



## **Domesticising the Exotic: Isabel Burton's *The Inner Life of Syria***

**Silvia Antosa**

### **Abstract**

Isabel Arundell Burton (1831-96), was a Victorian writer and traveller, married to the famous British explorer, translator, and Consul Richard Francis Burton (1821-90). This article focuses on her 1875 travel account, *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, because it is her first, sustained attempt to shape her public persona and to construct a convincing role for herself as devout wife, while leading a life that was ultimately unconventional. As I argue, in her fictionalised account she creates an ambivalent narrative of her life and travel experiences, in which she reconciled two opposing models of female subjectivity: the conventional myth of the angel in the house and the “transgressive” woman traveller. This article focuses on the formal strategies that Isabel adopts to construct a narrative that was acceptable to the Victorian readership and editorial market, including her declared attempt to “domesticate” her own potentially subversive agency. The article analyses the gendered discourses embedded in her word, especially those regarding women’s complicity with and resistance to colonial constructions of femininity. Isabel draws on the consolidated image of the “traveller’s wife” to forge a potentially new paradigm, the “Travelling Angel in the House,” which reinforced the values of domesticity and submission while also partially legitimising women’s access to public, masculine spaces. Furthermore, with reference to work by Mary Louise Pratt, I discuss the textual strategies that Isabel adopts to claim that she has remained immune to the process of transculturation by reinforcing her national and social identity of upper-class English woman. Overall, I demonstrate that Isabel’s “Travelling Angel in the House” is animated by dynamic and unstable tensions, which derive from her attempts to simultaneously conform to and transgress dominant norms of the period.

### **Key Words**

Travel Writing; Fiction; Transculturation; Domesticity; Exoticism; Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers; Isabel Burton; Angel in the House.

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## Domesticising the Exotic: Isabel Burton's *The Inner Life of Syria*

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Image 1: Unknown, *Sir Richard Burton and Lady Isabel Burton in their garden at Trieste* (modern print from negative 2010). [Courtesy of Orleans House Gallery](#).

### The Travelling Angel

Isabel Arundell Burton (1831-1896), was a Victorian writer and traveller, best known as the wife of the famous linguist, translator, traveller, and consular official Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890).<sup>1</sup> As the wife of a British explorer

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Burton is perhaps best remembered for his unabridged translation of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (1885–86), which became a successful literary case due to the explicit explicative nature of its footnotes and its controversial 'Terminal Essay' on pederasty. He had already produced a number of translations, including the *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (1883) and the *Ananga-Ranga or the Hindu Art of Love* (1885). Earlier in his life, Burton was known mainly as a travel writer and explorer, and wrote many accounts, including *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* (1855–1856), *First Footsteps in East Africa; or, An Exploration of Harar* (1856) and *The Lake Regions of Central Africa, A Picture of Exploration* (1860).

and then consul abroad, Isabel managed to cross the rigid geographical and ideological boundaries that Victorian society imposed on women. She obtained a freedom of movement that allowed her to travel around the world, including to Portugal, Switzerland, France, Italy, Brazil, Syria, Arabia, India and Egypt. She was also the author of four texts, which can be divided into two kinds. She published two travel accounts, which offer fictionalised versions of her experiences abroad: *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land from My Private Journal* (1875) and *A.E.I., Arabia, Egypt, India: A Narrative of Travel* (1879). She went on to write two biographical texts: the first focused on her husband, *The Life of Sir Richard F. Burton* (1893), and the second was her autobiography, *The Romance of Isabel Lady Burton. The Story of Her Life, Told in Part by Herself and in Part by W.H. Wilkins* (1897). As is clear from the addition of the word “Romance” in the title, this autobiography also contained fictionalised elements. In addition, Isabel contributed several prefaces and afterwards to Richard’s travel accounts and translations, and frequently intervened in the writing, editing, and diffusion of his texts, such as *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* (1855-56), *First Footsteps in East Africa* (1856) and *Exploration of the Highlands of Brazil* (1869). She also wrote the “Preface” to his translation *The Carmina of Caius Valerius Catullus* (1894) and intervened to ensure that other works, such as *The Jew, the Gypsy and El Islam* (1898) would be published only after her own death. Moreover, she ensured that erotic translations like *The Arabian Nights* were reprinted in an abridged version: it appeared without most of the footnotes and the long “Terminal Essay”, which included reflections on male same-sex relationships, that had caused much controversy when it was first published. As Leonard C. Smithers, the editor of this new edition, wrote in his “Preface”: “It has been deemed necessary to omit from this volume the article on Pederasty” (Burton 1894, 8: 185).

Isabel’s contribution to Richard’s work – travel accounts, letters, scientific essays, and translations—testifies to the fact that they worked together more than has usually been acknowledged. In her specific case, there is a distinctive element to be considered: while she worked with Richard, she was usually very careful not to overstep him, even though sometimes she acted against him and his interests by subverting and changing his texts, especially in the last years of his life. From this viewpoint, her most significant and controversial intervention was the bonfire that followed her husband’s death, in which she burned several manuscripts and most of his private diaries.<sup>2</sup>

Isabel’s life and work have not yet been thoroughly investigated and debated by critics, as she has been consistently relegated to the margins of her husband’s adventurous life. Most of the numerous biographies written about Richard Burton discuss his relationship with his wife and, to a lesser extent, point out her crucial role in the development of his career as a consul. Only a very few texts focus on her influence in his written production, especially as an editor of his

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<sup>2</sup> I have discussed elsewhere the bonfire and its significance for the critical reception of Richard Burton’s work (Antosa 2012).

work.<sup>3</sup> As I discuss in this article, in her fictionalisations of her and her husband's lives, Isabel attempted to offer a stereotypical portrayal of a conventional Victorian couple who followed a strict moral code, adhered to religious principles and supported the imperial project; however, there are several discrepancies in her accounts. Such inconsistencies reveal a number of tensions that not only affected their relationship, but also dominated the controversial explorer's life and pervaded the last decades of the nineteenth century.

