5. "The Wonder of Thy Beauty:" Bayard Taylor's *Poems of the Orient* as an Intermediary Between German Romanticism and American Gentility

The Arabian Indifference to Time—Moving From East to West

"Wir Deutschen sind in der Mitte zwischen Orient und Amerika. Bei den Arabern spielt Zeit keine Rolle. Amerika lebt mit der Uhr in der Hand. [...] Wir in der Mitte" (Kerr 221).[1] German traveler Alfred Kerr wrote these lines as part of his hymnal first impressions upon arriving in New York in 1914. Kerr articulates two oppositional cultural tropes: the Oriental calmness and tranquility on the one hand, and the American frenzy and turmoil on the other. Recalling his own enchantment and fascination with the American pandemonium years later, Kerr once more argues on the basis of an intercultural experience. It is only in the midst of American flurry that he comes to rest, whereas German boredom never leaves one in peace: "Die Mittel von Berlin wirken dermaßen langweilig, [...] daß man zur Ruhe nicht kommt. Ruhe fand ich hier: weil es rasend geht" (221).

What Kerr in his first statement articulates—the Arabian indifference to time—is one of the enduring stereotypes that Edward Said has argued as being responsible in creating a Western conception of the Orient. This 'timelessness' was something European travelers in the Orient felt to be a threat,

1 Many thanks to Huma Ibrahim for her valuable criticism of this essay. The cited passage originally stems from Kerr's *Die Welt im Licht* (1920). The quote, however, is taken from his later "New York und London: Stätten des Geschicks. Zwanzig Kapitel nach dem Weltkrieg," where in the last New York section, "Amerika—Postskriptum," he cites selected passages of his first text on America.

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and according to Said they had to protect themselves from such unsettling influences, since they "wore away the European discreteness and rationality of time, space, and personal identity. In the Orient one suddenly confronted unimaginable antiquity, inhuman beauty, boundless distance" (167). Kerr, however, seems not anxious about this dangerous Oriental trait. He does not feel the need of protection against it, because his take on the Orient is for rhetorical purposes only. In the course of his argument, as can be seen in his second statement, Kerr loses his initial point—and interest—of comparison: the claim of Arabian indifference to time.

Kerr could have constructed a triangular cultural relationship, but he drops the third—'Arabian'—party that would then have served as intermediary in favor of the pronounced contrast between Germany and America. Thus, his opposition is not based on the dichotomy of East and West, but on an inherent Western antagonism of old and new with the East as excluded 'Other,' way beyond any participation in this cultural assessment. Kerr's focus clearly points in the Western direction, from Germany towards America, first recalling but then neglecting the distant East which nevertheless may be said to remain in the back of his mind in a double sense: corporeal and historical.

Geographically, one way to get to America from Arabian countries is by passing through Germany. In this sense, Kerr would literally be leaving the East behind by facing the West. Historically, Kerr calls upon the enthusiastic German reception of Oriental culture exactly a century earlier, starting with Joseph von Hammer's translation in 1812-13 of the *Divan* by fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz that set off a broad interest of Germans in Oriental culture and triggered Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* (1819), which in turn inspired other Oriental poetry, such as August von Platen's *Ghaselen* (1821) and Friedrich Rückert's *Östliche Rosen* (1822). Kerr, as a German, takes this history and tradition of German Orientalism with him on his journey to America.

Another way of situating Germany as middle ground between East and West is by switching the direction of perspective, that is, by traveling from Western America to the Orient via Germany. It is this track that nineteenth-century travel writer and poet Bayard Taylor took, again in the mentioned double sense. Not only did he physically pass through Germany on his way east; in his ethically and aesthetically envisioning the Orient he also fundamentally relied on Germany's Oriental reception. His Oriental travel accounts and above all his own Oriental poetry thus reflect Taylor's actual encounter *with* the East as well as his engagement with German literature *on* the East. Addressing his home audience from abroad—and later at home with lecture

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tours—, Taylor through his writings held a prominent position in mid-nineteenth century as mediator in the triangular constellation America, Germany, and the Orient. At the same time, through employing the cultural standards of Genteel America, Taylor managed to sidestep the condescending colonial and imperialist attitude that characterized much of European Orientalist literature of the nineteenth century.

From West to East to West—Cross-Cultural Counterpoints

Speaking of the Orient "as a terrain for literary exploitation," Edward Said calls to attention the multiple layers of interest "that covered the Orient as a subject matter and as a territory," especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He goes on to argue that even "the most innocuous travel books—and there were literally hundreds written after mid-century—contributed to the density of public awareness of the Orient." What Said has in mind, however, is above all the interest English and French travelers had, even though he parenthetically acknowledges "some American voyagers, among them Mark Twain and Herman Melville" (192).

Said's claim of an exception from the rule actually ignores a quite different story, namely one in which there was an increasing interest in the Orient during the early nineteenth century on behalf of those Americans who cared about the formation of an American self-image apart from European models. "When the young republic strove to complement its political independence from its European origins with declarations of cultural independence," according to Catrin Gersdorf, "the Orient became if not America's surrogate self [...] then an imaginative figure employed to delineate those cultural and historical distinctions it sought between America itself and Europe" (99).

It was the time, when Europe and America competed in staking their mutual claims—geographically and culturally speaking—in the Orient. When Europe's Oriental interest turned especially towards Egypt and India, American writers like Irving, Poe, and Hawthorne took part in the geo-aesthetic fascination that at least in Europe led to an Oriental Renaissance, which Luther Luedtke describes as "a time when the language, literature, and imagination of Europe were reborn through Indic rather than Hellenistic inspiration" (xix). Recent studies like Fuad Sha'ban's define American Orientalism at the turn of the nineteenth century as an amalgamation of European stimulus and American public discourse, or in his own words as a "national cultural dialogue

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which derives from European background, heritage and influence on the one hand, and, on the other, stems from particular American factors and experience" (vii).

Sha'ban, who grounds his argument on the notion that American Orientalism relies on the self-perception of Americans as the chosen people, goes on, however, to claim that American travelers abroad economically and culturally appropriated the Orient by turning the intercultural encounters into a romanticized souvenir and exotic commodity.[2] With this turn of reasoning, Sha'ban actually asserts what Said himself had claimed as the Orientalization undertaken by Europeans. Whether writers on the Orient chose a more professional or a more personal take on their subject matter, their works, according to Said, "rely upon the sheer egoistic powers of the European consciousness at their center" (158). Thus, "the Orientalist ego" is evidenced by his perspective. Even when trying to be impartial, he writes *for* the European observer and as such is interpreting the Orient: "[T]his interpretation is a form of Romantic restructuring of the Orient, a re-vision of it, which restores it redemptively to the present. Every interpretation, every structure created for the Orient, then, is a reinterpretation, a rebuilding of it" (158).

