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Colette Colligan

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“Esoteric Pornography”: Sir Richard Burton’s *Arabian Nights* and the Origins of Pornography

Colette Colligan

Translations, especially from the Latin and French, were the mainstay of the nineteenth-century English trade in obscenity. Toward the end of the century, obscene translations of Indian and Arab texts emerged at the instigation of Sir Richard Burton (1821-90). Burton was renowned during his time as a traveler, explorer, orientalist, anthropologist, writer, linguist, and translator. Although a committed imperialist, he was also fascinated with Arab culture. He is still remembered for his covert pilgrimage to Mecca disguised as a Moslem, a disguise he refined by having himself circumcised (McLynn 74). He is best remembered, however, for his translation of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night* and *Supplemental Nights* — commonly known as the *Arabian Nights* (1885-87). This was just one of many translations that he published through the Kama Shastra Society, the underground press with false headquarters in Cosmopoli and Benares that he founded with F. F. Arbuthnot and Richard Monckton-Milnes along the lines of the Oriental Translation Fund (Wright 86), but with the primary purpose of publishing erotic and semi-erotic Indian and Arab texts.

When Burton first published his translation of the *Arabian Nights* in 1885, it outraged the English literary community. This collection of Arabic tales (*Alf Laylah Wa Laylah*), which had been circulating in the West since the eighteenth century, had long been familiar and cherished. The romantic and adventuresome stories told night after night by Queen Scheherazade to her husband had already captivated the imagination of Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and

the Brontës. Antoine Galland first introduced the Arabic text to Europeans with his adapted French translation of *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (1704-17). After Galland's translation, many eighteenth-century editions followed, both in French and English. In the nineteenth century, three important English editions preceded Burton's: Edward Lane's bowdlerised drawing-room translation (1839-41), Thomas Dalziel's illustrated edition (1863-65), and John Payne's complete and scholarly translation (1882-84). Lane's was a popular edition, but Payne's was a private edition restricted to 500 copies for subscribers. Burton, who had been working on his translation of the *Arabian Nights* for thirty years (*Nights* 1.ix), decided to profit from Payne's remaining subscribers. From 1885-86, he privately printed through the Kama Shastra Society 1,000 copies of his own ten-volume translation entitled *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night* and sold the set to subscribers for a prohibitive ten guineas (*Nights* 16.390). From 1886-87, he printed an additional six volumes under the title *Supplemental Nights*. Like Payne's translation, Burton's was a "plain and literal one," yet shockingly different from all previous English translations. The language was lurid and coarse and the style estranging with its Spenserian archaism and awkward literalism. Long familiar tales from the nursery and schoolroom, like that of the Baghdad Porter, now included awful scenes of sexual violence. It was in his footnotes, however, that Burton's translation especially set itself apart from other translations. These footnotes, accompanied by a full scholarly apparatus (Foreword, Terminal Essay, Appendix, and Index), offered a "panorama of Eastern Life" (Ali 115) that incorporated strange anthropological observations on Arab sexual practices such as bestiality, sodomy, eunuchism, clitoridectomy, and miscegenation. His note on Arab women's lust for black men is an infamous example of the commentary he appended to the text:

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; [. . .] whereas the pure Arab, man and beast, is below the average of Europe;

“Esoteric Pornography”

one of the best proofs by and by, that the Egyptian is not an Asiatic, but a Negro partially whitewashed. [. . .] In my time no honest hindi Moslem would take his womenfolk to Zanzibar on account of the huge attractions and enormous temptations there are thereby offered to them. (1n6)

Although the *Arabian Nights* already possessed exotic and sexual appeal in England before Burton’s translation, his translation emphasized its Arab origin and sexual content. With its focus on the sordid sexuality of the Arabs, Burton’s translation was estranging to the English reader who was used to chastened tales of tender English orientalism. In effect, he defamiliarised the Arab text that had been virtually adopted by English culture as its own. His translation violently disrupted the English cultural presentation of the *Arabian Nights* — to such an extent that it was branded “pornographic.”

Dane Kennedy (2000) importantly situates Burton’s controversial translation within discussions about contemporary morality, describing the competing uses of orientalism within debates about the translation: where Burton drew on orientalism to criticise English prudery (320), his detractors also drew on orientalism to voice their objections (326). However, what is most striking about the circulation history of this translation was the enduring debate it propelled about “pornography.” “Pornography” did not enter English vocabulary until 1850 in order to denote sexually explicit literature and art (OED). Such works were more generally referred to as “erotic,” “curious,” or “forbidden” (Kendrick 71). The term only began to enter the vocabulary of international moral campaigners by the early 1880s. At a presidential address for a National League Federation conference at Neuchatel in November 1882, Emile De Laveleye cautiously introduced the term as a French import:

There exists in what are called civilized countries, an inundation of immorality which is frightful; — it might almost be called a species of contagious *satyriasis*, — which infects alike our books, our journals, engravings, photographs, etc., and extends from our fine art exhibits down to our allumette boxes. And the rising tide of *pornography*, if I may venture to

use the word, threatens family life itself, the very foundations of society. (9-10)

In England, however, the *first* public literary debate about pornography emerged over Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights*. Burton, his readers, and his later editors and publishers debated the pornography of the *Arabian Nights* over such diverse issues as intention, accessibility, inconsistency, comparative sexuality, and the Eastern Question. Underpinning this debate about the putative pornography of the *Arabian Nights* was a struggle over its cultural presentation. The English demonstrated nationalist jealousy over the *Arabian Nights*; one reviewer, for instance, derided Galland's French edition for its "indecenty" and tendency to show "an Oriental [. . .] in the fashionable French hat, gloves, and boots of the last century" (qtd in Ali 720). Burton's translation similarly threatened to alter the *Arabian Nights*, changing it from what many English remembered from the nursery and the schoolroom as a storybook of oriental adventure into an Arab erotic almanac fit only for "the grand old barbarian" (*Nights* 16.451). What followed the appearance of Burton's *Arabian Nights* was a nationalist debate that rendered the issue of pornography its discursive battlefield. C. Knipp (1974) suggests that "Burton's edition is certainly fascinating as a personal document" (46), but it is more important as an English cultural document. The commentary that visually engulfs the translated text reveals that neither the translator nor the culture within which he wrote were invisible. Despite his claims for scholarship and semantic equivalence, Burton's translation is a creative production that discloses more about English sexual preoccupations than it does about Arab sexuality. His translation demonstrates how his transformation of the Arab text elicited a debate about pornography agitated by English nationalism, by anxiety about English sexual prudery, and by prurient interest in Arab sexuality. Most importantly, it shows how the literary and cultural concept of pornography emerged with the expansion of travel, empire, and globalisation.

