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# Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso's Western Feminism: The Poetics of a Nineteenth-Century Nomad

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## CRISTINA TRIVULZIO DI BELGIOJOSO'S WESTERN FEMINISM: THE POETICS OF A NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOMAD.<sup>1</sup>

The nineteenth-century Italian activist, feminist, and Princess, Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, expressed her views on gender and politics through writing and through action.<sup>2</sup> Included in Belgiojoso's corpus are not only travel writings, fiction and letters, but also texts on religion, history and politics. The tale *Emina* (1856),<sup>3</sup> which shall be the focus of this study, emerged from the Princess's eleven-month voyage across Turkey and Syria to regions little known to Westerners at the time -- to European women in particular.<sup>4</sup> Belgiojoso's political convictions, and her experiences as a social reformer in Italy and Turke set the scene for *Emina* and her other "travel tales."<sup>5</sup> The autobiographical nature of *Emina* and Belgiojoso's use of first-person narration provide a context in which Belgiojoso can express nineteenth-century Western values and authority. *Emina* is also a novel of development, and the protagonist's "coming of age" in a Turkish harem allows Belgiojoso to compare the extreme version of gender inequality she encountered in the East to the sexual imbalance she found so troubling in the West, albeit to a lesser degree.<sup>6</sup> In *Emina*, the Princess emerges as a colonizer -- the foreigner in the text who prescribes Christian, Western remedies to what she sees as the ills of the Muslim society. Belgiojoso indeed writes in the spirit of the nineteenth-century female explorer, social reformer, and/or missionary, as did Amalia Nizzoli, Lady Hester Stanhope, and Madame de Staël. In both *Emina* and many of the Princess's travel memoirs, Belgiojoso appears as the Western "enlightened" figure "cultivating" the uneducated peoples of the Orient.

"Orientalism" was, of course, a literary trend in the nineteenth century among such male writers as Gerard de Nerval and Gustave Flaubert.<sup>7</sup> Some writers actually traveled to the Orient while others merely read about it, and their writing often reflected both Romantic Orientalist stereotypes and Western political and colonialist agendas. In *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said explains how the "Orient," mainly Turkey and the Middle East during Belgiojoso's era, came to be "Orientalized," that is to say studied, discussed, and theorized, according to Westerners' particular views, desires and projections ("Introduction"). A body of male and female "harem literature" exists as well. For men, harems are often depicted as "exotic paradises." Women writers, however, such as Belgiojoso and Amalia Nizzoli, the first Italian woman to venture to Egypt, discover harems to be filthy, boring "cages," microcosms of female imprisonment in society at large (Morandini 62). Belgiojoso's explains: "I was better qualified than most travellers for studying one important side of Mussulman society -- the domestic side, that in which Woman predominates. The Harem, the Mahometan sanctuary, hermetically sealed to all men, was open to me" (*Oriental Harems* xvii-xviii). She compares the scenes of art and luxury described in the *Arabian Nights* to the real conditions of harem life: "Imagine blackened and

cracked walls. . . When I first entered one of these delightful bowers, it almost sickened me” (*Oriental Harems* 27-28). Although women, too, have experienced the East from the perspective of the colonizer, they focus more extensively on women’s lives and roles in their texts, and often pursue feminist causes in their travel writings.<sup>8</sup>

Belgiojoso devoted her life to both social and political reform. She was avidly in favor of a united Italy under a constitutional monarchy and participated in the Roman revolutions of the 1840s. During the same period, Belgiojoso launched her social reform efforts. In Locate, near Milan, she employed native workers in an agricultural community, created schools and organized religious celebrations. This project reflected a common belief at the time among those in favor of the *Risorgimento*, namely, that by educating the peasants and helping them out of poverty, one could eventually interest them in the national cause (Knibiehler 208). Later, during her voyage through Turkey and Syria, she bought a piece of land near Safranbolu, north of Andara, with the goal of organizing similar community activity (Archer Brombert 201). In buying “Ciaq-Maq-Oglou,” as the property was called, Cristina “undertook to apply in Asia Minor what she had learned in Locate about farming and administration” (Archer Brombert 201). At Ciaq-Maq-Oglou, she employed Italian ex-patriots and Turkish workers in a farming community. As with her Italian venture, Belgiojoso’s project in Turkey allowed her to further her political and humanitarian agendas.