Whereas the European Orientalists Said is thinking of in this generalized manner may be argued to 'acquire' the Orient in order to domesticate it to European codes and classifications, which "formed a simulacrum of the Orient and reproduced it materially in the West" (166), for American Orientalists the case was somewhat different. Since their perception of the Orient invariably was filtered and enriched through its European artistic response, American writers often took on a double vista that oscillated between a highly aestheticized modus operandi and a more basic fascination with Oriental customs compared to American manners and morals. This shift in perspective is also meant to reconsider the concept of Orientalism apart from its late twentieth-century normative tone that by and large can be seen as a result of Said's

2 For a critical reading of Sha'ban, see Gersdorf who writes that Sha'ban's persistent attempt to refer back to "the American vision of Zion" (Sha'ban 177) and to Puritan self-representations as a people "entrusted with the task of rebuilding the Kingdom of God, the 'little American Israel'" (Sha'ban 195) "not only runs the risk of reducing cultural criticism to an ideological exercise whose only concern is to display the one and only foundation for the proclivities and prejudices of late 20th-century U.S. politics in the Near East, it also comes dangerously close to reducing politics simply to a matter of religious zeal" (Gersdorf 101).

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powerful argument and that lead to the term being one of the most ideologically charged words in recent scholarship. This tone overlays an originally more sympathetic meaning of the word during the nineteenth century where it conveyed the study of the languages, literatures, religions, arts and manners of the East. As John MacKenzie stresses:

> Orientalism came to represent a construct, not a reality, an emblem of domination and a weapon of power. It lost its status as a sympathetic concept, a product of scholarly admiration for diverse and exotic cultures, and became the literary means of creating a stereotypical and mythic East through which European rule could be more readily asserted. (xii)

Without suggesting that the Orient and Oriental people were not often subject to being stereotypically presented, MacKenzie pleads for a more dynamic historical approach to artistic interests in Orientalism. He speaks of various contrapuntal processes leading to cultural cross-fertilization that in turn produced syncretic forms of art. Said himself admits in a short, rather enigmatic passage at the outset of his study that Orientalism has not always and only been a one-way street. "In addition," he writes, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West)" (1), adding on later that especially for the Romantics the Orient became a means of regenerating and revitalizing Europe (115). Said, however, does not follow through with an argument that the Orient could possibly be seen as the source for a counter-Western discourse which challenges Western conventions and as such would serve as a starting ground for cultural, social, literary, spiritual and artistic resistance. Reading Bayard Taylor's works on the Orient in this light leads to an understanding of how a romantic writer could draw from various artistic influences—both from the East and the West—in order to produce a highly syncretic literary output and at the same time adhere to a national, American, agenda.

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"Wahlheimatliteratur"—Taylor Reading Rückert Reading Goethe

POEMS OF THE ORIENT
Da der West war durchgekostet,
Hat er nun den Ost entmostet.
(Rückert)

Bayard Taylor's *Poems of the Orient* (1854) opens with this frontispiece, a quotation of German romantic poet Friedrich Rückert (33).[3] This is significant, for it bears witness to Taylor's having read Rückert's poetical works and to his knowledge of the German language in general. Taylor actually had met Rückert in 1852, when he interrupted his travels in the East for a short visit to Germany.[4] Later recalling this encounter, Taylor in 1866 writes:

> When I first visited Coburg, in October, 1852, I was very anxious to make Rückert's acquaintance. My interest in Oriental literature had been refreshed, at that time, by nearly ten months of travel in Eastern lands, and some knowledge of modern colloquial Arabic. I had read his wonderful translation of the Makamât of Hariri, and felt sure that he would share my enthusiasm for the people to whose treasures of song he had given so many years of his life. (*Critical Essays* 95-96)

From Germany, he took along Rückert's *Morgenländische Sagen und Geschichten* (1837) and, as John Krumpelman has shown, there is evidence in the poems composed subsequent to October 1852 of an almost direct use of Rückert's book, a very prominent example being "Bedouin Song," Taylor's most famous single poem.[5] Taylor's frontispiece reference to Rückert, however, does not

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3 The sequence *Poems of the Orient* is included in the household edition of *The Poetical Works of Bayard Taylor* 35-67.

4 While Taylor's focus on the Orient was based on first-hand contact, he also sought the aesthetic link to Germany. Taylor himself was partly of German ancestry and his first travel trip to Europe in 1844 at the age of 19 was his initial contact with his German roots. His constantly growing interest in German literature and life led him, for example, to his second marriage with German Marie Hansen, his post as non-resident Professor of German at Cornell University, his scholarly effort *Studies in German Literature*, and it culminated in his metrically faithful translation of Goethe's *Faust* as well as his eventual, but due to a close death short-termed appointment as American minister to Berlin in 1878.

5 Krumpelman convincingly compares Rückert's "Die Liebeslieder und der Koranvers" from his second volume of *Morgenländische Sagen und Geschichten* with Taylor's "Bedouin

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originate in Rückert's well-known translation and adaptation of Arabic tales, but is a quote taken verbatim from Rückert's own Oriental poem sequence, *Östliche Rosen*, which were directly inspired by Hafiz (written in 1819, published 1822).[6] At the time, Rückert was under great influence by the recent German translations of the Persian *divans* by the thirteenth-century mystic poet Rumi and the fourteenth-century more profanely oriented, at times even highly erotic poet Hafiz. Rückert became one of the leading Orientalists in Germany, a very important figure for academically establishing Oriental Studies. Like most other Orientalists of his age, he did not travel to the East himself, but his vast language skills allowed him to read Arabian and Persian literature in the original versions.[7]

Rückert is in yet another sense a pivotal character in Germany's romantic yearning for anything Oriental. Rückert followed Johann Gottfried von Herder's and Friedrich Schlegel's ideas of stimulating national poetry by searching for the very origins of language as the seat of all humanity.[8] They all believed to have found these origins not in Romanic or Hellenistic but in Oriental sources:

> Wären uns nur die Schätze des Orients so zugänglich wie die des Altertums! […] Im Orient müssen wir das höchste Romantische suchen, und wenn wir erst aus der Quelle schöpfen können, so wird uns vielleicht der Anschein von südlicher Glut, der uns jetzt in der spanischen Poesie so reizend ist, wieder nur abendländisch und sparsam erscheinen. (Schlegel 502)

Song." Rückert himself called his poem ein "beduinisch Lied," and it includes the following lines taken in a shortened version from the Qur'an: "Ich las die Verse vom Gericht: / Wenn die Sonn' ist erkaltet, / Und die Sterne veraltet / Und die Berge gespaltet. – / […] Und das Schuldbuch ist entfaltet." Taylor's refrain reads as follows: "Till the sands grow cold, / And the stars are old, / And the leaves of the Judgement / Book unfold!" Krumpelman shows that Taylor most probably did not take the verses directly from the English translation of the Qur'an, where the related passage is much longer and differently worded, but translated Rückert's quote instead (87). For the dates of composition of the *Poems of the Orient*, see Smyth 302-303.

