The Proper Author in Translation: Literary Property Across Borders

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the rapidly changing conceptions of literary property around the turn of the last century in China; in particular, it examines the practice of translation with the attending issues of authorship, authority and authenticity. For when a literary text crosses national, linguistic borders, it inevitably traverses the boundary of authorial territory. And no time is more so than the period under study here, the period of colonial expansion in China, the period of heightened nationalist sentiment among the Chinese intellectuals. The aim of this paper is to understand the historical, cultural specifics that govem the concepts of ownership in literary production.

KEY WORDS

translation
translator
authority
authenticity
forgery

Sir Edmund Backhouse
J. O. P. Bland
China under the Empress Dowager
Diary of Ching Shan
Hugh Trevor-Roper

> An attaché of the Chinese embassy... publishes high-class works in French under his own name. He negotiates with banks respecting a large loan for his government, and draws large advances for himself on the unfinished contract. Later it came out that the books were composed by his French secretary, and that he has swindled the banks. Fin de siecle diplomatist.

How does another take shape through the language of translation? How does the translator himself take shape, invent his role, while bringing forth this image of another? How does institutionalized expertise affect and how is it affected by this process? These are questions that are clearly central to the enterprise of translation. They point to a rethinking of the relationship of subjectivity and writing that conerns today's translators and scholars of trans-national cultural studies. These are the questions that must underlie my present project–a study that focuses on the intersection of translation and the emergence of sinology as a discipline around the turn of the last century.

The year 1900 was a year of great upheaval. From the point of view of the last Chinese dynasty, the Qing Empire, it was a time of chaos, the upsetting of all proprieties and hierarchies, as the court was driven out of the capital and the Forbidden City was penetrated and looted. From the point of view of western legations in Beijing, it was also a year of dramatic intensity, as they were besieged by the Boxers during the "madness of the summer." Out of this time of crisis, one Sir Edmund Backhouse made his name. He co-authored a book on the events of the time, *China Under the Empress Dowager,* which went through eight impressions within two years. Journalists hailed it for having "lifted the veil" that had hid the hand of the Empress in the events. Scholars of the field professed to be especially impressed by its well-documented research, in contrast to earlier publications of popular works of sensationalism. The centerpiece of the "primary document" is Backhouse's translation of the so-called "Diary of His Excellency Ching Shan," a fifty-five page chapter. He was offered the chair of Chinese at London University and was also at one point a serious contender for the Oxford chair. His name is carved in marble at the Bodleian Library at Oxford, in honour of his benefaction of some 17,000 volumes of Chinese books. Safeguarded by his expertise, the translation of the "Diary" was for a long time repeatedly cited in other works as an one-of-a-kind authentic document. Now, after nearly a century of debate, thanks to the detective research of Hugh Trevor-Roper, scholars generally agree that the "Diary" is a forgery (Trevor-Roper).[1]

Much as Backhouse appears now as an aberration of the name of the translator, not to mention a major embarrassment to the discipline, I would argue that the aberration is nonetheless typical of a period when the knowledge of China was rapidly going through the process of institutionalization. As a translational hoax, Backhouse's case serves as an opening for us to review and intensify interesting questions that are currently being reflected upon. Here then is a case where the issues of authenticity and authority are irrevocably intertwined, a case where the construction of the Other is based on the constructed authority of the self as an expert. What I propose to do here is to investigate the various authenticating devices, which are closely correlated to the historical conditions of his writing. The double contexts of the Victorian *fin de siècle* and the imminent collapse of the Qing Empire are what made possible the forged translation of the "Diary," as well as the forged identity of the translator.

What seems to strike everyone who came close to the case of Backhouse is the mystery of it. Hope Danby in *The Dictionary of National Biography* describes him in the following manner: "Little by little he gave up all social contacts with his European and American friends, and would receive only two or three of them; thus he gained the reputation of being something of a mystery man"(31-32). In the biography written by Trevor-Roper, itself a fascinating narrative, Backhouse is described as "pass[ing] in a rickshaw, in his Chinese clothes, hastily covering his face lest he be observed by profane Western eyes." The mystery is corroborated by Backhouse himself, as he writes to his co-author J. O. P. Bland, "As you know, I am an recluse, seldom or never visit anyone unless asked to do so...This has been my principle through life" (Hermit 100). The gesture of "covering his face" is then constant, both visual and verbal. His writing is also covered up by layers of other writings, those of his collaborator Bland, those of his shadowy native informants, and those of the "original diarist." The veil of the recluse takes on many possible shades: that of the eccentric professor, absent-minded but harmless; that of a scholar and a great benefactor; that of an English gentleman/aristocrat gone native, as the veil takes on a decidedly oriental hue. The blankness of the veil also refracts the time in which Backhouse wrote; it refracts as well the present age when historians and scholars of Chinese studies debate about the now infamous Backhouse case. Trevor-Roper, for one, paints a portrait of a figure from the Victorian *fin de sieclè,* a figure of scandal, a figure marked by transgressions of all sorts, a figure to be unveiled. Images of "penetrat[ing] behind such superficial impressions" dominate the narrative.

The Cultural Logic: Between Difference and Similarity

Backhouse was born 1873, his father from a long lineage of middle class Quakers, his mother from the Cornish stock of minor aristocracy, from whom he later inherited the title of baronet. He dropped out of Oxford in 1896 during protracted bankruptcy proceedings. Trevor-Roper notes a detail of his Oxford days: he tried to raise money for the defense of Oscar Wilde. Backhouse then appeared in in 1898 and worked as a translator of state documents for various diplomats including his future collaborator J. O. P. Bland. It was a perfect time for him to come on the stage in Beijng as it was a time of great excitement, and the Qing Court was in the midst of convulsion during and after the Hundred Day Reform. The year 1910 saw the publication of a collaborative work between Backhouse and Bland, *China under the Empress Dowager,* ten years after the events of the Boxer Uprising. The way the collaboration worked is that Backhouse did the translation of the primary documents, some of which he supplied; while Bland, whose Chinese was not sufficient, took care of the style so that it appealed to the English readership, Bland himself being a long-time foreign correspondent for *The Times.* Inspired by the great success of the book, in 1914 they collaborated again on another history, *Memories of the Manchu Dynasty.* Toward the end of his life, Backhouse wrote a two-part autobiography, *The Dead Past* and *Decadence Mandchoue,* in which he claimed intimate relationships with leading figures of the decadent circle of *fin de sieclè* England, several empresses in France, Russia, the eunuchs as well as the Empress Dowager herself at the Manchu court. He died in Beijing in 1944 during the Japanese occupation.

In the pages of *China under the Empress Dowager,* Backhouse endeavors to produce an image of the Chinese that would be readily recognized by his contemporaries as authentic. A year after the Boxer Uprising, Sir Robert Hart, head of the Imperial Maritime Customs, lamented in a personal letter,

> It would be interesting to get a really reliable Chinese account of

> Palace doings-and Peking doings–during 1900. As it is, we are all guessing and inferring and putting this and that together, but we have not got at the facts yet. It's all a question, with no finality in it. (Trevor-Roper 50-51)

With his book, in particular, its centerpiece "The Diary of His Excellency Ching Shan," Backhouse seems exactly to have provided the much desired first-hand information about the Chinese court at the time of the Uprising. Yet this is not the only reason, or indeed even the main reason, that the book was so popular, since it came out a good decade after the defeat of the Boxer Uprising, thus diminishing the political importance of the information. The late publication of the book also to some extent invalidates the dominant interpretation of the motivation of the forgery of the "Diary": that it is done in the interest of Jung Lu, Grand Secretary of the Qing court, who appeared to be pro-western in the Diary and might thus have hoped to win the favor of the western powers after Boxer Uprising. By the time of the publication of "The Diary," Jung Lu had been dead for seven years. Rather than fulfilling immediate political needs then, *China under the Empress Dowawger* was popular for more broadly defined cultural reasons.

