

“YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND” AND OTHER FICTIONS:
RELUCTANT POSSESSIONS IN RICHARD BURTON’S “ALADDIN”

By
Dan Fang

Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in
English

August, 2011

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:
Rachel Teukolsky
Dana Nelson

The Arabian Nights Entertainments is a work of fantasy, mystery, and the imagination. In it we find bewitching princesses, strange beasts, terrifying jinnis, and epic voyages; from it we draw stories and images that fill our culture with wonder. Since its introduction to the West by Antoine Galland in 1704, stories from the *Nights* have been rewritten and reworked into everything from children's stories to operas, musicals to movies. Of all of the stories from the *Nights*—which consist of more than 400 that a clever girl, Scheherazade, tells to her husband the Sultan over a thousand and one nights in order to stay her execution—the stories of Aladdin and his magical lamp, Ali Baba and his forty thieves, and Sinbad and his seven voyages are arguably the most popular. And since the production of Disney's 1992 animated feature film, "Aladdin" has become perhaps the most popular of the tales in Western culture.

The popularity of "Aladdin" is not a late 20th Century phenomenon, however. Aside from versions of Scheherazade's own story, "Aladdin" was the first to be incorporated into the British theater.¹ Throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries, "Aladdin" has been incorporated into countless collections of children's bedtime stories, picture books both cheaply accessible and gloriously exquisite, even into handbooks for English instruction in grammar schools. The story, which tells of a boy who rises from rags to riches, gets the girl, and defeats the evildoer, all with the help of a jinni in a magical lamp, doubtless appeals to a wide public as so many Western fairy tales—like "Cinderella" or "Sleeping Beauty"—do. It speaks to some of our wildest fantasies: unending riches, limitless power, and the world *literally* in the palm of the hand.

For all its popularity, however, "Aladdin" is a tale rather scholastically neglected. Part of the reason for this is perhaps precisely its popularity: Robert Irwin, in *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* condenses the discussion of "Aladdin" to a single paragraph, declaring that "there is no need here to follow the development of this famous story any further" (185). Another part of

¹ John O'Keefe transformed it into the popular pantomime in 1788.

the reason—probably a weightier one—is the fact that “Aladdin” is a so-called “orphan” tale, or a tale that Galland inserted into his *Mille et une nuits* with no discernable origin text or an idea of where the story might fit into the sequence of the thousand nights. As such, in subsequent translations, “Aladdin” is either left out of the collection altogether or tacked on at the very end, as a story that could not be left out for the audience but could not be put in by the translator. As such, it escapes critical attention, much of which focuses on the larger structure of the *Nights*, particularly Scheherazade’s narrative function.² Even though an original manuscript for the story has since been discovered and acts as the justification for Burton’s translation, its placement within the structure of the *Nights* is insecure at best: Burton himself includes the tale not in his ten-volume *Thousand Nights and One Night*, but in one of the supplemental volumes to the collection.

The narrative structures of *The Arabian Nights* is indeed an essential issue: as a story told about a collection of stories, and containing stories within stories—not to mention as a set of stories that travelled across continents and centuries—the *Nights* necessarily figures as a commentary on the variety of modes and purposes that story-telling might achieve. An exclusive focus on narrative, however—even a focus that is grounded in a discussion on imperialism, which most criticisms realize admirably—leaves out the examination of what the stories might stand for in a certain period and for a certain culture. The immense popularity of certain stories pushes for a deeper exploration of *why* they were so popular just at that moment and just in that locale.

For this study I will focus on the translation of “Aladdin” by Sir Richard Burton, one of the most famous orientalist of the Victorian period. His translation is particularly open to

² Ros Ballaster, for example, who in *Fabulous Orient*s mentioned “Aladdin” as one of her first encounters with *The Arabian Nights*, drops the story altogether in favor of Scheherazade’s narrative.

analysis, since his versions of eastern texts often stir discussion due to their problematic nature, both in his highly stylized language and their frank presentation of sexual and other customs. His presentation of “Aladdin” is especially interesting, as it was the first English translation of the story that had a basis in an Arabian manuscript rather than Galland’s French. His inclusion of the story to the *Nights* catered to the desires of so many Victorians who were clamoring for their favorite stories.³ The first appearance of a “literary” “Aladdin” in the Victorian period demands the questioning of the purposes it served and the needs it met for the Victorian public. And, as “Aladdin” separates itself yet again from “Ali Baba” and “Sinbad” because of its revolution around *one object*, it deserves an analysis of the context of its appearance, in an era so concerned with inundating objects and objectified persons. Aladdin’s Lamp is not only an object in this time but an arena in which both the anxiety concerning objects and the fantasy surrounding them could be more fully explored.

