"How great a good was Luria's having lived": Promoting the Moor of Sicily in Robert Brwoning's *Luria* (1846)

Zakariae El idrissi

The author of the article holds a PhD in Orientalism and Cultural Studies from Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fez, Morocco.

Abstract

In an attempt to find a possible alternative to imperial orientalism, this essay brings to the forefront Robert Browning's Luria: A Tragedy (1846) as a case study exemplifying irregularity, volatility, and discontinuity in Western discursivity. Drawing upon critics such as Dennis Porter, Kathryn Tidreck, John Mackenzie, Robert Irwin, and Ali Behdad, who take history, context, the author's experience, and socio-cultural particularities as factors defining the heterogeneity of orientalism, I argue that Luria sharply deviates from hegemonic orientalism in a way that perfectly fits with Browning's mysticism and disengagement from politics. Away from stereotypical dogmatism, the play promotes its Moor on stage both militarily and morally and employs diverse strategies to delegitimize racial antagonism and refute clichéd statements about the Moor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English playwrights produced an appalling image of the Moor, who was defined by various unpleasant stereotypes. The Moors were portrayed as ferocious, violent, bestial, and nasty infidels. They were portrayed as outsiders, defined by their faith, culture, and skin color. On the English stage, religious and cultural hostility against the Moor's faith, culture, and ethnicity was very common (Barthlemy, 1987).[1]

Frequent unfavourable images were, in fact, part of the East-West long history of conflict. Denigrating stereotypes was the only solace for the European Christians who failed to win their battle against the 'infidel' Moor. Representing the Moor as an inferior villain was an act of "psychological compensation" and "vicarious assurance," in Nabil Matar's words (Matar, 1999, p. 16). In other words, the English demonised and caricaturized the Moor to fake a

---

[1] This negativity in Moorish representations was generally dominant in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English drama. However, there were some possible differences. In his introduction to Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*, Khalid Bakkaoui assures that "Peele breaks away from the tradition of exoticizing and denigrating the Moroccans" when he represents the Moors in an authentic geographical space with heroic and positive epithets (p. 26). See Peele, George (2001). *The Battle of Alcazar*. Ed. Khalid Bakkaoui. Casablanca: Printed at Imprimerie An-Najah Al Jadida.

military as well as moral victory over the non-Christian Moor and, as a result, position themselves as superiors.

The unfavourable image of the Moor continued in the nineteenth century to legitimise colonial intervention in the Middle East or North Africa and has since been an imperial strategy of war. Using a wide variety of stereotypes, Europeans have deliberately managed to impose their dominance over Eastern and African countries. Western colonisers have developed a politics of representation through which the westerner is always the civilised, while the Oriental or Moor is deemed to be the uncivilised, or "the silent interlocutor." Most Western writers were not innocent but were involved in imperial discourse, or at least conscious of their belonging to European powers with imperial ambitions. The nineteenth-century imperialism engendered in many Europeans a division of race such as the civilised versus the uncivilised and the superior versus the inferior to render the Western invasion of other lands so acceptably legitimate (Said, 1978).

Being aware of this long history of hegemonic Orientalism, this article brings to the forefront a non-conforming Moorish-themed play with the aim, on the one hand, to find an alternative to Edward Said's narrow definition of Orientalism and, on the other, to uncover the contradictions residing at the heart of British imperialism. In contrast to what it might be called "a single-minded contrapuntalism" in critical reviews (Mackenzie, 2008, p. 206) this paper endeavours to open the scope for the interest in non-imperially oriented texts, stressing the heterogeneity and discontinuity of Western discursivity. To this end, Browning's *Luria* will be read as a non-conforming Orientalist text which does not produce a conventional image of the Moor, but rather disperses and challenges the Eurocentric and hegemonic representation through rejecting racial discrimination as well as counter-stereotyping the Moor.

The fact that this article is interested in non-hegemonic narrativity does not mean that it aligns itself with Ibn Waraq's *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said or* with Bernard Lewis' polemical attacks on Said; rather, it is an attempt to clean the dust from the literary works that operate outside imperialism, shaking at the very least the regularity of western hegemony. Both Ibn Waraq and Lewis reject Edward Said's theory as a whole in an attempt to defend imperial orientalism. On the contrary, this paper basically agrees with Edward Said and admits the ongoing history of imperially oriented narrativity, but still tries to find a new route for questioning the validity of Western prejudices. In reading *Luria*, this paper follows a strategy of bringing counter-hegemonic discourse to the surface and, as a result, declining the productive unity of the West. Following Dennis Porter's second alternative to Orientalism, in which he rehabilitates counter-hegemonic narratives as a means of decentralising Western discourse, this article reads Robert Browning's *Luria* as a non-hegemonic text, demonstrating how a sympathetic and non-imperial position towards the Moor can emerge significantly from the heart of British discourse.

