

Borders and Beyond

Orient-Occident Crossings in Literature

Edited by

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Series in Literary Studies



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Table of Contents

Foreword	vii
Arkadiusz Jabłoński	
Introduction	xvii
I. Limitations and Borderlands in Oriental Poetry	1
Chapter 1 Adaptations and Evocations of Orientalism in Nāzik al-Malā'ika's Poetry	3
Muneerah Bader Almahasheer, <i>Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University/ Saudi Arabia</i>	
Chapter 2 An In-depth Comparative Study of Victor Hugo and Shahriar's Poetry	21
Mohammad Amin Mozaheb, <i>Imam Sadiq University/Iran</i> Mostafa Shahiditabar, <i>Imam Sadiq University/Iran</i> Mohammad-Javad Mohammadi, <i>University of Tehran/Iran</i>	
Chapter 3 Crossing Borders in the Opposite Direction. An Influence of Western Elements in Contemporary Chinese Poetry*	35
Daniela Zhang Cziráková, <i>Slovak Academy of Sciences/Slovakia</i>	
II. Literary Boundaries — Ethical Limitations: Classical Literatures of the Orient	49

Chapter 4	Borderlines of Morality: Exploring the Ethos of the <i>Mu'allaqa</i> <i>Zane Šteinmane, University of Latvia/Latvia</i>	51
Chapter 5	Formation of Plot Canon in Arabic Literature: The Case of Love Stories About Poets of Bedouins <i>Arzu Sadykhova, Adam Mickiewicz University/Poland</i>	61
Chapter 6	Poetic Souvenirs: The Meaning of <i>Ise Monogatari</i> in Sōkyū's <i>Miyako no Tsuto</i> <i>Adam Bednarczyk, Nicolaus Copernicus University/Poland</i>	75
III. Orient-Occident Historical and Social Borders in Literature		91
Chapter 7	The “East-West” Dichotomy in the English Modernist Novel: An Imagological Perspective <i>Tetiana Derezhyska, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv/Ukraine</i>	93
Chapter 8	Between Literature and Ideology. <i>Ad-da'wa Al-Islāmiyya</i> in the novels by Nağīb Al-Kaylānī <i>Magdalena Kubarek, Nicolaus Copernicus University/Poland</i>	107
Chapter 9	The Boundaries of Historical Accuracy: Contemporary Re-reading of Salman Rushdie's <i>Midnight's Children</i> <i>Olivier Harenda, Nicolaus Copernicus University/Poland</i>	121
Chapter 10	Trifonov's Turkmenia: Optimism, Despair and the Intelligentsia <i>Benjamin Sutcliffe, Miami University/USA</i>	133

Chapter 11	Bringing the Orient to the Empire – An Analysis of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s <i>A Little Princess</i> and <i>The Secret Garden</i>	147
	Karolina Marzec, <i>University of Lodz/Poland</i>	
IV. Crossing Borders in Travel: Journey in Oriental Literature and Inspired by Orient		159
Chapter 12	The Great Wall of China in Polish and Serbian Travel Writing (From the 18th until the Middle of the 20th Century)	161
	Tomasz Ewertowski, <i>Adam Mickiewicz University/Poland</i>	
Chapter 13	<i>Ar-Rihla</i> in the Service of <i>An-Nahḍa</i>. Rifā‘a at-Ṭaḥṭawī’s Concept of Crossing Geographical and Cultural Boundaries	179
	Magdalena Lewicka, <i>Nicolaus Copernicus University/Poland</i>	
Chapter 14	Crossing the Borders of Decency. Gustave Flaubert, Maxime Du Camp and their Oriental Journey	193
	Małgorzata Sokołowicz, <i>University of Warsaw, The Fryderyk Chopin University of Music/Poland</i>	
V. Multidimensionality of Cultural, Social and Emotional Borders in Oriental Literature		207
Chapter 15	The World of Haruki Murakami – a Hidden World of Ourselves	209
	Milica Obrenović, <i>Independent researcher/Serbia</i>	

Chapter 16	The Role of Translation in Identity Formation: A Case Study of Turkish Translations of <i>Martine</i>	221
	Gözde Begüm Uyanık, <i>Istanbul University/Turkey</i> Harika Karavin, <i>Istanbul University/Turkey</i>	
Chapter 17	<i>The Story of Isamiga: An Analysis of a Miyakoan Epic Song</i>	235
	Aleksandra Jarosz, <i>Nicolaus Copernicus University/Poland</i>	
Chapter 18	Crossing Boundaries: From Private to Public Space. Memoirs of Antaranam	255
	Olga Nowicka, <i>Jagiellonian University/Poland</i>	
	Index of Names	265

Foreword

Arkadiusz Jabłoński

First of all, it is a pleasure and an honor to be invited by my colleagues from the Nicolaus Copernicus University Faculty of Languages to write a short introduction to this volume. I have always been of the opinion that interdisciplinary projects are a new and challenging direction, in the area of linguistic and literary studies – and not only. On the other hand, on the level of bare facts, I have to mention that I was not personally involved in the actual process of compilation of the volume. My area of research is definitely not literature, but general and Japanese linguistics, the pragmatics of Japanese language, including translation/interpretation studies and applied research on the effective means to describe the grammar of the language. For these reasons, doubts may arise whether it is me who should write the introduction.