The study of Victorian objects is not a novel feat. Elaine Freedgood, in *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, pushes for a reading of commodities that is both internally figural and literally, historically meaningful. Jeff Nunokawa, in *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel*, deconstructs the notion of absolute possession and explores Victorian anxieties concerning property. Andrew Miller’s *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* posits the Victorian relation to property as one of both desire and power, in which the object may retaliate with its own lack and frustrate the satisfaction of desire. And John Plotz, in *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, analyzes both objects and narratives in their portability and failure thereof, from England outwards and from Greater Britain inwards. Their works are all eminently useful in the

³ Burton noted in a preface to *The Supplemental Nights*, “Not a few readers of Mr. John Payne’s admirable translation...complained that they had bought it in order to see Ali Baba, Aladdin, and others translated into Classical English and that they much regretted the absence of their old favorites” (qtd in Cooperson 268).

study of a Lamp that is both desirable and anxiety-inducing. However, the study of “Aladdin” requires a wider examination of the various relationships between property, possession, and desire.

This requirement is due in part to the fact that “Aladdin” is an imported story, which allows for more imaginative dealings between person and thing. Unlike the largely realist novels of Eliot, Dickens, and Gaskell, in which things have, at best, a quasi-magical reality to their owners, “Aladdin” allows the object to take on *actual* magic. In the story, a Chinese boy encounters an African Magician who takes him to an enchanted cave and asks him to retrieve a Lamp that could bring unimaginable riches. Aladdin retrieves the Lamp successfully and becomes its temporary owner when the Magician abandons both. Through the use of the Jinni who resides within the Lamp, Aladdin climbs meteorically through classes, turning from a pauper to a merchant to the richest man in the land. He uses the treasures to gain the hand of the Princess of China, and the two survive attempts of both the Magician and his brother to rob the Lamp. Through all of this, the Lamp is never without enchantment: the Jinni can appear and disappear in the blink of an eye, bringing with him treasures from the farthest corners of the earth. At the same time, however, “Aladdin” manages to escape its fairy-tale trappings, returning again and again to market transactions that invoke imperial plundering. Aladdin’s Lamp is an object in its own right and a synecdoche for the story, traveling as both from hand to hand, gaining momentum in significance as it goes. The object that is the Lamp negotiates possession and personification, metamorphosis and stasis, and causes much anxiety in its reluctance to adhere to human systems of usage.

I: Confounding Objects and the Attempt to Control Them

One reason Victorians were so concerned with objects lies with the way in which tangible things were overtaken by intangible wealth. As much as the Victorians gloried in their things, possessions more often than not come into the picture only to call attention to their own loss. Jeff Nunokawa, in *The Afterlife of Property*, calls attention to “not only the possible, but the inevitable loss of property in the nineteenth-century imagination” (7). Marx’s 1867 publication of *Capital* suggests that this inevitable loss is indeed “the fate of property in a free market” (7). More and more, for Victorians, a treasure hoard is represented not by jewels and precious metals, but by investments and capital. Moreover, these investments and capital work in seemingly mysterious ways. Capital can achieve what objects cannot—that is, reproduce itself; and this reproduction gives it, as Marx says, “an occult quality of being able to add value to itself, [which] brings forth living offspring, or, at the very least, lays golden eggs” (*Capital* Ch. 4).

In the magical world of “Aladdin,” however, objects *do* achieve this occult quality. Like goose that lays golden eggs, the Lamp is capable of producing, in and of itself—that is, even without transactions of capital—limitless treasures. The Lamp, then, becomes something that is both mysterious in its inner workings and incalculable in its actual worth. Indeed, a large part of Aladdin’s beginnings concerns dealing with objects that have indecipherable origin and unmeasurable value. When he first discovers the Jinni, Aladdin asks for some food, which the Jinni brings upon “a mighty fine tray and precious of price, for that ‘twas all in virginal silver and upon it stood twelve golden platters...two silvern cups and as many black jacks” (Burton 719). Aladdin tries to trade these for more food, but loses out—at an astonishing rate—to a tricky peddler; for “neither [he nor his mother] knew whether the tray was or was not valuable, for never in their born days had they looked upon aught like it” (719), yet Aladdin tries to trick the

peddler by saying to him, “Thou wottest what be its worth” (721). Eventually he learns the truth from a kindly goldsmith—that the plates are worth seventy times what he was paid for them—and proceeds on the path to learn the true value of what he originally knew as a “priceless” lamp. He now associates with merchants instead of scapegraces, “asking about matters of merchandise and learning the price of investments and so forth,” as well as trying to figure out the worth of the jewels he brought back from the Lamp’s cave.

