Romantic Orientalists: 
Urquhart and Kinglake on 
The Ottoman Empire

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Introduction: An Unlikely Comparison of Two Controversial Figures

An initial reaction to a comparison of the writings on the Orient of Alexander Kinglake and David Urquhart might be surprise or even disbelief since both the men and their works seem so different. As Geoffrey Nash says, “In key respects Kinglake produced a polar narrative on Ottoman Turkey to that of Urquhart” (“Politics, Aesthetics and Quest” 62). Urquhart, the Highland Scot, is immensely proud of his heritage (Robinson 20, 64-65); he received a cosmopolitan education with private tutors, studied at the Dominican College of Sorèze in southern France, and matriculated at St. John’s College, Oxford in 1822, although he was forced to interrupt his studies because of ill health (Bolsover 444). He was critical of many aspects of European life, notably its system of taxation, its mechanical military organization, and its ignorance of the culture of Islam, of the Turkish language, and of the structures and manners ruling Eastern life.¹ Conversely, Kinglake is English although of Scottish descent, middle class, and was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge (Tuckwell 15-23); he is confidently Eurocentric, sure of the superiority of his country, its culture, and its power in the world (Morris iv). Urquhart spent the six years from 1831 to 1837 in the Ottoman Empire (Nash, From Empire to Orient 44).² He produced two substantial works, Turkey and Its Resources (1833) and The Spirit of the East (1838), which Gertrude Robinson claims were still required reading in the 1920s (46). Urquhart also served briefly and unsuccessfully as First Secretary to the British Embassy in Constantinople from 1836 to March 1837
before being recalled (Bolsover 464-66; Nash, *From Empire to Orient* 45-46; Robinson 48-54). By contrast, Kinglake spent only fifteen months travelling in the Ottoman Empire before returning to England (Morris ix). He wrote one travelogue, *Eothen* (1844), whose Greek title means “from the early dawn” or “from the East.” As he says in a note, it is “almost the only hard word to be found in the book” (Morris iii; Kinglake 3, n. 1). He spent seven years revising the travelogue, his only other publication being a multi-volume historical commentary on the opening phases of the Crimean War (Morris xv). Urquhart visited Roumelia, that is the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire: Bosnia, Macedonia, Epirus, Albania, and Thessaly (Panzac 252), whereas Kinglake travelled from Belgrade to Constantinople and Smyrna (Izmir), but also to Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. Urquhart learnt Turkish and applied himself to understanding the financial and administrative structures of the Ottoman Empire as well as its manners and customs, so that he came to be recognized as an expert on both Ottoman affairs and Islam (see *SE*: I:xiii-xiv). He displays what Geoffrey Nash has called an “empathetic Orientalism” (*From Empire to Orient* 47) in his ability to participate in life in the Ottoman Empire, after his initial Philhellenism was transformed into Turcophilia (Robinson 30; Jenks 4-5, 8-9). Kinglake learned only a little Turkish and never wavers from seeing the inhabitants of the various countries he visits as “the Other”: usually irrational, prone to be infected by the plague (which for him is synonymous with Muslim countries), and often comic, although occasionally also attractive, picturesque, or good servants.

Yet Urquhart and Kinglake are in many ways less different than they seem at first. Both are élitist, albeit in different ways; both were educated in the classics, as is attested by their occasional untranslated quotations from Greek (*Eothen* 46; *SE* I:43) and in Urquhart’s case occasionally from Latin (*SE* II:259n). Both are eccentric and have a strongly romantic attitude to the East, although, again, this is manifested differently: both see Eastern travel as an escape from European dullness and convention, and both delight in the possibility of adventure. In Urquhart’s case this is especially true of the second volume of *The Spirit of the East*. Moreover, while Urquhart very often praises traditional Islamic (Arab or Ottoman) financial and administrative structures
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and practices, especially in *Turkey and Its Resources*, his works nonetheless contain passages that suggest the superiority of European development that align his perspective with that of Kinglake to a certain extent. At times Urquhart proposes the development of the Ottoman Empire along lines that can be described as endorsing the philosophy of free trade and that contradict many of his initial arguments (*TR* 136-37; Nash, *From Empire to Orient* 58-59; Taylor 26, 31). In Kinglake there are no long discussions of British foreign policy, international responsibilities, or financial or commercial systems, but many incidents, most notably Kinglake’s account, in the final chapter, of the defiance of the local Ottoman Pasha at Satalieh, on the Turkish coast north of Cyprus, by himself and his Russian companion reveal the assumption of the superiority of European power in cultural terms, along with its recognized superiority in the military and technological domains. I shall analyze both *The Spirit of the East* and *Eothen* as versions of what Edward Said calls the “Romantic re-structuring of the Orient” (158) to demonstrate that their authors share more qualities than is generally acknowledged, and thus to modify somewhat the parameters of what are usually considered as the dominant Orientalist stereotypes of the East/the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s and 1840s.

The Ottoman Empire in this period, and indeed in earlier ones, was generally seen as being in a state of decline: backward, degenerate, and unequal with the West (Said 206); it was still seen as both exotic and despotic, as it was in the eighteenth century, as Ros Ballaster has demonstrated (48-49, 72-74). However, Urquhart explicitly rejects the label of despotism in the “Introduction” to *The Spirit of the East*, preferring to talk of tyranny, because in the East and specifically in the Ottoman Empire as opposed to Europe, “the principles of the government have never been in opposition to the opinions of any class of the people” (1 xxiii), and one of the main leitmotifs of both his major works on the Ottoman Empire is a defense of Eastern value systems and manners. Nonetheless, as Meyda Yeğenoğlu observes, positive representations of Oriental places and peoples do not mean that the writers necessarily escape the Orientalist framework, since they demonstrate the power of Orientalism “to construct the very object it speaks about and [...] to produce a regime of
truth about the other and thereby establish the identity and the power of the subject that speaks about it” (90).

