Translation and the Manipulation of Difference

Arabic Literature in Nineteenth-Century England

Tarek Shamma

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Translation and the Manipulation of Difference explores the question of difference in translation and the strategies used to manipulate it in the target language in the context of the advocacy of foreignizing translation as a practice that does not minimize the alterity of the foreign text, and could therefore serve as an antidote to ethnocentrism and cultural insularity.

Drawing on a range of case studies of translation projects, the author examines the reception of Arabic literature (especially the *Arabian Nights*) in nineteenth-century England. In his analysis of the period's major translations from Arabic (by Edward Lane, Richard Burton and Wilfred Blunt), he argues that the conception of how similar or different Arab culture was from English (and Western) culture, and the way this perceived difference or similarity was communicated through translation, had a major political significance at a time that witnessed the rise of British colonialism in the Arab World. The long, complicated history of interaction, often confrontation, between Europe and the Arab World (and the 'Orient' in general), where (mis)representations of the Other were intricately embroiled with political struggles, provides a critical position from which to examine the crucial role of context, above and beyond the textual elements of the translation, in shaping the political effects of translation.

Examining translation techniques and decisions in the context of the translators' own goals as well as the conditions that surrounded the reception of their work, the study shows how each translator 'manipulated' his original in line with political positions that ranged from (implicit) acquiescence to steadfast resistance to colonialism. In a carefully elaborated critique of totalizing positions, the author argues that the foreignizing-domesticating model is too limited to describe the social and political function of translation and calls for a more complex understanding of the sociopolitical dimensions of translation strategies.

Tarek Shamma is Assistant Professor at the Department of Translation, United Arab Emirates University. He received his PhD in translation and comparative literature from the State University of New York at Binghamton and has published several articles in leading journals on translation and cultural representation, and on the history of translation between Arabic and English.

A groundbreaking inside analysis of translation practices that have mediated Near-Eastern canonical works for Western readers. Shamma supports his argument with fascinating data and without defensive counterattacks. His method of analysis is applicable to the translation of any work that must cross cultural boundaries.

Marilyn Gaddis-Rose
State University of New York at Binghamton

An important contribution to contemporary translation studies and its growing interest in the performativity of the translator's craft. Shamma's careful analysis of selected translations and the contexts of both their production and reception allows him to convincingly problematize the validity of prescriptivism in general. This is a most welcome, well-informed book, particularly for those of us interested in the social and political roles of translation as a fundamental element in the construction of cultures and identities.

Rosemary Arrojo
State University of New York at Binghamton

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Transcription Conventions

أ	‘
ث	th
ح	ĥ
خ	kh
ذ	ŧħ
ص	ŝ
ض	đ
ط	ŧ
ظ	ž
ع	’
غ	gh
ق	q

Note on Transliteration

Each translator examined in this book employed a distinctive methodology of representing Arabic letters, especially those which have no equivalents in English. As these methodologies were integral to the respective translators’ purposes and strategies, I have found it necessary to preserve each translator’s own spelling system, despite the inconsistencies of transliterating one Arabic word in more than one form.

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Introduction

> *We travellers are in very hard circumstances. If we say nothing but what has been said before us, we are dull and we have observed nothing. If we tell anything new, we are laughed at as fabulous and romantic*.
>
> *Lady Mary Wortley Montague*

The "literal" v. "free" translation debate is one of the oldest in the field of translation. From the early reflections of Cicero and St. Jerome, through Martin Luther, Alexander Tytler and Friedrich Schleiermacher, down to the modern and postmodern formulations of Eugene Nida, Walter Benjamin, George Steiner, and Laurence Venuti, it has continued to frame investigations of the nature of translation and the duty of the translator in the Western tradition. Quite often, positions on the degree of permissible linguistic and stylistic deviation from the source text have given rise to full-fledged translation theories. Regardless of the specific terminology employed[1] – faithful/free, word-for-word/sense-for-sense, rank-bound/rank-unbound, overt/covert – the fundamental question remains the same: how should the translator handle the difference of the source text? Should it be emphasized or mitigated? Should the translation draw attention to itself or try to remain invisible? A famous statement of the problem can be found in Friedrich Schleiermacher's "On the Different Methods of Translating" (1813/1997: 229):

> The translator either (1) disturbs the writer as little as possible and moves the reader in his direction, or (2) disturbs the reader as little as possible and moves the writer in his direction [...] in approach 1 the translators works to compensate for his readers' unfamiliarity with the source language, by sharing with them the very image and impression he has gained through familiarity with the work as written in the original language, and in so doing nudging them toward that (from them truly alien) position which he has come to occupy. If on the other hand [...] the translation would voice a Roman author, say, in a German context, allowing him to address Germans as if he had originally been German, then its goal must not be to assimilate the author to the translator [...] but to haul him bodily into the German readers' world, making him or her their peer.

[1] Obviously, my choice of "literal" v. "free" is only an operational one.

While both literal and free translations have been put to different uses and enlisted in different ideological struggles throughout history, one can safely accept Lawrence Venuti's view that literal translation has been generally marginalized in modern translation studies in the West. At least since the Renaissance, free translation established itself as an orthodoxy, with literal translation condemned as disfiguring translationese (Robinson 1998: 126; Bruni 1424/1997: 57).

To be sure, literalist practices did not totally disappear. They surfaced most notably in the work of the German Romantics of the nineteenth century. Translators and scholars such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, August von Schlegel, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, eschewed the excessive freedom exercised by the French neoclassicists in assimilating foreign works to their linguistic and literary tradition. Thus, in contrasting the two choices with which the translator is faced, Schleiermacher categorically sided with the literal, "reader-to author" approach. This line of thought was picked up in the twentieth century by such scholars as Walter Benjamin, George Steiner, and Antoine Berman. Yet, as Douglas Robinson puts it, these were for the most part "underground" practices (*ibid.*). For a long time, the predominant trend in modern translation theory and practice was "fluent translation", which conforms to the linguistic and aesthetic norms of the target culture, producing naturalized texts that "do not read like translations". This is the ideal sought in Eugene Nida's linguistic theory of "dynamic (or "functional") equivalence", one of the most influential translation paradigms of the twentieth century, and the one which arguably "inaugurated modern Translation Studies" (Rose 1993: 265). Nida maintained that the aim of translation "consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida and Taber 1969: 12).

A major shift came about with the "cultural turn" in translation studies, whereby "neither the word, nor the text, but the culture becomes the operational 'unit' of translation" (Bassnett and Lefevere: 1990). The translator emerged as a cultural mediator, playing a central role in the representation of other cultures, and, consequently, in intercultural relations, not only on the literary, but also on the political level. Political engagement became a major factor in most cultural approaches to translation, as the focus of theory shifted to the ideological and social function of translation, now analyzed from a committed, often oppositional, standpoint. Such is the position of Lawrence Venuti, whose 1987 essay "The Translator's Invisibility" Marilyn Gaddis Rose identifies as a landmark in twentieth century translation studies (1993: 266). Mounting the first persuasive rebuttal of Nida's functional equivalence, it was instrumental in introducing "a new literalism" into the field of translation (*ibid.*).

Venuti looks at translation as a "cultural political practice" (1995: 19/2008: 33). It is not only a reflection of a different culture, but is engaged in the literary and ideological conflicts of the target culture itself. Thus (1996: 196-7):

> The effects of translation are felt home as well as abroad. On the one hand, translation wields enormous power in the construction of national identities of foreign cultures and hence can play a role in racial and ethnic conflicts and geopolitical confrontations. On the other hand, translation enlists the foreign text in the maintenance or revision of literary canons in the target-language culture [...] All these social conditions permit translation to be called a cultural, political practice, constructing or critiquing ideology-stamped identities for foreign cultures, affirming or transgressing institutional limits in the target-language culture.

What is unique about translation, in other words, is that it is the voice of the Other, a space for different values and beliefs that may contradict those of the target culture, and therefore pose a challenge to them.

Predicating his analysis on the same paradigm that underlies the age-old literal/free dichotomy, Venuti argues that the translator has the choice of either erasing the alterity of the foreign text, adapting it to the expectations and belief systems of his/her prospective readers, or, conversely, of preserving its difference and opposing it to established discourses in the target language. The former method (which he calls "domesticating" translation) Venuti equates with ethnocentric violence akin to imperialism and colonialism, one which tries to appropriate others and assimilate them into its signifying structures, thereby conserving prejudices and misrepresentations of foreign peoples (as their otherness is reduced to what the receiving culture thinks of them). Moreover, domesticating translation consolidates the power hierarchy that imposes hegemonic discourses in the target culture by conforming to its worldview.

Domestication, Venuti stresses, has long been the dominant practice, at least in Anglo-American translation theory and practice. It is the driving force behind the valorisation of transparent translations (those which "do not read like translations"), where the negation of difference has been used by "the hegemonic English-language nations" to uphold "the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others" (1995: 20/2008: 16). In opposition and redress, he advocates a "foreignizing" strategy of translation. By its openness to other cultural and social values, and its tolerance (and preservation) of the foreignness of other texts, this strategy "can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interest of democratic geopolitical relations" (*ibid*). Foreignizing translation

defies dominant discourses in the target culture, which try to disguise themselves as (the only) "natural" or "normal", by exposing them to be relative, culture-specific, and hence constructs of power. Furthermore, foreignizing methods liberate the translator from the invisible status to which he/she has so long been consigned, as a neutral mediator who exercises the least extent of intervention and allows the original to be seen through the translation, unchanged and unmediated.

Similar strategies have been prescribed in some postcolonial approaches to translation. In their refusal to engage in assimilative appropriations of the Other, and their attempt to recover the long repressed voice of the colonized, some postcolonial theorists have called for translations that deliberately foreground the foreignness of the original − whether through literalism (Gayatri Spivak, Tejaswini Niranjana), "bilingualism or translingualism" (Faiq 2001: 42), which keep texts "suspended between languages, suggesting the translator's incapacity to escape the influence of the source language and embrace the fullness of the target language" (Simon 1999: 71), or through other forms of "plurilingual" writing (Bergvall) that inhabits a "hybrid" space "in-between" languages and cultures, which Bhabha calls a "third space".

This study undertakes to analyze and evaluate these arguments, which have gained wide circulation and acceptability in modern translation theory. I examine the question of difference in translation and the strategies used to manipulate it in the target language in the context of the advocacy of foreignizing translation as a practice that does not minimize the alterity of the foreign text, and could, therefore, be an antidote to ethnocentrism and cultural insularity. I use case studies of various translation projects to test Venuti's and similar hypotheses and reveal their limitations. Focusing on the social and political realities that surrounded these projects and influenced their reception, I will argue that their impact in the target culture was far more problematic and complex than the narrow problem of the strategy with which they treated the foreignness of the translated text. My contention is that the foreignizing-domesticating model is too limited to describe the social and political function of translation, which is governed, in addition to the translator's techniques and individual intentions, by the larger context of reception, and the relation of the translated text to other texts in its cultural environment.

The choice of the translation of Arabic literature in nineteenth-century England is a strategic one for several reasons. The long, complicated history of interaction, often confrontation, between Europe and the Arab World (and the "Orient"[2] in general), where (mis)representations of the Other were intricately

[2] It should be clear that such terms as "the East", "the Orient", "the West", "Orientalists", etc., involve a certain degree of generalization, or even vagueness, which merely reflects the way in which they were used and understood in the contexts under study.

embroiled with political struggles, provides a critical position from which to examine the crucial role of context, above and beyond the textual elements of the translation, in the political effects of the translation. This is a key component of my analysis. Moreover, the nineteenth century saw the rise of British colonial expansion in the Middle East, especially in Egypt. Hence, the study of contemporary British representations of Arabs and Muslims through translation, and its implications in colonial power relations, will allow us to evaluate theoretical formulations of translation and power, especially as handled in postcolonial studies.

Chapter One is a study of William Edward Lane's 1839 translation of the *Arabian Nights*, the first English translation to be made directly from Arabic. The chapter argues that the turn of the nineteenth century saw a shift in the conception of the Arab and Muslim world which reflected the contemporary development of British imperialism. From the English translation of Antoine Galland's French version (1704) to Lane's translation of the Arabic classic, images of the Arab world increasingly focused on difference, as a result of the progressive involvement of British imperialism in the Middle East. As a result, Lane's translation embraced literalism, a strategy which produced foreignized representations and was a means of collecting information about prospective colonies. Chapter Two analyses another foreignizing translation of the *Arabian Nights*, that of Richard Francis Burton (1885-88). While Lane's translation utilized the informative function of literalism, Burton's centred on the emotive, portraying the Orient as a place of mystery, moral laxity, sensual pleasures, and unbridled emotions. For that purpose, the "foreignizing" technique of his translation emphasized the outlandish character of Arab culture, and thus was not as ethnodeviant as foreignzing translation is supposed to be. On the contrary, rather than disrupting the feelings of moral complacency and cultural superiority of its readers, it eventually corroborated these feelings. For it served to reaffirm Victorian belief systems by depicting deviations from them as bizarre and abnormal, if somehow entertaining. Chapter Three examines the opposite pole of translation strategy, domesticating translation, adopted for purposes that are supposed to be the privilege of foreignizing strategies. Wilfred Scawen Blunt's translation (along with his wife, Lady Anne Blunt) of *The Celebrated Romance of the Stealing of the Mare* (1892) and *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia* (1903) assimilated the Arabic works to English literary and artistic standards, especially those of chivalric romance. Moreover, the translators tried to underline the similarities between Arabic and European cultures, systematically emphasizing, and often magnifying, those features of the source texts that pointed to a shared ground of experience. The translators' goal, however, was not ethnocentric. In fact, the familiarizing techniques they

used were intended to combat stereotypes about Arab culture which depicted it as alien and, consequently, inferior, thereby serving the interests of colonial expansion and exploitation. Finally, the Conclusion proposes a different perspective on the evaluation of foreignness in translation that tries to take account of the complex contextual factors involved, instead of prescribing particular strategies a priori.

The aim of this study is certainly not to provide conclusive answers to the question of translation difference – much less to show which translation strategy is better or more effective. Rather, it is an attempt to expand our understanding of the management of difference in translation by examining this issue in various situations and from different angles. It is hoped that this will help us attain a broader understanding of the foreignizing-domesticating problem beyond the normative, and simplistic, either/or context in which it is often considered.

1. Colonial Representation and the Uses of Literalism

Edward William Lane's Translation of The Arabian Nights

In the history of the reception of the *Arabian Nights* in English, two translations stand as defining turning points − the French of Galland and the English of Lane. An analysis of the former is indispensable for understanding the latter. For Galland's translation shaped English, and European, views, of the *Nights* for a long time, and Lane had to work in reference to, if against, it. More than that, the way that Lane's translation supplanted Galland's was symptomatic of a significant change in the conception of the Arab and Muslim world in England, as the result of new political realities in British relations with this region. An examination of this transition, as reflected in Lane's translation, would help us explore some important issues of translation as cultural representation in its political context. In particular, it will allow us to interrogate some of the most influential formulations of resistance in postcolonial translation studies and reveal their limitations.

1. The Age of Galland

Antoine Galland's French translation of the *Arabian Nights* (1704–17) not only introduced the storybook to Europe for the first time; it had a powerful impact on the way this work − and by extension the culture that produced it − was to be conceived and appreciated for a long time to come. Even in the English-speaking world, many of the later translators had to define their aims and justify their choices in relation to that inaugural work. Thus, an analysis of the conditions that surrounded Galland's translation, and the strategies of representation that he used and popularized, can shed an illuminating light on subsequent projects, especially those that attempted a departure with, or an improvement on, the French Orientalist's version.

Antoine Galland (1646-1715) was an eminent French scholar of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. His knowledge of Oriental cultures and languages was based on three extended visits to the Levant. First, he served as an attaché to the French embassy at Constantinople between 1670 and 1675, when he travelled extensively in Turkey and Syria, familiarizing himself with the region, and collecting coins, antiques, and manuscripts. Then in 1676, and again in 1679, he returned to the region for scientific research that involved chiefly numismatic studies.

Galland's major works in the field of Eastern literature before the *Arabian Nights* include *Les paroles remarquables, les bons mots et les maximes des orientaux* [*The Remarkable Sayings, Apothegms, and Maxims of the Eastern Nations*] (1694), a collection of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish adages and proverbs (which appeared in English translation in 1795), a translation of the Koran (1694), and his contribution to the *Bibliotheque orientale* (1697), which he completed and prefaced after the death of Barthélemy d'Herbelot, the principal author. This work was an ambitious attempt to compose an encyclopaedia of Islam that incorporated the most up-to-date contemporary information on the subject. Standing at the threshold of modern academic Orientalism, it had an enormous influence on subsequent generations of scholars and artists in France and Europe.

Around 1698 Galland completed "Sindbad the Sailor", a translation from one or more of the Arabic manuscripts that presented the story as independent. It is clear that Galland had until then known nothing about the *Arabian Nights*. But in 1701, while he was seeing the translation through the press, he learned that "Sindbad" was "extracted from a vast collection of similar stories, in several volumes, entitled *The Thousand and One Nights*. This discovery obliged me to suspend the printing and focus my efforts on retrieving the collection" (qtd. in Mahdi 1994: 18-19).[3] Later in the same year, "a friend from Aleppo residing in Paris" told him that "he has received from his country a book I had asked him to get for me. It is in three volumes, entitled [...] The *Thousand Nights*" (*ibid.*: 19). But the manuscript in question was incomplete; it contained only 282 nights, and broke off half way through the story of "Camaralzaman" (*ibid.*: 23). In 1702, Galland received a fourth volume which furnished him with the rest of the incomplete story and some other tales. The remaining 1001 nights were complemented with the previously translated "Sindbad", a number of tales transmitted to Galland (orally or in written outline) by a

[3] In spite of his best efforts, Galland never managed to obtain a copy of the *Nights* that contained "Sindbad"; nor has any subsequent scholar. It seems certain that the story was never part of the collection.

Hanna Diab, a Syrian priest visiting Paris,[4] and, finally, two stories translated by François Pétis de la Croix, Galland's colleague at the Collège Royal, which the publisher added to the collection without Galland's permission.[5] Lacking the dénouement of the frame tale, Galland invented one himself.

Les mille et une nuits, contes arabes [The Thousand and One Nights, Arab Tales] appeared in twelve volumes between 1704 and 1717, the last two volumes published in 1717 after Galland's death from manuscripts that he had prepared. By all accounts, the work was an outstanding and immediate success. It "spread like wildfire all over Europe" (Rosenthal 1974: 346), and pirated editions appeared almost immediately in The Hague (Macdonald 1930: 414). The first two volumes, published in 1704, were reissued the next year, and the book went through numerous reprints, including pirated editions (Macdonald 1932: 388). Moreover, the popularity of the *Nights* created a demand for more oriental material: the "Arabian Tales" were soon followed by "Turkish" as well as "Persian" tales – *L'histoire de la sultane de perse et des vizirs, contes turcs* [The History of the Sultan of Persia and his Ministers, Turkish Tales] (1707), and *Les mille et un jours, contes persans* [The Thousand and One Days, Persian Tales] (1710-12). Both claimed to be translations from respective sources, and were highly popular. It was not until the twentieth century that *The Thousand and One Days* was revealed to be pure fabrication. The author, François Pétis de la Croix, professor of Oriental languages at the Collège Royal, collected a vast body of stories, story elements, themes, and motifs, invented others, arranged them into 1001 days, and attached the whole to a frame tale of his own creation (Fähndrich 2000: 98-99).

There followed countless other imitations, adaptations, abridgements, enlargements, and "continuations" (Conant 1908: XXIV). These works fuelled an "Oriental renaissance", reflected in a fascination with all aspects of Eastern life. On the literary level, the most remarkable product of this trend was "the Oriental Tale". That was a new genre which employed Oriental themes and settings for various purposes. It flourished in England, France, and other European countries throughout the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries, and was employed by figures as diverse as Joseph Addison, François-Marie Voltaire, Benjamin Disraeli, Oliver Goldsmith, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Lord Byron, Charles Montesquieu, William Beckford, and Dr. Johnson.

Les mille et une nuits was translated into English shortly after its appearance in French. The exact date of the first edition (in six volumes) has not been

[4] These include, among others, "Aladin" and "Ali Baba". The originals of these "orphan tales" have never been located, in spite of some false leads (see Mahdi 1994: Chapter II).

[5] For a detailed account of the intricate process of composing Galland's "original" see Macdonald (1932: 387-98), and, especially, Mahdi (1994: 17-49).

ascertained, but studies have confirmed the existence of an English version as early as 1706, and possibly earlier (Su Fang 2003: 21). It was, by all accounts, a commercial edition prepared in haste to bank on the success of the French translation. Due to this fact, and also to the inferior quality of the print (which is probably the main reason that it has not survived), this edition has been dubbed the "Grub Street Edition". The identity of the first translator is unknown; MacDonald believes that he "turned Galland's artistic French into the strangest Grub Street English" (1932: 405). It was these early editions that gave the collection the name which has remained with it to this day. It was part of the voluminous title *Arabian Nights Entertainments: consisting of One Thousand and One Stories, told by the Sultaness of the Indies, to divert the Sultan from the Execution of a Vow he had made to marry a Lady every Day, and have her cut off next Morning, to avenge himself for the Disloyalty of his first Sultaness*.

As was the case with the French version, the book was a tremendous success in England. Within few years the tales were so popular that a literary allusion could be made to their title, as one could see from Charles Gildon's collection of stories *The Golden Spy: or, A Political Journal of The British Nights Entertainments*, published in 1709. By 1718, at least five editions had been published (*Times* 1922: 176). Translations of "Persian" and "Turkish" tales followed in rapid succession.

Several explanations have been given for the instantaneous enthusiasm with which the *Arabian Nights* was met in Europe. The most common and widely accepted of these is that it represented "a natural reaction from the dominant classicism of Boileau" (Conant 1908: xxiii). "In France", Martha Pike Conant says, "the popularity of the fantastic and marvellous stories [...] had testified to a truant desire to escape from the strict artistic rules and classical ideals [...] Conditions were similar in England" (243). According to this argument, the "wild imagination" and the vast range of "intense and spontaneous emotions" which the tales displayed touched a nascent romantic spirit which later culminated in the "nineteenth-century romanticists who enthusiastically welcomed *Le Orientales*" (*ibid.*: xxiii).

On the other hand, in the larger historical context of Europe's relationship with the East, and specifically Muslim countries, military and political developments in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries made possible an appreciation of these cultures in entirely fresh ways. The Ottoman threat to Europe, the most recent stage in a long series of aggressions and counter-aggressions that had fashioned the European view of the Muslim East, had all but vanished with the failure of the siege of Vienna in 1683. Consequently, as Norman Daniel remarks, "as the centres of power in the world shifted, fear

gave way to patronage" (1966: 11). Of the host of negative representations developed over centuries of military and cultural confrontations, those of a terrifying and destructive enemy disappeared, while the attendant images of lasciviousness, license, and superstition (central to the hostile European conception of Islam) were relegated to the unthreatening realm of the exotic, and even the romantic. Thus, "during the eighteenth century, this world of Turks and Muslims developed into a world full of magic in the minds of Europeans, who no longer felt threatened by it" (Fähndrich 2000: 97).

Galland and His Readers

It should be noted that Galland took up his translation to satisfy a popular appetite for a brand of Arabic fiction that was often considered, by scholarly standards, much inferior to the "serious" literature to which he had so far dedicated his career. His remarks on the projected translation give us a clear idea about the context in which he saw his work. In a letter to Pierre-Daniel Huet on February 25, 1701, he said: "I also have another little translation from Arabic, stories just as good as the fairy tales published these last years in such profusion"[6] (qtd. in Mahdi 1994: 19).

Therefore, it is clear that Galland went about his new project with a different approach from the one he had adopted in his earlier works. His *Les paroles remarquables*, for example, had shown that he "could work with philological, bibliographical, and historical exactitude. He evidently considered that these qualities would be out of place in putting the *Nuits* before the public" (MacDonald 1932: 411). In other words, Galland, as translator of the *Nights*, was the popularizer rather than the scholar: he was anxious to make the tales acceptable and desirable to his readers. Not only did he have to defer to the modes of popular literature, but, specifically, to the tastes of the "society ladies" who were, as was the case with Perrault's fairy tales, his "most influential partisans" (Irwin 1994: 19). Indeed, Galland's translation was dedicated to a distinguished lady of the French court, "Marchioness D'o", who had already lent her support to his translation of "the seven Arabian stories" (Galland 1813).[7] Marchioness D'o was the daughter of the deceased Gabriel-Joseph

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[6] Here Galland is obviously referring to such works as Perrault's *Contes de ma mere l'oye* [Tales of Mother Goose] (1697) and Marie d'Aulnoy's *Contes de fees* [Fairy Tales] (1697) and *Les contes nouveaux ou les fées à la mode* [New Tales, or the Fancy of the Fairies] (1698). It is a testament to Galland's literary acumen that he knew exactly what kind of framework to adopt for his tales. The association of the *Arabian Nights* with magical and fairy tales has survived to this day.

[7] For the English translation of Galland, I have relied on the Oxford University Press

de Guilleragues, former French ambassador in Constantinople, under whom Galland had served for almost a decade (1679-88). By then she had become a lady in waiting to the Duchess de Bourgogne, wife of Louis, Duc de Bourgogne, Dauphine de France.

The hallmark of Galland's style was to domesticate the tales into the acceptable literary modes of the time, while consciously preserving, or even enhancing, their exotic flavour. Thus in the "frenchified dialogue" (Gerhardt 1963: 20) of the *Nuits*, characters address each other as "*madame*", "*monsieur*", and "*seigneur*"; "*courtisans*" address their king as "*votre Majesté*" [Your Majesty]. People use "sequins" instead of dinars, and are transported in "*equipages*"; and houses are equipped with porches. When he added descriptions such as "un [...] jardin [...] consacré aux fètes et aux divertissements de la cour" [garden dedicated to fetes and diversions of the court] (1840 I: 3), or "sa maison était le rendezvous de toute la noblesse de la cour" [his house was a rendezvous place for all the nobles of the court] (1840 II: 44), it was obviously the French court of the eighteenth century that Galland had in mind. Moreover, Arabic names were modified so as to mitigate their foreign sound. Names like Zobéide, Amine, Giafar, Schemseinihar, Noureddin, Casgar had an appealing exotic cachet, without sounding too cumbersome. When the "literal" translations later made their debut in nineteenth-century England, the suddenly jarring foreignness of the names was the first and most obvious cause of complaint.

Galland was careful to gloss over any customs that might have struck his readers as radically alien. As Mia Gerhardt observes, Galland was translating for an audience that "mocked at any word or gesture that departed from its own polite custom; it resented the bizarre" (1963: 19). Hence, in the story of "Noureddin and the Beautiful Persian" (1840 II: 134-181), Galland omitted a reference to circumcision; indeed, mention of this practice was suppressed in the entire translation. Also, in the context of the "Story of Ali Ebn Becar", the Arabic text talks about Haroun Alraschid's "concubines"; Galland has "dames ses favorites" [favourite ladies] (1840 II: 44). These changes resulted in "a certain vague generality in the description of manners, conduct and things of everyday life" (Gerhardt 1963: 73).

What is more, Galland went to great lengths to justify the actions of the characters and to explain away anything that might have rendered them unsavoury to

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World's Classics edition, edited by Robert L. Mack, a reprint of the earliest extant English version. I have also checked quotations against the French original (using the 1840 edition; see References). But neither this, nor any of the French or English printed editions I have been able to consult, has Galland's preface. For the preface I have used the electronic text of the English translation of Galland referred to as "Galland 1813".

the refined tastes of his readers. Thus, when Schahzenan discovers his wife in bed with "an officer of the guard", and proceeds to kill her, Galland provides him with a lengthy monologue in which he explains that, as king, he has to punish wickedness within his dominion, and that he has a "just resentment" as a husband, and so on (Galland 1995: 2). Moreover, Galland did not hesitate to censor the text "when modesty obliged us to it" (1813). Accordingly, the orgy in Schahriar's garden and the two brothers' encounter with the glass-box woman in the frame tale, the most erotic episodes of "Camaralzaman", and all other explicit passages, were cut out. (It should be remarked, however, that Galland was not as prudish as some later English translators were.)

Finally, when certain unfamiliar customs were indispensable to the story, Galland inserted corresponding explanatory passages into the text. In fact, he used few independent annotations, preferring rather to incorporate whatever comments he thought were necessary into the body of the narrative. In the "Story of Zobéide" (a name he invented for a nameless character), the eponymous character is in a strange palace, where she finds an "oratory", at which point Galland slips an explanation into her narrative: "it had, as we have in our mosques, a nich, that shews where we must turn to say our prayers" (1995: 129). Similarly, when she sees a little carpet laid on the floor, she clarifies that it is "like those we kneel upon when we say our prayers" (*ibid.*). In the same way, when in the tale of "Ali Ebn Becar and Schemselnihar", it is mentioned that the hero comes from "an ancient royal family of Persia", Galland supplies the context as part of the narrative: "This family continued at Bagdad ever since the mussulmen made a conquest of that kingdom" (1995: 306). Galland's translation abounds in such explanatory devices.

While a great deal of the appeal of the *Nights* derived from its novelty of form and matter, there was a limit to the extent to which one could deviate from the prevalent literary standards of the time, which were predominantly neoclassical. In order to enhance the simplicity of style and fluency of narration, Galland completely ignored the numerous poetic passages, which are interlaced with the prose narrative throughout, forming a considerable portion of the book. Also, in the third volume of the translation, he omitted Dinarzad's intervention at the beginning of every night, in which she asks her sister, Shahrazad, to tell a new tale. This repetition, he said, "has shocked a number of persons of wit and cultivation" (qtd. in Mahdi 1984: 28).[8] Similarly in the seventh volume, he announced his intention to forego the night breaks for similar reasons (Mahdi 1994: 28), thus presenting the book as a collection of independent stories, without any interruptions from the frame tale. In

[8] The first volume of Muhsin Mahdi's book (published in 1984) is an edition of Galland's Arabic source.

another gesture to neo-classical dicta, Galland was anxious to draw attention to the morally edifying value of the tales. Hence, he says in the preface to the translation: "if those who read these stories have any inclination to profit by the example of virtue and vice which they will here find exhibited, they may reap an advantage by it that is not to be reaped in other stories, which are more fit to corrupt than to reform our manners" (Galland 1813). Galland's systematic efforts to smooth out, domesticate, and tone down the tales were, of course, in line with this moralizing intention, as well as with neoclassical principles at large.

While it was necessary for Galland to acclimate the Arabic tales to the literary and social parameters of his time, it was equally important to stress their exotic character – for therein lay one of their primary attractions. Hence, Galland enveloped the tales in an ambiance of mystery, magic, opulence, and glamour – creating a world of kings and princesses, glorious palaces, intense passions, infatuated lovers, genies, and supernatural adventures. To be sure, the original work (in some ways an escapist popular fantasy about the magnificent life of the rich and powerful) did provide some grounds for this treatment. But there is no doubt that, as Hawari says (1980: 158),

> So much of the glamour of the *Nights* is [...] the work of Galland, and it follows that, as a translation, his work is crammed with material that is, strictly speaking, alien to the Arabic original in that it comes from another world – that of Galland's learning.

– or, in many cases, Galland's rich imagination. Such augmentations can be found all throughout the text; some examples are cited here at random. In the "Tale of the Three Apples", for example, the young man who has killed his wife by mistake says that he, and his father in law, "wept until midnight" [*wa bakaina 'ila nisfi alail*] (Mahdi 1984: 224). In the French they "wept three days together without intermission" (Galland 1995: 184). In the "Tale of the Five Ladies of Bagdad",[9] the first lady stands in front of a gate, through which a "Christian old man" [*shaikhun naŝrani*] hands her a jug of wine (Mahdi 1984: 127). In Galland's translation, this becomes "a Christian with a venerable, long, white beard" (1995: 66). Later in the account of the ladies' house, Galland expands the already extravagant description with "a gate of ivory" and "a great fountain faced with white marble, and full of clear water, which fell into it abundantly out of the mouth of a lion of brass" (1995: 67).

One should point out, however, that Galland's exoticism was predominantly of the romantic and fanciful type. It did not border on the grotesque or

[9] The Arabic title of this famous tale is "The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad".

the caricaturistic that distinguished the work of some later, especially British, Orientalists. The two approaches arise from different premises and have different applications. Trying to create a reader-friendly text, and at the same time influenced by the universalist principles of contemporary neoclassicism (Weitzman 1967: 1852), Galland sought to underline the similarities between the culture depicted in the *Nights* and his own. Such translators as Lane and Burton, on the other hand, were rather concerned with disparities and divergences, and therefore depicted cultures that looked fundamentally different. While these two methods may be equally misleading, it was undoubtedly the latter which was intimately linked with European imperial enterprises in the Arab and Muslim world. In fact, as will be discussed below in more detail, the transition from Galland's imaginative exoticism to the literalist praxes of Burton and Lane was reflective of – indeed, caused by – the rise of European (and especially English) colonialism in the Middle East, beginning with the second half of the eighteenth century. Norman Daniel sees this emphasis on difference as integral to the growth of imperialism (1966: 61):

> European literature began to make much of every difference between the two civilizations and veiled their basic resemblance. It is important that this was the background of the imperial movements which are the subjects of this book. It was from this literature that the young men appointed to posts in provinces of empire, in State, and Church, and commerce, had formed their first ideas of the Muslim world.

