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The American University in Cairo

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Constructing the Orient:

North Africa in the Short Stories of Albert Camus and Paul Bowles

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of Master of Arts

by

Lamish Abdelaziz Hamdy

Bachelor of Arts

Under the supervision of Dr. Ferial Ghazoul

March 2015

The American University in Cairo

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In the memory of my beloved grandpa Hamdy Ragab

Acknowledgment

This thesis would not have been accomplished without the support, the love and the dedication of so many people around me. I would like to express my deepest gratitude and love to my dad Abdelaziz Hamdy who did not hesitate for a second to help me and to inspire me. To the best woman ever, my mom Kawthar, whose prayers and power gave me the strength to finish my thesis. To my beloved sister Mariam, whose out of the box ideas both helped and soothed my tension, and little sister Mana's tenderness to help and encourage me. To Ahmed for supporting me. And To the Karam's family who always motivated me.

There would be no enough words to thank Dr. Ferial Ghazoul for teaching me so many things, commitment, integrity, dedication and persistence. Without Dr. Ghazoul's effort this thesis would not have been written properly. Her valuable remarks added more depth into my topic. Her dedication to her students left me with much more love and respect for her.

I would like to thank Dr. William Melaney for being patient with me for so many years, and for helping me with his knowledge and expertise. His priceless advice paved my path through my comps exam and thesis.

I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Nimis for coming at the right time and helping me rephrase and rearrange my thoughts to have the thesis more organized.

Thank you my dear friend Nermeen Serguis for your help and love. Thanks to my colleagues at work for tolerating my ups and downs through the thesis process. I am grateful to have all of you in my life.

Abstract

Constructing the Orient:

North Africa in the Short Stories of Albert Camus and Paul Bowles

This thesis looks at how the Other is constructed in Western short fiction. Western writers have represented the Orient through the ages, calling on images disseminated by Orientalism. Such representations result in deconstructing the humanity of the Other and denying them a voice, as Edward Said has shown in his works. Focusing on one particular location, North Africa, the thesis examines how two modern Western writers viewed and represented the natives and the Maghreb (Algeria and Morocco). I chose two creative writers who had a first-hand experience with the Other through decades of living in North Africa—the Algerian French Albert Camus and the American expatriate Paul Bowles who situated most of their work in North Africa. In analyzing the themes of their short fiction along with close reading of “La femme adultère” of Camus and “Allal” of Bowles, the thesis concludes that despite their affinity to the place—having either been brought up in it as in the case of Camus or chose to reside in it as in the case of Bowles—they represented the natives negatively. While Camus had the protagonist desire and even merge with the Algerian desert, the Algerian characters themselves were presented as inarticulate and marginal. The ultimate mystical union of the protagonist with the desert indicates the colons’ desire to merge with the land but not with its people. Bowles, on the other hand, does represent the Other, but dehumanizes the protagonist by depicting his beastly violence making him act like a reptile. Trapped in the Orientalist framework, Camus’s Other remains a shadowy character; for Bowles the Other is depicted in animalistic metaphors.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West).”

—Edward Said

“The exotic immediately evokes a symbolic world of infinite complexity, surprise, color, manifold variety and richness. It is a truism, yet fundamental that the exotic world is what we make it, possibly a compensation for the increasingly schematized patterns of everyday life in industrial society.”

—Stephen William Foster

Reflecting on Western writings on the Orient, a reader will see how the Orient has been represented in different ways and how Western writers looked at the Orient from diversified perspectives. The literature written on the Orient is remarkably multifaceted; from fair to biased, objective to subjective, from conveying a realistic picture of the people of the Orient to a very dehumanizing and prejudicial depiction. On the one hand, some have presented the Orient as primitive, backward or sensual; and on the other hand, sublime, wise or magnificent. However the Orient has been represented, it always had an appeal and novelty to the West. That mysterious land of the Other captivated many writers intellectually and spiritually (Ibrahim 55).

As Edward Said put it: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscape, remarkable experience” (*Orientalism* 1). Abdullah Ibrahim argues that there once used to be a patterned portrayal of the Other. He claims that it is very ironic how the fascination of those writers with the Orient and the Other made them believe that they know more about it than its own people; that they refer back to their works as a credible source for the image of the Other (56-57).

On a similar line, the excessive beauty and terror of the Orient portrayed in Western writings tempted many writers to escape their cultural limitations, to travel, and to experience this Other. In the article, “Journey to the East,” Sibel Bozdoğan mentions that, in order to experience the Orient one needs to embark on a journey to its land, where a memory of a writer would be rejuvenated with images and experience s/he would never forget.¹ It should be a “journey as a metaphor for the acquisition of knowledge and the opening up for a new world and visions” (38). Similarly Ibrahim believes that to be a traveler one needs to be prepared both physically and psychologically in order to experience the Other and merge with its culture (60).

One of the main objectives of this thesis is to examine the Maghreb in Western short stories as the “Other” and in short stories as a genre of fiction that is often underestimated and under-represented in scholarly research.² The thesis will focus on writers who had direct contact with the Other and who lived and experienced their culture, and not just wrote about it from pure imagination. Nonetheless, to understand why different writers travelled to the Orient one should not overlook the history of colonization in such a land and its effect on Europeans, or, as Fredric Jameson argues, one should not ignore the political intervention in a literary text as it is “the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation” (1).

In the late nineteenth century, North Africa faced several transgressions from colonial powers aiming at controlling it, often in the guise of helping the natives and initiating them into the civilized world. With this in mind, in this thesis I am addressing two particular locations in the Maghreb/North Africa, Algeria and Morocco, where colonization left its deep impact on them.

The south of Algeria is a Saharan desert. This desert constitutes a uniformity of great appeal with stony pavements and attractive mountains. Algeria's mesmerizing and striking location on the Mediterranean had captivated the eyes of colonialists starting from the Ottomans in 1536 to the Barbary pirates who paved the way to the French colonial power in 1830 ("Algeria" 263-65). For the first forty years of French colonialism, Algerians struggled to gain their independence. The transformation of culture under colonial power was severely aggravating and especially for the Muslim population in Algeria: "[t]he physical transformation of the land was also a cultural affront . . . Frantz Fanon, who played such an important role in articulating and analyzing the process of decolonization in Algeria, described how colonialism in general disoriented the colonized's personality, resulting in a 'psychoexistential' condition" (Naylor 156). For Fanon, under such colonial power, the Algerians not only felt that they were oppressed and do not have rights, but also that they were inferior in their own land. So severe was the sway of the colonizer that they made it a condition for any Algerian who aspires for a better status by acquiring citizenship that s/he should abandon their status as Muslims. Hence, in spite of this French strategy of "divide and rule," not all those who applied for citizenship were granted that privilege, and that was "on the vague grounds of unworthiness" (Ruedy 86). From 1848 until 1962, Algeria was proclaimed and considered an integral part of France (Naylor 155). It was this Algerian land that provided the French colonizer with an excellent market. Therefore, the French colonial power encouraged its people to move in and to settle down in Algeria ("Europeans in North Africa" 887). After settling in Algeria, these French colons felt that this land became their "other" homeland; that they have the right to identify with it, working, transforming and even revolting against the central government. Such transformation of land and culture for the native Algerians created a profound feeling of alienation and exile (Naylor 155).

As for Morocco, it did not suffer much from the colonial power like Algeria's more than a century of colonialism. Nonetheless, Morocco was not saved from falling under the colonial power. Its charming coastal location at the Atlantic attracted the Spanish, the British and the French. However, an agreement was reached whereby Britain seized Egypt, and Morocco was left to the French with the Spanish joining them in policy making in Morocco (Vikor 50). Therefore, in 1912 and in virtue of the Treaty of Fez, the French were able to establish their protectorate in Morocco (Naylor 162). The French colonizer exerted strenuous efforts to keep Morocco away from getting its autonomy. Unlike Algeria, the French were not aiming at making Morocco a colony, but a protectorate; on the surface ruled by a Sultan, but governed in reality by the French (Vikor 47-50). They worked on nourishing Morocco's economy and trade, which in the nineteenth century the Sultan was trying hard to improve.