Linguistic and literary studies have traditionally been separated while belonging to the same area of philological studies. Moreover, even within the same area, the determination of linguists to hold the position of science, focused on tangible objects and mathematically oriented results, may be perceived as strikingly different from the attitude of literary scholars, who seem to have nothing against being identified with the area of humanities, despite the allegedly intangible character of their statements. According to the practice of the present-day interdisciplinary research, it may not be surprising to unite the two approaches. Again, the famous interdisciplinary research may also be viewed as a mere temporary fashion, not leading to any promising synthesis in a longer perspective. Similarly, as in the contemporary circulation of information, the rise in quantity may not necessarily foster substantial gain in quality as well as the quality and regularity of its complete decoding by the target parties of the communication processes.

Why may my introduction be necessary for this volume? I think the answer is because it seems right to assume that it is in the first place the language, in its multiple, multi-dimensional emanations, that is challenged and researched in the philological studies. At the same time, it is the language that both creates and makes it possible to discuss the innumerable incompatibilities (and: the compatibilities) between the so-called science and the humanities. It is thanks to the language that we can, as I often do mention during my

linguistic classes with the university students, both complain that the mathematicians are unable to compute the number pi and to claim that its irrational properties or even devise a system in which all factors are going to be computed with the number pi as the base parameter. It is finally the language and linguistics-related statements that I shall use below, in the possibly most simple and comprehensible manner, in order to allude to several concepts from the history of linguistics and inter-cultural studies which explain the background of this volume.

The facts mentioned below are of classical, traditional nature, some of them being widely known, some other being unpopular and already forgotten or neglected. I believe that this short synthesis may contribute to bringing the reception of this volume a bit closer to reaching the ultimate goal of the philological, that is, the language studies – namely, to achieve “a scientific understanding of how people communicate,” as Victor Yngve once put it. My further objective, as compared to the Yngve’s objective, is to broaden the notion of communication with the phenomena of inter-cultural communication, a kind of “non-face-to-face” communication, which is in most of its aspects not different from its “face-to-face” counterpart mentioned originally. A short list of references may provide further hints to what has already happened throughout the history of the language, culture and communication studies in this aspect.

It is rather widely known what Eduard Sapir (born, which is not a commonly recognised fact, in a then German town Lauenburg, contemporarily, due to a number of complicated historical reasons, Łębork in the Republic of Poland) once mentioned on “the exotic languages of Eskimos and Hottentots.” According to his point of view, there would be absolutely no obstacle in translating the *Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant into any of those languages laying in their formal nature. It is hence not the languages, but the cultures of “those primitive peoples,” not (yet?) developed enough in order get their users interested in the abstract philosophical concepts, that make a difference. The statement may reveal some minor issues while compared to the beginning of the 21st century. It is for sure not common nowadays to classify peoples as “primitive” – and probably even Sapir himself did not mean to be xenophobic, but rather chose a common expression of the time in order to allude to the rather vague concept of distant cultures, by their very definition not considered civilised. Still, the relation of a message content to the phenomena of a culture remains one of the unsolved or, at best, scarcely known issues, both for linguists in general and for the researchers in the area of inter-cultural communication.

Benjamin Lee Whorf wrote in one of his papers that one is immersed in language and culture in a self-evident and an almost invisible manner, similar to the influence of the dust in the air and the phenomenon of air perspective resulting from it on human vision. Also in this statement, after the decades of discussion on whether and to what extent can this claim be related to culture and to the extralinguistic reality, it is not clear, exactly how much and what kind of dust causes what results in the process of communication. Accordingly, live language data and communication-related facts seem to prove that without the link any exchange of messages turns up to be futile or at best superficial. In other words, it may not be an extremely elaborate activity to test whether almost any source message is going to have the same target effect across different cultures. It is probably not. At the same time, to define the variables of the process is neither obvious nor intuitive. It is not clear what exactly happens and what exactly changes when the messages are transferred in the process of the inter-cultural communication.

Sapir and Whorf at the time their crucial hypotheses on the dependencies between the language and the reality were formed represented the new kind of an approach to the phenomena of communication. While the strict manner of the structural approach to “the language by itself and for itself”, formed according to the manifesto expressed in the famous last sentence of the most representative work by Ferdinand de Saussure did not take into account the multi-layered character of communication activity, it was for sure not due to the actual non-existence of relations between language and culture. Language functions also on the basic level of mutual, arbitrary linking between the signs and the designates. Studies undertaken on this level are crucial for discovering the nature of basic relations, such as between the few, simple and meaningless cenemes and the numerous, compound and meaning-bearing pleremes, as pointed out at a time by Louis Trolle Hjelmslev. Even though such relations reveal, at least to some point, the properties of purely mathematical or even mechanical character, it does not seem apt to transfer them in an automatic manner to the more complex levels on which communication processes are usually performed – to the links between words and phrases, phrases and sentences, sentences and paragraphs, paragraphs and chapters, chapters and texts, texts and cultural images of the world, images and behavioral schemes and so on.

