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**Themes and Story-telling Strategies in
Paul Bowles's North-African Fiction**

TESIS DOCTORAL

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Introduction

“There is a truth for everyone, and no one truth carries away all the others.”

The above statement was made by Bowles to describe Morocco; it is recorded by Gina Dagal Caponi in her 1993 collection of interviews with the writer made by different people between 1952 and 1990: *Conversations with Paul Bowles* (66). I think it is very important because it reveals Bowles as a liberal, a free spirit, a person who rejects any idea of a monopoly on the truth. He is willing to take in different viewpoints. Caponi, who is Professor of American Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio, wrote the monograph on Bowles for Twayne’s United States Authors Series: *Paul Bowles* (1998). She chose the title “A Spontaneous Life” for her first chapter of biographical introduction to the writer.

As Virgil Thomson once wrote to someone inquiring about Bowles:

Please try not to view his life as a planned career. He had more spontaneity than that, and he was always resistant to pressure, both from others and from his own convictions about “duty” or calculations about “advantage”. He is as “free” a man as I have ever known, even when accepting any obligation, which he does strictly on his own, never under pressure. (Quoted in Caponi 1993, xiii)

We must be careful, therefore, not to study Bowles’s corpus of work as a deliberate attempt to describe in both fictional and non-fictional form the realities of the life of American expatriates resident in North Africa. He did not set out with that intention, that was only the result. Bowles was a very unassuming man; when asked about his professional achievements towards the end of his life, he replied modestly: “I’ve written some books and some music. That’s what I’ve achieved.” (Caponi 1993, 217)

He wrote some music –that side of his professional life is less well-known to his readers. Bowles “shot to fame”, as they say, in the literary world, with his first novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), which was on the best-seller list for eleven weeks in the following year. Before that, as we can tell from Caponi’s valuable chronology of Bowles’s life – which I have brought up to date to include Bowles’s death in 1999 and included at the end of this study in the form of an appendix – he had collaborated with Aaron Copland on various musical projects, including film scores, theatre music and operas. He combined music with writing, as he also worked as music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*. His early writing was not fiction, it took the form of journalism, as just mentioned, and translation. It is important to point out that his first translations were of works by the French existentialist writers, notably Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit* in 1946.

Existentialism was one of the most powerful influences in his life, and his first two novels, *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down* are marked by it. Wayne Pounds, in his existential, psychoanalytical study of Bowles’s fiction, *Paul Bowles: The Inner Geography* (1985), concludes that disintegration of personality is the key to understanding Bowles’s work. So if Bowles holds that there is no stable personality in an individual – exacerbated, in his case, by the fact that he lived a long life, almost ninety years, from 1910 to 1999, so he had a long time to go through many different stages – then we should not look for stability, permanence, essence, in Paul Bowles himself.

In the fourteen or so years that have gone by since Bowles’s death there have been several biographies. This is normal, that critics and readers should be interested in a writer when his *oeuvre* is finally closed. He lived a long “colourful” life, so his death attracted attention. When existentialism went “out of fashion”, so did Bowles’s novels, but towards the end of his life, his novels were rediscovered, and different aspects of them – gender orientation, postcolonialism – came to the forefront, rather than existentialism. The spate of life-writing dedicated to Bowles began in 1999, the year of his death, with the re-issue of his 1972 autobiography, *Without Stopping*, though Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno had brought out his heavyweight biography (over 500 pages), *An Invisible Spectator: A Life of Paul Bowles* ten years earlier and Gena Dagel Caponi had written a biography too: *Paul Bowles: Romantic Savage* (1994). In 2000, two more women wrote biographical works: Cherie Nutting, *Yesterday’s Perfume: An Intimate Memoir of Paul Bowles* and Millicent Dillon, *You are Not I: Portrait of Paul Bowles*. Finally, in 2004, Virginia Spencer Carr published *Paul Bowles: A Life* and Allen Hibbard brought out *Paul Bowles, Magic and Morocco*.

These works fill in the background for a writer, but life-writing is problematic when it comes to understanding and judging a work. Bowles himself said in interview:

I don't want anyone to know about me. In the first place "I" don't exist. I disapprove very much of the tendency in America and everywhere to make an individual out of the writer to such an extent that the writer's life and his choices and his taste are more important than what he writes. If he is a writer, the only thing that counts is what he writes. (Caponi 1993, 217)

In spite of what he claims, certain facts are inescapable: that Bowles was greatly influenced in his childhood reading by Edgar Allan Poe; that he read and translated the French existentialist writers; that he spent most of his adult life outside America and therefore knew intimately the life of the expatriate in a place like North Africa.

In addition, at least five doctoral theses have been written on Bowles's work: firstly "The Unified Scream: The Disintegration of the Self and Society in the Works of Paul Bowles" by Neil Campbell (1978). The second is Abdelhak Elghandor's "Cross-cultural Encounters and the Image of the Other in Paul Bowles' Fiction" (1994). The third is by Hassan Bourara: "Paul Bowles: An Invisible Spectator?" (1996). The fourth is: "Morocco Bound, U S Representations of North Africa 1920-98" by B.T Edwards (1998). The fifth is Bouchra Benlemlih's "Inhabiting the Exotic: Paul Bowles and Morocco" (2008). The theses of Campbell, Bourara and Benlemlih have proved to be the most useful.

In this study, I have chosen to write only on Bowles's fiction set in Morocco and Algeria, that is, the first three novels (three out of four) and a large proportion of the short stories. But before that, I comment on his autobiography, *Without Stopping* and his non-fiction work, the eight travel essays written in the 1950s, *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue: Scenes From the Non-Christian World* (1963; 2000 & 2006). My viewpoint as I read the fiction is inevitably personal: as a Moroccan, as a Muslim and as a woman. When I started reading Bowles, beginning with his first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, it was my intention to make a note of all the "mistakes" Bowles made about Morocco, in the true sense of the word: a mis-take, a failure to understand, a bias or a contradiction.

But this intention was soon frustrated because one cannot read a work of art from a single point of view. I happen to be a woman, but I cannot close my eyes to a man's possible interpretation; I am a Muslim, but Bowles knew that his readers could be people of all ideological hues:

atheist, agnostic, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and many undefinable others. We must not forget his statement, with which I began this study: “There is a truth for everyone...” Moreover, his characters speak for themselves, not for “Paul Bowles”, man or author, in spite of the fact that he created them.

In any case, this ground has been covered before me. Abdelhak Elghandor interviewed Bowles and questioned him about his unflattering portrayals of Moroccans and Islam. He published his interview as an article in the review *Ariel*: “Atavism and Civilization: An Interview with Paul Bowles”. Bowles had an irrefutable reply for his (and my) criticism: when Elghandor asked Bowles if he thought he had given a “fair, true, and correct picture of North Africa,” he did not try to defend himself, he answered in the negative:

I think what I have written is generally realistic, yes. I think I have left out a great deal, oh yes, an enormous amount, but I do that on purpose; it’s not a mistake. I had no intention of giving a fair picture. You seem to think I meant to write serious and profound studies. (Elghandor 1994, 26–7)

All the factors – the problematic autobiographical element, the insistence on art before “truth”, the postmodern instability of values and identity – have pointed my researches in a certain direction. I begin at the beginning, by casting a cursory glance at the childhood influences, then compare them to Bowles’s own version in his life-writing. Chapter One is thus dedicated to *Without Stopping* and his experiences of an autobiographical nature as recorded in *Their Heads Are Green*. Then I make inquiries into two areas in the chosen long fiction: Chapter Two studies identity and narrative in Bowles’s novels in terms of existentialism, while Chapter Three looks at sexual identity, race, belief and society within a post-colonial critique. A main issue will be identity seen through gender orientation and race: I examine the three novels to see what Bowles has to say about expatriates in North Africa and how they identify with themselves and others via their sexuality and their racial differences.

Finally in this part, since Bowles has always been under the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, and there are parallels between the Gothic victim and the disoriented, existentialist character, I explore the interface between Bowles’s existentialism and his Gothicism. Parallels between the postcolonial “victim” or object and the Gothic victim have also been noted, so I end by exploring Bowles’s Gothicism when he is dealing with racial factors in his writing.

My final chapter, which, indeed, constitutes half of the study, carries over these thematic concerns into his short fiction set in North Africa, but with a further theoretical framework of enquiry into why and how some of his short stories are so successful. I scrutinise chosen examples for the application in them of those strategies and devices considered hallmarks of the good story by recent theorists of short fiction. I have dedicated such a large space to the short fiction as it has been studied less than the novels and usually separately. I hope to show common ground in themes between the long and the short fiction, as well as some later innovation, and sometimes even formal similarities insofar as the two genres can be compared.

1. Life-writing and Travel Writing

1.1 Background

Paul Bowles was born at a moment in history, 1910, when popular belief and thinking were in a state of flux. The ideas of Darwin and Freud, who visited Bowles's birthplace, New York, at around the same time, were widely discussed and often, but not always, accepted. Bowles's childhood was therefore dominated by the latest theories. As an only child in a household of strong-minded, rather eccentric adults, who were dedicated to putting these new secular ideas on child psychology and education into practice, he was not allowed the mental and emotional freedom many other children enjoy.

Bowles described his unusual childhood in his 1972 autobiography, *Without Stopping*. He explained how his parents regulated and regimented his days and nights, with rules on everything from study to play to meals and how to eat them. In spite of this regimentation –or perhaps because of it –Bowles's gifted imagination found an outlet in artistic activities. He drew pictures, wrote stories and learned music. He was a precocious piano player and composer, and was dedicated to music throughout his life. His writing began as short stories and journals, not so much of his own everyday life, as the imaginary life of invented characters in invented worlds.

As Caponi shows (1993, 83), a powerful influence in the life of the young Paul Bowles was the writing of Edgar Allan Poe. His mother, Rena Bowles, would read the stories of Poe to her son, in spite of the fact that they apparently gave him nightmares. Later on, in 1928, after leaving school and also, briefly, art school in New York, Bowles went to the University of Virginia, where Poe had studied: "What is good enough for edgar allan poe [sic] is good enough for me," he once wrote to a friend." (Caponi 1994, 33) He never completed his degree as his early musical composition provided a diversion and a living.

If his mother read him the stories, his aunt Emma, Rena's sister, seems herself to have embodied a Gothic victim. She was addicted to morphine and came to stay at their house when going through withdrawal symptoms. As Bowles describes her in his autobiography:

She was really sick, a veritable skeleton that lay in bed moaning most of the time; it went on day and night, week after week. Often the moans became screams, which rose and fell like sirens wailing. (*Without Stopping*, 59)

Perhaps Bowles was remembering his aunt when he described the death throes of the protagonist of his first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, Port Moresby, though the serious illnesses he himself suffered: jaundice, sunstroke, dysentery, migraine, carbon monoxide poisoning and typhoid, no doubt provided enough inspiration and practical information for him not to have to look for it in childhood memories or anywhere else. While on the subject of *The Sheltering Sky*, it is interesting to note that its title was based on a song on his favourite phonograph record: “Down Among the Sheltering Palms.”

While his aunt Emma was suffering this torment, her husband, Guy Ross, not surprisingly lived apart from her in a bachelor apartment. The young Paul would visit, and on one occasion was punished for spying on a gay party hosted by Guy (*Without Stopping*, 41). Bowles was therefore surrounded in his childhood by rather unorthodox people. He wrote about a “lost childhood”, an “infinitely distant and tender place” (Caponi 1993, 4). Rather like him, both Eunice Goode in his second novel *Let It Come Down*, and Lee Burroughs Veyron in his third, *The Spider’s House*, are seeking to recover their lost childhood in a foreign country. As Caponi writes:

Bowles rejected his parents’ suburban world for something more exciting and less modern and, in his view, a place where he might recapture the childhood he was never allowed to fully inhabit. (Caponi 1998, 4)

While in his early twenties, Bowles went to North Africa. From 1932 to 1933 he was busy composing music, but was at the same time involved in adventures that would later appear in *The Sheltering Sky*. He met a fellow American called George Turner in the Algerian Sahara, and travelled with him through the Sahara by camel, horse and truck as far as Tunis. Turner was no doubt the inspiration for Tunner, the intruder in the marriage of Port and Kit Moresby in *The Sheltering Sky*.

In the decades of the 1930s and 1940s, Bowles returned to New York, stayed in Europe and Mexico, got married to Jane Auer, and kept on composing and writing. In 1946 his translation of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Huit-Clos (No Exit)*, directed by John Huston, won the Drama Critics’ Circle Award for the best foreign play of the year. Encouraged to write by his writer wife, Jane, he published in 1947 in *Partisan Review* his first successful short story, “A Distant Episode”. This was the beginning of a new life, both because he became a writer and because that year he settled in Tangier. At the time, Tangier was separate from Morocco in that it was an “International Zone” from 1923 to 1956, and as such, enjoyed far more freedoms in every sense than the rest of Morocco.

Bowles felt little pressure on him in his choice of subject matter and began to portray not only cross-cultural encounters between expatriates and natives, but encounters that did not have happy outcomes. Thus he began to earn a reputation as a writer of violent fiction. He would later dispute that reputation for writing gruesome fiction: “I’ve written over fifty stories, only five of which are violent.” (Caponi 1993, 213). All the same, he places himself in a tradition of violent or horror writing (see Caponi 1994).

In this story, “A Distant Episode”, a linguist visiting North Africa is captured by a group of desert tribesmen who cut his tongue out and force him to perform weird and obscene dances. In another story published a couple of years later, in 1949, “The Delicate Prey” –this time a story with exclusively native protagonists– a robber mutilates and then murders a desert boy. Caponi, in her interviews (1993, 35), records an interesting anecdote about this story. He gave it to Tennessee Williams to read while they were travelling together by ship to Europe, and Williams later reviewed it for *Saturday Review of Literature* (see Williams 1959). Bowles collaborated with Williams, who became a lifelong friend, by writing the scores to four plays: *The Glass Menagerie* (1944); *Summer and Smoke* (1948); *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959); and *The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Any More* (1962). As Caponi records it, apparently, Tennessee Williams told him:

“It is a wonderful story but if you publish it, you’re mad.” As Bowles tells the story, “I said, ‘Why?’ He said ‘Because everyone is going to think you are some sort of horrible monster when they read it.’ And I said, ‘I don’t care. I have written it and I’m going to publish it.’ And he said, ‘You’re wrong, you’re wrong to publish it. You will give people the wrong idea.’ But I disagreed with him on that. Perhaps now everyone does think I’m a monster. I still disagree with him. I think if you write something, you should publish it.” (*ibid.*)

Certainly, some of the impressions and experiences Bowles had after he moved to Tangier in 1947 found their way into these early stories and into *The Sheltering Sky*. One might wonder why Bowles stayed in North Africa if he found life there barely separated from a proximity to poverty, hardship and even cruelty and violence. A key to the attraction can be found in his preference to turn his back on the modern world. According to his autobiography, his most treasured childhood memories are of visits to the country, to his maternal grandparents’ farm near Springfield, Massachusetts, perhaps appropriately called Happy Hollow Farm. He enjoyed not only being

closer to nature than at his parents' home in New York, but also relished the "Gothic" aspects, the "dark and rustic sheds that extended all the way back to the springhouse" (*Without Stopping*, 11). If there were frightening places in the wooded countryside, more frightening was the suburbanization of his world, a symptom of the modern civilization. For Bowles, the countryside and the old-fashioned world were much more alluring.

Another thing that attracted him to North Africa was the sun. It was Gertrude Stein, whom he had met in Paris, and who treated him like a grandson, who suggested that Tangier would be sunny and economical. His reaction was very positive, he liked the sun and the music:

Steady, hot, dry weather, with a sun that burns a white hole in the ultramarine sky with a moon that is like the sun when it is full. (*In Touch: The Letters of Paul Bowles*, 1994, 84)

Bowles obviously associated the sun with freedom, with release from the parental discipline he had suffered as a child. He later wrote another short story based on his difficult childhood, one of the few based on his own early years: "The Frozen Fields". In the story, the protagonist, Donald, is a child who suffers the cruelty of a father who is a strict disciplinarian, if not to say a sadist. Donald's father rubs snow in his face and puts it down his back because the child is too frightened to throw snowballs at a tree. As Donald falls "face-downward into the snow" (*Collected Stories 1939-1976*, 274), he falls into a sort of trance or out-of-body state: "He felt detached; it was an agreeable, almost voluptuous sensation which he accepted without understanding or questioning it" (CS, 275). Donald's state of detachment is what some psychologists identify as "dissociation", a defence used by people who are suffering so much they unconsciously remove themselves from the situation. This emotional detachment is the explanation for the apparently anti-social behaviour or lack of intimacy of the protagonist of both *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down*. Neither Port Moresby nor Nelson Dyar can connect with others, not even with their closest family or supposed loved-ones. But this lack of connection with the outside world has another explanation: Bowles's exploration of existentialism and its impact upon his fiction.

1. 2 The autobiography *Without Stopping*

As we search for Paul Bowles, the persona of the writer, and his relation to the exotic, I will look firstly at his autobiography and then an example of his non-fiction. I am going to begin this exploration of the *persona* or

myth of “Paul Bowles” with a quotation from the 1972 autobiography *Without Stopping*, actually written in 1971, when he was sixty-one years of age. It reveals a great deal about his attitude towards himself as a writer and towards the possible subjects of his writings. He had been introduced through family connections to “the bohemian life” of Greenwich Village:

It struck me as repellant that people in the arts and in letters should make themselves look different from ordinary citizens. My own conviction was that the artist, being the enemy of society, for his own good must remain as invisible as possible [...] (WS, 67)

First of all, he is considering “artists” in comparison to himself, he sees himself as, or wants to be, an artist, in the wide sense of someone dedicated to the arts, be they visual arts, auditory arts or textual arts, as, indeed, he was dedicated to all three in the early days, and for most of his life, to the last two. He was struck by the bohemian excesses of Jane Auer when he met her in 1937. It was through her that they made a trip with the Tonnyns to Mexico which brought him into contact on his home ground with a man whom he fully admired in his total embrace of art and life. The composer Silvestre Revueltas lived in a slum quarter of Mexico City, in a more deplorable poverty than any he had seen in North Africa. As his biographer Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno says:

Revueltas was the embodiment of the quintessential artist, sacrificing life for art. Extraordinarily passionate about music, poetry, life and politics, he was the consummate creator, seeing in existence itself the inspiration for the creative act, or as Bowles would write of Revueltas a few years later, “one had the sense of an organism attaining complete expression in the creation of music which was an accurate and very personal version of the life that went on around him in his country.” (*Invisible Spectator*, 176)¹

This model of the fusion of life and artistic work had a great impact on Bowles, who was by then in his late twenties and was hoping to live comfortably from his art with a minimum of effort.

But he would take away from Revueltas a sense, already nascent, of the need not only to open himself to a myriad encounters, but also the importance of transforming that lived experience into art. Although not

¹ Bowles, “Silvestre Revueltas,” in *Modern Music*, p. 12.

prone to the hedonism that affected Revueltas, Bowles was learning at the time a way of using the energy from events around him to create. Revueltas's legacy is paramount in Bowles. (*ibid.*)

Bowles seems to have emulated this model with great success, and went at his life and profession "without stopping." I think he could be satisfied at the end of his career that he had come up to Revueltas' high standard. As he wrote to his mother a good fifteen years later, when he was an acclaimed composer and novelist, you must live within the work you are creating:

With a novel the work is a good deal more than just consecrating so many hours of the day to sitting at a desk writing words; –it is living in the midst of the artificial world one is creating, and letting no detail of everyday life enter sufficiently into one's mind to become more real than or take precedence over what one is inventing. That is, living in the atmosphere of the novel has to become and stay more real than one's own life. (*IS*, 298 & 464)

1. 2. 1. Childhood and youth in America

Bowles seems always to have been dedicated, at least, to literature. His early memories, recorded without dates in his autobiography, tell of a precocious child who taught himself to read, and, at the age of four, produced "a little notebook with stories about animals, invented by me and printed in pencil." (*WS*, 14)

He was disciplined by his authoritarian dentist father, Claude Bowles, who seems to have been so jealous of his wife's attentions to their only child that he attempted to get rid of him by leaving him out in his baby's cot on a windowsill in the snow. The child was rescued by his maternal grandmother, but henceforth was occasionally beaten (*WS*, 45), and hated his father from then until much later in his life. He was subjected to a rigorous routine, and all toys had to be packed away in the toy chest by six o'clock in the evening: "Very early I understood that I would always be kept from doing what I enjoyed and forced to do that which I did not." (*WS*, 17) What he was able to do was read a lot, as a book could easily be slipped into the toy chest at the last minute (*WS*, 14). Moreover, he did not mix with other children until he went to school, so he had to amuse himself with solitary pursuits.

Going back to the quotation from the autobiography with which I began this analysis of Bowles's *persona*, he throws in the rather provocative idea that the artist is *the enemy of society*. If we take "society" to mean for Bowles the milieu in which his parents lived, then he would be an enemy of that, or at least alienated from it, for as long as

he could remember. Coming from New England Protestant stock, it is not surprising that the family somehow connected the arts with immorality. Bowles's father Claude had wanted to be a violinist, but was forced by his father to become a dentist. It is not that the grandparents were very religious, however, indeed, they practised no religion, though the paternal grandmother and his Aunt Mary (who had known Madame Blavatsky, the founder of modern Theosophy) had an interest in the occult sciences (WS, 17, 62). In fact, "Gramma" had gone to a clairvoyant after Paul was born: "The woman had claimed she saw piles of papers everywhere, and that was all. 'She certainly got *that* one right,' Gramma told me." (WS, 39)

So the family was not disapproving for religious reasons, but they seem to have had a sense of bourgeois propriety that made them strait-laced. Hostility towards his father made the young Bowles actually enjoy rebelling against him, even if this was kept secret:

Then they formulated the lesson: it was safer to stay on paths, literally and figuratively. The moralizing had its effect on me, albeit in the opposite direction from the one they intended. [...] Vaguely I understood that laws were made to keep you from doing what you wanted to do. Furthermore, I understood that for my family the prohibition itself was the supreme good, because it entailed the sublimation of personal desire. (WS, 22)

Another factor Bowles emphasized in the statement I quoted from the autobiography is the idea of the *invisibility* of the artist as a necessary requisite for good art. Bowles felt that writing was better if there were a certain distance between the subject, or the writer or narrator, and the object of the writing. This appears to be a contradiction to the concept of the artist desiring to be one with the work of art. But it is not a contradiction, because what Bowles means is that in the finished product the writer should have effaced him or herself, whatever symbiosis or fusion there might have been in the process. He did not admire those Modernist writers (and later postmodern ones) who write self-consciously, so that the novel or other artwork embodies its own methodology. This, in spite of greatly admiring Proust.

Not for nothing did Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno call his biography *The Invisible Spectator* (1989). From a young teenager, Bowles saw the need to efface oneself when writing and become a *medium* or vehicle for the ideas and sensations:

Perhaps two years later I found an even more satisfactory way of not existing as myself and thus being able to go on functioning;

this was a fantasy in which the entire unrolling of events as I experienced them was the invention of a vast telekinetic sending station. Whatever I saw or heard was simultaneously being experienced by millions of enthralled viewers. They did not see me or know that I existed, but they saw through my eyes. This method enabled me to view, rather than participate in, my own existence. (WS, 53)

He quotes André Gide on this and feels an affinity with him: “*Il me semble toujours m’appauvrir en me dessinant. J’accepte volontiers de n’avoir pas d’existence bien définie si les êtres que je crée et extrais de moi en ont une.* »²

One concludes from this that if the writer can efface him or herself and function as an intermediary, the interaction between the object or material channeled and the reader or observer will be more direct and immediate. Contrary to this, however, Hassan Bourara claims that Bowles is not as objective or innocent as he sets out:

Bowles never misses a chance to say that he does not have opinions “or ideas,” implying thereby not only a commitment to objective representation but also freedom from Eurocentric biases and prejudices. [...] My contention is that Bowles may be said to “have no ideas” only in so far as both he and his critics trade in “idées reçues” endowed with canonical veracity. He has, in other words, opinions too well worn to be “ideas”. His overall attitude towards the Moroccans or Muslims is, contrary to these claims, very judgemental and demeaning. (Bourara 2012, 21)

These three factors, the profession and the persona of the artist, the anti-social aspects of this and the distancing of the author from the material, lead to an alienation of Paul Bowles as a writer on three planes. Bowles felt he had to keep his artistic work secret from his father; secondly, the sensitivity which from the beginning gave Paul a propensity for aesthetic pleasure also seems to have unsettled his rational mind, almost alienating him from himself. Thirdly, the objects and material that attract his aesthetic interest also repel him through the nature of their insecurity, hence a distancing from them is advisable in any case.

Beginning with the secrecy of his early artistic production, while his mother, Rena Winnewisser Bowles, read Poe and Hawthorne to him at bedtime (WS, 33), creating in him a fascination with words, names,

² *Without Stopping*, 53. The French is in italics and comes with no reference to a work or page number in Gide.

especially place-names and maps (WS, 27) which he used in his early writings, a newspaper and diaries of imaginary characters (WS, 34), he was punished by his father for this and had to resort to a sort of code. Only when he was a teenager did he have his writings read aloud publicly, for example, his “Snake Woman Series” of crime stories at aged fifteen or thereabouts.

Perhaps the emotional pressure of his home life caused him to have psychotic experiences. He describes two in his autobiography. He has a frightening dream about a broken window which then turns out to be true after a burglary in their house: “For me it was an unsettling experience and one that temporarily shook my stubborn faith in a rationally motivated universe.” (WS, 55–56) On another occasion, after the stress of sitting exams, he has an obsessive mind-out-of-body experience, whereby he went into a shop and walked endlessly in and out of it, totally unable to break out of the circle until the chance sighting of his parents’ car broke the “spell” (WS, 59) He has become a sort of automaton here, or at least schizophrenic, as if there were two people in him, who had got separated. As Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno puts it:

Although a psychoanalyst might be inclined to describe such behavior as schizophrenic dissociation, for Paul it simply served as an indication that he was not totally in control of his own self, or of his own actions. (IS, 34–5)

Young as he was, Bowles had a decided taste in what he liked in terms of literature. At school, Jamaica High, he was one of the editors of the literary monthly, the *Oracle*. He was determined to write in his column only about the books he recommended; as Virginia Spencer Carr, his latest biographer, tells us: “Bowles endorsed Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, two books by Christopher Morley, *The Arrow* and *Pleased to Meet You*, H. L. Mencken’s *Selected Prejudices*, and André Gide’s *The Counterfeiters*.” (Paul Bowles: A Life, 53)

Gide obviously interested him for several reasons. One was that it encouraged him in the idea of escape, and escape to such a bohemian capital city as Paris:

It was Gide’s book that intrigued him. One of its protagonists was a boy who left home clandestinely at the age of seventeen and wandered the streets of Paris for six weeks, then returned home “as unexpectedly as he left.” An earlier book by Gide that made an even deeper impression upon Bowles was *Les Caves du Vatican*, which he read in French. (*ibid.*, 54)

Chapter three of Virginia Spencer Carr's biography is entitled "Paul Bowles, A Runaway to Paris (1928–1931)" (57–80).

1. 2. 2. Europe

"Each day lived through on this side of the Atlantic was one more day spent outside prison." This is what Bowles recorded as his state of mind once he had arrived on the old continent (WS, 165). However, in a communication to the poet Edouard Roditi some time later, he qualified that statement, saying that it wasn't so much America he desired to escape as his home situation: "I am very eager to leave New York, not America, because I love America a great deal. The only trouble is that I have always had to live in New York, which is not the same thing at all." (*ibid.* 81)³

Certainly, the new-found freedom in Paris at the age of eighteen – only months more than the protagonist of Gide's story– seemed to enable Bowles to develop his writing skills unimpeded. That his mind could function separately was put to use when he tried his hand at automatic writing. But two constraints on his writing changed the course of his stylistic development. When he had discovered poetry, his immediate response had been that discipline was more important than "inspiration" or direct flow of ideas to words: "I began to look at the real world around me with the idea of defining it in as few words as possible." (WS, 52) His autobiography, *Without Stopping*, is named after an early series of short fictional pieces based in part on fact, his adventures wandering "without stopping" through the countryside around Paris on his first visit there. Not much of this has survived, but a fragment called "In the Creuse", the product of his stay at a château in the Creuse region of France, is singled out by Sawyer-Lauçanno:

Although Bowles's style would change dramatically by the time he was writing serious fiction fifteen years later, "In the Creuse" contains many of the elements found in his more mature work: attention to detail, particularly natural phenomena; detached observation of a rather incredible event; and the commingling of the real and the unreal. In many ways, "In the Creuse" reads like a dream narrative, events unfolding without any attempt on the part of the author to interpret them. Despite the use of the first person, which usually implies an intimate connection with the subject matter, there is a decided

³ PB to Edouard Roditi, March 4, 1931, Edouard Roditi Collection, Department of Special Collections, UCLA Library, University of California, Los Angeles. (Chapter 4, note 1 of Virginia Spencer Carr, 385)

sense of separation from the reality being recounted. As much emotional attention, for instance, is given to the bleating nannygoat as to the old woman. The end result is that of a rather chilling sense on the part of the reader that the observer is incapable of any real involvement in the action. He is firmly neutral, a sharp-eyed recording machine, unable or unwilling to judge the very events that he is relating. (*IS*, 85–6)

The second constraint was the advice of the American expatriate writer Gertrude Stein, whom he met on this first visit to Paris and whose work he admired. She told him that his early poetry, albeit accepted and published in the Parisian review *transition* in 1928, was not poetry. He did not see poetry as Stein did: “writing is not word-banding, like Stein and the thousand legions of her followers, but an emotion seen through the mind.”⁴

Perhaps partly because Bowles had left the University of Virginia and gone to Paris, his Mecca (*WS*, 70), without telling his parents, the illicit nature of this subterfuge made him feel he was engaging in criminal activity, though as early as age sixteen, he had had such a feeling:

Somewhere in the back of my mind there was the assumption that art and crime were indissolubly linked; the greater the art, the more drastic the punishment for it. (*WS*, 67–8)

Sawyer-Lauçanno goes so far as to suggest that Paul thought that because he wanted to produce art, and art was criminal, then there must be some criminal or evil leanings in his own nature:

This notion of something being wrong at the core of his being stayed with Paul for at least a few more years. [...]

It is a concept that would never entirely disappear, but in the young man’s mind it was an overpowering idea, for he truly believed that somewhere deep inside his own self lurked demons. In some ways, he would spend the rest of his life transforming the demons into art, creating fiction as a way of dealing with fear; or as he put it sixty years later: “Writing about such things is a way of keeping the evil outside, away from me.” At this point, though, he was still engaged in the continual struggle to keep the darkness from surfacing. (*IS*, 37)

⁴ PB to Rena Bowles, January 13, 1933, Laghouat, Algeria; unpublished letter, Paul Bowles Collection, HRHRC. (Spencer Carr, note 43, 389)

From the early thrills of reading Poe, or having him read to him by his mother, the young Bowles moves to other authors he associates with the mysterious or criminal aspects of art: Gide, as already mentioned with reference to the self-effacement of the writer, and Machen. The latter's emphasis on mystery, the supernatural and the unconscious in his fiction appealed to Paul. A novel that had a great impact on him was Gide's *The Vatican Swindle* (later retitled *Lafcadio's Adventures*), where the protagonist's "gratuitous act", the murder of a stranger for no purpose –like Meursault's in Camus's *L'Etranger*– was particularly intriguing. The response came not so much through the murder itself as the amorality embodied in the act. As Sawyer-Lauçanno puts it:

Thus in Machen and Gide, Paul began to find writers who expressed his own concerns, who gave form to the dichotomy between his inner and outer self. And like Gide and Machen, Paul was beginning to find an exit through words. (*IS*, 40)

As Virginia Spencer Carr tells us, when *Without Stopping* (which she calls his "veiled" autobiography) came out, William Burroughs and Ned Rorem, who were close enough to him to know, described it as "without telling." (*Paul Bowles: A Life*, 2004, 11) At sixty-one, when he wrote it, Bowles already had his great novels, stories and music to his name, and had long had a reputation, his "persona." Over ten years earlier, he had been considered "some sort of patron saint" by the Beats. (*IS*, xiii) So *Without Stopping* is a sort of confirmation of this persona, presenting him as an avant-garde expatriate whose *penchant* and position allow him to take on material that might be considered transgressive. Yet at the same time, he is unwilling to confirm any transgressive nature of his own, especially with regard to his sexuality. As Sawyer-Lauçanno puts it:

His autobiography, *Without Stopping*, while entertaining, gave very few clues as to who Bowles really was, and was nearly devoid of commentary on either his writing or his music. (*IS*, xiv)

In writing his biography, Sawyer-Lauçanno draws heavily on Bowles's own account, *Without Stopping*, but has the advantage of the additional points of view of those friends and acquaintances of Bowles who were willing to collaborate on the biography, either in the form of interviews or access to letters. This additional material obviously enables us to see what Bowles wanted to include in the building of the picture of his "persona" and what he wanted to exclude or hide. Bowles had

written to Sawyer-Lauçanno in 1985, when he was planning the biography: “I hope no biography will be written in my lifetime [...]” (*IS*, xv), but later agreed to a visit in Tangier to discuss the project. In the end, Bowles consented to let Sawyer-Lauçanno write an “unassisted, synthetic biography,” by which he meant he would neither help with nor hinder the project as it brought together information about his life and work from both private and public sources. (*IS*, xv–xvi)

The public sources were few anyway, as his “exile” in Tangier for so many years had made him an “enigma” at home in America. (*IS*, xvi) The official reasons why Bowles did not want to cooperate with the biography are set out in a disclaimer Bowles asked Sawyer-Lauçanno to include, which he accordingly did in the Introduction:

“Paul Bowles found it so difficult to write the autobiography that he was unable to face getting involved in the same material, and thus asked to be excused from all participation in the project.” (*IS*, xvi)

Why did Bowles find it so difficult to write his autobiography, one wonders? The answer to that is that he had such a full life in those sixty-one years up to the writing of it, that it really does give the impression that he had never *stopped*. One must remember also, that he was writing from memory and not assembling already recorded information taken from different sources, which is the job of a biographer. Moreover, Bowles makes *Without Stopping* read like a novel. He recreates dialogue and tells anecdotes that create suspense and rise to a climax. While he did not have to invent characters, as in one of his novels, a task he had to be scrupulous over, and which must have made the effort just as arduous as writing a novel, was making sure that the “persona” he created for himself was as he wanted to be seen by those readers that mattered to him. He had to be equally careful about how his friends and family came over in this work.

Gertrude Stein was partly responsible for the creation of Bowles’s “persona.” Through their initial correspondance, she and her partner, Alice B. Toklas, had got the impression that Paul Frederic Bowles was “a highly eccentric elderly gentleman,” in Toklas’s words, which were similar to Stein’s own. (*IS*, 97) Asserting that the Christian name rather than the surname gave character to a person, Stein insisted on calling him by the diminutive of his middle name: “Freddy.” As Sawyer-Lauçanno says:

While the renaming is certainly amusing and illustrative of Stein’s didactic and dogmatic personality, it also says something about

the way she saw the young Paul Frederic Bowles. For her, “Paul,” with its Christian overtones, was a mask worn by a somber, elderly gentleman; the real person at her dinner table, youthful, alive, cocky, was a “Freddy.” (*IS*, 97, based on *Without Stopping*, 106)

In any case, Paul had already altered one of his Christian names while a teenager. As Spencer Carr relates:

When publishing his poems in the *Oracle*, Bowles had signed himself *Paul F. Bowles*, *Paul Frederic Bowles*, or, occasionally, *P. F. Bowles*. On his birth certificate, his parents had spelled his middle name with a *k*, but at the age of sixteen Bowles much preferred the look of *Frederic* without the *k*. He may not have thought consciously that his dropping the *k* was also a means of distancing himself from the other Fredericks in his family, but concluded that “on some level, it did have that effect.” (*Paul Bowles: A Life*, 56)

The renaming by Stein and Toklas led to a “launching” or a “*lancer-ing*” as Stein put it (*Without Stopping*, 106), in which Bowles was introduced to the *crème de la crème* of the artistic life of Paris: Jean Cocteau and André Gide being the most important. Shortly after, Bowles and Aaron Copland went to Berlin, where they met Stephen Spender and Christopher Isherwood. Though he liked Isherwood (who named the protagonist of *Goodbye to Berlin*, subsequently adapted for the stage as *Cabaret*, Sally Bowles), he was put off by Spender’s flamboyance. Sawyer-Lauçanno commented on Bowles’s own account in the autobiography:

“I noted with disapproval the Byronesque manner in which he wore his shirt, open down to his chest. It struck me as unheard of that he should want to announce his status as a poet rather than dissimulate it.” For Bowles, it was far more important to be a poet than to be thought of as one. (*IS*, 101)

Bowles realised that just by hobnobbing with artists was not going to transform him into one, in spite of his early welcome through Stein on the basis of his poems (or non-poems, according to her) in *transition*. Sawyer-Lauçanno shows up the dilemma this presented Bowles with:

His near-obsessive desire to visit the famous can be seen, at least in part, as a reflection of this quest to learn how to live as a

creative person. Having decided to pursue an artistic career, at this point he was struggling with establishing his own identity as an artist and in doing so, was forced to confront the old duality. For in spite of the models he found in Stein, Copland, Pound, Cocteau, Schwitters, and others, he was unable to achieve their seemingly effortless adoption of their roles. As revealed in his reaction to Spender, of one thing he was sure: an artist is an artist by virtue of his art-making, not by his outward appearance or pronouncements. For Bowles the notion of the outer and inner selves still held sway. And as in childhood, the idea of revealing one's true self was completely repugnant to him. Bowles was in many ways still a product of his father's manufacturing. (*IS*, 109)

This chapter in Sawyer-Lauçanno's *An Invisible Spectator* is called "A Manufactured Savage" (chapter 7), the title being taken from a comment by Gertrude Stein recorded in Bowles's autobiography:

I was the most spoiled, insensitive, and self-indulgent young man she had ever seen, and my colossal complacency in rejecting all values appalled her. But she said it beaming with pleasure, so that I did not take it as adverse criticism. "If you were typical, it would be the end of our civilization," she told me. "You're a manufactured savage." (*WS*, 119)

Here, Stein places Bowles in counterpoint to the authentic, noble savage, whose exoticism, to such Modernists as her beloved Matisse, and especially Gauguin, pointed to a natural human truth, lost to the West in the mists of civilisation.

Perhaps Gertrude Stein at that point did not know about the double nature of Bowles's psyche, the inner and the outer self, so it was perhaps the outer self that she judged to be so unusual in an American. As Sawyer-Lauçanno views it:

For Stein, Americans represented a rather peculiar species, more concerned with morality than aesthetics, greatly taken with honorable action, imbued with a work ethic, a sense of family. Bowles stood in contrast to all of this. At twenty, he was far more interested in art than action, in idleness than in work, far more engaged with himself than with his family history. Nonreligious and amoral, he truly exemplified a new breed, but a breed that had sprung, nonetheless, from an America that Stein had once known. Indeed, her fascination came from the fact that America had produced such a phenomenon. (*IS*, 108)

At this point, Bowles did not take offence at Stein's view of him, and there were certain aspects of himself which he was not willing to change for anyone. That he should be viewed as "different," apparently made him more interesting, and he seems to have cultivated an eccentric "persona" and welcomed the success of it. He records in his autobiography the impact he had on Stein's friend, the Dutchman Kristians Tonny, who on first meeting Paul in Tangier remarked to Aaron Copland:

"The young man with you is slightly off his head, isn't he? I noticed it the other night right away. I heard shutters banging in the wind in there somewhere." I found this a sympathetic observation and liked him better for having made it. (WS, 130)

Bowles was concerned, however, with the insinuation that he was lazy, and took to heart Aaron Copland's warning, which had had an impact on Stein too: "If you don't work now when you're twenty, nobody will love you when you are thirty." (IS, 108⁵) Another warning concerning his work which he took to heart was the comment by Stein herself: "What is the use of writing, unless every word makes the utmost sense?"⁶ From this point on in Bowles's writing: "Words are no longer used simply for their sensorial effect, as in the early poems, but because they also communicate something important to the reader." (IS, 106) Stein's admonitions had such an effect on Bowles that he wrote no poetry for three years, and when he started writing again, in 1934, he wrote in French: "It is as if in another language he could assume another persona, another style." (IS, 107) The result was a much more pared down and precise style; Sawyer-Lauçanno says these poems "tell the truth." (IS, 107)

Just as he sought a new style, Bowles sought new material, and Stein's recommendation that he should go to North Africa was an encouragement which led to experiences that he found he could transform into art.

1. 2. 3. North Africa

Bowles's first visit to North Africa was in 1931, though he soon had to return to Paris for treatment for typhoid A. The well-known opening

⁵ Taken from Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933, 309)

⁶ Sawyer-Lauçanno takes this from a letter Bowles sent to his former French teacher, Daniel Burns, (IS, 106).

paragraph of Chapter VII of *Without Stopping* (very similar to the account he sent his mother in a letter in August 1931, *Paul Bowles: A Life*, 92) shows a Romantic young Bowles⁷ responding subliminally to some magic power he sensed through a first glimpse of the North African shore line, that of Algeria:

On the second day at dawn I went on deck and saw the rugged line of the mountains of Algeria ahead. Straightway I felt a great excitement; much excited; it was as if some interior mechanism had been set in motion by the sight of the approaching land. Always without formulating the concept, I had based my sense of being in the world partly on an unreasoned conviction that certain areas of the earth's surface contained more magic than others. Had anyone asked me what I meant by magic, I should probably have defined the word by calling it a secret connection between the world of nature and the consciousness of man, a hidden but direct passage which bypassed the mind. (The operative word here is "direct," because in this case it was equivalent to "visceral.") Like any Romantic, I had always been vaguely certain that sometime during my life I should come into a magic place which in disclosing its secrets would give me wisdom and ecstasy—perhaps even death. And now, as I stood in the wind looking at the mountains ahead, I felt the stirring of the engine within, and it was as if I were drawing close to the solution of an as-yet-unposed problem. I was incredibly happy as I watched the wall of mountains slowly take on substance, but I let the happiness wash over me and asked no questions. (*WS*, 125)

The feeling is "unreasoned," which Bowles usually found worrying, but any negative emotions or even rational doubt ("asked no questions") are suppressed in the presence of a general sensation of buoyancy and expectation. Perhaps he wanted to portray himself as a young Romantic back in the thirties, and mentalised himself into this attitude when writing the autobiography, because, in fact, when he wrote it in 1971, he was not feeling so buoyant, quite the reverse, he was heavily burdened with his wife Jane's ill health.

⁷ Though he used the word here, he hated the idea of being considered a Romantic. See Spencer Carr's *PB: A Life*, 328–9, where he commented with exasperation on Gena Dagal Caponi's coining of "Romantic Savage," after Gertrude Stein's phrase "manufactured savage."

1. 3 Travel-writing: *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue: Scenes from the Non-Christian World*

Even ten years earlier, he had been more pragmatic. In 1962, the English publisher, Peter Owen, who would later become his publisher in England, approached him and asked if he had anything to publish at that moment. Bowles at first answered in the negative, but then decided to pull together some travel essays, mostly already published.⁸ The title he chose for the collection was *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue*; it was taken from a poem called “The Jumblies” by Edward Lear:

Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue
And they went to sea in a Sieve. (*Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue: Scenes from the Non-Christian World* henceforward *THAG*, [1963] 2000, 4)

Perhaps, rather than the absurd, childish element drawn from Lear’s poem, Bowles was thinking more of the exotic side to be applied in the case of African people. The nine essays and some photographs taken in Morocco and the Sahara, are aimed at showing the differences between peoples.

But as Bowles found, writing about “differences” between peoples where value judgements of “better” or “worse” cultures may come into play can be dangerous. There is a delicate line between wanting to see the picturesque when one travels, and taking the stereotyped “Orientalist” view that everything that is different in Africa is going to be inferior:

It would be an absurdity to expect any group of people to maintain its present characteristics or manner of living. But the visitor to a place whose charm is a result of its backwardness is inclined to hope it will remain that way, regardless of how those who live in it may feel. The seeker of the picturesque sees the spread of improved techniques as an unalloyed abomination. (*THAG*, 7)

⁸ In his book *Paul Bowles: An “Invisible Spectator”?* (2012), Hassan Bourara lists over 40 travel articles in his bibliography, many of them published in *Horizon* or *The Nation* (184–5).

This comment is not very politically correct, and Bowles is careful not to identify himself with “the visitor.” But, on the other hand, he has a sense of truthfulness and justice which is outraged at any falsification:

At the other end of the ideological spectrum are those who regard any objective description of things as they are today in an underdeveloped country as imperialist propaganda. Having been subjected to attack from both camps, I am aware that such countries are a delicate subject to write about. (7–8)

Sitting on the fence and trying to be impartial and objective gets him pilloried by both sides of the debate. An example of the hostility he suffered is as follows:

Whereas, when I wrote *Mustapha and His Friends*, a strong-minded French lady translated it into her language, had two hundred copies mimeographed, and distributed them among Moslem politicians to illustrate the typical reactionary attitude of Americans toward oppressed people. (8)

Bowles feels misunderstood. He is not an American tourist, and comprehends the complexities of the situation far too well to receive treatment such as the French lady meted out:

My own belief is that the people of the alien cultures are being ravaged not so much by the by-products of our civilization, as by the irrational longing on the part of their own educated minorities to cease being themselves and become Westerners. (8)

The strong words (“ravaged”, “irrational”) may indicate that Bowles is exaggerating, but he feels strongly that in any identity crisis of a once-colonized people, blame must be distributed fairly and not all apportioned to the colonizer. From the other side, this is the syndrome of oppressed peoples worrying that they might have a degree of responsibility in their own subjugation. Here, Bowles writes of the “educated minorities”, and, indeed, informs us a little further on that Morocco (in the early 1960s, when *Their Heads Are Green* was first published) had an adult illiteracy rate of 80 to 90 percent. In the following long quote from this book, Bowles illustrates from the recorded typical conversation with a Moroccan friend, the problems of coming to terms with uncomfortable truths:

“Why don’t you write about the civilized people here, instead of the most backward?”

I suppose it is natural for them to want to see themselves presented to the outside world in the most “advanced” light possible. They find it perverse of a Westerner to be interested only in the dissimilarities between their culture and his. However, that’s the way some of us Westerners are.

Not long ago I wrote on the character of the North African Moslem. An illiterate Moroccan friend wanted to know what was in it, and so, in a running translation into Moghrebi, I read him certain passages. His comment was terse:

“That’s shameful.”

“Why?” I demanded.

“Because you’ve written about people just as they are.”

“For us that’s not shameful.”

“For us it is. You’ve made us like animals. You’ve said that only a few of us can read or write.”

“Isn’t that true?”

“Of course not! We can all read and write, just like you. And we would, if only we’d had lessons.”

I thought this interesting and told it to a Moslem lawyer, assuming it would amuse him. It did not.

“He’s quite right,” he answered. “Truth is not what you perceive with your senses, but what you feel in your heart.”

“But there is such a thing as objective truth.” I cried. “Or don’t you attach importance to that?”

He smiled tolerantly. “Not in the way you do, for its own sake. That is statistical truth. We are interested in that, yes, but only as a means of getting to the real truth underneath. For us there is very little visible truth in the world these days.”

However specious this kind of talk may seem, it is clear to me that the lawyer was voicing a feeling common to the great mass of city dwellers here, educated or not. (75–6)

As R. Kevin Lacey informs us, Bowles was also attacked on the essay “Mustapha and His Friends” in *THAG* by Ralph Coury (in Lacey’s own book, *Mirrors on the Maghrib*, 1995) on the grounds of its Orientalism, portraying “Moroccans and Muslims more generally as lying, thieving, scheming, manipulative, aggressive, illogical, consumed with hatred of women, and lacking in self-consciousness as a result of a kind of infantilism”. (Lacey 2005, 106) The result of these attacks was that he withdrew this essay from the next edition of *Their Heads Are Green*.

(*ibid.*) Another accusation of Orientalism comes from Mohamed El Kouche regarding an interview in which he said:

[R]ight away when I got here [in Morocco] I said to myself “Ah, this is the way people used to be, the way my own ancestors were thousands of years ago. The Natural Man. Basic Humanity. Let’s see how they are.” It all seemed quite natural to me. They haven’t evolved the same way, so far, as we have and I wasn’t surprised to find that there were whole sections missing in their “psyche” [...] (Bowles, interview with Jeffrey Bailey, 130) ⁹

Mohamed ElKouche argues that Bowles’s viewpoint is Orientalist, or at least it was, as this comment came upon his arrival in North Africa:

Needless to say, Bowles’ reference to Moroccans as “Natural” and “Basic” humans, who have not yet evolved in the same way as Westerners, is quite racist and full of the ideological reverberations of the Darwinian evolutionary theory. But what is more significant and pertinent to our topic is his statement, “right away” after arriving in Tangier, “Let’s see how they are.” For this statement reveals quite unambiguously how Bowles put himself from the outset in the position of what Mary Louise Pratt calls “the ‘seeing man’ [...] whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess.” ¹⁰ Such “*positional* superiority,”¹¹ as Edward Said aptly labels it, implies that Bowles was functioning throughout his literary career as the observer or “representer,” whereas his cultural Others were mere passive objects of his observation and discursive representation. (In Khalid Amine et al 2005, 118)

Hassan Bourara, who has studied his journalism in detail, also comes to the conclusion that Bowles’s work is inevitably Orientalist, and that he has shown his true colours in his travel-writing. In comparing Bowles with John Steinbeck, whose novels also drew on his journalistic experience, the two factors of “history and honesty” (111) in writing come up:

In other words, in addition to its value as historical documentation, journalism, being an explicit and “unmediated” expression of its author’s mind and point of view, may be the only

⁹ “The Art of Fiction LXVII: Paul Bowles”, *Conversations with Paul Bowles*, ed. Gena Dagel Caponi, 123.

¹⁰ ElKouche’s note 21 refers to Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 1992, 7.

¹¹ His note 22 refers to Said’s *Orientalism*, 7.

“honest” record of an author’s personal opinions. In the case of Bowles, for example, the journalistic writings stand out as a point of reference more reliable than the interviews, which depend a great deal on the competence of the interviewers and the extent to which they are willing to dispute the author’s claims. (*ibid.*)

The point about Bowles’s “honesty” might be undermined, however, by two other factors. Firstly, Bourara says that Bowles often wrote what people wanted to read or hear, in that his tone and attitude and even subject-matter and “ideological bent” (61) were suited to the magazine in which he was to be published, otherwise he might not have been accepted and paid, and Bowles admitted that the journalistic work was his bread and butter, that paid for his time to write stories. Negative impressions are the ones that sell, says Bourara (59). Secondly, a different genre altogether, the novel does not require such “honesty”, thus Bowles has every right to claim freedom of expression.

Later on, we shall see how other scholars defend Bowles on the issue of Orientalism. Indeed, Bowles suggests that the term “exotic” should not lump all non-western peoples together. An extract from Bowles’s foreword to the collection reveals his attitude towards Africa in the 1960s, and rather contradicts the naïve impression he gave of himself in Chapter 7 of the autobiography. Henceforward I cross reference the two works to reveal Bowles’s dilemma. In the foreword to *THAG*, he shows that a landscape in itself has no magic. Indeed, we would have thought his native America had landscapes to match the Algerian coast. Landscape can only be exciting through the promise it holds out concerning its people:

If people and their manner of living were alike everywhere, there would not be much point in moving from one place to another. With few exceptions, landscape alone is of insufficient interest to warrant the effort it takes to see it. Even the works of man, unless they are being used in his daily living, have a way of losing their meaning, and take on the qualities of decoration. What makes Istanbul worthwhile to the outsider is not the presence of the mosques and covered *souks*, but the fact that they still function as such And North Africa without its tribes, inhabited by, let us say, the Swiss, would be merely a rather more barren California. (*THAG*, 7)

This is the view of an old hand, a long-term expatriate, so perhaps Bowles was right to try to reconstruct his initial enthusiasm. His first experience of a North African town was Oran: “It was hot and dusty, and

to me, beautiful and terrible.” (WS, 125) These are extreme words, but convey the impact the place had on him after New York and Paris: he wrote synaesthetically that the city “reeked of light” (126), and that the sun, the heat and the cicadas delighted him. Not only the sun in the sky, but the absolute silence had a great impact on him:

Immediately when you arrive in the Sahara, for the first or the tenth time, you notice the stillness. An incredible, absolute silence prevails outside the towns; and within, even in busy places like the markets, there is a hushed quality in the air, as if the quiet were a conscious force which, resenting the intrusion of sound, minimizes and disperses it straightaway. Then there is the sky, compared to which all other skies seem faint-hearted efforts. Solid and luminous, it is always the focal point of the landscape. (THAG, 119)

On the other hand, his early impressions of the people were that Moroccans were “excited and noisy” (WS, 126); they got into passionate arguments which often led to physical violence, as for example, after a football match (130). But his feeling was that there was a sort of artificiality about this, he described them as being like actors playing a part before a non-existent audience (127). Of course, he was the audience, and he knew all about play-acting, through his need to hide his interests and feelings from his father. This excitedness appears to begin at the Pyrenees, however.

Passing through Ceuta, he recorded his impression of the Spanish: “They’re like a lot of Italians who’ve gone raving mad.” (126) But this was the early 1930s, after the abdication of King Alfonso XIII and the start of the Republic, so excitement and apprehension were naturally in the air. Even when he went to Spain in 1932, the view he gave was what one might call a “folkloric” one, noting the superficial characteristics of the stereotype of Spaniard:

That early spring of 1932 in Spain was a time of collective happiness on a vast scale. In every town there was rejoicing; people were singing and dancing in each *plazuela*. The air crackled with *alegría*, and there were palms and flowers in the festive decorations that lined the streets. On the tables of the cafés they had put small signs advising that it was forbidden to give or receive gratuities. This prohibition was directly related to the general euphoria. It appealed to the common man’s inflexible sense of *honor*, which we define as “Spanish pride.” Spain was alive then; it has never lived since. (WS, 147)

A committed anti-Fascist¹², Bowles wrote his autobiography when Franco was still in power, in fact, four years before his death and the transition to democracy. But Bowles did live long enough to make many trips over to democratic Spain under King Juan Carlos I before his death in 1999 (though so often it was for medical treatment for Jane.)

Moving down from Spanish Ceuta, Tetuan was similar in many respects at the time: “the impression of confusion and insanity was redoubled.” (126) The international city of Tangier, just then under neither the French nor the Spanish, and not yet absorbed into Morocco, was confusing in a different way, it seemed labyrinthine:

If I said that Tangier struck me as a dream city, I should mean it in the strict sense. Its topography was rich in prototypical dream scenes: covered streets like corridors with doors opening into rooms on each side, hidden terraces high above the sea, streets consisting only of steps, dark impasses, small squares built on sloping terrain so that they looked like ballet sets designed in false perspective, with alleys leading off in several directions; as well as the classical dream equipment of tunnels, ramparts, ruins, dungeons, and cliffs. The climate was both violent and languorous. The August wind hissed in the palms and rocked the eucalyptus trees and rattled the canebrakes that bordered the streets. Tangier had not yet entered the dirty era of automotive traffic. There were, however, several taxis stationed along with the carriages in the Grand Socco, one of which Aaron and I took each evening to get home after dinner. Just as the absence of traffic made it possible to sit in a café on the Place de France and hear only the cicadas in the trees, so the fact that the radio had not yet arrived in Morocco meant that one could also sit in a café in the center of the Medina and hear only the sound of many hundreds of human voices. The city was self-sufficient and clean, a doll’s metropolis whose social and economic life long ago had been frozen in an enforced perpetual status quo by the international administration and its efficient police. There was no crime; no one yet thought of not respecting the European, whose presence was considered an asset to the community. (This was not entirely true with regard to the Spaniards, of whom there were so many thousands that they scarcely counted as Europeans.) (WS, 128-9)

¹² At around that time, and when things came to a head in Spain at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, Bowles defined himself as a Stalinist sympathiser (WS, 21). Indeed, as Sawyer-Lauçanno informs us, Bowles became a member of the Communist Party in 1938 and later, when he tried to resign, he was not allowed to (224).

If Tangier seemed enigmatic to Bowles, Fez was even more so: “everything was ten times stranger and bigger and brighter.” (WS, 130) So Bowles had much to learn and he sought to learn it through travel, meeting people and observing customs. Not all his friends and acquaintances were of a like mind, so they often left Bowles to it alone. What Paul found exotic, Aaron Copland did not, he had already had similar encounters with different ethnic groups back home in Brooklyn. (WS, 130) So when Copland returned to Germany, Paul’s friend Harry Dunham came to stay with him in Fez. Dunham was a photographer and wanted to visit exotic locations to take pictures, but he was rich, gay, and rather a racist, so Bowles has this to say about him:

[...] he would refuse to sit next to a Moroccan, for fear of catching vermin. Yet he thought nothing of being crowded in among French workmen who were infinitely less clean than the Moroccans. (WS, 131)

In terms of cleanliness, it does seem the Moroccans were generally cleaner than the Europeans. Abdelkader, whom Bowles later took to Paris to work as a valet for Dunham, was horrified by the dirtiness of Tonny and Anita’s house in Tangier (WS, 139). In turn, they suspected his honesty and the true motives of Dunham and Abdelkader’s desire to be together. In Marrakech, Bowles stayed at a hotel run by “a typically colonial couple who thought it their duty to warn us continually of the dishonesty and savagery in Morocco.” (WS, 133) Through a friend, John Widdecombe, Bowles met a man called Fletcher, who was apparently “appalled by Morocco” (WS, 173). They both witnessed a deformed man apparently transform himself into a goat, and had opposing reactions: the one, horror; the other, fascination. Bowles gradually learned more about Moroccans. He was struck by their “boundless self-pity” (WS, 153), especially when they compared themselves to foreigners. In spite of the economic inequality here, Bowles found in them a great desire to please Europeans, even if they could not follow up this desire with concrete actions. One day, Bowles went to catch a bus from Marrakech to Taroudant, only to find that there was no such bus, the man who told him was “just being nice” (WS, 173). When he went to work for Colonel Williams of the American equivalent of the RSPCA, a job involving protecting donkeys from abuse, he learned Williams’s opinion: “All Spaniards were idiots, all Moroccans thieves, and all French intolerably rude.” (WS, 174)

Bowles was adamant that he should not be considered a traveller in the sense of a tourist: “Now that all trace of charm has vanished from

the entire area, the Moroccans are making Agadir into a tourist center. Why not? Tourists will go anywhere.” (WS, 152) He did, in fact, have a rather neo-colonial nostalgia –reprehensible to some– for the “old” Morocco or the “old” Ceylon.¹³ One wonders how far he agreed with his western protagonists of *The Spider’s House* in not wanting things to change. In *Let It Come Down*, progress, in the sense of modernisation, was abhorrent to Daisy, as it was a levelling process that ended in sameness. But Bowles implies that there is only sameness if you do not know how to look properly. The exotic charm is there in changeless things that are available for all to see:

When I meet fellow Americans travelling about here in North Africa, I ask them: “What did you expect to find here?” Almost without exception, regardless of the way they expressed it, the answer, reduced to its simplest terms, is: a sense of mystery. They expect mystery, and they find it, since fortunately it is a quality difficult to extinguish all in a moment. They find it in the patterns of sunlight filtering through the latticework that covers the souks, in the unexpected turnings and tunnels of the narrow streets, in the women whose features still go hidden beneath the litham, in the secretiveness of the architecture, which is such that even if the front door of a house is open, it is impossible to see inside. If they listen as well as look, they find it too in the song the lone camel driver sings by his fire before dawn, in the calling of the muezzins at night, when their voices are like bright beams of sound piercing the silence, and, most often, in the dry beat of the darbouka, the hand drum played by the women everywhere, in the great city houses and in the humblest country hut. (THAG, 68–9)

1.4 The contribution of North African experiences to themes and methods in Bowles’s fiction

Bowles wanted to get beneath the surface, and he thought that the only way to do this was to get an introduction to Moroccan life through making friends amongst the locals. In Fez, he got to know Abdallah Drissi, a descendant of Moulay Idriss, founder of Morocco. He and his brother were very rich and had a labyrinthine house. Extending their hospitality to the foreigner, Bowles was able to ascertain, to his amazement, that amongst the “slaves” they had to do their bidding were groups of girl slaves –twenty-two of them– locked away. (WS, 132)

¹³ He recognized that in his letters home from Ceylon he must have sounded “colonial.” (Spencer Carr, *PB: A Life*, 234 & 401)

This experience served Bowles for his first novel about North Africa, *The Sheltering Sky*. In the late 1940s in Tangier, Bowles met and introduced to his wife Jane a woman named Cherifa, whom he described as “a wonderful savage girl with a laugh like a savage and who spoke only Moghrebi.” (PB to VSC, Tangier, December 22, 1992, *PB: A Life*, 215 & 400). Bowles thought Jane would be intrigued by Cherifa, and, unfortunately for them, she was. The relationship led to much turmoil. The master–servant relationship between Westerners and the locals was going to be problematic for them. A visitor to Tangier with Truman Capote at that time, Jack Dunphy, observed: “Of course one could always simplify the whole thing, as the British seem to do, and look on most of the citizens of Tangier as servants.” But such a view was sad and made the Westerner feel even more of an outsider. (*PB: A Life*, 227) The theme would be treated more than once by Bowles in his short fiction, as we shall see in our analysis of this genre in Bowles’s work. For his part, some time later, in Fez, Bowles met a sixteen-year-old youth named Ahmed ben Driss el Yacoubi. Like Cherifa, he lay claim to being a *cherif*, a direct descendant, through both parents, of the Prophet Mohammed. In el Yacoubi, Bowles had found the exotic “primitive” he had been looking for:

“I was determined to know him better. He was primitive, and his reactions were those of a primitive. That was what fascinated me. I don’t think I’d ever known anyone so primitive, and when we became better acquainted, I encouraged him not to lose that quality.” (*PB: A Life*, 217 & 400)

Bowles was astonished one day to find Yacoubi sitting on the floor in front of a drawing he had just finished and playing his flute to it to “blow life into it,” rather as God had blown over the clay figure of Adam to bring humanity to life. (218)

His early work was devoted to the cultural clash of Westerners and locals, it was only later that Bowles wrote wholly “Moroccan” works like the stories in *One Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*. Later on, indeed, when he did translations, the mechanics of this process brought him closer to his subject:

His translations from Maghrebi were well received in the West and in demand by various publications. Translations, furthermore, kept him in tune with Morocco and the Moroccans, and gave him an insider’s perspective on the workings of the Moroccan mind [...] (*IS*, 364)

But it was his acquaintances at the beginning, both Moroccans and Westerners, who provided models or material. In French Algeria Bowles met the American George Turner, who willingly accompanied him on a camel trip. Turner provided the model for the “third party” in the triangle of protagonists in *The Sheltering Sky*.¹⁴

Another source for material was his reading, though in his autobiography, he tends to refer more to literary texts that have had an impact upon him, than encyclopaedic or other didactic works. He attempted to go into the experience with an open mind in order to avoid misconceptions, but the curiosity and the energy were there in abundance to lead him on:

My curiosity about alien cultures was avid and obsessive. I had a placid belief that it was good for me to live in the midst of people whose motives I did not understand; this unreasoned conviction was clearly an attempt to legitimize my curiosity. (WS, 297)

Most readers would not ask writers to justify their curiosity about the different. Bowles’s curiosity, and perhaps good luck, led him to stumble onto important material from another source –not from acquaintances or books, but from events he happened to come across in his daily wanderings. His peripatetic lifestyle –unimpeded at this point in his life by domestic constraints– his rushing at life “without stopping”, and his adventurous nature, brought him into contact with external, though usually hidden, manifestations of Moroccan life.

