Title

Experimenting on Oriental Women: Tracing Oriental Women's Representations in Western Discussion of Bodily Autonomy and Desire in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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BY

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ABSTRACT

EXPERIMENTING ON ORIENTAL WOMEN: TRACING ORIENTAL WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIONS IN WESTERN FEMINIST DISCUSSIONS OF BODILY AUTONOMY AND DESIRE IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

BY MURSAL SIDIQI

This thesis traces the Orientalist foundations of Western feminist discourses on women's bodily autonomy and desire. The figure of the Oriental woman plays an integral role in Englishwomen's discussions of Western women's rights. Through Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's epistolary travel writing in her *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) and Charlotte Dacre's novel *Zofloya* (1806), I explore the manner in which Oriental women are represented through different literary forms and at different stages of English feminist development. This leads to an examination of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and its relation to Lady Mary's travel letters and Dacre's novel. All three texts employ Oriental women to discuss how English and Western women can or cannot gain a form of autonomy within patriarchy. I argue that this discourse begins with Lady Mary's observations of Turkish women's alternative lives and the bodily and sexual autonomy that grants them a kind of mobility within patriarchy. Wollstonecraft uses the East-West binary in her treatise's argument to depart from Lady Mary's empowered Oriental woman figure; she claims that restriction of the body and of desire will enable Western women's authority in patriarchy. Dacre then utilizes an East-West binary in her novel's experiment with a Western woman's transformation into an Orientalized woman. Dacre demonstrates that her Oriental woman character consequently becomes the enemy of, and brings about the downfall of, Western identity.

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Introduction

In this thesis, I examine the manner in which Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) influence and diverge from Wollstonecraft's Orientalist feminisms in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). All three texts employ Oriental women to express their explorations of Western women's rights. While Lady Mary's letters discover and admire how Turkish women's lifestyles allow them to navigate and gain a semblance of authority within patriarchy, Wollstonecraft's treatise uses Oriental women as examples of alterity and patriarchal oppression, and Dacre's novel transforms a Western woman into an Orientalized woman. A discussion of women's bodily autonomy and sexual desire links the three texts and their Oriental women. Lady Mary offers a new image of Oriental women whose bodily and sexual autonomy empowers them within patriarchy. In my reading, Wollstonecraft departs from Lady Mary's Oriental women to alternatively promote the restriction of sexual desire through the use of the East-West binary. The third writer examined here, Charlotte Dacre, presents the consequences Western women face when they adopt Lady Mary's Oriental woman's characteristics, which leads to the destruction of Western identity. In this thesis, I argue that Western feminisms are premised on an Orientalist foundation; Lady Mary, Wollstonecraft, and Dacre all aid in structuring this foundation through their exploration of the Oriental woman figure's bodily autonomy and desires.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* reclaims the figure of the Oriental woman from previous travel writing and the *Arabian Nights*, repurposing it to create an image of empowerment. Initially, in Western literary representations, Oriental women were a combination of licentiousness, unfaithfulness, and availability to men. Lady Mary challenges this misrepresentation by providing her own accounts of her interactions with Eastern women in

Turkey. She highlights and marvels at the communal, woman-exclusive spaces in Turkey like the hammam and harem. Lady Mary observes that these locations provide Turkish women with relative autonomy within patriarchy. Scholars like Garcia refer to these spaces as constituting a "feminotopia" that reflects "an idealized female autonomy that contests a male social and sexual economy" (Garcia 61). Her exploration of this uniquely Eastern space makes room for her to compare Turkish and Englishwomen's bodily autonomies and roles within patriarchy. The alternative, woman-exclusive space she occupies allows her to reflect on and express her criticisms of English patriarchal restrictions on women's bodies. As O'Cinneide explains, Lady Mary's literary form "vindicate[s] her writing as personal testimony" and "justifies enquiry" that might otherwise have not been received well by Western audiences (6). While Lady Mary is interested in accurately representing and commenting on Turkish women's mobility within patriarchy as is granted by the hammam and the veil, she creates her image of Oriental women through her misrepresentations of Islam. Garcia aptly claims that Lady Mary employs the epistolary form to "redefine Anglican citizenship in the gender-inclusive language of Islamic virtue, rather than in the gender-exclusive language of contractual rights," (60) I argue that the "gender-inclusive language" of Islam is mostly fabricated by Lady Mary, which allows her to create the image of an Oriental woman who is justified in her bodily autonomy and in the fulfillment of her sexual desires.

Wollstonecraft's treatise integrates civilizational and racial assumptions into her feminist argument in order to promote a newly emerging sense of Western identity. Wollstonecraft claims that Islam is the epitome of women's oppression. In her establishment of an East-West binary, Wollstonecraft highlights the civilizational differences between a progressing West and an immobile East. Dacre will utilize this idea of regressing into the Eastern identity as the basis of

her novel's commentary on Western women's rights. Cahill claims that "curiosity about the localized knowledge of Muslim women would certainly have corrected Wollstonecraft's misunderstanding of Muslim doctrine and, likewise, the writing of what became the cornerstone of Western liberal feminism" (196).

Dacre's novel *Zofloya* and its Orientalist underpinnings are largely overlooked in scholarship. Where scholars examine either the character Victoria's mother as failing to maintain domesticity or the character Zofloya's alterity, I approach the novel as an Orientalist feminist text that continues the discourse on women's rights in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England (Anolik; Haggerty). Craciun aptly notes that Dacre's novel "focuses on the mental and physical degeneration of women under the influence of violent passions" (22) as is recorded in Bienville's medical text *Nymphomania, or, A Dissertation Concerning the Furor Uterinus* (1775). I agree with Craciun's claim that Dacre adapts this scientific text into the form of the novel through Victoria's journey, and I add to her assertion by examining Dacre's use of an Oriental woman character as the embodiment of these "violent passions" (Craciun 22). Dacre's experimentation with Oriental woman characters and the East-West binary is emblematic of her involvement in the preceding conversation on Western women's rights (Makdisi 170). Dacre demonstrates what happens when Western women attempt to gain mobility within patriarchy through their bodily autonomy. I propose that Dacre presents two forms of women's bodily autonomy in her novel. The first is aligned with Lady Mary's image of Oriental women who embraces and pursues sexual desire. Makdisi alludes to what I consider the second form of bodily autonomy in the novel; he states, "Civilization is the regulation of desire," (Makdisi 172). This second form of bodily autonomy is the ability and willingness to restrict bodily, sexual desire which is claimed to be linked to Western civilization. In restricting their sexual desire,

Western women gain a form of authority within patriarchy. Through Zofloya's Oriental influence, Victoria transforms into a sublime, Orientalized woman character, allowing Dacre to impart her ideas on Western women's rights.

In the first section of this thesis, I examine Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's representations of empowered Oriental women. These women are intriguing to Lady Mary because they offer an alternative way for women to live and function in patriarchy. Through the epistolary, travel writing form, Lady Mary creates a reliable and seemingly objective image of Oriental women and Islam within their Turkish society. In the brief second section, I explore Wollstonecraft's use of the figure of the Oriental woman that establishes an East-West binary sustaining her feminist argument. I also examine how she diverges from Lady Mary's use of Oriental women. This section also serves to convey developments in Orientalist thought and Occidental identity during the gap between Lady Mary's and Dacre's texts, including the racialization of Islam and claims of Occidental progression and Oriental immobility. The third and final section of this project inspects Dacre's experimentation with Oriental woman characters for Western feminist discourses in her novel's transformation of a Western woman into an Orientalized woman. Through this project, I hope to examine the uninvestigated relatedness between the three texts that this thesis is interested in, despite their temporal differences and varying literary forms. Additionally, I aim to contribute to scholarship that is dedicated to revealing and tracing the long literary tradition of formulating and experimenting various forms of Orientalism that underpin the Western feminisms we have today.

"The only free people in the empire": Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Bodily Autonomous Oriental Women in Empowering Spaces

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's famously documented travels in Turkey conclude that Turkish women are "the only free people in the empire" (Montagu 72).[1] She offers Turkish women as an example of "free people" due to their mobility and relative autonomy even within their patriarchal system. Through her observations of the hammam, Lady Mary displays and reflects on the contrast between English and Turkish women's bodies and communities, or lack thereof. Lady Mary employs her literary form to provide a more accurate representation of Turkish women's lives that rejects their preceding (and for that matter later) representations as sexualized bodies for men's desire. Her travel letters and observations in Turkey provide her with a space to contemplate alternative ways that women can live in and gain mobility in patriarchy.