What is even more important, the simplicity of the original opposition between the cenemes and the pleremes can be achieved only on the assumption that the former are abstract concepts, not immediately linked to the actual, tangible sounds. This further obscures the fact of fundamental charac-

ter of approximation implemented in the process of mapping the actual results of the actual articulation activities (technically speaking, huge groups of tangible sounds, in their internal structure similar rather to what is known in the extension of the classical set theory as fuzzy set) onto the abstract, ideal phonemic patterns. The actual sounds are not equal to the phonemes (the classical sets of abstract features attributed in a conventional manner to the articulation of the latter). The way how the former is manifested in a purely physical environment, by means of the articulatory organ activities and the sound waves resulting from them, is only indirectly connected to the details of the complex processes of interpreting them in terms of *cenemes*. The process, usually conceptualised as a series of two-way decisions between the identification and differentiation of the actual sound with/from the ideal phoneme, should, in fact, be effectively viewed as an elaborate act of approximation. Throughout the process, the source innumerable articulation results are juxtaposed to a limited target set of perfect articulations (*cenemes*). The result of the process is neither obvious nor is it based on purely mathematical rules. This is exactly how the opposition between the finite and limited competence and the infinite and unlimited performance postulated by Noam Chomsky, though dated from the initial differentiation between *langue* and *parole* by de Saussure, makes it possible to manage the load of multiple language facts with the use of a relatively simple set of dimensions. Dimensions are of the mathematical or even arithmetic, predictable character. Language facts are not.

Another kind of competence necessary in the communication with the use of natural languages was rightly defined in a seemingly very simple statement made by a Polish linguist, Tadeusz Milewski: "A sign differs primarily from what is not a sound and does not refer our attention to any other object." This remark, absolutely basic for the linguistic studies, demonstrates at the same time, in an indirect but convincing manner, that it is entirely human (the language user) decision, whether, when and under what circumstances should a phenomenon be valid for the process of communication. While the detailed discussion goes beyond the set of subjects to be raised in this text, it is probably the core of this statement that causes disagreement between the researchers opting for the innate character of linguistic competence and their opponents, who support the hypothesis of primarily social properties of human communication skills. Accordingly, also the modern techniques of natural language processing and translation do not seem to be in the position to offer the tools in order to provide the artificial intelligence operating circuits with the means enabling them to dispel in an automatic and trustworthy manner inevitable doubts whether and with what actual consequences a

piece of information should be decoded as valid in a given context of an exchange. Furthermore, nowadays, with the apparatus of computational linguistics and comparative literary studies, it is possible to work on the huge corpora of data and obtain very quickly the extremely simple answers to the extremely simple questions. They, however, are also based on approximations and do not emerge from the self-consciousness of the related systems. Moreover, numerous further issues emerge and remain unsolved, such as the unbalanced character of the corpora or complex dilemmas related to their annotation. As can be seen, whether the ability of communication is innate or not to the humans, it is for sure not easily transferred to the human-designed, -made and -programmed systems.

To deal with a language requires a considerable degree of competence, measured in mathematical terms as well as some substantial linguistic and social experience, based on the trial and error processes already attempted individually and their actual results, along with the eligibility to attend a communication act, measured purely in social terms. As such, the speech or script acts are not automatic activities, nor are they effortless, with immediate consequences of this fact. Even in a seemingly homogeneous communication environment, not anyone can communicate with anyone, due both to the incompatible competence, the insufficient experience or the lack of eligibility. Such description of the communication competence sheds new light on the processes of intra- and inter-cultural communication activities, both requiring the motivation of the involved parties to commit themselves to the process of the homeostasis of a text, as defined by this author elsewhere. This includes advanced efforts towards achieving compatibility between the source text, with the source set of its projected users and the target environment in which the text is to be received and interpreted. No need to mention, the two may quite often differ in a significant manner.

Communication is much more than expressing one's thoughts or exchanging conclusions on the external states of affairs. It constitutes one of the activities most deeply embedded in the social and cultural actions of individuals and groups, with subsequent consequences related to the relations between the communication competence and performance.

The above statements apply in an obvious, though at the same time specific manner to the genre of literature. For ages written and printed texts were assumed by their very tangible existence to be the only trustworthy expressions of language. It is on the basis of such texts that the philological research was initiated and, subsequently, the theories of translation used to be created and verified. This mere fact has finally become the source of innumerable

convictions (including the false ones) on the feasibility and the quality of the translation, such as the famously alleged opposition between the faithful translations and the beautiful ones or the unsolvable dilemma of a struggle against the absolute untranslatability in search of the perfect translatability. While they may have been long denied by the expert approach to language and the actual translation phenomena, they inevitably continue to exist in the lay minds of the translation and interpretation product end users.

The translators had to be painfully aware of the trivial but true rule, that although probably every kind of thought and state of affairs can be conveyed by the words and expressions of virtually any language, it is usually achieved in multiple as well as heterogeneous means. Written texts did not help much in investigating the non-written parameters of the source reality of their authors or the target reality of their readers. The obvious conclusion was that there must have existed something different than script – not instantly visible, but perhaps even more important than what has been explicitly conveyed in writing.