While a detailed exploration of all Isabel's activities is beyond the scope of this article, my aim is nevertheless to contribute productively to the existing scholarly analysis of her work. This article focuses on her 1875 travel account, *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, because it is her first, sustained attempt to invent and shape to her public *persona* that seeks to construct a convincing role for herself as devout and faithful wife, while leading a life that was ultimately unconventional. What emerges is a fictionalised account in which she creates an ambivalent narrative of her life and travel experiences. Significantly, I argue, she managed to reconcile in this narrative two different and even opposing models of female subjectivity, by merging together the conventional and reassuring myth of the angel in the house and the image of the "transgressive" woman traveller who actively contributed to and engaged with her husband's work and decisions. Isabel's motivation for uniting these opposing characteristics almost certainly derives from a deeply felt awareness of the strict Victorian moral code, especially in relation to women venturing abroad. As a matter of fact, even if the nineteenth century saw an increase in the number of women who visited or settled in foreign countries, they were usually labelled as eccentric and subversive, especially if they travelled on their own. They were negatively judged as a "nonconformist race" (Robinson 1990: viii), and their credibility was undermined, as pointed out by Mary Morris: "For centuries it was frowned upon for women to travel without escort, chaperon, or husband. To journey was to put oneself at risk not only physically but morally as well. A little freedom could be a dangerous thing" (Morris and O'Connor 1996; see also Pemble 1987).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The most important archival biography of the Burtons is Lovell (1998). Other relevant biographies include: Byron Farwell (1963), Brodie (1967), Kennedy (2005) and Godsall (2008). Only a few articles have explored the Burton's work as a joint effort or have read Burton's oeuvre in relation to his wife's influence and contribution. These include Casari and Kennedy (1997) and Phillips (1999a). A survey article by Ladizesky on the Burtons has recently appeared (2011). Isabel's own work is partially discussed in Dokl (2013). It is worth mentioning the Burton Archive which is kept in Orleans House Gallery in Twickenham. London (<https://www.orleanshousegallery.org>), where two exhibitions have been organised: *Lady Burton's Gift to the Nation* (1998) and *Burton: The Case for and Against* (2005).

<sup>4</sup> Several Victorian women travellers disrupted the dominant codes of female behaviour. They include women explorers who went to distant, unexplored countries, such as Mary Kingsley who travelled to West Africa, Isabella Bird Bishop who explored many countries from Japan to America, Florence Dixie who visited Patagonia and Annie Taylor who ventured to Tibet. One example of a travel writer who ironically re-

As Billie Melman has shown, many Victorian women accompanied their husbands or brothers in their journeys and contributed to their research and sometimes even writing of their accounts (1992: 35). On the face of it, they were just helpers whose contribution was usually reputed minimal or was rarely made explicit in the text, even when it was crucial for the production and promotion of their male counterparts' work.<sup>5</sup> By positioning herself as the devout, religious wife to an influential and successful man, Isabel was freer to experience foreign cultures and relate her exotic adventures without running the risk of being stigmatised or diminished by her contemporaries. As I examine, these activities included visiting places that few women had had the chance to see as well as performing conventionally 'unfeminine' activities, such as horse riding, mixing with locals, learning their languages and moving in unfamiliar places on her own. As a consequence, beyond her reassuring self-depiction, what emerges in-between the lines is the figure of a woman who played a crucial role in the life and career of her husband. By showing her political skills of negotiation and mediation, she demonstrated unusual abilities when compared to many other women of the period.

Victorian women travellers had to contend with a literary tradition of travel writing that was mostly authored by men and that conveyed a colonial gaze and problematic stereotypes (Boehmer 1995). Therefore, while some women writers produced similarly traditional texts, many women chose to do something more challenging.<sup>6</sup> This stimulated the production of multi-layered narratives marked

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appropriated her role as autonomous and independent explorer was Emily Lowe, who wrote two accounts regarding her excursions to Norway and Sicily: *Unprotected Females in Norway* (1857) and *Unprotected Females in Sicily, Calabria and the Top of Mount Aetna* (1859). In choosing the title "Unprotected Females in...", she highlighted her status as a lone traveller who did not depend on male companions for either the logistics of her journey or for her own safety. For this reason, she sarcastically remarked that "The only use of a gentleman is to look after the luggage, and we take care to have no luggage" (Lowe 1857: n.p.). For an extended critical discussion on the controversial status of Victorian female travellers, see my study on Frances Elliot and her relationship with Italy (2018).

<sup>5</sup> Many studies have investigated the role and the contribution of women in travel accounts and colonial texts. These include: Birkett (1989); Foster (1990); Mills (1991); Blunt (1994); Blunt and Rose (1994); Frawley (1994); Siegel (2004); Richardson (2006).

<sup>6</sup> To clarify this point it is worth mentioning the difference of the work by Flora Shaw and Mary Kingsley. They were two fin-de-siècle antagonists, who represented and gave voice to different ways of embodying femininity and sustaining colonial discourse. Both fought to break free from Victorian ideological and moral constraints, in very different ways. While Shaw voiced the British imperial policy in her articles for *The Times* and married one of the most representative figures of the Empire, Lord Lugard, Kingsley, as a lone explorer in Africa, created an androgynous persona and wrote critical accounts in which she explored herself and the surrounding space with irony, detachment and ambiguity. Thus, these two figures exemplify the potentially different ways in which resistance could be embodied and performed in the public space, by showing the wide spectrum of the multiple, even contradictory approaches that women adopted as they

by the coexistence of imperialistic attitudes and a more individual approach that reflected the authors' own social, historical, ideological and embodied positioning. Thus, the variety of approaches adopted by Victorian women travellers is ample and complex, as it ranges from the most eccentric and subversive attitude to a declared adherence to the sociocultural and moral conventions of the time. From this perspective, understanding the interplay between key factors such as gender, social class, religion, alterity, nationalism, ethnicity and colonial discourses is crucial in order to assess the different ways in which women could be complicit with and resistant to both colonial discourse and constructions of femininity, in their home country and abroad. The life and work of Isabel are a case in point, and are here examined at the intersection of these tensions. Specifically, this article focuses on the formal strategies that Isabel adopts to construct a narrative that was acceptable to the Victorian readership and editorial market. These include her declared attempt to 'domesticate' her own potentially subversive agency, in her narration of both the years of her rebel youth and her role of wife who moves at ease in the traditionally male sphere of public spaces. At the same time, she paradoxically emphasised and criticised the domestic prudishness of Victorian orthodoxy. In the next section, I provide an overview of relevant biographical details of Isabel's life and draw attention to fictitious aspects of her autobiography, focusing on her fascination for the exotic. The remainder of the article offers an analysis of her *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, drawing on analyses of women's travel writings by scholars such as Dea Birkett, Shirley Foster, and Sara Mills. As I argue, in this account, Isabel constructs a traditional, conservative image of herself, even though her experiences were far from conventional. In so doing, Isabel draws on the consolidated image of the 'traveller's wife' to forge a potentially new paradigm, the 'Travelling Angel in the House', which reinforced the values of domesticity and submission while, at the same time, partially legitimising women's access to public, masculine spaces. Furthermore, with reference to work by Mary Louise Pratt, I discuss the textual strategies that Isabel adopts to show that she has remained immune to the process of transculturation by reinforcing her national and social identity of upper-class English woman. Overall, I suggest that Isabel's 'Travelling Angel in the House' is animated by dynamic and unstable tensions that derive from her attempts to simultaneously conform to and transgress dominant norms of the period.

