Crossing Borders in Victorian Travel

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Spaces, Nations and Empires

Edited by

Barbara Franchi and Elvan Mutlu

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INTRODUCTION

BARBARA FRANCHI AND ELVAN MUTLU

> A minute, then another minute, as we steamed past Seraglio Point […] I glimpse a vast space filled with light and colour […] We've passed the Point […] and there is the city of Constantinople. Endless, sublime, superb! The glory of creation and of the human race! So much beauty had not been a dream after all! (De Amicis [1877] 2010, 12)[1]

Upon his arrival in the capital of the Ottoman Empire in 1874, nineteenth-century Italian journalist and novelist Edmondo De Amicis (1846-1908), describes Constantinople with a mix of awe, admiration and incredulity.[2] The city is beautiful and glorious, it represents at one time the history of the East and the West, Europe with its Roman, Christian (and Byzantine) pasts, Islam, and, indeed, the whole of humankind. As a concentration of global and historical connections, nineteenth-century Constantinople exercises an appeal to De Amicis not so much because of what he *sees* with his eyes, but because of *how* he perceives the actual appearance of the city before his eyes. As a cultivated, relatively young, European intellectual De Amicis sets off to find in his vision of the city what he expected to find, what he had glimpsed at through his readings of previous travel writers,[3] and what he has come to see for himself.

Experiencing another place for real, travelling to a new destination and negotiating one's movement in an unknown space is an act which

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[1] Edmondo De Amicis, *Constantinople*, [1877] trans. Stephen Parkin (London: Alma Classics, 2010), 12.

[2] Throughout this introduction, Constantinople and Istanbul are used interchangeably.

[3] On the same page, De Amicis mentions his readings of Chateaubriand, Lamartine and Gautier, the very French authors that Said uses as emblematic examples of Orientalist views of Eastern Mediterranean spaces. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1985).

challenges one's comfort zone, and places one in a condition questioning one's perception of oneself and one's identity. Indeed, if travel is always a profoundly transforming experience, one that 'requires us to negotiate a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity *and* identity, difference *and* similarity,'[4] it inevitably requires taking into account the relationship between self and other (place, reality, culture, people). Encountering the other is also a way to see the extraneousness, the distance between one and the other party, and considering the role (and effect) of existing power structures in that relationship. Indeed, facing the unknown, or interacting with the stranger, is an act dense with political and ontological meaning, one which entails the crossing and potential friction between gazes and voices. In cases where the encounter is mediated, or filtered through racial, religious, class or gender differences, the stranger is no more another being with whom to exchange a glance or a word, but, as Sara Ahmed powerfully highlights, 'an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living (dwelling and travel), as well as epistemic communities'.[5] The stranger becomes one, then, in the eye of the beholder, in the eyes of those who see one as strange, as other, those who turn their gaze towards the unknown that attracts their attention and curiosity. To return to the example mentioned above, De Amicis sights the city of Istanbul in a similar way: as an object of fascination and curiosity, and a place to turn into the subject of his writing. *Constantinople* then emblematises the viewpoint of the gazer, the observer, into the form of the travel report, written and published as a guidebook to future (Italian and Western or, to put it better, the travellers from all corners of the world) travellers going in De Amicis's footsteps to discover their own version of the Ottoman capital.

The personal is always political, and the global has implications on the local when it comes to travel writing. Because of its investment in the experiences of encounter occurring at a personal level, travel writing is never fully objective, nor is it necessarily a faithful reproduction of 'the truth'.[6] Indeed, when guidebooks, newspapers and other types of text which appear as reliable and objective come to include travel poetry and fictional accounts, the idea of relating a journey, and reflecting on the impact of that experience of encounter in the written form comes to intersect with the arts of fiction. At the same time, fiction has made of

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[4] Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 10.

[5] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 6.

[6] See Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 10-12.

travel, mobility and the tensions generated by cross-cultural encounters a key theme that allows for the exploration of questions of identity, the construction of the self, and the very idea of place, locale and empire.