At times both Urquhart and Kinglake have recourse to remarkably similar tropes, such as the romance of horseback travel, the East as escape, and travel as an opportunity for adventure. Horseback travel was of course the primary mode of transport in the period, but both writers also associate it with what might be called a romantic sense of the effects of openness and closeness to the natural world, even when this produced discomfort. Moreover, while their attitudes to Britain’s imperial role in the East seem at times to be diametrically opposed, there are moments when they coincide because both men have complex and, to some extent, contradictory positions on the issue. As Geoffrey Nash says, Urquhart’s “romantic Orientalism” meant that he wished “to see Turkey change only in accordance with its ancient principles,” yet “at the same time he was instrumental in arguing for her opening up in the name of international free trade” (From Empire to Orient 56, 47). There is no equivalent in Kinglake to Urquhart’s painstaking elucidation of the structures of municipal administration, finance, and taxation in Turkey and Its Resources, but there is a parallel between Kinglake’s nostalgia for “the genuine Osmanlee” and his dislike of the modern Western-influenced Turk he encounters in Izmir (49) and Urquhart’s repeated evocation of the beauty and practical usefulness of traditional Ottoman manners and customs in both the Spirit of the East and Turkey and Its Resources. Kinglake does not analyze the political or economic relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, but he assumes the superiority of European manners and customs; similarly, Urquhart assumes the appropriateness of Britain’s possible patronage of Turkey at least partly because of his recognition of the superiority of British commercial, political, and military power. Moreover, Kinglake makes some brief comments on the Ottoman commercial system (38-40) that bear comparison with Urquhart’s imaginative reconstruction in Turkey and Its Resources of the Ottoman merchant’s problems in dealing with the alien and inefficient trading practices dictated by “the free-trade notions of political economists” in
England, compared with the “extreme simplicity of commerce” due to “the practical free trade of the East” (192, 136, 192-95).

In terms of travel writing about the Ottoman Empire, both Urquhart and Kinglake are relatively neglected figures. Urquhart is not mentioned in Edward Said’s Orientalism, although Nash sees him as one of the “dissenting voices” in Victorian imperial discourse (11), the creator of “the parameters of a foundational discourse” that questions “the more established axioms of British disquisition on the East” (11, 41), and he is the subject of a hagiographic biography by Gertrude Robinson (1926). Said dismisses Kinglake’s Eothen as “undeservedly famous and popular,” “a pathetic catalogue of pompous ethnocentrism and tiringly nondescript accounts of the Englishman’s East” (193). However, Donna Landry has recently suggested a possible reconsideration of Kinglake, wondering why Said is “resistant” to Eothen’s “nuances” which, she argues, make it read “at times like a self-conscious, even self-deprecatory, parody of travel writing, satirizing both Western travelers and Eastern potentates,” although she also acknowledges that any reconsideration of the book is “fraught with reactionary hazards” (444).8

Despite Said’s dismissal of Eothen, he views Kinglake as one of those creators of “imaginative and travel literature” who makes “a significant contribution to building the Orientalist discourse” (99) by writing about their “personal experiences in the Orient” and relying on “the sheer egoistic powers of the European consciousness” (157, 158). Said also argues that, often, “the work’s internal structure is in some measure synonymous with a comprehensive interpretation (or an attempt at it) of the Orient” (158), a comment that is true of both Urquhart and Kinglake. Furthermore, Said’s observation that although Kinglake, among others, “undertook [his pilgrimage] in order to dispel the mustiness of the pre-existing Orientalist archive,” his writing frequently “resolved itself into the reductionism of the Orientalistic” (169), which can also be applied to Urquhart, who repeatedly bemoans English and/or European ignorance of Turkey, but who also uses a variety of Orientalist stereotypes. Moreover, Said’s statement that “For all their vaunted individuality Kinglake’s views express a public and national will over the Orient” (194), the expression of “a public and national will” characterizes
Urquhart too, which reminds us that neither writer can free himself entirely from the Orientalist and imperialist modes of thinking of the 1830s and 1840s.

**Romance, Escape, and the Pleasures of Danger and Discomfort**

Both Urquhart and Kinglake evoke the pleasures of horseback travel in the East, pleasures that include the sensation of the actual journey, and also, paradoxically, what Donna Landry calls “the litany of discomfort, hazard, and mortal peril,” which she sees as a constant trope in travelogues by “English writers from the time of Margery Kempe” (441). The dangers Urquhart and Kinglake face include being held for ransom or killed by bandits or pirates, dying of thirst in the desert, and nearly dying from plague in Cairo in Kinglake’s case, or drowning in a swollen river at night in Urquhart’s case.

At the beginning of *The Spirit of the East* we encounter a long, dramatic, present-tense description of the pleasures of travel on horseback, a “nomad existence” (I: 9), which contrasts with the settled habits of daily life in England or Europe and which “involves hardship, exposure, and fatigue” although these are seen as pleasurable. Urquhart evokes the “heavenly climate” as they set out from Argos on horseback (I: 8):

> there is none of that languor and feverishness that so generally result from travelling on wheels. The very hardships bring enjoyment with them, in invigorated health, braced nerves, and elevated spirits. You are in immediate contact with nature, every circumstance of scenery and climate becomes of interest and value, and the minutest incident of country, or of local habits, cannot escape observation. A burning sun may some times exhaust, or a summer storm may drench you; but what can be more exhilarating than the sight of the lengthened troop of variegated and gay costumes dashing at full speed along, to the crack of the Tartar whip, and the wild whoop of the surrigée? what more picturesque than to watch their reckless career over upland or dale, or along the waving line of the landscape,—bursting away on a dewy morn, or racing “home” on a rosy eve? (1; see also 8)
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The use of the second person “you” and the rhetorical questions at the end of the passage draw the reader into the narrator’s perspective, while a little later, in a Wordsworthian moment, Urquhart suggests that travel on horseback allows the rider to enjoy “a calm communing with nature and a silent observation of men and things” (1; see also 12).