In his autobiography he describes a street procession in Fez, where the participants all appear to be in a mystical trance:

I had suspected that someday I would stumble onto a scene which would show me the pulse of the place, if not the exposed, beating heart of its magic, but it was a tremendous surprise to find it first in the open street. Yet there they were, several thousand people near Bab Mahrouk, stamping, heaving, shuddering, gyrating, and chanting, all of them aware only of the overpowering need to achieve ecstasy. [...] it was a procession, moving at the rate of approximately a hundred feet an hour [...] (WS, 150-1)

Bowles was privileged to witness a local brotherhood in action. He tells us that more than half the population belonged then, in the 1930s, to one or another of these Islamic confraternities. Through such experiences, their adepts were enabled to achieve transcendence of

¹⁴ Although eventually called Turner in *The Sheltering Sky*, in an early version of the novel he was Turner.

normal consciousness without going outside the limits of their religion. Given Bowles's youthful experiences of transcending his normal consciousness, especially in the two strange episodes he found himself involved in over the burglary and the shop door, it is not surprising that he was particularly intrigued by this. But there were two novelties here: firstly, the illicit nature, for him as a Western observer, and secondly, their collective, rather than solitary, experience:

For most educated Moroccans the mere existence of the cults is an abomination; with the emergence of nationalism they were suppressed more or less successfully for two decades or more. When once again they were sanctioned, care was taken to see that the observances took place hidden from the sight of non-Moslems. Visitors might ridicule the participants, it was said, or consider Moroccans a backward people if they witnessed such spectacles. (WS, 150)

Given Bowles's sympathy towards the culture, he was not the sort of observer to ridicule the spectacle or see it as evidence of the culture's backwardness. Years later, when Bowles got a grant to record local Moroccan music before it disappeared, he came up against some opposition. Accompanied by Christopher Wanklyn, a Canadian friend who could handle the equipment, and a friend of his later years in Tangier, Mohammed Larbi, he travelled the country in search of unspoilt, unwesternised music, but found many Moroccan officials disapproving. Certainly, without Larbi, they would have got nowhere: "Christopher spoke good Moghrebi, but he was a Nazarene. It is always better to have a Moslem with one, no matter where one goes in Morocco." (WS, 345) The ironic thing is that it was the officials themselves, not the Westerners, who saw the ethnic music as backward:

These men (officials) seemed to consider us part of a conspiracy to present Morocco as a backward nation, a land of savages. It was they themselves who used the expression *une musique de sauvages*; feeling as they did about it, they could be expected to consider it their patriotic duty to see to it that the shameful sounds made by their countrymen did not reach alien ears. (WS, 346)

To return to the second point, that of the individual or the group: a loner in his childhood and youth, and in some ways, always, throughout his adult life, Bowles had to admit another dimension to his life, and the sight of the procession moving along as if it were one single entity, seems to have had a profound impact upon his view of the cosmos:

Here for the first time I was made aware that a human being is not an entity and that his interpretation of exterior phenomena is meaningless unless it is shared by the other members of his cultural group. (*WS*, 151)

In fact, these two aspects, the occult, exotic side of native culture, and the transcendence of self, are closely knit. It is important to consider his working methods in relation to material and treatment of it, as he himself saw it in his autobiography. After early “success”¹⁵ with poetry and musical scores for theatre and film, in the 1940s he turned to fiction-writing, partly through the influence of his wife Jane. Both North Africa and Morocco offered him material. But rather than record, as he was to do with the music, with the aid of a Rockefeller research grant to record indigenous music, he was more interested in adapting the “primitive” and making it his own. He used at least two methods. One was to imitate the Surrealists’ approach:

I had been reading some ethnographic books with texts from the Arapesh or from the Tarahumara given in word-for-word translation. Little by little the desire came to me to invent my own myths, adopting the point of view of the primitive mind. 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 the experiments and then tales of animals disguised as “basic human” beings. One rainy Sunday I awoke late, put a thermos of coffee by my bedside, and began to write another of these myths. No one disturbed me, and I wrote on until I had finished it. I read it over, called it “The Scorpion,” and decided that it could be shown to others. When *View* published it, I received compliments and went on inventing myths. The subject matter of the myths soon turned from “primitive” to contemporary, but the objectives and behavior of the protagonists remained the same as in the beast legends. It was through this unexpected little gate that I crept back into the land of fiction writing. (*WS*, 261–2)

This method one might call more theoretical, in that it involved imitating a literary style. The other method of composition was to “abandon conscious control” through the giving up of his mind to either arbitrariness or to the effects of narcotics. Bowles found he could create

¹⁵ Not in Gertrude Stein’s view!

in these conditions once the novel or the piece he was working on already had a plan or a structure. As he explained in the autobiography:

I had already chosen my method regarding the selection of descriptive detail. The structure and character of the landscape would be supplied by imagination (that is, by memory). I would reinforce each such scene with details reported from life during the day of writing, regardless of whether the resulting juxtaposition was apposite or not. I never knew what I was going to write on the following day because I had not yet lived through the day. (WS, 277–8)

Here, he was talking about his first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, whose conception had come about in his mind on a bus travelling to Madison Square. He knew he had to write a novel set in the Sahara, where the “sheltering palms” of the popular song from before the First World War, “Down Among the Sheltering Palms”, in fact gave no shelter, as equally, the sky gave no shelter. (WS, 275)

This method, of letting the arbitrary events of each day govern the detail of the background of North African life in which the events are set, was used only in this novel. The technique seems to contradict what he wrote to his mother about the need to isolate oneself from the day-to-day in order to live in the reality of the novel. But we assume that the difference is that the immediate surroundings of quotidian life in the chosen milieu of the exotic North Africa are “invited” in and not rejected as a hindrance and a distraction. His later novels about Moroccan life, *Let It Come Down* and *The Spider’s House*, were written from memory on board ship or in different places.

But the use of narcotics to release the mind from the constraints of everyday life was a constant in his methodology. As Sawyer-Lauçanno tells us, the desire to experiment with altered states of mind was not new: “[T]he tendency was already present at the age of seventeen [...] the aspect of self-preoccupation, particularly with exploring the terrain of the creative consciousness [...] altered states of consciousness – induced through drowsiness, fever, delirium, or drunkenness– as a method of entry into the creative process.” (IS, 51) Having tried opium and rejected it: “it only gave me a headache” (WS, 148), he learned how to ingest *majoun* in just the right doses and conditions to be able to control the desired effects. He tells us he ate *majoun* then lay in the sun and the resulting experience enabled him to write the death scenes of Port Moresby in *The Sheltering Sky*:

I lay absolutely still, feeling myself being lifted, rising to meet the sun. [...] Very consciously I had always avoided writing about death because I saw it as a difficult subject to treat with anything approaching the proper style; it seemed reasonable, therefore, to hand the job over to the subconscious. It is certain that the *majoun* provided a solution totally unlike whatever I should have found without it. (WS, 278–9)

Later on, in the 1960s, he combined the arbitrariness of unrelated factors and aspects with *kif* smoking to produce a collection of stories: *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*. One needs an insider's knowledge to understand the reference to the *kif* in this picturesque title, as we shall see later in the study of this collection. Paul Bowles says that there is a Moghrebi proverb --perhaps best known among *kif* smokers-- which runs: "A pipe of *kif* before breakfast gives a man the strength of a hundred camels in the courtyard." (WS, 358) The pot-pourri method is described quite explicitly:

That year [c.1960] I was working on articles, but only in the daytime. At night, after Jane and the maids had gone to bed, I enjoyed myself writing stories about Moroccans. The pleasure consisted in inventing a new problem and finding a way to solve it. The problem I set myself was not unlike the one described by Raymond Roussel in *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*. Let us say that I started with four disparate fragments –anecdotes, quotations, or simple clauses deprived of context– gleaned from separate sources and involving, if anything, entirely different sets of characters. The task was to invent a connecting narrative tissue which would make all four of the original elements equally supportive of the resulting construction. (WS, 347)

Writing of the composition of *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*, he said:

It seemed to me that the subject of *kif* smoking, wholly apart from the desirable limiting of possibilities it implied, would provide an effective cement with which to put together the various fragments. (WS, 347)

The *kif* "limits the possibilities" but at the same time opens up other possibilities. *Kif* smoking had played a significant role in the dénouement of *Let It Come Down* and was incidental to *The Spider's House*, but the stories of *A Hundred Camels* are the first to show "the

power of kif” in Moroccan society among the Moroccans themselves. According to Sawyer-Lauçanno:

Although Bowles had been smoking kif for years, it was only in the late 1950s that it became a regular habit. By the early 1960s, when this sequence of stories was written, Bowles was using cannabis not just as a stimulus for writing, but as “a way out of the phenomenological world.” He had internalized the Moroccan concept of “two worlds”, one ruled by inexorable natural laws, and the other, the kif world, in which each person perceives “reality” according to the projections of his own essence, the state of consciousness in which the elements of the physical universe are automatically rearranged by cannabis to suit the requirements of the individual. (*IS*, 358)¹⁶

For Bowles, kif was a “passageway to enlightenment.” But some of his friends and acquaintances were less certain of the efficaciousness of using kif to facilitate the creative process. Gore Vidal, normally a great admirer of Bowles’s work, was not at all impressed by the *A Hundred Camels* stories. Later, as we examine them, I hope to show that technically, at least, they do not deserve as dismissive a view as Vidal suggests. Sawyer-Lauçanno thinks that Bowles was by then so immersed in Moroccan life that the tales read as if they had been written by a Moroccan:

This, of course, was partially what Bowles was aiming at, but in addition he was attempting to convey the central role and naturalness of using kif within Moroccan culture; had the stories featured kif-smoking Westerners, particularly in 1961, they would have of necessity been flavored with a high degree of exoticism. This was exactly the opposite of Bowles’s intention. In some respects, his goal was to show by way of implied contrast the difference between a society which relies on cannabis as a release from the pressures of daily life, and one in which alcohol fills that function. For Bowles, the major difference is that “alcohol blurs the personality by loosening inhibitions. The drinker feels, temporarily at least, a sense of participation.” Kif, on the other hand, pushes the individual into “contemplation and inaction.” (*IS*, 360)¹⁷

¹⁶ “A way out of the phenomenological world”: Bowles, conversation with Sawyer-Lauçanno, July 7, 1985; “requirements of the individual”: preface, *A Hundred Camels*, ix.

¹⁷ Sawyer-Lauçanno’s quotations of Bowles here are taken from “A Man Must Not Be Very Moslem,” in *Their Heads Are Green*, 71–2.

Part of the exotic nature of the kif-smoking by Westerners was its illegality. An anti-kif law was passed in Morocco in 1959 that made it a crime either to buy or to be found with kif in one's possession. (*Paul Bowles: A Life*, 287) Expatriates were associated with excess and leading the locals into trouble. The questioning of the Westerners' reputation came to a head for the Bowleses in 1957 as Yacoubi was arrested for taking indecent liberties with a fourteen-year-old German boy:

By late in the year, it was clear that the local police were hoping to drive out as many expatriates as possible, using their "personal life-styles" as an excuse. Moroccans such as Yacoubi, who seemed to have close ties to the expatriate community, were also under increased suspicion, not only because of suspected "immorality," but, more importantly, because they were suspected of being pro-French, or at the very least, not 100 percent supportive of independence. (*IS*, 341)

Paul and Jane Bowles left Tangier the following year, as not only had he been questioned by the police, but he feared that Jane would be interrogated over her relationship with Cherifa. Paul had known of Jane's lesbianism even before he married her: "Jane was set up as a lesbian and that was her way of life." (*IS*, 185 & 451: "Thomson, Conversation with author, March 6, 1986".) Their marriage and relationship was not an orthodox one: "Both Bowles and Jane had already established themselves as independent individuals and both intended to continue as free agents. With this understanding, they reasoned, they could have the best of both worlds: companionship and freedom to be themselves." (*IS*, 185) For both writers, no doubt this independence was a strict necessity for them to be able to live in the worlds of their artistic creations.

Bowles had never viewed sex as an overriding motivation of his life. One of his closest friends from the early years, Bruce Morrissette, recorded: "He was basically antisexual. [...] Interested in people, yes, but not sexually. Never." (*IS*, 50 & 435: Morrissette, Conversation with author, February 13, 1987) Sawyer-Lauçanno, who talked to Morrissette, is of the opinion that Bowles maintained this attitude throughout his life. It seems that towards the end of his life, Bowles was more willing to acknowledge what was an open secret about his sexual preferences, and not only opened up in conversation to Virginia Spencer Carr, but allowed her to question his friends and acquaintances. Her biography came out in 2004, five years after his death, and long after the

deaths of his parents and wife, Jane. Spencer Carr reveals that there was another book that had had an even greater impact upon Bowles than Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican*: Proust's 1927 *Le Temps Retrouvé*, the last two volumes of his epic *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

Carr relates one of Bowles's many sea-journeys across the Atlantic (it was boats for him, not planes.) This one was a return journey from North Africa to the United States in 1935, so he was aged 25, not in the first flush of youth, and the only book he had to while away the time was the Proust. The exact passage is as follows:

The one book he had brought with him was Marcel Proust's *Le Temps Retrouvé* [*Time Regained*], which he dreaded finishing. "For that reason I read sparingly, and reread rather than going ahead. Gertrude says everyone during his youth finds one great book which influences more than any other; hers was *Anna Karenina*. Mine was *Le Temps Retrouvé*, which I read in French." (*PB: A Life*, 118–9)¹⁸

Marcel's double life caused by his sexual tendencies in the culture of the time is obviously one of the aspects of the novel that must have appealed to Bowles. As Sawyer-Lauçanno points out:

Despite the Yacoubi incident, one's sexual preference, while still a matter of gossip in the European quarter, was not generally a concern of the authorities. As a result, the city spawned a fairly large gay community, many of whose members were writers. Indeed, in residence at various times in Tangier in the 1950s and 1960s were a number of American gay writers, including Burroughs, Gysin, Edouard Roditi, Tennessee Williams, Allen Ginsberg, Alfred Chester, and Capote.

It was with these writers that Bowles most associated. Like them, Bowles also wrote about homosexuality, but unlike them, despite his talent for exceedingly effective, even shocking description, he never wrote graphically about gay sex. Also, in contrast to many in this group who were intent on proclaiming their homosexuality to the world through their writing, Bowles declined to define himself in terms of his sexual identity. That he gravitated toward gay men is undeniable, but even in the company of homosexuals, Bowles maintained his long-standing position that one's own sexuality was not a subject for public discussion. (*IS*, 353)

¹⁸ Note 37, at the end, reads: "PB to VSC, Atlanta, June 3, 1994", 389). For a study of those aspects of the novel that would have interested Bowles, see Wallhead 2008.

So Bowles was never as shocking in his writing on sexual matters as some of his friends, but he could be shockingly graphic about the themes that interested him. After the success of *The Sheltering Sky*, John Lehmann considered himself fortunate to be Bowles's English publisher. But he had some qualms about the possible reception of some of the more violent of the short stories, particularly "The Delicate Prey" and "A Distant Episode." In fact, however, Bowles's third North African novel, *The Spider's House*, sold less well precisely because it contained fewer "excesses and eccentricities" (IS, 326), and Lehmann acknowledged that this "shocking streak" was part of Bowles's genius:

Lehmann was convinced that Bowles's stories were without parallel in modern literature, "a gift that general opinion is likely to fight against to the last because he has the quality that geniuses, great and small, so often display, of being profoundly disturbing to the deeper conventional assumptions and patterns of value, and not merely shocking to established codes of behavior already more or less abandoned by free-thinking people." (PB: *A Life*, 235 & 401: "John Lehmann, *The Ample Proposition: Autobiography III*, pp. 112–13".)

Lehmann was not wrong about the reception of "The Delicate Prey." Bowles had heard a tale from the local military commander in Timimoun, and it had stuck in his imagination. (IS, 267) He wrote it up and it came out in 1951 in a collection of his other stories, but with an unexpected title, giving it prominence, a change of which Bowles did not approve: *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories*. "Shocked, scandalized and disapproving. And all wrong!" was Bowles's reaction as he quoted their verdicts. (PB: *A Life*, 239) The American critics reacted more hysterically to the story than the British, using words like *decay*, *putrescent*, *revolting*, *loathsome*, *horror*, *evil*, *sensationalism*, *disintegration*. The British focused more on form and style than on content, and spoke of *strength*, *directness* and *being left breathless* (240). In an attempt to counteract some of the negative criticism in the American reviews, Tennessee Williams sought to explain Bowles's motivations and aspirations, justifying him by endowing him with credibility and authority through association with the French existential writers:

Bowles is apparently the only American writer whose work reflects the extreme spiritual dislocation (and a philosophical adjustment to it) of our immediate times. He has "an organic

continuity” with the present in a way that is commensurate with the great French trio of Camus, Genet, and Sartre. These seventeen stories are the exploration of a cavern of individual sensibilities, and fortunately the cavern is a deep one containing a great deal that is worth exploring. Nowhere in any writing that I can think of has the separateness of the one human psyche been depicted more vividly and shockingly. Even in the stories where this isolation is most shockingly, even savagely stated and underlined, the reader may sense an inverted kind of longing and tenderness for the things whose absence the story concerns. (241 & 402: Tennessee Williams, “The Human Psyche–Alone,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, December 23, 1950, 19–20.)

Bowles had noticed early on that the Moroccans were even more obsessed with death than their European, especially existential, counterparts. He wrote in his autobiography:

The Moroccans claim that the full participation in life demands the regular contemplation of death. I agree without reserve. Unfortunately I am unable to conceive of my own death without setting it in the far more terrible *mise en scène* of old age. [...] Of course this is not at all what the Moroccans mean by the contemplation of death; they would consider my imaginings a particularly contemptible form of fear. One culture’s therapy is another culture’s torture. (WS, 367)

That Bowles should consider old age a form of torture is quite understandable when we remember what he went through on account of the ill health of Jane. However, he was to live to a ripe old age (eighty-eight), without health concerns being such a drawback. A constant motif from his early writing onwards is that the outsider is vulnerable at whatever age. As Sawyer-Lauçanno explains:

“A Distant Episode” is also the first enunciation of what would become a major theme in Bowles’s work, that of the interloping Westerner who confronts an alien culture and inevitably comes up short, realizing too late that his “civilization” cannot protect him. All of the novels and a good many of the short stories revolve around this central concern. Sometimes the consequences are not so dire as in “A Distant Episode,” but even in the less obviously dark tales, there is an underlying sense of the impossibility for those of us in the West to understand, let alone penetrate, a “less civilized” culture. At the time, Bowles claims, he did not think of

the fiction as having any consistent unifying principle. Nonetheless, “A Distant Episode” can be seen as a first and crucial step in Bowles’s development of this central preoccupation. (*IS*, 249)

If we go back to Bowles’s childhood, we can find entries in his diary about his early preoccupations. They are illness and death, travel and adventure, the invention of names, both for his characters and places. (*IS*, 19) Thus Bowles never wavered in his obsessions and in his inclinations towards themes he thought would make good stories. Sawyer-Lauçanno states from the very beginning of his biographical study: “Possibly the most striking feature of the narrative [the diary], though, is the adeptness with which this young writer is able to fabricate a story that mixes, rather convincingly, the most fantastic adventures with commonplace reality.” (*ibid.*)

Bowles was born with a talent and pursued its development incessantly and during a long and successful career in both the media of music and fiction. He lived a life of adventure which fed his thinking and his writing. His works fell out of fashion for a period, as Sawyer-Lauçanno concludes:

There is always a certain whimsical quality to an artist’s popularity, but Bowles’s decline has some demonstrable causes. Perhaps the major reason for his inability to excite publishers or readers about his work, either new or old, had to do with the fiction itself. The American expatriate as an interesting character, in life or in art, milked so well by the “lost generation” of the 1930s, was no longer in vogue. Even Hemingway, the leader of that generation, had fallen temporarily from grace; and while others, like Mailer or Capote or Vidal, changed their styles to fit the times, Bowles did not. (*IS*, 379)

It was not that Bowles was stubborn, conceited or abhorred change, quite the reverse, he lived in change, hence there is no single view of his identity:

When Michael Lee interviewed Bowles for *Trafika*, a journal published in Prague, he asked if Bowles ever consciously tried to construct an image of himself for others. “No, my God! I probably repel some people, attract others, interest some, leave others cold. But to imagine that one has a fixed image which doesn’t change? ... One is whatever one is at the moment, but it doesn’t mean anything. One has a name, but the name really has nothing to do

with oneself. It's exterior. Is it important to be conscious of one's identity? I don't think it matters As soon as one gets the concept that one has an image, then one is hooked with the idea, which I don't think is very healthy." (PB: *A Life*, 338 & 413: "PB to Michael Lee, 'A Conversation with Paul Bowles,' in *Trafika: An International Literary Review* 1994, 125–41.)

Ultimately, we must find Bowles in his books, where there is inevitably autobiographical material, however camouflaged. He acknowledged this when in interview with Oliver Evans, explaining how much of himself he had put into *The Sheltering Sky*:

One's first novel often writes itself: everything comes out in it and it's generally the best novel that one writes. In that sense it was autobiographical, the one I'd been hatching for ten or fifteen years without knowing it. But the next one I planned carefully. It was completely surface-built, down to the details of the décor, choice of symbolic materials on the walls, and so on. It was an adventure story, after all, in which the details had to be realistic. The entire book was constructed to lead to an impossible situation at the end.¹⁹

But Bowles never wrote about himself, we find him in his books in a different way. We find his experiences translated into the lives of others, Westerners and locals, all vulnerable. Since he writes about the big issues –life, death, desire, work, the environment, hostile or otherwise– his writing may have temporarily gone out of fashion, but it will survive.

At least it does continue to prompt lively polemic, which is always a good sign that a writer's work has not gone stagnant. We saw in this chapter how Bowles was pilloried for Orientalism by such as ElKouche and Bourara, but he does have his defenders. Hisham Aidi of the Middle East Institute, Columbia University, wrote his undergraduate thesis on the subject of Orientalism in the writings of Paul Bowles, and after considering such motifs as "the Orient as a place for self-discovery" (Aidi 2005, 120), or its sense of mystery and fatalism, or the solitude of the outsider, opts for qualifying any accusation of Orientalism:

In light of these themes in my thesis, I conclude that Paul Bowles is not an Orientalist in the classic sense. Morocco exists in the minds of most Westerners as an exotic, mysterious land, an

¹⁹ PB to Oliver Evans, "An Interview with Paul Bowles," from *Mediterranean Review* (Winter 1971), in Gena Dagel Caponi *Conversations with Paul Bowles*, 52.

impression created by a slew of travel books and exotica literature. But, without exception, Paul Bowles was the only American author who transcended this type of representation and gained notoriety for his depictions about the North African kingdom. I believe that a central thrust of Bowles' work is to dispel the myth of a "tea in the Sahara" –maybe even going too far in that dispelling: many of his plots move toward epiphanies in which characters recognize their outsidership and the harsh reality of the Sahara. When he does inject some Orientalist motif –say the erotica of *The Sheltering Sky*— he develops it in such an ironic and ridiculous fashion that he robbed it of all validity. (123)

When Aidi gave Bowles a copy of his thesis, the latter was gratified: "I liked your paper. You didn't say I was innocent –but you judged me not guilty." (124) Certainly, in his own life-writing, he put over the persona of "Paul Bowles", whether he admits it or not, as an adventurer who lived life "without stopping" and a dedicated writer whose main principles have involved successful storytelling, regardless of any "truth" value or any particular stance. His ideas, beliefs and life-style may not agree with everyone, but he lived most of his life in a milieu where the surrounding society did not judge him. Those who visited him were like-minded. But his biographers, without being either hagiographers or the opposite, perpetrators of a hatchet-job, have shown that he silenced certain episodes, like his having to leave Morocco for a time and the reasons for this. It is undeniable that his fictional works grew out of a double well-spring, his life experiences and his reading, and perhaps these had a reciprocal influence upon each other.

2. The Novels of Paul Bowles: Existentialism in *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down*

2.1 Introduction

Ask a Muslim about existentialism, and he or she will reply: “Oh, but that is atheism.” Atheism is, of course, totally incompatible with Islam, whose starting point is Allah. It is no doubt this initial insuperable barrier that puts Muslims off studying existentialism, or at least, in any sympathetic way. But existentialism is a complex phenomenon, and not all versions of it are atheistic. Soren Kierkegaard (1813–55), known as “the father of theistic existentialism” (Flynn 2006, 29), was schooled in theology, attacked the popular press and the reigning philosophy, that of Hegel, and even the state Church (*ibid.*), but did not embrace atheism or pure humanism. Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), the first to apply the term “existentialist” to Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), perhaps the best-known existential philosopher, was a convert to Catholicism and maintained a strongly religious dimension to his thinking (Flynn 56).

It is impossible to understand the works of Paul Bowles without setting them within the framework of this ideology which dominated intellectual thought in the western world in the middle of the twentieth century. As Ihab Hassan writes in the section “Alienation and Anarchy” of *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (1961):

By far the largest part of contemporary literature comes under the rubric of alienation –alienation certainly from the dominant culture, alienation sometimes from the self and nature. The fictional hero is an outsider because the very conditions of life, of his own consciousness, require estrangement. The forms of estrangement, however, evolve curiously in the postwar years. Paul Bowles (born 1910) is among the earliest writers to turn his back on American, indeed, on Western culture. The characters of his novels, *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and *Let It Come Down* (1953), are expatriates in a stark and pitiless land, North Africa; and their existential quest, which recalls Camus’s *The Stranger*, ends in annihilation. His stories in *The Delicate Prey* (1950) contrast the worlds of nature and

civilization, instinct and reason, exposing unfit Americans to extreme situations: murder, suicide, rape, incest, drugs, torture, madness. The sinister transformation of Bowles's heroes from pilgrims into prey parallels the self-destructive impulses of the West; his work presages, in a style of classic restraint, the wandering Beats, and, more precisely, the violent Hipsters. (77–78)

Although existentialism has rather gone out of fashion, Bowles's writings have not, or have a renewed popularity, and can still be enjoyed without reference to its underlying ideology. However, since Bowles wrote with this thinking in mind and set his main characters within this ideological trend, it is unfair to Bowles and his intentions to read, at least the first two novels, without trying to understand their philosophical intentions and explanations. Furthermore, as Barry Tharaud informs us:

Bowles' interest in existential writers is reflected two decades later when he taught a course in the existential novel during the fall 1968 semester at San Fernando Valley State College (today California State University at Northridge) [...] (Tharaud 2005, 134, note 17)

As I said, existentialism is not discussed as much as it was thirty years ago, and we need to refresh our memories about the major points. So before I begin my analysis of Bowles's first two novels, I include here a summary of the main ideas which I have made from the *Short Introductions* series and the entry found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* along with a running commentary from the point of view of a Muslim.

2.2 Summary of Existentialism

The term “existentialism” (which Thomas R. Flynn refers to in the lower case in his book *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* 2006) brings together various philosophies, dating from about 1930, that “have in common an interpretation of human existence in the world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, vol. 7: 73–9*). Though elusive of a precise definition, the nature of existentialist thought and manner can be described through adherence to basic areas or tenets.

In his *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Flynn begins by saying that existentialism is not a new phenomenon, but “represents a long tradition in the history of philosophy in the West, extending back at

least to Socrates (469–399 BC). This is the practice of philosophy as ‘care of the self’ (*epimeleia heautou*.)” (1) He distinguishes this “moral” philosophy from a more theoretical, science-based philosophy associated with Aristotle: “It was a matter of becoming a certain kind of person, the way Socrates exhibited a particular way of life, rather than of achieving a certain clarity of argument or insight in the way Aristotle did.” (*ibid.*) Throughout the medieval and modern periods, the more theoretical approach dominated the teaching of philosophy, but there were some exceptions:

In the history of philosophy, care of the self was gradually marginalized and consigned to the domains of spiritual direction, political formation, and psychological counselling. There were important exceptions to this exiling of “moral” truth from the academy. St Augustine’s *Confessions* (AD 397), Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées* (1669), and the writings of the German Romantics in the early 19th century are examples of works that encouraged this understanding of philosophy as care of the self. (2)

Galileo’s contribution to modern science caused knowledge of the world that could be quantified, weighed and measured, to be prioritised over the non-measurable, which “was left to the realm of mere opinion”, says Flynn (3). Thus positivist philosophy in the 19th century and early 20th century turned its back on this “care of the self” approach, but again, with some exceptions. Soren Kierkegaard (1813–55) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), the 19th-century “fathers of existentialism” looked back to Socrates, although with some ambivalences, the former praising him and the latter censuring him for being “the defender of a kind of rationality that moved beyond merely conventional and subjective values towards universal moral norms [...]” (*ibid.*)

Later, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) insisted that if the non-measurable were left out from what counted as knowledge, some important questions that concern us would not be answered. He called for a revising of our definition of “objectivity” and a new look at what can be called “true” apart from the positivists’ “agreement with sense experience.” Absorbing the findings of Heisenberg in the eponymous Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, Sartre added to the debate the idea that the experimenter is part of the experimental system, so observation becomes limited and relative. (Flynn 4–5) Lived experience in these conditions means a personalized time and space. As Flynn interprets Sartre:

If “time is of the essence”, and the existentialist will insist that it is, then part of who we are is our manner of living the “already” and the “not yet” of our existence, made concrete by how we handle our immersion in the everyday. (6)

The example Flynn gives of this from literature is the allegory of the Nazi occupation of Paris (although ostensibly set in Oran), *The Plague*, by Albert Camus (1913–60), where the people feel as if they were entrapped: “The notion of imprisonment as ‘doing time’ is clearly existential.” (6) Thus both time and space can be brought within our personal framework of how we respond to them in our choices that lead to responsibilities. Our attitudes and feelings cannot be dismissed as of an “objective certainty” that requires no choice, indeed, our lives are full of choices, or “forks in the road”. This does not mean that there is no “objectively” correct path to choose and so whatever choice we make will be correct. “Rather, for the existentialist, after getting clear on the options and the likely outcomes, one *makes* it the right choice by one’s follow-through. For the existentialist, such truth is more a matter of decision than of discovery.” (Flynn 10, emphasis in the original)

Flynn sets out five criteria which philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree on, in spite of their wide differences –the former, as we saw before, being a Christian– and which the 20th-century writers Sartre and Camus implement in their works. I will quote the schema in its entirety and will then attempt to show how Bowles’s thinking fits in with this pattern:

Five themes of existentialism

There are five basic themes that the existentialist appropriates each in his or her own way. Rather than constituting a strict definition of “existentialist”, they depict more of a family resemblance (a criss-crossing and overlapping of the themes) among these philosophers.

1. *Existence precedes essence*. What you are (your essence) is the result of your choices (your existence) rather than the reverse. Essence is not destiny. You are what you make yourself to be.

2. *Time is of the essence*. We are fundamentally time-bound beings. Unlike measurable “clock” time, lived time is qualitative: the “not yet”, the “already”, and the “present” differ among themselves in meaning and value.

3. *Humanism*. Existentialism is a person-centred philosophy. Though not anti-science, its focus is on the human individual’s pursuit of identity and meaning amidst the social and economic pressures of mass society for superficiality and conformism.

4. *Freedom/responsibility.* Existentialism is a philosophy of freedom. Its basis is the fact that we can stand back from our lives and reflect on what we have been doing. In this sense, we are always “more” than ourselves. But we are as responsible as we are free.

5. *Ethical considerations are paramount.* Though each existentialist understands the ethical, as with “freedom”, in his or her own way, the underlying concern is to invite us to examine the authenticity of our personal lives and of our society. (8)

With respect to the first point, that existence precedes essence and therefore controls essence, in that what we choose in our life dictates what we become, or what we are, existentialism insists that existence is particular and individual –always *my* existence, *your* existence or *his* existence (*Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, vol. 7: 73*). Thus “existentialism is opposed to any doctrine that views man as the manifestation of an absolute or of an infinite substance.” (*ibid.*) Such doctrines, therefore, among others, would be Islam, with its absolute, its one God, Allah; Judaism, also with its one God, Yahweh; and especially Christianity, which holds that Jesus Christ is a manifestation of God, or is God Himself, in tripartite form, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, thus holding that man, as made in God’s image, is a manifestation of the absolute. As it is pointed out in the overview of the “Nature of existentialist thought and manner” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, these and other religions which preach the existence of an after-life, are also included in the rejected ideologies, since they believe in an infinite substance, man in eternity. Existentialism is opposed to most forms of Idealism, such as those that stress Consciousness, Spirit, Reason, Idea, or Oversoul (*ibid, 73.*).

As we said before, not all existentialists reject the idea of a Creator, a human soul and an after-life, indeed, Kierkegaard has a category that he calls “the religious stage” As Flynn explains:

But the nature of the choice is criterion-*constituting* rather than criterionless, as some have objected. What Kierkegaard is talking about expresses what one might call a “conversion” experience, where the decisive move is not purely intellectual but a matter of will and feeling (what Kierkegaard calls “passion”) as well. Such is the nature of the so-called “blind leap” of faith that catapults one into the religious sphere of existence. [...] But it applies equally to other fundamental “turnings” in a person’s life, from a basic change in one’s political convictions to falling in love. (10, 12, emphasis in original)

Existentialists of all philosophical or religious bents agree that because human existence is problematic in its mode of being, it must imply in thinking men and women the necessity for an ontological investigation of the meaning of Being. Such a large enterprise must mean that the investigations are open and individuals can reach different conclusions, which is why such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche can be bracketed together as existentialists, indeed, “fathers of existentialism”, without their thinking overlapping in any exact way. So existentialism insists that there should be no pre-concluded obligations, for existence is made up of a series of possibilities man must choose from. However, sects or varieties of Islam, Judaism or Christianity –to mention just the main religions of the Middle East and the West –that believe in a form of destiny or fate, cannot find any compatibility with this essential tenet of existentialism.

Secondly, because the diverse possibilities from which man must choose are constituted by his relationships with things and with other men, existence is always a being-in-the world –i.e., in a concrete and historically or temporally determined situation that limits or conditions choice. “Existentialism is opposed to any solipsism (holding that I alone exist) or any epistemological Idealism (holding that the objects of knowledge are mental), because existence, which is the relationship with other beings, always extends beyond itself, toward the being of these entities; it is, so to speak, transcendence.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica, ibid.*, 73) Only on this point is there any common ground with the major religions, which insist that Heaven or Eternity will only be gained (faith notwithstanding) through a correct, moral life of interaction with our fellow men.

Thirdly, existentialism is “opposed to any doctrine that sees in man some given and complete reality that must be resolved into its elements in order to be known or contemplated. It is thus opposed to any form of objectivism or scientism since these stress the crass reality of external fact.” (*ibid.*) Islam, for different reasons, is opposed to a purely objective, scientific view of existence.

As I stated before, Muslims who believe that all existentialism is atheistic would be wrong. Starting from the five bases which Flynn has outlined, existentialism can take diverse and contrasting directions. It can insist on the transcendence of Being with respect to existence, and, by holding this transcendence to be the origin or foundation of existence, it can thus assume a theistic form.

On the other hand, it can hold that human existence, posing itself as a problem, projects itself with absolute freedom, creating itself by itself, thus assuming to itself the function of God. Such arrogant thought

would be anathema to Muslims, for it is radical atheism. Nietzsche, who exalted life in its most irrational and cruel features, made this exaltation of absolute freedom the proper task of the “higher man”, who, he said, exists beyond good and evil. Needless to say, in Islam, as in Judaism and Christianity, nothing exists beyond good and evil. The three great religions stemming from the Old Testament do not deny choice, or that it may possibly be constitutive of one’s existence, but they argue that choice is limited to a black or white distinction between good and evil as defined in the Ten Commandments and other teachings, or between sin and grace in the context of the New Testament. Indeed, for the western monotheists, all clarification of the meaning of existence comes through the holy books: the Torah, the Bible, the Koran. To go outside these, indeed, to try individually to find the meaning of existence is a damnable presumption.

Flynn’s third point, that existentialism is a person-centred philosophy, follows on from this questioning. As the human individual pursues identity and meaning, he or she, in a specific spatial and temporal situation (Flynn’s second point), face such hazards as suffering and the dread of death; guilt over the limitations of choices; the boredom of repetition, and finally, the absurdity of man’s aspirations as opposed to his possibilities. Such rebellion against suffering, boredom, frustration of ambition and especially, death, would be unthinkable to a member of one of the western monotheistic religions, for whom death is the transition towards or entry to the true life.

Flynn’s fourth point brings together freedom and responsibility. What one chooses freely one must be able to uphold responsibly not only to oneself but to others. For fulfilling lives, there must be communion and cooperation between individuals or between the individual and the group, in spite of the superficiality and conformism of mass society. The lack of any authentic communication with others is one of the principal points manifested amongst the characters of Bowles’s novels.

Freedom consists in desiring what is and what has been and in choosing it and loving it as if nothing better could be desired. Such a desire is remote from the desires of the western monotheistic religions, which advocate renunciation of the self in the service of God or Allah, but this desire for what is, is apparent in the lack of ambition or future perceived in the lives of Bowles’s protagonists. These characters appear not to be aware that they are choosing, but if we examine the plots of the novels, we see that there is choice at every move, whether the characters realise it or not. Let us look for a moment at choices in existentialism.

Human existence is, for all the forms of existentialism, the projection of the future on the basis of the possibilities that constitute it.

For some existentialists (the Germans Heidegger and Jaspers, for example), the existential possibilities, inasmuch as they are rooted in the past, merely lead every project for the future back to the past, so that only what has already been chosen can be chosen (Nietzsche's *amor fati*). For others (such as Sartre), the possibilities that are offered to existential choice are infinite and equivalent, such that the choice between them is indifferent. For all existentialists, the choice among possibilities –i.e., the projection of existence –implies risks, renunciation, and limitation. Among the risks, the most serious is man's descent into inauthenticity or into alienation, his degradation from a person into a thing.

The theses of contemporary existentialism were diffused and popularised by the novels and plays of Sartre, by the writing of the French novelists and dramatists Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. In *L'Homme révolté* (1951), English translation, *The Rebel*, (1953), Camus described the “metaphysical rebellion” as “the movement by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation”. Bowles's existentialism came directly from Jean-Paul Sartre, whom he read in French and translated; let us remember he had lived in Paris for some time with Gertrude Stein. But there are also some connections between Bowles and Albert Camus. Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria, and like Bowles, often wrote about North Africa. His 1942 novel *L'Étranger* was set in Algiers, and there are many similarities between the office worker Meursault and the bank clerk Nelson Dyar in *Let It Come Down*, which, of course, was written later, in 1952. Caponi (1998, 19) informs us that, conversely, in another piece of writing, the influence seems to have been by Bowles upon Camus. Camus's story “Le Renégat”, published in *L'Exil et le Royaume* in 1957, is nearly identical to Bowles's “A Distant Episode”, published eleven years earlier in *Partisan Review*. Bowles denies having been influenced by Camus, but they were preoccupied by the same issues, and, in the case of the similar stories, perhaps there was a tale set in North Africa which they both heard and quite independently reworked.

To return to the subject of choice before leaving this overview of existentialism, Sartre has a famous quotation which can be applied to Bowles's heroes: “existence precedes essence”. This signifies that man does not have a nature that determines his modes of being and acting but that, rather, these modes are simply possibilities from which he may choose and on the basis of which he can project himself. Muslims and Christians, of course, reject this tenet entirely, holding that man's soul is his essence and it predates existence on earth. Moreover, all choice, between good and evil, is assisted by conscience. It is interesting in reading Bowles's novels to see how far the local Muslim characters fail

to understand the Westerners. Both may express a death wish, but if they do, it is for very different motives. Any death wish on the part of a Muslim must be carried out on behalf of a holy cause which will bring access to paradise. For the existentialist, death has a different meaning: it is the end rather than the beginning. But death can be chosen, and chosen as preferable. An individual who has witnessed the dread of life as leading to a final and insurmountable end may decide to escape from the banality of anonymous existence. For him, this banality disguises the nothingness of existence, or the nonreality of its possibilities, behind the mask of daily concerns. Thus his understanding of this nothingness leads him to choose the only unconditioned and insurmountable possibility that belongs to him: death. The possibility of death, unlike the possibilities that relate him to other things and to other men, isolates him as it continuously weighs upon existence. To understand this possibility means to decide for it, to opt for the death wish, thanatos, which, as Freud diagnosed, is as tied up with existence as the urge to be, the eros.

This is exactly the quality of mind demonstrated by Bowles's characters, particularly Port Moresby. Dread is not, therefore, fear in the face of a specific danger, though Port and Kit come across many dangers, but rather the emotive understanding of the nullity of the possibility of Nothingness, which comes to the same thing. Authenticity is acquired by the person who refuses to choose, rebelling against this effective lack of choice. Only by being indifferent to any possible project can the person assert himself or herself.

2. 3. Bowles and Existentialism

I start the study of the Bowles–existentialism paradigm by giving a brief overview of his first two novels, *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down* before going on to point out ways in which Bowles incorporates existentialist ideas not only into his characters but into the setting –the situation in which they find themselves– and the narrative, the events that happen to them or which they initiate –if they initiate any at all –and which constitute the choices available to them through which they can lead authentic lives or otherwise. But before that, even at the risk of anticipation, I would like to make reference to an iconic article on this subject, Barry Tharaud's "Gide and Bowles in North Africa" published in *Performing/Picturing Tangier. Tanger Scénique* (2007, 97–106), edited by him and the team who organise the Bowles conferences in Tangier: Khalid Amine, Andrew Hussey and José Manuel Goñi Pérez, of the Abdelmalek Essaadi University of Tetouan and Tangier, the University of London Institute in Paris and the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, respectively. All the same, we must not forget

that whatever label one attempts to put on Bowles will always be denied by one critic or another, and more often than not, by Bowles himself. Asked in interview by Daniel Halpern if he considered himself an existentialist, Bowles answered most emphatically:

BOWLES: No! Existentialism was never a literary doctrine in any case, even though it did trigger three good novels –one by Sartre (*La Nausée*) and two by Camus (*L'Etranger* and *La Peste*). But if one's going to subscribe to the tenets of a formulated belief, I suppose atheistic existentialism is the most logical one to adopt. That is, it's likely to provide more insight than another into what attitudes to take vis-à-vis today's world.²⁰

So he says no at the beginning of his reply, but by the end of it, in the third sentence, he has virtually admitted to accepting existentialism as the framework in which he views the world and writes.

2. 3. 1. Bowles and Gide

Tharaud previously wrote of the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson on Bowles through his childhood reading, and he begins by setting up “a brief arc in a curious transatlantic circle of influence that leads from Emerson, to Nietzsche, to Gide, and back to Bowles [...]” (97). The circle is not limited to the European and early American cultural and literary traditions (Gide's interest in Nietzsche at the beginning of the 20th century) but takes in North Africa:

It is especially interesting that this circle of transatlantic influence doesn't merely circulate between Europe and the United States, but it also sweeps across North Africa: during the mid-1890s Gide travelled the Maghreb and afterward wrote *The Immoralist* (1902), a novel based upon his travels in which the land and culture of North Africa become an orientalist symbol of the formless, insatiable desire that lies at the core of the human psyche; and during the early 1930s, partly in imitation of Gide, Bowles travelled the Maghreb and then later retraced his earlier travels while he wrote *The Sheltering Sky* (1949). (*ibid.*)

Tharaud reminds us that Bowles, in his autobiography *Without Stopping*, explicitly states his interest in three of Gide's works: *Les Caves du Vatican* (*The Vatican Swindle*, 1914), *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*

²⁰ Quoted in Hibbard 1993, p. 148, see note p. 144: “From Daniel Halperin, ‘Interview with Paul Bowles,’ *TriQuarterly* 33 (Spring 1975): 159–177. Used by permission.”

(*The Counterfeiters*, 1926) and *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* (*Journal of "The Counterfeiters"*, 1927). Tharaud detects an influence from these works not only in Bowles's writings, but in his life:

[W]e can see specific attitudes and techniques from these works in Bowles' life and fiction, including the famous *acte gratuit* of Lafcadio in *The Vatican Swindle*, the search for an authentic form of existence by Bernard in *The Counterfeiters*, and the tracing of one's desires to unconscious motivations in *The Journal of "The Counterfeiters."* (*ibid.*)

Bowles does not mention Gide's *The Immoralist* in his autobiography, but Tharaud sees it as "a sort of template" for Bowles's first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*:

In the former, Gide's protagonist, Michel, becomes aware of existence in its intensity and particularity, while in the latter, North African settings are used as a screen on which to project the nothingness at the core of the self. Bowles' use of geography in *The Sheltering Sky* parallels and extends Gide's use of Arab culture and the North African desert as sites and symbols of human existence. (*ibid.*)

Gide travelled North Africa as a young man struggling with his own identity in relation to his homosexuality and his family's puritanical attitudes, and Michel is a veiled self-portrait, but the striking and notorious title points directly at Nietzsche, who refers to himself as "the immoralist" in several of his works (see Tharaud 98). Tharaud explains that what Nietzsche meant by "immoralist" was "someone who recognizes that morality in general, and Christian morality in particular, are systems that encourage the individual to reject life in favor of moralistic 'appearances.'" (*ibid.*) We know that Bowles read Gide's autobiography *If It Die ...* (1925) during his second trip to North Africa in the early 1930s.

One significant difference between the two novels is that, unlike *The Sheltering Sky*, *The Immoralist* is narrated in the first person. It is Michel's confession to a close circle of friends, so it is a sincere, if subjective, search for and exploration of his elusive "self," bare of the trappings of culture, those pillars of society such as family, religion and profession. Tharaud compares and contrasts the two searches:

In contrast to Michel in *The Immoralist*, Port in *The Sheltering Sky* is older and more experienced and has already divested himself of

a good many cultural trappings: his father is dead, he seems to have almost no ties to his mother (154), his relationship with his wife Kit is problematical, and he has little use for Western cultural attitudes and institutions. Port's odyssey of self-discovery takes up about half-way through Michel's odyssey and completes the exploration of the self that Gide began. (98)

In spite of this divergence, Tharaud finds an important area of common ground in the two novels in the construction of character and narrative strategy:

Clearly, both novels are concerned with existential attitudes toward life in terms of sensory and aesthetic awareness. In Gide's novel, Michel learns to appreciate nature and life through his aesthetic awareness, based upon his discovery of the attractive vitality of the Arab children at Biskra oasis in Algeria. [...] Like Gide, Bowles on occasion refers to his own "voluptuous" feeling of selfhood (*WOS* 10, 25). And like Gide's Michel, who "shakes off" "this secondary being which education had inscribed" upon him, Bowles' Port rejects Western culture in an attempt to experience some sort of authentic existence. (99)

Both characters base their reactions to life on experiences as lived through the senses, but even in this there is a difference, as Bowles's character sifts these sensations through the net of his conscious mind. Thus, while Gide's protagonist comes to live life to the full, experiencing an intensity and singularity both back in rural France at the site of his childhood proximity to nature and later in North Africa, Port, ironically, "can't get beyond his own intellectualism" (100), his realisation that he cannot escape his culture's "language and logic and philosophy and history." (*ibid.*) It is rather like the problematic recognised in Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle: the very conditions of the observer, that both enable and limit, inevitably distort what he or she observes. It is not until "Port's intellect disintegrates as he is dying of typhoid" (*ibid.*) that he is sufficiently divested of these social trappings to be able to approximate to "raw sensory experience." (*ibid.*)

Port eventually reaches the point where "the connection between words and life no longer exists" (*ibid.*), in which Tharaud compares him to the linguistics professor in "A Distant Episode," a story, Bowles tells us, that was like a rehearsal for *The Sheltering Sky* (Caponi 21). As we shall see later, in this story, the protagonist finds himself in an unfamiliar linguistic environment he wishes to explore but which turns dangerous and he eventually finds himself caught in a trap, his tongue cut out and

brutalised by Reguibat tribesmen. The abrupt severing of the connection between life and words drives the Professor to madness –“a state that in the novel is reserved for Kit after Port’s death,” Tharaud reminds us (100). Indeed, direct contact with life and its possible hazards, in the sense of jeopardy, fear, meaninglessness, illness and death, turns out to be horrifying in *The Sheltering Sky*, unlike in the Gide, where it is portrayed in a more positive light and therefore desirable. Thus Bowles takes the concept of existential anguish much further.

To remove the layers of culture which function as “a membrane that separates us from nature and spirit –from direct contact with existence–” (Tharaud 102) is therefore good for Michel, whereas behind the “sheltering sky” there is only the horror of nothingness, both for Port as he lies dying: “He opened his eyes, shut his eyes, saw only the thin sky stretched across to protect him. Slowly the split would occur, the sky draw back, and he would see what he never had doubted lay behind advance upon him [...]” (*The Sheltering Sky*, henceforward referred to by the abbreviation *SS*, 186) and for Kit as she flies up into the sky, leaving the Sahara:

Before her eyes was the violent blue sky –nothing else. For an endless moment she looked into it. Like a great overpowering sound it destroyed everything in her mind, paralyzed her. [...] At any moment the rip can occur, the edges fly back, and the giant maw will be revealed. (*SS*, 251-252)

Tharaud concludes that Bowles, following in Gide’s steps in North Africa almost half a century later and writing a fictional development of existential ideas after that half century that included two world wars, inevitably leads to more sombre outcomes:

Bowles’ more immediate project is to track primordial being to its lair in the human unconscious. In the process, he takes Gide’s vision of North African culture as an “other” that offers an illusion of the fulfilment of nature and desire, and he transforms it into an “other” that is the objectification of an inner self that is infinitely more exotic and more fearful than any orientalist vision. (106)

2. 3. 2. Summary of *The Sheltering Sky*

The novel is tripartite: the first section is called “Tea in the Sahara”; the second “The Earth’s Sharp Edge”; and the third, succinctly, “The Sky”. “Tea in the Sahara” opens in a North African town that

resembles Oran and introduces us to the main American characters. The male protagonist is Port Moresby (his name “coincides” rather comically with the name of the capital city of Papua, New Guinea, though he is far from comical, and the only thing he has in common is his desire for the exotic and Oriental). Along with his wife Kit, he is wandering on a aimless tour of the Sahara with their friend Tunner. Still young, they are in their late 20s or early 30s, and have been married for twelve years. They do not seem to need to work for a living, so the vacation is not limited by time or economic reasons. Port and Kit hardly converse on anything important, they appear to be emotionally estranged from each other. Yet they do not suggest the idea of separation, they seem to long for reunion sooner or later. Tunner –based on Bowles’s friend George Turner, who made the trip through the Sahara with him –is the third member of the triangle. His presence sometimes eases the tension by diverting the couple’s attention to mundane things, but there is a latent threat to their reunion firstly because he prevents intimacy and later because he seduces Kit.

Port seems to be alienated from his wife through a fear of the consequences of commitment. The narrator says he is “unable to break out of the cage into which he had shut himself, the cage he had built long ago to save himself from love” (*SS*, 78). Kit is unable or unwilling to get him to make that commitment, though she herself seems committed to him as her life revolves around his: “She always did everything that required a conscious effort, for Port.” (*SS*, 35) Port goes along with this self-centred play, as he imagines he is a character in fiction or drama, and Kit is the audience watching his every move: “He felt himself the protagonist, Kit the spectator.” (*SS*, 18)

Port and Kit are not only separated from each other by this invisible barrier, but also seem disconnected from life around them. They have become alienated, not by being exploited and depersonalised by work, they are cut off from valuable interpersonal relationships. They are struggling to find meaning in their lives which, not so much mundane and monotonous, are “haphazard” (Caponi 1998, 25). An interesting definition of their excluded plight is made by Port in a phrase which refers to the old idea of a flat Earth, from whose edge they could fall off:

We’ve never managed, either one of us, to get all the way into life. We’re hanging on to the outside for all we’re worth, convinced we’re going to fall off the next bump. (*SS*, 79)

The pair are not at home in America or North Africa or anywhere, but keep moving on in order to find some spiritual accommodation.

Caponi (1998, 19) goes so far as to fit *The Sheltering Sky* into a tradition of American novels, calling it the first “road novel” of the 1950s, the period in America when travel was, once again, synonymous with self-discovery. The tradition had begun with Thomas Jefferson at the end of the eighteenth century, moved through the nineteenth century with the Leatherstocking novels of James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1852) and several of Henry James’s novels, to be reinvented in the mid-twentieth century. Port and Kit are exiles from America, they are not going back, so rather than tourists, they are travellers: “belonging no more to one place than to the next” (SS, 79). But just as they have no home to return to, neither do they have any fixed destination.

They are not at all motivated by the passing of time to achieve anything either material or spiritual. Time seems to have ceased having a meaning for them, so if they suffer inertia and refuse to make a move, they are putting their lives in the hands of a sort of fate, like the existential figures of Sartre and Camus. The narrator speaks of “the fatal error of coming hazily to regard time as non-existent. One year was like another year. Eventually everything would happen” (SS, 105). Kit tries to impose order on her life through an elaborate system of omens and portents. She also believes in destiny, as if the signs she tries to understand will give her clues to the patterns of her existence.

In Freud, a train ride is symbolic of the journey to death. In existentialism this is not, of course, the case. But the train journey that Port and Kit undertake to Boussif in Part One, leads to death for one of them. Bowles lets us know early on that they are both under threat. Kit leaves her first-class carriage and gets back on the train in a fourth-class carriage, where she is packed in with the North African men and the flies. She has no return access to her privileged first-class compartment because there is no bridge or passage-way between the carriages. “I couldn’t get back” becomes a leitmotif which recurs particularly towards the end when her fate is sealed. In the case of Port, his fate is intimately tied up with the title of the first section. It comes from a story about three North African girls who dream of having tea in the Sahara. They manage to make the trip into the desert, only to have their tea, but to meet their deaths too. Similarly, by the end of the first section, Port is succumbing to the typhoid fever which will kill him. In the second section, he manages to bribe someone to make him a cup of tea, and as he sits drinking it, he is oblivious of the fact that he will soon meet his fate in the form of death.

Before the first section ends there is a key conversation between Port and Kit. They have rented bicycles in Boussif and they ride up onto the top of a ridge to contemplate the desert beyond:

“You know,” said Port, and his voice sounded unreal as voices are likely to do after a long pause in an utterly silent spot, “the sky here’s very strange. I often have the sensation when I look at it that it’s a solid thing up there, protecting us from what’s behind.”

Kit shuddered slightly as she said: “From what’s behind?”
“Yes.”

“But what *is* behind?” Her voice was very small.

“Nothing, I suppose. Just darkness. Absolute night.” (SS, 79)

The nothingness that is suggested here sounds rather like the nothingness or the “horror” at the centre of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, also an African novel involving a journey of discovery of identity. The “nothing” beyond the sky is multivalent in the book. It is at once the empty desert, and also the “glacial deadness” Port feels at the centre of his being (SS, 111), and the annihilation facing Port at the end of his fatal illness.

But this is anticipating. To return to the second section, “The Earth’s Sharp Edge”. In Bou Noura, a military outpost on the edge of the desert, Port discovers that his passport is missing. He suspects it has been stolen either by Abdelkader or by Eric Lyle, who, with his “mother”, had been travelling on and off with them. Tunner had gone with the Lyles to Messad in their car, and that is where the passport had turned up. Tunner offers to bring it to Port, but because Port does not want to see Tunner at that point, since he feels Tunner is separating him from his wife, he makes a choice. That choice is to move on, towards El Ga’a, and not wait for Tunner. Because there is a meningitis epidemic in El Ga’a and there are no hotel rooms available, the couple moves on to Sbâ. It is here that Port succumbs to typhoid and dies. Kit, finding herself alone, panics and runs out of town towards the desert.

Kit and Port have come to a point where the known (earth) and the unknown (sky) meet. Port has already passed beyond the veil, the sky, into the unknown, and Kit is on the verge of doing so. The sky is ever present and oppressive in this section. The fierce sun is constant. But the most harrowing description is of a night sky, a “monstrous star-filled sky” that turns sideways before Kit’s eyes. As she stands on the roof of the fort, she sees the horizon on all sides so clearly that she can make out a rotation of the earth: “Every second an invisible star edged above the earth’s line on that side, and another fell below on the opposite” (SS, 181). Beyond the earth’s sharp edge there is nothing. Caponi discerns the existential position in Kit’s plight:

Kit stands in an unusual position. Rarely do any of us glimpse the earth's sharp edge. Port's death, Kit's neurosis, and the clear sight lines of the Sahara have brought her to this point where she faces the universe, accountable only to herself for any action she takes. This is the existential position. With Port dead, Kit faces the existential question: "What to do, to be what?" (Caponi 1998, 31)

With the male protagonist dead in the second section, the female protagonist, Kit, comes to the fore in the third part, "The Sky". Firstly, she goes into denial over Port's death. She bathes in a pool on the edge of the town as if to wash away the pain or the contamination or the despair. Then she sets up a barrier against them, the image used is that of an insect spinning a cocoon (*SS*, 215). She wanders into the desert and is "rescued" by Belqasim, an Arab merchant, who takes her south to his home near Dakar. He disguises her as a boy to hide her identity from his wives. He marries her, but she is kept a prisoner in a single room until she is able and willing to escape.

Her return to mental normality is prompted by language (just as the linguistics professor in "A Distant Episode" combined madness with lack of voice). She hears a man speaking in French, and this reminder of another world begins to break through the barrier or cocoon she has set up: "The words were coming back, and inside the wrapping of the words there would be thoughts lying there" (*SS*, 244). Without thoughts she had no interior identity. Also, just as Port had begun to lose his identity when he lost his formal verification of it, his passport, Kit had lost her exterior identity through her disguise. Someone then takes Kit to a group of nuns, who begin the process of discovering her identity and returning her to Algiers. But travelling north brings her nearer to the pain of truth, and she absolutely refuses to get on a plane because she is so afraid of the sky and what it signifies to her:

Someone once had said to her that the sky hides the night behind it, shelters the person beneath from the horror that lies above. Unblinking, she fixed the solid emptiness, and anguish began to move in her. At any moment the rip can occur, the edges fly back, and the giant maw will be revealed. (*SS*, 251-252)

Bowles gives the reader two distinct versions of what might lie behind the sheltering sky: the void or chaos. Behind Port's sky there was nothing, which meant for him peace and repose. But when Kit glimpses behind the veil, like Conrad's Kurtz, she sees "horror". Instead of peace,

she finds psychic anarchy. By the last two pages of the book, Kit has fallen so far beyond reach that the reader loses access to her thoughts.

2. 3. 3. Summary of *Let It Come Down*

This is Bowles's first novel set in Morocco, though in fact, being set in Tangier, it was not exactly Morocco at the time, as it was the International Zone. It is far less about the Sahara desert, and much less exotic. Although it is more urban, it is not less hostile. If Port and Kit found Algeria full of flies and disease, Tangier is not much more hygienic:

There were mounds of garbage and refuse everywhere, the cats whose raging cries racked the air, and that ever-present acid smell of urine: the walls and pavements were encrusted with a brine of urine. (*Let It Come Down*, henceforward referred to as *LICD*, 179)

The male protagonist is Nelson Dyar, a penniless bank teller who has become unbearably bored with his dull job and life's routine. If Port Moresby felt trapped in a cage, Dyar also feels trapped and wants to get out of his "damned window in the bank" (*LICD*, 14). He does not have the resources Port had, but escapes to Tangier with the hope of a job and a new future. His name, however, Dyar, a person who dies, does not augur well for him. He falls in with a crowd of ex-patriates but also comes into contact with the local people from all levels of society, from the Beidaoui brothers, who are from the elite, to Hadija, a low-class prostitute. There is not much action in this novel, Dyar merely socialises while waiting around for his supposed job to manifest itself. He is not good at taking initiative: "It was not in him to make things happen." (*LICD*, 162). He is even worse at making choices or deliberating on which would be the better choice for his life; he goes for: "the less strenuous of two equally uninteresting prospects" (*LICD*, 129).

When a choice is forced upon him as the job does not materialise and he has no resources, he takes a course of action that will have serious consequences for him: he accepts money from the Communist spy, Madame Jouvenon, and thus becomes compromised. His choice was unethical, but, really, it was a question of inertia: "the choice was already made, and he felt it was not he who had made it. Because of that, it was hard for him to believe that he was morally involved." (*LICD*, 180). Dyar comes to the conclusion that the world is divided into winners and losers, and he must at all costs avoid being classified with

the latter: “If one was not a winner one was a victim, and there seemed to be no way to change that.” (*LICD*, 155)

To avoid being a loser, he agrees, in lieu of an honest job, to go along with a money-laundering scheme run by his business associate, Jack Wilcox. But things go wrong on his first mission –the bank closes before he can deposit the money he has been entrusted with, so he keeps it, which is tantamount to stealing. Rather like the choice to take money from Madame Jouvenon, he realises that this step is an important choice in his life, a chance to change things from boring and precarious to exciting and more stable:

He expected now to lead the procession of his life, as the locomotive heads the train, no longer to be a helpless incidental somewhere in the middle of the line of events, drawn one way and another, without the possibility or even the need of knowing the direction in which he was heading. (*LICD*, 249)

He couldn't have been more wrong. His crime changes everything for him, he thinks he is now to have a better life, the life of a winner, but he is doomed. As part of his new life, he decides to try drugs, and eats the hashish candy *majoun* and smokes a pipe of kif. In addition, while in a café in Agla, while hiding from the police, he hears some drum music and witnesses its trance-inducing effects. The combination of the drugs and the music and the incense in the café causes a Moroccan in the café to go into a trance and cut himself with a knife. Watching the performance, Dyar realises that it is a purification ritual aimed not only at the Moroccan himself, but as a public spectacle, at everyone who watched and was not distanced from the event. Dyar has lost all sense of time and of his individuality, so he is drawn in:

The mutilation was being done for him, to him; it was his own blood that splattered onto the drums and made the floor slippery. In a world which had not yet been muddied by the discovery of thought, there was this certainty, as solid as a boulder, as real as the beating of his heart, that the man was dancing to purify all who watched. (*LICD*, 294)

The next thing that happens to Dyar is that he becomes “contaminated” by proximity to violence and becomes violent himself. It is actually a combination of several factors: crime (his stealing the money and therefore placing himself outside the law), sex (with Hadija, the prostitute, and also eventually with his compatriot, Daisy de Valverde), drugs, music, violence, and the rituals of another culture. Thus when

Dyar returns to his hiding place, a little house on the mountain, and eats *majoun* with Thami, one of the Beidaoui family who has befriended him because he also feels an outsider, he becomes disoriented and kills Thami in a particularly violent way, by hammering a nail into his head, rather like Jael and Sisera in the Old Testament.