One of such factors is related to the fact that literature is similar to all other genres of art, as a kind of a surplus communication activity. Its reception is usually backed up by the high aesthetic standards and the elaborated schemes of interpretation based on them, which may not be automatically translatable into other language codes. Furthermore, at least some of the actual literary works may be denied or rejected by the very members of speech communities or sub-communities they have been designed for. Other sub-genres or themes, peripherally used or even most representative for the literature of one culture, may slip out of classification or even be absent from the standards and classifications considered typical for other cultures. This assumption may not necessarily allude only to the sophisticated qualities of the advanced kinds of literary works. Quite independently of the specific genre, many of such rules may be hidden, simply for the reason that they constitute, as mentioned by Harold Garfinkel, the “routine grounds of everyday activities” – acquired by their users not only *expressis verbis*, but mainly throughout the regular presence and experience of the extralinguistic context. Some genres may further reveal differences on a higher level of complexity and other may not exist at all. It is hence also in this particular sense that, as pointed out by Elżbieta Tabakowska, the “communication barriers are made of grammar” – grammar including both explicit and hidden rules of social interactions.

Even despite their invisibility in most contexts of actual social interactions, it is relatively easy to allude to the omnipresent rules of communication *in*

abstracto. On the other hand, it may be close to impossible to study them while not being immersed in a certain reality. This, having been mentioned to avoid contact with actual facts and to value only written and indirect statements may lead to numerous common misunderstandings and overestimations. As Edward W. Said used to describe it, the manner of the orientalism, understood as trusting the text more than the actual phenomena, is a common weakness. This is how the concept of Oriental peoples is created, at the same time, as Said further aptly mentioned, denying their humanity. One surely cannot avoid in a perfect manner all dangers related to the inter-cultural generalisations. Still, the mere conscience of them may be crucial for understanding that the multi-cultural activities and studies may be an extremely demanding matter.

The notions of the Orient and the people of the Orient having been mentioned in the previous paragraph, the opposition between the Orient and the Occident, emphasised also in the title of this volume and frequently utilised in numerous works and conceptualisations belonging both to the Oriental and to the Occidental perspectives, is of course nothing new. It may serve well to illustrate the complicated status of the students and the researchers of the heterogeneous cultures, who experience a sudden enlightenment as well as the chronic encoding and decoding dilemmas in their inter-cultural contacts. It may also be useful in embodying the inevitably mixed impressions of tourists and casual or remote interpreters of the non-native culture facts, who may be free from obligation to strive at the universal solutions, though at the same time they are usually vividly determined to find the effective ad hoc solutions of the inter-cultural issues.

It is with no doubt the mission of the inter-cultural researchers to provide the methods and opportunities in order to confront the different points of view, be they linguistic or literary. In their research activities, they are inescapably forced to use the language, with all benefits and flaws resulting from this fact. There is, for example, much to question, whether the very distinction of the Orient and the Occident relies on some universal premises, alluding in an immediate manner to the archetypal notions of *us* and *them* or, perhaps, is but a product of tradition, embedded in languages and cultures the researchers have natively been immersed in. As such, this volume does not attempt at solving all possible problems and explaining any conceivable issues related to the actual acts of communication as a whole. It serves as yet another valuable source of facts and approximation to them, with both the tangible and the intangible results included.

The component texts, alluding in different ways to the notions of the Orient and the Occident, do by no means constitute a strictly defined, complete and featured in its classical character, set of language facts on a carefully selected area of communication. They should rather be viewed as a mere selection of approximations to the Oriental and the Occidental phenomena belonging to the widely recognized genre of literature. As can easily be seen, the possibly weakest factors of this classification are marked by the elements *Oriental* and *Occidental*. There is no Orient as such. Similarly, as there is no Occident. They are but the fuzzy sets of ideas, devised for the purpose to juxtapose the allegedly united and normalized concepts of the European (the inter-cultural *us*) cultures to the unknown and unexpected mass of events and phenomena that have happened to origin geographically from the so-called Asia (the inter-cultural *them*), located someplace to the East of Europe. "Asia" – as one of the prominent researchers of Polish literature and culture in Japan, Tokimasa Sekiguchi stated it in a convincing and reasonable manner – "does not exist."

Needless to say, the above assumption is not of a critical character towards the contents of this volume. The complex processes of cognition inevitably include the sequences of the construction and of the deconstruction of schemes and ideas. The more that is known about the objects of research, the easier and the more thorough may be the verification of the hypotheses applied to them. May the possible deconstruction of the concept of Asia (and, subsequently, the concept of Europe), resulting at least partly also from the reception of the content of this volume, contribute to a better understanding of what has for a long time been classified as the Orient and the Occident and lead to its effective re-definition. In other words, may the concept of Asia and the Orient vs. Occident opposition prove more useful in achieving the effective perspectives of approximation to the heterogeneous language and culture facts than in obscuring the unbiased view of them. This wish is of a consciously sincere and naive nature. Thank you, the editors, for making it possible for me to express it as the conclusion of this introduction.

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Introduction

In the era of domination of visual culture, literature seems to be losing its paramount role, and its researchers are increasingly moving towards social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology – disciplines that are strongly charged with Europocentrism in the research methods they adopt. The dangers of Europocentric approach in describing and familiarising the reader with foreign cultures were pointed out by, among others, J. Hillis Miller (“Cultural Studies and Reading”. In *Literary Theory. A Reader Guide*, ed. Julian Wolfrey, New York 1999). According to this scholar, in the present times, as a result of the invasion of information, we are witnesses of a constant breaching of borders, and thus, without moving outside the borders of our own, familiar world, we are subject to a constant confrontation with other cultures. “Otherness”, in turn, perceived as strangeness, results in the sense of danger and a fear of losing one’s own identity. A reaction to this state of affairs consists in returning to nationalism or a fanatical attitude towards religion. Cultural studies – as Agnieszka Kondor-Wiercioch writes – constitute a reaction of a kind to “this invasion”, but the attempt at domesticating “otherness” is frequently based on faulty assumptions, as it endeavours to translate and assess a foreign culture with the use of one’s own methodological apparatus (*Dwa światy dwie pamięci. Dylemat wielokulturowości w wybranych utworach Louise Erdrich i José Marii Arguedasa*, Kraków 2009: 46–47).