### **The Fascination for the Exotic**

Born into one of the oldest and most influential British Catholic families, the Arundells,<sup>7</sup> Isabel spent her childhood in Wardour Castle, Wiltshire. (Burton

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chose to adhere to or to contest the sociocultural and moral conventions of their time (Palusci 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Isabel Arundell descended from James Everard Arundell, youngest son of Henry, Sixth Baron of Wardour (1694-1746). Her ancestors included Sir Thomas Arundell, who had married Margaret, sister of Catherine Howard, fifth wife of Henry VIII. His grandson,

1897, 1: 4-6; Brodie 1967: 82; Lovell 1998: 91-4) Afterwards, her family moved to Furze Hall, Essex, and she was sent to the convent boarding school of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre of New Hall, where she studied for six years. There, she was given a strictly religious education, which would prepare her for a future domestic married life. As Mary Lovell has pointed out: “She was a bright, intelligent, observant girl, but the nuns were educating potential wives and mothers, not university students, and the Latin Isabel learned was sufficient to understand Mass and Catholic studies rather than the classics” (Lovell 1998: 95). Once at home, when she was sixteen years old, Isabel became an avid reader of fiction and led a solitary life in the company of the protagonists of her favourite novels, which – crucially for this article - gave shape to her escapist Orientalist fantasies of adventure. As she tells in her autobiography:

Disraeli’s *Tancred* and similar occult books were my favourites; but *Tancred*, with its glamour of the East, was the chief of them, and I used to think out after a fashion my future life [...] I was forming my character [...] I was enthusiastic about gypsies, Bedawin Arabs, and everything Eastern and mystic, and especially about a *wild* and *lawless* life.

(Burton 1897, 1: 19-21, my emphasis)

*Tancred* is mentioned again in a crucial point in her first travelogue, *Inner Life*, to justify her mingling with locals:

Although a staunch Catholic, I am an ardent disciple of Mr Disraeli [...] the author of ‘*Tancred*’. I read the book as a young girl in my father’s house, and it inspired me with all the ideas, and the yearning for a *wild* Oriental life, which I have since been able to carry out. I passed two years of my early life [...] in my father’s garden [...] alone with ‘*Tancred*’. My family were pained and anxious about me – thought me odd. [...] I was working out the problem of my future life, my present mission. It has lived in my saddle-pocket throughout my Eastern life. I almost know it by heart [...].

(Burton 1875: 337, my emphasis)

One has to agree with Melman that: “For Isabel Burton the East was a vocation, a Holy Place, the locus of freedoms denied her as the marriageable, self-educated spinster in a socially ambitious but impoverished Catholic family” (1992: 306).

In her autobiography, *The Romance of Lady Burton*, written with her friend W.H. Wilkins who finished the text after her death, Isabel reworks and reconstructs a largely traditional and conservative image for herself. She portrays herself as a Romantic heroine who is guided by her love for her husband, and by her respect for traditions and Victorian orthodoxies. Fictional elements of her narrative are especially visible when early in *The Romance* she encounters a community of gypsies that were camped not far from her parents’ home. There she met a woman called Hagar Burton who offered a prophecy about her future on a small piece of paper:

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Thomas Arundell, finding favour with James the first, became the first Baron of Wardour. Her mother was Eliza Gerard, daughter of Sir John Gerard. She was a devout Catholic.

You will cross the sea, and be in the same town as your destiny and know it not. Every obstacle will rise up against you, and such a combination of circumstances, that it will require all your courage, energy and intelligence to meet them. Your life will be like one swimming against big waves; but... you will always win... You will bear the name of our tribe, and be right proud of it. You will be as we are, but far greater than we. Your life is all wandering, change, and adventure. One soul in two bodies in life or death, never long apart. Show this to the man you take for your husband. Hagar Burton.

(Burton 1897, 1: 21-2)

More than likely, these words were invented by Isabel to make her encounter with her future husband a preternatural and inevitable event.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, Hagar Burton's marginal status and surname literally anticipate the wandering Richard as an outsider to society. Yet while Isabel's destiny is to marry and bear her husband's name, she will also be courageous, adventurous and triumphant: here we see the ambiguous paradigm of the "travelling angel in the house" taking shape. Hagar's words assimilate Isabel to the community of gypsies ("You will bear the name of our tribe"; "*You* will be as *we* are, but far greater than we"), thus foreseeing not just her future husband's nature but also her own destiny as a nomadic subject unstably located at the margins of society (cf. the definition of a nomadic subject offered by Rosi Braidotti 1994: 33). However, it is worth noting that while Isabel fantasises about aligning herself with a gypsy community, she retains her social superiority, as confirmed by the prophesy that she will be "greater" than them.<sup>9</sup>

Afterwards, Isabel's family moved to London for her 'coming out' into society as a debutante at Almack's Assembly Rooms. In Lovell's words, "Almack's, founded during the Regency for the specific purpose of introductions between the 'right sort of people', was still the most exigent marriage market in the Western world." (Lovell 1998: 98) Her social debut was not successful though: to start with, Isabel was aware of embodying a different model of femininity than most girls of her age. She felt overweight and unattractive (Burton 1897, 1: 22-3) and, in addition, she was critical of most of her potential suitors. (Burton 1897, 1: 33) At the end of the season, the Arundells moved to Boulogne, France, where Isabel encountered Richard for the first time in September 1850. As she reveals in her *Romance*, Isabel had been expecting this moment for years, and precisely since Hagar Burton had prophesised her future. For Isabel, Richard embodied simultaneously her ideal of British masculinity and virility ("He is a gentleman in every sense of the word", Burton 1897, 1: 37-9) and a wild exoticism that exceeded any form of social, cultural, ideological and class belonging. Later on, in her *Romance*, she wrote:

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<sup>8</sup> I have elsewhere offered a thorough analysis of Isabel's *Romance* as a fictional version of her life which is interwoven with tensions and ambiguities: see Antosa (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> Encounters with gypsies sometimes including prophecies were a recurrent feature in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature: see Brantlinger 2003 and Bardi 2006.



He is above all men – so noble, so manly, with such a perfect absence of all meanness and hypocrisy. It is true I was captivated at first sight; but his immense talents and adventurous life compelled interest, and a mastermind like his exercises influence over all around it. [...] *he unites the wild, lawless creature and the gentleman* [...]

(Burton 1897, 1: 90-1, my emphasis)

Isabel adopts the same adjectives that she had used to refer to her idealisation of the mystic East that had attracted her in Disraeli's *Tancred* ("wild, lawless") as if Richard were an incarnation of the protagonists of her favourite adventure novel. The appeal was so powerful that it compelled a form of identification: "I wish I were a man – if I were, I would be Richard Burton. But as I am a woman, I would be Richard Burton's wife" (Burton 1897, 1: 91). Isabel expresses her desire for freedom of choice and movement by wishing to be a man, and then specifying which one; however, it is a statement that she soon modifies. The adversative conjunction "But" marks a transition from a state of impossible desire to options left by reality: it follows that only by becoming Richard Burton's wife could Isabel fulfil her dreams and expectations.