Caponi (1998, 40) suggests interpreting the murder scene in psychological terms, with Dyar hammering a phallic spike into what he earlier calls the “humid, dangerous breeding place” of ideas, the brain (womb), achieving what Norman Mailer, in his classic existential essay, “The White Negro”, called the “apocalyptic orgasm”. But the basic idea, as found in the story of Jael, is already eroticised (see Wallhead 2001). Bowles makes no reference to Jael, and the difference is that it is violence between man and man, not between a man and a woman, but Dyar is unaware that it is Thami anyway, his perturbed mind has transformed the young man into an inanimate door. For a reader acquainted with stories of the Old Testament (Jael appears along with Deborah in *Judges*), the violent story of power play and betrayal of hospitality is latent in the background.

Caponi has also investigated interpretations of the ending of *Let It Come Down* by other scholars. She recommends (Caponi 1998, 40) Mitzi Berger Hammovitch and Wayne Pounds’ consideration of the ending as one of several examples in Bowles’s work in doubling or split personalities. When Dyar murders Thami, he is not seeing him as a person and his friend but as something else, an alter ego. Quite how this fits in with believing that Thami is a door which he must nail shut, Caponi does not elucidate. Elsewhere, she suggests that Thami represents “the objectification of the intellect: a witnessing consciousness” (Caponi 1994, 162). According to her view, when Thami has witnessed Dyar’s transformation to “aliveness” –before he was a half-alive existential zombie –he comes to represent not only the observing other but also the intellectual awareness. Dyar, on the other hand, has finally succeeded in gaining access to the long-stifled, unconscious, creative self. The only way to maintain that access is to kill the observing, judgmental, intellectual self, which Thami now represents. This idea may be all very well, but personally, I think it would have fitted with Port, who was a would-be writer, or John Stenham, the writer protagonist of *The Spider’s House*. In any case, the theme of the double belongs to Gothic writing, and I will discuss it more fully later in this study.

2. 3. 4. Discussion of existentialism in relation to Bowles's novels

At the time of publication, writers like Tennessee Williams and Norman Mailer immediately recognised *The Sheltering Sky* as a novel whose central concern was the existential dilemma. Also, the murder at the end of *Let It Come Down* was seen as a representation of the breakdown of social propriety, part of the existential pattern. Likewise, Wayne Pounds sees disintegration of personality as the key to understanding Bowles's work. This point is, I think, very important, as it brings all the novels together. As personalities disintegrate and social systems collapse, the existential hero is an adventurer through uncharted territory. They have to make their way, make their own way, and in so doing, they make themselves, their own character. Dyar did not possess the essence of a thief before he kept the money he intended and attempted to take to the bank. Likewise, he did not possess the essence of a murderer before becoming disoriented under the influence of drugs and unwittingly killing Thami. Meursault, the protagonist of Camus's *L'Étranger* was not a murderer until he committed his crime. But in both cases, if the interpretation of existentialism includes the idea of fate, then both men were doomed to be murderers and could not have chosen not to be. Bowles is as pessimistic as Camus.

Since I have already noted some of the existentialist ideas in the summary of the two novels, I will limit myself here to going through the five main points of existentialism to see how the theory is worked into his writing by Bowles. As regards the first point, that existence precedes essence and is particular, based upon choices, *my* existence, etc., it is obvious from the summary that there is no one quite like Port Moresby, or like Kit Moresby. They are as unique as human beings are in real life. There is never any suggestion that Port might represent any group of people or that his life might be a generalisation about some idea. One might argue that he stands for alienated, existential man, but if we examine his life, his choices, beliefs, fears and obsessions, we cannot say that he stands for anyone else except himself. Even though he and Kit have certain things in common, they are very different, especially in their attitude to the meaning of life and to what existence there may be after death.

Equally, there is no one quite like Dyar, in spite of his similarities with Camus's Meursault. He is trying to make a meaningful life for himself and must do it in his own way and in the context in which he finds himself.

The second point, that time is of the essence, is worked out in the characters in that these three main characters evolve from their choices

in their life concerning places and moments of time. The Moresbys and Dyar would not have been the same people had they not chosen at a given moment in their life that they wanted to move to North Africa. What they do there is also controlled by the historical moment that area of the world was living through. As we shall see later, the life of Fräulein Windling in the short story “The Time of Friendship” changes because there is a moment in the history of Algeria when the relations with the colonial power, France, are such that she can go to the desert and befriend a local boy, then they evolve to a moment in time when she must leave and the relationship must end. The moment in time affecting the protagonists of the novels is not so stark, but is equally significant.

The third point, humanism, that existentialism is a person-centred philosophy, where the person creates his or her own identity is an extension of this. For the characters, especially Port Moresby, existence is a problem and it involves an investigation of the meaning of Being. Port seems just to be on the brink of understanding something when he dies. Dyar is less intellectual (and apparently kills off his intellectual double anyway!); he cannot fathom life. Leaving the United States and going to Tangier does not rid him of his boredom and depression. His life still seems stationary. When Daisy meets him for the first time, she concludes he is “completely out of contact with life”, and when she reads his palm, she finds “an empty hand ... an empty life. No pattern. And nothing in you to give you any purpose.” (*LICD*, 30)

Thus the idea you must give meaning to life by choosing from among possibilities and committing yourself to them is difficult for some. Both Port and Dyar are profoundly ironic tragic “heroes”, because just at the point in which they think they have a meaningful choice, they are condemned to either death or the consequences of justice. (Both novels end without closure, leaving us to conjecture what will be the ultimate fate of both Kit and Dyar, but they are pessimistic, as Kit rejects apparent safety and so runs the risk of another semi-kidnapping which she may or may not enjoy as much as the first, and Dyar will eventually be found and will have to face Moroccan Justice.)

Existentialism insists that there are no generalisations and nothing can be worked out in theory and then applied to a life. Existentialism is so different from the monotheistic religions which offer a set of rules and a code of behaviour for man’s life on earth, but with the soul existing before and after. An existential life depends upon the people and the things an individual comes into contact with. He cannot be “good” or “bad” in isolation. This is particularly apparent in *Let It Come Down*, where the people are Hadija, Thami, Daisy, and the Moroccan in the trance in the café; and the thing that most determines Dyar’s life is the

money he is entrusted with. Change but one of these people and things, and we are dealing with a different case.

Thus Port Moresby and Dyar, principally, exert their freedom (Flynn's fourth point), but are not responsible, either to those close to them, whose lives they affect, such as Kit and Thami, or on any larger social scale. Port and Dyar seem to want to take into account ethical questions and give authenticity to their lives (Flynn's fifth and final point), but the sheer pressure of circumstances and a lack of personal integrity or self-assurance prevents them from doing so. As far as the first novel is concerned, Campbell asserts that "[o]ne of the greatest ironies of the novel is that the vagaries of chance play such a part in Port's eventual fate. His diseased physical decline typifies this for it is something over which he has no control whatsoever." (Campbell 127)

In his book *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (1961, 115), Hassan rearranges these points and interprets them under five related but different elements. The first is the chance and absurdity that rule human actions. In the case of the major protagonists, Port, Kit and Dyar, chance has affected their outcomes. The first two keep advancing into the desert because of a meningitis epidemic; perhaps Port would have been saved if they had not ventured so far. His obsession to keep on going south has something of Edgar Allan Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym and even Melville's Captain Ahab about it. If Thami had not entered the house at that precise moment, he would not have been killed. In all cases, the lives are disoriented and unmotivated, rendering them "absurd".

Hassan's second element is the absence of norms of feeling or conduct that the hero might follow. Again, it has amply been shown that Port will not keep up appearances by pretending to have feelings towards his wife, he will not be a hypocrite, yet he would dearly *like* to have these feelings, which he attributes to most "normal" people. Dyar, as we have seen, has become "numb" of feeling as a result of his bank routine and lack of life expectations.

The third element is rather different, in that Hassan accords importance to a hero at odds with the environment. We must remember that Bowles himself did not go to North Africa to be close to nature in any belief that, as in the Romantic tradition, or Primitivism, it would make him "nobler". Likewise, his protagonists do not seek harmony with nature and in a simple life. What we can see in them, insofar as they may be at odds with the environment, is their lack of ease anywhere, whether it is in the heat of the desert, in the fly-encrusted train, or facing the silent night sky.

Hassan talks of mixed human motives as the fourth element. Presumably, he means that people are not united in a single cause such

as a religion or an ideology, or even that they may be at cross-purposes within themselves, as in the case of doubles and split personality. Neither the Moresbys nor Dyar get any support or even warm human feeling from anyone who might share their ideas. Kit shares Port's fears, but does not exactly fear the same thing and they cannot find any common ground to advance together.

The fifth and last element is that the heroes have a limited perception of their options. All three arrive in North Africa as if making a new start and with almost no control over their future lives. They tend to allow things to happen to them because they are not motivated by any goal or any system of values. Thus when a choice is upon them, they either do not realise until too late that it is or has been a choice, or they cannot see any alternative. Neither can they project any possible outcome that might govern their choices. They are caught in a labyrinth, like the symbolic streets of Tangier Dyar tries to negotiate: "like the tortuous corridors in dreams... If he found the right series of connections he could get from one place to the next, but only by going through the buildings themselves." (*LICD*, 179)

The three main protagonists are not the only characters who seem to lead aimless lives. Both Daisy and the fat Englishwoman, Eunice Goode, in *Let It Come Down*, are disconnected, a symptom of a secular age. Even some of the natives seem to have come off the rails in terms of religion. Thami and Hadija are caught between their old world and the new, western secular world of moral relativism. Neither world is right for them, and Thami's attempt to be modern, abandoning Islam and fraternising with the foreigners, costs him dear.

Bowles is a secular writer, yet the secular position he describes is tragic for all his characters. He was not brought up religious and confided in interview to Abdelhak Elghandor his disdain for religious conviction: "All religions drive me crazy. I hate Christianity; I don't like Islam; I don't like Buddhism; I don't like any orthodoxies" (Elghandor, 12). Orthodoxies and common beliefs and routines make us feel comfortable. Compared to the existential hero, the Muslim, with his or her full spiritual life based on daily prayer and life objectives, like making the pilgrimage to Mecca, has a more fulfilling purpose. Through figures like Hadija and Thami, Bowles shows that he includes all races and religions in the existential predicament, whether they recognise it or not, and the outcome for Westerners and the natives alike is either tragic, or at least, pessimistic.

3. Cross-cultural Contact in Bowles's First Three Novels

3.1 Introduction

I would like to begin the third part of this study, my discussion of cultures in contact and confrontation and questions of identity in Bowles's first three novels, with a quotation. It comes from the *Columbia History of American Literature* and pinpoints Bowles as a pioneer or specialist in these areas:

Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) combined Hemingwayesque narrative of expatriates in Africa with a New Critical awareness of the poetic qualities of prose to characterize crises of self-identity resulting from the confrontation with an alien culture. (1991, 491-2)

The poetic qualities are testimony of Bowles's awareness of and implementation of Modernist tendencies, and particularly his orientation of the alienated character within a Gothic framework. The various factors involved in meeting an alien culture, apart from the personal ones already seen in my discussion of the existential hero and heroine, are differences in race, religion and cultural tradition, and sexual orientation. The "big three" differences of race, class and gender, which are at the root of all discrimination, are present here, if we understand "class" as being inherent in the comparison of cultures and their aligning within the superior/inferior paradigm.

Since I did not include Bowles's third novel, *The Spider's House* (1955) in Chapter 2 as it is less existentialist than the first two, I will begin my discussion with an introduction to it and a summary of the main events. I will then go on to discuss the themes of culture and religion, race, class and gender in the three novels through a discussion of culture contact and colonialism and the Gothic. A brief summary of what Gothic Literature consists of will lead into my analysis of Gothic elements in the three novels. Finally, my conclusions hope to show how Gothicism brings together all the themes mentioned, and with its ongoing fascination for readers and viewers, has helped to bring Bowles back into the limelight since existentialism went out of fashion.

3. 2 Brief introduction to and summary of *The Spider's House*

Cultures are not always mutually intelligible. Obscurities and silences will exist no matter how much research is devoted to the task of making lucid what is dim. (Boehmer 1995, 274)

The intelligibility of a foreign culture remains relative, just as is the case with any other knowledge. No person can pretend to have full knowledge of a given culture that is not his or her own. Despite all the efforts that may be put into the exploration of that foreign culture, his access to it may be limited for he is an outsider. Thus many aspects of this culture will undoubtedly remain inaccessible to him.

This hypothesis may be considered valid when applied to Paul Bowles's works. Bowles was fascinated by Morocco and chose to spend most of his life there, in Tangier. Yet, his long stay there has not enabled him to acquire a detailed overview of the whole culture, the land and the people. This limitation may have been shaped by a number of factors: his being a Westerner, his predisposition towards holding stereotyped ideas about the country, the sort of people he was in touch with, the probability of their misleading him, and his tendency to generalise the facts. We reach these conclusions on reading some of his novels, and more particularly, *The Spider's House*.

In this novel, Bowles takes on the disintegration of the traditional culture of the native Moroccans, a result of the French government's accelerated attempts to consolidate their colonial power, and of the opposing efforts of the nationalist party (Istiqlal), which fought both the established cultural values of Morocco and those of their French colonizers. The title of the novel does not come, this time, from a popular song, as in *The Sheltering Sky*, but from the Koran. A verse states:

The likeness of those who choose other patrons than Allah is as the likeness of the spider when she taketh unto herself a house, and lo! the frailest of all houses is the spider's house if they but knew. (Quran 29: 41)

This brings an added dimension to Bowles's perspective on the consequences of spiritual and cultural destruction brought about by the political upheaval involved in colonialism.

The Spider's House has, as its protagonists, a representative from each side of the cultural divide. Written by Bowles contemporaneously with the events, it is set in Fez in 1954, and shows up the attitudes and actions occurring between the colonisers and the colonised at the troubled point in time. The main character, John Stenham –more like Port Moresby than Dyar – is an exiled American writer. On the other side of the divide is Amar, a fifteen-year-old Arab boy. Readers may say that Amar is the real main character, as books one and two, roughly a third of the novel, are almost exclusively concerned with him. We see the events through his eyes, and Bowles has made a real effort to see the culture from the “other side”.

The secondary characters –Alain Moss, Lee Burroughs Veyron (whose name is no doubt a homage to his friend, William Burroughs), and the Moroccan natives – serve as contrasting elements. Although parts one and two are Amar's, there is a brief and enigmatic third-person prologue centred on Stenham. Stenham's story is then picked up again in books three and four as we see his interaction with Lee Burroughs and Amar. The main point of conflict in the narrative is centred on the choice Stenham must make between his developing friendship with Amar and his love relationship with Lee. In the background we have the rising political tension. Stenham believes that these conflicts between the French government and the native factions are destroying the Fez he has come to know. He believes the Moroccans are happy just as they are: “can't they just be let alone and go on as they are?” (*SH*, 154) Any change will affect radically their identity or essence: “they can stop being Moroccans.” (*SH*, 155)

As in the two previous novels, the plausibility of a meaningful connection being established between a native and an outsider is explored. As Amar begins to show the two Westerners some of the internal workings of the local Moroccan culture –religious festivities and their accompanying rituals –the beginnings of a true bond between Stenham and the young Arab become evident. That this should happen is made possible firstly through Stenham's willingness to open himself up to the new culture and not enclose himself in an expatriate enclave, and secondly through Amar's rejection by his own people. Because of his young age and lack of experience, Amar is only just learning –along with Stenham and the reader –about the changes going on in the city. He is unable to comprehend the Istiqlal's motives for turning on their own people, and in his naïveté he suggests that a much more logical choice would be for all the native peoples to stand against the French colonisers. He voices this opinion to representatives of Moulay Ali, a member of the Istiqlal, revealing his political ignorance and strong beliefs in the traditional religious ways of life. Rather than feeling

suspicious of him, Moulay Ali's representatives feel only contempt for Amar and tell him that he is crazy. When they warn him that on the following day he should not leave the Medina, Amar questions their reasons for giving him this information and chooses to disregard it.

Amar is thrown together with Stenham and Lee as, locked out of the Medina, he cannot get back (rather like Kit in *The Sheltering Sky*). The Americans offer him shelter in the hotel in which they are staying. Amar may be naïve, but he has a certain innate wisdom, which Stenham recognises:

He has been struck again and again by the boy's unerring judgement in separating primary factors from subsidiary ones. It was a faculty which had nothing to do with mental alertness, but derived its strength rather from an unusually powerful and smoothly functioning set of moral convictions. To have come upon this natural wisdom in an adult would have been extraordinary enough, but in an individual who was little more than a child, an illiterate as well, it was incredible. (*The Spider's House*, 329)

We might say that Stenham is attracted to opposites: he finds such firm conviction surprising and uncommon, though it was and still is, much more common in the Muslim population than he realised. Moreover, he views it from his own point of view and for his own advantage. In Amar he sees a measure of hope that the old ways –and Fez itself –will not be completely destroyed. Indeed, his apparent altruistic feelings for Amar as a representative of Morocco's future are severely undermined by his inability to remain committed to any cause beyond rudimentary interest. Like Bowles, he had been a Communist, only to leave the Party. In essence, he can remain interested and engaged only if there is some sort of intimate connection involved; thus Stenham's level of trust in others is virtually nonexistent, by his own admission, he can only entertain the desire for commitment, but not the commitment itself. In the end, Stenham, having gained a new interest in Lee, asserts the improbability of Amar's loyalty, he "knew how it would end: the boy would disappear, a camera, a watch missing [...] he would patiently explain that [...] such behaviour was merely an integral part of their ethical code." (261) Thus he and Lee abandon Fez, leaving Amar in an extremely compromised position, neither able to return nor to get to Meknes to the rest of his family. The Americans' abandoning of the Arab boy is rather like the treatment handed out by the rich couple, Daisy and Tom Buchanan, in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), who play around with people's lives and then just drop them –or

worse, as both Myrtle and Gatsby end up dead –when it no longer suits them. Amar had faith in them, but he was cruelly disappointed:

Amar was running after the car. It was still there, ahead of him, going further away and faster. He could never catch it, but he ran because there was nothing else to do... [H]e ran silently and with freedom. Now for a moment he had the exultant feeling of flying along the road behind the car. It would surely stop... When he got to the curve the road was empty. (405–406)

Just as Neil Campbell puts it, “[t]he Western arrogance exhibited by Stenham [...] involves toying with lives as an amusement or diversion before moving elsewhere.” (Campbell 222)

Although the pair leave together, that does not mean that they share the same ideas. Lee sympathises with Moroccans and is eager for positive change for she believes that their way of living was pure decadence. She is fascinated by the country, which she calls “absolute heaven” and “a magnificent country”, but feels that change must come and that this change will be brought by the Moroccans themselves and will involve the French leaving the country: “It was the express desire that all races, all individuals be equal” (251). Stenham’s reply to this is: “what would you like them to be other than what they are which is perfectly happy?” (216)

3. 2. 1. Culture in *The Spider’s House*

It is well known that Bowles held anti-colonialist ideas. He was all for a radical decolonisation of subjugated countries. Yet this has not prevented him from forming and holding stereotyped ideas. It is quite evident that some of his ideas about the natives were rather coloured by a colonialist viewpoint. One can even dare to say that there is a duality in his views about the land and the natives. While he is enthralled by the land, he is in a way repulsed by the people.

Stenham is the character who best embodies Bowles’s own ideas about the East and its people, though his support for decolonisation is injected into the character of Lee Burroughs more than Stenham. Like Bowles, Stenham is an American writer who has undoubtedly not found himself in his country and has come to Morocco in search of a better opportunity. Just like Bowles, Stenham learns the native language. This was to help him in his professional work. He found in the land and its people an interesting object for his writing which could not be realised without having a closer access through the language. The language was a primordial means to try to understand this foreign culture.

Despite Stenham's effort to learn the language, his knowledge of it remains limited. This limitation in the language is to make his access to the whole culture and its recondite parts rather difficult. The reader becomes aware of this limitation mainly when Stenham is at the house of his other native friend in Fez, Si Jaafar. There, he is not able to follow or understand their jokes, which are coloured with a native flavour. So even if he understands the meaning of the words, he is not able to grasp the hidden meaning of the anecdote. His being a Westerner and an outsider to the country impedes him from getting the whole meaning. So his limited knowledge of the language and the natives' lack of English are two of the many factors that block the channels to mutual cultural comprehension. Stenham thinks that his long stay in Morocco has permitted him to understand the land and its people: "I've been watching them for years..." (250). He no doubt does know them better than most foreigners, and certainly better than the tourists. He never ceases reiterating to his friends that he knows these people too well. As a matter of fact, he is so sure of himself and his knowledge that he lets himself fall into extreme generalisations about the people. Even Lee becomes aware of this tendency he has: "I don't believe you can make such hard and fast rules about the people... That doesn't mean that you know how much each one is like individually." (251)

The reader soon sees that Stenham is quick to form his views. He is equally quick to change them if it is in his interests. He believes Amar because he wants to: "If there were one Amar, there could be others... then his entire construction was false." (336) Upon making Amar's acquaintance and getting to know him, and Morocco through him, Stenham admits that the idea he had about the land and the people was not completely right. Amar comes along with his simple behaviour, his naïveté, his narrow-mindedness, his lack of full knowledge of religion, and shakes Stenham's long-held views about the country and the natives. But this merely demonstrates the negative means by which Stenham gets his information. It turns out that it was not based on good sources.

As a Westerner, he had a preconception about what Fez would be like: "It was part of what he thought a medieval city should be like" (4). In his mind, Stenham had set up a rule on the definition of medieval cities and their inhabitants. He finds it difficult, even on empirical evidence, to change those stereotyped ideas. For example, he thinks Morocco should be ancient and purely Berber, not Muslim. Though here, of course, we must be careful not to confuse Stenham with Bowles himself. The author is creating a character with the limitations of his ignorance, willed or otherwise.

Stenham, again as a Westerner, is filled with a high sense of superiority in relation to the natives. This superiority complex

emphasises his being an outsider and thus hinders a close contact with the native culture. It broadens the gap between him and “them”:

Stenham smiled: unaccountable behaviour on the part of Moslems amused him and he always forgave it because as he said no non-Moslem knows enough of the Moslem mind to dare find fault with it [...] there was a certain amount of hypocrisy in this attitude of his; the truth was that he hoped principally to convince others of the existence of this almost unbridgeable gulf [...] made him feel more sure and gave him a small sense of superiority to which he felt he was entitled, in return for having withstood the rigours of Morocco for so many years [...] secretly he was convinced that Moroccans were much like any other people, that the differences were largely those of ritual and gesture [...]. (6)

Because of this feeling that he is “owed” something by the country, he tends to exploit his relationships to the maximum, giving little in return. His standpoint with regard to Si Jaafar’s family is a case in point: his desire is to get as much information as he can about Moroccan customs in order to use it for his writing. He does not like the family, their behaviour, their dinners, etc., yet he keeps on responding to their invitations, laughing at their jokes, which he never understands.

His behaviour with Amar demonstrates his ambivalent feelings towards Moroccans. For him, Amar is a new sample of another category of Moroccans he has never known before. Amar comes to shake all the general views he has been forming about them for years. Amar’s concern for a mere insect, his sticking to his religion, his ethical behaviour (in not stealing from him when he had the chance), his clear ideas on the colonised status of his country, all of these are new to Stenham. However, without Lee’s insistence, Stenham would never have offered Amar any sort of help. Cambell finds that:

Stenham wants to be part of Morocco but without involvement. He wants everything to suit his demands. He sits between two worlds without making a choice but he expects the benefits of both to be his if he desires them. (Campbell, 215)

His coldness and cynicism, his unwillingness to become involved except if he has something to gain by it are what ultimately triumph in him. This situation is made particularly evident in the final scene with Amar. By letting him down and refusing to help him he is just stressing their relations of superior to inferior. Ultimately, Stenham feels so

superior that Amar no longer matters for him and can be disposed of as if he were a thing and not a person.

3. 2. 2. Religion in *The Spider's House*

On the whole, it may be asserted that a broad and not a superficial knowledge of a foreign culture is likely to be accessible if one is predisposed to accept this culture as it is and not as one wants it to be. As we have seen, this is not the case with Stenham. It is especially apparent in matters of religion. Stenham gets his ideas on religion from limited sources, like Amar. He tends to draw conclusions which do not portray Islam in a correct or very favourable light. The adolescent Amar is not well instructed in Islam and tends to mix dogma with superstition. Any misconception or unbalanced idea Amar might put over, Stenham takes on board and then exaggerates. Amar himself exaggerates those aspects of his religion which he personally feels are the right thing. For example, he believes more strongly than Islam allows in ideas of fate and destiny and what might be “written” about one’s future: “If his family had not been chorfa, descendants of the prophet [...] there would not have been his father insisting on his teaching him the laws of his religion.” (19) This is misleading, as the knowledge of religion is not something exclusive and proper only to the descendants of the prophet. In fact, any true Muslim should learn the principles of Islam.

Amar tends to overrate destiny and underrate choice and behaviour: “Since nothing in all existence could ever be counted as accidental, it had to mean that his life was fated to be linked with Mohamed’s and Ali’s [...] (88) He also has his crises of faith:

Since it is far more sinful to pray irregularly than not praying at all, they had [...] trusted that in His embracing wisdom, Allah would understand and forgive. But often Amar was not sure [...] there were moments when he felt very far from Allah’s grace [...] (70)

Amar’s superficial knowledge of Islam helps to give Stenham wrong ideas, and from his own confusion, he extrapolates the concept that Islam is itself confusing for its believers:

Stenham had always taken it for granted that the dichotomy of belief and behaviour was the cornerstone of the Moslem world. It was too deep to be hypocrisy, it was merely custom. They said something and did something else. They affirm their adherence to Islam in formulated phrases but they behaved as though they

believed something quite different [...] and to him it was eternal contradiction that made them Moslems [...] (336)

Obviously, there is nothing in Islam that says that one may say something and do something else quite different and still be a good Muslim. Hypocrisy –and this is nothing else –although Stenham rejects this alternative, is one of the many vices condemned by Islam. However, it must be admitted, as in any religion, there are people who, for whatever reason, and it is not always ignorance or lack of instruction, fail to bring their conduct into line with their professions of faith. But Stenham is quite wrong to judge as normal and mainstream a behaviour that is aberrant and condemned by the religion itself.

In *The Sheltering Sky*, although there is much less overt discussion of religion, there are certain allusions to Islam. Kit, for example, attempts to show consideration for Muslim sensibilities on the subject of alcohol: “The idea occurred to her that these were Moslems and that the odour of alcohol would scandalise them [...] She took out a small bottle of perfume [...] and rubbed it over her face and neck” (*The Sheltering Sky*, 65). This consideration is to be noticed again when Port and Kit see a Muslim praying. They use the adjective “venerable”, however on other occasions, like when they hear the calls for prayer, they are completely indifferent. They are witnesses of this occasional hypocrisy on the part of Muslims, as when Abdelkader has a drink. He “would sometimes have a Pernod...[and] smiling like a conspirator afterwards as he got up to wash the glasses himself [...] it would never do for anyone to know that he had taken something alcoholic” (206).

Coming back to *The Spider's House*, Stenham also tends to confuse religion with politics: “When I first came here, it was a pure country [...] Now it's finished everything. Even the religion [...]” (187). His judgement is superficial: while the sultan was in exile, there were calls to ban the celebration of the Day of Sacrifice, but this did not mean that the ordinary people were turning their backs on their religion or becoming less devout. When he says: “Can't you see they're taking your religion from you?” (210), he is actually being irresponsible as well as wrong. Sometimes, he even misunderstands his Muslim interlocutors on this subject, not just when they are having a joke at his expense. In conversation with the Arab girl Raissa, she says: “The Moslems are very bad, they may kill us” (202), upon which comment he thinks: “There was always that element of ambivalence in the mind of a Moslem. For a while, it was ‘we’, then suddenly it shifted to ‘they’” (202) Stenham confuses the meaning of the pronouns. By making Raissa use the general, but religious, term “Moslems”, instead of any other word (the people in the movement, the natives, or Moroccans), Bowles intends to

mix things. He lets a narrow-minded Muslim criticise all Muslims by making them appear as murderers who kill for the sake of killing. Actually, what Raissa means by “Moslems” is the people in the movement, but in her addressing Stenham, her mind makes the difference only between Moslems, to whom she belongs, and Christians, to whom Stenham ostensibly belongs, but as she doesn’t belong to the movement, she makes the difference between “they” (people of the movement) and “us” (the common people who work in French-owned buildings). Stenham can only think of “them” and “us” as a division which has arisen through the colonial situation.

3. 3. Colonialism and race in Bowles’s three North African novels

Ideas on race have been explored in literary works mostly in contexts related to colonialism and imperialism. So a work that describes the general interactions between the colonised nations and their colonisers will undoubtedly deal with matters related to race in one way or another. At the beginning we pointed out that the young Bowles was brought up in a household where Darwin’s ideas and the related Social Darwinism were inevitably discussed. He could not have been unaware that ideas of a hierarchy of races were used by some in the West to justify attempts to dominate and subdue peoples of other cultures.

One can easily discern Bowles’s standpoint on colonialism. From his very first novel, written after only a brief knowledge of North Africa, he denounces the colonial situation. Though we must remember that Bowles’s stance is not simple or simplistic. Greg Mullins, writing about Bowles and his fellow expatriates in Tangier, William Burroughs and Alfred Chester, says: “None of these authors pursued a nationalist anti-imperialism, because they criticized nationalism as much as imperialism.” (2002, 16) The ramifications of this stance will be examined later, especially in relation to *The Spider’s House*.

The Sheltering Sky criticises all that is colonial in Algeria and Morocco. Colonialism has deteriorated, if not obliterated, the specificity of the place. Port Moresby feels sorry that the typical characteristics have been lost:

Happiness [...] existed elsewhere [...] in the tents [...] beyond the mountains in the great Sahara, in the endless regions that were all of Africa. But not here in this sad colonial room where each invocation of Europe was merely one more squalid touch, one more visible proof of isolation; the mother country seemed furthest in such a room. (*The Sheltering Sky*, 44)

So even Westerners feel that African cities were contaminated and dirtied by contact with the West. They prefer the desert with all its disorder:

Outside in the dust was the disorder of Africa but for the first time without any visible sign of European influence, so that the scene had a purity which had been lacking in the other towns, an unexpected quality of being complete which dissipated the chaos. (149)

Bowles shows through Port that Europeans have visions of primitivism, but that, although they are naïve, they are also right. A place overwhelmed by disorder that is safe from any sign of civilisation in the form of colonialism is much better than places Europe tried vainly to modernise. These places lose their initial picturesque look without ever becoming really modernised. All the colonialists have succeeded in doing is to deteriorate the pristine state of the place and replace it by a bad, distorted model of Europe.

The Sheltering Sky also sheds light on the intentions and manners the colonisers manifested towards the colonised people: “The other soldiers at the post [...] would have enjoyed seeing all the natives put behind barbed wires and left them to rot in the sun.” (117) This quotation reveals the real intentions and behaviour of the colonialists vis-à-vis the natives. Even the apparent initial kindness Lieutenant Darmagnac showed in his dealing with the natives was undoubtedly no more than a tactical and strategic attitude that is to be characterised as typically colonialist: “[his...] enthusiasm for the natives had lasted three years. About the time he had grown tired of his [...] Ouled Nile mistresses, his great devotion to the Arabs came to an end [...] he ceased thinking about them and began taking them for granted.” (117)

Bowles’s anti-colonialist standpoint is made more obvious when he makes Westerners feel disgusted by the French colonisers. The Lyles, although they are sinister and beastly themselves, believe that the French are the bullies that everyone needs protection from. This evokes the sort of life the colonials compelled the natives to lead. It was a life devoid of any security or safety. So, while Westerners justified their colonising other countries by being the holders and bringers of modernity, technology and security, they were sowing chaos and terror not only among the natives but also among the Western visitors to those countries. Apparently, the only thing this Western civilisation has succeeded in accomplishing is to cause more problems to the countries it

has colonised. Bowles's novels focus on problems arising for natives and visitors alike.

Race characteristics in *The Sheltering Sky* are presented in such a way that difference between "us" and "them" is stressed and made obvious. The presentation of each native character is often achieved through focussing mainly on his physical appearance and, especially, complexion. These two characteristics are what most highlight the differences between natives and Europeans. Natives are usually described via the black/white paradigm of binary opposites. They are black, dark, swarthy, and together with this, the negative poles of other paradigms, such as lifeless. Some light is shed on how Westerners view the natives. They consider them as a low race that must be subjected to and by the West. They even use animal names to designate their "lower" status. It is the case mainly with the Lyles and Tunner, who show a high degree of arrogance and feelings of superiority towards the natives.

On the other hand, the natives often become a subject of fascination for these same Westerners. They perceive the natives as an exotic race who exhibit elements of spectacle with their different skin, typical clothes, etc. Kit is fascinated by the native on the Mehara. Through his image, his "otherness" is made apparent to her eyes. The natives she sees in the Sahara are different from the ones she has seen in the cities. The former are the "real" natives, in their pristine purity, whereas the city dwellers, with their old-fashioned European clothes, have been spoilt by contact with the "white" man. Thus the Saharians undoubtedly embodied the right image the Westerners had of people from the Orient. This explains why the American couple was disappointed by what they saw in the first Algerian cities: there was nothing exotic about them.

Thus race is a strong marker to distinguish between the "self" (the West) and the "other" (the East). Yet, ambivalence characterises the Westerner's view towards this other. There is an "other" which disgusts him or her, and an "other" which fascinates him. Kit goes further in her fascination. During her breakdown, she thinks that she is in love with Belqasim, a typical other. He embodies to a large extent the image of the real "other" in all the aspects of his life: his dark skin, his clothes, his dealing with women, his polygamic situation. Due to many factors, and mainly to her psychological disorder, Kit feels herself, at a given moment, attracted to this man, while she has rejected Tunner, who best represents her civilisation.

Turning now to Bowles's second novel, *Let It Come Down*, we find that race turns out to be an important theme. Right from his first steps on the Moroccan land, Dyar manifests his racist ideas towards the Arabs:

A half dozen of disreputable Arabs had already caught sight of him [...] he turned his head disgustedly as the shouting figures followed the taxi driver [...] he felt a little sick, anyway. (*Let It Come Down*, 11)

During his stay in Tangier, Dyar shows on many occasions his feelings of aversion towards the Arabs. It is a sensation that is aroused by his feelings of superiority towards them. In his contact with them, there has usually been that self-awareness regarding the them/us divide. He categorises “them” along with everything that is backward and lesser. His standpoint has led him to easily draw general conclusions from individual situations. He does not hesitate to qualify them as “monkeys”, “idiotic” or “barbarians”. As Edward Said said of this type of Eurocentrism:

[A] white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition “it” is not quite as human as “we” are. (Said 1978, 108)

When Dyar is with Khadija and sees some Arab boys engaging in indecent acts, he automatically thinks that “a group of American boys would never have behaved like the Young Arabs.” (96) He asserts that all Americans are decent and respectable in their behaviour and that all Arabs are uneducated and indecent. Thus, as Said points out: “what one rather peculiar [Arab] does is made to appear [...] as the candidly exposed centre of all Muslim faith.” (Said 1978, 161)

The association of the “other” with sexual advances on the “self”, particularly the western woman, is also inherent in this novel. Daisy has masochistic fantasies, as she was: “torturing herself with the fantasy that it might have been unlocked, so that it would have opened [...] and a Moor with a beard, looking at her evilly through slits of eyes [...]” (186). It is an instance in which she gives way to her subconscious and conscious fantasies. She imagines an Arab with a hideous appearance trying to force an entry to her house with evil intentions. This is the fantasy which Kit, in the previous novel, had actually acted out with Belqasim. It makes allusion to the prejudices Westerners held towards the Arabs. It is as if tyrannical acts were proper to the Arabs and to no one else. It is as Said noted: “the Orient [...] appeared lamentably underhumanized [...] backward, barbaric [...] the Orient was undervalued.” (1978, 150)

The Westerners discriminate between those natives who are apparently acceptable for social intercourse and those who are more

“other” than most and therefore to be avoided: “they praised the Beidaouis brothers for their cleverness in knowing what sort of Arabs could mix properly with foreigners.” (117) The unacceptable Arabs are to be avoided, unless, on the other hand, their picturesqueness can be exploited for entertainment or other such humiliating treatment. This explains Daisy’s behaviour when she invites her western friends. She “let old Ali serve at table because he owned a magnificent Moorish costume; although he was not very good, not very competent, she thought his appearance impressed them more than the superior service the two Europeans could offer.” (21) So an Arab presence is required to entertain the visitors. This in itself is an assertion of the western feeling of superiority, and a reinforcement of their racist and ethnocentric ideas. Thami, the Beidaoui’s brother, sensed this western feeling towards the Arabs particularly in Eunice: “this hideous woman was his idea of the typical tourist who admired his race only in so far as its members were picturesque.” (139) For her part, Eunice feels that Thami was “exactly the sort of Arab she disliked and habitually inveighed against: outwardly Europeanized” (139). She confronts him with her thoughts, that it “would be far preferable [that they be snake-charmers and scorpion-eaters] to being a nation of tenth-rate pseudo-civilised rug-sellers.” (*ibid.*)

Similar mistrust and mutual exploitation can be found if we examine questions of race and colonialism in Bowles’s third novel, *The Spider’s House*. Although the protagonists are Americans, the colonisers here are French, so it is mostly the French who are demonised by the natives. The French are held responsible for the tension that was prevailing in Morocco in the 1950s: “Ever since the day a year ago, when the French, more irresponsible than usual, had deposed the sultan, the tension had been there” (*The Spider’s House*, 10). The people of Fez were “caught between the diabolic French colonial secret police and the pitiless Istiqlal” (49). Attitudes became inflamed as exaggerated positions were used as propaganda: “The great ambition of every French in Morocco was to kill as many Moroccans as possible” (90). The French brought Berber troops to incite them to fight the Arabs, in such a way that Moroccans were busy fighting each other instead of fighting the French. Berbers and Arabs were both Moroccans and Muslims, yet they would be killing each other. An official strategy of colonialism was to divide and conquer, and this policy was carried out in North Africa, as Bowles shows in this novel.

“May their race rot in hell” (46) is a curse from a Muslim on the French. The local population is systematically targeted and misrepresented by the French, so naturally, there is resentment brewing up into revolt. The French use caricatures to make fun of the locals:

All of them were crudely caricatured scenes of life among Moslems: a schoolmaster, ruler in hand [...] a fellah ploughing, a drunk being ordered off a bar (this last he considered a gross insult to his people). (97)

The colonisers used other strategies to overcome or subjugate their colonised people as well. One way was by attacking the language: “Oh! That cursed dead language that refuses to die.” (294) Another was by debauching them, and yet another was by using strategies that would lead to a weakening of their religious faith:

It was well known that the French had suppressed the sale of kif in the hope of getting the Moslems into the habit of drinking spirits; the revenue of the government would be enormous [...] they always befriended those who broke the laws of Islam and punished those who followed them. (136)

This quotation allows us to detect an erroneous idea believed by Bowles. The fact that his Moroccan friends were consumers of hashish made him believe that use of this drug is permitted in Islam. It is an idea that has been further asserted in his *Their Heads are Green* when he says:

It is to be expected that there should be a close relationship between the culture of a given society and the means used by its members to achieve release and euphoria. For Judaism and Christianity the means has always been alcohol; for Islam it has been hashish. (*THAG*, 57)

Mullins says that Stenham has “a severe case of colonial nostalgia” (2002, 33). Stenham believes that French colonialism has brought only negative changes to the country, he fears the modernisation and “Westernisation” of Fez. His nostalgia is for the time before colonisation, and it is unsentimental: “in a few years the whole country will be [...] just a huge European slum, full of poverty and hatred. What the French have done to Morocco may be depressing, yes, but what it was before, never.” (187) Referring to a period twenty years before (in the mid 1930s), he says “the world was beautiful and life was eternal and it was not necessary to think further than that.” (188) Stenham therefore makes up his mind to leave Fez. He realises that he had fetishized it, Fez was not now what he had thought it was: “The sensible thing was to move to another place [...] in a Morocco not yet assailed by the poison of the present” (233). Mullins puts it in a nutshell: “The fetishization of

Fez includes an abstract appreciation for a static culture but erases the lives and desires of the people who live in the city and produce its culture. Stenham's existentialism and his identity as a Western man are contingent upon perpetuating this very unsentimental relation to his fetish." (2002, 35)

Stenham's attitude is almost racist when he reveals this nostalgia for a picturesque and backward place where people are not as human as Westerners: "I've been watching them for years [...] the whole point is that they are not individuals in the sense you mean." (251); "if they were rational beings the country would have no interest; its charm was a direct result of people's lack of mental development." (210)

To quote Bourara, we dare say that *The Spider's House* is Bowles's "most exclusively Moroccan novel" (Bourara, 164) for it "brings his overall knowledge of the country to bear upon the political situation." (*ibid*) It is a novel where Bowles displays different points of views as regards the political situation in Morocco and mainly towards the struggle for independence. There is the insider's view perceived through the members of the Nationalist party, through some minor characters and more particularly through Amar, who is only a child, and the outsiders' views, which are divided. One of them is "the progressive Polly Lee Burroughs" (162), and the other is "the sentimental Stenham" (*ibid*) with his "regressive ideas" (163). So while Amar is worried about "religion and the corrupting influence exercised by both [political] parties" (162), Stenham is concerned that "Morocco remain[s] primitive and 'pure'" (*ibid*): he doesn't want a new Morocco run by the Nationalist party that intended to modernise the country and eliminate its original and picturesque characteristics. As to Lee, she does what she can to convince Amar of the necessity of struggling for independence.

3. 4. Views on gender and sexuality in Bowles's North African novels

If we suspected that Bowles turned his back on American life for reasons other than pure ideology, this is confirmed in Greg Mullins's book, *Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs and Chester Write Tangier* (2002). Mullins reminds us that Bowles did not go to Tangier on the suggestion of Gertrude Stein merely for economic reasons. Mullins's title, *Colonial Affairs* is a play on words involving not only the literal meaning of "affair" as "matter" or subject", but the romantic and sexual meaning of erotic relationship. Mullins reminds us that "Tangier was an especially attractive place for foreigners to live during the postwar years because of its proximity to Europe and its long history of sexual tourism and intercultural exchange." (2002, 6) He emphasises the racial and colonial

aspect of sexual tourism: “Tangier held another, perhaps less ‘practical’, fascination for all three authors: in Tangier, they could pursue sexual relationships with men who were coded through regimes of colonial discourse as ‘racially’ and ‘sexually’ different from themselves. The culture of the Cold War consensus and of McCarthyism may be largely responsible for the exile of Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester, but the potential for ‘colonial’ erotic exploration in Tangier contributed to their decision to seek refuge there.” (2002, 7)

Tangier, of course, is the setting for only one of Bowles’s three North African novels, the second, *Let It Come Down*. Here, the relationships are mostly heterosexual, with Nelson Dyar pursuing the prostitute Hadija and later seducing the Spanish woman, Daisy Valverde. The figure of Eunice Goode (who is far from good!), however, in her sinister relationship also with Hadija, points to a lesbian relationship. It goes without saying that for Islam, homosexuality is as much to be condemned as is existentialism. The latter denies Allah himself, while the former denies what the three “great” religions of the Western hemisphere, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, among others, hold to be the purpose of a sexual relationship: procreation and the perpetuation of humanity. This is obviously not Eunice Goode’s intention, it is more like hedonism or self gratification. As a fellow expatriate, Eunice ought to be a kindred spirit to Dyar, but she turns out to be as threatening as any native “other” might be, for she reports his passing of information to the American legation.

Dyar is threatened on all sides. Some critics have seen frustrated sexual desire in the mode of Dyar’s murder of Thami. Mullins has this to say on frustration and repression and any possible parallel with Bowles’s own life:

The secrecy with which Bowles lived his sexual life should not be equated with sexual repression. In “The Delicate Prey” (1948) and *Let It Come Down* (1952), Bowles suggests that repression is not an attractive option to pursue. This is most memorably the case in “The Delicate Prey”, in which a bandit castrates, then rapes a defenceless boy. Another example comes at the climax of *Let It Come Down*, when Dyar, who two nights before has seduced Daisy in a majoun-induced stupor, is aroused once again by the same drug, instead of seducing or raping Thami, drives a nail in his ear and through his skull. The emergence of homosexual desire at such moments and its transformation into violence points to a prior repression. Exploring this dynamic makes for gripping fiction but living a life of such repression would be understandably miserable. We would be misguided to

think that Bowles's desire for secrecy indicated repression of this sort. (2002, 39–40)

Folz is a critic who rejects the sexual innuendo in this climax scene: "Nelson Dyar's most basic problem is his difficulty in understanding any individual's drive, especially his own. This leads – almost formulaically at times – to an oppressive negation of human existence." (2000, 104) She says that Thami's death was "motivated more by a need for some sort of definitive action" (*ibid*).

Leaving aside *Let It Come Down*, Mullins suggests that there is more of Bowles's own sexuality in the other two novels. To continue quoting him from where I left off, he has to say:

Rather, we can more accurately recall the remark Bowles once made that, while he never lied about his sexuality, he would consider it shameful to volunteer information about it. [Note 25: Bowles interview conducted in the documentary *Let It Come Down*.] For literary critics, fascination with Bowles's life is not an idle curiosity, because understanding elements of his lived experience can shed welcome light on his texts. Port is not Bowles and Kit is not Jane, but knowledge about the dynamics of the Bowleses' marriage does open up the interpretive possibilities of *The Sheltering Sky*. Similarly, appreciation of *The Spider's House* is enhanced appreciably by the knowledge that it was inspired in part by Paul Bowles's experience in Fez and by his relationship with Ahmed Yacoubi. (2002, 39–40)

To begin the discussion with *The Sheltering Sky*, we can say that sexuality is a recurrent theme in the novel. Yet all the sexual relationships that take place may be characterised as being abnormal, as either not licit or not of mutual consensus. They are rather forbidden relationships and stolen moments that take place in the shadow and darkness or outside of any sense of consciousness.

The first sexual relationship in the novel is one that is shrouded in mystery. It is the one that occurs between Port and Magnia, the prostitute. All the circumstances surrounding it call up suspense and even terror. It takes place outside the city in a tent, the way to which is sinuous, dark and foreshadowing danger. Magnia's friend pretends that she is not a prostitute, but she proves to be so, and furthermore, a thief. When Port discovers that her real intention is to rob him, she calls her friends to take revenge on him for eluding her. Magnia even narrates a legend to Port, where the main theme is sexuality.

The other sexual relationship is the one that materialises between Kit and Tunner during the journey in the train. This relationship may be perceived as the outcome of both drunkenness and Kit's wish to escape reality. She was in a tense mood because of her inability to improve her marital relations with Port. She was also irritated by her having chosen to let Port travel with the Lyles and she was with Tunner, whom she does not appreciate much. Another factor that has worsened her hold on herself is finding herself surrounded in the train by the "primitive" natives. All these factors contribute to her getting drunk, losing her self-control, and succumbing to Tunner's desires. But once she recovers from her "absent-mindedness", she refuses to remember anything about the matter. It is a slip she refuses to admit even in her subconscious.

Kit is subjected to another kind of sexual relationship when she escapes into the Sahara and asks the Arabs to rescue her. In fact, she is "rescued" but also raped by the two Arabs who decide to take her with them. During the trip they force her into a dual relation. When the younger of the two Arabs decides to take her to his house, she is placed in a different sexual situation. Disguised as a boy, her relations with Belqasim must be kept secret and hidden from his wives. It involves encounters that take place in complete darkness.

Her sexuality is also that aspect of her self to which Kit has recourse when she needs to forget her present and her past. Her immersion in her sexual desires constitutes a break between her present and her past and helps her to escape from reality by replacing it with another reality of which she is more certain. As Folz points out, after Port's death:

Kit flees the last representation of Western civilisation, vanishing alone in the desert [...]she becomes an enslaved sexual performer. A good deal of this totally new experience can be viewed as Kit's own attempt to bring meaning to her life without Port –her most sustained and significant source of definition. (2000, 102)

So, her trying to escape the reality she happens to be in is encoded in sexual terms. It is as if she were trying to create a new way of perceiving and adapting to that reality she had found strange.

Almost the same thing may be said of Port when he initiates a sexual relationship with Magnia and tries to have another with the blind dancer. It is as if he were seeking a fulfilment out of the ordinary. Undoubtedly, it is not sexuality in itself that he is concerned with in these two experiences. It is rather his eagerness to escape this reality in which he finds himself. He is in need of forgetting his failing

relationship with Kit, his past in the West and also his present in Africa. Unconsciously, he feels that if he succeeds in escaping these realities for some instants, he will be able to forget these problems and get rid of the tensions that overwhelm his life. His behaviour may also be perceived as an attempt to cope with the present and the challenges of the new land to which he has come.

The relationship existing between the Lyles sounds unusual. They pass for mother and son, yet they are undoubtedly lovers, as the Arab waiter asserts to Port. They cannot face society with their strange relationship: an elderly woman with a gigolo, a young man kept for his sexual services. It is a relationship that is hidden and that again, takes place in complete darkness. It is also a relationship that may be characterized as shocking and for some, even offensive. However, there is another interpretation which is even more offensive and repugnant and that sees the Lyles as mother and son and where the mother imposes an incestuous relationship on her son, taking advantage of his need of money. So both interpretations are likely to offer us an odd and abnormal sexual relationship.

We know that Bowles's views about sexuality were permissive, not for nothing did he choose to live in Tangier. Bourara goes so far as to assert that Bowles's interests in Morocco and more particularly in Tangier were mainly to "serve his personal interests and needs—to live cheaply, travel, and buy the (sexual and creative) services of unquestioning servants and partners." (179) But as Mullins said, Port is not Paul and Kit is not Jane. In fact, there is very little homoeroticism in the novel, a mere note: "I've been told that such infections can even be transmitted among men themselves." (70) Bowles, as a great observer among other people, uses his characters to discuss gender relations of different types in the setting of North Africa.

Gender is focussed on intensely in *The Sheltering Sky*. Women's bodies are represented as objects for male desire and masculine gaze. Their bodies are highly sexualized. Kit, for example, is the target of men's lust: either her compatriot Tunner, or the natives who exploit her like a slave, particularly when they compel her to perform the "double ritual love". Belqasim also imprisons her and limits her life to that of a sexual performer, for when he visits her, it is her body he is interested in, not her mind. It is as if she did not have a mind. The situation of Kit, however, is ambiguous: how far does she welcome the relationship with Belqasim, or how far does she welcome it because her mind is deranged? Mullins reminds us that part of colonial nostalgia is the repressed desire for the "other":

At this point, we can see yet another face of colonial nostalgia: not only a vague desire on the part of the postcolonial world to go back in time and not only a yearning to witness or experience the “purity” of traditional non Western cultures, but also a melancholia inspired by the unacknowledged loss of a disavowed sexual desire of the colonized other. (2002, 27)

Of course, Port had considered Magnia and the blind dancer in a similar way, except that he paid for their services. Another native woman subject to the desire of a Westerner is Yamina, for the Lieutenant “allowed himself to consider how to spend the night with her.” (119)

On the whole, the mere sight of a woman is capable of raising the possibility of having her as a sexual object. This is true of both Westerners and natives, and they have varying degrees of power to bring these possibilities to fruition. Since all the native women characters Bowles creates are either prostitutes, maids or submissive wives, who accept humiliation from their husbands in silence, the implication is that women in North Africa have little chance to lead decent and respectable lives in which they may enjoy their lives as “women”. Their marginalisation is manifest, and whether they are married or not, they are in the clutches of a male, as in the case of Magnia. Her case seems to back up the suggestion that prostitution might be the only option for a marginalised woman of the Third World with no access to any other kind of work.

Although Port is not Paul and Kit is not Jane, as Mullins said, their relationship sheds light on the texts. Similarly, appreciation of *The Spider's House* is enhanced in part by Paul Bowles's experience in Fez and by his relationship with Ahmed Yakoubi. Unlike Stenham, who met the young Amar, and nothing came of it, Bowles met an extraordinary young man and became his patron and lover. According to Mullins:

Bowles met Ahmed Yakoubi in 1947 and was immediately impressed with Yakoubi's talents as a story teller and an artist. They maintained a relationship over the following decade, during which time Bowles helped Yakoubi establish reputation for his paintings. During this time, friends of Paul Bowles understood his relationship with Yakoubi to be both sexual and deeply emotional. (2002, 40)

Bowles, since Yakoubi's rather early death in 1986, has denied all this, at one point avowing that he had never really been in love with anyone, which is probably true. Mullins suggests that it was perhaps Bowles's

own lack of passion that made him create passionless characters: “On the contrary, his major novels and short stories repeatedly explore the failure, inconvenience, or irrelevance of sentiment.” (2002, 41) According to Mullins’s reading, both Bowles’s and his character Stenham’s emotional attitude is a direct result of the colonial power relationship.

When the novel opens, he has already reached an understanding of his relation to the inhabitants of a colonial space that admits no possibility of sentiment. Stenham’s crisis is the inverse of [Fraulein] Windling’s: at the end of the novel he encounters genuine sentiment in Amar, and this challenge to his worldview leads him to end his nostalgic “romance” with Morocco. Stenham does not open himself up to affect at this point in the novel – neither his rude treatment of Amar nor his combative and parched relationship with Lee offers any hope along these lines. For Stenham as for Bowles, removing one’s self from sentiment is a way of coping with accommodating the psychological constraints of colonial relations. (2002, 43)

In spite of all this, Yakoubi no doubt contributed greatly to the conception of Amar, as Bowles himself admitted in interview: “It wasn’t about him as a subject, but it was inspired by him, suggested by him.” (Bischoff quoted in Mullins 2002, 41). Indeed, Bowles was living with Yakoubi when he began *The Spider’s House* in 1954, by which time, Yakoubi was about twenty-three. How far both the teenaged Yakoubi and the older Yakoubi influenced Amar is difficult to tell, but we might posit that he affected men and women in different ways. Lee has a completely different reaction to Amar’s sentimentality. Although she has come to know him as well as Stenham, she feels more distanced from the natives in general. At a religious festival, from the vantage point of her superior gaze as closer to the colonising French than to the natives, (she is looking down upon the scene) she feels completely an outsider and is not at all willing to “go native”:

[...] all belonged unmistakably to the darkness, and therefore it had to be wholly outside her and she outside it [...] she was up here observing it, actively conscious of who she was, and very intent on remaining that person, determined to let nothing occur that might cause her, even for an instant, to forget her identity. (314)

Fully engulfed by the terms of a discourse that divides coloniser from colonised, Lee abandons her sentiment for Amar and recognises the basis of her relationship with him as that of patron and client. She gives him money and tells him to buy a gun and join the Istiqlal. She thus tries to corrupt his purity and align him with those other youngsters willing to fight for “modernity” and “progress”. Thus we see that aspects of sexuality in this novel are politicised in a way not apparent in the other two novels. She willingly does this, while Fräulein Windling, as we shall see later, unwittingly or reluctantly does the same.

Religion also plays a role in these relationships, but only from the point of view of Amar. As Mullins points out:

Amar, on the other hand, is not restricted, because he sees and lives in the world through an entirely different discourse, that of Islam. To Amar, Stenham is sent by Allah, an intervention that benefits Amar materially but that also holds out the possibility for a sincere friendship. If Amar does desire Stenham, or identify with him, it is on an entirely different set of terms from those that form Stenham. (2002, 38)

Thus the native character turns out to be much nobler than the Westerners, and no less complex. He is also more sociable, for Bowles represents expatriation as an easy exile from national culture and from the very possibility of social integration. Mullins argues that:

American expatriate writers inhabit the legacy of American and Moroccan political history. As residents of Tangier, they participate in the social structures of colonialism and discover that their interactions with Tanjavis are of necessity shaped by the psychology of colonialism. Far from being “free” from history, sexual relations, too, are shaped by the psychology. (2002, 14)

Now I will leave discussion of content to focus finally on form: the use of the Gothic mode to portray the menacing or frightening aspects of meeting with the “other”. In a quotation immediately above, we saw how Lee convinced herself that “all belonged unmistakably to the darkness”. Black and white can no doubt be questioned, as Mullins said of Bowles, Borroughs and Chester: “While they step into a situation that casts them as foreign and white and therefore a ‘colonizer’, they write interzone texts that critique binary structures of dominance and that imagine new forms of subjectivity.” (2002, 15) But for questions of form, Bowles who suffered the impact of Poe as a child, turned to the

dark, Gothic mode for his frameworks and atmosphere. Poe was not the only writer to orient Bowles in this direction, there were two others:

In keeping with the boyhood interests nourished by his mother, Bowles became interested in Arthur Machen, an English writer specializing in psychological horror, mystery, the supernatural, and the unconscious. He also discovered André Gide, whose interest in and depiction of the Arab world with its radically different moral standards similarly sparked Bowles's interests. In these two writers Bowles encountered a fictionalized dichotomy of the inner and outer self, one of his own most sustained thematic pursuits. (Folz 2002, 83)

But before entering into a discussion of how Bowles uses the Gothic in his fiction, it is necessary to make a brief review of what the Gothic mode is, what its elements are, so we can detect them in the three novels.

3. 5. Bowles and the Gothic mode

3. 5. 1. Brief summary of the Gothic mode

Horace Walpolde's *The Castle of Otranto* is held by many experts to be the first novel of Gothic fiction, appearing in 1764, and thus placing the beginning of the genre in the second half of the eighteenth century. This century is the age of Enlightenment, in some ways the opposite of dark, often medieval, Gothic, so other critics prefer to equate Gothicism with Romanticism, and hail Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as the first prominent novel of the type. In any case, both novels and all those belonging to the genre appeared as a sort of protest against the horrific aspects of societies, whether simply primitive or developed and proto-industrial. In his "The Nature of Modern Gothic and Horror Fiction", Clive Bloom tells us that:

Theories of Gothic and horror literature tend to be of two philosophical types. The first sees such fictions as disturbing but conservative, restoring things to the status quo and dedicated to the ultimate return to normalcy. The second sees such fiction in the opposite light as disturbing in order to change, not recuperative and conservative but radical and subversive, dedicated to excess and marginality. (Bloom 1998, 13)

Later on, we will see that Bowles's brand of Gothic, although not ostensibly didactic or moralising, belongs to the second of these philosophical stances.

Though the term “Gothic” was exploited by many other artistic fields, most of all architecture, it “guaranteed its survival in the literary field” (Mulvey-Roberts 1998, 85) more than any other. Thus it is not confined to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but opened up and made itself available for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

The cultural conditions in which it had first appeared –the unease about Enlightenment modes of thought, about empirical science, and epistemological certainty inherited from the 18th century and the official daylight definitions of national, and rational, Protestant culture, the criteria for superstition—all these elements of late 18th century cultural formation had survived, and indeed intensified in the 19th century. The Gothic mode had become decentered, a register available for writers of many different kinds. (*ibid.*)

Marie Mulvey-Roberts’s *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* cites and differentiates between many subcategories of Gothic. There existed, or exist, American Gothic, Russian Gothic, female Gothic, Colonial Gothic, and so on. For instance, the American Gothic that was also one of the first literary genres of American fiction was contemporary with many cultural, social and political experiences and problems, among which we find racial discrimination. This Gothic literature articulated its criticism of the dark side of American society. The notion of the “other” (whether seen in the native Americans or the black slaves transported from Africa) was also a predominant theme of this fiction. The colonial setting, whether in the West or the East, is conducive to treatments of culture contact and unequal relations: “Certainly [there has usually been] a significant overlap as the Oriental and the Gothic continued to encode the alien and the other in terms of both external and internal corruption” (Mulvey-Roberts 1998, 169)

The same may be said of female Gothic. It has in fact shown a concern for the problems of the woman considered as the “other”, unequal to man. In this fiction, man is the alien and threatening force against which woman rebels. So Female Gothic was considered as an expressive “rebellion [...] to enforce social conformity” (*ibid.*, 54) As Helen Small, writing on insanity and the Gothic in Mulvey-Roberts’s *Handbook* puts it:

The forms of insanity are usually clearly gendered in early Gothic fiction. Where the mad heroines in these novels pathetically lose their wits, the villains of Walpole, Beckford,

Radcliffe, Lewis and their followers are driven to insanity by vaulting ambition and uncontrollable lusts (often incestuous). Their madness is little more than a cipher for immorality and evil. [...] Women, when deranged by the loss of a lover, or by the sexual predations of men, had an unchallenged claim upon the reader's sympathy." (*ibid.*, 153–4)

Despite the specific characteristics pertaining to each variant of the Gothic, they all share a concern with an attempt to analyse the darker side of society. They express their contempt for certain social arrangements through many prominent elements that constitute the important pillars of the Gothic. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* defines the Gothic novel as an "early Romantic, pseudo-medieval fiction having a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror" (*Micropedia IV*: 646). Mulvey-Roberts, in her *Handbook*, fills in more details:

Mystery and terror constitute the important elements of the Gothic. They shed an aura of darkness and gloominess on the narrative of the novel. A setting characterized by its claustrophobic aspect is another of these elements. It helps emphasize the notion of the trap and incarceration be it physical or psychological, in which the protagonists find themselves. The Brontës are said to have "internalized and psychologised the old Gothic, producing wild and dark accounts of the perversity of human passion." (Mulvey-Roberts 1998, 86)

Bowles's "mentor", Edgar Allan Poe, is said to have "used the Gothic vocabulary of excess to explore an intense and suffocating inner world of psychological isolation and perversity." (*ibid.*) The inner world of repression and marginalization is especially well suited to exploration through this mode: "Romanticism shares Gothic's sustained interest in the borders of human experience: as the range of Gothic motifs produces a symbolic language capable of representing repressed desire, or an obsessive fascination with taboo. [...] Romanticism takes an interest in that language for its own fascination with the disturbing power of imaginative or psychic activity." (*ibid.*, 197)

Gothic fiction presents a special category of characters. Many writers used figures of monsters or deformed beings who transgress the codes of reason and morality, as was the case with Shelley's Frankenstein and others. Gothic "heroes" are ready to practise any immoral or outrageous deed, justifying it with their right to survival. They may even be presented in the form of ghosts and other supernatural figures, as opposed to pseudo-scientific ones. On the other hand, a more

realistic aura has been added to the Gothic character by presenting them, not haunted by any supernatural force, but subject to some instability that renders them disordered. This disorder in their persona is worse when it is mental, for they lose all bounds with reality and start to act in an irrational manner. Such characters are found more recently, in contemporary Gothic. In this variant of Gothic, there may still be found figures of vampires or monsters, as in the works of Angela Carter, indeed, the trend has become fashionable again. Human beings may be transformed into zombies by some grotesque surreal deed or event that may happen during their mental or psychic disorder. What may differentiate the Neo-Gothic from the old version may be the contemporary setting more than anything else. Certain examples of the contemporary Gothic have been called the “subtly Gothic” by Crow in his *American Gothic*; these are stories which “reveal their Gothic elements slowly, or upon reflection, or in hybrid form with other modes of discourse” (1999, 2) This contemporary Gothic has little recourse to the old haunted mansion set in a wood hundreds of years ago. However, the setting is still made mysterious and labyrinthine. It still helps to intensify the horrific aspect of circumstances surrounding the protagonists, increasing their dilemmas and rendering their endings more dramatic.

