in Turkey for some time and seeing the Sultana traveling from Constantinople to Adrianople in a latticed wagon, concludes that it is jealousy that stands behind such conservatism and accordingly describes Turkey as a "jealous country."[27] He attributes to jealousy all the measures taken by the Sultan, and he fails to see these measures as precautions meant to guarantee the privacy and protection of the Sultana.

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[23] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), p. 9.
[24] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), p. 37.
[25] John Ray, ed., "Dr. Leonhart Rauwolff's Travels", *A Collection of Curios Travels and Voyages*, (London, 1693), [microform], part 1, p. 45.
[26] Ibid., p. 273.
[27] John Ray, ed., "An Account of the City of Pursa in Bithynia, and a Continuation of the Historical Observations Relating to Constantinople; by the Reverend and Learned Tho. Smith", *A Collection of Curios Travels and Voyages* (London, 1693), [microform], Tome II, p. 55.

This imprisonment, according to some dramatists, is equivalent to enslavement and thereupon the relationship between the Turk and his women is a relationship of a master and his slaves rather than a relationship of partners in life. In Hannah Cowley's play, ***A Day in Turkey*** (1791), Alexina, the Russian captive, describes the house of Pasha Ibrahim and his relationship with his women as "the abode of a tyrant and his slaves?"[28] Alexina, being from Russia, does not accept the lifestyle the Eastern woman leads, and she sees no difference between such a life and that of slavery. In Samuel Johnson's *Irene* (1748), Aspasia reminds Irene of the misery awaiting her should she weaken and accept Sultan Mahomet's offer to convert to Islam and become the Sultana. Irene, according to Aspasia, would suffer, in addition to eternal confinement, the excruciating pains of "slav'ry." [29] What is noteworthy is that Johnson wrote this play in an age in which the English were more open to the Eastern culture, and examples of conversion to Islam were talked about in the English taverns and alehouses. Therefore, through Aspasia, he tries to warn the English women, being the weaker side in this regard, of apostasy.

This notion of viewing Eastern women as slaves can be easily traced back to travel literature; English dramatists were actually bringing to the stage what travelers reported in their accounts. Sieur du Mont says, "there is no Slavery equal to that of the *Turkish* Women."[30] Du Mont reaches this conclusion because, as he says, "a Servant may live Twenty Years in a Family without seeing the Face of his Mistress."[31] So it is the strict confinement, according to Du Mont, that makes equals of the Turkish women and their slaves, not the mistreatment or the drudgery that usually mark the life of slavery. George Sandys remarks that there is

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[28] Hannah Cowley, "*A Day in Turkey*", *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 2, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), Frederick M. Link, ed., act V, scene 1, p.26.
[29] Samuel Johnson, "*Irene*", *Samuel Johnson: Poems, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* , Vol. 2, (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), act II, scene 8, p. 165.
[30] Sieur du Mont, *A New Voyage to the Levant: Containing an Account of the Most Remarkable Curiosities in Germany, France, Italy, Malta, and Turkey; with Historical Observations relating to the Present and Ancient State of those Countries* (London 1696), [microform], p. 268.
[31] Ibid., p. 268.

little difference between the wives of Turkish men and their female slaves. This difference, as he explains, is that the slaves are treated as commodities in addition to being sexual objects; they are "sold as horses in Faires," as he puts it, whereas wives are not.[32] Sandys grounds his conclusion on the sexual role that wives and concubines share in their relationship with the man, not paying attention to the social status, rights, and obligations of wives, which put them in a significantly higher social rank than that of concubines. Aaron Hill explains that Turkish men are not interested in prostitutes because of "the Slavery that poor unhappy sex are there subjected to, and the unbounded Liberty their Laws afford 'em in promiscuous Use of *Wives* and *Concubines.*"[33] Hill thinks that the Turks' sexual satisfaction is due to the unlimited sex and freedom with which the men practiced their sexual fantasies with their women.[34] In short, according to Hill, Turks practice sex with their women with the same liberty and promiscuousness a man might practice with the harlots in brothels and that is why they do not seek adulterous relationships.