Like Urquhart, Kinglake contrasts horseback travel “in the East” with travel in “Europeanized countries” (24). In Europe, he says, the actual journey time is short, but the traveler’s mind is unsettled by the change of scene; he may be excited by what he observes, but he “is still conscious of being in a provisional state, and his mind is forever recurring to the expected end of his journey” so that “before any new mental habits of thought can be formed he is quietly fixed in his hotel” (24). In the East, he continues: “It will be otherwise [...]. Day after day, perhaps week after week, and month after month, your foot is in the stirrup” (24-25). He continues by arguing that this means of travel becomes “your MODE OF LIFE,” and “If you are wise you will not look upon the long period of time thus occupied in actual movement, as the mere gulf dividing you from the end of your journey, but rather as one of those rare and plastic seasons of your life, from which, perhaps, in after times, you may love to date the moulding of your character—that is, your very identity” (25). Although Said argues in Orientalism that in Eothen the East exists “for the comparatively useless purpose of letting Kinglake take hold of himself” (193), this is somewhat overstated. Kinglake himself justifies the “egotism of a traveller,” because as “he tells you of objects, not as he knows them to be, but as they seemed to him,” this will show the reader who “bear[s] with him long enough,” “the realities of Eastern Travel” (5, 185). Urquhart’s moment of Wordsworthian contemplation moment at the beginning of The Spirit of the East (I:12) has at least a partial parallel in Eothen when Kinglake finds himself in the desert looking up at the night sky and “the deep black mystery of the heavens” (126). His next comment reveals his awareness of his individual insignificance: “If this cherished Self of mine had built the Universe, I should have dwelt with delight on ‘the wonders of creation.’ As it was, I felt rather the vain-glory of my promotion, from out of mere rooms and houses, into the midst of that grand, dark, infinite palace” (126-27). The ego in Eothen is not always as secure as it would like to be.
In *The Spirit of the East* and *Eothen* the narrators, but especially Kinglake’s, might be seen as forerunners of the male travelers whom Paul Fussell describes in *Abroad* as fleeing the drabness and restrictions of post-World War I Britain and early twentieth-century European life more generally.\(^1\) The sense of the freedom that comes from escaping conventional social constraints characterizes both *The Spirit of the East* and *Eothen*, and it is particularly emphasized in Kinglake.\(^2\)

For Urquhart, travel offers the possibility of escape from certain features of European life, such as political and party divisions, and the tendency of military organization to reduce men to machines, denying them any individuality, as well as the opportunity to encounter picturesque and romantic figures, lifestyles, and events, which may also offer an element of danger or risk. But if Urquhart’s experiences in European Turkey, that is, modern-day Greece and Albania, offer escape from aspects of European life, they also lead to a carefully reasoned critique of certain historical and contemporary developments and characteristics of European social organization, especially in *Turkey and Its Resources*, where he analyzes traditional financial and administrative structures in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire and advocates the principle of direct taxation as infinitely preferable to European systems and more conducive to commercial and social well-being. In *The Spirit of the East*, there is less discussion of these principles of commercial and social organization, but there are still intermittent allusions to them, as in the second chapter of Volume 2, where he recounts the rise and fall of Ambelakia as a commercial municipality (13-31). On occasion he also deplores the tendency of European military organization to reduce men to machines (*SE I*:35, 246), although he criticizes the lack of discipline of both the Ottoman forces and the less regular militias of the Albanians (*TR*:233). He admires the charisma of the “Eastern commander”—like the Albanian Veli Bey, or Arslan Bey, who is “the Patriarch of his followers” ensuring the unquestioning loyalty of his men (*SE I*:247), and he sees the Albanians as similar to the Scottish Highlanders in this respect and others, such as their costume, their warlike nature, their minstrels or bards, and the “love of adventure and speculation,”
combined with their “equal love of home” (see SE I:270). His second visit to Albania, he explains, is prompted by “A few months spent in the sober clime of the West; a few months of comfortable beds; rain-tight roofs; smooth, level roads; gas-lit streets; cloudy weather and monotonous faces,” which “gradually recalled—first in my slumbers, and then in my waking dreams—the bright skies and stirring scenes of the East” (SE II:202). The Orient is the land of dreams and dreamed-of adventures.

In *Eothen*, the narrator enthuses about his escape from European constraints and restrictions. Describing “The first night of your first campaign [on horseback] (though you be but a mere peaceful campaigner),” Kinglake declares, “is a glorious time in your life. It is so sweet to find yourself free from the stale civilization of Europe!” (23). He urges his reader to “think for a moment of those your fellow creatures who dwell in squares, and streets, and even (for such is the fate of many!) in actual country houses” (23-24), perhaps like the one he was probably brought up in (Tuckwell 15, 16). As the Reverend William Tuckwell reports: “To the end of his life he chafed at such restraint: ‘when pressed to stay in country houses,’ he writes in 1872, ‘I have had the frankness to say that I have not discipline enough.’ Repeatedly he speaks with loathing of the ‘stale civilization,’ the ‘utter respectability,’ of European life” (24). In *Eothen*, Kinglake evokes the rituals of English middle- and upper-class life and conversation, and he ends his list of these rituals by saying, “think of these, and so remembering how many poor devils are living in a state of utter respectability, you will glory the more in your delightful escape” (24; see also 119-20). Towards the end of the journey, in Damascus, he evokes “this poor sluggish century” in Europe in contrast to “the faint echo” he seems to hear of “the old Crusader’s conscience” about the situation of Christians in a “Mahometan Empire” (262). At this point, Kinglake, like Urquhart, sees romance in the past, although this is soon contradicted in Kinglake by a dramatic contrast between the East and the West, in which the East is seen as “old and decrepit,” with dead religions and expiring tyrannies and the West as characterized by “glad bustle and strife” with “steam buzzing” and so on (268). The contrast ends with Kinglake declaring that with the pace of life in the West, it is a case of “the Devil taking the hindmost—taking me,
by Jove (for that was my inner care), if I lingered too long, upon the difficult Pass that leads from Thought to Action” (268).

