

**Amelia Edwards's Picturesque Views of Cairo:
Touring the Land, Framing the Foreign**

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<1> Lady Hester Stanhope was the first Englishwoman to visit Egypt in 1815. Six feet tall, clad in a Turkish man's dress and fluent in Arabic she must have been as much of a sight in Cairo as Cairo would have been a sight to her. Unfortunately, she left no *récit-de-voyage* behind to record her impressions of Egypt, or Egypt's impressions of her. Three decades later, Harriet Martineau admitted in *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848) that her observing faculties failed her to describe Cairo, "the queen of Arabian cities," and she could only conceptualize her "as like as possible to the pictures of the Arabian Nights" (243, 246).(1) The Lockean idea that knowledge is gathered through observation and the notion of Egypt as picture remained with her in her subsequent descriptions of Cairo which are full of concepts of background and foreground, and the interplay of colors, light and shade.

<2> Later travellers would then more explicitly inscribe Egypt's land- and cityscapes in one particular pictorial tradition: In 1849, Florence Nightingale described her first nightly drive from the outskirts into the centre of Cairo as "the most amusing time I ever passed, and the most picturesque," but then she later and with sadness admitted that she found "nothing beautiful" about the pyramids at either Geezeh, Sakkárah or Dahshur; "nothing picturesque" (161, 182). Lucie Duff Gordon, resident in Egypt from 1862 to 1869 while trying to convalesce from tuberculosis, wrote to her friend Tom Taylor on 18 April 1863: "If you have any power over any artists, send them to paint here. No words can describe either the picturesque beauty of Cairo or the splendid forms of the people in Upper Egypt, and above all in Nubia" (57).(2) And Marianne North, visiting Egypt in 1865 when she also stayed with Duff Gordon, reprimanded herself for "having looked at Egyptian things from a purely picturesque point of view," which a Cairo clergyman's wife told her was to see "from a false point of view" (118-19). Nevertheless she resorted repeatedly to notions of the picturesque especially when, as she writes with a high degree of critical awareness, sights became "too stupendous" and made her "feel very small" (148, 130). The ancient ruins of Gertassee with the hills in the background, the blue river in the foreground and palm trees edging the scene could consequently only be described as resembling one of "Claude's small pictures" (144). And finally, Isabel Burton may have lacked North's critical self-awareness and painterly vocabulary but she, too, described, in her 1879 travelogue *Arabia Egypt India: A Narrative of Travel*, dresses, streets, people, buildings and bazaars as all rather "picturesque," whether in Cairo, Damascus, Jeddah or Bombay.(3)

<3> This essay offers an extended reading of one particular woman's vision of the Egyptian picturesque: Amelia Edwards came to Egypt in 1873, where she found a place and subject matter that would transform her life and shift her career from that of a novelist to that of an Egyptologist. Her travelogue *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1877) traces the steps of this development and Edwards's growing interest in Egypt's history, geography, culture and people. More importantly for this essay, however, and when compared with the Egypt descriptions of her predecessors, it elaborates on and complicates the exotic, Egyptian picturesque, specifically in Edwards's descriptions of the capital Cairo and the Geezeh pyramids. An analysis of the relevant passages in Edwards's text must be prefaced by a few theoretical reflections on the picturesque modality, its use by women writers and specifically its exotic manifestation.

Part I:

<4> In *Discourses of Difference*, Sara Mills elaborates on the "discursive restraints" and "discursive pressures" nineteenth-century women travellers were subjected to when producing travelogues (5, 12). The discourses of gender propriety and of a public female voice are perhaps the most obvious ones, but another important discourse that affects these women's travelogue is, indeed, the picturesque. While many earlier studies of nineteenth-century women's travelogues have centred on the character, motivation, conduct and self-discovery of the traveller, this essay departs from the notion that a Victorian woman's journey is always and necessarily a proto-feminist journey of finding herself.⁽⁴⁾ Its focus is not so much on the traveller's person (although it obviously remains the central agent in the experiences related), as on the external reality or, to be more precise, the aesthetic representation of objects and others, which is explored with reference to the discourse of the picturesque. As Alison Byerly elaborates, "[b]y framing a scene, or even a person or event, as picturesque, the author separates it from realistic considerations and presents it in a purely aesthetic context" (16).

<5> The discourse of the picturesque emerged as a third player in eighteenth-century philosophical and aesthetic contemplations on the sublime and the beautiful. Burke's and Kant's dualistic models – one built on sensory perception, the other translating the aesthetic encounter into the realm of epistemology – left an in-between space for the picturesque where it could emerge as more rugged than the beautiful but without the threat of the sublime. "Deeper" than the beautiful as it required not only a sentient but also rational observer who could bring order to the assorted components, the picturesque nevertheless, and in contrast to the sublime, retained its focus on the external world and vision, without necessitating the subject's enquiry into the objects' cause or meaning, or his ability to embark on such enquiry.