Even as Aladdin struggles to determine the very indeterminate price of the Lamp and its treasures, the very lavishness of all of the above makes in large part the very appeal of the story. The narrative itself becomes, for the reader, Aladdin’s magic Lamp: it showcases the vastness of the Enchanted Treasury from whence the Lamp comes. Even more opulent is a description of the palace that the Jinni constructs for Aladdin:

[The building was] of jasper and alabaster, Sumaki-marble and mosaic-work. Then the Slave led him into the treasury which was full of all manner of gold and silver and costly gems, not to be counted or computed, priced or estimated. Thence to another place, where Alaeddin saw all requisites for the table, plates and dishes, spoons and ladles, basins and covers, cups and tasses, the whole of precious metal: thence to the kitchen, where they found the kitcheners provided with their needs and cooking batteries, likewise golden and silvern; thence to a warehouse piled up with chests full-packed of royal raiment, stuffs that captured the reason, such as gold-wrought brocades from India and China and kimcobs or orfrayed cloths; thence to many apartments replete with appointments which beggar description; thence to the stables containing coursers whose like was not to be met with amongst the kings of the universe; and lastly, they went to the harness-rooms all hung with housings, costly saddles and other furniture, everywhere studded with pearls and precious stones. (Burton 756-7)

The description of the palace is a feast for the imagination, just as the actual palace is a feast for Aladdin’s eyes. Even within the marvels of the Palace, however, we note the anxiety concerning the control, valuation, and knowledge of the objects. The treasures in the treasury are “not to be counted or computed, priced or estimated”; the warehouse holds stuff that “[captures] the reason”; the appointments of the apartments “beggar description”; and the horses in the stables

are “not to be met with amongst the kings of the universe.” The very riches that the Lamp provides its holder escape the grasp of the holder.

Nor is Aladdin the only one who has difficulty determining the true value of a thing. Even the Magician, who is supposed to have a good grasp of all things magical, yet gives Aladdin a ring of “protection” that, apparently unknown to himself, contained a lesser Jinni (it is the Jinni of the ring who saves Aladdin, on two occasions, from the evil schemes of the Magician—first, when the Magician traps Aladdin in the cave and leaves him for death, and again, when the Magician steals away the Lamp along with the palace and the princess). Burton makes a comment in a footnote that “The Magician evidently had mistaken the powers of the Ring. This is against all probability and possibility, but on such abnormal traits are tales and novels founded” (Burton 1016). This is the comment that Burton repeats again about Aladdin’s carelessly leaving the Lamp, which allowed it to be stolen: “Nothing can be more improbable than this detail, but upon such abnormal situations, even in our most modern ‘Society-novels,’ depend and the cause is clear—without them there would be no story” (1027). He feels necessary to point out, as well, that even the narrative itself gets confused about the value of things: at one point, the gold platters change into silver ones. On this, Burton says, “This is one of the many changes, contradictions, and confusions which are inherent in Arab stories” (1019).

In these footnotes we note two divergent strains in dealing with the worth of objects: on one hand, to rescue the human actors and reinstate their absolute control and knowledge of things; and on the other hand, to relegate the confusion about things to an oriental context. The pretense of control for human characters, then—or at least the control accorded to the *male* human characters—necessarily turn them into Europeans in the scheme of the story. Burton’s analogizing “Aladdin” to “our most modern ‘Society-novels’ already sets this transformation

into motion. When the Sultan marries his daughter to the vizier's son, Aladdin commands the Jinni to bring the newlyweds to his chamber. After tossing the groom into the water-closet, Aladdin lies next to the Princess, but "a drawn sword separating man and maid" (Burton 1022). This act Burton analogizes to an "old knightly practice" (1022), thoroughly westernizing the scene.⁴ The abeyance of sexual congress becomes matter-of-fact, a throwback to the chivalrous knight and his chaste maiden. When the Magician steals away the palace and the princess and Aladdin plans her rescue, Burton insists on having Aladdin be the one to "[unsheath] his sword and [slay] the villain" (782), for "Galland makes the Princess poison the Maghrabi, which is not *gallant*" (1029, my emphasis). The easy wordplay nevertheless reins the story back into the tradition of European knights, who can casually commit murder in order to regain what is theirs.