The time in which De Amicis writes his highly personal - and fictionalized - account of his journey to Istanbul is important, in that it corresponded to the height of the British Empire, and the beginning of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. This element is relevant, in that accounts like De Amicis's are crucial examples of how nineteenth-century culture has shaped the notions and spaces of empire. Indeed, if travel to a new, unknown, unfamiliar place always entails an encounter with the Other (be it welcomed, mediated through one's expectations or not), a more complex dynamic occurs whenever travel is embedded in the hierarchies of empire. According to Sara Ahmed, [c]olonialism as an encounter involves not only the territorial domination of one culture by another, but also forms of discursive appropriation: other cultures become appropriated into the imaginary globality of the colonising nation.'[7] De Amicis, who, from his Italian perspective, experienced European imperialism from a liminal position, travelled to Constantinople to find his vision of the city confirmed; the city is encompassed in his perspective so as to suit his imagination. Similarly, the chapters in this book look at how the age of empires has created the tension between imaginary versions of places and the gaze of the Western travellers immersing themselves in colonized territories, or foreign countries. Visions of empire shaped travel practices and define empire as a space of clash, encounter and tension, by taking into account both fictional and non-fictional forms of writing.

As Mary Louise Pratt has argued, despite the clear predominance of one cultural approach that tends to superimpose its views on every other one, however, the boundary is always more unstable than that, and indeed has always an aspect of contact and exchange about it: the 'contact zone'. Pratt describes this 'contact zone' as a social space where cultures meet and clash, and where the constructions of subordinate others is the result of the processes of 'transculturation' and domination on the part of the European colonising power.[8]

In the context of African travel literature, the viewer's eyes always coincide with the viewer's identity (the 'I') – an element which has highly contentious issues in the context of shaping colonial identities through travel, in that it reinforces the hierarchy between observer's gaze and the observed culture's incorporation that Ahmed points out. Following Pratt's

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[7] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 11.
[8] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge: 1992), 4.

observation, Lindy Stiebel has suggested that 'Empire was about information gathering, laying secrets bare by mapping, naming, classifying: yet, on the other [hand], the attraction of the colonies lay in their ultimate unknowability, their secrecy'.[9] Indeed, the process of unearthing the unknown space through travel is the primary result of the curious, inquisitive and self-identifying eye that the colonial gaze has produced. Equally, the contrast between desire of knowledge and dark secrecy attached to (especially African) travel also witnessed strange encounters between the European travellers and explorers, and urged Henry Morton Stanley to ask his famous question in his book, *How I Found Livingstone* (1872): 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume?'[10] Following the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, which is regarded as the starting point of the so-called Scramble for Africa, a popular image of Africa as the centre of darkness, fear and evil emerged in the British psychology.[11] This was also the period when 'Empire Boys' built upon the notion of uncharted territories to explore their 'Hearts of Darkness,' and produced most of their significant works of travel literature.[12] While Robert Louis Stevenson celebrated the South Pacific in his travel writing, H. Rider Haggard set his well-known romances in Africa, and India was always at the centre of Rudyard Kipling' stories.

    In this context, how was the notion of Empire defined and challenged by Victorian travellers? How did the multiple forms of Victorian travel literature (fiction, travel accounts, newspapers, and poetry) shape perceptions of imperial and national spaces, in the British context and beyond? This collection examines how, in the Victorian era, imperial space has been shaped and defined by travel narratives and practices, from a variety of methodological and critical perspectives. From the travel writings of artists and polymaths such as Carmen Sylva and Jerome K. Jerome, to a reassessment of Rudyard Kipling's and Richard Burton's cross-cultural and cross-gender travels, this collection examines a broad

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[9] Lindy Stiebel, "Imagining Empire's Margins: Land in Rider Haggard's African Romances," in *Being/s in transit: Travelling, Migration, Dislocation*, ed. Liselotte Glage (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 130. See also Jessica Howell's *Exploring Victorian Travel Literature: Disease, Race and Climate* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
[10] Henry M. Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa* (London: S. Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1872).
[11] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (London and New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 179.
[12] Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991).

range of canonical and lesser-studied Victorian travel texts and genres, and evaluates the representation of empires, nations, and individual identity in travel accounts (real and fictional) covering areas such as Europe, Asia, Africa and Britain. Travel writing in this book, therefore, blurs the boundaries between spaces, viewpoints and genres, while retaining its focus on the problematic specificity that the traveller's gaze intrinsically carries. Born as a way to connect readers in the comfort of their armchair, more often than not located in the West, in Europe and in the centre of imperial, political and financial power, to the distant, exotic lands that they imagine themselves visiting, travel writing is always the representation of a specific viewpoint and perspective.