Despite Kinglake’s note of (European) urgency here, both he and Urquhart value what they see as the romance of the past, as Donna Landry notes of the latter (448-49). Urquhart regularly expresses his dislike for the imitation in Turkey of Western manners and customs, which he sees as destroying the very qualities that have enabled the Ottoman Empire to survive for so many centuries, although this is complicated by some of his endorsements of the progress in the Empire along European lines. At the end of the first volume of The Spirit of the East he muses: “It is strange, that it is to Turkey that one has to turn for the records of the Greece of antiquity […] But alas! the whirlwind of Western opinion has swept to Turkey, after devastating Greece. While I trace these lines, the race of 3000 years, which I am describing, is extinct! A Turkish serjeant, in a blue jacket and trousers, with red cuff and collars, occupies the Kiosk, and lolls in the garden of the Captain of Olympus!” (I:455-56; see also Nash From Empire to Orient 52). His long and enthusiastic description of the ascent and the summit of Mount Olympus ends with another complaint about “the importation [into Turkey] of European ideas, costumes, and manners, since the commencement of the [Greek] Revolution” (I:455). Similarly, Kinglake far prefers the dignity and visual appeal of the “genuine Osmanlee” to the Westernized Turk in Izmir and the “gobemouche expression of countenance with which he is swallowing an article in a French newspaper” (49), and later, in Cairo, preferring the “soft rolling language” of the “noble old fellow—an Osmanlee” to “the shrieking tongue of the Arabs!” (192).

The romance of danger and risk, similar to that of “the adventure tale” that Martin Green sees as “the energizing myth of English imperialism” (3), also characterizes both Urquhart and Kinglake, although it is more central and more carefully reasoned in Urquhart than in the latter. Early in the first volume of The Spirit of the East Urquhart comments on the “romantic interest” of the excursion with its “Difficulties and adventures” (I:102), and he is frequently disappointed at the beginning of the journey from northern Greece to Albania because of the lack of bandits and the general peacefulness of the countryside.
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(I:153). However, he and his companions are “relieved from further alarm” when they learn that they are “in time to come in for a share of the dramatic and the picturesque” (I:154), as the Albanian countryside ahead of them has not been pacified by the Ottoman forces. Danger is seen as both exciting and attractive. Shortly after they arrive in Albania, Urquhart recounts how they receive the gratifying news of unrest and violence: “While we were congratulating ourselves in not having been deterred, by the fears of our friends in Greece and Roumeli, from entering Albania, and in being so fortunate as to arrive at the very moment of the explosion, a Greek captain, a relative of the Consul’s wife, entered our apartment, and told us that he had just arrived from Berat, and that there the first scene of the tragedy had been enacted. ‘At Berat!’ we exclaimed’ (I:190). Shortly afterwards, he continues: “Our informant had, in two days’ march, counted fifty dead bodies along the road. Even between this place and Pente-Pigadia, four tambours, or posts, are not sufficient to secure the road; and, within the last few days, two parties have been attacked, and several men shot” (I:192). Somewhat later, evoking the past horror of historical events seems to add to Urquhart’s enjoyment of the landscape, each of whose elements, he asserts, tells “its distinctive tale of blood and crime” (I:211).

Once in Albania, Urquhart and his travelling companions experience “dreadful disappointment,” both when Veli Bey initially refuses to allow them go with his party to meet Arslan Bey (SE 1:216) and later when they are prevented by Gench Aga, an Ottoman official connected to the Sadrazem (or Grand Vizier [I:177]) from accompanying Veli Bey and Arslan Bey when they travel to meet the Ottoman Governor (SE 1:263-64). Six weeks later, at Larissa, however, there is a significant coda to this search for the excitement of danger, when they learn that these two Albanian leaders, formerly rivals but now allies, along with their most significant followers, have been betrayed and massacred by Ottoman forces of the Sadrazem at Monastir, under the pretense of an invitation to a feast (SE 1:307-10). Seeing the arrival of a Tartar, Urquhart asks whence he has come and what news he brings. “‘From Monastir,’ he replied, ‘with news fit to load a three-decker!’ ‘And what are the Beys about!’ ‘The Beys!’ he said, with a laugh, ‘are on their way to
Constantinople; the whole of them in the hibé (saddle bags) of a single Tartar” (I:308). Urquhart is appalled at “the catastrophe”: “We understood him to mean their scalps. This intelligence, so suddenly communicated, and in so scoffing a manner, was really sickening, and we were quite exasperated at the triumph and exultation exhibited by both Turks and Greeks at the announcement of this treacherous destruction of men in whom we were so deeply interested” (308). He concludes: “Thus have we been walking on mined ground, which has exploded both before and behind us”; he admits that now he understands why Gench Aga acted as he did since he was charged with protecting them (SE I:312), and the episode reinforces the romantic image of the Albanian leaders, Veli Bey and Arslan Bey, by representing them as victims of Ottoman duplicity.

Kinglake also at times expresses his fear that his desire for excitement and adventure may be disappointed. As he leaves Gaza to begin his desert crossing into Egypt, seeing “the land [...] covered with fresh verdure, and thickly jewelled with meadow flowers,” he admits that he begins “to grow almost uneasy—to fancy that the very desert was receding before me, and that the long-desired adventure of passing its ‘burning sands’ was to end in a mere ride across a field” (165-66), echoing in a minor key Urquhart’s initial disappointment on seeing the peacefulness of the Albanian countryside. However, in the desert Kinglake is reassured by swiftly having “the gratification of finding that I was surrounded on all sides by a tract of real sand” (166), and, indeed, later he experiences the intermittent danger of robbery and even death at the hands of bandits in the desert (225-26), as well as the risk of dying of thirst there (221).