So it is that Aladdin becomes the chivalrous knight of medieval Europe. Meanwhile, the African Magician takes on the likeness of the imperialist who travels (toward the east, no less) to a foreign land in order to plunder it of its riches. He attempts to manipulate the native inhabitants that he might gain the object that would make him "[unsurpassed] by any man upon earth, either in high degree or in wealth and opulence" (Burton 712). If we were to substitute "high degree or wealth and opulence" for "knowledge," the African Magician might become Said's Burton, who is "the highly idiosyncratic master of Oriental knowledge" (196). As Burton, according to Said, attempts to become powerful through his footnotes, in which he imposes the "system of rules, codes, and concrete epistemological habits" of Empire onto the "complexities of Oriental life" (196), so the Magician attempts to become powerful over other lands through becoming a "past-master in all such knowledge" (Burton 712) on the occult sciences. This "master," however, yet fails to retain the Lamp, as Aladdin robs him of it again and again.

⁴ Moreover, in doing so, he alludes to the work of folklorist W. A. Clouston, who traced the "Aladdin" storyline to European folklores about thankful beasts. See *Popular Tales and Fictions: Their Migrations and Transformations* (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1887).

The failure of retention in no way signifies any drop in usage. Each man who holds the Lamp—even the Magician’s brother, who only wants to hold the Lamp—asks the Jinni for bigger and better treasures than the man before. The excessive use of the lamp, however, and the unending cataloguing of the treasures that it brings, only serves to strengthen the powerlessness of its holders. These treasures—and the Lamp itself— are resistant to being categorized and valued, quantified and understood. Moreover, the very nature of the Lamp points to the frailty of ownership. Part of the magic of the Lamp is its portability, its ability to retain significance despite the change in its owner. There is always a Jinni in the Lamp, who is always at ready to serve he who rubs the Lamp. And the Jinni of the Lamp has one standard line: “Here am I, thy Slave and Slave to whoso holdeth the Lamp; and not I alone, but all the Slaves of the Wonderful Lamp which thou hendest in hand” (Burton 718), which he repeats to every person who ever holds the Lamp. There is no chance of the failure in portability such as John Plotz describes of Eliot’s Mrs. Tulliver, who can only imagine her possessions to be hers rather than part of the larger transaction of commodities (8). The Lamp, which serves the same purpose to all men, counters the notion that any one of them could have an exclusive relationship to it. For the possessors of property in Victorian England—“the first people to be so closely identified with their belongings” (Deborah Cohen, qtd in Plotz 2)—such a notion might have been terrifying. The Lamp, as an object, moves past both its social history and cultural biography; it asserts “implacable demands” (Pinney 145) to every one of its owners, presents a will of its own that is apart from a subject-object relationship, abides by the same set of codes no matter whose hands hold it.

As it travels from hand to hand, the Lamp begins to take on more and more personality—that is, the Jinni begins to wield more and more independence. When Galland’s Aladdin tells the

Jinni to build him a palace, he specifies, down to the horses in the stable, what he requires of the Jinni. Burton's Aladdin, however, leaves everything to the Jinni's own design (756). In some instances the Jinni appears before Aladdin "without the Lamp being rubbed" (739).

Such increase in agency of the Jinni—even the presence of the Jinni in the Lamp to begin with—recalls the tradition of magical thinking, or imbuing objects with magical agency. In 1871, E. B. Tylor published his two-volume *Primitive Culture*, in which he discusses various instantiations of animism and declares,

Certain high savage races distinctly hold, and a large proportion of other savages and barbarian races make a more or less close approach to, a theory of separable and surviving souls or spirits belonging to stocks and stones, weapons, boats, food, clothes, ornaments, and other objects which to us are not merely soulless but lifeless. (477)

Burton himself notes the tendency of oriental stories to personify: one footnote reads, "This address to an inanimate object (here a window) is highly idiomatic and must be cultivated by the practical Arabist" (1026); and another, that an address to the moon is "true Orientalism, a personification or incarnation which Galland did not think proper to translate" (1026). The tradition of attributing spirit to object is by no means exclusive to "primitive" or "oriental" cultures: Tylor himself notes the same tendency in Europeans who think about the ghosts of things.⁵ There exists a preponderance of it-narratives in the 18th Century, and the ghost in the machine becomes more and more present toward the end of the 19th Century.

