# Edmund Dulac's Book Graphics and the Problem of Orientalism in British Illustration of Edwardian Era and the Second Decade of XXth Century

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Abstract—At the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, Europewide enthusiasm about the Eastern art, which varied from Iranian miniature to Japanese engraving, led to the popularity of many artists whose works were impacted by Orientalism. In these circumstances, large London publishers, annually producing luxury gift books for Christmas, trying to adjust to the mass excitement around the Eastern art, invited young and promising graphic artists to illustrate these publications. Among the invited artists who actively cooperated with such publishers was the outstanding French-English illustrator Edmund Dulac (1882-1953). The article reveals one of the key aspects of Dulac's oeuvre. The author considers artist's attempts to convey the thematic and stylistic originality of the Oriental art in the context of book illustration of the Edwardian era and the second decade of XXth century. The work traces Edmund Dulac's creative career and examines the cycles of his illustrations in order to identify both typical and original stylistic and compositional techniques used by the author to create works in the spirit of orientalist aesthetics. The article also deals with oriental works of Dulac's contemporaries and analyzes them in comparison with each other.

Keywords—Edmund Dulac; Arabian Nights; book illustration; Orientalism; Oriental art; Eastern miniature; Japanese prints; Edwardian era (period)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Passion for Eastern art captured European artists in the second half of the XIX century. The collecting of Oriental art and journeys of European artists to the exotic Asian countries became an integral part of the European artistic life until the 1920-30s. Such enthusiasm for other cultures emerged, of course, in the European art field as well. The artists tried to reconsider the artistic experience of other cultures and transfer it to European ground. This is how Orientalism emerged and became one of the vectors of the development of European art for many decades to come.

Orientalism as a style in European art is considered to be the direction which represents "...adoption of Eastern decorative motifs and forms..." [1] to the national art school, which in a narrow sense only refers to the stylistic diversity of oriental XIXth and early XXth century artists. Though in reality the term is much more layered, because it incorporates not only the use of Oriental motifs, but also a deep imitation of the style and composition of the Eastern art, understanding of their narrative and coloristic structures. The use of this art and its achievements sometimes even led to new artistic forms arising from a synthesis of cultures.

In the mid-nineteenth century Eastern countries were represented in the European paintings in the classical (academic) manner that was understandable and clear to the European audience. However, towards the end of the century the French and the British began to experiment with new artistic techniques and styles, trying to convey a vision of the world from the Eastern perspective. In France and Great Britain, artists increasingly turned to the Japanese engraving of the XVIII-XIX centuries, as well as to Mughal and Persian miniatures. Here the colonial experience played a decisive role and largely determined the interest of European countries in the artistic heritage of the East.

"Throughout the history of such a direction in art as "Orientalism", it acquired different features in different countries..." [2] and England is not an exception to the rule. Great Britain was one of the important centers of orientalist artists, but the view of its masters differed from the continental enthusiasm for the art of the East. On the British Isles there was considerable interest in linear and planar drawing, typical for Asian masters, while on the continent, particularly in France, special attention was paid to the color scheme and silhouette image (an example is the group "Nabi"). Moreover, unlike France, in England prevailed the cult of narrative image, which was transferred entirely to the Eastern kind of view by orientalists in the early twentieth century. It can be easily seen in the illustration cycles made by the number of artists of the first quarter of the century, among whom a prominent place was occupied by the hero of this article — Edmund Dulac.

## II. FIRST STEPS IN ORIENTALISM

The most significant wave of English interest to the art of the East arose in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, starting with the first acquisitions of works painted by Japanese masters in the British Museum in the 1850s. It continued with the exhibitions of these works (especially the one in London in 1862), and reached its climax in the famous "Peacock room" created by artist James Whistler mid 1870s years [3].