One of the dangers both travelers encounter is that of disease or ill health. In Spirit of the East Urquhart finds himself penniless and then has “an attack of ague” (2; see also 192). He provides a long account of his “most deplorable situation” (II:194) as a fishing boat takes him toward Ozeros. Toward the end of his account of this episode, he states: “My recollections of the remainder of the journey are quite indistinct: the fever had become remittent, and then continuous; the weather was wretched, for the rains had set in; and considering that the country was infested with robbers—that I had not a farthing of money
in my pocket—that myself and my servant were in an utter state of helplessness, my passage from Athos to Salonica, fed, housed, and watched over, whenever we halted on the road, appears to be an indisputable proof of the good-nature of calumniated mankind” (II:196). What might have seemed a prelude to disaster becomes an assertion of faith in human nature. On another occasion Urquhart loses his horse and almost drowns attempting to cross a swollen river. He presents the incident dramatically:

I had escaped from the bogs, I had been snatched from the river, I had run from the dogs and the muskets—which way was I now to turn? Without a horse—unable to walk—without a word of any intelligible language at my disposal, hungry, shivering, and exhausted; drenched from top to toe, my boots filled with water, my ample shalvars and cloak weighing what might have been worth something in gold, and this on the 18th of December. The only thing to be done was to sit down on the bank of the river, and to wait for the 19th. It dawned at length; and, not long afterwards, one of the wandering Vlachs (shepherds) came down to water some cattle, at the spot where I had entered the river, and to which I had returned. (SE II:289).

The incident is presented dramatically: two of the three initial parallel clauses, “I had escaped” and “I had run,” establish Urquhart as the resourceful hero, while the third, “I had been snatched” and the following sentence with the further anaphora, “Without a horse” and “without a word of any intelligible language,” suggest he is also a victim of unfortunate circumstances, until rescued by one of the local population.

In Kinglake’s case, the dangers of disease encountered come from the plague, dangers to which Urquhart was presumably also exposed, but which he does not report. By the nineteenth century the disease had mostly been eradicated in much of Western Europe, but the Ottoman Empire continued to suffer from outbreaks of the disease, many of them severe (Panzac 245-46, 250-55). Kinglake’s itinerary brings him into contact with
the plague several times, and for him it comes to symbolize the danger of the East, which, paradoxically, is not without its own macabre excitement. *Eothen* begins with an evocation of the plague as he leaves Selim for Belgrade, in the Ottoman Empire, where he expects to see “the Splendour and Havoc of the East” (7) as he makes the transition between “The Hungarian on the North, and the Turk and the Servian on the Southern side of the Save”: “It is the Plague, and the dread of the Plague, that divide the one people from the other,” he declares (7). The disease reappears in the narrative when Kinglake becomes almost immediately “compromised,” that is contaminated because of contact with the clothes of plague sufferers in Constantinople as he moves from Pera north of the Golden Horn to explore Stamboul, the Turkish part of the city to the south of it (35). It reappears in his account of Franciscan monks in Palestine, where he regrets that in order to fulfil their duty to “the Catholic Christians of the place,” they “chose a plan most sadly well fitted for bringing down upon them the very death which they were striving to ward off,” since they gave the duty of tending the sick to one individual who lived in isolation from the rest of the community, thus heightening both his anxiety and theirs (112): in his view the fear involved was a factor in hastening the monks’ deaths (111-12, 196-97). But the plague figures most centrally in the long chapter entitled “Cairo and the Plague” (186-213), where the sense of risk and danger caused by the disease is experienced by Kinglake as stimulating as well as frightening. In a note at the beginning of the chapter he says: “There is some semblance of bravado in my manner of talking about the Plague. I have been more careful to talk about the terrors of other people than my own. The truth is, that during the whole period of my stay in Cairo I remained thoroughly impressed with a sense of my danger […]. But Fear does not necessarily damp the spirits; on the contrary, it will often operate as an excitement giving rise to an unusual animation; and thus it affected me.” The note ends, “Thus my account of the matter plainly conveys an impression that I remained at Cairo without losing my cheerfulness and buoyancy of spirits. And this is the truth, but it is also true, as I have freely confessed, that my sense of danger during the whole
period was lively and continuous” (186, n. 1). This discussion of the psychology of fear contradicts Kinglake’s comments on the role of fear in making people more vulnerable to the plague both earlier and in this chapter, but it may be explained by the fact that Kinglake is talking about his own individual experiences and reactions. The chapter itself ends: “I no sooner breathed the free, wholesome air of the desert, than I felt that a great burthen which I had scarcely been conscious of bearing was lifted away from my mind. For nearly three weeks I had lived under peril of death; the peril ceased, and not till then did I know how much alarm and anxiety I had really been suffering” (213). Like Urquhart with the bandits, Kinglake represents himself as having had a dramatically narrow escape.

**Orientalist and Imperialist Perspectives**

Although both Urquhart and Kinglake use a variety of Orientalist stereotypes, neither is consistent in his view of East-West relations or of imperialism. As shown above, both writers see the Orient and its people as “Other”: for both, the East represents the possibility of romance and escape, and both present certain groups of Eastern people as “wild” or “savage,” the Albanians in Urquhart, the Arabs in Kinglake. Kinglake describes some Arabs as possessed of a “wild instinct” in their dread of cities, their lacking foresight, their lying and untrustworthiness, and their speaking a “barbarous dialect” (236, 237, 169-71, 138). He sees “the Oriental” as subservient, having a “readily bowing mind,” and “the Asiatic” as having a “profound respect […] for those who have done him any bold and violent wrong” (246, 137). For his part, despite his admiration for some aspects of their culture, Urquhart calls the Albanians the “wild Arnaouts” and “these wild people” (SE I:4, 272), and he castigates the corrupt and “despicable” nature of the Ottoman Empire’s “central administration,” with its “robberies of legal and illegal bandits,” and “the common disasters” of life there (TR 99, 133, 52).

