

## "Wandering between two worlds": the Deviance of the Jailer's Daughter

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*Cette étude propose que la métaphore de mouvement cachée dans la concepte de déviance fonctionne comme un instrument efficace pour analyser les constructions d'identité aussi ethniques que sexuelles. La matière comprend un conte orientaliste distribué dans tout l'Europe, d'une jeune fille turquoise qui aide échapper le prisonnier de son père et après plusieurs années voyage pour le trouver et le marier. Comme femme et orientale, elle est doublement déviante, mais sa déviance est refrenée par trois moyens: elle est déplacée (par son voyage), renommée et enfin mariée: les noces doubles constituent l'apogée du conte. Le voyage, le nom et le mariage forment les moyens idéologiques principales pour incorporer et assimiler la déviance à le discours dominant.*

**Keywords:** orientalism, deviance, identity, migration, liminality

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that made all the difference.  
Robert Frost, "The Road not Taken"

I suggest in this paper that the metaphor of movement embedded in the concept of *deviance* (from Latin, *de via* – off the road, straying from the path) can be activated as a tool for analysing constructions of both national and gender identity in oral literature. The concept of deviance deconstructs normative binaries by incorporating elements of the Other as not Other but as transgressions of the norm. Transgression is, of course, another metaphor of movement (Latin *transgredere*, to step across), and in analyzing a narrative song about a young woman's actions in releasing her father's English prisoner and later journeying to Europe to force him to make good his promise to marry her, this paper suggests that, while the song conforms to contemporary Orientalist stereotypes, the woman's journey enacts metaphorically a questioning of gender norms and in so doing fashions a new model for sexual identity which has made it one of the most popular narrative songs in the English-speaking world (Roud database, available at <http://library.ehdss.org/cgi-bin/query.cgi>)

## 1 Nation and identity

Ethnicity, and particularly the nation state, were mapped out as sites for the construction and contestation of identity by Said (1978), Anderson (1983) and others more than thirty years ago. In particular, they showed how representations of encounters with the exotic other can help mask the heterogeneity of one's own "imagined community" in terms of age, class, gender and ethnicity. (Cheesman 2001: 138). National identity has continued to be a dynamic field today, with the field of imagology opening up racial stereotypes to a more nuanced analysis, particularly in popular cultural genres, and above all historicizing them (see Beller and Leerssen 2007). My own work *Imagined States* (Del Giudice and Porter 2001), extended Anderson's title to Utopias and cultural realisation in orature (oral literature), and expanded the construction of identity beyond the formal time frame of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nation state assumed by Anderson, Hobsbawm (1990) and others.

The present paper explores the way in which, from the time of the very first contact narratives, representations of women who travelled from Asia to Europe subverted Orientalist constructions of identity in ways which are relevant to modern Europe. It takes as its text a widely-distributed song known in England as "Lord Bateman." This song follows one of the most popular folk narratives, that of a woman who helps to set a captive free but is then rejected in favour of another woman (ATU 313. *The Magic Flight*, in Uther 2004: 194–6. See also Henderson 1992: 81–2). The story is found, with variations, as an oral narrative all over Europe from the fourteenth century onwards to the present, not only in countries that became part of the Ottoman Empire, such as Hungary and modern Serbia, but also Spain, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and all the Scandinavian countries including the Faroe Islands. There are also literary analogues like Stendhal's novel *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839).

The ballad version of *The Magic Flight*, known as "Lord Bateman," has played a significant role in the construction of European (and North American) identity. With more than 650 citations, it is the second most popular song (after "Barbara Allen") in the Roud database of traditional songs in English cited above. It was such a popular sheet ballad in the nineteenth century that Charles Dickens published a Cockney [London dialect] parody (1839). It is one of the ballads most often performed today by traditional singers in England, particularly among Roma (Atkinson 2002: 237–38). Ninety performances (including the earliest,

from 1790) have been noted in Scotland, while more than 400 have been recorded in North America. This study is based on a version noted down in Somerset in the West of England by the collector Cecil Sharp (1974: 10). It was sung by Henry Larcombe in 1905. His version opens with an English lord arriving in an Eastern country and being taken prisoner by a cruel and powerful Turk (in other versions he is a Saracen or Sultan). In prison he is made to act like a beast of burden, harrowing or pulling a cart, or humiliated in other ways:

And in this prison there grewed a tree,  
It grewed so stout, it grewed so strong.  
He was chained up all by the middle  
Until his life was almost done. (Sharp 1974: 10).