I.

Burton anticipated and, to some extent, incited the public controversy over the obscenity of his translation. As Kennedy writes, his “was a declaration of war against the proponents of purity” (325). He knew the potential legal repercussions of printing and advertising it — the only Kama Shastra text not masked behind anonymity and secrecy. He was keenly aware of the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, its threat having already led to the miscarriage of his earlier work, *The Kama Shastra*. Yet, he was also eager to shock the public and boast of his work’s difference from previous translations. As he wrote to Payne from his consular post in Trieste, “I don’t live in England and don’t care a damn for the Public Opinion” (qtd in Lovell 681). Therefore, in the 24,000 to 30,000 advertising circulars posted, he compromised by both suggesting and downplaying the sexual exoticism of his translation. One circular boasted that readers would find “in the notes a repertoire of those Arabian manners and customs, Beliefs and Practices, which are not discussed in popular works” (*Nights* 16.391). However, Isabel Burton, who acted as “wife, and mother, and comrade, and secretary, and aide-de-camp, and agent to him” and who was also well informed about the legal repercussions of printing an obscene book (*Life* 449), likely encouraged her husband to subdue his intrepid blustering in subsequent circulars. A later, more cautious, circular was included with the first volume “earnestly requesting that the book might not be exposed for sale in public places or permitted to fall into the hands of any save curious students of Moslem manners” (16.395). On August 15, 1885, Burton also wrote to *The Academy* to emphasize the limited accessibility of his translation:

One of my principal objects in making the work so expensive [. . .] is to keep it from the general public. For this reason I have no publisher. The translation is printed by myself for the use of select personal friends; and nothing could be more repugnant to my feelings than the idea of a book of the kind being placed in a publisher’s hands, and sold over the counter.
(101)

These advertisements demonstrate that intention and access were key determinants in assessing obscenity at this point. By indicating that the work will remain in the hands of a “select” few, they reiterate the persistent class bias that underscored ideas about obscenity. They also indicate — whether they downplay or suggest the exoticism of the translation — that Burton’s *Arabian Nights* was like none other in its intimate portrait of Arab culture.

Aware of the English cultural investment in the *Arabian Nights*, Burton’s Foreword to the first volume also anticipates a public outcry. Even before the controversy over his translation, he constructs a defence of the work’s *turpiloquium* (the term pornography did not enter the discussion on obscenity until the reviewers introduced it) to pre-empt the nationalist uproar over his transformation of the surrogate English classic. Burton begins his Foreword by defending the sexual content of his work on the grounds of cultural difference, suggesting that Arabs are more straightforward than the English and juxtaposing Arab sexual honesty with European sexual hypocrisy (cf. Kennedy 323):

Subtle corruption and covert licentiousness are utterly absent; we find more real ‘vice’ in many a short French roman, say *La Dame aux Camelias*; and in not a few English novels of our day than in the thousands of pages of the Arab. Hence we have nothing of that most immodest modern modesty which sees covert implication where nothing is implied and ‘improper’ allusion when propriety is not outraged; nor do we meet with the nineteenth-century refinement; innocence of the word not of the thought; morality of the tongue not of the heart, and the sincere homage paid to virtue in guise of perfect hypocrisy. (1.xvii)

He not only justifies his translation by emphasizing the sexual differences between English and Arab cultures and by adjoining the customary jingoist calumny against greater French sexual corruption, but also by challenging assumptions about English sexual innocence and decorum. Noting that English sexual prudery is a “nineteenth-century refinement,” Burton also recalls the coarser passages in Shakespeare,

Sterne, and Swift (1.xvi) to draw attention to England’s historically capricious definition of obscenity and to suggest that English and Arab sexual customs were not always so incommensurate. He relies on cultural difference to defend the sexual content of his work and, at the same time, disparage the nineteenth-century English national character as hypocritically prude.

Yet, while Burton’s Foreword aggressively defies English sexual custom, he tempers his criticism by demonstrating what his translation offers the English reader. He justifies his focus on the unusual sexual practices of the Arabs by insisting that he aims to instruct the English. He emphasizes the potential educational value of his translation for the English scholar and gentleman. His Foreword repeatedly refers to the student at which he aims his work. “The student who adds Lane’s notes to mine,” he promises, “will know as much of the Moslem East and more than any Europeans who have spent half their lives in Orient lands” (1.xix). He thus defends his work in terms of its anthropological and orientalist value. He indicates that his edition has provided him with the “long-sought opportunity of noticing practices and customs which interest all mankind” that “Respectability” and “Propriety” would not allow him to explore through his failed Anthropological Society (1.xviii). He even draws attention to the index to his anthropological notes appended to each volume “for facility of reference” (1.xix). Implying that his commentary surpasses the importance of the text itself, he deftly ensures that his scholarly apparatus accommodates the English orientalist and anthropologist — meanwhile guiding every prurient reader to his most lascivious notes.

Burton’s Foreword also defends the sexual content of his translation in terms of English gain by disclosing how it might benefit English imperialist venture in the East (Kennedy 328). More specifically, he defends his translation as a political answer to the Eastern Question — the nineteenth-century debate about England’s most advantageous political and cultural relationship with the decaying Ottoman Empire in the face of Russian and French imperial advancement in its receding territories. He emphasizes the political

exigency of dispelling England's "ignorance concerning the Eastern races with whom she is continually in contact" (1.xxiv). He argues that England should concentrate less on India and more on its nearer neighbours:

This book is indeed a legacy which I bequeath to my fellow countrymen in their hour of need. Over devotion to Hindu and especially to Sanskrit literature, has led them astray from those (so-called) '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 Moslems. (1.xxiii)

He also believes that England's past political failures resulted from its ignorance about the East, revealed in the Afghan Wars (1839-42; 1878-80) when England attempted to extend its imperial rule in India to Afghanistan, and in the bloody aftermath of the 1882 occupation of Egypt. Advancing an imperialist argument, he explains that England would govern best through superior knowledge:

Hence, 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; and her crass ignorance concerning the Oriental peoples which should most interest her, exposes her to the contempt of Europe as well as of the eastern world. (1.xxiii)

How his notes on topics such as castration (5.46n) or condoms (7.190n) might serve England's imperial interests he never elucidates, but implies that sexual knowledge about the Arabs could potentially advance the English imperial cause. Even as he transforms the *Arabian Nights* to include sexual exoticism, he justifies his disruption of the English cultural presentation of the text in terms of English gain. While his defence aggressively derides English sexual custom, it also outlines how his translation might benefit English imperialist venture in the East.