2. DYNAMIC ORIENTALISMS
The Role of Temporality, Context and Experience in Discursive Unconventionality

Said's theory of Orientalism is important for any analysis of colonial and Orientalist discourse since it has shown its ability to politicise the term "Orientalism," deconstruct the

Orientalist's text, and reveal its discursive mode of representation. However, Said's thesis has received a great deal of critical attention, engendering a lot of controversy. As a case in point, Said has been criticised for having viewed Orientalism as possessing one single fixed identity. In reading Orientalism, many have charged Said with imposing a generalised and unified feature on Orientalism. For critics such as Dennis Porter, Kathryn Tidreck, Robert Irwin, John Mackenzie, and Ali Behdad, Said does not allow for differences between Orientalists to appear, since he views all Orientalists as one undifferentiated group.

Dennis Porter, for instance, describes Said's analysis as ahistorical. He goes on to assure that Gramsci's hegemony is not a historical phenomenon, but a changing process within concrete historical discontinuities in which "power relations are continually reasserted, challenged, and modified"(Porter, 1983, p. 152). For this reason, one of the central perceived problems of Orientalism is the incompatibility of Gramsci's hegemony with Said's denial of historical changes, which, furthermore, has engendered:

> A unified character of Western discourse on the Orient over some two millennia, a unity derived from a common and continuing experience of fascination with and threat from the East, of its irreducible otherness. (1983, p. 152)

Said's de-historicization of Orientalism turns Western representation of the Other into a unified phenomenon and elevates the West to the status of a monolithic force. Thus, Said "fails to historicize adequately the texts he cites and summarises, finding always the same triumphant discourse while several are frequently in conflict"(1983, p. 160).

Porter's assessment of Said's Orientalism offers a critical perspective on the presumed unity among Orientalists and colonial discourses. Porter perceives Orientalism as a complex and internally inconsistent endeavour. He posits that it engenders distinct perspectives among Orientalists themselves and introduces elements of contradiction within Orientalist narratives. To go beyond the essentialist view of Said's Orientalism, Porter suggests three main strategies. First, critics should reject the unity of the colonial text through the contradictions of colonial discourse within an imperial text. Second, they need to stress the disharmony of colonial or Orientalist discourse through counter-hegemonic works. Third, they need to deconstruct Euro-centrism by bringing to the forefront the textual cultural exchange between Europeans and non-Europeans (1983, p. 157).

In the same vein, Kathryn Tidreck, in her historical review of Orientalism, focuses keenly on the influence of history and personal experience in shaping modes of representation. Tidreck convincingly asserts how the difference in experience between the authors may noticeably engender a split in representation. To buttress her argument, Tidreck differentiates between two different Orientalist experiences: professional and amateurish. The professional Orientalist is often occupied with the epistemological, literary, linguistic, and even cultural aspects of the Orient. The professional Orientalist is usually in pursuit of knowledge more than anything else. In contrast, the amateurish Orientalist or the Western tourist is immersed in visual experience and leisure. The amateurish Orientalist is usually in search of personal experience, closing his or her eyes to history and literature. Such differences between professional and non-

professional Orientalists have some bearing on how the Orientalists represent the Other (Tidreck, 1981, p. 22). As a result, the depiction of the Orient appears multifaceted and uncertain. This, in turn, may lead to dissension among Orientalists regarding their interpretations of the Orient.

John Mackenzie, in his book *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts,* criticises the intentialism that Said's *Orientalism* ascribes to Western authors. For Said, every Orientalist is stained with mainstream Western culture, that is, the imperial mode of hegemony. Mackenzie views that such a Saidian view takes no notice of the low or popular culture, which may have worked outside or even against the Eurocentric mainstream culture. Inappropriately, Said "concentrates on elite texts...his sources consistently inhabit the realms of high culture". (Mackenzie, 1995, p. 14). Repeatedly, in Said, there is usually a close link between art and mainstream culture, between creativity and imperial central culture. In this sense, Said's omission of low popular culture led him to "say nothing about the intended audience of different areas of orientalism or the possibility of contrasting receptions based on historical phase, class, and economic context" (1995, p. 14). Thus, Said's discount of popular culture led him to hush the peripheral opposing voices in Eurocentric societies.