<6> In accounts that ranged from the naïve to the critical (Macarthur 1), eighteenth-century British writers including William Gilpin, Sir Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight theorized and illustrated the picturesque landscape. The characteristics that emerged in their discussions included roughness, ruggedness, convoluted and broken forms, a jungle-like profusion and an overall complex, yet playful and harmonious, variety.⁽⁵⁾ The picturesque sought tension between the disorderly-irrelevant and the perfected form; its assortment of varied components appealed to the roving eye, and its complex and witty associations to the energy of the human mind. As Samuel Coleridge wrote: "Where the parts by their harmony produce an effect of a whole, but

where there is no seen form of a whole producing or explaining the parts of it, where the parts only are seen and distinguished, but the whole is felt – [there you have] the picturesque.”(6) With its reliance on both parts and whole, empirical observation and artistic composition, the spectrum of the picturesque could range, in both theory and practice, from an “analytic, additive method of composition” to “a formulaic synthesis;” from “a realistic description” to “a generalized translation;” “a closed system of signification” to “an open one” – in short, from realism to abstraction (Bermingham 93).

<7> While central theorists and painters in the heyday of the picturesque in the late eighteenth century were male, and would continue to be with nineteenth-century critics like John Claudius Loudon and Ruskin, Victorian women gradually developed an interest in the picturesque mode of representation, and especially in travel writing. Women’s travelogues “in particular seem to draw on visual images” (Melman 211), the reason for this recourse to the visual and to painting being a “mistrust of textuality,” which is generic to the travel writing genre: words do not seem to be able to translate sights or sense-impressions in a satisfactory manner. Marianne North, for instance, said she “drew all the temples” she saw on her Nile tour because she did not even want to “try to describe what has been so thoroughly done by many others, including the inevitable Murray” (143).

<8> Women travellers seemed particularly aware of the inadequacy of words and their skills as writers, and frequently related the poverty of their verbal images and the use of cliché to gender: according to contemporary discourse, and internalized by many female writers, a woman’s powers of observation and expression were limited and lacked originality. In addition to such mistrust in textuality, suggest Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, “the picturesque also involved a certain strategy of textual description which some women found useful; it allowed them to assert that they were not organising the accounts of their travels at all but were simply amassing detail of the objects and sights which they had seen to give an overall impression of the country” (93). For women, the use of the picturesque thus meant that they did not necessarily have to be scientific, linear or logical to be authoritative (and Edwards is a notable exception here, as we will see).

<9> Society encouraged women’s turn to the picturesque since sketching, drawing and the display of technical artistic knowledge were considered appropriate accomplishments for the Victorian woman: these required no formal training but suited the amateur, and, rather than displaying a wilful, masculine originality, merely copied or imitated an external reality in a feminine manner.(7) “Sketches” and “impressions” were incomplete, amateurish artefacts that had the advantage of having been done “on the spot” and this immediacy, Billie Melman writes, was also thought to appropriately “capture the emotionally charged landscape” (215). The method and trajectory of the picturesque to both document and “arous[e] in their readers [or spectators] an emotional response to the beauties of a particular geographical location” (Batten 29) may invoke notions of femininity through the association of the picturesque with emotionalism. At the same time, however, Melman’s use of the word “capture” invites questions about the potentially violent nature of the picturesque modality: “framing” a scene, “ordering” the features of a landscape, the picturesque may be not only a possessive, perhaps masculine, but also potentially imperialist endeavour, as W. T. J. Mitchell suggests. When such notions of the

picturesque as an aggressive aestheticization, appropriation and form of mastery meet issues of gender and, or *in*, Britain's actual colonies, Sara Suleri shows in her essay on the "Feminine Picturesque" in women's travel writing about India, the issue becomes even more complicated: is the (female) picturesque an attempt to anglicize and annex the foreign landscape?(8)

<10> Historically, the picturesque emerged during the French-British war when access to the continent was cut off, temporarily suspending the Grand Tour: increased travels in Britain, including Gilpin's, meant that the picturesque was associated with the British landscape and Britishness. However, as the British Empire fought her battles elsewhere in the world and opened up more exotic travel routes and locations, the discourse of the picturesque was transported into representations of the colonies and "the Orient." Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia, Nigel Leask and Timothy Mitchell show in their respective accounts of nineteenth-century representations of India and Egypt how the strategy to visualize and formalize a British landscape as picturesque could be, and increasingly was, translated into representations of a colonial otherness.(9)

<11> If Empire was the central argument for the picturesque to be carried overseas, another reason can be found in the third framing discourse I want to invoke for my discussion of Edwards's Egyptian travelogue: tourism. Martineau wrote of her "sight-seeing" in Egypt (a curious pleonasm which would require a longer discussion), linking her own tour with the discourse of an emerging tourism of Cook's tours and guidebooks (216). Duff Gordon described Thebes as "an English watering-place" and, as a resident, she mocked the tourists' "great object [...] to *do the Nile* as fast as possible" (36). North wrote self-consciously (yet again displaying astute powers of discernment) that she "did" the tombs of the Kings, the Memnonium and Colossi" (147). Indeed, the character of foreign travel changed "sometime past the middle of the nineteenth century" when the traveller began to be accompanied, or even replaced, by the tourist. (10) Thomas Cook, Karl Baedeker and John Murray introduced, in action and in print, travel as commodity, as a form of passive pleasure seeking and relaxation, rather than an active "travail." And interestingly, these three men at the same time exploited and popularized the connection between tourism and the picturesque: their guidebooks, as James Buzard argues, presented voyagers with an array of pictures, or sights, which the tourists read about before or while they stood before the site/ sight itself, full of aesthetic appreciation but in an inevitably detached manner (191).(11)

<12> The modern tourism industry had descended upon Egypt by the 1870s, appealing to both the middle and upper classes, through guidebooks, improved modes of transportation, organized package tours, luxury hotels like Shephard's, new cultural and architectural sights like Cairo's Royal Opera House (built by the Khedive to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal), and the royal patronage of the Prince of Wales who chose to convalesce in Egypt in 1872, thus greatly increasing its social cachet and, in fact, turning Cairo into a fashionable winter resort for wealthy Englishmen and -women tired of Italy and France.