In *The Spirit of the East*, there is considerable tension, not to say contradiction, in Urquhart’s views on Western influence on Turkey and, consequently, on the question of imperialism. At several points he praises the possibility of European-style agricultural and technological progress in the
Ottoman Empire, even though the Introduction argues that European criteria of progress are not relevant to the very different situation of the Ottomans (I:xviii-xxiv) and that the difficulties involved in understanding Eastern culture are entirely the result of “a European's preconceived opinions” (I:xxix). Urquhart ends the “Introduction” by stating that in Turkey he has seen with pain “the best interests of my country sacrificed, and the conservative principles of the Turkish government and society undermined, less by foreign and hostile influence, than by a fatal imitation of Western manners, prejudices, and principles” (SE I:xxxi). But in the second volume he also acknowledges that “there now exists among them [the Turks] a spirit of imitativeness which [...] contains the element of progress and amelioration” of which he seems to approve, and he continues: “Now a new duty evolves upon us,—that of directing their docility, and assisting their selection” (SE II:369). Moreover, deploring the mutual ignorance of Englishmen and Turks, as G.H. Bolsover notes, Urquhart “urged Mahmud [II] to send young Turks to England to study western civilization” (450).

In *Turkey and Its Resources* Urquhart argues that England’s “greatness” will be established through trade, partly due to “the superiority of English manufactures” (142, 156), describing the free movement of goods through the metaphor of free trade as blood circulating through the body with England as the “heart” (*TR* 115), thus urging the suitability of the Ottoman Empire as a “natural” sphere for English commercial expansionism. He expresses a similar idea in *The Spirit of the East*, where he declares that “the commerce of England may have as much to do with our greatness, as the satins, porcelain, and japan of China with its weakness” (II:105-6). As Miles Taylor says, Urquhart believed that “British pre-eminence should be sought through commerce and commercial men and not through statesmen and diplomats” (29). From 1833 onwards Urquhart corresponded with the British Foreign Office “on the prospects of Turkey as a field for British trade” (Bolsover 445). His commercial report from Turkey of 23 January 1834 “described Turkey as an undeveloped market for British manufactures and as a potential source for raw materials” (Bolsover 449; see also 460), one of the “British manufactures” specified in *Turkey and Its Resources* being British cotton
goods in exchange for the raw material of Turkish silk (149-50, 183; see also 179-84). Indeed, in *Turkey and Its Resources* Urquhart constantly describes Turkey as a potential source of raw materials and urges the advantages of free trade and development (134), as he talks about the future commercial possibilities of trade in and with the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, some of Urquhart’s comments suggesting the potential for progress along European lines—the exploitation of the natural resources of the country, for example—might be compared to the more overtly imperialistic writings of Lady Elizabeth Craven or Henry Morton Stanley. In her 1789 travelogue Craven explicitly states her desire “to see a colony of honest English families here [at Sevastopol]; establishing manufactures, such as England produces, and returning the produce of this country to ours,—establishing a fair and free trade from hence, and teaching industry and honesty to the insidious but oppressed Greeks” (188), and in *Through the Dark Continent* Stanley describes the potential of African territories, predicting “steamers” and the creation of a “great trading port on Lake Victoria after the arrival of “philanthropic capitalists” who will bring peace, Christianity, and business development (I:175).

Kinglake says little about commerce, although he does note the difference between commerce in England or in “any other great mercantile country” and that in Turkey: in the former, most business transactions go “through the hands of a wholesale dealer,” whereas in Turkey “the important merchant, the warehouseman, the wholesale dealer, the retail dealer, and the shopman, are all one person” (39). But the most striking dramatization of the issue is the parodic [stereo]typical, imaginary conversation between the Western traveler and the Ottoman Pasha as conducted through the mediation of the Dragoman in the first chapter of *Eothen* (14-18). The scene is a good illustration of Donna Landry’s argument that *Eothen* “reads at times like a self-conscious, even self-deprecatory, parody of travel writing satirizing both Western travelers and Eastern potentates” (443). Kinglake begins by declaring that he would “mislead you if I were to attempt to give the substance of any particular conversation with Orientals,” singling out the kind of exchange where the
traveler writes “The Pasha of So-and-So was particularly interested in the vast progress which has been made in the application of steam [and] that he remarked on the gigantic results of our manufacturing industry....” (13), and then giving a specimen of the Pasha’s reply to the Dragoman’s magical rendering of the traveler’s assertion that in the case of unrest, “we can send troops by the thousand to the scene of action in a few hours” (16). The Pasha is made to reply: “I know it—I know all—the particulars have been faithfully related to me, and my mind comprehends locomotives. The armies of the English ride upon the vapour of boiling cauldrons, and their horses are flaming coals!—whirr! whirr! all by wheels!—whiz! whiz!—all by steam!” (16), and so on for the next three pages. The traveler, the Dragoman, and the Pasha are all equally ridiculous.

