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The Poetics and Politics of Bayard Taylor's *The Lands of the Saracen* and *Poems of the Orient*

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It rained when I got on the plane in Toulouse. A couple of hours, a stop-over and few intermittent glimpses out of the window later, Istanbul finally stretched out underneath me: a panoply of Lego-sized rectangulars and a multitude of pencil-thin lines meandering to form the intricately designed pattern of an embroidered carpet, its broad blue edge sprayed with knotty, wooly-looking white. Flying in along the shores of the Sea of Marmara, I looked down on Istanbul's buildings, boulevards, and boats. Here and there stalagmitic minarets boldly pointed their tips towards the late summer sun. Still wrapped in the sadness of burying a friend in the Midi and feeling the soft-heartedness that only death and love stirs within us, the sight of the city actually made me smile. Even though flying back to Istanbul had been difficult at times over the past four years, it was not difficult today. Though I had experienced rather challenging moments in this place, this arrival was not one of them. The top view of a not-home home of four years offered me a comforting mixture of both beauty and manageability. Encouraged and glad to escape my gloominess, I leaned forward and tried to single out familiar spots, my brain Google-earthing the villa by the waterfront in Mimaroba where I had spent a miserable winter season enduring icy drafts ripping through the cracks around the windows. As we approached Atatürk Airport my gaze zoomed into the lovely sand beaches at Yeşilköy: there I remembered once having shared the view of the sea and the prospect of a future together. I was rather pleased with what I perceived to be my intimate knowledge of at least some parts of town. And when I realized I have my own history in the city, short as it may be, I suddenly felt I belonged, or had somehow earned the right to be a resident.

The synchronicity of my emotional tailspin and the incidental apperception of the city as both beautiful and seizable, was neither as

completely personal a matter, nor as accidental as it may seem. Neither was my sense of belonging. Rather, in order to restore emotional stability, my mind navigated by a culturally encoded global positioning system and executed a common follow-on operation, as if it had been programmed into it. By looking at the city and claiming the space as my own in order to serve my personal needs, I did what my antecedents had done before. In the mid-nineteenth century the American writer Bayard Taylor (1825-1878), mourning the death of his wife, embarked on a trip through the Middle East. Having had a good look around for three years, he concluded in his 1854 *Poems of the Orient*: "And the poet knew the Land of the East, - / His soul was native here" (38). In his poetry as well as in his travelogues Taylor conflated the imperial I/eye, as described by Mary Louise Pratt. Using tropes of surveillance, aestheticization, and appropriation to describe his interactions with foreign places, he imposed "the violence of the letter," too, which David Spurr thinks characteristic of all travel writing (qtd. in Gorra 57). One hundred and fifty years later and without a thought of Taylor's visual politics the conflation of the (neo)-imperial I/eye is effortlessly and automatically achieved from my seat on Lufthansa above Istanbul. Mapping, penetrating, sorting out the cityspace from above, forcefully set the power relations straight in the little empire that is my life. Psychological need prompting an act of control, my gaze reached from the panopticon of the airplane to appropriate the space of Istanbul, which too long had escaped my comprehension and lead me to live in a state of relative abeyance for four years. Cushioning watchful dominance by attributing beauty to the city, I put an end to both acute emotional misery and chronic indeterminacy. I did what so many other travelers had done before.

Having embarked on this journey from France to Turkey, I followed a geographical trajectory, historically apt to endow the Western traveler with the deluxe identity of a person in charge, conqueror of uncharted territories acquiring intimate knowledge and culture. For centuries Westerners, both European and American, have come to Constantinople to look for what they could get and what they could make of it, to satisfy their curiosity, searching to create an identity, ostensibly trying to forget their own qualms and melancholies. Having taken their share of the city for private reasons and established a public sense of entitlement to claim whatever seems desirable, their views and stories helped to produce a

mind-map of the city, a discursive orientation for today's traveler of how to physically and emotionally relate to the place. Their adventurous, exotic, mysterious, sensual, picturesque, orientalist tales also served more general and political purposes. As Edward Said argued in *Culture and Imperialism*, nineteenth century travel writing, both American and European, is situated within the all-pervasive matrix of imperialism, which inextricably linked culture, politics and economy.