2. Galland Reconsidered

In her comparison of the *Arabian Nights* and the *Persian Tales*, Conant points to a key difference between the two collections. The latter are "far more sentimental, more fantastic, more brilliant in colour"; while in the former "there is substantial ground underfoot" (1908: 25). "May not this be one reason", she continues, "why the *Arabian Nights* has always been a greater favourite in England [...] and why, in France, the popularity of the *Persian Tales* has equalled, if not surpassed, that of the *Arabian Nights*?" (*ibid.*).

Conant does not explain why this realistic basis should have made the *Arabian Nights* more popular in England. One may seek an explanation in Edward Said's distinction between British and French approaches to the Orient in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "For the former", he says (1978/1994: 169).

> the Orient was India, of course, an actual British possession; to pass through the Near Orient was therefore to pass en route to a major

> colony. Already, then, the room available for imaginative play was limited by the realities of administration, territorial legality, and executive power.

In contrast, the French outlook "was imbued with a sense of acute loss", in places where "France, unlike Britain, had no sovereign presence. The Mediterranean echoed with the sounds of French defeats, from the Crusades to Napoleon" (*ibid.*); this "was an Orient of memories, suggestive ruins, forgotten secrets, hidden correspondences, and almost virtuosic style of being [...] solidly fixed in an imaginative, unrealizable (except aesthetically) dimension" (*ibid.*: 170).

This disparity in perspective could help us understand the developing attitudes toward the *Arabian Nights* in England from the time of Galland's translation into the nineteenth century. For it was, in fact, colonial projects that created the need which Conant observed in England for more realistic representations of the East. In particular reference to the *Arabian Nights*, "with the growth of British mercantile interests in India and Egypt, the emphasis on information became a recurrent theme in writings about the *Nights* [...] the tales were seen as more impressive, and ultimately, more useful than travel accounts" (Musawi 1981: 27).

One should guard against the impression, created and sustained by much later scholars, not without their own agendas, that Galland presented the *Arabian Nights* merely as fatuous stories of magic and fairyland, without any foundation in the lived realities of the societies that produced them. In 1886, in his discussion of the various translations then available in English, Stanley Lane-Poole expressed a view of Galland that had by then become orthodox. In his commentary on Lane's translation, he maintained that the tales "had previously been treated merely as romantic fictions, and in the present day those who have been educated upon the English versions after Galland would probably say that the tales consisted mainly of impossible adventures with genies and afrits, and suchlike supernatural elements" (1886: 192). This verdict reflects more the changes in (English) Orientalist scholarship since the European debut of the *Arabian Nights* than an objective evaluation of Galland's own methods and purposes. For the potential value of the *Nights* as representing Eastern societies was not totally ignored by the French translator. In fact, Galland's preface to his translation commends the tales, not only for their "diverting" qualities, their "wonders", and the "surprising events" they contain, but also for "the account they give of the customs and manners of the eastern nations, and of the ceremonies of their religion, as well Pagan as Mahometan" (Galland 1813). That claim the early English translators did

not fail to bring to the attention of their readers. The "Grub Street Edition" provided this information as part of the title, which advertised the stories as "Containing an Accurate Account of the Customs, Manners, and Religion, of the Eastern Nations, the Tartars, Persians, and Indians, than is to be met with in any Author hitherto published". Hence, eighteenth-century travellers in the Middle East who had formed their first notions of the region from the *Nuits* were always on the lookout for the world described in the book – and they usually found it. In 1717, only few years after the appearance of Galland's translation, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, travelling in Turkey, wrote to her sister in England, confirming the authenticity of the stories: "This is but too like (says you) the Arabian tales [...] You forget, dear sister, those very tales were writ by an author of this country and (excepting the enchantments) are a real representation of the manners here" (1717: 110). Such a statement incidentally points to the powerful impression that the *Arabian Nights* made on its readers' imagination, even within few years of its first appearance in Europe. But there are significant differences between Galland's and later views of the relation of the *Nights* to its place of origin. First, the sociological dimensions of the book were by no means viewed as its most significant merits, and, therefore, no great care was taken to reproduce them in full. Second, the portrayal of manners and customs was not part of a systematized, and politically significant, apparatus of representation; for the most part, it was meant for the readers' enjoyment of exotic cultures.

Gradually throughout the eighteenth century, as the demand increased for first-hand knowledge of Eastern regions, one could discern a growing dissatisfaction with Galland's work. The opinion was repeatedly stated that, while the French translator did preserve some of the "manners and customs of the orientals" (Weber 1812: 509), his translation was free and adaptive to an extent that greatly distorted the socially descriptive value of the original. The *Arabian Nights*, it was said time and again, was a mine of data about the social life of the East, and a fuller, more accurate, translation would consequently be an immense addition to European knowledge on the subject. In fact, Galland's techniques seemed so domesticating to many readers that there was a long-standing and widely held belief that the *Arabian Nights* might be his own invention. Almost eight decades after the first publication of the *Nuits*, the English poet and essayist James Bettie still had his doubts (1783: 509):

> whether the tales be really Arabick, or invented by Mons. Galland, I have never been able to learn with certainty. If they be Oriental, they are translated with unwarrantable latitude; for the whole tenor of the style is in the French mode

This, Bettie said, "takes away from the value of the book, because I wish to see Eastern manners in the Eastern tales" (*ibid.*: 510).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, recurrent calls for a new translation converged almost into a consensus. In 1798, a letter to the editor in the September issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* sparked off a debate on the accuracy, or lack thereof, of Galland's version.[10] After assuring the readers that the authenticity of the *Nights* as a product of the East, and as illuminating of its societies, has been verified by the testimony of travellers, the writer cites a widespread view that "The French translation, from which our English is made, is generally supposed to be very defective" (W. W. 1798: 757). He goes on to ask for a remedy: "Would not a new translation, therefore, be gladly received by the publick?" (*ibid.*). In the 1799 January issue, Alexander Russell, author of the *Natural History of Aleppo*, and himself a long-time traveller and resident in the East, complains, in his commentary on a new English translation of Galland, about "the wretched translation into which they have been *done* now near a century" (1799a: 55). The article also refers to a new "accurate" translation by Jonathan Scott,[11] "A work very earnestly to be desired" (1799a: 55). In the 1799 February issue, in an article entitled "*Dr* Russell on the *authenticity* of the Arabian Tales", the same writer articulates more specifically his objections to Galland. The "deviation from the original", he argues, "is greater than even a free translation seemed to require" (1799b: 92). Moreover, relying on his own first-hand knowledge of the environment of the *Nights*, Russell protests that "great liberty, in accommodation to French manners, has been taken with the original [...] a few scenes [...] have with propriety been softened or suppresst: but other descriptions, tho' expressive of Oriental *costume*, have with less reason been omitted" (1799b: 92-93). Around the same time, and in reference to the same English edition of Galland, *The Monthly Review* calls for "a complete translation, from the Arabic, of the whole series of adventures" (1799: 475). Such an undertaking was highly needed for "the accurate delineation of eastern manners, or (to speak more correctly) of the manners of the Moslems, which they exhibit" (*ibid.*). The reviewer's observation on the specificity of the society of the *Nights* to Muslim milieus underlines the maturation of the sociological perception of the book from the early editions' vague designation of "the Eastern Nations, the Tartars, Persians, and Indians". Later in the early nineteenth century, the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* reiterated the necessity of a new, complete,

[10] It is more than likely that this surge in interest in the social dimensions of the best-known literary product of the Arab and Muslim world had been instigated by the French occupation of Egypt a few months earlier in the same year.

[11] As it happens, this project never materialized as advertised.

translation: "Galland did not translate fifth of the entire[12] – and [...] great light would be thrown on Asiatic manners, and literary history in general, by the translation of the entire" (Ferguson 1825: 63).

As argued above, British colonial expansion was a major factor behind the increasing demand for more concrete and "genuine" representations of the East.[13] Together with, and partly as a result of, this phenomenon, the turn of the nineteenth century saw a transition in the nature of Orientalist knowledge itself. The "Oriental Renaissance", whose most representative literary product was the Oriental Tale, came to an end (de Meester 1915: 2)

> in or about 1786, the year of the publication of [William Beckford's] *Vathek*, the last important oriental novel. After this, Orientalism developed in a quite different line, we might say a more scientific line, whereas in the eighteenth century it had been chiefly imaginative.

Edward Said points to the "difference between representations of the Orient before the last third of the eighteenth century and those after it (that is, those belonging to what I call modern Orientalism)", namely "that Europe came to know the Orient more scientifically, to live in it with greater authority and discipline than before" (1978/1994: 22).

Thus began the era of "the more modern and scholarly translations of various works made directly from oriental languages" (Conant 1908: xviii). Orientalism was now institutionalized; it evolved from a set of individual observations into a scholarly discipline that presented itself as grounded on verifiable facts, scientific methodology, and first-hand contact with its subject. These were the new requirements for practitioners in the field, and although imaginative and personal approaches did not entirely lose their appeal, or even their popularity, the new thrust of Orientalist scholarship "reduced the personalities of even its most redoubtable individualists [...] to the role of an imperial scribe" (Said 1978/1994: 197). This new conception of the East is best described by Benjamin Disraeli in his oriental novel *Tancred: or The New Crusade* (1847): "The East is a Career" (qtd. in Said 1978/1994: xiii).

3. Lane and *The Arabian Nights*

William Edward Lane was probably the most renowned and influential English Orientalist of the nineteenth century. Following in the footsteps of Sir William

[12] This exaggeration seems to have been caused by Galland's own imperfect knowledge of his Arabic sources (see Mahdi 1994: 26-7).
[13] See also Ahmed (1978: 3ff).

Jones (1746-1794), and in line with the growing organization of academic Orientalism, he was the one scholar who did most to turn English Orientalism from disparate, and often highly subjective, impressions and pronouncements into an objective, methodical, and in his case ostensibly impersonal, field of study. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Lane chose strict specialization: of Eastern languages, he knew only Arabic, which he mastered thoroughly; his country of specialization was Egypt, which was the only Eastern land he visited, but one where he spent twelve years of his life, trying to assimilate the local culture to the fullest possible extent. Edward Said regards him as one of the builders of modern Orientalism, who tried to "place Orientalism on a scientific and rational basis" (1978/1994: 122).

Lane's few, but influential, works do have a foundational character about them. His *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* was the first attempt in English at a systematic and comprehensive description of Egypt – indeed, of any Eastern country with the exception of India – that adopted the objective, disinterested tone of scientific methodology, in stark contrast to the personalized sketches popular at the time. His translation of the *Arabian Nights* was the first to be made into English directly from the Arabic, and was the first accurate, and "complete", European version of the book. His *Arabic-English Lexicon*, though not the first of its kind, was unprecedented in depth and scope; it still holds some academic value to this day. While Lane's characteristic methods were partly a matter of personal inclination and aptitude, it was the political and literary context of the time which made them particularly relevant and shaped them in accordance with its own demands and expectations.

The British Colonial Interest in Egypt

British imperial plans in Egypt, and the Near East in general, were shaped for the most part by this country's position on the route to British colonial possessions in south and east Asia, and, above all of course, in India. British interest in India as a source of trade and goods went back as early as 1600 with the establishment of the East India Company and the beginning of its encroachments in the Indian subcontinent. As a monopolistic trading body, the company became involved in politics and acted as an agent of British imperialism in India through the mid-nineteenth century. The British continued to advance their political and commercial interests in India slowly in fierce competition with other colonial powers in the region, notably France and Holland. A turning point came in 1763 with the end of the Seven Years' War and the signing of the Treaty of Paris, whereby the British took hold of

most French and Dutch possessions in India, gaining the undisputed upper hand in the region.

But the French continued their attempts to counter British colonial expansion by disrupting their communication with their Indian colonies. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European communication with India was conducted through the long, slow path of the Cape of Good Hope. Being excluded from this route, however, the French long entertained the idea of establishing a direct line of communication between their colonies in India and the Eastern Mediterranean. As H. L. Hoskins observes, "French interest in the Near East is of long standing. Sentimental, if not political and economic, connections have been maintained with but few interruptions ever since the time of the Crusades" (1924: 312). The setbacks of the Seven Years' War did not end the French efforts to garner influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, and especially in Egypt. Indeed, it is possible that British interest in that region was stimulated in the first place by the French manoeuvres there.

The first proposal for an "Overland Route" to India was put forward in 1775 by Warren Hastings, the then governor general of India. It was suggested that this "hitherto untried Channel of Trade" would afford a faster and more direct route of communication with England, as well as potentials for trade (Hoskins 1924: 313-14). There were various possible versions of this path, but the most efficient, and the only practicable, one was across the Mediterranean, then through Egypt, and via the Red Sea, to Bombay. As a result, the history of British diplomacy in the Near East throughout the last third of the eighteenth century is dominated by an intense rivalry with France for political control and trade concession in Egypt.

In fact, the appointment of George Baldwin as the first English consul in Egypt in 1786 was for the express purpose of "the opening of a communication to India through Egypt", as stated by the consul's instructions (qtd. in Hoskins 1924: 314). Baldwin was an ambitious merchant, who had been zealously promoting the cause of the Overland Route for years. In 1778, as an agent of the East India Company in Cairo, he had proven his case "when he was able to forward to India the news of the outbreak of the war with France in time for the British to capture Pondicherry" (Searight 1979: 151). Consequently, the British managed to obtain from the Ottoman sultanate, then the suzerain of Egypt, the privilege of free passage in Egypt and navigation in the Red Sea.

But although by the end of the eighteenth century the Egyptian Overland Route had become the regular line of express communication with India, and while the English were beginning to explore its potentials for trade and public mail, this path did not develop as rapidly as expected. The main reasons seem to be its expensiveness, the hazards of sailing in the Red Sea, and the lack

of coordination among officials in India, Egypt, and England. Furthermore, the French threat was not taken seriously: "None of the heads of England", Hoskins remarks, "saw or understood the danger" (1924: 311). Thus the Overland Route had to wait for later political and military events and technological developments for its full potential to be recognized and exploited in British colonial enterprises.

When their ambitions in Egypt were thwarted by English diplomatic influence with the Ottoman government, the "French were therefore compelled to watch for favourable circumstances under which Egypt might entirely be detached from the Turkish Empire by force of arms and established as a French colony or protectorate" (*ibid.*: 317). These plans were put into effect in May of 1798 when a French expedition under Napoleon Bonaparte invaded and occupied Egypt. Having ruled out the possibility of invading England itself, Napoleon wanted to subvert England's trade with one of the mainstays of its imperial power, the Indian colony – a step that, he hoped, "will inflict upon England the severest stroke, a stroke which she will feel most, till you can give her death-blow" (qtd. in England 2001: 11). More than that, "Egypt would become an outpost of France in the East, a stepping-stone to the conquest of India" (Elgood 1931: 100). The British were now quick to recognize the threat, and a force was immediately "sent from India to block the entrance to the Red Sea at Perim" (Searight 1979: 153). In August 1, 1798, a British force led by Admiral Nelson destroyed the French fleet at the port of Abu Qir, leaving the French troops practically stranded in Egypt. From then on, the British mustered all their diplomatic and military power in the struggle to force the French out of Egypt.

The French occupation was short-lived. It came to an end in 1801 when the last French troops remaining in Egypt capitulated to the joint invasion by the British, British Indian, and Ottoman forces. But the impact on the strategic significance of Egypt (not to mention its effects on the country itself) was immeasurable. As Leila Ahmed says: "Napoleon's invasion of Egypt [...] dramatically focused attention on the country" (1978: 4). Egypt became a centrepiece of British foreign policy, as the virtual cessation of Ottoman influence in Egypt opened the country for European interference. On the other hand, the invention of the steam engine "put a new emphasis on the [overland] route" (Searight 1979: 153), as it reduced the hazards of sale in the Red Sea. British political, military, and economic intervention in Egypt grew rapidly throughout the nineteenth century until this "veiled protectorate" (*ibid.*: 118) turned into a veritable colony in 1882, when British forces invaded and occupied the country after Egyptian nationalists in the army prevailed on the English-supported ruler of Egypt, khedive Tawfiq.

The Describer of Egypt

Edward William Lane was born in 1801 in Hereford, England, the son of a Protestant minister. In his early education he showed remarkable abilities in mathematics and the classics (Lane-Poole 1877: 10). For some time he considered studying mathematics at Cambridge, and then at Oxford; he also thought of joining the church (*ibid.* 12). But these plans were eventually abandoned, and Lane joined his brother, a lithographer later to acquire some national renown, who was practicing in London. There he took up training in engraving. Although he had to give up this profession due to health reasons, it was to be of great use to him in his future descriptive undertakings: "the mechanical training of the graver was afterwards turned to admirable results in Egypt" (*ibid.* 12). It was around this time that Lane's interest in Egypt and the Arabic language began. Although little is known about this period, there is no doubt that by 1822, he was already well advanced in his study of Arabic (*ibid.* 13). After spending some years familiarizing himself with Egypt and mastering its language, Lane embarked on a journey to this country in July of 1825, the first of three extended travels, which fashioned his professional and scholarly career.

It is not clear exactly how Lane was first attracted to the East – Egypt in particular – and why he wanted to research and describe its culture as meticulously as he would later do. Poor health could be one reason, since the mild climate of the region was far more agreeable to his chronic bronchitis than the cold winters of England (Arberry 1960: 14). But this, of course, does not explain his interest in the culture and language of Egypt – much less his scholarly applications. Lane's biographer and grandnephew, Edward Lane-Poole, thought that his motive "may have been the hope of a post in the service of the British government" (1877: 14). For someone without a university degree and little professional training or experience, mastery of the language and society of Egypt, then a focus of British imperial interest, would have been sufficient credentials for a career in the civil service. Lane-Poole explained that, as Lane "was informed by those who were qualified to speak, he stood a good chance of obtaining [a government post] if he made himself well acquainted with Easterns at home" (*ibid.*).

Lane's first residence in Egypt lasted for three years. His intention was (1860/2003: 17-18):

> to throw myself entirely among strangers [...] to adopt their language, their customs, their dress; and in order to make as much progress as possible in the study of their literature, it was my intention to associate almost exclusively with Muslim inhabitants.

Here we can find one of the primary concepts that underlay Lane's interpretation and presentation of Egypt – that there is some kind of an essence that defined its "Egyptianness", or "Easternness" (unproblematic and unchanging, though very elusive), which determined its social life and intellectual production, and which it was his task to uncover. After a short stay in Alexandria, Lane soon became disappointed with it, for "the city was not Eastern enough" (Lane-Poole 1877: 19). Consequently, he headed at once for Cairo: "here at least, where all was thoroughly Eastern and on a grand scale, no after disappointment could be expected" (*ibid.* 21).

In Cairo, Lane assumed the local dress, and tried to live as one of the inhabitants. So as "not to be remarked in public by Europeans", he adopted Turkish costume, "separated myself as much as possible from the Franks, and lived in a part of the town [...] somewhat remote from the Frank quarters. Speaking the language of the country, and conforming with the manners of my Moos'lim neighbours" (Lane 2000: 90). Disguising as a native was almost a standard Orientalist practice. In fact, in his introduction to *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, Lane faulted Alexander Russell, author of the *Natural History of Aleppo*, precisely because neither he, nor his brother who supervised a revised edition of the book, was able "to assume those disguises which were necessary to enable them to become familiar with many of the most remarkable religious ceremonies, opinions, and superstitions of the people whom they have described" (1836 I: v). That was a "device", Leila Ahmed argues, which was "adopted as the means to a variety of ends – to spy on an enemy nation, to study Arabic society, to mobilize a nation in the cause of a European war" (1978: 102).

Still, in Cairo Lane did not associate exclusively with Egyptians. He joined a group of British Orientalists then residing in Egypt, who were engaged in the description of the social and cultural features of the country, ancient and modern (Thomson 2003: vii). With the progressive involvement of Britain in the region, there was a growing need for more concrete data on Egypt. Thus, by the first half of the nineteenth century, the entire country was being surveyed by scholars and anthropologists, mapped out by geographers and archaeologists, and traversed by travellers. That "was a propitious time", says Lane-Poole. "Egypt had but recently been opened up to explorers, and no one had yet fully taken stocks of her treasures" (1877: 34). Echoing a sentiment that was often repeated in Lane's writings about Egypt, Jason Thompson says: "It was an exciting moment in the Western encounter with Egypt, one that can never be replicated, for Lane and his British colleagues observed Egypt when they could enjoy the advantages of increased Western contact with it but before the implications of that contact and the forces of development and modernization

transformed it" (*ibid.*). In other words, Lane managed to catch up with Egypt while its defining essence could still be captured and recorded.

Aside from Cairo, Lane spent the rest of his journey travelling on the Nile, which he ascended twice as far south as was possible for him. His main purpose there was to study and describe ancient Egyptian monuments. All the time, he was careful to observe and record everything that he witnessed, filling several notebooks in the process. Of great help to him was the camera lucida, which had been invented in 1807. This device allowed the user to project the image of an object onto a flat surface, on which it could be traced and drawn. Complementing this technique with his decent skill in painting, Lane was able to combine the advantages of both verbal and graphic description.

Lane returned to England in 1828, and started collecting, revising, and rearranging his notes into a full-length book. The result was *Description of Egypt*, a massive study of ancient and modern Egypt, which comprised an extensive account of the ancient antiquities and history of the country, as well as its contemporary population. Yet publication was not easy. Lane met with many hardships – rejections and promises that were not fulfilled. After a series of frustrations, he decided to separate from the book his account of the modern Egyptians, "which it was thought would appear to greater advantage and be more widely read as a distinct book" (Lane-Poole 1877: 39). It turned out that Lane well understood the demands of his publishers. For soon the book was accepted by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which sponsored the publication with £400, including the expenses of another trip to Egypt that would allow the author to expand on his material. Lane returned to Egypt in 1833 and remained there until 1835, organizing his book, elaborating his descriptions, and adding more observations. The section of Lane's notes dealing with ancient Egypt was cast aside, and would never be published in his lifetime.[14]

An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians was published in 1836 to wide acclaim. "Those who had advised the Society in the matter had no cause for disappointment in the success of the book" (*ibid.*: 85). Lane's work "immediately established itself as a popular favourite" (Arberry 1943: 20). The first edition, in two volumes, was sold out within two weeks; the third edition came out in 1842, and in 1846 the book was added to the series "Knight's Weekly Volumes" (Lane-Poole 1877: 86).

Lane's account obviously met a strong demand for first-hand information on Egypt. In this regard, Lane's forte was his descriptive gifts, and his

[14] It was not to come out until 2000, when it was published by the American University in Cairo Press.

work "was pronounced a masterpiece of faithful description" (*ibid.*: 87). In the words of one reviewer, *The Manners and Customs* was the "best account that we have yet met, of the state of society and manners in Modern Egypt" (*Edinburgh Review* 1837: 172). At the same time, the political background of Lane's work was not lost on many readers. The *Quarterly Review* recognized the link between colonial expansion and the work in question (*Quarterly Review* 1837: 165):

> The occupation of Egypt by the French, and their expulsion by the English, opened a wider door to that ancient country, and gave a facility to the researches of travellers, which had not previously existed; and many learned and intellectual men, both French and English, have availed themselves of the opportunities thus afforded.

Leila Ahmed credits Lane with a central part in (1978: 199)

> the change that occurred in English ideas of the contemporary world of the Near East, from the vague and muddled conceptions and legends of the Oriental world that appeared early in the century to the Arabian world as it appears in Lane's works.

One could appreciate Lane's achievement by comparing his description of Egypt with the popular travelogues of the time, which usually consisted of a string of personal remarks, reflections, and anecdotes that derived its coherence, if any, from the subjectivity of the narrator. In contrast, Lane's works are marked by the almost total effacement of the observing self; "Lane the scholar kept a tight rein upon Lane the story-teller, and only permitted himself occasional excursions into the ridiculous" (Arberry, *Oriental* 97). The resulting accounts not only exude the imposing air of objectivity; the impersonal character of the narrative gives them a highly authoritative tone. As the describing consciousness of the observer seemingly withdraws from the narrative, the effect is one of the "facts" speaking, as it were, for themselves without any intervention or manipulation: as Lane-Poole puts it, "The objects stand before you as you read" (*Life* 35). In other words, Lane shifted the focus from the narrator to the objects of his description. Thus, while traditional travel books were structured on the progress of the journey, *Modern Egyptians* formally traces the chronology of Egyptian life: after a general introduction about the geography of the country and the physical features of its people, Lane proceeds to discuss birth rites, infancy and early childhood, domestic life, education, occupations, entertainments, public festivals, and so on, finally completing the timeline with the description of death and funeral rites. The Egyptians are

thus presented before the reader as they pass through the stages of their existence, with the author towering high over them, leading the readers through, supplying them with relevant directions, and giving meaning and context to an otherwise incoherent reality.

This technique of "show and tell" is the key to Lane's method. In the "Author's Preface" to his account of modern Egyptians, Lane first discusses briefly and formally the circumstances of his acquaintance with Egypt and the strengths of his book vis-à-vis previous undertakings in the field. Then the narrative takes an unusual turn. Lane suddenly decides to introduce in more detail one of the subjects of his description: "Perhaps the reader may not be displeased if I here attempt to acquaint him more particularly with one of my Muslim friends" (xvi). This is "the sheikh Ahmad", a bookseller and a member of a dervish order, who was Lane's acquaintance, informant, and guide around Cairo and its society. Lane describes him as a man of bizarre behaviour, with propensities for polygamy, duplicity, and glass eating. Sheikh Ahmed and his mother, who appealed to Lane for help with her son, take up more than half of the eight-page preface. It is a curious episode, standing oddly out of place after the laconic and pedantic opening passages of a writer who insists a few lines below that he is not "conscious of having endeavoured to render interesting any matter that I have related" (xx). It only adds to the confusion when Lane tells the reader after he has completed his profile of Sheikh Ahmed that other Egyptians "are not marked by similar eccentricities" (xx). Then why did Lane, one may ask, dedicate such a considerable space for this portrait in the first place? On one level, Lane's attempt, despite his declared intentions, to "render interesting" some of his accounts probably reveals his awareness of the expectations of his readers, whose experience of the Orient was enmeshed with the exotic and the uncanny. But there is more to it than that. Placed as it is at the threshold of Lane's book, and setting the stage for what is to come, this episode embodies the pattern underlying Lane's description of Egypt – a string of generalized assertions made concrete by meticulously descriptive vignettes, whose authority (and semblance of authenticity) derive specifically from their graphicness of description and precision of detail. In this manner, Egypt and its culture is, as it were, put on display for the reader to examine. We will discuss this strategy more fully in the context of Lane's translation of the *Arabian Nights*.

What can be said here is that Lane's persistence in seeing every minute aspect of the world he describes as illuminating some deeper, and usually inherent, characteristic had the effect of turning the most mundane details into cultural peculiarities. Thus Lane on Egyptian "character" (1836 I: 358):

> The natural or innate character of the modern Egyptians is altered, in a remarkable degree, by their religion, laws, and government, as well as by the climate and other causes; and to form a just opinion of it is, therefore, very difficult.

But what is so unique, one may ask, about the Egyptian "innate character" being influenced by the mentioned elements? Is there a people about whom one cannot say that they have been "altered" by "religion, laws, and government, as well as by the climate and other causes"? So why should these factors make the understanding of Egyptians especially difficult? It is only through what could be called the "framing" of the other culture – setting it off in brackets and displaying every aspect of it as an illustration of some fundamental difference – that Lane could produce the impression that he is dealing with a special case. Furthermore, Lane's microscopic attention to details could make even mundane practices look bizarre and unusual. The *Quarterly Review* article quoted above made this point explicitly (1837: 166):

> Mr. Lane may safely be set down for an honest writer: he not only tells truth, and the whole truth, but a great deal more of it than was necessary to make his work pleasant to his readers. What we mean is this; whole pages are employed in an endless repetition of the idle ejaculations, extracted chiefly from the Koran, by which, on the most trivial occasions, the Egyptians are in the habit of taking the name of God in vain, to a degree that is absolutely revolting.

The Arabian Nights

In a footnote to the preface of his *Modern Egyptians*, Lane indicated a source for Egyptians manners and customs so representative that it could have substituted his field account (1836 I: v):

> There is one work, however, which presents most admirable pictures of the manners and customs of the Arabs, and particularly of those of the Egyptians; it is "The Thousand and One Nights; or, Arabian Nights' Entertainments:" if the English reader had possessed a close translation of it with sufficient illustrative notes, I might almost have spared myself the labour of the present undertaking.

Years later, after his description of Egypt had brought him fame and recognition, Lane, not content with attending the meetings of such Orientalist institutions as the Asiatic Society, where he was consulted as an authority,

was looking for a new project. The "opportunity came very quickly" (Lane-Poole 1877: 91). Lane's above remark in the *Modern Egyptians* "had drawn more attention to the work than when it was merely regarded as a collection of amusing and morally questionable tales to be given to children with due attention. Lane was asked to translate them afresh" (*ibid.*).

That was the beginning of a new era in the history of the *Arabian Nights* in England. While the social dimension of the book had not been totally overlooked, the use of the tales as the means, or often the pretext, to describe Arab, Islamic, and generally Oriental, cultures and illuminate literally all aspects of their lives, required and justified new approaches to the translation and appreciation of the book. Certainly, the European reader of the eighteenth century recognized that practices described in the tales reflected some of the customs of the society in which they had evolved: as we have seen with Galland's translation, that was part of the experience of reading the *Arabian Nights*, although it was always subordinate to its entertainment value. But the contribution of the "anthropological" methods of the nineteenth century, and particularly the one devised by Lane, was to treat the collection as no less than a microcosm of the entire world of the East – its people, culture, "mentality", and social institutions.

Lane's point of departure in the introduction to his version of the *Arabian Nights* was naturally the previous translations, and specifically that of Galland. In his preface to *The Thousand and One Nights, commonly called, in England, The Arabian Nights' Entertainments: A New Translation from the Arabic, with Copious Notes*, Lane, expressing his "unfavourable opinion of the version which has for long amused us", reiterates the by then standard complaints about Galland. The French translator, he says (1840 I: viii):

> has excessively *perverted* the work. His acquaintance with Arab manners and customs was insufficient to preserve him always from errors of the grossest description, and by the *style* of his version he has given to the whole a false character, thus sacrificing, in a great measure, what is most valuable in the original work, – I mean its minute accuracy with respect to those peculiarities which distinguish the Arabs from every other nation.

In contrast, Lane cites his own credentials – precisely, his first-hand knowledge of the region, "my having lived several years in Cairo, associating almost exclusively with Arabs, speaking their language, conforming to their general habits with the most scrupulous exactitude, and received into their society in terms of perfect equality" (*ibid.*: xi). That was, of course, the raison d'être for Lane's undertaking, and it would be his guiding principle throughout the

translation. This point is made conspicuously in the inscription of the 1859 edition, where Lane dedicates to Algernon, Duke of Northumberland, then his patron in his research on the *Arabic-English Lexicon*, "This work, considered as illustrative of the national character, domestic habits, and general manners and customs, of a remarkable people".

Even those who have formerly tried to establish a link between the *Arabian Nights* and its original environment have failed, Lane argues, to recognize its cultural specificity in their assumption that it represented the entire Orient. "It is in Arabian countries, and especially in Egypt, that we see the people, the dresses, and the buildings, which it describes in almost every case, even when the scene is laid in Persia, India, or in China" (1840 I: viii). This objection, however, does not prevent Lane from referring to "Easterns" "Muslims", and "Orientals" en bloc in his notes on the tales, or from invoking Persian and Indian social practices, among others, in his explanation of the society they ostensibly described.

Since the "illustrative" value of the *Nights* was Lane's criterion, his primary concern was to preserve the content and style of the original to the utmost extent possible.[15] Thus he tried to reproduce the style of the Arabic original in full – idioms, turns of phrase, and even grammar. The translation abounds in such expressions as "reason fled from his head"; "she is of the daughters of the great"; "my master and light of mine eye"; "he was admitted to the mercy of God" (i.e. he passed away); "he considered in his mind"; "a young man of the sons of Cairo"; "on my head be your command"; "it occurred to his mind"; "on the head and the eye"; "looking towards the Wazeer with the eye of anger". Most of these expressions are mundane, commonplace, and sometimes slang, in the original Arabic. Lane's literalism, however, gives them a curiously quaint character that could well have been exotic if it had not been for his grave tone and his all too serious anthropological pretensions.

Furthermore, Lane sometimes tried to preserve the grammar of the text, even in cases when it sounded peculiar in English. Some phrases, for instance, mirror the noun-adjective structure of the Arabic sentence: "wealth incalculable"; "wretched paupers and naked"; "blessing and peace enduring and constant". He quite often retained the repetition of "and" in Arabic: "A friendly and free and an ample welcome to you".[16] Also, Lane invariably used the exclamatory "O" as an equivalent of the Arabic "*ya*", which is a grammatical particle used with all words in the vocative case. Again, this resulted

[15] Thus Venuti's reference to Lane's "domesticating version" (2008: 269) must be seen as an unsupported assertion.

[16] In Arabic this conjunction consists of a single vowel, so it is not as awkward to repeat as in English.

in stilted and artificial English in the most unexpected places: "And what, she asked, was that, O my father"; "he said to her, O maid, the king saith unto thee"; "he said, O my son"; and so on. One can also find examples of the use of prepositions that clearly reflects that of the Arabic: "never trust in women"; "The Wazeer believed not in his escape from Kamar-ez-Zemán".