3. 5. 2. The Gothic mode in Bowles’s novels

The impact of Poe and Arthur Machen on Bowles’s childhood sensibilities helps explain why we find his works replete with dark images that remind us of Gothic fiction. In fact, just as Bowles was writing his North African novels, the Gothic hit the news in various ways. Firstly, Arthur Machen died in 1947, the year in which Bowles sketched out the whole idea of *The Sheltering Sky* while on a fifth Avenue bus suffering from a fit of nostalgia over Tangier (*Without Stopping*, 274–5); secondly, in the same year the French passed laws prohibiting children’s “horror” comics, and two years later, they were banned in Canada. In 1955, the year of Nabokov’s *Lolita*, about a pre-teenaged girl held as sexual prey and enslaved by a paedophile (however subtle and parodic), whose idea began when the author saw a monkey in the Paris zoo draw its own picture with the bars of its cage in a prominent position, that same year, the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act was promulgated in Great Britain. So horror stories were incredibly popular, so much so that some people were writing them specifically for children, and this apparent abuse needed to be curbed. Bowles, of course, wrote for adults, but he wrote to his mother, telling her that his stories “were gruesome and that he intended

to horrify his readers [... and that these stories] were the grandchildren of Poe.” (Caponi 1994, 67)

Catherine Rainwater advises us to look for Poe’s influence in more than just the content:

The works of Bowles suggest Poe’s influence in three major areas: characterization, architectonics, and notions about language. Like Poe, Bowles develops characters who suffer an imbalance between rational and nonrational forces of mind; such characters attempt to transcend or escape the limits of personality, often to find themselves inhabiting nightmarish psychological realms from which there is no exit. Also like Poe, who develops a single mythopoetic vision which informs almost all of his works, Bowles devises a system of spacial symbols that remains constant throughout the majority of his stories and novels. And finally, both Poe and Bowles raise similar questions about the relationship between the deterioration of personal identity and of linguistic ability.²¹

Here we will look at aspects of characterisation and Gothic spaces, while leaving the discussion of deterioration of personality and language ability until a later analysis, that of the early short story “A Distant Episode,” which particularly lends itself to an illustration of this idea. It is not surprising then, to find many of the conventions of this genre in Bowles’s fiction: disordered and disoriented characters with danger surrounding them on all sides, grotesque deeds committed by some of these characters, dark settings, even cemeteries, physical violence as well as fear, and tragic endings. Insanity and madness figure too, often brought on by contemporary problems, so Bowles partakes of both the old order and Neo-Gothicism. The ruined mansions and dark churchyards of medieval times have been replaced by contemporary neuroses and the desert. The desert functions as an uncanny, hostile and threatening place, capable of causing the maximum harm to the vulnerable person. No wonder one of his stories is called “The Delicate Prey”. As Caponi reminds us: “English critics [...] said [...] these are tales of terror of a high order.” (Caponi 1998, 66)

Existentialism and Gothic have much in common, so just as Bowles’s first two novels are more existentialist than *The Spider’s House*, so are they more Gothic. However, there is also a connection

²¹ Quoted in Hibbard 1993, 249. See note: “Catherine Rainwater’s article “Sinister Overtones,” “Terrible Phrases”: Poe’s Influence on the Writings of Paul Bowles” first appeared in *Essays in Literature* Fall, volume 2, 1984. Permission to quote from *Essays in Literature* is given by Western Illinois University.”

between colonialism and the post-colonial situation and the Gothic, so this last novel is not free from such elements. “That contemporary literatures could be both Gothic and the product of postcolonial cultures should come as no surprise” we read in *Empire and the Gothic* (Smith & Hughes 2003, 89). Thus, while dealing with postcolonial accounts one can also be open to possible Gothic interpretations. Many motifs, like the threats of racial mixtures and racial othering, circulate among Gothic as well as postcolonial works. They both project light on a “series of binary oppositions such as Occident/Orient, black/white and civilized/savage” (*ibid.*) And we must not forget that the Gothic developed in nations that were colonisers and have special relations with formerly colonised ones.

I will begin my discussion with *The Sheltering Sky*. At first sight, one may not notice these images here, but delving a little deeper, we see everything about the novel suggests the genre. Bearing in mind that the Gothic is used to exorcise fears and terrors, this framework is certainly present. *The Sheltering Sky* is not immediately Gothic because there are no medieval settings, no vampires and ghosts. But the protagonists are subject to psychological pressures and, in the desert, to physical harm, which generate fear in both characters and readers. Yet no one expects the ending to be so alarming and tragic. This unexpectedness is also a hallmark of the subtly Gothic.

It is true that the events do not take place in castles or haunted enclosed ruins in forests, but the dwellings in the desert get darker and darker, and more mysterious and inescapable. Poe showed us in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* that Gothic settings do not have to be dark; the narrator moves inexorably south until he is engulfed in the white maelstrom of the South Pole. The compulsion of Pym’s ever southerly progression may be seen reflected in Port’s determination to keep on travelling south, leaving the safety of more civilized places.

Port witnesses the first mysterious space of the trip when he decides to accompany the Arab to an unknown place. The way leading to the mountain where he is to have his nocturnal adventure with Magnia already generates the fear of Gothic places. Magnia’s dwelling turns out to be the nomad tents set in the bottom of a valley surrounded by “uneven black mountains” (SS 25). As he flees in complete darkness, he crosses a Muslim cemetery. Another place that offers us a typical Gothic vision is the train (as we saw, a symbol of the journey towards death in Freud). The train is old and dark and filled with unpleasant, uncongenial, even threatening, especially male, companions. Even were Kit able to escape from it, there is no safety outside in “the black night”: “Always there were voices out beyond in darkness, shouting in the guttural mountain tongue.” (63) By displaying one of the people on the train as a

lion-faced man, Bowles is intensifying the Gothic image of a sort of Frankenstein creation, not entirely human.

But the Gothic is seen most in Port and Kit's psychology. They suffer a high degree of tension that leads to terror: "The terror was always there inside her." (78) Kit cannot escape it because she cannot think for herself and just go back to a more civilised place, she follows in Port's wake. For his part: "He was unable to break out the cage into which he had shut himself." (79) Throughout the events of the novel, they experience feelings of uneasiness and fear of something terrible that is to happen, but they do not know what or where it will come from. Kit is obsessed by her fear of omens, to which she gives a significance that she thinks relevant to their future life. She is always "conscious of [...] the end approaching." (*ibid.*) With no hope for the future, they feel that "time would bring about a change which could only be terrifying." (178)

The Gothic vision is particularly prominent during Port's illness and his agony. His pain and his anguished cries sound so harrowing that they generate fear not only in Kit and the people around him but also in the reader. That Port is suffering in his body is part of the Gothic tradition. In *The Handbook to Gothic Literature* we read:

Emphasizing Ann Radcliffe's designation of HORROR rather than "terror", the Gothic graphically renders the body as violently attacked and in excessive pain. Whereas sentimentalism had envisioned the pained body through a decorous, private, and emotionally poignant lens, the Gothic body is publicly displayed as the victim of social, religious, or political tyranny. Such depictions are often formulaic, and in the case of the rivalry between M.G. Lewis and Radcliffe, proceed from the desire to outdo one's predecessors in the degree of violence depicted. (Mulvey-Roberts 267)

The place where Port dies is called "Sbaâ", Arabic for lion. This evokes the idea of a savage, hence Gothic, place that will devour the people coming there. It was an isolated place: "It was a separate town, alien to the surrounding landscape and candidly military in aspect." (161) Port's illness forces them to seek refuge in a sort of primitive military hospital. Kit only feels that "it's a prison and herself a prisoner" (163), and that "it is a place of horror." (165)

More Gothic images emerge when Kit has her adventure and breakdown in the Sahara. During her ride with the two Arabs, "it occurred to her [several times] that they were nowhere." (217) This evokes the idea of the void, a primordial notion in the Gothic. The idea of the prison or the cloisters reappears when Kit is at Belqasim's. There,

she is really enclosed. Belqasim puts her in a room out of which she is not allowed to go, first, for fear of being discovered by his wives, and later on for fear that she will escape. What further intensifies the idea of her being a prisoner is “the tiny square window with iron grillwork across the opening.” (227) The only person allowed to enter there, apart from Belqasim, is the maid, who is “an ancient negro slave woman, with a skin of an elephant’s hide.” (228) So all around Kit speaks the Gothic.

Like *The Sheltering Sky*, Bowles’s next novel, *Let it Come Down*, appears initially to have no hint of the Gothic. This in itself is a symptom of the Gothic; in fact, unexpectedness is a strong pillar of the Gothic genre. Right from the beginning of the events, the reader feels something awful is going to happen. It is something expected particularly from Dyar’s inner monologues, but we are never prepared for the appalling events at the end. This second novel is more like Camus’s *L’Étranger* in its vision of the Gothic than *The Sheltering Sky*. For while in the latter novel the protagonist is a victim, in *Let It Come Down* and Camus’s novel, the protagonists at the end turn unexpectedly into executioners.

Both protagonists seem to be simple characters, who lead simple monotonous lives far from any troublesome events. However, they end up killing a human being. They find themselves suddenly under pressure and their nerves stretched to the point that exacerbates their malevolent unconscious and leads them to commit their crimes. The idea for Dyar’s first crime, that of stealing his employer’s money occurs to him in a sudden moment without any previous preconception. Many factors contribute to his committing this crime: his desperate need to get money; his not taking seriously the commission he is charged with, for instead of waiting for the bank to open, he goes to the beach to sunbathe. His second crime, which is far more serious and grotesque, is also committed because of his malevolent unconscious. Afterwards, he takes refuge in an old house in the Spanish zone and is overwhelmed by fear that he will be found out and killed by Thami. The effect of the drug he has taken, given to him by Thami, is that he does not recognise the sleeping Thami as a human being:

The sides of his mind, indistinguishable from the walls of the corridor, were lined with words in Arabic script [...] Partly he knew that what he saw before him was Thami [...] partly he knew it was an unidentifiable object lying there immeasurably heavy with its meaninglessness. (308)

His crime is the outcome of the pressure under which he finds himself; it is not a situation he has actively sought. What makes his crime more

grotesque is his unawareness of the atrocity of his deed. Nor does he show any feelings of regret or remorse. He has become the amoral or immoral villain.

Dyar is like Meursault, who also leads a fairly peaceful and monotonous life. But he shows more ambition and frustration. Meursault's aimless life is directed more at others than himself. He is ready to help the people he knows without calculating the consequences. Indeed, it is his willingness to help and his naïveté that bring about his fatal ending. His deed is provoked more by the behaviour of others. His evil side, which is usually kept repressed, as with Dyar, is brought to light in a moment of unconsciousness. This double nature in both protagonists has similarities with Nabokov's murderer in *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert, and, of course, with that Gothic pair, Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Humbert Humbert feels remorse over ruining the life of Lolita, but none at all over murdering Quilty. Similarly, Meursault is pressed on to commit his crime by things in his subconscious, like the death of his mother, and irritating and frightening things apparent to his consciousness, like the sun and heat and the glint of the Arab's knife in the sunlight. The judge is harsh towards Meursault because he sees no mitigating circumstances and no remorse, for the murderer fired five more shots into the stricken body of his victim.

The theme of the outsider, a recurrent theme in the Gothic genre, is present in both novels. Both Dyar and Meursault transgress the laws and become outsiders as far as justice is concerned, so they must be judged and punished. In fact, ironically, the judge is more severe on Meursault for his reaction and his lack of emotional feeling about his mother's death than for the actual crime he has committed. One feels that Dyar has always been an outsider and a loser. He experiences feelings of uneasiness, sickness, pessimism, alienation and not belonging: "he still felt coreless, he was no one, and he was standing here in the middle of no country." (*LICD*, 151) The setting also contributes to his feeling of disorientation. Tangier, where most of the events take place, is a mysterious place with contrasting combinations. He gets lost in a maze of streets: "In the street Dyar tried to piece together the broken thread of the itinerary, but it seemed they were going back by another route." (147) And again: "The places through which he was passing were like the torturous corridors in dreams, it was impossible to think of them as streets or alleys." (178) Everything is gloomy and dark and a mystery beyond his Westerner's limited understanding: "It was as though each hill, stone, gully and tree held a particular secret for him to discover [...] the longer he considered the mysterious ensemble, the more indecipherable the meaning of the whole became." (274)

Dyar needs to do something to reconnect with life: “His problem was to escape from his cage [...] to discover the chord inside himself which would liberate those qualities capable of transforming him from a victim to a winner.” (178) To quote Elkouche :

Dyar has of course planned and wished that this symbolic journey from the West to the East will save him from his deep feeling of anxiety, boredom and vast existential emptiness which, he thinks, are engendered by the sophisticated and over-civilized quality of life in his American metropolitan milieu [...] he [...] has come to Tangier in quest for some “other” and simpler mode of existence as well as for therapeutic regeneration in the Orient’s “natural” and exotic universe [...]

Yet, instead of a simple and serene life, Dyar has found in Tangier only another cage and more complex and corruptive human relationships. For this city has lost much of its precolonial innocence, especially after its transformation into an “International Zone”. (Mohamed Elkouche: “Picturing the Interzone: Tangier in P.Bowles’s *LICD* and A.Majid’s *Si Yussef*” *Performing/Picturing Tangier*, 107)

So just as with Port, the struggle to give meaning to life ironically and inevitably entails courting and embracing death, or at least dire consequences. The “atmosphere of moral decadence and socio-political corruption in which Dyar himself soon gets enmeshed” (*ibid.*, 108) excludes any hope for a return to ordinary life. One may dare to say that the use of the Gothic in both of Bowles’s novels rehearses the collapse of a stable world. This contrasts with *The Spider’s House*, where the two Western protagonists escape from North Africa back to a more stable world, or at least to a more settled part of the country, leaving problems affecting others behind in their wake. The ending of this novel, like the narrative in general, is far less Gothic, but, all the same, many of the Gothic elements I have explored here are also to be found in it.

3. 6. Concluding remarks on Bowles’s long fiction set in North Africa

As Francine Prose neatly summarises:

Paul Bowles’s obsessive subject is the tragic, even fatal mistakes that Westerners so commonly make in their misguided and often presumptuous encounters with mysteries of a foreign culture.

(Prose 2005, 1)

Here, Prose has brought together all the factors we recognise in Bowles's North African novels. Firstly, my study has shown that he is obsessive: he recycles the same theme in almost all his writings, and, once having chosen his theme, in this case, the foreigner, who is also personally disoriented, in a potentially hostile environment, he carries it through to the ultimate consequences.

Secondly, all three stories are tragic, though the first two more than the last. Also, they are *inexorably* tragic, that is, the protagonists are singled out to have tragic lives and endings, with no hope of any reprieve. Part of their tragedy is that they make mistakes. They are placed in a context which, like Bowles's own life, and that of his wife, involves an encounter with the "other", with a situation which is different from their previous life and which brings them into contact with "different" people.

The characters' attitudes are usually set within a superiority complex. They feel that they come from a civilisation and a culture which they consider better than a new one in which they find themselves, thus their attitude is presumptuous, and, more or less misguided. Some characters are obviously more misguided and less well-intentioned than others.

Finally, the foreign culture is always mysterious to them, and some characters actually prefer this, while others deplore it and wish they were not there. To these characters, however, life is mysterious and overwhelming wherever they are. One suspects that they would be doomed even if they stayed at home.

Bowles himself is the manipulator, the puppeteer: Bernardo Bertolucci's 1990 film version of *The Sheltering Sky* portrayed Bowles himself, playing himself, sitting in a café observing Port and Kit and commenting on their short-sighted views and predicament. He knew much more than the best-intentioned of these characters, Port and Stenham, but, as Prose points out, he could over-generalise, and, as I quoted at the beginning, his aim was never to be what we might call "true":

Bowles was immensely proud and fiercely territorial about his knowledge of North African customs, music, and folktales, his familiarity with Islam, his fluency in Moghrebi, his ability to understand the North Africans around him or at least (unlike most foreigners) to admit, and know why, he would never understand them. At times, this led him to make sweeping generalisations of the sort that can't help but make us uneasy: "No Moroccan will ever tell you what he thinks, or does, or means. He'll tell you

some of it and tell you other things that are completely false and then weave them together into a very believable core, which you swallow, and that's what's considered civilised." (Prose 2005, 1)

4. Bowles's Short Fiction

In this close analysis of Bowles's stories I hope to follow through from the study of the novels and travel-writing by showing how the themes and points of view remain basically the same. However, I have tried to reveal in greater detail the technical devices that make of Bowles such a great writer in his condensed fiction. In this I also respond to Hassan Bourara's comment: "While all the attempts to relate Bowles to a Gothic or existentialist tradition are not completely misplaced, they nevertheless impose certain limits which make it difficult, if not impossible, to account for the aspects that make him a distinctive writer." (Note 47, p. 36) In order to account for these aspects –although Bourara was referring to the need to examine Bowles's personal experience and opinions as evidenced in his fiction– I prefer to take on Bowles the crafter of stories, thus I have made a formal study of each of the selected stories. Such a study also responds to Bowles's own affirmation: "To me, the manner of representation is considerably more important than what is represented." (quoted in Elghandor 1994, 23)

After his wife Jane published *Two Serious Ladies* in 1943, Bowles decided to turn his attention away from music and travel journalism and more towards writing fiction. In 1944 he wrote "The Scorpion" and the following year in New York, "By the Water" and "A Distant Episode." It seems he needed to place a distance between himself and his settings in order to compose his stories (just as he was to conceive of his first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, on a bus there three or four years later.) These early stories came out in 1950 as *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories*. He was to go on to publish a total of nine different collections, not counting the *Collected Stories, 1939–1976* (1980) and other collections that bring together already published stories.

4. 1. Introduction to the genre of the short story

As there is no consensus on what constitutes a good short story, I will start my study of Bowles and his short fiction with a brief overview of opinions and theories which lie in the background of his formation.

Until not too long ago, writes Lohafer (1989), the only people who theorised about short stories were the ones who wrote them, such as Edgar Allan Poe –curiously, one of Bowles's key authors–, Chekhov, Henry James, H.E. Bates, Frank O'Connor and Eudora Welty. But now, short stories are the object of theoretical criticism by scholars who are not practitioners, and may, therefore, be less subjective. Since the seminal work, Brooks and Warren's 1943 classic anthology *Understanding Fiction*, much work has been done. Shaw (1983) is not

the only critic to refer to the fact that the short story has usually been regarded as the poor cousin of longer fiction. She begins her work *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* with a chapter entitled “Only Short Stories”, and considers the estimates that have been made in comparison to novels, examining possible explanations for the apparent inferiority complex. The technique of small-scale characterisation she defines as “Glanced at through a window” (chapter 5).

Lohafer and Clary, editors of *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads* (1989), show how recent short story theories have focused upon problems of definition: for example, chapter 1 is dedicated to the “Genre Question”. In the same work, May writes in his essay “Metaphoric Motivation in Short Fiction” that “The theme and technique of the short story perhaps have always focused on the power of metaphor and story itself to answer that cry of [the] heart of each of its characters, ‘Who am I?’” (73). After a consideration of “Recalcitrance” in the short story, there is a discussion by O’Rourke on “Morphological Metaphors for the Short Story: Matters of Production, Reproduction and Consumption” (193-209), which can very appropriately be applied to a writer like Bowles, who has created characters who are writers, like the protagonist of “Tea on the Mountain” or the unfortunate linguist in “A Distant Episode”.

Most critical works on the subject have the typical development, as in Reid’s *The Short Story* (1977), of definitions, growth and essential qualities. The three essential qualities, as set out by Kilduff et al in *Working With Short Stories* (1991) are: unity of impression, moment of crisis and symmetry of design. This triple nature had been set out by Allen in his *The Short Story in English* (1981). For Allen, the modern story dates from Walter Scott in a short work of fiction like “The Two Drovers” in *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827). He suggests as a definitional paradigm that “we recognise a short story as such because we feel that we are reading something that is the fruit of a single moment of time, of a single incident, a single perception.” (7)

From Bowles’s own country, we have the definition of the short story offered by Edgar Allan Poe when reviewing Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842: “The short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal.” (quoted in Allen 1981, 10). But genre does not depend solely upon length. Allen continues to quote Poe:

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or *single* effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents –he then combines such effects as may aid him in establishing this preconceived

effect. [...] In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at last painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. (11)

Allen goes on to discuss Robert Louis Stevenson and such a fine modern short story as “The Beach at Falesa”, written on Samoa in 1891. He shows how Stevenson brought a new theme into English short fiction, the interaction between the exotic –the Pacific and its peoples– and Western Europe. Bowles does not go as far afield as the South Pacific, but we must not forget that like D.H.Lawrence, he trekked through parts of South America, and he even bought an island in Sri Lanka. Also like Lawrence, he was inspired to write about these places, and though much nearer to home in the West, Morocco is always treated by Bowles as exotic.

The strength of Stevenson’s story, however, lies not only in the subject matter, but in the treatment. In this, Stevenson’s reading of Flaubert was crucial. Allen quotes Flaubert:

To desire to give verse-rhythms to prose, yet to leave it prose and very much prose, and to write about ordinary life as histories and epics are written, yet without falsifying the subject, is perhaps an absurd idea. [...] But may also be an experiment and very original I believe that the rounding of the phrase is nothing. But that *writing well* is everything, because “writing well is at the same time perceiving, thinking well and saying well.” (Buffon) (Allen 1981, 18)

After Flaubert, treatment became everything and subject was relatively unimportant. Writers could now create characters who were poor, humble or afflicted, as beings in their own right, and not as eccentric, marginal or comic figures. Bowles creates Moroccan characters who come from all levels of the socio-economic spectrum, but in general, his western characters are well-off compared to the indigenous ones.

Allen points out the influence of journalism on the short story in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, especially in the United States, with such writers as Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser. Naturalism was also an influence, and the mass increase in literacy,

which produced writers of lower-middle-class origin, with their own peculiar subject matter. Most of Bowles's western characters are middle class and can afford to travel and live abroad (although life in Morocco was attractive because cheap for such people, including Bowles), but some of them have come down in the world, perhaps by having to flee from an uncomfortable situation. Some of them are living from hand to mouth, and may survive by resorting to illegal activities.

Bowles attempts, in his short fiction as well as the long, to portray the multi-cultural nature of some parts of Morocco, notably Tangier, as opposed to the more homogeneous character of local communities. Both of these form part of the post-colonial nature of Bowles's writing. The Irish question and Irish writing have always been considered possible models for post-colonial resistance as textuality was used as a medium to explore new identities, "the developments and changes in a people's perception of itself" (Allen 380). The Irish contribution to short fiction has always been strong, we think of dominant figures like Oscar Wilde, and Allen quotes V. S. Pritchett in his preface to Marcus's anthology of 1976, *New Irish Writing*, where he talks about "the sense of Ireland itself, its past or its imagined future, as a presence or invisible extra character in the story." By contrast, Pritchett finds no such presence in English writing, except perhaps in Kipling. Without wishing to make over-ambitious claims for Bowles's short fiction, I would like to suggest tentatively that, in its own way, it mirrors his three novels set in Morocco in attempting to portray the changing face of Morocco after the Second World War. It offers definitions of the character of Morocco often in contrast to characteristics of other nationals present there, such as the French.

The close relation between the short story and the particular culture of a nation has been pointed out by May:

Although there is some justification for the common claim that the short story as a distinct literary genre began in the nineteenth century, the wellsprings of the form are as old as the primitive realm of myth. Studies in anthropology suggest that brief episodic narratives, which constitute the basis of the short story, are primary, preceding later epic forms, which constitute the basis of the novel. (1995, 1)

May quotes Wheelwright on the importance of myth to the short narrative: the mythopoeic outlook most often is represented in the form of concrete narratives. A myth not only expresses the inner meaning of things, but it does so specifically, by telling a story (Wheelwright 1968, 148-53). We might suggest as a corollary that if we turn this around, a

short story that adds to its concrete narrative something of the mystical essence of things has the ingredients to become very striking. Quoting Bowles, we know how he used myth in his fiction and mainly in his short stories: “reading some ethnographic books with texts from the Arapesh or from the Tarahumara given in word-for-word translation [...] the desire came to me to invent my own myth, adopting the point of view of the primitive mind”. (Allen Hibbard 1993, 236) This desire was made a reality and took form in his short story “The Scorpion”. It was later on that “the subject matter of the myths [...] turned from “primitive” to “contemporary.” (*ibid.*)

May also quotes Henry James when he says in *What is the Short Story?* that what most interests him is the pattern or form of the work, its ability to transcend mere narrative and to communicate something illustrative, something conceptual: “It must be an idea –it can’t be a ‘story’ in the vulgar sense of the word. It must be a picture; it must illustrate something ... something of the real essence of the subject.” (Quoted in Current-García and Patrick 1975, 25) This is particularly to do with the short story’s singleness of effect, and Frank O’Connor (1963) suggests that English writers have been less successful than the Irish in this genre because of their emphasis on a cohesive society: as soon as a culture becomes more complex or is under threat, brief narratives expand to reflect that social complexity. Thus the short story seems to thrive in a fragmented society. Harris, in his “Vision and Form: The English Novel and the Emergence of the Short Story” (1975, 11), affirms that the fragmentation of sensibility necessary for the development of the short story did not begin in England until about 1880, at which time the form came to the fore as the best medium for presenting it. If we include the United States in this paradigm, the mass immigration of this period, especially the first decades of the twentieth century, contributed to an even more marked multi-cultural society than in Britain. With this fragmentation, perspective or “angle of vision” became most important in the short story, a genre which does not present a world to enter, as does the novel, but a vignette to contemplate.

The short story is the natural vehicle of minorities, and especially of the outsider. The lonely, excluded observer abounds in the short story, indeed, O’Connor’s study is entitled *The Lonely Voice* (1963). Perhaps normally in the wide canvas of the novel, such a person would pass unnoticed, making little impact, whereas, in a briefer form, an intense awareness of human loneliness can be conveyed without its becoming tedious. But in the case of Bowles and his cultural context of existentialism, we have to say that the protagonists of his novels are all outsiders, because human loneliness in the cosmos is a major issue. Thus

there is no difference in this respect between his novels and his short fiction.

But in general in the short story there is loneliness and a related subject, mystery. Other contemporary short story writers suggest the mystery of a story as being its attraction. Eudora Welty, Randall Jarell and Joyce Carol Oates have written upon this topic. Oates asserts that the short story is the “dream verbalized” (1971, 213–4). The component of dream and mystery may come from the putative mythical origins of the short story, but as a conscious formal element, its entry can be attributed to the Modernists. From the time of Robert Louis Stevenson, the short story focused, in the words of Harris, upon “the moment whose intensity makes it seem outside the ordinary stream of time [...] or outside our ordinary range of experience.” (1975, 11) Kipling built upon the work of Stevenson, and Conrad built upon Kipling, adding metaphysical issues and venturing on great philosophical generalisations. In Bowles’s writing, the whole of Morocco, as well as many of his characters, are made to appear frighteningly mysterious, both in the long fiction and the short.

To return to May, who discusses the contribution of Conrad: “The basis of Conrad’s symbolism/impressionism is his conviction, reminiscent of Poe, that fiction must aspire to the magic suggestiveness of music, and that explicitness is fatal to art.” (1995, 15) Perhaps that Bowles was as much a professional musician as a writer explains why this is true of his writing. Little of what is really important to Bowles is explicit. For May, James Joyce’s “The Dead” represents the zenith of the genre. He feels that Conrad laid the groundwork for Joyce to succeed in conveying a magical suggestiveness by focusing on concrete situations in the real world. May uses “The Dead” as an example to show how, in short fiction, the end of the story, in this case, when Gabriel accepts the idea of death, establishes a new criterion by which all the preceding, seemingly insignificant, details are brought together and made thematically meaningful (*ibid.*, 17). Perhaps the difference from the novel in this is that the ending must necessarily be unexpected or ironic, whereas this is not vital in the longer form. We think of the striking endings of “Allal” or “The Delicate Prey” as examples of concrete cases, whereby the end makes everything before meaningful, but without dispelling the thick mystery, and in “Allal” the magic, that surrounds these characters.

In May’s more recent criticism of the short story genre, he has taken on the question of contemporary trends such as the emphasis on self-conscious writing attributable to the postmodern contribution. If we view Bowles as a precursor to the postmoderns in his concern for the explicitness or otherwise of the transformation of raw material into art,

either in the form of local music in his capacity as professional composer, or local oral stories as part of his conception of the techniques of story-telling, much of what May discusses is applicable to his work:

Although the term postmodernism is difficult to define, most critics seem to agree that if a major part of modernism in the early part of the century was manifested as James Joyce's frustration of conventional expectations about the cause-and-effect nature of plot and the as-if-real nature of character, then postmodernism pushes this tendency even further, so that contemporary fiction is less and less about objective reality and more and more about its own creative processes. According to the basic paradigm that underlies this movement –grounded in European phenomenology and structuralism –“everyday reality” itself is the result of a fiction-making process, whereby new data are selectively accepted and metaphorically transformed to fit pre-existing schemas and categories. One critical implication of this theory is that literary fictions constitute a highly concentrated and accessible analogue of the means by which people create that diffuse and invisible reality that they take for granted as the everyday. (1995, 83–4)

This is a theme which fascinates Bowles, the finding of words to convey the everyday and the creation of worlds thereby. It involves a technique that allows, to quote Lasdun, the editor of his *Collected Stories*, that:

[t]he effect [be] oddly heightening, giving the stories an almost physical, uncontrovertible, object-like reality, with the words merely acting as a window onto the events they contain [...] Flourishes of metaphor or overtly ingenious description are rare, though when they occur, prove to contain marvellous – if discreet– compressions of meaning or sensory data.(CC x)

May goes on to discuss the implications for the short story of this tendency to be more aware of the wordiness, not only of fiction, but of our perceptions of “real life”:

The primary effect of this mode of thought on contemporary fiction is that the short story has a tendency to loosen its illusion of reality in order to explore the reality of its illusion. Rather than presenting itself “as if” it were real –a mimetic mirroring of external reality –post-modernist short fiction often makes its own artistic conventions and devices the subject of the story as well as

its theme. The underlying assumption is that the forms of art are explicable by the laws of art; literary language is not a proxy for something else but, rather, an object of study itself. William H. Gass notes that the fiction writer now better understands his medium; he is “ceasing to pretend that his business is to render the world; he knows, more often now, that his business is to make one, and to make one from the only medium of which he is master –language.” (*ibid.*, 83–4)

It seems that Bowles has made good use of this technique as we may read in Lasdun:

[H]is stories are highly sophisticated artefacts, with calibrated effects and skilfully organized constructions. In someone who has constantly split himself in two [...], it perhaps isn't surprising to find that mirroring, reduplicating and magical exchanges are not only the subjects of many of his stories, but also their predominant structural device. (*CC ix–x*)

May's conclusion on this particular topic is especially relevant to the art of Bowles:

The short story as a genre has always been more likely to lay bare its fictionality than the novel, which with the exception of “experimental” novels, has traditionally tried to cover it up. Fictional self-consciousness in the short story does not allow the reader to maintain the comfortable assumption that what is depicted is real; instead, the reader is made uncomfortably aware that the only reality is the depiction itself –the language act of the fiction-making process. (May 83–4)

May proposes the notion that there is an inherent relationship between a characteristic short story structure and its theme. But this issue is controversial and has divided critics into two camps. Many influential critics reject this and May's other assertion that a unified generic description of the short story is possible. Perhaps all one can say is that certain exceptional short stories, like Joyce's “The Dead”, may be seen to unite theme and structure, and that this is only a part of their greatness. As far as Bowles's stories are concerned, Lasdun points out that there is a “tension – between the extreme nature of the actions they contain, and the calm logic with which they unfold – [that] is partly what gives [his] tales their peculiar enchantment” (*CC ix*)

In conclusion, the full list of characteristics of a good short story to check out when reading Bowles's short fiction runs something like this: unity of impression, the single incident or perception, the moment of crisis; symmetry of design; myth and metaphor; a dream-like quality; verse-rhythms; ordinary characters; loneliness and outsiders; a sense of community; finally, a concern with language and self-consciousness in writing. A final component one could add is what A.S. Byatt calls "thinginess", based on Henry James's "solidity of specification" (Byatt 1999, xviii), whereby the solid presence of a thing, through its description, is so persuasive that it convinces the reader of the verity of the whole context. In my analysis of the most important of Bowles's stories set in Morocco, I will follow a tripartite approach. I will begin in each case with a brief resumé of the story, then the main aspect to be studied will be the thematic: how far Bowles endows his settings, characters and action with the themes we have seen in his novels, those covered by existentialism, Gothicism and post-colonialism. Obviously, the outsider or lonely character will attract our attention here. Thirdly, in each story, I will analyse the generic and formal aspects, looking for examples of the characteristics listed above. The object is to explain the power of these stories, how Bowles has managed to create worlds that convey so convincingly the atmosphere, the claustrophobia or the process of disintegration of the characters, however improbable, and how upon finishing our reading, we get the impression of a tale well told.

4. 2. Bowles's collections of stories: summaries, themes and form

I am going to deal with Bowles's short stories in chronological order. He started writing them before he wrote novels and continued producing them after his last novel, *Up Above the World* (1966), and long after his third and last North-African novel, *The Spider's House* (1955). He was writing stories for half a century, from his début in the genre – "Tea on the Mountain" is usually marked out as "the earliest work the writer considered worth preserving" (Hibbard 1993, 3) and is contained in his first collection, *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* (1950)– to his last collection, *Unwelcome Words* (1988).

4. 2. 1. *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* (1950)

Allan Hibbard does this collection both honour and justice when he writes:

Even when considered forty-odd years after its publication, this first collection of Paul Bowles is astonishing. Among the volume's 17 stories are some of the writer's finest, representing one of his most productive periods, the late 1940s. The collection established a range of themes Bowles subsequently continued to explore and, along with his first novel, *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), helped secure Bowles's literary reputation. These early works were responsible in large part for creating the image most readers and critics have of the author today. (*ibid.*)

“The Scorpion”

James Lasdun chose this story to open the collection *Paul Bowles: Stories* (1–5), which is where I have consulted it. It is one of the oldest of Bowles's stories, included in his first collection, *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1950). But in addition, Lasdun is obviously interested in animal-human tales, as he co-edited with Michael Hofmann the anthology *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses* (1994). As we saw in the first section on Bowles's autobiographical writing, this story was inspired by his reading of anthropological books and was one of his experiments with writing myths and animal or beast legends, as he calls them. He wrote it at one go with little “conscious control” (*Without Stopping*: 261–2) as he attempted to simulate the “primitive mind” (*ibid.*) by using the Surrealist method of creating a mood and letting the words flow from the pen. In spite of what he says here, it will be interesting to detect story-telling techniques and other devices for creating a good narrative, which are hardly available without some sense of conscious control. In his autobiography, Bowles had acknowledged the importance of this story through his understated “I read it over, called it ‘The Scorpion,’ and decided that it could be shown to others.” (*ibid.*)

Summary

The protagonist is a nameless old woman who lives in a cave after her sons left the countryside to go and settle in the town. Near the cave there is a spring which local people come in search of, but she never speaks to them. She enjoys her freedom and has no need of company, all her basic necessities are covered. The only person who passes by with any frequency is an old man, again nameless, who sits near the cave and stares at it, but without approaching her or addressing her. This annoys her as she thinks that it gives him an unfair advantage. One day, one of her sons –she does not recognise which one– comes to the cave and says

that she has to leave and accompany him to the town, three days' walk away. At first she is reluctant to give up her freedom and insists she has a sleep before they set off. While she sleeps, she has a dream in which she is a child again. She is shut in a room and is crying, disturbed by the loud ringing of the bells of a nearby church. A scorpion crawls down from the ceiling and pinches her finger. When she realises that it is not going to sting her, she puts her finger to her lips to kiss the scorpion. It moves into her mouth and crawls down her throat. In spite of the horror of this, she feels peace and the bells stop ringing. The third-person omniscient narrator says that the scorpion "was hers" (5), in the sense that she absorbed it. She wakes up and accompanies her son down from the cave. The old man is sitting outside and, profoundly shocked to see the woman emerge from the cave, says goodbye. When her son asks her who he is and she replies that she does not know, he says "You're lying," and the story abruptly ends.

Discussion of themes

The main theme of this story is the Nature versus Civilisation dichotomy, which is inevitably related to questions of colonialism and its aftermath, postcolonialism. Paul Bowles believed that so-called "primitive", third-world cultures were closer to the authentic way of living, purer because it is supposedly closer to nature and to the essentials of basic life and reproduction or continuity. For him, "civilisation" is a corrupting influence for man and as the first world continues in its path towards more "education" and "civilisation", Bowles saw the future as bleak and saw progress as its opposite, leading to annihilation. As Hibbard puts it on the subject of this story:

The appeal of the "primitive mind," which is so clearly a theme in Bowles's work and life, can be understood here not only as a reactionary modernist rejection of scientific, rational thinking but as a means of recovering the proto-rational, unconscious origins of storytelling. This attitude explains, in part at least, the meaning of Morocco for Bowles and his interest in the traditional oral storytelling of Moroccans such as Mohamed Mrabet and Driss Ben Hamed Charhadi, whose tales Bowles has made available to English readers. (Hibbard 1993, 9)

But the primitive world is not a safe world either, animals and humans are equally fragile and vulnerable as "Nature" will always be potentially hostile and there will always be predators and prey. Much of this thinking is contained in the dream which the old woman has before leaving the cave. She is taken back to her childhood where she was

“prey” to the authoritarian control of institutions, in this case, the Church, as it is the bells that upset her and make her cry. As a specimen of folk tale, this story has no specific location, but the fact that it is bells that affect her and not the muezzin, suggests a Christian setting.

The cave obviously represents the pristine world of primitive nature where the old woman has been content (“neither happy nor unhappy”, 1) for the last few years. She has been able to come and go at her leisure, foraging for food like an animal, albeit a herbivore, with no predatory killing. Primitive nature, as opposed to civilisation, is also represented by a lack of cooking and the use of fire, as we see in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Le cru et le cuit* (1964). This deprivation suggests a contrast with her former life, where she cooked food, but had to bully her sons into fetching her wood for the fire. Thus she is happier in that she no longer has to share her food or argue and fight with her sons to get them to do even their basic duties of care (2). Life is no longer a communal activity for her. She no longer has to ask permission or arrange with anyone as regards her movements and there is no key to the door. The curtain of the waterfall has been the intermediary between her free world and the world of the outside which leads back to civilisation. Hibbard speaks of looking for “the figure in the carpet”, looking for an explanation to what he calls the “allegory of the cave” (Hibbard 1993, 9). He points out this obvious dichotomy of inside and outside, the interior, precultural world of the cave being “a world in which the imaginative faculties are loosened and dreams occur naturally and fluidly.” (*ibid.*, 10) There is not much similarity in this to Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* (*The Republic* Book VII, 514a–520a), where the inhabitants of the cave are prisoners who have had no experience of the outside world beforehand. So the shadows that are projected on the wall to which they are chained are mere shadows of things from the natural world, though, knowing no other sensation, the prisoners take what they see to be the real thing. But perhaps Bowles had in mind a contrasting variation on the theme of the real and the perceived.

This variation could be that in the cave the old woman has a dream about the outside world. In her dream there is a scorpion on the ceiling of the room in which she is shut as a child, and even within the so-called civilised world there lies menace. The fact that she realises that the scorpion means her no harm can be interpreted as meaning that although “Nature” may appear hostile to humans and animals, in fact we should not interpret it as so, but that it just is as it is. There will always be birth and death and we should not fear death. Although neither Bowles nor his anonymous narrator pressurise the reader into making an interpretation of the old woman’s swallowing of the scorpion, we must inevitably make conjectures. Bowles has cast his story in the guise of a

simple folk tale, where concepts are presented in black and white and there is a commonly-accepted symbology. Thus the cave represents the primitive, but also a refuge, but like any of Bowles's houses, there is no guaranteed safety.

The scorpion, with its venom, is as perilous to man and its usual prey as any poisonous snake. It is also personified in the story, as the narrator calls it "he", not "it" (4). So when the old woman leaves the cave having dreamt that she has absorbed the creature, to her and to the reader, it is as if it were real, she contains the venom in her body. How are we to interpret this? On the one hand, we could interpret it negatively, in the sense that she now has something evil inside her, on her issuing forth from the innocence of the cave back into the corruption of the civilised world. Our evidence for this would be that when her son asks her about the old man sitting outside the cave and she says that she does not know him, she is not telling the whole truth; his comment, the last enigmatic line of the story is "'You're lying', he said." (5) Also enigmatic is the degree of astonishment the old man displays on his face when the old woman emerges from the cave: "as if a miracle had just occurred." (5) He scrutinises her face: "he peered more intently than ever into her face." (*ibid.*) So the reader is left wondering what he sees there and what his role in the story has been and is. Is he shocked to see signs of the inner scorpion? If there is nothing so specific, we wonder if he is just a human being who belongs to the world of civilisation but who is attracted to, almost absorbed by, the primitive world, and is fascinated to witness someone returning from the world of innocence. The old woman's hostility towards him, believing he has an "unfair advantage" (2) in that he can gaze at her while she does not gaze back, suggests the positions of power and powerlessness we associate with Civilisation and Nature, colonisers and natives.

If we interpret the absorption of the scorpion into the old woman's body in a positive way, it would be to suggest that it may imply acceptance of that part of Nature that appears hostile, to be more specific, the acceptance of death. At the beginning of the story, we are told that "she knew that the end of life was near" (1). In the dream, she had a "great feeling of happiness" (5) and kisses the scorpion when she realises that he is not going to sting her. The immediate effect is that the bells stop ringing and she is imbued with peace (*ibid.*) It is as if the rules of Nature have to be accepted, death is not to be feared but to be seen as the end of all the anxieties of civilised life.

Form

Lasdun, author of the Introduction to *Paul Bowles: Stories*, quotes the opening sentence of the story as exemplifying "the impersonal simplicity

of folk tales” (Lasdun, ix): “An old woman lived in a cave which her sons had hollowed out of a clay cliff near a spring before they went away to the town where many people live.” (1) There are many other lines that encapsulate this rather infantile simplicity, for example: “In the town there are always many things to do [...]” (*ibid.*) The conversations between the old woman and her nameless son –she does not know which one he is anyway– are almost monosyllabic:

He began to speak: “Is it you?”

“Yes.”

“Are you well?”

“Yes.”

“Is everything well?”

“Yes.” (2)

This simple focus and tone is upheld by Bowles throughout the story, with the bare simplicity and deliberate lack of detail or explanation maintaining the enigmatic quality to the very end, as the son’s comment ““You’re lying”” (5) hints at a whole story being suppressed by his mother. This simplicity and the reduction of the evocation of a life to its very last years spent in the heart of nature –as the old woman’s return to civilisation seems to herald her death– contribute to the idea of it being a single incident or perception in their lives and endows the story with a unity of impression. Another aspect of this folktale-like simplicity lies in the distance of the narrator from the events. The narrator tells the bare “facts” and makes no judgement upon the actions of the characters. As Wendy Lesser says in her review of Bowles’s *Collected Stories*:

The most essential aspect of Bowles’s stories –the way in which things *don’t* get said explicitly– is inevitably lost in any discussion of their content. Yet these stories must be talked about, because it is rare for any writer’s “Collected Works” (and this one spans 47 years of writing) to present the kind of uniform perfection that this book does.

[...] Bowles [...] has consciously excised such narrative judgements from his own stories, leaving a gap that creates strong tension between the seemingly traditional form and the far-from-traditional voice. Moreover, the events in Bowles’s stories are the sort that cry out for judgement: enormous cruelty, bizarre and inexplicable behaviour, psychological and cultural conflict. Yet judgement is consistently suppressed, and therefore the events never fully take shape as “bizarre” or “cruel” –they are simply

events. (*The American Book Review*, May 1980, reproduced from Hibbard 1993, 247–8)

The characters are quite ordinary, the old woman has no special gifts, but she seems to be undisturbed about leaving her community and living a liminal life, in between civilisation and the wilderness. The sense of community is given through the very sparse details of the life of the sons, carrying wood to the charcoal oven, for example, or of the son who had nearly been killed while riding his horse down a dry riverbed (2). Her dream also contains memories of her childhood, as a girl not only tormented by the church bells but stressed by the agglomerations of people swarming the streets. Thus she is a voluntary outsider. In his review of “The Delicate Prey”, Tennessee Williams has some qualifications to make about Bowles’s creation of outsiders:

Paul Bowles is preoccupied with the spiritual isolation of individual beings. This is not a thing as simple as loneliness. Certainly a terrible kind of loneliness is expressed in most of these stories and in the novel that preceded them to publication, but the isolated beings in these stories have deliberately chosen their isolation in most cases, not merely accepted and endured it. There is a singular lack of human give-and-take, of true emotional reciprocity, in the groups of beings assembled upon his intensely but somberly lighted sets. (*Saturday Review*, December 23, 1950, reproduced from Hibbard 1993, 207)

In Williams’s opinion, “The Scorpion” is not the best of Bowles’s stories, but he does single it out for comment on the outsider issue:

Nowhere in any writing that I can think of has the separateness of the one human psyche been depicted more vividly and shockingly. [...] Even in the stories where this isolation is more shockingly, even savagely, stated and underlined the reader may sense an inverted kind of longing and tenderness for the thing whose absence the story concerns. This inverted, subtly implicit kind of tenderness comes out most clearly in one of the less impressive stories of the collection. This story is called “The Scorpion.” It concerns an old woman in a primitive society of some obscure kind who has been left to live in a barren cave by her two sons [sic: nowhere in the story does it say there are only two] [...] Here is a story that sentimentality, even a touch of it, could have destroyed. But sentimentality is a thing that you will find nowhere in the work of Paul Bowles. (*ibid.*, 207–8)

If the story has a moment of crisis it is that the son arrives, disturbing the harmony of her serene existence and demanding that she return with him to the town, and no doubt to her death. The story does not have an ironic unexpected ending, except the horror of the scorpion and the enigmatic tone we have already noted.

The dream-like quality is undeniable as in fact a dream is embedded at the heart of the story and spreads back to the old woman's previous life and, located in the cave, suggests that the cave is also a site of dreams. The cave itself is metaphorical in that it represents the primitive life, but if Bowles had in mind any parallel with Plato's cave, then the real authentic life is not in the cave but outside. The embedded dream that points backwards as well as forwards endows the story with a temporal symmetry and is also the hub of a cyclical movement, in that the cave is an interpolated episode at the end of a long life and the old woman returns to her point of departure, the town. As she realises she has to leave the cave, she takes stock of her possessions, and in spite of their extreme sparsity, they have a thinginess which makes them solid and important: "her stick, her gourd, her tin can, her length of rope." (3) She also has a "huge bundle of rags" (2) which she uses to brush the scorpions down from the walls. We have a physical sense of the scorpion, "his hard shell and his little clinging legs" (5), which brings out that creepy-crawly sense that makes humans inherently recoil from the gangly legs and unpredictability of such insects as the spider or the scorpion. When the old woman feels this "thing" pass through her lips and over her tongue and down her throat, albeit in a dream, we come to the most repulsive point of the story and it constitutes for some readers the real moment of crisis.

As we said, the language of the story aspires to the simple formality of the folk tale. The formality is expressed in a lack of colloquial flow, in a placing of prepositions accompanied by relatives early in the sentence and not at the end: "a curtain of water-drops through which the old woman had to pass to get inside" (1). Another example of formality would be the avoidance of a word like "swear-word": "He was on the point of saying something profane [...]" (3). The verse-rhythms are found in sentences of rhythmic stress, like the opening sentence: "An old woman lived in a cave [...]" (1), "she was neither happy nor unhappy" (*ibid.*). Examples of three monosyllables are quite frequent: "hard bare heel" (2); "large dry leaves" (1); "not that son" (2); "I must sleep." (4); "the bells stopped ringing." (5)

The rhythmic cadences and accumulation of short direct statements constitute a formality that contributes to the "calm logic" Lasdun notes when he writes "This tension –between the extreme nature

of the actions they contain, and the calm logic with which they unfold—is partly what gives the tales their peculiar enchantment. One doesn't so much read them as succumb to them." (ix) With this detailed analysis of Bowles's development of the main characteristics of the short story in this tale, I hope to have defined the narrative and psychological elements at play in this "seduction" which leads the reader to succumb to his enchantment.

"The Delicate Prey"

One year after Bowles published *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), he brought out his first collection of short stories, *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* (1950), which takes its title from the eponymous—and highly Gothic—story. "The Delicate Prey" is not the only Gothic story in the collection, either, as "A Distant Episode" comes not very far behind in dark situations and horror. Unlike "A Distant Episode," however, as we shall see later, the characters are all natives. As regards the setting, they are not very different: the hostile desert; though in "The Delicate Prey" we find ourselves in the Algerian rather than the Moroccan desert. Both of these stories can be considered examples of "Bowles's texts [that] display a direct and striking continuation of Edgar Allan Poe's work, where the intricacy of design contains evidence of the intrusion of the alien into the familiar, a trope of the Gothic *par excellence*" (Benlemlih, 161) Critics agree that "The Delicate Prey" is a story that "upsets our sensibilities" (Hibbard 1993, 14) with the extremities of violence and horror embedded in it. Indeed, Hibbard informs us that it was "excised from the first British collection of Bowles's stories, apparently because of concern for censorship." (*ibid.*, 12)

Summary

"The Delicate Prey" tells the story of two Filala merchants and their nephew who set off on a trip across the desert to sell their leather. They start their journey from Tabelbala, in the southwest of Algeria, aiming for Tessalit, in the northeast of Mali. Their friends warned them about the Reguibat tribesmen, who pose the worst hazard they might encounter in the desert. During the trip, they do their best not to fall into the hands of the Reguibat; they take precautions and keep their guns by their side at all times and they even "took turns sitting guard at night" (CS, 141)

The smoothness of the trip is interrupted by the appearance of a stranger. As he is alone and seems not to be connected to the Reguibat, and as he apparently behaves with perfect manners, they permit him to accompany them. He tells them that he is a good gazelle hunter, which means that they may enjoy eating roasted meat. The stranger, while

pretending to be a Mougari from a holy place, chooses his moment to separate the three merchants and kill them one by one, ostensibly to steal their leather goods. He does this by also selecting the right place, a stretch of the desert with low hills. He makes them believe that he knows the place and gets them to stay there while he goes to hunt the gazelles. He adds that if they hear a gunshot “then come, because that will mean there are gazelles.” (142)

They follow his advice and each time they hear a shot, one of the uncles goes, never to return. The nephew, Driss, is left alone and becomes invaded by suspicions. He sets off intending to escape, but then thinks that it might have been a discourteous, even stupid, idea and comes back. The stranger is there waiting for him. Though the young Filali tries to defend himself, the stranger is more prepared. He tortures him then further mutilates and castrates him with a razor. The final gratuitous injury and humiliation is what might have attracted the attention of the censors: not only does he sexually assault him, but he slices off his penis and tucks it into an incision he has made in his belly. He then kills him by cutting his throat. Finally, he takes the Filala’s merchandise and their meharas and goes to Tessalit to sell them. Other Filala, recognising their friends’ leather, guess what the stranger has done to them and report him. The Filala themselves are allowed to take revenge: they bury him alive, leaving only his face “above the earth’s surface.”

Discussion of themes

The main characters of the story are all natives except for the Frenchmen who appear at the end and who represent justice. However, in this case, the interaction between the natives and the Europeans doesn’t form a part of any main theme of the story, they seem to be on good terms with each other. Here we have hostility between tribes and the theme of the “savage native.” As in most of Bowles’s stories, the characters are nameless, the only one whose name we are acquainted with is the nephew, Driss. He is the one about whom we readers know more details. We know that he is young and, ironically in view of his fate, full of life. His main interest in life is the beautiful girls of the “small quartier”. During the trip and particularly while taking a rest, he entertains himself by playing the flute. When they meet the stranger, the narrator allows us to penetrate Driss’s inner thoughts. The fact that his uncles insist on being on their guard, attending to their guns, makes Driss laugh: “To him it seemed absurd even to admit the possibility of trouble from one lone man” (141). He undoubtedly believes that because they are more numerous, they should be stronger. Yet he is the only one of the three who did not take to the stranger, for he notices that his eyes “seemed to

take in everything and give out nothing.” (*ibid.*) Yet he does not articulate his suspicions, especially as he is led to believe that “the man was a Mougari”, from Moungar, a very well-known holy place.

This is another of Bowles’s stories that takes place in the desert and where he proves how harsh and unfamiliar it can be, just as in “A Distant Episode” and *The Sheltering Sky*. The characters know that the deeper they go into the desert the more they will be confronted by dangers. After meeting the stranger they “felt glad” that “he comes from the north, not the west” (141). It is a conclusion to which they come after a meticulous observation of the newcomer. They don’t hesitate in “searching in the new face and in the garments below it for some false note which might reveal the possible truth –that the man was a scout for the Reguibat, who would be waiting up on the *hammada*.” (*ibid*) However, not only does the stranger “not wear the Reguiba attire” but he is also “quick and jolly, with light skin and very little beard” (*ibid*). For them, these are not the Reguibat’s characteristics. They ignore the fact that appearances may deceive.

All their conclusions based on personal feelings and emotional deductions turn out to be false. Driss was right when he felt that the stranger’s eyes captured everything and gave nothing. But the false Mougari succeeds in dissipating Driss’s suspicions. He is so clever that he knows that he must gain the Filala’s confidence. He achieves his aim by deceiving the three Filala step by step. He has taken good care of his appearance, his words and behaviour. To gain the utmost confidence from them, he goes to hunt the gazelles leaving with them “his mehari, his blankets, his packs” (142). So they think “he trusts us” (*ibid*). They are affected by such confidence on his part and no one dares talk of his inner thoughts which were alike, for “each knew that the others were thinking the same as he” (*ibid*). But there was no doubt of their growing trust in him. Though “it seemed that there would prove to be no gazelles in the region” (*ibid*), as the Mougari said he knew “this land” and that he can hunt gazelles there, no one tried to contradict his assertion.

The stranger knew that the only way to achieve his aim was to separate the three men. It is not such a difficult task after they have trusted him and “felt warmly toward” him (142), but it is ironic that Driss has thought it absurd to admit that a lone man may harm three people (141), for such a naive manner of thinking proves fatal. After the stranger has gone to hunt the gazelles as he maintained and they have heard various shots, all they think is that “there may be many gazelles” (143). The first uncle joins the stranger and again other shots are heard, “this time, they came from two guns”. But their trusting the stranger is above any suspicion, so as the stranger has killed the first uncle,

obviously, as Hibbard remarks, their “trust is broken by deception and malice.” (Hibbard 1993, 16)

The three Filala had led a stable life in their community, the uncles working and in their free time engaging in theological discussions while the nephew entertained himself with the local girls. To promote their commercial activity they have to sell their leather in the south, which means that they have to leave behind them the known and familiar to penetrate into the unknown and “unfamiliar region fraught with possibilities of deception and terror.” (Hibbard 15) As they know the difficulty of crossing such unfamiliar places, they equip themselves with guns which ironically do not leave their side until the last moment of their lives. It was supposed that “the danger lay principally in the territory they would reach only three or four days’ journey from Tabelbala” (141). However, they encounter the lethal danger when they think that they have reached the safest place, with the Reguibat “left entirely behind” (*ibid*). Moreover “a tiny group of three men and their camels could scarcely awaken the envy of the Reguibat, traditionally rich with loot from all Rio de Oro and Mauretania.” (140) Hibbard is right when he points out that Bowles once more creates characters who make themselves vulnerable when it was not really necessary. It eventuates that “the horror comes in human form, and its agency becomes a possibility only when those who are vulnerable let down their guard.” (Hibbard 14)

The three Filalas’ outsiderliness starts the moment they leave Tabelbala. In the vast area “there were only the three of them” (140), but as long as the three of them are together and accompanied by their guns, they suffer neither from outsiderliness nor from loneliness. Only when Driss is left alone, when his uncles have joined the stranger, does the feeling of loneliness and exclusion emerge. During his uncles’ absence, his imagination is set free to visualise himself as a hero. He wanted “to be up there with his gun, crouching behind the rocks, stalking the delicate prey”. Ironically enough, it is he and his uncles who will be made delicate prey at the hands of the stranger. Waiting for the three men and the hunted gazelles is so drawn out that Driss fell asleep. While sleeping he had an ominous vision that would have saved him if he had not been so sentimental. The suspicions he had felt when he had first seen the stranger “had bounded back” (144). This prompted him to escape, but as his suspicions were founded only on the vision he had had during the dream, he decided to come back. He thinks that if his uncles were still alive and enjoying their time with the Mougari then there “would be no excuse for his conduct, which had been the result of an absurd terror.” (*ibid.*) His indecision and slowness in taking decisions and also his naïveté will bring about his fall. As he discarded the idea

that his uncles had been harmed and as he was not expecting to be attacked by the stranger or to have to defend himself, “he clearly becomes the victim, the prey to the more powerful, deceitful Mounhari.” (Hibbard 14)

As we shall see in “The Eye”, “Here to Learn” and other stories, to quote Hibbard and Bowles’s biographer Virginia Spencer Carr, “The Delicate Prey” seems to be based on real events. Bowles himself admitted:

I also wrote a story during the crossing, which I called “The Delicate Prey,” and gave it to Tennessee to read on the ship. The tale itself was based on an actual happening, but Tennessee thought I had made the whole thing up. (Virginia Spencer Carr 2004, 223)

Hibbard refers to Lawrence Stewart for the origin of the story:

In conversation with Lawrence Stewart, Bowles has told how the outlines of the story were suggested by a French captain Bowles met and spoke with in Timimoun, Algeria, in the winter of 1947–48, while he was working on *The Sheltering Sky*. (Hibbard 15)

Yet despite the fact that there are clues that the events are real and likely to have often occurred in the desert, Hibbard finds that the story “displays a kind of violence we perhaps would rather deny or ignore, either as an imaginary or real possibility” (14), and Alice B. Toklas was horrified after reading it. For her, Bowles’s “delicacy is perfect –precise and poignant– but the macabre fate –though inevitable that overtakes [his] prey is not to [her] taste.” (cited in Hibbard 14)²²

Other themes introduced here are those of narcotics and sadism. While Driss tries to defend himself, he becomes conscious of the murderer’s looks which are those of a hashish smoker, those of “a man [who] can escape very far from the world of meaning.” (145) This reminds us of *Let It Come Down* when Dyar kills Thami under the effect of *majoun* or hashish. In “The Delicate Prey,” nothing is known about the murderer apart from what he shows of his apparent pleasant character while trying to deceive the three Filala. There are no hints about his state when he killed the two uncles. We know that the first uncle tried to defend himself as there was a shot heard from another gun apart from that of the stranger. It is quite evident that the motive behind his triple crime is theft of the Filalas’ merchandise. There are no

²² Note 28, p. 135: “Letter from Alice B. Toklas to Paul Bowles, 7 December 1950, HRC, University of Texas, Austin, Texas. [...]”

indications that while committing his first two killings he was in an alienated mental state because of the effect of drugs. His case is completely different from that of Dyar, who killed Thami by driving a nail into his head, killing the sleeping boy in one sequence, taking him for “an unidentifiable object lying there, immeasurably heavy with its own meaninglessness” (*LICD* 308). He kept knocking the nail into his head “as if it had been driven into a coconut” (309), always under the effect of the *majoun* he had smoked.

In “The Delicate Prey,” the Mougari slowly tortures Driss on different levels. He starts by shooting him in his arm, leaving him incapable of defending himself. He takes off his clothes and castrates him. He does all this showing sadistic signs of pleasure as he “[s]lowly [...] smiled, showing his teeth” (CS 146). Later on, he is “vociferous and leisurely in his enjoyment” (*ibid*), then he falls asleep. He continues his barbarous act with the Filala boy after he wakes up. This time he culminates the whole gruesome deed by pushing “the blade back and forth with sawing motion into the neck until he was certain he had severed the windpipe” (*ibid*). While Dyar’s crime may be explained as being brought about by his loss of consciousness because of the hashish, the same may not be said of the Mougari. He took his time to plan the triple crime. Then he took time torturing and executing the third Filala who was conscious and suffered all the violence inflicted upon him, not like Thami who was sleeping and under the sedative effect of *majoun*. Then the Mougari, to hide his gruesome crime, “spent a good while dragging the body over the base of the hill and concealing it there among the rocks.” (147) The last step of his crime is when he took the Filala’s merchandise and meharas and continued on his way as if nothing had happened. He does not show any feeling of remorse or guilt for all the barbarous deeds he has committed. This act of sadism can be seen as an example of an *acte gratuit* like those we find in Gide and Camus’s *L’Etranger*. Though, of course, as an isolated moment, we have no back story, so the Mougari may have committed crimes before (given their reputation), but with impunity

As we shall see, in “The Distant Episode,” there is no punishment of the malevolent tribesmen or the waiter who caused all the mischief to the Professor. He is mutilated and tortured until he becomes insane but there was no one to avenge him. Bowles chooses to give a different ending to “The Delicate Prey” when he has the Mougari punished by the Filala’s friends. They choose for him a slow wretched death when they decide to bury him alive in the desert. They wanted him to taste but a small portion of the deadly trauma he caused to the three murdered Filala.

Despite the fact that there are no important western characters in this story, there is no doubt that a subtle Orientalist message underlies it. The events take place in the South, which is presented as an alien setting full of violence even for its people. The Filala feel relief when the stranger informs them that he is from the North and not from the South. This binary combination of North/South is metaphorical of West/Orient. No wonder then that the South has connotations of terror and violence and is represented as a place far from immune to brutality. The Filala slowly proceed towards this deep and horrific south, through a journey that takes them “from a known place of safety and comfort” (Hibbard 15) to their graves.

Form

Though, as said earlier, the events of the story may have been suggested by real events that Bowles had heard of, and indeed, at first do not seem to differ from what might happen in these dangerous regions of the desert, the story fits into the folktale variety Bowles often favours (as in “The Scorpion”), with its suggestions of generalisations. It begins, as Hibbard says: “in typical Bowles fashion [...] prosaically, almost like a fairy tale: ‘There were three Filala who sold leather in Tabelbala [...]’ (165)” (Hibbard 12–13). No reference is made to the time as if the timeless expression “once upon a time” were missing from this introductory sentence.

The first paragraph displays a general view of the characters – ordinary people–, their profession and their immediate aims, before leading us to the main events which follow relentlessly in chronological order. One event leads to another in a straightforward causal relationship, as if the journey were a metaphor for life leading to its inevitable conclusion: death. The stranger’s cunning behaviour deceives the Filala into trusting him. Their trust leads to his killing the two uncles. The ominous dream leads the nephew to try to escape, but then his naïveté and even over-confidence that he might play the hero lead to his fall. The matching over-confidence of the stranger eventually leads him to his deserved punishment also.