Towards the end of the 19th century, Japanese engraving was reflected in book illustrations by Walter Crane and in erotic black-and-white planar compositions by Aubrey Beardsley. If the first of these masters became famous primarily in the field of children's book illustration, the second, despite his extremely short life, due to the combination of Japanese erotic art with the European culture of drawing and mood of decadence turned into an idol, and was imitated by many masters of his generation, as well as later graphics. Beardsley's interest in Japanese art was also expressed in collecting etchings of the Edo era, using which he created his unique artistic manner, which became the starting point for artists working in the style of art Nouveau (simultaneously with the first posters of Alphonse Mucha in France). In particular Beardsley admired the drawings of the Japanese master Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806), as evidenced by the interiors of his house: "Beardsley owned the most beautiful Japanese woodcuts one could see in London, all of the most detailed eroticism... They were hanging in simple frames on delicately shaded wallpaper all of them indecent, the wildest visions of Utamaro" [4].

Beardsley became a kind of a guiding light for many illustrators of the Edwardian period. In England it was a time of active development of the market of richly illustrated gift book editions of classical literature, and among the illustrators whose names appeared on the title pages of these publications most often were Arthur Rackham, William Heath Robinson, Harry Clark, Kay Nielsen and Edmund Dulac. Each of these artists became famous primarily for the illustrations to the tales of Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen or the brothers Grimm, as well as plays by William Shakespeare. However, at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, publishers also had a special interest in works devoted to the East, which gave these graphic artists the opportunity to engage in a variety of artistic experiments in this direction.

Edmund Dulac, a prominent painter and graphic artist of the Edwardian era, became known for his illustrations to such works - among his masterpieces art visual cycles to "Stories from the Arabian Nights" and "Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam, along with "The Tempest" by Shakespeare and fairy tales of Charles Perrault. This list of literature masterpieces reflects the diversity of the material the master worked on. "He looked to the Middle and Far East for inspiration, his watercolors of legendary subjects have a gemlike brilliance found only in Mogul miniatures, their flat, stylised and sleepy beauty sometimes comes from the Japanese print, sometimes from the Pre-Raphaelites and even occasionally from the Renaissance" [5] - these words accurately describe Dulac as an artist. However, particularly Orientalism became a Central landmark in his art, born when he was just beginning his artistic journey in the French city of Toulouse.

As a child, Dulac had much to do with his uncle, who was an "...importer of fancy goods from the East; inexpensive objects d'art which included some of the attractive Japanese woodblock prints then fashionable" [6]. Later, Dulac himself began to collect various pieces of art from the East. In addition, in his youth, he was so carried away by the culture of Asian peoples that took up studying a number of languages of these distant countries (and was very successful) [7].

In London, where Dulac moved in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century at the age of 22 [8], he quickly began working with major publishing houses, among which a decisive role for the career of the artist played the one called Hodder & Stoughton. It granted Dulac a permanent job – illustration of annual gift book, which were produced at Christmas each year during the Edwardian era and the years before the World War I. At the same time, the artist signed a contract with the well-known in those years Leicester gallery, where he subsequently exhibited his illustrative cycles for more than ten years.

Since the publication of "Stories from the Arabian Nights" in 1907, for which Dulac completed 50 color illustrations, English critics began to support the craftsman. For Dulac, it was the first real work that saw his merits not only as a graphic artist but also as a colorist, what set him apart in the British art world. After the release of "Stories from the Arabian Nights" such words appeared in media dedicated to Dulac: "...he has a truly exquisite sense of color, and of noble design" [9].

Among the many worthy works of Dulac especially stand out his creations, made in cold bluish tones. Here the artist managed to achieve the effect giving the illustrations the charm of the mysterious East: "...the softness of the gleam of moonlight on stone, or on shadowy figures, and his use of ultramarine, indigo and Prussian blue, mingled with purples and violets, brought to the illustrations the calm and mystery of Eastern nights" [10]. Researcher Colin White defines the first years of Dulac's work in the UK as his "blue period", due to the Illustrator's constant use of blue, purple and other cold colors and shades in the second half of the 1900s, and this was most clearly expressed in his illustrative cycle to "Stories from the Arabian Nights". Among his illustrations are the following: "She poured into each jar in turn a sufficient quantity of the boiling oil to scald its occupant to death", "In the garden of the summer palace all was silence and solitude", "She and her companion arrived at the city of Harran", in which the composition structure depends primarily on the color, and not on the lines of the preparatory drawing. This is most clearly seen in the third of these illustrations, where the human characters, the camel, the trees and the road, are separated from the background - the distant city, the horizon and the night sky through the division of the composition by darker and lighter tones of blue. Therefore, the composition is strictly divided into two parts diagonally, emphasized by the walking characters, from the upper right to the lower left corner of the illustration. The narrative side of the illustration seems clear, though a bit enigmatic - barely-sketched watercolor of the city in the background is lost in a mysterious blue background,



nevertheless telling the reader about the destination of heroes. ("Fig. 1")