One of the typical techniques of Lane's was what could be called etymological translation, where, instead of the contemporary, immediate usage of the word, he opted for the lexicographical origin, thus giving the text much more connotation than was intended. For example, instead of translating "*fi aqalli min lahđa*" into the usual "less than a second", Lane unearths the root of the word and translates it into "in less than the twinkling of an eye" (1840 I: 302). Similarly, he translates "*ibn adam*", which in common usage means not more than "a human being", into "a son of Adam" (1840 III: 185); a cliché like "*in sha'a allah*" ("God willing") is always inflated into "by permission of Allah", and "*allahu ta'ala*" ("God Almighty") into "Allah, whose name be exalted!" and so on. Obviously, Lane felt that such treatment was necessary to illustrate the mentality of the users of the source language.

In order to represent Arabic names and expressions in the most authentic manner, Lane devised an entire orthographic system (for which he created special characters and diacritical marks) that he used to transcribe all Arabic vowels and consonants. That was one of the most palpable of his many departures from the previous versions of the *Arabians Nights*. Leigh Hunt, one of Lane's notable critics, and one not unmindful of what he saw as the strengths of the translation, regarded this as one of its problematic features. Lane's radical literalism in this regard, "names marked in this way throughout the work with an unwearied precision", Hunt noted, often worked against the author's intention of faithfulness (1839: 113):

> it is impossible for European organs, with the most conscientious efforts, to pronounce these Arabic letter *T's* like an Arab himself [...] so, in the general tone of his version, the attempt to give us the spirit of the original by means of the letter in its other sense, has undoubtedly injured it in one respect throughout.

Hunt's evaluation of Lane's handling of proper names is revealing of the problems of his literalist approach. Surely, literal is not necessarily faithful. Lane's efforts to reproduce every linguistic and stylistic feature of the Arabic presented a misleading picture of the source text, and resulted in many instances of poor storytelling. An example, out of many others, of how Lane's linguistic translation was often detrimental to the narrative art, is an episode from "the Story of Joodar". The young fisherman of the title has just encountered two mysterious

"Maghrabees",[17] who, one after the other, have paid him generously for his help in some kind of enigmatic procedure that ends in their death (1840 III: 176):

> Therefore Joodar said, He is gone to perdition! If it be the will of God, every day may Maghrabees come to me, and I will bind their hands behind them, and they shall die, and a hundred pieces of gold from each one who dieth will suffice me.

The word that Lane translates as "perdition" is "*dahia*". While in classical Arabic it does mean "calamity" or "perdition", in the vernacular of Egypt, where the story is set, it is a slang, and usually humorous, term that gives the passage a comical tone. Moreover, the solemn "If it be the will of God" misses the ironical use to which the everyday expression "*in sha'a allah*" is often put. In his later translation, Burton fares better with (1885 VI: 219):

> He is dead and damned! Inshallah, may Maghribis come to me every day, and I will pinion them and push them in and they shall die; and I will content me with an hundred dinars for each dead man.

The tone is still grave, but Burton manages to capture some of the flippancy of the passage.

Furthermore, Lane's heavy-handed prose, with its biblical overtones, and his content-based translation, adopting the same flat style throughout, obscured the nuances of character and narrative situation. Comical episodes, in particular, suffered most on this account. For example, the farcical mood which dominates the first part of the story of "Kamar-ez-Zemán" is completely diluted. This is how the petulant young man of the tale fulminates against the old minister (1840 II: 94):

> And the Wezeer wondered at his words, and asked him, Didst though see that damsel this night with thine eye and awake, or in sleep? – O ill-omened old man, said Kamar-ez-Zemán, dost though imagine that I saw her with my ear? Nay I saw her with my eyes and awake.

"ill-omened old man" is another literal translation of a colloquial humorous expression "*'ajuz alnaĥs* ". A more "functional" translation would be something like "old geezer" or "old gaffer".

Since Lane saw the *Arabian Nights* as a social document, he had no regard

[17] Inhabitants of *al-Maghrib*, Morocco, and generally all Arab North Africa west of Egypt.

for its artistic or literary integrity. Thus, he did not hesitate to delete passages and entire stories as he saw fit, as long as this did not run counter to his descriptive purposes: "I have thought it right to omit such tales and anecdotes, &c. as are comparatively uninteresting or on any account objectionable" (1840 I: xvii). The only caveat in this regard was to be "particularly careful to render them so as to be perfectly agreeable with Arab manners and customs" (*ibid.*: xviii). In fact, Lane bowdlerized the tales so extensively that Galland's version, not lacking in moralizing pretensions itself, did look in comparison "morally questionable" (Lane-Poole 1877: 91). At times, Lane explains his decision to excise certain passages: "So the first, who carried the light, told his story; but it was of a nature unfit to be here repeated" (1840 I: 440). Similarly, when the "Tale of El-Amjad and El-As'ad" tells of a woman's attraction to her step son, Lane finds the subject ineffable: "I here omit an explanation which is of a nature to disgust every person of good taste" (1840 II: 213-14). He then clarifies that this and similar details were introduced "for the gratification of the lowest class of the auditors of a public reciter", and so were "obviously of suspicious authority" (1840 II: 214). But usually the omission is not acknowledged. Instances of this practice are numerous. When the "woman of the box" boasts about the men she has had intercourse with, Lane translates this into "admitted to converse with me" (1840 I: 9). In the introductory tale, it is told that Sháh-Zemáan finds his wife in his bed "in the arms of a black slave" (Bulaq 1: 2).[18] This sounds pretty mild; Lane, however, changes the phrase into "he there beheld his wife sleeping in his bed, and attended by a male negro slave, who had fallen asleep by her side" (1840 I: 4). Lane's propriety was excessive even by Victorian standards; aside from children's editions, the only other version that rivals his translation is *Lady Burton's Edition of her Husband's Arabian Nights* (1886-1887), which was prepared "for household reading" (see 75 ff. below).

Beyond "objectionable" material, Lane abridged, outlined, or simply omitted, any passages, episodes, or stories he deemed "of little interest", or otherwise repetitive or superfluous. In the first volume, for example, he decided to excise one of the longest story cycles of the *Arabian Nights*, "Omar En-Noạmán", a chivalric saga set against the background of the Crusade wars. Though it constituted about "an eighth part of the whole work" (1840 I: 544), Lane thought the story "unworthy of a place in the present series of tales; and so much of it depends of incidents of a most objectionable nature,

[18] This translation was originally published in 1835. I have used the 1964 reissue by Maktabat al-Muthanna (see References). This edition is generally known as "the Bulaq Edition"; this is how it is referenced in the text.

that I cannot abridge it"[19] (*ibid.*). Sometimes Lane removed details that he believed were not consistent with the society or history which the *Arabian Nights* was supposed to be a reflection of. For example, when he found that the description in his standard copy of the king of the frame tale as hailing from the Persian dynasty of Sásán was incompatible with actual history, he simply ignored it: "I have here omitted, in my translation, what would render the whole work full of anachronisms" (1840 I: 22). Yet the vast majority of the omissions and abridgements took place in the latter volumes, especially the final, third one.[20] These stories held no interest because whatever illustrative material they contained had already been discussed in Lane's notes on the previous stories; the bulk of his exposition of Egyptian society had by then been almost exhausted.

Yet, there are cases when Lane omitted narrative details for no apparent reason. In the story of "Ali Shér", he cuts out an entire passage that describes how the heroine, disguised as a king, waits for her beloved Ali Shér, and how the people reacted to her apprehension (1840 II: 418). Later in the same tale, Lane deletes the description of her room on Ali's arrival (1840 II: 419-20). As the stories were seen only in terms of their use value, Lane clearly thought nothing of some inessential narrative details that had no representative function, regardless of their importance to character and dramatic situation.

The question of authenticity was paramount among the translator's concerns: "I have the satisfaction of feeling confident that I have never given, to a word or a phrase in this work, a meaning which is inconsistent with its presenting a faithful picture of Arab life and manner" (1840 I: xvii). But Lane went a step further: not only did he make sure to preserve the meanings of words and phrases; he did not hesitate to add such meanings so as to make the text even more consistent with a "faithful picture". Thus he invariably substitutes "noon-prayer", "afternoon-prayer", etc, for "noon", "afternoon", and similar indications of time. His intention was apparently to emphasize that prayer times were used by Muslims as time markers. In the story of "The Bull and the Ass", the bull addresses the ass thus: "I hope you are enjoying your time", and goes on to describe the comforts of his life: "I'm tired and you are

[19] In fact, the story does not contain anything that cannot be made readable with some moderate editing; it certainly has far less "objectionable" material than many of the stories that Lane decided to keep – "The Three Ladies of Baghdad", "Aziz and Aziza", "Ali Shér", among others – where he had no qualms about deleting any portions, however significant to the story, which he considered the least unacceptable. It is quite possible that the religiously devout Lane was antagonized by the story's vehement anti-Christian sentiments. He might also have feared that it could alienate his readers.

[20] See, for instance, pp 145-167, 218-233, 343-347, 524-30, 587, 613, and others.

rested" [*hani'an laka ṯħalik. Ana ta'banun wa anta mustariḥ*] (Bulaq I: 5). Lane, however, has "May thy food benefit thee!" (1840 I: 12), which gives him the opportunity for a note on Muslim food habits and etiquettes (1840 I: 36). Again, in the story of "The Prince Kamar-ez-Zemán and the Princess Budoor", it is related that the "'Efreeteh" Meymooneh dealt Dahnash "such a powerful blow as almost brought his end" [*laṭmatan qawiatan kadat an taqđi 'alaihi min shiddatiha*] (Bulaq I: 351). Lane translates this as "with such force that he almost experienced his predestined end from the violence of the blow" (1840 II: 85). Evidently, Lane considered this addition to the text more illustrative of Muslim beliefs as he had expounded them earlier in his notes.

Overall, what Lane was trying to do was to reduce the massive corpus of the *Nights* into a manageable bulk, as long as its socially significant elements were kept unimpaired. That was central to his objective of coaxing the optimum factual data out of the text. Therefore, he divided the book into chapters and an introduction, and, as a result, turned it into a collection of separate tales, with the unifying thread of the frame tale receding into the distant background. Moreover, Lane abandoned the night divisions entirely, except for a brief note at the head of every chapter. He eliminated Shahrazád's interventions at the beginning and end of every night, which demonstrate her ability to control the narrative and manipulate Shahriyár/the reader, as well as give the tales their distinctive character. Thus, after allowing Shahrazád to display her art on the first night, Lane dispenses with her interruptions in order to concentrate on more pragmatic matters. In a brief parenthesis, he describes to the reader the function of this devise in the *Arabian Nights* and its effect on its outcome, thus giving away at the very outset what the tales lay out gradually over a thousand more nights (1840 I: 44):

> On the second and each succeeding night, Shahrazád continued so to interest King Shahriyár by her stories as to induce him to defer putting her to death, in expectation that her fund of amusing tales would soon be exhausted; and as this is expressed in the original work in nearly the same words at the close of every night, such repetitions will in the present translation be omitted.

What might otherwise be regarded as a narrative technique Lane viewed as a social phenomenon, so he inserted at this point an extensive note (which might well have been the sole motive for the above parenthesis) "On the Influence of Eloquence and Tales upon the Arabs" (1840 I: 63ff).

Another part of the book that Lane thought too intrusive was the poetry. First, he considered removing it all together, but later changed his mind because the book's "value, as illustrating Arab manners and feelings, would be

considerably diminished" (1840 I: xviii). Therefore, Lane ignored a good deal of the poetry (most of it in fact), selectively translating only passages that he believed were in keeping with his purpose, in addition to incorporating some of the other verses into the prose narrative.

Lane presented the *Arabian Nights* as "an encyclopaedia of Arab manners and customs" (Lane-Poole 1877: 93). But the Arabic book was certainly not an encyclopaedia. In its mixture of the realistic and the fantastic, the *Nights* presented, like any storybook, sporadic glimpses from the social life of its environment, ungrounded in any particular sociological or historical framework. It was the task of the cultural translator, mediating between the text and its readers, to piece together these separate fragments, put them in context, and provide many others from outside the tales themselves. So just as he did in the *Modern Egyptians*, Lane had to guide the reader through Oriental scenes, filling in the skeletal outlines and uncovering the meanings beneath the surface of things. It was Lane who started the later revered practice of "anthropological" notes. Galland had used footnotes to comment on the tales or explain details that the average reader was not expected to understand. But Lane's notes were unrivalled in length and range. Far more than was necessary to explain the text, they were veritable treatises with their own footnotes and cross-references, which sought to cover every aspect of the religious, political, and social life of the society in question. Thus, we find lengthy articles "On Fate and Destiny", "On Muslim Saints, or Devotees", on "the retaliation of Injuries on the day of Resurrection", "On Infancy and Education", "On Good and Evil Omens", "On Dreams", "On Oaths", "On Shaving the Head", "On the Passion of Love among the Arabs", and so on. Lane's notes were so comprehensive and self-sufficient that they were later detached from the translation, recovered from "the order required not by their subjects but by the tales they illustrated" (Lane-Poole 1883: viii), and collected in one volume. The result was Stanley Lane-Poole's *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages: Studies from The Thousand and One Nights* (1883), where Lane's notes were arranged in a convenient and "natural sequence" (*ibid.* vii), providing "the most complete picture in existence of Arabian society" (*ibid.*).

Lane's notes were indeed independent, "elaborate essays" (Lane-Poole 1883: vii), and it is not surprising that, in many cases, the text was a mere pretext for him to present what he knew about Egyptian society, even when it was irrelevant to the story in question. He seized the most tenuous opportunities to insert lengthy glosses and treatises. Thus, the opening formula alone (the routine "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" [*bismi allahi alraḥmani alraḥim*]) warranted a three-page exposition of the principles of Islam. In "The Story of the Three Apples", for instance, the narrator says:

"After this she recovered her health, and I went out and repaired to my shop, and sat there to sell and buy" (Lane 1840 I: 227). To this seemingly indifferent detail, Lane attaches a comment "On Sales by Auction" that is obviously off the point.

One can discern an overall pattern in Lane's notes. The early, longer ones expatiate on general subjects of introductory nature – "Mohammadan Religion and Law", "Arabian System of Cosmography", "Infancy and Childhood", "Decorations of Eastern Cities", "Description of Apartments in Arab Houses", "Marriage", etc. Subsequent notes tend to be shorter and more pertinently occasioned by the text itself. In the third volume, the notes, though still extensive by any standard, are of the kind typically employed by translators – a gloss of a word in the original, comments on historical references, brief explanations of a custom or a practice depicted in a story, etc. It seems that Lane's store of pre-prepared sociological data had by then been consumed in the previous tales. It was for the same reason that tales were being shortened, summarized, or completely excised in the last two volumes, and especially in the third. For the major goal of the translation – the description of a society – had been all but fulfilled.

The final component of Lane's descriptive machinery was a large collection of illustrations, which, he said, "will considerably assist to explain both the text and the notes; and to ensure its accuracy" (1840 I: xxi). Based on "many hundred engravings on wood", they were prepared by William Harvey (1796-1866), a well-known illustrator in the first half of the nineteenth century. So as to guarantee the accuracy of the pictures, Lane "supplied the artist with modern dresses, and with other requisite material. Thus he has been enabled to make his designs agree [...] with the costumes, &c. of the times which the tales generally illustrate" (*ibid.* xxi). The realism of Harvey's artwork does afford a striking contrast to the domesticating illustrations of Galland's translation, where the general character of architecture and costume is a quaint mélange that was as much French as "Oriental". In Lane's version, all the details of architecture and dress were reproduced with remarkable precision. However, one of Lane's reviewers, while acknowledging that the illustrations "present a world of information" (Hunt 1839: 136), went on to point to the negative effect of this approach on the portrayal of characters. Harvey, he said, was (*ibid.*)

> so much at home upon every point of design but one, – figure, group, landscape, or sea-scape – that he makes us mad (as the phrase is) to see him obstinately adhering to one monotonous form of visage, and by no means of the best, – square, heavy-jawed, and thick-chinned, with aquiline noses alike for his men and women.

Insomuch as Hunt (as we will see in more details below) was invoking the status of the *Nights* as a storybook, his objection, seen from Lane's anthropological perspective, was beside the point. For a story well told, the characters have to be distinct individuals. But Lane was describing an ethnicity. The generic appearance of the characters, in this respect, was an advantage; what Hunt viewed as a "monotonous form of visage" might have been intended as illustrative of an entire class of people. For, after all, Lane's source, and frame of reference, was not the Arabic tales, but the society behind them.

"An epoch in the history of popular Eastern literature"

Lane's *The Thousand and One Nights* first appeared in monthly parts between 1838 and 1840. The first complete edition came out in 1840 in three volumes, and earned "instant popularity" (Knight 1873: 258) on the commercial and critical levels. Lane's translation started a new era for the *Arabian Nights* in England. To many of the early reviewers, the age of Galland seemed now over. His version "insufficient as it was, has long been the delight of Europe, but it must inevitably yield to this vigorous successor" (*Eclectic Review* 1840: 645). As Muhsin Jassim Musawi explains, "After the publication of his edition (1839-1841), the romantic metaphor of a dreamlike and mysterious East became no longer tenable, giving place instead to a 'living picture' of a well-defined society" (1981: 97). We can have a glimpse of how radical this departure was from the apologetic note that Alfred Lord Tennyson felt compelled to make after the appearance of Lane's edition, for having used the translation from Galland, the only one then available in English, for his "Recollections of The Arabian Nights" (1830): "I had only the translation – from the French of Galland – of the *Arabian Nights* when this was written, so I talked of sofas, etc. Lane was yet unborn" (1907: 340).

Lane situated the long-familiar storybook within a new, pragmatic, framework, and most, though not all, of his readers accepted the change with alacrity. As a result, "Lane's version gained wide recognition in mid-Victorian England not only as a drawing-room book, but also as the best entertaining documentary record of the medieval Arab society" (Musawi 1981: 93). Indeed, the primary grounds for consensus in the reviews of the translation was Lane's anthropological methodology, and especially the notes and illustrations. Of the notes, said the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, it was "impossible to speak too highly" (Pote 1839: 157). "Undoubtedly the most important part of this new edition", the *Athenæum* declared, "is the notes" (1838: 739). Due to Lane's first-hand knowledge of Egypt, he had acquired (*ibid.*)

> so complete a knowledge of the language, manners, and customs of the Egyptian Arabs, that he succeeded in giving us, in a series of illustrative notes appended to the several chapters, a faithful, and, as it were, living picture of the East.

The book was thus "the most complete manual of Eastern manners which has ever been published" (*ibid.*). As the same reviewer later remarked, "these valuable notes [...] throw more light on the mystery of Arab life and manners than perhaps all other works in the language" (775).

Harvey's illustrations were praised for similar reasons. "If fidelity to the real character of natural scenery, to a certain type of architecture, manners, and costumel [*sic*] be desirable", said the *Eclectic Review*, "we have it in Mr. Harvey's pictures" (1840: 658). For they were executed "with a vividness and distinctness which all the description in the world could never reach; and thus they serve a much more important purpose than merely to render intelligible a series of tales" (*Dublin Review* 1840: 127).

Despite a few reservations, Lane's literalist style was also met with general approval. The imitation of the style of the original was recognized as highly informative and a source of knowledge. According to the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, "The felicity with which the oriental style has been preserved throughout this translation is another of its singular merits", for "We become in the perusal half orientalized, and therefore more capable of understanding and enjoying the niceties of oriental feeling in these oriental tales" (Pote 1839: 157). But there was one aspect of Lane's translation that many readers found difficult to stomach – the orthographic representation of names, which many found excessively literal. The *Dublin Review* critic felt the necessity of "defending it against the objections of a large portion of the periodical press" (1840: 132). "Much has been said [...] of *Jinnee* for genius, and *wuzeer* for vizier", he protested, (*ibid.*)

> without considering, that if the new spelling were correct, the old one was very far wide of the truth. There is certainly some uncouthness in the first appearance of new combinations of letters, and in some instances of new letters (the dotted ones for example); but if it is better to be right than wrong, we maintain that Mr. Lane has done the public good service by his attempt to reduce the orthography of oriental names to something like a system.

It was such complaints that Burton later ridiculed: "here and there some 'old Tory' grumbled that new-fangled words (as Wezeer, Kádee and Jinnee) had taken the places of his childhood's pets, the Vizier, the Cadi, and the Genie"

(1886 VI: 420). Certainly, one could perceive in some contemporary reactions to Lane a sense of loss, a longing for the old romantic experience of the *Arabian Nights*, which the new translation had now ruined irreparably. But there was much more to these attitudes than the memory of "childhood's pets". Many readers, especially artists and creative writers, had treasured the Oriental tales for their unbridled imagination, intense pathos, and narrative virtuosity. It was these characteristics that made them a favourite of the romanticists and one of their sources of inspiration. Against the rising tide of materialism, industrialization, and utilitarianism in Victorian England – forces which were threatening to marginalize the artistic experience, or even invalidate it – many of them came to see the *Arabian Nights* as an epitome of the unique qualities of imaginative literature, sometimes of art itself, which they hoped would redeem it and guarantee its survival in a period "which has been the most practically and stupendously scientific in the history of the world" (Hunt 1839: 102).

A perfect example of this position can be found in Leigh Hunt's review of Lane in the *London and Westminster Review* for October of 1839, while the publication of the translation was still in progress. Hunt was a romanticist out of his time – or so he seemed to feel. A poet and literary critic who had been the associate of Byron and Shelly, he had outlived the heyday of romanticism, and had come to see the backlash against his poetic ideals. Hunt opens his essay with an attack on those who have predicted "to see an end put to all poetry and romance by the progress of science; – to care for nothing but what the chemist could analyse, and the manufacturer realize" (*ibid.*: 102). The futility of such a prophesy, he argues, is bourn out by this most imaginative of books; for "at this present writing, the 'Arabian Nights' is the most popular book in the world" (*ibid.*: 106). While it may seem at first irrelevant to the immediate topic of his article, the question of literature in the age of materialism was central to Hunt's approach to the new translation. For he was very perceptive to the fact that Lane's preoccupation with cultural representation, the accumulation and recording of facts, and the tales' use-value was in line with the growing encroachment of science on literature. The influence of the "mechanical philosophers", who thought that "they were going to put an end to all poetry and romance" (*ibid.*), had now reached his beloved tales, and was trying to turn them into sociological documents.

Hunt was well aware that Lane had started "an epoch in the history of popular Eastern literature" (*ibid.*: 113). In this connection, he was one of the few critics who lucidly articulated the link between this novel approach to Eastern literature and its political context. As he put it, "the opening up of the East by French travellers and English conquerors gave them [the *Arabian*

Nights] a new importance by showing them in connexion with manners and learning" (*ibid.*: 104).

It was this particular shift, the abandonment of the *Arabian Nights* as a work of art for a utilitarian framework, that alienated Hunt most about the new version. He took special issue with Lane's contention that the value of the book rested on "its minute accuracy with respect to those peculiarities which distinguish the Arabs from every other nation". This, he protests, "is very far indeed from being, as he thinks it, the most valuable thing in the original work. National peculiarities the most valuable things in the 'Arabian Nights'!" (*ibid.*: 111). In reaction, Hunt constructs an argument that was commonly used in the defence of literature. What is most valuable about the book, he says, is (*ibid.*)

> not what concerns Arabs as Arabs, but what concerns all the world as men, women, and children [...] not as a nation distinguished from others by peculiarities, but a nation in whom these very peculiarities serve freshly to throw out the passions and sentiments common to all.

On these grounds, Hunt vindicates Galland's domesticating strategy. For while the French translator "did make his ladies and gentlemen say 'sir' and 'madam,'" Galland "made *every* body inclined to the 'Arabian Nights', greatly by reason of that very adaptation of his style to the prevailing taste and tone of conversation" (*ibid.*).

The "excessive exactitude" (*ibid.*: 113) with which Lane translated his original was, of course, part of his scientific method, and was, therefore, a major cause of disapproval. Hunt expressed his "fear that [Lane] is not duly sensible to the beauties of his original, nor quite so much in love with the spirit of ingenuousness as with a certain literality" (*ibid.*: 112). He conceded that Lane's "semi-scriptural tone", though it "rather startled us in the humorous passages" (*ibid.*), was more effective, and more "robust", than Galland's in rendering scenes of terror and supernatural wonder. But he recognized that Lane's preoccupation with literalism paradoxically betrayed his intentions of an authentic portrayal of the original. His speculation on the translation's relationship with its source text is worth quoting in full, not only for its soundness, but also because it exemplifies an approach to the *Arabian Nights* untypical of contemporary readings – one that assumes some sort of a shared basis of humanity with the original as a step toward understanding (*ibid.*: 113):

> whatever be the exact nature of the style in his Arabic copy, whether more or a less a "classical", a vulgar, or some middle style (as we understand him to contend), it is impossible that the impression made

> upon the audience of the native story-tellers can be of the same uncolloquial and semi-scriptural sort, apart from everyday experience, as that which the English reader receives from the unfamiliar style of Mr Lane. It must be far more easy, natural, impulsive, and unobstructed by a constant sense of strangeness. In this respect, therefore, he has missed even the Arab peculiarity; at least, he has sacrificed Arab spirit to Arab letter, and consequently the greater peculiarity to the less, and so become the victim of his own "excessive exactitude".

Hunt's essay was one of the very few attempts to assess Lane's work from a purely artistic and literary point of view. In this, however, it did not reflect the common trend. For Lane's "anthropological" turn did start a new epoch. Although romantic and aesthetic responses continued to appear throughout the nineteenth century, Lane's realistic translation became the measure of approaching the book, at least as far as translators and literary critics were concerned. The tales were now seen as representative of an entire ethnicity and illustrative of their customs and manners. Thus, the factual basis of the stories had to remain in the foreground, and the play of the imagination was curtailed. Even the extremely individualistic Burton, later trying, among other things, to revive the exotic element of the *Nights*, had to base his translation on the supposed realities of its society. As a result, his exaggerations veered toward the grotesque and the bizarre side of the romantic.

Literal Translation and the Exhibitionary Complex

In his "The Exhibitionary Complex", Tony Bennett, examining Foucault's analysis of the public deployments of knowledge and power, traces the emergence in the early nineteenth century of a new set of institutions whose disciplinary function relied, not on confinement, but on exhibition. This complex of disciplinary and power relations developed, Bennett argues, contrarily to the movement that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*, whereby "objects and bodies – the scaffold and the body of the condemned – which had previously formed part of the public display of power were withdrawn from the public gaze as punishment increasingly took the form of incarceration" (1999: 73). In contrast, forms of the exhibitionary complex were being increasingly brought out into "more open and public arenas, where, through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power (but of a different type) throughout society" (*ibid.*: 74). Thus, the proliferation of museums, "Great Exhibitions", panoramas, arcades, and department stores, ensured that the deterring effects of retributive punishment, which was receding from the

public view, were compensated for by another display of power. These institutions demonstrated "the power to command and arrange things and bodies for public display" (*ibid.*: 76). By thus making the principles of order visible to the populace, they provided the viewers with the experience of "knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation" (*ibid.*).

But there is a basic distinction that separates these exhibitionary mechanisms from the previous punitive displays. The spectators could now see themselves as subjects, as well as objects. For the public exhibition of power gave them the feeling of being complicit in its deployment and exercise. In this way, they were able to "identify with power, to see it as, if not directly theirs, then indirectly so, a force regulated and channelled by society's ruling groups but for the good of all" (*ibid.*: 80). Power, in other words, was paraded as a collective phenomenon, permeating all orders of society, and giving all its members, as they watched its workings, the chance of vicarious participation. As a result, this "subjugation by flattery" was a unifying force, as it positioned people "on this side of power, both its subjects and its beneficiary", thereby integrating them into "a nationalized citizenry" (*ibid.*). Nowhere was this mechanism more effective than in the representation, or exhibition, of other, non-European cultures. Bennett argues (*ibid.*: 80):

> this power marked out the distinction between the subjects and the objects of power not within the national body but, as organized by the many rhetorics of imperialism, between that body and other, 'non-civilized' peoples upon whose bodies the effects of power were unleashed with as much force and theatricality as had been manifest on the scaffold. This was, in other words, a power which aimed at a rhetorical effect through its representation of otherness rather than at any disciplinary effects.

For this representational apparatus to work successfully it obviously had to underline the difference of those 'non-civilized' peoples. In this connection, Bennett points to a shift in the conception of non-European peoples, and humanity in general, which occurred in the nineteenth century. Displays of human remains in the eighteenth century, he argues, "had placed the accent on anatomical peculiarities, viewed primarily as a testimony to the rich diversity of the chain of universal being" (*ibid.*: 91). By the early nineteenth century, however, "human remains were most typically displayed as parts of an evolutionary series with the remains of still extant peoples being allocated to the earliest position within them" (*ibid.*). The impression produced on the

spectators by this hierarchical classification was, unsurprisingly, a renewed conviction in their difference from, and superiority to, those less evolved peoples. The logic that informed these displays organized the (*ibid.*)

> public – the white citizenries of the imperialist powers – into a unity, representationally effacing divisions within the body politic in constructing a 'we' conceived as the realization [...] of the process of evolution and identified as a unity in opposition to the primitive otherness of conquered peoples.

Moreover, in the context of nineteenth-century imperialism, the employment of anthropology in the exhibitionary complex supplied a crucial part of this ideology of disparate development. For this discipline related the histories of Western nations and civilizations to other ones "only by separating the two", thereby "providing for an interrupted continuity in the order of peoples and races" (*ibid.*: 90).

Bennett's theoretical formulations are highly relevant to understanding Lane's projects of cultural representation. They lend context to his methods, underlying principles, and the reception of his work. It could be said that the main objective of Lane's work was the textual "exhibition" of another culture, displaying it in precise detail and delivering it to his countrymen in its totality. In the *Modern Egyptians* he went to great lengths to produce as vivid and life-like a simulacrum of Egyptian culture as was possible. But his translation of the *Arabian Nights* can be seen as the culmination of these efforts. For translation is arguably the closest textual equivalent to the exhibitionary complex. In it, the other culture is allowed to present itself directly to the reader, seemingly without any barriers. The world of the source text is the world of the original itself, brought home to the reader to be experienced at first hand. This is what Lane's literal translation was designed to do, and this is how contemporary readers responded to it. In a typical comment, the *Eclectic Review* declared: "the full peculiarities of the eastern style were preserved, and we could almost imagine an oriental addressing us, only in English instead of Arabic" (*Eclectic Review* 1840: 646). Lane, the *Athenæum* said, "let us so fully into the privacy of domestic life among the Arabs" (*Athenæum* 1838: 739). Another reviewer found the translation to be the best substitute for personally visiting the land of the *Nights* (*Dublin Review* 1840: 127):

> it is not the lot of every man to see, as Mr. Lane has done, with his own eyes, the streets of Cairo, – to mingle in her feasts, – to walk side by side with the sacred camel, – and to marvel over an ocular inspection of the wonders of the 'inky' magic.

Yet, Lane's translation, notes, and illustrations "all out place the reality bodily before us" (*ibid.*).

But the foreign text cannot, of course, speak for itself. Even if objects seem to "stand before you as you read", they are still in need of a guide to explain their hidden meanings and put them in the appropriate framework. The problem here is not merely one of commentary and glossary. As Timothy Mitchell argues, the task of cultural translators of the East was "not just to make a picture of the East but to set up the East as a picture" (1992: 305). In other words, what the readers saw in these works was not only the exhibition that was the East, but the East itself being fashioned into an exhibition to be experienced by the dominant European gaze. Just as the function of the exhibitionary complex was to display power in action as it ordered, and broadcast its control over, the physical and social world, so the aim of these representations was, more specifically, to show the *colonial* power in action as it imposed order and meaning on the Oriental world. For in the colonialist representation of the Orient (1992: 301)

> it appears that it simply 'is.' It is a place of mere being, where scenes are untouched by history [...] such an essentialized world lacks, by definition, what the exhibition supplies – the dimension of meaning [...] The techniques of the world exhibition build into an exterior world this supposed lack [...] just as colonialism introduces it to the Orient.

Notwithstanding their claims about reproducing things "exactly as they are", of showing "the East itself in its vital actual reality" (qtd. in Mitchell 1992: 304), Orientalist writers could not, therefore, in all objectivity recede entirely from the pictures they created. For what they presented was not only the East as an exhibition, but the power that made it so; they had to emphasize the constructedness of their portrayals vis-à-vis their corresponding reality. Thus the certainty of colonial representation, according to Mitchell, depended on a "deliberate difference in time and displacement in space that separated the representation from the real thing" (1992: 297); this "world is grasped, inevitably, in terms of a distinction between the object – the 'thing itself' as the European says – and its meaning" (*ibid.*: 309).

As far as Lane's translation of the *Arabian Nights* is concerned, this distinction, it could be argued, is effected by the division into text and notes. The translated text is the Oriental world itself in its raw reality, unmediated, and, therefore, formless and undifferentiated. The notes, on the other hand, are the "tell" of "show and tell". They intervene, with a panoptical power of vision, to organize the text representationally, and in so doing supply the

meaning and order that only the colonial interpreter can introduce. This is a principal mechanism of colonial representation and the source of its certainty. As Mitchell argues, "The endless spectacles of the world-as-exhibition were not just reflections of this certainty but the means of its production, by their technique of rendering imperial truth and cultural difference in 'objective' form" (1992: 296).