One central theme of the book is the imminent fall of the Qing Empire, which happened one year after the publication of the book. Much attention is lavished on the doings of the eunuchs and their corrupting power; images of decay and corruption abound; epithets such as "weak debauchee," "a degenerate," (Emperor Xian Feng) and "dissolute habits" seem to appear on every other page of the narrative. For example, while describing the life of the court in exile and the temporary ascension of one Ts'en Ch'un-hsuan, governor of Shensi, the third-person narrator of *China under the Empress Dowager* throws in an interpretive aside,

> It would have been well for her [the Empress Dowager] had she retained him [Ts'en] and others of his quality about her to counteract the corrupt tendencies of her Manchu clansmen and the eunuchs.(70)

Again, commenting on the "remarkable qualities of the Empress Dowager," the narrator has another aside:

> of those qualities which chiefly contributed to her popularity and power we would place, first, her courage, and next, a certain simplicity and directness–both qualities that stand out in strong

> relief against the timorous and tortuous tendencies of the average Manchu. (302)

It is interesting to note that the passages are both about exceptions to the rule, with the rule, the corrupt and corrupting tendencies, tucked away in subordinate clauses. General decadence then provides the backdrop of the narrative, and because it is only the backdrop rather than under the spotlight, the work as a whole appears to be serious and is distinguished from many of its sensationalist forerunners. However, by maintaining those asides and throw-away remarks, the book unwittingly reveals its indebtedness to its predecessors, by fulfilling quite similar expectations in the readers.

The spotlight of the narrative is, of course, on the Empress Dowager. The picture of her is an intricate balance between being the symbol of decadence, and being a "relief" against the decadent background, between being exotically different, yet "universal" in the unnamable quality of "charm." To summarize her essence simply, she is "a woman and an Oriental" (299). These two qualities indeed function as the guidelines for the complexity of the narrative, the difference registered in terms of gender and race. Thus, despite "her swiftly changing and uncontrolled moods, her childish lack of moral sense, her unscrupulous love of power, her fierce passions and revenges," she was not to be seen as "a savage monster." The assumption behind the argument is that these are common failings of "a woman and an Oriental," which the reader, should take with a measure of tolerance.

Thus on the one hand, the narrator beseeches his reader to "let us remember her time and place," so as to avoid judging her unfairly by "European standards of conduct and ideas." In the logic of the writer, the temporal scale is a projection of the European past onto the present of China, which is quite consistent with what Johannes Fabian calls the "denial of coevalness," "a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse." To see the parallel situation, one needs only replace the discipline of anthropology with that of sinology of the kind of which Backhouse may be a representative. The comparisons are then made with medieval Europe, as the narrator quotes a historian, "the life of the Beijng palace, life that of of our fourteenth century, was one of profound learning and crass stupidity, of infantile gaiety and sudden tragedy, of flashing fortunes and swift dooms." This paradoxical existence of childlike and childish qualities,[2] of sins and innocence, of learning and stupidity, makes the picture of the Empress Dowager strangely unintelligible while simultaneously strangely familiar, since it is supposed to be in the distant past of European memory. Compounded with this sense of time is the stress on the particular "place" of the Empress, her being an "Oriental." Explaining her "unexplainable" outbursts of sudden rage, the narrator takes on a curious "Oriental perspective," as "the fact did her no injury in the eyes of a race which believes that wrath-matter undischarged is a virulent poison in the system." At various other occasions, the "Oriental point of view," cultural relativism with a twist, also helps to explain away her other otherwise incomprehensible patterns of action. Thus taking on the role of her apologist, the narrator explains her various failings in terms of the tradition in which she operates, "the fierceness without which an Oriental ruler cannot hope to remain effective," and in terms of her upbringing in such a tradition, which allows no possibility of alternatives:

> Hers, from the first, was the trick and temper of autocracy. Trained in the traditions of a Court where human lives count for little, where power maintains itself by pitiless and brutal methods, there treason and foul deeds lie in waiting for the first sign of the ruler's weakness, how should she learn to put away from the Forbidden City the hideous barbarities of its ways? (300)

A sympathetic picture indeed, against the backdrop of "barbarities," from which the Empress is yet not always distinct. Decay and despotism, the nineteenth century's most favored political images of the Orient, thus help the home reader to understand the distant Other. Her "time and place" then places the image of the Empress Dowager into a fixed mode of interpretation, thus giving meaning to the otherwise unintelligible bundle of contradictions.

Further compunding this picture is the image of the forever feminine, ranging from motherly, wise, kind, to excessive, frivolous, uncontrollable, and full of vengeance. The mixture is summarized, as the Empress is portrayed as "imbued with a very feminine love of luxury, addicted to pleasure, and at one period of her life undoubtedly licentious after the manner of her Court's traditions." There is no doubt a considerable overlap between the qualities that define the Oriental and those that define the feminine, and indeed, the Oriental has often been couched in the terms of the feminine, or the effeminate. The issues of gender and race are therefore interwoven. And this is where images of decadence come in again, as the lack of virile power is often the metaphor, sometimes taking literally as the sign, of cultural and political decay. Curiously, against the "timorous and tortuous" Manchus as the background, the Empress herself is quite often portrayed as the truly virile one, a phallic woman of some sort:[3]

> Amongst the effete classical scholars, the fat-paunched Falstaffs, the opium sots, doddering fatalists and corrupt parasites of the Imperial Clans, she seems, indeed to have been an anachronism, a "cast-back" to the virility and energy that won China for her sturdy ancestor. She appeared to be the born and inevitable ruler of the degenerate Dynasty... (301)

As the men appear to be de-sexed in their progress toward decay, the one person who rules becomes all powerful, as she usurps the power of her more "sturdy," presumably male ancestors.[4]

The balancing act of the narrative does not stop here. Having proved that a true understanding of the Empress Dowager lies in the appreciation of her "time and place," in other words, her difference from "European standards of conduct," the book nonetheless concludes on a note of universality. It is that "mysterious and indefinable quality which is called 'charm.'" This is a quality that is "apparently independent alike of morals, ethics, education, and what we call civilization; universal in its appeal, irresistible in its effect upon the great majority of mankind." Why all of a sudden the need for this mysterious quality?

This invocation of universal feminine charm is highly effective in playing several functions. First, it has a similar effect to the recurrent gestures toward medieval Europe, in that it domesticates the exotic and thus makes it comprehensible for the home audience. "Universal" in this sense translates into "familiarity," if not exactly "European standards." Secondly, by distilling it from all cultural specifics, precisely what the author has pleaded with the reader to understand earlier, this quality of feminine charm paradoxically makes the Empress Dowager appear highly personal, while at the same time, strangely vague. This style of representation, a style that is vivid yet opaque, is to be quite characteristic of the narrative of *China under the Empress Dowager* as a whole. Finally, the invocation of this "irresistible charm" also gives the ordinary reader the reason to want to read about this strange woman in a faraway land, which in turn gives the writer the crucial legitimation to write this story. Entertainment value is never far from the mind of the narrator.