Her *Turkish Embassy Letters*, written from 1716 to 1718 and published posthumously in 1763, presents the image of Oriental women as empowered in their exclusive communities for women and rejects their image as sexual objects for men. Lady Mary extensively writes on her visit to the hammam, the communal bathhouse separated by gender. According to Herath, European artists and writers were invested in "breaching this cultural barrier" of woman-exclusive spaces in the East (32). The restricted access to such spaces prompted "production of visual art and textual narratives that imagined in vivid yet inaccurate detail, the forbidden mysteries of the harem" (Herath 32). Thus, Lady Mary's access into the space makes her text an important source for representations of Turkish women's exclusive spaces. As such, she is dedicated to portraying the unique communal experience of bathing and grooming in the Turkish

[1] Lady Mary's husband was the English ambassador to Turkey from 1716 to 1718, during which Lady Mary traveled alongside him and wrote her letters (Desai xxxix).

hammams. Her interests stem from the absence of such a space in English society. Englishwomen are expected to bathe and groom individually. Perhaps they have help from maids, but it is otherwise an individualized process. Thus, this communal, feminized space fascinates Lady Mary. Although the veil has come to be represented by Western authors as a signifier of the repression of women, Lady Mary approaches the communal dress of the veil as a promoter of women's equality and bodily autonomy. Lady Mary observes that this uniquely Eastern cultural aspect allows women to gain a kind of authority and independence within patriarchy. Lady Mary explores these spaces and concepts that present an alternative way of life for women who live within patriarchy and can maintain their right to bodily autonomy within it; the first space I will discuss is the hammam.

The Hammam as a Unique, Communal Space for Women's Bodily Autonomy

Lady Mary displays how Turkish women's lives and woman-exclusive spaces are unique to Eastern societies in her letter written in Adrianople on April 1st, 1717. The letter itself does not have a written recipient, although this does not affect Lady Mary's letter in any significant way as she prepared all of her letters for publication (Desai xxv). This letter begins with the phrase, "I am now got into a new world," (Montagu 57). Although the sentiment behind this statement refers to being in a location unlike England, the metaphor in the expression "new world" reinforces the perception that Turkey—and the East—is a realm wholly separate from the world of the West. She establishes that she is in a spatially distant location on a mission to send back her accounts of the explorations she has made for her British audience members, as is customary in travel writing.

As she situates herself in this wholly "new world," Lady Mary endeavors to present an objective account of her experience in the hammam. When she embarks on her journey to the hammam, she describes that she travelled in a Turkish coach "to go incognito" (57). She aims to avoid disrupting the normal flow Turkish life so as to prevent diluting her reported experiences with her English life's biases. Through this detail, the reader witnesses Lady Mary's observational methods and her integrity as a travel writer. Lady Mary approaches the hammam with an objective tone to reinforce her integrity as a travel writer. When Lady Mary enters the hammam, she first extensively describes its architectural appearance and the manner in which the hammam functions instead of the women within the bathhouse:

> I went to the bagnio about ten o'clock. It was already full of women. It is built of stone in the shape of a dome, with no windows but in the roof, which gives light enough. […] There were four fountains of cold water in this room, falling first into marble basins, and then running on the floor in the little channels made for that purpose, which carried the streams into the next room, something less than this, with the same sort of marble sofas, but so hot with steams of sulphur proceeding from the baths joining to it, 'twas impossible to stay there with one's clothes on. (58)

Lady Mary begins her description of the hammam by mentioning the time of day and the number of women in attendance. Naturally, the reader would expect to learn more about what the women looked like, what cultural influences brought Turkish women to the baths at this time of day, or similar details. Instead, Lady Mary turns her attention, and that of the reader, to the building's functions. This gives her time to present the Turkish women in the hammam as naked for functional, not sexual, purposes. Hence, she extensively describes the domes and overall architectural layout of the hammam, then explains how the water flows throughout the building,

all in one long sentence. This extensive description of the hammam's functioning is reflective of her introduction to the Turkish women there: "so hot with steams of sulphur proceeding from the baths joining to it, 'twas impossible to stay there with one's clothes on." Without the introduction of the hammam's workings, the Turkish women's nudity would confirm the notion that Oriental women are, supposedly, perpetually and sensually naked. Lady Mary presents the objective function and reasoning behind their nakedness, ensuring that the reader recognizes that there are no sexual connotations in the hammam setting.

When Lady Mary examines the Turkish women, she highlights the hammam's desexualized communal nakedness by emphasizing their purity and respect toward one another in their woman-exclusive space. She describes the women as: "without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them. They walked and moved with the same majestic grace which Milton describes of our general mother" (59). Foremost, Lady Mary introduces the women and their slaves as "being in the state of nature." Lady Mary aligns the Turkish women with "nature." Humberto Garcia notes that Lady Mary's description of the women's natural state connotes a "prelapsarian 'state of nature'" (75). In the hammam, the Turkish women's nakedness signifies purity and the absence of sin, which contrasts previous European representations of naked, sexualized Oriental women. In fact, Lady Mary deems that the Turkish women possess "the same majestic grace which Milton describes of our general mother." Lady Mary thus compares the Turkish women to John Milton's description of Eve in *Paradise Lost* (1667). Turkish women are not the image of sensuality in their nudity as male travel writers would describe Eastern women in woman-exclusive spaces. Lady Mary's comparisons assert that Turkish women are pure and graceful in

their communal state of nakedness at the hammam; their nudity is simply a communal practice in this location which English society has not seen before and which has no equivalent in English society. Their nudity also eliminates any "distinction of rank," presenting a form of equality among the women that later becomes instrumental in Lady Mary's description of the veil. Lady Mary admires the communal aspect of their gendered community and its uniqueness from English society's spaces for women. As I will explain in later sections of this thesis, Wollstonecraft and Dacre both utilize representations of Oriental women as Milton's Eve to represent their own beliefs on Western women's rights.

Lady Mary continues to observe and interpret the Turkish women's nakedness in their communal space, bringing attention to English and Turkish women's differing reactions to nudity. She describes that the Turkish women's bodies are able to be perceived and viewed by everyone in the hammam, with all their "beauty" and "defect." She then utilizes "Yet" as a coordinating conjunction: the women do not have a "wanton smile" or "immodest gesture" even though they are naked. To an English person, this nakedness would typically elicit these aforementioned emotions, but they do not appear in the hammam, Lady Mary demonstrates, because of the normalized practice of communal bathing. Lady Mary portrays the alternative bodily perceptions and lives that Turkish women have in order to both dismantle the preconceived image of licentious Oriental women and to display the presence of woman-exclusive spaces that function differently from those in English society.

Lady Mary attempts to compare the hammam to an approximate English equivalent in order to both present the similarities and differences between women's lives in the two spaces. Although she is unable to present an example of a communal space in England where women are nude and bathe together as they do in the hammam, she is able to identify an English location

that reflects the social aspect of the hammam. She states, regarding the hammam, “In short, ‘tis the women’s coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented etc.” (59). The coffee house to which she refers was a popular location for English intellectuals to gossip and discuss politics and literature (“coffee-house, n.”). As Lady Mary suggests, the coffee houses were separated by gender just as the hammam is. This metaphor highlights the similarity between English and Turkish women’s lives. She observes that both in England and in Turkey, women organize and gather to discuss “news of the town” and “scandal[s].” Turkish women operate similarly to Englishwomen in their social interactions, so much so that she later compares harems to a “women’s apartment,” which is simply a women’s room (Montagu 72). These comparisons then prompt the reader to focus on the differences between the coffee-house and the hammam, the main difference being their dress codes. Turkish women’s relative bodily autonomy within the space of the hammam differs from that of Englishwomen. Lady Mary then describes her interactions with the Turkish women who wish for her to unclothe and bathe with them.

In her interaction with the Turkish woman who asks her to bathe, Lady Mary inserts her criticism of Englishwomen’s bodily restrictions within English patriarchy. Lady Mary refuses to undress. This refusal to partake in this Turkish cultural practice is surprising, as Lady Mary has previously demonstrated her belief in the importance of not clouding her Turkish experiences with English biases and is open to fully experiencing Turkish life, hence her travelling in a Turkish coach. She explains, “I was at last forced to open my shirt, and show them my stays, which satisfied them very well, for I saw they believed I was so locked up in that machine, that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband” (Montagu 60). As Tuttle points out, the first-person pronoun in “I saw they believed” represents

Lady Mary's ability to criticize English society through her engagement with the Turkish women (4). She participates in a type of ventriloquy to share her own criticism of her bodily restriction by demonstrating that "they," referring to the Turkish women, "believed" that she was restricted by English society's patriarchal restrictions on women's bodies. Lady Mary calls her stays a "machine," connoting that it is a mechanism made by humans to perform a task—that task being restricting women's bodies to look a certain way, not necessarily to have them be "locked up." However, this figurative locking reinforces the implication that her body is not in her own control. She describes that the Turkish women directly "attributed" the cause of this restriction to her "husband," directly linking her bodily oppression to a man and by extension to the patriarchal social norms that cause her to wear the stays. Two contrasting images emerge: Englishwomen trapped in a machine and restricted by their society, and Eastern women autonomously controlling their bodies and presenting them freely within their woman-exclusive space. Through her letters and presentation of Turkish women's alternative lifestyles and bodily autonomy, Lady Mary has the opportunity to present and contemplate the oppressive aspects of English patriarchy.