Literalism in Postcolonial Theories

Translations that preserve, and emphasize, the alterity of the foreign text have been a constant theme in some modern reflections on translation, especially those with political orientation. It has almost become the standard argument that the task of the translator is to expose his/her own culture to the "experience of the foreign", that is to register those cultural and linguistic aspects of the source text that do not conform to the values of the target community. This ethnodeviant venture, it is proposed, would not only enrich the translating culture and add to its multiplicity; it can also defy national insularity and imperialist attitudes, best reflected, in Antoine Berman's phrase, in a "systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work" (1984: 5) in an attempt to appropriate it into one's worldview.

Literalist translation – as exemplifying the courage to present the Other culture as it is, without trying to tone down its otherness, however radical it may be – has often been championed as the praxis that would most ideally serve this purpose. Lawrence Venuti's work has largely developed around this thesis. He has advocated "an ethics of difference" that calls on the translator to "signal the foreignness of the foreign text and create a readership that is more open to linguistic and cultural difference" (Venuti 1998: 87). He espouses Schleiermacher's opinion that the translator must engage in "the invention of discursive peculiarities to signify the foreignness of the foreign text" (1995: 114-15), which ironically recalls Lane's foregrounding of ethnic "peculiarities" as that which is most valuable in the *Arabian Nights*.

Literalism has also been promoted in postcolonial theories of translation. Gayatri Spivak, for examples, maintains that "the task of the translator is to surrender herself to the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text" (1992: 187). In other words, the translator has to be faithful only to the linguistic and cultural codes of the language being translated, and should strive to preserve them. The best way to do that is a literalist method: "surrendering to the text in this way means, most of the time, being literal" (*ibid.*: 188). It is only this method, Spivak says, that could allow us to "imagine the traffic in accessibility going both ways" (*ibid.*: 189), without risking the "obliteration of Third World specificity"

(*ibid.*: 187). In *Siting Translation*, Tejaswini Niranjana attacks translations that create "coherent and transparent texts through the repression of difference, and participating thereby in the process of colonial domination" (1992: 43). To illustrate this point, she cites a translation of a Kannada poem where the name of a god is translated rather than preserved as a name as an example of colonialist violence which "erases and distorts beyond recognition [...] the *names* of the colonized" (*ibid.*: 183).[21] In opposition, she proposes a translation practice that combats the "strategies of containment typical of colonial discourse" (*ibid.*: 185) through literalism. Hence, echoing Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator", she describes this proposed practice: "seeing 'literalness' as an 'arcade,' I privilege the word over the sentence, marking thereby what Derrida calls in 'Des Tours de Babel' a 'displacement' from the syntagmatic to the paradigmatic level, and inserting my translation into the attack against homogenizing and continuous narratives" (*ibid.*: 185).

Set against Lane's literalist translation in its colonial context, these formulations seem too theoretical and prescriptive. For what distinguished Lane's translation, which was neither fluent nor domesticating, was, above all, the conscious effort to reproduce the linguistic and cultural features of the foreign text as meticulously and authentically as possible. Yet, Lane's work neither disrupted the norms of the translating society, nor created a reading public more open to cultural difference, not to mention combating strategies of colonialist containment. Quite the contrary: as Lane's example demonstrates, there are at least two ways in which literalist translation can actually serve imperialist agendas. First, it could be enlisted as a means of gathering information about the (would-be) colonized. Such information certainly has to be accurate and reliable, free from distorting names or any other cultural attributes. This is why colonialist ventures were usually accompanied by large-scale translation movements, whose aim was to transcribe the local culture for the new rulers; Lane's faithful and literal representations were a timely contribution to the growing interest of British colonialism in Egypt. On the other hand, the exhibitionary effect that literal translation assumes in situations of radical power disparity is far from encouraging respect for the difference of foreign cultures. For the power to put on display, to dissect and analyze to the smallest detail, is the symbol – indeed, the actual realization – of the power to control and subjugate.

If the theoretical constructions of Berman, Venuti, Spivak, and Niranjana, among others, describe the (hypothetical) situations where literalist translation

[21] Again, one is reminded of Lane's elaborate orthographic machinery for the representation of Arabic names.

is supposed to engage in anti-imperialist and resistant forms of cultural representation, then Lane's, and similar practices, provide examples where it could serve exactly the opposite causes. What this shows is that literalism per se cannot be advanced as an ideology; nor can one make assumptions about its desired effect in isolation from its political and social environment. Before making our estimate of what agendas a translation could, or should, be enlisted in, one has to be aware of the conditions that surround its production and reception. These, it is argued, are the major factors that should inform the choice of the translation strategy on the textual level.

2. The Exotic Dimension of Foreignizing Strategies

Richard Francis Burton's Translation of The Arabian Nights

Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) was one of the most prominent translators from Arabic and other Eastern languages in nineteenth-century England. His translations include the now classical *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night*, *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui* and the *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*. Burton was also a traveller, a linguist, an "anthropologist", and an adventurer whose exotic exploits in Arabia, Africa, and South America fired the imagination of many of his contemporaries.

When assessing Burton's work and career, one is faced with an ambivalent picture. On the one hand, Burton had very strong views about some of the practices and beliefs of his Victorian contemporaries, especially those concerning sexuality and moral propriety. His social criticism was expressed quite openly. At the same time, however, he craved social distinction on the very terms of the society whose values he defied and flouted. That was one of the most striking of the many contradictions of his life and character – "eschewing religious, political and social conformity yet seeking approval and recognition from those people and institutions he most openly despised" (Freeth 1978: 123).

Burton saw his works about the customs and beliefs of other cultures as a means of shocking his English readers out of their complacency and narrow-mindedness, and he professedly intended some of them (especially his translations from Eastern languages) to enlighten and educate the Victorians on issues that, in their "immodest modesty", they were reticent and consequently ignorant about. At the same time, however, he emphasized the utility of his translations and representations to a better understanding by the British colonizers of the peoples they ruled. He also reiterated, for different reasons, some of the crudest European stereotypes about the cultures whose difference

was supposed to challenge Victorian belief systems. There is no doubt that these contradictions drastically weakened the potential subversive effect of Burton's translations.

Other factors in Burton's career and the context in which he worked did not make him the rebel he aspired, or was supposed, to be. On the one hand, the image that his contemporaries held of him (and to which he greatly contributed) limited the extent to which he could "manipulate" his material and determined the lines that he was expected to follow. Moreover, the larger political and cultural background that surrounded his work (especially as constituted by power relations between Britain and the East, as well as the image that hundreds of years of European Orientalism had created of it) was such that made futile the attempt to use the representation of the East as a subversive practice. All these factors rendered Burton's projects, despite the foreignizing strategy of his translations and the professed intent of employing them as social critiques, something completely different from what foreignizing arguments would lead us to expect. In order to understand the reasons behind this paradox, a sufficient examination is needed of Burton's career, his relation to his contemporaries, the context of his translations, as well as the methods he employed and the choices he made in the process.

1. A Rebel Manqué

Like many of those Europeans who were in one way or another obsessed with the Orient, Burton was something of an outsider. Probably the most repeated account of him is that of someone who was born into the wrong time and place. "His chivalry", it is said, "belonged to the knights of the Middle Ages" (Burton 1893 I: 270). Others describe him as "a true man of the Renaissance" (Brodie 1967: 15), and "a man for all ages except his own" (Kernan 1990: 127).

Burton was of mixed English, Irish, and possibly French, ancestry. He was born in Torquay, England, but was raised in France and Italy. As a result, he always felt like a stranger in England. "In consequence of being brought up abroad", he wrote about the way he and his siblings were raised, "we never thoroughly understood English society, nor did society understand us" (Burton 1893 I: 32).[22] At another time, he complained in a letter to John Payne, his friend and rival translator of the *Arabian Nights*: "my misfortune in life began with not being a Frenchman" (January 19, 1884; qtd. in Wright 1906/68

[22] At the time of his death in 1890, Burton had not finished his autobiography. Covering the first 29 years of his life (up to the termination of his Indian career in 1850), it was published as the first 158 pages of Isabel Burton's *The Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton* (1893).

II: 71). Whenever he had to set foot in England, whether for a visit, or when he eventually went to Oxford in 1840, its climate, people, and social customs contrasted very unfavourably in his eyes with continental Europe. When a colleague at Oxford was astounded at his challenge to a duel, a practice which had been outlawed in England for decades, Burton felt, he said, "as if I had fallen amongst *épiciers* [French, "grocers"]" (Burton 1893 I: 70). This alienation must have been at the root of his dissatisfaction with Victorian England.

At the same time, Burton keenly regretted his inability to fit in society. Commenting on his father's decision not to have him receive his secondary education in England, he lamented the fact that he was not more acquainted with the requirements of success in English society (Burton 1893 I: 32):

> Future soldiers and statesmen must be prepared by Eton and Cambridge [...] the more English they are, even to the cut of their hair the better [...] it is a *real* advantage to belong to some parish. It is a great thing, when you have won a battle, or explored Central Africa, to be welcomed by some little corner of the Great World, which takes pride in your exploits, because they reflect honour upon itself. In the contrary condition, you are a waif, a stray; you are a blaze of light without a focus.

This wavering – the rejection of some fundamental principles of English society and the opposing desire to be accepted by it – could perhaps explain the contradiction between dissidence and conformity, which beset Burton throughout his life. From his early years, he was in constant struggle with all forms of authority. At Oxford, he made a point of violating as many regulations as he could, and engaged in unending clashes with his teachers and colleagues. Eventually in 1842, he managed to get himself expelled for unruly behaviour. Nonetheless, when he had to find a vocation, he chose, of all professions, to join the army. This episode started a pattern that would characterize Burton's life and career. He did not conceal his contempt for traditions and established conventions, yet he would always return to the fold, repressing his discontent, though smarting under the pressure of authority.

In India, where he served as a field surveyor and intelligence officer in the Sindh, Burton's indifference to official rules almost cost him his career. In 1845, he was commissioned by General Charles Napier, governor of Sindh, to investigate rumours that some brothels in Karachi offered boys and eunuchs as prostitutes. He was asked "indirectly to make inquiries and report on the subject" (Burton 1885 X: 205). But Burton's penchant for the erotic and the grotesque, and his eagerness to explore everything that was considered taboo by Victorian society, produced a report that was "more enthusiastically detailed

than required" (Lovell 1998: 57). His report was kept in a secret file, but when it was discovered by Napier's successor, it created great revulsion and dismay. Burton barely escaped dismissal, undoubtedly only due to the fact that he had undertaken his investigation on orders from his superiors. Yet his reputation was ruined in India, and his career there came to an untimely end.

The remaining years of Burton's civil service were spent in the Foreign Office, where he served as a consul, usually at obscure posts. The height of his official career came when he served as consul in Damascus (1869-71). But when this was terminated, due, it seems, to the proselytizing activities of his devoutly Catholic wife, he was consigned to an insignificant consulate in Trieste, Austria (now in Italy). The transfer was a thinly disguised exile: "commercial work in a small, civilized, European seaport, under-ranked and under-paid", his wife Isabel complained, "cannot be considered compensation for the loss of wild Oriental diplomatic life" (Burton 1893 II: 7). Nevertheless, Burton remained in this post for the remaining eighteen years of his life. In the letter to John Payne quoted above, he expressed his frustration and helplessness: "I am suffering from only one thing, I want to be in Upper Egypt. And, of course, they won't employ me [...] England is now ruled by irresponsible clerks, mostly snobs" (qtd. in Wright 1906/68 II: 71).

The "Pilgrimage" to Mecca

The most significant event of Burton's career before his translation of the *Arabian Nights* was his "pilgrimage". In 1853, having obtained the financial support of the Royal Geographical Society and a one-year furlough from his military duties to "pursue my Arabic studies in lands where the language is best learned" (1855-56/1964 I: 1), Burton embarked on what was to become his most celebrated achievement and a defining moment of his career, the "pilgrimage" to Mecca and Medina. Burton's original project was to remove "that opprobrium of modern adventure, the huge white blot which in our maps still notes the Eastern and Central regions of Arabia [i.e. "the Empty Quarter"]" (*ibid.*). But when the three years' leave he asked for (necessary for "the task of spanning the deserts") was denied, he was content with adventure for its own sake. The initially "scientific" mission turned into a test of personal courage (*ibid.*: 2):

> What remained for me but to prove, by trial, that what might be perilous to other travellers was safe to me? The 'experimentum crucis' was a visit to Al-Híjaz, at once the most difficult and the most dangerous point by which a European can enter Arabia.

For Burton the only way to explore "Moslem inner life in a really Mohammedan country" was from an insider's point of view. Consequently he disguised himself as a Muslim pilgrim. The journey started in April 1853 in Southampton, where Burton, dressed as a "Persian darwish", boarded a ship bound for Egypt. There he became an "Afghani doctor", and spent some time preparing himself for the journey, "after a four years' sojourn in Europe, during which many things Oriental had faded away from my memory" (*ibid.*). He joined the pilgrimage in July, eventually reaching Medina later in this month, and Mecca in September of the same year. Burton's observations, along with innumerable personal opinions and comments (delivered in a highly authoritative manner), on Islam, the pilgrimage, Arabs, Muslims and Orientals in general, were collected in the three volumes of his *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, the first two published in 1855, and the third in 1856.

Back in England, Burton's "extraordinary exploit" created a sensation. It "made Burton's name a household name throughout the world, and turned it into a synonym of daring; while his book *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* [...] was read everywhere with wonder and delight" (Wright 1906/68 I: 119). Isabel Arundell (later Mrs. Burton) described in rapturous terms, heightened by personal attachment but typical of many contemporary reactions, the enthusiastic reception of Burton's adventure (Burton and Wilkins 1897 I: 71-2):

> The news of the marvellous pilgrimage was soon noised abroad, and travelled home; all sorts of rumours flew about [...] Burton's name was on the lips of many [...] Richard has just come back with flying colours from Mecca.

Perhaps one of the most striking things about this "unprecedented achievement" is that it was not unprecedented: Burton was not the first European to enter the holy cities of Islam. Burton made it clear in his *Pilgrimage* that at least four others had preceded him. Indeed, his scheme was a replica of that of the last one of them, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, to whom Burton refers throughout the pages of his book. The Swiss traveller and scholar had no more than twenty five years earlier visited Mecca and Medina in the same way, i.e. disguised as a Muslim pilgrim. Burckhardt's description of the holy places of the cities, as well as of the geography of the Arabian Peninsula (compiled in his *Travels in Arabia*, published in 1829) was so accurate in Burton's opinion that he had little to improve on it, except to correct some minor errors. Hence, Burton's escapade did not make any substantial contribution to what Europe already knew of Islam. Nor was his disguise the single indispensable passport

to the two sacred cities. As he made it clear in his preface to the third edition of the *Pilgrimage*, "any Jew, Christian, or Pagan, after declaring before the Kází [Islamic judge] and the Police Authorities at Cairo, or even at Damascus, that he embraces Al-Islam, may perform without fear [...] his pilgrimage in all safety" (Burton 1855-56/1964 I: xxiii). In other words, what excited Burton was the mere pleasure of exploring "a virgin theme" (*ibid.*: xxv) and lifting "the veil from scenes hitherto wrapt in all but impenetrable mystery" (H.A.M. 1855: 318).

This, indeed, is how Burton's book and experience were received, with the "wonder and delight" of reading his exoticzed accounts of strange lands and customs. What validates the experience of reading, in this respect, is not the information furnished by the traveller's accounts, but the thrill of watching him as he passes through the successive stages of his adventure. Commenting on the recent publication of the *Pilgrimage*, the *Dublin Review* makes this point distinctly (1855: 77):

> Independently, therefore, of the interest which must attach to any account of a region so completely unknown in the West, the very narrative of an expedition so novel, and involving so much peril as well as of [*sic*] novelty, would be for its own sake, sufficiently curious and attractive.

The reviewer goes on to identify what exactly it is that makes Burton's narrative so "curious and attractive" (*ibid.*: 78-9):

> It would be amusing to follow the pilgrim through all the phases of his assumed character as one of the holy men of Islam – to watch him as he carefully interlards his conversation with pious ejaculations to Allah, to his Prophet, and to the manifold Moslem saints whose memory is sweet at Medinah and Meccah [...] to listen to his murmured litanies, responses, 'testifications,' 'Fât-hâhs,'[the opening chapter of the Koran] verses, and even whole chapters from the Koran; to see him anxiously placing himself, so that his face should front Meccah, and his right shoulder should be opposite the right pillar of the Prophet's Pulpit!

Such were the theatrical effects that Burton employed to arouse the fascination and enchantment of his readers. One effective technique he frequently used was what he called "the barbaric fidelity" of his literal translation. The problem of representation through translation is central to the text, and Burton was given to moments of reflection on his own translation. Here is one of his first impressions on landing in the East (Egypt) (1855-56/1964 I: 9):

> And this is the Arab's *Kayf*. The savouring of animal existence; the passive enjoyment of mere sense; the pleasant languor, the dreamy tranquillity, the airy castle-building, which in Asia stands in lieu of the vigorous, intensive, passionate life of Europe. It is the result of a lively, impressible, excitable nature, and exquisite sensibility of nerve; it argues a facility for voluptuousness unknown to northern regions [...] In the East, man wants but rest and shade: upon the banks of a bubbling stream, or under the cool shelter of a perfumed tree, he is perfectly happy [...] the trouble of conversations, the displeasures of memory, and the vanity of thought being the most unpleasant interruptions to his *Kayf*. No wonder that "Kayf" is a word untranslatable in our mother tongue.

This is a typical example of the explorer/translator at work, trying to fulfil his expected role of presenting the Orient to his Western readers. It seems that "*Kayf*", as Burton enumerates its endless meanings, could be anything it is required to be; indeed, Burton's explication of the word encapsulates most Western stereotypes about the East. Yet, the apparently infinite malleability of the term only leads to increasing obscurity and elusiveness. As Burton struggles to pin down the concept and define the experience associated with it, he gradually loses control of it: what started in the first line as naturalized in the language, potentially understood and familiarized, is eventually relegated to quotation marks. In a movement from the inside to the outside, from domestication to foreignization, from the Oriental experience to the Western conception of it, we are finally left with an empty signifier. The difference in the foreignizing translation is now taken to the extreme of enigma: the Other is excluded as unknown, and unknowable. While Burton and his readers could, and usually did, fill in the void left by "the impossibility of translation" with whatever they wanted to project onto the Other, here is a text that unwittingly reveals the violence inherent in its process of othering – the elimination the Other through estrangement, so that the self could be defined in contrast.

Coupled with his profuse comments, Burton's literal translation produced a "foreignizing" effect that could turn the most mundane actions and situations into curiosities. In one of his footnotes, Burton translates the word "*Alhamdlillah*" (a commonplace conversational expression equivalent to "Thank God") as "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the (three) worlds", and informs his readers that it is "a pious ejaculation, which leaves the lips of the True Believer on all occasions of concluding actions" (*ibid.*: 8, footnote 1).

Furthermore, Burton was not averse to spicing up his accounts with some linguistic embellishments. In his translation of the prayer that he had to recite on visiting the Prophet's tomb, one idea stands out as can hardly be expected in

a supplication: "O Lord [...] make me a Sultan Victorious!" (*ibid.*: 309). This is a striking example of how strict literalism may estrange the original and give it a bizarre spin – one, in this case, that is calculated to satisfy readers' expectations. The Arabic original does contain a "*Sultan*" [*ŝulŧan*], but there it means simply "power", which is the sense in which it is invariably used in the Koran. Accordingly, the last phrase of the prayer reads: "Give me power [*ŝulŧan*] to be victorious" (over temptation, etc.).[23] Burton, however, chose to retain the Arabic word with all of its cultural connotations, mindful of its currency in English, though, of course, in a completely different sense. As a result, we have supplicants imploring God to make them sultans.

In his *My Diaries*, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (himself a veteran traveller in Arabia) maintained that Burton "certainly exaggerates the difficulty of the undertaking [the "pilgrimage"] which in those days was comparatively easy to anyone who would profess Islam, even without possessing any great knowledge of Eastern tongues" (1921 II: 132). As seen above, Burton admitted that much in the introduction to the third edition of his *Pilgrimage*. However, the "*Haji*" (pilgrim) never failed to remind his readers of the great risks of his dissimulation, which, he repeated, time and again, would lead him to certain death if discovered. His readers, on their part, revelled in such details, proclaiming with awe that "had the slightest suspicion arisen […] an infuriated mob would have torn him into a thousand pieces" (H.A.M. 1855: 318). Reviews lavished praise on the bravery of Burton, who (H.A.M. 1856: 324)

> was not satisfied with the exterior, but must needs penetrate into the interior – a test of his disguise sufficient to shake the most iron nerves [...] a man to whom the word 'fear' was unknown, and the only effect of a distant sense of danger seems to have been a *joke*.

Burton's exploit brought him fame and initiated his association with the world of Islam and Arabia, which was to become the stamp of a lifelong career. The popular success of his "pilgrimage" made him the subject of a popular cult. "In addition to the 'Ruffian Dick' image that followed him from India", Glenn S. Burne (1985: 45) remarks,

> there now emerged a new and larger figure – created partly by his own rather theatrical manner and enhanced, after his death, by his admiring wife Isabel, who [...] contributed generously to the popular mythology that was growing up around her husband.

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[23] The full prayer, a Koranic verse, is as follows:
"*wa qul rabbi adkhilni madkhala ŝidq wa akhrijni makhraja ŝidq wa aj'al li min ladunka ŝultanan naŝira*" (17: 80).

Even thirty years after this journey, the romantic memory of the achievement of this "famous Oriental traveller", rekindled by his recent translation of the *Arabian Nights*, was still fresh (*The Bat* 1888):[24]

> all Europe, ay, all the civilized [...] world, was holding its breath in amazement at the record of the adventurous Briton, who had made his way, guided only by his genius and by his stout heart, into the very core of Mohammedanism.

Burton was careful to cultivate the myth that surrounded him, and he did everything he could to embellish it. Of all European travellers who adopted exotic costumes and manners, Burton took the trappings of exoticism to the utmost. His disguise was not simply a convenience necessary for him to be able to mingle with Easterners and understand their culture; it was a persona that carried over into his life in England, and remained with him all his life. On more than one occasion, Burton tried to test the efficacy of his Oriental outfit not only on Easterners, but on his countrymen as well. On his way back from Mecca, he was on the same ship with a Catholic priest who happened to be a cousin of his wife. Burton used to tease him by sitting opposite him and reciting the Koran aloud (Burton 1893 I: 179, footnote). On other occasions, he provided genteel English society with after-dinner entertainment by posing as an Oriental: "Richard [Burton], speaking alternately in Persian and English, told tales from the *Arabian Nights* [...] and chanted the Islamic call to prayer" (Lovell 1998: 383). "Haji Abdullah" was Burton's nickname, and he used to sign some of his letters and writings with this title, including his preface to the *Pilgrimage* and the title page of his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, where it was printed in Arabic.

Burton's reputation, however, was not always so romantic. He always delighted in shocking his audience (whether readers or listeners), and for that purpose, he invented some grisly stories about atrocities he had ostensibly committed. One tale, in particular, gained wide circulation: Burton was behind the spread of a rumour that during his "pilgrimage" he had to kill a man who had discovered his disguise. While he did not admit it openly, "he seems to have been rather gratified than not; and he certainly took no trouble

[24] Quoted in Burton (1893 II: 301). Some full-length reviews and articles are quoted in Isabel Burton's *The Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton*. Similarly, a few reviews of Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* are excerpted in full in "The Biography of the Book and its Reviewers Reviewed" in Appendix IV of the sixth volume of his *Supplemental Nights* (385-500). I have tried to identify the pages, volumes, and authors of these journal articles, either directly or through indices (*Poole's* and *Wellesley*). When this has not been possible, the reader is referred to the books by Richard or Isabel Burton.

to refute the calumny" (Wright 1906/68 II: 121). On a different occasion he remarked to one of his acquaintances: "it has always been a matter of regret to me that I never quite succeeded in cutting a man in two. I very nearly did once" (Redesdale 1915: 562).

In this context, we can understand the ambivalent image that Burton's contemporaries held of him, which shaped the reception of his Oriental works in particular. His erudition and phenomenal mastery of languages – Eastern ones in particular (it is estimated that he knew, at different times of his life, as many as twenty nine languages, including Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit) – were universally acknowledged. Yet, he was not always regarded as a serious Orientalist or a "scientist" (as somebody like Lane, for example, was seen). He was "Haji Abdullah" and Captain Burton; "Ruffian Dick" and Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George. Most of his books, especially the translations, were seen by many as no more, and sometimes much worse, than popular entertainment; but he was accepted as an expert on the East and was a member of the Royal Geographical Society. Moreover, Burton's theatrical exoticism, and his proclivity to the sensational and the grotesque, "the abnormalities and not the divinities of men" (Harris 1920: 183), created a certain mode of reception for his work and undoubtedly damaged the seriousness that could have been accorded his works, especially, of course, those purporting to challenge the prevalent norms of English culture.

2. Burton the Translator

In 1882 Richard Burton and Foster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot, a retired employee of the India Civil Service with great interest in Oriental literature, were working on the translation and prospective publication of some works of "Eastern Erotica". Comprising works from Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindustani, and possibly Chinese, these publications were supposed to form something of an Oriental sex encyclopaedia – as Burton described the *Arabian Nights*, "a repertory of Eastern knowledge in its esoteric phase" (Burton 1885 I: xix). Burton and Arbuthnot admired the alleged wholesome candour about sexuality, "the naive and childlike indecency which from Tangiers to Japan, occurs throughout general conversation of high and low in the present day" (*ibid.*: xv). Their aim was to bring the instructive treatises which Oriental "sexologists" had produced to their countrymen, whose stilted, patriarchal morality had resulted in repression, frustration, and physical and psychological ailments.

But regardless of the translators' intentions, publication of such material was not an easy task. The Obscene Publications Act of 1857, which "provided for the destruction of any obscene publications held for sale or distribution" (Craig 1937: 23), made their undertaking a very risky one. The Act was

originally intended to suppress veritable pornography, but in practice it was applied to all forms of literature (including works by such writers as Zola and, later, Wilde) with often very broad definitions of obscenity. Publishers were in serious threat of being fined, prosecuted, and possibly imprisoned (*ibid.*: 42 ff.). Already in1873 Arbuthnot had failed to publish the *Ananga Ranga of Kalyana Malla*, a book in Sanskrit on the "the Hindu art of love": only few proof copies had been printed when the publisher realized what the book was about, and immediately withdrew from the commission (Lovell 1998: 611).

After some deliberation, Burton and Arbuthnot agreed that the safest method for publishing their books would be through private subscription. Material circulated among individuals was not subject to the Obscene Publications Act, which applied only to books distributed to the public, the more so when they were published by a society for its own members. Thus was born the "Kama Shastra Society of London and Benares", practically a façade that kept Burton and Arbuthnot safe from prosecution. The first publication of the society was the *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* in 1883. It was followed by the *Ananga Ranga* (1885) and *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui: A Manual of Arabian Erotology* (1886). The *Arabian Nights* was also published under the nominal auspices of the Kama Shastra Society, but it was Burton's exclusive enterprise through all the stages of its production.

The Arabian Nights

Burton was satisfied with none of the available English versions of the *Arabian Nights*. To him, "Our century of translations, popular and vernacular, from (Professor Antoine) Galland's delightful abbreviation and adaptation (A.D. 1704), in no wise represent the eastern original" (Burton 1885 I: x). For the French Orientalist, he said, "was compelled to expunge the often repulsive simplicity, the childish indecencies and the wild orgies of the original [...] We miss the odeur du sang which taints the parfums du harem" (Burton 1885 X: 110-11). Lane's translation, on the other hand, though a significant improvement on Galland's, was, in Burton's opinion, incomplete, "unsexed and unsouled" (Burton 1886 VI: 422), for the British translator had bowdlerized (with puritanical strictness as we have seen) everything he had deemed objectionable to English taste. Burton believed that Europe still lacked a full and faithful rendering of the original.

According to Burton, his engagement with the *Arabian Nights* dated back to 1852, but his translation was precipitated when it came to his knowledge that another translation was already underway. In the winter of 1881-82, he read in the press a notice of a new version by John Payne, a minor poet and prolific translator, whose best-known work theretofore had been the translation

of the French poet François Villon. Payne had undertaken to produce for the first time a complete translation of the *Nights*, restoring all the tales and passages that other translators, including Lane, had abridged, outlined or simply left out as inconsequential, repetitive or indecent.

Payne's translation appeared in nine volumes between 1882 and 1884. Only five hundred copies were published for private subscribers, and Payne knew that he could have sold much more. On his part, Burton realized that there was still demand for another version. Moreover, he felt that there was a certain area where he could improve on his competitor. Although Payne's treatment of "the passages referring to a particular subject" (Wright 1906/68 II: 41) was not as austere as Lane's had been, he still was careful to "minimize these passages as much as possible" (*ibid.*): he either expurgated what he found improper or he "clothed the idea in skilful language" (*ibid.* 41-42). Burton, however, did not approve of what he saw as Payne's squeamishness: "You are drawing it very mild", he told Payne in correspondence on May 12, 1883. "I should say 'Be bold or *audace*,' [...] I should simply translate every word" (qtd. in Wright 1906/68 II: 42). As for style, Burton decided that his translation was to be more literal.

Burton and his Readers

Burton thought that it was high time to present English readers with a "full, complete, unvarnished, uncastrated copy of the great original" (Burton 1885 I: ii). In line with the general plan of the Kama Shastra Society, his objective was to enlighten his compatriots on sexual matters. In reply to "the mock-modesty which compels travellers and ethnological students to keep silence concerning one side of human nature (and that side most interesting to mankind), I proposed", he said, "to supply the want in these pages" (Burton 1886 VI: 437). He lamented the ills that arose from the ignorance inflicted by Victorian pedantic morality: "The England of our day would fain bring up both sexes and keep all ages in profound ignorance of sexual and intersexual relations; and the consequences of that imbecility are peculiarly cruel and afflicting" (*ibid.*: 437-8). Burton saw his literary project as a contribution to the advent of a new age that would see the end of the crippling priggishness of Victorian England. For the proper appreciation of his translation, he appealed to "the sound common sense of a public, which is slowly but surely emancipating itself from the prudish and prurient reticences and the immodest and immoral modesties of the early xixth century" (*ibid.*: 439).

But even when he was most forthright about the importance of sexual education, Burton did not fail to notice another, rather clandestine but no

less significant, manner in which the erotic element in his translation could be experienced. In the course of his criticism of the moral pretensions of his time, Burton ridicules the "mental prostitution" through which some of the sternest moralists would "relieve their pent-up feelings" (*ibid.*: 404). He exclaims (*ibid.*):

> How many hypocrites of either sex who would turn away disgusted from the outspoken Tom Jones or the Sentimental Voyager, revel in and dwell fondly upon the sly romance or 'study' of character whose profligacy is masked and therefore the more perilous.

Such was Burton's condemnation of the contemporary double standards applied to what counted as proper reading. Yet he was not altogether averse to piquing the curiosity of his prospective readers with the promise of a similar kind of guilty pleasure. In his letter to John Tinsley, a publisher whom he was trying to persuade to take on the publication of his translation, he describes the informative value of the work and indicates what kind of information is to be expected (September 24, 1883; qtd. in Lovell 1998: 670):[25]

> It will be a marvellous repertory of Eastern wisdom; how eunuchs are made, how Easterners are married, what they do in marriage, female [techniques] etc [...] Mrs Grundy will howl until she almost bursts and will read every word I write with intense enjoyment.

The "circulars" that Burton distributed as advertisements of his forthcoming publication were written in the same vein, though, naturally, in a subtler manner. The main one of these – originally an article by G. W. Smalley, which Burton asked to be allowed to use as a circular – promises a combination of exotic enjoyment and uncommon pleasures. "The text", it is assured, "is Oriental in tone and colour", preserving "Oriental habits of thought and language". Furthermore, "the singular adventurer will not shirk any of the passages which do not suit the taste of the day". The advertisement adds the cautionary, but evidently tempting, caveat that "the book is intended for men only [...] not for women or children, nor the drawing-room table or dentist's waiting-room" (Burton 1886 VI: 392).

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[25] This letter is in a private collection that Mary Lovell, author of *A Rage to Live: A Biography of Richard and Isabel Burton*, was given access to. The parenthesis in square brackets is hers. The first letter was sold in an auction, and its present whereabouts are unknown to Lovell (1998: 873).

Contextualizing the Nights

It is not surprising that Burton's foreword to the first volume of his *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainment, Now Entitled The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, which describes in detail the goals of his translation and the context in which he wants it to be received, does not make any claims about the educational value of the book's uninhibited sexuality. Instead, Burton tries in his opening remarks to call up the all too familiar Oriental ambiance of dreams, mystery and magic, which has supposedly provided him with the only release form the drab world of civilized Europe. The *Nights*, he says (1885 I: vii),

> proved itself a charm, a talisman against ennui and despondency [...] From my dull and commonplace and 'respectable' surroundings, the Jinn bore me at once to the land of my predilection, Arabia, a region so familiar to my mind that even at first sight, it seemed a reminiscence of some by-gone metem-psychic life in the distant Past.

As Dane Kennedy observes, "these remarks would seem to characterize the tales in familiar orientalist terms as escapist fantasies, standing in opposition to the Western realm of reason and respectability and offering emotional respite from its exactions" (2000: 323).

But these remarks also have another function. Burton was anxious to stress that he had started working on the translation before John Payne did and to establish his authority as the most competent for the task. His evocation of the Oriental atmosphere provides a setting not only for the stories of the book, but also for himself. For he soon enters the scene as a leading player (1885 I: viii):

> The Shaykhs and 'white beards' of the tribe gravely take their places, sitting with outspread skirts like hillocks on the plain, as the Arabs say, around the camp fire, whilst I reward their hospitality and secure its continuance by reading or reciting a few pages of their favourite tales [...] and all are breathless with attention; they seem to drink in the words with eyes and mouths as well as with ears.