Fig. 1. Dulac E. She and her companion arrived at the city of Harran. 1907.

The style of the East is easily readable on Dulac's illustration "Till the tale of her mirror contented her" where a lying lady is depicted in front of a mirror surrounded by female servants. There is no absolute following of any Japanese engravings, but the composition and an evident desire to abandon the saturation of the plot with unnecessary details and focus on the characters, tells about the influence of Japanese image manner. Also this illustration is analogous to the other drawings known for their "japonism" style those of Warwick Goble (1862-1943). Goble, one of Dulac's direct competitors in the Edwardian-era book illustration market, was famous for his Japanese-style watercolors. His illustration, "The Matsuyama Mirror", made for the collection of Japanese legends published in 1910, is similar to Dulac's illustration and close to it in plot. It is an example of even greater stylization of Japanese engraving of XVIII-XIX centuries, where the background doesn't completely exist. If Goble was so fascinated by the art of Japan that became fully mimic the style of its artists, Dulac only implied with his drawings to the East in General, giving no preference to the art of any particular Asian country. ("Fig. 2", "Fig. 3")



Fig. 2. Dulac E. Till the tale of her mirror contented her. 1907.



Fig. 3. Goble W. The Matsuyama Mirror. 1910.

Another illustrator, being spiritually and skillfully close to Dulac, was Irish master of the Eastern themes Rene Bull (1872-1942). Some of Bull's works are influenced by Dulac's drawings, which is not surprising due to the friendship of the two artists and their membership in The London Sketch Club [11]. A striking example is Dulac's illustration entitled "He arrived within sight of a palace of shining marble" to the story of the fisherman and the Genie from "Stories from the Arabian Nights", where the composition was fully transferred by Bull in his own watercolor. The image of the city was brought by Irish artist to absurd, because it seems extremely phantasmagoric, and the color scheme is fragmented and consists of not so harmoniously combined shades (in contrast to a single warm color in the Dulac's illustration to the same lines). Despite the fact that Bull's illustrations for "The Arabian Nights" (1912) and "Rubaiyat" (1913) are considered to be one of the best cycles in his work, most of the pictures there either repeat or significantly inferior to Dulac's interpretations of the same works, both in composition and in color. The most interesting of later versions of this famous collection of fairy tales influenced by Dulac are illustrations created by the French orientalist L éon Carr é(1878-1942) for the book published in 1926 [12].

Dulac illustrations for "Stories from the Arabian Nights" are also highly valued – back in 1976 at Sotheby's the artist's illustration "Forty thieves" from the series went under the hammer for a decent amount, exceeding the mark of 1,000 pounds [13] (a huge sum in those days), which proves the artistic value of Dulac's work based on Oriental subjects.

Dulac's illustrations of Omar Khayyam's "Rubayat", made two years later, have many characteristics in common with the preceding drawings for "Stories from the Arabian Nights", among which the use of various Oriental ornaments occupies an important place. Such patterns, represented as images on alternating tiles, can be found in several illustrations by Dulac for each of the editions mentioned. They are clearly visible in the drawings "As soon as he came in she began to jeer at him" (which is also similar to carpet ornaments), "Pirouz è, the fairest and most honourably born" of the "Stories from the Arabian Nights" and also "Quatrain XIV" and "Quatrain XLII" from "Rubaiyat". East repetitive patterns are also found on floors and character's clothing in Dulac's illustrations. Such images depict a symmetrical pattern, often in the form of a flower or a plant. Here, in "Rubaiyat", appear the first Dulac's carefull attempts to make a picture more planar and in the same time decorative: "...great charm of his productions lies in their somewhat flat effect, beauty of line and color being here recognized, as with the Japanese and by Puvis de Chavannes..." [14]. The comparison with Japanese and at the same time French art is noteworthy – Dulac still felt a strong influence of his homeland and artists who, like Puvis de Chavannes, were close to him in spirit, but at the same time he began to take a serious interest in Japanese engraving. In General, the illustrations for "Rubaiyat" can not be called the best Dulac's work - here the artist reinforces his previously found stylistic and compositional solutions, but at the same time, repeats himself.