Furthermore, not only did colonization occur through the monopolization of the resources of the land and the people, but Western writers did as well colonize the land through their writings, "as another attempt by Orientalists to monopolize the discourse on non-Western societies and perpetuate their own paradigms of the Other," by explaining their individualistic experience and, to a great extent, their fantasy and imagination rather than the social reality (Mazrui 79). Bozdoğan argues that some artists are inclined to "enframe" the Orient by giving it a form and a shape so as to be an "easy object" to represent, "just as nature is systematically discovered, studied, and abstracted . . . so is the Orient explored, recorded, and illustrated through the meditation of representation . . . thereby the Orient is set-up in such a way that it represents itself as representable" (39). While other writers tend to degrade the Orient, representing the Other to the reader as hideous and savage, the "accuracy of representational techniques is thus employed to construct an image . . . may or may not be faithful to the actual

experience” (Bozdođan 42). In many writings about the Orient, the reader can sense the richness and the marvelousness of that part of the world. Some writers’ own exploration of Oriental lands is a means to unfolding this hidden magical and seductive beauty of the Orient (Stevens 58). Or, as Said put it, some of these writers’ works include the idea of “imaginative geography,” where certain images, descriptions and inventions of the Orient are depicted: “It is perfectly possible to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind, and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality” (*Orientalism* 54). Some writers, for example, witnessed the excessive charm that North Africa has and thus tended to feminize its beauty and serenity. These images and descriptions depict how the West constructs the Orient by not allowing it to articulate itself; by saying our land and their land; them and us. These Westerners from Said’s point of view are curious, fascinated and inspired by the land and the Other. Yet they do not wish to understand it. They are too paranoid by the Other. Therefore, they only see what they want to see about the Other (*Orientalism* 55).

One of those Frenchmen who identified himself deeply with the Algerian land was Albert Camus (1913-1960). Camus’s status as a French Algerian, i.e. pied-noir (Black Foot), sums up his connection to the Algerian land.³ He was born and raised in Algeria where he received a privileged education. Thus, he considered it as a homeland. Due to the brutal colonialism of the French, Camus shared the feelings of injustice to the Other. He condemned the cruel and inhumane acts committed against the Algerians. Yet his elite status meant he could not side clearly and unambiguously with the Algerian Front of National Liberation (FLN) in its struggle for independence against France. In his collection of short stories *L’exile et le royaume* (*Exile and the Kingdom*), Camus was caught up in the Algerian scene and depicted its complexity. Most of

the stories in this collection are set in the Algerian desert, the place to which Camus was most attracted.

Like the British and the French, Paul Bowles (1910-1999), an American writer and composer, wanted in the 1940s to escape an industrialized America in search of a transcultural experience. Bowles abandoned his own motherland in order to cross the boundaries to connect with the Other. He always wanted to explore new environments where he could be inspired. Indeed Morocco, and particularly Tangier, where he resided for decades, enriched his style of writing. Tangier struck him as a magical and primitive place that allowed him to reveal the human suffering and ordeal along with the revolt against the French colonial power. His experience with the Other in Tangier shaped his fiction, as he was caught in the “vulnerability of the unfamiliar,” which placed him outside his comfort zone (Spindler 44).

Albert Camus and Paul Bowles are two prominent authors who had a first-hand experience in the land of the Other, North Africa: Algeria and Morocco— including their varied geography and diverse ethnic groups—as they lived there and chose to situate many of their works. Captivated by the mystery of the Orient and its land, their masterpieces of short fiction—which were neglected by many scholars— comprise profound depictions of the Other, the culture and the land. Focusing on two exemplary works, “La femme adultère” (The Adulterous Woman) included in Camus’s collection *L’exile et le royaume* and Bowles’s “Allal” in his collection of short stories *Things Gone and Things Still Here*, the representation of the Other and their land will be examined. Though all the stories of each collection show the resemblance in representing the Other, “La femme adultère” and “Allal” capture through their narrative what made Said argue: “The Orient was almost a European invention” (*Orientalism* 1).

In the collection of Camus that the thesis examines, there are other stories that partake in the mood and setting of “La femme adultère.” In “The Artist at Work,” (Camus 129-76/83-115),⁴ Camus narrates a life of an artist, Jonas, who was once not popular and suddenly obtained fame. Nonetheless, such fame bombarded his thoughts and forced him into his own exile in the land of the Other in order to create and produce works of art. Camus in this story reveals the quietness of the desert where Jonas gained tranquility in deserting people and focused on his artistic works. In “The Guest” (Camus 101-24/65-82), Camus sets off an emotional connection between a Frenchman and an Arab. Yet this connection is only from the French side. It is as if Camus wanted, in a way or the other, to portray a decent Frenchman in relation to Arabs or Algerians and how as a good Frenchman he was met with hatred from the Arabs even though he did nothing to offend them. Camus’s “The Growing Stone” (Camus 179-232/116-52) is a narration of a good French engineer, d’Arrast, who pardons a local drunken police officer who accused him of having an invalid passport, and who also helped an old man to fulfill his promise carrying a heavy stone up the mountain. The “Renegade” (Camus 45-72/30-48) tells a story of a missionary in Africa who has his tongue cut by savages. This story in particular does not show Camus’s affection to the Other, but rather how this Orient could also be barbaric and hideous. This missionary was left alone to his own thinking and could not articulate his thoughts to the people around him (McCormick 110-111). Despite Camus’s belief that both the French and the Other, i.e. Algerians, should co-exist and even live together in harmony and that the French regime should help those two different cultures to mingle and live in peace, his short stories do not explore such harmonious coexistence. I have selected “La femme adultère” (11-41/9-29) for my close reading and analysis because of its complexity and ambivalence towards Algeria.

Reflecting on Camus's "La femme adultère," chapter two will examine the journey of the protagonist, Janine, in the Oriental desert where she escapes the limitation of her French origin into the unlimited horizon of the Orient. Haunted by memories of her past, Janine finds her life after marriage fading away. She feels frustrated and weak. As a woman, she feels trapped in a sterile marriage and, thus, she needs to liberate herself. In this narration, Camus dwells on the exotic land of the Orient and the unprecedented representation of the Oriental land as a masculine figure rather than a feminine figure as it is usually depicted. In nature, Camus draws Janine into her freedom. He lets the desert feed the void inside her. In her mind, Janine is yielding to escapism. Her torment is in her subconscious and her feeling of exile is both sexual and psychological. Thus, Camus sets a narration of the exotic Oriental desert that seduces the Occident underlining a sensual view of the Other, "[i]t was bold of Camus to bequeath to us the image of a woman who makes love to the stars...breathes in primordial oneness with the cosmos" (McCormick 110). Janine's preoccupation with the Orient is revealed through her senses and also through her journey of self-discovery. She questions her existence in such a land; she reflects on her detachment from its culture; yet she is attached to its inviting setting.

Paul Bowles's collection of short stories in *Things Gone and Things Still Here* reveals his traumatic, yet appealing, experience in North Africa. This collection comprises seven short stories and all of them are set in Morocco except for "You Have Left Your Lotus Pods on the Bus" (Bowles 442-50), where the author explains the religious rituals of Buddhism. The common theme that is depicted throughout the seven stories is the idea of the manipulative, brutal, wicked nature and savagery of the Other. In "Mejdoub" (436-41), the protagonist finds an old man claiming to be attracted seemingly by something Divine and thus people around him are very generous, providing him with money and food. The protagonist thus decides to watch that

man and walk in his footsteps. In “The Fqih” (451-54), Bowles wanted to stress the cruelty of kinsmen towards one another.⁵ One day the protagonist’s older brother is bitten by a dog and thus the fqih asks the younger brother to lock him up, because he is now doomed to die. The mother could not believe that the younger brother has beaten and locked up her other son. She then goes to search for the fqih to inquire about her son’s situation. At last the fqih informs her that God has given her son another chance to survive such an incident. Yet, the younger brother, the protagonist, is scared that his brother might hurt him; and out of fear, he leaves his home and sets off to Casablanca. Like “The Fqih,” “Afternoon with Antaeus” (463-67) exposes the idea of violence and savagery towards mankind. Nonetheless, violence here is acted upon a foreigner who gets tricked by a local Moroccan and is fooled by him. The Moroccan man steals the foreigner’s belongings, leaving him in the middle of nowhere.