The notion of the spirit within the thing is nevertheless considered "other," which at least partially explains one aspect of "Aladdin" that is rarely discussed: that is, its setting in China. This is not a China that really exists: it is populated with Muslims and mosques, viziers and veiled women; in other words, it is as "Arabian" as the rest of the *Nights*. It is a setting that is twice

⁵ "The notion [of the spirit of things] is implicitly recognized in [the] account of ghosts, which do not come naked, but clothed and even armed; of course there must be spirits of garments and weapons, seeing that the spirits of men come bearing them" (Tylor 432).

displaced for Victorian England, an other even to the other. It is, moreover, the farthest *real* place one could go without falling off the map entirely; it becomes a placeholder for the unknown, a place where magic might happen, without indulging fully in fantasy. Burton comments in a footnote that the idea of the Lamp kept in cavern comes from “the *lumo eterno* of the Rosicrucians” (1015), a Christian brotherhood dating back to the Middle Ages, again imbricating “Aladdin” into an European tradition. Unlike the *lumo eterno*, which “the traveler will never see” (1015), the traveler in China—both the African Magician who travels to the country and Aladdin who travels to its extremities—are not only allowed to see the Lamp, but to touch it, bring it forth, and use it. Moreover, it is in this China that the Jinni of the Lamp can flourish, and that the holders of the Lamp can interact with the magic of the object. Here, the enigma that is the thing—at once resistant to human subjectivity and capable of a life of its own—can *literally* take on a life of its own and come into being as the Jinni in the Lamp.

II: The Market for Things, Oriental and Otherwise

This China, as mythical as it was in the *Arabian Nights*, had real relevance in the Victorian period. The China that in “Aladdin” was the land of sultans and seraglios took on new meaning after the Opium Wars. In 1860, during the Second Opium War, British and French armies plundered and destroyed *Yuan Ming Yuan*, or the Imperial Gardens, in Beijing. The looted treasures of all of Britain’s holdings quickly made their way into the oriental bazaars in Britain. These bazaars—including, in a way, the Great Exhibition of 1851—became a space in which goods from all over the world converged. In these bazaars, goods were removed from their original contexts (Miller 51), which allowed for an epistemological appropriation by the British Empire, for the goods came to be marked with “the visibility and continuous

representation of empire” (Lysack 28). At the same time, the removal of context allowed the Britons to imbue its imperialist holdings with imaginations of vast hoards of treasure. The ““fairy structure in the sky”” (Teukolsky 71) that is the Crystal Palace becomes Aladdin’s fairy palace; rent from any real notions of production and human transaction, the objects that flow into Britain from China, India, and Arabia become like the treasures of the Lamp. Neither Aladdin nor English shoppers need question whence these treasures came.

The import of Orientalism did not limit itself to material possessions. The flow includes narratives, as can be observed through the various figurations of stories from the *Nights*. The flow of elements *within* the narratives, moreover, reflects what John Plotz called the portability of novels. The novel, according to Plotz, lies “at the heart of Victorian reflections on portability” (5) due to its material circulation and the global applicability of its contents, both in quotations and in allusions. The stories were first translated by Antoine Galland into French, and thence into English as a cheap chapbook. Though they gained immense popularity from their very introduction, the stories were particularly portable for Victorian authors: they were alluded to and quoted from by such illustrious authors as Dickens, Thackeray, Stevenson, Gaskell, and Collins.⁶

The interplay between East and West—better, the subsuming of the one into the other—seems a particular feature of the narrative of the *Arabian Nights*. In her introduction to *Fabulous Orient*s, Ros Ballaster calls both Scheherazade and the *Nights* “all things to all men” (9). More importantly, in their importation into Europe, “The *Arabian Nights* allows the metamorphosis of the Orient into the Occident; Antoine Galland turns the seraglio into a French Salon” (12), which Burton, despite an insistence on the particularity of the Orient, has repeated with Aladdin’s

⁶ For an in-depth exploration of the significance of the *Nights* for Victorian authors, see *The Arabian Nights in English Literature*, ed. Peter Caracciolo (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988).

palace and an Arthurian castle. This “creolization” is present in both the story of Aladdin itself—which we have already seen through its tumultuous translation history—and in the pivotal object of the Lamp. As an object for which the Magician travels to China, it is a foreign object for the Magician and a native object for Aladdin; however, the Lamp also exists in a deep cavern in “an extreme city of the cities of China” (Burton 712), and this liminal origin makes it a curiosity for both. The fairy palace that Aladdin uses the Lamp to construct is composed of materials from Egypt, India, and China; yet this palace lies opposite the Sultan’s own palace, at the exact center of the kingdom, and it becomes the very feat that indicates Aladdin’s right to inherit this kingdom. Both the Lamp and its treasures, not to mention the story of “Aladdin” itself, become “creolized” in their cultural significance.

