The Oriental City
A North African Itinerary

Gareth Stanton

1 Anour Abdel-Malek, 'The End of Orientalism', in Diogenes (44), 1963

2 Anour Abdel-Malek, ‘Marxism and the Sociology of Civilisation’, in Diogenes (64) 1968


Writing concerned with the “Orient”, “Orientalist discourse”, groups together a universe of different cultures and brands them as one. The work it describes is said to be a fiction. Those people who have taken up the gauntlet thrown down in 1963 by Anour Abdel-Malek in his article, The End of Orientalism, have moved from the greater flexibility he later counselled in using historical materialism to understand historical sociology of civilisations in what he called the ‘three continents’, to a complete rejection of any formulations or statements of ‘Western’ provenance. Now it sometimes seems enough to pick on a series of ‘texts’ and dismiss them for the evidence of Orientalism they exhibit. To view such a work as Elias Canetti’s Voices of Marrakesh, however, as no more than a prurient catalogue of ‘Marrakesh’s supply of miserable animals, destitute natives, and decrepit “creatures”’ is not the most constructive approach to adopt. The critic remains tangled in the myth; to say, for example, that Orientalism represents no more than certain sordid manifestations of the effects of bourgeois repression
means that the political and economic dimensions of the power and knowledge equation alluded to by Edward Said are lost. Nonetheless much ink has been spilt on dismissing works *tout court* when there is perhaps cause for closer attention; criticism must move forward to dismantle the monolith of Orientalism. The very scope of Said’s formulation — stretching from the ancient world to modern times — makes Orientalism a cumbersome entity and criticism such as Rana Kabbani’s *Europe’s Myth of Orient* has tended to rely on Said’s original formulation rather than attempting to refine it (what seems like a development, i.e., her consideration of the other side of power and representation by introducing Arab chronicles which indicate a sort of inverted Orientalism is to simply fall into the trap set by Bernard Lewis in his vitriolic attack on Said in the New York Review of Books).4

This article will draw parallels between what has been written about certain North African towns and villages and the historical forces operating at the era. It will consider features of the Orientalist complex within a specific framework and relate them to developments in cultural history — especially those surrounding the birth of the ‘modern’.

Whereas Abdel-Malek’s was a plea for an elegant sociology of civilisations viewed in the light of independence movements and the eclipse of the colonial period (i.e., the reinstatement of ‘lost’ civilisations in the roster of human history), this account will be located firmly within the context of a form of cultural history which recognises important changes in the ways in which people see and live the world around them, and the various influences of new productive techniques (both on the imagination and in its service). The objective is not to produce a “truer” version of “the Orient” — which, anyway, is something of a logical impossibility; if statements about knowledge and power are conceived instrumentally the very act of communicating automatically implies a series of relative hierarchies. Rather, it is an effort to fit the pieces together within the ever expanding constellation of modernism in which non-Europe was conceived on the basis of categories used for thinking Europe. As population movement increased with the new forms of transport which heralded the advent of the “culture of time and space”5, venues of Victorian life, the holiday resort for example, were imagined into these new worlds.

In his study *Touring in 1600* E.S. Bates describes the guide books of that time, exemplified by the work of Gruberus and Plotius, “the very guidiest of guide-book writers”, both of whom drew up a series of questions for erstwhile travellers which would not have been unfamiliar to the British anthropologist of the nineteenth century armed with a copy of *Notes and Queries*. They are advised to question the inhabitants of the lands they visit on all manner of topics. This form of guide book is unknown today and corresponds to a past vision of travel. Mystery has already been possessed and the role of the guide book is to access and catalogue the world in the form of a sensible itinerary (with people, as distinct from landscapes or monuments, this is a more difficult task, but it can be done if they are objectified as “dancer”, “snake-charmer” or “woman from the south” and, in the mind of the tourist, the essence of their whole being is captured in this role playing). The French critic Jean Cassou discussed the
displacement of "voyage" by "tourism" in the nineteenth century. At this time the growth of travel agencies made it possible for the masses to travel, but it was travel with a difference:

7 Jean Cassou, ‘Du voyage au tourisme’ in Communications, (10), 1967

8 Kern, S. op cit, p. 352n.

...the tourist agency brought the voyage to the masses as a denatured experience, stripped of the possibility of discovery. The modern tourist was locked into a collective consciousness of the group and saw everything passively, according to a preconceived itinerary that excluded the possibility of error and adventure. He experienced only what the tour guide had already experienced...
Of course travellers had recorded their experiences prior to the nineteenth century, but with an increasing technical sophistication it was possible to reproduce and proliferate visual images of these far-off lands. Early travellers, if not themselves artists, might make a few sketches which, upon return, would be handed to someone more competent to produce drawings. In some cases the artist took a companion who would compose a text to complement his/her vision. The work of Etienne Dinet appeared in a popular book form with a text written by Sliman Ben Ibrahim, a Mozabite from southern Algeria who had seen through "‘certain errors’" in the way the Koran was commonly interpreted and reassessed the role of painting and representational art, coming to view them as forms of prayer. Kabbani would have made much of the irony of Léonce Bénédite’s preface to their collaboration in which he calls for an edition of the book in Arabic to enable the Arabs themselves to appreciate the high regard in which their customs and beliefs are viewed in the West\(^\text{10}\) and the book does indeed conform perfectly to most Orientalist stereotyping. Increasingly, however, travel books came to be recognised by the presence of photographs. For Malek Alloula it was the photograph that superceded the work of men such as Dinet as the receptacle of European phantasms about the East, but in time it succumbed to another product of the new age — the postcard:

...it became the fantasy of the poor — filling shop-stalls with cheap dreams — encountered by members of the military, tourists and colonists alike, it was all pervasive in the colonial world; serving to fix and perpetuate the lyricism and glory of the colony alongside its fake knowledge of Algeria.\(^\text{11}\)

The growth of communication in the western world was what enabled the postcard to figure so largely on the cultural horizon. Turning to figures for England and Wales we can gauge the scale of the increase:

When the penny post was introduced in 1840, 132 million letters were delivered in England and Wales. By 1870 this had risen to 704 million; in 1913 it stood at 2,827 million. This was in addition to the 1,069 million postcards delivered in the same year.\(^\text{12}\)

Alloula’s study of the ways in which the colonial postcard functioned to project a view of Algerian women demonstrates clearly that the images manufactured are by no means innocent of intent. Despite their pretence at illustrating the world, the "‘ethnographic alibi’" masks "‘un regard vieusècteur’". For the people subjected to it, "‘photography steals the soul; the ‘savages’ who will pay the price of a less symbolic and more ferocious spoilation sense this fact intuitively.’"\(^\text{13}\)

These old cards, which knew their golden epoch in the first thirty years of this century, can, in some cases, be traced back to individual photographers. Early postcards of Palestine were the work of Bonfils.\(^\text{14}\) In the images displayed sometimes the explicit mark of events can be seen. Dreissen has argued that changing images of the Rifians in postcards was a direct result of their pacification by the Spanish. Riffian notables in Melilla complained about caricatures
introduced in 1916. These "were displayed in shop-windows and became very popular amongst the conscripts who sent them home to family and friends. Spanish officers considered these postcards morale-boosting." Subsequent to pacification the Rifian appears more frequently in bucolic scenes. Why should these objects, these particular artifacts of colonial iconography, have known there greatest popularity at a period corresponding with the most intense period of European colonialism? Here we must examine the nature of the postcard.

What are postcards? They partake of the same world as "popular" literature. They have, however, a different function. They convey a message, a greeting. They are the product of a world where access to communication has become "democratic". This is not to say that they communicate a great deal, they are not the direct descendant of the tradition of bourgeois letter-writing on the grand tour, rather they are formulaic, a duty, an incantation. Historically they flow in one direction alone; backwards in space and symbolic time; back to the people who still live in a world Before Voyage and the necessity to travel; returning to the metropoli of European expansion. The train postcard spawned the picture postcard. The message enlivened with a visual image meant more than the few words it was possible to squeeze onto the card (in the early days of the picture postcard one entire side had to be devoted to the address and the message written on the picture side.). The soldier-son could now be imagined strolling
down the dusty street or stretched out amid the ruins of other worlds; the emigrant pictured in the verdure of the colonies, successful at last (the "social death" of migration to the Americas in an earlier period is now ruptured by missiles from the after life).16

All these images, however, conveyed other meanings, not only did they herald the arrival of modernity by representing the new towns constructed by the colonizers,17 they helped to reduce the population to the level of the natural landscape, what Laroui described as the "general regression of the dominated society...toward an objective and absolute negation of its historic past."18

In this essay postcards are used as illustrative material for a more general set of transformations of which they themselves are a part. The first section deals with the development of tourism in the Sahara, specifically in the small town of Biskra and relates this to a more general set of European visions of idyll. The second section examines two Moroccan cities, Casablanca and Tangier, and their representation in certain forms of popular writing and travel literature.