Charlotte Mathieson suggests that [t]he idea of the nation as a community imaginatively unified through networks of print was thus accompanied by the production of the nation as a unified space, in which regulated, systematised networks of mobility re-ordered the nation-place into a conceptually homogenous unit.'[13] The notion of empire works in similar terms: if, as Mathieson highlights, the existence of the national mail and a more regulated travel system (e.g. via the railway and an improved road system) contributed to shaping Victorian Britain, as a nation and as a space, so did global trade and travel networks define the idea of empire. Throughout the nineteenth century, travel writing was as instrumental as the infrastructures in constructing that space: as this book explores, as diverse types of writing as guidebooks, biographies, diaries, letters, novels and poems played a crucial contribution in this respect.

The connection between individual identity and the construction of a sense of empire is exemplified by the three essays comprising the first section of this collection, titled *Performing Gender, Ethnicity and Empire: Orientalism and Queerness*. This part examines the intersection between the imperial enterprise, travel practices, gender and sexuality: by taking into account the travel writings of Sir Richard Burton and Julia Pardoe, and the mobility depicted by Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, these three essays analyse how travel texts engage in performative strategies to represent, or oppose discourses of imperial hegemony and cross-cultural encounter. Chapter 1, by Silvia Antosa, investigates Burton's queerness and his wide array of hybrid cultural identities as a fluid, mobile perspective which opposes the imperial allegiances of his year-long experiences in the diplomatic service. By focusing on Burton's travel accounts, his biographies and portraits, Antosa argues that the Victorian

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[13] Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.

polymath embraces an unstable identity that determined his success at challenging the imperial dynamics from within. His cross-dressing practices and his cultural shifts in the spaces between places and languages become then a primary location of empire in itself, albeit one which resists the dual divisions of gendered spaces and spheres. Similarly, Barbara Franchi's chapter (Chapter 2) considers the relationship between queerness, masculinity and empire in Wilkie Collins's detective novel *The Moonstone* (1868). By analysing the movement of goods and characters in the text, Franchi assesses the relationship between centre and periphery at stake in the novel, emphasised by the presence of imperial merchandise such as diamonds and opium, and highlights how Collins uses tropes of imperial travel to produce a critique of imperial domination. The crucial relationship between the European appropriation of the Orient under a western, Eurocentric gaze and gender is central to Asli Kutluk's assessment of Orientalism in Julia Pardoe's *The City of Sultan and the Domestic Manners of Turks* (1836). Kutluk's analysis on this relatively understudied author of travel accounts and her travel practices, which include cross-dressing, adds layers of complexity to the notion of female domesticity by placing it alongside the self-emancipatory dimension of travel. At the same time, by getting access to spaces traditionally precluded to men in Istanbul (both local and foreign), such as harems, Pardoe adds an important voice to the travel accounts by western individuals to the Ottoman capital, one which goes beyond the awe-struck, fantasised impressions De Amicis et al communicate.