The Framing of the "Diary" and the Framed Translator

What characterizes this work of history is then its strong narrative impulse, with its need for the presentation of an interesting and coherent story line, its attention to details, and its complex frames of narrators and authenticating devices. Although no "hard evidence" has yet been found to prove that Backhouse himself forged the diary, it is reasonably safe to assume, after J. J. Duyvendak and Cheng Mingzhous thorough arguments, that it is a heavily doctored document, and that Backhouse was quite aware of its nature. To read the chapter as a framed narrative allows one then to see the diary as a special mode of representation which conforms to well-established conventions. It is an exploitable genre that may serve several functions, in relation to the reader, as well as in relation to the author behind the scenes–the "translator." The ultimate impossibility of distinguishing fact and fiction in the "Diary" is but indicative of the very slippery nature of these relations.

The "Diary" covers the period from January 25 to August 15 of 1900, beginning from the siege of the foreign legations to the time just before the Allied Troops stormed into Beijing. It gives a day-to-day, sometimes hour-to-hour, report of the political situation at the time, with numerous rumors, various drafts of decrees from the Empress and quotations of speeches from the major Qing officials. It notes in great detail the debates that occured at the Qing court, debates over the use of force on the legations, the possible support of the Boxers, and the surrounding court intrigues. These are mostly reported to the diarist from his former students, relatives, and neighbors.

The chapter presents a complex framing structure to the center of the story, with three different layers: the diarist, a high-ranking Manchu official who apparently was murdered soon after the last entry, the document, rescued in the "nick of time" from a bonfire, and the narrator, who is also the discoverer and the translator of the document. The mimetic function of Ching Shan's diary is no doubt central to its value. One reviewer from *The Daily Chronicle* stresses the artlessness of the record so that "this sober record of events surpasses in interest the wildest of romantic writers."Another writer goes further to say that "boys would mistake it for a romance, and read it as they read *Gulliver's Travels.*"[5] Adults would presumably know how to: as a document, and as a diary. The most prominent virtue of the diary form is the presumed sincerity of the diarist, writing in private, never intending it to be published. A reviewer in Shanghai dramatizes the situation: "Had the writer known the use to which his manuscript was to be put, he would probably rather have cut off his hand than penned it." For the "Diary" recorded "such things as a man tells only to his soul, such as he writes only in the privacy of his own chamber, and probably in the stillness of the night after the deeds are done."[6] Thus, "the greatest value of the Diary" is hailed as a "human document" and compared often to that of Samuel Pepys.[7] The immediacy of the diary writing, soon after "the deeds are done," is another virtue, especially important to a work that deals with recent history. In this respect, the stress is somewhat shifted from the immediacy of action, to that of writing itself, so that the gain is the particular perspecitve of the diarist, as the reviewer of *The Shanghai Mercury* claims, "Once immersed in its illuminating revelations the reader loses his own insight, or to speak more correctly, his own foreign obliquity of vision respecting things native, to gain that of a high-placed Manchu official." Writing thus becomes the event, because China

> is the land of the written word. It is ruled by essays. It lives on paper. Elsewhere things happen. In China they are written. We experience events. They only write history. And because this is the central fact regarding China, the book which will render China must be a book of documents.[8]

How does this writing in the first-person narrative relate to the third-person narrative history of the rest of the book? Having depicted the decadent state of affairs in the Qing dynasty earlier in the book, and especially having presented it as a mystery, the "Diary" in Chapter XVII functions as a privileged view into the heart of the exotic mystery. The rest of the book to some extent is yet another frame to the centerpiece that is the "Diary," a relationship that is quite revealing. It is as though the narrators have taken a backseat this time, conceded their position of prominence to a "native informant." On the other hand, the rest of the book leading up to the "Diary" has established the "basic facts" of history, seen undoubtedly from the view of the West. The expertise of the narrators, the authoritative yet impersonal "we" is already established as a trust-worthy frame, against which the first-person narrator is to appear.

How then is the first-person narrator framed? Much as reviewers hail the "human document" value of the "Diary," Ching Shan the diarist is portrayed as a man of rather limited understanding, one full of vengeance, and in particular, a miser and coward. The "Diary" presents him as an extreme xenophobe, rather befitting the stereotype of the Chinese at the time. Even more damaging is his lack of moral principle, for, although he apparently hates foreigners and wishes that the Boxers would wipe them out, he has this to say when the Boxers in fact chose to take up his home as a temporary lodging:

> Although it cannot be denied that everyone should join in this noble work of exterminating the barbarians, I grudge,

> nevertheless, spending money in these hard times even for the Boxers, for rice is now become as dear as pearls, and firewood more precious than cassia buds. (188)

Such sincerity in the diarist, while effective in verisimilitude, also functions to draw contempt from the reader. The issue of authority takes on a different meaning as the third-person narrator clearly does not endorse the diarist's views. By conforming to the stereotyped image and thus becoming a cardboard character, Ching Shan paradoxically becomes more authentic, as a gulf has been created between him and the reader. On the one hand, the third-person narrative relies on the "Diary" as the central native document for authenticity; on the other hand, its own authority is confirmed through the distance from first person narrator.

Apparently in contrast to his somewhat unreliable narrator is another image of the native informant, variously called "Backhouse's friend," "Backhouse's pal," "Backhouse's spy," etc. Possibly someone who collaborated with Backhouse on his translations of the state materials, scholars speculate. This shadowy figure, apparently well-placed in the Qing court, is present in Backhouse's various projects, including providing confidential information for a British railway firm, in his fraudulent dealings with the Bodleian Library, and in his short career as a secret agent for the British Secret Service. Although surrounded by a host of named high-ranking officials, this figure always appears unnamed, the primary source of Backhouse's priviledged information.[9] While providing a sense of authenticity, this shadowy figure is also the one to shield Backhouse when the information is later found to be false. Thus, Weatherall, in his investigation of Backhouse's dealings with the Bodleian, decides that he "remains a scholar and a gentleman," while at some point he has "been the tool of able and unscrupulous Chinese" (Trevor-Roper 121). And as a secret agent on the mission of acquiring weapons for the British, "the party with whom Backhouse was working" was the one who inexplicably changed his mind, and thus the rifles and machine guns so exactly described and dated mysteriously evaporated.

The function of Ching Shan's "Diary" is after all not unlike that of Backhouse's "pal," in that it guarantees the authority of Backhouse while, at convenient times, it also bears the blame of fraud, as Backhouse (or other supporters) stress the distance between himself and his native informant. And thus, the two earlier scholars who agreed on the forged nature of the "Diary" also agree on the more or less innocent role of Backhouse in the whole business, while attributing the forgery to some unnamed, presumably "unscrupulous" Chinese.

"External" evidence with which to pin down Backhouse, then, is nearly sure to fail, as the distinction between the subject and what is external to the subject is constantly blurred. What first aroused the suspicion of possible forgery had to be "internal" evidence. In 1936, the doubts of one William Lewisohn, a British journalist in Shanghai, were aroused when he noticed that what Ching Shan quoted Jung Lu as saying was too close an echo of what Talleyrand said of the murder of the Duc d'Enghien, "The attack on the Legations... is worse than an outrage, it is a stupidity" (197). This echo of another's voice, although quite unintended by the author/translator, is nonetheless unavoidable. These words are oddly out of character with Jung Lu, out of context in Ching Shan's report. They are however not "out of context" to the author, who, as a translator, must bring his own cultural/lingustic repertoire to bear. In other words, Ching Shan's "Diary" is meaningful partly because it can be placed in the context of the likes of Talleyrand. For having stressed the authenicity of the "Diary," the distance between the home perspective represented by the third-person narrative and Ching Shan's voice, these echoes appear as the repressed similarity between the foreign other and the self, as the alien is revealed as but a construct of the self.