Undoubtedly, Eastern culture acknowledges the primacy of man over woman, though this primacy is not left unconditional. Nevertheless, the relationship between husband and wife, as Abdelwahab Bouhdiba argues, is one of "complementarity," not of enslavement because man, according to the Quranic verses, to use Bouhdiba's terms, "transcends himself" and "finds his fulfillment" only when he is coupled to a woman.[35] Travelers, apparently, could not see this side of the male/female relationship in Eastern culture and depending on their misconception of the harem insist that women in the East are no more than imprisoned sexual beings.

Travelers, however, do mention a few exceptions to this confinement. The only places women are allowed to go to— though not

[32] George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun an Dom 1610* (London, 1637 ed.), [microform], p. 69.
[33] Aaron Hill, *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1709), [microform], p. 80.
[34] Hill, who spent about six years in the East, noticed that there were no brothel houses in the Ottoman Empire.
[35] Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (Boston: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), Trans. Alan Sheridan, p. 11. Note: The book was first published in French in 1975.

as frequently as they desire— Rauwolff says, are "the Tombs of their deceased Parents or Relations" and the "Hothouses."[36] Rauwolff sympathizes with the Turkish women who do not have an opportunity to see and talk to one another except in the cemetery and the "Hammams," places which are in themselves odd to socialize in. Moreover, the Turkish houses, especially the Sultan's Seraglio and the houses of the Pashas and wealthy people, the travelers report, have gardens that women are usually allowed to "sport" in. But the image of the Turkish house as the woman's prison still looms despite the existence of these gardens since, as the travelers assert, these gardens are surrounded by high, thick walls. Rycaut says that the ladies of the Seraglio sometimes "obtain license to sport and recreate themselves in the Garden, separated from the sight of men by walls higher then those of any nunnery."[37] These walls are well represented in Hannah Cowley's play, ***A Day in Turkey*** (1791). Being within high walls, Alexina seems desperate of any possibility to escape. When Mustapha admonishes her not to lose hope, she asks him in amazement, "But how it's possible within these walls?"[38] Evidently, the walls are strong and insurmountable and thereupon Alexina sees no glimpse of hope in being free again. In the same play, Ala Greque, the French captive who is sexually aroused by the laughter of the Pasha's concubines from behind those walls, is puzzled because the wall of the garden is so high and thick. It leaves him no hope of enjoying a look at the Pasha's women. Therefore, he wishes that the "Devil take the workmen who built the wall."[39] Cowley's depiction of the garden wall invites the spectators to imagine the well-fortified wall of a castle or garrison, not a garden wall. Moreover, guards do not leave the women when they are allowed a few hours in the garden. Roxolana, in Bickerstaff's ***The Sultan*** (1775), protests because their keeper is so strict that he "won't let [them] walk in the gardens," the only place wherein the

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[36] John Ray, ed., "Dr. Leonhart Rauwolff's Travels", *A Collection of Curios Travels and Voyages* (London, 1693), [microform], tome II, p. 45. Hothouses are also called "Hammams" and "Pagnios" by Rauwolff and other travelers.
[37] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), p. 9.
[38] Hannah Cowley, "*A Day in Turkey*", *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 2, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), Frederick M. Link, ed., act II, scene 1, p. 26.
[39] Ibid., act IV, scene 1, p. 48.

women of the Seraglio could see the outside world.[40] Thus, the garden, with its thick and high wall and guards, functions as no more than a bigger prison, slightly more bearable than the harem.