<13> Gender, the picturesque and tourism must therefore be the three discourses that inform and frame the following analysis of Amelia Edwards's travelogue. The discussion focuses on this traveller's descriptions of Cairo and the Geezeh pyramids in particular and investigates how

three prominent nineteenth-century discourses establish, in combination and sometimes in conflict, this female writer's version of the exotic North African locality.

Part II:

<14> Novelist Amelia Edwards arrived in Cairo on 20 November 1873, allegedly after bad weather in France had prompted her and her companion L. [Lucy Renshawe] to travel further south. Their journey through Egypt followed the conventional route from the coast via Cairo up the Nile by *dahabeeyeh* to the second cataract, but their time frame, which was seven months, exceeded what the regular traveller would have invested. The "usual" tour of Egypt (of a traveller, not a tourist) would take between two and three months: once she had landed in Alexandria by steamer, she would continue on a boat or, from 1855 by railway, to Cairo. After a few days in Cairo and a visit to the pyramids the itinerary would take her southwards on the Nile, on a privately hired *dahabeeyeh* or, from the 1860s, Nile steamers, and upriver to Aswan, stopping at Thebes, Karnak, Luxor and the Valley of the Kings. A traveller with more time on her hands (like Edwards) would continue further into Nubia and to the second cataract, to Aboo Simbel and Wady Halfah.

<15> Even if Edwards thus followed the conventional Egypt route she would, on these beaten tracks, consciously uphold and, in her account, display a unique attitude, and not just because of the leisurely pace she had adopted. Having ample time, she was independent of the weather and of Nile winds and currents, and she could also stay in riverside places she liked and explore the interior further, which the usual traveller did not have the time to do. As she proudly announces, "we [...] were going as far as we liked and for as long as we liked."⁽¹²⁾ However, it is also in invoking the discourses of gender, tourism and the picturesque that Edwards shows her unique position.

<16> The introductory declaration of the travelogue, "Never was distant expedition entered upon with less premeditation" (2, referring to how bad weather in Southern Europe caused her to travel to North Africa), is only partially accurate as Edwards subsequently reveals her preparatory reading of Baedeker and Murray handbooks, Sir Gardner Wilkinson's, Edward Lane's and Jean-François Champollion's Orientalist works, and Martineau's, Alexander Kinglake's and Duff Gordon's travelogues. However, Edwards's interest goes beyond the usual traveller's familiarization with Egypt through guidebooks, lay Orientalist works or travel writing: her journey would initiate her academic interest in, and subsequent scholarly contributions to, Egyptology, which in the 1870s was still an emerging, open and amateur-friendly field without clear disciplinary boundaries or formal academic requirements. As she writes in the "Preface to the First Edition," *A Thousand Miles* differs from other travelogues in that it was not written "rapidly" but took two years to complete, as "the subject gr[ew] with the book, and with the knowledge [she] acquire[d] by the way," including an ability to read hieroglyphs (xi). Her search for scholarly "accuracy" led the author to "go for [her] facts" to original sources, translations, commentaries, scientific journals and experts, which sometimes meant that "[a] date, a name, a passing reference" required "hours of seeking" (xi). The scholarly research Edwards conducted in the two years after her actual Egypt journey postponed the publication of her travelogue until 1877, but subsequently rendered it not only a travel classic (although Edwards did not plan on

this) and also an important historical-archaeological, scholarly work – the first in Edwards’s career as Egyptologist. *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, Edwards’s later studies of Egyptian history and culture (particularly her lectures collected in the 1892 work *Pharaohs, Fellahs, and Explorers*) and the money she bequeathed to University College London after her death to establish the first English chair in Egyptology, signalled the professionalization of a field and her place in it.(13)

<17> If Edwards thus marks her difference as a serious scholar in comparison to the more frivolous (male and female) travel writers – among whom she most certainly and especially would have counted Duff Gordon whose account is personal, chatty and people-, rather than fact-oriented, but perhaps also Martineau who was on a personal pilgrimage rather than a fact-finding journey –, she also carries this elitist stance into her condemnation of especially the tourists who had started to flood Cairo and the Nile from around mid-century.(14) Her first chapter relates her and L.’s arrival at the Shepherd’s Hotel in Cairo and records the “miscellaneous gathering” present in this hotel “during [what would in November have been] the beginning and height of the regular Egyptian season” (1):

Here assemble daily some two to three hundred persons of all ranks, nationalities, and pursuits; half of whom are Anglo-Indians homeward or outward bound, European residents, or visitors established in Cairo for the winter. The other half, it may be taken for granted, are going up the Nile. So composite and incongruous is this body of Nile-goers, young and old, well-dressed and ill-dressed, learned and unlearned, that the new-comer’s first impulse is to inquire from what motives so many persons of dissimilar tastes and training can be led to embark upon an expedition which is, to say the least of it, very tedious, very costly, and of an altogether exceptional interest. (1)