This suspicion is but the first of a series of queries concerning a fundamental ambiguity in the language of Backhouse's narrative. Weatherall, the one who would like to see him in China rather than England, despairs, "I am come gravely to doubt whether he is able to separate the true from the untrue in his own mind. He may do so in reflexion; he cannot in speech" (Trevor-Roper 20). The authority who came nearest to nailing the Backhouse case in 1937, the Dutch sinologist J. J. L Duyvendak, also suggested that although there might have been an original to the "Diary," the once truthful details had been elaborated to such an extent that "it has become practically impossible to extricate them from the additions." There is then something inherently suspect in the very "speech" of the narrative which makes everything murky, fact or fiction, reality or fantasy. The telling of the story cannot but implicate the teller. In fact, Trevor-Roper's whole project may be described as proving that Backhouse himself is an unreliable narrator, not only a narrator whose words we cannot take at face value, but a narrator so unreliable that he cannot even be depended on to know the difference between truth and fantasy. The decay of the Other is then seen as contagious to the self that is the observer, even if, or especially if, that observer is particularly privileged. As the distance between the unreliable, native narrator and the authoritative, third-person narrator disappears, the Other's story turns out to be that of the Self, the story-teller but a construct of the Self.

Rather than treating this unreliable narrator as somewhat crazy, or somewhat degenerate, which is to say somewhat of an aberration that can be then explained by its very peculiarity, Backhouse's success is better understood in relation to its cultural and historical contexts. We have seen that much of the success of China under the Empress Dowager is due to its tapping into the needs and desires of the readers of the time; the various authenticating devices that Backhouse uses for the infamous "Diary" again point to the complexity of the cultural fabric from which he weaves images of himself, the expert China hand, the authoritative historian. What then are the conditions of Backhouse's writing?

The Home Condition

While he was in Beijng, a few people did have glimpses of the mysterious Backhouse from time to time; one of them was a Mr. M. E. Weatherall, a dealer in Chinese art. Having discovered a couple of Backhouse's shadowy dealings, including non-existent Chinese originals supposedly deposited at the Bodleian Library at Oxford, he has this to say, "I fear for him out of China, for in the lax, semi-colonial atmosphere of Peking, eccentricities are tolerated which, in England, would soon land him in Wormwood Scrubs" (Trevor-Roper 120).

So, better in China than England. What is it then about China of the time that makes it the perfect place for someone like Backhouse? The other side of the question is: what is it about England that makes it unfit for Backhouse? After all, much of his life was devoted to being in the service of the Empire, to being a benefactor for the home University, and to writing for the home audience. What constitutes the tenuous line between eccentricity and insanity? What are the conditions of his existence, and in particular, of his writing?

According to one part of his autobiography, *The Dead Past,* Backhouse claimed a close personal relationship with many of the well-known figures of the later nineteeth-century England, including Walter Pater. At Oxford (intermittently between 1892 to 1895), Backhouse says, Pater was his "outside college tutor" and "I fell completely under his spell" (Trevor-Roper 245). Whether one takes Backhouse at his own word or not, Walter Pater was certainly a very influential figure of the time, whose *Marius the Epicurean* presented an invitation to life of passionately charged experience, a mysterious hint at the allure of "strange dyes, strange colours, curious odours" which altered the lives of thousands of undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge. What Linda Dowling calls the "aestheticism of cultural surface" is mainly based on two elements: the stimulation of the senses, and the "strangeness" of the stimulation. All through Backhouse's writing, whether it is the history of a Manchu Empress or the story of himself, one finds minute description of "strange" objects, catalogues of exotica, as well as narratives of the effects of these objects on the observer. Backhouse's own long-standing fascination with the figure of the eunuch may have much to do with its multiple symbolic value: its central place in the Palace, the heart of the foreign other; its connection with the learned tradition; and not the least of which, its ambiguous sexuality. This fascination was mostly veiled in this book, the first of Backouse's published works. It becomes more pronounced in his subsequent collaboration with Bland, *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking,* published four years later. By the time Backhouse wrote his autobiography, meant for publication, this interest has become overt. As an over-determined figure, the eunuch becomes for Backhouse an exotic vehicle of expressing what was repressed at home. The author's fascination belies his attraction toward the Other as a desired image of the repressed self.

There is yet a deeper connection between the Victorian *fin de sieòle* and the representation of the exotic other. Toward the end of the nineteenth-century, with the Indian Mutiny and the Boer War, the weakness of the British Empire was starting to show. This weakness, this decay of the state, as many saw it, was mirrored in the decadence of social morals and cultural heritage, the loss of masculinity in men, femininity in women, lack of purity in the English language, lack of power in English literature. Analogies were made between the Greek and Roman Empires with the Victorian one, and indicative of a deep-seated anxiety was the fear that, in the infinite expansion of the empire, lies its ultimate collapse. The anxiety of cultural decadence and impending doom was often projected outward, as other, more contemporary analogies were made, one of which is with the Qing Empire, which, by the turn of the centruy, was evidently nearing its end. The heightened exoticism of the East then functions to alleviate the anxiety of recognition between the near mirror image of the two empires, so that the decadence of the other is seen as a result of its very Otherness, therefore not possible for the Self. Here then is the place for Edmund Backhouse, arriving at the perfect time to witness and write about the fall of the Manchu Empire in the next decade.

Backhouse's primary qualification was his unusual facility for language. Apparently by the time he arrived in Beijing in 1898, his Chinese was already more than proficient, inaddition to knowing Japanese and Russian. His ease and speed at translating Chinese documents was admired and envied by all, including old China hands and sinological experts. He thus presented an apparent contrast to someone like G. E. Morrison, correspondent for *The Times* (1897 to 1918). Morrison's lack of any understanding of the Chinese language was occasionally the butt of jokes from people who would like to see themselves as better Chinese scholars. Nonetheless, the Chinese language was more often described as formidable, even by those who thought of themselves as having mastered it, and indeed it was compared to the second Great Wall that inhibits entrance from outside. Backhouse, by virtue of knowing the Chinese language rather well, was in a highly privileged position, the person to "penetrate" the Great Wall. In the diplomatic circles of Beijing, he provided that much needed service to Morrison, and later J. O. P. Bland, among many others. Later, his linguistic ability was also the primary qualification for his employment by the British Secret Service. Backhouse's privilege goes further than the political, diplomatic circles. As his linguistic facility was being admired by sinologists, Backhouse's reputation as a scholar gradually ascended. In the scholarly sinological journal *The New China Review*, a portrait of Backhouse was featured as a frontispiece, along with other sinologists presented in earlier issues, including Herbert Giles and Edouard Chavannes. Occasionally, he participated in the scholarly discussions on esoteric matters, such as when he replied to the Editor's query concerning the history of the palace copy of the famous encyclopaedia, the *Yongle Dadian.*[10]

Backhouse the sinological scholar at first may not seem to fit well with the image of the hack translator and secret agent. However, the state of the profession of sinology at the time makes possible a close link between the two sides of Backhouse's image. As T. H. Barrett notes, the late nineteenth-century saw a change in the background of sinologists in England, in that many of them now came from government service rather than religious missions. These men, Barrett continues, "having mastered a useful skill,... by reason of age or infirmity were incapable of putting it any longer to some good purpose," thus retired to England to "pass on their knowledge" (120). Around the last decade of the nineteenth century, many of these amateur sinologists were at pains to prove their professionalism, as the discipline turned away from the kind of sinology *de chambre* that had been prevalent.