The story is structured around the journey and Bowles chooses real places, not imaginary ones, as in other stories like “A Distant Episode”. They are the real settings for such tragic events that happen to people who dare to cross the desert without being prepared. The story and the journey start in Tabelbala and they end in Tessalit, while the main tragic events happen in between the two places. The story starts in a simple way not foreshadowing any of the appalling events. But gradually it is made known that the trajectory is not a safe one. The Reguibat are the fearful face of the desert, like the wolf in the forest

Little Red Riding Hood has to cross to get to her grandmother's house. Still, the danger is underestimated for "most people were of the opinion that since the war of the Sarrho they had lost the greater part of their arms and ammunition, and more important, still, their spirit." (140) But in general, we can say that the setting shapes the events. The setting being unsafe, the events, though not expected, are very plausible and credible despite the amount of embedded violence. Commenting on Bowles's settings, Joyce Carol Oates wrote:

To state that the intensely invoked settings of Bowles's disturbing stories are usually hostile to his people –natives as well as hapless North Americans– is perhaps misleading, for the setting of a typical Bowles story possesses more life, more identity, than the human beings who find themselves trapped in it, succumbing to fates that read more like ominous parables than "stories" in the usual sense of the word. (Quoted in Hibbard 239)²³

There is thus a dreamlike sense about the setting, as if it were not entirely of this world, for, as Oates went on to say, the stories are "terrible without being terrifying, as if the events they delineate take place outside our customary human world." (Hibbard 239–40)

The dreamlike vision is made to appear more visually acute than ordinary life. The whole story has a sense of unity through this idea of a journey towards death. All life is in a way a journey towards death, but on a second reading of this story, we are much more aware of the fragility of life and the threat of a crisis at any moment than on the first reading. It is true that the suspense builds up and by the time that the stranger has killed the two uncles –although neither the reader nor the young Filala are aware of this– the real moment of crisis is undoubtedly the moment when the stranger starts to torture Driss. It is a moment that can be divided into three parts. It starts with the first shot: as Driss is hurt in the arm, he loses control of his gun, which means that he is in the power of the Mougari, who mutilates him. The stranger stops torturing him for he falls asleep under the effect of hashish. The next day he resumes his sadistic and implacable violation of the young Filala's body, and this time it is fatal and there is no escape for the prey. Gore Vidal said of this story:

Both "The Delicate Prey" and "A Distant Episode" create the same sense of strangeness and terror that they did the first time I

²³ "From *THE PROFANE ART* by Joyce Carol Oates. Copyright © 1983 by Ontario Review, Inc. Used by permission of the publisher, Dutton, an imprint of New American Library, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc." (Hibbard 239)

read them. “The Delicate Prey” turns on a Gidean *acte gratuit*: the slicing off of the boy’s penis is not only like the incident on the train in *Les Caves du Vatican* but also presages the driving of a nail through a skull in Bowles’s novel *Let It Come Down*.²⁴

That most of the events revolve around the three Filala and what happened to them makes for a good unity of impression. It is an effect achieved through the way Bowles makes the characters behave. They prepare themselves for a journey which heralds a certain hazard, so there is suspense from the start. The fact that they go prepared with their guns and that their friends advise them to be alert during the trip foreshadows what would happen. By the final scenes, the three Filala have already been killed but the closing events are still related to them for their friends are worried about their absence. Even the title contributes to this unity of impression for the three Filala are all made to be prey. Their delicacy is brought to light when they are separated and consequently lose their strength. But the most delicate of the three Filala is the nephew. His tender age, his inexperience and also his naïveté contributed to his tragic ending. He was in a situation of being saved, for the vision he had while sleeping was a sort of “divine” indication, but, as we said earlier, he did not make use of it. He allowed himself to be driven by his emotions, a further example of his delicacy. Just as the Filala were hoping to catch and eat the gazelles, which would have proved a more than delicate morsel, the false Mougari is the only predator and he “devours” his prey, especially Driss, as if he were delicate meat.

The motifs of predator–prey and of tenderness or delicacy are joined by another uniting motif: that of singing. The predator himself, the Reguibat posing as a Mougari, sings as he faces death:

When they had gone the Mougari fell silent, to wait through the cold hours for the sun that would bring first warmth, then heat, thirst, fire, visions [...] The wind blew dust along the ground into his mouth as he sang. (148)

He is left alone to agonize and having no hope of being saved, he preferred to sing instead of cry. One of the uncles had already gone to his death singing (143). But the difference between the two songs is marked: the uncle did not know that death was awaiting him. He was full of hope, hope of hunting the gazelles and eating their meat, hope of

²⁴ Quoted in Hibbard 1993, 237. See note on p. 235: “Gore Vidal, ‘Introduction,’ *Collected Stories 1939–1976* by Paul Bowles, Santa Barbara, Black Sparrow Press, 1980.”

continuing on their way to Tessalit and hope of selling their leather at a good price.

Characteristic of Bowles's writing is the use of Moroccan dialect words without providing any translation or explanation, examples being: "hanoute" (140), "S'l'm aleikoum" (141), "Timma" (142), "Yemkin" (143) and "mechoui" (144). Non-Arab readers (and even non-Moroccan ones) are left to guess the meaning of each one of these words from the context, in addition to French words referring to places, such as "le quartier réservé" (140) pointing to the existence and influence of French colonialism in that region.

The sense of the thinginess of things is strengthened as words such as "leather", "flute", "mehari", even "camel" seem to add to the credibility of the events. The scene of the fight between the false Mougari and the young Filala is one of the most credible scenes, full of tension and macabre details, especially in the climax. The last scene, that of burying the Mougari, is another repulsive scene, however, it is not surprising, and one feels relief rather than horror, for it is more a deserved punishment than a gruesome crime.

It seems a fitting ending for a fairy story with a difference. There are three protagonists, but instead of one of them being older, one in the middle and one younger, and either the oldest or the youngest being the cleverest of the three, all three are naïve and pay with their lives. But even the "monster", the predator, meets his just reward. No one lives happily ever after in this story.

"A Distant Episode"

"A Distant Episode" can also be fitted into the subgenre of fiction defined as Gothic or dark fiction, that is, replete with settings and events detailing physical and psychological horror. It is also yet another account of a failed cross-cultural encounter. The protagonist is a Westerner who comes to North Africa with the aim of completing an anthropological survey on languages, but things turn out badly for him. He goes through a tragic experience that deprives him of his tongue, his sanity and even his humanity. It seems, as Bowles admitted, that the dread he felt while waiting for a tooth extraction was behind the writing of this story.

Summary

Here, just as in his first story, "Tea on the Mountain", Bowles presents us with a nameless foreign (presumably American) protagonist. All we know about him is that he is a linguist "making a survey of variations of Moghrebi" (14). Nothing is said either about his family life

or his country of origin. Throughout the whole story he is presented merely as “The Professor”. The starting point of the story is his arrival at a Moroccan village in the deep south, the imaginary Ain Tadouirt. This visit was preceded by another one, ten years earlier, during which he came to know the owner of a cafe, Hassan Ramani.²⁵

The first thing the Professor does on arriving at the village is to look up Hassan Ramani in his café. The unpleasant *qaouaji* (waiter) informs him that his friend is dead. Despite the reluctance of the *qaouaji* to give him more information, the Professor asks him to help him find where to buy some camel-udder boxes which had attracted his attention on his previous visit, promising him a sum of money. That same night, the *qaouaji* leads the Professor through a tortuous path to a mysterious spot and abandons him to carry on alone until he arrives at a place where he may get the camel-udder boxes “if there are any.”(16) Once the *qaouaji* has gone, the Professor is surrounded and assaulted by some members of the feared Reguibat tribe, who treat him cruelly and mutilate him by cutting out his tongue. They humiliate him by compelling him to dance for them and their children as a form of entertainment. After more than a year, they sell him to the Tuareg deep in the Sahara. Things turn out differently from what the Reguibat and Tuareg have planned, and the Professor manages to escape in the Sahara. But there is no real escape as the manner in which he behaves indicates that he is completely insane. Even the French soldier who tried to shoot him took him for a holy maniac.

Discussion of themes

Given the protagonist and the setting, a Westerner in a remote area of North Africa, it is immediately obvious that here we have a cross-cultural encounter deliberately sought by the Westerner, rather like that set up by the equally anonymous protagonist of “Tea on the Mountain”, but with two important differences: the encounter takes place in a remote area (hence the title “A Distant Episode”) and they are all-male encounters. On both of these points, the story is more similar to the previous story, “A Delicate Prey”, though in the latter, the meetings are not between members of different races, nationalities and cultures, but between members of mutually hostile tribes. Thus, as we saw, the Orientalism in “A Delicate Prey” is more subtle than here. Though in both cases we have the theme of vulnerability through a journey which turns out to be perilous, with the concomitant motif of predator and prey, in “A Distant Episode”, the Orientalism covers such aspects as racial

²⁵ According to Barry Tharaud: “‘Hassan Ramani’ is the name of an Algerian from Constantine whom Bowles met on a train near the Algero-Tunisian border in the 1930s. (WOS 163, 164)”, (Tharaud 2005, note 12, p. 134).

superiority or inferiority, the outsider/insider dichotomy, language and communication and lack of communication and loneliness or danger.

The Professor had come to the village ten years previously and to his surprisingly naïve mind, his mere three days' stay had been "long enough [...] to establish a fairly firm friendship with a café-keeper" (16) called Hassan Ramani. Although we have a third-person omniscient observer who frequently distances himself from the protagonist, the fact that we are told the name of a minor character who is already dead at the start of the action, but not the name of the main character, suggests that we are more familiar with the latter and even that we are initially invited into the Professor's subjectivity in order to view the café-keeper objectively as the Other, rather than the other way round in the outsider/insider order. Although it must be added that Bowles complicates their identities, for it is true, as Tharaud suggests, that the use of the title "The Professor" is "a sign of his institutionalized and intellectualized non-Being" (2005, 127).

Some knowledge of Moghrebi contributed to this relationship, which the Professor remembers as very positive: on the bus he "closed his eyes happily as he relived the memories." (16) He thinks that he can negotiate foreign cultures with a smattering of the language and a willingness to bargain, but this proves insufficient. So the second visit comes in stark contrast to the more fortunate first one. He is not made to feel welcome by anyone; firstly, the chauffeur's response to his project of "making a survey on variations of Moghrebi" is "scornful" (*ibid.*) while the waiter speaks "gruffly" (*ibid.*) and ignores his questions. As Bouchra Benlemlih points out: "There is no meaningful verbal exchange between the linguist and his guide." (2009, 231). This lack of communication does rather unsettle the Professor: "He may cut my throat," (*ibid.*) he thinks, which is an ominous pointer to the cutting out of the tongue which is to come shortly.

However, the Professor contributes, though not overtly, to his outsiderliness and almost invites the cold-shoulder treatment. When dealing with the natives there is always that unpronounced or even sometimes pronounced "I" and "you" distinction with its implied superiority complex. When he sets off with the *qaouaji* he comments on the fact that some people greet his companion with: "Every one knows you [...] I wish every one knew me." (*ibid.*) Even when he arrived at the cafe, "the *qaouaji* tried to make him take a seat at the other table in the front room" (15), but the Professor ignored him, he "walked airily ahead into the back room and sat down." (*ibid.*) Though his last visit to the café took place ten years earlier, he behaves as if he had been there the previous night. He treats the place familiarly, but is not on such intimate terms with the new people. He may desire to be an insider, which access

to the back room would admit, but his highhandedness merely alienates him. This may remind us of what Muhamed Choukri said of Bowles himself, that “he loved Morocco but not the Moroccans” (Choukri 1996, 12; my translation)²⁶ Further to this, the Professor seeks relations with ordinary people, even those who serve him, not with fellow linguists or people with a similar educational background to him. In this, he is again like his creator, Paul Bowles.

The outsiderliness of the Professor is emphasized far more when he is captured by the Reguibat. He is alone before them and their dogs, which attack him. Ironically, apparently unaware of the seriousness of the matter and the danger he is facing, he “was scandalized to note that no one paid attention to this breach of etiquette.” (21) That the Professor is under the threat of dogs and guns and yet thinks in such a naïve way is demonstrative of the unfoundedness of his superiority. His reaction is particularly strange because he has already heard about the Reguibat and their cruelty. He knows that “[t]he Reguibat is a cloud across the face of the sun” (20), and that “[w]hen a Reguibat appears the righteous man runs away” (*ibid*). The fact that the Professor talks with the Reguibat in Arabic, a language they do not understand, is symbolic of his eccentricity, outsiderliness, and indeed, hubris before the fall.

The height of his rejection is reached when the Reguibat cut out his tongue. They cause him to be an outsider in the bitterest way; as Ihab Hassan puts it, he is “brutalized into the role of a speechless clown.”²⁷ Being deprived of his tongue is doubly ironic for someone who pretends to being a linguist. Unable to defend himself verbally, both literally for lack of a tongue, and metaphorically for the lack of a common language, the Reguibat further humiliate him. When not dancing or eating, he is put in a sack, which symbolises his dehumanization. So his life is limited to the basic animal urges and he is treated as a trained animal: “he ate and defecated and danced when he was bidden, a senseless hopping up and down” (22–23). During that period, the narrator stops talking about the Professor’s feelings or his thoughts: he “did not begin to think again” (22). Lack of language brings on the inability to think in language.

His identity is completely annulled as the tribesmen took good care to efface all signs that might allude to his identity, particularly by painting his face (24), turning him into the kind of “primitive” he

²⁶ Hisham Aidi says that he has never been able to corroborate this statement (Aidi 2005, 122) but quotes Pateson 1987, 75: “I don’t think we’re likely to ever 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. And I believe that the same applies to their getting to know us. At the moment they admire us for our technique; I don’t think they could find more than that compatible. Their culture is essentially barbarous, their mentality that of a purely predatory people.”

²⁷ Quoted in Hibbard 1993, 220.

himself might have taken as an object of study. Reversed colonialism is what may be said of the situation the Professor finds himself in, either when he is with the *qaouaji* or when he is enslaved by the Reguibat. When the Professor is assaulted by the tribesmen, he tries to talk to them in Moghrebi, but they only speak a language he does not understand, which is ironical as he is a linguist who had, moreover, spent four years learning Moghrebi and had come to study dialects such as theirs. This means that his efforts to learn Moghrebi have been of little or no use. Stenham in *The Spider's House* has also learned some Arabic but his learning has helped him to communicate with the natives and to understand their culture, though not in depth. Apparently, unlike Stenham, the Professor has gone too far, he has ventured into a place where communication seems impossible. The chauffeur's words: "Keep on going south [...] You'll find some languages you never heard of before" (14) turn out to be shockingly ironical.

The Reguibat become his new masters, taking over from the *qaouaji*, who had also had him at his mercy. Later on, he becomes accustomed to knowing what they want of him merely by looking at their gestures, there is no need for verbal language. The body has taken over from the mind and the Professor no longer has a choice or a will. The Professor is another of Bowles's characters who "exercise remarkably little will-power" (Hibbard 1993, 18). He seems to recover his memory only when he hears the Tuareg speak in Moghrebi. Then "the words penetrated for the first time in many months" (24). He "[...] listened too. That is, he was conscious [...]" (*ibid.*) It is not known whether this partial recovery is due to the Professor's recognition of the familiar Moghrebi or in addition, to the content of their conversation. The words "celestial vengeance" have undoubtedly attracted his attention, refreshed his memory and aroused his terror again: "the pain had begun. It operated in a kind of delirium, because he had begun to enter into consciousness." (*ibid.*)

The Professor's experience may also be seen as a journey. It is a journey from north to south, from civilisation to primitivism, from outside to inside as regards the personality, from sanity to insanity. In a couple of words, it is a journey towards darkness and barbarism. The *qaouaji*'s behaviour towards the Professor is ominous regarding the coming tragedy. Even when the Professor tries to understand what is happening, the *qaouaji* "had covered his face with his burnous" (17) and ignores him. At this point, the Professor could choose to stop and return, but does not. The journey starts during the night, symbolic of darkness, the unknown and fear. They set off along a sinuous path and then the *qaouaji* stops and tells him in French to "go down", thus leaving him to

face his fate alone at “the edge of the abyss” (18), symbolical of the fall awaiting him.

It is a journey that reminds us of Kit’s and Dyar’s journeys and their tragic endings in *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down* respectively. As stated by Bourara “Port and Kit (SS), Nelson Dyar (LICD), and the Professor in “A Distant Episode” [...] all undergo a form of mutilation as a result of thoughtless immersion in the native territory.” (Bourara 142) Insanity is the finality faced by the Professor, Kit and Dyar. Kit was on the point of being saved, for despite her insanity, she was able to send a telegram asking for help. However, a negative lack of will returns, as with the Professor, and when she was found, although there was a plane waiting for her to take her back home, she sank again into the darkness and escaped from the nuns who were accompanying her. Dyar is located because he is a thief and murderer and there would be a judicial order against him. The case of the Professor is different. His coming to North Africa is not like Kit’s and Dyar’s, to escape the war or the dullness of the West. If we take him at his word, he has come to do linguistic research. Secondly, in his case, no one except the *qaouaji* who led him into mischief, knows of what has happened to him. When the Professor feels that his mind is conscious again, he defies the tribesmen by refusing to dance. The reader is invited to think that the Professor has recovered, particularly when he escapes. But then, he does not seem to react or take advantage of the new situation. People look at him “with great curiosity” and the French soldier takes him for a native holy maniac²⁸. If the Professor were mentally healthy, he would have tried to ask the French soldier for help, despite his being dumb. He loses the only chance he had to be rescued as the French soldier does not recognize him as a Westerner. So he sets off aimlessly into the Sahara, a sign of complete insanity and loss of identity.

One wonders if the message Bowles is trying to put across with this macabre story might not be an Orientalist one. The Westerner comes to North Africa and tries to build a bridge to communicate with the Other, who rejects all connections with that bridge. The first thing the Professor does to communicate with the other is to learn his language. It turns out to be a useless step. The driver talks with him in French: “Vous êtes géologue?” and when he first meets the *qaouaji*, the Professor “asked him in the Moghrebi” (15), but the Moroccan replies in “bad French” (*ibid.*) The most negative of all the replies the Professor gets to his Moghrebi words is when he “heard voices but the person directly

²⁸ The idea of dressing him in strings of tin-can bottoms seems to have come from Bowles’s own experience. His biographer Virginia Spencer Carr records a letter to his mother of 17 March 1933 where he describes a woman he saw in the desert: “Hundreds of bright discs hung from wires she had made into a girdle, which she constantly removed, examined, and put on again, talking all the while.” (91)

behind him said nothing” (20). This was the reaction of the Reguibat, who uttered nothing understandable for the Professor, using guns and dogs instead. The West, represented by the linguist, is presented as a peaceful and pleasant protagonist of an exchange, while the Orient, which is represented by all the other characters, is seen first as uncommunicative, then savage, brutal, bloodthirsty, receiving the benevolent representative of the West with hostility. Here there is undeniable condescension and stereotyping, but we should not be so crass as to identify Bowles with his Western protagonist, he is neither so foolhardy nor so inept in the other culture. One wonders if Bowles is not portraying Orientalist attitudes for us all to condemn.

However, according to Tennessee Williams, the main theme of “A Distant Episode” is “the collapse of the civilized ‘Super Ego’ into a state of almost primitivism, totally dissociated from society except as an object of its unreasoning hostility”²⁹ (cited in Hibbard 207). The Professor comes to an unknown place, meets unknown people, yet behaves with all this mysteriousness in a simplistic and naïve way. When the *qaouji* is on the point of leaving him, the Professor notices that “the sound of the flute came up from the depths below at intervals” (18), then says to himself: “These people are not primitives” (19). He allows himself to judge people and situations according to western criteria. When he is attacked by the Reguibat and remembering what he had already heard about them, he thinks: “An opportunity [...] of testing the accuracy of such statements” (20). Both macabre and laughable, his feeling of superiority may have minimized the threat and danger he is confronting so he is incapable of imagining the seriousness of the matter. His “structuralist ‘logic’ becomes both rigid and arbitrary” (Benlemlih 243). The Professor’s tragic ending is precipitated by his inability to measure the danger that was coming: “It occurred to him that he ought to ask himself why he was doing this irrational thing, but he was intelligent enough to know that since he was doing it, it was not so important to probe for explanation [...]” (*ibid.*) His excessively high self-esteem precipitates his downfall.

Finally, there is a message in the setting. Just as in *The Sheltering Sky*, the desert is turned into a hostile and perilous background in which human beings who are not familiar with it act out their tragedies: “the desert becomes a dominant element, the modern metropolis in the Professor’s mind” (Benlemlih 236). Of the story, Bowles said “I wanted to tell what the desert can do to us”. (Caponi 54) By “us” he undoubtedly refers to the Westerners. They come to an unknown place and behave naïvely in its threatening surroundings. Bowles was fond of

²⁹ From Tennessee Williams’s review of the story for the December 23 1950 issue of the *Saturday Review*. Permission by Omni International Ltd. (Hibbard 207)

travelling but he never travelled alone, on his journeys he was always accompanied by his friends, either his compatriots or the natives he knew. As Sawyer-Luçanno confirms: “Bowles would not even stray from his house in Tangier, save in the company of a trusted Moroccan” (Sawyer-Luçanno 310-311).

For all these reasons of disorientation in mind and body, of thought depending upon language and signs –the Professor’s consciousness is further aroused when he deciphers and understands “black objects” on a calendar which are musical notes– Barry Tharaud reads the story as more existential than Orientalist:

In light of the contrast between the brutal events of the main story and the farcical ending, it is easy to imagine that when Bowles wrote “A Distant Episode” in the latter half of 1945 (published in early 1947 in *Partisan Review*), he might have been influenced by the mixture of deadly philosophy and farcical, vaudevillian delivery in Sartre’s *Huis Clos*, which he translated into English as *No Exit* in the first half of 1945. The conclusion of “A Distant Episode” has some of the characteristics of Sartre’s formulated existential view that life is bleak and absurd as well as terrifying, but in the general sense in which we have been using the term “existential,” the significance is that the Professor has been “dispossessed of [the] parasitic pseudo-consciousnesses that lurk in the unguarded recesses of [his] mind” (*WOS* 366). Bowles has depicted a character who generally substitutes thought for sensory perception, and who substitutes the study of dialects for the living, brutal facts of culture, against the backdrop of the desert that is an irreducible fact of nature and existence itself, and that is a fit externalization of the new, living, terrifying Being that the Professor experiences. Bowles is in effect saying, “Given a person who has substituted an intellectualized life for the living reality to the extent that this linguistics professor has, to shock him out of his pseudo-existence you would have to kidnap him, cut out his tongue, reduce him to an unthinking fool, and sell him into slavery.” [...] Beyond the brutality and the exotic violence of “A Distant Episode,” there is an existential rationale to the Professor’s encounter with existence that is found in all of Bowles’ stories, and that is generally expressed through an encounter with nature and a new perspective on culture. (Tharaud 2005, 128)

Form

The story starts optimistically and smoothly but then takes a gruesome turn, which means that there is no symmetry of design as regards the narrative strategy. The Linguistics Professor we saw at the outset of the story is not recognizable at its end. He has nothing left of a Linguistics Professor, nothing of a Westerner, nothing of a normal human being. “The last we see of the North American professor of linguistics he has become sheer animal” (Joyce Carol Oates 1983, quoted in Hibbard, 239)³⁰ However, the introductory paragraph and the concluding one share a common point. Both parts witness “the sunset time” and the sky in its reddish colour. Time seems to have become immobilized at this instance if it were not for the radical and ghastly transformation undergone by the Professor.

As stated before, the events of the story start calmly with no hints of any trouble ahead. But then they gradually become more and more unpleasant. When the Professor is with the *qaouaji*, he starts to show annoyance (17) and to feel “indignation, curiosity, fear [...]” (18). When the *qaouaji* leaves him alone he “was in a state of nerves”. Later on he was “furious with himself” (19). The physical pain starts when he is attacked by the Reguibat (20). However, the real moment of crisis is undoubtedly when his tongue is cut out. The pain is so extreme and so unexpected and unbelievable that “He could not distinguish the pain of the brutal yanking from that of the sharp knife” (*ibid.*). By stages, he “sank into darkness” until he lost all sense of connection with his present and past by imagining that “the word ‘operation’ kept going through his mind.” (*ibid.*)

His fall from his initial position of superiority and safety is conveyed in the language of physicality. In the first paragraph we are told that the Professor “came down out of the high” (14). The entrance to the café “was very low, and he had to bend down slightly to get in” (15). So the language used at the beginning seems to be ominous of what would happen later on. Also, the descent represents a descent into nature, a natural setting that, as an academic, an anthropologist whose field-work seems rather thin, he has virtually turned his back on.

Yet even the animal world seems stacked against him, as while waiting for the *qaouji*, “there was a growing chorus of dogs that barked and howled.” (*ibid.*) One might add that this chorus of dogs is part of a series of references to musical sounds that add unity to the story. Most of the sounds are ominous, the Reguibats’ dogs and their flute, also the clanking of the tin cans they tie upon his body. However, his return to

³⁰ From *The Profane Art* by Joyce Carol Oates. Copyright © 1983 by Ontario review, Inc. Used by permission of the publisher, Dutton, an imprinter of New American Library, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc. (Hibbard 239).

consciousness is sparked by his recognition of some “black objects” on a calendar, which turn out to be musical notes that he remembers and can decipher.

Some Arabic words are used without a translation or italics and, unlike in the collection of *Midnight Mass*, Bowles does not provide a glossary of the Moroccan words. However, he supplies some hints that help the reader understand such words: the word *qaouaji* is quite understandable in the context in which it is presented and it needs no further explanation: “The qaouaji tried to make him take a seat ‘One tea?’” (15) One easily guesses that the word *qaouaji* means “waiter.” As for the word *khamastache* (16), Bowles provides more details so that the reader can make out its meaning: “‘Khamstache’, said the qaouaji, opening his left hand rapidly three times in succession” (16), and it is followed by the linguist’s reply: “Never, ten.” (*ibid.*)

The story has a unity of impression, for all the events that occur from the outset to the end focus on the Professor and his personal tragedy. The scene is so far removed from his normal life that the whole has a dream-like quality, though in this case, it would be truer to say a “nightmarish” quality. The cutting of the tongue is at once literal and metaphorical and deeply ironic. The specific thinginess of the camel-udder boxes anchors the story in real life but adds two further dimensions, both ironic: firstly, the professor sees himself as a professional, an expert in languages, yet his attempt to buy the boxes reduces this scientific interest and approach to a form of patronising tourism. Secondly, by the end of the story, we realise that the Professor has lost his dignity, his tongue, his sanity and no doubt eventually his life, and all for the sake of some trivial souvenirs. These boxes come to symbolise the stupidity of his hubris.

“By the Water”

Written in New York in 1945, like “A Distant Episode,” this story has both similarities and differences when compared to it and to “The Scorpion.” There is shocking deformity and de-humanisation, bestialisation, and like the latter story, “By the Water” had a genesis in Bowles’s experiments in automatic writing: “I sat down with no previous idea in my head, wrote the thing without ‘knowing’ what I was writing, and at a certain point stopped, probably because I was physically tired, and called that the end.” (Stewart 1974, 27) In spite of this, the story does have a definite beginning and a coherent ending and can be seen to be crafted. Stewart tells us, however, that the story is not pure invention, incredible though the deformed character Lazrug may seem, and so perhaps it emerged from Bowles’s unconscious where his

experiences and memories were stored. Apparently, Bowles knew someone in Fez whose physical disabilities –similar to those we see in thalidomide victims– resembled those of the character he created: “He could only reach up to the rungs of a chair. He could reach about as far as the seat of the chair I was sitting in, with these flippers that came out of his shoulder, like a seal.” (Stewart 1974, 26) Even the interior part of the setting of the story, a *hammam* or public baths, is based on a place Bowles knew: “The pool is, again, from another place. The pool I’m thinking of is not really underground –it’s in a sort of cave. It no longer exists, it’s been destroyed by the Moroccan government.” (*ibid.*)

Summary

The protagonist is a young man, Amar, who works in a shop in a city but is “alone in the world” (6). He decides to make a visit to a city where apparently some cousins live. The places are not named, but he wears a burnous and upon his arrival looks for a place to sleep, a *fondouk* or a *hammam*, so it is a North African setting. What is surprising is the extreme cold of the city he visits, there is deep snow in the streets and the place is hostile in other ways: the darkness, the labyrinthine nature of the streets, the incommunicativeness of the people. (*ibid.*) He takes refuge in a public bath in a grotto. A little boy, Brahim, guides him and tells him it is “Lazrug’s grotto.” (8) Lazrug turns out to be a stunted, deformed creature with flippers for legs and pincers for arms. He challenges Amar and tells him to leave. Amar kicks him into the water. The reaction of shock and fear of the men in the bath causes Amar to flee. The young urchin finds him and guides him out of the town. They ride on top of a lorry down to the sea. As he bathes, Amar is surprised by a giant crab and as he recoils in horror, he falls and hits his head on a rock. The little boy scares off the crab and supports Amar’s head above the water. He claims that the crab was Lazrug metamorphosed by magic and that he has saved Amar from his vengeance. Although Amar assents to this after a long time, he is in pain and we do not know how serious his injuries are.

Discussion of themes

The main theme here is the vulnerability of the outsider, but the idea of human-beast metamorphosis and the predator-prey theme are what makes the greatest impression. The magical transformation of the deformed human, Lazrug, into a crab, and possibly into a bird to cover the distance from his grotto to the sea, is true if you believe it, according to Bowles. The young lad Brahim does believe it, just as he and the other men in the baths believe Lazrug has the power to turn them into birds, and he may convince the protagonist Amar of this magic.

The latter's vulnerability is developed on two levels, both involving irony. Firstly, there is the inside–outside dichotomy, as we saw in “The Scorpion.” Amar comes from outside to the city of his cousins, but instead of finding hospitality there for the night, he immediately sees it as “an unfriendly town,” “[a] bad town” (6), an “inimical place.” (7) Again, inside the warm bath he ought to be more protected than outside in the snow and the dark, but ironically, the harm comes from within, the source of it being the deformed creature, Lazrug.

Secondly, Amar is vulnerable on account of his attitude. Like the professor in “A Distant Episode,” he believes that cultural superiority bestows immunity from harm, and ironically, this mistaken belief causes the protagonists to take erroneous decisions or to act irrationally out of the weakness of a defence mechanism. Initially, Amar had not taken precautions to protect himself from the climate, although he knew he was going up the mountain to the region of the snows before winter was out. He had not foreseen his possible discomfort “[b]ecause he had not wanted to.” (6) So it is not just ignorance, but a sort of wilful refusal to take precautions. Then Amar “felt proud to be coming from a better and larger city.” (6–7) In spite of this complacency, he knows that he must not let his feelings of superiority show in the form of disdain or mistrust: “It would not do to seem too distrustful. He would be embroiled immediately in a quarrel which could end badly for him.” (8) This is not exactly a premonition of what is going to happen, more a recognition of knowledge of the people, but the events do occur inexorably in a logical chain reaction of cause and effect from this point onwards.

Thus he feels anxious but, ironically, as the situation develops, at first he does not have to protect himself and his possessions from the depredations of the men in the bath, as they apparently feel menaced by him, the intruder. Although this is not an explicit reason, Lazrug orders him to leave, indeed, it may have something to do with Lazrug's condition and his attitude to strangers, or perhaps with his strange powers he has perceived and reacted angrily to Amar's superciliousness. In any case, this is left unexplained and is as enigmatic as Lazrug's magic powers. After the violent incident, Amar flees and thus becomes prey to Lazrug.

Form

The story has the same impersonal, non-judgemental third-person omniscient narrator as “The Scorpion.” Amar is not judged for kicking the dwarf Lazrug, but the consequences of his action come hard upon it. Neither is Lazrug explained or his revenge reconciled, and of course, not only did Bowles have a living model for him, but he was writing before

the days of political correctness, when such physical disabilities would be written differently, if at all.

Bowles has paid great attention to climatological recreation, the description of the cold, also of light and dark. This is a single incident in the life of the young protagonist Amar, and the whole is like a bad dream, a nightmare whose focus is the interior of the grotto. In “The Scorpion,” the old woman has a dream in the cave, here it is not a dream, but what seems more like a dream is the magic centred on the figure of Lazrug. The moment of crisis comes when Lazrug confronts Amar and he kicks him with a sort of knee-jerk reaction, and this leads step by step to the final crisis where Amar is injured and possibly killed.

The story has a symmetry of design based on the journey, where the protagonist goes to the “bad town” and then escapes from it. As the title suggests, water is central to the story and always has negative connotations. Although the water of the *hammam* is warm and comforting, the crisis comes in the baths. Furthermore, we are told that Amar is not a good swimmer (9), so it was perilous, even perverse, to insist on swimming out into the sea and having the child, a non-swimmer, accompany him. The ending is unexpected, though on account of the foreboding inherent in the story from the beginning, anything can happen. The bird-like freedom enjoyed by the boys on top of the truck cannot last.

There is a sense of community about the city Amar leaves behind: the streets smelling of frying fish, gramophones scraping, storks (6). Amar himself is conveyed through references to the things he possesses, rather like the old woman of “The Scorpion.” The thinginess of his burnous and the leather purse on a string round his neck (8) make his plight more urgent. His city contrasts with the hostility of the city he visits, where the people hardly glance at each other. They only play music and drink tea with those they are close to. Lazrug’s only words to Amar are peremptory: “Get out. I don’t know you.” (9) Even Brahim’s grandfather is hostile. There is no explanation for this reserve and resistance to visitors from outside, the people are just suspicious through their experience, and this mistrust is conveyed through the language of abstractions and also in the concrete detail.

“A Thousand Days for Mokhtar”

Summary

The eponymous protagonist, Mokhtar, is a lonely widower who has spent the ten years of his widowhood trudging from his shop to his little room and back again. Like Amar in the previous story, he is affected by the weather. But here is a curious twist: bad weather reminds him of the

cosy hours he spent shut in the room with his wife, so it affects him negatively not because of its harshness but because it accentuates the fact that he is alone. On rainy evenings therefore, he goes to the Café Ghazel. One night, uneasy at the weather and harassed by the agglomeration of people in the café, he returns home and has a dream. In it, he kills his old friend the butcher Abdallah ben Bouchta (one wonders if Bowles was deliberately punning on the name here, but in any case, since he never uses the word “butcher,” it is up to the reader to appreciate the joke.) Worried by the dream, he goes to the market to check on his friend and there unwillingly, but not unwittingly, re-enacts the events of the dream. Upon a hostile reaction from the meat-seller, who accuses him of not paying his debts, he grabs him by the throat, and in front of the onlookers, inadvertently causes his death, no doubt through a heart attack, all the time asserting that he had already dreamed this and was not killing his friend. The reluctant witnesses assure the police that it was not murder, all the same, the judge sends Mokhtar to prison for a thousand days. He offers two reasons for his decision: Mokhtar’s dream was evil and caused the death of an innocent man, and an upright man is incapable of having an evil dream; secondly, as Mokhtar pleads psychological pressure from the weather and from his loneliness, the solution for both of these is to be locked inside the prison where he will not notice either of them. Indeed, he is happy in prison and suddenly remembers that the butcher’s accusation, that he did not pay his debt for the lamb’s head at the Aïd el Kebir was true, he meant to, but forgot.

Themes

The variation on the theme of loneliness here is that the character is lonely within his own community. He does not feel superior, but his happiness with his long-departed wife created an anti-social streak in him which translated itself into anxiety over the weather and over social pressure. The cause and effect sequence is strong in the story, as the anxiety causes the dream; the dream causes curiosity to see if there is any truth in it; and ironically, Mokhtar’s pleasure to see that the butcher is alive and well produces annoyance in the latter on account of the debt about which the reader knows nothing and which Mokhtar had forgotten. Disaster is caused by wrong choices: Mokhtar should not have acted upon his curiosity and gone to the market. As he himself acknowledged, he did not need or want any meat. Thus the dream is central to the story and the formal symmetry is produced through the dream or nightmare being double: it is re-enacted in real life.

The inside-outside, safety-danger, happiness-unhappiness theme ties in with this also as at the beginning of the story Mokhtar is enclosed

in a room, either his home or his shop; he is free when he goes to the café, but at the end he is enclosed again, this time in the prison. Ironically, the prison should represent unhappiness, but here it does not (just as the old woman of “The Scorpion” was emotionally indifferent in her cave), for Mokhtar’s lonely, boring life before prison was no better. At the base of all this is the theme of poverty. We are told that Mokhtar sells very little in his shop and this no doubt accounts for his falling into debt with the butcher.

Form

The story ends in crisis as Mokhtar causes the butcher’s death, and there is a parallelism between the butcher and the lamb’s head which was not paid for. The butcher is like a lamb to the slaughter: in the dream, as he dies, his eyes remind Mokhtar of those of a lamb being sacrificed for the Muslim festival (*The Hours After Noon*, 130). There is no metamorphosis this time, but there is an animal–human resemblance and a thinginess and a concreteness about the lamb’s head that tie together all the themes.

4. 2. 2. *The Hours After Noon: Short Stories (1959)*

This collection was brought out by Heinemann in 1959, although some of the ten stories are older, dating back to the 1940s. “Tea on the Mountain”, for example, is reproduced here although it had come out in *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* of 1950. The eponymous story is placed at the end and, at forty pages, it is longer than “Here to Learn,” perhaps Bowles’s next longest story, and is almost a novella in length. In this story, the sexual relationship is reversed in comparison to “Tea on the Mountain”, the male is a Westerner and the outcome is much more tragic. I will not discuss it at length as it has been dealt with by Hibbard (1993, 62–67) and although set in Tangier, it mostly concerns relationships between Westerners. Only at the very end do we find the relationship between Frenchman Monsieur Royer (his name is similar to *roué*, a rake) and a native girl that will be the cause of his murder. Royer has thought it not proper to press his desires upon the innocent but eager-to-learn Charlotte, an English schoolgirl in her late teens (156), but cannot resist fondling a much younger native girl-child as she plays with his watch out in the desert. He loses his life because he should have known better. As Hibbard says: “He had not accurately assessed the risks involved, his position as a Christian and outsider, and the value traditional Moroccans place on a woman’s purity.” (66)

The title refers to the period between lunch and supper, when the main female character, Englishwoman Mrs Callender, who together with

her American husband runs the Pension Callender –Bowles stayed at a Pension Callender in Tangier says Stewart (1974, 80)– is not totally in control of herself and may come up with any outrageous scheme. She is partly responsible for Royer’s death, as she suggested he went out to El Menar in the desert in order to get him away from her daughter Charlotte, whom she deemed vulnerable to his attentions. Little did she know that Charlotte was more in danger from the American archaeologist Mr. Van Siclen, who also had a share of responsibility for putting the idea into her head. His words were also a premonition of the Frenchman’s imminent death in that he called Royer “a useless old rake who’ll be up to no good until the day he dies” (149). Royer dies in the desert like Port Moresby, the native boy of “The Delicate Prey” and the linguist of “A Distant Episode”, whom we cannot imagine surviving the horror of his tormented life for long.

4. 2. 3. *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* (1962)

This was Bowles’s second collection, first published in San Francisco by City Lights Books in 1962. Allen Hibbard is the only critic who has dealt with this collection in any depth. Even then, he dedicates a mere nine pages to it in his *Paul Bowles: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1993, 43–52), as opposed to the forty pages of analysis of Bowles’s first collection *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* (3–42). Of course, *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* comprises just four stories. These had been published separately and were later incorporated, along with the title story and eight others, into *The Time of Friendship* (1967), though, as Hibbard points out, the separate edition by City Lights Books in 1962 is well justified:

Though all four of these stories also appeared in Bowles’s next volume, *The Time of Friendship*, they clearly belong together as we have them in *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*, a small, tight, distinctive ensemble, all remarkably in tune with one another. (52)

Bowles himself provided a Preface to *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* to help orientate the western reader in the enjoyment of these exclusively Moroccan tales. Hibbard reproduces this Preface (1993: 191–3), but also adds considerable information, both anecdotal and of serious import, which proves of essential background reading not only in the understanding of the stories, but in any attempt to place the stories thematically and formally within Bowles’s oeuvre. He also adds personal analysis to explain how he thinks Bowles managed to get the

stories to chime together, to be “in tune with one another” as quoted above. First we will review the information he offers us and then study his explanations for Bowles’s success with these stories.

The first point is the delicacy of the subject matter, since they are set in Morocco and all four prominently display the smoking of kif. Hibbard informs us that Bowles was able to place the stories with City Lights, recommended to him by Allan Ginsberg, as they had published his *Howl*. Even so, the title was a problem, for, as Bowles acknowledged: “The authorities here are touchy about the kif question [...]”³¹ Hibbard goes on to quote a second letter to Lawrence Ferlinghetti of City Lights, which shows how the title came about and managed to avoid the word *Morocco*:

The title business has kept me thinking, but not with any great degree of productivity. The difficulty of finding a word that has some reference, even oblique, to kif, is that the word will necessarily be a Moghrebi word, and thus will have no reference at all save to the few who know the region. (*Moghrebi* itself could be used, I suppose: *Four Moghrebi Tales*, for instance. But of course, no kif is suggested there.) Do you like A HUNDRED CAMELS IN THE COURTYARD ...? On the title page we could have the whole quote: “A pipe of kif before breakfast gives a man the strength of a hundred camels in the courtyard.”

...Moghrebi Proverb

That would more or less capsulize the meaning, since the theme of all the stories is specifically the power of kif, rather than the subjective effects of it. (note 37) (43)³²

Although Bowles’s reputation as an “enfant terrible” (*ibid.*) attracted the attention of the Beats, who visited him in Morocco in the 1950s and 1960s, as Hibbard points out: “his aesthetic vision is much more conservative,” (44). He may refer to kif-smoking, but he is “far from being an advocate of the indiscriminate use of drugs,” and “neither condones nor champions the drug’s use” (45). This does not mean, however, that he is completely neutral, again, far from being the opposite, a moralist, Bowles does at least describe lives that go off the rails or are even destroyed by the consumption of alcohol and drugs.

³¹ “Letter from Paul Bowles to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, 28 December 1961, Bancroft Library, University of Berkeley, California. Cited in Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *An Invisible Spectator: A Biography of Paul Bowles* [New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989], 357-8”, Hibbard note 36, 1993: 136.

³² Note 37 reads: “Letter from Bowles to Ferlinghetti, 12 January 1962, Berkeley. Cited in Sawyer-Lauçanno, p. 358”, in Hibbard 1993, 136.

Having reviewed these background notes to the collection, we will now go on to an analysis of the individual stories and the collection as a whole. Hibbard begins by making a claim that needs to be pondered: “In these stories kif functions in a manner symbolic of the operation of the imagination.” (*ibid.*) I hope to ponder it under the section of “Form” in my discussion of each story.

“A Friend of the World”

Summary

The protagonist, Salam, who calls himself the “Friend of the World” of the title, lives with his brother in the Jewish quarter of a town or village near Tangier. One day, a stray kitten turns up at his rooms and he decides to keep it. He names it Mimí, which turns out also to be the name of the little Jewish girl who lives downstairs. As he calls to the cat from the terrace, her mother thinks that he is mocking them. When he discovers that the cat has been killed, he naturally suspects her. He decides to exact revenge by frightening the family through placing the ingredients of black magic by their door. The woman complains to a local police officer, who speaks to Salam. The latter feels that this surveillance may lead to a search which could reveal his possession of kif. To prevent this, he arranges for the policeman to be accused of bribery and he is transferred south to the desert. Salam is freed of his vigilance and also of any trouble from the Jewish family, since his great-aunt, who was instrumental in the black magic plot, has pretended to be angry with him, so they deduce that she will not use black magic again to help him.

Themes

Salam calls himself a “friend of the world” in that he lives in peace with everyone around and does not seek trouble, indeed, his name means “peace”; however, he is lazy, immoral and vindictive. All the same, it will be pure chance and his kif-smoking that will menace his peace rather than the qualities of his character. He is lazy and immoral because the only “work” he does, and that is occasional, although it seems regular, is to perform as a gigolo: “[...] he got his money by going to Tangier once a month and sleeping for a week with old English and American ladies who drank too much whiskey [...]” (*A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* 2nd ed. 1986, 15). The word I have omitted at the beginning of this sentence is “If”, but Bowles uses the caveat or the conditional as a hypothesis which the reader interprets as being true. The deliberate ambiguity arises because Bowles uses a third-person narrator who sees into Salam’s mind, but as the Muslim boy is making judgements about the Jews and their tolerant attitudes, it is not clarified

whether he is saying “What if ...” and making a hypothesis or thinking guiltily of his life and that of his family. But because the Jewish tolerance is the reason given for his living in the Jewish quarter and not in a smarter part of the town (though to do so he would have to increase the visits to Tangier to afford it), logically, we assume that those are the facts of his life. Of course, in the background lurks the ugly truth of the oppression of the locals under colonial rule –though Tangier, in the International Zone, was a freer and more prosperous area– and the grim fact that prostitution may be the only alternative both for women and men when there is no work.

So Salam is no hero, but the Muslims in general come off badly from Bowles’s pen in this story. In this case, however, at least he has placed the criticism in the voice of a Muslim and not someone from another faith or culture. The story begins:

Salam rented two rooms and a kitchen on the second floor of a Jewish house at the edge of the town. He had decided to live with the Jews because he had already lived with Christians and found them all right. He trusted them a little more than he did other Moslems, who were like him and said: “No Moslem can be trusted.” Moslems are the only true people, the only people you can understand. But because you do understand them, you do not trust them. Salam did not trust the Jews completely, either, but he liked living with them because they paid no attention to him. It had no importance if they talked about him among themselves, and they never would talk about him to Moslems. (*ibid.*)

This lack of trust and communication is crucial to the development of the story. The lack of communication amongst neighbours who are thrown close together amidst the poverty means that they do not learn each other’s names: “Although he had lived there for almost two years, he did not know the names of any of the Jews. For him they had no names.” (16) Again, this lack or absence accounts for Salam’s giving the same name to his new kitten as that of a neighbour’s child. Also, because of his age, he is not interested in children, but the different culture accentuates this lack of interest and dehumanises the Jewish children completely in his eyes:

If they had been Moslem children he would have spoken to them, but since they were Jews he did not see them as children at all, but merely as nuisances in his way, like cactuses that had to be stepped over carefully because there was no way of going around them. (*ibid.*)

Another aspect of cultural differences which Bowles exploits is that just as chance brought the kitten to Salam, chance so has it that Ramadan has come around, and Salam and his brother's night-time activities out on the terrace mean that the kitten is allowed to stray (17–18). A final important cultural factor in the story concerns the attitudes towards superstition and magic, and drug-taking. Both of these were banned by the modernising force of the authorities: "It is forbidden to practice magic." (22) Yet the very fact that it has to be explicitly outlawed suggests that it does go on, as Bowles learned to his horror with his wife Jane's friend Cherifa, as we shall see later in the discussion of the story "The Eye." The practice of magic arts went on amongst both Muslims and Jews of traditional background, and everyone knew that old women were especially associated with them. Equally, the police had the powers to stop and search anyone suspected of possessing kif. Salam's decisions on how to act to restore his peaceful life are dependent upon these cultural givens.

Form

The two decisions taken by Salam regarding the Jewish woman and the policeman respectively, are nurtured under the influence of kif-smoking, but first we have to see why that is so. In his Preface to the volume of the four stories, Bowles explains his *modus operandi*:

In 1960 I began to experiment with the idea of constructing stories whose subject matter would consist of disparate elements and unrelated characters taken directly from life and fitted together as in a mosaic. The problem was to create a story line which would make each arbitrarily chosen episode compatible with the others, to make each one lead to the next with a semblance of naturalness. I believed that through the intermediary of kif the barriers separating the unrelated elements might be destroyed, and the disconnected episodes forced into a symbiotic relationship. I listed a group of incidents and situations I had either witnessed or heard about that year. (9)

The factual material Bowles decided to use for "A Friend of the World" was what he calls "A., B., G. and K." (10):

A. had an old grudge against B. When B. was made a policeman, A. sent money to him, seeing to it that B.'s superior was made aware of the gift. B. was reprimanded and given a post in the Sahara. [...]

Finding his kitten dead with a needle in its stomach, G. decided that it had been killed because he had named it Mimí. [...]

K. frightened a Jewish woman by leaving the ingredients of magic on her doorstep. (*ibid.*)

As Bowles adds: “No one of the actual situations had anything to do with kif, but by providing kif-directed motivations I was able to use cannabis both as solvent and solder in the construction.” (*ibid.*) So we might ask ourselves, “How has Bowles used kif in the construction of this story?” First of all, Salam is a transgressor of his cultural, and especially, religious codes, and the possession of the kif, freely bought in the marketplace, makes him fear the policeman and want to get rid of him. Secondly, as already suggested, the kif-smoking and the sleep or dream that ensues provides an answer to each problem. Salam enters into this state of mind deliberately. The first time that he smokes after the discovery of the needle in the dead kitten’s stomach, his brother “understood that Salam was looking for an answer.” (19) The second time, the problem is more complex and requires more kif:

He smoked for an hour or more. [...] He wanted to sit in a quiet place in order to find out what to do. [...] He felt the kif in his head, and he knew he was going to make it work for him.

He put the plan together slowly. [...] After six pipes, when he had everything arranged in his mind [...] (25–6)

A non-kif-smoker might allege that his decisions are purely logical, though unscrupulous. How can one frighten a Jewish woman? By using something she is afraid of, such as black magic. How can one get a policeman off one’s back? By getting him transferred. How can one do that? By getting him accused of something and reprimanded. But how does kif work? Bowles explains his understanding of this at the beginning of his Preface:

Moroccan kif-smokers like to speak of “two worlds”, the one ruled by inexorable natural laws, and the other, the kif world, in which each person perceives “reality” according to the projections of his own essence, the state of consciousness in which the elements of the physical universe are automatically rearranged by cannabis to suit the requirements of the individual. These distorted variations in themselves generally are of scant interest to anyone but the subject at the time he is experiencing them. An intelligent smoker, nevertheless, can aid in directing the process of deformation in such a way that the results will have value to him

in his daily life. If he has faith in the accuracy of his interpretations, he will accept them as decisive, and use them to determine a subsequent plan of action. Thus, for a dedicated smoker, the passage to the “other world” is often a pilgrimage undertaken for the express purpose of oracular consultation. (9)

So Bowles suggests that Salam has entered a dream-world where he acts out possible scenarios and foresees just how they could work to his advantage. This dream-like quality, combined with the specificity of other factors, contributes to the success of the story. Other strategies that enhance the story are the fact that it is a single incident making for a unified impression, for through the kif, Bowles has managed to credibly bring together these apparently unrelated incidents he took from real life. The story also has symmetry as there is a return to a peaceful life after this incident of the cat. Life goes on in this community of poor people of mixed cultures, who grate against each other in their daily lives. They blow up out of all proportion insignificant altercations, which the policeman reduces to the thinginess of “a dead lizard” (23), and they will always continue to do so.

“He of the Assembly”

Summary

One of the two protagonists is an older man called Ben Tajah who married a “wild” girl from the mountains. Since she broke everything, he had to repudiate her. From that time onwards, he has lived alone, but from consorting with many women, he contracts “*en novar*” (38), or as it says in the Glossary at the end: “EN NOUR. Flowers (popularly syphilis)” (89)³³. He is often too ill to go to tend his stall in the bazaar. One day he comes back to Marrakech from visiting his cousin in Fez, who sometimes advises him. The narrator does not actually state that the story is set in Marrakech, but he does mention street names in the Medina, or non-European quarter, or, for example, the name of the main square, Djemaa el Fna (33). Ben Tajah is very tired and thinks, or imagines in his weary brain, that he has picked up a letter from the pavement which just happens to have his name on it. Inside, there is a piece of paper which reads: ““The sky trembles and the earth is afraid, and the two eyes are not brothers.”” (*ibid.*) He is troubled by this as he thinks that it is a message from Satan. He becomes involved with a young man whom he overhears in the street near his house saying, as if to him: ““It ends that way.”” (45) Learning that the boy has been in the same café that he frequents, the Café of the Two Bridges, he tries to find

³³ *Ennouar* in Moghrebi does have the connection between flowers and syphilis.

out if he was seen with a letter in the café. He does not know if he has imagined the letter or if the letter is real, though he cannot find it. His main objective is to verify that the letter does not exist and therefore that he is not being pursued by Satan.

The other protagonist is a seventeen-year-old local boy –again, we assume that “‘If I’m seventeen I can run faster’” (45) means that he is seventeen– known only as the “He of the Assembly” of the title (33). The assembly referred to would be the Friday prayers, for, as Hibbard reminds us, He of the Assembly is “a direct translation of the proper name Boujemaa, which can also mean ‘Born on Friday’” (1993, 50). We do not see him frequenting the mosque, indeed, the Café of the Two Bridges is the only place we know he frequents (later we shall see why), apart from Mustapha’s bakery (where he borrows money). He moves between his aunt’s house, where he lives, hardly speaking to her, and the café, where he also hardly speaks. He is such a loner and so undevout that the name is not only mysterious, but possibly also ironic. He is as lazy and kif-riddled as Salam of the previous story. There is also a suggestion that he may be a toy-boy like Salam, as Ben Tajah, upon speaking to him thinks euphemistically: “‘He has a good heart [...] even though he is probably a guide for the Nazarenes.’” (48) His whole life is dedicated to getting enough money to pay what he owes for his food and to buy kif. Like Salam again, in his guilty conscience, he imagines he is pursued by the police for possession of kif. When he meets Ben Tajah, he sees the opportunity as a way of escaping off the street and finding somewhere else to live and possibly a source of income. When the kif wears off in his muddled brain he can be astute. The end of the story involves the pair each explaining their respective enigmas: Ben Tajah wants to know what the message about the sky and the earth and the two eyes means, and He of the Assembly knows that he must give a convincing answer so that Ben Tajah will take him in. He of the Assembly tells Ben Tajah about his kif-dream of fleeing from the police and hiding in a soup-kettle which must have been incredibly large (35), and asks Ben Tajah to tell him how he could have got out without a ladder. Ben Tajah’s reply is: “‘You smoke too much kif, brother’”, to which He of the Assembly retorts: “‘And you don’t smoke and you’re afraid of Satan.’” (51) So they both give answers as if to make the reader realise that whether you smoke kif or not, your mind can become obsessed by fears. He of the Assembly needs time to think of an answer to the question about the contents of the letter and playing for time, he is admitted to Ben Tajah’s rooms, which is what he wants. Here, a possible sexual motive takes over, or at least, the desire for payment for sexual services. For He of the Assembly expects Ben Tajah to make advances, but he falls asleep, exhausted with the journey and his worries. Since He

of the Assembly is not paid, before leaving, he steals all the money his host had in his pocket. The unexpected thing is that in amongst the banknotes he finds a letter with Ben Tajah's name on it and inside a piece of paper with the enigmatic words inscribed. He proceeds to burn the evidence and returns to his house to smoke a pipe of kif. Feeling rather pleased with himself, he utters the words of the proverb: "A pipe of kif before breakfast gives a man the strength of a hundred camels in the courtyard." (54)

Themes

Just as in the previous story, paramount in this one are themes related to the negative side of Moroccan life and culture: ignorance and laziness, unemployment, delinquency, misogyny, venereal diseases, drug-taking, corruption in public life, superstition and the general lack of trust even between and amongst local Moslems precisely on account of these tendencies. As we saw, Bourara has no qualms in stating his belief that "Bowles is [...] especially concerned about adequately representing the Moroccan/'Moslem' character to the West, contradictions notwithstanding. And in the West, to be 'Moslem' is to be backward, to be fatalistic—i.e, lazy and unproductive—[...]" (Bourara 169). If the eponymous protagonist of "He of the Assembly" works at all, it is in exploiting the Nazarenes, the Westerners. If he has no money, he either begs or steals. The other protagonist, Ben Tajah, does in theory work, but is often too ill even to look after himself. When he had a wife, albeit for a short time, he beat her (37). Both are superstitious in their ignorance. He of the Assembly believes, like many local men, in Aïcha Qandicha, to whom they will be in thrall if they as much as look at her:

I heard it again saying my name, a voice like water, like the wind moving the leaves in the trees, a woman. It was a woman calling me. The wind was in the trees and the water was running, but there was a woman too. You think it's kif. No, she was calling my name. Now and then, not very loud. When I was under the trees it was louder, and I heard that the voice was my mother's. I heard that the way I can hear you. Then I knew the cat was not a cat, and I knew that Aïcha Qandicha wanted me. I thought of other nights when perhaps she had been watching me from the eyes of a cat or a donkey. I knew she was not going to catch me. Nothing in the seven skies could make me turn around. (43)

In this story, Bowles is explicit about the beliefs concerning Aïcha Qandicha, that she will lead a man to perdition:

Aïcha Qandicha can only be where there are trees by running water. “She comes only for single men by trees and fresh moving water. Her arms are gold and she calls in the voice of the most cherished one.” Ben Tajah gave him the *sebsi*. He filled it and smoked it. “When a man sees her face he will never see another woman’s face. He will make love with her all the night, and every night, and in the sunlight by the walls, before the eyes of children. Soon he will be an empty pod and he will leave this world for his home in Jehennem.” (49)

If He of the Assembly thinks he is being contacted by the djinn Aïcha Qandicha, Ben Tajah thinks he is being pursued by the devil himself, Satan. So the one believes in cultural superstitions and the other, in religious ones. Furthermore, both Ben Tajah and his cousin, in their ignorance, believe that penicillin will cure syphilis by hanging vials of it around your neck instead of having it injected :

He asked a doctor for medicine. The doctor gave him a paper and told him to take it to the Pharmacie de l’Etoile. There he bought six vials of penicillin in a box. He took them home and tied each little bottle with a silk thread, stringing them so that they made a necklace. He wore this always around his neck, taking care that the glass vials touched his skin. He thought it likely that by now he was cured, but his cousin in Fez had just told him that he must go on wearing the medicine for another three months, or at least until the beginning of the moon of Chouwal. (38)

Again, superstitions that are given a religious connotation, the need to wait until the end of Ramadan, outweigh the powers of science in the hands of the doctor and the chemist. The six vials of penicillin hung around Ben Tajah’s neck remind us, as we shall see later, of the “empty” amulet in the story of that title.

The corruption in public life in this story concerns the police. The latter only intermittently crack down on the use of cannabis: “he understood that the police had begun once more to try to enforce their law against kif.” (47) If one has the protection of people in high places, then there are premises which are out of bounds even to the police: “No policeman can go into the Café of the Two Bridges because it belongs to the Sultan’s sister.” (35) The Café of the Two Bridges is always full of smoke: “Outside everyone smokes kif too, but only for an hour or two – not all day and night like the ones inside.” (36) Both inside and outside, everyone knew that they had to “keep one hand on their money.” (*ibid.*) As regards police methods, He of the Assembly hallucinates in his kif

dream about an old woman helping him to escape by letting him down a ladder into a soup-kettle. When he imagines she is a manifestation of Aïcha Qandicha, or at least in league with her, he hopes the police will catch her and torture her. The descriptions in his thoughts are ostensibly part of his kif hallucinations: “I hope the police put a hose in your mouth and pump you full of salt water until you crack open!” (44) and “The police had tied the old woman naked to a table with her thin legs wide apart and were sliding electrodes up inside her.” (45) Yet one guesses that his imaginings are based at least on a mixture of truth of what he has heard reported of police interrogation methods.

Form

Bowles’s narrative technique of sliding from objective description to penetration of lucid thoughts of characters and then to their imaginings and hallucinations, blurring the boundaries between these is what makes the whole story enigmatic and dream-like. Its genesis and framework are slightly different from those of the other three stories in the collection. In these, Bowles amalgamates completely unconnected events or anecdotes he has heard in the area in the previous year and cements them through the use of recourse to kif. But this one uses a personal conversation (if you can call it that) rather than pieces of local news to which he is alien, as he explains at the end of his Prologue:

He of the Assembly has no factual anchors apart from three hermetic statements made to me that year by a kif-smoker in Marrakech: “The eye wants to sleep, but the head is no mattress,” “The earth trembles and the sky is afraid, and the two eyes are not brothers,” and “A pipe of kif before breakfast gives a man the strength of a hundred camels in the courtyard.” He uttered these apocalyptic sentences, but steadfastly refused to shed any light on their meanings or possible applications. This impelled me to invent a story about him in which he would furnish the meanings. (10–11)

So “a kif-smoker in Marrakech” is the inspiration and model for this character, who utters the Nchoui proverb (which also heads the collection) at the end of the story. He of the Assembly is pleased with himself, having stolen the money, so feels strong. But when we contemplate the ending, it would have been cleverer of him not to steal from Ben Tajah, opting for the short-term solution to his debts, but to work his way into Ben Tajah’s life more permanently. The proverb is readily understandable, that kif can give one the power of one’s convictions, the beliefs or plan of action with which one emerges from a

kif-induced reverie. The other apocalyptic statement made to Bowles in Marrakech, which he reproduces on the paper in Ben Tajah's letter, has no explanation even in the story, except insofar as the fact that it is acted out to a certain extent. Both Ben Tajah and He of the Assembly have their own private fears; together they feel safer:

He felt that if the boy went with him the *qahouaji* might say there had been a letter, and that even if the man could not remember, he would not mind so much because he would be less afraid. He waited until he thought the boy was not nervous about going into the street, and then he said: "Let's go out and get some tea." "Good," said the boy. He was not afraid of the police if he was with Ben Tajah. (48)

Ben Tajah's tiredness, which He of the Assembly unfortunately interprets as a snub or a lack of interest, is what divides the two. He of the Assembly has high hopes: "'This night is going to be a jewel in my crown,' he thinks" (41). So in his disappointment, he suddenly feels very peevish – "angry" is the word used (53). He has run out of kif and wants to exact a sort of revenge, so steals from Ben Tajah, thus enacting the last part of the statement: "the two eyes are not brothers".

In his Prologue, Bowles comments on the structure of the story:

Here the content of each paragraph is determined by its point of view. There are seven paragraphs, arranged in a simple pattern: imagine the cross-section of a pyramidal structure of four steps, where steps 1 and 7 are at the same level, likewise 2 and 6, and 3 and 5, with 4 at the top. In paragraphs 1 and 7 He of the Assembly and Ben Tajah are seen together. 2 and 6 are seen by Ben Tajah, and 3 and 5 by He of the Assembly, and 4 consists of He of the Assembly's interior monologue. (11)

As regards the pyramid, as one reads linearly, one is not really aware of the effects of this, except, perhaps, in one's understanding of the realistic beginning and end, where the two characters are together, and the dream-like middle, which delves deep into He of the Assembly's muddled mind. In this middle part, He of the Assembly begins fairly lucidly in that he recognises the baker Mustapha and talks to him. Again, at the end, he is lucid enough to recognise that a man (Ben Tajah) is speaking to him, but in between, he has the hallucinations of Aïcha Qandicha, the old woman and the police, as he thinks: "[...]Hashish in your heart and wind in your head." (42) Thus this middle paragraph has a symmetry, and the whole story has a symmetry, with Ben Tajah and

He of the Assembly together at the beginning and end, the difference being that in the first paragraph they are together but do not know each other:

While he was smoking it, Ben Tajah looked in his direction, and although they were facing each other, He of the Assembly did not notice Ben Tajah until he got up and paid for his tea. Then he looked at him because he took such a long time getting up off the floor. He saw his face and thought: “That man has no one in the world.” (36)

At the end, they are together in Ben Tajah’s house, but after the imagined offence and the theft of the money, He of the Assembly must go away and, we assume, no longer frequent the Café of the Two Bridges, his twenty-four-hour kif refuge. So his earlier thought, at the end of paragraph one, comes true: “[...] and when he got up to go out into the street he found the world had changed.” (37)

One final point about the paragraphs with the different points of view and the sliding in and out of the characters’ minds is that Bowles’s explanation of the pyramidal structure may in fact be a red herring that distracts us from other important markers in the text. It is interesting to note what Stewart has to tell us about editors’ first reactions to the tale:

Bowles submitted “He of the Assembly” to the *London Magazine*, but John Lehmann rejected the story “with great regret,” calling it interesting but a failure: “The dope-dream atmosphere seems to me to become merely a confusion, and I fear that too many readers will give up bewildered before they have got half-way” (HRC: TLS, 26 Feb. 1960) (Stewart 1974, 129)

Indeed, I think the tale needs to be read at least twice before we are fully able to follow the threads, and then we have to be very attentive to the little comments of the narrator on the movements of the characters, which are like stage-directions in a play:

in paragraph one: “they were facing each other” (36);

at the end of paragraph four: “He stepped out and raised his arm. He said to me: ‘Come here.’” (44);

in paragraph five, He of the Assembly’s paragraph, this character mistakes Ben Tajah, whom he still does not know, for a policeman: “A hand seized his shoulder. He opened his mouth and swiftly turned, but the man had moved and was pushing him from the side. He felt the wool of the man’s *djellaba* against the back of his hand.” (45);

in paragraph 6, Ben Tajah's paragraph, we learn that Ben Tajah overheard He of the Assembly, again, before making his acquaintance, speaking aloud: "Ben Tajah looked at the boy and asked him: 'What did you mean when you said down there: "It ends that way?" I heard you say it.'" (46).