“Istikhara, Anaya, Medagan and the Medaganat” (455-58) is a controversial story. Here Bowles shows the cruelty of the French regime towards Moroccan voyagers. Yet, simultaneously in a subtle technique and affirmative words, he claims that religion did not produce what the story’s protagonist hoped for; religion is useless for them. In an interview, Bowles claims that even though he is not a Muslim, he knows more about the “Other” and Islam than Muslims do (Alameda 221). “The Water of Izli” (459-67) is a very appealing short story in which Bowles pays close attention to the resources of that land with its villages, animals and nature. However, again he stresses the greediness of the Other and the wicked maneuver that make things work for one’s own benefit. Ramadi, the protagonist, wishes to have his mare and Sidi Bouhajja’s stallion breed. He does not know how he could accomplish this. His chance comes when he hears that the saint is dead. Before his death he asked, “at the moment of his death it was to be the horse that would decide on his burial place” (Bowles 460). Ramadi manages to shift the stallion’s

destination by letting a snake down in the road before the horse, and then the horse instead heads to Ramadi's house and his plan succeeds to get the mare and stallion together. In "Things Gone and Things Still Here" (477-81), Bowles shifts his narration to the Moroccan women and their wickedness and evil. He narrates the story of Moroccan women who bewitch men with black magic in order to control them or take revenge.⁶

Chapter three of the thesis highlights the story of "Allal" (425-35); because it is the longest short narrative compared to the above stories of Bowles and it is where he masterfully puts the Other in the frame of beastly metamorphosis. Bowles stresses the idea of a weak primitive Other in the guise of Allal, the Oriental, who is ashamed of his origin and wants to escape his weakness through a stronger power. Allal resorts to the Oriental desert, to the wilderness, and takes it as a shelter and a refuge from the brutal people around him. Bowles links Allal, the Oriental, to a "snake"—an emblem of both power and evil: "Allal watched the long bodies [of the snakes] move cautiously . . . marking so delicate and perfect that they seemed to have been designed and painted by an artist . . . As he stared at it, he felt a great desire to own it and have it always with him" (Bowles 428).

In dealing with these two short stories of Albert Camus and Paul Bowles that take place in North Africa, specifically in Algeria and Morocco, the connection to the land of the Orient through different perspectives will be examined. Both protagonists resort to the desert where it is the dream place associated with the exotic, the primitive, and the sublime. It is this place where Camus and Bowles escape reality and reveal imaginatively their views of the Other. Camus's short story expresses deep and ambiguous feelings towards Algeria, of being alienated in a beautiful land, where merging takes place with the land but not with its people. Bowles, on the other hand, depicts the revengeful character of the Other and his eventual sinking into beastly

form. Within his direct experience in Tangier, where he resided for decades, Bowles reveals the Other's primitiveness, wickedness, and savagery.

Chapter Two

Mystical Orientalism

“You cannot create experience. You must undergo it.”

—Albert Camus

“An intellectual? Yes. And never deny it. An intellectual is someone whose mind watches itself. I like this, because I am happy to be both halves, the watcher and the watched. ‘Can they be brought together?’ This is a practical question. We must get down to it. ‘I despise intelligence’ really means: I cannot bear my doubts.”

—Albert Camus

Albert Camus was a French novelist who wrote artistic novels, essays and plays. Born from a French father and a mother of a Spanish origin, Camus held deep inside him the dilemma of belonging to two different lands, two different ways of thinking (Knorr). The family was pied-noir living in Algeria. They were very poor. And hence, when the father died in WWI his mother had to work to support the family (“Camus” 782). A primary school teacher, Louis Germain, was a source of great help to Camus during his childhood and had left a profound impact on his life as a writer. With Germain’s constant support and encouragement, Camus won a scholarship to attend the Algiers Lycée. When Camus received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, out of loyalty to his school professor and first role model, he dedicated it to his teacher, Germain (“Camus” 782).

With great enthusiasm, Camus joined the University of Algiers in 1930 (“Camus” 782). The influence of his university professor and the French philosopher, Jean Grenier, was quite noticeable on him. Camus was interested in philosophy and especially aesthetics (Fletcher 3). Grenier, thus, stimulated and directed Camus’s philosophical and literary ideas according to what Camus loved and was interested in (“Camus” 782). Throughout his life experience and the

search for inclusive aesthetics, he was in constant search of a middle ground that could have both the French and Algerians living together in harmony and peace. He condemned the brutal acts of French colonialism towards the native Algerians. Yet he was also against Islamic fundamentalism, which had such intolerance towards the French; “he believed or perhaps wished desperately to believe that if only Algeria's underdevelopment, poverty, and lack of educational opportunity were tackled through systemic reform, then French, Arab, and Berber could live together in a confederation” (Fletcher 2).

Many perceived this state of Camus as a sign of bewilderment. He did not know where he belonged. He did not choose or make up his mind concerning his homeland. However, he was well aware that he was granted a situation in which he could “experience” the life of a semi-westerner in North Africa. As he said in the epigraph of this chapter, he preferred to be “the watcher and the watched.” In a biography of Camus by Herbert Lottman, Camus states that “I am suspect to the nationalists of both sides: I am blamed by one side for not being sufficiently . . . patriotic. For the other side I'm too much so . . . What too many Arabs don't understand is that I love [Algeria] as a Frenchman who loves Arabs, and wants them to be at home in Algeria, without himself having to feel a stranger there” (qtd. in Fletcher 3).

His presence in Algeria made an imprint on his character and accordingly on his writing. In his writing, he not only paid attention to every minute detail about North Africa and particularly Algeria, but as a humanist he paid attention to its people and human beings in general living together in such a beautiful land (Joyaux 10-11). His emotions are vividly expressed in his writings with his professional use of style. His first collection of essays, *L'envers et l'endroit*, was mostly about his family's suffering and the hard time he, his mother, uncle, and grandmother went through after the death of his father in Algeria (“Camus” 782).

As Camus was born a French citizen, he was privileged by the rights of the French people/citizens in Algeria. However, he did not enjoy those rights to the fullest as he was not considered a metropolitan French; he was a pied-noir. Camus and those like him, i.e. French Algerians, were at a distance from French European society residing in France. They were seen as the Other of the French people. It might be possible that the pied-noir's association with the Arabs and Berber communities in Algeria made them less genuine French. Thus, "the Algeria of Camus' youth was not French in the same way that areas on mainland France were French" (Carroll 2).

Camus believed Algeria to be his true homeland (Carroll 2). Nonetheless, it was not that easy to be an Algerian as well, since he did not belong to the culture of the natives but was simply associated with it. In order to be fully French, you need to be living in France, experiencing all aspects of soil, culture and tradition (Carroll 3). For Camus it was not until 1940 when he first visited Paris that he was really able to identify with the French citizens there and feel another sense of belonging (Carroll 5).

When France initiated its struggle for freedom with Nazi Germany, Camus's sense of belonging to that land, i.e. France, grew. He found himself identifying with the French people and their desire to gain back France's autonomy and liberty. Parallel to this situation with his fellow French men during their struggles, a reader can see the Algerian in Camus surfacing and opposing the French regime in its suppression of Algeria. He believed that reform could only take place once a transparent social democracy was given to all kinds of Algerians (Carroll 5). However, from Camus's viewpoint, France did not succeed in bringing the French and Algerians together. He declared that France's ignorance and its inability to see the Algerian point of view would be fatal. As Carroll put it: "[t]he Algerian in Camus never disappeared, no matter how

long he lived in Paris. Immediately after war, Camus published a series of editorials in *Combat* arguing that the French could not continue to deny the majority of the inhabitants of Algeria what the Resistance had fought to achieve in mainland France” (5-6).

Focusing on Camus’s short story, “La femme adultère,” in his collection, *L’Exile et le royaume*, this chapter will revolve on how the Other is portrayed and marginalized through Western eyes. The story was written in 1957; it tackles the journey of a French woman, Janine, and her husband, Marcel, in the countryside of Algeria. Traveling has a significant meaning to Camus. As Jean Onimus describes in his article “Camus, ‘The Adulterous Woman’ and The Starry Sky,” traveling can lead a person to a new discovery of Self. Encountering the unfamiliar, a person gets to experience his hidden soul or rather his true being (122-23). It is through Janine’s journey to an unfamiliar place where the psychological dilemma of an outsider, of a foreigner in a strange land, is narrated. From the protagonist’s point of view, there is nothing in this land to look up to; simultaneously, a new bizarre feeling that was not expected comes to light. This story exposes the protagonist to a wild experience in the seductive desert; “the French came to a rather unknown land . . . however . . . [they] still attempt to comprehend it with known categories of his or her own” (Hannoum 3).

Furthermore, in “La femme adultère,” Camus gives the vague yet interesting picture of a metaphorical adultery between the protagonist Janine and the Oriental land. Through a third-person narration, all the memories from Janine’s past are brought back to the present, awakening in her the desire to feel young and wanted. Through the style and the language of Camus, the ambiguity of Janine’s experience with the Orient is revealed.