Bayard Taylor first laid eyes on Constantinople on July 13, 1852, approaching it by boat in a storm on the Sea of Marmara. The bad weather, he writes in *The Lands of the Saracen*, "advanced slowly enough to allow a sight of the mosques of St. Sophia and Sultan Achmed, gleaming far and white, like icebergs astray on a torrid sea" (55). Taylor's sketch of sublime Constantinople is stereotypical. He chooses the city's most well-known landmarks, "the mosques of St. Sophia and Sultan Achmed," as dominant orientational elements. With one being the epitome of Ottoman, the other a doxological sign of Byzantine architecture and the former center of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the mosques simultaneously work as visual and conceptual anchors for Taylor's image of Constantinople. Signifying Islam's victorious and violent relationship with Christianity the mosques introduce religion as focal point of Taylor's four chapters on Constantinople, which revolve entirely around the festivities during Ramazan Bayram. Claiming that the "general features of Constantinople and the Bosphorus are so well known," Taylor spares himself "the dangerous task of painting scenes which have been colored by abler pencils" (71), thus avoiding evaluation by aesthetic criteria. Instead, Taylor focuses on politics. Covering Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily, and Spain, he explores regions of religious rivalry in his 1854 travelogue. Introducing religious difference as vehicle to establish an authentically American identity, *The Lands of the Saracen* caters to a wider process of national character building in antebellum America: "Revisiting the Holy Land brought nineteenth-century American travelers to the sources of their own tribal authority, the Judeo-Christian belief system—and to the opposing domain of the Oriental Other, the Ottoman Turks and other Muslims who occupied the biblical territory" (Espey 812).

Initially perceived as icebergs, the mosques on the Golden Horn seem strangely misplaced in Taylor's text. As natural phenomena icebergs are impossible in the Mediterranean. But what is seen of an iceberg is just the tip: there is more to it than meets the eye, and in Taylor's text the

iceberg metaphorically creates an aura of magical mystery with a sub-surface element of danger. Matching form and content of his text, Taylor lets the iceberg image float solitary in a sea of words in the long chapter on his advancement towards the city. Mixed into a paragraph on the Princes' Islands, the long-awaited sight of Constantinople (re-)presents a foreign body. By letting the city appear in but a blink behind the storm clouds, Taylor insubstantializes it like melting ice: "Leaving Prinkipo, we made for Constantinople, whose long array of marble domes and gilded spires gleamed like a far mirage over the waveless sea. It was too faint and distant and dazzling to be substantial. It was like one of those imaginary cities we build in a cloud fused in the light of the setting sun" (56).

However, aiming to provide his readers with "correct pictures of Oriental life and scenery" (1), Taylor drops the insubstantializations as he lets his audience get closer. Viewed close-up from the Bosphorus, "those airy piles gathered form and substance" and "the minarets of St. Sophia and Sultan Achmed rose more clearly against the sky" (56). Focused perception, a central feature of realist literature, is used as a clarifying device, a means to see things clearly and for what they really are, to get to the core, to reveal the truth. Focused perception also helps to construct the authority of the travelogue's first person narrator: he has the power to open people's eyes, direct their views and provide them with a true understanding of the foreign place and the people who live there. Taylor's later remarks on having privileged access to ceremonies and areas which are generally restricted for Christian observers, also represent him as his reader's superior, the principal source of insider knowledge. As the picture of the mosques gets clearer, identities become definite. Both the city's and the author's appearance are taken to unambiguously represent their identities. Dressed in Oriental habit while traveling through the East, on arrival on the Princes' Islands Taylor suddenly reports feeling "awkward and absurd, and longed to show [him]self a Christian once more" (56). Feeling no need now to appear Arab, Taylor reveals his identity as a Christian. Cross-dressing as a Muslim is no longer necessary because Constantinople—and this being the "truth" the text provides—is Christian at the core:

> Constantinople is not the true Orient, which is to be found rather in Cairo, in Aleppo, and brightest and most vital, in Damascus. Here, we

> tread European soil; the Franks are fast crowding out the followers of the Prophet, and Stamboul itself, were its mosques and Seraglio removed, would differ little in outward appearance from a third-rate Italian town. (71)

If the initial image limns the possibility of the mosques gone, melted away like icebergs in a warmer climate, Taylor firms up his idea once he has scrutinized the city. With the architectural emblems of Islam removed like a masque after carnival, Constantinople not only *looks* European, it is revealed *to be* Christian at core. Once a vision of the geographical space minus the misplaced exoticising elements is established, the reader is left with a more familiar view of an Italian town. In an early chapter on Damascus in *The Lands of the Saracen*, Taylor referred to the common notion that "Constantinople is semi-European" (21). Now the travelogue gives the "correct picture" of Constantinople as essentially a European city. The insubstantialization of Constantinople in Taylor's text works so that "exotic geographical space is understood as an inner exploration of the boundaries of consciousness" (Gorra 57-58). The traveler's imperial I/eye sees, what he desires to be rightfully his. Taylor's vision instigates a sense of ownership for America. Being reportage in style and general in tone, his travelogue addresses the property issues of the cultural community to which he belongs.