6 In turn, Rückert's *Ghaselen* were modelled after Rumi's *Divan* (cf. El-Demerdasch 235-236).

7 For an overview of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German response to Oriental poetry, see Radjaie 21-34; Weber 39-61.

8 See Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772) and *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791) and Friedrich Schlegel's "Gespräch über die Poesie" (1800) and *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder* (1808).

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By quoting Rückert in his own poems, Taylor therefore situates himself within this German tradition of romantic Orientalism. But a closer look at the quote and its original source reveals that Rückert too has linked his own poems to another author's work. Taylor's quote is taken from Rückert's very first verses of *Östliche Rosen*, a panegyric poem honoring Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* (1819). Taylor's quote in its context reads as follows:

> Zu Goethes west-östlichem Divan
> Wollt ihr kosten
> Reinen Osten,
> Müßt ihr gehen von hier zum selben Manne,
> Der vom Westen
> Auch den besten
> Wein von jeher schenkt' aus voller Kanne.
> Als der West war durchgekostet;
> Hat er nun den Ost entmostet;
> Seht, dort schwelgt er auf der Ottomanne. (Rückert, *Gedichte* 105)

Goethe's great poetry sequence marks a crucial peak in Germany's perception of the Orient, of course. Like Rückert, Goethe never traveled the Orient; in his "notes" on the *Divan* he writes nevertheless:

> Wer das Dichten will verstehen,
> Muß ins Land der Dichtung gehen;
> Wer den Dichter will verstehen,
> Muß in Dichters Lande gehen. (*Noten* 126)

Goethe does not refer to a journey in the literal sense of meaning. His is both an imaginary-poetical journey as well as a formal-aesthetic project (cf. Boubia). Cultivating the "technique of poetic traveling" (Bahr 148), Goethe insists on the spiritual unity of East and West. To achieve this union, he pleads for an aesthetically equilibristic moving back and forth between the two:

> Wer sich selbst und andere kennt
> Wird auch hier erkennen:
> Orient und Okzident
> Sind nicht mehr zu trennen.
>
> Sinnig zwischen beiden Welten
> Sich zu wiegen lass' ich gelten;

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Also zwischen Ost und Westen
Sich bewegen sei zum Besten! (*Divan* 121)

Said declares that "the two most renowned German works on the Orient [are] Goethe's *Westöstlicher Diwan* and Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder*" (19). Nevertheless, he believes that "the sheer quality, consistently, and mass of British, French, and [post-World War II] American writing on the Orient lifts it above the doubtless crucial work done by Germany, Italy, Russia, and elsewhere," conceding later on that "I particularly regret not taking more account of the great scientific prestige that accrued to German scholarship by the middle of the nineteenth century [...]" (17-18). Indeed, Said was not very much interested in pursuing Germany's role in the Western perception of the Orient, since there "was nothing in Germany to correspond to the Anglo-French presence in India, Levant, North Africa." His dismissal was mainly due to the fact that "the German Orient was almost exclusively a scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient: it was made the subject of lyrics, fantasies, and even novels, but it was never actual [...]." This "fact" notwithstanding, Said claimed that Goethe partook in the overall Western acquisition of "intellectual authority over the Orient" (19).

Ehrhard Bahr as an aside has drawn attention to Said's consistently misspelling Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* as "Westöstlicher Diwan." With the omission of the hyphen Said obscures, according to Bahr, "the delicate balance of this hyphenated qualifier" (151). Hendrik Birus, on the other hand, has particularly stressed the importance of this hyphen in his claim that the German hyphenated title *west-östlich* speaks of more than merely a peaceful side-by-side, namely of a "spannungsvolles In-Eins" of East and West (114). Moreover, Goethe actually chose a dual, bilingual—Arabian and German—title with two separate title pages facing each other, a fact Said entirely misses or prefers not to mention. The Arabian title significantly marks a difference for it reads—translated into German—"Der östliche Divan des westlichen Verfassers." Thus, while it is a fact that the Arabian language does not know hyphenated composites, Goethe in choosing these two varying titles pronounces the move towards union as well as the tension between East and West.

Like Goethe's notion of "world literature," Rückert had sought to bridge the cultural gap between East and West in two major ways: on the formulaic level by turning to the syncretistic and polyfunctional model of the *divan*-cycle and the *ghazal*-stanza, and on the broader level of poetics by envisioning a "world

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poetry." Each in his own way combined a universal approach towards poetry bridging the gap between East and West as well as Old and New with the idea of rejuvenating one's own national literature:

> Ich sehe immer mehr, [...] daß die Poesie ein Gemeingut der Menschheit ist, und daß sie überall und zu allen Zeiten in Hunderten und aber Hunderten von Menschen hervortritt. [...] Ich sehe mich daher gerne bei fremden Nationen um und rate jedem, es auch seinerseits zu tun. Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Welt-Literatur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen. (Goethe, qtd. in Eckermann 173-174)

> Mög' euch die schmeichelnde Gewöhnung
> Befreunden auch mit fremder Tönung,
> Daß ihr erkennt: Weltpoesie
> Allein ist Weltversöhnung. (Rückert, qtd. in Schimmel 32)

Goethe's idea of world literature serves as a spiritual space, in which peoples no longer speak with the voices of the poets to and about themselves but to another. It is meant as a dialogue between nations, a spiritual interaction, a mutual giving and taking of all spiritual treasures (cf. Strich 18). The outcome of this intercultural encounter should never lead to a levelling of national literatures but to a reciprocal acknowledgement of a common understanding through national characteristics (Blessin 65). Especially Goethe's *Divan* develops this double vision on behalf of the traveling poet that takes him to foreign homelands. "Niemand kann ich glücklich preisen / Der des Doppelblicks ermangelt," says Goethe (73). The *Divan* therefore is a prime example of "Wahlheimatliteratur," since by opting for the old Orient as his newly found 'Heimat,' this chosen relationship henceforth leaves traces through poetical trajectory in one's own country and, indeed, throughout the world (Boubia 70). Inspired by Goethe's *Divan* in this respect, Rückert in a similar mode takes recourse to a poetical homeland in order to invest its traces into one's own writing:

> Die Poesie in allen ihren Zungen
> Ist dem Geweihten eine Sprache nur,
> Die Sprache, die im Paradies erklungen,
> Eh sie verwildert auf der wilden Flur.