In a bus heading to a village in Algeria, Marcel, Janine's husband, takes a trip to a place that is only inhabited by Algerians in order to sell his goods after the war has ended.⁷ Even though they prefer to stay in a neighborhood where most of its inhabitants are European, Marcel travels to provide a living for his wife. He always promises, "S'il m'arrivait quelque chose, disait-il, tu serais à l'abri [If something happened to me, he used to say, you'd be provided for]" (Camus 16/ 12). Not accompanying her husband on this trip was not an option for Janine, because he needs her and she needs him. During the one-day trip, Janine reflects on her life now and before. She looks at her husband, but all that she sees is "Des épis de cheveux grisonnants plantés bas sur un front serré [wisps of graying hair growing low on a narrow forehead]" (Camus 11/ 9). She is left alone in her solitude on that bus, wondering why she is there in the first place. When the bus motor breaks down and the native driver tries to fix it, Marcel curses the Arabs and informs Janine of the Arabs inability to fix anything properly: "Quel pays! dit Marcel [what a country! Marcel said] . . . Marcel maudit encore ce pays [again Marcel cursed this country]" (Camus 12-18/10-13). They live in their bubble and do not interact with the natives. Thus, everything around her promotes a feeling of alienation and a sense of being a captive. Her estrangement grows more and more as her journey continues.

Janine's troubled feelings are depicted in various ways. Starting from the housefly that annoys her, moving back and forth over the sand, and the wind blowing on the bus windows, to the "Arabes qui faisaient mine de dormir [Arabs pretending to sleep]" (Camus 12/ 9) and her ridiculous name, which in her mind does not fit her huge body, Janine's feeling of distress grows. She is overwhelmed with the feeling that she has been traveling for days and not only a single day. In addition, she is very self-conscious about her state as a woman. She wants to feel wanted and desired by others in the way that Marcel used to make her feel at the beginning of their

married life. Hence, she starts to observe people around her on the bus and searches for someone to pay attention or admire her. The bus has many Arabs whom she is not fond of—Arabs who have a look of pride on their faces, which she does not understand. Nonetheless, they are all indifferent to her. Only one French soldier is there to notice her:

Janine sentait cependant le sommeil la gagner quand surgit devant elle une petite boîte jaune, remplie de cachous. Le soldat-chacal lui souriait. Elle hésita, se servit, et remercia. Le chacal empocha la boîte et avala d'un coup son sourire [Janine was feeling overcome with sleep when there suddenly appeared in front of her a little yellow box filled with lozenges. The jackal soldier was smiling at her. She hesitated, took one, and thanked him]. (Camus 19-20 / 15)

But when they arrived at their stop, nothing more happens. The French soldier simply leaves the bus. At that moment, her feeling of abandonment grows more inside her: “Elle attendait son sourire ou son salut. Il la dépassa sans la regarder, et disparut . . . sentit soudain sa fatigue [She was expecting him to smile or salute. He passed without looking at her and disappeared . . . Suddenly [she] became aware of her fatigue]” (Camus 21/ 15-16).

After arriving at the hotel, Janine feels that she needs rest. She is affected by the coldness of the air and her surroundings. She needs to forget about her exhausting experience on the bus and relax only to find herself enter into another phase of loneliness. She expected to find a room where she could feel the warmth of home and forget about the coldness of the trip and of her companion on the bus. However, the room is even colder inside than outside. She even wonders what she is doing there. It is a place where she does not belong, with people who do not notice her and a husband who looks now totally different in her eyes than he did before. She likens him to a woman when he is selling his goods: “Il s'énevait, haussait le ton, riait de façon désordonnée, il avait l'air d'une femme qui veut plaire et qui n'est pas sûre d'elle [He got excited,

raised his voice, laughed nervously, like a woman who wants to make an impression and is not sure of herself]" (Camus 26/ 19).

Yet when Janine visits the fort, she is overcome with a new experience. She connects to the surroundings. She connects emotionally with the desert. She loosens herself to the beauty around her and hopes that she will get something in return. To some extent, she even wishes to embrace it somehow. However, she does not have much time to be immersed in such a feeling and has to go back to her sterile life. She has to return to her husband who is waiting for her; or maybe does not notice her absence or even her agony; "[e]lle pleurait... Ce n'est rien, mon cheri, distait-elle, ce n'est rien [she was weeping... it's nothing dear, she said, it's nothing]" (Camus 41/ 29).

Camus, I believe, plays with the aspect of time to give Janine a chance to contemplate her life in the seductive desert. It is only a one-day journey but it carries within it various moments of agony, yearning, amazement, and the need for an appealing, once in a lifetime, experience. If we are to look closely at this short story, the reader could feel that this journey is divided into three parts: (1) Janine herself as a person and her trip compared to the vast surrounding; (2) Janine and the people whom she encounters; and (3) finally, Janine and the "kingdom" that promises her an eternal feeling of ecstasy and fulfillment.

Janine has been married for almost twenty years. Her life now is not as attractive as it used to be. She does not have a child, a fact that makes her life sterile in the literal sense. From the first scene of the story, Camus reveals to his readers the nature of Janine's soul and how Janine views and sees herself. In the bus journey towards their hotel, she feels cold and exhausted, like the housefly moving in circles with no exact destination, just tired and aimless.

She starts to ridicule her name, Janine, and how it does not fit a big woman like her; she is indifferent to her own name as well as her state of being (Camus 13/ 10).

During this journey and only in her mind, Janine reminisces about the past, when she used to be young, energetic and beautiful. She becomes agonized as to how things came to be now; she drifted away from what she pictured it would be: “Au collège pourtant, elle était première en gymnastique, son souffle était inépuisable [yet in school she had won the first prize in gymnastics and hasn’t known what it was to be winded]” (Camus 13/ 10). She remembers how she met her husband and what she admired most about him. However, her life is now dull. She does not feel the same young spirit that she used to be. Her life does not attract her anymore. Her husband is no more appealing to her as he used to be. She cannot utter what is on her mind out loud, because she is trapped in this futile marriage. Janine is also like Camus’s “Renegade,” trapped with his thoughts with no tongue to articulate what he thinks or to express revolt (Camus 43/ 31).

However, when Janine finds everything around her agonizing, she becomes detached from her real world. She now carries out a fantasy that allows her to escape her dark reality. According to Onimus, Janine is an oppressed woman in heart and soul. She is a fly that cannot reach out further because of her sterile life. She is always comparing herself to her vigorous young self. She lives a monotonous boring life. Therefore, Onimus argues that this trip was important in helping Janine to break loose. It is crucial for breaking the wall she built against her true self: “this dull woman looks in confusion at her past life, dreaming, recapitulating, questioning herself without resolving anything, plunging into her existence as she had never done before” (124).

Throughout the journey, she has been waiting for something significant to happen to her; whether a look from a man to regain her self-confidence, or a love life from her husband who abandoned her years ago so that now they are making love in the “dark.” Janine lives in “fragile defenses [which] collapse and behind a comical or ridiculous exterior lies a panorama of anguish” (Onimus 122). She experiences a great deal of limitation in her life journey, ending with that trip to the Other land which she showed resentment in inhabiting. She has been suffocated by a shackled life and is willing to do whatever it takes to set her soul free. Yet there is another obstacle, or more of a barrier, that she has to pass in order to reach her ultimate ecstasy.

Describing them as tucked down in their burnouses to tall and very thin faces that surround Janine in the bus, Camus portrays the Arabs as passive and mute to Janine. Janine and Marcel are not interested in learning their language; this could be out of their feeling of superiority as French people. Janine feels that the Arabs are taking up space in the bus while she and Marcel feel wedged in a very tiny seat, and “Leur silence, leur impassibilité finissaient par peser Janine [their silence and impassivity began to weigh upon Janine]” (Camus 12/ 10). This feeling of hostility and of not being welcome bothered her. Deep down, Janine as French feels superior to the Other. And there is this hope that she might be appealing as a modern attractive woman in such a gloomy desert to the Arab men surrounding her. Nevertheless, the Arabs are not interested in Janine: “Des Arabes les croisaient qui se rangeaient sans paraître les voir [They encountered Arabs who stepped out of their way without seeming to see them]” (Camus 24/ 18). She is shocked by the idea of losing her charms and not being desirable anymore. This Other fills her with agitation and anxiety, claims Onimus (124). Hence, I believe that Camus throughout the story shifts her attention from those Arabs, being indifferent to her as a woman, to the constant comparison in Janine’s mind as a French woman, a *pié-noir*, to those Arabs, the colonized. As

English Showalter, Jr. mentions in his book, *Exiles and Strangers*: “[t]hey are all to be sure, Arabs, and racial barriers would tend to make Janine invisible to them; but like Marcel, like the soldier, Janine has noticed them and notices their failure to look at her” (24).