*Emina*, along with other travel memoirs, letters and fiction, emerged from Belgiojoso’s three-year exile in the Near East. After leaving war-torn Italy in 1849, she lived in Turkey and traveled as far as Jerusalem. The narratives from this period: “capture the fascination of her discoveries while revealing her keen eye for detail, humor, and the ‘human interest’” (Archer Brombert 205-06). Luigi Severgnini affirms that “la principessa si ispirava a conoscenze ed esperienze dei suoi viaggi in Oriente, sviluppando soprattutto l’indagine sociale e la rappresentazione delle condizioni del popolo” (13).

In *Emina*, Belgiojoso herself figures as an unnamed traveler who encounters the young protagonist Emina in Turkey. The autobiographical nature of *Emina* in fact extends beyond the presence of this narrator-traveler, spokesperson for the author, in the text. Belgiojoso also projects personal concerns and aspects of her own character onto her protagonist. For example, Emina spends her days in the fields as a shepherdess and concocts various natural cures for her goats’ ailments. She administers her “drugs” to her young shepherd companion Saed and other ill peasant children and hence becomes “a little doctor” (10).<sup>9</sup> In her travel memoirs, Belgiojoso indeed describes her own reputation in Asia Minor for medical prowess. She explains, for example, how an elderly man from Angora seeks her advice on a cure for blindness and how she acts as a physician for a young girl in Kupru (*Oriental Harems* 40, 57). Archer Brombert adds that the Princess tended to the ill children of Ciaq-Maq-Oglou, and “her fame as a doctor (began) to spread” among the peasants who marveled at her “powers of healing” (201). A second common point between the protagonist and the author emerges from the narrator’s extended criticism of polygamy in Muslim society. The Princess’s first exilic sojourn in Paris was inspired in part by her unhappy marriage to the filandering Emilio Belgiojoso. At the very least, she would have been sensitive to the problem of multiple partners which she attributes to Emina.

Finally, in keeping with the literary conventions of nineteenth-century Realism, the narrator claims to present a "true story," the tale of a poor Turkish family who lived "in one of the countless vallies of Asia Minor" (11), emphasizing the fact that Emina's story could have been that of any poor, young girl of this time and place. Belgiojoso surely encountered many young women like the protagonist during her travels, and she visited several harems. Therefore, although the author presents on the one hand a "simple story," she simultaneously claims that the tale reflects "real" problems which she encountered first-hand. As such, she emerges as a politically committed writer.

Belgiojoso speaks through a strong first-person narrator in *Emina* in order to persuade and influence her readers to favor her feminist principles. Joanne S. Frye notes the effectiveness of the narrative "I," a common voice amongst women writers: "To speak directly in a personal voice is to deny the exclusive right of male authority implicit in a public voice and to escape the expression of dominant ideologies upon which an omniscient narrator depends" (51). Such an authoritative narrator also exudes confidence and a sense of superiority, an assurance which may be attributed in part to Belgiojoso's noble birth. For example, Belgiojoso continually interrupts the narrative with biting, sarcastic comments, particularly with regard to gender roles. She notes, for instance, that even if Mohamet did not "explicitly (refuse) to give woman a soul," he neglected to elaborate on the subject (12). His followers therefore concluded that "he had nothing to say about it" (12). Belgiojoso criticizes the lack of religious education for girls in Islamic doctrine at the time. While she praises Emina's self-education, for example, she is quite critical of her lack of formal education. She reminds the reader that Emina is "a woman and Turkish, no one had ever taught her anything about religion" (12). Belgiojoso attributes an intuitive knowledge of religion to her protagonist, which perhaps can be explained by the author's Romantic ideology. Emina is an exceptional young woman, intelligent, and curious. Despite her lack of religious instruction, she draws conclusions about God and spirituality from others' remarks. Through "reasoning" (12), Emina comes to believe in eternal life. Belgiojoso in fact creates a protagonist who resembles an ideal Western heroine more closely than an Oriental one.