In comparison, his 1854 *Poems of the Orient* provide more intimate views and address Taylor's wish to find a home outside the US.[1] Written in New York after the same extensive tour through the Middle Eastern and North African countries, the politics and poetics of his poems correspond more closely with Taylor's personal desires. *The Lands of the Saracen* makes a discursive appropriation of geographical space for Taylor's cultural community. *Poems of the Orient* also testifies to Taylor's appropriation of the "East" not only as the center of his poetic attention, but of his own life. In this divanesque cycle of poetry, Taylor merges Eastern and Western forms like the sonnet and the ghazal, thereby articulating his idealized notion

1 *Poems of the Orient* originally published in 1854 is out of print. From 1855 on it was included in editions of Taylor's collected poems. For this article I used the household edition of *The Poetical Works of Bayard Taylor,* 1880. I thank Ralph Poole for making the text available to me.

of world poetry and politics.[2] In form and content, *Poems of the Orient* shows Taylor's discomfort with the aggressive thrust of industrializing and imperializing America, to which he has himself submitted: one may not claim that Taylor's poetry—meant as an artistic endeavor—is devoid of commercial interest. But Taylor also wrote poetry as a refusal of complete submission to writing as business. A farmer's son from Pennsylvania, Taylor displayed ambiguity in his assessment of the American work ethic. Although he was supremely ambitious, practiced the intense work habits of his time and exhibited full-fledged approval whenever he saw a chance to escape his working-class background, Taylor never completely gave up his resistance to the strict regime of time in the labor processes escorting industrialization. Fatigued and overworked, he took great pleasure in his extended travels because they offered him a way to recover physically and he found a different model of work and leisure in his travels. While in the United States mechanization and the Protestant work ethic collaborated to prioritize labor over leisure, in his travels Taylor found an Orient better able to keep a balance between effort and rest. While in *The Lands of the Saracen* Constantinople is perceived as European and thus appropriated on the grounds of its similarity, the narrating voice of "An Oriental Idyl" appropriates Damascus on the grounds of its difference:

An Oriental Idyl

A Silver javelin which the hills
Have hurled upon the plain below,
The fleetest of the Pharpar's rills
Beneath me shoots in flashing flow.

2 Taylor, who is much celebrated for his translation of *Faust* in the original metre, was entranced by the idea of a world poetry, which reverberates much of Goethe's notion of a world literature. As Hendrik Birus argues in "Goethes Idee der Weltliteratur" the German poet meant to oppose the patriotic tendency to stress the particularities of national literatures by affirming the universalism of poetry instead (5). Critics differ on the question of whether Goethe's influence on Taylor goes beyond his universalistic notion of world poetry. While Albert H. Smyth claims that Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* (1819) had "exerted some influence over him when he was writing 'Poems of the Orient'" (202), John T. Krumpelmann finds himself "unwilling to predicate an influence of this German work on Taylor's volume" (23). In my view, in both form and content Taylor's *Poems of the Orient* is influenced by the American Transcendentalist Emerson and the Persian poet Hafiz, who is known to have inspired not only Emerson, but also Goethe.

I hear the never-ending laugh
    Of jostling waves that come and go,
And suck the bubbling pipe, and quaff
    The sherbet cooled in mountain snow.

The flecks of sunshine gleam like stars
    Beneath the canopy of shade;
And in the distant, dim bazaars
    I scarcely hear the hum of trade.

No evil fear, no dream forlorn,
    Darkens my heaven of perfect blue;
My blood is tempered to the morn, —
    My very heart is steeped in dew.

What Evil is I cannot tell;
    But half I guess what Joy may be;
And, as a pearl within its shell
    The happy spirit sleeps in me.

I feel no more the pulse's strife, —
    The tides of Passion's ruddy sea, —
But live the sweet, unconscious life
    That breathes from yonder jasmine tree.