17 This process is clearly seen in David Prochaska's work on colonial Bône, "Reconstructing 'L'Algérie française'" in J-R. Henry (ed), *La Maghreb dans l'imaginaire français: la colonization, le désert, l'exil. Édissud, Aix-en-Provence, 1985*

DANCERS, PAINTERS, WRITERS AND GUIDES AT THE MOUTH OF THE SAHARA.

Do you know why we have gone as far as Biskra, among the Oulad Nail? To open our commercial routes to the interior. We have copied the English and waged a war of self-interest; we have marched with a sword in one hand and a ruler in the other.\textsuperscript{19}

Maréchal Bugeaud, speech to the Chamber, 24 January, 1845

Don’t talk to me about Matisse... the European style of 1900, the tradition of the studio where the nude woman reclines forever on a sheet of blood
Talk to me instead of the culture generally — how the murderers were sustained by the beauty robbed of savages: to our remote villages the painters came, and our white-washed mud-huts were splattered with gunfire.\textsuperscript{20}

Lakdasa Wikramasinha

South of the Aurès mountains in Algeria at the turn of the century the village of Biskra, chief settlement in a group of oases known as the Ziban (the plural of Zab, a village), was the haunt of Bohemian artists. They came to Biskra to taste the desert; its smells, the light, the sheer scale.

Before this could occur, however, the dream of Biskra had to be born. In 1880 Paul Bourde wrote: ‘’O Biskra! who, once having seen you, could ever forget!’’\textsuperscript{21} Such enthusiasm was of recent mintage. Initially it was not so:

On the 4th of March 1844 Biskra was occupied by the Duke of Aumale who left behind him a company of native soldiers commanded by five French officers and junior officers. The massacre of these men by miserable fanatics was quickly avenged and a better organised occupation made us definitive masters of Biskra the following 18th May...\textsuperscript{22}

Within two decades of the first occupation of Biskra, thirty-one years since the French first set foot in Algiers, a comprehensive guide-book is available to those free spirits bent on exploring the new land. Apart from the details of conquest Piesse’s guide, quoted above, reveals only formal notes on Biskra: circle of the subdivision of Batna; indigenous population numbering some four thousand (excluding the garrison and the few Frenchmen installed in the Fort-Saint-Germain). That those using the guide were not only mere sight-seers is suggested by the following remark:

It has not yet been possible to grant land in the Biskra district. That will only occur when dams and artisanal wells have made the good quality land, which is currently sterile through lack of water, financially viable.\textsuperscript{23}
Environ de Biskra. Foum as-Sahara (mouth of the Sahara). In some form or another this image, the gorge of El Kantara appears in almost every ‘travel’ account of Algeria. Many early twentieth century books contain a photographic record and the ‘scenes’ and ‘types’ which they illustrate are close relations of the postcards.

Most of the information the guide provides deals with the plant which produces the region’s most precious commodity, the date palm.

An Englishman, Rev. J. Blakesley,24 travelling in the 1850’s had very little to say about Biskra, but by 1875 the situation has changed remarkably. No longer are the few Frenchmen cooped up in the military fort, writes George Gaskell:

Biskra, which may be called New Biskra, to distinguish it from the original Arab village about a mile from it, is a pretty little town which has sprung up under the auspices of the military… Many of the Arabs, appreciating the advantages which the modern town possesses over the mud-built capital of the Ziban, or finding it in their interest to live amongst Europeans, have abandoned their former quarters, and their numbers now greatly predominate in Biskra proper.25

Gaskell was also an Englishman and there would be many more. He notes with approval the proposals to establish a winter station for invalids at Biskra: ‘‘Medical men admit that Biskra possesses all the climatic advantages that nature can unite in one delectable spot…”26


26 ibid, p. 316.
By 1881 another Englishman, Piesse’s guidebook in hand and in need of rest, is enjoying a pilgrimage of health to Biskra; From Pimlico to the Palms is the whimsical title he adopts for this part of his journey. Piesse alone, however, proves inadequate for the great task of discovering Biskra:

After coffee...we began to consider how we should employ our time in the desert, and sent for and secured the services during our stay at Biskra, of Abd-el-Kader, and I can, with a good conscience, advise all who come after me to employ him. Clean and neat in his person and dress; civil attitude, always at hand when wanted, and not boring you when you had rather be alone; familiar with everybody and everything at Biskra; not only your guide during excursions, but your confidential servant and interpreter all the day through.27

By the 1880’s French writers were already surveying the massive changes which had occurred in Algeria. Turning to Biskra Bernard wrote: ‘‘Biskra is such a civilised oasis! It’s the Sahara on the doorstep of even the most timid tourist; a desert for the photographers. There are far too many Europeans here.’’28 What exactly was attracting this excess of European visitors? Certainly French railway building had made it possible for most tourists to visit Biskra and the pre-Sahara, but wherein lay the appeal, the dream of Biskra, and what further attractions awaited?

28 M. Bernard, L’Algérie qui s’en va, Plon, Paris, 1887, p373.
THE NAYLETTES.

The model and what it signified (the Algerian woman) fades away to become no more than the prop for a carnavalesque orgy.  29

A French artist, living in an Arab house, has arranged a delight of the Orient—a dance. The dancers are girls belonging to the Ouled Nail tribe, who live on the Sahara, far south.  30

The Ouled Nail dancing girls, known familiarly as naylettes, are, like the gorse of El Kantara, another common image of Biskra. Their fame has even extended to the realm of sociology where they appear in Fernando Henriques’ study Prostitution and Society.  31 In both visual and written accounts they undoubtedly represent the strongest symbol of what Alloula terms a ‘carnavalesque orgy’. Their presence makes Biskra radically different from Europe. Here, writes F. Hautfort, ‘vice seems to be unknown and recklessness reigns as if the place were another Eden before the Fall, good and bad have no definition and the naivety of some past golden age lingers on.’  32 He continues his uninhibited eulogy for Biskra by praising the beautiful dancing women and the passions they inspire: ‘Embarka’s peasant good-looks have even made victims of colons; and, finally, Maryam, who receives writers and painters and in whose company the dilletantes of Albion encounter the neurotics of Paris.’  33

The Ouled Nailians belong to a nomadic tribe which occupies the desert between Bou Saada and the M’zab. The group makes an exception to the traditional Muslim rule of jealousy over female virtue, as Bourde puts it. The situation has sometimes been described as dowry prostitution; the women leaving the tribe and working as dancers prostitutes until they accumulate a sufficiently large dowry. They then return to the tribe to marry, making, to the great surprise of many Europeans, good wives and mothers.

Their dancing was an event sought out by many, but responses to this voyeuristic spectacle were ambivalent:

...it’s a pantomime which could only be found in a people whose women play no part whatsoever in public life and, in consequence, have not the least moral refinement. The name given it, the belly dance, tells us enough of what it contains: a gross parody of brutal love, executed with the impassive face of the Muslim woman, whose greatest glory is to ignore pleasure. It is wholly indecent.  34

Here is Knox’s description of such a scene:

presently a woman, one of the professional dancers, neither young nor well looking, made her appearance, and wriggled herself up to the open space very slowly; she would pause every now and then, and appear to be taking aim at some one as with a gun, with a stick which she held in her hand. I suppose her wriggles and twistings of the head seemed to imply general fascination; they did not fascinate me. It seemed, however, to satisfy the Arabs, who I dare say saw more in the wriggling than I did. The women were most fantastically dressed, with an
abundance of what was, no doubt, sham jewellery, with a head-dress which looked like a large stool with silver ornaments hanging from it. They had many chains of silver, with a silver kind of breast plate, and a silver belt. There was only one that had the smallest pretension to decent looks, and even in her case one had to "make believe" a good deal... Perhaps the less said the better about the dancing women, who are, if I remember right, called "oulad nail". They inhabit a street apart in Biskra, and come from some distant part of the desert. I can only say they seemed to me very unattractive, not to say hideous.35

Gaskell was similarly distressed by the performance. "In large cities the world over", he wrote, "in spite of civilisation, or perhaps in consequence of it, a certain class of society follows the same course
and...amuse themselves in much the same way; but we did not expect to find the social evil amongst the daughters of the desert in the quiet and distant oasis.”