These "stage directions" which represent the real interaction between the two characters easily get missed in amongst the imaginings of the febrile minds of both characters.

Before leaving this discussion of the form of the story, it is worth emphasising this importance in it of the interplay between the lucid, precise, solid and specific, on the one hand, and the imagined, dream-like and fearful, on the other. The narrator (a third-person anonymous and omniscient narrator) actually begins his –his rather than her, as it is a man's story, and most public story-tellers in Morocco, if that is the model for this one, are male– on a note which suggests the putative, the seeming or possible, rather than the categorical: "It seems there was a man named Ben Tajah [...]" (33) Indeed, we can contrast this opening with the factual beginning of the previous story: "Salam rented two rooms and a kitchen on the second floor of a Jewish house at the edge of the town." (15)

We have already commented on the enigmatic, even contradictory, name of He of the Assembly, and it contrasts with the solid sound of the name Mustapha, the baker who plays a minor role in the story. The concrete things make us aware of what is "true" in the tale, like the wool of Ben Tajah's *djellaba*, or the brass pestle he uses to call the postman who lives downstairs to bring him some food when he cannot get out of bed (37). A similar "thinginess" (and sense of humour) we find in one of He of the Assembly's more lucid thoughts: "[...] This isn't a dream brought back from another world past the customs like a teapot from Mecca.'" (42–3)

Similarly, the enigmatic or unimportant words in the story are afforded great weight by the characters, when in fact they are almost meaningless. When Ben Tajah overhears He of the Assembly say "It ends that way", he thinks it is apocalyptic and applies to him, whereas even He of the Assembly does not know why he uttered the phrase: "When a man is tired he mistakes the hopes of children for the knowledge of men. It seemed to him that He of the Assembly's words had a meaning all for him." (47) Whether Bowles invented the phrase about the hopes of children and the knowledge of men or whether it is a saying, we do not know, but it encapsulates the irrational thinking based on fear that both characters reveal. Ben Tajah is easily convinced because he wants to be. He of the Assembly, in his *kif* dreams, is in the habit of allowing songs to enter his mind. It occurs to him that he can

satisfy Ben Tajah by telling him that he is familiar with the phrase about the earth, the sky and the two eyes who are not brothers because it is a song (53). Thus he finds answers to his problems in his kif dreams, just as Salam, the “Friend of the World” had done.

Sometimes, in opposition to this, what seem to be unimportant words come to have greater meaning. He of the Assembly’s next thoughts are enigmatic to the reader: “‘I’ve made him happy,’ he thought. ‘But I won’t ever tell him another lie. That’s the only one. What I’m going to do now is not the same as lying.’” (53) First of all, he is always lying to himself in one way or another by smoking kif and going off into another world. He seems to have a conscience about telling a lie, even if it is a white lie, whose object is to do good rather than harm, but he has no qualms about committing a robbery. So words cannot be relied on, but nor can actions: “What I’m going to do now” is enigmatic, but since at that point He of the Assembly had not been offended by Ben Tajah, we know that he is not contemplating the robbery, but must be contemplating having sexual relations with his host, especially since a couple of sentences further on he gets into the bed. (*ibid.*) To his mind, “making a living”, as he sees it, is less reprehensible than deliberately lying with evil intentions. One wonders if Bowles implies a pun on the word “lying” in order for us to guess his meaning.

In this story, Bowles attracts attention to words, to language and the way it is used, especially the way meaningless things are accorded great importance. At the end, He of the Assembly looks at the piece of paper “as he would have looked at a snake” (54) because he also believes Satan is behind it (which would explain why he burns his boats with Ben Tajah, never to have anything more to do with him). They both believe in superstition and it is more powerful in their thinking than what true religion teaches. Here, the latter is characterised as being as insubstantial as smoke: “Ben Tajah nodded his head. Pious thoughts can be of as much use for keeping Satan at a distance as camphor or *bakhour* dropped onto hot coals. Each holy word is worth a high column of smoke, and the eyelids do not smart afterward.” (47–8)

“The Story of Lahcen and Idir”

At half the length of the previous story and much less subtle, we are never taken into the mind of a kif-smoker, though the story could have been sub-titled: “The drunkard and the drug-addict.”

Summary

Lahcen and Idir are two friends, probably in their late teens (there is a reference to a fairly recent past when Idir was fourteen, 58), who live near Merkala in Algeria. They sometimes take work at the port when it

is available. Like Salam and He of the Assembly, they have just enough money to cover the cost of their basic needs, their food and their addictions: Lahcen's being wine and Idir's kif. Also like the characters mentioned from the other stories, they fear the police, though for different reasons. They were imprisoned on at least one occasion for abusing prostitutes, using their services and then hitting them and going off without paying (57–59). The tale hinges on one crisis in their relationship. They meet a young girl and Lahcen goes off with her, but not before Idir has given him a meaningful look as if to warn him. He remembers about being in prison and in his gratitude, the next day makes him a gift of a gold ring. Just by chance, a bird flies in through Idir's window, he slips the ring over its head, but is horrified to see it fly off, taking the ring with it. Lahcen is not convinced by this story and is angry, so to appease him, Idir gives him a pair of shoes. The shoes need new soles and Lahcen haggles with the cobbler to get them resoled at a lower price. While they are being mended, he meets another girl, who turns out to be beautiful and so he falls in love. He is seized by a fit of jealousy and suspects she is a girl of easy virtue who will go with other men. To test her, he decides to leave her with Idir. But before he can take her round to Idir's house, he suddenly has another reason to be angry with him. In resoling the shoes, the cobbler has tightened them and he cannot get them on. When he eventually manages to sell them, it is at a loss in relation to what he paid the cobbler. Although Idir gave him the shoes for nothing, he is angry with him rather than with the cobbler. The girl spends the night with Idir, who is equally infatuated with her. When Lahcen asks how it went, he realises the truth and so picks a fight with his friend. Since Lahcen is bleary-eyed from drink and lack of sleep, he is easily beaten. He vows to kill Idir, but gets drunk instead. When Idir goes to meet the girl, she accompanies him, the winner of the fight. She tells him that Lahcen was always drunk, so we see that the kif-smoker rather than the drinker wins the girl.

Discussion of themes

The themes here are similar to those of the previous stories: negative ones such as economic hardship through unemployment, addiction to substances to alleviate monotony, promiscuity, child prostitution and fear of the police, misogyny and the bad treatment of women, especially if they fall outside the protection of the males of the family; and on a more positive note, male friendship and even love (a rare theme in Bowles), or at least sexual attraction. At the end of the story, Idir is rather smug as he has won the girl, so there is a sense of approbation of kif-smoking and disapproval of alcohol, which culturally, is associated with non-Muslims.

Form

As regards form, although the narration is third person omniscient, the reader is aligned more with the views of Idir, so his winning the girl at the end comes as no surprise. What is described is a moment of crisis in an otherwise fairly smooth friendship, and the factual material Bowles has used to build the story is employed in making the cracks appear in the relationship. As Bowles says in his Prologue, he has combined two stories for this tale: “C., D., and H.” (10), which are as follows:

C. acquired an old pair of shoes from D. When he had them resoled he discovered that he could no longer get them on. As a result he quarreled with D. [...]

H. slipped a ring over the head of a stray bird, and the bird flew away with it. (*ibid.*)

In both cases, the actions and attitudes of the two boys are rather stupid. Lahcen (C.) should have been grateful for the gift of the shoes and been angry with the cobbler, not his friend. Equally, Idir (H.) was thoughtless in putting a gold ring over the head of a bird. Symbolically, gold is unlucky for Idir, it brings together different strands of the story. The first girl repels Idir because of her gold teeth since they remind him of a prostitute with whom he had fallen in love at aged fourteen and who paid him no attention. In the background lie suggestions that both girls probably lost their teeth either through poor diet or through being hit by men like Idir and Lahcen, and one wonders how the gold teeth were financed. A quotation from a story by Bowles’s friend Mohamed Choukri, the title-story from *Majnoun al-Ward (The Flower Freak;* Rabat 1993), is explicit on this issue: “*I have seen the delirium of night dissolve their [the prostitutes’] make-up, tear their veils and their teeth, teeth which are being wrecked by decay while they are still in the full flower of youth. (p. 128).*” (Quoted from Abdellatif Akbib in Khalid Amine et al 2005, 86) On the other hand, to have gold teeth was considered very attractive and females would go to great lengths to save up and have their otherwise healthy teeth capped with gold.

Equally, one wonders about Lahcen’s gold ring, whether it was really gold –Idir speculates on its value, “at least fifty dirhams” (59)– and whether it was bought or stolen. Gold is a unifying sign in this story and chance is a device that unites it with the first story. The bird flies by chance into Idir’s room, just as the kitten had suddenly appeared by chance to Salam. Both the bird and the kitten (taken from the factual material Bowles has chosen) bring problems which are not merited or

caused by the protagonists, though the moral is that one must have sharp wits. A kif-smoker has sharper wits than a wine-drinker here. In a way, these chance encounters are caused by poverty and are related to the idea of doors or windows being open or closed. In this story, the window is unguarded because Idir cannot afford to buy blinds (though he can afford kif). He suffers the extreme glare of the light during the daytime, just as He of the Assembly suffers from doors being open or closed to him (34). Salam, through his work in Tangier, can afford to live in the best house in the street and can therefore open his window to the breeze (17).

Bowles anchors the story in real life with references to the cost of things like the gold ring. We learn how much it costs to have a pair of shoes resoled, and because shoes are more related to a life of poverty, the story of the shoes is more believable than that of the bird. Equally, we learn that a prostitute charges more than it costs to get her drunk. Thus Bowles uses kif to cement the stories together, but he uses other motifs and narrative devices too. Perhaps the motifs are noncausal, but Bowles adds a logic which appeals to the western mind.

“The Wind at Beni Midar”

Summary

A young soldier from Tetuan, Driss, is stationed at a distant barracks in windy Beni Midar. (One wonders if this story inspired the song of the same name by Robert Scott Thompson, although rather than for wind instruments, it is “for six celli”). Driss’s superior, Aziz, the “cabran,” had been a neighbour back in Tetuan and on his return visits brings Driss parcels from his sister. So initially, there is a good relationship between the two men. Sundays are long boring days when Driss often passes the time by going down into the valley to shoot hares. One Sunday, he finds that he has only one cartridge, so pays his friend Mehdi, who has to do sentry duty, ten rials to swap his good, loaded gun for his old one. Mehdi warns him that he must bring the gun back by seven o’clock. Driss does not make it back on time, nor does he have the gun. Kif is the direct reason for the delay and the loss, as it makes him sleepy then hungry and he wanders further away to collect cactus fruit to eat. He eats so much that the pile of cactus peelings covers the gun and in his confusion he cannot find it. He gets back to the barracks late to find, to no great surprise, that Mehdi has been put in solitary confinement in “the dark room.” Driss tells the cabran a half-truth: he does not mention the cactus peelings, but says that there was a dog barking when he placed the gun on the ground and it disappeared. Much as he hates ignorant superstition, he says ““Maybe the dog was a *djinn*”” (78), in the hope that this excuse will explain the mystery and cover his omission.

In the background, conversations between Driss and the cabran have been reported on how they both censure the superstition of the local Jilali tribe, some of whose members dance in the café until they fall into a trance and cut themselves with knives. The cabran maintains that such superstition will only die out when all children are educated, but that the government is taking its time over this. The cabran does not believe in superstition but is intrigued about the whereabouts of the gun. He thinks that the kif has made Driss lose the gun, so believes that it can be found. Perhaps what is surprising is that the cabran follows the same pattern as Driss, in that he smokes kif and gets hungry. As he goes in search of cactus to eat, he sees the forest of cactus, eventually discovers the pile of peelings Driss had left and notices part of the gun barrel shining in the sun. In his happiness over retrieving the gun, he decides to play a trick on Driss, and this is what is going to bring about his own tragic downfall.

The cabran does not tell Driss that he has found the gun but makes him go down to the café where a Jilali is dancing and mutilating himself. Driss is told to ask the Jilali to make the *djinn* return the gun. Reluctantly, Driss does so, and as the cabran produces the gun, it makes him believe in the power of the Jilali and in the existence of a *djinn*. Driss is now very unhappy because he is afraid of the power of both the *djinn* and his superior officer, especially when he overhears the latter laughing at his expense with the other officers. He vows to break the cabran's power and to do so he has to resort to magic. He finds an old woman who sells him a powder he has to get the cabran to ingest. He manages this easily enough because the other soldier, Mehdi, who has spent ten days in solitary confinement, is also determined to get revenge. He attacks the cabran, and when the injured officer is taken to his room, he drinks a bottle of wine into which Driss has poured the poisonous powder. The result is that the cabran is racked with pain and is struck blind and dumb. His power is broken along with his health.

Discussion of themes

There are no new themes in this story, we have a repeat of the revenge of a perceived grudge which we found in "A Friend of the World" and at the end of "He of the Assembly," and the measures taken by an individual to protect himself from threat from different quarters, be they physical, such as institutional authority like the police or the army, or psychological and spiritual, such as magic and superstition. In all three stories we have what Hibbard calls "the triumph of the powerless over the powerful" (Hibbard 1993, 48), and at the base of it all, incommunication, even within cultural communities, as Hibbard puts it:

“thwarted desire for human contact and communication [...] the flight of the outlaw from authority.” (51)

The figure of the cabran is ironic in that he does not really deserve his fate (fate in the sense of what happens to him, not in the sense of predestination). His name, Aziz, is dropped once quite casually by Driss (81), but in the rest of the story he is referred to as “the cabran”, which we assume comes from *cabrón* in Spanish, someone who does bad things or is a bad person. He is not a bad person, he just wants to play a joke. The irony is that the joke rebounds upon his own head. A further irony is that it concerns superstition, and there is discussion in the story on how the government wants to extend education and eradicate ignorance. Both Driss and the cabran are in favour of this, and if there is any division, it is between Driss and his father, who is old-fashioned in this way. But Driss is a good Muslim and will not openly rebel against his father (73–4). The double irony is that the cabran uses superstition, in which he does not believe, and it does him great harm, and Driss is tricked into half-believing in superstitious ideas like *djinn*, which reduces him to the same level of ignorance as his father.

Form

As regards the construction of the story, in the Prologue, Bowles explains the ingredients: “E., F., I. and J. (for *The Wind at Beni Midar*).” (10) These are as follows:

In another personal feud, E. consulted with a witch to help him deal with his enemy F. [...]

I. although brought up as a Jilali, hated and feared the Jilali.

J. ate so many cactus fruit that the peelings covered his gun and he was unable to find it. (*ibid.*)

So the Jilali and the cactus fruit have nothing to do with each other but are cemented together by the narcotics. Driss’s kif-muddled brain is incapable of uncovering the gun and the cabran decides to use the Jilali, who are in thrall to drugs, to sew the seeds of doubt about magic powers in his brain. As Hibbard notes: “Bowles neither condones nor champions the drug’s use. Rather, unalarmingly and evenhandedly, he displays its operation.” (1993, 45) Hibbard also reminds us that Bowles’s recourse to drugs both for personal use and as a sort of poetic device is nothing new:

Altered consciousness of the kind referred to here figures in nearly all of Bowles’s fiction. His interest in drugs is much like that shown by creative talents such as Coleridge, De Quincey, Baudelaire, and Walter Benjamin. The drug experience, to them,

represents wide-ranging imaginative freedom, as it gives a long leash to reality, suggests bizarre connections, and stands in opposition to the dominant, increasingly scientific, rational world that threatens to obliterate the imagination completely. (Hibbard 1993, 46)

As a general conclusion to the collection, we can say, however, that Bowles shows here how kif plays a role in the ordinary life of ordinary people, not exceptional ones like Coleridge or Baudelaire. He portrays ordinary life in which at given moments there are unforeseen crises. The pace of life in these stories is much slower, says Hibbard (47), who also draws upon one of Bowles's own fictional characters, Stenham of *The Spider's House*, to explain the philosophy of Moroccan life:

It's a culture of "and then" rather than one of "because," like ours. [...] What I mean is that in their minds one thing doesn't come from another thing. Nothing is a result of anything. Everything merely *is*, and no questions asked. [...] Everything's explained by the constant intervention of Allah. And whatever happens had to happen, and was decreed at the beginning of time, and there's no way even of imagining how anything could have been different from what it is. (*The Spider's House* [1955; reprint, Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1982, 187] quoted in Hibbard 1993, 47)

Perhaps Bowles's Stenham is right about the less enlightened characters, like the Jilali or Driss's father, indeed, Driss himself after his experience with the gun, but in general, the young generation represented by such characters as Salam, Idir or Driss before his adventure, suggest that things may change, albeit slowly, towards a more rational view of life. Even Ben Tajah asks rational questions, like whether Satan is behind his messages. Thus Bowles has portrayed both styles of life in these stories and has used anecdotes he has heard and the consumption of kif to foreground his main concern, which is to tell tales:

The stories in this volume present one imaginative version of Morocco, and while we must not mistake this representation as a wholly realistic one, certainly the reader acquainted with Morocco will easily recognize the real place in the fiction. Bowles's interest here is not so much in giving an accurate portrayal of Morocco as it is in telling an interesting story, though the two purposes need not be presumed as being at odds. (Hibbard 1993, 46)

They are not at odds, though Bowles does add to the mix of these unconnected episodes and recreation of kif dreams a sense of logic which explains the connections for his western readership.

4. 2. 4. *The Time of Friendship* (1967)

Bowles's fourth collection of stories, *The Time of Friendship*, was brought out by Holt, Rinehart & Winston of New York in 1967, though of the thirteen stories, only a few are new, the four stories of *One Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* reappearing here. The story that gives the eponymous title to the collection is one of the new ones, though it is like a mature re-writing of "Tea on the Mountain," which had appeared in his first collection, *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories*. Both deal with western women who maintain a relationship with young native men in a North African context. In the latter, the protagonist is a nameless American woman writer, while in "The Time of Friendship," the woman is Swiss and we are told her name, Fräulein Windling, later, even, we learn from a letter that her Christian name is Maria (*Paul Bowles: Stories*, 225). This precision helps the reader to identify more closely with the protagonist, and in general, the new story is more satisfying. As Hibbard puts it: "A maturation of style and a realization of greater complexity, however, are noticeable in many of these stories, the most powerful among them being 'The Time of Friendship,' 'The Hours After Noon,' 'Doña Faustina,' and 'The Frozen Fields.'" (Hibbard 1993, 53) So, having already looked at "The Hours After Noon", here I will confine myself to an analysis of the first of these.

Summary of "The Time of Friendship"

Fräulein Windling is not a casual visitor to North Africa, but has been regularly spending her winters in an isolated oasis in the Gourara region of the Algerian Sahara (Timimoun, deep in the desert, and Kerzaz and Abadla are the place-names mentioned). She has become very familiar with the local area but her visits are a practice and custom that is threatened by trouble in the region, which is referred to at the very outset. As her visits come under threat and even become hazardous, by the end of the story she has to cease making her annual pilgrimage. She must remain in Switzerland, where she had maintained her standard of living and financed her travels by working in the summers, teaching "in the Freiluftschule in Bern". (*Paul Bowles: Stories*, 216)

She has a routine which involves sunbathing on the roof of the hotel in the mornings and watching the sun go down in the evenings. In between, she would sit alone by the fireplace after lunch playing solitaire

(218) or go for walks in the wind and the heat. A twelve-year-old boy she has seen on her walks and later in the hotel takes to watching her through the door of her room as she types her letters. They communicate in French, as the boy's father has been a soldier and "Soldiers speak good French." (220) After a time he tells her his name, Slimane, the same as King Solomon, and he becomes her companion on long walks or "pilgrimages" (220) through the valley. She judges his attitude towards her as one of "respect bordering on adoration" (223) as long as she keeps off the subject of Islam. She talks to him about Christianity, but if she makes any comparison with his religion or even broaches the topic, he would cry: "No, no, no, no! Nazarenes know nothing about Islam. Don't talk, madame, I beg you, because you don't know what you're saying. No, no, no!" (223)

In her final year, when she has been told by the local French military commandant that all civilians, foreigners like herself included, were no longer to be allowed to visit that part of the Sahara, she decides to have one final attempt at approaching Slimane intellectually and spiritually by trying to convince him of the "poetic truth" of the story of Jesus. For Christmas, she prepares a crèche, a nativity scene, making the figures herself laboriously out of clay and scraps of paper and material, and surrounding them with Christmas delights such as chocolates and almonds. Her plan is to invite him to the hotel to supper, explain the Christmas story to him at length, surprise him with the Nativity scene all lit up with candles, and take his picture beside it with her new camera complete with flash for night-time photography.

But things go wrong, she forgot to tell the hotel owner that Slimane was invited for supper, so he is sent away and is too proud to return home, having told his parents of the invitation. Called back to the hotel after supper, when Fräulein Windling leaves him for a moment to fetch her camera, she returns to find a scene of devastation: Slimane has played war-games with the figures of the Wise Men and the camels and has eaten most of the chocolates and almonds, leaving a trail of debris of bits of clay and coloured papers. Shortly afterwards, Fräulein Windling leaves for Switzerland, never to return. On being persuaded to take Slimane with her as far as the train station in Colomb-Bechar (now Bechar), as he gives her his address so that she can send him some money, she realises that he is going to stay there, which can only mean one thing, that he is going to volunteer as a soldier to fight for Algerian independence against the French, and therefore, he is unlikely to survive for long. The story ends with a sense of guilt on her part, having uprooted him from his family and village and left him stranded in a dangerous position between cultures. She can only console herself with the thought that he would have gone off to fight eventually anyway,

given his earlier enthusiasm about his friends: “killing the French like flies.” (226)

Discussion of themes

Towards the end of the story, when Fräulein Windling is summoned before the French military commandant, he enquires what she teaches and whether she is a journalist. He is concerned about her motives and about possible propaganda hostile to France. The reader, but not the officer, is party to her thoughts and opinions, which, says Hibbard, are similar to Bowles’s own stance regarding the purity and innocence of the native uncorrupted by Western civilisation: “No doubt reflecting Bowles’s own views, she thinks at one point in the story, ‘What we have lost, they still possess.’” (CS, 339; Hibbard 1993, 53). Not only does she admire the native way of life, in spite of recognising both backwardness and laziness (*PB: Stories*, 217), but she also holds an inverted form of Orientalist racism, in that she thinks the natives are superior to the Westerners, or at least, to herself, both physically and mentally. The first sentence of the following quotation also depicts Fräulein Windling as one of Bowles’s existentialist characters, especially like Port Moresby, as she feels that she has encountered authentic life only through her experience of the desert:

Her first sight of the desert and its people had been a transfiguring experience; indeed, it seemed to her now that before coming here she had never been in touch with life at all. She believed firmly that each day she spent here increased the aggregate of her resistance. She coveted the rugged health of the natives, when her own was equally strong, but because she was white and educated she was convinced that her body was intrinsically inferior. (218)

In spite of this disapproval of cultural “contamination”, as a professional educator, she tries to teach Slimane to read, but soon gives up, and confines herself to talking about the “cleanliness, honesty and good health of her countrymen” (222). She seems to approve of culture contact on an individual level, like herself and the hotel owner or herself and a teenage boy, but not on a supra-national level: “‘This place would be a convenient model for Hell,’ she wrote to a friend in Basel before going to sleep that night. ‘A full-blown example of the social degeneracy achieved by forced cultural hybridism. Populace debased and made hostile by generations of merciless exploitation [...]’” (225). She had thought that if the older generation, those of her age, were intransigent, she would be able to communicate, in her capacity and experience as a teacher, with youngsters: “As she watched him smiling she was able to

exult in the reflection that Slimane had been reachable, after all; she had proved that it was possible to make true friends of the younger people.” (226) But after the incident of the crèche, she has to admit that her belief in communication was wishful thinking and self-congratulation on her part:

For it had shaken her, the chaos Slimane had made in those few minutes of her absence. Across the seasons of their friendship she had come to think of him as being very nearly like herself, even though she knew he had not been that way when she first had met him. Now she saw the dangerous vanity at the core of that fantasy: she had assumed that somehow his association with her had automatically been for his ultimate good, that inevitably he had been undergoing a process of improvement as a result of knowing her. In her desire to see him change, she had begun to forget what Slimane was really like. “I shall never understand him,” she thought helplessly, sure that just because she felt so close to him she would never be able to observe him dispassionately. (237)

Her desire to “improve” Slimane seems to contradict her feeling that the natives were superior to her, however, this can be explained by her devotion to her profession as a teacher and to her attitude towards young people, as opposed to those who are already grown-up and presumably beyond the reach of education by foreigners and intruders. Thus she feels justified in trying to teach him, also in giving him gifts of food and clothes and later money. But this attitude is patronising, a sort of travesty of foreign aid. Similarly, Bowles’s simple phrasing suggests a patronising tone when he describes how Fräulein Windling speaks of her knowledge of this culture to her students back home: “she entertained her pupils with tales of the life led by the people in the great desert in Africa.” (216)

Towards the end, therefore, the title of the story recurs in a sad acceptance of the parting of the ways on a personal and local level, and on an international level too: “[...] Perhaps another year, when the disturbances are over ...’ (‘Why does he say that?’ she thought, ‘when he knows it’s the end, and the time of friendship is finished?’” (239; suspension marks in the text). As Hibbard concludes: “As in so many of Bowles’s works, the Westerner is free in the end to leave, but locals must stay and face the sometimes unpleasant facts of political and social realities.” (Hibbard 1993, 61). The Swiss woman sees the country itself as an innocent sufferer (“the countryside’s innocent face”, 241) and the French as the “culprits” of a “betrayal” (240).

Thus in her desire for Algeria to remain ever the same and not drag itself into the modern world, Bowles imbues her with his own ideas. Hibbard draws on Lawrence Stewart to demonstrate other autobiographical origins and factors concerning the genesis and development of the story:

“The Time of Friendship” is of interest not only because it further defines some of the author’s thematic concerns but because it can be thought of as a matrix in which have been combined the key elements that generally go into shaping a Bowles story: actual events or experiences, literary antecedents, the writer’s psychological imprint, the imagination, the story’s formal demands, and the writer’s craft. The story is ostensibly derived from the author’s actual experience. Lawrence Stewart traces the story’s origins to Bowles’s wanderings in North Africa in the winter of 1947–48, nearly 15 years before the writing of the story. The setting of “The Time of Friendship” clearly resembles Taghit, which Bowles describes in his autobiography as being “probably the most intensely poetic spot I had ever seen. The tiny hotel atop the rocks was run in conjunction with the military fort nearby. There was a solitary old servant who did everything; fortunately he had only one other guest besides me, an elderly Swiss lady who taught school in Zurich and spent her winters in the Sahara. She and I got on perfectly and took long walks together in the valley to the south” (WS, 282). Bowles kept in touch with the Swiss woman, who, in about 1962, sent him a Christmas tree from Switzerland “and said that she hadn’t been able to go back ... and this put the idea into my head: “the war’s now keeping poor Fräulein from going to her favorite spot” (Stewart 1974, 136).

The character Slimane was also suggested by the writer’s acquaintance with a young Moroccan on that same trip in 1947–48. Bowles recalls “a little boy named Suliman who used to come and see her –they were great friends– she did actually make a crèche for him, and that’s about all. The rest of it’s all my imagination, because I transposed it from ’48 when it actually happened to, say, ten years later, after the Algerian War had been going a few years” (Stewart 1974, 140) (Hibbard 1993, 54–5; suspense marks in the text).

Turning to the theme of religion, Bowles’s knowledge of Islam, although not by any means thorough and questioned by some, is sufficient to make a credible portrayal of some of the bones of contention between Islam and Christianity. At one point, Fräulein

Windling suggests that although she will leave, the wind and the heat will go on forever in the desert, but Slimane objects, speaking of the Christian Second Coming and the end of the world:

“No, no!” he cried. “When Sidna Aissa has returned for forty days there will be no more Moslems and the world will end. Everything, the sky and the sun and the moon. And the wind too. Everything.” He looked at her with an expression of such satisfaction that she felt one of her occasional surges of anger against him. [...] She had never understood why it was that the Moslems had conceded Jesus even this Pyrrhic victory, the coda to all creation: its inconsistency embarrassed her. (227)

She wanted to find common ground, she intended the crèche to look “like a Moslem religious chromolithograph” (228) and has a sort of ecumenical cause in mind: “she wanted only to suggest to him that the god with whom he was on such intimate terms was the god worshipped by the Nazarenes. It was not an idea she would ever try to express in words.” (229) But Bowles has put it into words. We are even privileged to have a Moslem view of Christianity, that of Boufelja, the hotel owner or worker:

He was impatient with Nazarene feasts because the hours of their beginnings and ends were observed in so slipshod a manner. Moslem feasts began precisely, either at sundown or an hour before sunup, or when the new moon was first visible in the western sky at twilight. But the Nazarenes began their feasts whenever they felt like it. (*ibid.*)

So the common ground has its pitfalls. In her review of the collection *The Time of Friendship*, Maureen Howard points to Fräulein Windling’s shortsightedness, in spite of her good intentions:

The woman’s yearly retreat to the peace of the desert is based on a travel-poster conception of tranquillity that screens out most of the picture. She can never stop teaching, in an enlightened colonial spirit, the little boy whom she grows to love. Polite friendship is the only possible arrangement for these two because she will always give in the wrong way and he will always use her. Her European morality, his devious Arab practicality will make them blind to the other’s needs. [...] (Maureen Howard’s “Other Voices” first published in *Partisan Review*, Winter 1968. Reprinted by permission.) (Quoted in Hibbard 1993, 233)

In his chapter “Colonial Contact Zones in Bowles’s Moroccan Fictions” (2012, Chapter 5, 133–174), Hassan Bourara is much harsher in his treatment of this story and uses it as one of his most fully fleshed-out examples of explanation of Bowles’s political ideas and Orientalism. He notes how the theme of Bowles’s first serious attempt at fiction, “Tea on the Mountain”³⁴, the contact “on the Moroccan/North African soil, between a Western individual and a North African Muslim” (135) is carried through into later fiction like “The Time of Friendship” and other works, and that his opinions on the theme changed little from his early negative ideas set out in his travel writing and journalism:

“... I believe the whole present situation in North Africa is due to a vast series of misunderstandings. The Moslem³⁵ and Western points of view are basically irreconcilable” (“View from Tangier”: 550). In other words, if the Moroccans are undertaking wide anti-colonial campaigns, it is not because of a genuine desire for freedom, an inherent belief in their own sovereignty, or injustices inflicted upon them by the colonial regime; it is simply an expression of their long hatred of, and antagonistic attitude towards, the Christian West. (134)

Bourara records Bowles’s striking simile used in an interview, where he expresses his lack of optimism for a successful outcome with regard to such cross-cultural relationships conceived according to the Western pattern. An on-going bilateral and balanced friendship of such a nature was to him “absurd”: “Like expecting a boulder to spread its wings and fly away.” (*ibid.* quoted from Bailey: 130[sic])

Thus Bowles is pessimistic as to the prolonged success of such a cross-cultural encounter, but that does not mean that he will not attempt to portray an initiative of this kind in his writing. Indeed, narrative drama lies in conflict and failure rather than harmony and success. Bourara draws upon Simon Bischoff to express the unlikelihood of picnics and teas between western women and local men:

As Simon Bischoff demonstrates, the circumstances in the International Zone then were such that the very idea of a Western woman befriending native males was unlikely, let alone openly exposing herself in their company in such public places as the

³⁴ Bourara reminds us that Bowles wrote it in reaction to his wife Jane’s *Two Serious Ladies*.

³⁵ Bourara comments earlier on Bowles’s use of the term “Moslem” rather than “Muslim”: “Though Bowles’s Moghrebi (Moroccan Arabic) is almost perfect, he never uses the word Muslim, which again points to the kind of readership he addresses and the kind of ‘Moslem’ he represents.” (68, note 98).

native or European cafés. In Bischoff's words, "the situation described in *Tea on the Mountain* [sic] is a perfectly typical male-masculine situation. Any man who has been there has experienced it. And any man who has been there knows what it is." (20)³⁶ (Bourara 137)

In Bourara's opinion, Bowles's model could have been his wife Jane or Djuna Barnes, whom he had met, but he sees it more as a personal, male dream or desire, written from the distant New York, the "expression of a dream –the desire for a particular life-style in alien terrains– couched in nostalgia for Tangier." (137) There is a worrying dilemma here, says Bourara:

The motives for living in and writing about places like Tangier create a dilemma: writing necessitates that a degree of intimate knowledge of the natives be reached but, at the same time, requires "objective" distance, which eventually hinders real knowledge from taking place. What is at stake here is the effect that intimate knowledge can have on the writer's own conception of his/her identity. (141–2)

Whatever the effect on the sense of self of the Westerner, Bourara would have it that, deny it though he may, Bowles shows in his protagonists of such encounters that the situation is always colonial in that the initiator is the Westerner and that he or she always has potential gain in mind, even if it is only self-satisfaction, the condescending sense of benevolence in helping those considered inferior or needy. (147) I do not think that Bowles would deny that at the root there is a colonial situation and he would probably argue that the foreigner is not privileged because the native is also out to make a gain or strike a bargain.

To return to "The Time of Friendship," the irony here and in similar stories is that the supposed benevolence, with its basic selfishness, rebounds upon the heads of the Westerners. Fräulein Windling attempts to teach Slimane and thus help him emerge from "poverty, disease, lack of hygiene, oppressive traditions" as Bourara puts it (140), only to find that he had "been planning to use the Swiss lady as a passport to the north (of Algeria) where the fighting is taking place" (145). Thus Slimane becomes one of the so-called "Predatory Natives" Bourara discusses (150). A further irony lies in the fact that by taking advantage of Fräulein Windling in this way, Slimane may hasten his

³⁶ The reference is to Simon Bischoff, "The Serpent's Eye: Paul Bowles as Photographer." Bowles and Bischoff *Photographs: "How Could I Send a Picture into the Desert?"* Simon Bischoff, ed. Zurich: Scalo Publishers, 1994: 7–60.

death, which is the aspect of the whole affair that most worries the Swiss teacher. While Bourara may see this as Bowles attacking nationalists, be they Algerian or Moroccan, for using children as militia or suicide-bombers: “Through Fräulein Windling, Bowles sees the Algerian War in terms of child sacrifice [...]” (158–9), Slimane and the nationalists saw it as their own way of trying to get rid of poverty and backwardness.

Bourara reiterates, as do most of his critics, that Bowles preferred the picturesque old-world charm of North Africa: “This comment is clearly in favor of the status quo, that is of the colonial regime, precisely because the exploitation of the native cheap labor and resources is what makes the place a ‘little paradise’ for the likes of Bowles.” (116) However, he could not have been unaware that at least some of his readers –even admitting Bowles’s intended audience was western– would interpret Slimane’s aspirations as being on the right track for his fellow sufferers under French colonialism. Bourara relents in his criticism of Bowles and his western protagonists for a moment, holding out the idea of a prolongation of the friendship between Fräulein Windling and Slimane after she has gone back to Switzerland in that Slimane “does resist forms of paternalism but welcomes a lasting relationship from a distance –exchange of correspondence.” (159), yet we should not forget that there is also an ulterior motive, in that the Swiss lady has asked for his address so that she can send him money.

Although Bourara is basically right in his judgements and argues his case well with solid evidence, I would take issue with him on a couple of points. One is that I think that he identifies Bowles too closely with his western protagonists like Fräulein Windling and particularly Stenham of *The Spider’s House* when he makes such statements as: “especially given that the distance between the author and the Western protagonist is so small, or even absent, that the latter may be rhetorically characterized as Bowles’s ‘second self.’” (135)³⁷ Much as Bowles puts his personal experience into his stories, he fills them with dramatic complications and dilemmas that alert the reader to the fact that he also distances himself from these characters.

The second point, which may be related, concerns the references to Hitler in “The Time of Friendship”. Fräulein Windling understands that Muslims have their own version of Jesus of Nazareth and tries to “Christianise” it for Slimane, but she is surprised to find that they have their own version of Hitler too:

³⁷ Bouara writes against the distinction in Abdelhak Elghandor’s thesis “Cross-Cultural Encounters and the Image of the Other in Paul Bowles’s Fiction” (1994 diss. U. of Ohio) between two “modes” for viewing the Other, an “analytical” one and a “projective” one, which has allowed him to discuss the issues in the fiction that concern Otherness without taking on the author’s personal views. (Note 171 p. 135).

[S]he told him in great detail the story of the life of Hitler, showing why he was hated by the Christians. This she thought necessary since Slimane had been under a different impression, and indeed had imagined that the Europeans thought as highly of the vanished leader as did he and the rest of the people in the village [...] (*PB: Stories*, 222)

Bourara wonders about this “sinister aspect” (156) of Slimane’s personality, which he shares with the whole village and, one supposes, beyond. Bourara asks: “Why Hitler and the Christians? Is it on account of her being a German-Swiss?” (157) In the story, Fräulein Windling is referred to as Swiss, not “German-Swiss”, though both her name and the town where she works, Bern, denote a German-speaking area of Switzerland. Bourara’s reference to her being “German-Swiss” suggests some affinity with Hitler, although as a Christian, according to her argument, the Christians opposed Hitler. As a middle-aged Swiss woman, visiting Algeria at the outbreak of the War of Independence (1954–62), she had obviously survived the Second World War, throughout most of which (1941–44) Hitler threatened to put into effect (but never did) Operation Tannenbaum, the invasion of Switzerland, thus she must have had little sympathy for the German leader. In this, Bourara’s argument that Bowles is close to his western protagonists would be true and would thus justify the mention of Hitler without it being questionable. Bourara then turns his argument towards a possible accusation by Bowles that such a view of Hitler had arisen in Morocco as a result of Muslim hostility to Jews. In a note (note 178, p. 157) he adds that Bowles was explicit in this: “In an interview with Simon Bischoff, Bowles discusses the same issue which he relates to the anti-Semitism of the Moroccans. (See Bowles, *Photographs*, 210–11)” (For this work, see the note above). This is again all true, pointing to the mutual hostility of Judaism and Islam, but the story does not delve into the reasons for Slimane’s beliefs and the Swiss teacher thinks she is enlightening him as regards the relations between Nazism and Judaism, which she suspects Slimane knows little about. Bowles is deliberately ambiguous and hints at issues that are very complex, leaving it up to the reader to bring his or her own ideas to the text. Since his expected readership was western, Bowles no doubt expected his readers to agree with Fräulein Windling rather than Slimane.

A similar case occurs when the Swiss teacher talks about teaching Slimane the “poetic truth” about Jesus (233). But here, Bourara quite rightly asks what we are meant to understand by that (158). She seems to refer to an “aesthetic or spiritual beauty” in the Nativity scene (*ibid.*) and Bowles himself seems to see religious manifestations less in terms of

their philosophy or life-view than as, in Stenham's words, "works of art" (*The Spider's House*, 219) which are more long-lasting, and therefore more important than, people. Thus Bourara is not wrong in interpreting Bowles's presentation of Islam as "conceived as a sort of cultural artifact" (173).

Finally, an insignificant point in comparison to the value of the frank ideas Bourara has contributed to this discussion: since Bourara has just published this work (2012), he could have brought it up to date in terms of Bowles's life. Bowles died in 1999, and yet his Preface ends with the statement:

As his progress from "Tea on the Mountain" (1939), his first fictional attempt, to "The Time of Friendship" –the last in a line of works dealing exclusively with the cross-cultural encounter–shows, his alleged love for Morocco and its cultures was conditional upon the latter's remaining under Western sway, especially the city of Tangier where he dwells to this day. (12)

The subject of Bourara's book, set out in the interrogative of the title, questioning whether Bowles as a spectator in North Africa was really as invisible as he and his biographer Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno (1989) suggest, is developed with such evidence to the contrary that we have to agree that Bowles was not apolitical or impartial. Bourara shows how Bowles's travel-writing fed into his fiction and both ended up unable to escape the Orientalist point of view:

Regardless of how tenable is any argument based on rigid generic distinctions and aesthetic hierarchies, journalistic-travel writings are contaminated because they reflect contradictory allegiances and (political) convictions. The very fact of writing for a Western audience viewed as essentially "White" and Christian inevitably relegates the represented Others –always non-white and non-West– to a lower position; representing them is in itself a denial of their capacity to do it for themselves. (64)

Form

At thirty pages, this is one of Bowles's longest stories, and like another long one, "Here to Learn," Bowles is able to develop at length the psychology of individuals in contact with another culture and its people. It covers at least three years of Fräulein Windling's visits to Algeria, and her relationship with Slimane (and the story) seems to grow in three stages as each year she comes to know him better. However, there is still a unity of impression which is a moment of crisis in itself, in that the

encroaching Algerian war is going to bring to an abrupt end not only the Swiss teacher's visits, but her friendship with the local boy. Within this moment of crisis there is another, smaller, moment of crisis, which is Slimane's destruction of the crèche.

There is a strong dream-like quality in both the visits and the relationship, as they both represent the Western woman's acting out of her romantic yearnings. Hibbard explains to us how Bowles's protagonist harks back to yet another real-life female adventurer who acted out her dreams in the desert:

While Bowles may have modeled Fräulein Windling after the Swiss woman he actually met in Taghit, the fictional representation also calls to mind Isabelle Eberhardt, another Swiss-born woman who, drawn to Islam and the desert, masqueraded in male garb and lived an absolutely daring life in North Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century. Bowles's preface to and translation of Eberhardt's *The Oblivion Seekers* is surely proof of his acquaintance with her life and admiration of her work. [note 49, which refers to some bibliographical suggestions] The woman in early drafts of the story seems to bear more of a likeness to Eberhardt than the woman in the published version. In his first drafts Bowles writes: "[S]he had once dressed up in men's clothing, burnous and all, and ridden horseback with a group of Mougara all the way to Sidi Mougari, where she had spent the night outside the shrine, rolled in a camel's blanket." [note 50, reference to the ms version in the University of Texas at Austin] For both Eberhardt and the early version of Fräulein Windling, the male disguise seems a way of breaking through the rigid attitudes and norms of a strict, patriarchal society, as well, perhaps, as playing out latent fantasies. (56)

As well as these real-life antecedents for the protagonist, Hibbard also suggests that there are literary antecedents in that aspects of her character remind us of Marcel in Gide's *L'Immoraliste*: "Like Gide, Bowles vividly paints the North African landscape, noting patterns of light and weather, cubistic architecture, palms, sand, and sun." (55) We see the outlines of the dwellings through Fräulein Windling's eyes as "geometric and precise"; the huts are "a mass of mud prisms" (217). The glare of the light is "cruel" (*ibid.*) and building up to the disaster of her Christmas Eve supper, the bad weather is "perhaps portentous of her project's doom," in the alliterative words of Hibbard (58).

The most obvious difference from *L'Immoraliste* is, as Hibbard points out, that any latent sexual attraction, surely only on the part of the

Swiss spinster, is heterosexual, whereas in the Gide, it is homosexual (56). There are sexual dynamics present in the tale, claims Hibbard, and in examining early versions, he is able to show how “expurgation of explicit sensual detail” (57) has resulted in a much more subtle treatment of the themes than in “Tea on the Mountain,” for example. In the latter, which, at sixteen pages is only half as long as the later, more successful treatment of this theme, the unnamed American woman has money, as she has received an advance from her publisher, and moves to the International Zone to make it go further. She has a sort of existentialist dream of freedom, and perhaps, freedom without responsibility:

“What am I doing here? I have no business here. I said I wouldn’t come.” The idea of such a picnic had so completely coincided with some unconscious desire she had harboured for many years. To be free, out-of-doors, with some young man she did not know –*could* not know– that was probably the important part of the dream. For if she could not know him, he could not know her. (*The Hours After Noon: Short Stories*, 121)

Although she is nameless, we have the names of the Moroccan boys, the Europeanised Driss, Mjid and Ghazi, who accompany her on the picnic, where they eat ham and drink wine and enjoy breaking the taboos of their religion. In his description of their “real European picnic”, Bowles has introduced a pun on the word “religious” which adds a note of humour to what is deep-down a serious matter: “The opening of the ham was observed in religious silence.” (117)

As Hibbard notes, money and sexuality are inseparable in the context as it is framed in “Tea on the Mountain”:

Her money and its value in Morocco, a function of the political and economic strength of her homeland, give her the freedom to come and go as she pleases. Not only does the woman come to Morocco in search of a place to live cheaply; she is also led by a vague yearning for sexual adventure. To the Moroccan male she becomes an unwitting symbol of accessible sexuality and corruption. Desire to possess a Western woman (to wrest her from her Western man) is fed by advertising and economic deprivation, and conquest is a sign of virility as well as a way of avenging a gnawing condition of political impotence. The process of corruption is symbiotic. As much as the West thrusts itself on the East, the East eagerly awaits all the freedoms and glamor it often perceives the West as offering. These psychological/historical

dynamics act as a kind of palimpsest over which the individual characters in the story move. (5)

In “The Time of Friendship”, the relationship that develops between Fräulein Windling and the Algerian boy, almost fourteen by the end of the story, is less sexual and more cultural, as Hibbard shows:

The “friendship” [...] is grounded in the curiosity each has about the other’s mysterious world. Each is, for the other, a symbol of the unknown; friendship is the means by which each tries to tame, penetrate, or master that unknown. The sense of difference between the characters is a powerful catalyst in the establishment of the relationship, yet it is also a source of irritation and misunderstandings. (57)

Such misunderstandings remind her that she is alone, but she does not seem lonely, she has a busy interior mental world, is creative (the handiwork of the crèche is all her own work) and is active physically. But the great difference is that she can choose, whereas the boy has little choice. His friendship with the foreign woman is not approved of by his parents, except insofar as it brings material reward. In narrative terms, the mention of the parents’ attitude, also the little group of boys at the beginning, from which Fräulein Windling chose the one who seemed more separate from the group, gives a sense of community to the story.

Fräulein Windling had already chosen to leave and not come back when the French commandant made that choice mandatory with his prohibition on returning. The coming and going give a symmetry to the story, but the final leave-taking is expected; here we do not have a surprise ending. Only if we interpret the incident with the crèche as the moment of crisis can we say that the reader is as surprised as the protagonist by the turn the episode takes.

Although the Nativity scene incident again places the story on the level of discussion of high themes of culture contrast and clashes of religion, and Christians may judge Slimane’s act as sacrilegious, it is also comic. Fräulein Windling is brought down to earth, her grand schemes deflated, but just as we laughed at the “religious” solemnity of the eating of the ham in “Tea on the Mountain,” Bowles knows that we will laugh at the decapitated camels (236). The thinginess of the clay figures and the materials brought together and used to make them also adds great authenticity to the story. Other examples of thinginess, which have more serious overtones, are firstly, the choice the local women have in carrying water in either the traditional goatskins or the more recent and manageable, but possibly contaminating, oil cans (217).

Secondly, a material thing which functions on a higher plane, metaphorical this time, is the sliver of glass or china Fräulein Windling gets stuck under her thumb nail as she collects her washing things together in the bathroom as she prepares to leave (240). She departs from the oasis with her thumb throbbing, a painful reminder that things have gone wrong.

4. 2. 5. *Things Gone and Things Still Here* (1977)

This was Bowles's fifth collection of stories, published in 1977 by the Black Sparrow Press of Santa Barbara, California, but again, it mostly consisted of re-published material. But two stories can be singled out as adding further explorations to the theme of human-animal relations and the deterioration of the personality, "Allal" and "Mejdoub" respectively.

"Allal"

Summary

The eponymous protagonist is disadvantaged from birth; of unknown father, his mother, from Marrakech, gave birth to him at aged fourteen and abandoned him a few months after. This took place in a hotel owned by a Greek who allowed him to stay and put him to work without pay as soon as he was able to lift and carry things. When he was older, he left to go to work in the town. But he hated the townspeople, who called him "*meskhot* – damned": "Because he had been left behind by his mother they called him a son of sin, and laughed when they looked at him. It seemed to him that in this way they hoped to make him into a shadow, in order not to have to think of him as real and alive." (CS, 258–9) Soon after, he moved to a hut set in the palm groves outside the town. One day, he came across an old man who hunted snakes and took them to Taroudant, south of Marrakech, to be sold to the snake-charmers of the latter city. Virtually chased out of town for letting a couple of snakes escape from their bag, the old man was invited by Allal to his hut, where they drank tea, ate kif paste and watched the snakes. The old man said to Allal: "“Did you know that if you give them majoun you can make them do what you want, and without saying a word?”" (261) Allal did not doubt this so much as whether he could ever put the knowledge to any use. However, the words penetrated into his subconscious, together with the visual impact of a particularly beautiful reddish-gold serpent: "As he stared at it, he felt a great desire to own it and have it always with him." (*ibid.*) Thus he contrived to capture and hide the snake and the old man departed after a fruitless search. To test the snake hunter's assertion, Allal enticed it out with milk laced with kif paste and proceeded to "train" it by drumming with his fingers whenever he wanted it to emerge

and approach him. Finally, the snake drew near and slid up his naked body to coil itself beside his head. Under the effects of kif himself, Allal was in ecstasy and his vision was distorted, seeing the patterns on the snake's body swirling and its eye growing immense. Allal was then drawn into the snake's body through the aperture of the black pupil of its eye. Having swapped bodies, the dénouement spelled disaster for both of them. Allal, in the snake's body, set off for the town, but in daylight, he was pursued by men. He bit them in revenge but they managed to cut off his head. The mindless body of Allal (or the body with the snake's mind) was taken away to be shut up in an asylum in Berrechid, north of Marrakech.

Discussion of themes

Like "The Scorpion," this is one of Bowles's animal stories where an animal and a human are incorporated into each other, or in this case, exchange parts, unlike a story such as "Kitty," (in *Midnight Mass*), where the human becomes an animal. Like both "Mejdoub" and "A Thousand Days for Mokhtar," the protagonist is an outsider within his own community and through a series of steps with wilful decisions, they all end up in either prison or mental hospitals. The main theme is the cruelty of human beings to each other, especially to the weaker members of society, to the point that some victims prefer animals to their fellow humans.

There is a hint of postcolonial critique, though it is not developed, in that the Greek hotel owner exploited Allal as a child and wished he had "taken advantage of the situation while he had had the chance" (258), meaning that he would have sexually abused his fourteen-year-old mother. But the Greek is no more cruel to Allal than the local people. Developing the theme of anthropomorphism, the local people, for whom Allal had "a thorough hatred" (259), are more cruel and harmful to Allal than the snake in spite of all the serpent's Biblical connotations of evil: "Snakes are like people, he said. You have to get to know them. Then you can be their friends." (260)

But rather than cast the story in the frame of social critique, Bowles's main objective is to tell a story about human-animal relations and cause wonderment in the reader or listener as to how he can tell a story about unnatural happenings and make them appear natural. That the protagonist is anti-social is merely a necessary requirement to explain his preferences for snakes. It is not a simple fascination for or obsession with snakes, like Bowles's own predilection for scorpions, as Hibbard informs us: "Indeed, Bowles was fascinated with the relationship between predator and prey. He keenly observed the habits and stratagems of poisonous spiders and scorpions as they lured their

unwitting victims into death traps.” (Hibbard 2004, 109) Allal actually prefers them to humans, or at least the reddish-golden one. He also befriends another outsider, the snake hunter, which is a common theme in Bowles (Hibbard 1993, 94).

Form

How does Bowles achieve this step-by-step transformation from the ordinary and the real to the miraculous and surreal? Several narrative techniques and thematic devices are deployed.

First of all, he employs the same third-person omniscient narrator as in “The Scorpion”: he tells the events with the simple, matter-of-fact approach of the folktale but can see into the minds of the characters. Even the conversations are recorded as if in reported speech but with the actual words, a sort of stream of consciousness approach, unlike in “The Scorpion” and “By the Water,” where speech marks are used.

Secondly, as we saw, Bowles used kif to inspire the conception and writing of these animal stories, and in this one, drugs form part of the narrative and thematic development. Both Allal and the snake are under the influence and the result is the dreamlike hallucination which makes for a difficult distinction between the real, the imagined and the magical. Just as an incredible thesis is tested out in “By the Water” –that the deformed Lazrug had magical powers– so here we find the proof of the assertion that humans can get snakes to do their bidding. What shocks the reader in the surprise ending is that this is taken further and the roles possibly reversed, as one is left wondering if the snake had the human Allal in its power at the end.

Where Bowles shows his narrative mastery is in the step-by-step process whereby Allal slowly gains control over the snake. His methods and precautions are meticulous: he tied three corners of his blanket together, with the fourth corner facing the snake’s basket; he set out a bowl of milk and kif paste; he loosened the strap from the cover of the basket. His patience as he “teaches” the snake by drumming his fingers on a “low wooden tea table” is fundamental. The thinginess of the blanket and table make the training and its result more credible. Similarly, the preciseness of the topographical locations of the story –the snake hunter taking the snakes to Taroudant and Allal being sent to a lunatic asylum in Berrechid– make such activities as the work of a snake charmer or the processes of dealing with madness more acceptable.

The moment of crisis comes as the snake slides onto his body. As with “The Scorpion,” the physical feeling of human–animal contact is conveyed: “Its body was heavy and tepid, its scales wonderfully smooth” (265), the smoothness of the snake contrasting with the rasping of the hard shell of the scorpion in the old woman’s mouth. The dreamlike fluctuating visions or hallucinations of the patterns on the

snake's body are accounted for by the fact that Allal has consumed kif paste. So it is a short step from this vision with its realistic explanation, to his viewing his own body, hairy and large, from the snake's point of view as his mind is contained within the snake. Hibbard compares Allal's transformation to that of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, where the supernatural occurrences "seem to be a logical, figurative extension of that fundamental sociopsychological state." (94) Beyond this, what Bowles intended us to understand from this story remains unclear. Hibbard feels that Wayne Pounds goes too far in his book *Paul Bowles: The Inner Geography* when he interprets it "to fit his concern with myth and the 'divided self,' suggested by the work of Jung and R.D.Laing." (Hibbard 95) But Hibbard agrees with Pounds that we should consider the story important in that it deals with the conflict within the self (*ibid*), and, we might add, between the self and society.

"Mejdoub"

At the end of the collection, Bowles includes a glossary of Moroccan words (and Spanish ones that are used in the North of Morocco in their everyday life) for clarification of his texts, for there is no doubt that the use of the Arabic word in the story instead of its translation, or as well as it, adds to the exotic nature of his writings. In the texts he uses neither italics nor inverted commas for the Arabic words like mejdoub and djellaba. In the glossary, we are told that a mejdoub is "a madman who is also a Cherif and thus cannot be considered mad" (*Midnight Mass*, 189; henceforward *MM*). The apparent incompatibility of madness and saintliness might be considered under a different logic by the western mind. From the cases Bowles himself witnessed in Morocco he came to the conclusion that: "Although in most places it would have been clear enough that a madman was loose in the streets, in Morocco there are subtle distinctions to be made, sometimes the person turns out to be merely holy, or indisposed." (*THAG*, 135). The fact that religion appears to make up for or condone indications of madness seems ironic to begin with, and the possible ramifications include priorities such as which came first, the religion or the madness. In the case of our protagonist, however, we are dealing with a trickster, someone who wants a bargain, something for nothing, or for little effort. Religion only comes into the picture in that it is used to pressure people into giving alms.

The protagonist is truly what we would call an existentialist outsider. He has no name, home or occupation, he is a nothingness waiting to be filled: "A man who spent his nights sleeping in cafés or under the trees or wherever he happened to be at the time when he felt sleepy[...]" (*MM*, 25). Starting off as a vagabond, he becomes a rich man

with everything to live for, only to lose everything again in the end. Having said that, we notice immediately that this story has the symmetry of design so prized in a good short story.

Summary

One day in his wanderings, the unnamed protagonist, an ordinary fellow in an ordinary North African community, comes across “an old mejdoub dressed in rags” (25) waving a “scepter” and attracting quite an audience. Young lads gather round and adults give him money, and when he gets up to move on, he passes by shops where the shopkeepers unfailingly give him more money. Fascinated by this personage, the protagonist thinks that this is an easy way to get money and that he could impersonate him and probably also gain money, albeit by deceit, since he was not a holy man. Thus he travels to another town, buys a ragged djellaba and has a sceptre made. He sits by the mosque and recites short quotations from the Koran. He has become a trickster, taking advantage of people’s perennial fears of disaster, death or punishment in the afterlife.

The locals show no response to him until he realises that the missing factor –the aspect that the real mejdoub in the other town manifested and he did not –was madness and possibly its relation to the visionary, the foreseeing of apocalypse. Only when he feigns madness by letting his turban fall over his face and shouts the words “*fire*” and “*blood*” do people give him coins (26). Thus he is doubly a trickster. He invents a name for himself, “Sidi Rahal” (*ibid.*) so that people have a reference for him and starts to beg in the shops. The shopkeepers respond, “eager to show their piety” (27), hence religion becomes a sort of blackmail. Over the summer he amasses a considerable amount of money, and when winter comes, he leaves the djellaba and the sceptre³⁸ in a room with several months’ rent paid in advance and returns home, or at least to his former community, since he did not exactly have a home. He buys clothes and even a house and spends the winter “eating and smoking kif with all his old friends” (*ibid.*). He has no other aspirations, he is satisfied with this. He justifies his newfound wealth to his friends by telling them that the money came from the generosity of his wealthy brother in Taza.

The following spring, he finds the temptation to go away to the other town to adopt the new personality and make money quite irresistible. The trick works again and the factor of holy madness and magic powers comes into play. An unforeseen event over which he has no control works in his favour. A taxi-driver who had taken him to visit

³⁸ In American editions of Bowles’s work, the American spelling for words like “sceptre” or “centre” is obviously used.

a shrine but who failed to wait for him had an accident on the return journey. People immediately attributed it to the black magic of “Sidi Rahal”, as other holy maniacs had been known to put spells on motors and brakes (*ibid.*). He had no control over this event, but because the incident is introduced by the statement that “he decided to make a test” (*ibid.*), it is placed in the framework of everyone, himself included, knowing about the supposed powers of holy men and possible reactions to rumours of examples of them. This incident attracts much more attention and money, and each year he buys more houses and lands until he becomes very prosperous (28). He struggles briefly with the moral and spiritual problems of his deceit, but convinces himself that Allah would not permit his success if it were wrong: “He assumed that Allah did not mind if he pretended to be one of His holy maniacs. The money was merely his reward for providing men with an opportunity to exercise their charity.” (*ibid.*)

Then another unforeseen event occurs, again over which he has no control, but which now works against him: a new local government outlaws begging. From now on, it is as if his luck has turned, or he has tempted fate, because he makes a series of wrong choices which bring about his downfall. His first mistake or wrong choice is that he could give up begging as “Sidi Rahal” and get on with his life and enjoy his wealth. He decides not to, but the decision is governed not so much by greed, the desire to get more and more money, as by a more existential factor. He finds his ordinary life, as himself, empty, he has become hooked on the challenge and the thrills of his new identity as a saint and beggar, and cannot leave it (*ibid.*).

When he starts begging again, he is approached by three policemen. And here he makes his second wrong choice. Instead of accepting the reprimand and stopping begging, he runs away. Great irony lies in the fact that his decline stems from this having to flee from society when it was not necessary: the three policemen were laughing, suggesting that they did not take his case very seriously. However, he did not know this (29). But having made that instant decision, he no longer has a choice until he is captured. With true symmetry of narration, the decline comes to match his rise, though it is more rapid. Again it comes in a series of steps. He is tired, hungry, dirty and hot, and is fed scraps of bread by children. He is arrested in town, again ironically, not for begging, but for having no identification papers. He spends four days in a police cell and is given one more chance to choose. At this point, he could tell the police the truth, that he imitates a saintly madman, but finds it too embarrassing. He prefers to insist “I am Sidi Rahal” (39), so he is sent to a lunatic asylum. Now, of course, he wants to tell the truth, but it is too late and they only laugh at him, which is a

little like the case of the boy who cried “Wolf!” After months living with the real madmen, he accepts his fate and no longer struggles against it.

Discussion of themes

The protagonist is an ordinary man in an ordinary community. The sense of community is provided by the reference to his friends, who replace family, as he has a rich brother in another city, with whom he seems to have broken off contact. One has to assume that the rich brother is bright and hard-working and tired of the fecklessness of his brother. In spite of this, the protagonist distinguishes himself in that he has a greater sense of daring and opportunism. Perhaps in this he was genetically like his brother, who also saw financial success, though we do not know by what means. He thought he was onto a bargain, that he was getting something for nothing, but in a way he made a pact with the devil (though this is not mentioned as such), for after years of enjoyment of his success, the time of reckoning came and he paid with his freedom, his sanity and his life. Although it was not a pact with the devil, there is a rejection of good and an embracing of wrong, for there was a moment when the protagonist rejected Allah by reasoning, through false logic, that Allah would not allow him material success if he did not approve of his methods. Thus he is locked up in a Gothic-style prison-house of an asylum with no hope of reprieve or escape.

Form

Bowles uses a third-person narration which allows us to see what is happening to the protagonist at all times but to remain distant from him. He amuses us, as he shows up the stupidity or superstition of the masses, and we can admire his cleverness at taking advantage, but without deceiving anyone. But he does not merit our sympathy, so when utter disaster befalls him at the end, we feel that it is deserved and we do not consider it a tragedy. He took risks, he knew the rules of the game of being a trickster and he paid the price. He is caught in between communities and his initial choice to leave his community and his very identity turns him into a loner, especially as his new identity involves deceiving the new community. He obviously left his community because he did not have strong enough ties to keep him there, his brother living elsewhere and there being no other family mentioned such as parents or a possible wife. When he returns, he can no longer be “himself”, his original self, as his humdrum life is too boring, suggesting an equally boring community life, the “populace” (25) doing little other than eat, smoke kif and laugh at madmen. When he falls into a pattern of going away every summer to take up his role of trickster, the possibility of

forging ties and possibly setting up a family is ruled out. Life on the “outside” is much more stimulating and more demanding, requiring him to be on his wits at all times. As with Malika in “Here to Learn”, as we shall see later, there is a learning process and a certain anxiety attached to it. We follow his initiation, we engage with his surroundings: the slaughterhouse, the flea-market, the iron-monger’s.