Edwards’s powers of reasoning and judgement quickly enable her to learn to distinguish “at first sight between a Cook’s tourist and an independent traveller” (1), and to also deduce the various sources of motivation behind individual Egypt journeys:

Here are invalids in search of health; artists in search of subjects; sportsmen keen upon crocodiles; statesmen out for a holiday; special correspondents alert for gossip; collectors on the scent of papyri and mummies; men of science with only scientific ends in view; and the usual surplus of idlers who travel for the mere love of travel, or the satisfaction of a purposeless curiosity. (1-2)

Edwards’s condemnation of organized group travels suggests that in 1873 the traveller-tourist dichotomy was so firmly established that a “serious” traveller like Edwards – her gravity primarily resulting from the purpose of her scholarly endeavours – could express her superiority. And the situation had become much worse in Edwards’s eyes when she wrote in the “Preface to the Second Edition” in 1888: “and because I in no sense offer myself as a guide to others, I say nothing of the altered conditions under which most Nile travellers now perform the trip” (n.p.). Not only had serious travelling diminished but tourists and all the comforts associated with them had arrived. Throughout the narrative, Edwards stresses how she and L. regularly frustrated local guides’ expectations by refusing to follow popular tracks carved out by tourists or behave at

certain sights in an expected manner, as in the case of their visit to the Geezeh pyramids or the Summer Palace.(15) At some point she adds how proud it made her that, after several months on the river, their boat was “the last dahabeeyah of the year”: “We had out-stayed all our fellow-travellers” (466). In Cairo, at Shephard’s, by the pyramids and also on the Nile the distinction between traveller and tourist is emphasized and reinforced: “Such is the *esprit du Nil*. The people in dahabeeyahs despise Cook’s tourists; those who are bound for the Second Cataract look down with lofty compassion upon those whose ambition extends only to the First; and travellers who engage their boat by the month hold their heads a trifle higher than those who contract for the trip.” (36)

<18> As these elaborations suggest, gender issues are rather complicated in Edwards’s case. Critics like Ruth Jenkins and Melissa Lee Miller have labelled Edwards’s scholarly agenda, her disinterest in Egypt’s people and focus on inanimate objects, history and facts, her emphasis on “true” and “meaningful” travel and her genderless and impersonal self-portrayal in the travelogue as “the writer” as androgynous, if not at moments masculine. Such inversion of established gender roles, these critics argue, befits the image of the first female professional Egyptologist in an age of proto-feminist activity.(16) Jenkins’s and Miller’s observations are both perceptive and valid, but as I indicated earlier, this essay is, more so than in a gendered reading of the traveller’s character, interested in delineating the specific ways in which Edwards describes Egypt, and it is a different paradigm that we must invoke here, rather than that of masculine (scholarship, travelling, rationality, detachment) versus feminine (prattle, tourism, sensibility, involvement).

<19> Edwards’s opening description of the Shephard’s guests includes “men of science with *only* scientific ends in view” (2, emphasis added). Edwards may stress her scholarly agenda but her own approach to Egyptology is different from that of the scholars who were already active in the field and against whom she measured herself in a public letter to the American antiquarian and Egyptologist C. Wm. Winslow. Referring to the “*only* scientific” type of writing of her close associates Flinders Petrie and Llewellyn Griffith, she wrote:

the Egyptologists do not write a picturesque and popular style like that of A.B.E. [Amelia Blandford Edwards], who had thirty years of literary work in the romantic school, and who has especially cultivated style – worked at it as if it was a science – and mastered it ... style is an instrument which I have practised sedulously, and which I can plan upon. But our Egyptologists, etc., what do they know of that subtle harmony? They have never flung themselves into the life and love of imaginary men and women; they have never studied the landscape painting of scenery in words ... It is not their vocation. I am the only romanticist in the world who is also an Egyptologist. We must not expect the owl of Athena to warble like the nightingale of Keats.(17)

Edwards’s emphasis on her hybrid approach to Egyptology in this open letter – which does not mean androgynous, but rather the combining of her novelistic skills and knowledge of composition with an eye for archaeological detail and skill of analysis – would cause problems for her later on when Samuel Birch, Director of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum, opposed her plans to establish the Egypt Exploration Fund on the basis of her promotion of what

he dubbed rather condescendingly “emotional archaeology.”(18) However, for the purpose of this essay, Edwards’s emphasis on her picturesque style – that is, combining empirical observation with a romantic aesthetic – is remarkable and a fitting transition to an analysis of Edwards’s representations of the Cairo bazaars and the Geezeh pyramids.