Most accounts, however, resemble Tripp’s. He found the dancing girls “remarkable for the grace of their persons and the gorgeous costumes and jewels they wear”, even if “their complexion is darker than gipsies, and most of them are tattooed like savages.” The Nailsians became central to the Biskra “package”. So much so that by 1913 a cynical observer, John Fraser, wrote:

Everybody goes to the Street of the Ouled Nails, the professional courtesans. It is a naughty experience, and quite nice ladies saunter through the sordid lanes, and sip coffee in the dancing-saloons where the attraction is the indecent posturing of fat females — and they excuse themselves for going because it is the custom of the country, and they are witnessing a phase of life prohibited elsewhere. As a matter of fact, there are not half a dozen real Ouled Nails in the street — most of the girls are tricked-out strumpets from Algiers and Constantine. They are brought to Biskra for the amusement of Europeans and Americans.

Authenticity, if ever there was, is no longer central to the performance. The dancers constitute the country in the eyes of visitors and, as the self-styled Hafsa (described by his publisher as an American citizen of distinguished Arab and Spanish descent) wrote, ‘the Walid Nails are too profitable to the owner of the individual dance-hall, who is not always ‘native’, and too much a part of the country’s picturesqueness as a whole.’

**SIDI SAOUARR (MISTER PAINTER)**

Painters, professional and amateur, poured into Biskra. They were required to point out the physical beauty of the land, because, as the American saouarr Bridgman puts it, “The lack of appreciation of a picture, photograph, or any representation of nature is wanting in the Arab mind to an incredible degree, more so perhaps than among the most ignorant of the European peasants.” The artists set about putting things right, but they needed “authentic” props: “From time to time we bought second-hand costumes either at the market-place or directly from the back of whoever was willing to sell his garment and strip on the spot.” How convenient it is that people will sell the clothes off their very back for the furtherance of art. In this emporium the dancing girls will sell their jewellery, “but they make a great favour of doing so and demand exorbitant prices. Ornaments are best bought from the husbands or brothers of less fashionable ladies.” To these painters the water tasted sweeter in the desert and the air was purer. They came and stole the sunsets, they turned the people into dreams. Some took their names, wore their clothes and drank their hospitality, but they always left. The Biskris waited for the next Sidi Saouarr to paint pictures in their staring eyes, to give them a life, to tell their stories. The dream they were given, however, was not their own and they were unable to live up to the power of brushes or the magic of paint-boxes:
The ruses for getting sitters to come, and the fruitless rendezvous given; the assistance of neighbours to whose house the suspicious and half-frightened feminine natives could first go, then sneak round the corner or through a hole in the roof by passing over the terraces, would be as confusing a record to offer my reader as the incidents were amusing and more frequently exasperating to us. Then the halt, the maimed, and the blind, to say nothing of the healthy, ugly specimens of humanity, who pounded at our door, beseeching us, "Saouarr, Saouarr nee! Saouarr nee!" (Artist, paint me; paint my portrait).43

Biskra was many villages, but mostly it was two; from one the ascent was hard because, although the route was flat, dusty rags were heavy. In the opposite direction the descent had long been assured with guns, and dust was only the veil masking the ages which rolled by with every step taken towards old Biskra.
WRITERS AND GUIDES

Biskra, the present terminus of the railway, is the Mecca of the casual tourist, who, with little trouble, and without wandering from the region of large hotels, without, indeed, changing his train, may wish to believe he has seen the desert. And because at Biskra the tourist is largely represented, it follows that the guides are numerous also. "Guides," indeed, there are of every description, pleasant companions generally; as a study of Oriental life, a varied experience of them is both interesting and amusing.44

The guide alone becomes sufficient evidence of Oriental life, C.F. Grant goes on to elaborate the varieties of this exotic breed:

There is the guide who is nominally attached to the hotel...[...] There is the smart good-looking, youthful guide, who borrows lustre from an alleged descent from the Prophet, and is always appearing in gorgeous new clothes, obtained, it is whispered, from the shops for the purchase of supposed "clients", worn for a day, and then returned as unsuitable.

There is the quiet, reliable, studious young guide, who is too proud to ask for employment, and perhaps has no need; for he seems to be a general favourite, and to be employed by the same people when they return to Biskra year after year... Occasionally they are a little supercilious in their remarks, as, for instance, one of the Arab guides who had been employed by an English writer, whose rapid motor tour through the country had resulted in a book — "I know how these books are made; I tell them five words, and they make ten pages."

All this takes place in the modern Biskra of the tourist, and the French Government, and the Hôtel de Ville, and the European shops and hotels.45

And yet these guides are not enough. Oriental life requires a richer, more picturesque and colourful backdrop — one not to be found in Biskra. Outside the town there is a garden, pitched on the burning edge of the Sahara; in reality the garden of Château Landon, designed and executed by Count Landon de Longueville. For the English tourist this was to take on an added significance in 1904 when the Biskra industry went into top gear with the publication of a novel, Robert Hichens' Garden of Allah.46 Beni Mora of the book is Biskra and it was to Biskra, and the garden, that thousands of tourists came looking for evidence of the book. Hichens (1864–1950) was a curate's son and the book — the story of the sophisticated Domini travelling in the Sahara where she meets the man she marries who, it transpires, is an escaped Trappist monk — was his greatest success. It was adapted for the stage to popular acclaim and no less than three film versions were made, the last in 1936, directed by Richard Boleslawski and starring Charles Boyer and Marlene Dietrich. For Biskra the writing of the book was to mark a new phase in its touristic development and the guides, in some measure, were to exact a Pyrrhic revenge on writers and their ilk. The desire to be guided through strange worlds. Perhaps there is something important in this, however displaced whatever we may find. The guide is the organiser of our imaginings, presenting them back to us in their best light. Performing a role similar to the museum, to de-historicise, repack and sanitise the spoil of the past. Guides found

45 ibid, p360-1.
their way into the fiction; showing the characters of the book round the "Oriental" garden; unveiling "their" town to the tourist; fabricating an imaginary city in the desert to comply with European expectations. In this game of mirrors Biskra becomes "the market, the negro village, the mosque, the casino, the statue of the Cardinal, the bazaars, the garden of the Count Ferdinand Anteoni" — the selection of sites offered to Domini by her guide. The real guides were soon following this lead, "My mistress was introduced to Safi who had been Robert Hichens' guide. He took her to the famous garden in which Domini spent so much time, and explained how he had given the author most of the data concerning that story."48

Village Negre The Village Negre is worth a visit, and if a horrible curiosity appeals to one, the dervishes who eat scorpions and glass and pierce their faces with nails can be seen without difficulty.49

Here, however, the European imagination is impoverished and within little more than a decade of the book's publication the romance of Biskra had finished. Grant complained that the garden:

...is invaded by matter-of-fact, unimaginative people, anxious to prove the identity of certain spots, and to connect them with the characters in a novel; these meet you at every turn. Vendors of carpets miscellaneous wares dodge and follow you, successfully eluding all your efforts to escape them, finally settling themselves on the ground at your feet, hoping by sheer importunity to drive you to an undesired bargain.50
Writing in 1906 M. Hilton-Simpson was shocked to find in the market "a vast crowd of hangers-on whose business it is to scrape acquaintance with a stranger, offer to show him the sights, and, in short, to swindle him in every imaginable way: a truly motley throng..."\textsuperscript{51} The authorities, he further noted, had decided to act and all those wishing to act as guides had, by this time, to register with the police and receive an official number. Another writer, travelling in 1911, put the influence of the novel even higher: "'Biskra of the tourists, orbs circum currentm, is in a fair way to rechristen itself Hichenstown.'\textsuperscript{52} In similar vein Bodley remarked that with the aid of a railway an English novelist had made Biskra what it was, a kind of "Dieppe-on-sand": 'The town has an air of fat prosperity unknown in the other places we have visited. Arab guides are paid the wages of colonels and the hiring of camels is as expensive as a motor car.'\textsuperscript{53} Another writer, March Phillips, also uses the comparison with a more usual holiday resort. Biskra, he says, is a "mixture of Brighton and Aldershot."\textsuperscript{54}