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Doch wo sie nun auch sei hervorgedrungen,
Von ihrem Ursprung trägt sie noch die Spur. (*Gedichte* 136)[9]

Bayard Taylor through the initial double citation in his *Poems of the Orient* refers to both German poets in different ways. Much like Goethe, at least as Rückert's quote suggests, had made his trial of the West and turned his attention to the East, Taylor himself is about to try his poetic luck with the Orient. And as much as Rückert—the minor poet—through his dedication thrives to participate in Goethe's—the major poet's—fame, Taylor—the yet unknown poet—relies on both poets' reputation to forcefully guarantee his own.[10] And like Rückert and Goethe, Taylor in one of the first of his *Poems of the Orient*, "The Poet in the East," envisions a poetic homeland in the East. Employing a scenery that includes nature imagery of spring air and festive earth, he makes recourse to seeking out the Orient as true homeland of the Western poet:

The Poet came to the Land of the East,
When spring was in the air:
The Earth was dressed for a wedding feast,
So young she seemed, and fair;
And the Poet knew the Land of the East, —
His soul was native there.
All things to him were the visible forms
Of early and precious dreams, —
Familiar visions that mocked his quest
Beside the Western streams, [...] (*Poetical Works* 38)

The poem recalls a moment of recognition and transition. Similar to Rückert's envisioning the trace of poetic origin ("Von ihrem Ursprung trägt sie [die Poesie] noch die Spur"), Taylor discovers this same trace in his romantic dream vision of a poetic quest fulfilled by transcending the national confines ("All things to him were the visible forms / Of early and precious dreams"). The claim of being a "native," of finding his long-sought poetic home-land

9 Rückert wrote these verses in 1828 while working on the translation of one of the most important collections of ancient Arabic poetry, the *Kitab-al-Hamasah*. Published in 1846 as *Hamasa oder die ältesten arabischen Volkslieder*, Rückert opens this translated collection with his own famous poem, quoted above (cf. Solbrig 17; El-Demerdasch 240).

10 Ironically, what really guaranteed Taylor his longstanding fame in academia were neither his travelogues nor his poetry but his translation of Goethe's *Faust*, still available and read today.

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after being led astray in a mock quest through Western regions, reflects not so much the biographical voice as it might seem. The poet here is a figure of transcendence, a cipher within an ongoing intercultural process, symbolized both by the virginal image of spring time and the bonding ritual of the wedding. Taylor in this poem marks the existing East-West dichotomy only to claim his own overcoming the cultural distinction. He uses spatial and temporal metaphors to focus on paying homage to the Orient. The Eastern poet symbolizes the Orient as a deliberate choice of a poetic and cultural homeland. In a proleptic vision, the poet claims to have always known that here, in the East, his "soul" would find its proper home.

"Unwinding the Turban:" *Poems of the Orient* as American Pastoral

Travels—be they real or imaginary—like the ones Goethe, Rückert, and Taylor undertook suggest movements in space as well as time. They are not only journeys into different cultures but also passages through cultural time zones, juxtaposing the present to both the past and the future. Speaking of Goethe's 'travel' to the Orient, Mirjam Weber remarks: "In der Orientierung an der Vergangenheit (die im Jetzt der Fremdkultur gegenwärtig ist) entdeckt er Richtlinien für die Zukunft, den Stoff für reale Utopien. […] Goethes Orient-Bild ist also die Frucht der in die Vergangenheit verlagerten Jetztzeit" (43). As a poetic device, this leads Goethe to the concept of relating what is far away to things close and present. In one sense, Goethe's verses in his *Divan* link up to both the syncretism of Oriental poetry as well as the simple and popular *Lied*-formula reminiscent especially of eighteenth-century German Anacreontic poetry (Bahr 146). Rückert, also relying on this syncretistic aesthetic of mixing elements that are 'natural' for both foreign and one's own cultures, coins the apt term "language garden:"

DER SPRACHGARTEN
Ich hab' in meinem Garten
Ein Dutzend Sprachen gebaut,
Und Blüten mancher Arten
Hab' ich von ihnen angeschaut; […]
Begieß es, und erlangen
Wird's einen neuen Trieb.
Aber dann bleib nicht hocken

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Bei diesem wieder, bis trocken
die andern sind, die nun prangen;
sie sind dir doch alle lieb! (*Werke* I, 210)

Rückert's vision of planting various languages as seeds, and taking care and watching them grow into many different beautiful flowers speaks for a multi-faceted approach to poetry. Likewise, Taylor's *Poems of the Orient* harbors such a mixture of various forms, symbols, stiles and references. In the concluding poem of his collection, Taylor once more takes up the notion of 'world poetry' as an intermingling of East and West and refocuses his perspective of the "Poet in the East" as a poet returning finally. Through his physical and poetic traveling, the lyrical vision now has become more complex. The poetical "I" speaks of the traces he hopes to leave through his "songs:"

L'ENVOI

Unto the Desert and the desert steed
  Farewell! The journey is completed now
Struck are the tents of Ishmael's wandering breed,
  And I unwind the turban from my brow.

The sun has ceased to shine; the palms that bent
  Inebriate with light, have disappeared;
And naught is left me of the Orient
  But the tanned bosom and the unshorn beard.

[…]

I found, among the Children of the Sun,
  The cipher of my nature,—the release
Of baffled powers, which else had never won
  That free fulfilment, whose reward is peace.

[…]

Go, therefore, Songs!—which in the East were born
  And drew your nurture—from your sire's control:
Haply to wander through the West forlorn,
  Or find a shelter in some Orient soul.

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And if the temper of our colder sky
  Less warmth of passion and of speech demands,
They are the blossoms of my life,—and I
  Have ripened in the suns of many lands. (*Poetical Works* 65-66)

This concluding poem is both an elegiac farewell to Taylor's own chosen new 'Heimat' in the East *and* a record of the continuous fear of his failure to be recognized as a poet in his old home country. The speaker here no longer seeks entry into Oriental culture and an outlet there for his suppressed longings. He has done all that already ("The journey is completed") and he is ready to "unwind the turban" and face the West once again. His re-entry to his old homeland he had so gladly left behind triggers an imaginary vision of his wandering texts: "Go, therefore, Songs!—which in the East were born." They, so he projects, will always remain at his literally newly found and symbolically regained home in the East, where they have originated in form and substance. But since these texts are part of the poet's very own nature ("They are the blossoms of my life"), they are also meant to remain and travel with him and as part of him.