It is crucial to point out the ambivalence of the discourse that Isabel carefully constructs in her work, especially in her autobiography. As a young woman, Isabel was, in Jean Burton's words, a "fearless, passionately imaginative, adventure-craving girl of tireless energy and increasingly stubborn independence" (Burton 1942: 16). It is precisely because of this that Isabel managed to go against her parents' – and especially her mother's – opposition to her marriage to Richard. (Lovell 1998: 259-361; Russell 1988: 170). However, her self-confidence notwithstanding, her narrative ostensibly changes from the moment in which she encounters Richard, and outlines her future role of wife: "[...] my ideal of happiness is to be to such a man wife, comrade, friend – everything to him, to sacrifice all for him, to follow his fortunes through his campaigns, through his travels, to any part of the world, and endure any amount of roughing" (Burton 1897, 1: 38-9). Significantly, if she characterises her youth by rebellion and a desire to transgress norms and boundaries in order to find alternative real and imaginative spaces for herself, her plans for her married life seem instead to be dominated by an almost obsessive search to fit into the socially acceptable role of subaltern, and devoted, angel in the house. All her texts are rich in references to her awareness of what becoming a wife entailed. For example, a few weeks before her wedding she compiled a list of seventeen "Rules for my Guidance as a Wife" that would, in her view, turn her into a perfect spouse (Burton 1897, 1: 162-4). As Lovell has commented, her notes demonstrated her awareness not only of the necessity of fulfilling her social duties as a British officer's wife, but also (and above all) of Richard's "less-than-perfect [character] traits" (1998: 361). This confirms that, ironically, the beautiful wife was not simply passive, but had to work hard to be appropriately submissive.

Isabel's early travel accounts, and especially *Inner Life of Syria*, are animated by this ongoing tension between her search for independence and her sense of belonging, her declared adherence to social norms and her need for transgression, her respect for gendered conventions and her underlying search to

cross boundaries. Indeed, as I discuss in the next section, Isabel's early work demonstrates that her life experiences and writings are characterised by several layers of complicity with and resistance against sociocultural and colonial discourses, both in her own country and in those Eastern countries that she had long fictionalised as a refuge from her constraining present circumstances. I start by analyzing the formal features of her text to demonstrate the ways in which she builds a conventional image of herself as the ideal Victorian wife; then, I point out the ambiguities that convey a more ambivalent and controversial figure.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Inner Life of Syria, or Domesticising the Self***

Isabel's first travel account, the two-volume *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land* (1875) tells of the two years that she and Richard spent in Damascus where he was British Consul. Damascus was not their first destination outside England: soon after their marriage, Richard was assigned between 1861 and 1863) to the small consular post in Fernando Po, Western Africa, where he went alone as it was deemed to be a dangerous place, especially for white women; on his return, Isabel and he enjoyed a long journey to Tenerife (1863-1864) and, afterwards, they moved to South America for his second Consulship in Santos, Brazil (1865-1868). Towards the end of his Brazilian post, Richard was becoming depressed and, thanks to Isabel's lobbying activities with Lord Stanley, with the help of her family and friends such as Lord Houghton, he was finally assigned the long-awaited post of Damascus. A number of objections followed Richard's appointment because of his well-known Muslim sympathies and his previous scathing comments about the missionaries in Sierra Leone, which caused a panic among the missionaries in Syria who sought, unsuccessfully, to prevent his appointment to the post (Wright 1891: 23-5; Lovell 1998: 498). He moved there in October 1869 and Isabel joined him on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1869 ("I reached Damascus at sunset on the last day of 1869", Burton 1875, 1: 24).

Isabel carefully crafted her account of the journey in order to make it acceptable for the British market. For example, she constantly emphasised and praised the gendered values of decorum and domesticity, and portrayed herself in the roles of nurse, affectionate wife and charitable woman. According to Sara Mills, this strategy allowed women travelers to reinforce their femininity, while, paradoxically, they moved quite freely in the male-dominated public sphere. (Mills 1991: 22) Isabel's awareness of the expectations that Victorian readers had about women's travel accounts is evident in numerous textual details, starting from the title and subtitle of her account which suggest an intimate approach to the places visited: *Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land: From My*

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<sup>10</sup> This is confirmed by Isabel's numerous letters that she sent anonymously to the *Levant Herald* as "Our correspondent from Damascus", where she more openly voiced her views on the current political situation and took a stand in favour of her husband when he was attacked by both British consul and the local authorities before he was sent away in 1871 (see Lovell 1998: 556-89).

*Private Journal*. Diaries, letters and journals were the privileged forms of writing from women, as they were considered the most suitable form of expression for emotions and feelings. In addition, the diary, or private journal, gave an impression of immediacy, even though the text was usually reworked and reconstructed afterwards.<sup>11</sup> Both Burtons had the habit of filling their diaries with notes and entries that enabled them to make more detailed descriptions when time and circumstances allowed. *Inner Life* has many daily entries and notes from Isabel's own journal that (See Lovell 556-564; Burton 1875, 1: 283)

Maria H. Frawley has pointed out that the diary form was typical of women's writing and changed according to the destinations of Victorian travellers:

The most typical form [...] was [...] the chronologically rendered, diary-like report of the woman's experience in another country. Important variations among travel accounts occur even within this standard form. Curiously, the various manifestations of the simple travel account seem to correspond in a general way to geographical locale or region. For example, the Victorian women who travelled to central and southern Europe tended on the whole to represent themselves as tourists on a cultural mission; the women who travelled to Africa and other regions considered remote from England tended to represent themselves [...] as adventuresses. (Frawley 1994: 36–7)

Isabel was no exception: as I discuss later in this section, in her private journal about her travels in Syria and to Jerusalem she frequently portrays herself as an adventuress who is exploring a world previously unknown to other European women.

The subtitle of her work can be found in the frontispiece of *Inner Life*, where there are also two proverbs and one poem. The frontispiece usually anticipated the contents of the text and influenced readers' expectations and response.

The two proverbs are written in Arabic (in Roman script) with the English translation, and serve to tell the readers that the author has written and travelled together with her husband and not on her own:

- 1) The woman who has her husband with her (i.e. at her back) can turn the moon with her finger.
- 2) The woman without her husband is like a bird with one wing. (Burton 1875, 1: n.p.)