Belgiojoso's analysis of Emina's "coming of age" allows for a consideration of both female development and gender oppression in the nineteenth century. Indeed, critics started discussing components of a "female *Bildungsroman*" in the early 1970s (Fuderer 2).<sup>10</sup> *Emina* illustrates female formation in typical nineteenth-century fashion: an innocent young girl is torn from her peaceful, sheltered, childhood world, sent into the "society" of marriage, and expected to adapt to her new role and responsibilities. When she finds that this enviroment does not allow her to develop as a whole person, and that in fact there is no socially acceptable manner for her to realize her desire to be an equal partner in marriage and a contributing member of the larger community outside of the home, or in this case the harem, she dies. Certain parallels between the Oriental girl's *Bildung* and that of Western heroines -- the liberty of youth versus the confinement of marriage, for example -- are obvious. Oppositions, such as the legality of polygamy in Turkey at the time versus monogamous marriage laws in Europe, also exist. For these reasons, Belgiojoso accomplishes her dual agenda of warning Westerners against sex

discrimination and the lack of formal education for girls in general, and condemning Easterners for the extreme gender inequality of harem life and polygamous marriage in particular.

We see very clearly in this text that male and female protagonists confront different societal obstacles and expectations in the growing up process. The male *Bildungsroman* commonly includes such elements as: the focus on one central character's growth and development; society as the novel's antagonist; a quest plot which depicts the protagonist's search for meaningful existence and values; an emphasis on the development of selfhood; an oftentimes ironic and distant narrative point of view vis-à-vis the inexperienced hero; and other characters serving as educators and companions (Hirsch, "The Novel of Formation" 296-98). Similar to Belgiojoso's project in *Emina*, the male *Bildungsroman* is a didactic novel which educates the reader through the portrayal of the protagonist's education (Hirsch, "The Novel of Formation" 298). Recall that Goethe's prototypical Wilhelm Meister undergoes various adventures, trials and tribulations on the road to maturity, but eventually becomes a contributing member of society, as does Charles Dickens' Pip and Alessandro Manzoni's Renzo. Yet Germaine de Staël's extraordinary Corinne could never have survived the confines of the female path of marriage, motherhood and little else. Like Corinne, Gustave Flaubert's Emma Bovary dies at the end of the novel, the victim of an all too frustrating marriage coupled with a desire for adventure. The plot structure which fixes heroines in stifling marriages is common in nineteenth-century texts.

Belgiojoso may have been drawing on two nineteenth-century developmental models for women characters in her portrayal of Emina. First, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Italian counterparts, like Neera and Marchesa Colombi, taught girls "the need to subordinate their individuality and will to others in order to become good wives and mothers through acquiescence, chastity and self-sacrifice" (Bassanese 135). Belgiojoso indeed critiques this scenario in *Emina* through the depiction of an extreme version of self-sacrifice -- the life of a Turkish harem wife. A second model portrays female characters who are generally more gifted, intelligent and less conventional. Their *Bildung* does not always lead to marriage and maternity. This "novel of awakening" often depicts women's struggles in male-dominated spheres, and frequently leads to pessimistic conclusions. The female protagonist's journey usually culminates in a heightened self-understanding which will in turn be frustrated by the lack of appropriate channels allowing her to integrate this awareness into an active social role. *Emina* also echoes this structure, for the intelligent young heroine dies at the end of the tale, apparently the victim of her desire to be the equal and only wife of her husband, and of the jealous first wife's deadly designs.

Critics have explored the frequent fate of madness or death in female novels of development as well, and contend that we must reread these tragic conclusions in light of modern psychology and the female maturation process. Marianne Hirsch argues that "if we look at what adulthood and maturity mean for the female protagonists of these texts, at the confinement, discontinuity, and stifling isolation that define marriage and motherhood, they do not present positive options" ("*Bildung*" 27-28). Emina's life will indeed be fragmented as she is torn from her safe childhood world, where she experiences a oneness with Nature and possesses a certain dominion,<sup>11</sup> and forced into the harem environment. "Success" in this environment demands a degree of self-

effacement. Emina's refusal to conform to harem dictates ultimately leads to her death. Hirsch concludes that "the heroine's allegiance to childhood, pre-Oedipal desire, spiritual withdrawal, and ultimately death is not neurotic but a realistic and paradoxically fulfilling reaction to an impossible contradiction" ("*Bildung*" 28). Death and insanity in these texts can therefore be read as affirmations rather than complete renunciations.