The exoticism of this passage, complete with literal translation, underlines Burton's mastery of the Other's environment and way of life, which is the subject of his translation; it confirms his qualification for the task he has taken upon himself. Furthermore, it recalls his previous Oriental achievement, the "pilgrimage" to Mecca, and the authority with which it imparted him. That is

why Burton is anxious to establish a connection between his two representational enterprises: "It may be permitted me also to note that this translation is a natural outcome of my Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah and Meccah" (*ibid.*: ix).

When Burton addresses the question of the frankness with which the tales treat sexual matters, he is, at best, defensive. Far from holding it up as a challenge to the Victorians' received ideas about sexuality, he tries to justify what he calls the *turpiloquim* (Latin, "dirty talk") of the book (*ibid.*: xv) on the basis of some sort of cultural relativity (*ibid.*: xvi):

> As Sir William Jones observed long ago, 'that anything natural can be offensively obscene never seems to have occurred to the Indians or to their legislators' [...] we must remember that grossness and indecency, in fact *les turpitudes*, are matters of time and place; what is offensive in England is not so in Egypt.

Many of Burton's readers would have agreed, but it is doubtful that they would have considered the acceptability of different social practices in India or Egypt (the former an English colony and the latter under English protection, and soon to be annexed) enough reason for them to reconsider their own.

This brings us to the question of the larger political context that defined the cultural exchange between England and the East in the nineteenth century, and one in which Burton's interpretation of Oriental works (regardless of his own intentions) took place and was understood. In his "The Concept of Cultural Translation", Talal Asad calls attention to the power relations that may affect linguistic transfer between different cultures, resulting in what he calls "the inequality of languages" (1986: 156). It is not enough, he argues, to introduce new structures and "modes of intention", to use Benjamin's phrase (1923/1985: 74), into one's language to be able to transform it. The success of such an endeavour (Asad 1986: 157)

> depends on the willingness of the translator's *language* to subject itself to this transforming power [...] I want to emphasize that the matter is largely something the translator cannot determine by individual activity [...] that it is governed by institutionally defined power relations between the languages/modes of life concerned.

Burton, however, cannot be accused of ignoring the political implications of his translation. In fact, insomuch as his contextualization of it is concerned, he was consciously trying to underscore these implications. Although his introductory remarks, as we have seen, rely for dramatic effect on the romantic mystique of the *Nights* fairy tales, later in his foreword Burton condemns

Galland and his English imitators because they "degrade a chef d'œuvre of the highest anthropological and ethnographical interest and importance to a mere fairy book" (1885 I: xi). His, on the contrary, is "a book whose specialty is anthropology" (*ibid.*: xviii). It is "my long dealings with Arabs and other Mahommedans", he says, "and my familiarity not only with their idiom but with their turn of thought, and with that racial individuality which baffles description" (*ibid.*: xviii), which would allow him to bring the Orient home to the English readers just as though they had lived there (*ibid.*: xxiii):

> with the aid of my annotations [...] the student will readily and pleasantly learn more of the Moslem's manners and customs, laws and religion than is known to the average Orientalist; and [...] he will become master of much more Arabic than the ordinary Arab owns.

Yet, this curiosity about the Other is not an end in itself. In the "final words" of his foreword Burton explains why he thinks that the knowledge of the Muslim East is necessary at this particular point in time. His translation, he says, is presented to his countrymen in their "hour of need" (*ibid.*: xxiii). He denounces the "Over devotion to Hindu", which has overshadowed interest in (*ibid.*: xxiii)

> 'Semitic' studies, which are the more requisite for us as they teach us to deal successfully with a race more powerful than any pagans – the Moslem. Apparently England is ever forgetting that she is at present the greatest Mohammedan empire in the world.

Burton goes on to warn of the consequences of England's ignorance of colonized peoples: "when suddenly compelled to assume the reins of government in Moslem lands, as Afghanistan in times past and Egypt at present, she fails after a fashion which scandalizes her few (very few) friends" (*ibid.*: xxiii).

Apparently, Burton was trying to obtain the broadest readership by evoking all the different ways in which the *Arabian Nights*, especially his own version of it, could be appreciated. What is clear, however, is that this approach seriously watered down the force of any social commentary he tried to make through the translation. What is more, Burton did not become comfortable about delivering his social criticism until all the sixteen volumes of his colossal translation had been published and delivered to the paying customers. His uncompromising attacks on Victorian morality had to wait for the tenth volume of the *Arabian Nights*, and, particularly, the last, sixth volume of his *Supplemental Nights*, from which the provocative passages on pages 60-61 above are quoted. As for the text of Burton's translation (as opposed to his

notes and introductions), it contained plenty of material that was shocking to contemporary readers. But exactly what kind of shock is something to be found in the context of the translation, as well as in his performance of it, which will be discussed now in detail.

"Oriental in tone and colour"

Reviewing the previous translations of the *Arabian Nights*, Burton feels called on to give "some *raison d'être* for making a fresh attempt" (*ibid.*: xiii). This, he says, is the necessity of showing the West what the Eastern book really is, in content as well as in form: Burton wants to make "a faithful copy of the great Eastern Saga-book, by preserving intact, not only the spirit, but even the *mécanique*, the manner and the matter" (*ibid.*). As seen above, one aim of this strategy (insofar as the content of the tales is concerned) is to provide an accurate, "anthropological" picture of Oriental life and character, preserving (highlighting, it could be said), everything that the English orthodox taste would find unpalatable. On the other hand, the literal translation of the "*mécanique*" of the Arabic style is intended to produce an exotic effect "by writing as the Arab would have written in English" (*ibid.*). Burton realized the delight that his readers would derive from a deliberately foreignizing translation; he says: "I have carefully Englished the picturesque turns and novel expressions of the original in all their outlandishness" (*ibid.*: xiv).

Burton took literalism to the utmost, trying to mirror all the aspects of the Arabic – "turns of expression", rhetorical devises, imagery, and even sentence structure.[26] Thus we read expressions like "Harkening and Obedience" [*sam'an wa ṭa'a*] in reply to an order, a phrase which Burton occasionally spells out in other places as "We hear and Obey"; "he did not savour the sweet food of sleep" [*lam yaṯhuq ṭa'ma alnawm*]; "king of the age" [*malik alzaman*]"; in

[26] At the time of Burton's translation, four editions of the *Arabian Nights* had been pulished – "Calcutta 1" (1814-18), "Bulaq" (Cairo, 1835), "Calcutta 2" (1839-42), and "Breslau" (1824-43). Burton relied on Calcutta 2, which he considered the most reliable. Yet he frequently patched up his translation with other versions when these afforded more details, often without acknowledging his source. Thus, in the introductory frame tale (1885 I: 1-16), he used Calcutta 1, which he otherwise deemed inferior, because it was the most elaborate. When texts differed on a certain point, Burton chose the most exciting details. For example, the four texts describe the Queen's lover in the frame tale variously as "a black slave" (Calcutta 2, Bulaq, and Breslau), and "a dirty and shabby cook" (Calcutta 1). Burton combined these into "a black cook of loathsome aspect and foul with kitchen grease and grime" (1885 I: 4). Moreover, the entire *Supplemental Nights* were translations of the Breslau tales not found in other versions. Therefore, I have used mainly Calcutta 2, but collated it with other texts when necessary to determine Burton's exact source.

times of yore and ages long gone before" [*fi qadimi alzaman wa salifi al'aŝri wa al'awan*]; "I will bring thee to thy wish" [*sa'ublighuka maramak*]; "he thought in himself" [*fakkara fi nafsih*]; "give me to know thereof" [*a'ṭini 'il-man biṯħalik*]; "he felt like to fly for joy" [*kada yaṭiru mina alfaraĥ̂*]; "I said in my soul" [*qultu fi ruĥ̂i*]. Often such expressions are practically incomprehensible: "Allah upon thee" [*billahi 'alaik*, "I entreat you by God"]; "despite the nose of thee" [*rughma anfik*, "against your will"]. Occasionally, Arabic words are left intact, e.g. *Inshallah* ["God willing"]; *Alhamdolillah* ["thank God"]; and the verb *nakh*, which Burton transcribes as "he nakhs his camel" (Burton 1885 II: 139).

One of Burton's favourite, and rather overused devices, was the repetition of one word, or words of the same root, a technique usually used in Arabic for emphasis. The frequency of such expressions in his translation almost exceeds that in Arabic: every page is peppered with such expressions as "the Compassionating, the Compassionate" [*alraĥ̂man alraĥ̂im*], "grew and grew", "a King of the Kings of the Persians" [*malikun min muluki alfurs*], "word followed word", "talk answered talk", "a merchant of the merchants", "leg overlying leg", "jolliest and joyousest", "wight clashed against wight, and knight dashed upon knight". Similarly, cognates, also common in Arabic, are in abundance: "Joyed with exceeding joy" [*fariĥ̂a faraĥ̂an 'adhiman*]; "marvelled with exceeding marvel"; "thinking with saddest thought"; "to die by the illest of deaths" [*mata sharra maita*]; "Stroke me a strong stroke".

Expressions based on repetition are often coupled with Burton's prolific use of *saja'*, end rhyme used selectively in ancient artistic prose in Arabic. This was probably one of the most problematic of his literalisms: he maintained it, he said, "despite objections manifold and manifest" (1885 I: xiv). Some examples chosen at random are "without stay or delay", "none to guide and from the way go wide", "wrath exceeding that lacked no feeding", "this heart of mine! O dame of noblest line", "whatso woman willeth the same she fulfilleth however man nilleth". As employed, rather inconsistently, in the *Nights*, *saja'* makes the narrative, which is intended to be recited to an audience, flow with conversational smoothness. In Burton's translation, however, *saja'* sounds artificial, tedious, and often cumbersome, especially in longer passages. To cite one, not untypically elaborate example (*ibid.*: 10):

> and out of it a young lady to come was seen, white skinned and of winsomest mien, of stature fine and thin, and bright as though a moon of the fourteenth night she had been, or the sun raining lively sheen.

And likewise: "O my son, know that man's lot and means are distributed and decreed; and the end of days by all must be dree'd; and that every soul drain

the cup of death is nature's need" (1885 II: 12).

Not confined to rhetorical devices, Burton sometimes copies even the grammatical structure of the original. This results, for example, in sentences that reflect the usual verb-subject word order of Arabic: "It hath reached me [...] that quoth the king's son to himself"; "then came forward the Greek"; "Said Shahryar, who was much surprised by these words: 'Let me hear first, etc.' " There are also phrases that are clearly influenced by the Arabic noun-adjective word order: "artificers and past masters [...] skilled in making things curious and rare"; "splendid stuffs and costly"; "a masterful potentate and a glorious"; "a pious heir and a virtuous".

Literalism is not the only foreignizing element that Burton employed. His translation abounds in archaic words and expressions that looked antiquated and unwieldy to his contemporaries. He almost invariably uses "thou" and "thy", "aught" and "naught", "an" for "if", "ere" for "before", "anent" for "about", "ye" for "you", "anon" for "at once", and words like "whatso", "wroughten", "wotteth", "whilome", "tarry", and so on. Always striving to impress with novelty, Burton ransacked old English for words that had perfect counterparts in the English of his day. Thus he has "cilice" (shirt), "verdurous", "vergier" (garden), "egromancy" (magic), "purfuled" (bordered). Many of his readers were surprised by such expressions as "Woe betide thee! What means thy weeping"; "an thou speak sooth"; "a garth right sheen"; "an but swevens [dreams] prove true"; "sore pains to gar [make] me dree". Furthermore, Burton often resorted to the heavy use of head rhyme, which, more common in ancient English poetry, adds to the archaic flavour of his style. For instance: "snored and sparked [a neologism]"; "strain his strength"; "regret and repine"; "cark and care"; "kith and kin"; "rest and repose". Sometimes similar sounds clash to produce a cacophonic effect: "huge of height and burly of breast and bulk, broad of brow and black of blee, bearing on his head a coffer of crystal" (1885 I: 10).

Burton did not hesitate to augment his translation with anything that he thought might enhance the impression of outlandishness. The source text's rhetorical and prosodic devises, as well as figures of speech, became handy formulas, used persistently throughout the translation even when they did not have counterparts in the original. Prose rhyme, repetition, stock Arabic metaphors, as well as some clichés that Burton coined ("toil and moil", "fair and rare") are regular features of the English version, regardless of whether the source text uses them in a specific place or not. Burton was trying, as it were, to out-oriental Orientals. Naturally, his favourite embellishments were those that contributed to the exotic or sensational character of the narrative. Thus, every person to appear before a king should "kiss the ground between his hands", whether he/she does that in the Arabic text or not. All beautiful

women are either "full moons" or "gazelles", no matter how they are described in the original. While in the Arabic text, for example, Shah Zaman calls his wife "this damned woman" [*haṯhihi almal'una*] (Calcutta 2, I: 1), Burton makes her "damned whore"; while this king "drew his sword, struck the two [his wife and her lover] and killed them in bed" [*salla saifahu wa ḍaraba alithnaini faqatalahuma fi alfirash*] (Calcutta 2, I: 3), in Burton's hands "he drew his scymitar [...] cutting the two in four pieces with a single blow" (1885 I: 4). In the "Tale of the Ebony Horse", the people visit their king to congratulate him on the New Year, and they "give him gifts and servants" [*wa yuqaddimu lahu alhadaia wa alkhadam*] (Breslau III: 327).[27] Burton, however, adds "eunuchs" (1885 V: 1). Later in the same tale, he substitutes a "sleeping slave" [*'abd naiym*] (Breslau III: 33)[28] with a "sleeping eunuch" (1885 V: 8). This, in fact, is one of Burton's favourite additions. He inserts it wherever he has the chance: "eunuch(s)" is frequently added to, or replaces, "servant(s)". Hence, in another story, Burton has "fell in with an Eunuch riding a mare" (1886 I: 27) for "he saw a servant riding a mare" [*fara'a khadim'ala faras*] (Breslau VI: 191). Again, in the "The Story of the Merchant Who Lost his Luck", Burton substitutes "one of the servants" [*ba'ḍu alkhudam*] (Breslau VI: 214) with "one of the eunuchs" (1886 I: 35). This gives him the chance to interpolate a lengthy discussion of eunuchs in a three-page footnote, where he elaborates on the creation, history, and types of eunuchs (*ibid.*: 35, footnote1).

Such alterations did not only contradict Burton's claim of making a "faithful" copy of the *Nights* and portraying the "true" East to his contemporaries;[29] they also perpetuated the legends and stereotypes about Eastern people that had obtained in Europe for centuries, since Burton resorted to exaggeration to make his translation as exotic and outlandish as possible. Discussing one of the favourite and most persistent themes in the Orientalist imaginary, Burton comments on the sexual habits of harem women: "Onanism is fatally prevalent: in many Harems and girls' schools tallow candles and similar succedanea are vainly forbidden and bananas when detected are cut into four so as to be useless" (Burton 1885 II: 196, footnote 2). This motif (prohibiting or cutting

[27] "This tale (one of those translated by Galland) is best and fullest in the Bresl. Edit. iii. 329/6" (Burton 1885 V: 1, footnote 1). "Eunuchs" is not in Calcutta 2 either.

[28] This phrase is not in Calcutta 2.

[29] When faced with the question of why he wanted to bring out yet another translation of the Eastern "saga – book", Burton replied: "Orientalists are anxious to have the real Eastern work. I have received sundry letters saying – let us know what the mediæval Arab was. If he was exalted and good, let us see it. If he was witty, let us hear it. If he was uncultivated and coarse, still let us have him to the very letter. We want once for all the very letter" (Burton 1893 I: 391).

longish objects in seraglios so as to prevent concubines from practicing masturbation) is at least as old as Alexander Pope, with the only difference that in the case of the eighteenth-century poet it is not bananas, but cucumbers that are cut. More than a hundred and fifty years earlier, Pope had written (on November 16, 1717) to Lady Montagu, who had just embarked on a journey to Constantinople (1717/1956: 362):

> I shall look upon you no longer as Christian when you pass from that charitable court [of Vienna] to the Land of Jealousy, where the unhappy women converse with but Eunuchs, and where the very Cucumbers are brought in Cutt.

Even with Pope, one could detect a tone of irony, especially in his humorous reprimand of Lady Montagu for "going native". In Burton, however, the stereotype is presented with all the solemnity of an "anthropological" fact.

Burton's notes – anecdotes, personal opinions, "treatises" – do much more than their usual function in translation of clearing linguistic and cultural difficulties for readers and helping them put the foreign work in perspective. In size, they amount to almost one third of the text of the sixteen volumes. In scope, they touch on almost every subject known to the Victorians – geography, literature, history, science, sociology, anthropology, mythology, sex, religion, folklore, and many others. In particular, Burton was fascinated with everything that was considered abnormal or exotic in his time: circumcision (male and female), homosexuality, magic, eunuchs, torture, perverse sexual practices. Obviously, such a huge body of information cannot all be related to the translation. In fact, many of the notes were completely irrelevant to what they were supposed to explain. They were inserted on the most tenuous excuses, and their aim was simply to make the text say what it was required to say. Indeed, these notes are the sole justification that Burton could give for undertaking his translation of the *Supplemental Nights*, after the first ten volumes have covered exactly one thousand and one nights and brought the story to its conclusion, leaving no place except for tales that do not belong in the *Arabian Nights* proper: "my 'Anthropological Notes' are by no means exhausted", he said, and "I can produce a complete work only by means of a somewhat extensive Supplement. I therefore propose to print [...] five volumes,[30] bearing the title – *Supplemental Nights*" (1886 I: i).

Burton sometimes trumped up any excuse to introduce a subject that could be found tantalizing. Such elaborations can be found throughout the text, and one is often surprised at the disparity between an incident, a word, or a

[30] On publication, the number of volumes swelled to six.

phrase, and the note it occasions. In the tale of "Judar and His Brethren", for instance, we are told that "the Wazir [minister] laid down his arms and donning a white habit [...] set out afoot alone and unattended" (Calcutta 2, III: 230). Burton makes the obvious remark that "white robes denoted peace and mercy as well as joy" (1885 VI: 250, footnote 1). Consequently, he adjoins a detailed account of the presumable symbolism of different garment colours in Islamic culture, which gives him the opportunity to jump, quite abruptly, to one of his typical horror stories (*ibid.*):

> The red habit is a sign of wrath and vengeance and the Persian Kings like Fath Ali Shah, used to wear it when about to order some horrid punishment, such as the 'Shakk'; in this a man was hung up by his heels and cut in two from the fork downwards to the neck, when a turn of the chopper left that untouched.

In the story of "Ali of Cairo", we are told that Ali "cut out a [sheep's] intestine […] filled it with blood and bound it on his thigh" (Calcutta 2, III: 462). In Burton, the passage is slightly altered to "bound it between his thighs" (1885 VII: 191). For no conceivable reason, Burton opines in a footnote that "the bag made by Ali was, in fact, a 'Cundum' " (*ibid.*: 190, footnote 2); then he elaborates with a prolonged discussion of condoms – their origin, history, and types. In the story of "The Ebony Horse", the king's son finds "a young lady lying asleep, chemised[31] in her hair" (1885 V: 8). Burton sees something that is unsupported by anything in the passage: he comments in a footnote that "Eastern women in hot weather, lie mother-nude under a sheet here represented by the hair" (*ibid.*, footnote 2).

As these example show, Burton's notes combine into an overbearing metadiscourse that engulfs the source text, trying to control its signifying structure, and to adapt it to a predetermined representational framework. Yet this process could not but leave the traces of its discursive violence. Usually, Burton's extravagant sketches are more than enough to produce the effect he strives for. Too often, however, as if too eager to control the reference of his comments and leave no doubt about how they should be interpreted, he has to go a step further – to expand, elaborate, and, ultimately, overstate his point.

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[31] Another example of Burton's overtranslations. The Arabic has "*mujallalatun bi sha'riha*", which could be literally translated as "crowned with her hair", or, at the most, "covered with her hair", which implies that she has thick and overflowing tresses. At any rate, the phrase does not suggest any reference to clothes; nor does the context of the story suggest in any way that the woman is naked.

In the tale of "Al-Malik Al-Zahir", for example, Burton tries to elucidate the significance of a plot point by explaining that "in Moslem cities, like Damascus and Fez, the *Hárát* or quarters are closed at night with strong wooden doors" (1886 II: 10, footnote 1). This sounds like an innocuous explanatory detail, until we are told: "the guards will not open them except by means of a silver key" (*ibid.*: 9, footnote 4). In another footnote, Burton glosses the Arabic word *musamara* accurately as "night talk", but adds the further information that it has to take place "outside the Arab tents" (1885 VII: 217, footnote 1). This refinement does not only stretch the lexical reference of the word (which means no more than "night-talk"); it also contrasts strangely with the situation it is supposed to clarify, since the story takes place in a completely urban environment: the word occurs in a letter sent by the "king's son" to his beloved, who is also a princess ("the tale of Ardashir and Hayat Al-nufus"; Calcutta 2, III: 488).

The result is a case of what could be called overdetermined exoticism, one which, striving to dominate its subject, somehow exposes the transformative forces at work in its production. In his "Terminal Essay" in the tenth volume of his translation, Burton proposes to undertake a scientific and objective investigation of "pederasty" (1885 X: 205-54). Most of the examples he discusses, however, are sensational and absurd (*ibid.*: 325; emphasis added):

> A favourite Persian punishment for strangers caught in the Harem or Gynaeceum is to strip and throw them and expose them to the embraces of the grooms and negro-slaves. I once asked a Shirazi[32] how penetration was possible if the patient resisted with all the force of the sphincter muscle: he smiled and said, 'Ah, we Persians know a trick to get over that; we apply *a sharpened tent peg* to the crupper bone (os coccygis) and knock till he opens'.

Why a "tent peg", it may be asked? One would think that any pointed object could perform the task, and it would be much easier to procure in an urban dwelling (or rather a palace) – the only place where harems, if at all, could be found. It is at such moments that Burton's text borders on self-parody: we see the translator/commentator overreaching to bend the text into a preset mould, and, in the process, showing too much of the violence that he had to apply to an intransigent text.

[32] Someone from Shiraz, a city in southwest Iran.

"A complete picture of Eastern peoples"

Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* was an outstanding commercial and critical success. "Burton's new *Arabian Nights* is the book of the season", declared an enthusiastic reviewer (*The County Gentleman* 1885: 494). The popularity of the book exceeded Burton's highest expectations: he had printed one thousand copies at the exorbitant price of one pound a volume, but when the number of subscribers swelled to over two thousand, he regretted that he had not set the initial figure higher. The demand was so high that "the copies published a month ago at a guinea have gone up in value to ten" (*ibid.*). Burton, who eventually decided to become his own publisher, though still printing the book under the nominal aegis of the Kama Shastra Society, spent six thousand pounds on the sixteenth volumes, and grossed sixteen thousand pounds, bringing his net profit to ten thousand pounds (Wright 1906/68 II: 287). That was more money than he had ever had,[33] and it finally brought him the wealth for which he had struggled laboriously, but unsuccessfully, for the best part of his life. Thomas Wright, Burton's contemporary biographer, remarks: "Burton had wooed fortune in many ways, by hard study in India, by pioneering in Africa, by diplomacy at Court, by gold-searching in Midian and at Axim, by patent medicining. Finally he had found it in his inkstand" (*ibid.*: 285). But, as has been argued, Burton's financial success was not a serendipitous turn of events; it was the outcome of a carefully planned enterprise, calculated to satisfy the expectations, sometimes prejudice, of his prospective readers.

The reception of Burton's translation was not restricted to a closed circle of private subscribers. His work was reported, reviewed, and debated in all the major contemporary periodicals, where the general consensus was unqualified enthusiasm. Of course, there were some detractors, who, unsurprisingly, objected to the "immorality" of the tales. In the *Edinburgh Review*, Stanley Lane-Poole condemned Burton's decision to restore the "unclean" material ("an appalling collection of degrading customs and statistics of vice") that all previous translators of the book had chosen to expunge: "It is natural that he should make the most of such omissions, since they form the *raison d'être* of his own translation" (Lane-Poole 1886: 172). This, it is argued, is the reason behind the success of Burton's translation, for it is rich in "objectionable qualities which unfortunately only add to the excitement of a new version" (*ibid.*: 176). As for Burton's linguistic experimentation, Lane-Poole declares that one should "place Captain Burton's version quite out of the category of

[33] We can make a fair estimate of the magnitude of Burton's profit if we compare it to his annual salary as a consul at Trieste, which was 500 pounds a year.

English books", for it is "an unreadable compound of archæology and 'slang,' abounding in Americanisms, and full of an affected reaching after obsolete or foreign words and phrases" (*ibid.*: 181). His final judgement on the relative value of Burton's translation is outright damnation: "The different versions, however, have each its proper destination – Galland for the nursery, Lane for the library, Payne for the study, and Burton for the sewers" (*ibid.*: 184). Similarly, the *Echo*'s review complains that Burton is "always eager after the sensational", seeking to "cater for the prurient curiosity of the wealthy few" (1885: 405). On a shriller note, the *Pall Mall Gazette* lashed out at Burton's work in two articles, "Pantagruelism or Pornography", and "The Ethics of Dirt". The book is called "pornography" – the "muck heaps of other races" (Sigma 1885b: 2). Its "main reason for existence", the reviewer asserts, "is certainly its grossness!" (Sigma 1885a: 2).

But these were, for the most part, lonely voices. "Congratulations", says Wright, "rained in on Burton from all quarters" (1906/68 II: 127), and the reviews of the book teemed with praise. Few readers were prepared for the novelty of form and matter that set Burton's translation apart from the previous ones; but the new atmosphere of the *Nights* possessed a distinctive charm all the more pleasing because of its unusual character (*The Lincoln Gazette* 1885a: 463):

> The reader most familiar with the ordinary versions at once is in a new atmosphere. The novelty is startling as it is delightful [...] We have alluded to the strength and beauty of the style [...] What could be better than the terms to express grief and joy, 'his breast broadened,' 'his breast straitened,' or the words used of a person in abject terror, 'I died in my skin,' or the cruelty of the scourger who persevered 'till her forearm failed'.

Reviews extolled Burton's "faithful and racy" translation, its "graphicness", "picturesque prose", and the "quaint charm" of its "sumptuous style". "There is a charm and fascination about Burton's translation that enchains the reader", says *The United Service Gazette* (1886). For "the Eastern beauties of expression are singularly attractive, and [...] we may rely on a rich feast of such gems of thought and poesies of imagination as only the resplendent Orient can produce" (*ibid.*: 467). In the same vein, the *Liverpool Mercury* commends the foreignizing method of translation for its "subtleties of literary skill, which impart an additional charm to the book, if for no other reason, because they are racy of the soil from which it sprang" (1887: 484). Despite some reservations, the archaisms of the style were largely a source of delight, functioning somehow as counterbalance to the visceral frankness of the

translation: "how pleasant is his use of antique phrase, serving as it often does to soften the crudity of the Oriental expression" (*Lincoln Gazette* 1885b: 466). The *Continental Times* applauds Burton's linguistic innovations on similar grounds: "The choice of an idiom which in some degree recalls the air of the Canterbury Tales [...] softens the grossness of some of the stories, and gives an additional quaint charm to the others" (1885: 459). In short, and despite Burton's claims about the educational value of his translation, its reading was an enjoyable experience in and of itself: "The new edition will be prized by a few students, perhaps, but its chief value in the eyes of many who hold copies of it will be its high qualities" (*The County Gentleman* 1885: 494). Even in modern times, Burton's translation has elicited similar responses from some readers. In his 1967 biography of Burton, Byron Farwell recapitulates the attractiveness of Burton's stylization (1988: 366):

> The great charm of Burton's translation, viewed as literature, lies in the veil of romance and exoticism he cast over the entire work. He tried to retain the quaintness and naïveté of the mediaeval Arab [...] The result is a work containing thousands of words and phrases of great beauty, and, to the Western ear, originality. Arabic, if we can trust Burton, contains the most beautifully phrased clichés of any tongue in the world.

As we have seen, Burton's translation restated and perpetuated many of the age-old myths about the East. Its foregrounding of the alterity of the source text and culture only facilitated the familiar process of affirming the self in contrast to the emphasized difference − or eccentricity − of the Other. The following comment from *The Lincoln Gazette* (characteristic in its sweeping generalization) sums up the images of Arabs, Muslims, and Easterners (the terms being used interchangeably) that emerged from the new translation of the *Nights*. It reveals how the Other is often a construct of language, created, among other things, as a surrogate to the repressions and fantasies of the self (1885b: 464-5):

> *The Thousand Nights and a Night* offers a complete picture of Eastern peoples. But the English reader must be prepared to find that the manners of Arabs and Moslems differ from his own. Eastern people look at things from a more natural and primitive point of view [...] It is their nature to be downright, and to be communicative on subjects about which the Saxon is shy or silent, and it must be remembered that the separation of the sexes adds considerably to this freedom of expression. Their language is material in quality, every root is objective; as an instance, for the word *soul* they

> have no more spiritual equivalent than *breath*[34] […] But the Arabs are a great mixture. They are keenly alive to beauty, and every youth and every damsel is described in glowing, rapturous terms [...] The Arabs are highly imaginative, and their world is peopled with supernatural beings [...] Their nerves are highly strung, they are emotional to the hysteric degree, and they do everything in the superlative fashion [...] All this effervescence, so different to our rigid repression, all this exuberance of feeling, is the gift of a hot climate.

Along these lines, many readers who rankled under the "rigid repression" of Victorian society found in the Eastern storybook an outlet for their pent-up feelings, now sublimated through the distancing effect of a foreignizing translation. The reviewer of *The County Gentleman* alludes, rather sarcastically, to the contribution of this mode of reading to the popularity of the translation: "Mr. Stead's review[35] gives it enhanced value [...] School-girls cry for the book, and the Social Purity people borrow it when they can" (1885: 494).

The fame (or notoriety) of the new *Arabian Nights* spread to popular quarters as well. Burton was gratified by popular anonymous verses that circulated in London, a sing-sang jingle that captured the appeal of his translation. About the *Arabian Nights*, a young girl says (Burton 1993 II: 262):

> What did he say to you, dear aunt?
> That's what I want to know.
> What did he say to you, dear aunt?
> The man at Waterloo!
> An Arabian old man, a Nights old man,
> As Burton, as Burton can be;
> Will you ask my papa to tell my mamma
> The exact words and tell them back to me?

Probably nothing can better illustrate the attractiveness of Burton's "faithful translation" to many readers than the ill fate of the so-called "Household Edition", supervised by Burton's wife Isabel. Lady Burton, who abhorred her husband's obsession with "Eastern erotica", prepared an expurgated edition of his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, "excluding only such words as were not possible to put on the drawing-room table" (*ibid.*: 285). The

[34] It should be noted that this is the reviewer's own conclusion. In his explanation of the Arabic word "*nafs*", Burton did not make this point explicitly: "Arab 'Nafs.' = Hebr. Nephesh (Nafash) = soul, life as opposed to 'Ruach' ['*rauh*'] = spirit and breath [...] Another form of the root is 'Nafas,' breath" (1885 I: 107, footnote 1).

[35] William T. Stead was the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*.

omissions were not substantial: two hundred and fifteen pages out of the grand total of three thousand (*ibid.*; Burton 1886 VI: 452). The price, on the other hand, was much more accessible: £3 3s, as opposed to the sum of £10 for the original ten volumes. The result, however, was a commercial fiasco: of a thousand copies published of this version, only 457 were sold in the course of two years (Burton 1886 VI: 452). Burton had no doubts about the reason for readers' indifference to the new edition: "The public would have none of it: even innocent girlhood tossed aside the chaste volumes in utter contempt, and would not condescend to aught save the thing, the whole thing, and nothing but the thing, unexpurgated and uncastrated" (*ibid.*).

3. Foreignism or Exoticism?

In his *The Translator's Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti undertakes a history of translation that traces "the rise of transparent discourse in English-language translation from the seventeenth century onward" (1995: 40/2008: 33). This condition (the valorisation of domesticating translation), Venuti argues, continues to dominate the modern Anglo-American practice of translation, much to the detriment of cultural multiplicity. The goal of his historical investigation (like that of Foucault, from whom he borrows his "genealogical" approach) is to recover the voice of the other, to recuperate what the prevalent discourse in translation since the seventeenth century has been trying to exclude and conceal – dissident translations that defied the established "regimes of domestication", and were therefore ignored or marginalized. As he puts it, Venuti's aim is "searching the past for exits, alternative theories and practices in British, American, and several foreign-language cultures" (*ibid.*). Translation, he maintains (*ibid.*):

> can serve a more democratic agenda in which excluded theories and practices are recovered and the prevailing fluency is revised [...] bringing to the light forgotten or neglected translations and establishing an alternative tradition that somehow overlaps with, but mostly differs from, the current canon of British and American literature.

The alternative practices include "the Victorian archaism (Francis Newman, William Morris) and modernist experiments with heterogeneous discourse" (*ibid.*). Yet, in so much as it overlooks different trends within the very neglected practices that he tries to recover, Venuti's analysis is not free from the exclusionism that it tries to combat. In his study of translation in Victorian England, Venuti examines the projects of Francis Newman (1805-97) and William

Morris (1834-96), who translated Homer and Virgil respectively. Newman and Morris, Venuti says, were members of "a small group of Victorian translators who developed foreignizing strategies and opposed the English regime of fluent domestication" (*ibid.*: 119). In particular, Newman (whose practice is the subject of Venuti's study in the second part (118-147) of Chapter 3 of his book) "enlisted translation in more democratic cultural politics [...] pitched deliberately against an academic elite" (*ibid.*). As a result, his experiment was reviewed unfavourably by most critics, and was consequently marginalized and denied a place in the literary establishment.

