Introduction
Victorian translations, poetic transformations

The genesis of this book lies in two questions. One concerns an unremembered, hypogean figure, the twentieth-century translator William Hichens, who spent a decade devising English versions of Swahili poems and writing essays to introduce this poetry to a British audience. Familiar mainly to specialists in Swahili literature, Hichens published just one significant translation, of the seminal nineteenth-century poem *Al-Inkishafi* (by Sayyid Abdallah bin Ali bin Nasir), but he wrote translations and discussions of hundreds more poems and songs. In those manuscripts, Hichens's Victorian predilections are clear. His Swahili poems in translation sound comfortably Victorian, and he sends readers to Victorian poems as a way of illuminating poetic maneuvers in the original texts. Yet in reading the original Swahili poems, I would never have said they *sounded* particularly Victorian. Like all translators, Hichens was attaching a timbre, an orientation, to the poems as he brought them into English. But why this timbre? Hichens does not say, and no scholar of Swahili poetry seemed to be asking. Surely, though, the question wanted exploration. Ezra Pound's influential collection of translations from the Chinese, *Cathay*, had been published in 1915, several years after Pound wrote about the importance of removing "the crust of dead English" from his translator's lexicon.[1] Didn't Hichens, in the 1930s, live in the era of modernism, and didn't he, too, want to avoid "dead English"? He was, after all, part of the cosmopolitan world – living in Fleet, commuting less than forty miles to the metropole, the "Unreal City" where T.S. Eliot sat at his desk at Faber. Why, then, was he so persistently hearing and asking us to hear strains of nineteenth-century English verse in the poets of Mombasa? What was at stake – artistically, politically, nationally – in translating into this particular kind of English?

The second question has to do with Edward FitzGerald and the stanza form he uses in his *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. These quatrains are FitzGerald's analogue – as has many times been noted – for the Persian

ruba'i, a poem that consists of a metered quatrain (*hajaz* meter, in this case) rhyming a-a-b-a (or a-a-a-a); a poet who joins a series of these poems creates *rubáiyát*. Octosyllabic and likewise rhymed a-a-b-a, FitzGerald's quatrains seemed unremarkable when I first encountered them: distinctive, yes, but also inevitable; they were, it seemed, a stanza some poet in English would surely have devised at some point. What was it that made them worthy of quite so much note – in anthologists' introductions, in classroom discussion, in twentieth-century handbooks of prosody – and why was their appropriation here and there, from Swinburne's "Laus Veneris" to Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and onwards, traced with such enthusiasm? For level of surprise, the "*Rubáiyát* stanza," as it is often called, seemed comparable to the *"In Memoriam* stanza," the octosyllabic quatrains of a-b-b-a in which Tennyson wrote the elegy published nine years before the *Rubáiyát*. True, the triad of "a" in FitzGerald's four lines creates, stanza by stanza, moments of distinctive challenge for poets. And true, FitzGerald devised the English triad as he tried to listen to the Persian. But was he not, in this, doing what translators always do, developing a new strategy in English in response to the challenges of a foreign text? Prosodically much stranger, surely, were the sonnets of Hopkins. Arguably more experimental was Christina Rossetti's stanza form in "Goblin Market," with its alternations in line length, rhyme patterns, and stanza size, or George Meredith's incantatory prosody in "Woods of Westermain." What was so persistent and important about FitzGerald's form? Was it orienting readers to something, and, if so, what, and how did it accomplish that orientation?

Each question about a translator points to the persistence of Victorian modes of thought well beyond the period called "Victorian." We find FitzGerald's invention of the *Rubáiyát* stanza so remarkable because the Victorians taught us to find it so, and seventy-five years later Hichens went on comparing songs from the Swahili coast to "The Lady of Shalott" and drawing up compendious catalogues of Swahili verse forms because all his models for how to represent these exotic texts to a domestic audience, and how actually to think about – even to hear – poetry itself, were Victorian. Virginia Woolf remarked, as we know, that "On or about December 1910 human character changed," and other high modernist writers readily shared this sense of the ending of an era.[2] The modernist break with Victorian thought was felt to be profound. Yet it was also less complete than modernist writers who reflected on the shift would have us believe, or had to believe themselves. This point is not new, nor is it new to maintain

that, extensively and problematically, Victorian terms have persisted in unrecognized ways within our efforts to understand the Victorian world, eroding our interpretive purchase on nineteenth-century history and culture.[3] Yet translation remains a sphere in which too few questions have been asked about Victorian practices and their meaning. A central contention of this study is that we must understand Victorian translation to understand Victorian poetry. This book considers how the expansion of translation to include languages that are themselves no part of the tradition of English literature – languages with their own, independent traditions – tests and transforms English poetry.