Burton's Foreword aggressively justifies his intent to "produce a full, complete, unvarnished, uncastrated copy of the great original" (1.ix). He defends the sexual exoticism of his translation as a cor-

rective to English sexual insipidness and regards it as a resource for English scholarship and imperialism. In so doing, he adopts the rhetoric of the “new empiricist pornographers” (Sigel, *Governing* 76) and confirms Ronald Hyam’s (1990) thesis that sexual dynamics underscored the operation of empire (1). At the end of his Foreword, he signs his defence from the Athenaeum Club, the exclusive English gentleman scholar’s club on Pall Mall Street in London that was established in 1824 as an association of distinguished writers, scientists, and artists. Burton’s reference to his association with the Club lends his translation cultural authority: he relies on his association with the English intellectual elite to present his exotic and estranging translation as scholarly rigorous, quintessentially English, and worthy of any wealthy collector’s library. While he relies on this association to present his translation as respectable and quintessentially English, he also points to the symbolic home of the upscale, scholarly works of dubious moral footing that were the new obscenity of the period, far removed from works like *The Exquisite*.

II.

When Burton began receiving reviews for the first volume of *Arabian Nights*, he quickly realised that he would “play the part” between “the pornologist and the anti-pornologist” (*Nights* 16.401). What ensued in the daily and periodical press was a virulent public debate about whether or not the work was pornographic. Underlying this attack was the feeling that the depictions of a debased, Arab sexuality made the work particularly offensive. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, a penny weekly with a wide readership, was at the centre of the controversy with its vitriolic condemnation of Burton’s new translation. One of the first reviews by *The Standard* on September 12, 1885 was positive: it concluded that the work contained “nothing intentionally demoralizing” (5). The *Pall Mall Gazette*, however, was quick to attack *The Standard* review and censure Burton’s translation as pornographic. In a September 14 article “Pantagruelism or Pornography,” John Morley (under the pseudonym Sigma) repudiates Burton’s claim that his work aims to instruct the student of anthropology and orientalism.

Denying the work's scholarship, he asks: "Students! Students of what? Does any one need to be told that the vast majority of them are simply students of what I shall call [. . .] pornography?" (2). Striving to show that the translation is worse than the extravagantly rude humour of *Pantagruel*, a character from Rabelais, he searches for a novel, even more upsetting term. According to Morley, "The book would never secure 1,000 subscribers at the large price put upon it, were it not for its actual reputation and its prospective value as one of the grossest [. . .] books in the English language" (2). He also casts doubt on whether the student will ever see the so-called tome as it has already appeared "in the window of a second-hand bookseller in a questionable backstreet" (3). On September 24, the paper continues to attack Burton's pretence of scholarship by claiming that it could not print a section of it for fear of police seizure. It also equates the translation with street pornography, dismissing its scholarly pretensions. It refers to it as "the garbage of the brothel" and "the favourite literature of the stews of Leicester-square," and also, in a shorthand way to explain its pornography, draws attention to its foreign publication by the "Kamashastra Society of Benares" ("Occasional" 3). On September 29, Morley also wrote a follow-up article, "The Ethics of Dirt," to argue that his focus on Arab sexuality makes his translation particularly offensive:

I am not prepared to formulate a complete "Ethics of Dirt," but it seems to me clear that there is, for us, a vast difference between the obscenity of our own classics and that of the Mahommedan East, or, to put it generally, between European and Asian obscenity. In the garden of western literature there are many foul quagmires which must be faced by the explorer; but we have a legitimate—nay, an imperative—interest in wading through them. Is there any reason why we should laboriously import the gigantic muck heaps of other races, placed them *très curieux*, and charge a high price for the privilege of wallowing in them? I think not. (2)

Morley denounces Burton's translation because it imports Arab sexual perversion to the West. Referring to the translation as "Cap-

“Esoteric Pornography”

tain Burton’s Oriental muck heap,” he suggests that its “esoteric pornography” lies in its defamiliarising exploration and importation of foreign sexuality that disguises itself under “the mask of scholarship and culture which enables it to insinuate itself into the columns of such journals as the *Standard* and appear on the “unsullied British breakfast table” (2). Kennedy draws attention to Morley’s focus on oriental debauchery (326); what is more striking, however, is the fear of contamination. According to Morley, Burton’s *Arabian Nights* was an insidious threat to the English moral and national character. It threatened the “unsullied” sanctity of English domesticity, and English prudery was apparently worth defending.

Over the next couple of months, subsequent criticism on the *Arabian Nights* responded to the *Pall Mall Gazette* attack by debating the pornography of the translation. This debate developed into a standoff between Burton and the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, William T. Stead. Stead was a social reformer and purity campaigner who had just recently become notorious for the investigative report “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” on child prostitution in London. Reviewers supported either Burton or Stead, largely debating the pornography of the new *Arabian Nights* in terms of its inclusion of Arab sexual practices. On September 29, 1885, *The Bat* responded to *The Pall Mall Gazette* by attacking the newspaper and defending Burton’s translation:

Journalists, who had no objection to pandering to the worst tastes of humanity at a penny a copy are suddenly inspired by much righteous indignation at a privately printed work which costs a guinea a volume, and in which the manners, the customs, and the language of the East are boldly represented as they were and as they are. (876)

Stressing the limited accessibility of Burton’s translation as a safeguard to public morals (a precaution that Stead’s cheap penny newspaper could not boast), the reviewer defends his uncensored focus on Arab life. While acknowledging that Burton shifts the translation from what Galland and Lane had presented to the West as “the play-book of generations, the delight of the nursery and the school-room

for nearly two hundred years,” he praises it for offering the “truth” about the Arabs as no translation had done before. The reviewer also suggests that “the blatant buffoons who have described Captain Burton’s work as pornographic only show their own ignorance of the literature of the East and of pornography” (876). To describe the *Arabian Nights* as pornographic because of its eastern origins is the mark of literary and cultural ignorance. Nor, he adds, does its focus on Arab sexuality make it comparable to London street pornography: “The misguided lunatic who invests in it in the hope of getting hold of a good thing in the Holywell Street sense of the term will find indeed that the fool and his money are soon parted” (876). On October 12, *The Echo* contributed to the Burton-Stead debate by condemning Burton’s “morally filthy book” (2). Arguing that Burton had “out-Heroded Mr. Stead, and cannot plead Mr. Stead’s justification or excuse,” the review categorically pronounced that his translation was unfit for English audiences: “What might have been acceptable to Asiatic populations ages ago is absolutely unfit for Christian populations of the nineteenth century” (2). In a column called “Acid Drops,” the radical paper *The Freethinker* prolonged the debate further. On October 25, it described Stead as “getting more pious and Persniffian everyday” (339) for traducing “Captain Burton, a gentleman and a scholar whose boots Mr. Stead is not fit to black” (339). This reviewer defends Burton’s translation by lauding his character condemned by Stead supporters. He strategically presents Burton as a scholar and gentleman — the kind one might find in the Athenaeum Club — to offset competing representations of him as non-English. Where *Saturday Review*, for instance, draws attention to Burton’s covert pilgrimage to Mecca disguised as a “True Believer” (27), this reviewer represents him as an upstanding English gentleman fit to translate an English classic.