Against this background, Backhouse was bidding for the coveted chair at Oxford from 1914 to 1920. His rival was from a missionary background, thus considered by many to be less qualified than Backhouse. His lavish donation of Chinese books to the Bodleian Library during this period, a portion of which never materialized, resembled closely what Thomas Wade did for Cambridge, for which he was granted the first Chinese chair. What

Backhouse needed to do then was to prove his expertise, and that he did by claiming first-hand knowledge, and by making sure that he had the monopoly of such first-hand material. The value of the expertise not surprisingly coincides with that of the secret agent, which resides in his being the sole intermediary, the one and only privileged observer.

The Scholary Apparatus of the Translator

The authenticating device that Backhouse uses from beginning to end is a circumstantial one. Appearing in front of Chapter XVII, "Diary of his Excellency Ching Shan," is a page-long "Note," establishing the background of Ching Shan the narrator, and describing the circumstances of the discovery of the "Diary" by the translator Backhouse. In addition to being highly placed in the Qing Court,[11] a characteristic which Ching Shan shares with the "pal," the "Note" gives two other details about Ching Shan: that he died a tragic death at the hand of his own son soon after the allied forces entered Beijing; and his relative obscurity to the foreign legations despite his high postion. The tragic ending, being the one well-known documented fact about the historical figure, adds spice to the historical convulsion while also providing a dramatic situation in which the translator discovers the "Diary." The relative obscruity of Ching Shan makes him a prime choice, while at the same time, shows off more knowledge of the translator than an average member of the foreign legations. The "Note" takes on a decidedly scholarly flavor at the end with what must have seemed a near-pedantic caution to the average reader, "It should be explained that Ching Shan..., who retired from office in 1894, must be distinguished from Ching Hsin..., who died about 1904" (166). It then refers the reader to an official source for more information on both figures, citing the edition and year of the official publication.

When, some twenty-seven years later, the authenticity of the "Diary" was challenged seriously, what Backhouse did is in effect to enlarge this note, especially his own role in it. The one sentence in the "Note," explaining Backhouse's role in saving the "Diary" "in the nick of time from being burned by a party of Sikhs," becomes a full-fledged description with great detail in what is called this time "The Footnote." What is most noticeable in this narration, as Backouse calls it himself, is the extraordinary attention paid to details. When he entered Ching Shan's house "in the main room of the inner courtyard Madame Ching Shan lay moaning and murmuring on the *K'ang,"* while her relatives were trying to persuade her to take some gruel; there were

Sikhs and Welsh and "native" officers there, arguing with one another; in Ching Shan's private study, "the litter of paper [was] several inches deep," while in the outer courtyard, there were signs of burnt paper.[12] In this general confusion, some loose sheets of paper caught the would-be translator's eyes: they were Ching Shan's Diary.[13] The great many details set up a well-furnished stage, ready for the main character to enter. Apparently, that character is Ching Shan, as the spotlight seems to be on his household, *his* study, *his* diary, while the translator is only the objective presenter of the document, faithfully rendering it for historical interest, an intermediary. However, Backhouse's authenticating devices show that the central character is without doubt Backhouse himself, with Ching Shan as a puppet, a stage-prompt as it were.

"The Footnote" was written in response to William Lewisohn's article casting serious doubt about the authenticity of "The Diary." In particular, it sets out to defend Backhouse's scholarly abilities, which the Lewsiohn article had made suspect. The focal issue is the ability to read "grass hand" Chinese characters that the "Diary" allegedly was written in. Lewisohn claims that even Duyvendak, who first endorsed the authenticity of the "Diary" thirteen years earlier had now joined him in refuting it, had to have help from the natives to read it. Duyvendak is quoted as saying "...the reading of 'grass character' always remaining a perilous task for a European." Judging from the ensuing debate, the word "perilous" is fitting.

A brief recounting of the history to this debate may be useful in understanding Backhouse's later response. In 1926, Reginald Johnston, well-known in the diplomatic as well as the sinological world for being for many years the English tutor of the young Emperor Hsuan-t'ung, published under the nom de plume Reginald Irving an article in which he supported the authenticity of the "Diary." He had apparently shown several pages of it to two people, "a Manchu and a Chinese who were connected with the Imperial Court and had been personally acquainted with the diarist, and that they had both independently declared that they recognized the handwriting and knew it to be that of Ching Shan" (Chinese Social 951). To have such an authoritative figure further cite more native authority was indeed formidable. Despite such strong corroboration, some doubts were raised by Lewisohn, who questioned the consistency of the paper on which the "Diary" is written and that of the hand-writing, in addition to a host of other doubts. Lewisohn's argument is primarily historically based, and his conclusion is that the "Diary" is "not genuine," but a patchwork by several people after the events. This is years after Duyvendak had confirmed the authenticity of the Diary as well as published a closer translation of parts of the "Diary" himself. A few months after the publication of Lewisohn's article Duyvendak also published a lengthy article, well-researched and thoroughly documented, this time basically to confirm Lewisohn's doubts. What is most noticeable about Duyvendak's argument, however, is a sense of professional pride, which is rather hurt by having an amateur such as Lewisohn challenge what he himself had endorsed before. As a result, Duyvendak's own argument is quite tortuous. At the beginning of his article, Duyvendak points out that much of Lewisohn's argument is based on issues that he himself had raised years earlier when he translated the "Diary," which, however, he does not "consider conclusive enough to outweigh the arguments in favour of the 'Diary's' authenticity." He then goes on to cite all the evidence in favour of the authenticity, including Reginold Johnston's corroboration, apparently proving its irrefutability. At this point, Duyvendak makes a 180 degree turn, to argue that, indeed, the "Diary" is inauthentic. This time, the proof, or counter-proof, lies not in circumstantial or even historical argument, but in the "exclusive philological" argument. And indeed, one might almost say that the point of the argument is to be "exclusive," as Duyvendak skillfully marshals an impressive amount of Chinese texts to show that the "Diary" has "verbal dependence" on texts which are of later date than the entry in the "Diary." The article is fully footnoted with profuse quotations from these primary sources, with Chinese characters covering a good quarter of the space of the article. It is very consistent with the seriousness of the journal in which it appeared, the *T'oung Pao*. In remarkable contrast to the Lewisohn article, the style of which is somewhat chatty, Duyvendak writes in a cool scholarly tone, in what might be called the scientific style, with the majority of the sentences in passive voice, and the "I," when it appears, in an unemotional and presumably objective mode. Apparently then, what is on the line now is professional reputation and integrity, the involvement of the scholars' own pride in scholarship.