Besides suggesting how we are enduringly Victorian, my questions about FitzGerald and Hichens point to connections between poetry and Britain's imperial undertakings. FitzGerald's quatrain matters so much because a belief that prosody had an intrinsic relationship to cultural and national identities infused the world of Victorian translation, and within a world holding this belief an English stanza modeled on a Persian stanza becomes a daring act of prosodic innovation: FitzGerald turns into a translation stuntman. Victorian imperialism did not create the belief that prosody encapsulates national identity, but it did develop and complicate it. In each act of literary translation – many comprising efforts to situate within English literary culture texts that culture had never before had to make sense of, from places where Britain exercised imperialist interests – lay an important question: to what extent could these two worlds, the British world and the world that had produced the original text, relate to one another? How might the British world gain from the other without sacrificing part of itself? Hichens made his poems Victorian because his project of domesticating a foreign poetry from a British colony for a British readership was quintessentially a Victorian one: Victorian translators and anthologists had shown him how such domestication might (but only *might*) be successfully accomplished.

The relationship between literary form and historical reality is important to this volume as it endeavors to find where translation studies and historical poetics intersect. Attentiveness to form, J. Paul Hunter notes, can open novel historical awareness, revealing "practices that have become obscured or even invisible to us," that are "erased or clouded."[4] Our understanding of Victorian translation remains "clouded," and essential in this case to exploring relationships between literary forms and lived realities has been uncovering more of a historically specific translation culture, one defined not only by a uniquely Victorian set of values, assumptions, and secrets, but also by the subjective agency of the

poets, translators, and poet-translators who participated in it. This book aims to clarify our picture of Victorian translators, especially poetic translators, in their time and to reveal their pervasive legacy across the twentieth century.

The incorporative impulse

In 1829 Robert Browning left his studies at London University to resume a course of self-education at his father's home in Camberwell. Having pursued intensive study in Latin and Greek the year before, he had determined now to turn his attentions to the writing of poetry.[5] Edward FitzGerald, Browning's near-contemporary who would translate Omar Khayyám's *Rubáiyát* (1859), was fraternizing with the Cambridge Apostles at Trinity College, nurturing the condition of outsider that would characterize him for the rest of his life; although members of the group liked him – including Tennyson, to whom FitzGerald later sought awkwardly to justify his interest in Persian poetry – he never became an Apostle himself. Charlotte Guest, whose widely read translation of Welsh legends (the *Mabinogion*, 1838–1845) would attract the interest of Tennyson, had yet to conceive her interest in the Celtic world in 1829, when she wrote in her diary that she was beginning to teach herself Arabic: "At five minutes past eight (I hope an auspicious moment) I commenced my Arabic studies in the garden."[6]

Also in 1829, a group of men bought land near Richmond Park, in suburban London, on which to raise black swans, kangaroos, and other animals, some domestic but many foreign.[7] These purchasers were members of the London Zoological Society, founded a few years earlier to introduce new animals into Britain: "new races of Quadrupeds, Birds or Fishes . . . either in our Farm Yards, Gardens, Woods, Waters, Lakes, or Rivers," as the society's charter reads.[8] Raising marsupials and "Chinese pheasants" on the outskirts of the metropolis was an impractical project, and the society met with many failures in its undertakings, which have a cruel aspect. A series of orangutans named Jenny were on view in the London Zoo – which society members opened to themselves in 1828 and to the public in 1847 – having "tea parties" while wearing fancy dress. The zoo's first chimpanzee lived for just six months before succumbing to tuberculosis, two giraffes perished in a stable fire in 1866, and ammonia damaged the brains, eyes, and noses of lions.[9] A surprising number of animals were surviving on "bread and milk," despite fastidious cataloguing of the diet each creature enjoyed in the wild.[10] The society

understood much about the taxonomy, habits, and native habitats of its animals. It knew less about how to keep them alive in their new home. Integration into England presented a challenge.