<20> The description of the Cairo bazaars is preceded by Edwards’s romantic, indeed rather Keatsian, rendering of her first morning at Shepheard’s after a restful night. The rain in France, storms at sea and several impatient hours spent in quarantine in Alexandria seem unimportant to the writer,

when one awoke at sunrise to see those grey-green palms outside the window solemnly bowing their plumed heads towards each other, against a rose-coloured dawn. It was dark last night, and I had no idea that my room overlooked an enchanted garden, far-reaching and solitary, peopled with stately giants beneath whose tufted crowns hung rich clusters of maroon and amber dates. It was a still, warm morning. Grave grey and black crows flew heavily from tree to tree, or perched, cawing meditatively, upon the topmost branches. Yonder, between the pillared stems, rose the minaret of a very distant mosque; and here where the garden was bounded by a high wall and a windowless house, I saw a veiled lady walking on the terraced roof in the midst of a cloud of pigeons. Nothing could be more simple than the scene and its accessories; nothing, at the same time, more Eastern, strange, and unreal. (3)

Edwards’s first description of Egypt is that of a picturesque (if not labelled as such), exoticized garden: as in an exemplary garden scene by Gilpin the vista opens to a gradated landscape with palm trees in the front, a house in the first background and a minaret in the second. An appropriate number of animals (though crows and pigeons rather than English sheep) are set off against the single solitary figure, who is not an English wanderer or hermit but a veiled Arab woman. We can see the beginnings of Edwards’s exoticized picturesque here as the (empirical and scientific) observation of details is composed into a (romantic and abstract) wholeness.

<21> The bazaars then call more explicitly upon the verbal painter and her picturesque style: Edwards can only describe the overwhelming, ineffaceable first impressions of Oriental outdoor life in the bazaars as “a ready-made picture” (3). The writer’s acknowledgement that Cairo’s bazaars are a verification of familiar Orientalist paintings is of interest in the light of Timothy Mitchell’s argument that Egypt could, in the later nineteenth century, no longer be *discovered* but merely *rediscovered*, as an array of pictures had always already been seen by any traveller prior to his or her journey (Mitchell 30): the business-oriented donkey-boys, sleeping beggars, veiled women who fetch water from the public fountains, the narrow streets, distinctive Arab architecture, Arabesque ornaments and lattice-clad windows are already familiar sights to Edwards (3-4). More interesting than such poststructuralist ideas of the world as representation, however, is Edwards’s reinterpretation of Oriental motifs through the vocabulary of the picturesque, which becomes the dominant expression as it is, over the space of only a few pages, repeated at least four times (3, 6, 9, 11). First, the author organizes the bazaar scene in terms of forefront (figures) and background (architecture). The chaotic profusion and variety of bazaar people and their activities, Edwards acknowledges, are at first “too bewilder[ing to be]

catalogue[d]” (11), but this is exactly what the writer does subsequently. In order to convey a complete impression of the bazaar panorama, she observes and describes all details, which can then be organized into a picturesque composition that is complex and yet harmonious, and that creates order out of the disorder of its many elements:

The crowd ebbs and flows unceasingly – a noisy, changing, restless, parti-coloured tide, half European, half Oriental, on foot, on horseback, and in carriages. Here are Syrian dragomans in baggy trousers and braided jackets; barefooted Egyptian fellaheen in ragged blue shirts and felt skull-caps; Greeks in absurdly stiff white tunics, like walking penwipers; Persians with high mitre-like caps of dark woven stuff; swarthy Bedouins in flowing garments, creamy-white with chocolate stripes a foot wide, and head-shawl of the same bound about the brow with a fillet of twisted camel’s hair; Englishmen in palm-leaf hats and knickerbockers, dangling their long legs across almost invisible donkeys; native women of the poorer class, in black veils that leave only the eyes uncovered, and long trailing garments of dark blue and black striped cotton; dervishes in patchwork coats, their matted hair streaming from under fantastic head-dresses; blue-black Abyssinians with incredibly slender, bowed legs, like attenuated ebony balustrades; Armenian priests, looking exactly like Portia as the Doctor, in long black gowns and high square caps; majestic ghosts of Algerine Arabs, all in white; mounted Janissaries with jingling sabres and gold-embroidered jackets; merchants, beggars, soldiers, boatmen, labourers, workmen, in every variety of costume, and of every shade of complexion from fair to dark, from tawny to copper-colour, from deepest bronze to bluest black. (4-5)

I disagree with Melman that a classification of such enumerations as “photographic” and “*catalogue raisonné*” (that is, “bare of metaphor and comment,” in the style of a guidebook or art catalogue) is the most appropriate (271-72), even if Edwards herself uses the latter expression when forced to describe the particularly popular tourist spot Philae, which leaves her unable to say anything original and wherefore she resorts to enumeration.⁽¹⁹⁾ The picturesque is, I believe, more suitable because the photograph and the *catalogue raisonné* refer, first and foremost, to a documentary, mimetic representation of an external reality whereas Edwards’s frequent turn to interpretation, metaphor and comment – clearly visible in the above paragraph on the various people in the Cairo bazaar – are better understood through her hybrid, namely scientific *and* romantic, approach to Egyptology: she describes detail, perhaps even catalogues it, but with an eye on synthesising her description and analysis of components in a more meaningful composition and totality. To return to Coleridge’s definition of the picturesque, Edwards, by describing and distinguishing the individual parts, produces a harmonious effect of the whole, which cannot merely be rationalised but must also be sensed. The detailed account of all the different trade-specific bazaars, which completes Edwards’s discussion of Cairo’s bazaars – bazaars for saddlers, slippers, carpets, gold and silver smiths, sweetmeat, hardware, tobacco, sword-mounting, coppersmiths, muslins – thus contributes to creating the impression of the aesthetic whole and sum of Cairo’s markets.