Despite the scepticism characterising the approach of Miller and scholars similar to him, as well as despite various doubts concerning whether we are capable of understanding “otherness”, it is certainly worth it to undertake studies and research into literature from various cultural areas, taking, however, into account difficulties which one would need to face and traps into which one might easily fall when looking for shortcuts. The assumption driving the editors of the volume *Borders and Beyond: Orient-Occident Crossings in Literature* was to inscribe the book into a current whose aim is to break away from Europocentric traditions in studies on literature, conceived of as a product of broadly understood culture, and to undertake a reflection over the experience of border beyond the common lines of linguistic, ethnic and national divisions, which continue to determine academic discourse. The articles collected in this volume are concerned with multi-faceted issues

connected with the notion of borders and that which is beyond them in the context of literary studies. Their authors, both Orientalists, and researchers of native literature, propose a reflection over a work of literature, trying to re-create the course of various borders or to revise them and design them anew.

The common plane that connects texts representing diverse and distant cultures is created by an assumption regarding migration and mutual permeation of elements – repetitive and universal on the one hand, specific and particular on the other – within the field of literary tradition perceived as Western and Oriental. We will find here texts pertaining to regions such as Europe, the Arab world, Indian subcontinent or countries such as Japan, China, Iran, Turkmenistan or Turkey. However, the geographic and cultural criterion is only one of many possibilities of ordering the rich material contained in this volume. Another criterion is the historical one. The analysed subjects are presented in a broad time perspective, covering the period from the fifth/sixth century until the present day, resulting in a cross-sectional outline of the literary output of diverse national and ethnic groups. The historical perspective showcases the fluidity of the course of contemporary borders and it points out that literary work should not be considered in their context, as political or cultural borders undergo constant changes and, at the time when the work is analysed, they are not the same as the borders determining the life of the creators when the work was produced.

In the pages of the present publication, we will find familiar names, counted among the canon of world literature and shown in a new context, but also figures that are lesser known even in their own cultural circle. The authors of the articles discuss phenomena of cross-regional scope, but phenomena of local scope, such as the literature of small, isolated ethnic groups, are also analysed. Subjects from the field of theory of literature (questions concerning delineating the borders of genres) are entangled with text analysis in the aspects of identity, trans-boundary issues, liminality, and transgression.

Among the collected articles, we will find analyses and interpretations. Many of them are characterised by an interdisciplinary approach, of both diachronic and synchronic character. Obviously, it is difficult for any contemporary publication dedicated to the East-West (or West-East) relations to lack references to colonialism and postcolonialism, but they do not constitute a dominating discourse.

Adam Bednarczyk, Magdalena Kubarek, Maciek Szatkowski

I

**Limitations and Borderlands
in Oriental Poetry**

Chapter 1

Adaptations and Evocations of Orientalism in Nāzik al-Malā'ika's Poetry

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Introduction

Nāzik al-Malā'ika's poetry can be considered through the lens of Orientalism and Deorientalism respectively. A central question in the present article involves investigation as to whether the "Orient" is engaging in the process of deorientalization through the act of – physical or cultural – border crossing. An analysis of the poetry of Nāzik al-Malā'ika will seek to understand to what degree this body of work can be considered to be Oriental.

Orientalism and Deorientalism can be conceptualised in terms of literal or metaphorical crossings of borders and frontiers. In order to effectively compare the influence of the concepts of borders, frontiers, borderlands, and transgression on both Orientalism and Deorientalism, certain preliminary examinations of relevant works must be pursued. It is first necessary to examine the question of potential intertextuality between the works of authors with roots in the Middle East that have gained a Western audience. Additionally, it is essential to seek out any other Western texts that reflect a similar set of themes as those addressed by Middle-East rooted authors. When examining the literature of this area, a number of highly important questions arise. Among these foremost of these is the issue of the Orient crossing the borders and the borderlands to deorientalize itself.

Unfortunately, Middle-East literature is not translated or examined enough compared to African or East and Southeast Asian Studies, which makes it an alluring less Oriental field. In other words, it is not an easy endeavor to survey Iraqi Arabic literature or Al-Malā'ika's poems translated into English given the lack of a comprehensive bibliography of translated Middle-East literature. Nāzik al-Malā'ika, in her poetry, often appears to be associating herself with the traditions or cultural norms of the West as opposed to those of the East. It

is necessary to contemplate the degree to which the works of the writer are in fact products of an oriental cultural frame. It is not entirely clear that a sharp delineation between the East and the West, the Orient and the non-Orient can be made when asking this question. It would appear, for example, that the context in which the relevant issues are taking place involves considerations that are themselves a manifestation of a certain interaction between Orientalism and Deorientalism (Biddick 2000: 1234–1249). It is, therefore, necessary to crystallise a new formulation of an original critical representation of Orientalism (Balagangadhara 1998: 101–102).