Aesthetically, he herewith underscores the German romantics' program of a multinational and multifunctional 'world poetics' based on Oriental foundations. But implied are also ethical concerns relating to the state of affairs in his 'old' homeland of America. At this point, the poem is significantly contradictory. On the one hand, the texts may be said to be the better part of the speaking poet's nature. And this better part is closely linked to the Oriental soul that the poet claims to have now gained himself. On the other hand, the poem consistently evokes images of departure, removal, and loss as well as coldness and darkness. All these negatively connoted suggestions are related to the West he is looking ahead to, but not truly forward to.

This obvious paradox grounds on the suggestion, expressed in many of Taylor's Oriental poems, of the poet searching and finding a prelapsarian idyllic pastoral. As such, the seeming contradiction is but a generic device of the pastoral discourse. Taylor's pastoral ideal—at least as articulated in *The Poems of Orient*—differs from that of many American contemporaries in that his is clearly situated far away from his original homeland. Also, it does not oppose the city and the country in a strict sense. It is nevertheless a 'classic' pastoral, since the pastoral in its basic historical form involves the pendulous movement of retreat and return with the pastoral retreat returning insights relevant to the audience at stake (Gifford 2). The contemporary reader thus

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must understand this pastoral discourse in order to make sense of the cultural context of return. The movement of retreat and return, if not explicit in the text, is, as Terry Gifford asserts, "implicit in the address to an audience for whom what happens in Arcadia has some interest" (81). The essential paradox in the pastoral thus lies in the fact that the retreat to some place experienced without anxieties delivers insights into the culture from which it originates and that had been perceived to be troublesome in some respect.

Shortly before embarking on his travels to the East, Taylor, who grew up in a rural and repressive Quaker community in Pennsylvania, at first seemed to have found his Edenic place of contentment and freedom in the West of America, as can be concluded from his 1850 travelogue *Eldorado; or, Adventures in the Path of Empire: Comprising a Voyage to California* [...]. While Taylor's California in *Eldorado* stands as a model for American democracy, for peaceful relations among diverse ethnic groups as well as for a new, energetic and nature-bound kind of man, the poem "On Leaving California," written at that time, however expresses a telling ambivalence towards this Western idyll:

> Thy human children shall restore the grace
>   Gone with thy fallen pines:
> The wild, barbaric beauty of thy face
>   Shall round to classic lines.
> And Order, Justice, Social Law shall curb
>   Thy untamed energies;
> And Art and Science, with their dreams superb,
>   Replace thine ancient ease. (*Poetical Works* 92-93)

Although he clearly identifies the pastoral with California, he also evokes the impression of a disconcerting present. It is the Edenic past of the Western "wild, barbaric beauty" that needs to—and will, as the speaker assuredly avows—be restored in future again. Both society's rigid rules and laws as well as an unimaginative artistic sensibility are in need of change, so he claims. An essential part of Taylor's struggle with the American present and thus part of his pastoral dream is the realization of manly love (Martin 13). Especially in his later novel *Joseph and His Friend* (first published 1870), he once again returns to the Californian pastoral setting with the promise of a future where love between men may become possible:

> I know [...] a great valley, bounded by a hundred miles of snowy peaks; lakes in its bed; enormous hillsides, dotted with gloves of ilex and pine;

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> orchards of orange and olive; a perfect climate, where it is bliss enough just to breathe, and freedom from the distorted laws of men, for none are near enough to enforce them! If there is no legal way of escape for you, here, at least is no force which can drag you back, once you are there: I will go with you, and perhaps—perhaps [...]. (216)

California once again is envisioned in a temporal and spacial realm of "freedom from the distorted laws of men." Both Californian texts evoke what Leo Marx has called the "middle ground" of pastoral. It is the American ideal of "semi-primitivism," that according to Marx, "is located in a middle-ground somewhere 'between,' yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature" (23). While critics like Roger Sales and John Lucas have articulated a very bleak understanding of the English pastorals from the seventeenth up to the early nineteenth century for the English reading public by calling them essentially escapist in seeking refuge in an idealized past and thus serving a deeply conservative agenda (Sales 17; Lucas 118), Marx referring to the American context insists on the notion that "the pastoral design, as always, circumscribes the pastoral ideal" (72). There is invariably a "counterforce" undercutting the idyllic vision leading up to a qualification of the retreat within the pastoral design (26). Lawrence Buell, like Marx focusing especially on the American tradition of the pastoral, considers it a versatile form with multiple frames. Accordingly, he argues for careful readings of a pastoral in its specific cultural framework: "American pastoral cannot be pinned to a single ideological position. Even at its most culpable—the moment of willful retreat from social and political responsibility—it may be more strategized than mystified" (44). Buell believes in the pastoral's capacity to assume oppositional stances within otherwise conventionalized "sleepy safe" visions of America. "So American pastoral," Buell points out, "has simultaneously been counterinstitutional and institutionally sponsored" (50). Gifford takes up this anti-simplistic view of the pastoral asserting its capacity for making critical judgments about its inner tensions, its contextual functions and its multiple levels of contradictions: "They are borderland spaces of activity which can be seen through a number of frames" (12).

While Taylor in his relying on the popular pastoral mode was "institutionally sponsored" by his Genteel peers insofar as his texts were widely circulating, his writings do not always comply with the dominant gentile standards of his times that value not so much a natural, corporeal as an abstract, ascetic ideal of beauty, "one closely tied to an emphasis on purity and innocence and

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one usually symbolized by children and virgins" (Wermuth 178). Pastorals like Taylor's probing into the exploration of various bodily pleasures, even when seen primarily as a discourse of retreat, can still work in two differing ways, either simply as escape from a demanding and dissatisfying present, or as deeper examination of these circumstances. Exploring the present and possibly imagining an alternative future marks the difference between Marx's "sentimental pastoral" and his "imaginative and complex pastoral." Whereas the simplistic, escapist "sentimental pastoral" serves as an "illusion of peace and harmony in the green pasture" that is produced by "the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery" (25), the "complex pastoral" productively works with the notion of the "counterforce" undercutting the idyll that shows the discursive mechanism of the pastoral. Taylor's Californian writings belong to Marx's category of complex pastorals, because they are distinctly American Arcadias that are not so much set in the garden of Eden, but in a half-wild, half-innocent state that is presumed to be beyond the 'frontier' in both space and time. Taylor's claim to a better future, for example by realizing a love between men without social restraints, poses an implicit, yet harsh critique of the present repressive culture by relying on an Arcadian past prior to harmful civilizing measures. The nostalgic backward-looking is an essential trademark of the pastoral in general. Quite different from the English counterparts that Sales and Lucas are referring to, Taylor's American version of an Arcadian innocence that is located in a land before colonization and civilization therefore takes hold as the idealized representation of the past and implies a better future conceived in the language of the present.