Such hybridity is resonant of one of the anxieties about portable property to which John Plotz points. He speaks of the “imperial panic” of the British public concerning the importation of goods that keep their “‘native’ cultural essence about them” and refuse to become commodities (22). Even as the *Nights* were absorbed into English literature, they retained the element of exoticism that is part and parcel of their popularity. Even as marble and cloth are imported for the palace, they remained foreign materials and refused to be valued or commodified. There is little chance that Aladdin’s Lamp, either in the story itself or as a cultural symbol, could ever have all its resonances erased and replaced with a monetary price. Burton, in westernizing the characters in the tale, not only puts them in the position of mastery in relation to property, but points out that very failure in mastery is a western concern. By making Aladdin the chivalrous knight and the Magician an imperialist, he bars his readers from being able to displace the anxiety over property onto the oriental front. Read this way, Burton’s footnotes become less

interruptions than reminders that the British Empire itself has a most difficult time with its properties.

Burton's translation of "Aladdin" had another function: not only did he westernize, if only in footnotes, the oriental tale, his edition took "Aladdin" from a children's tale to one that, due to its "unexpurgated" status, would be read by adult Victorian men. When the Victorian writers encountered the stories of Aladdin, Sinbad, and Ali Baba, they did so in the form of picture books and abridged stories for children, which were, according to Peter Caracciolo, at least as popular as tales taken from Perrault, d'Aulnoy, and Grimm. For the Victorians, these stories became a symbol for the wonder as well as recognition of "their first impressions of alien experiences" (30). Indeed, it was in the nursery where the *Nights* and its particularly popular tales truly took root. Not only was the collection considered "attractive fare for children," they became thought of as "children's stories before all else" (Alderson 82). In these versions they were truncated, illustrated, inducted into fairy-tale collections where they commingled with European stories. It was precisely in the realm of children's literature, however, that "Aladdin" could take on the fullest extent of its magic. As a fairy tale, and moreover an oriental tale, it offered an arena for the exploration of certain desires "at a time when 'official' children's books had few imaginative delights to offer" (82). Burton, by making the story part of a translation that was in opposition to the "'prudish' delicacy" of his time, created a work that was inappropriate for women and children. Hence he selected, consciously or not, a readership composed entirely of men; for these men, who would have been the most concerned with the control of property, "Aladdin" and its implacable objects would have been anxiety-inducing indeed.

III: The Sexual Transaction of Property

This anxiety plays itself out through desire. The Lamp becomes the material projection of Ros Ballaster's notion that Scheherazade's stories become "all things for all men." The Lamp has, indeed, the *potential* to fulfill the desires of all men. Yet the Lamp, by its very definition, can never actually fulfill desire, for it is an object through which limitless treasures can be retrieved. Each time the Jinni carries in a hoard—no matter how large—this hoard remains but a partial satisfaction of what the Lamp promises. The Lamp becomes, then, an object for the self-perpetuating circuit of desire (Miller 30), for it as object—rather than the desiring person—perpetuates its own desirability.

In the larger plot of the story, the desire for Lamp as an object becomes imbricated with the desire for the Princess; the desire for commodity comes to resemble, as Jeff Nunokawa states, "an undeniable sexual attraction" (17). In "Aladdin," however, this interplay between the two desires is not merely one of resemblance, but one of substitution. Aladdin's and the Magician's relationship with the Princess becomes one in which transactional desire does not overwhelm the men. Their desire for her, unlike their desire for the Lamp, can be arrested.

This substitution in part explains the oddity of "Aladdin" in the larger scheme of Burton's *Nights*: it is one of the only stories into which Burton did not inject his notorious concern with sexuality. In fact, a key component of the "unexpurgation" of Burton's translation lies in his insertion of sexual elements into the stories. In Colette Colligan's *The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley*, Burton's *Nights* features prominently as inciting "the *first* public literary debates about 'pornography' in England" (57, emphasis original). As Dane Kennedy explains in his biography of Burton, *The Highly Civilized Man*,

Burton not only offered an English-language reading public the first frank and unexpurgated translation of the tales themselves, but also peppered the text with

footnotes about esoteric aspects of Islamic culture, especially sexual customs. (207)

Kennedy takes a more sympathetic view than Said, who considered Burton's footnotes as his way of reinforcing a "position of supremacy over the Orient" (196). Kennedy analyzes them as a reflection of Burton's views of his own society. In a period of crisis over "the disintegration of the high Victorian moral and cultural consensus" (207) involving, for example, the 1885 publication of W. T. Stead's "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," which was yet marked by the birth of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 and the National Vigilance Association in 1884, Burton's version of the *Nights*—along with his *Kama Sutra* and *The Perfumed Garden*—provided an alternative structure for encountering sexuality. For Burton, the *Nights* became

evidence of the superior sexual knowledge of other cultures, which recognized that women had sexual needs, men had sexual responsibilities, and sexuality itself had varied avenues of expression...and he portrayed his translation of these works as means to the emotional liberation of his countrymen—and women. (212)