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the contemporary travel writer Frances Minto Elliot clarified in the preface to her *Diary of An Idle Woman in Italy* (1871) that her text was the outcome of a long reworking process: "It may be well to mention that some of these chapters (*now almost entirely rewritten*) have appeared from time to time in some of the leading periodicals (1871: n.p., my emphasis).

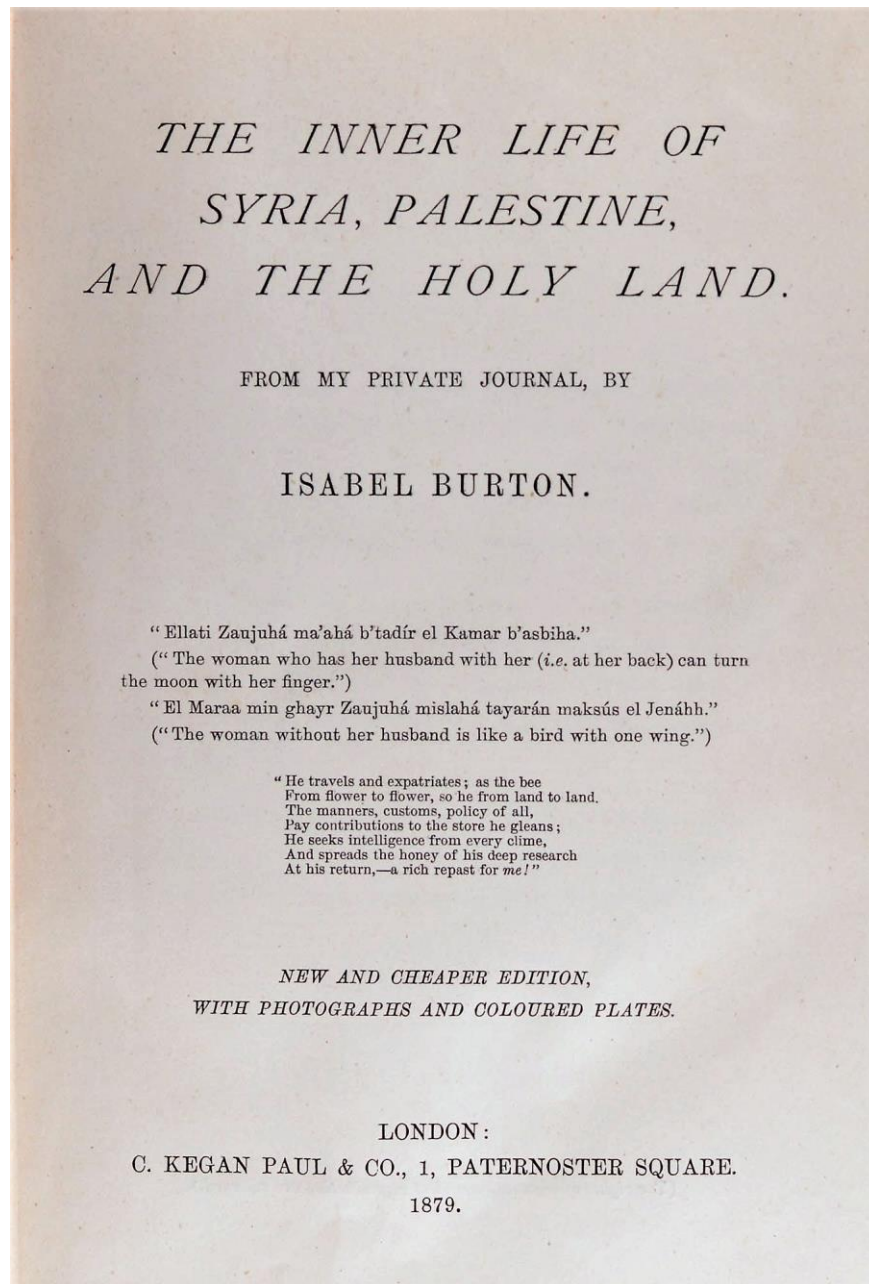


Image 2: The Frontispiece of *Inner Life* by Isabel Burton  
Personal copy

These brief proverbs evoke the Victorian patriarchal ideology that Isabel ostensibly endorses. The semantic core of both phrases rotates around the word “husband”, associated to two lexical opposites: “with” and “without”. In the first case, the reference is the unbounded and unlimited opportunities that a woman can reach together “with” her husband. In Isabel’s case, it is a reference to her ability to write and travel that would have otherwise been precluded as the second proverb makes clear: “without” her husband she, as a woman, would not be able to move autonomously. In other words, Richard was for Isabel her key to access the whole world. This view is reinforced by the short poem that follows:

He travels and expatriates; as the bee  
 From flower to flower, so he from land to land,  
 The manners, customs, policy of all,  
 Pay contributions to the store he gleans;  
 He seeks intelligence from every clime,  
 And spreads the honey of his deep research  
 At his return – a rich repast for me

(Burton 1875, 1: n.p.)

The main subject of the poem is Richard, whose peregrinations are transformed, through a refined metaphor, into a constant source of cultural enrichment for himself and, indirectly, for his wife who patiently inhabits the domestic space waiting for his “return”. These lines echo Coventry Patmore’s well-known poem “Angel in the House”, that celebrates, in Elaine Harnell’s words, the ideal figure of a “domestic woman [...] whose sole window on the world is her husband” (Hartnell 1996: 460). However, the ambiguity of Isabel’s embodiment of this role is conveyed in the implication that she (the Queen bee) then uses the material offered by her husband (the worker bee), to write a successful travel text.

These paratextual elements constitute a preview of the account and at once convey to the readers that the author has been careful not to trespass beyond the sociocultural and textual confines allowed to her. In a similar vein, the Preface testifies to Isabel’s awareness of the limits of what she was allowed to say. The Preface was the space where women travellers could explain the reasons for their journey and the motivations for their writing. Often, Prefaces explicitly declared conformity with Victorian norms of women’s intellectual inferiority to men, as the authors diminished the importance and epistemological value of their work. This is certainly the case with *Inner Life*, which begins thus: “This book contains little History, Geography, or Politics; no Science, Ethnography, Botany, Geology, Zoology, Mineralogy, or Antiquities [...] this book contains things women will like to know” (Burton 1875, 1: vii). Isabel also makes clear from the very beginning that she has made a careful selection of material deemed appropriate for inclusion: “[...] where I have seen good I shall speak of it with pleasure, and where I have seen the reverse, I shall try to be silent” (Burton 1875, 1: 3). Soon after, the author rejects the views of those who have deemed her to be a skillful writer, as if this were an unpleasant accusation: “I have been often accused of writing as if it were intended as an address for the Royal Geographical Society, that is, in a quasi-professional way. I conclude that this happened because I always wrote with and for my husband, and under his direction” (Burton 1875, 1: vii).