Lady Mary solidifies the integrity of her representations of Eastern women by criticizing the male travel writers who perpetuated the Eastern women's fabricated sexual characteristics. She addresses her reader: "Adieu madam, I am sure I have now entertained you with […] what no book of travels could inform you of, as 'tis no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places" (Montagu 60). As previously noted, this letter does not have a clear recipient, revealing Lady Mary's addressal of a "madam" to truly be aimed at a generalized audience of readers. She emphasizes the falsity and unreliability of men's "book[s] of travels" because they did not have access to woman-exclusive spaces such as the hammam or the harem. Lady Mary

challenges the reader to question the validity of the sources from which they have been "inform[ed]" about Eastern women. In fact, she notes that this woman-exclusive space is protected by within Turkish patriarchy, as "'tis no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places." Through this condemnation of male English travel writers and writing, she establishes her own documentation of Turkish women's lives as the most and only accurate source of information. She completely dispels the caricature of Oriental women as objects for male desire through her invalidation of their texts and presents instead Turkish women's actual alternative lifestyles that consist of bodily autonomy in their woman-exclusive spaces. In the next section, I present how Lady Mary expands on her observations of Turkish women's navigation within society and its connection to their bodily autonomy through their use of the veil.

Turkish Women's Mobility within Patriarchy through the Veil

The second letter which I will analyze in this thesis is Lady Mary's letter to her sister, written on April 1st, 1717, while she was in Adrianople. In this letter, Lady Mary describes another form of women's equality through communal dress: the veil. She observes that the veil protects Turkish women's bodily autonomy and protects them from patriarchal consequences for using their bodily autonomy. She describes the practicality of the veil that is not found in English society:

> 'Tis very easy to see they have more liberty than we have, no woman, of what rank so ever being permitted to go in the streets without two muslins […] and their shapes are also wholly concealed […] You may guess then how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave and 'tis impossible for the most

> jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street. (71)

To Lady Mary, wearing the veil, or the niqab as she describes in this section, is a symbol of "liberty." In fact, she argues that "they have more liberty than we [Englishwomen] have." Again, Lady Mary criticizes English society through comparisons between Turkish and Englishwomen. Turkish women's "liberty" lies in their ability to navigate society without fearing men's gaze. The niqab "disguises" the "great lady" and "her slave," protecting all women from men as their "shapes" are concealed, similar to the hammam's equality through nakedness. Their communally obscured bodies are indistinguishable, and all women benefit from the veil by sharing the same social rank. The possibility that a woman could be of high rank deters men from "dar[ing]" to "touch or follow a woman in the street." This physical reference of a location, "the street," demonstrates that women can navigate society on a daily basis without the need for or fear of a man. This equality also permits women to have autonomy from even the most oppressive, "most jealous husband." All women are guaranteed their bodily autonomy due to their veiling and obscurity of their identifiable "shapes." Lady Mary evidently praises Turkish women's ability to maneuver within patriarchy and possess a kind of independence from men's oppression through the veil.

After positively portraying the veil and explaining how it enables Turkish women to gain a form of mobility within patriarchy, Lady Mary describes how this bodily autonomy informs their sexuality and desire. She continues to describe Turkish women's autonomous abilities when they wear the veil: "This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery. […] You may easily imagine the number of faithful wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from their lovers' indiscretion"

(71). The “perpetual masquerade” no longer connotes the same protective disguise as seen in the previous paragraph. Although the “masquerade” denotes a disguise, it also connotes the playfulness of a masquerade ball (“masquerade, n. and adj.”). Turkish women use their “liberty” granted by the veil to be unfaithful, as “the number of faithful wives” is “very small.” The number of unfaithful wives, then, makes up the majority of Turkish women. Their obscured identities which give them the ability to navigate patriarchal society and autonomy over their bodies is used among other things for the Turkish women to engage in adultery. Turkish women have the ability to choose to have sex with a “lover” outside of marriage. Marriage designates a wife to the jurisdiction of her husband, and he possesses her body through it; marriages were most often arranged in both English and Turkish society to an extent, so women had no choice in who would ultimately control their bodies. Unfaithful wives, then, are the embodiment of women’s bodily autonomy, as they can choose who they want to sleep with, for how long, etc. all while maintaining their anonymity and patriarchally determined role as a wife. In reality, Turkish women likely did not engage in affairs, and especially did not do so on as large scale as Lady Mary is suggesting here. Lady Mary’s emphasis on unfaithfulness serves to demonstrate the degree of bodily and sexual autonomy that the veil grants Turkish women. While she presents the image of empowered Turkish women who have sexual and bodily autonomy, her descriptions align them with former iterations of *Arabian Nights*-esque Oriental women who are promiscuous disloyal to their husbands.

Lady Mary asserts that Turkish women experience a form of equality by using the veil and can navigate within patriarchal society due to their ownership and authority over their bodies. This authority results in Turkish women’s ability to be unfaithful to their husbands and choose to use their sexually bodies however they see fit. Although this unfaithfulness resembles

the preceding image of licentious Oriental women, Lady Mary presents Turkish women as empowered in their infidelity as they are not sexual objects for men. In the next section, I will examine how Lady Mary elaborates on the point of religious difference and justifies Turkish women's bodily and sexual autonomy.

Lady Mary's Misrepresentations of Islam and its Treatment of her Oriental Women

In letter XL, addressed to Abbé Conti and written in February 1718, Lady Mary responds to a series of questions posed about Islam and reveals that England, and by extension the West, are misinformed in their understanding of the religion. Lady Mary herself misinforms her audience about the religion as she does not seem to have much knowledge about Islam. However, it is important to examine how Lady Mary's defense of Islam is heavily informed by her interest in Turkish women's bodily autonomy, as we viewed in her descriptions of the hammam and the veil. Lady Mary's representation of Oriental women develops religious characteristics and virtue in her bodily autonomous identity.

In fabricating Islam's promotion of women's bodily and sexual autonomy, Lady Mary's argument culminates in her portrayal of Oriental women as empowered figures who are rewarded for her bodily autonomy. Lady Mary explains women's rights in Islam:

> I assure you 'tis certainly false, though commonly believed in our parts of the world, that Mohammed excludes women from any share in a future happy state. He was too much a gentleman and loved the fair sex too well to use them so barbarously. On the contrary, he promises a very fine paradise to the Turkish women. […] It remains to tell you that the virtues which Mohammed requires of women to merit the enjoyment of future happiness

> are: not to live in such a manner as to become useless to the world, but to employ themselves as much as possible in making little *musulmans*." (Montagu 109-10)

Lady Mary begins her defense of Islam by arguing against the Western conception regarding the religion's designation for women as soulless and therefore unable to access the afterlife, a widely believed notion in eighteenth-century England. She readily decries the falsity that "Mohammed excludes women from any share in a future happy state." Mohammed's position as the subject of the verb "excludes" and his power over the "women" and their "future happy state" seems to designate him as a God. Mohammed certainly does not have the ability to deem whether or not someone can access the afterlife, as he is simply a prophet of God with no divine powers of his own. She then describes Mohammed as "too much a gentleman" to exclude women from paradise. The concept of a gentleman is particular to Western/English culture, and she places this description in the very same sentence ending with "barbarously." She claims deeming women as soulless beings who are unable to access the afterlife is barbarous and ungentlemanly, neither of which characterizes Mohammed and by extension "Mahometanism"[2]/Islam. She grossly misrepresents Islam, but she attempts to defend women's rights in the religion. As I will later discuss, Wollstonecraft's argument for Western women's rights relies on Islam's role in the racial identities of Oriental individuals.

Now that Lady Mary's audience knows that Muslim, Turkish women have access to the afterlife, she reveals the criteria that they must follow to gain their place in the "very fine paradise" that, again, Mohammed "promises." Muslim women must "employ themselves as much as possible in making little *musulmans,*" or reproducing, in order to gain access to the

[2] "Mahomestanism" is the Western construction of Islam. This term is used to describe the religion of the followers of Mohammed. This description is plainly inaccurate, as Muslims do not actually follow Mohammed, they follow God.

afterlife. This requirement for Muslim women to gain a place in heaven is blatantly inaccurate, yet Lady Mary presents it as if it is fact. It is uncertain whether she believes it is true or if she imagines this aspect of the religion, but its effects inform the identity of her Oriental woman figure. This autonomy over their bodies is integral to Muslim, Turkish women's assurance of going to the afterlife, making this bodily, sexual autonomy a responsibility for Turkish women. Lady Mary's Oriental women are responsible for having sexual, bodily autonomy in life to access the afterlife. Her Oriental women are also rewarded in the afterlife as a direct result of pleasing Mohammed in this bodily way. Even simply "employ[ing] themselves" in the process of reproduction, not just the act of giving birth, is designated as a positive characteristic for women to have Islam. Women's "useless[ness] to the world" is characterized by their inability or unwillingness to try to reproduce. This negative characterization suggests that Muslim women must autonomously endeavor to be useful, which in this case means to use the body for reproduction. Even if it means that the Turkish women are unfaithful to their husbands, Islam justifies their rejection of marriage's patriarchal restrictions on their bodies as they are simply fulfilling their religious duties. Again, Lady Mary inaccurately represents Islam, but uses the religion to reinforce that Turkish women's bodily autonomy is virtuous and reproductive even if it goes against Turkish patriarchy.