To this Burton's own footnotes attest. In another story about China ("The Three Princes of China") that comes two volumes after "Aladdin," he gives an extensive footnote concerning the nuptial night of a wedding:

'The first night,' which is so often so portentous a matter in England and upon the Continent...is rarely treated as important by Orientals. A long theoretical familiarity with the worship of Venus "leaves not much mystery for the nuptial night." Such lore has been carefully cultivated by the 'young person' with the able assistance of the ancient dames of the household, [etc]. Moreover not a few Moslems, even Egyptians, the most lecherous and salacious of men, in all ranks of life from prince to peasant take a pride in respecting the maiden for a few nights after the wedding-feast extending, perhaps to a whole week and sometimes more. A brutal haste is looked upon as 'low'; and, as sensible men, they provoke by fondling and toying Nature to speak ere proceeding to the final and critical act. (223)

He goes on, in the rest of the footnote, to criticize the English who act quite the opposite: the brutal husband who drives the ignorant wife to adultery, and the cruel yet “universal custom of civilized and Christian Europeans to plant their womankind upon a pedestal exposed as butts to every possible temptation: and, if they fall, as must often be expected, to assail them with obloquy and contempt for succumbing to trials imposed upon them by the stronger and less sensitive sex” (224). In criticizing the European and praising the Oriental, however, Burton manages to construct a dichotomy between the Europeans, whose virtue is damaging, and the Orientals, whose looseness might be equally damaging.

In the story of Aladdin, however, Burton does away with this dichotomy between the openly sensual other and the inanely prudish Briton. He never manages to inject “Aladdin” with any sort overt sexual representation. Part of this results from the fact that the story itself represents a perpetual delaying of sexual gratification—an aspect that would justifies its inclusion into the larger structure of the *Arabian Nights* in which gratification is delayed for one thousand days. After Aladdin first sees Princess Badr al-Budur, he tells his mother to make supplications to the Sultan on his behalf; it takes her a full fortnight to gain audience (Burton 733). When she does, the Sultan agrees to a marriage between his daughter and Aladdin, but dictates that they must wait three full months, which causes Aladdin to exclaim parenthetically, “Well, it *is* a long time!” (736). When, in the meanwhile, the King marries Badr al-Budur to the vizier’s son instead, Aladdin instructs the Jinni to carry the newlywed couple from the bridal chamber to Aladdin’s house and toss the bridegroom into the water closet (738). Thus for three nights their marriage remains unconsummated, at the end of which both the princess and the vizier’s son beg their parents for an annulment. Nor does Aladdin himself attempt to achieve sexual satisfaction: for these three nights, he merely “[strips] off his outer dress [and places] a

scimitar between them and [lays] upon the bed besides the princess; and he [does] no villain deed, for it sufficed him to prevent the consummation of her nuptials with the Wazir's son" (738-9). The arresting of desire, here, is more important than its successful outlet, for with complete stoppage there can be little anxiety over the perpetual circuit of unsatisfied desire.

In the crucial scene of a nuptial night, albeit not Aladdin's own, Burton shies away from imbuing the narrative with much sexual description. He adds in a footnote that a previous translation (the H.V.) gives the following sketch of the wedding:

'And when the ceremonies ended at the palace with pomp and parade and pageant, and the night was far spent, the eunuchs led the Wazir's son into the bridal chamber. He was the first to seek his couch; then the Queen, his mother-in-law, came into him leading the bride, and followed by her suite. She did with her virgin daughter as parents are wont to do, removed her wedding-raiment, and donning a night-dress, placed her in her bridegroom's arms. Then, wishing her all joy, she with her ladies went away and shut the door. At that instant came the Jinni,' etc. (1021)

This description, in his own version, Burton replaces with a simple "bride and bridegroom bedded together this night" (738). The H.V. carries with its description a nuanced account of the handing down of the Princess—from her mother who undresses her, to her bridegroom who awaits her, and finally to the Jinni who interrupts her. The threat of devirginization (moreover, by a monstrous Other) is emphatically present in the Jinni's penetration of this innermost sphere—and all of this Burton removes. His own account is more obvious and less sensual, as if the princess and the vizier's son are already an old married couple who bed together thus every night; nor does he make much note of this important moment of anticipation and lack, to which he is yet expressedly attuned.

Even the scene of Aladdin's own nuptial night is filled with abeyance. We never do get to *see* the Princess as Aladdin does: her veil is never lifted for the reader, for "[Aladdin's] strength [is] struck down from the moment he saw her" (Burton 725). Like Aladdin, we only hear of her

“beauty and loveliness,” and the narration quickly moves on to describe her effect on Aladdin.