In 1886, when the Stead controversy was not so topical, reviewers no longer framed their response in terms of his newspaper. The perception that Burton’s *Arabian Nights* was, as *The Whitehall Review* suggested, a “monument of labour and scholarship and of research” grew alongside the competing impression of its pornography (qtd in *Lady Burton’s* 431). Attitudes about its pornography, however, were

“Esoteric Pornography”

still intimately linked to its focus on Arab sexuality. On January 2, *The Saturday Review* suggested that the translation was pornographic because it would tarnish and possibly weaken England’s international reputation. Rejecting Burton’s suggestion that the English could learn from Arab sexual honesty, it lauds English prudery:

Abroad we English have the character of being the most prudish of nations; we are celebrated as having Bowdlerized for our babies and sucklings even the immortal William Shakespeare; but we shall infallibly lose this our character should the Kama-Shastra Society flourish. (26)

An even more vitriolic review of Burton’s translation appeared in *The Edinburgh Review*. Written by Lane’s nephew, Stanley Lane-Poole, the article compared the various translations of *Arabian Nights*. He not only criticises the archaising translation as “unreadable” (182), but also denounces its “varied collection of abominations” (183) as an “ocean of filth” (185). Arguing that Burton is simply “the chronicler only of their [Arab’s] most degraded vices” (185), he famously concludes that “Galland [is] for the nursery, Lane for the library, Payne for the study, and Burton for the sewers” (184). Lane-Poole also appears to criticize the anti-democratic nature of the book’s production, revealing a latent hostility toward the cultural and legal permissiveness toward rich men’s peccadilloes. For him, the fact that Burton had the wealth and social connections to print a translation that would be encased in “private libraries or secret cabinets in public libraries” (180) did not excuse his defilement of an English classic with “such an appalling collection of degrading customs and statistics of vice” from “Orient lands” (183). Where Burton draws on his connections to The Athenaeum Club to legitimise his translation, Lane-Poole denounces this kind of social elitism for its importation of oriental debauchery in England. Both of these reviewers are protective of the international perception of the English character, apparently worried that pornographic works will seriously compromise it. Such thinking eventually led Laveleye to write an article in June 1888 for *The Vigilance Record* entitled “How Bad Books May Destroy States.” Writing about the “publication of pornographic literature,”

he argues that “it is both legitimate and necessary to oppose the circulation of writings which may attack public morality, for nations who respect women and who are pure in their sentiments and feelings grow and prosper; whereas those in which immorality reigns, on the contrary, decline and fall” (60). Such thinking shows the emergent association between nationalism and moral respectability in the nineteenth century, which George Mosse (1985) argues reached its height in Europe during the two world wars (133). Such thinking also shows how the cultural concept of pornography developed with the nationalist sentiment that grew with empire.

Although shadowed by the Society for the Suppression of Vice during the printing of the *Arabian Nights* (Lovell 691), Burton responded to the debate by appending an erudite and scholarly Terminal Essay at the end of the tenth volume of the *Arabian Nights* that became notorious for its sections on “Pornography” and “Pederasty.” Where he uses his Foreword simultaneously to deny and defend the putative immorality of his edition, he uses his Terminal Essay on “Pornography” to respond to negative criticism by defining English pornography. His essay on “Pornography” is brief and embryonic, but notable for being the first English attempt to theorise pornography. Arguing that the *Arabian Nights* was deemed pornographic because of its explicit renderings of Arab sexual practices such as sodomy, he defends his translation by challenging the implicit association between pornography and Arab sexuality. Developing the arguments from his Foreword, he suggests that the Arabs are candid where the English are suggestive about sexual matters. As he argues, the “suggestive” is more “seductive” than the “raw word” and, therefore, exercises a more insidious influence on morality (10.203): “Theirs is a coarseness of language, not of idea; they are indecent, not depraved; and the pure and perfect naturalness of their nudity seems almost to purify it” (10.203). He maintains that the English, with their suggestiveness, are more immoral than the Arabs with their candour. By use of cross-cultural comparison, then, he defines pornography as English prudery rather than Arab sexual honesty. Burton also rethinks the English bias against sodomy as necessarily pornographic.

“Esoteric Pornography”

Addressing the so-called prevalence of sodomy (what he calls “le vice contre nature”) in the *Arabian Nights*, he explains that it “is one of absolute obscenity utterly repugnant to English readers, even the least prudish” (10.204). Yet, he attempts to purge sodomy of its pornographic associations by dealing with it with Arab frankness: “I proceed to discuss the matter serieusement, honnetement, historiquement; to show it in decent nudity not in suggestive fig-leaf or feuille de vigne” (10.205). Ironically, as he insists on the “decency” of Arab frankness, he himself displays English circumlocution by resorting to the French, an inconsistency that demonstrates the degree to which the English disavowed sodomy by expunging it from its vocabulary and transferring it to the French. While not comprehensive, Burton’s essay is an early theory of pornography, notable for defining itself *against* Arab sexuality and sodomy. Understanding that what underlay the debate about the pornography of his *Arabian Nights* was its focus on Arab sexuality, Burton challenges assumptions about English prudery and Arab perversion to justify the sexual exoticism of his translation as morally sound and nationally important in its sexual frankness.

Burton not only responded to his detractors by offering a definition of pornography that redirected opprobrium away from Arab candour to English prudery, but also by contesting their accusations as unfounded and arbitrary. Harboring a grudge against Stead whose newspaper initiated the public censorship of his translation, he attacks him in later volumes of his translation. He exposes the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the *Pall Mall Gazette* which “mourn[s] over the ‘Pornography’ of the Nights,” while overlooking the immorality of many classical texts. “Why does not this inconsistent puritan,” Burton asks, “purge the Old Testament of its allusions to human ordure and the pudenda; to carnal copulation and impudent whoredom, to adultery and fornication, to onanism, sodomy, and bestiality?” (10.254). With characteristic audacity, Burton also included a section entitled “Reviewers Reviewed” in his final volume in which he reproduces the debate, rearticulates his former defence, and calumniates most of his critical reviewers. In particular, he maligns the *Pall Mall Gazette*

as “The Sexual Journal” and “The Sexual Gazette,” because it “deliberately pimps and panders to this latest sense and state of aphrodisiac excitement” (16.404). As is his wont, he displaces the charge of pornography elsewhere. He describes Stead’s portrayal of London as the centre of child prostitution as nothing less than a national scandal that subjects England to the ridicule of the French “who hold virtue in England to be mostly Tartuffery” and of the Germans “who dearly love to use us and roundly abuse us” (394). Burton thus justifies his translation, by suggesting that Stead’s newspaper is unfit to judge whether or not his *Arabian Nights* compromises the English national sexual character. The debate’s true concern was the presentation of English sexual identity.