#### III. DEVELOPMENT OF ORIENTAL VIEW

With the end of the Edwardian era and the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, Dulac's style evolved significantly, increasingly leaning towards Eastern motifs. The reason for this change is Dulac's absolute and unconditional rejection of the direct perspective. In "Discovery", he once wrote: "the end result of objective imitative art... is nothing less than colored photography" [15] - and exactly this "painted photo" Dulac wanted to avoid in his own work. The artist's words were a symbol of his transition to another art, typical of the Eastern pictorial tradition: "...in this later period he often abandoned western 'photographic' perspective, in favor of multiple viewpoint of oriental and medieval art" [16]. Dulac further sought to move away from the objective, naturalistic interpretation of reality in his illustrations, at the time he came to the new kind of space construction. It was no more the depth of the image, but only a decorative panel, from top to bottom representing the plane on which the characters and objects played the role of visually encoded text.

The first stage of a significant change in Dulac's style is noticeable in his illustrations for "Princess Badoura" in 1913. Here, despite the residual effect of the art Nouveau style, the artist's desire to quote Oriental miniatures in his works is clearly seen. The space in these drawings is lost, the background is distorted, the horizon line becomes higher, to fit more equivalent subjects or objects on the sheet of paper, to make the drawings more decorative and at the same time more narrative. The boundary between the two approaches (the former - art Nouveau and the new one - Oriental miniature) can be seen in the illustration "She ran forth, and threw herself into the arms of Camaralzaman", where a slight hint of perspective and compositional highlighting of the characters still remain. Here the background is depicted as planar – not to distort the spatial structure, but with the idea of putting a large decorative work in the form of a typical Eastern interpretation of the wall paintings - vertical and landscape ornaments with repeating patterns. Draping on the attires of the characters also emphasize the pursuit to planar illustration, abandoning the depiction of any halftone or shaded areas, just mapping out a small number of barely visible lines of a drawing. It is likely, that this illustration was inspired by the work of Japanese eighteenth century artist Suzuki Harunobu (1724-1770) called "Young Man Playing a Noh Drum". Here the style and compositional structure are almost identical to the Dulac's painting. The

division of wall space on both papers is developed geometrically, lines of character's clothing are treated similar and jug of flowers as a decorative addition is presented on both drawings (even though in Dulac's illustration the flowers are replaced by more typical, from a European point of view, symbol of Japanese culture – a branch of Sakura). ("Fig. 4", "Fig. 5")



Fig. 4. Dulac E. She ran forth, and threw herself into the arms of Camaralzaman. 1913.



Fig. 5. Harunobu S. Young Man Playing a Noh Drum. Mid 18th century.

An even greater tendency towards the miniature can be seen in Dulac's illustrations to "Sindbad the Sailor and Other Tales from the Arabian Nights" (1914). In the best-known Dulac's illustration "The Episode of the Whale" the raging water element depicted by the artist is a softer, smoother version of the famous Katsushika Hokusai "The Great Wave", which in one form or another was quoted by almost every artist fond of Japanese art at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries. Passion for the art of Hokusai began in England mainly from Whistler – his lecture about the Japanese artist and the skill of engraving [17]. The wave's crests from Dulac's illustration, rising virtually to the upper limit of the sheet, echo the Japanese drawings structure of Edo period landscape painters, led by Hokusai and Hiroshige. ("Fig. 6", "Fig. 7")





Fig. 6. Dulac E. The Episode of the Whale. 1914.