It is apparent that the dramatists in this regard mirror the travelers who overlook the positive aspects of these gardens and magnify the negative ones, for Lady Wortley Montagu views them from a totally different perspective. Unlike male travel writers, Lady Montagu finds these gardens beautiful and very agreeable to women. In one of her letters, she says that in the gardens of the countryside, "wives and daughters take liberty not permitted in the town," in the sense that they take off their veils and entertain themselves in different sports.[41] Even the whole notion of confinement seems to Lady Montagu a mirage that male travelers imagined; she refutes the disillusionment of the travelers and attributes it to the fact that they did not have access to the harems, nor could they talk to the women in them and therefore started to fantasize about the happenings within.[42] In so doing, Lady Montagu "distinctly sets herself apart from that tradition," the travelers' tradition of presenting the Western reader with "inaccurate representations" and "misconceptions" of the nature and conditions of the Turkish woman.[43] Surprisingly, the image of imprisonment and strict surveillance persisted in English drama despite the fact that Lady Montagu discredited the accounts of male travelers in this regard. Ruth Yeazell says that "the idea

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[40] Isaac Bickerstaff, "*The Sultan: Or, A Peep into the Seraglio*" , *The Select London Stage: A Collection of the Most Reputed Tragedies, Comedies, Operas, Melodramas, Farces, and Interludes* (London 1824-1827), [microform], act I, scene 1, p. 9.

[41] Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters from the Levant During the Embassy to Constantinople, 1716-18*, J. A. ST. John, ed., (London 1838), p. 137. Reprinted by the Arno Press and the New York Times in 1971. Mary Lady Wortley Montagu was the wife of the British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte; she lived in Constantinople from May 1717 until July 1718. Being a female, Lady Montagu, unlike the male travelers, had the opportunity to see the Eastern harem from inside, for she visited several Turkish ladies as well as Sultana Hafiten.

[42] Ibid., pp. 224,225.

[43] Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), p. 31.

of imprisonment in the seraglio continued to haunt the Western imagination well into the nineteenth century."[44]

This jealousy-motivated confinement, according to travel writers, backfires; it turns the Eastern lady into a lascivious woman. Hill sympathetically clarifies that "The warm Desires . . . of the *Turkish Ladies*, are rather the effects of their unnatural Confinement."[45] Because the Turkish woman is deprived of a natural social life, according to travelers, she turns to sex, a practice to which she, by time, becomes addicted. Travelers, however, agree that Turkish women are amorous and wanton. Rauwolff, seemingly, commends the Turkish women when he describes them as "pretty handsome, and well shaped, [and] very Civil in their Discourses," but it is evident that this compliment is loaded with sexual undertones, for the Turkish women are not commended for their intellect, nor for their chastity, but for their beauty and amiable talk.[46] Du Mont, brings the ostensive sexual trait of the Turkish women to the surface when he says, "the Turkish Women are the most charming Creatures in the World: they seem to be made for Love; their Actions, Gestures, Discourses, and Looks are all Amorous, and admirably well fitted to kindle a soft and lasting Passion."[47] Du Mont suggests that the Eastern woman functions as a merely sexual being whose sole concern is to master the art of temptation and seduction, and the Eastern man, of course, sees her as such. Talking about the sexual thirst of the Sultan's women, Rycaut says that their "only study and business of the life [is] to obtain a single nod of invitation to the Bed of their great Master."[48] Rycaut goes farther than this to declare that the harem women sometimes

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[44] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western and Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), p. 88.

[45] Aaron Hill, *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1709), [microform], p. 111.

[46] John Ray, ed., "Dr. Leonhart Rauwolff's Travels", *A Collection of Curios Travels and Voyages*, (London, 1693), [microform], part 1, p. 79

[47] Sieur du Mont, *A New Voyage to the Levant: Containing an Account of the Most Remarkable Curiosities in Germany, France, Italy, Malta, and Turkey; with Historical Observations relating to the Present and Ancient State of those Countries* (London 1696), [microform], p. 273.

[48] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), p. 38.