But while Venuti attempts to reclaim Victorian translations that were disregarded or condemned by the contemporary regimes of transparent translation because they threatened their political and intellectual assumptions, he manages, in the process, to ignore other Victorian foreignizing practices that did deviate from the norm of domesticating translation, but ones which were implemented and received in a completely different manner from Newman's. Apart from the passing mention of Edward Fitzgerald, Venuti's group of Victorian translators does not include those who worked on Eastern languages (which, of course, did not have the canonical status of Latin or Greek), although a few of them adopted the same strategies he promotes. *The Arabian Nights* alone enjoyed three more or less full translations (by Lane, Payne and Burton), all of which had claims to varying degrees of being literal, and one had explicit subversive intentions. In foregrounding these overlooked practices, one could restore what Venuti's analysis, for the sake of consistency, fails to consider, and, in so doing, interrogate some of his basic assumptions about translation strategies and their socio-political dimensions.

To judge by the translator's claims and the method of translation he adopted, Burton's *Arabian Nights* would seem to be a model case of what Venuti advocates in translation. Its foreignizing strategy was designed to preserve the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text. Moreover, there was the articulated intention on the part of the translator to contrast this difference to the dominant social values in his culture, with the aim of criticizing some of the most entrenched (and to the his mind, regressive) of them. Even more, Burton shared Venuti's concern about the economic and social undervaluation of the translator's work (1886 VI: 411):

> My estimate of a translator's office has never been of the low level generally assigned to it even in the days when Englishmen were in the habit of englishing every important or interesting work published on the continent of Europe. We cannot expect at this period of our literature overmuch from a man who […] must produce a version for a poor £20.

Hence, Burton's conscious foregrounding of the translatedness of his work was meant, among other things, to draw attention to the central role of the translator in the reception of foreign works and cultures.

Nevertheless, as argued above, the effect of Burton's translation, as reflected in its reception, was quite different from Venuti's postulates. As Paul Bennett argues in his review of *The Scandals of Translation*, even if foreignizing translation "brings home to the reader more clearly the various aspects of the author's world-view, it is hard to see how this in itself challenges the reader's cultural assumptions" (1999: 132). In our case this source-oriented practice actually had the reverse effect. For the difference in the translated text was so exaggerated that the translation became more "eccentricating" and exoticizing than foreignizing. Contrasted to the extreme foreignness (i.e., strangeness) of the translated Other, the values of one's own culture would seem normal and acceptable. Being so dissimilar, other cultural practices thus look irrelevant, and therefore unthreatening.

As a result, rather than disrupting the feelings of moral complacency and cultural superiority of its readers, Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* eventually validated these feelings. In this case, the shock effect of encountering customs, ideas, and even words, that are considered unacceptable, perverse, or immoral by the standards of the readers' culture, did not disturb their conviction in their own beliefs. On the contrary, this emotional experience had a therapeutic impact akin to catharsis: it offered readers something of a safety valve through which they could exteriorize and cope with their inhibitions by acting them out through the description of foreign people, who "say what they think with all the unrestraint of children" (*Lincoln Gazette* 1885b: 464). In this regard, the exaggerated mode of representation (generated by the deliberately foreignizing translation) helped distance this expression, and thereby keep it psychologically safe and socially acceptable. In this, the *Arabian Nights* was not unique; it paralleled other contemporary forms of clandestine release from the repressions of society. In *The Other Victorians*, Steve Marcus demonstrates that "amid and beneath the world of Victorian England as we know it – and as it tended to represent itself to itself – a real, secret social life was being conducted, the secret life of sexuality" (1966: 100). There were many types of this Victorian "underground"; and they afforded different levels of relief, ranging in intensity and social visibility from rampant prostitution to the more subtle and disguised – "the dear delights of sexual converse and that sub-erotic literature, the phthisical 'French novel,' whose sole merit is 'suggestiveness'" (Burton 1886 VI: 404).

Moreover, the example of Burton's translation demonstrates that Venuti's theory ignores the political context that governs the transfer between the two

linguistic poles of translation, and the history of representation between them, which any new intercultural project has to reckon with. Drawing on her work on the English translation of Irish medieval literature, Maria Tymoczko notes that Venuti overlooks an essential aspect of the context of translation, that of political power. What holds true for Anglo-American culture, which is the subject of his analysis, does not necessarily hold true for others, especially those with no pretensions to cultural imperialism: "Venuti's normative stance about foreignizing and resistant translation is highly specific in its cultural application; it pertains to translation in powerful countries in the West in general and to translation in the United States in particular" (Tymoczko 2000: 39). But in order for the difference in a translated work to challenge its readers' estimation of other peoples or, especially, of themselves, the two cultures and languages involved should be in a proper configuration of power relations, with the source culture either in an equal or a higher position of political power. This is why challenging the fluency principle may be effective in translations between European cultures, interacting in a context of equal power relations, but not necessarily from cultures not at the centre of global political power. In such cases, Tymoczko argues (*ibid.*: 35), the standards are quite different:

> in translation domains with which I am familiar – namely the translation of languages that are not globalized and the translation of languages from former times, fluency is most decidedly not the norm. Indeed it goes very much against the grain to offer literary or even reader-friendly translations in such fields.

My analysis of Burton's translation confirms these findings,[36] albeit in different circumstances, and for different reasons, from those that she discusses in her examination of English translations from Irish (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, translations (except, perhaps, the very first ones made from a certain language) are not read in isolation from other representations that already exist in the target language. This corpus of other texts is what Edward Said terms an "archive" (1978/1994: 41) – a constellation of ideas, motifs, preconceptions, and images accumulated throughout a history of numerous forms of contact with another linguistic community, which amounts to an interpretive framework through which its linguistic and artistic products are filtered. In other words, what the readers of a translation think (or are, as it were, conditioned to think) of its culture of origin is a crucial factor in

[36] As does my study in Chapter Three of Blunt's translations, which defied the norms of colonialist representation described by Tymoczko specifically by producing fluent, domesticated translations.

determining how they respond to its alterity. For instance, translations from Arabic, Persian, or Sanskrit (cultures that the average nineteenth-century English reader generally considered inferior, or, at least, incorrigibly dissimilar) could not have disrupted his/her entrenched beliefs.

The insistence on the decisive role of the socio-political and literary context of translation in shaping its reception would seem to lead us to a deterministic standpoint reminiscent of what some of the radical positions in descriptive translation studies seem to lead to. Yet, one cannot overemphasize the role of individual mediators in the process of cultural translation. The canonical reading of Burton's translation was greatly facilitated (and mostly generated) by his deliberate efforts to gain acceptance and circulation for his translation by situating it in a codified and power-instituted mode of reception. It was his linguistic choices, contextualization cues, and publishing strategies, above everything else, that made it possible for his work to be appreciated as it was. On the other hand, it is, of course, perfectly possible for a translator to act in disregard, or defiance, of the expectations of the bulk of his/her reading constituency. Whether such an endeavour would fulfil its subversive ambitions, or whether it would be marginalized and obscured, is something that takes shape within the larger socio-political context, whose complexity defies any attempts of conclusive systematization. It is a question that would probably be best studied on a case-by-case basis.

What is clear, however, is that the impact of translation cannot be reduced to the translator's strategy, i.e. whether he/she uses a domesticating or a foreignizing approach. The major weakness of Venuti's argument, in this regard, is that he confuses the *strategy* of translation (which is confined to the textual level) with its *effect*, which is realized only in its socio-political and intertextual dimension. Some critics of Venuti's work have pointed to this problem of causality (Pym 1996: 166-67; Bennett 1999: 131-33). As Bennett puts it, "it is simply not enough to declare that a particular action can have some effects, without explaining just how these effects are likely to arise" (1999: 131). To be sure, Venuti does not claim that any foreignizing translation is automatically subversive. Yet his entire investigation of the question of translation and its political implications (mainly in *The Scandals of Translation* and the first and second editions of *The Translator's Invisibility*) is centred on foreignizing translation, valorized as an antidote to cultural, political, and racial prejudice and narrow-mindedness. It has been shown, however, that foreignizing translation, in and of itself, is only one tool that could be used to serve many ideological agendas – that it could rationalize racial and cultural bias and imperialist attitudes, as well as oppose them. On the other hand, domesticating strategies are equally unsusceptible to prescriptive formulations.

In the next chapter, I will discuss a translation project that directly enlisted a domesticating strategy in acts of political, anti-imperial resistance.

If both domesticating and foreignizing strategies can have such varying uses, then the politics, as well as the ethics, of translation is an issue that cannot be minimized to one of technique, but must be seen as the outcome of a complexity of circumstances that incorporate the intervention of the translator and the choices that he/she makes (including, but certainly not confined to, the "foreignness", or lack thereof, of the translation), the larger context of reception, and the relation of the translated text to other texts in its cultural environment.

4. Venuti on Burton

In the recent, revised edition of his *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008), Venuti responds to criticisms of his advocacy of foreignizing translation. In his "Call to Action" at the end of the book, he adds a study of Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* (2008: 268-73), intended as a rejoinder to my paper "The Exotic Dimension of Foreignizing Strategies: Burton's Translation of the *Arabian Nights*," published in *The Translator* (2005, 11: 51-67), and based on an earlier, shorter version of this chapter. Instead of tackling my central argument – that the emphasis on difference in foreignizing translation may end up depicting others, especially from cultures on the weak end of the power balance, as alien and bizarre, or at best exotic, and could therefore justify cultural superiority rather than defy it – Venuti centres his analysis on what he maintains is a misunderstanding of Burton's readership and his purposes (2008: 271-72).

Venuti argues that the readers of Burton's translation, who obtained it through private subscription, were far from average (see 80 above); they were "an educated elite capable of evaluating his translation" (2008: 272) and sympathetic to what he calls Burton's "Orientalist critique of Victorian hypocrisy as well as his universalist challenge to Orientalism" (*ibid.*). This Venuti projects on the evidence of one such reader, John Addington Symonds (*ibid.*: 271-272), who objected in a letter published on October 3, 1885, in the *Academy*, to the outcry in some quarters against the graphic sexuality of Burton's version of the *Arabian Nights*. A poet and a critic who was writing and privately publishing polemical essays in defence of homosexuality against public prohibition, Symonds was undoubtedly predisposed to welcome any infringement of Victorian sexual mores. Indeed, it can be argued that his defence of Burton was more a matter of principle than a recognition of the merits of the translation. In his letter to the *Academy*, Symonds explained that he only had the first volume

of the translation, and that he had not even read the whole of it. He could not comment on the notes, "the present sample being clearly insufficient to judge by" (1885: 223). Yet, he proceeded to "record a protest" against the double standards which condemned the *Arabian Nights*, while equally explicit works, such as those by Aristophanes, Boccaccio, and Rabelais, were available to the public. Otherwise, Symonds' assessment of the translation was not radically different from more popular reactions. Echoing many other reviewers (and following Burton's exhortations in his preface), he did not hesitate to point to the relevance of the translation to British imperial interests. As the translation provided a "rare insight into Oriental modes of thought and feeling" (*ibid.*), it was unacceptable, he said, to "exclude the unexpurgated Arabian Nights, whether in the original or in any English version, from the studies of a nation who rule India and administer Egypt" (*ibid.*). Similarly, his generally favourable view of Burton's linguistic methods did not reference any universalist principles. Though "some coarse passages [were] rendered with unnecessary crudity and some poetic passages marred by archaisms and provincialisms" (*ibid.*), the word-for-word translation, he argued, was "better suited to the naïveté combined with stylistic subtlety of the former [the *Arabian Nights*] than to the smooth humanistic elegancies of the latter [Camoens' *Lusiads*, which Burton had translated in 1880]" (*ibid.*).

As argued above, the framework in which Burton presented the *Arabian Nights* was far from appealing to universalist standards. His letters to potential publishers, as well as the circulars that publicized his forthcoming publication, demonstrate that he was planning to capitalize on his readers' curiosity for the exotic and the perverse. For example, in a letter to Quaritsch, a publisher that he was trying to convince to take on his project, Burton described his translation thus (qtd. in Lovell 1998: 670; see also page 61 above):

> The tone of the book will be one of extreme delicacy and decency, now and then broken by the most startling horrors like 'The Lady Who Would be Rogered by the Bear.' It will make you roar with laughter [...] What *will* Mrs Grundy say? I predict read every word of it and call the translator very ugly names.

Moreover, Burton's decision to sell his book through private subscription had nothing to do with "pinpointing" any audience (Venuti 2008: 270). It was simply a means of avoiding public persecution, since the publication of "startling horrors" of the kind he had in mind would have subjected him to persecution according to the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 (see for example Burton 1886 VI: 394-95). This danger was still present even as the work was being published for private subscribers (*ibid.*: 401).

While Burton's readers could certainly have included some intellectuals who shared his objection to the repressive aspects of Victorian morality, there are no grounds to equate financial means with intellectual status. The exorbitant price at which the translation was sold did make it accessible only to a minority of readers. But there is no indication of any selection process on the part of the translator. Burton's concern from the start was how many copies he could sell and what kind of people would be interested in buying them (*ibid.*: 390 ff.). When he decided on a 1000 copies as a commercially viable amount, the volumes were sold simply to anyone who could afford them (*ibid.*: 393-94). Hence, when Burton tried to analyze the composition of his readership, it was purely on financial grounds. The process of "filling up" his list provided him, he said, with the chance to divide his subscribers into "eight species. The friendly subscriber who takes ten copies (more or less) forwarding their value. The gentleman subscriber who pays down his confidingly. The cautious-canny subscriber who ventures £5.5s., or half the price" and so on (*ibid.*: 393). In short, the conditions in which the translation was sold and distributed suggest an elite readership created more by "the prurient curiosity of the wealthy few", as the critical review in the *Echo* protested (see 73 above), than by a sympathetic appreciation of a little understood culture on the basis of some "universalist challenge to Orientalism".

But even if we accept Venuti's speculations on the nature of Burton's readership, it is still unclear how the foreignizing strategy of the translation produced the subversive effect attributed to it. The only part of the translation where Venuti seems able to find such an impact is, surprisingly, delivered through a domesticating effect. Burton's translation, we are told, underlay a "universalist argument" that "questioned Orientalism by erasing the distinction between Western and Eastern cultures" (Venuti 2008: 270). Therefore, Burton "was careful to select canonical English authors, and in observing a similarity between their works and the *Arabian Nights* he was in effect counteracting the ideological functions that English literature came to perform during the Victorian period" (*ibid.*). Consequently, for Burton's readers "his translation reverberated through centuries of English literature, not only investing the *Arabian Nights* with unprecedented cultural prestige but defamiliarizing English literary history by putting the language of canonical authors to unexpected uses" (*ibid.*: 271). Aside from the fact that the grand generalizations about Burton's efforts to subvert canonical English literature and thus undermine "the formation of a British identity that was at once nationalist and imperialist" (*ibid.*: 270) contradict, as argued above, Burton's own account of the goals of his translation in the preface and notes, as well the methods he adopted, they present an inaccurate picture of the reception of the translation. As many

readers struggled to put Burton's foreignizing textual innovations in perspective, they compared them to all types of literary techniques known to them, domestic and foreign. But the almost eighty reviews that Burton excerpted – in part or in full – in the sixth volume of his *Supplemental Nights* show that the prevailing reaction was hardly a questioning of English literary history. Even if some readers compared the translation's novelties of expression to literary and linguistic devices they had encountered in some authors in their language (perhaps an inevitable reaction to any foreignizing translation), the prevailing attitude among reviewers was a realization (or a confirmation) of how different Arabic literature and Arab culture were from their own,[37] and how the literal translation served as the "perfect expositor of the mediæval Moslem mind" (*The Nottingham Journal* 1885: 458). One is hard pressed to find in these reviews signs of such a momentous shift as "changing reading patterns, winning acceptance for the literature of a stigmatized foreign culture while casting English cultural history in a different light" (Venuti 2008: 272).

These reactions were not a matter of personal taste; nor were they the result of the persistence of cultural bias despite Burton's best efforts. Readers were applying the frameworks of reception that for a long time had filtered works from Arabic, and of which (it is important to emphasize) Burton had kept them aware through paratextual as well as textual material. Thus, even if Burton's translation did make this purported impact on some of its readers, it is clear that it was generated not by the foreignizing methods of the translation, but rather in spite of them. A translator whose aim is to erase the differences between East and West and to question the formation of an imperialist identity does not base his translation on a radically foreignizing approach, preserving "not only the spirit, but even the *mécanique*, the manner and the matter" (Burton 1885 I: xiii)" of the original work, with the aim of highlighting the "racial individuality which baffles description" (*ibid.*: xviii) of the people who produced it, while reminding his compatriots that knowledge of the language of this work is necessary for them to colonize its users (see 64 above). For this goal, a domesticating translation would have been much more effective. In Chapter Three, I discuss how, within a decade of the publication of Burton's work, another English translator from Arabic, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, would use a decidedly domesticating strategy for the same purposes that Venuti attributes to Burton. In the context of his campaign against British imperialism, Blunt

[37] See, for instance, the October 17 review by the *Lincoln Gazette*, cited by Venuti as an example of "Orientalist superiority" (2008: 272), but which was commended by Burton himself as one of the articles that "expressed my meaning as though it came from my own mouth" (1886 VI: 406). These also include the review by *The Nottingham Journal*, cited below (*ibid.*).

consciously emphasized similarities and connections with Arab culture (and created them sometimes) with the aim of challenging Orientalist stereotypes – though without resorting to stories about ladies being rogered by bears.

In his "Venuti's Visibility", a review of the first edition of *The Translator's Invisibility*, Anthony Pym points to the several changes in Venuti's position from the early unproblematic advocacy of foreignizing translation to the later incorporation of techniques that simply resist fluency – mixing registers, adopting marginalized discourse, etc. (Pym 1996: 173-174). The recent edition of *The Translator's Invisibility* introduces a further widening of scope, including, as could be seen from Venuti's study of Burton's translation, a rehabilitation of domesticating strategies. Now even resistance to fluency (overtly at least) is not needed for the translation to be foreignizing. Venuti completely separates translation techniques from their effects to argue, in the context of discussing I. U. Tarchetti's plagiaristic Italian translation of Mary Shelly, that "the domesticating work on the foreign text can be a foreignizing intervention, pitched to question existing cultural hierarchies" (2008: 267). This makes possible such a thing as a "foreignizing fluency", which "produces the illusion of transparency and enables the translation to pass for an original composition, ultimately reforming the literary or scholarly canon in the translating language" (*ibid.*).

While these adjustments may be intended to show the complexity and subtlety of his arguments (vis-à-vis the oversimplified readings of his critics), one cannot help but wonder what has remained of Venuti's campaign for foreignizing translation. Simply the proviso that translators should somehow flout their readers' expectations about foreign cultures and the nature of translation itself, especially when these involve the consolidation of cultural insularity? If any technique – actually any effect – can serve this purpose, then why should the whole discussion be premised on the valorization of one specific translation approach? It would be much more meaningful to explore the potential sociopolitical and textual uses of various translation strategies, and describe the conditions in which they may be realized, instead of trying to fit the existing data into preconceived theoretical models. This is one of the major aims of this study.

3. Domestication as Resistance

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's Translations from Arabic

In marked contrast to Burton and Lane, whose translations, as the modern reader can see, conformed to the Orientalist (or even imperialist) modes of representation to gain acceptance for their work, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922) is an example of a translator who chose to violate the parameters which filter the works of a particular foreign culture, along with the socio-political power structures that generate them. Blunt was a British traveller, poet, dramatist, and anti-imperialist activist, who advocated the rights of colonized and persecuted peoples (especially the Arabs, the Indians, and the Irish). In numerous books and pamphlets, he untiringly denounced the injustices of British Imperialism, "the greatest engine of evil for the weak races now existing in the world" (1921 II: 212).

A study of Blunt's works and career, focusing on his representation of Arab culture, can illuminate important issues of translations strategies and their sociopolitical functions. It will allow us to interrogate some of the major assumptions of modern, especially postcolonialist, theories of translation with special emphasis on their conceptualizations of translation and political engagement. Because of the strong connection between Blunt's career and his literary works, a brief biographical sketch is essential to understanding his translation strategies, which reflected his political, intellectual, and literary preoccupations.

1. Looking for a Cause

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt was born in 1840 at Petworth House, Sussex, a traditional county in southeastern England, to a distinguished family of the landed gentry, "with strong Conservative traditions and connected with some of the

then leaders of the Tory party" (Blunt 1907/1980: 1).[38] While not exceptionally wealthy, the Blunts descended from an eminent and ancient lineage in the English aristocracy, their pedigree dating back to the knights that accompanied William the Conqueror from Normandy to England in 1066. For hundreds of years, they had produced a long line of country squires and justices of the peace. His father, Francis Scawen Blunt, was a Sussex squire, and owner of the 2,000-acre Crabbet Park estate. As he himself put it (qtd. in Longford 1979: 4):

> I was born under circumstances peculiarly fortunate as I think for happiness. Those of an English country gentleman of the XIXth Century – may father a Sussex squire of fair estate … very beautiful in the most beautiful of Southern counties – my mother of the same social rank, respectable both and locally respected.

For, Blunt the Sussex countryside became not only a haven from the turbulences of his intellectual and political struggles, but something of a utopia that exemplified the best and noblest in English life and character. The country squire (whose epitome was his own father) he saw as the ideal English gentleman. He cherished the independence, freedom, and full dominion that he enjoyed as something of a rural monarch (1914: 13):

> Nor has the world a better thing,
> Though one should search it round,
> Than thus to live one's own sole king
> Upon one's sole ground.

This idealized view of the squire – benign patriarch on his estate, who, firmly but equitably, ruled a hierarchy in which everyone respected their rank and none was wronged – came to define Blunt's conception of the model government. In his travels in the East, it was one of the most appealing things about the social and political system which he believed prevailed among Bedouins. His attachment to the old aristocratic values of the countryside was at the root of his anti-imperialist sentiments (Lytton 1925: 211):

> He hated big empires as being modern and vulgar; to him the world was a better place when divided up into smaller states, with jolly little wars from time to time which involved no great extent of victory or defeat.

[38] I have used the 1980 reissue of this book. See References.

A blissful childhood, surrounded by the idyllic scenes of the Sussex countryside (memories to which Blunt would return with great fondness in later life), was suddenly interrupted by the death of his father in 1842. His mother had to leave Crabbet Park, the family estate, and for many years she moved with her three children (Wilfrid and his brother and sister) from pillar to post both in England and on the continent. Blunt was not to settle in his beloved family estate until his early thirties, when he had spent his childhood and youth travelling all over the globe. This early restlessness left an indelible mark on his character. When he reflected on his childhood long afterwards, it seemed to him that this lack of a fixed abode was "a considerable misfortune, for a life to be perfect should have for its beginning the strong and definite visual impression of a permanent home" (qtd. in Finch 1938: 19).

In 1851 Blunt's mother converted to Roman Catholicism. Soon the children had to follow, young Wilfrid, in particular, very reluctantly. It was "a very hard blow" (*ibid.*: 21) for the young boys: it practically meant social ostracism by their peers. When they heard of the unexpected news, they were filled with "unspeakable shame" (Longford 1979: 13). This disorienting experience exacerbated Blunt's feelings of uprootedness and his concomitant identity conflicts. Moreover, it confronted him at a very early age with the dilemmas of religion and doctrinal differences. To the end of his life, Blunt was preoccupied with the philosophical and moral difficulties of faith, especially in view of the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century and the existence of different religions.

The death of Blunt's mother in 1853 only added to his growing estrangement, which elevated itself to a feeling of distinction. As Kathryn Tidrick puts it, Blunt was "possessed with a strong sense of singularity. His parents' death and his Catholic upbringing had marked him from his kind" (1981: 111). In the biographical poem *Esther*, Blunt expressed this combined sense of isolation and being destined for a special mission (*ibid.*: 27):

> Thus through these griefs I had been set apart,
> As for a double priesthood [...]
> I saw Mankind a tribe, my natural foe,
> Whom I must one day battle with.

Probably due to the bullying he suffered in his "slave years" (Finch 1938: 20) at preparatory school as the youngest and physically weakest boy in his class, he was to battle against injustices and tyranny in all their forms:

> Man, only Man I feared with eyes bent down,
> Man the oppressor, who with pale lips curled
> Sheds blood in the high places of the world.

Blunt's defence of the oppressed was to become a lifelong passion. It was the driving force of all his political and intellectual crusades.

In Byron's Footsteps

In 1858, Blunt was appointed, with the help of family connections, an attaché at the British legation in Athens. During the following ten years his various diplomatic duties took him to places as varied as Frankfurt, Constantinople, Madrid, Paris, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, Vienna, and Bern.

In Greece Blunt became a "Byron worshipper and began to fancy himself a very Byronic figure" (Finch 1938: 34). The romantic poet had captured his imagination since his early childhood; indeed, one of the major disappointments about his Catholic conversion was the fact that he would not be able to attend Harrow, which inspired him with great romance as Byron's own school (Longford 1979: 13). But now he had the chance to trace Byron's footsteps in the East, where he though that he could still perceive the memories of his heroic exploits. Byron had a great impact on Blunt's thought and career. It was especially the Byronic ideal of the poet as a man of action that especially appealed to him.

Blunt's first encounter with the Muslim East was in Constantinople in 1860. His first impressions of Islam where positive, but, as expressed in his later reflections on that early period, they may well have been coloured by the later development of his political and religious ideas. According to Longford, "All the visible vice and squalor in the teeming city seemed to be Christian", Blunt remembered later, "while the beauty was of Islam" (1979: 15). It was in Constantinople too that Blunt's faith encountered one of its early challenges. He found himself "face to face with the first great difficulty which besets an inquiry into the rival claims of faith and reason, namely the existence of more faiths than one" (1878: 25-6). Such an awareness of the position of the Other is not common in Orientalist accounts. Positive descriptions of the manners and customs of the East are certainly not missing from them, but to engage in a real dialogue with the subjects of their description, to recognize that they have legitimate belief systems that may be comparable to one's own to the point where they may call them into question, requires far greater empathy and introspection than most of Western observers of the East were willing to engage in.

Blunt's interest in travel in the Arab World was first kindled when he was serving at the British legation at Buenos Aires by none other than Richard Burton. Burton, then consul at Santos, was visiting the Argentine capital for exploration projects. His connection with the Consular service brought him to the Legation, where he and Blunt "sat up many nights … talking of all

things in Heaven and Earth" (1921 II: 129). Blunt was especially fascinated by Burton's account of his travels in the Arab World: "I had hardly as yet visited the East, but Eastern travel had interested me from the day I read Palgrave's 'Journeys in Arabia,' and Burton was fond of reciting his Arabian adventures" (*ibid.* 130). Though initially fascinated by Burton's character, Blunt did not appreciate his attitude toward the Arabs (*ibid.*132):

> in his talks with me, and also in his books, he showed little true sympathy with the Arabs he had come to know so well. He would at any time, I am sure, have willingly betrayed them to further English, or his own professional interests. His published accounts of Arabia and the Arabs are neither sympathetic nor true.

Naturally, these remarks tell us more about Blunt himself than about Burton, and they reveal how he came to see his own approach to the East, and his place among other Orientalists and their role in the British intervention in the region.

Blunt turned his imaginative affinity with Byron into a material one in 1869, when he married Annabella King-Noel, granddaughter of the poet though his daughter Augusta Ada Byron. Blunt saw the union as "a first step in his poetic progress" (Longford 1979: 71), as it made it possible for him to share in literary heritage. On the social level, the marriage was highly rewarding: it placed Blunt, as he put it, "almost in the rank of the world's sublimities" (*ibid.*). Lady Anne Blunt, as she was later known, soon became Blunt's partner in many of his political, literary, and expeditionary enterprises. She became his trusted companion in all their travels throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, and she contributed actively to his descriptions of the region.

Suffering from various health problems, and increasingly feeling the need to dedicate his time to poetry and travel, Blunt retried from the diplomatic service at the end of 1869. Before long, he became the sole heir to the family estate after the deaths of his brother and sister in 1872. Therefore, he was finally able to return to his beloved Essex and establish himself as the squire and patriarch of Crabbet Park, where he could continue the age-old traditions of his ancestors (1914: 13):

> I like to be as my fathers were,
> In the days ere I was born.

2. A "Political First Love"

Blunt maintained that "it was only by accident that [his] mind was gradually turned to politics" (1907/1980:4). His political activity was a lifelong battle

against British imperialism, and it was in the Muslim and Arab world where his career started, and where he focused his energies for most of his life. In 1873, finding himself "in indifferent health, and to escape a late spring in England", he embarked with his wife on their "first common journey in Eastern lands" (*ibid.*). Their destination was Turkey, and this time Blunt's visit was not confined to a short stay at Constantinople. The couple spent six weeks travelling in the Turkish countryside, "away from the beaten tracks and seeing as much of the Turkish peasant life as our entire ignorance of their language allowed" (*ibid.*: 5).

What struck Blunt most about the life of the Turkish peasants was the relatively great degree of freedom from bureaucratic intervention that they seemed to enjoy: "with much fiscal oppression a large personal liberty existed in rural Turkey for the poor, such as contrasted not unfavourably with our own police and magistrate-ridden England" (*ibid.*). He recalled how his indigent listeners were horrified to know that (*ibid.*)

> there where countries in still wore plight than theirs, where if a poor man so much as lay down on the roadside at night and got together a few sticks to cook a meal he ran risk of being brought next day before the Cadi [judge] and cast into prison.

They refused to believe, he said, that such tyranny existed anywhere in the world.

This incident gave Blunt the "earliest political reflection I can remember making in regard to Eastern things" (*ibid.*: 5-6) and it clearly reveals as much about his conception of British, as about Eastern politics. As a member of the land-owning aristocracy, whose power rested in their independence and sovereignty on their country estates, Blunt resented the increasing bureaucratization of British administration, which, among other forces, was threatening what Lord Willoughby de Broke (another nostalgic aristocrat) described as "a more simple, more benevolent age, when landowners presided responsibly over their great estates" (qtd. in Cannadine 1990: 521).

The following year in French-colonized Algeria, Blunt witnessed "another spectacle which gave food for reflection: that of an Eastern people in violent subjection to a Western" (1907/1980: 6). With all his admiration for French culture, Blunt found "his sympathies in Algeria going out wholly for the Arabs" (*ibid.*). He was especially impressed with the nomadic tribes of the Sahara, who had "retained not a little of their ancient pride of independence which the military commandants could not but respect" (*ibid.*). There he thought that he saw a community that he could not only appreciate, but also identify with. His account of the Algerian nomads may just as well apply to the rural aristocracy

which he idealized: a "noble pastoral life … a life of high tradition filled with the memories of heroic deeds" (*ibid.*: 7).

But there was more to this eager identification with the East than the mere appreciation of a kindred way of life. Strongly attached to his social class, Blunt was obviously seeking a vindication for values that were quickly passing away in England. For the British aristocracy was going through a historical crisis, from which it was never to recover: several economic and political factors eventually forced it to release its hold on English politics and culture. Successive parliamentary reform acts – in 1832, 1867, and 1884 – and the Redistribution Act in 1885, steadily undermined its monopoly of the government as the electorate was expanded to include an increasingly greater portion of the population (eventually the majority of male citizens), while in the beginning of the century it was restricted exclusively to the property-owning nobility. No less importantly, the inexorable rise of industrial production and world trade was tearing away at the economic base of the aristocracy, heavily dependent on "'landowning interest,' which derived its wealth from the nation's agrarian economy" (Altick 1973: 20). It was the landed elite that was hit the hardest "when the bottom fell out of agriculture in the 1870's" (*ibid.*: 21), as "a series of bad harvests and the tariff-free importation of vast quantities of foodstuffs presaged the imminent end of the agrarian economy" (*ibid.*: 93). Fortunes made in trade, finance, and industry replaced inherited property and proud tradition as the foundation of political power and social influence. Therefore, "Those with money, land and leisure watched their traditional skills… their inherited notions of nobility and honour … all suddenly rendered irrelevant" (Brent 1977: 25).

As their golden age, with its elevated codes of nobility, was fading into the past, some of the cornered patricians began to look abroad for places in which what they thought were similar codes of leadership and conduct were not yet obsolete. As Peter Brent explains (*ibid.*: 26):

> it was to people in such a situation that there was brought a series of reports [...] of a distant wilderness where people had conserved an enviable lifestyle. There, it appeared, were a free people, with each individual his own master, living proudly by the skill of hardship, disdainful of cities, his code half chivalric [...] it must have seemed a vision of perfection. There in the desert [...] flowered honour, hospitality, simplicity and freedom. It was a vision that must have been irresistible to those hemmed-in inheritors of Romanticism.

As result, the image of the Arabs, and sometimes Islam, defined by representations that for a long time had emphasized their radical difference, suddenly

assumed a new familiarity for some Englishmen: "The fascination of Arabia, once a matter of distance, of bizarre practices and a rival mystery, had become instead a nostalgia for the standards of Sir Lancelot, the nobility of Lyonesse" (*ibid.*).