But there is a fairy-tale quality which places the story at a distance from us: firstly, the language is simple but formal: “The bread had given him a little nourishment.” (30) The narrative has an inexorable rhythm of steps. The story begins: “A man who [...]”; it continues, “It occurred to him then that [...]”; “He travelled south”; “The next day”; “First he bought [...]”; “One day he decided to make a test.”; “One winter [...]”; finally, “Through nights and days and nights [...] and the time came when [...]” drawing, for him, to an inevitably tragic conclusion. If Malika’s story is that of Cinderella with a twist at the end, our nameless profiteer aspires to becoming a fairy-tale king, but again, there is a twist at the end.

The story has a unity of impression as it focuses upon the protagonist, and although there are several incidents, there is a single perception: the stubbornness of this man in sticking to his initial decision to try to survive without having to work. Even the policemen’s perception of the trickster is not new, as from the beginning, the view of the protagonist, the figure of a holyman/madman or mad king waving a false sceptre was comic. In the western world, the Roman Catholic Pope and other leading clergymen may wield versions of sceptres, but normally they are not ridiculed (though sometimes they are satirized, caricatured or criticized). In Bowles’s presentation of a simplistic view of the more popular and elementary practices of some simplistic Moslems, or local devotions, the idea of making fun of a disadvantaged person, a “madman”, or a religious or spiritual person, appears acceptable, but at all times we must remember that Bowles is using the age-old popular and literary figure or trope of the trickster. However, we must also remember, as Asad Al-Ghalith asserts, that: “Bowles consistently portrayed the most simplistic believers as Muslim representatives.” (Asad Al-Ghalith 1992, 103)

The moment of crisis occurs when he attracts the attention of the police and it is ironic because it should not have been a crisis at all. Or at least, it could have meant his having to give up his double life, but he need not have ended up in a lunatic asylum for the rest of his days, indistinguishable from the other lunatics. A double irony is that through pretending to be a lunatic he has become one, or by assuming he was cleverer and more powerful than such a discapacitated person, he has become powerless. It is as if there were in fact two moments of crisis,

the first being the first encounter (at a distance) with the three policemen, from which he could have been reprieved on account of their lack of seriousness and failure to pursue him. The second is when other policemen ask to see his identity papers, and the horror of this inescapable second and last moment of crisis is brought home in the bald statement: "He had none." (30) The three monosyllables sound his death-knell.

The symmetry of design of the story is found in the basic circularity of the story: from poverty to riches and back to poverty; from an empty character to being the well-known personage "Sidi Rahal" and back to having an empty brain again as true madness takes over; from powerlessness to power back to complete lack of control or power even over himself. The circle is completed in a series of steps outwards and a series of steps on the closing half of the circle. There is also a bi-polarity to the story in that it is located in two places: home and away, here and there. These two locations also correspond to the two different personas of the character: the nameless and characterless protagonist and "Sidi Rahal".

Myth and metaphor can be seen in the background of the story in the concept of the holy madman with his reputed powers of the evil eye. This is closely related to the dream-like atmosphere of fairy-tale, where ordinary people aspire to becoming kings or saints. Also tied in to this is the solidity of things: the sceptre has a solidity of specification, the protagonist having his made at the ironmonger's and then practising with it (26). This solidity gives the thing a power which convinces us the reader in the telling of the story in the same way as it convinces the "populace" that the new holy maniac is in fact holy and mad and not the trickster we know him to be. The ragged djellaba bought in the flea-market (*ibid.*) is also solid and part of the disguise that convinces, though it only appears to effectively work when the equally solid turban is displaced and made to fall over his eyes, truly making them believe that his mind is as deranged as his headwear (*ibid.*). Later on, the solidity of the scraps of bread and then the clods of earth thrown at him by the children in their cruelty (30) reinforce the idea that he has lost his humanity and is being treated like an animal, worse than a dog.

The theme of adults versus children, apparently power versus powerlessness, runs through the story, giving it a unity in its repeated and connected ideas. Firstly, the theme of learning is present, as it is in "Here to Learn", where language (Malika's Spanish and the protagonist's use of menacing apocalyptic words) conveys power and brings wealth, but the process and its application are not without their attendant anxieties. Secondly, a child learns in order to grow up and function as an adult. In this story, children appear to have a power that

needs to be harnessed as success in life may be a two-way process between adults and children. From the very beginning, our protagonist noticed the role played by small boys in the true mejdoub's work as a beggar:

Almost before he got out of the market he was aware that small boys were hurrying from under the arcades to run alongside the mejdoub, who merely strode forward, chanting and waving his sceptre, and from time to time threatening the children who came too close. Walking at some distance behind, he saw the old man go into several shops. He came out each time with a banknote in his hand, which he promptly gave to one of the small boys. (25)

So perhaps the true mejdoub (who may be as much of a trickster as our protagonist, for all we know) has a network of boys working for him like Fagin in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. The protagonist is not approached by any young boys:

For some reason no children followed him. He would have been happier to have a group of them with him, like the old mejdoub, but as soon as he spoke to them, they were frightened and ran away. It's quieter like this, he told himself, but secretly it bothered him. (26-7)

So perhaps another important mistake which brings about his downfall is in failing to pay his dues. Perhaps he should have set up a network of helpers and shared out the proceeds of his begging. He thinks that he is more intelligent than his fellows, but he is not intelligent enough not to fall into a trap set unwittingly by himself. It was only a question of time before he was found out. The comedy of this story would not have metamorphosed into tragedy for the protagonist had he known just when to call a halt to his deceit. But then Bowles would not have given us the ironic unexpected ending required of a good short story.

4. 2. 6. *Midnight Mass* (1985)

Midnight Mass and Other Stories (henceforward *MM*), Bowles's sixth collection and again published by Black Sparrow, is a work of his maturity, it was published over thirty years after his first literary success, the novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949). On the fly leaf the publishers say that the stories were "chosen by the author from his best" and that they display new incursions and explorations of new aspects of life for expatriates in North Africa and elsewhere. It says elsewhere because, of

the twenty stories, four –towards the end of the collection –are set in Sri Lanka, where Bowles had bought a house, or Kuala Lumpur. The other sixteen deal with Bowles’s usual subjects of the existential *angst* of individuals who question their humdrum life, or whose ordinary life suddenly comes under threat.

In these sixteen North African stories, there are western characters whose lives are complicated by the fact of their living abroad and of their intermingling with the local people, whereas some stories involve exclusively native characters, whose problems are caused by intrigue among themselves. Indeed, on the fly sheet, the new aspects mentioned reveal “insights into the subtleties of domestic and public intrigue.” The intrigue on both levels usually involves money, and, indeed, one of the aspects mentioned is “bargains”, which, of course, everyone loves, wherever you are from. The question is whether you really get a bargain, or whether it costs you dear in the end.

Money and poverty are constant refrains in the stories, and the consequences of a lack of money, causing one to descend into poverty, often affect people’s health. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Bowles introducing the new theme of “healing”. Belief in healing powers, whether in the hands of local quack-doctors or the professionals, can border on the superstitious. Bowles explores the area of illness, remedies, medicines, faith, miracles, etc., in some of these stories.

Moving on from miraculous remedies or belief in death sentences through “the evil eye” takes us into the world of the supernatural and fantasy. Two stories in this collection seem to be hyper-realist, until we realise that the narrator has managed to make us believe that people have turned into animals. The fly sheet says “human and animal relations”, which leads us to expect that someone has a close relationship with their dog, or has bought a pet monkey, when, to our surprise, we find that a little girl has metamorphosed into a cat and a young man has slowly transformed into a snake.

The stories vary in length from the forty-odd page “Here to Learn”, about a Moroccan girl who goes on long travels through Europe and eventually the United States, and whose story cannot be told in a page or two; through the group of about four stories of nine or ten pages, which includes the first, the eponymous “Midnight Mass”; to several of only three or four pages, which really do fulfill those requirements of the short story: unity of impression, single incident or perception and moment of crisis. Since Bowles chose the story “Midnight Mass” to head his collection and to give it its title, I will start there.

“Midnight Mass”

Summary

Like many of Bowles’s short stories, the events of “Midnight Mass” take place in Tangier, the North African city he knows better than any other. The protagonist is a Westerner, whose name is not given at any point in the whole story, unlike some of the other characters. For instance, we know the names of the servants and those of two of the guests, Madame Dervaux and Vandeventter, but not of the others. These are mentioned as the painter, the doctor, the rector, the Indian girl, the French couple, etc. The events of the story start when the protagonist arrives at the house he owns in Tangier and in which he used to live during his childhood. He came there because he has decided to spend the Christmas holidays in his house that has been deserted since his mother’s death. He becomes aware of the lamentable state the house is in. Though the Moroccan servants have been paid for their service during his absence, the house seems to suffer complete negligence: broken windows, fireplaces belching smoke: “The place was only a shell of the house he remembered” (*MM*, 7) To bring some life to the house, and after repairing the essentials there, he decides to invite some people for Christmas Eve. The occasion seems to develop smoothly with no disturbances. As all that interests him is that there be guests in his house, he doesn’t care who they may be. He doesn’t know most of them, they were brought by Madame Dervaux, supposedly a friend of his family. Among the guests there are three Moroccans, one of whom is a painter. The evening passes off quietly, the protagonist trying to serve his guests and hoping they will leave soon for he was already feeling bored. Nothing special occurs that night except for two incidents: firstly, Madame Dervaux insists on his showing the house and its splendid views to his guests, which he does reluctantly; secondly, his conversation with the painter, which occurs as a consequence of the first event and after which he decides to offer him the unused conservatory of his house so that he may realise his dream and have a place in which to paint.

Though the protagonist’s offer seems rather strange because he offers someone he meets for the first time a room in his garden, it appears as something normal and acceptable. The acceptability of such an act arises from the explication he gives himself: “Let him use the room. No one else is ever going to use it [...]” (*MM*, 15). Furthermore: “He was pleased with his decision. The house seemed more real now that he knew someone would be using even that small part of it.” (*ibid.*) All these events are narrated in more than eight pages and a half of the nine pages of the short story. The last paragraph provides a surprising

ending: we are told that the protagonist did not go to Tangier that Easter as he had promised his wife in the telegram he had sent her at Christmas, and we know that it was because he was informed that the painter's family had taken possession of his house in such a manner that it was not possible to evict them. The second surprising event is that he learned later on that his house was no longer his as it was located on land that was certified as agricultural. However, the news that hit him the hardest was that he found out that Madame Dervaux was renting the upper floor and the tower of what used to be his house.

Discussion of themes

Like most of Bowles's western characters, the protagonist of "Midnight Mass" is portrayed as an outsider and as a lonely person. Undoubtedly, his being an Occidental makes of him an outsider in Tangier, in spite of the city's international status. Though he had spent his childhood there, he has no sentimental feelings for the place: "the courtyard [that] was uninviting" (*MM*, 7), and the disorder and chaos that surround it emphasize his distance from it. The house plays an important role in the story, as Hibbard says: "If there be a central motif in this collection of stories, a figure in the carpet, so to speak, it might be the preoccupation with houses, the structures we inhabit." (1993, 103) To escape his loneliness, more particularly the night of Christmas Eve, he decides to have a party in the house. He is anonymous and an ordinary person, but his superior western status enables him to have people come running to his house at a whim. Hibbard continues: "In some instances stories begin with the presentation of a house, which becomes a fragile haven for human life or a contested site for opposing values." (*ibid.*) What mattered to him was that there should be people, even if they were not entirely respectable: "[...] he did not much care, since he only wanted to see someone in the house [...] he reflected with satisfaction that not one of the prospective guests would have been asked to the house by his mother" (*MM*, 10). It is as if he tries to prove to himself that he is responsible and able to take decisions, inviting whoever he wants. The satisfaction he feels on thinking about the matter may be interpreted as a feeling of triumph. His behaviour sheds some light on his relationship with his mother. It must have been rather strained. The sharpness in his voice while talking about his mother and her love for the house (10) performs the uneasiness he feels on remembering her and how much the house counted for her. There is a difference between the love he pretends to feel for the house and the one felt by his mother for the same house.

One may guess that during his mother's life he could not take decisions. But now being the sole owner of the house, he wants to assume that responsibility. It is something he tries to practise and starts by contradicting and defying his mother's habits and deeds after her death, and inviting people she would never have invited during her lifetime. So the union that should exist between mother and son was in a way missing between them. The protagonist does not show this belonging to what the mother represented. His mother knew that he did not want the house and that "[he]'ll never use it." (*MM*, 7) The protagonist therefore had an alternative life of which we know nothing. He had no need of the house. Feeling that her son would not take care of the house as she used to do, the mother offered all the valuable things of that house to her friends and left him just the house, when he insisted on having it: "But I love it" (*ibid*). He was trying to prove his belonging to that world where he had grown up. The reaction of the mother is brought in to contrast with and to accentuate his loneliness and his outsider status, even in so far as his community is concerned. He tried to convince his mother of his love and feelings towards the house but the fact that he has come to the house eight long years after her death proves that she was right. As far as his guests are concerned, he seems to share nothing with them, even the Westerners among them. Feelings of relief overcome him when he knows that soon they will leave to let him sleep and another day will dawn.

Mystery envelops the whole story, starting from the protagonist's name, his life and all that concerns him, to that of the guests, of whom we, as readers, know only their jobs or their nationalities. The end does not escape that lack of definition. It is an end that is not at all expected, or explained. The title itself is deliberately misleading, or leads nowhere. The words "Midnight Mass" are mentioned only twice. The first time is when Madame Dervaux makes her friends hasten to leave so that they can go to Midnight Mass. The second is when the protagonist thanks God for the existence of Midnight Mass as it helps him to get rid of his guests earlier, thus he will be able to sleep and rest. "Midnight Mass" works here as a sort of relief. It means that the Westerners are practising Christians, or at least, go to church on Christmas Eve. But ironically, her Christian values do not prevent Madame Dervaux from illegally occupying someone else's house.

The protagonist turns out to be the means by which the desires of the Moroccan painter are realised. What was only a dream for the Moroccan could become in a short lapse of time a reality. Owning a room of his own has never been more than a dream for him: "Nearly every night I dream that I have a room of my own where I can paint." (*MM*, 12). But in offering him the conservatory, the protagonist

never guesses that this may have dire consequences, to the point of losing the whole house. One wonders if the phrase “a room of my own” is a deliberate reference to Virginia Woolf and her feminist statement of the basic needs of women if they wish to emulate their male peers and be creative. The Moroccan also needs a space in which to work.

His offering the conservatory to the Moroccan denotes a simplicity and naïveté in his social behaviour as he reacts according to his sentimental sensibility. His decision comes also as a consequence of his being conscious that he personally will never put the studio to proper use. But again, ironically, he wants it when he cannot have it. The Orientalist message here is that the natives are thieves, that the Moroccan painter steals a house from a Westerner.

If we admit this possible underlying meaning, we may bear in mind the fact that Bowles and his wife were subject to a more or less similar pressure on the part of Cherifa, the Moroccan woman who was involved in a relationship with Jane, who forced them to give her their house, though the circumstances of each story are completely different. In the real-life story, Paul feared that Cherifa had some magical hold over Jane and was destroying her health. Perhaps also, guilt over the master-servant relationship caused Jane to offer Cherifa more and more gifts. So here, the power of the native over the foreigner concerns health issues, while in the story “Midnight Mass,” the power or lack of it is concentrated on other factors. The first one is the absence of the protagonist, the owner, which causes his failure to protect the house, his mother’s legacy. The second is the illegal nature of that possession in the first place, in that it was constructed on agricultural land or land declared so. Bowles uses these details to create a sense of ambiguity. If the western protagonist does not appreciate the house, and the Moroccan painter does, surely the latter is more deserving, we must think. Also, a native artist in his own country should have as much right to cover his needs for expression as a Westerner. Admittedly, the servants have been paid to look after the house and have neglected their duties, adding to the “lazy thieving native” theme, but the protagonist has also failed in his duty of protection of what was his mother’s pride and joy. Thus, weighed in the balance, the Westerner is found wanting, while the local artist is not. The issue of the status of the land is also ambiguous, we do not know whether it was considered to be in a residential zone or an agricultural one when the protagonist’s mother bought the house. Many people may have taken advantage here, not least the Westerners, perhaps the protagonist’s mother, and certainly Madame Dervaux at the end. Thus, on the Orientalist issue, Bowles sets up a very interesting discussion through its ambiguity, its refusal to consider Westerner-native relations and behaviour in black-and-white terms.

Form

It is quite evident that this final paragraph is what constitutes the moment of crisis of the story. No reader is likely to guess that the unexpected end of the short story will have to do with the painter or even with Madame Dervaux. The end which turns out to be so shattering is given with no details. It is brought as a mysterious outcome of the protagonist's "trivial" and naïve decision to offer the conservatory room to the painter to make use of it. The information is given in succeeding sentences, each causing a stronger effect than the other. The last one of them is the most shocking for the protagonist. He seems calmer on hearing that the painter's family got possession of the house or that the land was certified as agricultural and no longer his. It is as if he were ready to accept to pay for his fault: having naively offered a room in his house to a Moroccan he meets for the first time, he accepts this cause and effect chain of events. The fact may also be interpreted as not at all surprising coming from a Moroccan, seen from a Westerner's view. Learning that Madame Dervaux rents the upper floor from the family is hard for him to accept. Madame Dervaux is the one character who showed her great admiration of his house during the party. The protagonist seems to connect her with all that happened to him. The painter is a friend of hers; she was the one who introduced him to the protagonist as an interesting contact; her comment on addressing him when she was leaving, having learned that the painter was staying there on the protagonist's request, shows her disapproval: "Immediately her head emerged. 'Oh, le méchant! [...] il va avoir une gueule de bois affreuse'" (*MM*, 15). The word *méchant* suggests that she feels that the painter has taken advantage and is going to be very smug, very pleased with himself. We do not know how much rent she pays, but one might conjecture that she has also taken advantage of the delicate situation of the residential/agricultural land problem and has got a good rate.

However, it seems that on writing this short story, Bowles did not intend to make us think of Madame Dervaux that way, as he explains to Allen Hibbard, but he leaves it deliberately ambiguous:

AH: In the story "Midnight Mass", you always have the suspicion that Madame Dervaux had something to do with the appropriation of the house, and the artist moving in, but there is never any proof of that.

PB: No, probably, not. I imagine the Moroccan family did that by themselves and she, knowing that, would immediately say, "Ah,

then. I want the tower.” She was probably willing to pay a good price.

AH: That leads to suspicion in the end, when she is there entrenched in the house.

PB: Yah, but I don’t know.

AH: Well, there is no way of telling in the story.

PB: It doesn’t matter really. (Hibbard 1993, 185)

Even if things were as Bowles said, the protagonist’s shock might be explained as if he felt intense betrayal on the part of his fellow expatriate. He no doubt expected compassion from her and not that she would take advantage of the situation and rent part of the house which she had admired. At first sight, we can say that the story does not end where it started. The protagonist makes his appearance in Tangier with the house in his possession but in the end he is in Europe, the house already lost and stolen from him. Thus we can conclude that there is no symmetry of design in this story. However, if we read deeper in the events of the story we may say that though the protagonist used to own the house, actually he was living far from it and knew nothing about it, he could not even recognise it when he arrived. He claims to love the house but he stayed away from it for eight long years after his mother’s death. It seems that even during his mother’s life, he was away already: “Mohamed told him that the water heater had not functioned since the year before Madame had died” (*MM*, 8). So neither was he present during his mother’s life nor after her death. All that connected him to the house during those eight years were the wages he used to send to the Moroccan servants and who, despite being paid, didn’t take care of the house as they should have done.

As I said before, the events of the story seem to develop calmly and smoothly. They are not important or dramatic events apart from the catastrophic consequences of offering the unused room to the painter, which brings about the quite unexpected ending of the story. And this is what makes for the single perception of the story. The eight pages and half and what takes place during that time are background that prepares us for the ending which is the most important crisis of the story. Commenting on the ending of the story, Allen Hibbard says that “The story symbolically shows the end of a certain kind of European postcolonial presence and the growing determination of Moroccans to conduct their own affairs.” (Hibbard 1993, 103) I think that this vision may be applied as far as the certification of the land as agricultural is concerned. However the unorthodoxy of the manner in which the

Moroccan painter and his now wealthy family took possession of the house may be interpreted quite differently.

“Here to Learn”

Summary

“Here to Learn”, the longest story in the collection *Midnight Mass*, tells of the peripatetics of a young Moroccan girl who unexpectedly finds herself leaving her isolated home village and travelling through the western world. From Spain to France to Switzerland, she goes on to America. She is accompanied by western men and comes to lead a very different lifestyle from the one she was used to in her country. I have mentioned already that in most of his novels and short stories, Bowles chronicles the lives of western people who come to the “other” world, which is so very different from their apparently more “civilised” one, and they experience this world as exotic. He also deals with Moroccan characters whom he usually describes within the Moroccan community or whom he depicts when coming into contact with western characters who come to North Africa. So most of the events of his short stories take place in North Africa. In “Here to Learn”, the opposite occurs. The events start in Morocco, then the narrative moves on between Europe and the United States, and the last scenes occur again in Morocco. Thus the symmetry of design is respected as far as the setting is concerned.

Curiously, Malika seems to have really existed, or at least had a plausible model, although with a different ending to her story. In his book *Paul Bowles: Magic & Morocco*, Allen Hibbard quotes from a letter from Bowles in 1983:

After sharing my responses to the collection of stories *Midnight Mass*, in particular my admiration for “Here to Learn,” he replied:

I like “Here to Learn” best of the *Midnight Mass* volume, myself. I’d always thought of writing such a tale, but didn’t get started on it. (“Always” means since 1955, to be precise, when I met Malika.) (The last I heard of her, she was married to someone in the State Dept., and living outside Washington, D.C.). (Paul Bowles to Allen Hibbard, 15/ii/83) (Hibbard 2004, 136-7)

Like many of Bowles’s characters, Malika is presented as a person fated to be different and to live a different life even from her young age. She is at variance from most of these characters, like the Moresbys, for example, in that she is much younger and does not always choose for herself. Malika’s difference is located on many levels, physical and

mental. Though she has another sister, she is the one whose outstanding beauty has been noticed by the Spanish nuns. They ask her father to let her live with them to learn Spanish and embroidery (there is no mention of indoctrination or change of religion). The father, believing that we are here in this world to learn, allows his daughter, against the mother's will, to live with them with that objective in view, in order for Malika to be able to learn more. Her five-year stay with the nuns is one of the keys that initiated her journey to the occidental world and made it easier, for they teach her Spanish. Speaking another language, a European one, opens for her the doors of another world of which she had never thought before, without any planning on her part. Her knowing a foreign language facilitates her escape from her home, community and country. So language is used by Bowles as a prominent factor in the "metamorphosis" that Malika's life will undergo.

Her extreme beauty is the key factor that shapes her fate. Yet her beauty does not have the same significance at home as outside. At home and in the immediate community she is never made to feel proud of her looks. Indeed, her mother makes her feel guilty about her body. She punishes her when she tells her about the soldier who has roughly accosted her, believing that Malika herself must be responsible if someone tries to approach her too closely. First there is physical punishment (42), and then her very existence is ignored. Despite her young age, Malika is aware of her beauty and the danger it may cause her if she does not protect herself. The precautions she takes involve wrapping her head in a towel or trying to make her face appear ugly by daubing it with mud.

Yet as she is the only one who can speak Spanish among the women selling their products in the market, they ask her to talk to a European man who approached them wanting to take their picture. Without knowing exactly how it has occurred, she finds herself inside his car. It is an act that is to change her life radically, though neither the European, Tim, nor Malika had intended it. The man apparently only wanted to escape the noise of the boys and to take pictures of Malika. Malika for her part, only wants the man to buy her eggs so that she may return home. But things turn out differently. When the man takes the mud off her face and the towel off her head, Malika shows no signs of the fear or anxiety she used to feel on seeing the soldiers on her way home. For her, this man is different: "Why shouldn't he see me? She thought. He's a good man. She has already noticed that he did not smell at all, and his gentleness with her gave her a pleasant sensation" (44). Young Malika lives in the present without worrying much about anything else, neither her short past nor the future. She enjoys the moment: "her emotions hovered between delight at being in the fine car

and anxiety about walking back to her town” (*ibid*). It is an anxiety that does not last long. She concentrates on what the western man does and tells her, as long as “there was no one to witness the shameful act” (*ibid*), when she allows him to take a photo of her. The taking of pictures is followed by a sort of picnic and finally by a ride to Tetuan, which is an hour from her home. These events seem to have occurred while Malika is not fully conscious. She does not seem to realise what the consequences of her deed would be. She is in a sort of dream from which she awakens only when the western man suggests taking her back home. Only then does she realise the impossibility of going back home. She decides to go with him: “Malika was conscious of having made an irrevocable choice. The results, already determined by destiny, would be disclosed to her one by one, in the course of events” (46). So, we as readers follow her in her adventure and the events are disclosed to us at the same time as Malika takes part in them. Consequently, just like Malika, we know nothing about the reaction of the women who were with her nor of that of her family and community.

When Malika has made the above choice, she seems to have closed the door on her past life, her native world and her family, not wanting to contemplate their attitude towards her departure with a foreigner. She is naturally enthralled by the “mod cons” of her new world, first in Tangier: the modern flat, the electric lights, the bathroom and its hot and cold taps, the fashion magazines. She soon starts to have her own point of view and to prove she may take decisions as far as what concerns her: she chooses the clothes that she sees in the magazine just after her arrival there. Later on, she allows herself to enjoy all the advantages of being with an occidental man. She even starts to think about improving her status and aspires to a better standing and surroundings: she “question[s] the fitness of the people in Tangier to be her models for the elegance she hoped to attain” (49). The opportunity is presented to her when, during the absence of her friend abroad, she comes to know another man, Tony, who takes her to Spain. There, with the help of Tony and his money, she can renew her wardrobe. Malika keeps on discovering new places and each time she is more impressed and she is further from her own world back in North Africa, she even “did not want to think of Tangier” (53). What she likes most during her travels is her effortless ability to impress others by her beauty and her new clothes, otherwise she feels sad. Ironically enough, what displeased her when she was at home is what pleases her most now: showing off her beauty. When she was living with her family, she used to conform to the mandates of society embodied in her mother’s orders, and now she tries to cope with the new society and live as they do. With Tony and his sister she travels to Paris, where she is not in awe of her surroundings,

she measures up to the new high standard and can fulfill her main desire: to show off at the parties with her sumptuous clothes. Ironically, at a given moment she dares to think of discarding Tony for being inferior to her in the new surroundings: “it occurred to her that perhaps he could not be relied upon as an arbiter of taste in a city like this.” (54) The striking thing about Malika is her high esteem of herself and her sense of self confidence. It is a self confidence she has always possessed. When she used to live with her family and some men “tried to speak with her [... they] would do better, she thought, to say all those flattering things to girls who needed such reassurance.” (40) So, in Europe, she never shows any fear of being laughed at or of acting in a ridiculous way. On the contrary, she acts as if she has been in contact with that world and its people all her life. She even dares to criticize them for not keeping up with the latest fashion. After only a few days of her visit she starts to feel that Paris “had turned out to be rather dull.” (57)

Malika’s journey goes on smoothly almost without any problems. Tex is her next friend and again, he makes things easier for her. He helps her with his money to learn new things: she has skiing lessons and goes to English classes. (63) She shows a great interest in anything that will help her to learn more. After a time, she confides in Tex, revealing to him the truth about her identity and letting him see her passport. Before that, she purposely withheld knowledge of her country, her true name or anything important related to herself. She believed that surrounding herself with mystery would attract others to her more. She uses her female wiles to make him think he is the first man in her life as far as her emotional and intimate life is concerned. Their relationship becomes stronger and they decide to get married and to go to Tex’s home in California. But it is not a fairy story, Malika is not Cinderella, after all. Tex dies and Malika returns to her home in Morocco, only to find that the home and her mother are no longer there.

Discussion of themes

Typical of the protagonists of short fiction, Malika is an ordinary, indeed, humble, character. Similarly, she is an outsider for most of her story. But Bowles discusses implicitly the difference between outsider and lonely person and the role of volition in a person’s uprooting. Unlike some of the protagonists of Bowles’s other short stories and novels, Malika makes a journey not from north to south or west to east, but from south to north. As Benlemlih puts it: “Malika’s search is parallel to, but in the opposite direction to Bowles’s other characters, Port and Kit, Nelson Dyar, Stenham and the Professor.” (218) Their journeys are generally ones in which they have taken the decision either because they want to flee the war or the dullness of their daily life, or because they

want to discover the exoticism of the south. Hers is one that comes about just by chance, without her ever having heard about all those countries she visits. “Fate, not exercise of will or the development of a plan, is responsible for Malika’s escape” (Allen Hibbard 1993, 111). Though she has not been happy with her life with her family because of the lack of communication between her and her mother and also because she felt that no one understood her and her needs, she had never dreamed of going anywhere and least of all to foreign countries which she had never heard of before. She had never thought of an alternative to her present life. “It had never occurred to her to hate the town, for she assumed that anywhere else would be more or less the same” (*MM*, 41). Bowles’s expatriates tend to be “in-betweens”, excluded from both worlds and unhappy in that uneasy state of transition. Malika, for her part, does not show any of these signs. She proves to be able to adapt herself to all those places she goes to, and with all the people she meets. She finds sufficient protection and distraction in her friends, successively Tim, Tony and his sister, Tex and finally the lawyer and his secretary. But she does not need much emotionally, as her mother had already hardened her to life. She does not make comparisons between the two worlds. She almost never questions the motive of her long trip through Europe and to the United States. She takes things as they are, taking advantage of all the opportunities that are offered to her without ever regretting any steps she makes.

The expression that provides the title of the story, “Here to Learn”, may be interpreted as “here to take advantage”. From a post-colonial point of view, she is only doing what the colonial conquerors have always done, take advantage of people and resources, so it is a reversal. While the Westerners look at the new world arrogantly and express their distaste loudly, she never feels belittled by Westerners. She also feels from time to time a certain arrogance, knowing she has better taste than some Europeans, though she learned and acquired it from magazines only after meeting the occidental men, but she never utters it aloud. Allen Hibbard qualifies her stand as being limited. He states that as she comes from a “primitive world” she does not have the right to criticise European taste: “This, we assume, would certainly be exotic from the perspective of someone who had lived in North Africa all her life” (Allen Hibbard 1993, 116). But despite her superficiality, Malika’s observations seem to be the outcome of her intelligence and her eager wish to improve her social status. Bowles just points to the tip of the iceberg of the whole question of education for females. He is not misogynist in this, as many western women voluntarily limit the source of their learning to magazines, and he seems to suggest that North

Africa can produce intelligent women. Malika proves to be quick at learning and wanted to impress others.

This recognition makes her happy and the only event during her trip that makes her sad is her husband's death. But there is the odd moment of anxiety. As we saw in the story "Mejdoub", the protagonist, a local character who is "in-between" in his own land, finds that when learning leads to a new life, it is not without its doses of anxiety. Malika is unlike Bowles's rootless western characters as we come to know them only on their arrival in the other land. Bowles makes us know them through their adventures and their new life. Almost nothing about their life back home is known or said: "They are lost and rootless, searching for something nameless (perhaps a quick and sensible death), but finding only slow disintegration and senseless destruction" (Maloney 1950, 4)³⁹. The ends of their stories coincide with their collapse in the other world, and nothing more is said. Malika's case is different in that we know something of her past life with her family and her problems. We follow her in her long trip step by step. Throughout the duration of her journey, and for someone who does not know her, she may appear as someone rootless, for she never thinks of her past or her family. The relationship that she used to have with her family and more particularly her mother, is one lacking any human emotions except negative ones. Just before she left, she had had a disagreement with her: "she's not my mother and I do hate her" (*MM*, 42). It is as if Malika could cause her mother to cease to exist just by willing it, in the same way as her mother had nullified her daughter's presence and even existence by denigrating her: "If I'm not here, then she is not here." (*ibid.*) This elimination of the object has post-colonial reverberations, although in reverse, as if the colonial subject can see only what he/she wants to see and belittles the other or others to the point of not acknowledging or even seeing them. From Malika's point of view, the situation with her mother can also be regarded as a development of character along the lines of Bowles's other existential characters, in that their being, the character and personality they have built up over the years, is brought into question, even annihilated. With Malika, this functions on a much smaller scale because of her comparative youth.

Thus we may dare say that Malika is, in some way, not so different from Bowles's other protagonists. Just like them, she may be considered rootless. When she let herself be carried along by this adventure there were strong motives that urged her not to look back and to miss neither her family nor her country. She puts a veil between her present and her past. In a way, she was unconsciously searching for self-

³⁹ John J. Maloney, "Skillful Tales From Exoticism's Gardens of Evil", review of "The Delicate Prey", *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 3 December 1950.

determination. We may say that when she has travelled and melded in with that western world to the point of speaking only their languages, marrying one of them and living the same way they do, she has lost her identity and mainly her linguistic one. Only twice does Malika dare question the experience of the journey and its usefulness, and it is then that she utters to herself some words in Arabic, her mother tongue. When she is in the plane travelling with her husband to Los Angeles, she is overcome by a silent thought: “She shut her eyes and sat quietly, feeling that she had gone much too far away – so far that now she is nowhere. Outside the world, she whispered to herself in Arabic, and she shivered” (66). This is the first time since her departure that she thinks of her trip with anxiety. That she thinks in Arabic and not English or Spanish is symptomatic of her inner self, perhaps an attempt to recuperate something she never entirely lost. The same feeling comes over her once again in a deeper manner after her husband’s death: “[...] she was assailed afresh by the sensation she had felt on the plane – that of having gone too far for the possibility of return. Being with Tex had made it possible to accept the strangeness of the place; now she saw herself as someone shipwrecked on an unknown shore peopled by creatures whose intentions were unfathomable...” (73). The second time she utters an Arabic word is after her return when just before going to see her mother she says to herself again: “Bismillah” (in the name of God). Muslims pronounce this expression whenever they intend to start something (eating, praying, working, taking any step in life). Convinced of the seriousness of her decision to visit her family and community, she feels that she needs the help of God/Allah. Having never during her journey used this expression, we may feel that she is trying to prove to herself that she still belongs to this community, which she had left a couple of years earlier.

Throughout her travels, she has never visualized a return, but circumstances make her return to her native country. It is a step or decision proposed indirectly by the lawyer after her husband’s death. On arriving at her native town, Malika feels that “now she was entering the crucial part of the journey.” (80) However, she had not imagined that her land would change, she expected it to be immutable and stationary: “It looked completely different. There were big new buildings and bright lights. The idea that the town might change during her absence had not occurred to her; she herself would change, but the town would remain an unmoving backdrop.” (80) Just like “Port and the Linguistics Professor, Dyar and Stenham [Malika is] [...] turned towards a centre that no longer exists, an origin that is absent.” (Benlemlih 264) On seeing the new aspect of the town she felt a strong confusion and “a wave of indignation at this betrayal.” (81) It is true that before arriving there “she suspected

that the visit is foredoomed to failure”, but it is a sensation that she related only to what would be her mother’s reaction at seeing her. She was sure that her mother wouldn’t be pleased for she feels that her going with a Nazarene is not something to be forgiven by the mother.

It is there in her native world that she feels that she has failed after all. For the first time since the beginning of the story, Malika is seen in a state of weakness after she gets the biggest shock of all her life. Though it is an incident that occupies only a few minutes, it may be considered as constituting the moment of crisis. Neither her escape with Tim, nor all the ups and downs she goes through during her trip, among which there is the death of Tex, her husband, undermine her optimism and buoyancy. On her return, first she discovers “the meaningless terrain” (81) and the landscape of emptiness caused by the bulldozers (*ibid.*). Her family’s house was no longer there: “She felt her throat tighten painfully as she told herself that it no longer existed” (*ibid.*). Then she learns that even her mother no longer exists, for she died more than a year before. The news she learns makes her feel torn and collapsed inside. She feels that everything that she has done has after all been in vain. She had wanted to prove to her mother and her local community that she had succeeded, that she had achieved something they never would. What she finds here makes her discover that all that she has done turns out to be useless. She is utterly disappointed by what she discovers: “The vision of the triumphant return” (79) she had been dreaming of is denied her.

What Malika may share with the other protagonists is something related to the objective of her trip. Just like their trip, hers, which she has not explicitly chosen to make, may be seen as a way to reach self-affirmation and self-fulfilment. She also, like them, ends in a state of disappointment and shock. But one may dare foresee that unlike them and due to her young age and to her simplicity, she may not surrender to that collapse. Though not much is said after her discovery of the state of what was her home, she will undoubtedly pick up the threads of her life again. Though initially on finding out the shocking news she lets herself be taken over by dark ideas: “it would be good to perish here in the place where she had lived, to be buried along with the house under the fateful mass” (82), she soon seems to see more clearly. She succeeds in overcoming those negative ideas that were leading her to paralysis and turns her back on the remains of her old home: “there were faint stirrings and clinks around her, but they quickly died away into silence. She scrambled up to the roadbed [...] She hurried down the hill toward the street light where Salvador waited.” (*ibid.*) Her intention to join her driver, significantly called Salvador, means that she will be saved. As a matter of fact, her intention to join her driver means that she is to go back to her life in the west, or in North Africa but enjoying her wealth,

which has a western origin. The suggestion is that she has opted to continue her life and not surrender to depressing moods. Just as Tim was followed by Tony and his sister and then Tex, the three “T”s will no doubt be followed by another man whose name may begin with T.

Yet Malika may be perceived as a lonely person as she is an outsider in both worlds. Rejected in her own, she is not fully integrated in the new world, however much she is fêted for her beauty, as she moves in it in a superficial way, her textbooks being fashion magazines. Her relationships, even including that with her husband, are not strong or well developed. Her first western friend leaves her in Tangier and goes abroad. She had been seen as a desirable object by a Westerner and “acquired” by him and taken out of her context. A rupture is forced when he is obliged to travel and leaves her in the company of his two eunuch friends. The second friend is not much different, for he leaves her with his sister and travels to London. When she gets married to Tex and they go to Los Angeles, Malika suffers a little when left almost alone at home. But she succeeds in overcoming all those moments of loneliness, she tries to fight and escape it and never succumbs to it. This may be due in part to what Hibbard called her “limited” expectations. She usually finds an alternative to distract her, thus when the first friend travels, she attaches herself to a second friend, Tony. When he leaves, she is accompanied by his sister. Soon after, she finds refuge in Tex’s interest and apparent love. Once having made her new home in Los Angeles, and to fight her loneliness while her husband is at work, she occupies herself momentarily with cooking and improving her English. After her husband’s death, the lawyer helps her to satisfy her eager desire to learn: he puts her in contact with his secretary, who teaches her administrative affairs about which she knew nothing before. She finds in the secretary a suitable companion.

What makes the story of Malika different from the other short stories is that, if part of the conclusion is omitted, it may be considered a sort of fairy-tale: the story of a beautiful girl living in unfavourable conditions who by a stroke of luck finds herself travelling and living in surroundings of a relatively high social standing. At home, she seemed to be disconnected from the setting and her family. Nothing is said about her relationship with her sister. With her mother, matters seem to be worse than normally exist between a mother and her daughter. At no time does one feel that we are dealing with a mother-daughter relationship. This reminds us of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales like Cinderella and Snow White, whose beauties marked their fates. While Malika’s extreme beauty, like theirs, seems to be a curse on her at home, it opens to her the doors to a joyful world far from home. By the end of the story, she finds herself in possession of a considerable fortune. All

that happens to Malika seems to belong to a dream-like world. The reader may wonder if all that happens to her is real or not. During her trip, she easily acquires almost all that she wants. No obstacles come her way. She spends the whole trip in a mood of enthusiasm and optimism. The ending is unexpected and ironic at the same time. When she learns about her mother and discovers the devastation of her home, curiously enough, she does not show a concern for anything else: neither looking for her sister nor anybody else. She seems to be still living in a dream from which no sooner has she awoken for a brief instant than she intends to immerse herself in it again, forgetting anything else. As I said before, during her trip, Malika had never thought about her family nor about coming back. The shock she gets and the sadness she feels at the end is not for the dead mother: “she found it strange, for she had not felt tenderness for her mother.” (82) It was more for herself and for the “lost land”, for herself because the death of her mother deprived her of feeling the triumph of her achievement. She feels intense melancholy for the transformation of her native land. The absence of its primitive aspect exercises on her a negative psychological effect because in her inner self she would have liked to find it in the same state she had left it in, years before. The “unmoving backdrop [...] would help her define and measure her transformation” (80); but it is no longer there. “Things change and the element of transformation is crucial” (Benlemlih, 264-265), and again, just like “The Professor’s [...] world as well as Dyar’s Interzone and Stenham’s Fez [Malika’s own world is] [...] revolving around change and exchange.” (*ibid*)

Benlemlih stresses the “fall into modernity” of this story, the fall from Eden as the modern world destroys the pristine nature of primitive life close to the earth:

Melancholy and regret connect the *tristesse* of Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques*, even if the geographical direction is reversed, with “Here to Learn”. Bowles’ reflections may be understood by invoking what Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* calls a “structure of feeling” (Williams 1977: 128—135), in which modernity is “most visibly destroying ‘Nature’: that complex of the land as it was in the past and in childhood, which both aging and alteration destroy”. (Williams 1973: 138) (Benlemlih 220)

Form

“Here to Learn” is made up of twenty-two parts. Each part narrates in chronological order a different stage in the life of Malika. For instance, the first part is a sort of introduction and presentation of the character of Malika and we know that her extreme beauty is what makes her

different. The second part talks about her problem with her mother and at the same time may be considered as the substructure that makes Malika gain the reader's sympathy throughout all the events of the story. Her beauty continues to be the central theme in this second part, as it is the cause of her conflictive relationship with her mother, and in all the other chapters. It is in the third part that Malika meets by pure chance her first western friend. In part four she decides not to go back to her family and starts her adventure in another world. We keep on discovering in each part a new aspect, a new place and new people in the life of Malika: her life in Tangier with Tim, his travels and his leaving her in the company and under the protection of the two eunuchs, her meeting with Tony, her trip with him to Spain, then to Paris, her life with Tony's sister after his travels, her meeting with Tex and her close relationship with him. It is in part XV that she is in Los Angeles, already married to Tex. The next chapter tells how Malika's previous life was different from the one she is now going to lead to the point that she herself feels that "she had left behind everything that was comprehensible" (*MM*, 66). She is conscious that her life before was one of only fun and pleasure while her present and future life are going to be characterised by more seriousness and anxiety. She was right, as in the next chapter she starts to feel that her life has become "static" (70). It is a state that will be strongly shaken by her husband's death which is announced in the next chapter. In the following chapter Malika is taken care of by Tex's friend and his wife while his secretary plays the role of a teacher and a companion in the next one. In chapter XX Malika is on her way home. In the penultimate part Malika arrives in Morocco and in the last one she goes to what used to be her home and which is now bare of all its original features and its people as her mother is now dead.

Despite the description of the life of Malika being lengthy and full of incident throughout her journey, the story is characterized by a unity of impression as it focuses on the person of Malika and what she does. Her beauty is the leitmotif around which revolve most of the events of the story. It is her beauty that led the nuns to ask her father if she could live with them and learn the Spanish language, which was to make things easier for her during her journey. It is this same beauty that caused the conflictive situation with her mother and it is also this beauty that made all the western men she meets feel attracted to her and want to entertain her. Yet, when she was still with her family, she understood what her grandmother meant before dying when she had said that "Only Allah remains the same. One day she would no longer be pretty" (*MM*, 40). She was also conscious that "now she was" (*ibid.*). This is why when, thanks to her beauty, the occasion is presented to her to make her situation better, she doesn't hesitate.

The last chapter is at the same time an attempt on the part of Malika to reconnect with her past and also the end of a great illusion. She marks her presence in her native land first by uttering to herself in Arabic the word “Bismillah”. Then she “wrapped a silk kerchief tightly around her head.” (*MM*, 80) It is something she used to do before, to escape men’s devouring gaze. Now she does it because she wanted to feel “wholly anonymous.” (*ibid.*) Before, she used to wrap her head in a towel, now it is a silk kerchief, which is a more luxurious version. It is ironic, for she accedes to being converted into a European woman, wearing European garments and silk kerchiefs, but she expected her country to remain the same as before in its primitive and exotic aspects. More ironic is the fact that “[t]he world that she wanted to escape to, one of materialism and progress, has caught up with her past and submerged it.” (Campbell 325)

As stated by Bowles in his conversation with Allen Hibbard, though Malika had been absent only for few years, the changes that affected these aspects of her native land are so extreme that they shock her. The confusion and shock she feels at seeing the changed aspect of her country last only a brief moment, yet it is what makes the moment of crisis of the story. It is not in vain that Bowles emphasises this last scene. To understand the seriousness of this chapter and why it constitutes the moment of crisis of the story, it would be apt to quote from Hibbard’s *Magic and Morocco*, part of his conversation with Bowles in 1987:

[...] He began to reminisce. “It must be sad to walk through this area and compare things now and things then”, I said.

“Well, I’ve been living here all the time, so it hasn’t happened suddenly. It would be rather shocking if I’d been away and returned”.

“Like Malika in ‘*Here to Learn*’”.

“Yes. That’s it. She’d been away only a short time and came back and found they’d torn down the old market and everything”.
(Hibbard 2004, 143–144)

It is quite evident that he was against the modernization of Morocco. It was its primitiveness and exoticism that kept him enthralled by the place and urged him to take the decision to live in Morocco. But:

To think that Morocco – or any other place in the universe - could ever be fixed, congealed, is a romantic dream of plenitude that Bowles shares with other visitors, literally or not [...] for Morocco

is in mediation. It does not have one pattern fixed in its pastness. It is neither static nor stagnant. (Benlemlih 301)

Choukri has criticized him for his ideas in respect of this topic. In his *Paul Bowles wa Uzlat Tanja (Paul Bowles and the Reclusion of Tangier)*, he says: “If Bowles thought Morocco should remain the same as it was in the thirties and forties, then this is an absolutely colonial idea” (Choukri 11. My translation). Choukri feels that Bowles’s main problem was that “he doesn’t distinguish between past and present in the life of the countries and its peoples despite his many travels [...] in other words, he is fond of living in a constant and primitive but civilized world. How could it be possible? He himself is unable to reply [...]” (135) As a matter of fact “Bowles may glorify the ‘primitive’ but is always critical of the lack of modernity’s inventions [...]” (Bourara, 83) Choukri advocated such criticism asserting that “lamenting [the past of a country] is useless, for each stage in the history of a city or a country has its value, beauty [...] and magic.” (Choukri 3)

Choosing to end the story with this scene, Bowles is just emphasizing what we know to be his point of view about people, mainly the North Africans, when they embrace the western culture and forget all about theirs, including their language. He never ceased to criticize them for this: “[...] Traditional customs, clothing and behaviour must be replaced by something unequivocally European. In this [the North African] is fanatical. It does not occur to him that what he is rejecting is authentic and valid, and what he is taking on is meaningless imitation”. (*THAG* 77).

As I said before, the story starts in an area in the north of Morocco. It is there that Malika was born and where she has grown up and from there she sets out on her journey. It is true that by the end of the story Malika has undergone many changes, both physically and psychologically, but the fact that she happens to be in the same place where she was at the beginning of the story makes this short story benefit from the symmetry of design that characterizes many of Bowles’s short fictions.

It is no accident that the story ends where it started. At both points, Malika is not at her best. Surprisingly enough, she experiences and lives happy moments only when she is far from her native country, more precisely in the West. And it is in her native land that she lives her worst moments either at the beginning of the story or at the end after her return. It is true that she doesn’t undergo explicitly anything violent like many of Bowles’s other characters in his short stories and novels (neither insanity like Kit Moresby and Dyar nor physical violence like the linguist in the desert), but she lives through hard moments that make

her feel sad and shocked. This conveys the implicit idea that North Africa is a place where people, be they natives or Westerners, encounter difficult moments.

The smoothness with which the events in Malika's life in the West flow, and the fact that she easily gets everything and finds almost no problems in her life and even her extreme beauty that opens for her all the doors, make the story appear a sort of fairy tale. Yet, the "thinginess" or the solidity and specificity of things make the story more convincing. The use of such items as the towel, the mud, the basket of eggs, the taps, the gandoura, the magazines, etc, convince the reader of the credibility of this dream-like story.

Though the journey of Malika in the West was not one that she had started after a predetermined choice, it can still be perceived as a metaphor of a search for self assertion and freedom. Yet during her journey "she is totally dependent on men, a position that given her upbringing, she understandably does not try to alter" (Hibbard 1993, 114). She achieves this self assertion or "freedom" (to quote Hibbard) only by chance also (like almost everything in her life) after her husband's death. It is only then that she decides to go back to her native land to celebrate and triumph in this freedom which she had not sought or dreamed of.

"Madame and Ahmed"

Summary

"Madame and Ahmed" is a story that deals with a relationship of interaction between a European and a native: the eponymous "Madame," Mrs Pritchard, and Ahmed. The latter has been working as a gardener for Mrs Pritchard for eleven years. It is a lengthy period of time that has consolidated their culturally superficial relationship into one of mutual respect, one where "they knew and understood each other in a basic and important fashion." (MM, 118) The story focuses upon a moment of crisis when Mrs Pritchard's garden inexplicably loses its beauty. Her friends advise her to look for another gardener, but she "shrank from the idea of getting rid of Ahmed." (117) Ahmed, for his part, strives with all the powers that his knowledge and experience of a traditional gardener allow him, to look out for the best interests of Madame and her garden. Despite the disparity in wealth between the characters, the story is one of Bowles's rare stories where there is mutual respect between the European and the native and where each one of them cares about the interests and even the feelings of the other.

Mrs Prichard is particularly upset when "certain large shrubs she had imported from England seemed to be doing very poorly" (*ibid.*), a point which emphasises her own uprootedness. Though she rejected her

friends' advice concerning Ahmed and because she likes to have her garden looking good with the best plants, she has recourse to another man to bring her some plants and plant them himself in her garden. Feeling that Ahmed is upset, Madame tries to explain the situation to him with some plausible pretexts but they don't convince him. Ahmed cannot bear the idea that a stranger should be working in the garden but he is not in a position to contradict the decisions of his employer.

Ahmed makes enquiries and discovers that the man is none other than the gardener of the Municipality and the plants those of the "Jardin Municipal." In other words, he is a thief and the plants he has sold to Mrs Pritchard are stolen goods, belonging to the Municipality. Ahmed's intelligence and common sense teach him caution and he decides to be patient and not to tell Madame immediately about what he has come to know, otherwise she might accuse him of jealousy and deviousness.

What happens soon after this enables him to use his intelligence and work towards the promotion of his own interests and those of his employer. Not only was the thieving gardener planning to persuade Madame to get rid of Ahmed, but moreover, he seemed to be planning to steal Madame's valuable plants. Given this new crisis, Ahmed has to act quickly to "save his job" and "his garden." (119) His fears, preoccupations and intelligence lead him to decide, although with a sense of guilt, to sever the roots of the plants recently put in by the thief. He calms this feeling of guilt by convincing himself that all this is for the sake of Madame. The result will be observed the following day by Madame. What she thought were healthy and beautiful plants were no more than "just stems stuck into the ground." (121) To Ahmed's advantage, the one to be accused is the man who planted them. Madame not only felt hurt for having been cheated and robbed, but also felt sorry for having "been considering the possibility of dismissing Ahmed and hiring the man." (121)

One of the concluding scenes in the story is between Ahmed and the thief. When the latter comes back, Ahmed is charged by Madame to put him off the premises and tell him not to come back. Ahmed does more than what Madame asks him. The time has come for him to make use of the first piece of information he learned about the gardener of the Municipality and the plants of its "Jardin Municipal." So he confronts the man with it and adds the lie that even Madame knows that he is a thief.

The last scene, a brief one indeed, is between Ahmed and Madame, who asks him about what he has told the man. Being unable to tell her the truth, he invents a very convincing reply. He makes her believe that he reprimanded the man for not having acted as a good Muslim and having played "tricks on a woman without husband." (122)

He adds the comment that “Everybody plays tricks nowadays” (*ibid.*) and advises her not to believe anybody. Ahmed implies that she is to mistrust everyone except him, although there is the ambiguity that he should be included in that reserve too, for the reader knows that he has been far from honest. All three characters have tried to play tricks on each other.

Discussion of themes

The theme of the trickster, or con-man (confidence trickster) is common in Bowles’s writings, and not only amongst his native characters; we have only to think of the “mother-son” couple in *The Sheltering Sky* to see that Westerners are adept at such deceit too.

Madame started playing tricks when she tried to get a better gardener who might be able to bring to her garden the beauty and vivacity it had lost. It is true that she didn’t welcome the idea of getting rid of Ahmed when her friends proposed it, yet the idea was not completely discarded. Her love for her garden and its beautiful plants led her to try to buy some beautiful plants from another gardener and accept his suggestion to plant them himself. She is unlucky in that the man is a trickster and a thief and in her vulnerability through not being a gardener herself, she is easily taken in.

Ahmed is the last one who resorts to tricks and because he is essentially more noble, his tricks bring about a happy ending for himself and his employer. Ahmed took advantage to make both of the people menacing the status quo, his means of sustenance and his peace of mind believe what he wanted. Consequently, he saves his job and Madame’s garden. If Madame had been present in the confrontation between Ahmed and the thief she would have known that the man was a thief. She would have also known that the one behind the death of the plants was Ahmed, not the man. It is true that she might have been against the theft of the plants, but also she would have reprimanded or even dismissed Ahmed for his deed. As things have gone differently, we “feel that in the end each got what he deserved” (Hibbard 1983, 104), particularly that “not much harm comes to anyone.” (*ibid.*) The material loss figured in the death of the plants may be compensated for by the fact that the garden and Madame are saved from the tricks of the thief and his immorality.

The reader is undoubtedly meant to sympathise mainly with Ahmed. Despite the harm he caused to the plants, and as the feeling of guilt accompanies him all the time, he is the one whose tricks may be excused. At the beginning of the story, there are no hints that the garden did poorly because of his negligence or any tricks on his part. Throughout the story, his respect for Madame and his concern for the

garden are paramount. His tricks came as a natural reaction to defend his position and also to the theft of the gardener of the Municipality. The thief is the only one who is presented as a character who doesn't deserve any sympathy, for he has acted with cunning and self-interest and there are no suggestions that he has felt any guilt. Undeniably, we find the theme of morality in the story, and since both Christianity and Islam condemn theft, and since all three practise deceit to a certain extent, the theme of the "thieving native" is less pronounced. Through the story, Bowles is able to insist that there are honest natives and dishonest natives and that Westerners look out for themselves above all, but are not beyond gratitude and loyalty to their native subordinates. The usual power play between Europeans and natives is present, but the story is more subtle in that we see that the European can be vulnerable, as in this case, Mrs Pritchard is dependent upon her gardener if she wants to have a garden to impress her fellow expatriates. Mutual need is what drives the story.

Form

As regards form, we can say that symmetry of design is respected, for at the end of the story, we are at the same point as at the beginning, though having learned something. Madame and Ahmed will undoubtedly come back to work in "their" garden as they used to do before. Nothing is said about the reason behind the garden doing poorly. Neither is anything said about what Madame and Ahmed will do to put an end to this "sick state" of the garden. But Madame won't think about bringing in other gardeners. One tricky event/gardener is enough to make her satisfied with her "sincere" long-term gardener, Ahmed. There is the sensation that this has been a single event, and looking back, they might see it as a short-lived small-scale nightmare, especially for Ahmed, who could have lost his livelihood. There is certainly a dream-like quality to the story, with hints of ancient myths, especially as it is set in a garden, harking back to the events of the Garden of Eden in Genesis, where harmony is upset by a "snake in the grass."

"The Husband"

Summary

"The Husband" is another of Bowles's short stories where he unfolds an anecdote about a moment in the life of a native family. The protagonists are again, and as in almost all his short stories that deal with Moroccan characters, stereotypes. So the woman, Aisha, is a maid in the houses of European families and Abdellah, the husband, is a lazy, almost good-for-nothing individual. Their son works as a gardener for another European family and the girl is still studying. As indicated by the title, the events

have mainly to do with the husband. He is the one whose behaviour shapes the events of the story and turns upside down a seemingly calm and peaceful marital and family life.

The wife's work at the Nazarenes' affords them a living and the husband does not believe it necessary for him to work. In addition to her wage, they have another "extra bonus", which they manage to get from selling the things the wife dares to steal from the houses where she works. However, the wife does not like the idea of selling all those things for she prefers to have them in her own house. This is what will cause the disagreement, the silence and the breakdown in the marital life of the couple and the decision of the husband to go to live with another woman, Zohra.

Despite his conflict with his wife, he goes to her house when he knows she must be at work and steals a set of silver spoons she herself had stolen from one of the houses. After selling it in the market, he buys some goats and goes off to mind them far from his two wives. Feeling he is the owner of goats fills him with satisfaction, though it will not last very long. This pleasing sensation comes to an end when two of his goats are run over and killed by a passing car in the road. It would have been just a simple case of the loss of a couple of goats were it not for a "recently passed law stipulating that henceforth no motorist would be held responsible for any livestock he happened to hit on the highway" (*MM*, 97). The person responsible would be the owner of the livestock. Abdellah tries to get rid of the dead goats before the police find them. He pays the son of a neighbour to take the bodies away. Unaware of the seriousness of the matter, the boy throws them in the river near where some women are doing their washing. One of them indignantly informs the police, who eventually find out that the dead goats belonged to Abdellah.

In addition to the loss of the two goats, Abdellah loses another four when the police take them as a fine for the infraction he committed. His complaints cause such an uproar that both Aisha and Zohra discover his sideline in goat-rearing. Aisha retaliates by presenting a complaint against him for having abandoned his family and that is how he comes to lose the four remaining goats: the police make him forfeit them to Aisha. So Abdellah ends up alone with no goats and no wives.

Discussion of themes

One of the prominent themes in "The Husband" is that of money and poverty. Poverty is what makes Aisha work in Nazarene households, and if we omit the moral aspect, we may say that it is poverty that impels Aisha to steal from her European employers. Money is also the factor that causes the break in the couple's relationship. Though at the

beginning, Aisha used to hand over to her husband the money she earned and the stolen goods for him to sell, later on, she is more reluctant. Having the necessities of life covered by her wages and the proceeds of the theft, she wanted to keep for herself some of the luxury items. Abdellah's affair with Zohra is also likely to turn sour for matters related to money.

Within an Arabic community and a rather patriarchal system, it is quite surprising that the one who works outside the home is Aisha and not her husband. His part of the deal merely involves selling the stolen goods in the market, and he appears to be as satisfied with this as if he were doing an honest day's work. Moreover, his wife does not seem to object to the fact that he doesn't go out in search of a job. Even when he starts his affair with Zohra, Aisha does not seem to care or be troubled about either the personal, the public or the moral aspects of the blatant infidelity. Only when she learns about his secret sideline in goats does her wounded and humiliated female self seem to awake. She feels that the time has come for her to take revenge by preventing him from having what he likes most: money. Hibbard asserts that with this decision and Aisha's appropriation of the goats, "we feel as though justice, oddly enough, has been rendered." (Hibbard, 108) However, it seems that only the husband is subject to punishment for his untoward deeds. Knowing that Aisha herself has stolen the spoon set, we may wonder to what extent justice has really been rendered, and when justice will be done against her, as she keeps up the systematic thieving. Stealing seems to have become a ritual that forms part of her employment at the Nazarenes' homes. Her pilfering does not seem to be questioned, as Allen Hibbard points out: the "Bowles story is told in a fairly straightforward, linear manner [...] [without supporting any] moral comment on the actions that take place." (Hibbard 2002, xiii)

The theme of money and poverty may lead us to another important factor in this short story: the disparity in wealth between the natives and the Europeans and the concomitant "thieving natives" trope. It is true that in this story Bowles does not refer to any direct verbal interaction between Europeans and natives, but he makes it quite evident that they are there living together, albeit the Europeans are in the background. Europeans, as usual in Bowles's fiction, are either wealthy people or at least they take advantage of the lower standard of living to afford maids and gardeners. Aisha's employers never seem to notice they have been robbed, no matter how expensive the stolen things might be, for example, a cashmere shawl. This inattention on their part seems to be what encourages her to steal ever more blatantly. So the conflict is never between Europeans and natives: it is between natives themselves; though we have to admit that the disparity in wealth between the two

communities can be considered one of the underlying factors that have caused this conflict in the couple's life. The personal moral transgression of theft aside, one wonders if Aisha –and any Moroccan or person in a less powerful economic position– is not justified in wanting material goods as equal rights. In Aisha's case, having seen European homes from the inside "had given her a taste for the way the Nazarenes lived" (MM, 95).

The colonial theme of the "thieving native" is presented by Bowles as something quite normal when dealing with local characters. We have already seen that he stated through Stenham's inner thoughts in *The Spider's House* that "such behaviour was merely an integral part of their ethical code." (SH, 261) Even Port in *The Sheltering Sky* accused Abdelkader, the native character, of having stolen his passport, though later on things turned out to be different from what he had imagined. So the natives here are almost predisposed to steal from their European employers. When stealing, they do not seem to be disturbed by any moral or religious consciousness. Thieving seems to flow smoothly in their African blood, mainly if the act of stealing is perpetrated against the Europeans who never miss the stolen items. Once again, Bowles's local characters behave thus towards the Europeans as if it were a normal and clever way of getting even. They think they are there to offer them employment and to allow them to steal from them whenever something pleases them. This may corroborate Bowles's thinking when he commented to Michael Roger: "If you ask them why we exist, they will explain immediately that Allah made the Christians for us to live on. The Christians are for the Moslems to live off of, by milking." (Hibbard 2003, 172) So Aisha takes advantage of the existence of the Europeans in her life to the full extent of her possibilities without being discovered: she "milks them" illegally, but to her mind, justifiably. One wonders if "Bowles's claims that the 'Nazarenes' are always potential victims for the essentially predatory Muslims" (Bourara, 31) were not right. When Abdellah is punished, it is never for having stolen. The punishment he incurs twice is first for having committed an infraction against the stipulated law (when the infraction is discovered) and second for having abandoned his family when the complaint is presented against him. So, theft is presented as a crime that is never punished. Nor does Aisha at any given moment fear that her employers will discover that she steals from them. Thieving is presented as a normal act in the everyday life of the natives. As long as it is not noticed or discovered, their thieving will continue as if it were a condoned, even necessary, part of the relations between natives and their "visitors".

The theme of the outsider and loneliness can be discerned in the story as far as Abdellah is concerned. Right from the beginning,

Abdellah is depicted as a strange character. His staying at home while his wife and son work at the Nazarenes' positions him on the other side of active society. He stays at home waiting only for his wife to bring her wages and the stolen objects for him to sell. His absence from the house after the conflict with his wife and his living with a mistress does not arouse any jealousy in Aisha. This means that he did not count much for his family. This is corroborated by the aversive reaction of his daughter when he calls on them during his wife's absence. He does not seem to be very welcome to Zohra either when she discovers he does not have the wherewithall to make an honest (or even a dishonest) living.