"exercised an unnatural kind of carnality" amongst themselves.[49] To decrease the wantonness among them, Rycaut says that "between every five or six lies an Eunuch" to watch their behavior and eavesdrop on their discourses.[50] Ottavanio Bon also remarks that "by every ten virgins there lies an old woman" and that "many lamps" are kept burning "all night" long in the women's bedchambers, in part, to "keep the young wenches from wantonness."[51] Other travelers talk of women quenching the fire of their sexual desires with their eunuchs. According to the Western explanation, the lack of the "real" compels the deprived women to seek the "shadow."[52]

But when they have a chance for the "natural" sexual practice, they do not hesitate to fulfill their desires, even by illicit means. John Covel insinuates that he was sexually entertained by two Turkish women when the plague spread in Adrianople and the wealthy evacuated the city for the surrounding villages. He triumphantly says that he had the chance to be entertained by "a couple of very lovely women."[53] Du Mont tells a story of a French man who received a letter from a Pasha's wife offering to entertain him. It was the woman's habit, Du Mont adds, to invite men to her house when her husband was abroad.[54] Talking about the Turkish

[49] Ibid., p. 10.
[50] Ibid., 27.
[51] Ottaviano Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court* (London: Saqi Books, 1996 ed.), p. 47. Bon (1552-1623) was the Venetian ambassador to the Sublime Porte from 1604 -1608; his account was first translated into English with additions by John Withers in 1625; a second edition, with more additions, appeared in 1650. The Saqi Books' edition, which was published in 1996 under the title *The Sultan Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of life at the Ottoman Court*, was based on Withers' edition. John Greaves' *A Description of the Grand Signour's Seraglio or Turkish Emperours Court*, which he published in the late 1640s, was actually based on Withers' 1625 edition, which was given to him in Istanbul in the early 1640s. However, in the present time, the two books carry the name of the original author.
[52] Mita Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theater, 1660-1800: Identity, Performance, Empire* (London: Associated Press, 2000), p. 45.
[53] J. Theodore Bent, F. S. A., F. R. G. S., eds. "Extracts from the Diary of Dr. John Covel", *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (London, 1893), [microform], p. 244. Dr. Covel stayed in the East from 1670 until 1679.
[54] Sieur du Mont, *A New Voyage to the Levant: Containing an Account of the Most Remarkable Curiosities in Germany, France, Italy, Malta, and Turkey; with Historical*

women, Hill says that they are "so *lascivious*" and when "they can procure the Company of some Stranger in their Chamber, they claim *unanimously* an equal share for his *Caresses*."[55] To confirm his statement, he relates a very fascinating and lengthy story of twenty five Turkish women who helped an English sailor (by tying several sheets together) to climb to their chamber after he had leaped over the wall of the garden. The women agreed to keep him for a month, a night for each one. Hill says that the sailor left on the tenth day because of a quarrel between two of the women over him that caused his discovery by the eunuch.[56]

The English playwrights did not forget to bring this lust to the stage; they portray the women in the Eastern harem as lascivious creatures. These women do not hesitate, nor do they consider it vulgar, to show that they are impatient to sate their appetite for sex. Caltista, in Payne's ***The Siege of Constantinople*** (1675), says to the Eunuch Pasha when he informs her of the Sultan's invitation to his bed, "this obligation is so great, / That no sufficient thanks can be repay'd."[57] Caltista's reaction is so much exaggerated; she is overwhelmed by joy when she is informed of the Sultan's invitation. She is so grateful to the eunuch Pasha for bringing her this happy news and doesn't know how to reward him, for thanks, no matter how big they are, as she says, would be insufficient.

The harem women could even be bolder than this, as they are portrayed by some playwrights. Just like the twenty five Turkish women in Hill's accounts, Pasha Ibrahim's concubines, in Hannah Cowley's play ***A Day in Turkey*** (1791), admit Ala Greque, the captive French playboy, into the Pasha's harem through the garden, and he entertains them for several hours before the eunuchs suspect the existence of a man in the harem. Before the eunuchs enter into the women's chamber, Fatima and the other women cover Ala Greque with the drapery and mattresses to

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Observations relating to the Present and Ancient State of those Countries (London 1696), [microform], p. 269.

[55] Aaron Hill, *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1709), [microform], p. 111.

[56] Ibid., pp 11-115.