With Emina's marriage, Belgiojoso tackles what she calls "the true subject of our story" (49) -- the young shepherdess turned "young slave wife" (49). Whereas marriage is a banal occasion for a Turkish man, it constitutes a turning point in the developmental process of a young woman. In Belgiojoso's travel memoirs, she observes the importance for women of marriage and producing children. For example, she describes the humility and shame of a childless wife of an important bey. The young woman bows her head and blushes in the presence of the Princess, and is the victim of the other wives' scorn, for "no object is so deprecated . . . in the Orient as a sterile woman" (*Oriental Harems* 132).

Emina's marriage stems from her father's debts to the rich Hamid-Bey. Emina is offered to the bey as a prize -- a means by which Emina's father can *postpone* his debts for another five years. Belgiojoso's criticism of women as objects of exchange in male bartering is quite direct. She comments that one might wonder why the bey preferred a wife to a slave, and explains that the reason is quite simple: "one amounted to a better bargain for him than the other" (31).

In the bey's harem, we are introduced to his first wife Ansha, the other children and family members, and the slaves. There is an emphasis on the boredom of harem life for women, evoking the limited domestic sphere that so many nineteenth-century female characters experience. Their development is measured in terms of interpersonal relationships rather than through activity in society. A girl's inferior position in this setting is evident from the power boys possess, "treating their mother and all the women in the harem like the lowest of slaves" (54).

With the character of Ansha, we get some insight into Belgiojoso's stereotypical views of Oriental women and the rivalry created by the harem setting. Ansha, a "superior woman," is experienced in the domestic circle. She possesses financial savvy and is hence influential in both her husband's personal and economic decisions. Her experience and shrewdness are contrasted to Emina's naïveté. Ansha has, in fact, arranged the bey's second marriage, and in so doing employs a female strategy, a form of manipulation which allows her to maintain both control over her husband's future and a certain status in the harem environment. We witness the jealousy and competition between Ansha, who can be seen as the "wicked step-mother figure," and Emina, the latter yearning to win the respect and confidence that the bey seems to pay his first wife.

Belgiojoso adds a bit of local color to the story with the interjection of an external political situation which lends authenticity to the narrative -- infighting and brigandism between the Turks and the Kurds.<sup>12</sup> Upon returning from a trip with Emina to baths in a neighboring city, the bey is attacked by Kurdish rivals. Belgiojoso highlights the protagonist's courage as Emina tries to save the bey from being stabbed. Hamid-Bey soon falls ill -- a possible metaphor for the ills in Muslim society which Belgiojoso outlines -- and Ansha then tries frenetically to come

between her husband and his second wife. Emina administers one of her "remedies" to her now delirious husband. Similar to the dominion Emina experienced in Nature during her childhood days, this is another instance where she senses some wholeness and transcendence, for only her touch can relieve the bey's suffering. As a result, Ansha becomes the object of his "profound indifference" (103). Here again, however, we are in a realm outside of every social realities, the world of the bey's delirium and illness.

By establishing the foil Emina/Ansha, Belgiojoso continually emphasizes the contrast between the purity of the heroine and the calculating, malicious nature of her rival. Yet Belgiojoso will later forgive Ansha to a degree, and blame unjust marriage laws for a situation which drives women to compete. For the author, the lack of equality between men and women in Muslim marriages forces the latter to scheme against one another in order to maintain the husband's attention and to battle for positions of relative power in the harem hierarchy.

When the bey's illness continues, Ansha proposes to send for the *iman*, a Muslim priest/warlock friend known for his miraculous healing powers. In her portrayal of the bey's illness and the family's reaction, Belgiojoso criticizes the superstitious nature of an "uncivilized" people in need of Western education. She supports this view with her presentation of the ridiculous *iman*, who possesses nothing of what "we imagine . . . as the living résumé of Christian virtues, or simply of the civilized gentleman" (94, emphasis mine).