Fig. 7. Hokusai K. The Great Wave off Kanagawa. Ca. 1831.

Through one of the intricate "multilevel" illustrations called "The Bridge at Baghdad where Abu-l-Hasan awaits strangers" Dulac transferred typical of Japanese prints composition in the world of the Arabian nights, combining the two different Eastern cultures in one drawing. Breaking all the laws of perspective, the artist still left the horizon line in the upper part of his painting, though the characters appear absolutely identical in height and elaboration of their depicted space, which is again similar to the Japanese paintings of the Edo period, such as the engraving of Utagawa Hiroshige "Otsu". ("Fig. 8", "Fig. 9")

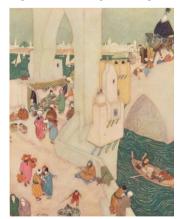


Fig. 8. Dulac E. The Bridge at Baghdad where Abu-l-Hasan awaits strangers. 1914.



Fig. 9. Hiroshige U. Otsu. Mid 19th century.

In addition to Dulac's interest in Eastern art, his artistic development depended on the events that took place in England, and in early 1910s London was stunned by "Russian Seasons" - ballets, organized by the famous Sergei Diaghilev, already famous due to the glorious performances held in France. Among other ballets presented in England, the most oriented to the exotic of the East was "Scheherazade", the costumes for which were created by Russian artist Leon Bakst (1866-1924). It is safe to say that the artist Charles Ricketts, having visited this performance [18], shared his delight within a circle of close friends, and among them Dulac, already fascinated by the East. In confirmation of the ballets popularity it must be mentioned, that in 1912 in London an exhibition of Bakst drawings was held, which thus could have been seen by Dulac, although his visit can not be surely approved for the lack of direct sources. And yet the influence of Bakst sketches and a General atmosphere of Diaghilev's Seasons on Dulac cannot be underestimated. Exotic dancing partly wild, but at the same time graceful and fascinating movements can be seen on some of his illustrations for "Sindbad the Sailor and Other Tales from the Arabian Nights", particularly in watercolors "Abu-l-Hasan entertains the strangers with dancing and music" and "The Nuptial Dance of Aladdin and the Lady Bedr-el-Budur". The second one unusually expresses the sharpness of the character's dance movements and the incredible, even unprecedented flexibility of human body in the style close to Mughal miniature painting and as well referring to Diaghilev's ballets.

About Dulac's further illustrations, made during the World War I and after (like those to the "Fairy Tales of the Allied Nations" of 1916 and "Tanglewood Tales" of 1918), it can be said that they "...confirm Dulac's remarkable ability to assimilate the ethnic elements in a story and adapt his style to the country of origin and the time in which the action is taking place" [19]. This method of matching the drawing to the style of the era, presented in the illustrated text Dulac started using when he created watercolors to "Princess Badoura", and reached its culmination in 1920, when he took over the "Kingdom of a Pearl" by Leonard Rosenthal. "...Dulac used Persian and Indian miniature painting for his inspiration..." [20] - that characteristics of Dulac's art suit particularly to the cycle of illustrations of the master, made for the publication of this work in 1920, where he made a final transition of the style to the Persian miniature drawing [21], some features of which had appeared in previous cycles of the Illustrator. One of the most typical works of this cycle



is the hunting scene, created by Dulac in the best traditions of Persian miniature. The most likely source of inspiration for Dulac was the period of Safavid dynasty (XVI-XVII centuries), which is confirmed by the color and composition of the works of miniaturists of this time. An image close to Dulac's watercolor is a XVII century miniature "Nobles out hunting", where the vertical orientation, characters, fantastic landscape and color correlate almost completely with the Illustrator's drawing. The only significant difference is an inaccuracy in the proportions on the Persian master's drawing (this is easily seen when comparing proportions of riders and horses to each other). Dulac's composition, as well as his characters from this point of view is as precise as it can be. ("Fig. 10")



Fig. 10. Dulac E. The hunting. 1920.