Part two is titled *Re-reading African Space: British Imperialism and Resistance*, and it examines the theme of anxiety and resistance to empire in Victorian travel texts about Africa. Since Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness* was published in 1988, many scholars have discussed the representation of the 'Dark Continent' and how it is interpreted, and re-interpreted by European travellers. While Lara Atkin's essay on H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* contributes to these debates, it brings together Johannes Fabian's concept of space/time distancing,[14] chronological progression and cultural regression in Well's novella. Atkin argues that one factor which gives the book advantage is the analogy that could be made between the Time-Traveller and the African explorer, suggesting that this similarity urges Wells to question and criticise the presence of imperial rules on African topography. Conversely, Elizabeth Rawlinson-Mills's essay depends on an extensive archival research in which she

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[14] See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

engages with the importance of popular newspaper poems about the Boer War, and considers how poets reveal their own anxieties developed as a consequence of the British administrative system in South Africa. Rawlinson-Mills analyses the several defeats British troops had and how this complicated British national psychology, given that these newspapers were publishing both patriotic poems and poems that raised controversial questions. The authors of this section show how, in the texts they examine, the very practice of empire is questioned in the contexts of 'Dark Continent' explorations.

Poetry about travel and commodities is central also to the collection's third section, titled *Encountering Other Empires: Viewing Europe through British Eyes*. This part focuses on British travellers in Europe, European travellers in Britain, and how modern travel practices operate in the construction of national identity. In Chapter 6 Heidi Liedke examines how Victorian guidebooks and new publications encouraging travel and tourism shaped the experience of tourism as deeply embedded in the (capitalist) idea of productive time, busy time and an experience of the reassuring, the known. Liedke argues that these guidebooks create new dimensions of the concept of time and space for Victorian travellers, as they seek to reassure travellers about modernity by providing a safe space of the known, a connection between the known home and the unknown of the places that are not home traversed by individuals' travels. Feeling reassured about home while looking for glimpses of it abroad becomes central also in Chapter 7. Here, Rebecka Klette provides an insightful discussion of how, in Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men on the Bummel*, stereotypical perceptions of the German and British national characters are represented, and ridiculed, through natural and environmental tropes. By highlighting how the local and national character in British travel literature is inextricably linked to imperial practices abroad, Klette also sets the tone for necessary future research into travel literature's representations of empire in the context of environmental sustainability. Laura Nixon further expands the iconic notion of popular travel writings in Chapter 8, where she analyses the tourist culture and celebrity developed in late-Victorian Britain around the figure of Carmen Sylva, novelist, travel writer, Queen of Romania and icon. Enormously popular in 1890s Britain, this non-canonical figure in late-Victorian culture produced insightful accounts of her British travels which, Nixon argues, destabilise British hegemonic discourses in imperial and European contexts, and contribute to defining Britain as a location for tourists who come in search for the thrill and novelty that Britons were trying to seek beyond the channel.

The fourth and final part of this book brings two writers of late-Victorian romance fiction together, who, besides being contemporaries, enjoyed a life-long friendship: H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. Both writers reached the peak of fame during late-Victorian culture: Kipling for his *Jungle Books* (1894) and Haggard for his *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). This section, which is titled *Circling the Globe: 'Empire Boys' at Home and in the World* revisits these two Empire boys and their work, and brings a new, unexpected, approach to their travel texts by reading them as local yet global writing. Elvan Mutlu examines Haggard's travels across rural England, and how they informed his perception and redefinition of the English national identity. Mostly well-known for his romances written on African landscape, this chapter suggests, Haggard's substantial work on the depiction of the English agriculture and landscape has been ignored. Mutlu's chapter brings a new angle to Haggardian studies by focusing on the historic representation of the English landscape, and how Haggard connects the local to the global through celebrating the multiplicity of ancestral roots. Mutlu's essay argues that Haggard's engagement with English national identity could not be explained in a homogeneous and pure context; but in a rather cosmopolitan angle instead. In this respect, Mutlu suggests that Haggard's characters do not have to cross borders to have cosmopolitan identities: by linking English national identity to ancestral sites and rural roots in Haggard's texts, cosmopolitanism is placed at the heart of Englishness. Although Rudyard Kipling's name has been extensively linked to the Anglo-Indian community, John Anders moves to a consideration of a larger geographical travel conducted by the writer. The final chapter focuses on Kipling's observations and reactions to the strangeness of the people he encountered during his journey across borders. Anders suggests that this long journey was essential in the sense that it changed the way Kipling perceived different cultures and nations. Kipling's writing found more freedom as he journeyed away from the British Raj and he could question the practices of empire more openly. Anders concentrates on Kipling's travel through China, Japan and the USA, and concludes that the writer's previous thoughts on the British superiority are challenged throughout his travels.