Core Questions

This study will attempt to answer these highly relevant questions by the means of comparing the life path of Nāzik al-Malā'ika in the context of an Oriental origin. Al-Malā'ika (1921–2007), who was born in Iraq, studied in Princeton, Madison/Wisconsin, and afterwards returned to the oriental world, migrating to different Middle-East Countries, had her own history of displacement. The present study will ask the central question of whether or not the Orient is crossing the borders and the borderlands to deorientalize itself? In order to effectively elaborate on this central hypothesis, it will be necessary to attempt to find the answers to two main questions: What are Orientalism and Deorientalism? How did Nāzik al-Malā'ika experience border transgressions, associating herself predominantly with the West or the East?

A Critical Representation of Orientalism and Deorientalism

Orientalism has been defined as a way in which Western artists and cultural commentators depict cultures from the global East – the Middle East, South/Southeast Asia and North Africa. The term “Orientalism” is also somewhat historically loaded as involving a rather condescending or patronizing attitude by those in the West towards the cultures that are considered non-Western. To Edward Said, the author of 1978's *Orientalism*, a discourse that labels any non-Western reality as a non-favorable, underdeveloped, immoral and violent world merely seeks to establish Western cultural hegemony. Orientalism depicts the societies which Nāzik al-Malā'ika originated from as archaic, retrograde, and primitive, and yet regards these societies as somehow exotic and mysterious.

Orientalism and Deorientalism constitute a binary-based arbitrary system; the reality of Nāzik al-Malā'ika's poetic output shows that one person and one cultural voice can include multiple or fragmented aspects of identity, heritage, cultural context and act(s) of border-crossing or transgression. The

PAGES MISSING
FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

Index of Names

A

'Abbās, Iḥsān 57
'Abd Al-Hādī 110
'Abd Al-Malik, Anwar 173
'Abd Ar-Raḥīm, Mu'Addin 173
Abdul-Hai, Muhamad 10
Abū Ḥamdān, Samīr 174
Abū Tammām, Ḥabīb 58, 59
Abu-Lughod, Lila 52
Ahmad, Naqui 115
Aiyappan, Ayinipalli 255
Al-'Arīnī, 'Abdallāh 105, 109
Al-Anṭākī, Dā'ūd 58, 63-65, 67
Al-Azm, Sadik J. 5, 6, 19
Al-Ḥuṣrī, Ḥaldūn Sāṭi' 173, 183
Al-Iṣfahānī, Abū al-Farağ 58, 60,
62, 63, 66-67
Al-Kaylānī, Nağīb 99, 102-110
Al-Ġumaḥī, Ibn Sallām 58-59, 67
Al-Malā'ika, Nāzik 3-5, 8-13, 15-
19
Al-Mawāfī, Nāṣir 'Abd Ar-Rāzzaq
171-173, 184
Al-Qāḍī, Muḥammad 173, 184
Al-Samaany, Nasser S. 171-173,
184
Altman, Israel 174, 182
Amīn, Aḥmad 174
Amīn, Qāsim 109
'Ammāra, Muḥammad 173, 174,
182
An-Nağğār, Ḥusayn Fawzī 184
Antharjanam, Lalithambika 247,
249-251, 254-255
Appelrouth, Scott 6, 7, 19

Arberry, Arthur John 52-56
Ari, Sevinç 216
Aristotle 50, 56, 179
As-Sarrāğ, Ğa'far 58, 65, 67
Aš-Şayyāl, Ğamīl Ad-Dīn
Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Rifā'a Rāfi' 171, 173-
177, 179-184
Aṭ-Ṭībī, 'Ukāša 'Abd al-Munān
107, 111
Auriant, Alexandre H. 193-196
Aytaş, Gıyasettin 213, 226

B

Bahayy, 'Iṣām 171, 182
Balangadhara, S. N. 4, 19,
Bantysz-Kamienskij, Nikołaj
[=Бантыш-Каменский, Ни-
колай] 156, 167
Bariğiš, Muḥammad Ḥasan 103,
105, 109
Baseer, Abdul 22, 32
Bauer, Thomas 57, 67
Beeston, Alfred Felix L. 49, 56
Behdad, Ali 196
Berger, Rafał 6, 7, 104, 109
Biddick, Kathleen 4, 19
Bielawski, Józef 171, 172, 182
Blachère, Régis 57, 67
Boehmer, Elleke 88, 98
Bosworth, Clifford Edmund 171,
182
Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab 54, 56
Brockelmann, Carl 57, 67
Brown, Jonathan Andrew C. 51,
52, 54, 56

Bryła, Stefan 160, 161, 164, 166,
167

Burnett, Frances Hodgson 139-
149

C

Cabanowski, Marek 158, 167
Çayir, Kenan 108, 109
Chaudhuri, Nupur 146, 148, 149
Chiheb, Amel 86, 98
Clowes, Edith 128, 136
Colonna, Vincent 186, 196
Cook, David 107-109
Corbin, Alain 187, 196
Culbert David 109
Cull Nicholas J. 108, 109
Cyrzyk, Leszek 155, 167
Czyba, Lucette 187, 194