Mackenzie recognises that paradoxes, contradictions, and oppositions are features of history. For Mackenzie, "the arts and dominant political ideologies tend to operate in counterpart rather than conformity [while] it is from the arts that a counter-hegemonic discourse invariably emerges" (1995, p. 14). Mackenzie frees himself from Said's determinism; Orientalist designers, artists, and playwrights were not all engrossed in Western stratagems against the Orient. Orientalism "was as likely to be oppositional as consensual in relation to established power structures, a promoter of, a ferment in ideas as in artistic innovation" (1995, p. 211). Concerning the culture of imperialism, there were times of agreement and others of sharp disagreement between imperialism and popular art. Evidently, between cultural productions and imperialism, "there was a period of convergence in late Victorian and Edwardian times followed by an era of divergence in the inter-war years" (1995, p. 14). Undeniably, artistic productions are not usually sided on the imperialists' part; many works departed from imperial Orientalism and constituted a contrasting strand within hegemonic imperialism.[2]

Contrary to Said's belief that the white man is centred in the Orientalist text, Robert Irwin[3] reveals the degree to which the white man was a marginalised figure in Orientalist scholarship. Irwin provides the example of Louis Massignon, whom Said describes as a centred figure and associates with French colonial institutions. For Irwin, Massignon's scholarship is not sullied with imperialism, but rather he was an insignificant scholar to colonialism; Massignon was an inferior and abnormal figure who committed all his life to pursuit of oriental

---

[2] Following Mackenzie, this paper assumes that Browning is not sullied with racism or imperialism, but rather questions and declines racism and western centrism.

[3] This essay does not support Robert Irwin's central thesis positing Orientalism's complete dissociation from politics and imperialism, since there exist numerous Orientalist texts profoundly entwined with imperialistic sentiments. Nevertheless, this paper finds value in Irwin's notion regarding the marginality of certain white figures in colonial history, as it fits quite effectively with my own argument.

mysticism and benign religious knowledge. Another example is the case of Luis De Cuadra, a young man whom Massigon met on his way to Egypt. Luis De Cuadra was a strange and marginal homosexual figure. Having been accused of espionage, De Cuadra is detained and imprisoned by the Turks (Irwin, 2006, pp. 220-229). In that case, the Orientalist figure is not necessarily a chief central character, but he or she may be downgraded to peripheral and insignificant positions in imperialism.[4]

Accordingly, Ali Behdad recognises that although Said makes certain distinctions among different forms of Orientalism (academic, professional, aesthetic, or personal), he leaves no room for the possibility of significant differences between Orientalists when he repeatedly insists that "every European in what he could say about the Orient was a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally Eurocentric"(Said, 204). For Behdad, the Orientalist discourse is characterised by a principle of discontinuity. That is to say, the Orientalist discourse is not a unified system but a complex network full of counter-ideologies and irregularities. The history of Orientalism is a dynamic system that is open to changing determinants. Orientalists do not necessarily repeat similar labels, but some Orientalists speak outside the orbit of hegemonic Orientalism. For instance, Orientalism finds its most discursive heterogeneity and discontinuity in the belated travellers of the mid-and late-nineteenth centuries. Travellers of the Orient at that time did not write as their precursors, but they wrote, especially in the context of the rise of tourism, as tourists. Behdad speaks of how "a belated reading is not an orthodox reiteration or a reapplication of a previous theory; rather, it is an inventionary articulation of a new problematic" (Behdad, 1994, p. 3). For this, Behdad provides the example of Gustave Flaubert's Note de Voyages. Unlike his predecessors, Flaubert did not tend to write a travelogue but rather a diary (1994, pp. 53–4). In this sense, both temporality and experience are important in creating spaces of difference in the Orientalist discourse.

Significantly enough, Behdad puts his finger on some works that break considerably from Orientalist conventions. Strikingly enough, Behdad describes how Lady Anne Blunt (1837–1917) in her *Pilgrimage to Nejd* disregards radically classical Orientalist metaphors through de-eroticizing the harem life. Behdad states that Blunt:

> Neither dramatizes the harem's inaccessibility nor valorizes her visit as symbolic "penetration" into sacred and secretive domain, as do previous accounts by men. Anne characterizes the visit as a mundane social event where the guest, as anywhere else, is entertained by the host. There is even a tendency in her narrative to de-eroticize. (1994, p. 107)

Thus, Blunt questions deny, or even challenges the Orientalists' eroticizing of the oriental harem. Hence, Blunt assures the discursive instability and historical irregularities of Orientalism.

---

[4] Irwin's idea may be useful for my analysis of the Moor's representation. Contrary to conventional Orientalism, the white characters' voice in *Luria is* decentralised in comparison with the strong vocal presence and the central role of the Moor.

With these notions in mind, I try to analyse Browning's *Luria*, highlighting its departure from conventional Orientalist literature. Following the criticisms mentioned above, I read the play as a deviation from the Eurocentric and dominant narrative and as an instance of Orientalism's heterogeneity. As it will be argued later, *Luria*, unlike other dogmatic Orientalisms, debunks racial and religious biases and presents its Moor in a manner that astutely challenges prevailing stereotypes.