Turkey became the representative eastern, Muslim country between about 1550 and 1680. Because of the extent of the Ottoman Empire, the word “Turk” was also used of a person of African origin, often being varied with “Saracen”, “Moor” or “Algerine”. In eighteenth century Europe, the adjective “Turkish” might be varied with “Persian” or “Arabian”. This was particularly true in the case of prose tales published as part of the vogue for *The Thousand and One Nights*. However, the dominant metonym for “the oriental” was until quite recently “Turk”: in Zafer Senocak’s words, “the most western oriental culture is always the most forcefully excluded by the west, because it brings the repressed into contact with Europe’s conception of itself” (quoted in Cheesman 2001: 136, 137). Almost all the variants of “Lord Bateman” which specify the country are set in Turkey: in Britain, making Turkey the setting was an example of othering which says more about England’s own lack of focus about distant lands than about the actually-existing Ottoman Empire, since it continued to be sung even when Turkey was Britain’s close ally in the Crimean War. Furthermore, in practice, aristocrats, wealthy merchants and pilgrims who were kidnapped by pirates like “Lord Bateman” were usually quickly ransomed, while seamen or poorer citizens kidnapped from ports were more likely to be sent to work on the galleys (Sisneros 2010: 11).

Difference relies on a repertoire of signs, and on the level of national, as opposed to gender, identity, “Lord Bateman” is thus a fantasy narrative in line with Edward Said’s thesis of Orientals as feared and controlling. It is important to historicise such statements. The expansion of the Ottoman Empire deep into Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century meant that Turkey was by no means an unknown country, and Katie Sisneros (2010: 38) has recently argued that even the earliest

representations of Turks, in the so-called "Turk plays" of the seventeenth century, with a similar audience to contemporary ballads, "showed Turkish characters as complex and worthy of at least some semblance of compassion". The fearsome stereotype was even less true in the nineteenth century, with the country as a military ally of England and the great popularity of imported Turkish furnishings and items of dress: in one page of Charles Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5), a male character is seen in Turkish trousers, a Turkish cap and Turkish slippers (1864–5: 682), and as a young man he wrote a comic burlesque of this song, "The Loving Ballad of Lord Bateman (Dickens and Thackeray 1839)".

Despite this penetration of Turkish products into everyday life, popular representations continued to emphasise the country's cruelty and barbarism: only twelve years before Dickens' burlesque, a popular street ballad had described Turks "slaughter[ing] children like rabbits" after the battle of Navarino (Ashton 1973: 21). In 1701, Nathaniel Bailey's *Dictionary of Cant Words* had defined a Turk as "any cruel hard-hearted man" (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1991: 2129. My emphasis: see Porter, "Turning Turk", forthcoming). This identification of Turks with cruelty was still very much alive in the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the imagologist Nedret Kuran-Burcoglu maintains that it is still an active stereotype today (2007: 255), when tourism, Turkey's possible future entry to the European Union, the presence of perhaps 3 million *gastarbeiter* in Germany, and the killing of Turkish peace activists on the food convoy to Gaza in 2010 have greatly increased awareness of the complexity of modern Turkey.

It is significant that, as in Bailey's definition quoted above, references to "Turks" in songs and popular texts were almost invariably gendered male. This left a semantic space, a gap, which singers were at liberty to fill with more complex and sympathetic female characters, and this has happened in many of the "Turkish" songs. Such a gendered reading of the "Turkish" songs shows that the situation goes beyond a simple demonisation of the Oriental Other. In the nineteenth century, for example, it meant that the harem offered a topos for repressed European sexuality. In a society where modern conditions of production were beginning to prevail, life was presented as an accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived had moved away into a representation.

I suggest in this paper that, in traditional songs, positive images were frequently predicated on the behaviour of female characters who challenged cultural norms

because, they were often more able to “travel” culturally as well as geographically. This is clearly seen in the case of the song “The Turkish Lady” (Laws O26; 1957: 238), a broadside printed in 1782 but probably dating from the seventeenth century (see Creighton and Senior 1987: 123). It was widely reprinted in the United States in the nineteenth century, and was still being sung by the traditional singer Harry Cox of Norfolk in 1953. In the song, a Turkish woman makes an offer of marriage to her English slave if he will turn Muslim. When he refuses to marry her on the grounds that she is a Muslim, she follows him to England, converts to Christianity and marries him there. Conversion is the liminal gesture, the point of renunciation of the displaced system and integration into a new social nexus. While her conversion is obviously perfunctory and incomplete, the process of crossing a boundary acts as a catalyst for other changes: slavery becomes a porous structure that can be challenged, and female agency is asserted over the institutions of patriarchy and religious belief.