D

Danecki, Janusz 104, 110, 174,
182, 183
Dawson, Raymond 155, 158, 167
Dawson, Robert 166
Dayf, Šawqī 171, 172, 182
Delahaye, Gilbert 215, 225
Denney, Reuel 203, 211
Devika, Jayakumari 247, 248, 255,
256
Dīkrā, Abū Bakr 100, 110
Dildaralvi, Sofia 22, 32
Du Camp, Maxime 185, 186, 188,
193, 196
Dučić, Jovan 155, 167
Dunn, Ross E. 172, 182
Durkin, Andrew 130, 132, 133,
136, 137
Dusūqī 'Alī, Muḥammad 100, 110
Dwyer, Anne 134, 137
Dziekan, Marek M. 102, 110

E

Eaglestone, Robert 113, 115, 120,
123
Edles, Laura D. 6, 7, 19
Edwards, Holly 8, 19
Ellul, Jacques 100, 110
Euben, Roxanne L. 172, 182
Even-Zohar, Itamar 215, 225
Ewertowski, Tomasz 156, 157,
161, 167

F

Fajans, Roman 164, 165, 167
Faris, Wendy B. 115-119, 123, 124
Fass, Paula S. 139, 149
Ferguson, James 97
Filshtinsky, Izaak 57, 67
Flaubert, Gustave 185-197
Fogel, Joshua 155, 167
Forster, Edward 85, 89-98
Fromm, Erich 201, 204, 210
Fukuda Hideichi 81, 82

G

Gabrieli, Francesco 57, 67
Galewicz, Cezary 256
Gallet, Valentine 186, 196
Gandhi, Indira 114, 119, 121, 122
Gandhi, Leela 123
Gandhi, Mahatma 116
Gandhi, Sanjay 120, 121
Ganguly, Keya 88, 98
Gans, Eric Lawrence 186, 196
Garden, Kenneth 172, 182
Geil, William Edgar 166, 167
Gelgeç Bakacak, Ayça 216, 225
Glazer, Nathan 203, 211
Goleman, Daniel 201, 202, 211
Golik, Katarzyna 161, 167

Gothot-Mersch, Claudine 186,
187, 192, 196
Grabowski, Wojciech 101, 110
Grosfoguel, Ramon 11, 16, 19
Gupta, Akhil 97
Gvozden, Vladimir 155, 164, 167
Gymnich, Marion 141, 149

H

Habib, Rafey 146, 147, 149
Hafez, Sabry 11, 18, 19
Hervey, Sandor G. J. 214
Hewitt, Douglas 87, 98
Ḥiğgāzī, Maḥmūd 182
Hitti, Philip Khuri 99, 110
Hokama Shuzen 228, 229, 232,
234, 237, 242-246
Hołda, Renata 100, 110
Hong Zicheng 42, 46
Horn, Madelaine 115, 120, 123
Hourani [=Ḥūrānī], Albert 173,
182
Huart, Clément 57, 67
Huigen, Siegfried 155
Hulme, Peter 82
Ḥūrānī, Albert 173, 182
Husry, Khaldun Sati 176, 183
Hvistendahl, Mary 153, 167

I

Ibn an-Nadīm, Abū al-Farağ 67
Ibn Battuta, Muhammad 172, 182
Ibn Fadlan, Ahmad 183, 171, 183
Ibn Qotaiba, Abū Muḥammad 60,
61, 67
Iha Fuyū 230, 231, 234
Inada Toshinori 70, 71, 81
Ivanova, Natal'ia 127, 130, 133,
135, 137

J

Jabłoński, Witold 161, 167
Jafari, Nasrin 22, 32
Jamsheer, Hassan Ali 173, 174,
183
Janta-Polczyński, Aleksander 166-
168
Jarosz, Aleksandra 227-229, 237,
246
Jayyusi, Salma 19, 58, 67
Jones, Polly 127, 137
Jovanović, Milan 157-161, 166,
167

K

Kajdański, Edward 155, 168
Kalmar, Gyorgy 119, 121, 124
Kałuski, Marian 155, 158, 168
Kant, Immanuel 162, 168
Karvonen, Erkki 87, 98
Keene, Donald 69, 70, 76, 77, 80,
81
Kerr, Douglas 156, 168
Khorana, Meena 140, 141, 149
Kosanović, Bogdan 155, 168
Kostadinović, Aleksandar 157,
168
Kowalska, Maria 172, 183
Krachkovsky, Ignaty [=
Kraczkowski, Ignacy] 60, 64, 67,
171-173, 183
Królikiewicz, Grażyna 163, 168
Kubarek, Magdalena 102, 103, 110
Kuehn, Julia 156, 168

L

Lahusen, Thomas 129, 137
Layton, Susan 128, 137
Le Bihan, Yann 194, 196
Leiderman, Naum L. 134, 135, 137

Lewicka, Magdalena 173, 174,
176, 183
Lewis, Bernard 173, 183
Li Dian 46
Lichterfeld, Imke 141, 149
Lipovetskii, Mark N. 134, 135, 137
Little, Douglas 6, 19
López-Gil, Norberto 153, 168
Lovell, Julia 153, 154, 168
Lowe, Lisa 195, 196
Lukin, Aleksandr Vladimirovich
[=Лукин, Александр] 156, 168