In the contemporary digital era, with online travel and augmented reality, the risks and fears that emerged in travel writing in the Victorian era are emphasized. The ways in which mobility in the age of empire created areas of friction and encounter, and the tensions between gendered and racialized spaces which allowed empires to thrived while challenging them from within, are the more important in the current context of global

networks that reinforce but at the same time defy boundaries between nations. Global tourism allows more individuals to travel than ever before, but how accessible is travel to 'exotic' Easts to the disenfranchised, exploited citizens of the global south? How can social media, ideally placed in the role of mediators connecting the world, cope with the censorship perpetrated by antidemocratic regimes? And, importantly, to what extent do social media contribute to reinforcing perceptions of travel as a predominantly privileged, able-bodied, white or Western practice that stems from the same ideas of privilege that made empire possible in the first place? This book is therefore placed in a postcolonial and post-structural framework, and, while looking back at how travel shaped empires and challenged the notion of imperial spaces through the continuous crossing of borders between places, genders, genres, cultures, and ideologies, it also opens important questions on whether the discrepancies of the past are reflected in the contradictions of the present. Rosi Braidotti offers an important answer to similar queries, in the form of nomadism, constructed not as the postmodern, privileged, jet-setter or globe trotter (figures not too dissimilar to their Victorian antecedents the likes of Burton, Pardoe, Sylva and Kipling), but as the epistemological position which challenges the Eurocentric viewpoint that Victorian imperialism has cemented: '[t]he decline of Eurocentrism questions the philosophical mind-set based on universalism as disembedded and disembodied subject position. Nomadism is about critical relocation, it is about becoming situated, speaking from somewhere specific and hence well aware of and accountable for particular locations.'[15]

The question of empire becomes central in light of these considerations and, we argue, nomadism is the essential counterpoint to the imperial system of divisions and separations. Indeed, this book continues in the wake of Braidotti's work, by providing a number of case studies, from fictional as well as autobiographical writing, guidebooks and other travel texts, to analyse how travel culture and practice has shaped past empires. The crucial question that we ask ourselves is whether that empire does not have relevance on the ways space and travel are determined, here and now. According to Braidotti, nomadism is a way to read the self, and travel as a practice for the individual (with all its cultural implications) occurs at the intersection between identity, subjectivity and power.[16] Indeed, mobility as a practice, and the writing about it, involve necessarily a reflection on the power of the gazer, of the viewpoint, expressed through the writing, the

[15] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 15.
[16] See Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 64.

subjective experience of travel, the questions of identity and displacement, the feeling of home and away, that the history of empire has emphasised.

To be a nomad is to have 'an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries'.[17] The texts, authors and subjects analysed here challenge this lack of clear-cut boundaries and look, from their viewpoint as Victorian travellers – be they fictional or not – the fixity of boundaries, by inventing and challenging the imperial spaces they contribute to shaping. While Braidotti views nomadism as located in the late-twentieth-century context, travel authors and texts in the nineteenth century have constructed the notion of space as that place of encounter where borders exist, but only to be crossed and challenged. This border to be crossed is, we argue, the root of the instability and non-fixity that characterize the experience of the nomad. Travel writing is by its nature personal, intimate, and political at the same time: the essays that follow show how Victorian travellers and authors have embraced this duality in order to redefine the imperial dynamics they experienced and paved the way for new relations in the contested zone of empire, before it became postcoloniality.

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[17] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 66.