III.

After the public furore over Burton’s *Arabian Nights*, later nineteenth-century editors and publishers of the translation attempted to regain control over its cultural presentation. In so doing, they too contributed to the late nineteenth-century popular perception and arbitration of pornography. A struggle over how to present later editions of the *Arabian Nights* arose among Isabel Burton, Burton, and his publisher Leonard Smithers. While Isabel Burton, who replaced Stead as England’s moral figurehead in this debate, aimed to make the text familiar again to a general English readership, Burton and Smithers preferred to preserve, and even accentuate, its sexual exoticism. This later dispute over the handling of the sexually explicit passages of the *Arabian Nights* becomes conspicuously gendered. Isabel Burton’s active role in her husband’s literary affairs gendered the discourse of pornography as the various editors attempted to regulate and discipline the presentation of Burton’s translation.

Isabel Burton’s six-volume edition of her husband’s *Arabian Nights* was the first attempt to recuperate Burton’s translation from the imputation of pornography. In 1886, the reputable English press Waterlow & Sons published *Lady Burton’s Edition of her Husband’s Arabian Nights*. Her edition was ostensibly the “family” version of the translation. Her title page indicates that she chastened the translation

for English “household reading,” and her dedication to “The Women of England” demonstrates that she offered her edition to English women especially. In her Preface, she guarantees “no mother shall regret her girl’s reading this Arabian Nights” (vi). In order to fulfil this promise, she excised 215 out of the original 3,215 pages (vii), including Burton’s defence of *turpiquillum* in his Foreword (except the passage when he reassures his readers that “the general tone of The Nights is exceptionally high and pure”), all sexually explicit commentary (such as his note quoted earlier about debauched women), and, finally, the two final essays on “Pornography” and “Pederasty.” She never condemned the translation as pornographic (in her 1893 biography of her husband she endorses his translation as “good for the Government” [*Life* 458] and a benefit to the “Orientalist” [458]), but nonetheless edited the book for a household readership by regulating its morals. As reviewers from *The Academy* insisted, Isabel Burton consequently restored the *Arabian Nights* to its old familiar self. “Under Lady Burton’s auspices,” writes Amelia B. Edwards, “*The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* becomes once again the dear old ‘Arabian Nights’ of our youth” (387) fit “to be read by the fireside on a winter’s night” (387). On December 31, 1887, another reviewer for *The Academy* describes it as the perfect giftbook: “It would not be easy to imagine a more charming Christmas present for young people at this ‘boxing’ time of year, than Lady Burton’s dainty and delightful series” (439). In the hands of Isabel Burton, Burton’s scandalous translation becomes a Victorian giftbook, no longer a book to be kept under lock and key, but now suitable for general exchange and circulation. The two photographs that accompany the first and second volumes visually encapsulate the achievement of her edition: the first photograph of Isabel Burton figured as a fine Victorian lady is offset by the second photograph of Richard Burton dressed in Arab frock and tarboosh. She exerts her feminine moral influence over her husband’s translation, yet still preserves its oriental character. She never objected to its exoticism, only its sexual content. After excising the obscene passages, she reintroduces the *Arabian Nights* into the English drawing room.

As the female editor of a questionable book, however, Isabel Burton also felt she must justify her own exposure to it. She publicly claimed that her husband “forbade” her to read the translation until “he blotted out with ink the worst words” (*Life* 458). Yet, as Fawn Brodie (1967) discusses, the Burtons together fabricated the story that she never viewed the unexpurgated edition of the translation. Having examined the manuscript copy of the *Arabian Nights* now housed at the Huntington Library, Brodie shows that Isabel Burton not only read the original translation, but also made copious marginal comments beside the passages she deemed obscene (310; McLynn 344). In her bid for respectability, she overlooked that the text was transcribed by Victoria Maylor, a Catholic friend who read every errant word of the *Arabian Nights*, and later *The Perfumed Garden* (*Nights* 16.91-92). There was a split between public expectation and private practice regarding women’s exposure to purportedly obscene material. Public decorum may have demanded that women refrain from reading questionable texts, but they could indulge privately without opprobrium. It seems that upper-class women had greater and more unregulated access to obscene material than other classes for they could access family libraries with relative privacy without the scrutiny of booksellers or passersby on questionable streets. Women could and did indeed read Burton’s translation of the *Arabian Nights*, despite Melman’s claims otherwise (65). However, as Isabel Burton attempted to reintroduce the *Arabian Nights* into the English drawing room, she still confronted the obstacle of her gender. Although she assumed an active role in the arbitration of pornography, she resorted to subterfuge to belie her exposure to questionable material. Her actions demonstrate the difficulties and complexities she faced as a woman who hoped to position her husband’s translation as an English classic, but regulate its morals and maintain her respectability. Although Burton endorsed his wife’s edition of his *Arabian Nights* and helped spread the deception of her limited access to it, his satisfaction with its commercial failure (it sold only 457 copies over two years [McLynn 345]) suggests that he resented her attempt to sanitise his translation. As he wrote, “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” (*Nights* 16.452). The language in which he expresses his contempt for his wife’s bowdlerisation — as if to suggest that she unmans him with her censorship — is conspicuously gendered and sexualised. On other occasions, he also imagines his censor as a female with whom he engages in pitched sexual contest. Before the publication of the *Arabian Nights*, Burton often spoke of his censor as Mrs. Grundy, the character from Thomas Morton’s novel *Speed the Plough* (1798) who had become a popular stereotype for extreme moral rigidity in the nineteenth century. On a number of occasions, Burton wrote to Payne with barefaced sexism to disparage the efforts of the ubiquitous Mrs. Grundy. As he writes in one letter to Payne about Mrs. Grundy, “I know her to be an arrant whore and tell her so and don’t care a damn for her” (qtd in Ali 126). In another letter, he adds that she “may howl on her big bum to her heart’s content” (qtd in Lovell 681). Imagining his wife as a kind of incarnation of Mrs. Grundy, he threatened to defy her in the same way. Partly in jest, he made plans to publish “The Black Book of the Arabian Nights,” a volume that would comprise all the most offensive material from the translation that his wife had excised. In a manuscript preface to this volume, Burton writes that a ‘bowdlerised’ book loses half its influence and bears the same relationship to its prototype as a castrato to a male masculant” (qtd in Nelson 37). What Burton’s gendered language shows, as Mark Turner (1999) has argued, was a contemporary movement among male writers like Anthony Trollope and George Moore to masculinise literature and invest it with male libido in the face of a feminised morality (199). Thus, as Burton disputed with his wife over the presentation of the *Arabian Nights*, he demonstrated that his desire to preserve the “barbarian” character of his translation was intimately bound up with a sense of manhood threatened by a feminised figure who represented the prudery of the nation.