Non-Imperial Culture and the Making of the Image

The rise of British imperialism markedly shaped Britain's cultural, religious, and social ideas. Modern imperialism did produce a sense of pride and racial superiority in British society. This sense of racial distinctiveness was reflected in many colonial writings, in which the English were promoted to a state of racial superiority and civilization while the colonised were relegated to a state of inferiority and backwardness. Colonialism would generate a division of race such as civilised versus uncivilised and superior versus inferior so as to justify the colonial rule. Therefore, non-English people in nineteenth-century English drama were stereotypically created "for the patriotic programme of both defence of the motherland and conquest of the outer regions of the globe" (1995, 180). Thus, the misconception about the colonised people and the binary focus developed with the unfolding of the imperial project.

However, the English citizens' view of the outside world was not the same; British theory about race varied significantly. The sense of pride and racial superiority in English society were not shared homogeneously. From the late eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, the Empire left heterogeneous and contradictory impacts on Britain. It produced voices of racial superiority and others of refusal to embrace imperialism and racial discrimination. Although imperialism evoked a sense of racial superiority, it was not without some tensions between English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish identities, which saw themselves excluded from British racial distinctiveness (Peers, 2004, p. 61). Not only did colonialism prompt in English societies racism and hatred against the indigenous people, but it also stimulated some voices of ethical refusal of discrimination and imperial economy. Many voices of humanitarians, economists, religious reformers, and imperial critics opposed, from various points of view, imperialism, the imperial economy, and over-discrimination.

English imperialism generated diverse effects in English societies. The period of nineteenth-century imperialism brought much opposition to the empire. Imperialism was not simply the move to dominate politically, economically, or even culturally; it "brought with it responsibilities for the moral, economic, and social improvement of the subject people" at home (2004, p. 59). Imperialism triggered economic as well as cultural opposition. There were some of the "very vocal critics of the empire who stressed that the empire was not only incompatible with British values but was also ultimately not in Britain's interests, for it would retard rather than encourage economic development" (2004, p. 60). Imperialism did not only conjure up images of exploitation and oppression but some voices mobilised opposing opinions against the slave trade and human abuses (2004, p. 59).

Edward Said in his *Orientalism* views that nineteenth-century Orientalism was complicit with imperialism. Novels, plays, and political reports that worked on the Orient were

all important for Western imperial dominance. For Said, in the heart of nineteenth-century imperialism, western, including English, writings systematically stereotyped the Orient to support imperial rule. Orientalism, embodied in Western writings about the Orient, is:

> not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious "Western" imperialist plot to hold down the "Oriental" world… it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world (Said, p.11).

Thus, Said defines Orientalism as a Western style of imperial hegemony. It is not a mere benign field of writing; it is an expression and a form of hegemonic control and manipulation.

Through this idea, Said assumes that nineteenth-century imperialism is a unified production and that colonial power is an invariable system; all Western imperial writings of that time were producing hostile and hegemonic views of the natives. In this case, Said suggests that imperialism has one effect on the domestic western, including English, level. Hence, he denies the diverse and complex effects of the empire on the English elite and public. Said has been blind to the moral objections to slavery and imperial hegemony in nineteenth-century English society. He has even ignored the critical domestic voices that were conducted against imperialism and its economy. Thus, the diverse effects of imperialism, the dynamics inherent in imperialism, and the variegation that marked imperial English society have been ignored.

In contrast to such a view, English attitudes towards imperialism were actually far from uniform. The English empire of that era left a complex and heterogeneous impact on the English elite, leading to intense debates and disagreements about its merits. Consequently, the literature of the time reflected not only exclusionary narratives, racial superiority, and assertions of imperial dominance but also narratives of inclusivity, racial equality, and challenges to imperial authority. In a similar way, Browning might be seen as one of those literary agents who were less immersed in imperial culture. He exhibited a benevolent apolitical inclination from an early age, aligning himself as a mystic whose faith was deeply rooted in the divine. Throughout his life, politics held little sway over him, and his voice was often marginalised in the realm of imperial pursuits. Speaking of Browning's mysticism, Inge states,

> We may rightly call him a mystic, in virtue of his profound belief
> in a perfect spiritual world, in which all broken fragments are made
> whole, all riddles solved, and all legitimate hopes satisfied" (Inge,
> 1906, p. 207)

Browning also emerged as a moral and spiritual guide, expounding a philosophy rooted in the tenets of love and human sharing. For Browning, "love and reciprocity of life are the conditions and necessary expression of human expression" (1906, p. 219). For him, love is "the unifying principle that unifies the world" (Tucker, 1948, p. 422).