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SECTION A:

PERFORMING GENDER, ETHNICITY AND EMPIRE: ORIENTALISM AND QUEERNESS

CHAPTER ONE

PORTRAIT OF A VICTORIAN EXPLORER: RICHARD F. BURTON ON MYTHS AND EXOTICISM

SILVIA ANTOSA

> The individuality of Burton was so unique, so singular, so many-sided, so extremely startling to all commonplace people, so utterly confounding and unintelligible to all ordinary persons, that the idea of anyone presuming to know it when he was himself unknown is amazing and almost comical in its audacity.[1]

Rereading Burton, once again

Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) was a Victorian explorer, an incredibly prolific travel writer, an expert linguist and translator and a pioneer in the field of psychology and anthropology. He was a complex and controversial figure, who has inspired a wide variety of responses that – far from depicting a univocal character – reveal a many-sided, provocative and highly-debated personality. Contemporary readers, former friends, and biographers from the 1890s up to today have given diverse and, sometimes even opposing readings of Burton's life and work. One of the most controversial fields of debate is Burton's relationship with British colonialism and his productive, although ambivalent, contribution to the construction of Victorian discourses on race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. On the one hand, he supported the colonial project; but, on the other, he was an outsider who contested imperial authorities. In so doing,

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[1] Ouida, 'Richard Burton,' *Fortnightly Review* 85 (1906): 1039.

he defied the normative sociocultural rules of his country by exploring, appropriating and importing the rituals and the languages of other cultures. In addition, his travels enabled him to develop a unique relationship with the country of his birth, which was marked by a sense of cultural, geographical and ontological displacement from British society. Burton did not always assume a consistent perspective, and the arguments he used to support his ideas tended to change both synchronically and diachronically according to context. In this sense, Burton's controversial ideological assumptions also revealed the epistemic instabilities and the contradictions of his own age.

In the nineteenth century, with the conquests of India (1798-1804), the British programme of colonial expansion seemed to have reached its highest point. The profits coming from India – given the success of the British Raj after 1813 and above all after the so-called Indian Mutiny in 1857 – were even sufficient to compensate for the losses of the American colonies and the former West Indian colonies.[2] Queen Victoria became the Empress of India in 1876, and her coronation marked the primacy of England over all the other nations in the world.[3] However, alongside this growing colonial success, which seemed to mark the apex of British domination and control of the colonised other, England was in the grip of axiological uncertainty, which gave rise to anxieties and tensions. As the cultural and moral stability of the Victorian system gradually unravelled, a growing awareness emerged of the new sociocultural paradigms coming from the colonies – countries which were generally perceived as dangerous but which also held the promise of renewal. Contact with 'other' cultures, languages and people caused a reassessment of British identity. The relationship between the countless British travellers, members of the Empire, anthropologists and explorers and the 'other', colonised populations cannot be easily subsumed under the hierarchical dichotomy Self vs Other, as theorised by Edward Said. In his discussion of 'Orientalism', Said defined it as 'a Western style for dominating,

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[2] See Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 13-14.

[3] Francesco Marroni, 'Introduction: the Victorian Ethos and the Disharmony of the World', in *Victorian Disharmonies: A Reconsideration of Nineteenth-century English Fiction* (Rome: The John Cabot University Press, University of Delaware Press, 2010), 11-50.

restructuring, and having authority over the Other'.[4] Later in the text, Said specified that:

> Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition […] the word […] designate[s] that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. […] [B]y use of them both Europe could advance securely and unmetaphorically upon the Orient.[5]

Said's analysis of Orientalism has been criticised in particular for failing to take into account any alternatives to its dichotomic analytical model. Yet alongside the colonial process of appropriation and control of the Oriental Other, British colonisers were forging spaces of mutual interaction with the colonised, thus generating a process of hybridisation[6]. In order to understand this transition from a binary to a more hybrid critical approach to the colonial encounter, it is worth citing the work of Timothy Powell, who has aptly observed that:

> It has become clear in recent years [...] that a binary form of analysis that collapses a myriad of distinct culture voices into the overly simplistic category of "Other" defined in relationship to a European "Self" is theoretically problematic. The time has come, therefore, to initiate a new critical epoch, a period of cultural *reconstruction* in which "identity" is reconfigured in the midst of a multiplicity of cultural influences that more closely resembles what Homi Bhabha has called the "lived perplexity" of people's lives.[7]