Upon the glittering pageantries
    Of gay Damascus' streets I look
As idly as a babe that sees
    The painted pictures of a book.

Forgotten now are name and race;
    The Past is blotted from my brain;
For Memory sleeps, and will not trace
    The weary pages o'er again.

I only know the morning shines,
    And swept the dewy morning air;
But does it play with tendrilled vines?
    Or does it lightly lift my hair?

Deep-sunken in the charmed repose,
    This ignorance is bliss extreme:
And whether I be Man, or Rose,
    Oh, pluck me not from out my dream! (*Poems of the Orient* 54-55)

In "An Oriental Idyl" unburdened from "the pulse's strife" that symbolizes the stress of demanding work days in America, the lyrical I is allowed "to live the sweet, unconscious life" in Syria. Since Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the representation of the Orient as the place of leisure has been understood as a durable cliché feeding the exoticism prevailing in the Western imagery of the Orient. Taylor's orientalist poem bears witness to an act of solitary withdrawal from a troublesome reality at home, a common *topos* in the literature of the nineteenth century. As in *The Lands of the Saracen* Taylor also uses tropes of insubstantialization here. The politics of vision are similar. Looking idly at Damascus in a drug induced trance from the belvedere, from the position of a detached observer, the speaker diminishes and again insubstantializes the place, and by these strategies is able then to appropriate it. Confronted with the impact of Damascus' majesty, the poetical I is awestruck like a child. There is something of Emerson's transcendentalist understanding of the poet as perceiving the world with the eyes of a child here, of claiming the double role of the Romantic poet and the Romantic prophet made popular by Emerson in "Nature" (1844). But the poet returns from his retreat with a vision for the future. He envisions the object of his desiring gaze as a paradise for himself and his ilk among the readers in the United States. As Robert K. Martin writes, "Taylor may have felt that true pleasure, particularly pleasure between men, could only be found in another land, where the burden of rigid moral code was less heavy" (4).

While this imaginary homeland remains insubstantial as a dream, a child's fantasy in a picture book, Taylor's appropriating visual politics become more apparent in the diptych "Smyrna" and "To a Persian Boy, / In the Bazaar at Smyrna":

Smyrna

The 'Ornament of Asia' and the
'Crown
Of fair Ionia.' Yea; but Asia stands
No more an empress, and Ionia's hands
Have lost their sceptre. Thou, majestic
town,
Art as a diamond on a faded robe:
The freshness of thy beauty scatters
yet

The Radiance of that sun of Empire
set,
Whose disk sublime illumed the ancient
globe.
Thou sitt'st between the mountains and
the sea;
The sea and mountains flatter thine
array,
And fill thy courts with Grandeur, not
Decay;
And Power, not Death, proclaims thy
cypress tree.
Through thee, the sovereign symbols
Nature lent
Her rise, make Asia's fall magnificent. (*Poems of the Orient* 62)

Taylor starts off in a powerful exclamatory style: "Ornament of Asia," a praising periphrasis for Smyrna centrally put in the first line, is followed by the highly panegyrical "Crown / Of fair Ionia." Despite the tribute to the city's splendid past, Taylor uses the same strategy in "Smyrna" as in *The Lands of the Saracen*. The power of the Ottoman Empire is fading and the best places are now open to invasion. Appropriation and aestheticization go hand in hand once again. The lyrical I finds Smyrna's true "Grandeur" a result of the everlasting natural beauty by which it is surrounded, of its spectacular setting between the Aegean coast on its Western side and the mountains in the East. Lines fourteen to seventeen describe how Smyrna is placed in the Mediterranean, hence turning the place into a picture. The interdependence of the city's significance and its natural geography is foregrounded by a chiastic structure. As a result personification and agency are attributed to nature: "Thou sitt'st between the mountains and / the sea; / The sea and mountains flatter thine / array." Reading "Smyrna" in conjunction with the succeeding poem "To a Persian Boy, / In the Bazaar at Smyrna" connects both poems to a poetic diptych and explains that by way of personifying the natural geography, the desired place and the desired people can be used interchangeably:

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 Roc-
nabad,
Or in the bowers of blissful Samarcand. (*Poems of the Orient* 62-63)

The long visual shot of the first poem is narrowed down to a smaller display window of the camera eye in the second. While in "Smyrna" the city is perceived as personified entity from an outside perspective, the complementary poem, "To a Persian Boy," leads the reader inside the city's walls to the bazaar: the very social center, economic hub, focal point of exchange of goods, news and views. Consequently, the point of view shifts from an unidentified, omniscient speaker, who addresses the city from an outside position in "Smyrna," to the lyrical I now placed inside the ancient town. The speaker, too, opens up his own inner sanctum allowing the reader access to his feelings about how he perceived the encounter with the Persian boy in the bazaar, to whom the poem is addressed.