Lady Mary's imagined Islam clearly relates to her interest in Turkish women's bodily and sexual autonomy. Either intentionally or unintentionally, she fabricates Islam's promotion of Muslim, Turkish women's sexual and bodily independence. This excuse deems that it is Turkish women's responsibility to have possession over their bodies in order to secure their place in the afterlife. Lady Mary is plainly fascinated with Turkish women's bodily autonomy and the mobility within patriarchy that it gives to them. Her interest stems from her observation that

Englishwomen's lives are devoid of the woman-exclusive spaces, equalizing attire, and religious encouragement of women's bodily autonomy. Her descriptions of Turkish women through the epistolary form provides a supposedly accurate and realistic representation of Turkish women. This figure of the Oriental woman and the fictionalized parts of her identity serve as a foundational model for women like Wollstonecraft, whom I turn to next.

"Only fit for a seraglio!": Mary Wollstonecraft's Establishment of an East-West Binary and Initiation of Orientalist Feminist Discourse

While Lady Mary's letters and Charlotte Dacre's novel are the focal points of this project, it is important to recognize that their texts are written almost a century apart, during which Mary Wollstonecraft published her *Vindication*. Again, Lady Mary's letters were published posthumously, making them available to the English audience in 1763 but they were written between 1716 and 1718. Dacre's novel was published in 1806, and Wollstonecraft published her text in 1792, during the 40-year gap between the former texts' publications. Before analyzing Dacre's *Zofloya* and tracing the development of Lady Mary's Oriental woman, I must briefly share the feminist foundations established in Wollstonecraft's treatise.[3] Wollstonecraft's initiation of feminist thought influences Dacre's approach to women's bodily autonomy in a manner that was not present in English society during the time that Lady Mary wrote her letters. Wollstonecraft applies civilizational and racial universality to champion her feminist beliefs.[4] In analyzing Wollstonecraft's argument against women's bodily autonomy and her assertion that the East is regressive due to its associations with Islam, we are able to view the longer conversation between Orientalist feminisms from the early eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.

Mary Wollstonecraft's treatise is invested in promoting progress for English society, which she argues is dependent on women's education. Cahill states that "she saw the emancipation of women and of the common people as analog" (193) and yet uses racial and

[3] I use the terms feminist and feminism(s) in this section because Wollstonecraft inaugurates the ideas of women's liberation within and from patriarchy in a way that remains relevant in contemporary conceptions of Western feminisms. Although Western feminisms' definitions change with time, Wollstonecraft's seminal foundations of Oriental, racial arguments as well as her concerns with desire, sexuality, femininity, bodily autonomy, and so on, all resurface and connect to modern day issues within Western feminisms.

[4] It is important to note that religion was a marker of race in the nineteenth century. Hence, Wollstonecraft's racial and civilizational argument heavily relies on her critique of Islam.

civilizational binaries in expressing her feminist ideas. Her assertion of women's rights in England is dependent on "a specifically Western or Occidental mode of identity, subjectivity, citizenship" as Makdisi states, "that depended both on linear time and on a recurring contrast with Oriental otherness of the kind with which they sought to taint their aristocratic European enemies" (238). Hence, Wollstonecraft would disagree with Lady Mary's ideas on women's empowerment within patriarchy through bodily autonomy for both of the following reasons: Lady Mary is open to examining Oriental alternatives for women's roles and rights within patriarchy, and Lady Mary's argument aligns with what Wollstonecraft states is exclusively aristocratic behavior from Westerners. Wollstonecraft considers Westerners' aristocratic behavior to be indicative of their Oriental degradation, and she is critical of aristocrats' aversion to achieving progress for English/Western society. The idea of progressing toward a future was not part of England's attempt at defining itself in the time that Lady Mary wrote her letters but is central to Wollstonecraft's argument. Thus, when Mary Wollstonecraft employs the idea of cultural progression in her feminist argument, it in turn anticipates Dacre's reaction to Lady Mary's Oriental women.

Wollstonecraft criticizes Englishwomen's adherence to aristocratic marital customs and advocates for women's education to progress the entirety of English society through the degradation of Oriental women's emphasis on bodily liberation and their consequent lack of mental ability. She asserts, "when [Englishwomen] marry they act as such children may be expected to act:—they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures.—Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio!" (Wollstonecraft 74). The "seraglio," another word for the harem, serves as the comparison for Wollstonecraft to demonstrate the incompetence that Englishwomen are reduced to having when they become wives for social mobility—they are

reduced to what she imagines the status of an Oriental woman to be. The placement of her simile that women "act as such children" within the metaphor of the "seraglio" reveals that Lady Mary designates Eastern women, and Eastern men for that matter, as children whose minds do not progress beyond that infantile stage. In naming the institution of the "seraglio," she suggests that the Eastern societies are built and established themselves as the epitome of women's submission to patriarchy. Similarly, the aristocratic institution of marriage confines women to bodily responsibilities to their husbands. Although Lady Mary's interpretation of marriage and unfaithfulness seems to align with Wollstonecraft's criticism, their oppositional positions on Oriental culture causes them to employ their figures of the Oriental woman differently. Unlike Lady Mary, who is interested in the harem's gender-exclusivity, Wollstonecraft condemns it for its emphasis on bodily pleasure and lack of mental stimulation. Wollstonecraft equates the body and a lack of progression with the East, which she applies to English aristocracy's engagement with pleasure and desire.

Like Lady Mary, Wollstonecraft situates Islam within her interpretation of Milton's Eve to exert her feminist ideas against women's pursuit of bodily desire. She claims that Milton's description of Eve embodies Muslim thought: "I cannot comprehend his [Milton's] meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we are beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man" (84). The pronouns "us" and "we" are notable. Before the passage begins, Wollstonecraft establishes women as the subject of the sentence and are the referent to the pronouns. Yet, it is not all women to whom she refers when she employs the idea of the "Mahometan strain." Muslim women are excluded from this collective gendered experience, further reinforcing their alterity from middleclass Englishwomen. The use of the "Mahometan

strain" solidifies the notion that Islam is the antithesis of her definition of a universally progressive, Western feminism, and that Muslim societies cannot gain women's liberation because of their religion's condemnation of their souls. Docility, "grace," and "obedience" are embodied by women, as Wollstonecraft explains, "to gratify the senses of man." Lady Mary's Oriental woman is not empowering to Wollstonecraft; in fact, she is the victim of patriarchy. Should Englishwomen reduce themselves to becoming like Eve in her docility, they will then also become Oriental women—a fate which Wollstonecraft states would dehumanize them and render them mere objects or bodies for male desire. In using Oriental women in this way, Wollstonecraft continues Lady Mary's conversation about women's roles and rights within patriarchy. Wollstonecraft formulates a racial/civilizational universality that aims to reject Oriental women and promote a progressing English society.[5]

To address how to prevent the regression of English society into an Eastern, seraglio-ridden society, Wollstonecraft offers the solution of diminishing sexual desire in marriage. She claims that "a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion. I mean to say, that they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society, and engross the thoughts that should be otherwise employed" (96). Evidently, Wollstonecraft considers sexual desire as disruptive of "the order of society." As we previously established, Wollstonecraft considers the East and its seraglio as the epitome of sensual desire and women's submission to patriarchy. Hence, when she states that society's order is at stake if licentiousness prevails, she also suggests that Eastern barbarism threatens to infiltrate Western civilization through aristocrats' Oriental behavior. Further, Wollstonecraft states that the thoughts of women would then be freed from patriarchal docility and could be "employed" in

[5] Wollstonecraft elaborates on her rejection of femininity in her *Vindication*. She asserts that women should become more masculine in order to gain agency and autonomy within English society and patriarchy (72-3).

progressive activities. Thus, the East is not only the antithesis of feminism, but of civility as a whole. Wollstonecraft attempts to unite all English people under their shared Western identities to promote Englishwomen's rights. Lady Mary's observations of Turkish women's bodily autonomy as a form of mobility and authority within patriarchy sets up the use of Oriental woman figures in the discourse on Western women's rights. Wollstonecraft uses an Oriental woman figure as a basis of her argument against both Lady Mary's empowered Oriental woman and Lady Mary's identity as an Orientalized, aristocratic woman.

This short analysis serves to show the two ideas that were cemented during the time between the publication of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* and *Zofloya*: First, the idea of progressing toward a future became a characteristic of English, and by extension Western, identity; second, the East-West binary became a feature of feminist discourse to unify Westerners in their common goals of progressing, which the East is supposedly incapable of. Although there is more to note on Wollstonecraft's Orientalist feminisms, I have highlighted only the most important aspects of her argument: those which appear in Dacre's *Zofloya* and which continue Englishwomen's conversations about women's bodily autonomy through imaginations of Oriental women.

"Suggestions of infernal influence": Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* and her Orientalized Western Woman's Destruction of Western Identity

Charlotte Dacre's novel *Zofloya, or The Moor* continues the preceding Orientalist feminist discourse and employment of the figure of the Oriental woman to express her advocacy for women's bodily and sexual regulation. She experiments with Oriental woman characters to display the possible outcome of Western women gaining bodily and sexual autonomy. The novel offers a warning of what happens when women pursue their sexual desires—they become Orientalized. As we will observe in the following sections, Dacre demonstrates that Western women lose their racial and civilizational identities and regress into an Oriental identity when they pursue their sexual desires through their bodily autonomy. The resulting Oriental identity leads the former, purely Western woman both to become subjugated to even Oriental men within patriarchy and to destroy Western civilization's identity as progressing, pure, and virtuous.