Yet while the Society made errors that now seem stereotypically Victorian, by prizing an external dignity that proved costly in terms of day-to-day suffering, it also represented the vanguard of a new approach to assimilation. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, pleasure-seekers viewed animals like lions, camels, and pelicans at menageries, collections of exotic creatures exhibited in a circus-like atmosphere. The menagerie at Exeter Exchange, one of the biggest operations, was visited by Lord Byron and probably, on evidence of the seventh book of the *Prelude*, by William Wordsworth.[11] But in the lifetimes of Browning, FitzGerald, and Guest the establishment of zoological parks gradually replaced the menagerie's spectacle for spectacle's sake with a deliberate program of incorporation and induction. Rather than be wheeled through Yorkshire in carts for the amusement of villagers, exotic animals were to be studied by scientists.[12] They were to be integrated into England's everyday world, Arabian camels alongside English bovines, and the benefits they might offer – in terms of pest control, of food stock, of insights into biology and evolution – were to be discovered and mined. The foreignness of exotic species would be tempered even while England benefited from that foreignness. The animals were to be translated, in a manner of speaking, into England.

Although the parallel has obvious limits, it merits mention because Victorian translation is not typically conceptualized as hungry for difference – for what might be gained and learned for English, and expressed and experienced in English, through attention to writing in other languages. Yet the work of Browning as poet and translator, of FitzGerald and Guest as translators, and of Tennyson as an appropriator of Guest's translation, involves an impulse to enlarge and enhance English life and letters by incorporating non-English elements. Their literary work involves a textual version of the broad cultural impulse that led scientists and explorers to create the London Zoo: an impulse to enlarge and enhance the English world of life and letters by incorporating non-English things into it.

Victorian translators had complex involvement with – and helped to define – this incorporative impulse in its literary form. Rejuvenated interest in Eastern civilizations, conflicts over racial identity associated with the ascendance of Welsh nationalism, and uncertainty about the viability of imperialist undertakings gained ingress into Victorian poetry through their

writing. The transformations thus wrought on language, themes, and forms demonstrate that English poetry in the latter half of the nineteenth century was profoundly pervious, susceptible to historical-cultural currents arising from the territorial expansion and imperialist tensions that Britain experienced in the time. As translators ministered to this susceptibility, mediating and struggling to stage the assimilation of foreign literary elements into English, often at some remove from imperial contact, they opened English poetry to influences of British imperialism. To tell the stories of this process well, we have to allow them to be complicated. Imperialist connections lie behind FitzGerald's access to Omar Khayyám's quatrains, for example, but they emerge less in his translating than in the reception of his *Rubáiyát* by a devoutly imperialist cohort of admirers. Imperialist tensions are arguably incipient in Guest's translation of the *Mabinogion*, originating in her personal circumstances as an upper-class Englishwoman in industrializing Wales, but they come further into being with Tennyson's creation of *Idylls of the King*, for which he used Guest as a source. As Joe Phelan has shown, a cluster of work from the late 1830s and early 1840s reveals Browning's topical engagement with colonialism,[13] but the texts that concern me date from after that time and involve the poet's rendering of Eastern and colonized figures as speakers whom he associates with his own aim of nurturing poetic innovation. Connections between Victorian translators and imperialist activity are seldom simple, for even when translators learnt their languages or began their work under the auspices of colonial organizations, their aims and practices readily diverged from one another's, and from their sponsors' plans.[14] Records of such complication lie around and within Victorian texts, emerging in formal choices, and the dynamism of Victorian translation really emerges (only) when we attend to them.