A stylised desert had its stylised inhabitants. By the mid-thirties of this century "the image of the desert sheikh had already impressed itself upon a million minds, his features those of Rudolph Valentino, of Ramon Navarro, his language and his passions devised by such writers as Edith M. Hull."\textsuperscript{55} Hull's book, The Sheikh, went into thirteen printings within eight months of its publication, but that is not to say that its storyline of the Englishwoman kidnapped near Biskra by a sheikh who miraculously turns out to be the son of the Earl of Glencaryll was not mocked. The American satirist S.J. Perelman devoted a piece to the book entitled Cloudland Revisited: Into Your Tent I'll Creep,\textsuperscript{56} but authors had already commented on the discordance between what they saw on their travels and such portrayals. The sheikhs of fiction, one writer wrote, bear more relation to the 'guides' who 'swindle visitors in Cairo.'\textsuperscript{57} Is this comparison between guides and the fictional representations simply fortuitous? The dream of "Orient" gave way rapidly to other sentiments. For some writers disillusion was already present before Anthony Wilkin wrote:

Biskra was to us a great disappointment. It is like Cairo in the season—full of big hotels, tourists, and more or less corrupted (if it were possible) Arabs, who assail the visitor with a mixture of French and English, the proportion being varied according to his supposed nationality.\textsuperscript{58}

Wilkin also noted the "guide problem" elaborated on by Fraser: "Touts — alleged guides — make life unbearable. All the young lads and young men of Biskra, instead of earning a decent livelihood, seem to spend their time touting amongst the visitors; and they are the most impudent of blackguards."\textsuperscript{59} The guide is an important locus which connects the Orient of the dream with disappointment; counterpoints seduction with deception. The often mentioned "duplicity of the Arab" may well lie in the impossibility of fulfilling this dual role: "Most travellers in the East find sooner or later that the Arab, at least the settled Arab, is an incorrigible thief and rascal, often without even a smiling countenance..."\textsuperscript{60} Does this "duplicity of the East" lie here — the projection of modernity onto a world which has no choice but to struggle with and adapt the new rules posed? The young learn fast
how to play such games. Paul Bourde notes a conversation he had with a young boy in Biskra. The child claims to be without parents, he sleeps in one of the cafés — cleaning it in exchange for a place on the floor:

What do you want to be when you grow up?
I want to go to France.
Good heavens, what will you do?
I'll shine shoes. And then I'll be a soldier.61

Bourde and the party with whom he travels are so touched by the young Biskri who exactly fits their vision of the street urchin that they club together and buy him the new shirt he has demanded; subsequently, with the exception of a brief glance, the boy is seen no more. Bourde and his party are informed that he had lied. The normally effusive Hautfort is forced to dress up the irritation children cause the innocent tourist:

They have only one cry with which they torment the stroller: Sordi? macache sordi? ...sordi barca? (a copper?, won't you give me a copper?, just one?)

If the gift is slow to arrive the kids carry on; if the knowing roumi [European] replies with the traditional, ironic phrase. ‘Return tomorrow, Allah will provide!’, they become annoyed and chant in unison: -Un-sor-di, Un-sor-di!62

Despite its increasing spoilation Biskra occupied a central place in the iconography of exotica. A book which has weathered the ravages of time rather better than that of Hichens is André Gide’s The Immoralist. In his notebooks of 1896 the writer claimed that the earth of Biskra spoke a different language, but one which he had come to understand. He ridicules the other tourists for their gullibility and dancing girls. He had witnessed many real musical gatherings:

And I was always the only Frenchman to see them. I don’t know where the tourists go; I fancy the paid guides show them a trashy Africa in order to protect the Arabs, who like calm and secrecy, from intruders... Yet the hotels are full of travellers, but they fall into the trap set by the quack guides and pay dearly for the falsified ceremonies tricked up for them.63

But Gide of the novel, Gide the self-confessed pederast, is also deceived in Biskra:

I do not recognise the children, but the children recognized me. They have heard of my arrival and come running to meet me. Can it really be they? What a shock! What has happened? They have grown out of all knowledge — hideously. In barely two years! It seems impossible... What fatigues, what vices, what sloth have put their ugly mark on faces that were once so bright with youth? What vile labours can so soon have stunted those beautiful young limbs? What a bankruptcy of hope!... I ask a few questions. Bachir is scullion in a café; Ashour is labouriously earning a few pennies by breaking stones on the roads; Hammatar has lost an eye. And who would believe it? Sadek has settled down! He helps an elder brother sell loaves in the market; he looks idiotic. Agib has set
up as a butcher with his father; he is getting fat; he is ugly; he is rich; he refuses to speak to his low-class companions... What! Am I going to find the same things I hated so at home? Boubakir? Married. He is not fifteen yet. It is grotesque... He is, I expect, an utter waster; he has taken to drink and lost his looks... So that is all that remains, is it? That is what life has made of them.64

This is deception of a different order, but ultimately it bears the same stamp as Fraser’s lament:

Years ago Biskra must have been redolent of the Orient... It was truly Arabic.
Then the French built a railway, so that it was easily reached. Then doctors discovered the air was so dry it was just the place for invalids. Then Mr Hichens wrote his novel, 'The Garden of Allah', and that did the mischief... He is the maker of Biskra today, and has brought much gold to the town. But I wish 'The Garden of Allah' had never been written.
For Biskra is spoilt — irrevocably spoilt. It has become the shrine of the galloping tourist, here today and gone the day after tomorrow. The East is overlaid with the West. Instead of a natural town it is a fake Eastern town.65

Increasingly this is the shrill message of the writer/traveller. When Wyndham Lewis envisaged travelling to the Sahara he chose to enter
"at its Atlantic extremity, rather than approach it via Biskra, or the 'loop' Beni Abbes — Timimoun — Guadaria — with all the stupefying squalor of Anglo-American tourism about one, poisoning the wells and casting its Baedeker'd blight."66

Meanwhile the economic reality behind the idyll tells another story. The saouarr Bridgman remarked of the first artisan wells sunk by the French in 1856:

The hearts of the inhabitants as well as the water-field were tapped, and the rejoicings they manifested in "fantasias", dancing, and singing, in gratitude to the French for their enterprise, can be better imagined than described... It would be difficult to understand how a nation, however fanatical, could rise in insurrection against such benefactors as their conquerors have been.67

But arise they did. The situation is portrayed in an all together different light in a study by Jean Perennes,68 for the Garden of Allah is His in name alone. New intensive forms of irrigation introduced by the French were to destroy the entire economic balance of the pre-Saharan region and result in the impoverishment of many of the local population. This then is the background to the tourist saga. From the Anglo-American tourist/writer there was the occasional pat on the back for the French authorities and their benevolent drilling, but the mystique of the 'Orient' prevented them looking any further. Reading their books the myth of Biskra eventually devours itself, its very success brings about its downfall, but the children of the dream will not simply go away when the revelry is over. Rather, they have moved on:

But the Biskra tout has come to El Kantara. There he is — three of the breed — standing beyond the gates of the inn, and whilst we have our coffee he babbles, "Geeb (guide); ver nice; ver good; ver expensive, yes." That was the range of his English. He would not be shoo'd away; he would not be cured away; the threat of a bucket of water only made him grin.69