Through the novel's literary form, Dacre illustrates an empowered, sexually and bodily autonomous Oriental woman character that is resemblant of Lady Mary's Oriental women in her text. Victoria, the novel's main character, transforms into an evil, bodily-driven Orientalized woman. In her story, Dacre presents the manner in which Wollstonecraft's East-West plays out as Western and Eastern women's sexual and bodily identities merge. Dacre's novel traces Victoria's bodily, behavioral, and psychosocial regression as she becomes more evil, irrational, and Oriental. Dacre's novel asserts that Lilla, Victoria's foil and the incarnation of Milton's Eve, has a semblance of authority to navigate within patriarchy due to her Western purity and civility. These Western qualities are directly linked to her bodily restriction. Lilla is the ideal Western woman to Dacre because she chooses to restrict her body from engaging in sexual desire. Once Victoria's transformation into an Orientalized woman is complete, she chooses to kill Lilla,

dooming herself to hell. Victoria represents the potential failure of Western society should it succumb to its Orientalized desires.

Given the relative obscurity of the novel today I will briefly summarize its plot with an emphasis on Victoria and Lilla. Victoria de Loredani and her brother Leonardo belong to an aristocratic Italian family in the later fifteenth-century. Their mother, Laurina di Loredani, is seduced from her husband by Count Ardolph, which sets the precedent for both her children's future sexual transgressions. Laurina's husband dies, and she makes an oath to refrain from sexual and bodily temptation in order to be an example of purity for Victoria. However, she breaks this promise and returns to Ardolph's seductions. Victoria later falls in love with Il Conte Berenza, an aristocrat who wants Victoria to be his mistress while Victoria is under the impression that she will become his wife. When Victoria and Berenza, by a turn of events, get married, Victoria is enamored by another man, Henriquez, and wishes to release her body and herself from her marital bonds. Henriquez is cordial with but detests Victoria for her evident passion and desire for Henriquez. He also dislikes her because she is the opposite of his betrothed Lilla, the cherub-like orphan. Lilla loves Henriquez, but refuses to marry him until she fulfills the promise she made to her dead father to marry only after a full year has elapsed after his death. Victoria is then greeted by the alluring Zofloya, more often referred to as the Moor, who is Henriquez's servant. Lured by Victoria's sexual and bodily deviance, he offers to aid her in fulfilling her desire for freedom from her marriage with Berenza and for Henriquez's love. Guided by Zofloya, Victoria poisons Berenza, drives Henriquez mad which ultimately leads him to take his own life, and kidnaps and eventually, on her own accord, violently kills Lilla. While Victoria commits these acts, she physically, behaviorally, and psychosocially transforms into an

Orientalized woman, which I will elucidate in the following section of this thesis. At the end of the novel, Victoria is sent to hell by Zofloya, revealed to truly be Satan.

The Novel's Purpose

Now that we understand the novel's important plot points, I will describe how Dacre utilizes the novel's literary form to continue the discourse on Oriental women's bodily autonomies. The novel allows Dacre to use supernatural occurrences to imagine the experiment of a Western woman transforming into an Orientalized woman. Dacre was conscious that her novel deals with what her nineteenth-century audience would consider deviant sexuality. Craciun explains that "[r]eviews of Dacre's novels consistently expressed disgust with the excessively sexual language of her prose" (22). Dacre begins her novel with the narrator's overt explanation of the novel's purpose and methodology both in anticipation of her audience's reaction and to make it clear that this novel is didactic.

At the beginning and throughout the rest of the text, the narrator constantly repeats that the novel is meant to teach its readers various lessons.[6] The text's very first paragraph opens the story with the narrator's explanation of their role, intent, and methodology in the text:

> The historian who would wish his lessons to sink deep into the heart, thereby essaying to render mankind virtuous and more happy, must not content himself with simply detailing a series of events — he must ascertain causes, and follow progressively their effects; he must draw deductions from incidents as they arise, and ever revert to the actuating principle. (Dacre 39)

[6] At the beginning of the novel, the text is meant to teach women to be good mothers, quite aligned with Wollstonecraft's ideas on mothers' responsibility to educate daughters in her *Vindication*. Although I do not analyze this theme in this thesis, it is still notable to explore in future scholarship on Dacre and Wollstonecraft, as I mention in my conclusion.

Dacre's narrator begins the story with their identification as a "historian." Rather than beginning the novel's plot and allowing the reader to read the novel as they would any other, the narrator emphasizes that they are teaching a lesson as a historian would teach historical events. It is important to consider that Wollstonecraft ridicules certain novels, claiming that they negatively contribute to women's gendered education. She asserts that certain iterations of this literary form perpetuate the child-like and naïve characteristics that reinforce women's submission under patriarchy (Wollstonecraft 131, 271). The form of the novel also seems almost the opposite of Lady Mary's travel writing in the epistolary form—novels create imaginations while travel letters present an objectively witnessed reality. Thus, the narrator's call for the reader to pay attention to this novel's lessons emphasizes that there is a purpose to Dacre's experimentation with her Oriental woman character's sexuality. Dacre's narrator continues to list the procedure and method with which they structure their narration of the story: "ascertain causes," "follow progressively their effects," "draw deductions from incidents," and "revert to the actuating principle." This listing of methodology recalls Craciun's statement that the novel is informed by Bienville's scientific writing (Craciun 21-2). The narrator sets the precedent that they will scientifically or methodologically "follow" the experiment of Victoria's transformation in order to impart their lesson. Although the text contains numerous "lessons," the final and most important one is shared in the last paragraph of the novel: to protect Western purity by avoiding the "infernal influence" of her Oriental woman character's sexual and bodily autonomy (Dacre 255). I will discuss the final lesson further in the final section of this thesis. In this upcoming section, I present Dacre's imagination of the process of Victoria's Orientalization, resulting in Victoria's loss of Western rationality and civility.

Victoria's Regression into an Orientalized Woman, Part 1: The Physical and Behavioral Transformations

In order to trace Victoria's regression into an Orientalized woman, we must examine Zofloya's physical characteristics that make him an Oriental man. Zofloya has "luminous eyes" (231) and "a noble and majestic form" (145); he is "towering as a demi-god" (170) and "gigantic even from the diminishing points of heighth [sic] and distance" (203). He is clad in Oriental clothing, including bejeweled accessories and a white turban which, as the text highlights, contrasts his dark skin (145). This aesthetic contrast in color is a characteristic of sublimity in nineteenth-century literature and art. Zofloya's sublimity extends beyond the aesthetic into bodily capabilities, as he achieves supernatural feats such as when he "bounded like lightning up the rugged rock" and moves giant boulders "with apparent ease, though it seemed to require superhuman strength" (203).[7] In the process of gaining bodily and sexual autonomy, Victoria develops physical features similar Zofloya's: "demoniac sparkling eyes" (200) and a "dark cheek" (164). Following the change in her physical appearance, Victoria's bodily functions alter. When she becomes fully Orientalized, she gains the same preternatural powers that Zolofya has; she is able to traverse mountainous terrain with ease, for example, and loses the human need to eat and sleep (201). Victoria's physical transformation is reflective of the novel's ability to present fictional situations and experiments. Victoria undeniably adopts Zofloya's physical appearance after she expresses and pursues her bodily and sexual autonomy. I now turn from the visual markers of Victoria's Oriental transformation toward her behavioral changes.

As Victoria becomes more possessed by her desire and regresses into an Orientalized woman, she develops animalistic urges and loses the ability to control herself and to be

[7] See Pramod K. Nayar's "The Interracial Sublime" for a closer examination of Zofloya's embodiment of the sublime beyond his visual aesthetics.

controlled by civility. narrator describes Victoria's mindset as she works to poison Berenza and win Henriquez's desire: she felt "the wildest phrenzy of passion, the most ungovernable hate, and the thirst, even for the blood of all who might oppose her" (184). Evidently, Victoria's mental state slowly regresses into having violent, primal, "wild" thoughts. Her "phrenzy of passion" renders her "ungovernable" due to her excessive "hate." Her bodily "passion" for Henriquez and against Berenza makes her unable to control herself. Her "ungovernable" quality also suggests her inability to be civilized due to her transformation into an Orientalized woman. She is unable to adhere to marriage, her mind's wishes, or the simple human restraint that comes with civility due to her overwhelming concern for only gaining her bodily desires. Her uncivil, animalistic qualities are then revealed. Through the commas separating the short phrase "and the thirst" from the rest of sentence, followed by the adverb "even" provokes a tonal shift. Her incivility extends beyond her passions; it is aligned with the animalistic. She "thirst[s]" for her opponents' "blood," as if she were a carnivorous animal. The tone shifts from concern to disturbing fear of the unhinged and inhuman character Victoria is transforming into. Through Victoria's behavioral transformations, Dacre's novel demonstrates that Western women's adoption of Oriental women's bodily and sexual autonomy leads Western woman to adopting Oriental incivility along with it.