Colonial studies and the insertion of poetry

Thinking about foreignness in England in the second half of the nineteenth century entails thinking about imperialist ambitions. The British Empire in the last years of Victoria's reign encompassed one quarter of the earth's land and one quarter of its population.[15] The Empire stretched to North Africa, where Britain occupied Egypt in 1882, regaining the formal control it had lost early in the century. It stretched to West Africa, where Sierra Leone, Gambia, and the Gold Coast were merged into British West Africa in 1821; to East Africa, where Stanley discovered Livingstone in 1871, seven years before the Imperial British East Africa

Company was founded; and to South Africa, where British soldiers fought Zulu soldiers in the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879. It stretched to the Far East, where Britain established Hong Kong in 1842, after fighting the First Opium War with China, and to the South Pacific, where five Crown Colonies were established in Australia in the nineteenth century. It stretched to Iran, in medieval times the home of Omar Khayyám, where Britain cultivated influence throughout the nineteenth century before taking partial control in 1907. It stretched to India, where FitzGerald's tutor Edward Cowell took up residence in 1856, to FitzGerald's great sadness, as Professor of History and Political Economy at the new Presidency College and where Cowell had the "Calcutta manuscript" of Omar Khayyám's quatrains copied for his friend. It stretched to the Arabian Peninsula, where Britain annexed Aden in 1839.[16] And it stretched back into the heart of Britain, resonating in England's relationship with Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, the poorer and less powerful parts of Britain's own self, which protested their legitimacy as sovereign states in various ways throughout the nineteenth century – protestations that would influence Guest in her translation of the *Mabinogion* and Tennyson in his poetic adaptation of her translation.[17]

Thus this study relates to a constellation of scholarship that considers how imperial activity affected the culture of the imperialist nation, the *polis*. Since the late 1980s, colonial and post-colonial scholars have shown that nineteenth-century imperialism intrinsically shaped British identity. In *Masks of Conquest*, Gauri Viswanathan proposes that the development of British literature as a field of study depended upon British colonial rule in India.[18] Simon Gikandi argues in *Maps of Englishness* that nineteenth-century imperialism defined British culture and subjectivity then and later, creating "a referent (empire) and a culture (that of colonialism) that became the conditions of possibility for metropolitan and colonial subjects and cultures alike."[19] Gikandi goes so far as to posit that literary modernism in England derives solely and directly from the waning of empire. In *Out of Place*, Ian Baucom makes a similar argument, showing that imperialism catalyzed within England a definitive deterioration of identity, and tracing the re-creation of that identity in literature of place.[20] Each of these writers works with the understanding, important to my study, that British empire definitively changed British literature and culture.

More recently, scholars exploring English poetic cultures in the colonies have brought much needed consideration of poetry into Victorian-era

colonial studies, with Mary Ellis Gibson focusing on India and Jason Rudy on the migration to Australia.[21] While Gibson and Rudy concern themselves with poetry in English rather than with translation per se, I share their interest in how poetic subjectivities are inflected by challenges of intercultural negotiation and in elucidating, as Rudy has it, "nineteenth-century movements toward what might now be called transcultural thinking."[22] This book extends Victorian "transcultural" literary studies by examining the role of translators as key agents of assimilation and proposing a methodology for interpreting poems as themselves *enacting* intercultural negotiations of the sort that became pressingly necessary as Britons sought to integrate into their physical and metaphysical worlds new species of all kinds: from quadrupeds, orchids, and porcelain to languages, meters, and narrative structures.

Seeking to elucidate how metaphor, meter, form, and tone in poetry are influenced by a complex impulse to incorporate foreignness, *Translation as Transformation* works within the interpretive tradition initiated by Isobel Armstrong in *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (1982), which understands form as a conduit for Victorian poetry's engagement with the social and philosophical questions of its age. Scholars including Jamison, Rudy, Matthew Reynolds, Meredith Martin, and Catherine Robson have diversely revealed the dynamism of Victorian poetry and how form speaks of and to lived reality (and receive more mention elsewhere in this book).[23] Like their work, *Translation as Transformation* invests itself in discerning how nineteenth-century writers and readers actually experienced literary practices. But its focus on translation makes its subject matter new, enabling an understanding of Victorian poetry as significantly exogenic in its development.

Victorian practices and the study of translation

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed an expansion of translation activity that prepared the way for the Victorians upon whom I focus. From the 1760s to the 1830s, among writers and scholars, new interest arose in comparative literary study, in translation of literature from languages besides Greek and Latin, and in using such literature as a source of models for poetry in English. Sir William Jones's *Poems, Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages* (1772) became a turning point, inspiring popular interest in languages of the East and efforts in comparative philology.[24] Hans Aarsleff has demonstrated how around the turn of the nineteenth century scholars began to view the learning of

languages more as "a means to an end rather than the end itself."[25] One end was the discovery of foreign literatures.