Belgiojoso may also be projecting onto the *iman* the kinds of attacks of which she, too, was a victim. The Princess was a misunderstood and mysterious character and remained so even after her death. Brombert explains that many portraits and caricatures of Belgiojoso appeared during the mid-nineteenth century. Some were satirical, like Théophile Gautier's *La Croix de Berny*, which appeared in the 1840s and depicted Belgiojoso as strange and eccentric. Others were serious. Brombert notes that the fictional *Souvenirs du Marquis de Floranges* (1906, *Memoirs of the Marquis of Floranges*), written by *pasticheur* Marcel Boulanger, "provided decades of later writers with details of Cristina's fifth-floor apartment, presumably littered with esoteric volumes in Hebrew and Latin, stilettos, skulls, and a sign on her door reading 'LA PRINCESSE MALHEUREUSE' (the unhappy princess)." The text was actually a farce, drawing many elements from Gautier's satiric work. Brombert points out that "those of Gautier's readers who recognized Cristina were vastly amused and understood it was a satire. Boulanger's readers, less astute, launched the tradition of a macabre conspirator-bluestocking, an image too beguiling to rectify" (11).

The bey recovers, but forgets the affection that he showed Emina during his illness. Emina in turn becomes ill, perhaps purely of unrequited love, and perhaps from poisoning by Ansha and the *iman*. As Emina feels death approaching, she turns away from obsessions of love and jealousy, and toward the serene days of her childhood and loftier thoughts of God, not unlike virtuous nineteenth-century heroines such as Manzoni's Lucia and Balzac's Madame de Mortsauf. When Hamid finally begins wondering if Ansha could be jealous of his second wife, our narrator is quick to evoke the classic image of the witless male as a victim of female cunning. According to the narrator, the bey's uncertainty regarding Ansha's motivations proves "how much the wisdom of man is easily diverted by feminine mischievousness!" (115).

It is here that Belgiojoso, through her narrator-traveler, enters the scene: "Not having much to do in my valley, I decided to visit the neighboring province" (124). With her companions, she happens upon the bey's harem. He recounts the adventure with the Kurds, his illness, the intervention of the *iman* and his young wife's present condition, and asks the traveler to visit and try to cure Emina. Belgiojoso suspects the *iman*'s relationship with Ansha, along with the love triangle within the harem. The bey marvels at her perceptiveness, and exclaims: "--I was quite certain . . . that you Europeans, you can do all and know all!" (126-27) -- precisely the point Belgiojoso wants to make. Further, she becomes the "doctor" called upon to cure the social ills exemplified by this family. Finally, Belgiojoso subverts the superior male/inferior female paradigm prevalent in nineteenth-century Turkish society. She, the European woman, emerges as the enlightened and progressive figure.

The traveler meets the young girl, who extends the tender welcome "which Turkish women usually give to the European woman" (127). She comforts her and answers Emina's questions about Western religion, serving as both a maternal substitute and spiritual guide. Through Emina's naïve comments, the narrator is able to criticize a culture which believes in male hegemony. For example, Emina talks of a wonderful place where good Muslims gather with the prophet, but where women are not allowed. She has learned that for the "Franks," women are admitted to "the gardens of the faithful" (130). Belgiojoso, spokesperson for Western thought and religion, sets herself up as the voice of knowledge: "I said to the poor child everything that seemed to me clear, easy to grasp and above all consoling . . . In my place, a member of the biblical society would have been most happy with himself" (130-31). Belgiojoso's heroine may be reserved and meek, but her narrator cannot hide long behind a modest tone.<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Crémieux has analyzed Belgiojoso's character and her desire and need to serve: "Christine needs to dominate because she feels superior . . . (she) needs to give herself, but not to a single human being . . . It is to the whole of humanity that she would like to sacrifice herself" (33, translation mine). *Emina* tells of a traveler who endeavors to make an impact on one family. Yet Belgiojoso's aspirations are indeed much greater. Through the "conversion" and education of Emina, the Princess's journey becomes a part of a much larger feminist and humanitarian mission.