In popular culture, a prison setting is typically an arena for contesting power, and in “Lord Bateman” this resistance is achieved through the agency of the jailer’s daughter, making this ballad too an early text of women’s empowerment within the conventional Orientalised frame of the adventure narrative of Lord Bateman. This is expressed dramatically in the figure of the jailer’s daughter Sophia, who appropriates the narrative for herself and travels across Europe to the north of England to find him. This forms the second phase of the narrative. Although the young woman bears many names in different performances of the song, she will here be referred to by the name used by the singer Henry Larcombe, which was Sophia. This name, meaning (in Greek) “wise,” is a significant choice in the context of this paper’s theme of deviation as an exploration of “new worlds.”

## **2 Defined by a woman: “She was never known to speak so free”**

Henry Larcombe’s version of this second phase largely follows a broadside published at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It features the jailer’s daughter helping Bateman to escape on condition that he will marry her. Seven years later she finds her way to England to demand a share of his land and, almost incidentally, to marry her as promised, but arrives on the very day that he is to marry another woman of his own social standing. By making this journey, I suggest, she enacts metaphorically a questioning of gender norms and in so doing fashions a new model for sexual identity.

Sophia is dressed in her full finery when she arrives at Bateman's castle, and she immediately prepares to intervene in the ceremony taking place inside, telling the "proud young porter" at the gate to announce her arrival. Literally dazzled by her wealth, the porter reports to Lord Bateman that:

"She has got rings on every finger,  
Round one of them she has got three.  
She has gold enough round her middle  
To buy Northumberland that belongs to thee." (Sharp 1974: 10).

Such display is clearly intended to signify wealth, real or implied. However, the details of her "fine gay clothing" when she arrives at the castle (Sharp 1974:10) also contain a suggestion of supernatural powers.

Unlike the first part of the narrative, in Turkey, these later scenes are dominated by lively dialogue. Thus Sophia not only has a powerful presence in this way, but is also skilful with words: she is an example of what Ros Ballaster (2007: 144) calls "the loquacious woman" who intervenes in her own destiny. Seven years earlier she had negotiated Lord Bateman's freedom on condition that he would share his considerable property with her: now she assumes the significant status of "Lady" in her orders to the "proud young porter" at the gate:

"You tell him to send me a slice of bread  
And a bottle of the best of wine  
And not forgetting that fair young lady  
That did release him when close confined." (Sharp 1974: 10).

Inevitably, Bateman recognises her and another wedding is arranged, this time between himself and Sophia. As with the fine clothing, powers of persuasion like Sophia's were sometimes considered evidence of supernatural powers. They were a common feature of both German and English ballads associated with women, since, with a few exceptions (most notably Queen Elizabeth I), they had no access to formal power structures (Cheesman 2001: 150).

As both a woman and an Oriental, Sophia has the double oppression of femaleness and the racial other, and this deviance is both expressed and challenged by means of the journey, her change of name and her marriage, three of the main ways in which difference is incorporated into the dominant discourse. By leaving Turkey, Sophia deliberately rejects the captivity narrative's identification of homeland as a space of belonging and security associated with women and the

home. This traditional identification is instead personified in the ballad by Bateman's new bride and her mother, who momentarily steps out of her overdetermined role at the end of the ballad with the comment, "[she] was never heard to speak so free" (Sharp 1974: 11). It is a measure of the strong foregrounding of the female voice in "Lord Bateman" that even a relatively minor character in the ballad should be described in this way.

The significance of the journey as the most prominent marker of Sophia's "deviance" is seen in its fullest extension in European analogue where the journey to England is carried out by supernatural means as an instrument of her empowerment: hence the name of the international tale-type, *The Magic Flight* (Uther 2004: 194–6). While this feature is largely missing in English and North American sets like Henry Larcombe's, it is found in some Scottish versions, which describe how Sophia had been woken by a fairy (the Billy Blin) or a woman in green, to tell her of her lover's unfaithfulness, and had then been transported to Cumberland in a magic cloak (Child 1882–98: 466, 478), an uncanny experience in the sense that it removes her from her own space and time.<sup>1</sup> Lord Bateman's own journey, resulting in his being taken captive, was one that was intended to reinforce the power of the centre; Sophia's, on the other hand, has the effect of undermining that normative role in such narratives, since her journey was undertaken precisely to undermine that normative power.

