

TRANSLATION AND RACISM IN THE CONTEXT OF *THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS*

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THE FRAME STORY

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwM2pfh2Ow8>
- Scheherazade and King Shahriyar
- 'a black slave' or: "a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight."



THE TRANSLATORS OF THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

- Antoine Galland *Les mille et une nuits* 1704
- Maximilian Habicht
The Arabian Nights 1828-1838
- Edward William Lane 1841
The Thousand and One Nights
- John Payne 1882-1884
The Thousand and One Nights
- Sir Richard Francis Burton
The Thousand and One Nights

THE WORLD IS MADE UP OF TWO UNEQUAL HALVES, ORIENT AND OCCIDENT.

EDWARD W. SAID, *ORIENTALISM*

Karl Marx

The East is a career.

Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred*



STEREOTYPICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORIENT:

The Orient is represented by the West by means of
binary oppositions:

Occident - Orient

Order – Chaos

Civilization – Barbarity

Power – Weakness

Active – Passive etc.

Masculine - Feminine

WHERE IS ORIENT SITUATED?

- For Americans the Orient is the Far East, China and Japan.
- For Europeans, mainly for the French and the British, it is the Middle East and Asia Minor.
- In the Polish culture the Orient means both the Middle East, Asia Minor, China and Japan.
- Do you know the difference between Orientalism and Oriental studies?

EDWARD SAID *ORIENTALISM* AND THE IMAGE OF HIS ORIENT

- Almost a European invention
- a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.
- The perception of the Orient:
 - as a mythologized image of the European Western experience,
 - the so –called Oriental experience,
 - a „discovery“ of the Orient.
- The Orient helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.

HISTORY OF TRANSLATIONS OF THE 1001 NIGHTS ANTOINE GALLAND *LES MILLE ET UNE NUITS* 1704

- Soaring interest in the Orient, perceived as the Other.
- The Other was appropriated, distorted, and finally mythologized.
- The “Oriental” otherness - the cultural hegemony of Western culture over the invented Orient
- “Aladdin,” “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,” “Prince Ahmed and his Two Sisters,” “The Ebony Horse

- The initial translation of *The Arabian Nights* coincided with growing fascination with the Orient, a time when the Oriental tale became popular;
- the primary focus of translators was to romanticize and mythologize the Other;
- Translators as 'beautiful infidels'.

MAXIMILIAN HABICHT

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS 1828-1838

- the so-called Tunisian manuscript, that was supposedly a basis for Habicht's translation, never existed.
- Habicht's translation is a patch of various manuscripts or of a number of 'ghost manuscripts.'
- In this view a literary myth was created on a basis of an imagined manuscript from Tunis.
- another „translator“ of the tales assuming the role of the „author“

EDWARD WILLIAM LANE 1841
*THE THOUSAND AND ONE
NIGHTS*

- three-volume translation, not a complete edition, but a selection of tales.
- Scheherazade's voice is erased
- Full of idiosyncratic quasi-scientific notes, such as the following in which the translator refers to other manuscripts:

E.W. LANE

- NOTE 1. I am inclined to think that it is not a genuine tale of *The Thousand and One Nights*, and that it has been inserted in some copies of that work (perhaps only in one, to supply a deficiency. But as it exists in one copy, and is one of the best tales in Galland's version. I have gladly given it a place in the present collection.

E.W. LANE

- NOTE 142. Thy whole description of the costume, manners, and expressions, of the hypocritical old woman in this tale is admirably just.
- FOOTNOTE 9. In the original are a few introductory words, which I omit because they are inappropriate.

JOHN PAYNE 1882-1884
*THE THOUSAND AND ONE
NIGHTS*

- Payne did not display a marked propensity for explicating things.
- Translation = a work of literature.
- Most critics believe that Payne's text is the best full English translation.

RACISM AND MYSOGYNY:

SIR RICHARD FRANCIS BURTON *THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS*

- Plagiarism → Payne
- Difficult, strange, the use of archaic words.
- Burton wrote extensive footnotes, sustained the division of nights.
- Burton's footnotes, however, do not constitute a sociological discourse in the Lane's sense. **His annotations largely focus on the spheres of eroticism, sexuality, racism, and misogyny**

Burton had broken the Victorian taboo of masking sexuality. Yet he managed to do so only by speaking of sexuality in a removed setting – the East. His was a language of enumeration of perversions, deviations, excesses. [...] His footnotes to the *Arabian Nights* were often irrelevant to the text they were annotating, mere additions for the purposes of entertainment, erotic highlights of a sort. [...] Burton used the *Arabian Nights* to express himself, to articulate his sexual preoccupation. He made it serve as an occasion for documenting all manner of sexual deviation.

BURTON, TRANS., *THE BOOK OF THE THOUSAND NIGHTS AND A NIGHT*, VOL. 1, P. 157.

- [FN#7] Debauched women prefer negroes on account of the size of their parts. I measured one man in Somali-land who, when quiescent, numbered nearly six inches. This is a characteristic of the negro race and of African animals; e.g. the horse; whereas the pure Arab, man and beast, is below the average of Europe; one of the best proofs by the by, that the Egyptian is not an Asiatic, but a negro partially white-washed. M Upon the subject of Imsák (retention of semen and "prolongation of pleasure"), I shall find it necessary to say more.

RACISM, SEX AND MYSOGYNY: TEXTUAL CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATIONS OF THE NIGHTS

- Burton's translation was a cornerstone of the 'discovery' of the Orient
- It fueled the Victorian society with the myth of the exotic, sexually insatiable, and perverted Other.
- The English translations of the *Nights* helped to perpetuate the Victorian notion of promiscuous Eastern women, and Burton's translation in particular gave added substance to the myth
- For Burton the Orient was that of a sexual domain that was to be colonised.
- Hence, Burton's translation, which is to a great degree responsible for mythologizing the Orient, reshaping the Other for the sake of indulgence of the translator's fantasy.

TO SUM UP:

- Galland is for the nursery
 - Lane is for the library
 - Payne for the study
 - Burton for the sewers
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- What about the Polish translations of *The Thousand and One Nights*?

ON OUR DOORS OF PERCEPTION

„If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thru' narrow chinks of his cavern.“

William Blake, “Memorable Fancy” in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

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