Due to her absence of Western civility and its replacement with Oriental incivility, Victoria's bodily functions become increasingly violent and self-destructive as she pursues her bodily desires. While Victoria anxiously waits for Zofloya to meet her in the forest after poisoning and killing Lilla's elderly caretaker, the narrator describes that Victoria "struck her forehead violently with her hand, and threw herself with her face upon the earth" (180). The situation that prompted Victoria to act in this way is stressful and fear-inducing, but it does not

warrant such self-destructive behavior—even Zofloya, the only fully Oriental character, never harms himself in the novel. This violent, physical behavior also becomes a means for her to communicate her desires. When speaking of her wish to be with Henriquez, the narrator explains Victoria's dialogue: "'This heart knows not to shrink,' she answered, forcibly striking her bosom, while her eyes flashed fire; 'and in its purpose would persevere, even to destruction!'" (159). Victoria violently injures herself in order to express her thoughts; she strikes her heart when telling Zofloya about her heart's strength. It is as if she needs a physical marker or expression in order to share her thoughts—as if verbal communication is insufficient to wholly capture her desire. She also explains that her heart is so motivated to achieve her sensual passions that she will "persevere, even to destruction." Again, Dacre employs the adverb "even" to present an extension of the preceding clause. Victoria does not care if she or her heart is destroyed in the process of gaining her desires. Dacre's reader would be astounded by Victoria's irrationality and her inability to identify the irony in her plan to achieve her bodily desires, especially with the juxtaposed terms "persevere" and "destruction." Victoria cannot "persevere" in her goal of attaining Henriquez's love if she or her heart end up in "destruction." She is unable to think about her future in terms of progressing time; she thinks in causal terms fueled by passion: her heart will "persevere" because her heart will not "shrink." A rational, Western woman would know to preserve the self in order to enjoy the fruits of their labor when time continues beyond the accomplishment of the goal. Victoria loses all semblance of bodily control, and can express herself only in short term, Oriental manners.

Dacre again presents Victoria as incapable of expressing herself without the use of her body; her bodily autonomy seems to become the main form of communication and the self-inflicted violence with which she communicates does not affect her. When Henriquez ultimately

kills himself, Victoria reacts, again, in a violent, bodily-driven manner. Victoria and Zofloya drug Henriquez and trick him into believing that Victoria is truly Lilla, while the real Lilla is trapped by the two characters in a cave on a mountainside. After realizing he has been tricked and that he was romantic toward Victoria, Henriquez kills himself. The narrator describes Victoria's reaction: "Now she clasped her hands, and twisted her fingers in each other, and now tore, by handfuls, the hair from her head, strewing it in agony over the lifeless body of Henriquez" (217). Dacre draws out this scene by using short clauses separated by commas that describe each action she takes. The image slowly materializes due to the pauses prompted by the commas. Additional anticipation and emphasis on the revelation of the tone appears due to the repeating "now." Again, the moment, "now," slows to the point where the reader waits to learn how violently Victoria will react. When the verb "tore" is revealed, the following clause evoked imagery of terror and irrationality as it visually presents the amount of hair that she is tearing from her own head. The moment is truly frightening to the reader, but Victoria does not seem to feel anything beyond her mental pain. Victoria harms herself, but her "agony" is not due to the pain she endures from ripping her hair out—it seems as if she does not feel any physical pain at all. Her "agony" is directed to the "lifeless body." She communicates her "agony" through her body; she places her physical, bodily mark and expression of emotion on Henriquez by giving his body her hair. She does not simply tear her hair due to feeling distraught, she "strew[s]" it on Henriquez's body. Victoria can no longer rationally use her mind and must utilize her physical body to express herself. Victoria's womanhood coupled with her desire for sexual, bodily autonomy causes her to regress into an uncivil, animalesque being who cannot reasonably function or communicate even to achieve her own desires.

Victoria transforms from a dignified, Western woman into an Oriental, uncivilized woman who cannot rationally control her body or her mind; rather, her sexual and bodily autonomy drives her to function primarily through physical expression. Dacre's application of Western women embracing Oriental women's supposed bodily autonomy, reveals a horrifying image of the loss of Western civility and identity. Victoria can no longer restrict her body so she cannot control it at all; she embraces her body's sexual desires and in turn her body's desires control her. In the next section, I examine the social relationship between Zofloya and Victoria. At first, Victoria believes that she has power within the patriarchy as she can command Zofloya, but her Orientalization as she pursues bodily and sexual autonomy leads her to lose all authority and become subservient to Zofloya himself—and Zofloya is, quite literally, the devil himself.

Victoria's Regression into an Orientalized Woman, Part 2: The Psychosocial Transformation

Through Victoria's psychosocial transformation and her resultant shift in power within patriarchy, Dacre continues her experimentation with preceding imaginations of Oriental women (Barlaskar). Victoria, renowned for her fearlessness in verbally expressing her offensive thoughts, loses the ability to speak when she is in Zofloya's company. As Victoria becomes more bodily autonomous with Zofloya's aid, her transformation into an Orientalized woman progressively leads to her loss of her authority over Zofloya, "the lowest of [Victoria's] slaves" (Dacre 160). Dacre demonstrates how Victoria's new racial identity as an Oriental woman alters her psychology to designate herself in a social position below that of Zofloya, rendering her subservient to him (Barlaskar 46).

Although Victoria does not have much or any authority in patriarchy due to her gender, she can command Zofloya due to his racial identity. When Zofloya first appears to Victoria,

before her physical transformations, she clearly expresses her power and authority over him. After she learns that sha can command him, she begins her pursuit of bodily autonomy to gain some semblance of authority within patriarchy and to fulfill her desires. The narrator reveals that at first Victoria does not want to condescend to share her secret desire for Henriquez "to an inferior and an infidel […] but, in the next instance, she cast her eyes upon the noble presence of the Moor: he appeared not only the superior of his race, but of a superior order of beings" (Dacre 156). She knows that Zofloya is socially "inferior" to her and uses the word as a noun rather than an adjective to dehumanize him. She also directly references his religion when pairing "inferior" with "infidel." Zofloya's alterity is defined both by his social role and his belief in Islam, as the term "infidel" was typically used to describe Muslims ("infidel, n."). Hence, Victoria recognizes that she is not only socially superior to him; she is racially superior to him as well. Dacre clearly employs the East-West binary and the racialization of Islam here, before Victoria begins her transformation, and then displays how it mutates when her Western woman becomes Oriental. This moment in the novel marks the beginning of Victoria's transformation, as she asks for Zofloya's help in achieving her bodily desires.

Continuing with the same passage, the tone drastically shifts from the beginning to the end of the phrase. The narrator even highlights the sudden tonal shift when they state, "in the next instance." As if she has been entranced or put under a spell, Victoria unexpectedly rejects her previous interpretation of her social superiority to Zofloya. Dacre's narrator uses a correlative conjunction when she states that Zofloya is "not only" exceptional among the Moors, "but" is better than all other people. This statement demonstrates the categorizations of East and West that are being broken down by Victoria's shifting racial identity. She at first sees him as an "inferior," then her image of him shifts to make him "superior." However, this superiority does

not refer to being better than all of humanity at first. Rather, Victoria's mind seems to first place Zofloya in his racial category and compare him there, and only after that does she move past his race and claim his superiority over all "beings." Dacre displays how Victoria's mind changes to disregard the racial boundaries between Easterners like the Moors and Westerners like herself. Her power and authority over Zofloya are dependent on her racial superiority as a Westerner, and when her racial identity begins to shift, she is unable maintain the struct hierarchy between them.

Conscious of this shift in power and racial identity, Zofloya reassures Victoria that she maintains her control over him by appearing as a passive character. When Victoria first asks for his help in achieving bodily autonomy to fulfill her desires, she asks, "Can you instruct me? can you arrange? can you direct the confused suggestions of my brain?" to which Zofloya responds, "I think I could *assist* you, fair Signora!" (Dacre 156). Victoria asks, even offers, for Zofloya to gain power over her through the transitive verbs she presents for Zofloya to do: "instruct," "arrange," and "direct." Victoria herself, "me," is the direct object of Zofloya's action, "instruct," and the same occurs with her mind's "suggestions" being the direct object of Zofloya's action to "direct." While she may think she is commanding him to do these actions, she is simultaneously giving him power to control her. Zofloya responds by emphasizing through italics that the action he is willing to do is simply to "*assist*." Zofloya expresses his removed role in Victoria's achievement of her bodily desires and sustains Victoria's belief that she has authority over him. He will aid or "*assist*" her, working as a partner rather than an agent in achieving her goal. Through Victoria's inability to recognize her loss of authority as she becomes bodily and sexually autonomous, Dacre demonstrates how Zofloya tricks Victoria into regressing into an Orientalized woman; while Victoria thinks she is gaining authority within

patriarchy through her bodily autonomy's sexual freedoms as she enacts in her commands to Zofloya, she actually unknowingly gives up and loses all authority.

Victoria begins to realize that she is unable to speak to Zofloya and is unable to identify that the cause is her loss of Western characteristics. After poisoning Berenza and other characters, Victoria and Zofloya meet one another again. Victoria is undergoing her final Oriental transformation at this point in the novel. The narrator reveals Victoria's internal thoughts: "how happens it, that with a thousand questions to ask him, I find time to ask him nothing? And, with a thousand inquiries to make respecting himself, my tongue refuses in his presence to perform its office, and I remain unsatisfied?" (172). Through the internal dialogue, it is evident that Victoria is cognizant of her inability to speak to her inferior, but she cannot comprehend where the inability originates from. She also cannot "find time" to ask Zofloya anything. Although there is sufficient opportunity for dialogue between the two characters, Victoria loses a sense of time and cannot progress in her simple will to ask a question. She loses control of her body as well, as her "tongue refuses in his presence to perform its office," which would typically permit her to gain power over their conversation and aid in her expression. Victoria loses her Western attributes—regulating time and having control over her body—as she becomes an Orientalized woman. She slowly becomes inferior to Zofloya and can no longer wield her Western identity to exert power over him.