Furthermore, Janine believes that the French are more rational and courageous than those Arabs: “courage . . . partageait avec les Français de ce pays . . . air déconfit quand les événements, ou les hommes, trompaient son attente [courage . . . shared with all the French of this country . . . crestfallen look when events or men failed to live up to his expectations]” (Camus 15/11). The French are well educated, unlike the greedy Arabs as described by her husband. In addition, her husband brags about how they, the French, can cook better than the Arabs: “Nous autres, nous savons faire la cuisine [We French know how to cook]” (Camus 23/17). Nonetheless, Janine could not help but sense the charming and attractive nomads with their tents and freedom. Those proud Arabs unconsciously make Janine feel a burden deep within her soul and heart so that unintentionally she starts to compare her life to theirs (Showalter 22). They are humans like her except that they are ruled by no one and they have the freedom to do anything:

quelques hommes cheminaient sans trêve, qui ne possédaient rien mais ne servaient personne, seigneurs misérables et libres d'un étrange royaume. Janine ne savait pas pourquoi cette idée l'emplissait d'une tristesse si douce [a few men had been ceaselessly trudging, possessing nothing but serving no one, poverty-stricken but free lords of a strange kingdom. Janine did not know why this thought filled her with such a sweet, vast melancholy]. (Camus 32/ 23)

This scene opens Janine’s eyes to the need to be free. Paradoxically the Arabs encourage her to search for her true identity in such a land. They are the “lords” of their own world and of their own lives. Just by speculating, she can sense that there is something inviting about this Other. With these people around her she feels that “le cours du monde venait alors de s'arrêter et que

personne, à partir de cet instant, ne vieillirait plus ni ne mourrait [the world's course had just stopped and that, from that moment on, no one would ever age any more or die]" (Camus 32/ 23). Thus, Camus situates her out of place and time, I believe, in the land of the Orient and away from its people or her people, where her sensations could be rejuvenated and fulfilled.

Starting with the very minute details of the desert, Camus plays on the aesthetics of the Oriental land (Cosman x). Although it is wild and primitive, it retains deep inside its sand and palm trees an inviting and captivating quality. At the beginning of the novel, Janine feels the hostility of the land towards her: "le sable s'abattait maintenant par poignées comme s'il était lancé par des mains invisibles [the sand now struck the windows in packets as if it [was] hurled by invisible hands]" (Camus 12/ 9). Showalter claims that Janine's expectation of the land was not satisfying at the beginning of the story: "[n]ow she saw that the desert was not that at all, but merely stone . . . the sky full of nothing but stone-dust, rasping and cold" (27). As these stones struck the windows, Janine feels that they are striking her, meeting her discontentment. For both Janine and Marcel, this land until now is hostile and not promising: "this hostile landscape is more threatening. . . [it] resists the intruders and challenges their physical and spiritual complacency" (Pratt 166).

All of them came with a mission in their heads. They wanted to get something out of this rich and promising land. On one hand, Marcel came to sell his goods after the war ended. He knew that this oasis would be a good market for his goods. On the other hand, Janine came out of obligation and courtesy towards her husband. However, later in the story, she came to discover her real self in this inviting land. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* claims that Camus rises with Janine to another level—a level of merging with the richness of the Oriental land, despite her hostile trip in the bus: "Camus's intention is to present the relationship between

woman and geography in sexual terms, as an alternative to her now nearly dead relationship with her husband” (213).

Janine feels indifferent to the language that those natives speak. She never cares to learn it, even though she has been hearing it all the time around her. She is also indifferent to the collective mass of burnouses around her (Camus 12-14/10-13). She only relates to the desert. Like other French settlers, Janine is both repelled and fascinated by this land. She can sense the desert’s sensuality. She feels threatened by the eroticism and boundless magic of that Algerian oasis town she is visiting (Camus 31-32/22-23).

Camus promises Janine a lifetime exotic experience in the horizon of the Oriental land, which she never dreamt of before. As Guy Lafèche argues in his article, “Albert Camus ou l’Imagination du desert,” Janine gets to explore the country as she has never seen it before. She feels confident when standing tall at the fort with the wilderness before her. There is sexuality, a very deep sensual feeling of ecstasy that she never knew before (287-88). There is this land standing high, huge and massive right before her eyes, where she is tiny like the grains of sand compared to the vastness around her: “Janine liberates herself from herself” and “she became capable of hearing the call of the desert, of embracing this vastness devoid of men and full of soul” (Onimus 124-26).

At the fort she regrets her past and unknots the ties that held her captive. Janine liberates herself mentally, physically and “metaphorically” from her past life. She loosens the knot that kept her buried and trapped in the cage of boredom and in the cage of obligation: “Janine, appuyée de tout son corps au parapet, restait sans voix, incapable de s'arracher au vide [Janine, leaning her whole body against the parapet, was speechless, unable to tear herself away from the

void opening before her]” (Camus 31/ 22). This Oriental land, the land of the Other, promises her a certain kind of pleasure and experience, which was lacking in her past twenty years of marriage. She bursts and unleashes the masked, unfulfilling life she has been living and sinks into the fascinating Orient, or as Said put it in *Culture and Imperialism*, “Janine comes to a stop at last, motionless, fecund, ready for communion with this piece of sky and desert, where the woman—pied-noir and colon—discovers her roots” (214).

There are now no barriers between her and the fascinating exotic desert with which she hopes to converge. It is this land and not its people that attract her. This Oriental land is offering her serenity and sexual satisfaction. Janine is willing to do anything just to own this magical desert for only a split second: “Janine opens to the emptiness of the desert, becomes aware of the final equality of things, and feels a primitive and serene indifference to everything and even to herself” (Zahareas 321). And this is actually what Camus gives her. This desert, this land of the Other, calls her and invites her with the promise to contain her in the grace of its seduction. The desert is now spreading itself in front of Janine like a man lying in bed and inviting her. Camus describes Janine as if she were drunk from the view before her eyes. It is at this point that Janine commits the metaphorical adultery. Her adultery, as Camus portrays it, is with nature, with the horizon and the palm trees. She surrenders to the tempting unknown (Onimus 128-129). On a parallel note, Anthony Zahareas claims in his article, “La femme adultère: Camus Ironic Vision of the Absurd,” that Janine’s adultery is “related to her independence, that is, her momentary rejection of dependence upon her husband” (322). She longs for a sensual caress. Hence, she lets the desert with its coldness and wind to overtake her. She moves from meditation to a sensual surrender away from the boundaries of her marriage. The Oriental land is overwhelming for her and it gives her a way out of all possible limitations in her dull life (Zahareas 324). The Oriental

land is a salvation for Janine. She is being watered like a flower in the Oriental desert.

With selected words Camus builds an aesthetic description of the Oriental land. Manfred Pelz in his essay, “Camus’s Two Styles in ‘The Adulterous Woman’,” assumes that Camus starts up a comparison between the Orient and the Occident through the eyes of Janine from the beginning of the short story. This style, Pelz argues, is “to clothe his truth in the most satisfying, most exact, most perfect form—in short, to construct a work of art with words” (133). When Janine says, “ce royaume... lui avait été promis [that kingdom had been eternally promised her]” (Camus 32/ Camus 23), she expresses the wish to seize such a moment of liberation and have control over the rich seductive Oriental land. Camus knows well that only at this moment could French Janine liberate her soul and fulfill her wild dream of being alive, young and desirable in such a land. It is now her chance to own the rich promising land for herself alone, without its native inhabitants, rather than being trapped in a sterile marriage. She discovers a homeland, which she yearns to possess. However, in truth, she has to go back to her bitter reality.

Unfortunately for Janine, this physical and spiritual fulfillment and happiness is deceptive and not eternal. The unlimited horizon and the boundless sky of the seductive Orient are momentary. She has to go back to reality, where her real exile lies. As a woman she is vulnerable to anguish and loneliness. Through her voice, Camus reveals to us the beauty of the Oriental land where she is enchanted. In this land of the Orient, Janine went through a new revelation and a new form of aesthetic experience, which exists only in the rich Orient in Camus’s perspective (Onimus 131). Janine answers the mute call of the Oriental desert; she opens herself to the Other land and to the void desert, where she first felt unwelcomed and antagonized. But she is unable to relate to the Arabs she encounters in her journey. The natives are presented as a mass without individualizing traits. They are waiters, men in burnouses undifferentiated in their collectivity,

and a sleepy watchman. Even the pride and dignity she observes on their faces turns to be viewed later as arrogance (Camus32/23).

Chapter Three

Beastly Orientalism

“I’ve always wanted to get as far as possible from the place where I was born. Far both geographically and spiritually. To leave it behind . . . I feel that life is very short and the world is there to see and one should know as much about it as possible. One belongs to the whole world, not just one part of it.”