In light of this, I suggest, in what follows, that Browning's mystic inclinations, coupled with his love-oriented philosophy, serve as a background against his benign position towards the Moors of Sicily. It will be arguably stated that Browning clearly deviates from imperial Orientalism and radically promotes the Moor in what might be possibly explained as a result of his mystic experience, apolitical stance, and love-centred philosophy.

3. PROMOTING PRO-MOORISH DISCOURSE IN LURIA

Luria: The Virtuous Moor

Robert Browning wrote *Luria,* a tragedy of five acts in 1846. The play revolves around Luria, a highly respected Moorish commander of the Florentine forces. Despite Luria's unwavering dedication to Florence and his successful military endeavours against the Pizan invaders, his trustworthiness is consistently doubted by Florentine characters, particularly the military commanders Braccio and Puccio. Luria has a deep affection for the city of Florence and its natural surroundings. However, due to their fear and jealousy of Luria's growing influence, Braccio and Puccio conspire against him, falsely accusing him of treachery. Even though Luria faces unfair judgement from the Florentines, who lean towards putting him on trial, his love for Florence remains steadfast, demonstrating his moral superiority over his accusers. In a heartbreaking act to express his love for Florence and his profound sorrow over the mistrust of the Florentines, Luria consumes a poisonous drink to finally fall dead. This event leaves the Florentine characters morally defeated by Luria's nobility, and burdened with guilt for the wrongs they committed against him.

Racial and anti-Moorish sentiment, which the play deals with, was present in many English plays, such as Shakespeare's *Othello* and Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*. Conventionally, white characters were usually suspicious of the Moorish characters and their behaviours. They launched many wrongs and hostilities against the Moorish race, which they repeatedly considered "otherness." This section reveals how Robert Browning breaks away from the Orientalist tradition. In fact, the anti-Moorish sentiment is present in the play, but it is usually questioned and rendered illogical and unjustifiable; the play reveals how the Eurocentric feeling is double-sided and illegitimate. Unlike the Orientalist conventional English plays, Browning's Luria urges its audience to rethink racial superiority. For Browning, superiority is not racial, but it is built around moral and personal achievements.

In Browning's *Luria*, the conventional stereotypical image of the Moor as a wicked villain is absent. The playwright offers an image of the Moor that is devoid of the usual cultural prejudice. Luria is a brave, powerful, and loyal commander of the Florentine forces. The white characters themselves, Luria's enemies and abusers, comment on Luria's personality positively. Puccio, the Florentine chief officer, admittedly presents the distinguished character of Luria:

> No younger I am longer, to my cost;
>
> Therefore while Florence glorified in her choice
>
> And vaunted Luria, whom but Luria, still

> As if zeal, courage, prudence, conduct, faith
>
> Had never met in any man before (Browning, 1919, p. 440)

Luria is a very skilled and noble fighter who is admired both by his army and his Christian enemies. Puccio trusts Luria's military ability to save Florence: "this boy to whose untried sagacity, /raw valour, Florence trusts without reserve/the charge to save her-justifies her choice"(1919, p. 440). In the same flow, Puccio adds, "And luria's hastening at the city's call/to save her, as he only could, no doubt" (1919, p. 440). Domizia, the Florentine noble lady, exalts Luria as "the highest in honor" (1919, p. 434).

Through action, Luria is a defender and a reliable protector of the Florentines against the Pizans; he is powerfully able to win the war against the Pizans. In *Luria*, there is no single hint of wickedness. Rather, all the evidence on the stage buttresses his humanity and good character. Luria is nobly faithful to Florence. For example, when the Florentines, Braccio and Puccio, have conspired against him, Triburzio, the commander of the Pizans, discovers a letter that uncovers the Florentine conspiracy. Tribuzio brings the letter to Luria, telling him that his life would be in danger and urging him to join Piza's army. But Luria's faithfulness to Florence remains stable, refusing the offer of Triburzio. Thus, unlike Eleazar in *Lust Dominion*, Luria is not motivated by circumstances to desert virtue and morality.

Unlike the conventional Moor, Luria is devoid of bloody and violent intentions towards his Florentine abusers. Although the Florentines relegate him to otherness and conspire against him, Luria's anger is not translated into violence or revenge. Conventionally, the Moors' reaction to their abusers is usually aggressive. In *Lust Dominion*, for instance, Eleazar makes a violent plan to realise his revenge plot. Shakespeare's Othello, in his turn, reacts against Eurocentric injustice by killing the Venetian citizens so horribly. In stark contrast, Luria is idealistically immune against human temptations. The more circumstances force him to deviate from morality and adopt violence, the more he is found to be attached to virtue and tolerance.