In a similar vein she downplays any enthusiasm she might have had for travelling, denies any active explorations of her own, and describes her journey as motivated by and limited to wifely duty: “I have followed my husband [...] gleaned only woman’s lore” (Burton 1875, 1: vii). The verb “follow” identifies her as a subaltern figure to her husband, as she demonstrates that she has not chosen autonomously when and where she has travelled. At this point, she clarifies the motivations of her writing: “I hope that the daily jottings of my

private journal will yield a scratch of the inner life of the Holy Land in general, and of Damascus in particular. I wish to convey an idea of the life which an Englishwoman may make for herself in the East” (Burton 1875, 1: vii). The objectives of the author are two-fold: to show Western people the life of the East and to become a useful guide for those British women who intend to go there. The reference to the national identity of her female readers (“Englishwoman”) is crucial in her text as it focuses on a shared, nationalist sense of belonging; in other words, Isabel makes clear her sociocultural distance from the people she meets and the places she visits. Moreover, her adoption of expressions like “yield a sketch” and “convey an idea” strategically diminishes the extent of her narrative project, by demonstrating an apparent insecurity that is, however, deemed necessary for her to mark her distance from more authoritative, didactic and scientific texts authored by men.

In addition, in her Preface, Isabel adopts another typical strategy used by women travellers: the *captatio benevolentiae* whereby women authors asked for their readers’ indulgence or patience for any potential textual faults in their writing: “I have found it difficult to avoid being too personal, or egotistical, or too frank, but I do not know how to tell my story in any other way, and I hope that in exchange for my experiences my readers would be indulgent” (Burton 1875, 1: vii). On the face of it, her intention is to make readers aware of the difficult challenges that she has encountered in the writing process. However she is also obliquely deflecting potential accusations of having transgressed normative models of femininity. As mentioned above, these were stylistic and textual strategies that were deemed necessary by readers and publishers if women were to publish their work and to receive a positive critical reception. As Isabel well knew, favourable reviews were vital if she were to establish herself as an author. As Lovell notes, *Inner Life* received very good reviews from both male and female readers, including Lady Ann Blunt and Charles Algernon Swinburne and Isabel cultivated her supporters by “writing to thank every reviewer” (1998: 614).<sup>12</sup> It was indeed its success that encouraged her to write her second travel account (Burton 1879, 1: 1).

### Synesthetic Views

On the face of it, *Inner Life* fulfils the expectations created in the paratext. The account is written in a simple and dialogic style. In the first four chapters, Isabel describes the long journey from England to Syria; then after settling down, in the fifth chapter she addresses her readers as if she is talking to a female friend who has gone to visit her in Damascus: “Reader, I am going to ask you to suppose that you have come to Damascus to pay me a visit, and that I am now your hostess and cicerone.” (Burton 1875, 1: 39) In so doing, she guides her imaginative female

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<sup>12</sup> Swinburne wrote to Isabel to express his “warmest congratulations” for its “general triumph [...] to judge from reviews” (1959). One reader called Mrs Major praised her as follows: “Your dream [...] I am pleased with. It was so good, and suited to the times” (Major 1877).

friend around Damascus, showing her the streets, the bazaars, the harems and Turkish baths, and inviting her to observe the *Haj*. From the fifteenth chapter onwards, Isabel pretends that her friend has left (Burton 1875, 1: 204) and moves to a more dynamic series of excursions and adventures that she and her husband undertake in the desert. In this second part, there is a shift of role from authoritative guide to the city and its mysterious traditions to adventuress who, under the guidance of her husband, frequently cross dresses as a boy and passes as Richard's son. The second volume of the account is about their pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

As Morris has discussed, women travellers are considered observers of the world and their texts were expected to be "rich in description, remarkable in details" (Morris and O'Connor 1996: xix; Robinson 1990: x). Isabel is no exception:

Suddenly, when least prepared, I should gaze, as it were out of the window [...] the abrupt descent of the mountain [...] and upon the plain the city of Damascus, lying in the desert at my feet. I should behold my Pearl, the Garden of Eden, the Promised Land, my beautiful white City with her swelling domes and tapering minarets, her glittering golden crescents set in green of every shade, sparkling with fountains and streams, the Abana [Barada River] rushing through and watering the oasis. The river valley spreads its green carpet almost thirty miles around the city and is dotted with white villages. All around that again, like another or outside frame, and as if nature had drawn the line between green and yellow like a ruler, are the reeking sands of the sunburnt Desert. In the far horizon to the east are the distant hills and ghostly, misty cones, backed by the red and purple of the setting sun.

(Burton 1875, 1: 24-25)

Such descriptions turn Isabel, in Mary Louise Pratt's definition, into a "verbal painter", who is able to transpose what she sees into words. In discussing the work of explorers like Richard (rather than Isabel) Burton, Pratt emphasised three main aspects concerning "verbal painting", that in her view "create qualitative and quantitative value" for their achievements:

First [...] the landscape is *aestheticised*. The sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground, symmetries [...] and so forth. Second, *density of meaning* in the passage is sought. The landscape is represented as extremely rich in material and semantic substance. This density is achieved especially through a huge number of adjectival modifiers [...] The third strategy at work [is] the relation of *mastery* predicated between the seer and the seen.

(Pratt 1992: 204-5, emphasis in the text)

The landscape is depicted as if it were a painting, as the references to the "window" and the "frame" suggest. Moreover, the adoption of the objective "dotted" recalls a painting technique, while nature itself contributes to the creation of the landscape as if it "had drawn the line". Inside this verbal frame, every element occupies its own place, that is either foregrounded or located in the background, as testified by the spatial expressions: "upon the plain", "all around that", "in the far horizon" and "backed by". The long list of adjectives ("abrupt",

“swelling”, “tapering”, “glittering”, “sparkling” “setting”) and chromatisms (“white”, “golden”, “green”, “shade”, “yellow”, “red”, “purple”) make the picture dynamic by creating a vertical, in-depth movement for the eyes of the beholders. In this way, they provide “density of meaning” by conveying the richness of the material and semantic substance of the description. All these elements convey the mastery of the author’s perspective. Even if Isabel is not writing an exploration narrative, she nonetheless adopts a strategy common to exploration texts because – especially for her female readers – she is describing a place that few women until then had had the chance to see. This technique is then used more consistently in the sections about their excursions to the desert and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. However, it also allowed Isabel to make unknown, exotic landscapes familiar to her readers at home, as it helped to reduce potentially disruptive and exotic elements and contained them in a normalised, pictorial frame, according to the conventions of the picturesque.