In the end of the 1910s, another Illustrator - Kay Nielsen showed a strong interest in Oriental miniature. This younger contemporary of Dulac in the years 1918-1922 created a series of illustrations for the next edition of "The Arabian Nights" (unfortunately, unpublished), where, under the strong influence of scenic painting and Persian miniatures, was able to present a wonderful composition, strong structure and intensity of the work. Similar to the Dulac's illustration is Nielsen's drawing to the "The Tale of the Third Old man", where he not only presented a fantastic flat landscape, full of incredible plants and trees, but also used typical of Oriental miniature diagonal composition, which included two plots on the same painting. He also generated luxurious frame, looked like the embroidery on a colorful Persian carpet covered with images of flora and fauna of the East. Dulac was more interested in the decorative features of the drawing itself, than a decorative edging of it, and besides, he didn't like to place more than one storyline on the same picture and in his linear drawing he still remained faithful to the style he began his career with - art Nouveau. At the same time, Nielsen was a painter of another generation, which more closely embraced the style of bright colors and sharp outlines - popular in 1920s and was called Art Deco, and that is the reason for the differences in the approaches of each of the artists to the Oriental art.

### IV. CONCLUSION

At the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, European masters changed their approach to the visualization of Oriental

subjects. As one of the researchers correctly notes: "Ethnographic Orientalism has lost its relevance, and new goals were set for the artists" [22]. An attempt to comprehend the East through the prism of its art style, through the analysis of the planar structure of the works of its artists and the poetics of culture - this became a new approach in their illustrations, which English Orientalists promoted during the Edwardian period, among whom a prominent place was taken by Edmund Dulac. The definition of the word "orientalist" in the interpretation of a researcher Lynn Thornton – "...meaning someone who is knowledgeable about Oriental people, their languages, history, customs, religions and literature" [23] - can be surely attributed to Dulac, because he succeeded in all the mentioned fields, and moreover in performing Eastern music [24], and, of course, in the artistic stylization of oriental art. Dulac's life was so closely bound to the art of the East that one can't help feeling as if Dulac was born there. According to art critic Martin Birnbaum: "If (he) had had any voice in the matter he would have chosen some dream city of the Orient for his birthplace, a Persian princess for his mother and an artist of the Ming Dynasty for his father" [25].

Dulac's genuine talent as an orientalist painter is manifested in his cycles of illustrations for "Stories from the Arabian Nights" (1907) and "Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam (1908), where the artist demonstrated an inimitable sense of color, while remaining stylistically true to the elegant lines of art Nouveau. In 1910s on the wave of Diaghilev's Russian Seasons' popularity, Dulac returned to the theme of the Arabian Nights by illustrating "Princess Badoura" (1913) and "Sindbad the Sailor and Other Tales from the Arabian Nights" (1914). These cycles demonstrate Dulac's thorough study of Oriental miniatures and Japanese prints (probably something based on his own collection of Eastern prints and other art objects). The desire for absolute flatness and decorativeness of a drawing, brought him to climax in his illustrations to the "Kingdom of a Pearl", where in 1920 he completely imitated the style of Persian miniatures of the XVI-XVII centuries. So the most important turning point in the work of the illustrator was his rejection of the direct perspective in favor of the Eastern space interpretation, which really made him an orientalist artist.

It should be mentioned that Dulac had been developing in tandem with a number of other orientalist illustrators, such as Rene Bull, Warwick Goble and Kay Nielsen, whose works echo Dulac's illustrations mainly in the second decade of the XX century. While Dulac gradually came to the transliteration of Oriental style into his illustrations, other mentioned artists completed all their illustrations, for the most part, in a single, almost unchangeable style. Thus, Dulac differs from his contemporaries in continuous development and a penchant for stylistic experiments (his works created during the Edwardian era and illustrations of the postwar period radically differ from each other in style). This allowed him to become one of the outstanding original Franco-English artists of his time, to compete with whom in the mastery of oriental illustration, in fact, no one could. Dulac's art, no doubt, was an important link in the chain of oriental art development, which united the French sense of



color with the English desire for linear drawing together with the passion for Japanese prints, Persian and Mughal miniatures in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

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