In terms of international relations, Urquhart believes that England should play a paternalistic role and should treat Turkey with “the firmness it owes to an unfortunate and erring, but confiding friend” (TR 214). He declares: “Turkey is now daily in the schools of experimental administration—she is assuming a place in the council table of Europe: she places herself under the tutelage of England” (TR 191). In The Spirit of the East he expresses similar ideas, arguing that the ideal foreigner to advise Turkey is Christian, Protestant, and English. He declares: “As Christian, you are the depositary of their differences amongst themselves; as Protestant, you are an object of interest, by an affinity of religious simplicity and worship, and even of dogma; while distinct from the Greek and the Romish Churches, idolatrous and sacrilegious through their forms, in the eyes of the Turks: as Englishman, you are the depositary of all their political and national hopes and alarms” (SE II:346). He adds, however: “These characters […] are of no avail, unless you know their feelings sufficiently to touch the chords that interest them, unless you know their manners sufficiently to make them bear you respect, unless you appreciate their merits sufficiently to awaken their sympathies, and unless you know their errors and their failings sufficiently to give weight to your words, and value to your opinions” (II:346). Thus, through the four parallel clauses beginning with “unless,” Urquhart emphasizes his status as the ideal interlocutor and negotiator with Turkey.
Kinglake’s views on imperialism are much less explicitly expressed. At times his narrative seems openly Orientalist or imperialist, as for example at the beginning of his narrative when he equates leaving “Christendom” (Christian Europe) with leaving “the civilized world” or even with “departing this life” (9, 8). At other moments the tone is more nuanced and self-conscious, with what seem to be somewhat self-deprecatory evocations of what it means to be English. For example, describing his crossing of the desert between Gaza, in Palestine, and Egypt, Kinglake describes how “the Wind that everywhere else could sweep as he listed along those dreary plains, was forced to turn aside in his course, and make way as he ought for the Englishman” (174, emphasis added). But this hubristic statement is almost immediately followed by a reference to himself as the “encroaching Englishman” on whose departure, “like an owner who had waited and watched, the Genius of the Desert stalked in” (175). This romantic personification is then followed by the comedy of two Englishmen, each with his own small retinue, crossing paths in the desert: they first pass each other—somewhat absurdly—without speaking, but when their respective servants stop and talk, they are forced to do likewise, and after their conversation Kinglake expresses his approval of the other man and his work in India and the imperial enterprise: “I thought him manly and intelligent—a worthy one of the few thousand strong Englishmen to whom the Empire of India is committed” (180), as he returns to the sense of English superiority and power with which the passage began.

At times in Eothen the Englishman is seen as a kind of ideal. For example, Kinglake explains that “in Asia” supplies from Arabs can only be got by “intimidation” and that is “utterly hateful” to an Englishman (241). At Suez Kinglake is “horrified to find that two men had been bastinadoed by order of the Governor, with a view to force them to a confession of their theft” (229). He describes the Governor as “a thorough Oriental” and adds: “I, of course, took care that there should be no repetition of the torture, at least so long as I remained at Suez” (229). Here Kinglake projects himself as the just and honest Englishman, but also as a figure of authority over the Ottoman Governor, even though he has no official position of any kind.
This sense of English and more generally European superiority and power over the East is underlined in the final anecdote of *Eothen*, where Kinglake and his companion, “the Russian Sataliefsky,” that is, the “Transcender or Conqueror of Satalieh” (271 and n. 1), defy the quarantine rules and the local Ottoman Pasha. As Nash states, “there is an ominous metonymic significance to the men’s subsequent bullying behaviour” to the Pasha (“Politics, Aesthetics and Quest” 62). Kinglake admits that “the course we chose to adopt on the occasion” was not “perfectly justified,” and that he is glad they operate under “the Russian standard,” because he “should have been sorry to engage the honoured flag of England in an affair like this” (273, 274). He later admits that he felt himself “completely in the wrong,” whereas the Russian “had really worked himself up to believe that the Pasha’s refusal to permit our landing was a great outrage and insult” and thus is able to use the whole force of his rhetoric to browbeat the Ottoman official (277). The Russian ends by speaking French in the absence of any interpreter, and Kinglake quotes what he remembers as the end of the Russian’s diatribe, where he reminds the Pasha that neither “a Russian General Officer” nor “an English Gentleman” can be treated as though he were “a mere Eastern Jew” (277). The whole incident shows the weakness of the Pasha who ends by not only not shooting Kinglake and the Russian (which the narrator admits he had every right to do), but by giving them a feast and then horses to continue their journey (273, 279). There is a somewhat similar scene in *The Spirit of the East* when Urquhart and his companions are captured by bandits, and Urquhart shows both daring and calculation in order to effect their escape (II:141-54) although, unlike Kinglake and the Russian officer, he is not defying the “quarantine of three weeks” that is Ottoman official policy or in Kinglake’s words, “the regulation of a foreign state” (*Eothen* 272, 273).

**Conclusion**

The endings of *The Spirit of the East* and of *Eothen* reflect their authors’ divergent priorities. In Urquhart’s “Conclusion” he states, “My object has been to make the reader acquainted with the feelings and habits of the country. I have, with this view, chosen the narration of a journey, as furnishing most
Valerie Kennedy, “Two Versions of Romantic Orientalism”

naturally occasions for such intercourse. If I have succeeded in any degree by awakening interest among my compatriots in those populations and countries—if I have removed any unjust conclusion, any feeling of hostility, of aversion, or of indifference—I conceive that so far I have gained a political advantage; for it is through errors of judgment, arising from misrepresentation of facts, that national power decays” (SE II:413). Rather disingenuously, Urquhart emphasizes the patriotic purpose of his narrative, setting aside the many dramatic or adventurous episodes in it. By contrast, *Eothen* ends with the evocation of another romanticized horseback journey: “our promised horses were brought without much delay; I gained my loved saddle once more, and when the moon got up and touched the heights of Taurus, we were joyfully winding our way through the first of his rugged defiles” (279).

In *The Spirit of the East*, Urquhart criticizes much of the writing about Turkey by his contemporaries as “too frivolous and childish to merit even censure” (2; see also 273). It seems likely that had he read *Eothen* (published six years later), he would have classified it as an example of such frivolity—think of the parodic dialogue between the Pasha and the foreign traveler as relayed by the dragoman described briefly above, for example. And yet, while Kinglake’s parody might seem to suggest that he refused to treat issues like European technological and industrial development and its influence on the Ottoman Empire with any seriousness, it also reveals his awareness that in the East “the intervention of the Dragoman is fatal to the spirit of conversation” (13), a view shared by Urquhart, who in Volume II of *The Spirit of the East* refers to “the ruin brought upon Turkey by the Dragomans” (221)—which he learns Turkish in order to avoid.