<22> Edwards’s description of the Geezeh pyramids, twelve miles outside of Cairo, helps us to further explore this writer’s hybrid picturesque, which negotiates surface and depth, empiricism and abstraction, scientific analysis and romantic-aesthetic synthesis. Describing her first trip to

the monuments – which coincided with lengthy and frustrating dealings in Boolak to hire a suitable *dahabeeyeh* for the Nile journey, which took up three to four hours a day for at least ten days – Edwards is keen to stress that, this first time, “we did not go to *see* the Pyramids. We went only to look at them” (13). And she explains, it is only with “some practical understanding of the manifold phases through which the arts and architecture of Egypt had passed since those far-off days of Cheops and Chephren” (13) that the traveller can claim to have *seen* the pyramids – a project impossible upon one’s first arrival in Cairo and only to be accomplished after better acquaintance with the country and particularly its historical sites upriver. Looking at the pyramids means to be a tourist while seeing the pyramids means to be a traveller, suggests Edwards. And yet, she once again employs strategies to distinguish herself from a superficial tourist, despite the circumstances of her all-too-brief first encounter with the pyramids.

<23> First impressions from a distance are frustrating, just like the knowledge that a one-hour-forty-minute stopover in Geezeh within the first few weeks in Egypt cannot be meaningful to the serious traveller. As Edwards laments, the pyramids are “not impressive” and do “not take one’s breath away,” as they are “too familiar to be in any way startling” (13). The writer’s acknowledgement of her familiarity with representations of Egypt and her overall belatedness anticipates once again Mitchell’s but also Ali Behdad’s thesis about the unfeasibility of the nineteenth-century traveller’s encounter with foreign countries as an actual entity of otherness beyond representation and *déjà vu*. Yet, in the same way that Mitchell’s and Behdad’s travellers still did not give up on “the real” and “the exotic” behind the known representation Edwards, upon approaching the pyramids, finds something new and deep to see.

<24> Rather than hurrying to quickly “do” all nine pyramids (the pyramids of Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus are accompanied by six much smaller ones), Edwards and L. frustrate and astonish the Arab tour guides, who anticipate business, by simply sitting down in front of the Great Pyramid and ignoring the rest of the necropolis. There, Edwards does not just content herself with objectively taking in scientific and measurable data, or giving the trivial, Orientalist but common comparison of the size of the Cheops Pyramid with Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Instead, she tries to “feel” the site: “[P]lans and measurements, the clearest photographs, the most elaborate descriptions” (14) in her mind do not do justice to the pharaohs’ tombs. Rather, the traveller has to stand in front of them to really get a sense of their magnitude and majesty. Making oneself aware of their surface texture, color, relative position and overall number raises the pyramids beyond the established image, and the traveller beyond the inferior act of merely looking at them. Concentrating on the exterior of the Great Pyramid alone for more than an hour, Edwards tries to steady her mind, as she writes, to its size and age. Measuring her own height against one of its lowest blocks, touching the stone and contemplating that the Great Pyramid was four thousand two hundred and odd years old at the time of Christ’s birth, a sense of “awe and wonder” suddenly grows in her, and an “overwhelming” feeling (14): “Now for the first time, [historical dates] resolved themselves into something concrete, definite, real. [...] It was as if one had been snatched up for an instant to some vast height overlooking the plains of Time, and had seen the centuries mapped out beneath one’s feet” (15).

<25> Matter-of-fact statements about size and time – rational and scientific measurements – do not do justice to the (at this point almost sublime) “dignity of the subject” (16), concludes

Edwards, revealing once more her rejection of an exclusively scientific approach to Egypt. Tourism is wrong, as is false Egyptology, and as she cannot merely remain with sublime awe and wonder but needs a pictorial description for herself and posterity, Edwards concludes her first pyramid description in a picturesque style. The first references, typical of the picturesque, are to the characteristic play of light and shadow in the composition of the aesthetic whole: the sun goes down behind the Great Pyramid and “[t]hat mighty Shadow, sharp and distinct, stretched across the stony platform of the desert and over full three-quarters of a mile of the green plain below. It divided the sunlight where it fell, just as its great original divided the sunlight in the upper air; and it darkened the space it covered, like an eclipse” (16). Mindful that this shadow has stretched over the landscape for more than six millennia, Edwards composes not only an aesthetically multi-layered image of this monument and its surrounding landscape, but also hints at a further distancing, abstraction and meaning – namely, through time and history. And this distancing becomes the central focus of the second visit to the pyramids, which also concludes Edwards’s travelogue and her time in Egypt.

<26> Since “[i]t is impossible to get tired of the Pyramids” (487), L. and Edwards spend their very last day at the site, after months of travelling on the Nile. Their drive from Shepherd’s to Geezeh takes them past Cairo’s outskirts, past market-folk, donkeys and laden carts, veiled women, masons and camels outside the Khedive’s new palace, and into the cultivated plains, where there are corn fields, roads bordered with acacias, fellaheen who cut clover, and goats and buffaloes that feed on the clearings. At last, the two women reach the desert platform once more and see the pyramids at a distance, set against the horizon. More villages, *shâdûfs* [swapes], herds and flocks, palm trees, corn-flats and spaces of rich, dark fallow follow in Edwards’s description until she at last disembarks at the sandy slope near the Great Pyramid for a second time. The drive to the pyramids offers vignettes and components of contemporary Egyptian life in an almost cinematographic fashion, where one picturesque scene follows another in quick succession. But now that the traveller has arrived at the Great Pyramid once again, and after having seen ancient Egypt as well as contemporary Cairo, Edwards climbs the Great Pyramid to paint her final and ultimate picturesque vista of the country.