—Paul Bowles

“[A]nother important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with the others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking.”

—Paul Bowles

Paul Bowles was born in New York in 1910. He wrote around 60 short stories, 4 novels, and different travel pieces and he also translated some Moroccan folk tales. Since his early childhood, his mother played a very significant role in inviting him to the world of art. She read him stories of Poe at the age of four (Pounds, “Paul Bowles” 424). Bowles was encouraged through her at a very young age to explore the realms of painting, listening to music and even writing; a fact that shaped his life, long-term basis. The father, on the other hand, was against Bowles’s artistic life style and tried in all possible ways to get him away from those artistic “habits” (Bowles 1022). However, he possessed various talents and found it hard to give them up that easily. His fondness for musical composition started to develop throughout his years of adolescence. He loved the theatre and performed various theatrical pieces with amateur groups in New York (Bowles 1022). He also immersed himself in writing crime fiction and portraying human-animal like characters. His tendency towards horror in writing could be attributed to the influence of his mother, who read him Poe’s nightmarish stories, and also could derive from his anger towards his dad, who tried to deny him his artistic gift (Pounds, “Paul Bowles” 425).

It was not until 1930 that Bowles decided to leave the United States and embark on his journey of discovering the Other. During his trips, he was acquainted with various writers, like Ezra Pound, Jean Rhys, and many others, who had an influence on his writings. Yet, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway left the dominant trace in the style of his writings. In 1945, his journey of writing fiction began. He abandoned music, as he felt confined in it. In an interview with Soledad Alameda in 1990, Bowles stated: “music is abstract and I wanted to be very specific in describing these things. I had spent many years in the abstract, too many years” (223). Bowles felt that there is more tangibility in literature, that he could elaborate himself more through specific details, descriptions and settings. Thus, he looked around himself and found that he was caught up in the modernity of the US with its rapid tempo. In order to stimulate his inspiration, he wanted something new, something fresh. Then he was off to a journey to the Other, where he began to be “truly” inspired. Nonetheless, his writings did not receive critical attention for quite a time due to his long travels abroad, mostly in, Morocco, “[f]or those who rejected the decadence of industrializing society in Europe found in the desert dwellers of the Middle East a vision of life free from such complexities” (Stevens 58).

After World War II, places of attraction like Paris and Europe shifted to the East where Africa with its magic and novelty was overpowering. Thus, upon a friend’s suggestion, Bowles left the States and embarked on his journey to North Africa, settling down in Tangier, Morocco. Tangier struck him with its attractiveness and the cosmopolitan atmosphere. In an interview with Jeffery Bailey, Bowles was asked why he left his homeland and came to such a very far place. Bowles’s answer was very surprising: “I didn’t find the United States particularly interesting and once I found places that were more interesting I chose to live in them, which I think makes sense” (115). Bowles loved travel: He believed that in order to be a good writer, or a music composer,

one needs to be aware of the differences around him, or indeed around the whole universe. It is through traveling that one can experience the Other rather than writing, second handedly, about something based on textual information. Travel makes one go beyond the norms to the unknown “for to be a traveler is, first to fall, to shake oneself free from the inhibitions fostered by society and so be able to indulge libidinous impulses tabooed at home” (Spindler 37). Bowles in his homeland considered himself to be a prisoner in a place where he was not able to be creative. He was clear in his talks about why he left his homeland. It was the confinement that he rejected and the liberation and freedom that he sought from such entrapment. His journey was a reflex action of the need for a new adventure and a new realm of splendor and savagery, both at the same time. It was intended to nourish his view of the land and the desert. In the Moroccan desert and in the Sahara, “Bowles was on a . . . terrain, able to use his inspiration” (Sawyer-Laucanno 269).

As a foreign traveler, Bowles knew that he would be more creative in an atmosphere different from the one he was used to. In Tangier, the idea of drugs fascinated him and he was challenged by the culture and norms. Firstly, drugs struck him as a tool that changes people’s perspective on life; it reveals the subconscious and it “transcends the limitations of the moment and of surface realities” (Ditsky 379-80). Believing that it would make him stronger, Bowles tried it and found it of good use in facilitating the writing process: “[h]e himself, employed majoun, a kind of jam made with cannabis, to help him write the last sections of *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down*” (Spindler 37). Secondly, he was challenged by the culture when he came face to face with it. As he wanted to escape the conventional and the familiar that he already knew in America, he articulates and portrays in writing the primitiveness of the Other. In more than one story, he depicts horrific savagery: an American professor who is attacked by the natives and whose tongue is cut; an Indian savage who rapes a girl, and so on. In these horrifying

stories, Bowles's writing was likened to that of "Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers and Truman Capote as influential writers who have special need for violence and terror in their works" (Pounds, "Subject" 304). Nonetheless, in his writings, he does not condemn such savagery. He believed that civilization interfered with the mind of the people and its spontaneity, causing it to be more materialistic than spiritual (Pounds, "Paul Bowles" 433). Indeed "he came to the conclusion that our civilization is largely responsible for our misery and that we would be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions. The lure of the exotic arises then out of the desire to escape the repressions of civilization and to achieve the liberation of the instinctual self-primitivism promises" (Spindler 39).

In his process of getting to know the culture and norms of the Other, he started to translate some Moroccan folk tales that were recorded by one of his Moroccan friends on a tape (Bowles 1035). These tales were mesmerizing for Bowles. Through their simple narration, they carried insights into this unknown, wild, and even wicked Oriental land and its people. Still, for some reviewers, Bowles's ability to translate those tales proved to be of great help to his literary works. Bowles was able to get close to this Other so that he himself used those tales in his short stories, yet writing them from his own perspective about the Other. Wayne Pounds states the following in his article, "The Subject of Paul Bowles":

In 1954, Bowles has produced the series of collaborative translations from oral-tradition Moroccan storytellers which I would cite as the second phase of his achievement . . . [that] taken in conjunction with Bowles' own fiction of the period, manifests the increased power of assimilation of authorial self in confrontation with the alien Other. (303)

Pounds argues that for some critics, like Hilton Kramer, the violence portrayed and revealed about the Other in Bowles's works was not convincing. He felt that Bowles's writings are dehumanizing of the Other and that they only portray or speak the mind of the author and not

reality (304). This type of violence, for Kramer, does not deal with what the war has brought about and shows a total detachment and failure of the author to form a sincere reflection of reality. He believed that there should have been more profundity and exploration from Bowles before he portrayed such characters, and that the evocation of violence should have had more depth and meaning—which Kramer thinks Bowles’s writings lacked—to comprise all aspects of the community and culture of the Other (304). But does Kramer’s claim contain any truth?

Bowles rejected Kramer’s claim as not even close to being true, and denied the fact that Kramer grouped him in the same category as writers of fame whom he “humbly” knew were far better and skilled in writing than him. Furthermore, in 1986, Bowles had an interview with Paula Chin, where he claimed that he did not like violence and that he may have written about it because he wanted his work to be as far as possible from his reality; he wanted violence to be only present in his fiction (48). However, in his collection of short stories, *Things Gone and Things Still Here*, a reader could sense that in North Africa, the Other is portrayed as barbaric and savage. I believe that wickedness and evil dominate the narrative, which in truth supports Kramer’s idea and reveals how Bowles viewed the Other as brutal. In addition, in Alameda’s interview with Bowles, one could—to some extent—agree with Kramer’s claim (220). When Bowles was asked about the Orient, specifically Tangier, that city where he spent his adult life, Bowles was ambivalent. The land of the Other was both fascinating and savage to him. He stated that the land was captivating, yet dreadful and horrifying. People there are greedy and wicked. They kill their own flesh and blood for money, not feeling any kind of remorse for such a hideous crime. They can also do this with impunity since the law did not rebuke them (Alameda 220). Moreover, the country is wicked; its women perform black magic on men in Bowles’s short narrative, “Things Gone and Things Still Here,” where the narrator, who is a foreigner,

finds “folded knives deep in the water at the bottom of the cliff . . . women who do this are even worse than the ones who bury them in the ground” (Bowles 481).

I believe that Bowles was deeply moved by such incidents of black magic because of what he believed happened to his wife, Jane, due to the influence of her Moroccan woman companion. He believed that this Moroccan woman was evil and that she put a curse on his wife to surrender totally to her and thus to obey her without resistance (Alameda 220). However, when asked why he continued living there, Bowles did not have a concrete answer. He spent almost sixty years going in and out of Tangier, buying a house for himself there, yet he did not know why he was “entrapped” in such a terrible place. His remarks to Alameda proves how he detested Tangier and that one should experience it at first hand to see how awful it was (Alameda 219). But simultaneously, this terrible nature and awkwardness of the land fascinated him. Deep within his psyche, he found it hard to leave this land and its people, where he became enchanted and more creative in his writing.