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**Notes**

Although the main focus of the essay in the analysis of David Urquhart will be the travelogue, *The Spirit of the East*, reference will also be made to *Turkey and Its Resources*, Urquhart’s painstaking account of the principles of municipal organization and taxation in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In the parenthetical references, *The Spirit of the East* will be
abbreviated to SE and referred to by volume and page number, and Turkey and Its Resources will be abbreviated to TR and referred to by page number.

1 At the end of Volume I of The Spirit of the East Urquhart describes in detail the manners of the Ottomans in paying and receiving visits, and he laments the many gaffes made by ignorant Europeans, which make them ridiculous (I:392-97). See Schiffer 230.

2 Karl Marx refers to Urquhart several times in his newspaper articles of 1853 on the Eastern Question, calling him “the great Eastern authority for all English Liberals who object to Palmerston,” and he sees him as partly instrumental in causing Palmerston’s resignation (25, 193). In Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians Edward W. Lane acknowledges him as an authority on the interpretation of the idea of “holy war” in Islam (562, n. 9).

3 Urquhart also sometimes sees his guides or travelling companions as comic. Describing the absurd appearance of the Greek who accompanies him on part of his ascent of Mount Olympus, Urquhart baptizes him “Diogenes” (SE I:415). Similarly, Kinglake gives contrasting accounts of the appearance of “the Tatar” at the beginning and the end of the journey from Selim to Constantinople: at the end he is “a mere weak and vapid dilution of the sleek Moostapha, who [...] came out like a bridegroom from his chamber, to take the command of our party” (31; see also 20).

4 The Latin quotation is from Sir William Jones.

5 Like figures as different as Julia Pardoe and Karl Marx, Urquhart also sees the influence of Russia on the Ottoman Empire (and, indeed, the possibility of Russian conquest), as a danger not only to the Ottomans but to the peace and stability of Europe more generally.

6 Donna Landry is the only critic to my knowledge who suggests parallels between Urquhart and Kinglake’s attitude to horseback travel and the romance of the past, and who notes their often diametrically opposed approaches (448-53).

7 Less cautiously, Jan Morris calls the work “one of the most original, graceful, and creative of all travel books, which has cast a sort of spell over the genre from that day to this” (Morris v), while Jonathan Raban argues that it has influenced later travelers like Robert Byron, Evelyn Waugh, Graham
Valerie Kennedy, “Two Versions of Romantic Orientalism”

Greene, and Paul Theroux (viii). Moreover, Kathryn Tidrick sees *Eothen* as “one of the best travel books ever written” because of its “charm” and “because it is, among other things, an account of the successful conclusion to an unusually prolonged adolescence” (45).

8 It is perhaps no coincidence that Kinglake’s comparison of Western and Eastern travel reminds us of Wordsworth’s complaints about the advent of the railways in his beloved Lake District, and his habit of composing poetry while walking. See Wordsworth, “On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway” for the first, and Jarvis, “William Wordsworth: Pedestrian Poet” for the second.

9 Said dismisses this claim as “little more than solidifying ‘your’ anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and general all-purpose race prejudice” (193). However, as Donna Landry observes, “Kinglake gives us an identity ‘moulded’ in the saddle,” that is, an English rather than a Turkish one (443).

10 The third section of Fussell’s *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars* is entitled “I Hate It Here,” that is, in Britain (15-23).

11 For Urquhart and Kinglake this sense of escape does not seem to relate to English or European sexual conventions, despite Said’s assertion that for most European writers, travel to the East involved a “quest” for “sexual experience unobtainable in Europe” (190). Kinglake talks about the “bewitching” women of Cyprus and the “romping girls” of Bethlehem” (76, 158), but women do not play a very significant role in either *Eothen* or *The Spirit of the East*, and they are entirely absent from *Turkey and Its Resources*. Toward the end of *The Spirit of the East* Urquhart does describe the lives of women in the Ottoman Empire, including in the harem (II:352-412), explaining, somewhat disingenuously, that “without seeing or conversing with a single Turkish woman,” it is “easy” to learn about them through the men (II:354).

12 The trope of disappointment occurs again vis-à-vis Captain Demo, the “mountain pirate-king” and his home of Caria (*SE* I:439). Urquhart expects to find Demo’s home “the frontier fortress of his legitimate domain, the *beau-idéal* of a robber’s retreat, perched on a precipice, or nestled in a cavern” and is astonished to find “a peaceful and smiling village” (I:441).

13 Urquhart repeatedly urges the vital role of the Ottoman system of direct
taxation in ensuring financial and commercial prosperity in the Empire (see, for example: TR 12, 21, 81, 85, 95-99). Direct taxation, he claims, leaves “every field of industry open”: Turkey has “no pauperism” and “no idlers” (95, 96, 98); commerce is rendered “simple and intelligible” and more democratic (132-33). Concomitantly he contrasts the Turkish system with the complications, intricacies, and impracticalities of the indirect taxation in European countries (99-102, 131).

14 In this connection, Margaret Hunt quotes Mary Louise Pratt: “early nineteenth-century travel narratives tend to ‘focus on the Other’s amenability to domination and potential as a labor pool.’ She shows too that travelers reserve their greatest enthusiasm for ‘the consideration of the commercial and geographical importance of the prospect before them’” (351). Pratt’s comments are true of Stanley, but only partially true for both Craven and Urquhart, since they are antiquarians as well as proto-imperialists.

15 For Kinglake, Tuckwell says, his readers: “are always Englishmen in the East” (43). Raban argues that Kinglake creates the narrative persona of “a representative Englishman,” who is “a distinctly callow and nasty piece of work” (vi-vi), but he fails to notice the variations in the persona’s attitude.

16 The second epithet confirms Said’s view of Kinglake’s anti-Semitism (193) although the speaker is the Russian

Works Cited