The French naturally took their technological achievements more seriously. They are encoded into the doxic form of the 1927 Guide Bleu which, in the words of Denise Brahimi, speaks "emphatically of the artesian bores made by our drilling teams, which have increased the number of wells from 200 in 1856 to 800."70 The Oued R'hir south of Biskra spawned its own novel in the shape of Aichoucha la Djellabya: Princesse Saharienne.71 The authors, René Pottier and Saad Ben Ali, encapsulate in their romance all the major themes enacted in the colonial history of the region: the battle of old with new; the jaundiced French theme of Arab and Berber (now usually ascribed to the divide and rule motive); exotic sexuality and so on. Although this vision of the pre-Saharan areas was common, Bernard, even in 1887, had discussed how the Biskris were migrating to the large towns of the Tell to find work, but always there is some romance ascribed to the fact and the dream returns; Biskris aren't allowed to exist in the real world of the modern. They are fixed in some permanent archaic state and, no matter what they do, it is seen as further evidence of this condition. After "saving hard and living off nothing", the Biskri always
manages to "amass a little nest egg, and he returns, a man of means, to cultivate the native date, that is to say, by the grace of God, to watch it grow."\footnote{72}

Not all travellers, however, were completely taken in by the situation. Touring the Tunisian pre-Sahara (not greatly distanced geographically from these regions) Norman Douglas was inspired to write:

That witchery of Orientalism, with its immemorial customs, its wondrous hues of earth and sky — it exists, chiefly, for the delectation of hyperborean dreamers. The desert life and those many-tinted mouldering cities have their charms, but the misery at intermediate place like Gafsa (and there are hundreds of them) is too great, too irremediable to be otherwise than an eyesore.\footnote{73}

What remains after the plague has ravaged the land? The eclipse of Biskra saw tourism broaden out its base in the Saharan regions. Hafsa notes a conversation with an Arab companion in the town of Bou Saada — a rare voice in the travel books:

"Yes", he replied, 'soon we shall have as many visitors here as go to Biskra.' There was a suggestion of displeasure in this answer, and I asked him why...

'...know you, what I say is not unkindly; yet you may observe that our roofs are no longer the unseen windows of our houses. They who come, we often feel, view our mosques as if to reckon how better minarets could be made, or admire them as if grown there like palms. Sometimes we ourselves feel like strangers, strangers of uncommon strangeness.\footnote{74}

\section*{INTO UNKNOWN LANDS}

To step on board a steamer in a Spanish port, and three hours later to land in a country without a guide-book, is a sensation to rouse the hunger of the repletest sight-seer.[...] There is no guide-book to Morocco, and no way of knowing, once one has left Tangier behind, where the long trail over the Rif is going to land one, in the sense understood by anyone accustomed to European certainties.\footnote{75}

By 1927 Edith Wharton was able to write in a preface to the new edition of her book:

In the interval since my visit this guide-book-less and almost roadless empire has become one of the most popular and customary scenes of winter travel... Since my book was written Monsieur Richard's Blue Guide has done for the traveller's curiosity what the beautiful new 'national' roads have done for his motor wheels... Morocco has been made comprehensible, accessible and inviting...\footnote{76}
By 1936 readers were treated to the spectacle of Marise Périale’s book, *Le Maroc à 60 Kms à l'heure*. There were now all the guidebooks required to the dream of Morocco. What is the counterpoint to the guide through revelry? I think it is the explorer, but there is a polarity here. Many people have pointed out the metaphor of exploration often adopted in the Victorian era to describe the journey into the industrial slums in search of the tribes of the poor. Naturally the "great" explorers had their guides but the characteristic amnesia covers up the fact. In our imaginary topography of the North African landscape the city has a strong image. It is the opposite of the rural idyll. The shock of the Victorian explorers fuels the expectations of the modern tourist exploring the cities of Morocco. Paradigmatic here are Casablanca, a "modern" city, and Tangier, where the "very worst" becomes possible.

**CASABLANCA (DAR AL-BEITHA)**

It was not long before French efforts had generated Morocco’s largest city. The growth of Casablanca has been documented in detail by André Adam, but here I shall stick to its imaginary other. To many Casablanca evokes no more than a film of that name and the film, for many, is the only reason for the existence of the city. What then is this mythical city? What are the vital clues that tell us this is Casablanca? A few shady characters wearing tarbooches. These do no more than indicate that the Casablanca of the film is simply a metaphor for a particular set of foreign locations; the film extras are as superfluous to the cinematic representation of the city as they are to the colonial vision of its history. This is yet one more "Oriental city of the mind", but unlike many of the others — Bagdad, Tunis, Damascus, Cairo, this is one city which embodies the modernising impulse of colonialism most completely. Here colonial ambitions are fused with the modern because if Casablanca is anything it is the dream of rational economics. When, in 1912, the French began their occupation of one of the last independent polities in Africa, Casablanca was no more than a small fishing village. Fifty years later it was one of the largest ports on the African continent. Because of its natural harbour it was selected by the French as the focus of their economic policies in a reorganisation of the country’s infrastructure. The shift was from the inwardly looking world of the old imperial cities to that of an economy based on the extraction and exportation of primary materials (predominantly phosphates) back to metropolitan France. Casablanca was the lynchpin in the process.
Today the city still bears that legacy, both in its spatial and social organisation. Many would have us believe that the unbridgeable gap which still exists between life in some of the town’s bidonvilles and the smart downtown hotels is fortuitous. But the dynamic of the city’s rapid growth and the factors that conditioned it gave rise to both faces of the city. Lyautey, first Resident General and ‘‘pacifier’’ of Morocco, admired the work of the British in India and with his group of urban planners sought to maintain the strict separation between the ‘‘natives’’ and the colonial rulers which was so dear to the Raj. Casablanca, however, could be created ex nihilo as a modern European town transplanted onto African soil, but in this very process the requirements of labour generated an urban proletariat out of the anthropological vision of Morocco as a country of distinct tribal units. In the thirties, the orderly workers’ compounds created by the French for the indigenous workforce slowly transformed into the shanty towns that now blight this and other North African cities. Beni M’Sik, at one time the largest bidonville in North Africa, was a prototype. The message of modernism holds its grip and Casablanca is living proof that Europe can happen in Morocco. In some senses the message is captured in the packet design of one of Morocco’s leading cheap brands of cigarettes, Casa Sports: a sports stadium, fast car and frantically saluting spectators. Sport has become pivotal in the presentation of national identity and in this post-independence vision of modernity the city and the future become fused in a cheap smoke.

Perhaps more than any other North African city Casablanca is, like Marshall Berman’s characterisation of Petersburg, an ‘‘archetypal ‘‘unreal city’’ ‘‘80; born out of nothing and built by the labour of those in the population who constitute the inevitable historical losers in the race for modernization. In the building of Petersburg, ‘‘The human sacrifices were immense: within three years the city had devoured an army of close to 150,000 workers — physically wrecked or dead — and the state had to reach into the Russian interior, inexhaustibly, for more.’’81 This sounds not only like the construction of Casablanca, but the very building of ‘‘modern’’ Morocco (the sacrifice continue in the forms of migrant labour which still pertain today for many North African workers). In Berman’s description it was Tzar Nicholas, through ‘‘a policy of enforced backwardness in the midst of forms and symbols of enforced modernization [who] made Petersburg the source and the inspiration for a distinctly weird form of modernism, which we might call the ‘‘modernism of underdevelopment’’.’’82 Here, in Morocco, it was an oppressive colonial regime that played the role. The cosmopolitan nature of Casablanca in its colonial heyday was more intense than that represented in the bilingualism of shop signs in the Nevsky Prospect (the main street in Petersburg), but one thing is excluded from representing itself in anything other than an archaic form — the local population. The emotions generated in the young Moroccan flâneur in the town, fascinated by the bourgeois villas under construction in the forties and fifties, are impulses to destruction: ‘‘Adolescent dreams where I walked about at night with dynamite. I connected the houses with a long fuse and when I got to the edge of town I blew the whole lot up. No more red villas!’’83

A similar sort of antagonism had been noted in the sexual domain,
and this was generally true for North African cities:

The walls were covered with obscene graffiti. The physical and moral world was divided between male and female. The constant reference to notions of activity or passivity in describing people, situations or behaviour illustrated the exuberance of the masculine symbol.\textsuperscript{84}

Berque talks of the colonial experience intensifying the "traditional sexual ardour" of the Maghrebi peoples, but on the whole he remarks that "relations were only possible on the horrible fringes of the two worlds":

The Casbah of Algiers combined African brutality with the prostitution of Marseilles. With its shadowy and squalid cul-de-sacs, seductive and yet blatant, it spread over the upper part of the town. For all its hideousness, it inspired descriptions by Louis Bertrand and Lucienne Favre, and a romantic film, \textit{Pépé le Moko}.\textsuperscript{85}