In addition, while acknowledging that 'this initial phase of binary analysis' was important and necessary, Powell advocates new ways of thinking and theorising identities by building up complex critical paradigms able to take into account 'the fluidity, multiplicity, and intricate contradictions that

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[4] Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 3
[5] Said, *Orientalism*, 73.
[6] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.
[7] Timothy B. Powell, 'Introduction: Rethinking Cultural Identity,' in *Beyond the Binary: Reconstructing Cultural Identity in a Multicultural Context*, ed. Timothy B. Powell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 1, emphasis in the original text.

characterise all forms of cultural identity'.[8] These might include a fresh approach to the so-called "Orientalist question" and the colonial encounter, as the British approach to colonised cultures could not help taking into account the existence of multiple voices and of countless cross-cultural influences.[9]

Burton's complex and ungraspable personality reflects such a breakdown of identitarian boundaries, as can be found in the shifting discourses that he wove together in his books, from his earliest work up to the translations that he undertook and published in the last years of his life. Similarly, the numerous portraits and biographies that have been written about him both during his life and after his death in 1890 reflect such an ambivalence, and oscillate between contrasting, disharmonious representations of the explorer's life and thought. Moreover, both Burton's contemporaries and his earliest and later biographers have focused on his achievements and failures by deploying a number of stereotypes that, in turn, have ambiguously assimilated him to, or distanced him from the construction of the colonised "others" he encountered in his many travels. As most of his work was motivated by his awareness and first-hand experience of the various modalities of contact between the British and other cultures, languages and societies, Burton has been celebrated or criticised alternatively as a representative of British colonisation and as an anti-imperial subversive rebel.

In the first case, critics have accused Burton of adopting Orientalist, colonial discursive tropes in his accounts of his explorations and travels in the British colonies. In so doing, they have appropriated and interpreted some of his discourses to re-create a colonial figure that, notwithstanding his weaknesses and faults, can be considered as representative of the British Empire in its highest phase of expansion. Read in this way, Burton's work could be defined as reinforcing and perpetuating colonial discourse. Said has discussed the origin of colonial discourse theory, which deals with the critical study of literary and non-literary texts which were written and circulated in the period of British imperialism. Said has convincingly shown that the recurring models which can be found in these works stem from systems of thought that are structured by discursive frameworks that, in turn, are given strength by the power relations created

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[8] Powell, 'Rethinking Cultural Identity,' 2.

[9] On the complex processes of hybrid cross-cultural contact between the British and colonised cultures, see also Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

by the Empire. In other words, what emerges is a circular discourse that produces and is in turn produced by the hierarchical, symmetrical power structure on which the Empire built its axiological and economic foundations.[10]

Peter Hulme has further developed this issue and has pointed out that colonial discourse is:

> […] an ensemble of linguistically-based practises unified in their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships […]. Underlying the idea of colonial discourse […] is the presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were *produced* for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery, normally separated out into the discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir and so on.[11]

In his accounts of his travels in India, Arabia, and especially Africa and South America, Burton seems to construct and produce for his British readers several colonial 'imbricated sets' of assertions, descriptions and 'assumptions' about the non-European populations he met, thus almost literally reproducing the idea of colonial discourse discussed by Said and Hulme. On the face of it, his narratives and descriptions largely conformed to the expectations that readers at home had about such an imperial explorer and travel writer. However, as other critics have foregrounded, his production is more complex and multi-layered than it seems: whole passages and entire paragraphs are dense with criticism, contestation and anti-establishment statements that were not particularly accepted by his superiors and which also caused him trouble with the imperial authorities that – in most cases – funded his journeys and expeditions (such as the East India Company and the Royal Geographical Society).

Therefore, accounts and counter-accounts by and about the Victorian explorer have contributed to the mythicisation of the figure of Burton and have revealed the gaps and the undecipherable aspects of his life and work, especially in relation to the British consolidation of imperial power and its discursive production of the system of rules and behaviours superimposed on non-European countries in the process of colonial

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[10] See Said, *Orientalism*.

[11] Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), 2, italics in the text); on this issue, see also Pratt; and Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).