Naming is, of course, a central aspect of identity, both cultural and personal, as much in communication between individuals on Facebook as in the then-rural society in the west of England where Henry Larcombe was living when he sang "Lord Bateman." The act of naming is also, of course, an exercise of power: although Sophia dominates the action in all but the first three stanzas of this long ballad (84 lines in Henry Larcombe's version), almost every editor has given this song the name of the male prisoner, with numerous variants (Bateman, Batesman, Beaconet, Beicham, Beichan, Bichan, Bonwell, Brechin). In addition, the substitution of one name for another, whether of a baby, a tree, a continent, or a subjugated people, is highly significant, a transfer of power. As Maria Tymoczko puts it:

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<sup>1</sup> Almost all the nine texts collected by Greig-Duncan at the beginning of the twentieth century describe the way she "kilted up her gay clothing" or, even more significantly, had "ta'en her mantle her about" (Shuldham-Shaw 1995: 344, 356). Bell Robertson remembered, but does not sing, about "the boats comin rowin tulle er han [sic] and the Belly blin that gave her the information that her love was to be married" (Shuldham-Shaw 1995: 622).

Every society has its own practices and ceremonies of naming, but all go deep into the heart of issues having to do with fundamental patterns and practices of culture; with cultural difference, cultural strength, and cultural prestige; with knowledge of self and other; with paradigms of identity and assertion of self-determination; and with the legacy of colonialism in our modern world. (Tymoczko 1999: 239).

Thus in some versions of the ballad Lord Bateman, evidently preoccupied with social appearances, tells his Turkish lover to change her name to one such as Lady Jean or Jane (Child 1965: 475; Shuldham-Shaw et al. 1995: 356) which better conforms to his social rank: often, as in Henry Larcombe's version, this is the first time her name is given. Some Scottish and American singers have given Sophia the very un-Turkish name of Suzy Pye (Randolph 1982: 28; Child 1965: 463–81), and in nineteenth-century America she was often known as Honey or Silky, presumably to appropriate her for democratic American ideals (Coffin 1963: 59).

Despite these attempts to incorporate Sophia into the dominant discourse, she remains a fully realized portrait of an independent woman. She is the dynamic centre of the ballad, both in the depiction of the racial other and in her initiation of the action. She shows conspicuously more agency than the male protagonist, and the narrative is constructed around this. It is her story rather than Lord Bateman's: her fierce love and loyalty to Bateman is in stark contrast to both the inhuman treatment he receives in prison, but also to the way he breaks faith by promising to marry another.

### **3 Conclusion**

As a narrative foregrounding a young Asian woman, "Lord Bateman" and its analogues form early examples of a speaking subject representing a minority discourse. Sophia's independence of action in traveling from Turkey to the north of England is not in itself disorderly: indeed she follows the path traditionally taken by disempowered women within the rhetoric of the ballad, into marriage. She expresses her independence instead through her ability to take "the [road] less traveled by," in Robert Frost's words (1967: 129). Her deviance is expressed through her command of language, where she gives social categories like "bride" and "land" (both in the sense of "nation" and "property") a deliberately ambiguous signification, suggesting their provisional nature. In this her deviance has a narrative function: in the process of "becoming minor" Sophia adopts a transformative transcultural standpoint that escapes the confines of nation and sex



articulated by the easy certainties implied by the frame narratives, and thus asserts the return of the repressed. Finally, her deviance is *dialectical*, simultaneously wanting to have and wanting to be the object of desire.

In the words used in the title of this paper, the nineteenth century poet Matthew Arnold, fearing just such a return, pessimistically expressed the paradox of a progressive philosophy as “Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/ The other powerless to be born” (“The Grande Chartreuse,” lines 85–6; in Arnold 1921: 260). This reading liberates the past from “tradition” by suggesting that Sophia resolves the uncertainties of the individual which are characteristic of transcultural narratives and in this way anticipates the new dissident communities which lie outside the confines of systems which are being historically displaced. It was the great popularity of *The Thousand and One Nights*, a collection which is of Oriental origin but now incorporates numerous European additions, that had raised the possibility of imagining oneself in the role of multiple others (Ballaster 2007: 5). We have seen that, even in its most reductionist form, the representation of the deviant Turkish woman in particular was polysemic. I also suggest that it is the representation of the woman Sophia, who questions the racial assumptions that lie behind the song by inserting herself into the gap left by the term “Turk,” that offers an answer to the powerlessness feared by Arnold. By crosscutting the Orientalist stereotype, as it were, Sophia makes it visible and so reduces its potency.

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