Yet, for most of these aristocrats, the newfound affinity with Arab culture was merely a matter of emotional attachment; for the most part, it did not seem necessary to translate it into concrete action. And so it was for Blunt during that time. The plight of the Algerians, though cause for much sympathy, did not compel him to any stance other than that of a neutral observer: it was a "new political lesson which I took to heart, though still regarding it in no sense my personal affair" (1907/1980: 7).

The Blunts' journey in Egypt the next year did little to change this attitude of noninvolvement, though it allowed them to improve their knowledge of Arab culture and the Arabic language considerably. Blunt did have then, as he explained later, "sympathies in the cause of freedom in the East" (*ibid.*). But that was due to the romantic association with Byron, reinforced by his wife's relation to the poet, and so it "seemed to us … that the champion of the cause of Arabian liberty would be as worthy an endeavour as had been that for which Byron had died in 1827" (*ibid.*). Consequently, neither of them "had any thought in visiting Egypt more serious than that of another pleasant travelling adventure in Eastern lands" (*ibid.*). During their three-and-a-half-month stay in the country, the Blunts started to learn Arabic. In the Suez desert, Blunt had his first glimpses of the Bedouin life of the desert which was later to become his "political first love" (*ibid.*: 58); "they laid the basis … of those relations with the desert tribes of Arabia which were afterwards to become so pleasant to us and so intimate" (*ibid.*: 9).

On leaving Egypt, Blunt made his first visit to the confines of Arabia. In the company of the same Bedouins who had escorted them from Suez, he and his wife crossed the Suez Canal and made a long tour in the Sinai Peninsula and through Aqaba to Jerusalem. In their dealings with the Bedouins they encountered on this journey, "Blunt first became really interested in the Arabs as individuals" (Finch 1938: 69). A young man confided to him his love affair and asked his help in persuading the girl's father to approve of the marriage. Thus Blunt "began to suspect that these people were men with like passions with ourselves" (qtd. in Finch 1938: 69). When he was impressed with the honesty of his guides, he concluded that they "were as honest men as ourselves" (*ibid.*). Despite the condescending tone of these remarks, they underlie an empathetic drive rarely seen in similar travelogues. Blunt was beginning to discern familiar features beneath the deceptively alien appearance of another culture, and he was eager to convey the experience to his readers.

At that point in his career, Blunt was still "a believer in England" (1907/1980: 12). As he listened to the grievances of the poor peasants about a government that was laying them bare, he no more understood than they the financial pressure from Europe which was the cause of their suffering. He subscribed to the "common idea of the beneficence of [English] rule in the East, and I had no other thought for the Egyptians than that they should share with India, which I had not yet seen, the privilege of our protection" (*ibid.*). Subsequent experiences, and especially a visit to India, would oblige Blunt to revise this judgement.

The "Rob Roy of the Desert"

The Blunts returned from Egypt, and the Arabian desert in particular, dissatisfied with the superficiality of their experience there. They were determined to improve their knowledge of Bedouin life and manners, as well as the Arabic language, by "a more serious journey than any we had yet undertaken" (1879 I: 2). Blunt discerned some sort of a progression to their travels, carrying them "always farther and farther eastward … so that it was natural that the Euphrates valley and Mesopotamia should be chosen as the scene as our next campaign" (*ibid.*). Moreover, when they discovered that the Royal Geographical Society's latest maps of central Arabia were largely outdated, the Blunts decided that a new, more accurate geographical survey of the region was needed.

Their journey started on 20 November 1877 at Scanderoon,[39] on the north-western Syrian coast. From there they soon moved to Aleppo (the gateway to the desert), where the British consul regaled them with tales of Bedouin exploits, some of which "seemed as though fresh from his countryman, Walter Scott" (1879 I: 38).[40] The most exciting of these told of Jedáan, a local chief who had risen to the rank of the supreme leader of Ánazeh, one of the most powerful desert tribes, and had maintained his independence staunchly against the Turkish occupying forces. The Blunts were so fascinated by this "Rob Roy of the Desert" (*ibid.*) that they decided to meet him in person. Thus, they accompanied the Ánazeh tribes on their travels, especially when they knew that these might take them as far as Nejd, the heart of Arabia. Although no

[39] In what follows I use Blunt's own spelling of Arabic names and words.

[40] The bulk of the journey's narrative was based on Lady Anne's diaries; Wilfrid wrote the introductions and chapters on the politics and geography of the Euphrates desert. The same plan was followed in *A Pilgrimage to Najd*. For the purpose if this analysis, the spouses' contributions are treated as undifferentiated parts of the same representative project, without considering the potential gender implications of this division of labour. For a thorough investigation of this issue, see Behdad (1994: 92-112).

European had attempted the journey before, Blunt admitted that "it would not be even a dangerous experiment; and only tact and patience would be required" (*ibid.*: 43).

From the very beginning, it was clear to the Blunts that travelling disguised in local costume, as most European travellers from Burckhardt to Lane and Burton had found it necessary, was out of the question. This would have betrayed the entire purpose of their journey. For the aristocratic couple wanted to be acknowledged for what they were: "persons of distinction in search of other persons of distinction" (1881 I: 205). They were anxious not only to meet nobles, but also to be recognized in return as such. Thus, as they approached the Shammar tribe, Lady Anne ascended her mare, "so as to arrive in becoming dignity", while Wilfrid "put on a sword which he has been keeping for state occasions" (1879 I: 179). More importantly, as Blunt was trying to emphasize the insignificance of the surface differences of dress and custom that separated him from his hosts, it was necessary, if he wanted to signify his ability to transcend these differences, not to gloss over them, but rather to display them. As it was commented with reference to Charles Doughty, another traveller in the East (qtd. in Kiernan 1937: 274):

> The instinct to imitate, to cloak your own convictions and follow alien and perhaps disliked conventions, is based on a deep distrust of human brotherhood. The man who really believes that the distinctions of race, colour, language, and creed are ultimately less important than the fact of our common humanity is never afraid to admit the reality and significance of these distinctions: the man who minimizes the reality of the distinctions in the human family is the man who, at bottom, suspects them of having a terribly potent force, a force stronger than that of the brotherhood which is human nature's indefeasible privilege.

As they came closer to Jedáan, the couple grew even more anxious; indeed, Wilfrid was determined to help the tribal chief in his wars (1879 I: 61). But when they finally met the "prince of the desert", he did not live up to their rather exacting standards. To them, he did not look like an aristocrat: "In appearance … he is not prepossessing … and his manner wants the well-bred finish which distinguishes the members of families really '*asíl*' ['noble']"[41] (*ibid.*: 304). The problem with Jedáan was that he had not attained his eminence by blood: he was "a parvenu, and owes all his position to his merit as a man of action and a politician. He began life as a poor man of no very distinguished family" (*ibid.*). Yet, the Blunts were glad to conduct some diplomatic missions

[41] This technique of linguistic identification became a staple in the Blunts' translations.

on his behalf, in an attempt "to bring peace between the tribes", especially "when the Bedouins had in face of them so powerful an enemy as the Turks" (*ibid.*: 315).

The Blunts' disappointment in Jedáan was more than rewarded with other genuine "gentlemen of the desert". The most remarkable of these was Faris, one of the leaders of the Shammar tribe, who was a true aristocrat: "a better-bred man it would be difficult to find … we have at last found the thing we have been looking for … a *gentleman* of the desert" (*ibid.*: 228). Indeed, Faris belonged to "what may be called the royal family" (*ibid.*: 230). The Blunts were so impressed with his lineage, including a brother who was "a hero of romance" (*ibid.*: 228), that they reproduced his entire family tree (*ibid.*: 231). The meeting of equals was consummated with an oath of brotherhood between Blunt and Faris – "an oath as impressive as those of our marriage-service, and considered quite as binding by those who take it" (*ibid.*: 237). The Blunts were deeply moved by the ritual: "There was something so impressive in the ceremony that, for some minutes after it was over, we all three sat without speaking" (*ibid.*).

"Shepard rule"

The next step in Blunt's travels in the East seemed a natural one: "The journey to Nejd forms the natural complement of the journey through Mesopotamia and the Syrian Desert" (1881 I: ix). To them, "imbued as we were with fancies of the desert", this central region of the Arabian Peninsula had for long assumed "the romantic colouring of a holy land" (*ibid.*: x). The blunts attached such supreme importance to Nejd precisely because of its significance for the Bedouins, whom they had met and found so congenial: "Nejd, in the imagination of the Bedouins of the North, is a region of romance, the cradle of their race, and of these ideas of chivalry by which they still live" (*ibid.*).

The direct motive of this new undertaking was no less romantic. During their journey in the Euphrates in the previous year, their guide, Mohammed Ibn Arûk, was a youth "of high birth", who eventually became Blunt's "brother". Before leaving him to return to England, Blunt had promised to help him in the choice of a wife "of noble blood", from Nejd, his ancestral home. It was important for him, as Blunt explained, to continue the family history, "which formed a perpetual romance, and the *kasid* or ballad … came in on every occasion … as a chorus to all that happened. But for it, I doubt whether the journey could ever have been accomplished" (*ibid.*: xvii).

The Blunts started their journey in Damascus in December of 1878, where they were united with old friends. The most singular of these were perhaps

Mijuel el Mizrab and his English wife Jane Digby. In a sense, the a couple embodied the link of nobility across cultural barrier which the Blunts were eagerly seeking. Mijuel was the chief of a Bedouin tribe, "a man of birth and position", with "all the characteristics of good Bedouin blood" (*ibid.*: 8); his wife was an English aristocrat, formerly Lady Ellenborough. Having married about twenty years earlier, the couple now divided their life between the city and the desert, spending six months of each year in the nomad dwelling of Mijuel's tribe, and the remaining months in a palace they built for themselves in Damascus. The Blunts were taken by the seventy-year-old Digby and her devotion to her husband's tribe. Lady Anne described her manner as dignified and unassuming. How different, Elizabeth Longford remarks, from "the outrageous picture of her drawn by Mrs Richard Burton in the press" (*ibid.*: 131).[42]

After encountering some of their "relations" along the way, the Blunts fulfilled the romantic purpose of their journey in the oasis of Jôf in northern Nejd, where Ibn Arûk's relatives lived. Lady Anne was instrumental in the selection of the wife, and when some disagreements arose, Wilfrid presided over a general council of all the family, and finally ironed out the differences. Wilfrid, in his "brotherly offices", paid the dowry on behalf of Ibn Arûk. Finally, when all the arrangements were completed, the couple left for the next, most important station of their journey, as "Wilfrid solemnly kissed his relations all round, and exchanged promises of mutual good-will" (*ibid.*: 151).

But the height of the Blunts' journey was their visit to Haïl, then the capital of Nejd under the leadership of Mohammed Ibn Rashid. There, Blunt found no less than "an ideal State in the heart of Arabia" (*ibid.*: 208). Though not greatly impressed by Ibn Rashid himself, who reminded them of "the portraits of Richard the Third … the very type of a conscience-stricken face, or of one which fears an assassin" (*ibid.*: 216), the Blunts acknowledged that the prince was "adored by his subjects" (*ibid.*: 218). In fact, Ibn Rashid's state at Haïl was the model of what Blunt came to call the "Shepard rule", which was to be found in its "pure form", he argued, in Central Arabia (*ibid.*: xxi). As he described it, the "Shepard rule" was a system of strict, but benign, hierarchy, ruled by aristocrats motivated for the most part by their *noblesse oblige*. The sovereign, or "Lord Protector" (*ibid.*: 260), who rose to power through "prestige of his rank (for Bedouin blood is still accounted the purest)" (*ibid.*), exercised full authority but was not an absolute ruler: "the Bedouin prince, despotic though he may be, is still under strict restraint from public opinion" (*ibid.*: 270). For he knew "that he cannot transgress the traditional unwritten

[42] Richard and Isabel Burton lived in Damascus between 1869 and 1871, during which time Burton served as consul.

law of Arabia with impunity" (*ibid.*). That was a community of harmony. When disputes arose, they were settled on the spot by neighbours and friends; if not they were judged by "the Emir, who settles them in open court, the *mejlis*, and whose word is final"; thus, "the rowdyism and violence of European towns are unknown in Haïl" (*ibid.*: 266). Indeed, it was in Nejd where "the three blessings of which we in Europe make our boast, though we do not in truth possess them, are a living reality: 'Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood,' names only … but here practically enjoyed by every free man" (1907/1980: 58). The foundation of this society, and the basis of its rule of law, Blunt believed, was ancient tradition and custom: "The law of the Koran … is not, I fancy, the main rule of the Emir's decision, but rather Arabian custom, an authority far older than the Mussulman code" (1881 I: 266). This idealized form of government, based on venerated customs and respected blood privileges, was closely intertwined with Blunt's own concerns: it was to become not only his view of the type of political system that should be encouraged in Arabia, but also his response to the political and social ills that, in his view, ensued from the collapse of the old way of life in England.

Blunt completed his exploration of Eastern politics in India. When they arrived in Baghdad at the close of their travels in Central Arabia, the Blunts found, among the papers awaiting their arrival, an invitation from Lord Edward Robert Lytton, an old friend of Blunt's who had served with him at the British legation in Lisbon in 1865, and was now Viceroy of India. At Simla, then the summer capital of Imperial India, Blunt was able to see the workings of imperialist management at first hand. Sir John Stratchey, the finance minister, put him "through a course of instruction on Indian finance and Indian economics, the methods of dealing with famines, the land revenue, the currency, the salt tax, and the other large questions then under discussion" (1907/1980: 61-2).

Up to that point in his career, Blunt was still a believer in the potentially benevolent nature of the British Empire. Indeed, he believed then that the best way to secure the independence of Arabia and preserve the "Shepard rule" he so enthusiastically extolled was to extend the protection of the British Crown to the Bedouin princes of Arabia, which, he hoped, would disrupt Russian designs in the East and encourage the Arab peoples to rise against their Ottoman rulers (Longford 1979: 153-4). One the other hand, he knew that "Ideas … of Arabian independence were agreeable to the official view" in the Indian Government (1907/1980: 61). There were even plans for a diplomatic mission by the Blunts to Nejd, in an attempt to forge an alliance with Ibn Rashid, the prince of Haïl (*ibid.*).

Yet, Blunt's close observation both of the political methods of English rulers and the miserable condition of their Indian subjects finally led to disillusionment. As he was to recall later, he "left Simla with my faith in the British

Empire and its ways in the East shaken to its foundations" (qtd. in Longford 1979: 154). In a letter to a "Radical friend", he said: "the 'natives,' as they call them are a race of slaves, frightened, unhappy, and terribly thin … I own to be shocked" (1885: xvi). He continued (*ibid.*: xvi-xvii) that if the British went on

> *developing* the country at the present rate the inhabitants will have sooner or later to resort to cannibalism for there will be nothing but each other left them to eat … All public debts, even in a self-governing country, are more or less dishonest, but in a despotism like India they are a mere swindle.

Blunt thus came to realize that the interests of the peoples of the East would be best served in independence from the British, not to mention the Ottoman, Empire. He expressed his newfound conviction unequivocally in another letter: "I believe the natives capable of governing themselves far better than we can do it, and at about tenth of the expense" (1885: xviii). Eventually, Blunt came to the radical conclusion that the best remedy of the plight of colonized peoples would be to dismantle the empire once and for all: "Want eats up these Empires in their centralized governments, and the only way to make them prosper would be to split them up and let the pieces govern themselves as they could" (*ibid.*: xvi).

3. The "scourge of the oppressor"

Blunt's discovery of the Bedouin lifestyle and political system brought into focus several, hitherto disparate, threads of his thought and career – his romantic idealization of, and identification with Byron, his rage against oppression and injustice, his quest for a heroic mission, his anguish over the passing of his aristocratic class and its world of values. It was the beginning, as he put it, of "a romance which more and more absorbed me, and determined me to do what I could to help them to preserve their precious gift of independence" (1907/1980: 58). Arabia now appeared "in the light of a sacred land, where I had found a mission in life I was bound to fulfil" (*ibid.*). The result was a wide-reaching vision in which the decline of what Blunt saw as the most vital, and noble traits of English character was linked to the exploitation of nations with proud ancient traditions, all as the outcome of one evil – colonialism spurred by industrialization and international finance. "England's decay", he explained, "rests upon causes far more general than any one man or party of men can be responsible for. We fail because we are no longer honest, no longer just, no longer gentlemen" (*ibid.*: 92). This failure to fulfil the moral duties

dictated by a chivalric concept of honour Blunt blamed squarely on imperialist expansion (1921 I: 212-213):

> We were better off and more respected in Queen Elizabeth's time, the 'spacious days,' when we had not a stick of territory outside the British Islands, than now, and infinitely more respectable. The gangrene of colonial rowdyism is infecting us, and the habit of repressing liberty in weak nations is endangering our own. I should be glad to see the end.

Blunt's imaginative observation of Arabia not only lent context to concerns that had so far been personal and subjective; it also provided him with a plan for action. Nejd had seemed to him a stronghold of traditional ideals, a community ruled by a rural aristocracy whose claim to authority was based on blood, not acquired wealth: "By publicizing the existence of such a society and the desirability of preserving its independence he was affirming in a vivid public manner the virtues of aristocracy – and the legitimacy of his own social position" (Tidrick 1981: 124). Thus, the struggle against imperialism was necessary, not only to support heroic values where they still endured, but also to maintain the hope of salvaging England from the evil that had ruined the old "spacious days".

Wilfrid Blunt's political struggles were concentrated in a decade of intense activity that directly followed his return from his Indian and Arab travels in 1880. He decided that the first step in his ambitious mission would be a thorough introduction into the teachings of Islam. It seemed to him that a wide-range religious reformation was essential to the political revival of the Arab World.[43] Blunt's plan was to start his Islamic education at the city of Jeddah on the Red Sea, in what is today western Saudi Arabia. There he hoped to meet a scholar with whom he could devise a movement of reform, of which he would suggest the political elements (1907/1980: 86). But on arriving in Egypt in late 1880 on his way to Jeddah, he found the country in a state of great religious ferment. It seemed that the religious revival that he had hoped for was already taking place. As he conversed with young liberal-minded scholars about their ideas for Islamic reform, Blunt was delighted to find that "they were close to my own" (*ibid.*: 101).

Blunt's studies of Islam and deliberations with religious scholars in Cairo (and then in Jeddah) in 1880-1881 formed the basis of a series of essays published in the *Fortnightly Review* in the summer and autumn of 1881, later

[43] Already in *A Pilgrimage to Nejd*, Blunt had called Mohammed Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab the "Luther of Mahometanism" (1881:xiv), although he disapproved of the doctrines of Wahhabism in favour of the more liberal Ibn Rashid (1881: 250 ff.).

collected in The *Future of Islam*, published in 1882. In this first of his political books, Blunt tried to present his readers with a view of Islam "from within, not from without" (1882:174). He argued that a deep and far-reaching Islamic reform movement was underway, particularly in Egypt, where "Cairo has now declared itself as the home of progressive thought in Islam" (*ibid.*: vii). This, he hoped, would lead to the establishment of a liberal Islamic government by a free Islamic people in Egypt (*ibid.*). Blunt looked forward to the restoration of the Islamic caliphate (as a spiritual, not a temporal institution) to Mecca or Cairo as the natural, and necessary, corollary to the imminent collapse and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire (189-90). He called on England to direct its Eastern policy toward this end, pointing out the benefits to English interests in the East, and particularly in India (*ibid.*: 194). Blunt also appealed to the moral obligation of the Empire, which was "an experiment new in the history of the world, and needs justification in exceptional enlightenment" (*ibid.*: vi). Notwithstanding his own view of the conditions of the colonized peoples, the Empire was a reality. It was a powerful political and military engine, which Blunt still believed could be possibly directed for the good. Consequently, he hoped that his book might "be instrumental in guiding the national choice" (*ibid.*).

In his attempt to impress his arguments about Islam on his English readers, Blunt was anxious to draw parallels between the two cultures, a technique that he would employ regularly in his later writings and translations. He appealed to his readers to forego the prejudices created by a long history of aggression inherited from the Crusades and the wars against the Ottoman Turks, for it was "surely time that moral sympathy should unite the two great bodies of men who believe in and worship the same God" (*ibid.*: 172). He pointed to the Arab influence, as filtered through Spain and Italy, on European and English thought and literature (*ibid.*: 143-44):

> Chivalry, a notion purely Bedouin, is hardly yet extinct among us. Romance, the offspring of pre-Islamic Arabia, is still a common motive of our action, and our poets express it still, to the neglect of classic models, in the rhymed verse of Yemen.

In a more speculative vein, Blunt pointed to the "close resemblance" between the Islamic reformers, who were advocating a more austere religious practice and the return to the moral law of the Koran, free from theological speculation, and the "'Reformers' of Christianity" (*ibid.*: 137). He maintained (*ibid.*) that

> some of the circumstances which have given them birth are so analogous to those which Europe encountered in the fifteenth century that

> it is impossible not to draw in one's own mind a parallel, leading to the conviction that Islam, too, will work out for itself a Reformation.

Blunt's grand designs were abruptly cut to size in 1882 with the British invasion of Egypt. Egyptian nationalists, some of whom Blunt had met and befriended during his recent visits to the country, were determined to free their country from European control, which had kept a firm grip on the country's political and economic system since the French Expedition in 1798. In 1881 they prevailed on the British-appointed ruler of Egypt, Khedive Tawfiq, forcing him to reconvene the Assembly of Delegates, which he had dissolved earlier, and appoint a nationalist government, with Ahmad Arabi, the leader of the nationalists in the army, as war minister. European powers became concerned about their interests, especially the bondholders' shares in the Suez Canal. When a French-English joint warning in early 1881 was not heeded, England resorted to military action. On September 1, 1882, British forces defeated the Egyptian army, led by Arabi, at Al-Tall al-Kabir. Cairo was occupied on the next day.

Throughout the crisis, Blunt stood firmly by the Egyptian nationalists. He kept a line of communication open with Arabi and his followers, expressing support and sending advice; he offered to act as mediator between the khedive and his parliament, in the hope of averting the imminent foreign invasion. He defended the Egyptian cause vigorously in the local press and in public forums, condemning the English interventionist plans. At one point, he even seriously considered going to Egypt to smooth out the differences among the nationalists and apprise them of the international situation, but he was warned that he would be arrested by British forces once he landed in Alexandria (Longford 1979: 182). Though he was supported in his struggle by a small group of political friends and sympathizers, Blunt was largely maligned for his "unpatriotism". A letter he sent to the *Times*, appealing to the English people and denouncing the government's actions, was met by a "storm of abuse" (*ibid.*: 184). Blunt was called a traitor, "the head of the insurrection" (*ibid.*: 183); one Lord Houghton declared that "both Blunt and Arabi ought to be shot" (qtd. in Longford 1979: 185).

Yet Blunt was not deterred. After the British army had occupied Egypt, he concentrated his efforts on saving Arabi and his officers from execution. His agitation in the English press was instrumental to abandoning the originally intended court martial for a civil trial. He founded the Arabi Defence Fund, to which he was the major contributor, and hired two lawyers who eventually managed to have the death sentence commuted to exile.

From then on, Egypt became the centre of Blunt's political activity, especially when it became clear that, contrary to initial claims, the English forces were to stay permanently in the country. He maintained his connections with

Egyptian nationalists, and visited Arabi and other exiles in Ceylon, where he stayed for ten months. In various articles and books – such as *Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt* (1906), *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* (1907), and *The New Situation in Egypt* (1908) – he set out to uncover the abuses of the British colonial government. In particular, he denounced Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer), the British Consul-General, so strongly that in 1883 he was banned from entering the country for three years (Finch 1938: 212).

Another cause for which Blunt became an ardent campaigner was that of Ireland. Indeed, it was his sympathy with Irish nationalists that first prompted him to enter the field of practical politics. In 1885 he ran for the House of Commons as a "Tory Democrat" in the London district of Camberwell. He attributed his narrow defeat solely to his open support of Irish Home Rule (Finch 1938: 209-10; Longford 1979: 221). Yet, Blunt's attachment to the Irish struggle for independence only grew stronger. He became an active member of the "Irish Home Rule Union", and in 1886 he made two journeys to Ireland, where he met nationalist leaders and made friends among them.

It was only natural that Blunt should make a connection between Egypt and Ireland. As he was later to remark in The *Land War in Ireland*, "The two causes, the Irish and the Egyptian … seemed to me to stand on a common footing of enlightened humanity" (1912: 155). Elizabeth Longford argues that the "deciding factor" in Blunt's decision to take up the cause of Ireland was the remark by an Irish friend that "both Arabi and the Mehdi [the Sudanese rebel against the English occupation] were heroes in Ireland" (1979: 216).

Ireland, moreover, presented a better chance of effective political action. Thus, Blunt ran for elections a second time in 1886 in the city of Kidderminster – this time as a Liberal (as the Liberal Party had proposed a program of Home Rule). Again, Blunt lost the election, but now it was a universal defeat for all Home Rule candidates. The height of Blunt's Irish career, however, came in 1887. Having returned refreshed from a trip to Egypt (the first after a three-year ban), he again plunged himself into politics, accepting the candidacy of Deptford in southeast London as an anti-coercion candidate.[44] But instead of managing the campaign himself, he went to Ireland again to protest ongoing evictions, as the delegate of the Home Rule Union. In late 1887, Blunt held a meeting at Woodford, County Galway, in defiance of an official proclamation declaring the meeting illegal. Blunt challenged the authorities to arrest him, and he actually provoked the police to do so; his intention was "to test the validity

[44] The Irish Coercion Act, passed in 1881, gave the English authorities in Ireland the power to arrest people indefinitely and without trial; another coercion act in 1882, and the Crimes Act, passed in late 1887, enforced even more stringent measures.

of the Crimes Act … by placing the Government in the dilemma of having to arrest an Englishman for doing in Ireland what in England was admitted to be the right of every peaceable citizen" (Finch 1938: 237). Blunt was arrested and sentenced to prison for two months. While he was serving his prison term in early 1888, Blunt lost the Deptford election. It was to be his last.

After his release from prison, Blunt would not try any more to pursue his principles through direct political activity. Having realized that he was not cut out for professional politics, he decided that he could serve the causes in which he believed better through intellectual activity. Thus, he began to dedicate more time to his literary pursuits, especially poetry and translation. He did not abandon his political preoccupations, but he was now primarily an observer and a commentator, not a practicing politician. He continued to write books on the injustices of British colonialism, most notably the "Secret History Series": *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events* (1907), *India under Ripon: A Private Diary* (1909), *Gordon at Khartoum: Being a Personal Narrative of Events* (1911), and *The Land War in Ireland: Being a Personal Narrative of Events* (1912). His indignation at all forms of injustice never abated. Commenting on the imminent Boer War of 1899, he said (1921 I: 325):

> there is some chance of a general war between the Dutch and the English in South Africa, which may alleviate the condition of the only people there whose interests I really care for in the quarrel, namely the blacks. It will also be a beautiful exposure of our English sham philanthropy.

His farewell to the Nineteenth Century is one of great outrage, with undertones of frustration (ibid.: 375-76):

> The old century is very nearly out, and leaves the world in a pretty pass, and the British Empire is playing the devil in it as never an empire before on so large a scale. We may live to see its fall. All the nations of Europe are making the same hell upon earth … The whole white race is revelling openly in violence, as though it had never pretended to be Christian … So ends the famous nineteenth century into which we were so proud to have been born.

Blunt and the Irish Literary Revival

In her preface to Blunt's *My Diaries*, Lady Augusta Gregory, recalling her first meeting with Blunt in Cairo, where her husband was serving at the British

embassy, acknowledged that she "had made [her] education in politics there" (1921 I: x). Next to his wife, Lady Gregory was perhaps Blunt's most faithful ally during his fight against the English invasion of Egypt and his support of the Egyptian nationalists. She even published a pamphlet, *Arabi and his Household*, in which she defended the Egyptian nationalist leader against misrepresentations in the English press.

Blunt's friendship with Lady Gregory continued until his death (he appointed her his literary executor), and it was only natural that he should get involved in the "Irish Literary Revival", of which she was a founder and a driving force. His assistance was essential to the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, a centrepiece of the movement, in 1904; on William Butler Yeats' request, he helped obtain the patent for the theatre through his cousin George Wyndham, the Chief Irish Secretary. Indeed, Blunt became a veritable participant in the Irish Literary Revival with the verse play *Fand of the Fair Cheek* ("a Féerie in Three Acts"). Based on an episode in the Cúchullain cycle of Irish mythology, it was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1907.

Apart from his friendship with Lady Gregory and other Irish Nationalists, several elements attracted Blunt to the project of adapting and translating ancient Celtic literature. He admired the romance and heroic spirit of this ancient mythology, qualities which he discerned in the Bedouins he travelled amongst, as well as in "the Arabic literature in which [he] was steeped and which seemed to him akin to the Irish sagas" (Finch 1938: 317). More importantly, the Nationalist Irish translators were able to combine his two grand passions, politics and literature, into one enterprise. By reviving their ancient national heritage and bringing it to modern readers, they laid claim to a proud cultural tradition whose artistic value presented both evidence of their right to be a free, independent people and a refutation of English stereotypes which depicted them as barbaric and uncivilized (Tymoczko1999: 62 ff.). This achievement of the Irish Renaissance was certainly on Blunt's mind when he embarked on his translations from the Arabic.

4. Blunt the Translator

One of the most remarkable aspects of Blunt's career was the unity and consistency of his thought and action. His diverse pursuits were all driven by a set of basic ideas that put them in a meaningful and coherent context. It should not be surprising, therefore, that his translations from Arabic literature fall neatly in line with his other concerns. His two undertakings in this area[45]

[45] As with his travel accounts of the Arab Near East, Blunt's translations were done in collaboration with his wife, Lady Anne, but the notes and introductions to the translations were written by Blunt himself.

– *The Celebrated Romance of the Stealing of the Mare* (1892) and *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia* (1903) – formed yet another stage in his political and intellectual campaign.

At first glance, the choice of these particular works seems rather unusual. The "Golden Odes" are the earliest examples of Arabic literature (and of the Arabic language in general). These poems were selected by eminent literary critics and connoisseurs, at special literary fairs held annually in various parts of ancient Arabia, as the finest examples of Arabic poetry. According to an ancient tradition,[46] they were honoured by being written in gold and hung on the wall of the Kaaba (a holy shrine in Mecca even before Islam) – hence the name *almu'allaqat* ("the suspended poems", the "Mollakat" in Blunt's transliteration), or, less commonly, *almuṯhahhabat* ("the golden poems"). Regardless of the authenticity of the tradition attributed to their selection, they have always been held as paragons of classical Arabic eloquence and poetic skill. The *Stealing of the Mare*, on the other hand, was a translation of an episode from the Saga of Banu Hilal (*sirat bani hilal*), a narrative cycle which relies on a thin basis of historical fact to relate the heroic deeds and battles of the tribe of Banu Hilal in the 10th-11th centuries A.D. Composed mostly in the vernacular, and recited by professional storytellers at public gatherings and coffeehouses, this folk epic was for a long time relegated to the level of popular, or even "vulgar", literature; it was not given any serious attention by scholars of Arabic literature until well into the twentieth century.[47]

In spite of the apparent disparity, the two works are united by the common thread of chivalric romance. The Seven Odes flourished at a time when the Arab Peninsula, as Blunt describes it, was "in the occupation of more or less kindred pastoral communities, following the same customs [...] and bound by the same code of honour in peace and war" (1903: ix).[48] The poets themselves were no different from European chivalric knights of the nobility: "free gentlemen of blood and lineage [...] They were warriors and knights errant, the heroes of their own romances" (*ibid.*: xi). Similarly, the Saga of Banu Hilal tells of intrepid knights of noble ancestry (exemplified by its celebrated hero Abu Zeyd), who set out in search of heroic adventures and romance. The particular episode selected for translation typified these themes perfectly. It tells the story of Abu Zeyd's quest to win a noble horse, rescue a beautiful princess and marry her, and save a young man and his old mother from servitude.

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[46] Which was the subject of heated critical disputes, and has been all but refuted in modern times (Lecomte 1993: 254).

[47] Thus, the Blunts deserve credit for being among the first scholars, Arab or European, to appreciate the literary value of this work.

[48] Citations of the introduction and notes to this translation are from the 1903 edition; poetic citations are from Blunt's *Poetical Works* (1914).

The Blunts' handling of the translation shows a clear intent to foreground this element of the Arabic texts. To be sure, the themes of love, war, heroism, and honour were not simply tagged on to the pre-Islamic Odes and the Banu Hilal Saga; these works do provide the closest parallels in Arabic literature to the *Song of Roland* and the *Le Morte d'Arthur*. But the abundance in the translations of such key words as "maiden", "noble", "lineage", "honour", "knight", "fair lady", "woo", and so on (even when they are not in the original) reveals a conscious effort to couch the Arabic texts in the familiar terms of European chivalric romance. In *The Stealing of the Mare*, for example, while the protagonist, Abu Zeyd, tells his servant to "Find out the story of this woman" [*ikshuf lana khabara haṯhihi alĥurma*] (*Qiŝŝat faras al-'Aqili Jabir*: 2); the translation has "read me the errand of this fair Lady" (1892: 1). Similarly, "the old woman" [*al'ajuz*] (31) is translated as "the ancient dame" (*ibid.*: 113), "abundant gifts" [*al'aṯaia alza'ida*] (31) as "noble gifts" (*ibid.*: 111), "young girls" [*banat*] (17) as "damsels" (*ibid.*: 63), and "our husbands" [*bu'ulatana*] (al-Zawzani 1963: 257) as "our lovers (1914: 118). Again in the *Stealing of the Mare*, Abu Zeyd goes out "disguised as a poet" (*Qiŝŝat faras*: 2); the Blunts translate this as one "of the singers of ballads" (1892: 12). In the poem of El Hárith, "I see her no more who used to live there" [*la ara man'ahidtu fiha*] (al-Zawzani 1963: 288) is expanded into "ye lost are to me with my lost glory" (1914: 120). In the poem of Imr El Káis, the poet's beloved is described as "fair-faced, slim of waist, not the least flabby" [*muhafhafatun baiđa'u ghairu mufađatin*] (al-Zawzani 1963: 98); the translation adds the phrase "noble of countenance" (1914: 79). In the poem of Ántara, the warrior poet describes how he killed his enemy: "I split through his clothes with my solid spear" [*fashakaktu bil rumĥi al'aŝami thiabahu*] (al-Zawzani 1963: 379). In the translation, the mundane "clothes" is replaced with "mail-coat and armouring" (1914: 110). These adjustments are found throughout the translations; they are probably the most frequent form of intervention by the translators.