(The resonance of the word casbah in French is perhaps lost to an English reviewer; Graham Greene, reviewing this film, saw only "the story of a man at liberty to move only in one shabby, alien quarter when his heart is in another [which] widens out to touch the experience of exile common to everyone."\textsuperscript{86})
The world of prostitution, however, was not a free-for-all. Often the advances of the foreigner would be rejected and forms of segregation operated even in the brothel areas. Berque goes so far as to suggest that prostitution, “far from being anarchical, thus provided an illustration of civic order... it confirmed and protected the established order”; much in the same way as the colonial architectural policies had generated their own “urban apartheid” (a process documented for the city of Rabat with this very concept in mind by Abu-Lagoud). Prostitution represented one of the many forms of individualism arising from the destruction of the “archaic” order.
So too did labour migration, a cruel necessity of the modernising process which rings the death knell for corporateness and traditional authority. An anthropologist who worked in the Rif was Carleton Coon. Moved by such changes he composed a novel in the thirties to mark the passing of a different world; two Riffians enlist in the French army during the first World War, but true to Coon’s romantic view of them they turn their long-barrelled rifles on the trenches of the French and kill their commanding officer. Even before Protectorate, however, tendrils of the new world to come were spreading over Moroccan soil. The “archaic” sultanate was providing labour for French concerns in Tunisia and Algeria even in the first decade of the century. This fact is underlined by René Gallissot’s suggestion that 30% of the workforce at the phosphate mines of Khoribga in 1930 came from then unconquered territories in Morocco. Nevertheless, only in the early fifties did the French begin to conduct serious sociological studies of the “Moroccan worker”.

Having cast doubt on the parentage of his enemies and questioned the honour of their female relatives R.B. Cunninghame Graham wrote that the Moroccan would add finally that he hoped the sultan would pay them a visit. This idiom of despotism integral to understanding of the ‘Orient’ was one of the keys to Europe’s modernising influence. While the young sultan Abdul Aziz was being wooed by the intricacies of European mechanical toys and putting on expensive displays of English fireworks in his palace at Marrakesh, European liberal opinion was denouncing the Moroccan prison described here by Anatole France:

> From the windows of the block, he told them, bronzed arms stretched out holding their wicker baskets. It was the prisoners who, from their prison, offered, for a piece of copper, the product of their indolent labour... Locked up haphazardly in a vast room they fought for a place at the opening where they all wanted to display their baskets. Too loud a quarrel would attract the black soldier to quell it with blows of a stick making the baskets with their pleading hands withdraw back within the walls. But soon other hands would reappear, brown and tattooed in blue like the first.

The French aimed to change such conditions; their “humanitarian” conscience was as highly attuned as any other in the gaze of the “Moroccan Question”. Their efforts are described by the French folklorist Jean Herber. Modernism and imperialism went hand in hand and by 1925 Herber could boast that, “Casablanca has a modern prison constructed according to the latest penal principles; Rabat has very hygienically transformed an old casbah; Meknes and Marrakesh have kept their old prisons, but you no longer see or hear the coming and going of vermin,” Thanks to such efforts Herber was able to conduct his research into Moroccan tattooes, for they were the identifying marks used in the “fiches anthropometric” of the French goalers. Located here is a hypocrisy. By a sleight of hand a criminal sub-proletariat had been created out of what would previously have been described as communal resistance to despotism. In modernising the prisons the French had criminalised a body of people whose ‘crimes’ had been no more than asserting their communal identity in
relation to the sultan. The point is more striking if we consider the remarks of Jacques Berque who maintained that for the period between the two world wars "judiciary repression had, we believe, no particular criminality to subdue." As the Protectorate's economy got into gear labour demands increased. Initially there was some reluctance to employ les indigènes on a large scale, but when supplies of migrants from southern Europe (who, rather than the French, constituted the bulk of immigrants into French North Africa) dried up there was no longer room for scruples. The question of how this shift of opinion was achieved resolves itself in the work of Herber. In his study of figurative tattooes he argues that we are observing a process similar to the spread of imported goods. The benefits and evils of civilization spread like ripples from the points of most intense contact: "in classing the tattooed prisoners according to their origin...they mark the successive steps of conquest and colonization." They also demonstrate something else. The absence of tattooes in prisoners from the Rabat sub-division is attributed by Herber to the presence of fercious Berber tribes which have only indirect links with the coast and provide only a small number of recruits for the urban workforce. The argument is quite clear. Tattooing, the mark of the beast and criminal according to the contemporary criminology, identified the Moroccan labourer in the blooming Atlantic towns of the French protectorate as a criminal and it is only as such that he can escape the tribal world and enter the modern. When the French began to study the bidonvilles of towns like Casablanca in the fifties Montagne was able to demonstrate that each had separate criminal identities and specializations.

The popular consciousness had already assimilated this fact and, for the petit blanc, versions of supremacist ideology made life possible in a proximity with Moroccans which was the opposite of the ethos behind the official policies of segregation. Such views were reinforced by the institution of the Quartier Réserve Aux Femmes Publiques, and, to the stigma of criminality, could be firmly fused whatever dark sexual phantoms came to hand. Here, as in Biskra, poverty could induce some form of conformity which, in the minds of visitors, only served to convince them of what they had already heard from other sources. When Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre made the obligatory pilgrimage to the notorious Bous-bir district of Casablanca the former describes meeting "an Arab woman who was heavily tattooed and swathed in long flowing robes, over which she wore masses of heavy clashing jewellery. She took us to a bistro, and then to her room, where she undressed, did a belly dance, and smoked a cigarette through her vagina." The Bous-bir was an almost self-sufficient walled city in miniature built on the outskirts of a "new native town". Its building was financed privately, but it had full public approval. Constructed originally in 1923, the travel writer Norman Lewis remarked that by 1935 it "had become a tourist attraction; a curiosumity worthy of visit with its coy paragraph in the official guide-book." On his visit Lewis notes the curious behaviour of the "French speaking sophisticates" among the women when confronted with a camera:

94 Berque, J. op cit,
p280.
97 This is much clearer in the Algerian urban context, c.f., I. Sivan, 'Popular Culture in Algeria', The Journal of Contemporary History, 1978.
...these are excessively eager to be photographed and formed the habit of automatically adopting lascivious poses whenever we hove in sight. This extreme camera consciousness usually took the precise form of suddenly uncovering the breasts and agitating them with a violent lateral motion. If these manoeuvres failed to produce results, one of the girls would occasionally attempt more potent publicity by parading before us with her skirts held aloft.¹⁰⁰

These particular women Lewis describes as being of mixed blood. The "pure arabs", however, refuse to be photographed despite all his entreaties and bribes. From one of the "sophisticates" he elicits the reason for their bashfulness. It was, she said, "a horror of appearing on picture postcards..."¹⁰¹
The Moroccan worker, male or female, could only be conceived within this "Orientalising optic" and this served to mask the real nature of relations within the country. So powerful was this power to "think" that no lesser an authority on the subject of workers than Joseph Stalin was writing: "there are countries like Morocco which have no proletariat or almost no proletariat."\(^{102}\) Obviously there is an inadequacy in the categories used here and the situation is more complex, but we can trace one path in the transformation from "traditional" to modern indicated by Cunninghame Graham in 1898:

As Mazagan is distant only three days from the city of Morocco [Marrakesh] it may be destined some day to a glorious commercial future, with railways, docks, smoke, pauprism, prostitution in the streets, twenty-five faiths instead of one, drunkards, cabs, bicycles and all our vices...\(^{103}\)

His prediction was not far wrong, for he could not have predicted the growth of Casablanca, where, he might have come to say, "the emaciated faces are no longer human, they have been made gnomish by work, drink, and east wind, like the poor Christian scarecrows of Glasgow, Manchester, and those accursed 'solfataras', the Yorkshire manufacturing towns."\(^{104}\) Thirteen years later, on the other side of the Maghreb in Tunis, Colette made the following observation:

With a feeling of discouragement I catalogue this "Tunisian" home. Beige woolen damask curtains hang crooked across the two windows: there are endless calendars with coloured lithographs, zinc pin-trays, tambourins painted with Louis XVI landscapes... A thin pinkish carpet covers a quarter of the floor, but by the bed a fairly attractive Turkish carpet has been nailed along the wall... Above the piano, two large photographs smile at each other; a young women in a tailored suit, a sunshade open above her large beach hat, and a man with glossy hair... "We might be in my concierge's place!" cries Lulu. "I'll give her a fine surprise, my concierge, when I go back, I'll tell her she's got a Tunisian home."\(^{105}\)

Race and class merge in this remark; a fact that has been pointed out, in other contexts, by populist sociologists like Jonathan Raban and Jeremy Seabrook looking at the nineteenth century explorers of London.\(^{106}\) Somehow the feeling is that this is inherent in urban life — especially where the nineteenth century gaze creates the city's inhabitants, because while on one hand city identity can be multiple — to be modelled and abused by psychopaths as in Raban’s description of the Kray twins\(^ {107} \) — it can also be replaced by anonymity. Apochrphal country bumkins, assured of their identity in a hierachic world, become disenchanted by their confrontation with the indecipherable multiplicity of the city. In Bourdieu’s early work on Algeria a "peasant logic" of the concrete confronts modernity; goats are kept in the bathrooms of tower blocks; pistons is conflated with baraka.\(^{108}\) In these circumstances the world is reconstituted on the basis of the particular; individual interaction generates meaning for the actor/peasant playing out a new role without a script on a stage cluttered with unknown objects. The only audience is a team of
sociologists who log his/her movements — generating their own orders of meaning out of his/her chaos. For Marshall Berman this chaos is the hall-mark of literary modernism — epitomised by a remark from Dostoevsky: "that apparent disorder that is in actuality the highest degree of bourgeois order."109 "Oh, do not trust the Nevsky Prospect", Berman quotes Gogol, "The Nevsky Prospect always lies".110

TANGIER

Harrouda has returned to the scene of all betrayals site of contraband and kif111

George Borrow, who visited Tangier early in the nineteenth century, was charmed by what he found and had kind words for the man who showed him round and refused any offer of payment for the service.112 The town is the third and final site in this topography of North Africa. I shall explore forms of Orientalist imagining in relation to the city and its "native" inhabitants. For many years Tangier was not even considered Moroccan in anything except a nominal sense. Officially it was an international city until the time of Moroccan independence and inhabited by a vast variety of people. This tumult infected the minds of many with exotic ideas about life in Tangier; a dangerous town filled to the brim with smugglers, spies and renegades from justice. Popular fiction responds to such a venue and there are a large number of thrillers which use Tangier as a means to heighten their excitement.

In 1899 this seems not to have been the case. Budgett Meakin, editor of The Times of Morocco, a paper established by his father allegedly in order to publicise the plight of the sultan’s citizens, speculated on Morocco’s place in fiction: "So many a distant land has come to be a hackneyed stage for the imaginative writer, that it is remarkable how rarely Morocco has served as a scene for drama, poetry or fiction."113 Meakin surveys the various work published at the time and, of the few which existed, claims that none give a reliable conception of Moroccan society. Therefore he took it upon himself to utilise fiction as "a medium for the presentation of a picture of Moorish life and thought, more complete than would have otherwise been possible..."114 The product of his labour was the book Sons of Ishmaël. Rather than reviewing his work we shall turn to the two books he praises. The first of these is Hall Caine’s novel Scapegoat which he described as being wonderfully accurate in its depictions of "local atmosphere". The novelist had "in the course of a few weeks...secured marvellous grasp of the typical features of his
surroundings.”

The second work he praises is Dawson’s *Bismillah*, but the author apparently gave the work “a Biblical, if not an Oriental, flavour — the scenes described are not Moorish.”

The resemblance to Moorish life is felt to be purely imaginary in comparison with Caine’s more serious effort, but even the latter comes in for criticism. The tenor of the criticism is very straightforward: Caine is unbraided for such sins as describing a wandering Arab using a tripod (this he simply never does!). Such criticism set the limit to Meakin’s knowledge of the “Moors”, for it is very much a generic understanding of a paternalistic kind (although not without respect). He corresponds to an era of British

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115 *ibid*, p.526.

116 *ibid*, pp.527-8.
gentility in Tangier. Urbane British sophisticates began to build villas in Tangier in the late nineteenth century. Often they were ex-diplomats who themselves had spent time in the Middle East or English eccentrics (such as Walter Harris). As Parsons has pointed out the quality of information available on late nineteenth century Morocco was low. Outside the coastal towns and the imperial cities visited by diplomatic missions little was known. Travel was difficult in the interior and often called for disguises and protection. The hostility to the European that had existed since the times of Portugese coastal incursions centuries previous still existed and the Portugese themselves had attained near mythical status for tribes of the interior. The first detailed account was not to appear until de Foucauld who travelled disguised as an Algerian Jew, published his *Reconnaissance au Maroc* in 1888.

Increasingly the city of Tangier is displaced simply to be pillaged occasionally in the search for "local colour", but it is tempting to suggest that the relation between the dream city and the other Tangier is not a dialectical one; the natives when they become visible wear the clothes of homogenising Orientalism. The academic interest in native life of a Meakin or a Harris slowly dissolves into the self-aggrandisement of expatriot life: "Tangier is interesting, intense, eventful, but it must always be a place of expatriates. The Moors themselves are not often natives of the city, and the Europeans are all migrants, even if some of them have been here for a generation or two."  

An anonymous brand of sensationalism was to replace gentility and become part of other modern myths. The British writer, Angus Stewart, sadly hands over his room to the "young American" William Burroughs. The power of the myth is demonstrated by its transformations. This is the same room in the same city, but it now has a very different tale to tell. The egoism of the British optic which increasingly celebrated the environment (colour, light, shade) and tried to ignore the swarming humanity Orwell noted in Marrakesh became a subjective near deification of "native" life which centred largely around drugs — especially kif.

Tangier is a privileged locus for representation. The specific facts of its history account to some extent for its unique position in certain literary genres, but their individual threads are distinctive. Indeed some seem opposed. Witness the admonishment Anthony Burgess puts in the mouth of his creation the poet Enderby. Speaking of the artistic community in Tangier (European, that is) he comments "there is not a real artist among them". A dig at the "beat" authors perhaps; Burroughs and his fellow pioneer of the cut-up technique, Brion Gysin, author of *The Process*, and others. Jack Kerouac describes Burroughs at work: "Meanwhile mad genius Burroughs sat typing wildhaired in his garden apartment the following words; 'Motel Motel Motel loneliness moans across the continent like fog over still oily water tidal rivers..." (meaning America.) (America's always memorable in exile.) Burrough's 'knows' Tangier: 'I said to Bill: 'Where do I get a woman in this town'."

The link between the Western visions lies perhaps in their definition of freedom. For many of these exiles life in Tangier is defined in
opposition to the constraints of their own societies; sexual, social, and, in a naive sense, political ("absence of"). Some of these features were facets of an Orientalist perception of North Africa in general. The "Tangier" of André Gide and Oscar Wilde was Algiers, another "Wicked City". In Tangier these various strands have become congealed and it represents a nodal point in an imaginary "topography" (used here in the sense designated by Edward Said). For those who haven't reached the point charted by Kafka ("from which there is no turning back"), and used by Paul Bowles as an epigraph to his novel The Sheltering Sky, the city is to be read in terms of the imaginary and regarded with the fear and loathing some writers reserve for their own society. On the outer limits of such an appraisal we find the likes of Hendrik de Leeuw, an American journalist, who, in a sensationalist account of prostitution (which centres largely on North Africa; "the hell-roaring debauchery of the Moors", comments the dust jacket), entitles a chapter on Tangier The Maricones of the Barbary Coast. Stewart wrote that in Tangier tourism reaches its extreme, "specializing in the westener taking two weeks annual holiday in Tangier for one purpose only... Girls cost from five dirham to fifty; boys from one to ten; youths from ten to twenty." Joe Orton, on holiday in Tangier, was to reflect ruefully on being asked by a young Arab "If he was English and if he did things". Escape had already been transformed into a trap. Recently the novelist Paul Bowles, a resident of Tangier since the 1940's, remarked on how the city has closed in on him like "an insect eating flower". It is to this writer, commonly held to be the spiritual father of the "beat" generation, and his vision of the city which we now turn.