But not only Taylor's Californian pastorals are complex in their employment of the undercutting counterforce. His Oriental poems also are not simple escapist pastorals that deal with nothing more than a longing to withdraw from the world's affairs to an oasis of harmonious well-being. Taylor's retreat is a yearning for a simpler style of life that at the same time is a movement toward a symbolic landscape and thus "a movement away from an 'artificial' world" with its "disciplined habits of mind or arts" (Marx 9). As such Taylor's pastorals become the embodiment of this middle-ground of "semi-primitivism." Reading Taylor's *Poems of the Orient* in the context of the pastoral construct indeed opens up possibilities of multiple frames. In the exploitation of the Oriental location, Taylor may be said to participate in or even help to form the notion of Orientalism in Said's sense. But adding the frames of the German romantic's aesthetics of finding and recovering a 'world poetry' as

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well as of the American pastoral ideal of "semi-primitivism," Taylor's Oriental landscapes both envision and transcend these opposing forces and thus form a middle ground that Taylor himself has labeled "semi-barbaric." On a symbolic level, these poetic landscapes evoke what the German romantics referred to as "Weltpoesie," namely the site of all poetic origins. But on a corporeal level, Taylor's experiences with Eastern living habits are no escapist dreams but "the release of baffled powers," as he puts it in his poem "L'Envoi." And thus, as much as he enjoyed these foreign manners, he is well aware that he will not be able to keep up their "barbaric splendour" after returning home. Through the ciphered nature of his *Poems of the Orient*, however, and the aesthetics they call forth, he constructs a poetic *alter ego*. In his dedicatory poem, Taylor tellingly calls this *persona* "shaggy Pan:"

PROËM DEDICATORY
An Epistle From Mount Tmolus.
To Richard Henry Stoddard.

[...]

But were you here, my Friend, we twain would build
  Two altars, on the mountain's sunward side:
  There Pan should o'er my sacrifice preside,
And there Apollo your oblation gild.
He is your God, but mine is shaggy Pan; [...] (*Poetical Works* 35-36)

With this poetic design of installing "shaggy Pan" as representative of his earth-bound, sensual identity, the speaker once more juxtaposes America to the East. It is America that functions as counterforce, as intrusion, to its idyllic Other, the Orient. With his Oriental poems, Taylor sets up a dialogue functioning as intermediary between opposing cultural forces. For Taylor, a "consolatory prospect" (Marx 32) may be found only in syncretizing literalness and figurativeness, that is, in combining intercultural corporeal experience with multidimensional poetic devices. Accordingly in the "Proëm," Taylor—speaking from mythological Mount Tmolus—addresses his poet-friend Stoddard. He clearly marks his own poetical ethics of the "Sprachgarten" in the effort to retrieve his lived experiences of encountering wonderful beauties from a pastoral setting and send them forth as expansively wandering lyrics:

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Take, therefore, Friend! these Voices of the Earth,
The rhythmic records of my life's career,
Humble, perhaps, yet wanting not the worth
Of Truth, and to the heart of Nature near. (*Poetical Works* 37)

Emblematic Male Oriental Beauty—Emulating Hafiz

Throughout his life, Taylor suffered from being primarily known as the 'Great American traveler.' Although travel writings—at least in his early years—earned his living, what Taylor really longed for and worked towards was to be remembered as a poet. And indeed, *Poems of the Orient* became his most popular poetry collection and was received as a "wonder book" (Smyth 218-219). "To a Persian Boy" is one of his earliest poems from this collection:

TO A PERSIAN BOY
In the Bazaar at Smyrna
The gorgeous blossoms of that magic tree
Beneath whose shade I sat a thousand nights,
Breathed from their opening petals all delights
Embalmed in spice of Orient Poesy,
When first, young Persian, I beheld thine eyes,
And felt the wonder of thy beauty grow
Within my brain, as some fair planet's glow
Deepens, and fills the summer evening skies.
From under thy dark lashes shone on me
The rich, voluptuous soul of Eastern land,
Impassioned, tender, calm, serenely sad,—
Such as immortal Hafiz felt when he
Sang by the fountain-streams of Rocnabad,
Or in the bowers of blissful Samarcand. (*Poetical Works* 62-63)

This poem was first published in 1851, that is, three years prior to the publication of the complete volume. Taylor here pursues a twofold interest. He sets the stage for his audience, describing the perfumed, intoxicating atmosphere of the "Bazaar at Smyrna" with its "opening petals" of "gorgeous blossoms" on a "magic tree." Like a setting taken from *The Arabian Nights* the speaker voices his enjoying Oriental delights. But then the setting turns out to serve as backdrop for the entrance of the protagonist, the Persian boy. The observing speaker

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makes an effort to intellectualize his feelings ("I [...] felt the wonder of thy beauty grow / Within my brain"), but clearly not only his mind is enchanted. Although he refrains from going into praising the boy's overall physique, he nevertheless focuses on one detail: the boy's eyes. These eyes with their "dark lashes" are not only metonymically linked to the owner's wonderful beauty in its bodily entirety; they also signify the beauty of the boy's culture and origins. The projected allusions to Oriental sensibilities, however, reflect back onto the image of the boy. In the wishful and longing view of the beholder, the boy is all that: tranquil, gentle, melancholic, passionate. Therefore, on the one hand, the speaker seems to evade any straightforward connection between his erotic yearnings and the corporeal object of his desires, transferring them onto the plain of generalized and pleasing cultural attributes. On the other hand, poetically this evasion leads to a metatextual reference that in the end only reaffirms this very desire.

Through a chain of references, Taylor moves from the description of the setting to the appearance of the boy within to stressing the emblematic quality of his eyes which in turn prompts the allusion to Hafiz. With mentioning Hafiz, Taylor thus calls forth the tradition of Persian love poetry, often addressed to boys and therefore suggesting a homoerotic affection on behalf of the speaker (Bürgel 26; Martin 13; Wild 82). This reference that identifies Hafiz with the desiring "I" marks the speaker's implicit positioning of himself both as male voice and as love poet. What is even more striking, however, is the fact that by identifying with Hafiz, the speaker claims to be part of the Eastern landscape that he metonymically discovers in the eyes of the Persian boy. Therefore, what at first seems to be a hierarchical dichotomy of East and West with a Western man looking with a certain distanced attitude at Eastern beauty turns out to be yet another scene of recognition and transition: the speaker becomes enchanted by the boy's beautiful eyes that literally enter the male poet's being. He then not only discovers his own soul as rich as the Orientals', but links up his identity with immortal Hafiz, as lover, as poet, and above all as Easterner.