Indeed, when Lewisohn and Duyvendak successively launched the attack, Backhouse's collaborator Bland urged him to publish a "scholarly refutation" to save the book (Trevor-Roper 200). This is the background against which Backhouse wrote his "Footnote." Not surprisingly then, he also defended his own scholarship by focusing on the issue of the grass-hand writing of the "Diary." He first gives his professional pedigree, replete with references to famous philologists, tracing it back to his Oxford days of studying Japanese, especially "the Hiragana, or Japanese grass hand," so that he had already had some 4000 grass characters down before he came to China. A curious turn occurs when Backhouse coolly corrects his critics by saying that the "Diary" is not written in difficult grass hand, so that the few difficult words could easily be found in grass-running hand dictionaries. On this point, Backhouse proves to be more accurate than his critics, as indeed the handwriting of the "Diary," judging from the facsimile of some of the pages published, could hardly be called grass-hand, but instead is written in a fairly regular running-hand. This one rebuff then is the strongest of all, turning from defensive to offensive, with Backhouse definitely winning an advantage. The real issue, however, remains unchanged: the expert authority of the scholar, whose very integrity is called upon for the guarantee of authenticity. The physical "hand" of the diarist is summoned as an alibi not only for the existence of the diarist but also for the presence of the translator.

Another proof that Backhouse offers, again one relating to his own worth as a scholar, is the various employers he has had for translation tasks. Among his list are Sir Earnest Satow, British minister to Beijing between 1900 to 1906, Sir John Jordan, who came after him to the same post, Sir Sidney Barton, his collaborator in a dictionary on Chinese colloquialism, all of whom wrote him "wonderful recommendation letters." Backhouse goes on to quote the price he charged for the translations he had done for these noted personalities, rhetorically asking "would these men have paid me a sum of ￡ 2000 over many years, if my translations, whether into or from Chinese, Mongol, Japanese, Russian, etc. were of no value?" The string of "sirs" and the price they paid to Backhouse combine to make up an impressive curriculm vitae, so to speak, to vouchsafe for the value of the translator, which then, by an extension of logic, vouchsafes the value of the document under contention at present. The value and integrity of the scholar, rather than any point-by-point refutation of the challenges, is guaranteed through references to more believers, more documents, and more texts.

On one point alone even the non-believers all concede: is the literary value of Backhouse's works. Daniele Vare, who was cognizant of the controversy, has this to say, "If it is really apocryphal, it is a real work of art. The point of view of the old China could not be better presented, or represented." (215). Lionel Giles considered the Diary to be "well worth preservation as the most masterly specimen of literary forgery in modern times" (Trevor-Roper 207). Even Duyvendak, whose own style is as dry as Backhouse's is imaginative, concludes that the "Diary" retains value merely as literary fiction, which, in masterly fashion, expresses the atmosphere of those days. "Atmosphere" is indeed a well-chosen word, characteristic of Duyvendak's precision. Some scholars have tried to redeem the "Diary" on the basis of the "atmosphere" of the time that it faithfully renders. And that indeed is Backhouse's greatest strength, as a creator of atmosphere, a vague vividness at points hard and clear, at others quite opaque. It is the realistic convention at its best. How is the self-image of a historian, a sinologist, and most of all, a translator, constituted by a text that is best at atmosphere? Backhouse himself would not have been content to regard his work merely good for the atmosphere, however. The whole point of providing the "Diary" as the centerpiece of the project is so that first-hand information is presented. The inside information is then to guarantee the expertise of the historian, the translator, the would-be Oxford chair of Chinese. There are present in the narrative of *China under the Empress Dowager* two somewhat contradictory impulses, the narrative one that counts on the vividness of representation, on the creation of great atmosphere, and the scholarly one that depends on the presentation of authentic material and on the power of an authoritative voice. Furthermore, paradoxical as they may seem, the two impulses are closely connected with each other, to the extent that they are interdependent. No place is this tension more pronounced than in the relation between the "Diary" proper and the footnotes where these contradictory impulses are played out.

The most noticeable feature of Backhouse's translation of the "Diary" is the smoothness of the English text. It flows effortlessly if sometimes quaintly. Review after review raved about its readability. To someone like Duyvendak, the very smoothness, however, renders it suspect, as "...the very fluency of the English made those, who had experience of translating from Chinese into a western tongue, feel that the translation was probably rather free." Duyvendak's own translation, in contrast, is to be "literal," so that the Chinese text may be "subject to a strictly scientific examination" (Acta Orientala IV). For the reasons why Backhouse's translation is in such a free style, Duyvendak had two speculations: writing for the general public rather than for scholars, and the collaboration between Backhouse and Bland–the latter revised and polished it without reference to the Chinese original.

Two things are at stake here: appeal to the reader and fidelity to the original, typical translator's issues. In this case, the composer of the final draft in the target language is only responsible to the target language and the target language reader, which was not uncommon in this period. What makes Backhouse's case unique is that the translation is possibly twice removed from the original, since in all likelihood there is another shadowy collaborator behind Backhouse, unacknowledged to be sure. In addition, the original is often concealed, made inaccessible, forever receding. What emerges, then, is the strong presence of the translator, who is by no means a transparent medium through which the reader gets to the original. Instead, the original is always in the process of being composed, reconstituted, while the simultaneous effect is the constitution of the authoritative figure of the translator as the expert. In Backhouse's version then, very rarely is there any hint of the gap between the source language and the target language. For Backhouse, there is likewise the need to create a space from which the authoritative presence of the translator locates itself. That space this time is provided by the scholarly apparatus that surrounds the book.

In addition to the "Note" that appears at the beginning of the chapter, there are three other kinds of footnotes: those that primarily give information, those that refer to other texts, and those that provide commentary on the translated narrative of the text proper. There is a large number of notes that give various kinds of information, in particular historical or folkloric information, in a way educating the uninitiated reader. When the text of the "Diary" mentions the Jade Emperor, for example, the footnote provides the information, "The Supreme Deity of the Taoists and tutelary spirit of the Boxers" (172). This seems like a piece of pretty straight-forward information with an ethnographical bent. In the same spirit, there is another footnote on the name of one of the key figures of the court, Prince Tuan.

> The second character of Princeton Tuan's name contains the radical sign for dog, and was given him by the Emperor Hien-Feng, because he had been begotten during the period of mourning for his parent Tao-Kuang; it being an offence, under Chinese law, for a son to be begotten during the twenty-seven months of mourning for father or mother. (n. 203)

What is curious about this footnote entry is the mixture of very precise information, exactly "twenty-seven months," which seems to be designed to dispel all doubt, however much it defeats any sense of logic, with a highly bogus piece of curio, the "dog radical sign." Together, the two elements combine to make what is called "Chinese law" appear to be very alien indeed. The information that this kind of footnote provides, then, is a kind of diversion, in the guise of knowledge of the Other. The uninitiated or semi-initiated reader, for whom this kind of information is primarily intended, is thus entertained as a tourist in an exotic land.

The second kind of footnote appears to makes references to other texts, conforming to the most basic form of scholarly citation. In this respect, Backhouse most often makes references to texts of classical Chinese philosophy and literature, ostensibly bringing to light otherwise obscure allusions made by the learned diarist. There are numerous footnotes referring to Mencius, Confucius, and sometimes just generally referred to as "a classical allusion." If the first kind of footnote obliquely draws on the nineteenth-century European trend of *chinoiserie,* this kind of footnoting appeals to the earlier tradition of the Enlightenment, when there was great admiration for the wisdom of the Chinese sages. At the same time, the numerous references to the classics also establish the translator as a scholar, capable of recognizing allusions and obscure echoes of a difficult classical tradition. Now if the Chinese original of the "Diary" is indeed forged, and Backhouse had a hand in doing it, then the allusions were first put in there so that they could later be dug out. The forger is then very adept at anticipating the expectations of the more learned reader on the one hand, and on the other hand, highly skillful in creating a space to show off his own supposed expertise in the classical learning of the tradition. The success of Backhouse's project owes a great deal to this mixture of exoticism and classicism in the representation of the last empire of China.