And when Aladdin and the Princess are finally married, he delays spending the nuptial night with her (as he forced the vizier’s son to do):

And presently the bridegroom arose and would have fared forth, when his father-in-law withheld him and asked, ‘Whither away, O my child? The bride-fetes have begun and the marriage is made and the tie is tied and the writ is written.’ He replied, ‘O my lord the King, ‘tis my desire to edify, for the Lady Badr al-Budur, a pavilion befitting her station and high degree, nor can I visit her before so doing.’ (755)

After the palace is built, the narrative gives us, “Aladdin arose and went in to his bride” (762), a comment that Burton remarked was made with “exceptional reserve” (1026). To this, Burton adds nothing else: no long postulation, unlike in “The Three Princes of China,” of the validity of openness over prudery. Burton seemed to have wanted to keep “Aladdin” as exceptionally reserved as he had found it.

All this speaks to a larger concern: “Aladdin” becomes less a playground for exploring the sexuality of the Other than a story in which the anxieties concerning objects, property, and possession can right itself through the Princess. He plays on the interchangeability of women and property that was paramount in the Victorian period. After all, this was the era in which George Eliot, a most solidly Victorian of Victorian authors, wrote of Tertius Lydgate in *Middlemarch*, “[T]hat distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardor, did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture, or women” (149). In “Aladdin,” the commodification of the Princess is in direct correlation with the personification of the Lamp. As the Jinni becomes more and more a presence and gains more and more a mind of his own, the Princess becomes a spoil of the Lamp for Aladdin. As well, she is part and parcel of the “priceless value” (Burton 720) of the Lamp for the Magician. Whosoever holds the Lamp, it seems, owns the Princess, as well, as

she becomes the palace's "inmates and all that be therein" (772) which the Magician demands of the Jinni.

The objectification of the Princess casts in to even brighter light the various desires surrounding the Lamp. Whereas Aladdin seems to be able to stop himself from interacting sexually with the Princess, he cannot help but rub the Lamp, and he demands more from the Jinni each time he does. His lack of desire to "know" the Princess carnally contrasts with his exceeding desire to know the Lamp in value. And while there is an end to his desires for the Princess—in fact, he says, "the end of my desires is to see her" (Burton 725)—there is no end to his desires for the Lamp. The story can only end when the Jinni finally refuses an order: when Aladdin is fooled into asking the Jinni for a Roc's egg, the Jinni retaliates with such anger that Aladdin's "wits fled his head and his joints trembled" (792). In a moment of clarity, Aladdin—and the Victorian reader along with him—sees the Lamp as an intractable thing, never to be perfectly controlled or absolutely possessed.

Aladdin's Lamp, as an object, is a set of paradoxes: it refuses to be commodified, yet is eminently transferrable; it is an amalgamation of cultures, but never fails to be exotic; and it perpetually generates a desire that could never be satisfied even with its possession and usage. In all these facets the Lamp is resistant to the needs or wants of its handlers, despite being a fantasy object—perhaps *the* fantasy object in our culture—that purports to satisfy all wishes. Burton's story shows, then, that even in the most magical of realms and the most exotic of lands, the anxiety over our possessions never leaves us.

Works Cited

- Alderson, Brian. "Scheherazade in the Nursery." *The Arabian Nights in English Literature*. Ed. Peter Caracciolo. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. 81-94.
- Ballaster, Ros. *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Burton, Richard Francis, Trans. *The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand and One Nights*. New York: Modern Library, 2004.
- . *Supplemental Nights to the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, Vols. III and V*. London: The Burton Club, 1888.
- Caracciolo, Peter L. "Introduction: 'Such a store house of ingenious fictions and splendid imagery.'" *The Arabian Nights in English Literature*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. 1-80.
- Colligan, Colette. "Sir Richard Burton, the *Arabian Nights*, and Arab Sex Manuals." *The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 56-95.
- Freedgood, Elaine. "Introduction: Reading Things." *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. 1-29.
- Irwin, Robert. *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. London: Penguin, 1994.
- Kennedy, Dane. *The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005
- Lysack, Krista. "Goblin Markets: Women Shoppers and the East in London's West End." *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2008. 15-43.

- Miller, Andrew. *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Nunokawa, Jeff. *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994.
- Pinney, Christopher. "Creole Europe: The Reflection of a Reflection." *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 20 (2002): 125-161.
- Plotz, John. "Introduction: The Global, the Local, and the Portable." *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008. 1-23.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Teukolsky, Rachel. *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Tylor, Edward Burnett. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom, Vol. 1*. London: John Murray, 1871.