Belgiojoso indeed takes the voice of the Western female explorer-colonizer one step further. Rather than land or an entire people, it is men who are to be "colonized," educated, and brought into the fold of the civilized in this narrative. The female characters in *Emina* are all strong, influential, intelligent and perceptive. The male characters of all ages and classes, on the other hand, are generally childlike, malleable, ignorant and in need of guidance. Emina's childhood friend Saed cannot understand her knowledge of God. Emina's father is completely insensitive to her developmental needs. Hamid-bey recognizes only too late the reasons for his wife's suffering. Belgiojoso portrays men as insensitive to loftier, spiritual or intellectual understanding. Except for Saed, they are often insensitive to women as well.

After the traveler's meeting with Emina, she explains to an impatient bey that Emina is dying out of love for him. She continues: "To tell the truth I don't see . . . No, nothing is less conceited nor less irascible than a Turk!" (132). In the ellipses, she implies, "I can't imagine



*why* Emina would be in love with you!" Furthermore, she ironically expresses how very irritable and vain the bey, in fact, is. Her condescending attitude toward him is reinforced by the fact that he becomes "nameless" as their conversation continues. He is "my bey" or "a Turk." Finally, she realizes that if she wishes to be understood by the bey, and to stir some remorse in this character whom, along with Turkish society, she depicts as the guilty one, she must explain everything to the bey "categorically" (133), thus implying his limited intellectual capacity. When Hamid protests that he does love Emina, the traveler counters: "You loved her in a certain way, because she was young and pretty, and you would have also loved any other woman as young and as pretty as she; but it isn't in that manner that Emina wanted to be loved" (133). In contrast to the bey's volatile, emotional reaction: "Allah!," we have Belgiojoso's reason: "I needed much time and no less patience to make him understand that Emina suffered from being treated . . . like a child . . . and not as a friend, an equal, a heartfelt companion" (133). The ideal, then, is Western, Christian, monogamous love, and more specifically, monogamous marriage.<sup>14</sup>

The female characters are exonerated in this text. According to Belgiojoso, they either resemble Western heroines (Emina), or have the potential to do so through their "superior" nature (Ansha). Emina possesses "an elevated intelligence of which (the bey has) no idea" (134). She is the heroine who approaches a more typically Western conception of womanhood, desiring to be the equal and only conjugal partner. Furthermore, she is very concerned about God and about the afterlife; in this regard she has ideas which are, according to Belgiojoso, "much closer to *ours*" (134, emphasis mine). Ansha is indeed partially excused for her behavior. In the most dogmatic phrases of the text, the narrator states: "-- Ansha is not the only one to be blamed in all of this, I told (the bey) one day. It is your laws regarding marriage which are the true cause of ill" (139). Through such simple, declarative statements, Belgiojoso continues to draw Eastern/Western contrasts in an authoritative fashion. Similar views are confirmed in Belgiojoso's travel memoirs:

Let the wise . . . recreate the family by abolishing polygamy; for if one wife constitutes the family, more than one destroys it. Without pronouncing the ways of Christ, let the people, however, be initiated in the civilizing doctrines and the moral standard of Christianity. (*Oriental Harems* 264)

Female rivalry in this text, and in this society according to the author, is the result of circumstances rather than ignorance regarding women's worth as capable individuals. Belgiojoso echoes this sensitivity toward women's lack of choices in Muslim society in her travel memoirs. When a Muslim woman who has traveled to Europe admonishes her friends for tolerating infidelity, Belgiojoso refutes her: "You speak on this matter as profoundly as any socialist defender of women's rights. But these women candidly tell you what they experience, and, having lived as they have, I can comprehend . . . their sentiments" (*Oriental Harems* 414).

It is the bey's point of view, however, that we do not hear in *Emina*. The bey is never pardoned, and only makes limited "progress" in his understanding of his relationship with Emina and the ideas she entertains. The male view is only partially represented by the situation, but the fact that there is no "defense" or explanation of the bey's behavior, and no attempt to justify the male code of conduct in Turkish society, weakens Belgiojoso's feminist statement.