Later, when Duyvendak proposed to make a better translation of the Diary, his version again attempts and succeeded in surpassing that of Backhouse in terms of the amount of classical allusions recognized. It is a matter of professional pride, as Duyvendak declares, "Ching-shan was evidently a man of fine scholarship, and his brush often indulges in literary quotations. I have taken some pains to trace these and find their origin.. As nothing so clearly shows the working of a Chinese scholar's mind as the constant use of classical references,..."(VII). Nor anything to show the working of a western scholar's mind, nor indeed, a scholar-forger's mind, for that matter.

The third kind of footnotes are a medley of parallel narratives and meta-commentaries on the text proper, further mixing and mingling the familiar and the exotic. Some of them fill in the blanks of the missing entries, for example: "between January and June," the entries are described as "of no particular interest," and thus are left out of the translation. Again, right in the middle of the June 22 entry in the diary, this time in the text proper but in parenthesis and italicized, the translator cuts in "At this point the diarist proceeds to give a full account of the rise and spread of the Boxer movement,... The facts have nearly all been published before, so that most of this portions of the "Diary" is here omitted... We give one example only of the farrago of gibberish..." (191). In both cases, when Duyvendak checked with the Chinese original at the British Museum, he could not find the manuscripts. The footnotes then stand in for otherwise conspicuous absences in the original. Whether "the farrago of gibberish" was lost, as Backhouse claimed, or had been neglected to be forged will never be known. What they remind one of is the shadowy figure of the "pal" whose existence could never be ascertained, a veritable veil for the enigmatic space which the translator occupies. If the "grass-hand"

and the intertextual moments and there to guarantee the presence of the native informant, however backfiring, this last kind of footnoting is the most fragile sign, free floating without a referent.

There are then two layers of mystery surrounding the "Diary": Backhouse's mistranslation, or "literary embellishment," and the possible forged nature of the original Diary itself. To safeguard this secret, Backhouse made sure that manuscripts were hard to get at. The parts of the "Diary" that are not translated by Backhouse himself, nobody has ever seen. Lewisohn had offered to buy them, Duyvendak had repeatedly asked to see them. But they were lost to nameless buyers, when, as Backhouse claims, "there is higher and a more immediate interest, viz. BREAD AND BUTTER interest, and ANGUSTA DOMI" (Footnote 283). Even the portion deposited at the British Museum is not easy to get at, as for a long time, Duyvendak was the only one except Backhouse who had access to it. The monopolized possession of the manuscript is no doubt a control of power, scholarship notwithstanding; and monopoly over a non-existent manuscript is, needless to say, a necessity with forgers.

There were many other ways for Backhouse to safeguard his higher authority in terms of his relationship to the text. At several points, Backhouse takes on the role of a connoisseur, expert at detecting forgery, other people's forgery. For example, what Ching Shan as well as the Qing Court apparently took as genuine, a document demanding the restoration of the Emperor, Backhouse points out authoritatively as a forgery in the footnote, thus showing a much better understanding of the historical events than the diarist. At other points, the translator also corrects the information given by the diarist. The kind of mistake the original diarist tends to make typically concern the names or nationality of foreign legation people, understandable within the general picture of Ching Shan as a conservative and a xenophobe. Although the original diarist is the basis of the authority of the translator, the latter's distance from the native informant need not be close, and his relation to the text need not be slavish.

Distanced too is the translator from all other China-hands, those who are in a competitive positive *vis-à-vis* otherwise unmediated authority. One of those disparaged is a Miss Catherine A. Carl and her book *With the Empress Dowager of China.* The Empress Dowager at two points entertained the wives of the foreign diplomats at Beijing, and as a result, some of them wrote books about their forays into the imperial court. One of these is Catherine Carl's, who also was the only one privileged to paint a portrait of the Empress Dowager at her request. From Ching Shan's mouth a sarcastic insider's point of view, the Empress Dowager was only up to her old tricks, "allur[ing] them to her side with rich gifts and honeyed words" (202). In the footnote, Backhouse takes a jibe,

> How well and successful she did it, has been told in Miss Catherina A Carl's book, *With the Empress of China.* The painting of her portrait for the St. Louis Exhibition was in itself an example of Tzu Hsi's "cardinal virtues of government," which she practiced with conspicuous success on the simple-minded wife of the American Minister, Mrs. Conger. (n. 202)

Later, in the "Conclusion" to the whole book, Backhouse again disparages the records of the other Europeans, "equally valueless, for historical accuracy, are most of the accounts and impressions of the Empress recorded by those Europeans (especially the oadies of the Diplomatic Body and their friends)," as they are invariably taken in by her false display of "womanly grace and gentleness of disposition" (299).

Nor does Backhouse have anything good to say about Chinese books on the Empress, as "no useful record of the life and times of the Empress Dowager is to be expected from any Chinese writer." The main reason is apparently their bias against the Manchus. Thus one such Chinese author, a disciple of the famous reformist K'ang Yu-wei, whose work is said to be remarkable for sustained invective and reckless inaccruacy,

> drawing on a typically Babu store of "western learning," this writer compares the Empress to Circe, Semiramis, Catherine de Medici, Messalina... But his judgment is emphatically sweeping... his work is almost valueless. (298)

Surprisingly, the hidden reason seems more the problem of "western learning" than his purported Chinese bias. On the other hand, it is not very surprising, indeed one might say there is an equally "typical" hatred of the Babu figure, prevalent among Anglo-Indian writers like Rudyard Kipling. Not only are those "native informants" reaching the intended English audience and therefore possibly superseding the need for people like Backhouse, they also uncannily remind people like Backhouse of the similarity between them. For after all, on the very next page, Backhouse himself is comparig the Empres Dowager to "Emperor William of Germany and Mr. Roosevelt," and all through the book, numerous comparisons have been made from Queen Elizabeth to Queen Victoria.

The similarity between the Babu and someone like Backhouse is the very ambiguity of their identity, and the rage of Backhouse towards their mirrored counterpart is the signal of the desire to repress that similarity. However mixed that identity may be, and however it can lend him authority at times, ultimately it is undesirable and has to be relegated to somewhere else, or someone else.

The Complexion of the Sinologist: "Gone Native"

Much as Backhouse shrunk from his own mirror-image, others unwillingly see themselves in Backhouse. Speaking about his own aborted effort to acquire scholarship in the Chinese language, J. O. P. Bland, Backhouse's patron and collaborator, talks about acute mental indigestion produced by painfully plowing through two classics of Chinese fiction, which in the end do not "compensate any normal individual." He then goes on to say the following, in implicit reference to Backhouse,

> I observed that the mentality of Europeans who become absorbed in the intensive study of Chinese gradually assumes an oriental complexion and, in the end, becomes estranged from the European outlook on life, habits of thought and standards of conduct. (Bland's unpublished memoirs, quoted in Trevor-Roper 215)

How very curious that the mentality eventually becomes a complexion, and all that through the study of a language? It is as through the ultimate "going-native" is achieved through language acquisition, through which some essence of the alien other gets under one's skin, so to speak. In Bland's metaphor, something that starts off as mental, internal, and presumably normal as part of one's scholarship, becomes something physical, external as it may be "observed," bordering on the abnormal, at least in terms of "European standards." It is portrayed as a gradual alienation from one's root, an estrangement. Bland is too much of a gentleman to say that it is possibly a sickly "complexion," though it is obviously bad enough that it is given as a reason for not ending up in that condition himself.