In the bazaar, where he finds himself looking into the boy's darklashed eyes in a wondrous almost magical moment, he feels not only the Persian boy's "beauty grow," but simultaneously the "rich, voluptuous

soul of Eastern / land" shine back at him. Among others, this very scene has established the critical discourse on the homoeroticism in Taylor's poetry. Ralph Poole remarks that "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" (99). Still, Poole does not fully subscribe to a postcolonialist reading of Taylor that shows "the condescending, racist attitude of the colonizing Westerner" (99). Instead, Poole follows Robert K. Martin and recognizes Taylor's forbidden fantasizing as an early act of gay sexual liberation from "standard Genteel morality" (100).

The lyrical I's gaze upon the Persian boy again demonstrates poetics informed by a transcendentalist notion of the poet, "who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (Emerson 1108). This spirit enables him to perceive the wonders of nature's beauty. With enlarged vision, and eye-to-eye with the boy,—"From under thy dark lashes shone on / me"—the poetical I is able to see all, even the non-corporeal soul of the East. The eyes of the native boy become a metonym of Smyrna's natural beauty, thereby also fusing the speakers of both poems into one. Fusing the boy with the natural geography, the lyrical I's gaze ultimately facilitates a simultaneous appropriation of the person and the place, devouring both in an act of visual desire. The appreciation the poetical I harbors for Smyrna and for the Persian boy masks an appropriation of the Other, be it nature or an ethnic Other. The illicitly gazing poetical I looks at the objectified, commodified Persian boy as if he was the most desireable of all the goods offered and eventually sold at the bazaar in Smyrna, the encounter between the Western male subject and the Eastern boy-object is commercialized and thereby unequal power relations are established.

This after all might be the mark, which the powerful economic discourse of globalization in its nineteenth-century American version has imprinted on the American traveler-poet's way of seeing. The way Taylor looks at the Orient, its nature, poetic tradition, and boys, cannot be separated from the will to dominate the object of this desire. The idealized union is unequal, because the Western male desiring the natural and ethnic Other, thereby appropriates and controls it. Despite its ambivalences, the power relations are clear and *Poems of the Orient* thus takes its place in the early political trajectory of the United States, where it is, like *The Lands of the Saracen*, linked to the industrialization and the rising imperialism of

pre-Civil-War America. Both Taylor's poetry and prose work as discursive agents, which—as Foucault reminds us—simultaneously recover, re-circulate, and disguise dominant power relations.

In *The Lands of the Saracen*, however, the argument deals directly and openly with imperial politics. The travelogue opens the conceptual frame for (re-)appropriation. Doing so, it references contemporary European politics, at once legitimatizing imperialistic action against the Ottoman Empire, for which in Taylor's view, the Sultans themselves are to blame. From his conscientious observations of the outward appearance of architecture, local costumes, festivities and physiognomies, Taylor deducts an understanding of the ingrained ills of an empire wasting due to a weak Sultan, a wicked Grand Vizier and "the monstrous system of deceit and corruption" (75) they administer:

> In spite of all efforts, the Ottoman Power is rapidly wasting away. The life of the Orient is nerveless and effete; the native strength of the race has died out, and all attempts to resuscitate it by the adoption of European institutions produce mere galvanic spasms, which leave it more exhausted than before. The rosy-colored accounts we have had of Turkish Progress are for the most part mere delusions. (75)

Whatever right the Ottomans might have had to claim and rule Constantinople after the conquest in 1453, at the time of his visit in 1852 Taylor feels they have given it up. Indeed his account culminates in a downright verdict about Turkey's political future. With England and Russia "lowering at each other with sleepless eyes, in the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus," the narrator predicts a "long and wary struggle" (75). Convinced that the Turks are weak, he "cannot avoid the conviction that the regeneration of the East will never be effected at their hands" (75). The future of the Ottoman Empire seems clear to the narrator. In his view the Turks have no chance of winning the war, which he is certain, will come. And did come: in 1853, Anglo-Russian rivalry in the Middle-East led to the Crimean War, after which "the [Ottoman] empire was declared as lying within the 'Public Law of Europe'" (Mazower 3). Of course Taylor already knew that war would break out when he wrote *The Lands of the Saracen*, which is based on letters written while he was traveling and published in Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* while he was away. After his return Taylor could have easily fabricated the political foresight of his first-person

narrator after the events in order to build up the expert authority of his textual alter ego.