Bowles' work frequently rests on the ethnographic. David Hart, the American anthropologist, describes Bowles, in the introduction to his vast monograph The Aith Waryaghur of the Moroccan Rif, as the man who guided him through Tangier. In short, he 'knows' Tangier and, by extension, Morocco — even to the point of fulfilling the dictates which anthropologists set for themselves. As one reviewer in the Observer puts it: "Paul Bowles has spent many years in Morocco and understands it better than most Moroccans." In his novels characters lose themselves, both literally and metaphorically, in alien worlds: in the Sahara in The Sheltering Sky, in Tangier and northern Morocco in Let it Come Down. Once lost they become victims (of the culture, of the people, of themselves). This theme of predation is extended to his short stories; his first collection was called The Delicate Prey. These short stories nearly all confront the western and urban with alternative society in a way with which we are familiar, but Tangier colours his vision and there is a macabre sense of horror in them. The atmosphere Bowles creates finds an echo in the words of Peter Mayne: "I am a stranger in these parts and Tangier feeds on the flesh of strangers." Much of Bowles' later work consists of translations from Moroccan dialectal Arabic and it relies on the notion of 'storytelling' and its role within an "archaic" culture. It would seem recently, however, that he has reformulated his own position. In a preface to a new edition of his only "political" novel, The Spider's House, he wrote: "What I failed to understand was that if Morocco was still a largely medieval
land, it was because the French themselves, and not the Moroccans, wanted it that way.” 130 The intimacy he has with the subject: the town, its people, is the projection of those seeking guidance through the unknown. But the city now has him in its grips. He once wrote: “I have no political ideas to speak of. I don’t think we’re likely to get to know the Moslems very well, and I suspect that if we should we’d find them less sympathetic than we do at present... Their culture is essentially barbarous, their mentality that of a purely predatory people.” 131 Michael Griffin remarked rather aptly “How Bowles achieved the fluency that makes possible such vivid minatures of Moroccan life is mysterious for... he has always kept to himself”. Bowles himself admits, “I never knew many Moroccans, four or five by name.” 132

Nonetheless his representations are privileged, but it takes only a change of clothing to reveal another world. Witness the remarks of the Dane, Knud Holmboe, who crossed North Africa in the early 1930’s. Himself a convert to Islam he made the journey in “native” dress thus affecting a change in his position within the power nexus of the colonial hierarchy:

This was going to be my last day as a European, my last day for a long time in an elegant, civilised hotel, and my last day with the people I so much wanted to know and whom one can only get to know by living among them. 133

He quickly realised that he was forgoing rather more than the comforts of a hotel:

At that moment two Spanish officers arrived. I had spoken to them the day before and they had been very pleasant. Now they did not know me, I was occupying the space at the counter which they evidently wanted. With a movement of the hand they swept me aside. I understood that I was déclassé. I was now un Moro and could be treated anyhow. 134

This event took place in Ceuta, the Spanish enclave east of Tangier, but it can be assumed that things were not altogether different. Indeed, in some of the oral fiction, glimpses of this world do penetrate the fascination with distancing the “other” with a coat of magic. The classic case in point is For Bread Alone (written in 1972), Bowles’ translation of an autobiographical account of childhood in Tangier written by Mohammed Chokri, a one-time street kid who had learnt to read and write in his twenties. Describing this work Bowles later wrote:

Had I known how difficult it would be to make English translations of Mohammed Chokri’s texts, I doubt that I should have undertaken the work... After Chokri it was a relief to return to the smooth rolling Mrabet translations... He has no thesis to propound, no grievances to air... He is a showman; his principle interest is in his own performance as virtuoso story-teller. 135

Chokri has some right to his grievances and the Tangier he shows us is all the more shocking because of the autobiographical nature of the work. Writing in 1979 Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun comments
that the book had still to appear in Arabic, ‘‘It is therefore worse to write about misery and poverty than to live them. Censorship is already utmost in people’s minds’’. It is this process which Ben Jelloun challenges in his own work and the phantoms of past “visions” are invoked in parodied form. Harrouda, prostitute and mystical central character, returns to Tangier to be engaged by the owner of a fair to play “a dozen surprising and extraordinary roles in a mildly
pornographic story". The author imagines the scene, Harrouda, in the guise of Shahezade and high on kif:

"distributing aphrodisiacs to the crowd, an old woman talking with her belly, a snake-woman defying all symbols, a queen conducting illicit business under the influence of hashish, a dancer in drag brandishing a plastic penis, a spider-woman invading adolescent dreams."  

Tangier is the site of all betrayals, it is also the stepping stone towards Europe and the ultimate betrayal:

"I was also strong", interrupted a neighbour. "After wearing me out, my brother, wearing me out, they sent me away without any insurance money, nothing. I'm finished [. . .] I worked in the mines. I'm an old man at 46! France, what misery my brother. The lies must stop. People must be told the truth. Make your fortune in France! You must be joking, it's death."  

The line of immigrants has not ended with Morocco's independance and Ben Jelloun has written at length on the subject of labour migration and the lies which perpetuate the system.  The name of Tangier's greatest betrayal is finally recorded — its proximity to Europe, but already it is too late and voices are whispering "I hear that my country, disguised and made-up, offers itself to tourists".  

We speak of bodies. You tell us our destiny is epic so why evade bodily pain. We have already heard the notables of Fez talk of cafés and men: cafés are the hideout of zoufries (bastardization = thuggish insult = unmarried = worker), therefore they must be closed or razed to the ground; perhaps they could be gathered together in the same district (a bidonville or somewhere); secure the area, get rid of the zoufrie...  

JOURNEY'S END

The inward gaze, back to the Orient of the mind, is a response to the world reconstituting itself in closed orders that even the mighty imperialists cannot penetrate. The embrace of the ethnographic eye is held in doubt. A century of "science" is viewed with suspicion. Orientalism becomes no more than myth building. When it was powerless an Orient was born, given names and tales to tell. Domination spawned the ethnographic — the detailed reworking of this naming process. The ethnographic now looks to itself and erects another grail to its own memory under the rubric of "reflexivity". As the inward focus takes over a new popular version of the Orient is re-invented. This new "primitive irrationality" we call fundamentalism (an expression initially coined for "western" religious idiosyncracies) or terrorism: powerful names for banishing fear and restoring colour to a greying world-view.  

Bowles and the unique position he holds among European portrayors of Morocco represents the apogee of a certain European vision. That
is not to reflect on Bowles the individual. Lately his work has become more gnomic; *Points in Time* is a short, but nuanced commentary on Moroccan history, an attempt to convey the feeling of crucial events without exposing them to a hagiographic treatment. In this sense it reads very much like a "dry academic history" in certain respects. It has a distance which the oral translations attempt to reduce despite the fact that they introduce us to specifically folkloric elements of life: spells, ceremonies, foods — the quintessential forms of difference. Why do the two separate approaches seem so irreconcilable? How do they translate into the reality of lived experience? The remark of Elias Canetti warns us of the danger of the translation metaphor:

What is there in language? What does it conceal? What does it rob one of? During the weeks I spent in Morocco I made no attempt to acquire either Arabic or any of the Berber languages. I wanted to lose none of the force of those foreign-sounding cries. I wanted sounds to affect me as much as lay in their power, unmitigated by deficient and artificial knowledge on my part. I had not read a thing about the country. Its customs were as unknown to me as its people. The little that one picks up in the course of one's life about every country and every people fell away in the first few hours.¹⁴²

This repudiation of folklore (while it still basks in the exotic) is based on his own recognition that while he watched the blind *marabout* sucking the coins he had been given "The astonishing creature was myself, who stood so long uncomprehending."¹⁴³ Still, Canetti cannot conceal his annoyance when somebody informs him that the *marabout* puts the coins in his mouth to feel how much he's been given and, thus, shatters the author's illusions.

In Bourde's book¹⁴⁴ Biskra is addressed in the familiar "tu" form which the colonizers and settlers in North Africa generally use when addressing the "natives". The images of North Africa that are left behind have the same familiarity — the stamp of the age of mechanical reproduction. But in this new age the staged intimacy of the postcard — the naked Algerian, smiling at the camera, inviting — is a fraud. Truth proclaimed in the towns is also false. In the last line of *Harrouda* Ben Jelloun leaves us to ponder the following message: "Wash your left hand and beware for everything is a lie."