This passage in Bland's memoirs is taken by Trevor-Roper to be Bland's reply to Backhouse's having gone native. Even if it is not a direct reference, since the name of Backhouse does not appear in the whole memoir, it is at least Bland's gesture at distancing himself from the likes of Backhouse, those who are prodigious in native learning and are particularly noted for their linguistic ability. For Bland once joined Morrison in praising precisely this quality of Backhouse, being "more of a classical Chinaman than an Englishman," and both made full use of it in their much needed information on China for *The Times*.

Backhouse's having gone too far native also furnishes a point for critcism in academic terms. D. L. McMullen, in reviewing the rapid professionalization of the discipline at the time, concurs with Henri Cordier that there is a need for sinologists to "add to a practical knowledge, gained in China, the scientific training gained at home." McMullen then invokes the names of Marcel Granet, pioneer anthropologist on China, and Max Weber, who, although short on data about China, was nonetheless quite "scientific" in approach. In comparison, Backhouse appears at best a half-qualified scholar, since although he does apparently supply primary documentation, he lacks the "distance" and "keener critical knowledge" that "scientific training gained at home" is presumably to supply. Further concurring with Bland's judgment of Backhouseas a "classical Chinaman," McMullen invokes the Chinese phrase *shu-hsiang* (fragrant of books) to describe the kind of written style and personality that Backhouse represented. Although writing a good two generations later than Bland, McMullen thus employs the same distancing device that Bland employed to distance himself from Backhouse. It is the device that Marlow uses against Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the device of the traveller who went half way(therefore has had glimpses of the darkness) to distinguish himself from the one who presumably went all the way.

If Bland, and to some extent McMullen, play the role of Marlow, Trevor-Roper is more like the unnamed seaman who tells Marlow's story in *The Heart of Darkness*. Trevor-Roper mostly stays in the background, rarely intrudes on the scene of the telling. At the same time, he is engaged, however implicitly, in the same quest romance that Backhouse and Bland are engaged in. Moreover, while both quests take the shape of penetrating to "the imagined center of an exotic civilization, the core,... coeur, or the heart of darkness," the interior of the Forbidden City, the dark recesses of the Qing palace, the writing (telling) of them have more to do with the probing of the quester's own mind, his inner "heart of darkness" (Showalter 81). In his biography, which is also a detective romance, Trevor-Roper occasionally falls on the image of the hermit to account for certain blank spots in his own research, where Backhouse proves to be too elusive to be grasped. Thus he describes his hunt at the Bodleian, "there I was rewarded by finding my first solid evidence of his existence and activity before he disappeared into his almost total oriental seclusion" (7). Again, speaking about Backhouse's position at Beijing University, Trevor-Roper says, "Of Backhouse's duties and success in this post, which he held for ten years, we know nothing: the documents of the university of Peking have disappeared from human, or at least from western, sight" (37). The elusive hermit then definitely has an oriental "complexion," as Trevor-Roper's book is appropriately entitled *The Hermit of Peking.*

However, nothing can be quite definite about the elusive forger, hardly any "solid evidence" can be had, even for the various forgeries he is supposed to be involved in. The so-called "hermit of Beijing" is instead a self-consciously constructed image, designed to be bought by people like Bland, but also unwittingly bought by late-comers such as Trevor-Roper. One need only look at Backhouse's own descriptions of this hermit to understand the self-consciousness behind it. In 1932, when Backhouse was trying to interest Bland in another collaboration, the centerpiece this time was to be the memoirs of the Grand Eunuch Li Lien-ying. He says that he has gone native, "by wearing Chinese dress (as is my habit now) I am able to go about with delightful freedom and in company with Chinese friends to pass as an indigene" (Trevor-Roper 190). Bear in mind that the memoirs never materialized, and that Backhouse's description of them are personally tailored to entice Bland. As a "native" informant seeking further employment, it is of course to his advantage to pass as native as much as possible in front of Bland. Backhouse looked nothing like this sort of hermit when he posed for a picture for *New China Review;* in fact he looked like a regular English gentleman, if somewhat conservative in outlook. But then again, that was a time when he was enthusiastically bidding for the Oxford chair.[14] In another instance, Backhouse went back to England to visit his relatives. At Victoria Station, his niece could not recognize him, as he was "with a long black beard, dressed in the robes of a Chinese mandarin." While visiting the relatives at Banffshire and Edinburgh, Backhouse continued to wallow in his eccentricity, "walking aborad in his Chinese garb," going "native" in his home country (Trevor-Roper 110, 112).

Rather than "indifferent to everying and everybody outside [his] own work and hobbies," as he claims to Bland, Backhouse's self-image of an eccentric hermit is therefore very much of a pose, intended for the eyes of the observer, intended to draw attention in certain directions, to draw attention away from other undesirable directions. So now we have come full circle to the functions of the veil of the recluse, as the "native" garb is but another veil, with which Backhouse literally covers his face. It may be the longest worn and last shed, if ever shed. Ultimately, there is no possibility of peeling all the veils, of getting down to "solid evidence." For Backhouse thrives by the multiplicity of roles (and robes), by the weaving and un-raveling and re-weaving of himself in the various garbs, in the various texts.

And what makes it possible for him to weave something convincing is the historical, cultural context of the "orient" of Beijing that provides an exotic and distant fantasy land. As long as this fantsay land provided the stage of the play between the western powers and the benefits of these powers depended on their understanding of this land, as long as it was or is perceived as a land behind walls, including the linguistic wall, someone like Backhouse would be there, wearing native robes and a native "complexion," presenting the native scene for the home audience, representing the natives in history.

Notes

[1] I rely mostly on Trevor-Roper's research for biographical details.

[2] Describing the Empress as a *bon enfant* is also well within the tradition of colonial discourse, as excellently analyzed by Ashish Nandy in his *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).

[3] For an analysis of the art icon of the "phallic woman of the decadence," see Peter Wollen, "Fashion/Orientalism/the Body," *New Formations* (Spring, 1987): 20.

[4] The inversion of sex roles, projected onto the decadent Qing court, is a recurrent motif of the Victorian *fin de siècle*. See Showalter.

[5] *Daily Chronicle*, 3 October 1910. Nation (U. K.), 22 October 1910.

[6] *Shanghai Mercury*, 29 November, 1910.

[7] *Public Ledger*, 13 November, 1910.

[8] *Nation*, ibid.

[9] The "native informant" is thus presented as the unreliable narrator, the raw material from which the expert pieces together real knowledge.

[10] *The New China Review*, Vol. 1, 1919, in the section "Notes and Queries."

[11] Lo Huimin convincingly argues that the image of Ching Shan in *China Under the Empress Dowager* is considerably different from the historical figure. See Lo.

[12] "A Footnote to *China under the Empress Dowager*," sent to Bland by Backhouse in 1937 and forwarded to Lionel Giles; keeper of Oriental books at the British Museum. Quoted in full by Purcell: 280-84.

[13] The dramatic rescue of a valued document was an established trope in fictional writing by then. Examples abound: Jules Verne's *A Journey to the*

Center of the Earth, Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal suivi de le dernier jour d'un condemne.* For discussion of this convention, see Abbott's *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action.* Ithica: Cornell UP 1984. and Trevor Field's *Form and Function in the Diary Novel* London: MacMillan, 1989.

[14] Frontispiece of *New China Review*, October 1919.

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