A similar strategy is adopted to describe local people. Isabel portrays a microcosm inhabited by a variety of unknown passers-by encountered in the street. In many ways, she complies with what Morris has written about the ways in which women travellers described people: “often [women travellers] are storytellers, weaving tales about the people they encounter [...] the women approach their journeys with [...] compassion, and empathy for the lives of others” (Morris and O’Connor 1996: xix-xx). Isabel frequently tells stories or anecdotes about unknown people; at other times, she focuses on their dresses, gestures and attitudes. For example, she describes a local seller as follows:

We will now pass down a narrow lane joining two bazaars [...] and squatting on the counter a shriveled little old man sits under his turban, with his palsied chin shaking like the aspen leaves. You see how smilingly he salutes me [...] Being fond of ladies’ society, he will saturate our handkerchiefs and clothes with his perfumes [...] He is not as poor as he looks [...] he has 15 wives and 102 children, and he would still like, he says, to marry again

(Burton 1875, 1: 76).

This short depiction is dense with lively details and replicates some of the strategies discussed above. The dominating feature is the masterly gaze that Isabel as guide provides her readers, both in anticipating the little old man’s behaviour (“he will”) and in telling her readers background information about him (“He is not as poor as he looks”).

Another crucial feature of her accounts is the focus on the senses: the environment described by Isabel is rich in perfumes (as in the previous description, for example), smells, sounds, taste and, as already mentioned picturesque views. What readers experience is a multisensorial, embodied journey in which all the five senses play a pivotal part, as in the following passage: “you first *see* a belt of something dark lining the horizon [...] then you *enter* by degrees under the trees, the orchards, the gardens; you *smell* the water from a far like a thirsty horse, and you *hear* its gurgling [...] you *scent*, and then *see*, the fruit – the limes, figs, citron, and water-melon” (Burton 1875, 1: 238, my emphasis). Readers are thus invited to enjoy a synesthetic, climactic experience that turns the Oriental landscape into an Edenic Garden where everything seems to be fecund, rich and available.



### Subversive Adventures in the East

*Inner Life* explores a number of different aspects concerning the cultural traditions in Syria, ranging from the polychromatic beauty of Eastern landscapes to the diverse religions and rites (Burton 1875, 1: 372), from the different ethnicities of the inhabitants (Burton 1875, 1: 101-4), to the autochthonous practices such as cuisine, modes of dress, the application of henna to hands and hair (Burton 1875, 1: 79) and smoking narghiles (Burton 1875, 1: 82). There are abundant references to Oriental music, dances and songs (Burton 1875, 1: 129), and several anecdotes about local disputes in small villages around Damascus (Burton 1875, 1: 318), and bigger conflicts between different ethnic groups. On the whole, her narrative tone follows the established strategy of reducing the exotic unknown into a familiar, comforting frame.

Most of her stories are told with an apparent light and frivolous narrative tone, which belies the most subversive and daring parts of her account. These include her frequent visits to harems, and her explorations in the desert where she visited ancient tombs and classified archaeological sites with her husband. Western women's visits to Eastern harems were an increasing phenomenon in the nineteenth century, so that "harem literature" became a subgenre of travel writing (Lewis 2005: 48). According to Reina Lewis, "as a topic, the harem sold books [...] publishers knew it, booksellers knew it, readers knew it and authors knew it" (Lewis 2004: 12). Books about harems were exclusively written by women, as they were the only ones who could access them. Isabel introduces this topic in the first pages of her account, thus stimulating curiosity in her readers.<sup>13</sup> However, as Richard Phillips has emphasised, it also had another strategic consequence: "[It] functions rather like the warning that there will be explicit sex scenes in a television programme: while some viewers switch off, others watch more attentively. The content is sexualised more than it might otherwise have been" (Phillips 1999a: 253). Thus, Isabel warns her readers while justifying herself at the same time: "[...] every one of my friends has begged of me to describe the inner life of the harim; a minute detail of some parts of the domestic life of all classes of harim [...] would not be suitable for English girls, and I wish to write a book which may be read by everybody, and which may appear on every table sans peur et sans reproche" (Burton 1875, 1: 3-4). The reference to her friends who "begged" her to write about harems is the key justification; in addition, Isabel explicitly clarifies that she has framed the material in order to make it "suitable for English girls", thus diminishing the subversive, sexual potential of her narrative material<sup>14</sup>. The connection between Eastern harems and eroticism is rooted in a long-standing association between Oriental riches and lust and

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion about the representations of harems by male and female authors see for example Reina Lewis (n.d.).

<sup>14</sup> A similar strategy was used by Isabel in her preface to Richard's *Exploration of the Highlands of Brazil*, when she preannounced the theme of polygamy: "Having now justified myself, and given a friendly warning to a fair or gentle reader, - the rest must take care of themselves" (Burton 1869: viii).

epitomised by the stereotypical vision of the Orient as an exciting but dangerous realm which is geographically and sexually distant from Britain. Generations of travellers and explorers had reinforced popular gendered stereotypes of the sexually promiscuous exotic Oriental females, who were portrayed and represented as immodest, active creature of sexual pleasure who held the key to a myriad of mysterious erotic delights.<sup>15</sup>

The perturbing images of harems as sites of excess and perversions are transformed by Isabel into more comfortable domestic, de-sexualised environments. She conceptualises the harem as a middle-class home, clear in the following description of the women's daily activities: "They go out very little [...] Their lives are therefore a round of household duties, after which they dress, receive their harim friends thus, or they ride to the Sük and buy trifles." (Burton 1875, 1: 158). Oriental women's everyday life was thus not so dissimilar from their Western counterparts: domestic duties and social rites took place within the restricted space of the harem, which was divided from the public sphere by "the boundary gate, which separates them from the world" (Burton 1875, 1: 148). Even her description of the women who inhabited the harem goes against the stereotypical representation that for centuries had inhabited the Western imagination, as they are depicted as innocent but ugly and inclined to age early.<sup>16</sup> In order to emphasise their physical ugliness, Isabel concentrates on individual body parts and describes them by using synecdoches (Burton 1875, 1: 146). They are thus dehumanised and turned into soulless beings. In this way, Isabel carefully de-sensualises the erotic and perturbing image of the East to show that she had not succumbed to its exotic fascination and dangerous allure, but remained immune to its potential for transculturation<sup>17</sup>. Even if she travelled in a place that was socio-

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<sup>15</sup> Reina Lewis explained that Oriental women were diminished by Western men in many ways: "[they were] diminished by the West in ways that were sexual (the lascivious odalisque), temporal (the Orient as a zone out of time locked in a pre-modern past), social (unable to distinguish Ottoman class difference, Oriental women were pictured as either sultans or slaves), and cultural (the ignorant, lazy harem woman) (Lewis 2004: 7). On Orientalism and sexuality see also Said (1978); Hyam (1990); Boehmer (1995); Phillips (2006); and Kabbani (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Melman explains that the sulphuric atmosphere of the Turkish bath was constructed as a metaphoric hell as it was conceived as the main reason forwarded the deterioration of the skin and as a consequence of the entire nervous system. In this way, in the critic's words: "unknowingly perhaps, the nineteenth-century 'moralists' echo the rationalist climatologists of the Enlightenment, who associated character in behaviour with climate, geography, and physical environment" (Melman 1992: 135). Significantly, this climactic interpretation of sexual 'perversions' recalls Richard Burton's own mapping of the Sotadic Zone in his "Terminal Essay" (see Antosa 2010; 2012; Phillips 1999b).