In contrast to his careful diction when aiding Victoria before her Oriental transformation, Zofloya overtly flaunts his power and authority over her after her transformation is complete. When Victoria again asks Zofloya for his guidance in her mission to gain her bodily desires, Zofloya states, "I direct, Signora, not advise," (177). The lack of emphases contrasts his use of the word "*assist*," (156) to assert his position as inferior to Victoria. In this phrase, Zofloya

demonstrates his confidence in his superior position. Zofloya no longer needs to position himself as a supplement to Victoria's goals and as inferior to her. He now has complete control over her life as she has completely lost her Westerness. He can "direct" her, as she is under his jurisdiction when she is an Orientalized woman. He reinforces this point when says to Victoria, "am I not thy equal? — Ay thy superior! — proud girl, to suppose that the Moor, Zofloya, is a slave in mind!" (234). Zofloya refers to himself with his racial identity, "the Moor," as he knows that this is the identity in society which designated Victoria as his superior who has authority over him. Similarly, he presents his social role as a "slave" within Western society, which is informed by his racial identity. Through Zofloya's awareness of Victoria's loss of Western identity and therefore loss of racial power, Dacre demonstrates the dangers of the East-West binary's potential dissolution. Zofloya reveals to Victoria that now she and he are "equal" due to their shared Oriental identities, which again was brought on by Victoria's desire for bodily, sexual autonomy and for authority within patriarchy. Victoria's Oriental identity coupled with her gender now designate her as inferior to both Western and Oriental men within patriarchy—Zofloya is her "superior." Through this hierarchical shift, Dacre demonstrates how Western women are reduced to an Oriental racial status when they embrace Oriental women's sexual and bodily autonomy as a means for authority and mobility within patriarchy.

Victoria's experiences of shifting power dynamics and roles within the social hierarchy are indicative of her gender and newly developed racial identity. Victoria's inability to speak to Zofloya and his overt expressions of power display how Victoria is now subjected to both Western and Oriental men in patriarchy. Where she initially thought she was gaining mobility and authority within patriarchy through her sexual and bodily autonomy, she finds that she has lost all authority that she once had in the beginning of the novel, all due to the consequent shift in

her racial identity. Dacre displays the psychosocial consequences of Western women becoming bestial, Oriental women through their loss of all authority within patriarchy due to their celebration of bodily and sexual autonomy. Now, we will compare this Orientalized Western woman character to Lilla, the novel's heroine and Victoria's foil, which will lead us to the novel's resolution. Lilla maintains her Western identity and successfully maneuvers within patriarchy due to her Western form of bodily autonomy. Dacre continues the discourse on women's rights that Lady Mary and Wollstonecraft structured, presenting her ideas on a uniquely Western bodily autonomy for Western women. As I explained in the introduction, both Lilla and Victoria have bodily autonomy; however, Victoria's autonomy is informed by her right to freely engage in and pursue sexual desire while Lilla's autonomy is informed by her ability to restrict her body from sexual desire. As I discuss in the next section, Lilla's and Victoria's forms of authority within patriarchy and their ultimate fates are emblematic of the potential civilizational consequences when Western women transform into Lady Mary's empowered Oriental women.

The Feminist, Racial, and Civilizational Consequences of Becoming an Orientalized Woman

At the beginning of the novel, before her transformation, Victoria often elicits the reader's sympathy despite her impropriety in her outspokenness and rudeness toward her mother. When Victoria decides to avenge herself for being taken advantage of by Berenza, who married her halfheartedly while she was young and desperate, the reader may feel that her goal is reasonable and even noble; her mother suffered from the same fate, after all, and the narrator expresses sympathy for Laurina throughout the text. Victoria rationally observes that it was Berenza who tricked her into her lustful position as a wife with extramarital bodily desires toward Henriquez:

> Detestable Berenza, selfish and unworthy wretch, that played upon my youth, and deluded me into the misfortune of becoming thy wife! […] my energies are all enslaved, my powers fettered, by the hated name of wife. Henriquez should have yielded to my love; he should not have yielded only, but gloried in it. Who is the minion, Lilla? A friendless upstart! *she* was no obstacle; I think not of her: detestable Berenza! I say again — mean, calculating philosopher, it is thou — thou that I should wish annihilated! (153-4)

Evidently, Victoria uses critical adjectives that express her distaste for her husband. She feels "played" by Berenza because she was too young and naïve when she married him. This sentiment resembles Wollstonecraft's assertion that marriage is a broken institution which hinders women's educational development, as women marry too young for social mobility. Victoria even describes her marriage as a "misfortune" that she was "deluded" into. She is "enslaved," just as Wollstonecraft claims that marriage enslaves women and reduces them to the equivalent of Oriental women in a harem. Quite rationally, Victoria blames Berenza for her limiting position as a wife. She references Berenza's intent to possess and limit her bodily authority and potential when calls him a "calculating philosopher." Like Lady Mary's unfaithful Oriental women, Victoria wants to choose how and with whom she uses her body without the restriction of marriage. Dacre's text illustrates patriarchy's ability to control women's bodies through marriage and creates a dilemma where Victoria rationally advocates for her release from an oppressive marriage. It is imperative to my argument to note that Victoria recognizes that her enemy and her oppressor is Berenza, or the patriarchy, and she knows that Lilla is not at fault for her position as an oppressed wife. Victoria completely dismisses Lilla, stating that "*she* was no obstacle" as she is not actively oppressing Victoria like Berenza is. Lilla is not Victoria's enemy,

although Victoria feels some animosity toward Lilla for her position as Henriquez's betrothed. Victoria and Lilla are not enemies as they are both Western women who face the same oppression from patriarchy. Later, however, Victoria faces this situation with her new, Oriental identity, making her react to Lilla in an uncivilized and irrational manner. Dacre's novel asserts that although patriarchy exists and oppresses women in institutions like marriage, the ideal Western woman can gain a form of authority and mobility within patriarchy if they restrict their bodies and desires, as we will see in the following descriptions of Lilla.

Dacre's characterization of Lilla is resemblant of Milton's Eve and is positioned as the opposite of Victoria, continuing associations between Eve and Oriental women in feminist discourses. Unlike Lady Mary and Wollstonecraft, Dacre's novel champions that Lilla's pure, Western attributes and her ability to restrict her body gives her a kind of mobility and authority within patriarchy. Lilla embodies the characteristics of Lady Mary's Turkish women and Wollstonecraft's criticism of the "Mahometan strain" (Wollstonecraft 84):

> Pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of corrupt thought, was her mind; delicate, symmetrical, and of fairy-like beauty, her person so small, yet of so just proportion; sweet, expressing a seraphic serenity of soul, seemed her angelic countenance, slightly suffused with the palest hue of the virgin rose. […] she might have personified (were the idea allowable) innocence in the days of her childhood. (Dacre 144)

First, Lilla is introduced with a list of her attributes; she is "[p]ure," "innocent," and "free" from "corrupt thought." This description is reminiscent of the prelapsarian purity associated with Eve. Her lack of "corrupt thought" is demonstrative of her opposition to Victoria, as Victoria's desires are precisely what doom her to her transformation into an Orientalized woman. The imagery of Lilla's description also makes the color white and pale pink emerge in the reader's mind: "Pure,

innocent, free from even the smallest taint," "fairy-like," "seraphic," "angelic," "palest hue of the virgin rose." These repeated attributes again juxtapose her character and Victoria's post-transformation, with her "dark cheek" for example (164). Evidently, she belongs in the heavenly realms of the garden of Eden. Through Lilla's descriptions as the opposite of Victoria's Orientalized character, Dacre evidently agrees with Lady Mary's interpretation that Milton's Eve is an admirable figure, but she connects this figure to Western identity rather than to that of Oriental women. Lilla's distinction as a purely Western character also demonstrates that Dacre disagrees with Wollstonecraft's assertion that Milton's Eve is a part of the "Mahometan strain" (Wollstonecraft 84). Dacre's novel asserts that Lilla's likeness to Eve aligns her with a Western identity that allows her to restrict her body and protect its virtue. Orientalized Western women like Victoria cannot restrict their bodies, therefore they lose their ability to navigate and have authority in patriarchy.

In the same passage, Dacre's narrator describes Lilla as a child. She is "so small," a "virgin," and quite overtly, "personified (were the idea allowable) innocence in the days of her childhood." Although she progresses in time and matures into a woman, Lilla maintains her purity as a child-like and "innocent" woman, again as Eve was in the garden of Eden before the fall. The connection between her virginity and her characterization of Eve also opposes Wollstonecraft's claim that the seraglio consists of child-like women who are reduced to objects for male desire. Here, Dacre illustrates that being child-like is not related to objectification and submission; rather, it is related to a woman's protection of her body from men's desire through bodily restriction. Lilla directly embodies this child-like "innocence" in her refusal to marry Henriquez before a year has elapsed from her father's death. No matter how much she loves Henriquez and how much he coaxes her, the "pious Lilla" holds fast to her bodily restraint and

maintains her authority in her relationship with Henriquez (Dacre 141). To Dacre, the Western woman is pure, virginal, and restricts her body in order to gain and protect her form of authority within patriarchy. Lilla and Western purity both maintain their power even when they meet their untimely deaths.