[57] Henry Neville Payne, *The Siege of Constantinople* (London 1675), [microform], act IV, p. 54.

protect him from the eunuchs as well as to have him for more time.[58] This scene leaves no doubt that Cowley did read Hill's accounts, particularly the "adventure" of the English sailor with the twenty five Turkish women, the story which he relates in the minutest details. It is probably for stage limitations that Cowley does not incorporate, in her play, Hill's story by its entirety. The only change she procures is that she substitutes the English sailor with the French Ala Greque. As a female playwright, she seems to have done this to harmonize the story with the Englishwomen's expectations who always thought of the Frenchmen as much more romantic than their own country men.

It is thought-provoking that even fathers, according to some English playwrights, looked at their daughters as lusty creatures and addressed them as such. In Elkanah Settle's ***The Empress of Morocco*** (1673), Albuzeiden, King of Algiers, tries to compel his daughter into a marriage she does not desire, viewing her as a sexual being seeking sexual satisfaction. He says to his daughter, "Prepare, fond Girl to, to obey thy father's will, / T' extinguish all thy vaporous wandering Fires."[59] Albuzeiden's conception of love is limited to the physical side; he thinks that his daughter loves Altomar, the one she prefers to marry, solely for sexual ends, so he presents her with another man— Prince Gayland— whom he regards as a better choice to "extinguish" her "wandering Fires." The vulgar and obscene terms he uses in addressing his daughter reflect simultaneously the absence of fatherly emotions between fathers and daughters in the East and the dominance of animalistic nature among the Easterners, a notion that many travelers and dramatists tried to reinforce among their fellow citizens.

Sometimes, the Turkish woman's lust takes a violent manifestation, especially when she feels insecure or her lust is not sated. In Du Mont's story of the Pasha's wife and the French sailor, the woman, Du Mont tells his readers, had the habit of killing the man she had entertained to secure her reputation. Mary Pix, in ***Ibrahim, The***

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[58] Hannah Cowley, "*A Day in Turkey*", *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 2, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979), Frederick M. Link, ed., act V, scene 1, pp. 68, 69.

[59] Elkanah Settle, "*The Empress of Morocco*", *Five Heroic Plays*. Ed. Bonamy Dobree (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), act I, p. 7.

Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks (1696), presents similar violence, but induced by an abominable motivation. Sheker Para, the privileged concubine of the Sultan in the play, shamelessly threatens to "destroy" Amurat, the army General, if he does not yield to her "fierce desires" and "quench these raging fires" of her lust.[60] Another example of the violent lust of the Eastern woman is in Settle's ***The Empress of Morocco*** (1673). Crimalhas, the lover of the Queen, poisons the King of Morocco at Queen's instigation so she can enjoy her sexual relationship with him without the fear of being discovered. The Queen also plots for the murder of her son on the same account. "And your next stept t' a Throne," she says to her lover, "Must be . . . to murther my Son."[61] The "amorous Queen", as Muly Hamet labels her, says, as she wades in the blood she has shed, "my pleasures are my Gods," defining herself as an entirely violent sexual being.[62] Geoffrey Marshall compares her to men "who act by appetite alone and without reason."[63] This depiction of lust and violence, as extravagant as it may appear, was not shocking to the English audience since the East, in their minds, was the land of the unusual, the land of lasciviousness and tyranny, an image originated by the early medieval travel writers and sustained by the writers of the ensuing centuries.