Isabel Burton and Smithers also fought over the presentation of the *Arabian Nights*. When Isabel Burton became Burton’s literary

executor after his death in 1890, she dealt with dubious publishers attempting to capitalise on Burton's notoriety (Lovell 779). One such publisher was Smithers. James Nelson's (2000) recent study has uncovered a wealth of information about Smithers's clandestine publishing activities and his epistolary relationship to the Burtons. While best known for publishing Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, and *The Savoy* (1896), his early publishing career revolved around the Burtons. He began corresponding with Burton after the publication of the *Arabian Nights*, to which he had subscribed (Nelson 11). Soon, they began collaborating on upscale, scholarly, and unexpurgated translations of classical authors (12). Smithers himself was a frequent translator of erotic works that were published with his partner and printer Harry Sidney Nichols under the guise and protection of the Erotika Biblion Society of Athens. For Smithers, Burton's death confounded his publishing agenda, not only because their translations were still incomplete, but also because he found himself having to complete them with a widow whose programme was anathema to his own. In their respective roles as "pornographer" and Catholic moralist, they were possibly the strangest bedfellows of the century. Corresponding over a four-year period, Isabel Burton and Smithers wrangled over the sexual content and objectionable language of unexpurgated translations like *The Priapeia* (1890) and *The Carmina of Catullus* (1894), to which Burton had contributed. Despite the very real danger of the Obscene Publications Act, Isabel Burton nonetheless participated in the production of these underground publications by Smithers and Nichols. Her participation in the production of these clandestine translations demonstrates, as Mary Lovell's (1998) biography shows, that she was not simply the prudish moraliser that biographers since Stisted and Wright have argued.

The most important dispute between Smithers and Isabel Burton, however, was over *The Arabian Nights*. Smithers had already translated two imitations of *The Arabian Nights* from the French: *The Thousand and One Quarters of an Hour* (1893) and *The Transmigrations of the Mandarin Fuam-Hoam* (1894). He also translated *Oriental Stories* (1893) and published it privately under the guise of the Erotika Biblion

Society. This text, an English translation of *La Fleur Lascive Orientale* (1882), features an indiscriminate collection of racy oriental tales that intended to be “a Supplement to the Editions of ‘The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night’ ” and included a number of stories that appeared in the *Arabian Nights* (ix). Obsessed with the tales, Smithers was also eager to republish Burton’s unexpurgated *Arabian Nights*. In 1894, he bought the rights to the *Arabian Nights* for three thousand pounds (Lovell 775) in order to publish what would become the twelve-volume Standard Library Edition (1894-97). It was not a clandestine production, but was published by Nichols under a more respectable name than the Erotika Biblion Society — H. S. Nichols & Co. Frustrated with the amount of Isabel Burton’s censorship of the other translations, Smithers and Nichols gendered the controversy by insisting that they were “not going to have the thing [the edition of *Nights*] petticoated” (qtd in Nelson 25). To her astonishment, they deliberately ignored her revisions (Lovell 776). They restored four fifths of the passages that her edition excised, only omitting the rest because of Burton’s promise to his initial 1,000 subscribers not to publish another complete set (*Nights* 16.391). While Smithers claims in his Editor’s Note that he omits words and passages of “extreme grossness,” he allows Burton “greater latitude of expression” (vii) and releases it “from the burdensome restriction of being kept under lock and key” (viii). He also restores the two final essays on “Pederasty” and “Pornography”. Smithers, it seems, won this struggle over the representation of *Arabian Nights*. Preserving Burton’s translation almost intact, yet also adapting it for wider publication, he maintains the sexual exoticism of the translation while accommodating English legal and moral expectation — Isabel Burton excepted. As a reviewer for *The Athenaeum* writes in 1895, “If Burton had adopted the present redaction for his original issue, a great deal of hostile criticism would have been averted” (247). Yet, because of the “inherent coarseness of the Arabic,” the same reviewer still cautions that any literal rendering of the *Arabian Nights* must remain under “lock and key” in England (247).

IV.

For more than a decade, Burton's translation provoked discourse on English pornography that implicated both legitimate and illegitimate print communities through its rereading, reediting, and recirculation. A generalised conception of a new category of obscenity — “pornography” — emerged as Burton, his reviewers, and his editors struggled over the presentation of the *Arabian Nights*. Strikingly, these debates about its pornography arose over the sexual exoticism of his translation. The focus on Arab sexuality provided an excuse to discuss sexual issues pressing to the English, but was also the reason for the translation's censorship. These varied debates about the sexual exoticism of the translation, ultimately underscored a national investment in the idea of English prudery. Whether the sexual exoticism of Burton's translation was exploited or condemned by readers, the debates illustrated a concern about the representation and perception of English sexual identity — a concern that would increasingly dwell on England's sexual shortfalls in the national and imperial context.

In the twentieth century, Burton has struck a much different figure in England than he did in the late nineteenth century. Although Burton's *Arabian Nights* was contentious for more than a decade, it too was finally recognised as an English classic. He is most famous today for his unexpurgated translation of the *Arabian Nights*, as any English literary companion will reveal. This recognition came at the turn of the century when the Grolier Society issued a sumptuous, illustrated edition of Burton's *Arabian Nights*. In the numerous prospectuses for the edition made unashamed appeals to the book collector by describing it as a “masterpiece which must appeal in the strongest manner to all who possess libraries or care for books.” For 120 guineas, The Grolier Society even offered the gourmand bibliophile a limited Edition de Grand Luxe of the *Arabian Nights* that was bound “in white vellum, with red inlay, heavily tooled in gold” and came in “a casket in polished mahogany, with handsome mouldings of darker shade” with “plate-glass doors [. . .] overlaid with brass lattice work,

hung on brass hinges, with two locks and key of Oriental design.” In its bid for respectability, however, The Grolier Society made sure to omit the essay on “Pederasty” from its edition.