According to Larzer Ziff, Taylor's work is important "because he brings to the fore the entwined issues of racism and imperialism that are never far from the surface of other travel writings" (12). And while *The Lands of the Saracen* appears to promote and legitimize European imperialism on the grounds of the opponent's racial weakness, a more nuanced and historically situated reading suggests that the text written by an American for American readers circulates "the nineteenth century identification of civilization with Christendom" (Mazover 3) in order to discursively negotiate the specific role the United States could play in this development of nineteenth century geopolitics. As Liam Corley points out, "Taylor effectively launched his literary career upon the warrant of America's eastward growth as an economic and cultural competitor within traditionally European spheres of influence" (3). Pre-Civil War American travel literature is generally understood to promote continental imperialism of the young US-American nation deferred from the older European model by bracketing the American West with the Oriental East under the claim of a manifest destiny. Often this is being done via a textual interplay of religion and geography according to Bruce Harvey in *American Geographies*. Taylor's *The Lands of the Saracen* marks Constantinople as America's frontier with Europe, the precise material and discursive border space where both the American and the European missions met and collided.

Bayard Taylor's adoption of Oriental dress and his fluency in the native language explores in material ways a model of assimilatory interaction with the foreign people. In discursive terms, the authorial persona in *The Lands of the Saracen* and the lyrical I of *Poems of the Orient* experiment with a concept of assimilation as a way of both incorporation and domination of the Other. To a certain degree Taylor's is a romantic's vision of a peacefully interacting and mutually respectful global community. In his 1856 introduction to Richard Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, Taylor ardently expresses his belief that globalizing the world both by and for Western travelers leads to religious reconciliation and thus, to world peace:

> Except in Arabia, the cradle and stronghold of Islam, the Frank Christians mingle freely with the followers of the Prophet, not only without indignity, but in many places as their friends and protectors. The rapid spread of intercourse

> between the East and the West, and, more than all, the recent alliance of Christian and Moslem powers in the war against Russia, has greatly weakened, and, in the course of time, may wholly obliterate, the bitterness of that religious prejudice which has hitherto been the characteristic of such intercourse. Its effect is already seen, in the facility with which travelers now obtain access to the sacred mosques of Constantinople and Cairo. Even the Mosque of Omar, at Jerusalem, where, five years ago, Christians were stoned for attempting to enter—whose gates would not open to a Frank for a firman of the Sultan himself—has alike become accessible to profane feet. (x)

As Liam Corley points out, informed by unitarianism, Taylor, whose travelling and travel writing made him at home in the world, believed in the global religious, political and cultural connectedness. Taylor's vision of a globalized world under American guidance is at once remarkably idealistic and cosmopolitan and patronizing and nationalistic. After all, Taylor never fails to point out the superior role America will play in the process. As such, his vision represents an early discursive incident forming the intricate connection of American imperialism with American protectionism, which in the twentieth century "asserted America's role as heir to a fading Europe" (Mazower 6).

Nineteenth-century travelers like Bayard Taylor physically pushed the geographical frontiers of their time. Their texts, shaped by what David Spurr calls the rhetoric of empire, ideologically encompassed their destinations. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, in the globalized world of the early twenty first century the discursive politics of nineteenth century imperialism remain encoded in the bodies and minds of the traveler and the travel writer. Today, both the traveler and the travel writer are disciplined subjects in a Foucauldian sense, performing the culture, economy and politics of the very regime that created them in the first place. The traveler's vision, motion, and emotion might seem true, honest, emerging from unique and individual experience, stripped of the politics of power and possession. Yet such is not quite the case and even the seemingly naive,

spontaneous act of looking at a foreign city from an airplane window can imply the power relations of an earlier time when Bayard Taylor gazed at Damascus from his belvedere or at Constantinople from a distance.