M

MacKenzie, John 10, 19
Mackerras, Colin 155, 168
Maeshiro Junko 246
Maksimović, Goran 157, 168
Mancall, Mark 156, 168
Mansoor, Saeed 22, 32
Markowski, Michał P. 81
Marlier, Marcel 215, 225
Mazan, Bogdan 162, 168
McCullough, Helen Craig 81
McGillis, Roderic 140-143, 145,
146, 149
McLeod, John 116, 124
Mehrpour, Hamed 22, 33
Meisami, Julie Scott 51, 56, 57, 67,
182
Mengham, Rod 123
Menon, A. Sreedhara 250, 251
Mermoune, Amina 95, 98
Micklin, Philip 126, 137
Miner, Earl R. 82
Mirek, Franciszek 99, 111
Monfared, Abbas 22, 33
Moromi Nana 228, 246
Morrell, Robert E. 82
Moseley, Christopher 227, 246
Mostow, Joshua S. 82

Moudden, Abderrahmane 172,
184
Mozaheb, Mohammad Amin 22,
33
Mrozek-Dumanowska, Anna 101,
111
Murakami Haruki 201-211
Muramatsu Tomotsugu 76, 81
Mūsà, Munīr 173, 184
Myasnikov, Vladimir Stepanovich
[=Мясников, Владимир Сте-
панович] 156, 168

N

Naaman, Antoine Youssef 187,
192, 196
Nakada Takeshi 77, 81
Nakazato Jūkichi 69, 77, 81
Nehru, Jawaharlal 119
Netton, Ian Richard 172, 184
Nevskiy, Nikolay 228-231, 234,
235, 237, 238, 241-244, 246
Nicholson, Reynold A. 49, 50, 56,
57, 67
Nieć, Mateusz 100, 111
Nilayamgode, Devaki 248, 250-
256
Nilsen, Sarah Rhoads 88, 98
Nodelman, Perry 140, 150
Northrop, Douglas 126, 137
Nycz, Ryszard 76, 81

O

Odagiri Hiroko 82

P

Palowski, Franciszek 166, 168
Panikkar, T.K. Gopal 256
Parkinson Zamora, Lois 123, 124
Parpola, Marjatta 256

Pellat, Charl 54, 64, 67
 Philipp, Thomas 106, 111
 Pillai, T. Meena 256
 Pludermacher, Isolde 195, 196
 Plutschow, Herbert 73, 81
 Potocki, Jean 191, 196
 Pratt, Mary Louise 155, 164, 169
 Praz, Mario 195, 196
 Propp, Vladimir 59, 68

Q

Qindīl, Fu'ād 172, 184
 Qurat-ul-Ain, Ahmad 22, 23
 Quṭb, Sayyid 101, 102, 104, 105,
 107, 109, 111

R

Rajčević, Milorad 165, 166, 169
 Reyf, Igor' 127, 128, 137
 Richard, Guy 168, 190
 Richard-Le Guillou, Annie 185,
 190, 196
 Riesman, David 201, 203, 211
 Rotter, Andrew J. 10, 19,
 Rushdie, Salman 113, 114, 116-
 120, 122, 123

S

Said, Edward W. 4- 8, 11, 19, 87,
 88, 140, 146, 155, 165, 169, 187-
 189, 194, 195, 197
 Sapieha, Paweł 162-166, 168, 169
 Šarābī, Ḥiṣām 173, 184
 Satretdinova, Raisa S. 129
 Ṣawwāh, 'Abd Allāh 173, 184
 Ṣahriyar, Mohammad 23, 32
 Selemeneva, Marina 133, 134, 137
 Shahiditabar, Mostafa 22-24, 31,
 33

Shinzato Kōshō 228, 229, 232,
 234, 242, 244, 245
 Siber, Mouloud 92, 98
 Sindik, Dušan 155, 169
 Singh, Kushwant 121, 124
 Sivan, Emmanuel 104, 111
 Smith, Hedrick 128, 137
 Smolik, Przeclaw 158-160, 166,
 169
 Sōkyū 70, 72-82
 Spence, Jonathan 155, 169
 Spurr, David 155, 159, 164, 169
 Starkey, Paul 56, 182
 Steegmuller, Francis 192, 196, 197
 Stolze, Radegundis 214, 215, 226
 Šu'Ayb, Ḥalīfī 173, 184
 Sutcliffe, Benjamin 125, 137

T

Tamaki Masami 246
 Tartalja, Ivo 157, 169
 Tew, Phillip 123
 Tibi, Bassam 108, 111
 Tikhonov, Ia 126, 137
 Toth, James 105, 111
 Toury, Gideon 214, 226
 Trifonov, Iurii 125-138
 Tritter, Jean-Louis 193, 197
 Tyler, Royall 82

U

Uemura Yukio 228, 246

V

Velimirović, Milutin 161-163, 166,
 169
 Veluthat, Kesavan 256
 Vladislavić, Sava 155-157, 167-169

W

- Waldron, Arthur 153, 154, 155,
169
Walter, Wiebke 171, 172, 184
Weaver, Afaa Michael 36, 46
Webb, Jean 145, 147, 150
Wehr, Hans 100, 101, 111
Welch, David 109
Woll, Josephine 134, 135, 138
Wood, E. Amanda 256
Woolf, Leonard 85, 90, 91, 97

Y

- Yalçın, Alemdar 226
Youngs Tim 82
Yücel, Faruk 214, 226
Yuval-Davis, Nira 226

Z

- Zdanowski, Jerzy 104, 111
Zwoliński, Andrzej 100, 111