In highlighting the chivalric motifs of the Arabic originals, Blunt's aim went beyond the mere confirmation of the values of his own class. In presenting these generally unknown works to the English reader, he was trying to create a shared basis of experience that would make it easier to approach the works of a little understood culture. Thus, he was anxious to underline the political and literary interaction between Arabs and Europeans and the similarities between them. In the introduction to the Odes, for instance, analogies are invoked with "the lyrical portion of the older Hebrew Scriptures" and "the Book of Job, the Psalms of David" (1892: ix). The Banu Hilal saga, on the other hand, is compared to the *Song of Roland* and the *Le Morte d'Arthur* (*ibid.*: vii), and seen as "an excellent example of the Mediæval Epic in its Eastern dress" (*ibid.*: viii).

Evidently, this technique of identification is far from the reduction of the difference of the foreign into the familiar terms of the self. For one thing, Blunt argued that it was actually Arabic literature that could have influenced the emergence of parallel genres in Europe. Thus, the Banu Hilal saga is (*ibid.*)

> perhaps, a model from which Europe took its romantic inspiration [...] The romantic cycle of Abu Zeyd may very well have been known to the first singers of the cycle of Charlemagne and King Arthur, and have suggested to them their method.

Even more, Blunt attributed to Arab influence (*ibid.*: xiii-xiv)

> the whole scheme of chivalry which we are accustomed to consider an exclusively Christian condition of things, but which in fact mediæval Europe imitated and developed on lines of its own from the original Arab model, brought through Africa into Spain.

Furthermore, Blunt argued that Arab influence was behind not only the codes of chivalry, but also many other elements of European culture (*ibid.*:ix):

> the magnanimous code of honour in war [...] the feudalism of the middle ages was Arabian; the union of the temporal with the spiritual authority in politics; and in literature, the purely Semitic form of rhymed verse, as distinguished from the classic scansion and the unrhymed sagas of Europe.

There was more to these analogies than the attempt to create a favourable mode reception for the translation. The substantial contribution of Arab culture to European civilization attested to its intrinsic value, thereby refuting the pretexts of colonialism. In this regard, Blunt's efforts paralleled those of the nationalist Irish translators of the ancient literature of Ireland, "the nearest analogy" in Europe, Blunt believed, to the pre-Islamic poetry of Arabia, "which by a strange accident was its close contemporary" (*ibid.*).

A New Rúbaiyāt?

The Blunts' Arabic translations were almost unique in foregrounding the literary merit of the works they selected for translation, an element which was neglected in contemporary "sociological" and "anthropological" approaches to Arabic and Oriental literature. Blunt describes *The Stealing of the Mare* as a story of "peculiar vividness, and for that reason and for the liveliness of

the plot and the individuality of the characters was chosen by the translators in preference to any other for a first attempt to introduce the poem to English notice" (1892: ix). This does not mean that the social and historical dimension of these works was completely ignored. Blunt argues that the Banu Hilal saga, for example, gives a picture of Arab life and ideas characterized by its "fidelity to the African form of Arabian thought. The hero, Salame Abu Zeyd, is the exact type of the North African Bedouin" (*ibid.*). But as this statement demonstrates, Blunt was well aware of the specificity and historicity of the work's relationship to its environment; he did not view the source text, in the manner of Lane for instance, as a manifestation of some timeless essence, subsisting beyond the confines of time and place. Therefore, "an indulgent spirit, and some knowledge of Bedouin customs" encountered in *Stealing of the Mare* is useful, he explains, only to give the reader "a fair idea of its merit" (*ibid.*: x). In other words, manners and customs are not the main interest of the work, or the pretext for an "ethnographic" account that covers the entire source culture, but a means of appreciating the work's artistic value.

Blunt's aspiration was no less than to present English literature with "true poetry [...] a new flower added to the body of English classics" (*ibid.*: xxi). Hence, in contradiction to the common practice of contemporary Orientalists, who usually stressed the highly specialized nature of their subject and, consequently, their own authoritative role in describing and interpreting it, Blunt wanted to "produce a volume, not for scholars only, but also for all lovers of strange and beautiful verse" (*ibid.*: xix). To that end, and also to highlight the shared ground of experience to which he repeatedly appealed in his introductions and notes to the translations, Blunt's method was "so to simplify and arrange the verses as to make them run easily and intelligibly to English ears" (*ibid.*: xx). His criticism of literalist translation may just as well be a commentary on the strategies of Lane and Burton: An "absolutely verbal rendering of verse in another language is nearly always a betrayal", but that is "especially true when Arabic and English are in question. To translate baldly, where tongues are so different, is to outrage the original, and often to render it ridiculous" (*ibid.*). The model he sought to emulate in this regard was that of Edward Fitzgerald's 1859 translation of the *Rúbaiyāt* of Omar Khayyam. He hoped that his translation would have the same impact as that "produced forty years ago by FitzGerald, when he gifted English poetry with the glorious 'Quatrains of Omar Khayyám'" (*ibid.*). The Seven Odes, as Blunt had argued years before the publication of his translation, still awaited someone "who shall do for them what Fitzgerald did for the *Rúbaiyāt* [...] find them their equivalent [...] in sterling English verse" (1896: 626). Consequently, he believed that Fitzgerald's "freehand method is really the only fair one"; and,

therefore, "FitzGerald's has been the model taken by the present translators" (1892: xx).

Following Fitzgerald, the Blunts steered away from the overly literalist practices that had focused on the surface features of the Arabic texts. While they were faithful to the original, producing a generally accurate translation, especially in comparison with Fitzgerald himself, there was no attempt to mirror the grammatical or stylistic structures of the Arabic texts. Rather, they tried to capture the "spirit" of the original as they understood it. For them, the pre-Islamic poetry of Arabia and the Banu Hilal saga revolved around themes of chivalric heroism. That was the character they were eager to preserve in the translation. The result was a dignified, lucid style, whose formality, and occasional archaism, was probably the best contemporary vehicle for chivalric romance, and one which stands in stark contrast to the stilted, faux-authentic mannerisms of Burton and Lane:[49]

> Antar! they cried; and their lances, well-cords in slenderness,
> Pressed to the breast of my war-horse still as I pressed on them.
> Doggedly strove we and rode we. Ha, the brave stallion!
> now is his breast dyed with blood-drops, his star-front with fear of them!
> If he had learned our man's language, then had he called to me:
> if he had known our tongue's secret, then had he cried to me. (1914: 112)

In their effort to underline similarities across ethnic barriers, the Blunts were eager to find familiar equivalents for the cultural and linguistic features of the Arabic texts, even when this sometimes resulted in inaccuracies or anachronisms. In *The Stealing of the Mare*, for instance, Abu Zeyd takes "his lute" and disguises himself as "a poet" (1892: 123). A footnote explains that the musical instrument in question is "The 'rebab,' or Bedouin fiddle" (*ibid.*). Yet, the more familiar term, "lute", though less accurate, is the one used throughout the text. In the same story, people play musical instruments and sing (*Qiŝŝat faras*: 16); this is translated as "they sang psalms and canticles" (1892: 64), or "hymns" (*ibid.*: 67), where the songs do not have any religious or spiritual significance. When the poet Ántara describes his rival as causing wine-sellers to bring down their "flags"[50] [*hattaku ghayati altijar*] (al-Zawzani 1963: 280), the English version has the more familiar "signboards" (1914: 111). Perhaps the most striking addition in the translations occurs in the same poem. The phrase "his finger tips [...] dyed with the dragon's blood" (1914: 111) stands

[49] I follow the Blunts' line divisions.

[50] The flag was used as the inn's landmark; the implication here is that this man would buy all the merchants' stock of wine, so that they would have to close down.

out sharply in the translation since this creature is unknown in pre-Islamic mythology. The original has "his finger tips [as if] dyed with indigo"[51] [*khaḍbu albinan*] (al-Zawzani 1963: 380).

Another domesticating technique was the effort to tone down practices and customs that might have looked objectionable or bizarre to English readers, or otherwise incompatible with European principles of chivalric romance. For example, when a character in the *Stealing of the Mare* talks about a tribal chief who has taken his father and crucified him [*fa'akhaṯha abuia wa ŝalabah*] (*Qiŝŝat faras*: 10), the translation has "slew my father" (1892: 31). In particular, the Blunts were careful to soften or romanticize the raw sexuality of the *Seven Odes*. For instance, the poet Imr El Káis describes his sexual exploits in this manner (al-Zawzani 1963):

فمثلك حبلى قد طرقت و مرضع فألهيتها عن ذي تمائم محول
إذا ما بكى من خلفها انصرفت له بشق و تحتي شقها لم يحول

> [Many a woman have I visited by night as I visit you, pregnant and nursing, whom I distracted from her amulet-adorned infant.
> When he cried she would turn to him with one half, her other half still under me, unmoved]

In the Blunts' translation "visited by night" is turned into the more romantic "wooed", and the graphic account in the second verse is dramatically watered down: "Her, the nursling mother, did I not win to her?" (1914: 78). Moreover, "pregnant" is replaced with "wedded ones", and "maidens" is added to the first verse (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, some of the pre-Islamic standards of female beauty that might have seemed unusual in a romantic English context were also modified. For example, the poet Amr Ibn Kolthúm describes the tall, slim figure of his beloved, as well as "her buttocks, burdened by their weight" (al-Zawzani 1963: 242):

ومتني لدنة سمقت وطالت روادفها تنوء بما ولينا

The English version of the second half of the verse, "fair flanks sloped [...] and downward bending" (1914: 114), presents a more congenial image of female beauty. In the same poem, Ibn Kolthúm describes how the women of his tribe walk slowly, swaying as if drunk (al-Zawzani 1963: 256):

[51] i.e. covered with (clotted) blood.

إذا ما رحن يمشين الهوينى كما اضطربت متون الشاربينا

According to commentators,[52] the implication is that the heavy, drunken-like gait is the result of the women's heavy weight, and, especially, backsides. In the Blunts' translation, however, this is explained in a more romantic manner: "our maidens advance with a proud gait swaying" (1914: 118).

One particular custom that the Blunts regularly glossed over in the pre-Islamic poems was enslavement, especially of war captives. In El Hárth's poem, this practice is described unambiguously (al-Zawzani 1963: 296):

ثم ملنا على تميم فأحرمنا وفينا بنات قوم إماء

> [Then we swooped on [the tribe of] Tameem, and by the truce-months
> we had their daughters for slaves]

In the translation the second line is altered into "taken their daughters for wives, their maids for handmaids" (1914: 122). In Ibn Kolthúm's ode, warriors have to guard against their women being captured (al-Zawzani 1963: 256):

على آثارنا بيض حسان نحاذر أن تقسم أو تهونا

> [On our tracks are fair beauties,
> whom we protect from being divided or disgraced]

But the Blunts' undertranslation obscures the reference to slavery (1914: 118):

> [...] Behind us marching
> trail our beautiful ones, our wives close-guarded.

Similarly, in the Poem of Ántara, "female slave" [*jaria*] (al-Zawzani 1963: 281) is translated simply as "handmaid" (1914: 111).

One of the key, and telling, elements in the translations of Burton and, especially, Lane was the system used for the transliteration of Arabic names and words. Unsurprisingly, the Blunts eschewed an excessively literalist approach. In his introduction to *The Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates*, Blunt had pointedly expressed his opinion on this issue: "It has, however, been repugnant to our taste to adopt a system entirely phonetic. 'Ali' cannot be spelled 'Arlee,' [*sic*]

[52] See, for example, Al-Zawzani (1963: 265).

nor 'Huseyn' 'Hoosain,' without one's eyes aching" (1879: 10). Instead, they opted, of all possibilities, for "a modification of the old '*lingua franca*' spelling used by Galland, in his translation of the 'Arabian Nights'" (*ibid.*). That was the system that the Blunts adopted for their translation. While it does not exude the same air of erudite exactness found in Lane, it does not produce the impression of an alien people, separated by an unbridgeable cultural chasm.

The use of elaborate, exhaustive notes was another established Orientalist practice that the Blunts did not find necessary. The notes they attached to the translations were minimal, confined to explanations of historical and linguistic details unfamiliar to the English reader. Grouped together at the end of each book, they provide the least interruption to the reading experience, which the translators clearly wanted to be smooth and continuous. Moreover, the notes are not marked with numbers or symbols in the text (actually, the reader may not even be aware that there are notes, unless by flipping through the entire book). Consequently, the reader does not know when a certain word or passage is further explained, and would consult the note section only when extremely necessary. As the introduction explains, it was hoped that "without referring to the explanatory notes of the Appendix, each poem will now be readable even by those who run" (1892: xxi).

The content of the notes was similarly conducive to a fluent reading experience: far from using the texts to describe the source culture, they mainly supply background information essential to the literary appreciation of the story and poetry. Otherwise, the notes allow Blunt to elaborate on his theories on the connections between East and West, especially the influence of the former on the latter. Thus, commenting on the word *ra's* ("head"), which he translates as "captain", he refers to the Arabic word "*akíd*", speculating (rather shakily) that it is the origin of the English "guide", perhaps on account of its Spanish origin (*ibid.*: 65). In his discussion of a reference to the mirage phenomenon, he argues that the English word "may possibly have been derived by travellers from the Arabic *meráj*, meadows, which are sometimes the form of the appearance" (*ibid.*: 61).

At times, comparisons were employed to dispel European misconceptions or to clarify actions or practices that might have seemed unusual. For example, when explaining the custom of Bedouin pirate-raids, "which supposes each tribe to be a nation at war with all other nations unless protected by a treaty", Blunt adds that "The international law of Europe has a very similar basis" (*ibid.*: 66). When the heroine of *The Stealing of the Mare* is about to be burnt alive, Blunt cites equivalents in European literature, implying not only that this brutality is not unique to the source environment, but also that it could be no more than a narrative devise (*ibid.*: 127):

> This condemning of Alia to be burnt, and her rescue by Abu Zeyd, compares closely with mediæval practice in Europe, as when Guinevere is condemned to be burnt by King Arthur and is rescued by Launcelot in Mallory's version of Morte d'Arthur.

Sometimes, Blunt took the chance to refute some of his readers' stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. When a female character in *The Stealing of the Mare* recites a prayer, he notes that "the passage will serve as a refutation of the foolish fancy of European writers, that Moslem women have no religion" (*ibid.*: 124).

In 1914, the two Arabic translations were included in Wilfrid Blunt's first complete edition of his poetry, *Poetical Works*. The two texts appeared in the second volume as the "Golden Odes of Pre-Islamic Arabia" and "The Stealing of the Mare: An Arabian Epic of the Tenth Century". No introductions or notes were deemed necessary; there was not even a notice that these works were translations, not authored by Blunt himself. That was obviously a further attempt to incorporate the translations into the canon of English literature, to the point where they could be treated as original productions, just as the *Rúbaiyāt* had become almost an English classic.

Yet, the Blunts' translations did not make the impact they had counted on. Though generally positive, reviews were few and rather cursory. A brief comment in the "Short Notices" section in *The Academy* commends the "exceedingly interesting translation" (1904: 72). The reviewer takes up Blunt's analogies, noting that the Arab ancient poets were "somewhat like the noble *trouvères* of the middle ages" (*ibid.*). While the review tends to focus on the exotic features of the translation ("These poems [...] are unlike the cultivated Eastern poetry we know. They are free, wild songs of love and adventure, with a primitive strength and spaciousness about them" (*ibid.*), the general impression created by the translation is not very different from the one intended by the Blunts. Even when the poetry is described as "Very beautiful, often singularly original, and sometimes strange to the Western mind" (*ibid.*), this is in the context of the reviewer's approval of the similarity with the Song of Solomon. *The Stealing of the Mare* did not command more attention. There was a belated review in *The New Statesman* on the occasion of the publication of a special, limited edition[53] of the translation. In the course of reviewing ten new literary works (under the general title "Images and Inventions"), the reviewer hails the Blunts' as "one of the great translations from Arabic, a poem that has the strength and beauty of the achievements it celebrates" (1930: xxii). But apart

[53] Only 275 copies were printed (1930: xxii).

from the quality of the print, that was all that the reviewer had to say about the book.

A few critical notices, positive as they were, did little to save the translations from obscurity. Arthur John Arberry, an eminent twentieth-century Orientalist, argues that the pre-Islamic Odes found "sensitive and gifted" interpreters in the Blunts, calling their work "the finest rendering in any language" (1943: 22). Yet, in the introduction to his own study and translation of the poems, Arberry laments the scant popular and critical attention the Blunts' work received at the time of publication (*ibid.*: 30):

> Sustained by this high expectation [of repeating Fitzgerald's success], the Blunts published in 1903 *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia*. The first edition was printed finely [...] The price asked for was the modest sum of five shillings. But FitzGerald's shade had been invoked in vain; the indifferent public hailed no new Omar, and the Blunts' translation has never been reprinted.

5. Translation as a Political Act

In emulating Fitzgerald's "freehand" treatment of the *Rúbaiyāt*, the Blunts were oblivious to the fundamental differences between their methods and objectives and those of their predecessor. For one thing, Fitzgerald's goal was hardly to introduce his readers to Persian culture, to rectify their stereotypes about it, or to reveal the connections that linked them with it – much less to combat imperialist attitudes. In fact, Fitzgerald made no secret of the low esteem in which he held his original and the culture that produced it. "It is an amusement for me to take what Liberties I like with these Persians", he wrote, "who (as I think) are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them" (1972 VI: xvi). In other words, Fitzgerald's domesticating approach did not stem, as the Blunts' did, from the assumption of a common ground of human experience. As numerous studies of his translation have shown, Fitzgerald used al-Khayyam's poems for his own artistic and poetic ends: his was "the work of a poet inspired by a poet; not a copy, but a reproduction, not a translation, but the rediscovery of poetic inspiration" (Arberry 1959: 26). The reason for his success was his ability to adapt the poem to the artistic and philosophical concerns of his contemporaries, who admired "the vigour of [Khayyam's] thought and expression, and their harmony with much that is going on around us" (qtd. in Arberry 1959: 28). In particular, Fitzgerald's version resonated with the scepticism and world-weariness of the Victorian *fin de siècle* (qtd. in Yohannan 2004: 6):

> It heightened the charm to readers, living in a season of outworn faith and restless satisfaction, to find that eight hundred years before, far across the centuries, in the dim and remote East, the same problem had pressed sadly on the mind of an ancient and accomplished sage.

Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rúbaiyāt* is a pertinent example of the kind of domesticating translation condemned in some modern theoretical reflections on translation, especially in the work Lawrence Venuti. Showing no respect for the difference of other cultures, it sets the self as the norm and tries to assimilate all unfamiliar ideas to its worldview, and, in so doing, it contributes to ethnocentric and even imperialistic attitudes. Yet, the case of Blunt shows that domesticating translation can serve completely different purposes. For in the context of nineteenth-century British representations of colonized nations, and the political realities that underlay them, the attempt to find equivalents for the experiences of these others offered less grounds for feelings of superiority, and consequently less legitimatization of subjugation and exploitation, than Lane's and Burton's emphasis on their alterity. Indeed, this domesticating approach was coupled with an overt and explicitly stated anti-imperialist agenda. Therefore, in looking for a framework for the practice of resistance in/through translation, one cannot speculate about the linguistic and stylistic techniques that would a priori make a translation resistant or ethnodeviant. It all depends on the context of the translation, the political and cultural history of representing the source culture, the intended audience, and the translator's own agenda.

As argued above, the main weakness of the valorisation of foreignizing translation derives from the confusion of the translation's technique with its function: domesticating or foreignzing strategies can be enlisted for very different political ends. But when examining Blunt's translations from Arabic and their reception by contemporaries, another gap becomes apparent – that between a translator's goals and methods and the impact of his/her work. Blunt's choice of translation strategy seemed well suited to his intention of combating ethnocentric stereotypes. But his work was marginalized and practically ignored. The reason for this is not difficult to surmise: political relations are sustained by institutional structures of power that override individual intentions. Of course, this does not mean that translation cannot contribute to political action, but that disparate individual efforts aimed at influencing the conceptions of a group of readers cannot be counted on to change political and social realities.

In her study of "Translation and Political Engagement", Maria Tymoczko makes the distinction between translation that "actually participates in social movements, that is effective in the world at achieving demonstrable social and political change", and that aiming "at attitudinal shifts" (2000: 26). Attitudinal

shifts, she argues, "are notoriously problematic to correlate with social change [...] It is a particularly questionable business to argue for the transformative value of changing the attitudes of a small avant-garde" (*ibid.*). As an example of a translation practice that contributed to sociopolitical change, Tymoczko points to the Irish Literary Revival, with which Blunt was affiliated in more ways than one. That was a large-scale translation movement sustained over a long period of time by a coordinated group of Irish nationalists. The translations of ancient Irish literature, whose approaches Blunt adopted,[54] were produced in the context of an active political struggle that took place in England's own backyard, using official, populist, and, sometimes, military means. Furthermore, unlike the remote Egypt, Ireland was an integral part of English home politics, a land that many Englishmen considered part of their own country.

In contrast, the individual efforts of Blunt were easy to marginalize. In this regard, the fate of Blunt's translations was not different from that of his political campaigns, even those conducted by literary means. Hence, for example, the treatment given his political poetry, especially *The Wind and the Whirlwind*, a passionate denunciation of British imperialism in general, and of the British invasion of Egypt in particular. Commenting in 1898 on the recent publication of Blunt's collected poetical works, a sympathetic writer expressed his "regret that the political differences which divide Englishmen [...] have led [the editors] to exclude from this volume of his selected poetry all poems, or extracts of poems, bearing on public controversy" (W. M. 1898: 276). *The Wind and the Whirlwind*, in particular, was "left out of view", and, indeed, "Of all books, it is the most difficult to lay hands upon" (*ibid.*: 277) – so much so that the lengthy extracts that the reviewer interpolated into his article were to be read for the first time by the majority of readers (*ibid.*). This wilful neglect, the reviewer argued, had similarly been accorded Blunt's vigorous calls for justice (*ibid.*):

> Nobody listened even to his statement of facts. It was nothing that he knew his Egypt; nor is it now recalled that the result verified every statement he made about the really national and universal character of the 'rebellion' against the Khedive and the bondholder.

Wilfrid Blunt, the writer concluded, was a prophet without honour in his own country: "It was the lot of the prophets to be stoned. Other times bring other manners – now they are not slaughtered but ignored" (*ibid.*).

[54] Blunt's translation choices and techniques were very similar to those of the Irish nationalist translators (Tymoczko 2000: 28-29).

While it is not difficult to explain the marginalization of Blunt by most of his contemporaries, the little attention he has received in modern postcolonialist studies is much more problematic. A more relevant figure for critiques of colonialism, one would think, is very hard to find. Yet, in Edward Said's foundational work on Orientalism, Blunt is discussed practically only once, and then as one of those writers each of whom "believed his vision of things Oriental was individual, self-created out of some intensely personal encounter with the Orient, Islam, or the Arabs; each expressed general contempt for official knowledge about the East" (1978/1994: 237). Blunt's difference is recognized, but only in passing: "in the final analysis they all (except Blunt) expressed the traditional Western hostility to and fear of the Orient" (*ibid.*). There is no further analysis of how different Blunt's view was from the traditional hostility to the Orient, and, especially, what this difference meant for Orientalist discourse. For the sake of consistency, Blunt is thus treated as a minor exception that does not affect the validity of the overall argument. It should be noted that this exclusion is characteristic of Said's approach in *Orientalism*, the major weakness of which, as various critics have pointed out, is the picture it presents of Western representations of the East as forming a monolithic, overriding discourse, obtaining unchanged over a long history, immune to deviations and counter-representations. As Richard van Leeuwen notes in his study of "The Cultural Context of Translating Arabic Literature" (2004: 17):

> [Said's] analysis of texts leaves little room for variations and currents diverging from the mainstream [...] It is also rather mechanistic, leaving little opportunity for change, since Orientalism is an essential part of the European discursive structure and inseparable from the European self-image.

Later postcolonialist interventions have tried to fill these gaps in Said's work and move beyond the fixities of a dominant colonialist discourse to accommodate practices of resistance. Homi Bhabha has undertaken to reveal the discrepancies lurking beneath the colonialist pretensions of power and omniscience. Thus, in "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", he uncovers the contradictions at the heart of British liberal attempts to justify colonialism (1994: 86):

> in 'normalizing' the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty [...] The ambivalence which thus informs this strategy is discernible, for example, in Locke's second Treatise which splits to reveal the limitations of liberty in his double use of the world 'slave'.

Along similar lines, Ali Behdad tackles in his *Belated Travelers* what is possibly the only in-depth postcolonialist engagement with Blunt. Focusing his analysis on *A Pilgrimage to Nejd*, especially the diaries written by Lady Anne Blunt, Behdad maintains that the travel narrative is split by the inconsistencies of a representation that attempts to combat the stereotypes of colonialist discourse, and yet has to situate itself within it to gain acceptance, thereby showing the "impossibility of occupying a position outside the orientalist formation" (1994: 111). On the one hand, "Self-reflexity in writing about culture, interest in local knowledge, and sensitivity to coevalness with Bedouins are instances of discontinuity from dominant orientalist discourses" (*ibid.*). Therefore, while the Blunts' narrative generally does not question the legitimacy of colonialist modes of representations, "it employs them in ways that deflect their authority and mediate new possibilities for representation" (*ibid.*). However, these discursive strategies "are produced within the orientalist system as part of its discursive apparatus, and as such, ironically, they do not necessarily destabilize the prevailing practice of authority but strengthen it" (*ibid.*).

Starkly absent from these highly nuanced analyses, original and stimulating as they are, is any recognition of head-on refutations of colonialist ideas, those which do not lie beneath the surface of arguments, waiting to be unearthed and deconstructed. One cannot help but wonder how a study of anti-colonialist discourse can concentrate predominantly on subliminal textual deviations from Orientalist discourse (important as that analysis is) to the exclusion of writings that openly challenge imperialist practices and expose the injustices of colonial rule. Are Blunt's books on Egypt, India, and Ireland, for example, irrelevant because they do not involve such subtle discursive strategies? And if the narrative of *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* could not break with the prevalent modes of representation, then what about Blunt's anticolonialist writings? Did they fail to produce the intended impact because of discursive barriers, or simply due to actual political forces? One almost has the feeling that Blunt's, and similar expressions of resistance, are perhaps too crude – that critiques of colonialism have to be couched in covert textual terms, or else they fall outside the scope of postcolonialist analyses of resistance.

This valorisation of textual resistance, to the neglect of social and political factors, is, I believe, a major weakness of formulations of resistance in postcolonialist translation theories. One of the most important contributions of postcolonialist critics has been to demonstrate that language is not a neutral tool, that translation can never be a purely technical activity. They insist that one has always to consider the larger framework of power relations in which intercultural and interlingual encounters take place. But having established that, they tend to separate linguistic performance from its context and treat it

almost as an end in itself. Thus, most recommendations for political engagement – Bhabha's "mimicry" and "hybridity", Sherry Simon's contact zone bilingualism, Niranjana's "translation as disruption" (1992: 163 ff.), Spivak's literalism (1992: 400 ff.) – are purely textual, confined to translation techniques on the linguistic level.

In his comment on the papers in Dingwaney and Maier's collection *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*, the anthropologist Talal Asad maintains that "the structures of power the colonized writer confronts are institutional, not textual" (1996: 330). To be sure, this does not undercut the role of the individual agency of the translator, but one should be wary of generalizations based only on the discursive aspects of the translation. As the case of Blunt's translations demonstrates, many extra-textual elements interfere in the reception, and final effect, if any, of the translation. It is the complexity of cultural and sociopolitical parameters in the target culture that define what counts as a resistant strategy. Asad calls for a "more systematic consideration of the social preconditions and consequences of translating Western discourses" (*ibid.*: 329). Indeed, while the individual translator has no control over the social preconditions that shape the communicative act, he/she should strive to acquire a full knowledge of them before adjusting his/her translation to the relevant contextual parameters.

Conclusion

Translation as Adjustment

Translation does not occur in a vacuum. In all the translation practices that we have examined, various contextual elements – political, social, literary, historical, personal – influenced the selection of texts, translation strategies, and the reception and appreciation of the English version. Each translator – Lane, Burton, Blunt – showed, in his own way, keen perception of these elements, and had a clear set of assumptions about both the source and target cultures and specific goals (political as well as literary) that informed his approach to the texts he chose for translation. Therefore, what determined the final effect of their translations, and what cultural impact they had, was how these translators understood and responded to their contexts, as shaping the strategies they adopted to deal with them, not these strategies in and of themselves.

The translation of Arabic literature in nineteenth-century England could not be separated from the political and historical environment of representation, which over a long period had centred on polarized images and was further complicated by growing British and European colonial intervention in the Middle East. But this situation is by no means unique. Translation rarely, if ever, initiates intercultural relations: even first translations have to deal with some pre-existing history of representation that creates certain images and expectations of what constitutes an "accurate" or an "acceptable" description of the source culture. Hence, it is obviously facile and unrealistic to propose translation techniques that are assumed to have specified functions and effects in isolation of these external factors, as if translation controls the entire process of intercultural communication.

This is certainly not to detract from the individual contribution of the translator, but to emphasize the necessity of defining the boundaries and limitations of this contribution. Within its broader cultural context, translation, it is argued, is an act of adjustment. Translation is always belated, preceded by past representations, and followed by elements of reception over which the translator has little or no control. Its final effect is realized only as part of, and in interaction with, other extratextual parameters. To put it differently, every individual translation is one stage in a long series, and whatever contribution it makes is realized only in combination with other stages of intercultural representation. Consequently, translators should try to ascertain their position relative to other, pertinent works and formulate their translation strategies accordingly, as part of an ongoing, dynamic process.

Within this framework, we can acquire a relativized, and I believe more

accurate, perspective of the question of difference in translation. The overall image of another culture, whether stressing difference or similarity, is distributed over a wide continuum of representative acts, of which translation is only one component. It is essential for the translator, in this regard, to estimate how his/her handling of the alterity of the source text will play out in the totality of reception parameters in the target culture before deciding on a foreignizing or a domesticating strategy. All the translators we have analyzed were aware of this issue: they calibrated their translation projects according to their conception of their context, and how it could shape their own goals and intentions. Lane criticized Galland's familiarizing techniques as outdated and inaccurate. He realized that a more literal, and (as numerous scholars and literary critics had indeed been saying) a socially representative version of the *Arabian Nights* was in demand. The wide acceptance of his translation testifies to the relevance of his methods. Burton was aware that Lane's version, "accurate" as it had been, had not yet exhausted the demand for literal translation: as we have seen, he tried to present his own translation as a contribution to much-needed data about the Arab World, generated, among other things, by increasing colonial expansion. Furthermore, with the already foreignizing practice of Lane as a standard by which his own version was to be judged, he pushed literal translation to the extreme of the exotic and the grotesque, which met the demands of his readers and contributed to the success of his translation. Finally, coming at a time when the representations of the Arab East had fixed its image as alien and incompatible, Blunt tried to change the equation by revealing its links with, and impact on, European civilization, fully realizing the potentially subversive implications of this approach.

Obviously, no one practice can work across the board. The translator has to gear his/her practice to a wide variety of textual, contextual, and intertextual factors: the history of representation between the two cultures in question and the power balance that filters communication between them, how similar or related they (and their languages) are perceived to be, current (and past) political and social forces in the target culture that may have a vested interest in circulating certain images of other peoples, predominant views of the source culture in the target culture, the intended audience of the translation, to mention only the most salient ones.

Yet, awareness of contextual elements and appropriate decisions on the textual level are only the initial step in effecting the general impact of the translation. As the case of Blunt especially demonstrates, translations which are effective in spreading their message and bringing about any kind of political change are those conducted, not only in conjunction with other linguistic and literary enterprises, but also as part of larger, well-coordinated social and

political struggles. Otherwise, an individual effort, even with the relevant techniques and the best of intentions, may not go beyond influencing the conceptions of a limited group of readers.

If this is the case, then, barring the necessary sociopolitical circumstances, what is the individual translator to do? What can be said with any degree of certainty is that to pursue any kind of agenda, political or otherwise, the translator must attain as comprehensive an understanding as possible of the complex environment of the translation, which shapes its reception and impact, and which, above all, should inform translation choices on the level of the text. Beyond that, whether one chooses to act in defiance of the expectations of the bulk of his/her readership is a question that can be answered only within the individual translator's own system of values. At worst, one at least has the satisfaction of fulfilling an ethical obligation, and, on the practical level, knowing that doing something, however small, is better than doing nothing: if one translation cannot change social and political realities, it is at least a push in the right direction.

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