The Princess does not hesitate to inquire about the couple after her departure. She receives such news on several occasions during her sojourn, and proceeds to recount three "conclusions" to the story. Perhaps the multiple endings to the narrative, like an open ending, are meant to inspire the reader to draw conclusions about Emina, to make parallels between the oppression of this Oriental girl and that of women in Western culture, past and present, and finally to take action to change such injustice. Perhaps, too, given Belgiojoso's personal investment in the story -- Emina's concerns reflect those Belgiojoso had in her own life -- the author is unable to conclude the tale or resolve entirely the problems it thematizes.<sup>15</sup>

In the first conclusion, which Belgiojoso supposedly hears from a traveler six months later, Emina dies as a result of Ansha's plotting and scheming shortly after Belgiojoso's departure. In a second version of this ending, Hamid-bey expects "frequent visits" (142) from his dead wife.

In the second conclusion, the bey catches Ansha with the *iman*, and a domestic scandal ensues. The couple settles on a divorce, but since such action always requires "a certain amount of time between the signature and the execution of the decree," the divorce is drawn out indefinitely (142). During this time, Ansha tries to regain her former status.

Finally, in the third account, the bey finds another young bride. As the only daughter of the third of five wives of another bey, this young girl was "raised in good hands" (142). She would neither contest the harem structure nor die a heartbroken victim of her place in it.

In the final pages of her text, then, Belgiojoso refuses closure with regards to the future, positing only potential conclusions to the story. We are left with merely a glimpse of hope for future change in the second version of the first conclusion -- Emina's spirit lives on, along with the possibility of reform in harem life. Though Belgiojoso proposes far-reaching changes regarding marriage laws in Muslim society, she realizes that they will only come about gradually. Such tempered optimism is perhaps the result of her own life experiences; Belgiojoso's hopes for Italian unification, for example, and her dreams of a better life for the underprivileged classes, were realized only after years of struggle.<sup>16</sup>

Belgiojoso's views are reinforced in one of her later texts entitled: "Della presente condizione delle donne e del loro avvenire" (1866). In this feminist essay, the Princess gives a historical outline of female oppression beginning in antiquity. She calls for education for women, recognition of their intelligence, and opportunities for women to exercise their capabilities outside of the home. She warns the courageous women who will break new ground, however, of the difficult path they will have to follow:

Le donne che ambiscono un nuovo ordine di cose, debbono armarsi di pazienza e di abnegazione, contentarsi di preparare il suolo, di seminarlo, ma non pretendere di raccoglierne la messe. (183)

Belgiojoso's hope is that all women will help to reverse the tide of sexual oppression for generations to come. Although this will be a slow and tedious process, she appeals to women to participate in her feminist crusade.

In conclusion, Belgiojoso brings Western feminism, and Western values, to an Oriental context in *Emina*. She positions herself and her culture as superior, and voices her convictions in an authoritative manner. Though many of the Princess's views are dogmatic and her prejudices

apparent, her depiction of the female role in Turkish society is compassionate and reflects certain anthropological and cultural insights. Despite the fact that the male point of view is lacking, the representation of the unfair female role in harem life found in *Emina*, and in other similar texts, would have an impact on future women writers.<sup>17</sup> In her “coming of age” *Emina* experiences many of the common trials and tribulations attributed to her literary contemporaries regarding the relationship between self-education and social education, maturity and development, the role of the wife and the limitations on women’s freedom. Parallels between this Oriental woman’s sorry fate and that of other nineteenth-century heroines in tales set in the West serve as a warning to European readers. In effect, Belgiojoso represents the plight of the Oriental woman as the “black fate” of the Occidental one, an extreme depiction of the issues she saw as problematic at home. The story can indeed be read as an argument for monogamous love, and more specifically monogamous marriage, and the text underscores the tragic consequences that can ensue if such limits are transgressed.