<sup>17</sup> Pratt defines transculturation as a process of negotiation and intercultural selection which is characteristic of the contact zone. It is a social space in which different cultures encounter one another and clash, by generating symmetrical relations of domination and subordination (Pratt 1992: 4). Usually the subordinate group tended to absorb behaviours from the dominant one; there are however a few exceptions, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839) and Jane Digby (1803-1881) who, as Isabel pointed out, "lived of their own choice a thoroughly

culturally constructed as the epitome of moral corruption, she managed to construct a narrative where the superiority of conventional Victorian ideology and morality could prevail. These strategies are similar to Isabel's censorious editing of her husband's unabridged translation of *The Arabian Nights*. (Burton 1886). According to Rana Kabbani, Isabel "rewrote for the 'angel of the house' what [Richard] had produced for the gentleman's club" (Kabbani 2008: 7).

A similar move is carried out when justifying her habit of dressing as a local. As the wife of the master of disguise who had managed to reach the holy cities of El-Medina and Mecca in indigenous dress (Burton 1855-6), she justifies her decision to dress in local clothes as necessary to deal with the climate. She also advises her readers to use particular pieces of clothing, like the *izâr*, the *mandil* and the *kufiyeh*, as "it gives the sun off the head and the nape of the neck, which are the dangerous places – it takes the place of umbrella, hat [...] It keeps out wind, cold, and rain" (Burton 1875, 2: 76). She even suggests that they should be used in Europe, thus trying to neutralise their potential transgressive exoticism. In addition, she points out how dressing as a local is a matter of safety; otherwise, she suggests, it is better to be escorted by the local *Kawas*. However, Isabel's 'real' dressing up occurs when she travels in the desert: "I always wore the men's dress on our expeditions in the desert [...] I mean the dress of the Arab men" (Burton 1897, 2: 398). Lady Hester Stanhope was a notable, albeit scandalous, precedent. She had chosen to dress in native garb on several occasions, including in her crossing of the desert to visit the city of Palmyra (Stanhope 1845; 1846). Isabel tries to reduce the impact of her double transgression (racial and gendered) by declaring that it happened during her excursion to Palmyra, where she was commonly mistaken as a boy due to the ambiguity of her clothes. She justifies her choice of dressing as a local boy, and sometimes as a groom, as a matter of security for her. She explained that the desert was a dangerous, wild place full of potentially hostile Bedouins, who gave women scarce consideration. Men, even young boys, enjoyed instead a better status: "As *such* I shall meet with respect only second to the consul himself. As *such* I shall be admitted everywhere [...] So *attired* I could do what I liked, go into all the places which women are not deemed worthy to see, and receive all the respect and consideration that would be paid to the son of a great man" (Burton 1875, 1: 224, my emphasis). The anaphoric reiteration of "as such", followed by "so attired", emphasises the significant change of status that Isabel especially enjoyed while passing as the British Consul's young son in a challenging role-play. This strategy allowed her to access the real 'inner life' of places that were otherwise precluded to women.

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Eastern life" (Burton 1897, 1: 361). Although she was a very good friends with Jane Digby, she nonetheless criticised the fact that she married the Bedouin Medjuel el Mezzâb, in a Muslim ceremony and that she spends six months of the year in the desert. In her view, Jane's transculturation is accompanied by a racial regression caused by her mixed marriage that leads her to become "more Bedawin than the Bedawi" (Burton 1875, 1: 470). Such criticism however might hide another anxiety: Isabel might have feared being compared to Jane Digby because of the "Arab features" of her husband: Burton was nicknamed the 'white nigger' when he was in the East India Company also because his ability to mix freely with the natives (Antosa 2012: 100-17).

Cross-dressing and passing are two of several transgressive practices that Isabel adopts. Her definition of herself as a travelling wife is a case in point:

*A traveller's wife must cultivate certain capabilities – ride well, walk, swim, shoot, and learn to defend herself if attacked, so as not to be entirely dependent upon the husband; also to make the bed, arrange the tent, cook the dinner if necessary, wash the clothes by the river side, mend and spread them to dry – for his comfort [...] sleep on the ground with the saddle for a pillow, and generally learn to rough it, and do without comforts*

(Burton 1875, 1: 232, my emphasis).

Alongside more traditional requirements, some of the capabilities listed by Isabel sound atypical and quite controversial for Victorian women, especially shooting and defending themselves, though several episodes assert her ability to do just that (for example, during the Greek attack on their camp site near Nazareth; Burton 1875, 2: 220).. It is worth remembering that she had learnt to fence before her marriage. While, as Lovell speculates, she might have wanted to impress Richard (Lovell 1998: 343), there was a more pragmatical reason, as she narrates in her *Romance*: “To defend Richard when he and I are attacked in the wilderness together” (Burton 1897, 1: 55).

## Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the textual strategies and fictional tropes that Isabel Burton adopted in her first successful travel account, *Inner Life*, in order to combine two opposing models of female subjectivity that circulated in Victorian society: the first, the submissive “Angel in the House” was imposed on women, while the second, that of the fearless, transgressive traveller to the East, developed from travel accounts by women who transgressed gender norms of the period. I have proposed that we call this hybrid figure the “Travelling Angel in the House.” The analysis of the stylistic and narrative features that Isabel used in her text has shown the extent to which she was aware of the expectations that readers and publishers nurtured towards texts and accounts written by women, which occupied a contested space in the male-dominated publishing industry. She thus strove to comply with these expectations, by fictionalising her experiences, and interspersing her text with formal strategies such as self-diminishment, justification, and an informal narrative tone focused on the more intimate aspects of Eastern life. In so doing, Isabel strategically positioned herself within a more traditional gendered sphere, reinforced by her process of purification of the Western exotic and sensual representation of the East to adapt it to the “taste” of upper-class English women readers. However, Isabel’s life-long fascination for the exotic, her attraction to the “wild, lawless” Eastern spaces, and her unusual skills and abilities such as riding, fencing, shooting and passing as a young man are features that enabled her to exceed her gender role and national identity. As I have argued, she thus projected herself into an ambivalent space animated by unstable tensions that, ultimately, unveil an ambiguous complicity with and resistance to both colonial discourses and constructions of femininity.

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