The assumingly amorous nature of Eastern women— molded in the harem— led the travelers apparently to conjecture on the way the Turkish Sultan enjoys his women. Travel writers seem to have been in a competition; each one tries to relate a more exciting story about the Sultan's private life with his women. George Sandys relates that when the Turkish Sultan desires to choose his bedfellow, his women "stand ranckt in a gallery and she prepareth for his bed, to whom he giveth his handkercher"[64] Sandys' story of the Sultan's handkerchief and his bed

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[60] Mary Pix, *Ibrahim, The Thirteenth Emperour*[sic] *of the Tu*rks (London 1696), [microform], act I, p. 6.
[61] Elkanah Settle, "*The Empress of Morocco*", *Five Heroic Plays*. Ed. Bonamy Dobree (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), act III, scene 2, p. 137.
[62] Ibid., act IV, scene 3, p. 157.
[63] Geoffrey Marshall, *Restoration Serious Drama* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1975), p. 42.
[64] George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun an Dom 1610* (London, 1637 ed.), [microform], p. 74.

partner is confirmed by Ottavani Bon and by Paul Rycaut, fifty years later, with much more elaboration, however. Both Rycaut and Bon relate an astonishing ceremony that takes place in the Seraglio whenever the Turkish Sultan chooses a bedfellow from his women. The Sultan, according to the two travelers, gives a notice to an elderly woman, in charge of the Sultan's women, to arrange the "virgins" in the harem in a certain order. The Sultan comes with a "handkerchief" in his hand and starts screening the women while walking among them. He throws his "handkerchief" on the one that charms him most— a token by which she knows, as Bon explains, that she is to be his bed partner for that night.[65] Both Rycaut and Bon talk of the joy the chosen virgin displays, but Rycaut depicts it in a more titillating way. He reports that she, "ravished with joy," holds the handkerchief tightly and kneels down kissing it, and then she puts it in her bosom[66] They also talk in detail how the virgin is bathed, perfumed, adorned with jewels and led in a ceremonious way to the Sultan's bedchamber.

In their description of the supposed ceremony, Rycaut and Bon show how the Eastern culture turns the woman into an entirely sexual commodity. With the life of idleness the Eastern women lead in the harem, they become convinced that they are created to function as sexual beings, so they impatiently wait for the Sultan's sexual grace, each one hoping to be the elect one for the night. The ceremonious aspect of the process highlights the lascivious nature of both the Sultan and his women, but more that of the women since the chosen one "snatches" the handkerchief and, imagining what is to come, is intoxicated with joy and overwhelmed by ecstasy. This obscene sexual ceremony becomes more offensive to the civilized person when it is known that the other virgins escort the "privileged" one to the Sultan's bedchamber and that two old women witness the sexual intercourse while "two great" candles burn in the room.[67]

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[65] Ottaviano Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court* (London: Saqi Books, 1996 ed.), p. 48.

[66] Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), p. 39.

[67] Ottaviano Bon, *The Sultan's Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court* (London: Saqi Books, 1996 ed.), p. 48.

Even though neither Bon nor Rycaut provide any credible source for their detailed portrayal of the Sultan's tradition in picking his bedfellow, Mary Pix incorporates this story in her play ***Ibrahim, The Thirteenth Emperor of the Turks*** (1696).[68] Sheker Para, the major concubine of the Sultan, in Pix's play, assumes the role of the 'Mother of the Maides'— referred to by Rycaut in his story— when she says to her master that she has brought him "Twenty fair Virgins" to pick his bed partner from.[69] The stage directions in Pix's play read thus:

> The scene draws and discovers the Ladies set in Order for the Sultans Choice, who takes out his Handkerchief, and walks round them;…The Sultan drops his Handkerchief, which the Lady falling prostrate, kisses, and takes up, and is led off by two eunuchs; the sultan following . ." [70]

The concubines are arranged on the stage as if they were in a "gallery," the way Sandys, Bon, and Rycaut relate in their accounts. The arrival of the Sultan with a handkerchief in his hand along with the reaction of the chosen concubine is conspicuously in full harmony with the description of both Bon and Rycaut. The English audience, of course, witnessed the selection ceremony performed on the stage. Being in the theater, this audience had the opportunity to see and hear, not only read as is the case in travelers' accounts, what supposedly used to take place in the Turkish Seraglio whenever the Sultan picked a bed partner from his virgins, a theatrical privilege that made the theater much more powerful in its influence on people than the book. Virtually, Pix's close adherence to Rycaut's account of the festivity stands as another salient example of the profound role that travel literature played in molding the image of the Eastern woman on the English stage.