Finally, with the inclusion of Belgiojoso as traveler, as character in her own text, the Princess’s narrative reflects a personal commitment to social change. The Princess traveled to foreign lands largely unexplored by women, and wrote extensively in both fictional and non-fictional contexts about her impressions of the sexual inequality she witnessed in the East. Her dedication to social and political activism indeed permeated her entire life. Hence Belgiojoso’s political agenda continually merged with her feminist one. *Emina* emerges as a meditation on the problem of gender oppression in different cultures and a call for social reform both at home and abroad.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Portions of this article were presented in my paper: “Crossing Borders: Travel, Transgression and Self-Discovery in the Works of Cristina di Belgiojoso.” Div. on 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-Century Italian Literature. MLA Conference, Chicago, 29 Dec. 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Many thanks to Frank Paul Bowman, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, Victoria Kirkham and Danielle Haase-Dubosc for their critical comments on this study.

<sup>3</sup>All quotations will be taken from the 1858 edition of *Emina in Scènes de la vie turque (Scenes of Turkish Life)* and cited by page number. All translations from the original French are mine.

<sup>4</sup>Archer Brombert notes that amongst Europeans only Lady Stanhope and certain English missionaries had traveled as far as Judea by the mid-nineteenth century (207). Belgiojoso’s exile in the Near East lasted three years.

<sup>5</sup>See Mills for a discussion of “travel novels” which share elements of travel memoirs and fiction (73).

<sup>6</sup>Zonana tackles some similar issues in her study on the “feminist Orientalist” discourse in *Jane Eyre*. She notes that Brontë’s extended use of the slave-sultan simile allows for the displacement of the root of patriarchal oppression onto an “Oriental” society. As such, British readers are able to contemplate their own problems without jeopardizing their self-image as Westerners and Christians.

<sup>7</sup>See Miller (698-705) for additional details on Nerval, Flaubert, Lamartine and Chateaubriand.

<sup>8</sup>For a detailed study of women travelers in Italy, see Borghi et al.

<sup>9</sup>There are certain similarities between the character of *Emina* and that of Fanchon, or “La Petite Fadette,” in George Sand’s novel by the same title, published in 1848. Recall that Fadette is gifted in the natural sciences and is known as “une petite sorcière” (“a little witch”). *La Petite Fadette* illustrates an idealism also common to Belgiojoso. Naomi Schor notes that at the end of *La Petite Fadette*, “Fanchon and Landry marry and live happily ever after, (and) Fanchon founds and presides over a school for the needy children of the commune,” (Schor 773) – the type of social reform which Belgiojoso also favored.

<sup>10</sup> See also Lazzaro-Weis' chapter on the female *Bildungsroman*.

<sup>11</sup> See White (17) for a details of the heroine's dominion in the natural childhood world.

<sup>12</sup> In my paper "Crossing Borders," I analyzed *Emina* and another tale in *Scènes de la vie turque (Scenes of Turkish Life)* "Un Prince kurde" ("A Kurdish Prince"). In both stories, Belgiojoso illustrates conflicts between the Kurds and the Turks. I developed the argument that the Princess's comments on the civic strife in Asia Minor were a veiled criticism of the atrocities she witnessed in war-torn Italy between her compatriots and the Austrians.

<sup>13</sup> Belgiojoso's assurance, independence and success as a political activist, writer and thinker were in fact threatening, particularly to men. Archer Brombert speaks of Belgiojoso's "manless feminism," and her systematic refusal of such suitors as Alfred de Musset and Henrich Heine. Musset's poem "Sur une morte" ("About a Dead Woman," 1842), concerning the cold, unfeeling Princess, reveals to what extent he felt rejected by her.

<sup>14</sup> Lucienne Frappier-Mazur noted in response to this study that in encouraging a monogamous married situation, Belgiojoso points to the area where Eastern and Western conceptions differed at the time. Whereas a Muslim could repudiate his wives, monogamous marriage, regardless of adultery, gave more dignity to women.

<sup>15</sup> A more straightforwardly autobiographical text would also exclude an "ending," of course, or the writing of one's own death.

<sup>16</sup> Note that Belgiojoso, who died in 1871, did live to see the Italian unification.

<sup>17</sup> Consider the numerous women writers in the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century who focus on women's roles and women's lives, past and present (Matilde Serao, Sibilla Aleramo, Anna Banti, Oriana Fallaci, Dacia Maraini, etc., to name only certain Italians). Further, much feminist research continues to be conducted on the harem.

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