Taylor here goes a significant step further than Goethe, whose infatuation with the Orient let him to the belief of identifying Hafiz as his own twin brother across time and space:

Und mag die ganze Welt versinken!
Hafis, mit dir, mit dir allein
Will ich wetteifern! Lust und Pein

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Sei uns den Zwillingen gemein!
Wie du zu lieben und zu trinken,
Das soll mein Stolz, mein Leben sein. (*Divan* 23)

Aesthetically, Taylor like Goethe chooses in many of his Oriental poems a simple form in both meter and rhyme, some similar to the German *Lied*-stanza and some to the Persian *ghazal*, a richly symbolic kind of love poem, often addressed to a universalized and stylized friend.[11] But unlike Goethe, Taylor in declaring Hafiz his soul mate takes up the distinct homoerotic suggestions that can be traced in Hafiz' poems like this one:

Möge keiner je erleiden,
was ich durch die Trennung litt,
Denn mein Leben war nur Scheiden,
mich traf nur der Trennung Tritt.

Fremd, das Herz in Lieb' verloren,
arm und im Verstande irr,
Schlepp ich überall die Qualen
und die Glut der Trennung mit.

[...]

Oh, ich will die Trennung quälen
mit der Trennung, Freund, von Dir,
Daß ihr Lid wie meines träne,
blutend von der Trennung Schnitt!

[...]

11 *Ghazal* originates in the Arabian word 'ghezâlà,' meaning erotic conversation, flirting, love-making, and has in Persian literature (dating as far back as to the tenth century) come to denote a love song or love poem with panegyric function. The first *ghazal*-poet of great consequence was Sànâi who in the twelfth century wrote *ghazals* with a polyfunctional meaning. With his mixture of mystic and profanely erotic motifs, he prefigured Hafiz (cf. Radjaie 55-69). Structurally, a *ghazal* comprises an elaborate string of stanzas each consisting of a couplet of long-verses with all even verses monorhymed, such as aa ba ca da ea fa ga. This consistently homophonic repetition adds to the poem's intended magic effect of a timeless flow.

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Glühend von der Liebe Brandmal,
singe ich bei Tag und Nacht,
Hafis gleich, mit Nachtigallen
immerzu der Trennung Lied! (*Gedichte* 80-81)

Hafiz' elegy expresses the suffering of being parted from one's beloved friend. This friend, however, has various guises and may also represent a sovereign as is the case here. This turns the poem from a pure love song into a panegyric oration praising the monarch's supremacy. Johann Bürgel claims this to be one of the major poetic revolutions undertaken by Hafiz, "daß er [...] Fürstenlob und Minnedichtung so miteinander verschmilzt, daß nicht nur der verherrlichte Geliebte für den Fürsten, sondern auch umgekehrt der gepriesene Herrscher für den Geliebten stehen kann" (11). The inherent multidimensionality of such poems calls for further interpretative possibilities. The "I" of the poet, therefore, may turn into a distinct *persona* of the poet, acting as a male muse; and the addressed friend may serve as a variant of the poet's own voice or as the epitome of humankind and beauty. Similarly, in Taylor's poem the gazing 'I/eye' and the object being self-reflectively admired are linked and poetically united through the poet Hafiz. The projection of his own eye onto the other world's wonder of beauty is reflected back onto the perceptive writer in its corporeal and poetic meaning.

Taylor's calling on Hafiz in his own verses therefore brings up this ancient custom of polyfunctional love poetry. Transferring his own romantic longings onto the level of metatextual reference, Taylor strives for poetic immortality in the tradition of Oriental poets like Hafiz. Like in his "The Poet in the East," Taylor in "To a Persian Boy" stresses the East-West dichotomy. But here it is especially the reliance on the bodily presence of the Persian boy that accounts for the overcoming of the cultural chasm. The Persian boy with his erotic attraction—"the wonder of thy beauty"—serves as emblem of the Orient. But by epitomizing Hafiz as the Eastern poet and at the same time proclaiming to emulate Hafiz, Taylor takes a daring step towards mixing his private longings with cultural concerns. This synthesis on the thematic level corresponds to the strategy of fusion on the poetic level. The poem formally recalls the sonnet in iambic pentameters, however not in its Anglophone Shakespearean, but in its older Romanic Petrarchan form with the concluding sestet. The evoked atmosphere is distinctly Orientalized and marks the backdrop for both an erotic and poetic outlet culminating in the union of lover (the speaker), beloved (the boy) and poet (Hafiz). The overall impression is of a homecoming in more

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than one sense: for Taylor the East relieves him of his cultural restraints. He succeeds in letting go the restrictions that tied his body and his mind to the usual standards of Genteel America.

Taylor's Travels to the Orient—Expanding Genteel Expectations

Taylor's *Poems of the Orient* is but one literary output of his journey to the East. He also wrote three travel narratives—*A Journey to Central Africa*, *The Lands of the Saracen*, and *A Visit to India, China, and Japan*—, like *Poems of the Orient* all published in 1854-55. Taylor was probably the most prominent traveler of his generation, attesting to the fact that before Twain and Melville toured the Orient, and contradictory to Said's assessment, quite a number of earlier American Orientalists undertook travels abroad. In 1851, Taylor set out for a two-year trip to the East, visiting countries and regions—like Nubia, Sudan and Japan—hardly any American writer had traveled to before. Like other traveling Americans of his time,[12] Taylor's journeys and his ensuing writings on them were motivated partly by curiosity, but also by pecuniary interests. He herewith profited from the special status of writing in antebellum America that contributed to the success of travel writing in general. According to William Stowe, among the many contradictions of the time in structuring societal classes was that "between the neo-Puritan work ethic and the economy's new ability to support more and more economically unproductive members" (10). Taylor indeed was one of a growing number of men in economically marginal occupations, and he took part in redefining the idea of work to include writing as a people's activity. As Stowe points out, Taylor like his contemporary travel writer Margaret Fuller[13] was not rich, but both of them were "members of what [Thorstein] Veblen would call the leisure class because their occupations

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12 Examples range from Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Pencillings by the Way* (1836), a book that Taylor had read and adored as a boy; John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (1837); George William Curtis, *Nile Notes of a Howadji* (1851); John Ross Browne, *Yusef; or, the Journey of the Frangi: A Crusade in the East* (1853); and John William de Forest, *Oriental Acquaintance; or, Letters from Syria* (1856) to Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad; or, the New Pilgrim's Progress* (1869) and Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), who make literary use of the Muslim Near East. See the chapter on "American Travelers in the Levant" by Obeidat 97-126.