<27> Arriving at the top, “the view is immense” (489) with the necropolis just underneath and the sphinx – “[o]lder than the Pyramids, older than history” (490) – and its temple close by. In the distance, “the view [being] more long than wide” (491), the flat country stretches to the horizon, and Edwards lets her eyes rove from east to west, north to south. At the foot of a range of yellow hills, in the near distance, lies Cairo, the mosque of the Citadel quite visible, as are the cultivated plains through which Edwards drove. Also in the distance is the fertile Nile Delta, the desert to the south, and on its platform the pyramids of Abooseer, Sakkárah and Dahshur. It is, however, into one direction that Edwards gazes in particular: following the flow of the Nile upriver, she fixes her eyes upon where Egypt’s ancient sites of Thebes, Philae and Aboo Simbel would be. After seven months in Egypt on land and on river, and now with an understanding of Egypt’s people, culture and history, Edwards can in her summative picture compose a wholeness which goes beyond a tourist spectacle but which is complex, varied and thick with the profundity required by both the romantic and the scientific Egyptologist. People, nature and culture unite in a vista that offers aesthetic (foreground and background) as well as historical depth (present and past). The picturesque here possesses – to paraphrase Nigel Leask – two dimensions of distance, namely spatial and temporal, and the analytic, additive composition of the earlier picturesque

description of the bazaars in Cairo is now transformed into a more open, abstract system of signification, suggesting Edwards's – now an Egyptologist's – deeper understanding of the country as a complex but harmonious entirety.

Conclusion

<28> Amelia Edwards was no tourist, but a self-proclaimed traveller and (future) Egyptologist. Her scholarly quest to find and relate the “depth” of her travelling experience to her readers produced – when it met her novelistic skills and experience – a hybrid writing style that combined the observation and gathering of detail with the composition of such information into an aesthetic totality. This merging of styles, tastes and agendas makes *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* not only a fascinating and complex document within the corpus of women's nineteenth-century travelogues about “the foreign other,” but it is specifically this formal interplay between parts and a whole that situates the descriptions within the picturesque tradition.

<29> The picturesque may have been an originally British invention but became – with Britannia's growing influence abroad in the nineteenth century – evermore “tainted” by imperialism and what Mary Louise Pratt calls the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” mentality.⁽²⁰⁾ Interestingly, Edwards steers clear of any comment on the British administrative and military presence in Egypt, nor does she present herself as particularly English while she sojourns in Cairo or sails downriver on the Nile. The reasons for this rejection of a nationalist consciousness or pride are manifold and can, on the one hand, be found in Edwards's very hostility towards the British tourists she found everywhere along her route and who, to her, represented the worst face her mother country could show abroad. On the other hand, Edwards generally took her own person back and focused instead on offering to her readers Egypt's sights, people and customs; content to be the faceless verbal painter of meaningful, picturesque scenes.

<30> Investigating female travellers in Egypt from Stanhope to Edwards and beyond through the interlinked and yet often conflicting discourses of the picturesque, gender, and tourism reveals the complex nature of these travellers' narratives, which can only be brought out by the excess seeing of the variety of discourses these nineteenth-century texts tap into. The category of the “female travelogue” must be as heterogeneous as are manifestations of the picturesque. In the specific context of Amelia Edwards, but also in view of a travelogue like North's, I would not agree with Lynn Withey that the picturesque has, in the nineteenth century, lost all of its precision and become interchangeable with associated notions like the “romantic,” the “beautiful” and the “sublime” (44). These travellers' knowledge of the aesthetic features of a picturesque composition through variety, foreground, background, light and shade are too prominent to endorse Withey's statement. Specifically, in Amelia Edwards's case, this author's picturesque receives an even more elaborate dimension when it adds to the profundity created by a spatial composition the distancing of temporal change. However, I would agree with Withey that the precise usage of the term “picturesque” has to be analysed for each specific traveller to reveal its idiosyncrasies, history, structural conflicts and harmonies.

(1)See, for a detailed reading of *Eastern Life*, which is a curious mixture of a historical-philosophical tractate on the development of religion and civilization, and the diary of a personal pilgrimage from Unitarianism to agnosticism, Melman.(^)

(2)Similarly, houses in Feshn are picturesque, as is a bridge in a garden in Siout (31, 34). It is noteworthy, however, that these references to the picturesque occur early, when Duff Gordon has just arrived in Egypt, and are non-existent in letters written during the later years.(^)

(3)E.g., when describing a bazaar in Bombay, she writes: ‘The roofed and shady Suks of Damascus, Cairo, and Jeddah are picturesque, especially Damascus, but this has a totally different *cachet*.’ (263)(^)

(4)See the following excellent and yet perhaps somewhat outdated accounts: Russell; Birkett; Foster; Frawley; Blanton. Bassnett writes that the ‘search for self-expression and the reformulation of identity; are central concerns within women’s travel writing of the late Victorian and early modernist era (239).(^)

(5)See the discussions of eighteenth-century theories of the picturesque (and those that followed in the early nineteenth century) in Macarthur; Price; Bermingham. The three central eighteenth-century authors of the picturesque are Gilpin, Price; Knight. See their relevant works in the Works Cited list.(^)