Most recently, interest in Burton has shifted from this focus on him as a man of letters to his role as an explorer and a racist. The 2001 “Victorian Vision” exhibit at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, included a glass cabinet dedicated to the Victorian relationship to the “Orient” and included Burtonalia as part of its display. Along with Edward Leighton’s portrait of a restless and scarred Burton, it included the fez hat and Turkish slippers he wore when travelling in disguise to Medina and Mecca. As the display depicted Burton as a cultural crossdresser, it overlooked his translation of the *Arabian Nights* by instead including Dalziel’s lesser-known illustrated translation. In recent English news, there has also been controversy over Burton’s racist manuscript, *Human Sacrifice Among the Sephardine or the Eastern Jews*. The Board of Deputies of British Jews hoped to auction the manuscript despite protest against the sale of a treatise that claims that the Jews committed ritual human sacrifices. *The Times* even quoted one critic of the sale who equated the treatise’s racism to pornography: “It’s immoral to propagate pornography, and I regard this vicious Nazi document as worse than pornography” (4 June 2001). The manuscript subsequently failed to find a buyer at the auction. The current English interest in Burton has shifted from sexuality to race — a move that is signalled rhetorically by the critic who implies that racism is today’s pornography. Amid this current focus on Burton’s role as explorer and racial theorist, one should not overlook the important role he played in late nineteenth-century sexual discourse. Although he instigated the discourse on pornography through the appropriation of Arab texts and through racist assumptions about Arab sexuality, he did so when his method of translation was one of the few ways explicitly to discuss the deficits of English sexuality. His contribution to early discussions of pornography should not be categorically dismissed because of their racism, but studied insofar as they demonstrate how English sexuality historically found expression through a combination of racist, imperialist, and

reverent attitudes toward Arab literature and culture.

Simon Fraser University

Notes

1. Burton held positions with the Indian Army and the Foreign Office, during which time he supported English imperial rule in India (McLynn 48), the conquest of eastern Africa (120), and the annexation of Egypt (328).
2. F. F. Arbuthnot collaborated with Burton on numerous translations along the lines of The Oriental Translation Fund (Wright 86), established in 1828 as a sister organisation of the Royal Asiatic Society for the “advancement of Oriental learning” (*Report* 1). Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton, owned an extensive collection of French and Italian erotic literature and was one of Burton’s intimate friends (McLynn 328). In 1859, he introduced Burton to Frederick Hankey, his Paris agent who purchased erotic works for Milnes and ingeniously undermined the vigilance of English customs (Pope-Hennessy 118).
3. Besides his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, the Kama Shastra Society published *The Kama Sutra* (1883), *The Ananga Ranga* (1885), *The Perfumed Garden of the Sheik Nefzaoui* (1886), *The Beharistan* (1887), and *The Gulistan* (1888). Despite England’s greater colonial and cultural contact with India, the translations of the Arab texts elicited the most discussion, reproduction, and imitation.
4. See Peter Caracciolo’s (1988) anthology for a range of essays on the impact of the *Arabian Nights* on English literature.
5. Both Thomas Wright (1906) and C. Knipp (1974) dispute Burton’s account that he spent thirty years translating the *Arabian Nights*. They argue that his translation is heavily indebted to Payne’s earlier translation (Wright 105; Knipp 45), and they also suggest that his lurid annotations and Terminal Essay are alone what make his translation distinct.
6. Burton’s version of “The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad” includes vulgar references to genitalia, female nudity, and flagellation (1.90-97). Even a favourable reviewer for *The Bat* in 1885 was shocked by Burton’s translation of the tale: “The conduct of the three fair ladies is decidedly eccentric; their language, to put it mildly, is copious,

“Esoteric Pornography”

expressive, and direct in the extreme; their customs, in the phraseology of the burlesque, are very peculiar; and very improper is their behaviour as judged by our occidental standards” (876).

7. Before Burton’s translation, the *Arabian Nights* had already been the inspiration for a serialised story entitled “Conjugal Nights” that appeared between 1842-44 in *The Exquisite* (2.61). The story, which consists of a series of racy tales recounted by a husband to his wife each night and broken off at a critical point until the following evening, borrows its title, frame, and narrative technique from the *Arabian Nights*. It appropriates the text for erotic purposes, recreating these stories as conjugal sex aids.
8. The *Arabian Nights* had long been westernised before the Arab scholars reclaimed it. The tremendous popularity of the *Arabian Nights* in the West actually stimulated Arab interest in the text that had been previously derided (Knipp 47).
9. Nineteenth-century translation theory assumed that a good translation would achieve semantic equivalence with the original text. In “The Task of the Translator” (1968), Walter Benjamin questions the notion of the fidelity of reproduction to suggest that the translator is an artist who re-creates the original as a work that echoes it, but also changes it (73). Recent critics, including Douglas Robinson (1997), also acknowledge this disruption between the original and translated text as the product of linguistic, gender, colonial, or historical difference.
10. Sometimes known as Lord Campbell’s Act, the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 gave statutory authority to existing common law to measure obscenity according to a common test: those “works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in any well-regulated mind” (qtd from Craig 42). *The Kama Shastra* was first printed in 1873, but the printers refused to print its full run for fear of prosecution (Ashbee, *Index* 282). Burton’s Kama Shastra Society reprinted it in 1885 as *The Ananga Ranga*, after first printing *The Kama Sutra* in 1883. See M. J. D. Roberts (1985) on the history of English laws against obscenity in the nineteenth century.
11. During the production of the *Arabian Nights*, Isabel Burton sought counsel about the Obscene Publications Act through the criminal lawyer George Lewis who had worked for the NVA (Lovell 685).

12. References to the indecency of French literature proliferated late nineteenth-century popular culture. On May 12, 1882, an article on “Immoral Current Literature” in *Town Talk* insisted that “a French novel is but a synonym for obscenity” (3). On January 31, 1885, another article appeared in the same magazine entitled “Indecent French Novels.” Here, the author argues that “this literature is steadily sapping all strength and energy from the French people,” and he asks “is it to be allowed to emasculate our hardy manhood?” (1).
13. In 1863, Burton founded the Anthropological Society of London as well the periodical *Anthropologia*. As he writes about the journal, “My motive was to supply travellers with an organ which would rescue their observations from the outer darkness of manuscript and print their curious information on social and sexual matters out of place in the popular book” (1.xviii). Lisa Sigel (2002) discusses the “carnal exoticism” of the Society inner circle, the Cannibal Club, that included Burton, Monckton-Milnes, and Hankey to suggest that it demonstrated a brutal and prurient interest in the sexual practices of other cultures (74).
14. In the last volume of the *Arabian Nights*, Burton repeats the same imperialist argument for studying the Arabs: “In fact, I consider my labours as a legacy bequeathed to my countrymen at a most critical time when England the puissantest of Moslem powers is called upon, without adequate knowledge of the Moslem’s inner life, to administer Egypt as well as to rule India” (16. 438-39).
15. Burton’s argument that his sexual knowledge of Arab peoples was in the service of English empire still found an audience in the twentieth century. Frank Harris, author of the salacious autobiography *My Life and Loves* (1925-29), believed in Burton’s political importance. Comparing him to the German imperialist Bismarck, he argues that Burton would have acquired an empire for England from the Cape to Cairo if England had given him due regard (59). He explains more fully in his earlier *Contemporary Portraits* (1915) that Burton’s knowledge of Egypt and Sudan would have “made [him] an ideal ruler of a Mohammedan people” (171). He acknowledges Burton’s carnal predilections, describing him as “a sensualist of extravagant appetites, learned in every Eastern and savage vice” (179); however, even his “pornographic leaning” (179) allows Harris to conclude that “Burton’s place was an

“Esoteric Pornography”

Eastern throne” (180).