Hussain, his Moorish friend, urges consistently him to avenge, but Luria remains morally unshaken. Husain tries to dissuade Luria from defending Florence, arguing: "I doubt and feat. There /stands a wall/Twist our expansive and explosive race/and those absorbing, concentrating men/they use thee" (1919, p. 646). But Luria refuses but to bring victory to Florence, then leave Florence forever. Later, when Luria is deceived by Florentines, who are about to bring him to trial for fake treachery, Hussain intervenes to urge him to "take revenge" and not to "be their dupe," but Luria again nobly sticks to his moral line and avoids revenge (1919, p.457).

Furthermore, Browning's Moor is morally and nobly superior to the white Christians; through action, Luria is free of the fallible behaviours of the Florentines. Braccio is full of dramatic flaws; he misjudges the trust of Luria and fakes the treachery of Luria to contain his growing strength. Domizia, in her turn, tries to immorally use Luria against her enemies, the Florentines. Puccio is devoid of moral attachments and is reduced to a blind follower of Braccio. In contrast, Luria is depicted as psychologically immune against human desires and flaws. In this way, Luria is morally the strongest character in the play.

Luria "the Barbarous", Luria "the Saviour": Racial Bigotry Delegitimized

Luria unveils the dual perspective held by Europeans in their regard for the Moor. The outlook of the European characters is conspicuously two-fold. Browning lays bare this paradoxical facet of Euro-centrism, not with the intent of perpetuating Moorish stereotypes but rather to repudiate racial bias. In a similar vein, Browning rejects the validity of the apprehensions and suspicions with which the white man regards the Moor. The avenues Browning employs to disprove Eurocentric allegations are manifested through Luria's own moral rectitude, accomplishments, and eloquent advocacy, and through the profound metamorphosis in the attitudes of the white characters towards Luria by the play's denouement.

The comprehension of the Moor by the characters is riddled with contradiction. The white characters' stance towards the Moor is a tapestry woven with clichéd impressions, bequeathed by the Eurocentric vantage and marked by an undercurrent of suspicion, fear, and adversarial sentiment. Concurrently, their perspective is also graced with notes of adulation and encomium for the Moor. The Florentines depict Luria as a trustworthy saviour of Florence, "to save her, as he only could, no doubt," Puccio announces (1919, p. 440). However, Florentines refers to Luria as "the Moor of the bad faith" and "the inevitable foe" (1919, p. 440). Luria is exalted by the white characters as a paragon of heroism, yet he is spurned on account of his Moorish lineage.

Luria is the "saviour"; however, he remains "the black face, the barbarous man." Braccio would like Luria "to win the battle," but he is frightened by "these [Moorish] great ones" (p. 440). Triburzio, the Pizan, would like to be supported by the military power of Luria, but he assumes that Luria is in pursuit of "the sure destruction the saviours find" (p. 440). Evidently, though Luria stands as a steadfast Christian guardian of the Florentines and their realm, he is consistently consigned by the white characters to the realm of Otherness. Luria's vigilant safeguarding of the Florentines is met with open arms, yet his Moorish heritage is met with rejection, neglect, and trepidation. Despite his professed Christian faith, Luria's allegiance to Florence is frequently tinged with suspicion and apprehension, solely due to his Moorish lineage. For this, Khalid Bakkoui states that "the question of religious sameness is utterly irrelevant before racial difference (1998, p. 80).

Evidently, the white man's conflicting stance towards the Moor bears the hallmark of a customary Orientalist inclination. However, this does not align with the playwright's intent. Robert Browning does not endorse the Eurocentric, paradoxical perspective of the white characters towards Luria. Instead, Browning exposes the contradictory disposition of the white characters' perspectives to interrogate their legitimacy and unveil the white man's misconceptions.

Upon encountering these conflicting and distrustful perspectives towards the Moor, those unacquainted with the intricacies of the play might misinterpret Browning's stance towards Luria as adverse, inconsistent, and Eurocentric. Yet, through the unfolding of events, Browning demonstrates that the white man's suspicions are groundless and devoid of reason. In practice, the playwright portrays a Moor who is resolutely faithful in matters of morality, a Moor who exemplifies a fervent Florentine spirit even surpassing that of native Florentines. Luria emerges

as a staunch defender of Florence's territorial sovereignty, exhibiting an unwavering dedication to its cause. Luria refuses Triburzio's conspiratorial plot and prefers to fight for Florence (p. 448). Luria succeeds in bringing victory to Florence and detaining Florence's enemy, Triburzio (p. 450). In this way, in action, Luria is a faithful insider rather than an untrustworthy outsider.