(6)Qtd. by J. Shawcross, in his notes to Coleridge’s essays ‘On the Principles of Genial Criticism Concerning the Fine Arts, More Especially those of Statuary and Painting, Deduced from the Laws and Impulses which Guide the True Artist in the Production of His Works’. Coleridge II: 309. See also Byerly (30): ‘the picturesque [...] is a detached and self-conscious mode of vision; it requires the spectator to look objectively at a scene, analyze the features and contrasts that make up a harmonious composition.’(^)

(7)See, for women’s focus on the visual and pictorial in their travelogues, Melman 211-15; Forster and Mills 88-98. In fact, a total of 80 illustrations accompany Edwards’s travelogue; like so many Victorian women she was an amateur painter. In fact, in her Preface to the earlier, 1873 travelogue, *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys*, Edwards points not only to her dual skill as painter and writer, but also links these two forms of the picturesque to the (lack of) power of verbal expression. ‘In conclusion I can only add, that I have tried to give a faithful impression of the country and the people; and as, when on the spot, I endeavoured to sketch that which defied the pencil, so now I have striven in the following pages to describe that which equally defies the pen. No one knows better than myself how inadequately I have succeeded. Why had I not Mr. Ruskin’s power to create landscapes with words? And why, my dear American friends to whom this volume is inscribed, had I not some of those gifts that make your paintings more eloquent than words? Could I have seized the weirdness and poetry of those scenes, VEDDER, as you would have seized them – could I have matched the relative tones of trees, and skies, and mountain-summits, CHARLES CARYLL COLEMAN, with your wonderful fidelity – could I have dipped my brush, TILTON, like you, in the red and gold of Southern sunsets, what sketches mine would have been, and how nobly this book would have been illustrated!’ (xxxvi-vii)

However, I agree with Melman who argues that these actual sketches are only a sub-text to the verbal pictures – Edwards’s is not an annotated picture book, but an illustrated textbook (271), hence the focus of this essay is on the text alone.(^)

(8)Bermingham also takes up the issue of the ‘consumption’ of the landscape in her essay.(^)

(9)Mitchell does not specifically talk about the picturesque, but his entire thesis is built on the idea that the British in the nineteenth-century saw the world, including their colonial world, as an exhibition and representation: ‘European visitors would arrive in the Orient looking for the same kind of structure “raised in their imagination”’ (21), understanding the Orient as ‘a recurrence of a picture one had seen before’ (30). See also Leask’s Chapter 3 on Egypt and his elaboration on the picturesque (166-78).(^)

(10)This is Boorstin’s temporal framework (84). Buzard also sees the emergence of the traveller-tourist dichotomy in the nineteenth century whereas Fussell locates the ‘end of travelling’ between the two world wars.(^)

(11)Indeed, a qualitative survey of the 1880s and 1890s Egypt guidebooks produced by Cook (1897, 26 times), Baedeker (1898, 36 times) and Murray (1888, 49 times) shows an abundance of the use of the word ‘picturesque’ in relation to the sights they describe.(^)

(12)Edwards 36. All subsequent in-text references in this section are, unless otherwise specified, to this edition.(^)

(13)See – despite its interpretive shortcomings – the overview of Edwards in Nittel 106-17.(^)

(14)I completely disagree with Grosskurth’s argument that L. and Edwards, ‘in the early parts of the expedition [...] behaved like any other tourists scrabbling among the ruins for souvenirs’ (88).(^)

(15)‘[W]e resolutely refused [...] to be shown anything, or told anything, or to be taken anywhere’ (Edwards 14); ‘[the gardener] could not understand why we [rather than seeing a large Italian fountain in a rococo style in the Khevide’s palace gardens] preferred to give our time to the shrubs and flower-beds’ (33); ‘The guide shook his head; but we insisted on going’ (476).(^)

(16)See also Nittel 113-14, and Melman on Edwards’s self-portrayal as the genderless, professional explorer and her rejection of anything ‘feminine’ by being callous towards children, and unfeeling towards natives who ask her for sympathy or medical assistance (260, 263).(^)

(17)Edwards, ‘To C. Wm. Winslow’, *The American Antiquarian*, November 1892: 7-8. Qtd. in Melman 258.(^)

(18)See Melman 257-58. I cannot go into the details of how the Romantic School and its representatives, including Keats, were often considered ‘feminine’ due to their focus on emotions and the metaphysical.(^)

(19)See Edwards on Philae: ‘It is one of the world’s famous landscapes, and it deserves its fame. Every sketcher sketches it; every traveller describes it. Yet it is just one of those places of which the objective and subjective features are so equally balanced that it bears putting neither into words nor colors. The sketcher must perforce leave out the atmosphere of association which informs his subject; and the writer’s description is at best no better than a catalogue raisonnée.’ (233)(^)

(20)See Pratt. Along the same lines, Suleri would argue that the aestheticization (as well as the feminization) of the foreign landscape in fact hides the actual violence of the historical encounter between colonizer and colonized. See also the conflicting viewpoints offered by critics Melman and Marx. The former considers, in her critical account of women’s travel writing, Edwards as a passive observer who “does not control her landscapes” (273), whereas the latter suggests that Edwards’s framing and possessive picturesque made “Egypt dependent on British knowledge” and helped “create an Egypt amenable to the modernization programs of colonial administration” (n.p.).(^)

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