16. Burton likely donated a set of *The Arabian Nights* to The Athenaeum Club. The Club’s Library holds all of the original volumes, except for the first that would provide details about their provenance.
17. See Richard and Isabel Burton’s separate accounts of the reviews on his *Arabian Nights* (*Nights* 16.385-457; *Lady Burton’s* 6.430-38).
18. Over the month, the newspaper also published a number of spurious notices about impending libel action against the book. There is no evidence that Burton was ever prosecuted for his publication of the *Arabian Nights*. Yet, the *Pall Mall Gazette* claimed that “it was resolved by the authorities to request Captain Burton not to issue the third volume and to prosecute him if he takes no notice of the invitation,” and the same paper later announced that the “Government has at last determined to put down Captain Burton with a strong hand.”
19. Stead was famous for publishing his 1885 report on child prostitution. He was subsequently jailed for three months for “abducting” a child in order to prove his case. His findings nonetheless forced Parliament to raise to the age of sexual consent to sixteen in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885; see 48 & 49 Vict., c.69.
20. For some, Burton’s unconventionality signalled his non-Englishness: his fellow Indian Army officers called him “The White Nigger” (McLynn 34), and John Hanning Speke dismissed Burton as an English explorer when he insisted that he “would rather die a hundred deaths than have a foreigner take from Britain the honour of discovery” (qtd in McLynn 164).
21. This mention of secret cabinets in public libraries is likely a reference to the Private Case collection originally held at The British Museum and now at The British Library.
22. According to Isabel Burton, it was only Benares, the Kama Shastra Society’s false place of publication, that saved the Burtons from discovery and prosecution (Lovell 691). The Society for the Suppression of Vice was founded in 1802 as a semi-official arbiter of morals that sometimes acted in conjunction with the police. It was initially preoccupied with suppressing blasphemy, but later focused on the suppression of obscene publications. It was replaced by the emergence of the National Vigilance Association in 1886. See Roberts (1981) for information on the history of the two societies.

23. Burton often turned to the Old Testament to point out English inconsistency about pornography. He puzzled over why the English accepted free translations from this “ancient Oriental work,” but not his own unexpurgated *Arabian Nights* (*Nights* 16.437).
24. Isabel Burton may also have hoped to profit from the financial success of Burton’s translation, which made a gross profit of ten thousand pounds (*Life* 459).
25. The Burtons fostered this myth elsewhere in their writing (*Nights* 16.452; Isabel Burton “Sir Richard Burton’s” 3).
26. Like Isabel Burton, Georgina Sisted, Burton’s niece, also felt compelled to explain that she had never read the original translation at her uncle’s “special request,” even though she defended the *Arabian Nights* in her 1896 biography of Burton on the grounds of its limited accessibility to the “select few” and its difference from “the latest nauseous case from the Divorce Courts” (403).
27. Between 1888 and 1894, Smithers and Nichols collaborated on various underground projects. They were involved in the production of a number of clandestine works together, the most important titles including *Gynecocracy* (1893) and Oscar Wilde’s *Teleny* (1893). They had connections with other underground publishers such as Edward Avery in London and Carrington in Paris. After 1891, they also opened shops in Soho. Their partnership apparently ended when Nichols’s interests deviated from the expensive, upscale obscenity that Smithers preferred (Nelson 43; Lawrence 6). Smithers’s son, Jack, drolly recounted in 1939 his experiences with Nichols. While he insists that his father produced only legitimate works, he shows that Nichols’s print press “was nothing more or less than a wholesale factory of pornographic books and photographs” (82) that often resorted to blackmailing its customers.
28. Not only did the correspondence between Burton and Smithers reveal anxiety about surveillance by the NVA, but also that between Isabel Burton and Smithers. When Isabel Burton wrote Smithers about *The Priapeia*, she also began using a pseudonym, “Hermaphrodite” (Lovell 766). See Dane Kennedy and Burke Casari (1997) for their discussion of Isabel Burton’s correspondence with Smithers before and after her husband’s death (235, 240).
29. Apparently there was a previous English translation of this text: *Oriental Lascivious Tales*. London: Bibliomaniac Society, 1891 (*Oriental* x). It no

“Esoteric Pornography”

longer exists.

30. Smithers struggled with the French translator to gain control over this text, a conflict that is enacted in the margins of the English translation of *Oriental Stories*. The combination of French and English commentary included in the English translation at first seems harmonious until one realises the extent to which Smithers obfuscates its French literary heritage by fabricating an English one. For instance, the stories from the *Arabian Nights* are probably extracts from a French translation of the work, particularly since the French translation preceded Payne’s and Burton’s by a few years. Yet, when Smithers translates these stories into English, he alludes to Burton, suggesting that they derive from him. His translation reveals an English effort to assert literary dominion over the French. In so doing, he constructs an erotic literary legacy for the English by appropriating the Arabic texts, obfuscating French involvement, and reattributing Burton as the founding author. A similar sort of struggle between French and English translators transpires over *The Perfumed Garden*, a work discussed in the next section.
31. Isabel Burton, however, countered Smithers’s betrayal by thwarting future would-be pornographers. She wrote instructions to the executors of her will to burn Burton’s unpublished works and send all relevant material to the NVA (Lovell 783). In an early letter, Isabel Burton condemns “that hideous humbug The Society for the Suppression of Vice” (Lovell 685); however, faced with antagonistic publishers intent on republishing Burton’s works, she eventually sought the aid of one such society (Lovell 783).
32. The Grolier Society prospectuses are collected in the bound volume *Prospectuses* at The Bodleian Library in Oxford.
33. See other articles on the auction in *The Observer* (3 June 2001) and *The Guardian* (7 June 2001).

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C. Colligan

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