In contradistinction to Luria, Florentines such as Puccio, Braccio, and Domizia have contributed nought of note to their cherished Florence. At the very beginning of the play, Puccio fearfully refuses to join the battle against the Pizans, answering, "Not I; Luria, the captain" (p. 439). Braccio, in his turn, expresses his desire for victory, but throughout the whole play, he never translates his Florentine identity to execution. He does not move to fight against the Pizans, but his Florentine identity is simply genetic. Even worse, Domizia, the Florentine lady, whose brothers were punished by Florence, is obsessed with her deep hatred against Florence and is ready to make use of Luria to take revenge (1919, p. 445). From this vantage, Luria emerges as a figure more steeped in Florentine spirit than even the denizens of Florence themselves. His conduct stands as a resolute repudiation of the suspicions and racial biases harboured by the faithless Florentines. Thus, through Luria's steadfast deeds, the audience is led to discern that the white characters' wary dispositions towards him are misjudgments and mere distortions of reality.

On a wider scale, the suspicious attitudes towards the Moor in the play are also rejected by Luria's expressions of love and affiliation to Florence. Luria insists on his Florentine belongings. He calls Florence "my place" (p. 454) and her residents "my Florentines" (p. 442). Even he repeatedly refers to himself as "we Florentines" (p. 459). Luria is enamoured with Florence; he is convinced that the city of Florence is "beautiful" (p. 458) and that God has blessed "the fields and gardens, vineyards, and olive grounds" (p. 459). Although he is mistrusted by her people, Luria utters no single word of hatred towards the city and says that "his fate is sealed at Florence" (p. 451). In this way, the racial prejudice and suspicions with which Luria is addressed are clearly rendered illegitimate.

A non-detailed reading of the play would assume that these arguments support the idea that Robert Browning celebrates the Moor's conversion and acculturation in Florentine society. This point could not be Browning's since the Moorish identity of Luria is repeatedly declared from the very beginning of the play until the end. In the first act, Luria adds a Moorish front to his Florentine army (1919, p. 441). Later, he describes his instinct as "Moorish" (p. 449). In the final act, he assures: "I, born a Moor, lived half Florentine" (1919, p. 462); Undeniably, Browning does not rejoice in Luria's acculturation into European society since he admits Luria's Moorish cultural affiliation. Luria's identity on stage is rather described as a hybrid: Moorish and Florentine.

"Oh! noble Luria": Luria's Nobility admitted

Browning's refusal to tolerate racial prejudice in *Luria* is obviously clear at the end of the play. In the final act, the playwright makes a radical change in the white characters' attitudes towards Luria. Puccio comes to admit his misjudgment of Luria and his blind fellowship with Braccio. Puccio holds himself in readiness to follow Luria "to exile or to death" (1919, p. 461); Puccio says:

Here at your feet, my captain and my lord!

That such a cloud should break , such trouble

be,

Ere a man settle, soul and body, down

Into his true place and take rest for ever!

Mere my wise eyes fixed on your right-

hand,

and so the bad thoughts came and the worse

words,

and all went wrong and painfully enough

In the same scene, Puccio adds:

I am yours now, -- a tool at your right-hand

wields!

God's love, that I should live, the man I am,

On orders, warrants, patents, and the like,

…And you are Luria, our great chief again!

(1919, p.461)

So, Puccio confesses that his suspicions towards Luria were "wrong and painful." For this reason, he decides to be himself rather than a doll in Braccio's sway. From now on, he is a follower of his "great chief," Luria.

Domizia decides to leave her revenge and admits Luria's "loyalty and simplicity" (1919, p. 463). Now, Dominzia denies all her old stereotypes and trusts Luria's faith and nobleness.

The early traits all dropped away,--we said

On sight of faith like you …

Oh noble luria! What you have decreed

I see not, but no animal revenge,

No brute–like punishment of bad by worse-

It cannot be, the gross and vulgar way

Traced from me by convention and mistake

Has gained that calm approving eye and

Brow!

Spare Florence, after all! Let Luria trust

To his own soul, he whom I trust with mine!

(1919, p. 463)

In this way, Domizia is transformed into "another woman" who "let [s]the past sleep," the past of racial abuses (1919, p. 462).

Braccio confesses his flaws and his misjudgments of Luria. For his suspicious attitude towards Luria, Braccio asks for forgiveness:

> Till Braccio told in just a word
>
> The whole—
>
> His lapse to error, his return to knowledge:
>
> Which told…nay, Luria, I should drop
>
> The head,
>
> I whom shame rests with! Yet I dare look up,
>
> Sure of your pardon now I sue for it,
>
> Knowing you wholly. Let the midnight
>
> end!

(1919, p. 464).

The metamorphosis in the white characters' disposition towards Luria stands as a tangible embodiment of the playwright's intolerance of otherness. Ultimately, the white characters concede that all their racial preconceptions regarding Luria were nought but distortions of reality. Such a denouement also begets a psychological shift in the audience, leading them, by the end, to perceive that racial apprehensions and animosity directed towards the Moor by Puccio, Braccio, and Domizia were fabricated and without basis. The audience finds itself, at the close of the play, confronted with a reversal and refutation of the racial stereotypes that have plagued the Moor; the audience is prompted to dismiss racial bigotry.