Since his early childhood, Bowles was fascinated by myths and fables. He loved stories that talked about animals in relation to humans. In his writings, he believed that the element of fascination and shock should rule any narrative. What any other possible way should a writer master to grasp a readers’ attention other than writing a stimulating and thrilling narrative? When writing about the Orient, Bowles wanted his experience, I believe, to be catchy and to depict the exotic and the primitive Other. On one occasion back in 1945 he said,

Little by Little the desire came to me to invent my own myth. The only way I could devise for simulating that state was the old Surrealist method of abandoning conscious control and writing whatever words came from the pen. First, animal legends resulted

from experiments and then tales of animals disguised as ‘basic human’ beings. (qtd. in Hamdaoui 38)

His short story, “Allal,” then came to life in 1977, carrying his favorite theme of the human in animal disguise. In an interview, Bowles states that Allal’s narrative is a complete fiction. He did not experience such an incident like Allal’s during his life in Tangier. Yet he felt the urge to invent and quickly write this short story: “[w]ell there’s kif.... I wrote it out very quickly. It has to be fast for me or either it doesn’t come out right” (Davis 107).

The story is set in a small Moroccan village. As an infant, Allal was deserted by his mother. From this moment on, he was marked as an “outcast” with his people calling him “[a] son of sin, and [they] laughed when they looked at him” (Bowles 425). For them, “[t]hey hoped to make him into a shadow, in order not to think of him as real or alive” (425). The owner of the hotel where Allal’s mother worked took advantage of the young boy, and as soon as Allal was old enough, he asked him to work for him without any wages. The hurtful truth is that Allal was unwanted by his mother first—since she conceived him illegitimately at a very young age—and then by his people—who called him a son of sin. This left him in a state of alienation from everything that surrounded him. This alienation and labeling angered him. He left the hotel, where he stayed with its owner and his wife, and lived in a small hut at the village edge, where he felt safer from the hatred around him. The desert with its palm trees and wind were his only companions. He wanted to belong somewhere and find a single person whom he could befriend.

One day in the town, he encountered an old man carrying a sack containing snakes. Two of the snakes fell off the sack, terrorizing people in the town. Again, Allal witnessed how this old man and his snakes were not welcome, like him, in the town. Thus, he started to embrace what this brutal society rejected. He invited the man to his humble hut; “I’m not like the rest of them

here,” he said, and since then the narrative takes a turn for Allal (Bowles 427). Allal invites the old snake seller to his home and then he deceives the old man and steals one of his snakes. The old man introduced him to another realm, the one where he could practice control over something and own it. The old man unintentionally taught Allal how to control the snake and Allal became happy with the outcome. The snake he stole was obedient and did exactly as he wished (Bowles 428). And once again, a striking shift in the narrative takes place, transforming a wicked boy who managed to steal the snake to a human being tempting an animal and ultimately merging with that animal. High from kif paste, which both he and the snake consumed, Allal and the snake, in a very dramatic enthralling scene, switched bodies, ending in the banishment of both by the town’s people:

[h]e quickly undressed, and moving the table so that he could reach it . . . Allal began to say to it over and over: Come here . . . Then climbed up his leg and lay for a time across his chest . . . They merged and separated . . . He slid through the crack and was swallowed by darkness . . . he knew he was looking at his own head from the outside. He had not expected this. He had hoped only that his friend would come in and share his mind with him.” (Bowles 431-433)

Through the dense and the brutal description of the finale, Bowles demonstrates the psychological battle, the anxiety, the dehumanization and finally the terror Allal went through. Victimized by his own society, Bowles shows various sides in his representation of the Other. On an emotional and psychological level, Allal receives nothing but cruelty and rejection from his own people. It is through this narrative instance that Bowles’s motif confirms his experience in Morocco, mentioned in Alameda’s interview, namely, that kinsmen are cruel to one another and that they could kill each other with no feeling of remorse. With this example, Bowles presents in a fictional form how the mother abandoned her infant and left him behind and how his society abandoned him as well, killing him spiritually and physically.

Given that Bowles is a foreigner, Wendy Lesser mentions in her article that he wanted to move in his writings “[b]etween these untamed parts of the world and the rigid expectations of Europeans and Americans . . . But for Bowles the touchstone is violence” (402). Bowles shows the disintegration within the same culture that helps in deconstructing and breaking down a fragile boy (Spindler 38). Deep down in Allal’s psyche, he knows well that his own people rejected him. Therefore, he thought of “befriending” the snake and ultimately merged with it, becoming one. He is then overwhelmed by the idea of revenge and thus he “[h]ad the joy of pushing his fangs into two of them” (Bowles 435).

Bowles here stresses the anxiety of the wicked and his violent revenge. The outcast Allal was on a quest for belonging somewhere. Wendy Lesser claims that Allal had to give up his own body, and disguise himself as an animal to fit into his society. His revenge is the outcome of such cruelty: “[t]he only way that he can cease to be a victim is to cease being himself” (405). Psychologically, Allal is not a stable character. And again, Bowles’s technique stresses the idea of having kif and drugs and what it does to a person’s mind: “[b]y this time the kif paste had completely taken over Allal’s mind. He lay in the taste of pure delight, feeling the snake’s head against its own” (Bowles 432). Both Allal and the snake are in a state of hallucination from the kif paste (Hamdaoui 186). The scenery that Bowles presents to his reader could indicate how he demotes the Other, putting Allal in a state that is less than that of the others around him.

Furthermore, Bowles’s short narrative raises the aspect of dehumanizing. By merging Allal and the snake, a vicious animal, and by highlighting the idea of revenge in Allal’s mind, we learn that the protagonist fails to communicate with the surrounding. Therefore, brutality and savagery is the only resort. Asad al-Ghalith in his article “Overlooked Prominence: Two Short Stories of Paul Bowles,” states that Bowles was interested in how the Other communicates with

the foreigner. By a “foreigner” here he means all that is not familiar with his own state, “[a]nother characteristic Bowlesian motif that is pressed into these very brief pieces is the portrayal of man’s inevitable failure to communicate, frequently leading to the failure to form true friendship” (208). Animals are without minds; they do not think. They are barbaric and once a prey falls in their hands, it is slayed. That is how Bowles portrays Allal. Allal is primitive, wicked and evil. He invites the old man to his home and steals his snake. He tempts and seduces the snake to come over his naked body and wishes to be one with it. Yet his communication leads him to inevitable destruction.

Allal possesses the snake’s body and avenges himself on people of the town. That was the only communication that he could have throughout the whole narrative. There was a definite desire to control and have power and that is why Bowles merges the snake with Allal. Yet through Bowles’s style, it seemed demeaning. In this discourse of dehumanization, Bowles sends a message where he not only emphasizes the portrayal of Allal, but the nature of the Orient and the Other in general. Even though in many interviews he tried hard to state that he did not condemn such savagery, but, I believe, as a foreigner, he could not hold his pen from not labeling and downgrading the Other. Referring to Allal, Bowles describes him as a reptile: “from here the boy was a monstrous creature, with all the bristles on his head and breathing that vibrated inside him like a far-off storm . . . it was beautiful to caress the earth with the length of his belly” (433).

Another psychoanalytical dimension of Allal’s story is “[h]ow he [Bowles] can tell the story about unnatural happenings and make them appear natural” (Hamdaoui 185). Although it is hard to imagine that a human being and an animal could switch bodies or even minds, due to the cruelty of Allal’s society towards him his mental faculties became unstable. Both the long search

for a companion and the hatred he had towards his own state of being distorted his rational faculties. Wishing to switch “thoughts” with a snake looked very appealing and inviting to Allal; he got enchanted and absorbed by the beast before him. Bowles invites his reader to examine the psyche of Allal (Hamdaoui 186). Deep down his psyche, Allal could feel that this snake is much more friendly than those humans around him.

Much to Allal’s misfortune, his state of ecstasy, and his empowerment did not last long. The liberty and independence that he thought he would be gaining from the flexibility of the snake’s body proved to be temporary; “[h]e crawled around the side of the house...rejoicing in a sense of freedom different from any he had ever imagined” (Bowles 433) and met a terrible ending from those who rejected him and now reject his animal form as well. Like Janine, Allal figured out that his liberation is momentary. Yet, he tried to escape from those who wanted to banish him. In addition, Bowles, I believe, wanted to highlight the violence and the savagery associated with the Other. Hamadaoui on the other hand, argues that Allal became psychologically disturbed, a fact which ultimately doomed him to nonexistence (186). Allal when finding that he is again helpless and there is not much he can do, “the rage always had been in his heart . . . Allal had the joy of pushing his fangs into two of them before a third severed his head with an axe” (Bowles 435). Crawling like a snake and having fangs like an animal, certainly contribute to blurring the distinction between human Allal and a serpent. It is not the snake that gets humanized, but the human who gets to be animal-like, and a dangerous animal at that.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

“The desert refers to a complex locus of experience and reflection; it is simultaneously an interior space of mind; an exterior place where pilgrims, adventurers and travelers can visit and dwell; and an archetype or icon of the imagination.”