After being staged, the story, evidently, became familiar to London dwellers, at least, if not to the majority of the English people, for

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[68] Mrs. Pix seems to have relied on Rycaut's version of the story, probably because it is more titillating than Bon's or that Bon's travel account was not yet available to the English reader.

[69] Mary Pix, *Ibrahim, The Thirteenth Emperour*[sic] *of the Tu*rks (London 1696), [microform], act I, p. 4.

[70] Ibid., p. 4.

Mrs. Montagu, during her embassy in Constantinople, was careful to ask Sultana Hafiten about this profligate sexual ceremony. Montagu confutes the story as it is related by the travelers saying that the Sultana assured her that the display of the women, the "throwing of a handkerchief", and the "creeping in the bed's foot" are all "fabulous."[71] In other words, they are merely fantasies interwoven in the minds of the male travelers to present something thrilling and titillating to their readers. Contrary to the travelers' versions of the story, Montagu reveals that the desired woman arrives into the bedchamber before the Sultan, who, on his part, "precedes his visit by a royal present."[72] The aim of the gift, as she implies, is to make himself more agreeable to his woman. Thus, the animalism and "commodification" Rycaut and his fellow travelers highlight in their versions of the story diminish before the civility of the Sultan.

In spite of Montagu's nullification of the handkerchief story, the English people, including the playwrights, retained the story; it continued to circulate among people and to appear in printed materials. As Ruth Yeazell points out, "The story of the nightly handkerchief was one of the more persistent tales to circulate around the mysteries of the sultan's harem."[73] About fifty years after the publication of Montagu's letters, Bickerstaff insists, in his play ***The Sultan*** (1775), on reinforcing the long refuted story. Bickerstaff's Osmyn says to Elmira, the concubine in the Sultan's harem, that she is supposed to be reassured since she has already been "twice honored with the imperial handkerchief."[74] Despite the fact that Montagu has relied on an authoritative source in revealing that the handkerchief ceremony was a fabricated one, it seems that neither the playwrights nor the audience were willing to depart from the "fascinating" story that titillated their minds for many decades. The English would not correct this grave misconception simply because the

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[71] Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters from the Levant During the Embassy to Constantinople, 1716-18*, J. A. ST. John, ed., (London 1838), Reprinted by the Arno Press and the New York Times in 1971, p. 202.
[72] Ibid., p. 202.
[73] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western and Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), p. 15.
[74] Isaac Bickerstaff, "*The Sultan: Or, A Peep into the Seraglio*" , *The Select London Stage: A Collection of the Most Reputed Tragedies, Comedies, Operas, Melodramas, Farces, and Interludes* (London 1824-1827), [microform], act I, scene 1, p. 8.

story, to use Yeazell's premise, has become part of the harem of the English mind. Thus, it has become of little significance, for them, whether or not this ceremony is part of the Sultan's harem.

Evidently, travel literature played a key role in molding the image of the Eastern woman on the English stage. A long tradition of travel writing portrayed the Eastern woman as being subjugated by her man and consequently confined to a specific quarter of the Eastern house, the harem. According to those travel writers, this "unnatural" lifestyle, as they label it, turned the Eastern woman into a purely sexual being, willing sometimes to commit crimes to satisfy her sexual desire. The theater did not only breathe life into this image, but also it, for theatrical purposes, exaggerated it. Furthermore, it presented this image to a far wider audience than that of travel literature, as more people attended theater performances than could read at that point in history. Thus, any attempt to change this image was destined to failure. Interestingly enough, locking the Eastern woman in this portrait did not end with the departure of the eighteenth century. Rather, it was perpetuated throughout the two ensuing centuries despite the fact that the East ceased to be a veiled mystery to the West with beginning of the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the mid nineteenth century, for Westerners had a greater opportunity than ever before to examine Eastern culture at firsthand, as the Ottoman dominions became increasingly under the jurisdiction of European colonial powers.

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