It is of paramount significance to mention that this radical change in the white characters' vision towards the Moor is new and non-conventional. In *Lust Dominion*, Eleazar dies at the end of the play, while his abusers still believe in his evil nature. In *Othello*, when Othello perishes at the end, the white characters are still convinced of the destruction Othello has brought to Venice. In *the conquest of Granada*, when the Moors are punished by death, the white characters believe that justice is achieved. Contrarily, in the culminating act of *Luria,* the white characters find themselves wholly persuaded of the fallacy in their earlier assessments of Luria. They replace their mistrust with a newfound trust, casting aside their previous views of Luria as deficient. This denouement is not devoid of intention; rather, it seems crafted, in my view, to rectify and dismantle all the racial preconceptions that the white characters have heaped upon the Moor.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Browning's Moor emerges as a heroic figure, adorned with commendable virtues and noble accomplishments. At the play's outset, Browning artfully unveils the conflicting sentiments the white characters hold towards Luria and issues a caveat to his audience, urging them not to unquestioningly accept their claims about him or to adopt their apprehensions and suspicions. To achieve this, the playwright initially depicts Luria in deeds as a figure of noble trustworthiness, fervently dedicated to the cause of Florence. This renders the white characters' claim untenable and without merit. Second, Browning offers the Moorish hero a wide opportunity to verbally refute his abusers' claim. In addition, Browning dispels the notion of racial otherness through a substantial and affirmative transformation in the white characters' attitude towards the Moor. Thus, the depiction of the Moor in *Luria* presents a distinctly non-traditional rendition, diverging from the typical and widely accepted Orientalist representation of Moors in English dramatic literature.

The fact that Robert Browning's *Luria* deliberately puts emphasis on the Moor's virtues and noble deeds and illegitimates white characters's racial bigotry shows that Orientalism in the age of imperialism was not always unfavourable, but it did change from one dramatist to another according to political, historical, and even philosophical determinants. Indeed, Browning seems to have been one of the fewest playwrights whose mystical experience and apolitical stance pushed him to paint a fresh and non-conventional image of the Moor.

REFERENCES

Barthemely, A. G.. (1987). *Black Face Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Behdad, Ali.(1994). *Belated Travelers*: *Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* Durham: Duke UP.

Bekkaoui, Khalid (1998). *Signs of Spectacular* Resistance *: The Spanish Moor and British Orientalism*. Casablanca: Imprimerie Najah El Jadida.

Browning, Robert. (1919). *Luria: A Tragedy* (written in 1846). In *The poetical Works of Robert Browning*. Vol 2. Ed. Augustine Birell. London: John Murray.

Dekker, Thomas.(1875). "Lust's Dominion; or, The Lascivious Queen.*"* In *A select collection of Old English Plays*. Vol XIV. Ed. Carew W. Hazlitt. London: Reeves and Turner.

Dryden, J. (1968). "The Conquest of Granada." In *Dryden: The Dramatic Works*. Vol. III. Ed. Montague Summers. New York: Gordian Press.

Dryden, John. (1968). "The Conquest of Granada." In *Dryden: The Dramatic Works*. Vol. III. Ed. Montague Summers. New York: Gordian Press.

Inge, William Randolph.(1906). "The Mysticism of Robert Browning." In *Studies of English Mystics*. London: John Murray.

Irwin, Robert.(2006). *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and* their *Enemies*. Penguin.

Mackenzie, Jhon. M.(1995). *Orientalism, History,Theory and the Arts*. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Mackenzie, John. M. (2008). "Edward Said and the Historians." In *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18:1.

Matar, N. (1999). *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*. USA: Columbia University Press.

Peele, George (2001). *The Battle of Alcazar*. Ed. Khalid Bakkaoui. Casablanca: Printed at Imprimerie An-Najah Al Jadida

Peers, Douglas M. (2004). "Britain and the Empire." In *A Companion To Nineteen Century Britain*, Ed. Chris Williams. USA: Black well Publishing.

Porter, D. (1983). "Orientalism and its Problems." In *The Politics of Theory*. Eds. Francis Barker et al. Colchester: University of Essex.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.

Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.

Tidreck, Kathryn. (1981). *Heart Beguiling Araby*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Tucker, William John. (1948). "The Mystic Note in English Verse." *Catholic World*, 167.

AUTHOR'S BIO

Zakariae El Idrissi *holds a Ph.D. in Orientalism and Cultural Studies from the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in Fes. He is currently a teacher of English as a foreign language. His educational background includes an MA in Cultural Studies and a BA in English Literary Studies. His research interests include Orientalism, postcolonial studies, comparative literature, and cultural studies.*