13 In the fall of 1846, for example, the *New York Tribune* simultaneously ran two sets of European letters, Taylor's "Glances at Modern Germany, by a Young American" (pub-

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produced not material goods, but rather intellectual products in return for which their relatively prosperous society would afford to support their literary activities" (27). Taylor from the start of his traveling career thus succeeded in making money by relating his experiences to an American public interested in narratives about the exotic and the romantic. Robert Martin claims that Taylor's depiction of adventure and romance offered "the new bourgeoisie dreams of travel and excitement, ways of spending their new affluence, and of countering the boredom of everyday life" (13).

fig. 5.1 Portrait of Bayard Taylor by Thomas Hicks (1855), Oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

But besides the pecuniary aspect, Taylor firmly believed in traveling as a source of knowledge and inspiration—for himself as well as for others. In *Journey to Central Africa,* he claims that "the first end of travel is instruction, and that the traveler is fully justified in pursuing this end, so long as he neither injures himself nor others" (132). Many travelers, however, even when they actually went to the Orient, refrained from an effort in truly observing Eastern

lished as the tremendously popular *Views Afoot, or Europe Seen with Knapsack and Staff*) and Fuller's "Things and Thoughts in Europe" (published as *Dispatches from Europe*).

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cultures but held on to preconceived images of the strangeness and exoticism of the Orient, thus enhancing the popularization of a romanticized, adventurous representation of anything believed to be 'Oriental.' Paul Wermuth links this attitude to the Genteel tradition that leaned towards idealistic abstraction in general due to a rising middle-class' imitation of aristocratic qualities. Like other Genteel writers, who believed that to "live like a gentleman was a cardinal principle of Victorian gentility" (Wermuth 22), Taylor also felt that he deserved to be a prosperous member of bourgeois society. But his special way of gaining a position within this society first led him to embrace Oriental culture.[14]

Another Genteel poet, Whittier, captured this important aspect of Taylor's approach to travel. In his poem "The Tent on the Beach," Whittier presented Taylor as "One whose Arab face was tanned [...] And in the tent-shade, as beneath a palm, / Smoked, cross-legged like a Turk, in Oriental calm" (16).[15] Taylor himself declared to be "attracted less by historical and geographical interest of those regions than by the desire to participate in their free, vigorous, semi-barbaric life" (*Journey to Central Africa* 2). The implicit aim, that links Taylor's Oriental travel writing to the pastoral's middle-ground of "semi-primitivism," was to help his reader share in that participation of "barbaric splendor." While traveling along the Nile from Alexandria to Cairo he revealed his desire to adopt a new attitude toward life. Juxtaposing America's fast life and hard work with Egypt's luscious languor, Taylor indulged in this newfound splendor in the manner of a man coming to rest. When visiting Egypt a second time in 1873-74, he once more gladly acknowledged that "oriental repose had not yet been seriously shaken" (*Egypt* 52). In this he implied his doubts about Westernization and his deep sympathy with the people: "Alas, for the Orientals! They get but scanty justice, I fear, even from us: we praise the rulers who keep them abject and ignorant, and then revile the people because they are not manly and intelligent" (90). This concern in itself does not create a 'new' discourse on the Orient. It points, however, to Taylor's ultimate interests that reach beyond his at times stereotypically viewing and experiencing the Orient. As can be shown in parts of his travelogues as well as in his Oriental

14 For a discussion of Taylor's societal and artistic position within the Genteel circle during the Gilded Age, see Cary and Tomsich.

15 This pose is manifest in Thomas Hicks's *Portrait of Bayard Taylor* of 1855, showing Taylor clad in an Oriental costume amidst an idealized Arcadian setting (see fig. 5.1).

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poems, Taylor by referring to the Orient articulates an implicit—sometimes even outspoken—critical and self-reflexive view on his Genteel background.

In particular Taylor's representation of Oriental masculinity touches upon the delicate issue of the popular attitude of feminizing Oriental culture in general and Oriental men in particular. His evocation of semi-barbarism, which for our contemporary ears that have been trained by critical postcolonial theory has the definite ring of the condescending, racist attitude of the colonizing Westerner, for Taylor meant a less pejorative starting point of cultural comparison. Especially in *The Lands of the Saracen,* he repeatedly argues the beauty of the nude male Arab body by comparing it to the American clothed counterpart. Inverting the standard argument of the feminine Oriental men, Taylor claims that by shedding their dresses, for example in public baths, the Arab men appear heroic, muscular and free, whereas American men ignore the existence of their bodies and even lean towards nervousness, a stereotypical trademark of the hysterical female at the time. Describing the Oriental bathing habits and asserting that dress "hides from us much of the beauty and dignity of Humanity," it becomes clear that Taylor notably liked the bodily aspects of the East. And he goes on to appeal to his Western audience that they should similarly "preserve that healthy physical development" (*Lands of the Saracen* 311). Thus, as James Gray puts it, the physical sensuousness that Taylor experiences in the baths "stands in clear opposition to the usual standards of mid Victorianism" (329).

Critics like Robert Martin go even further than that by pointing out that in his travel writing, Taylor "extended the moral options open to a mid-nineteenth century American man and permitted the expression of ideas that were inconceivable at home" (13). In a fairly straightforward fashion and without having to fear censorship, Taylor could rely on the strategy of 'merely reporting' exotic customs. And as Martin asserts, such "travel books thus served a function not unlike some early forms of pornography. Under the guise of science, they offered erotic titillation" (13).

Taylor in his travel writings might not be altogether absolved from drawing "picturesque, often highly romantic, descriptions of what he observed and felt" (Obeidat 115). The same could be said—and has been said—of his Oriental poems. A closer look, however, reveals Taylor's approach to cross-cultural engagement as being deeply self-reflexive and critical towards his own culture. The multifaceted implications of his Oriental poems are based on balancing Eastern habits with both German aesthetics and American ethics. By way of intercultural comparison as well as intertextual reference Taylor man-

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aged both to oppose East and West *and* to transcend this dichotomy at the same time. In his "wonder book" he herewith created syncretistic poetry that combined cultural traditions and national agendas. And whereas in the poems he relied on the poetic emulation of Persian poet Hafiz as well as German romantic poets like Goethe and Rückert, his usage of the genre of the travel narrative gave him the liberty of relating his exploration of the more corporeal aspects of his foreign affairs. In these texts, Taylor indulged in describing 'forbidden pleasures' like visiting Turkish baths, smoking hashish, and wearing Bedouin costumes. And in clear contradiction to standard Genteel morality, he allowed himself to reveling over the wonders of male Oriental beauty.

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