In considering Victorian literary translations, I do not evaluate, as a primary purpose, their equivalence or accuracy. This work has in many instances been done.[26] Rather, I focus on the reception, identity, and influence of translations within their new literary cultures. In doing so, I draw on the theory of descriptive translation studies to assert the inevitability of links between translated and "original" Victorian literature.

Here it may be useful to have a digest of descriptive translation theory. The first modern translation theorist explicitly to make a case for focusing on the life of a translated work within its new literature rather than on issues of linguistic equivalence was Itamar Even-Zohar in the late twentieth century. Translation, Even-Zohar argues, is a literary rather than linguistic phenomenon. It is governed by a nexus of historical-cultural circumstances and relations rather than by language compatibility, which is essentially predetermined and static. While literary studies tend to view translations as *faits accomplis*, "completed facts, imported from other literatures, detached from their home contexts and consequently neutralized from the point of view of center-and-periphery struggles,"[27] in fact literary translations profoundly influence, and receive influence from, the literature that they join through translation. By calling literature a "polysystem," Even-Zohar emphasizes that literary texts arise from and are continually shaped by a nexus of linguistic, cultural, and historical relations. Translation, he argues, functions as crucial vehicle for such relations, comprising a "central" rather than "peripheral" element of the "literary polysystem."[28] Translated literary works change the literature that they join in translation, serving as a source of innovation and as an engine of literary transformation.

Gideon Toury, a student of Even-Zohar, develops this theory with his ambition to create a "*poetics of translation*, both in its *descriptive* and in its *historical* facets."[29] Toury agrees with Even-Zohar that a "target-text" ("TT" in the lingo of translation studies)-oriented approach to studying translation illuminates the influence of translation within literature in ways that a "source-text" ("ST")-oriented approach cannot. Like Even-Zohar, he insists that literary scholars should focus on the new, or "target" language ("TL") of a translation, instead of on the source text or source language ("SL"). Existing theories of translation, Toury writes,

> consider translation from the point of view of its being a reconstruction – in general a maximal (or at least optimal) reconstruction – of ST (i.e., the formalization of ST's systemic relationships), or even of SL, in TL, in such a

> way and to such an extent that TT and ST are interchangeable according to some preconceived definition of this interchangeability.[30]

Such theories focus, that is, on equivalence between translations and original texts. Thus they have more to do with linguistic relations than with translations themselves, which are above all a literary phenomenon within their new language. Toury's ambition to develop a new "descriptive poetics of translation" speaks to literary scholars and is important to this book. I understand "descriptive poetics" to mean an account of the career of a translation – of the circumstances that attended its creation, of how it was received in its new language, and of how elements of it have been carried into or brought to bear upon original literature in that language – and this book connects "descriptive poetics of translation" to the cultural and political valences of a multilingual historical poetics.

The rubrics of two other translation theorists, George Steiner and Walter Benjamin, suggest an approach to studying translation that resembles the "descriptive" method advocated in Even-Zohar's and Toury's writings. In the terms Steiner sets forth in *After Babel*, my study concentrates on a translated text's "incorporation" into a new language and the "reciprocity or restitution" that follows. These phases, in Steiner's thought, represent the third and fourth of four "movements" involved in translation. First comes "trust," a translator's faith that the text to be translated has meaning and that its meaning can be carried into a different language, and next comes "aggression," the work of translation itself, through which a translator "invades, extracts, and brings home" meaning.[31] Those stages lead to "incorporation," when a translated work exerts influence upon texts within its new language: "The import, of meaning and of form, the embodiment, is not made in a vacuum. The native semantic field is already extant and crowded."[32] Steiner observes that however much a new text may (or may not) be assimilated, it has the capability of deeply influencing existing literature. "The act of importation," he writes, "can potentially dislocate or relocate the whole of the native structure."[33] Conversely, the existence of a translation changes an original text. This transformation is part of the "reciprocity or restitution" that follows "incorporation," in which translation elevates the status of an original.[34] In the terms posited by Steiner, my study concentrates on the "incorporation" of translations into English literature. An interest in "reciprocity or restitution" enters in when I examine how translation altered the status of the original texts with which Guest (Chapter 2) and FitzGerald (Chapter 4), in particular, were working. Chapter 2 takes up Steiner's notion of "appropriation."