We would like to think otherwise. In a postcolonial, neoimperial, globalized world sensitive Western travelers are intimidated by their complicity with a system they have been educated to resent. Meeting the moment of realization with administered self-critique is a common reflex of twenty first century travelers and travel-writers, who generally share a consciousness about the intricate complicities of their bodies, minds and literatures with the system of (neo-)imperialism, in which the distinction between the textual body and the body as text has become obsolete, at least on a discursive level. Thus, today's tourism/traveling and travel writing is responsible and self-critical: the White Man's Burden, as Mary Louise Pratt phrases it, is being turned into the White Man's Lament (216-21).

But both self-reflexive travelers and lamenting travel writers owe much to the legacy of Bayard Taylor. "The American Traveler" as Taylor was idiomatically referred to in the nineteenth century modeled low-budget tourism. Launching "a representative literary career" (Wermuth *Letters* 18), he "invented travel writing as a profession" (Ziff 12). Taylor effectively commercialized a leisure activity opening utilitarian ways to meet foreign people and places both for mercenary ends and legitimate literary reasons. Most importantly, Bayard Taylor's textual conduct signifies a shift in episteme. Due to the lucky combination of distinct features in individual physique, personality and profession at a specific historical moment within a distinct cultural context, Taylor made a first pass at cathecting the textual body of the travelogue with the body of the traveler. He performed much of what he wrote about. In this, Taylor represents a crucial and exemplary figure, showing how mid-nineteenth century American cultural politics were both instigated and performed by individual subjects.

In this cathexis we might find some explanation for why Bayard Taylor enjoyed literary fame and success during his lifetime, only to be all but forgotten after his death. Taylor's texts never gained much in the way of posthumous fame. As Paul C. Wermuth puts it rather dismissively, Taylor's "career was sustained over many years by his intelligence, ability, and personality, all of which were considerable. Indeed, his career illustrates much about the relationship between authorship and public

life" (*Letters* 23). "Bayard Taylor may have traveled more, but Melville *saw* more, or at least," Bruce Harvey claims, "was capable of inscribing in his texts richer, more nuanced reflections about the foreign lands he visited or imagined" (20). Harvey "posits an *aesthetic* distinction" between Taylor and his friend Melville (Hsu 298) and reiterates the verdict longstanding in literary criticism, if not in public reception at the time: Herman Melville, canonized by Matthiessen as one the great five figures of the American Renaissance, wrote masterpieces. Bayard Taylor traveled a lot.

Understanding Taylor as a prototypical traveling/writing subject, with both his touristy and writerly activities being discursive incidents of commodification, globalization, and imperialism, might also explain his lifelong unease with the genre he had created and at what cost. In the face of his success as a travel writer, Taylor constantly yearned for repute as a poet. In his time Taylor was a "celebrity" (Wermuth *Letters* 23), traveling all over the country to give lectures dressed in Oriental style and besieged by admiring crowds. However, the magic combination of his personality and his reporting skills only worked in prose. The more popular his travel writing and his live performances became, the more Taylor's disdain for his reportage and his yearning for success as a poet grew:

> Taylor insisted all his life that his real calling was poetry and that he cared much less about the prose work that constitutes the great bulk of his output and that actually supported him. His poetry, while technically skillful, has come to be thought often conventional and abstract, out of tune with the taste of our time. (Wermuth *Letters* 18)

John Richie Schultz, editor of some unpublished letters of Bayard Taylor in 1937, found similar reasons for Taylor's failure as a poet. He might have been "a good conversationalist and had a large store of personal experiences to talk about" (v), so that he "became famous in his day for his personality as well as his works," his poetry, however, "continued the old tradition in a changing world" (viii). Thus, as a poet Taylor "failed to make the transition" (viii).

But there is more to the story than that. The success of Taylor's first travel book *Views A-foot* in 1846 produced a dilemma: *Views A-foot* "led to

his being commissioned to undertake other travels in order to report on them, and he drifted into travel writing as a livelihood, becoming, in effect, the first person who kept traveling solely because of the books that could be written about the journeys" (Ziff 12), but his heart was set on poetry. In a letter Taylor admits that he traveled extensively in order to write prose for income which he then used to buy time to write poetry (qtd. in Wermuth *Letters* 18). In this way both Taylor's travel writing and his poetry were now bracketed by an economic rationale fit for the age of realism. And as much as his travelogues succeeded in fulfilling the readers' expectations due to the cathexis of person and text, Taylor's poetry did not. Having sold a part of himself by impersonating the public persona of the daring, manly adventurer, the true Christian, upholder of national and religious core values, Taylor also sold the chance to be acknowledged as anything other than the best American traveler. If his fictional alter ego in *The Lands of the Saracen* dresses in Oriental fashion to blend in, to negotiate the limits of assimilation, his authentic identity as a Christian man is not put at risk, but rather powerfully reinforced by these cross-dressing episodes. If in *Poems of the Orient* the person in drag, however, is revealed to show a truer, more authentic part of him, Taylor disappoints the product expectations of his customers. In a best capitalist practice Taylor created a demand by successfully introducing a product. Yet with the market's negative response his variation of the product, he came face to face with the rules of capitalist economy, he had agreed to use for his own benefit. Due to the cathexis of text with person, Taylor had a painful experience of the literary market and consumer demands. In a letter to John J. Piatt on May 7, 1875 Taylor complained vigorously and without much insight into the paradoxical connection between his fame and his frustration:

> You know how slow the public is to accept new impressions, but in my case there is now the beginning of such an acceptance—that is, the public is inclined to believe that I have done, or am capable of doing, better work than my narratives of travel. For ten years past I have been persistently snubbed by certain literary critics, by whom at least the sincerity and steadiness of my endeavor ought to have been recognized, and a large class of readers have been influenced by their attacks. (qtd. in Schultz 186)

Taylor considered his poetry a much more personal, intimate form, ideal to express his feelings and homosexual desires, whereas his travel writing was reportorial, "highly professional and effective" (Wermuth *Letters* 18), detailed without being confessional—though personalized by his public performances and a persona, which was not completely inauthentic, but certainly incomplete. Wanting to be appreciated for who he really was, or thought he was according to his own views, Taylor spent a lifetime being frustrated by and unappreciative of his own travel writing, much of which he wrote quickly and rather carelessly. Given that Taylor's observations "were of considerable consequence shaping the views literate, white Americans held about other peoples, other lands. . . . For thousands upon thousands Taylor constructed not just a world but a world view" (Ziff 167), we can only speculate as to what he might have been able to write had he cared more. But as it was, the American public paid to read and see the traveler and the professional travel writer. Few were interested enough to invest appreciation in the private person and the poet, the other, maybe truer Bayard Taylor. Poetic fame never came. Instead, Taylor's numerous travelogues also "lost a considerable part of the great appeal they exerted in their day" (Ziff 12). Paul Wermuth dismisses Taylor's travel books, because they "did not break new ground in the travel genre; he followed standard models," when the overwhelming variety of people and places he had seen could have been the source of inspiration and creative innovation (*Taylor* 74).

Distinguishing "the fashionable, the informative and the utilitarian views of landscape" (86) as standard varieties of nature portrayal, Robert Bredeson finds Taylor unable to "represent any sense of a first-hand confrontation between the actual nature and men concerned" in *Eldorado, or Adventures in the Path of Empire* (88). Since the fashionable mode presupposes an unequal, detached observer, who never gets his hands dirty in the experience, Taylor's genteel account of the American wilderness not only betrays a lack of involvement, but also a "failure of vision" (88). A better travel writer, Bredeson concludes, does not follow stereotypical formulas, but challenges the readily available with the specific and individual view. He has his eyes "honestly open to what he sees and experiences in each confrontation and his pen candidly records those impressions" (94).

Attempting to integrate the personal with the public by way of performative actions and body politics, Taylor had to keep the genres

separated. In Ziff's view it was Henry James, who "marks a shift from external observations to a preoccupation with how travel affected the traveler's moods and states of mind" (qtd. in Espey 815). James, who "developed an acute consciousness of his own superficiality" (Gorra 65), presented his experiences with other cultures and people with self-irony (66), a character trait Bayard Taylor lacked. Fully invested in being someone else somewhere else, Taylor ultimately missed the chance to ever truly reach his full potential as a writer or to live the life he really wanted. Travelling the world, he remained closeted in his own machinations. Bayard Taylor and his work do, however, mark a moment, where the traveler's body and the travel text became one, cathected and intricately linked in both failure and achievement.

Physically and textually Taylor paved a way, which we might take ourselves travelling on. While we stare down from an airplane at a city and imagine a sense of ownership, like I did on my flight to Istanbul, we need to remember that whatever we are looking at will never be truly ours. Possession is endlessly deferred in the act of looking. And thinking of Taylor's dilemma, we might start searching for the desire that really keeps us looking at and for other places, craving a home we think we can never inhabit, or ways of life we assume we will never be able to live. In some cases, all it takes is to go home and start being who we really are.

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