Dacre demonstrates how Western women risk becoming Orientalized and polluting Western purity and civility when they embrace bodily liberation and reject bodily restriction. Dacre's novel illustrates this assertion through Victoria's irrational choice to kill Lilla. As I explained earlier in this section, Victoria at first recognizes that Lilla is not her enemy because she is still a Western woman with Western rationality. At this point in the novel, Victoria has completed her transformation into an Orientalized woman and can no longer control her body at all. After Henriquez kills himself, Victoria rushes to the kidnapped Lilla, who is in a cave in the mountains where Zofloya and Victoria hid her after stripping her of her belongings and clothing. Victoria wants to avenge Henriquez's death. When Victoria enters the cave, the narrator describes Lilla's countenance: "Clasping her thin hands upon her polished bosom, and with some of her long tresses, still in pure unaltered modesty, essaying to veil it, she raised her eyes" (218). Although Lilla is in the worst condition, naked and chained to the walls of a cave, she retains her bodily restriction; her bodily autonomy remains "pure" and "unaltered," and she uses her long, open hair to restrict her body from being seen. Lilla's control over her body's modesty is juxtaposed by Victoria's inability to regulate her body and her mind when she kills Lilla.

Continuing the analysis of the same scene, Victoria loses her rationality and accuses Lilla, the beacon of Western civility and purity, of killing Henriquez. When Lilla asks Victoria if Henriquez died at the hands of Victoria, Victoria replies, "'Murdered by *thee*, viper!' fiercely returned Victoria. — ''Twas thee who plunged the sword into his breast, — thy accursed image

revelling there, impelled him to the frantic deed!" (219). Victoria knows that Henriquez killed himself and the reader knows that neither she nor Lilla truly killed him. His grief for Lilla's disappearance and Victoria's trickery to gain his love both led him to kill himself. However, Victoria claims that Lilla metaphorically kills Henriquez: "*thee*, viper!" Victoria's irrationality is profound, as Lilla never embodies the characteristics of a "viper"; only Victoria herself seems to have these characteristics, with her metaphorically venomous tongue. She finds Lilla's goodness and purity infuriating, as her Orientalized identity does not understand how Lilla can have so much authority in patriarchy that she could cause Henriquez to kill himself even with her absence. Victoria extends the metaphor of Lilla being responsible for Henriquez's death when she states, "'Twas thee who plunged the sword into his breast, — thy accursed image revelling there." Victoria creates a metaphor that places Lilla directly and physically in Henriquez's death scene. Lilla, addressed as "thee," directly commits the verb "plunged" and utilizes the direct object, the "sword," which she sends into Henriquez's "breast." Victoria emphasizes that it was Lilla's "image" that kills Henriquez, as she cannot figure how Lilla holds power within patriarchy when her body is physically not present in the situation; Victoria's body was present, but was ultimately not as powerful as Lilla's palpable, intangible authority. What initially began as bodily autonomy through embracing the right to sexual desire resulted in the inability to regulate Victoria's body's desires at all; Lilla's bodily autonomous restriction prevails and gives her a form of power within patriarchy. Lilla's death at the hands of Victoria as an Orientalized Western woman, signifies that Western women's civilizational identity could potentially be overpowered and exterminated by Orientalized Western women, dooming all of Western civilization's identity, which I will discuss in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Dacre's narrator returns at the very end of the novel to impart its final and most important lesson: Western women's espousal of Oriental attitudes on women's bodily autonomy and desire (albeit fictionalized by writers like Lady Mary and Wollstonecraft) threatens to transform them into Orientalized women and ultimately destroy Western civilization's identity. In the last lines of the novel, the narrator directly addresses the reader:

> Reader — consider not this as a romance merely. — Over their passions and their weaknesses, mortals cannot keep a curb too strong. The progress of vice is gradual and imperceptible, […] Either we must suppose that the love of evil is born with us (which would be an insult to the Deity), or we must attribute them (as appears more constant with reason) to the suggestions of infernal influence. (254-5)

First, the narrator directly addresses her audience: "Reader." They follow this use of the common noun with a caesura through the em dash, which emphasizes the demand for the reader's attention at this crucial moment in the novel. Within the dashes lies an imperative phrase which reminds the reader that they must "consider" this story as more than "a romance merely." Now that the reader knows the fates of all the characters, who signify "morals," the narrator aims to express the novel's final lesson to the reader. The "passions" and "weaknesses" are listed together as qualities that people must regulate or restrict, "cannot keep a curb too strong." Evidently, this coupling of passion and weakness through the coordinating conjunction equates them and refers to the passion which Victoria had for Henriquez. Her passion was in fact weakness, although she thought it would give her strength to navigate within patriarchy. Through the Orientalization of female desire, Dacre demonstrates that Victoria's transformation into an Orientalized woman is the "progress of vice" that, in the novel, contaminates her Western identity.

In the same passage, Dacre's narrator presents the dilemma of evil's origin, this "evil," again, being Western women's adoption of Oriental women's supposed bodily and sexual autonomy. The parenthetical phrases within the passage's last sentence play an important role in Dacre imparting her lesson. The parenthetical phrases are dependent clauses and are unnecessary in the sentence. Without these parenthetical phrases, the reader is left with a neutral sentence with the two simple options of evil's origin. The reader would then have to contemplate and form their own opinion around the novel's events. However, in employing the parenthetical phrases, Dacre impresses her own answer to the question, leaving no opportunity for the reader to guess at her experiment on Western women's sexual and bodily autonomy. She presents the first possible explanation: that "evil is born with us." She quickly refutes this claim through the parenthetical phrase, stating that this explanation "would be an insult to the Deity." This deity is of course God and must be Christian due to the narrator's addressal of a Christian, Western readership. Considering that Zofloya is Satan in this text, the racial implications between holy and evil arise. This distinction between the Christian, Western God and an Oriental as the Devil is accentuated in this very last line and brought to the forefront of the reader's interpretation of the novel. Dacre's narrator affirms through the parenthetical, "(as appears constant with reason)," that "the suggestions of infernal influence" lead people to evil. In applying the previously mentioned racial distinctions, Dacre concludes that through the Western quality of "reason," the reader can plainly trace the story's evil, Oriental influences on Western, civilized women.

Dacre evidently departs from Lady Mary's interpretations of women's bodily autonomy as an alternative mode for women to function in patriarchy. Through Victoria's loss of rationality, Dacre demonstrates how her Oriental woman character, an Orientalized Western

woman, becomes the enemy of Western women's civility. Dacre's description of Lilla, the embodiment of this Western civility, as Eve diverges from Wollstonecraft's claim of Eve's characteristics that subjugate and restrict her within patriarchy; Lilla's purity and bodily restriction allows her to successfully maneuver and gain a form of authority within patriarchy. The novel's final scene and lesson reinforces Dacre's assertion that embracing Orientalized desire in the pursuit of Western women's rights results in the destruction of the Western, civilized identity.

Conclusion

Through this project, I endeavored to trace Englishwomen's use of the figure of the Oriental woman in their discourses on Western and Englishwomen's rights. Although these texts initially seem disconnected from one another, their use of imaginations of Oriental women links them in a common conversation regarding gendered alterity while embedding imperialist imaginations within the establishment of Western feminist discourses.

I wonder how current scholarship on *Zofloya* and the relationship between mother and child could be supplemented by Wollstonecraft's ideas on mothers' responsibilities to serve as educators for their daughters, and how this influences the differing relationship and racial identity that Victoria's brother Leonardo develops by the end of the novel. Due to their differing gender and ultimate racial identities, examining men's desire and bodily autonomy could be salient in illuminating the nuances of gendered and racial alterity in all three texts. Lady Mary is invested in Turkish politics and framing Turkish patriarchy beyond the walls of the hammam and harem, and Wollstonecraft explores the beneficial role masculinity would play in Englishwomen's lives. Examining masculinities and femininities in the three texts could illuminate how the East-West binary functions within this gendered binary.

Traces of these texts can be seen in the modern day, from travel vlogs made by Americans touring Southwestern Asia to Western media's representations of hammams and harems. Take, for example, the show *Emily in Paris* displaying a white, American woman feeling uncomfortable in the sensuality of an hammam located in a European country ("Bon Anniversaire!"). These two examples apply only to Lady Mary's letters, and there are examples abound for both Wollstonecraft's and Dacre's texts that have been produced in recent years. Western women's identities and their dependence on establishing themselves as separate from

the Other in modern media are worthy of exploration. Tracing the Orientalist attributes from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts to contemporary media will aid in understanding the current issues that Western feminisms face regarding anxieties about desire, modesty, sexuality, bodily autonomy, and more; once we expose Orientalist feminist foundations within modern Western feminisms, we can begin to deconstruct their prevailing legacies.

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