—David Klemm

“The Orient as a representation in Europe is formed—or deformed.”

—Edward Said

When thinking of the Orient and the Other, Albert Camus and Paul Bowles, as writers, wanted to highlight various aspects of such Otherness. Both had different experiences in North Africa and hence strived to make an uneasy transition in that world of the Other through their representations. Stephen William Foster believes that, the exotic was a “source of hope as well as fear” for both writers (21). Each of them embarked on their own journey to the desert, where they portrayed both the distances and the differences of the Other (24). Like other authors who talked about the Orient, Camus and Bowles were providing their own perspectives of the Orient and its culture:

[T]he Orientalist provides his own society with representations of the Orient (a) that bear his distinctive imprint, (b) that illustrate his conception of what the Orient can or ought to be, (c) that consciously contest someone else's view of the Orient, (d) that provide Orientalist discourse with what, at that moment, it seems most in need of, and (e) that respond to certain cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements of the epoch. (*Orientalism* 274)

Nevertheless, having a firsthand experience in North Africa, both authors took upon themselves the responsibility of showing a representation of the Orient to their readers. One was driven by his affinity to the land and how it was hard to drift away from such beauty, yet neglecting and marginalizing the natives of this land as in Camus's short story. Bowles got

entangled with Moroccans themselves and ended up anxious about them. For Camus, “the exotic is always full of surprises; it delights and titillates”; and for Bowles, “[the Orient] appear[s] chaotic, threatening, bizarre, ineluctable” (Foster 21).

The main element that dominated both writers’ short narratives of “La femme adultère” and “Allal” is silence. In Camus’s “La femme adultère” Janine is drawn to her inner self, and to the tempting land, so that only she can hear its call. She does not care about people of that land and to her they are invisible, compared to such a massive vibrant lively erotic land, “so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe” (*Orientalism* 191). As a colon seeking to own such beauty of the Algerian land, Janine was longing for a communion with the unknown desert. Therefore, on a similar note, Janine asserts Camus’s idea of existentialism when she revolts against her state of depression and seeks a metaphorical sexual relationship with the Oriental desert to achieve supremacy over her psychological state.

In addition, Micheline Tisson-Braun in her article “Silence and the Desert” states that Camus’s attachment to such a land, where he considers as his own “homeland,” is revealed through Janine’s surrender to her unconscious bittersweet encounter with the Oriental desert (43). In Algeria, where Camus was born and brought up, a certain feeling of harmony was created deep within his mind and soul that in a very captivating scene he captures such moments through Janine’s metaphorically sexual encounter at the fort. Deep in the Orient Janine experiences a harmony between the senses and beyond the self-entrapment. She knows well that in that kingdom “even erotic joy is deceptive . . . and inevitably leads to the apprehension of death” (Tisson-Braun 43). She has to go back to her bitter reality with that average husband and

abandon such transcendence of the exotic Orient, “[f]rom her briefly visited kingdom of beauty she returns to her exile” (McCormick 110).

Like Camus, Bowles adopted a silent atmosphere in his short story “Allal.” The condition of the Other baffled Bowles. Their life is very dramatic and savage from Bowles’s perspective, which leads him ultimately to dehumanizing his protagonist Allal and presenting him as sub-human. Allal’s voice is somehow choked. His silence is presented through his subconscious and his desire to belong and enjoy the company of his own people. Bowles promises Allal with a series of encounters with an animal that is contextualized through his need to gain control over his life. By degrading Allal, he makes him lure an animal, a vicious one, a snake, and getting into its body. Bowles’s shocking description of Allal’s encounter with the snake’s body creates a demonizing relation between nature and human beings, “he [Bowles] was fascinated by the tension that exists in nature and between human beings” (Seinder 154). This trait of dehumanization can also be traced to a later work of Bowles’s such as “Kitty,” which he wrote in 1980. And that will lead us logically to have a clearer view of him and how he looked at the Other.

Bowles’s “mal-representation” of the Other, I believe, stems from his repulsion and attraction to the primitive. He did not love Tangier and did not know why he kept coming back to it, but it provided him with an enormous amount of savagery and traumatic incidents with which he was fascinated as a kid, “[c]ertainly I never meant to stay in Tangier again...perhaps because one can get everything one wants here and life is cheap as dirt” (Caponi xi). However, he liked nature as it is and that is what he also found in Tangier, “the trees, the wind, the globe” (Evans 46).

Reflecting again on these two short narratives, which I examine, I could not help but wonder about the role of place and proximity in viewing the Other. Camus was born and raised in Algeria; he was nourished in the “East.” He shared the natives’ lives, culture, and sufferings from colonialism, and Bowles voluntarily chose to come to the “East” and live in Morocco. Nonetheless, both writers turned out to voice the mainstream view of traditional Orientalism. They got trapped in a blind spot within the Orientalist vision. They both chose to look at the Orient from their own perspective and with the same eyes of a Westerner. They both persisted in their writings to depict what would betray where they are coming from and not how the Other interacts mentally, psychologically and spiritually with the charm of the totality of the patterns of life and ways of thinking. Bowles was attracted by what is violent and horrifying and situated it in the Orient. He presented the Other in a degrading status. He believed that in such a land violence is characteristic. Violence, for him, is related and appropriate to the Third World, but not the West: “as for where they [horror and violence] take place, it’s probably easier to believe such stories happen in Latin America, North Africa or Sri Lanka than Europe or the United States” (Chin 48). Such idea of relating violence only to the East and to Africa in general is transparent Orientalism. As for Camus he represents a French pied-noir couple in Algeria whose conjugal situation is delved into through the stream of consciousness of Janine, but the natives Algerians remain in the background: undifferentiated, invisible, and mute. Janine's desire is focused on the desert and not on its inhabitants. She cannot see the Other and she cannot develop any feelings for them, even though from her sexually frustrated life a reader would guess that she might be attracted to those Arabs in burnouses.

This confirms, based on the analysis of these two stories, that despite proximity, residence, and affinity to North Africa, both Camus and Bowles were trapped in the Orientalist

framework. In the case of Camus, the Algerians in the oasis visited by Janine and Marcel remain shadowy characters. In the case of Bowles, the protagonist Allal, is depicted in animalistic metaphors. North Africa, as a geographical location within human interests eludes both writers.

Endnotes

¹ Said pointed out how Romantic Orientalists sought the Orient for rejuvenating Europe: “Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, for example, urged upon their countrymen, and upon Europeans in general, a detailed study of India because, they said, it was Indian culture and religion that could defeat the materialism and mechanism (and republicanism) of Occidental culture. And from this defeat would arise a new, revitalized Europe” (*Orientalism* 115).

² JoAnn McCaig mentions in her book *Reading In: Alice Munro's Archives* that the short story negligence stems out from three different aspects: “First, the short story has had a briefer history, as a literary form, than the novel, and thus has simply not had the time to achieve critical respect. Second, the short story is more ‘popular’ than the novel, because of its marketability in magazines, and thus is deemed less worthy by critics, which is in accord with Bourdieu’s view of hierarchy of genre and the field of production. Third, the formal properties of the novel more closely inscribe the ideology of dominant culture, thus making it more central form” (86).

³ Pied-noir is a term that refers to the French population, *colons*, who settled in North Africa. As they were farmers and cultivated the land, they were dubbed black-footed.

⁴ In my citation of “La femme adultère,” the first number refers to the French original; the second following the slash is from its English translation by Justine O’Brien *Exile and the Kingdom*, Penguin edition of 1962.

⁵ Fqih is the popular Moroccan pronunciation of *faqih*, a man of knowledge about Islam and Islamic legal issues.

⁶ Paul Bowles experienced the same situation with his wife Jane’s Moroccan companion, “[w]omen in particular possess this knowledge . . . there are the great sorcerers and true witches . . . the doctor said that we had to get that woman [the Moroccan maid] out of the house. But Jane neither agreed nor wanted to hear any talk about that” (Alameda 220).

⁷ The war that Camus refers to in this narrative would probably be WWII.

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