Exclusion and loneliness are far more emphasised at the end of the story when Aisha succeeds, thanks to a judicial order, in taking the goats from Abdellah. He had already lost much of the satisfaction and vivacity he used to feel with the ten goats, after having lost more than half of them. So, with Aisha preventing him from keeping what is left of their number, he loses all interest, vivacity and satisfaction. "[H]is face buried in his hand [...] he looked so solitary and hopeless." (100–101) But all is not black and white in these characters: there was a faint hope that he might be saved from this loneliness as we read through Aisha's inner monologue: "At that moment, if only he had looked up, she would have called out something to him, to make him understand that it was all right, that he could return to her. But he did not move." (100) Even this slight hope and this small amount of desire on the part of Aisha vanishes soon. It seems it was such a brief thought that occurred in her subconscious that it was but a momentary weakness. She immediately comes back to reality and realises that "she had done well to hold her tongue." (101) Aisha is so immersed in a materialistic and immoral way of thinking that she foresees that the return of her husband will prevent her from enjoying the stolen goods that cost her a great effort in planning how to steal them.

Form

The story is constituted of many ups and downs that make it difficult to decide which of the events may be considered the true moment of crisis. But there is no doubt that the moment of crisis begins with the conflict between the husband and his wife that emerges through the wife's new sense of power and her realisation that she did not really need her husband so had no obligation to share with him the proceeds of her dishonesty. The death of the two goats and the punishment by the police may be considered the second moment of crisis for from then onwards, Abdellah's economic decline begins. The ironic last straw is his wife's possession of the rest of the goats, as he had kept it a secret from her.

As in many of his short stories, Bowles makes for an ambiguous ending in “The Husband”. It is left open to whatever interpretation one may speculate upon. Abdellah remains alone, without a job, without a wife and without goats and we cannot imagine what he may do later on. He is presented as a lazy man who is good for nothing, he was not even successful in keeping his goats safe. He started to lose them in twos or fours because he couldn’t prevent himself “from dropping into a deep slumber” (97). Ambiguity surrounds even some of the events before we get to the ending. For instance, though Abdellah lives happily alone with his goats, nothing is said about how he manages to eat and live without money until he sells them. It is something that may give a dream-like quality to the story. Later on, we know that while he was taking care of his goats he went neither to Aisha’s nor to Zohra’s so that they thought that he had left Tangier. In fact he was in nearby Vasco da Gama (100). It is a situation that shows that there is no symmetry of design in this short story for the husband is at a different place and in a different situation.

The use of the language is one that goes in concordance with the content of the story and emphasises its authenticity. The stolen items are enumerated in such a way that makes them very credible. Except for the silver spoon set and the cashmere shawl, all the other stolen objects (a bath towel, sheets, a travel alarm clock, a fancy serving dish, etc) are not valuable, so this may explain how the employers did not miss them. The use of a couple of Moroccan words without translating them is another element that builds for the credibility of the story. Words such as *joteya* and *dellal* which mean respectively “flea market” and “the auctioneer”, as explained in the glossary elaborated by Bowles at the end of the collection, come to add an exotic flavour to the story. The credibility of the events is also supported by the choice of the setting of the events which take place in Tangier or more specifically on “a hillside several miles from the center of the town” (95) and a “quarter that lay at some distance” (97) from the first one.

“The Empty Amulet”

The past, with all its rich legendry and charm, held out immense possibilities for a sense of belonging and continuity; yet at the same time it could be an enormous burden, a heavy weight, a stagnant force that held societies back. The traditional was often associated with superstition, intolerance, and moral inflexibility. (Hibbard *Magic and Morocco* 2004, 66)

Superstition and ignorance are among the themes Bowles usually includes in his fiction where the characters are natives. Bowles is conscious that presenting his native characters as superstitious and ignorant will make them stand for something typically exotic and primitive. “The Empty Amulet” is one of these short stories where knowledge, and let us say even science, try to defy ignorance and the superstition that it generates. Ignorance and superstition are represented by the female protagonist, while knowledge and rational thoughts are represented by her husband. However, it seems that such social vices are rooted so deeply in society that it is difficult to get rid of them easily. It is one of Bowles’s stories that “show how characters act in consonance with their belief in the supernatural.” (Hibbard 2004, 102)

Summary

Like the stories in *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*, what characterizes this short story is that it is set in Morocco with no Western characters at all. It is the story of a newly-married native couple, Habiba and Momen. Habiba is the model of the ignorant girl. Yet she is lucky to have an educated husband with modern ideas and who does not believe in the idea of shutting his wife away at home. He permits her to be in contact with her neighbours and to go out with them. Everything seems to be all right with Habiba and her husband until she starts to visit those neighbours who regularly go to a saint’s tomb with the hope and the illusion that they will be provided with *baraka* and henceforth be cured of all their illnesses and problems. At first, and unlike her neighbours, Habiba is gifted with good health and she doesn’t need any *baraka*. However, when on one occasion she suffers a headache, her friends advise her to accompany them to the saint’s tomb and to drink “a glass of water containing a large pinch of black earth from the mausoleum” (MM 128). After drinking the mud and surprisingly enough, feeling better “in the open air” (*ibid.*), she believes that the mud contains the saint’s “*baraka*”, capable of making any mischief vanish, as her neighbours convince her. Her husband’s rational objections to the matter do not persuade her of the uselessness and the negative aspects of such practices and of her continuing to make pilgrimages to the saint’s tomb.

When Habiba falls pregnant, her husband, who is working at a hospital, fears that these practices might harm the baby. This leads him to commission at a jeweller’s a tiny golden cage in which he inserts a ball of cigarette paper. He offers the necklace to Habiba, making her believe that the cage contains a fqih’s *baraka* which has the powers of protecting their baby. All her discomforts disappear after wearing the necklace and she doesn’t need to go to any saint’s tomb. However, by pure chance, she discovers the truth of the supposed charm, that it is

only paper. The amulet is not empty as the title states, but the suggestion is that it might as well be, as the ball of paper has no power, just as there is no real power in these magic tricks. The only real power lies in what one is willing to do if one believes in them, as Bowles himself explained. So it is more a question of self-suggestion. The feeling of having been deceived provokes her fury against her husband and also dizziness and pains of all sorts. To be cured, as we may expect, she takes up her pilgrimages to the saint's tomb again. Momen "had learned the futility of expecting her to follow a logical train of thought." (131) Habiba cannot live without her saint's *baraka* nor can Momen stand such irrational practices on her part. Consequently, divorce comes as a reasonable solution to this tormented marital relationship.

Discussion of themes

Significantly, the story is metaphorical in that it pertains to and tries to explain the reality behind two different ways of thinking. Morocco is presented as a place where two contradicting world-views coexist: irrationality versus logic. For Bowles, Morocco was not only "a place where the spirit world, happily, had not been extinguished or buried", (Hibbard 2004, 71) but it was also "a place relatively remote from the influence of strictly rational modes of thought." (*ibid*) Habiba personifies that remoteness from rationality and also that backwardness. Bowles presents her as an ignorant person who was not authorised by her father to keep on at her studies like the other girls of her age. The fact of not being integrated into the educational system has accentuated her ignorance and contributed to making her easily believe that visiting a saint's tomb and drinking the mausoleum's mud will make all her pains disappear. Ignorance has more influence on her conduct than her husband's rational ideas.

When Momen at first succeeds in convincing Habiba not to go to the saint's tomb any more, it was only by making her believe in another set of irrational ideas, that he had brought her *baraka* from a "very great *fqih*." (*MM*, 130) He succeeds in convincing her not to go, not with rational and scientific proof, but by coming down almost to her same level of thought, which, of course, was the best and perhaps only way to convince her. In the glossary offered by Bowles at the end of *Midnight Mass* we learn that the word *baraka* means: "Beneficent psychic power (by extension, an amulet providing protection.)" (*MM*, 189) Allen Hibbard adds that:

Baraka, like magic, is part of the fabric of belief in Morocco and elsewhere in the Arab world. It is something like charisma, adhering to particular people, and is often associated with

holiness. It is integrally connected to life-giving forces, with breath itself, and brings good fortune. To say someone or some place or something has good *baraka* is to say there are perceived advantages in being in close proximity to that person, place, or thing, for *baraka* has a contagious quality. It can travel or rub off from its source. (Hibbard 2004, 42–43)

Baraka is a recurrent word in Bowles's fiction about the natives, as is the case in his "The Waters of Izli", where we read: "It was no time before crowds of pilgrims began to arrive in Izli, seeking *baraka* at Sidi Bouhajja'a's tomb" (*MM*, 136). The truth behind the *baraka* in this latter story is that it is all an underhand plan practised by the protagonist to make his village become more prosperous (*ibid.*). By making people believe that the tomb and everything to do with the "saint's" death is imbued with *baraka*, he is the one who first makes a profitable deal from the plan. First he succeeds in getting his mare and Sidi Bouhajja'a's horse to mate and henceforth have offspring, and then he attracts people to visit the tomb and leave "offerings of food and money." (*ibid.*) It is quite evident in "The Waters of Izli" that "what is attributed to divine causation is actually the result of self-interested human intervention, discretely concealed." (Hibbard 1993, 99) However, nothing is said about the truth behind the *baraka* in "The Empty Amulet", Habiba's health, especially considering her pregnancy, has its natural vicissitudes.

A key word in Bowles's definition is the word "psychic". Contemplating Habiba's case and her experience with the *baraka*, we feel it is all a psychic process. Before getting to know her neighbours, she has never suffered any pains, but being surrounded by them and their never-ceasing pains, she starts to suffer from headaches. As they insist that the mausoleum mud is capable of dissipating her pains, she recovers soon after drinking the dirty water. Later on, her belief that she is wearing an object with *baraka* from a well-known fqih, makes her as healthy as she used to be before knowing her neighbours. Once she discovers the lie, her pains come on again. We may be drawn to say that "The power of legends such as these lies in the belief audiences put in them. So long as one believes in magic, all of these things are possible." (Hibbard 2004, 42)

The choice Bowles has made of the names is not a random one: in Arabic, Habiba means "lover" or "the beloved". Indeed, she had the chance to be married to a man who, no doubt, loved her and did all that he could to make her live happily as long as she acted in a rational manner. Ironically enough, she didn't succeed in conserving that love. She has preferred to rush after the *baraka* of the saints' tombs. On the

other hand, Momen is a name meaning “the believer”. It is not for nothing that he is called that name. He is a believer in common sense and also in true religion, for there is no such belief in religion as eating dirt or mud and expecting to be cured.

Having recourse to divorce stands for turning down the irrational and superstitious beliefs in magic and similar practices. It also admits that such beliefs are deeply rooted in society and that their practitioners are not ready to get rid of them no matter how serious the harm they may cause them. So Habiba sacrifices her happy life with her husband and baby for the sake of unfounded and irrational beliefs that the tombs of saints may bring her health and happiness.

Though not overtly, Habiba may be considered as an outsider. While her friends among girls of her age “had been to school and even passed their examinations, so that they could become secretaries and bookkeepers and dentists’ assistants” (*MM*, 127), her father “considered all this highly immoral and would not hear of allowing her to attend school.” (*ibid.*) Exclusion accompanies her even when she is in contact with her neighbours, for unlike them, she never suffers any pains: “Every one of them claimed to suffer from some affliction or indisposition. This discountenanced Habiba, for, always having been in the best of health, she could only sit and listen when the subject of ailment arose.” (*ibid.*) When she chooses to come down to their level and accompany them to the saint’s tomb, she also chooses to be an outsider in her husband’s life and world.

Form

In terms of form, this is a successful story as Bowles recreates a community with its backward and its enlightened members, and sets up a moment of crisis which will have permanent consequences. There will be no return to normality for this couple.

“**The Eye**” (In *MM* but accessed in *PB: Stories*, Penguin 2000, 269–276)

Summary

The nameless first-person narrator is an expatriate who has lived in Tangier for at least fifty years (270) and who tells a story he has heard on the “cocktail-party circuit.” (269) We assume that the protagonist is a man, on account of his relations with the male native characters in the story, they would have been different, more difficult, had it been a woman. The outline is told in the first three paragraphs.

A Canadian called Duncan Marsh, purportedly from Vancouver, came alone to Tangier “[t]en or twelve years ago” (*ibid.*), rented a furnished house, replacing the cook with another, and died upon being

flown back to Canada, after suffering for months from an illness that affected his digestive system. The story could have ended there, for, as the narrator says, “In all this there was nothing extraordinary.” (270) He says that there have been several cases of “slow poisoning by native employees” during his “five decades in Tangier.” (*ibid.*)

The story is therefore potentially a crime story, for there is a victim but no culprit, and the narrator justifies this by saying that such cases are almost never investigated for lack of proof. The narrator then adds two details which are what sparked his curiosity and the reader’s: one to do with a potential motive and the other possibly related to the *modus operandi* of the killing. The victim had engaged a night-watchman and had provided him with a “notarized letter” that assured him financial aid “in the event that he should be obliged to leave Morocco.” (*ibid.*) The wording here leads one to conjecture that because Marsh has left Morocco to return to Canada, perhaps that financial aid is continuing from some source although Marsh is dead. The second piece of intriguing information – indeed, the narrator says that for him, this information is what “made the story take on life” (270)– is that the physician who supervised Marsh’s removal from the house to the airport noted deep incisions on the soles of his feet “systematically marked” and “in the form of crude patterns.” Apparently, the cook and the watchman showed “astonishment and dismay” on seeing the state of their employer’s feet. (*ibid.*)

The narrator then begins to make his own conjectures, which, as the reader will later realise, serve to throw him or her off track: “There could be little doubt that the boy was guilty.” He is pointing the finger at the night-watchman, who brought in another woman “(very likely from his own family)” (*ibid.*) to do the cooking, thus he seems to have both the motive –economic– and the access to the food. What does not fit in with this possible explanation is the mutilation of the feet. The narrator calls it “bravado” (271) and a “patient, careful, methodical” slow poisoner would never attract attention to him or herself in such a fashion. So again, for want of further proof, the case seems to have been dropped even by the amateur sleuth, the narrator.

Then, by chance, new information comes to light which will eventually lead the narrator, if not the police, to draw more definitive conclusions. “[P]erhaps five years ago,” (271) says the narrator, an American resident put him on the track of the night-watchman. Bowles has called this character Larbi Lairini, the same name as his friend the storyteller Larbi Layachi, even the second name is similar. The narrator contacts the night-watchman, now working as a waiter, who shows him the document. Two points are of interest, the first is the date, June 11, 1966 –a time when Bowles himself was visited in Tangier by the Beats and other Westerners– and this gives a date of the late 1970s for the telling of the

story, since it is said to tell of events just over a decade earlier, thus the American's information about the watchman would have been given around 1975. The most important thing about the date of the document is that it makes it appear authentic and credible. Again, the story could have ended there as the night-watchman assures the narrator that he got no financial gain after his employer's death.

The second point concerns the wording of the document, that one hundred pounds per month would be paid to Larbi "*for as long as I live*" (272; the whole document is in italics). The narrator leaves the watchman, but these words echo in his mind for weeks. Again, he works on a possible hypothesis: that Marsh had made official an arrangement that was already in place, that he needed the watchman's help and it was in the watchman's interest to give it and to try to keep Marsh alive. The narrator admits to this conjecture being "melodramatic" (273), but his curiosity will not be curbed and he feels sure the watchman knows more than he is telling. He will need an incentive and the right circumstances for his possible "confession." The narrator speaks to him in the local dialect of Arabic and offers him fifteen thousand francs to take him to the scene of the crime – the house.

The narrator's plan works, as the watchman takes him there and proceeds to describe succeeding episodes of the story that occurred in the different rooms and spaces of the house. Larbi provides an explanation of events, but at the end of the story there is no full clarification and one is left with a sense of mystery.

Larbi takes the narrator to the patio and explains that the trouble started there. The cook who came with the rented house was careless and the food was bad, so Marsh asked Larbi to find a replacement for her. The new cook, Meriam, came with the disadvantage that two or three days a week, she had to bring her little daughter with her to work. Marsh complained to no avail about the noise the little girl made as she played in the patio, so one day he went down and gave her a fright: "He got on all fours, put his face close to the little girl's face, and frowned at her so fiercely that she began to scream." (274) The upshot is that the girl is traumatised, almost dies of a fever and is left a cripple. Meriam consults several *fqihs* and the conclusion is that the "Nazarine" has put the evil eye on the little girl. To counteract the spell, Meriam should administer "certain substances" to Marsh (275), nothing harmful, apparently, just medicines to relax him so that "when the time came to undo the spell he would not make any objections" (*ibid.*) But the substances make Marsh seriously ill, and even a trip to hospital in London does not cure him. As Marsh suspects that his food is being tampered with, he draws up the agreement with Larbi, but Larbi does not control the *fqihs* who will attempt to remove the curse. Later he learns that Marsh was dragged out

and up the hillside to a well, where the incisions were made in his feet so the blood would drip into the well, and so, it was believed, the little girl would be cured. Larbi did the cleaning up afterwards, but never heard whether the girl was cured or not. So the narrator paid eighteen thousand francs (three thousand to the guard in the house) for his story, which ends in “disappointment,” as the guilt cannot be pinned on anyone in particular, and the root cause of all the problem is “ancient ignorance.” (277)

Discussion of the themes

Like Bowles’s novels and some of his best stories, such as “A Distant Episode,” this story concerns the interactions of expatriates and natives. Here, the protagonist, Duncan Marsh, is a loner as well as an outsider, he has no family and we are told of no friends, therefore he is completely vulnerable to any hazards he might be exposed to. We are not told why he has come to Tangier or how he supports himself, whether he does any work or has private income. He does not appear to have economic problems, but on the other hand, the mention of the rented furnished house being “correspondingly inexpensive” (269) suggests that, like many expatriates, the Bowleses included, he resided in Tangier because the living was much cheaper than in America or Europe.

We cannot place Marsh in an existential framework because there is no suggestion that he felt unfulfilled or was escaping from his former life. That other English-speaking residents failed to rally round to help him in his predicament is explained in the first paragraph as being on account of his perceived bad luck. That he had called his misfortune “down upon himself” is reason enough to avoid him, lest it be contagious, thus the man and his problems became “taboo.” (*ibid.*) The very expression “down upon himself” is reminiscent of Bowles’s second novel *Let It Come Down*.

In the first outline of the story which the narrator traces, we are told that the cook who came with the rented accommodation was dismissed and a “teenage” (*ibid.*) night-watchman was installed. The youth of the local employee and the fact that he was to be available at night open the context up to suspicions of homoeroticism on the part of Marsh, a situation not uncommon in Tangier at the time. But this hypothesis is not made explicit by the narrator and no further evidence is provided to follow up that suggestion. So, momentarily, it is a possible false lead for the reader.

The locations of the story are Canada, Tangier, London, Tangier again, and finally, a return to Canada. London provided two months’ refuge and restoration, which were insufficient to undo the harm done in Tangier. North Africa is a hazardous place for Marsh, and as it says in the opening sentence of the tale, he “would have done better to stay away.” (*ibid.*) Not only does Tangier place the safety of the foreigner in jeopardy, but the house itself becomes a trap, almost Gothic in its description. There

is a “forest towering behind it” (273) and three or four flights of stairs which seem labyrinthine; the guardian appears, “eyeing” the narrator with mistrust (*ibid.*), where the word *eyeing* takes on a specially menacing significance. The walls are damp and covered in mildew (274), the patio, where the trouble began, is almost claustrophobic with its “high phylodendron,” (*ibid.*) which, though its name means love plant, sounds as though its branches or dendrites are suffocating tentacles, and Marsh was dragged through a “tangle of undergrowth” (276) up to the old stone well to be bled.

But ironically, the locals believe that the danger emanates from the foreigner and is directed at them. They are not the source of the evil eye, but are convinced that the intruder casts the evil eye on a vulnerable member of their community, the little girl. The trouble is caused by beliefs, and if belief is based on ignorance and is held to with stubbornness, no reason is going to counteract its power.

Bowles has woven magic into several of his works, and Allen Hibbard, who knew him well, as we saw, dedicated a book to the subject: *Paul Bowles: Magic and Morocco* (2004). As he says in his opening chapter:

What follows is an extended meditation on the intriguing relationship between Paul Bowles and Morocco, on the nature of those changes that took place inside him as a result of his sustained interaction with the country, its people and culture. More specifically, I am interested in how Morocco, a place where, especially when he first came there, the power of magic was yet integrally woven into the fabric of belief, enabled Bowles to develop his own imaginative powers and persona. Those who visited Bowles in Tangier often thought of him as a sort of sorcerer, magician, or guru –someone who could ever so cleverly orchestrate the forces around him simply because he understood those forces so deeply and intuitively. This essential quality lies at the heart of Bowles’s unique creative genius. (10)

Bowles himself did not believe in magic, just as he did not subscribe to any religion. As Hibbard finds:

As much as Bowles was fascinated by the idea of a world in which people believed in the supernatural, he himself, a product of the modern, scientific Western world, could not so easily abandon his skepticism toward magic. His rational, calculating mind always kicked in. (105)

This judgement is based on Bowles's own affirmations:

Bowles's views toward magic, in particular, toward the *djinn*, resemble those submitted by anthropologists such as Westermarck. In conversations with Ira Cohen, Bowles delineates between male and female *djunun*, noting that the Hammra seek out water and could sometimes take human form, possessing individuals. These unwanted, mischievous, or evil spirits can be exorcised by various means, such as those employed by the Hamadcha and other cults. When Cohen asks Bowles flat out whether he believed in the existence of *djinn*, Bowles replies:

No, no. I believe in the existence of them as projected by common belief Obviously they don't exist outside the minds of people who believe in them. If they all believe in them, then they do exist. For them they exist, or it's as though they existed and therefore they exist. I can't believe in their objective existence, obviously. [note 70]⁴⁰

Bowles, like Westermarck, places the emphasis on belief. If people believe in these supernatural presences then –for them at least– they are real, and this is what matters. In Morocco he saw that others can act on beliefs wholly alien to us. (50–1)

That Bowles knew about local magical practices and rituals is confirmed by Hibbard and Cohen:

Bowles also talked with Cohen about various magic potions used to effect spells. *Fasoukh*, for instance, he describes as “a purifier, a warder off of evil. At the same time, you can do evil with it if you work it backwards, against a person.” [note 74]⁴¹

Remarks such as these show that Bowles was thoroughly versed in the same kinds of rituals, beliefs, and practices anthropologists have noticed and studied. (53) His knowledge makes the descriptions and accounts of rituals in his stories all the more credible. For example, the cutting of the symbolic “crosses and circles” (271) in Marsh's feet is not arbitrary and the *fqihs* in the story are attempting to ward off the evil they perceive in the foreigner. The “letting of blood” (Hibbard 2004, 78) as a purifying ritual is also present in *Let It Come Down*, where Dyar is the witness.

⁴⁰ The reference in Hibbard's note 70 is to Ira Cohen, “Interview with Paul Bowles, 1965,” in *Conversations with Paul Bowles*, ed. Gena Dagel Caponi, 1993, 17.

⁴¹ Note 74 refers to Cohen's interview, p. 24.

(*ibid.*) The narrative success of Bowles in these accounts of magical dealings depends upon a very fine balance between the credible and convincing on the one hand, and the mysterious and unaccounted-for. The mystery must not be dispelled or the magic will be revealed as fraudulent or infantile. The inconclusive ending of this story maintains the mystery.

As Hibbard reminds us, Bowles was not attracted to magic suddenly upon encountering it in Morocco, the interest had been there since his childhood: “Paul Bowles was predisposed to worlds of magic and sorcery. The patterns of life and belief in Morocco merely reinforced a way of being in the world that had begun to incubate and grow within him long before he encountered Morocco.” (91) Richard F. Patteson also points to this early and perennial fascination:

Bowles had long been fascinated with the role of sorcery in Moroccan life, but his interest in the metamorphosing powers of magic extends even further back, into his earliest childhood. The stories he told himself then, many of which he wrote down, were often tales of secret, magical places that no one else could enter. (Patteson 1987, 129-130, also quoted by Hibbard 2004, 91)

The stories that Bowles wrote as a youngster created magical worlds, but no doubt lacked the authority for adult readers of the anthropological background, even research, he provided in his adult works. Bowles shows how the locals are convinced of the power of the evil eye, words like “agreed” and “equally clear” indicate their unanimity:

Meriam [...] consulted one fqih after another. They agreed that “the eye” had been put on the child; it was equally clear that the Nazarene for whom she worked had done it. What they told her she must do, Larbi explained, was to administer certain substances to Marsh which eventually would make it possible to counteract the spell. (275)

That the night-watchmen also believed in the magic is confirmed by the next sentence: “This was absolutely necessary, he said, staring at me gravely.” (*ibid.*) Larbi would have nothing to do with the ritual to remove the spell, he abandoned the premises. But the procedures were explained to him as he knew that the same symbols had to be cut into Marsh’s feet as had been drawn on paper for the little girl. (276) It is not stated, but we may infer, that Marsh’s feet were the focus of the ritual since the little girl had had her legs and feet affected. When asked

whether administering Meriam's "concoctions" (275) and the cleansing ritual had caused Marsh's death, Larbi is non-committal: "He died because his hour has come." (277)

Certainly there is an element of predator becomes prey in this story. The little girl was terrified and traumatised because Marsh got down on all fours and frowned at her. (274) Presumably, he squatted down to place himself on her level, but she must have interpreted his attitude as that of a wild animal, although he did not bark or howl or roar. He did smile when he saw how much he had frightened her. He paid dearly, indeed, with his life, for such an innocent reprimand. Hibbard remarks on the predator-prey theme in Bowles:

Some have even suggested he was himself spider-like, spinning webs into which he lured his prey. Indeed, Bowles was fascinated with the relationship between predator and prey. He keenly observed the habits and stratagems of poisonous spiders and scorpions as they lured their unwitting victims into death traps. These kinds of moves, too, resemble the work of the conjuror or magician. The plot is planned, the web is spun, and the predator sits aside, waiting patiently. Knowledge of the ruse, of the trick, is carefully concealed. Success depends upon careful dissembling. (109)

Hibbard speaks of a "sadistic streak" in Bowles, of his own admission:

Call it morbid curiosity or simply scientific interest: Bowles seemed especially fascinated with specimens of life that were teetering on the edge –between life and death, between sanity and madness, between vulnerability and safety, between terror and calm. He was a connoisseur of danger. (111)

If there is sadism in Marsh's smile, there is none in the machinations of Meriam, her family and the fqih, they merely want to restore the little girl to health. If the foreigner's health suffers in the course of the application of the "antidote," that is a side-effect. When Meriam says "I've done what I could [...] It's in the hands of Allah." (275) she is placing the magic within the frame of Islam, not some pagan belief. In his article "Paul Bowles's Portrayal of Islam in His Moroccan Short Stories," Asad Al-Ghalith has much negative criticism to make of Bowles's "penchant for suggesting an inaccurate image of Islam." (Al-Ghalith, 103) Al-Ghalith asserts, quite rightly, that Bowles creates characters "who misunderstand or deviate from the basic principles and

injunctions of Islam with the same lack of insight into Islam that Bowles had.” (*ibid.*) Part of the problem lay in the local people he associated with: “It appears Bowles did not have much contact with the intellectual and more devout Muslims, but rather preferred associations with the deviant or weak followers who were willing to share in his life-style.” (105). It is only fair to say here, though, that the narrator accuses Meriam of participating in “ancient ignorance,” not that she is acting according to Muslim precepts, even if her advisers, the *fqih*, are supposedly holy men. Bowles, as we saw, did also remove from his collection *Their Heads are Green and Their Hands are Blue* the story “Mustapha and His Friends,” which gave one of the more disparaging views of Muslims as illiterate and violent people. Al-Ghalith takes on the question of Islam and fate in Bowles’s portrayals of the fatalistic Muslim and the misrepresentation of the Islamic concept of *Maktoub* (what is written). Bowles does not present the story from the point of view of Meriam and her family, but the reader must infer that she had two choices: to do nothing or to pay money she could hardly afford to take advice and then act upon it. Having done this, she saw that she could do nothing further. It is in this light that we can interpret her sad interjection: “I’ve done what I could [...] It’s in the hands of Allah.” So it is not as if Bowles were indicating that Muslims are lazy or inert because of this belief. In defence of Bowles, we have to say that Meriam’s conduct here does not go against what Al-Ghalith describes as a proper understanding of the will of Allah:

Bowles, like many non-Muslims in the West (including many erudite scholars) perceives of Middle-Eastern Muslims as being “fatalists” in a pejorative sense. Fate to the Western reader carries the implication that the believer is completely without free will to change what is predetermined by God as a blind force. [...] However, in Islam, it is intrinsically understood that one’s belief in Allah’s merciful and compassionate determining will does not necessitate that one give up individual effort or take no responsibility for his/her actions; in fact, it is obvious logic that drives the individual to take the initiative within the design of Allah. Although the Muslim believer cannot know the will of Allah, there is a mystery and promise in acting upon it. (107)

Thus the mystery of the ending Bowles has given the story regarding the future of the little girl matches the inherent relationship of devotion and faith in lieu of certainty which the Muslim believer enjoys towards Allah, which is not so different from some Western Christian views on predetermination.

Bowles confronts the issue of magic and Islam more explicitly in another story, "The Hyena," published in *Pages from Cold Point and Other Stories* (London: Peter Owen, 1968) and included in *Paul Bowles: Stories*, 212–5. I am not going to discuss the story individually as, although it is set in Morocco, in the Khang el Ghar mountains, it is a purely animal story, with no human characters. These animals can be surrogate humans, however, as writing about his readings of animal stories and resulting attempts at writing such myths himself, Bowles does talk of "animals disguised as 'basic human' beings." (*Without Stopping*, 261–2) The two protagonists are the eponymous hyena and a stork, and the story is similar to Aesop's "The Wolf and the Stork" or "The Fox and the Crow," but here, the stork gets eaten. Although the stork has the reputation of being "a saint and a sage" (*Stories*, 213), he forfeits his life because, in his curiosity, he wants to test out an assertion about magical powers. The assertion is that if a hyena "can put a little of his urine on someone, that one will have to walk after the hyena to whatever place the hyena wants him to go." (212) The stork meets a hyena for the first time and cannot resist getting into conversation with him over the question of the legitimacy of magic: "Magic is against the will of Allah." (213) The hyena says that this is a lie and he speaks low so that the stork has to draw nearer. He is seduced into a conversation about sin and the will of Allah, and it says at least three times that he stood thinking; he sounds like the narrator of "The Eye": "You have given me something to think about. That is good." (214) He has been thinking but not using his head, for he postpones his departure so long that in the dark he hits the mountainside and breaks a wing. The wily hyena tells the stork to follow him to safety and lures him into a cave, without the help of any magical urine, and kills him there. The hyena thanks Allah for giving him something better than magic: a brain (214). Before he dies, the stork has to admit that there is no magic: "There is no power beyond the power of Allah." (*ibid.*) The stork learned this to his cost, for it was an opportunity for learning that came too late for him.

To return to "The Eye," this story is a good example of a domestic version of the "insights into the subtleties of domestic and public intrigue" in Bowles's stories, as noted on the fly-sheet of *Midnight Mass*. Poverty, money and the chance of a bargain also form part of the intrigue. As Larbi pointed out, "There would have been no trouble at all [...] if only Marsh had been satisfied with Yasmina, the cook whose wages were included in the rent." (274) It is ironic that such a simple step as asking a cook to draw her wages without working for them should ultimately bring about one's death. A further irony is that Marsh asked Yasmina to leave on account of the bad food she served up, only to be killed by the food provided by the new cook. Initially, Yasmina

might have been a suspect; perhaps she wanted revenge for losing her job, but she was paid anyway, Marsh was in fact paying twice, so she had no need for revenge, as she was better off. Yet another irony concerning money is that Meriam “was earning relatively high wages” from Marsh (275) and therefore was able to consult “one fqih after another.” (*ibid.*) Presumably, their advice was not free, and so it was Marsh’s own money that was paying for his own poisoning and death-sentence.

There is a similarity between this story and Bowles’s own domestic arrangements. From as early as his wife Jane’s arrival in Morocco in 1948, Jane came to know Cherifa, who sold corn in the Grand Socco. She became obsessed with her and her “otherness” (Hibbard 2004, 56), and learned Maghrebi, or *darija*, the local Arabic dialect, in order to talk to her in her own language. In her poverty, Cherifa naturally assumed that because Jane was American, she must be rich and placed increasing demands upon her, escalating from a pair of shoes to the Bowles’s own house (Hibbard 2004, 57). There was a power struggle between the couple’s individual friends in the local community, between Cherifa and the young Moroccan painter Ahmed Yacoubi: “Yacoubi took a strong disliking to Cherifa. Yacoubi, perhaps as a means of exerting his power in the situation, warned Paul that he should steer clear of Cherifa because she was a witch and would seize any chance to poison him.” (57–8) But Jane was in greater danger than Paul and after her stroke, which occurred when Paul was returning from Ceylon, “At times, Paul pinned the blame for Jane’s ill health on Cherifa, suggesting black magic may have been involved.” (58)

Michael Rogers interviewed Bowles for *Rolling Stone* magazine and specifically asked about Jane’s stroke. Bowles, in his western persona, attributes it to a combination of her fasting during Ramadan, and ironically, in seeming contradiction, her heavy drinking. But adopting his “Eastern persona,” through which he delighted in shocking his western interlocutors, he gives a very black image of Cherifa:

“This maid was a horror. We used to find packets of magic around the house. In fact, in my big plant, in the roots, she hid a magic packet. She wanted to control the household through the plant. The plant was her proxy or stooge, and she could give it orders before she left and see that they were carried out during the night. She really believed these things.” (Paul Bowles, in interview with Michael Rogers in Caponi, *Conversations*, 82–3)

Bowles wrote about this plant in a piece entitled “The Cherifa Plant” in *Yesterday’s Perfume*, and he tells how Cherifa menaced him

when he tried to remove it from Jane's apartment.⁴² The plant may have come to inspire the sinister philodendron in "The Eye." We do not know what substances Meriam put in Marsh's food, but the contents of the magic packet Cherifa hid in the roots of the plant include "pubic hair, dried blood, fingernails, antimony and I don't know what all." (Rogers in Caponi 1993, 82–3)

In spite of all this, Bowles did not believe in magic, only his writing persona assumes the position of believing in it, or at least, acknowledging that if others believe in it, that makes it exist. An incident where his Jaguar car was wrecked in an accident, caused, according to his chauffeur Temsemany, by a *djinn*, is related in a letter to a friend as if this were the true cause. As we saw, he includes a similar incident in "Mejdoub," where everyone believes the protagonist has caused an accident and he temporarily profits from the power this belief gives him. As Hibbard notes on the real-life accident with the Jaguar:

How Bowles relates this incident deserves as much attention as the incident itself. He stands aside, a seemingly dispassionate observer, describing what happened and how people responded as though it were perfectly natural, as though he himself found these supernatural explanations wholly plausible. His pose is that of the invisible spectator, the artist/anthropologist simply looking on, detached. The more bizarre, outlandish, perverse, or macabre the event, the more it enlivened Bowles's curiosity; normal, ordinary behaviour held little interest for him. Tangier, a site where incredulous stories regularly were produced and circulated, was thus a perfect place for him. Bowles took those stories, ran them through the mill of his imagination, and retold them to Western audiences, ever aware of an appetite for exotic tales. (2004, 54–5)

Form

Bowles makes his narrator attract attention to how the story is composed. The narrator, though nameless, has a personality and his knowledge grows in the course of the story; the knowledge of the reader runs parallel to that of the narrator as he chooses just when to disclose certain details. At first, he knows no more about Duncan Marsh's tragedy than all the other expatriates on the "cocktail-party circuit," though he does not actually confess to being a frequenter of that circuit. There was no personal contact, as he hastens to tell us in the second paragraph: "I never saw him, nor do I know anyone who claims to have seen him." (269) Thus everything comes on hearsay. That the facts of

⁴² "The Cherifa Plant," in Cherie Nutting with Paul Bowles, *Yesterday's Perfume: An Intimate Memoir of Paul Bowles*, 59.

the matter might have been elaborated upon because of this lack of first-hand witness is suggested by the narrator's accusing the "more irresponsible residents" of "myth-making." (*ibid.*) If the local people invent stories of magic, then the Westerners are not so dissimilar to them, as the narrator again accuses them: "These people often have reactions similar to those of certain primitive groups" (*ibid.*). Perhaps it is part of the narrator's persona to be delicate about accusations of Orientalist attitudes.

The narrator's next personal intervention is to tell us that he has lived in Tangier for fifty years, so his residence was concurrent with that of Marsh, although they did not meet or know of each other, and that, in that time, several expatriates had been poisoned by their servants. The narrator's specificity over dates also helps us to anchor the story and makes his personal intervention in it and the telling of it more convincing. After the narrator has recorded that there were two further pieces of information, he intervenes to tell us that it gave him food for thought: "I thought about it." (270) The story intrigues him, but for want of further concrete evidence, he puts it out of his mind: "I myself thought of it less often, having no more feasible hypotheses to supply." (271)

Then an advance in the narrative is made when the nameless American puts the narrator on the track of the night-watchman. If we look carefully at his words, we can guess at why he approached the narrator, of all people: "This information was handed me for what it was worth, said the American, in the event that I felt inclined to make use of it." (*ibid.*) The reader conjectures that the narrator might make use of it, not to go to the police, or to attempt blackmail, but to follow clues, put them together and complete the story. This makes of the narrator a sort of Bowles figure, an expatriate writer living in Tangier, even with "deficient Arabic." (273)

Bowles makes the narrator stretch out the story as it continues in a series of slow steps. First, he is mystified by the agreement between Marsh and the watchman: "I no longer understood anything." (272) So he says farewell to the watchman, thinking no further progress can be made: "I had no intentions then. I might return soon or I might never go back." (*ibid.*) But as we saw, the phrase "*for as long as I live,*" which he finds to have such melodramatic reverberations, echoes in his mind and will not leave him in peace. His unconscious mind seems to suggest a way forward: "Slowly I came to believe that if only I could talk to the watchman, in Arabic, and inside the house itself, I might be in a position to see things more clearly." (*ibid.*)

Although the crime, if it was a crime, took place a dozen years before, as the narrator is taken to the crime scene, he becomes excited:

“The absurd conviction that I was about to understand everything had taken possession of me; I noticed that I was breathing more quickly.” (274) His rational mind tells him he is going to discover nothing (“absurd”) but the story has taken a hold, taken possession, of his unconscious mind.

The narrator’s telling is a frame for the embedded account of the “truth” by the night-watchman, Larbi. This account has cost the narrator eighteen thousand francs. So the writer-narrator either has a curiosity which he is willing to indulge at some cost, or he thinks a story has to be paid for and strikes a bargain, or indeed, if he is a writer, though we are not told this, he himself can make money out of it. As Larbi tells his story, Bowles’s narrator becomes the “invisible spectator” Hibbard referred to, as indeed did also Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, who used the phrase for the title of his biography. Bowles describes his narrator as he listens to Larbi’s account, although he is cold, he suppresses his feelings and keeps still. That the feeling might be disapproval is implicit:

I asked no questions while he talked; I made a point of keeping my face entirely expressionless, thinking that if he noticed the least flicker of disapproval he might stop. The sun had gone behind the trees and the patio was chilly. I had a strong desire to get up and walk back and forth as he was doing, but I thought even that might interrupt him. Once stopped, the flow might not resume. (275)

Disappointed at the end, he tells us again that he “thought about it on my way home in the taxi.” (277)

Indeed, the story has many aspects which invite our meditations: he “thought about it” at least three times. The reader may be as struck by it as the narrator, and it is Bowles’s fine story-telling through his narrator that achieves this effect. The story describes a moment of crisis in the life of a fairly ordinary man. The crisis begins with the frightening of the little girl, where the protagonist acts in total ignorance of the possibility of a cause-and-effect chain of events that will lead to his death. Although the narrator, with his western point of view, may bring different possible explanations to this apparent crime story, which turns out not to be a deliberate homicide, in the end, there is only one version, one perception, of the whole adventure.

Bowles also gives a symmetry of design both in space and time, through the Canada –Tangier – Canada location, whereby the protagonist comes full circle, leaving Canada and going out to Tangier to live, only to return to Canada to die. The temporal unfolding of the story involves a looking back of several years, with a beginning that tells all in

outline in three paragraphs, and an end in which the embedded story of Larbi fills out the details of that outline in the last four pages. The fact that it is a story purportedly about magic and that the supposed magic and its effects –both the “spell” and its antidote– are left unexplained at the end, gives the whole a dream-like quality based on the myths of such ideas, bedded in popular lore, as the evil eye.

There are several instances of irony in the tale, as we have seen, no less so the ending, where both the narrator, who has paid a sum of money in order to learn the truth, and the reader, are cheated of the truth. Were Bowles to have had the narrator learn from Larbi that the girl had been cured, we would have been invited to believe in magic. On the other hand, had it been confirmed that the girl had not been cured, we would have condemned the efforts made by the fqih outright. Leaving the ending open suggests that there is no truth, or that there are things in life which science cannot explain, but the western narrator condemns ignorance at the same time as he understands and approves of family love, as he acknowledges in his poetic summing-up: “only a mother moving in the darkness of ancient ignorance.” (*ibid.*) So in this story there is intrigue, there is a hint of an animal-human relationship, but in the end there is no bargain, no healing and no learning.

4. 2. 7. *Unwelcome Words* (1988)

As Allen Hibbard points out: “The stories brought together in *Midnight Mass* (1981) and *Unwelcome Words* (1988) (Bolin, California: Tombouctou Books) have not yet enjoyed the popularity that those in Bowles’s *Collected Stories* have, despite the inclusion of many of them in *A Distant Episode: The Selected Stories* (1988).” (1993, 102) So I will deal in detail only with the title story of *Unwelcome Words*. As a volume, it seems to have turned out to be better, albeit little known, than one might have expected at the outset. It does not appear to have had a very auspicious beginning. The publisher of Tombouctou, Michael Wolfe, was visiting Bowles in Tangier and asked him if he had written anything recently. Bowles showed him three monologues and he later sent on whatever stories he happened to have completed shortly afterward. The three dramatic monologues are “Massachusetts 1932,” “New York 1965,” and “Tangier 1975.” As their titles indicate, they deal with three very different places and times in Bowles’s life, with the last one being of most interest to us. As regards its composition, Bowles confided in Hibbard:

I heard the voice of the woman telling about the peacocks, and heard it very strongly in my ear and so I started writing what she

would say, and what she did say, in her kind of speech. Once I had written one, I found it fun to become someone else and write what words I heard in my head –rather like writing music (personal interview). (Hibbard 1993, 123)

It is interesting that he should compare the composition of the monologue to that of writing music, his first career, but there are obviously literary models here, too, such as Robert Browning in “My Last Duchess” or the voice of Molly Bloom towards the end of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. For this dramatic mode to be successful, the importance of getting the voice just right cannot be overestimated, which is probably why Bowles so often portrayed expatriates like himself and his wife here and elsewhere. The lack of punctuation helps one penetrate the speaker’s mind, in this case that of an unnamed expatriate wife who is obsessed with a problem with another expatriate woman who happens to be wealthy and has asked them to stay at her house in Tangier. Thus we enter a mind that seems to be almost dreaming. This incursion into a different fictional mode parallels that of the two stories, “Unwelcome Words” and “In Absentia”, which both take on the form of unilateral or univocal letters, and again, rely for their success on not falsifying the voice of the speaker/writer.

Summary of “Unwelcome Words”

This story presents a new framework to the reader in that Bowles has written it in epistolary form⁴³. Furthermore, the protagonist is much closer to the author himself than the main characters have ever been, so much so, that the letter-writer actually refers to himself as “Paul Bowles.” The story consists of a series of six letters from the fictionalized “Paul Bowles” to a friend whom he seems to be admonishing. This friend is older and is confined to a wheelchair as a result of a stroke. The letters have no date but are obviously written from contemporary Tangier, as they focus upon the growing problems an expatriate faces when living there. We have no replies from the recipient, and Hibbard comments: “Both correspondents seem immobilized in time and space. The unnamed recipient of the letters not only is physically constrained but reads no literature written before the nineteenth century and experiences failure of memory.” (*ibid.*, 128)

⁴³ As we have said, there is only one other story in epistolary form: “In Absentia”.

Themes

The same “food” but different, is the verdict of Allen Hibbard when talking metaphorically about Bowles’s last stories:

These recent volumes, however, contain many splendid stories, demonstrating the author’s versatility and mastery of the genre. Bowles does not simply serve up tried and popular dishes, though familiar flavors are recognizable. He rather offers novel treats, lending both expected and surprising pleasures.

These later stories, consistently sharper than those of *Things Gone and Things Still Here*, depict a more settled mode of life and experience. There are, to be sure, expatriates in many of these stories, yet they tend now, like Bowles himself during this period, to be rather sedentary, and the conflicts that arise generally pertain to managing local help or dealing with property, rather than those arising from more daring wanderings into hostile, foreign terrain. (1993, 102)

The themes covered in “Unwelcome words” are those of postcolonialism from the point of view, not of the local people, but of the remaining “colonialists”, or expatriates. Although the recipient of the letters is far away, “Paul Bowles” seems able to assume that he will understand and sympathise when he enumerates all the ways in which daily life in Tangier has deteriorated since it ceased being the International Zone. He complains precisely of the postal service, so one wonders how long it might have taken for these fictional letters to reach their destination had they really been sent. Expatriates are no longer safe in their homes, says “Bowles”, giving instances of a Jewish woman and two old Americans being targeted by locals for money supposedly in their possession. Thus the predator-prey theme reappears, but the local example is set in a wider context of deep pessimism where “Paul Bowles” suggests to his correspondent that in spite of having lived through the horrors of the Second World War –this is implicit only–, there is more horror to come:

I think the most important characteristic you and I have in common [...] is a conviction that the human world has entered into a terminal period of disintegration and destruction, and that this will end in a state of affairs so violent and chaotic as to make any attempts at maintaining government or order wholly ineffective. (CS 295)

One wonders if Bowles the real author is truly so pessimistic or is just creating a dramatic alter ego. The theme of death is included ironically

and humoristically when Bowles's own death is announced: "Paul's dead." (292) This turns out to be a joke played on a rather unwelcome visitor.⁴⁴ Fortunately, Bowles was to live a good decade longer, though he did not write much more.

Form

As Hibbard notes, Bowles remained loyal to themes and the realistic form throughout his writing, but did innovate towards the end of his writing career:

Midnight Mass signals stylistic as well as thematic shifts. Bowles's characteristic sense of sureness and economy is as sharp as ever. Each sentence drives the story a step closer to its logical outcome. The storyteller gives his listeners what they need when they need it. We get not a word more than necessary. These stories, especially those in *Unwelcome Words*, have that pellucid, bonelike quality we associate with Beckett's later work. This the writer achieves in part by abandoning the use of quotation marks to indicate dialogue, so that speech, description, and the subtle intrusion of the narrator's ironic wit merge fluidly, creating the semblance of a seamless, integrated whole. (*ibid.*, 102)

The fact that these letters are not answered means that we can only conjecture about a possible answering voice, and it also means that they read rather like the monologues of the other three stories. The main difference is that this time, the voice is much closer to that of Bowles himself in his letters and journals. Even in those, he did try to dramatise moments as if his non-fiction writing were going to be subject to as much scrutiny by the recipients as any novel or short story. We must not forget that he was also a professional journalist, in the sense of travel writer. Thus we have moments of crisis, often based on culture contact, attention to voice and language used and an equal attention to the structure of the piece, in its form of six letters. The whole thing seems to come full circle as "Paul Bowles" sets out to inform and involve his correspondent, but by the end complains that he appears to have got nowhere, the correspondent is not corresponding in any way. Hibbard astutely ties in the conclusion with the tone and the message and the self-consciousness about language and creative writing:

⁴⁴ Hibbard recognised that Bowles had told this story about himself to a group of friends he was entertaining, and on being confronted about it later, more or less confessed that he had taken the story from elsewhere. (Hibbard 1993, 127 and note 83, p. 140)

Toward the end of the series of letters in “Unwelcome Words,” Bowles notes that his correspondent has not been appreciating his letters. In the face of what he takes to be hostility, the writer explains, in desperation, “There’s obviously nothing I can do from here to help you” (*UW*, 85). He does not close, however, before offering a final plea that the correspondent at least recognize the noble intent his words represented: “I hope you’ll remember (you won’t) that I made this small and futile attempt to help you remain human” (*UW*, 85–86). (*ibid.* 131)

Indeed, it is easy to forget that “Paul Bowles” is not Paul Bowles, and much as he insists that his fictional work has no message, we cannot help but read into this a plea to all his readers to look for the deeply human in his stories. They may be overly dramatic, even cruel and disgusting, especially those written in the aftermath of a world war, but Bowles is saying that there are people like those he portrays, the predators, with their reasons for taking advantage of others, and the vulnerable who succumb. The voice we hear in this story corroborates the voice we hear behind the narrators of all his fictions, and contributes to making it all the more authentic.

4. 3. Conclusions on Bowles’s short fiction

One cannot say that Bowles’s short fiction has been neglected in comparison to his major novels like *The Sheltering Sky*, but few people in addition to Hibbard, Lasdun and Benlemlih have contributed much. Thus we hope that these perhaps over-detailed analyses of the major stories such as “The Delicate Prey”, “A Distant Episode” and “Here To Learn”, alongside less-well-known ones like “The Husband” or “The Empty Amulet” can add something to our knowledge of how and why Bowles can be considered one of the best storytellers in general, quite apart from his role as intermediary working on the interface of cultural boundaries.

For his western readership, Bowles has mined a profitable vein in his portrayal of the dangers of exotic locations and different cultures. Indeed, as we saw, he has been accused of degenerating to the aestheticisation of violence in his descriptions of victimhood. The plights of some of those preyed upon do seem to be a recycling of gratuitous tropes of trauma, but in their reenactment of situations of erroneous choices, a possible site of Orientalist encounter places the onus of blame as equally upon the western outsider.

My hypothesis on Bowles’s working formulae has proved fruitful and, I hope, confirmed, as we see how he uses myth, crises, symmetry

and other aspects of content and form in creating stories with surprise and great impact. Regarding his own assertions about his attitude towards subject matter and treatment thereof, we have to be wary. Concerning Bowles's ambiguity and understatement, as Wendy Lesser says:

The most essential aspect of Bowles's stories –the way in which things *don't* get said explicitly– is inevitably lost in any discussion of their content. Yet these stories must be talked about [...] Bowles, on the other hand, has consciously excised such narrative judgements from his own stories, leaving a gap that creates strong tension between the seemingly traditional form and the far-from-traditional voice. Moreover, the events in Bowles's stories are the sort that cry out for judgement: enormous cruelty, bizarre and inexplicable behavior, psychological and cultural conflict. Yet judgement is consistently suppressed, and therefore the events never fully take shape as “bizarre” or “cruel” –they are simply events.⁴⁵

Bowles himself, in answer to his interviewer, Oliver Evans, says that his only intention is to entertain through storytelling, that he has nothing to teach:

BOWLES: A moral message is the *last* thing I look for. I reject moral messages, unless they're my own. I don't like other people's moral messages, no! I suppose what I look for is accurate expressions, for accurate accounts of states of mind, the way in which the consciousness of each individual is reported in the book. How the author makes us believe in the reality of his characters, in the reality of his settings.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Quoted in Hibbard 1993, 247–8. See note on p. 247: “Excerpts from Wendy Lesser's review of Paul Bowles's *Collected Stories* published in *The American Book Review* May 1980. Reprinted by permission.”

⁴⁶ Quoted in Hibbard 1993, 159. See note on p. 156: “From Oliver Evans, ‘An Interview with Paul Bowles,’ *Mediterranean Review* 1:2 (Winter 1971): 3–15.”

5. General conclusions

In this study of Paul Bowles's long and short fiction set in North Africa, I have endeavoured to verify the accuracy of certain assertions regarding it and hope to have accumulated in the analysis sufficient data and detail to help us to come down on one side or the other with respect to these assertions. Firstly, by comparing his autobiography *Without Stopping* with his biographies, we see that he did not always tell the whole truth, but then, an autobiographer has that prerogative. We may ask ourselves if this matters, as regards the finished product of his writings. The consensus seems to be in the negative.

It is undeniable that his personal experiences entered his fiction and, indeed, non-fiction, in modified form, but again, very few authors will have written totally from the sources of their pure imagination, and the imagination has to be fed. Nor must we forget that one of Bowles's most admired writers, Marcel Proust, produced work based almost entirely on his lived experience. Some critics, especially Bourara, have made a distinction between his fiction and his non-fiction with regard to his personal involvement and degree of objectivity. Naturally, a novel-writer has a free hand, whereas in journalism, travel-writing in this case, Bourara feels that Bowles should have been less partial, less Orientalist. As we saw, Bourara is one of Bowles's most acerbic critics as regards impartiality and "truthfulness," even in the fiction:

Bowles is not only interested in writing a fiction but especially concerned about adequately representing the Moroccan/ "Moslem" character to the West, contradictions notwithstanding. And in the West, to be "Moslem" is to be backward, to be fatalistic—i.e, lazy and unproductive—and above all, to be actively, militantly anti-Western and anti-Christian. (Bourara 169)

So even descriptions of Bowles such as "invisible spectator" are suspect and hardly bear scrutiny, since Bowles, as a Westerner, is inevitably partial for he is catering to a western readership. Thus he writes the exotic, which is what is required and is lucrative. Undeniably, Bowles went at life "without stopping," but much of his long life was also spent at his desk or table, pen in hand.

That his fictional stories involve conflict, drama and violence is true, though extreme violence is to be found in only a small proportion of the work, which perhaps inevitably happens to be the best known. So

it stands to reason that Bowles used his experience and tales that were told to him to create fictional situations which stand out and are particularly compelling through dramatisation and exaggeration. Also, since he happened to be living at a time when the fashionable thing was to create stories about alienated, existentialist figures, then, naturally, he made the most of the disintegrating personality in a context of cultures in conflict.

My second objective was to demonstrate in greater detail what other critics had already found –and Bowles’s writer friends apparently noticed immediately upon reading *The Sheltering Sky*– that his works enact existentialist dilemmas. I also hope to have shown the orientation that Bowles has given to his existentialist discussions: the individual in a context of cultural alienation. Although the stories narrated in the novels and the short fiction that I have chosen are set in North Africa and are about this part of the world, they necessarily broach the difference or otherness in relation to, and in contrast with, the West. In *The Sheltering Sky*, which is representative of all three novels, even insofar as to admit that every character is an individual, the culture clash is inside the minds of Port and Kit, and neither of them speaks openly to the other of the cause of their suffering, but the reader is made aware. The couple have decided to come to North Africa to forget all that is related to the West after the barbarities of the war. Their first reaction to the East, and more particularly to the Sahara, unveils their real feelings towards their own civilisation and culture. It turns out that they have chosen to replace their land and their culture for one that is totally different from their own. There are different social, economic, political and ideological systems. The radical change in everything is a shock to their very identities and the alienation causes them malaise and anguish rather than refreshment.

It is undeniable that Port and Kit have been seeking the exotic side of the country, but they have not been satisfied by what they have found. There are times when they are as disappointed or even disgusted by either the people or the land as they had been by their home in America. They shed their American experiences and values but do not embrace those of North Africa. For in their inner selves, they refuse to part with their past which represents their culture. They live in a dilemma in which they suffer extremely, for they want to be separated from their past and still be united with it. They also want to be involved in the eastern culture without being integrated into it. As Port says: “It’s awful to be two things at the same time.” (SS 173) His position alludes to the impossibility of embracing two different cultures simultaneously.

Because these are existentialist characters, they founder in the interstice of nothingness between the two cultures. Of Port it is said:

The room meant very little to him; he was deeply immersed in the non being from which he has just come [...] he was somewhere, he has come back through vast regions from nowhere; there was the certitude at the core of his consciousness, but the sadness was reassuring because it alone was familiar. (9)

And towards the end of his life, in the Sahara, which he had hoped would restore him to mental and physical health, he is totally alone: “It is an existence of exile from the world. He never saw a human face or an animal; there were no familiar objects along the way, there was no ground [...]” (178).

On the whole, one may deduce that Westerners are not ready to accept any other culture that is not their own, or at least, they will not abandon willingly those aspects which they deem superior. Bowles shows through his characters that Westerners tend to perceive other cultures as inferior to their own, perpetuating the Orientalist viewpoint that Said wrote so much about. The West has inculcated in its citizens such a feeling of superiority during and after the colonial period, that even as recently as the postwar years, they find such attitudes inescapable:

The Orient was overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitiveness and so forth [...] yet the Orient suddenly appeared lamentably under humanized, anti democratic, backward, barbaric [...] the Orient was undervalued. (Said 1978, 150)

The fact that Bowles selects his native characters among the backward people may characterise his depiction as being one-sided. Though there may be a great deal of truth in his exposition of the natives in such a way, one may observe that these do not represent all Eastern people. For instance, not all women are prostitutes or maids or slaves. Men are not all barmen, dirty shoe-shiners, cheats, thieves and liars. So his view seems often biased, presenting stereotypes for Easterner people but individuals for Westerners. This is not always true of Bowles; we have to admit that the stories also involve characters who are more objective. For example, when Port accuses Abdelkader of having stolen his passport, the French Lieutenant who belongs to the colonialist camp tries his best to convince him that it is not because he is a native that he should be called a thief, and that crimes are also committed in the United States. The real thief, of course, turns out to be Eric Lyle, a European, whom Port had also suspected. By making the thief a Westerner, Bowles asserts that Westerners are not the superior race that they pretend to be,

nor are the natives the immoral race that some Westerners make them out to be. Indeed, by making Kit the slave of Belqasim at the end, he reverses the colonial power relations: a Westerner is enslaved by an Arab. Bowles shows that situations can be inverted to their opposites, and by making Kit a willing slave, Bowles questions the black/white binary oppositions involved in the colonial situation. The same reversed idea may be noticed in *Let it Come Down* when Bowles makes a Westerner kill a native. “Dyar’s criminal act of killing the sleeping Thami [...] undermines quite profoundly the pre-established assumption of the [orientalist prejudices]. Hence the key notion that the novel’s Orientalism is unwittingly subverted and interrogated from within its proper discourse.” (ElKouche, 110)

Bowles’s characters are entrapped by their own dissolving mental identities. They are also entrapped by the physical environment. Bowles uses the landscape in at least two ways in his novels and stories. It forms the hostile framework for the testing of the characters: “Bowles relies on a kind of stimulus/response form as each of his characters continues to develop in response to the environment.” (Foltz 2000, 101) It seems as though their behaviour depended on the state of the landscape they happen to be surrounded by; or as if the landscape were affected by their emotional conditions. In the case of Kit: “The wind celebrated her dark sensation of having attained a new depth of solitude.” (SS 174) And Port’s death is also “celebrated” by equivalent images in nature: “A black star appears, a point of darkness and gateway to repose [...] pierce the fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose.” (188) So nature is always there to witness the state of the protagonists, and therefore is used by Bowles in ways similar to the Romantic poets, but with a symbolism also akin to the Modernists.

As Said said, non-Orientals make things into symbols for the whole Orient:

My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations, *as representations*, not as “natural” depictions of the Orient. This evidence is found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treaties) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e. openly imaginative) text. The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. (Said 1978, 21; emphasis in text)

What Said has to say in general terms about western texts about the Orient is very true of Bowles, in spite of his being much nearer to the Orient than many other writers. Said here is partly criticising those writers of factual texts, and exonerating the fictional writers who have other purposes. Ultimately, however, the fiction writer can be as responsible as the historian or journalist for perpetuating erroneous or partial views.

As a third line of enquiry, it is not surprising that there should be shadows of nineteenth-century Romanticism in Bowles's use of nature, since we know he was fascinated by such writers as Poe, although he personally rejected the label of "Romantic." The environment, sympathetic or hostile, and it is usually the latter, forms the basis of the Gothic entrapment of all of Bowles's principal characters.

My analysis of the Gothic framework of Bowles's first two North African novels has confirmed my apprehension at the outset that there would be many Gothic aspects to be found there. The hostile environment is only the starting-point. Others are the hostile political situation, the context of colonial power relations which puts certain characters, whether they be Westerners or natives, at a disadvantage. Images of darkness are used for both physical and psychological components. The menacing male(s), the unexpected setback, the lack of a kindred spirit, all build up to bring the narrative to a climax of horror from which there is no escape.

The two major points of conclusion I have come to concerning Bowles's use of the Gothic mode are: firstly, he uses it in a subtle way; we only slowly become aware that there are so many dark factors that the tale is becoming Gothic, and this is confirmed only at the end, but therefore, by contrast, it seems to have greater impact. Also, his use of Gothic in relation with the colonial and post-colonial context is not new, but fairly unusual and certainly individual. Secondly, Bowles's intelligent and not heavy-handed use of Gothic subtly brings all the strands together: both thematically and formally, the existential dilemma, the postmodern crisis of identity and the post-colonial context of culture conflict and power relations are united through problems, crises, bodily pain, mental anguish, and usually, final tragedy. All these components make for a very dramatic narrative. The Gothic mode, which is enduring, has given new life to Bowles's existential fiction. Although most readers and viewers are only acquainted with Bowles's first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, which most critics and general readers hold to be his best, they should not be disappointed with his two other North-African novels, or indeed, his short stories, because the same intriguing themes are reworked in ever different and rewarding ways.

Analyses of both well-known and lesser-known short stories by Bowles set in North Africa confirm our hypothesis that Bowles reworks the same themes related to identity, especially in the framework of the encounter with the other. But in the stories, he covers new ground as he often invents situations of problematics exclusively between natives. A further innovation in the later stories is the concentration on the more local and static: domestic power relations rather than incursions into the hostile desert.

Bowles's style throughout remains realist and a logical progression forms the substructure of his narratives. However, this does not exclude reference to dream and magic, which add an ambiguous complexity. Dramatic crises are found to be present in every short story, just as in the novels, culminating in greater or lesser degrees of cruelty and disaster. Bowles's reputation as a writer who sets out to shock the reader will remain intact, but analysis reveals that he impresses the reader not through sensationalism but through the exactness in his choice of narrative technique and expression.

Even when he asserts that a story is the result of automatic writing coming from his pen under the influence of narcotics, I hope to have shown that the stories in question are not devoid of craft. Bowles's greatest stories in both his long and short fiction are the product of personal encounters with the exotic and a "translation" of this material into works of great impact as a result of his natural understanding of and response to, story-telling devices. His reading has been fundamental in this. From an early age he could discern the properties of a good story and in his long years of reading fiction as well as travel accounts and anthropological discourses, he analysed –consciously or otherwise– the narrative procedures required to make an impact on the reader and applied them to great effect.

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APPENDIX: CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL BOWLES

(updated from Caponi 1998)

- 1910 Paul Frederic(k) Bowles is born in Jamaica, Long Island, 30 December
- 1928 Enters the University of Virginia at Charlottesville.
- 1929 Leaves school and sails for Paris. Returns to New York, meets Aaron Copland and begins study of musical composition, meanwhile publishing several poems in small magazines.
- 1930 Returns to the University of Virginia, continues to publish poetry. Completes freshman year and joins Copland at the Yaddo artists' retreat in New York.
- 1931 Sails for Paris. Joins Copland in Berlin, travels throughout Europe, visits Gertrude Stein, departs with Copland for Tangier.
- 1932 Tours Tangier and Fez before returning to Europe.
- 1933 Travels through North Africa before returning to New York.
- 1934 Returns briefly to North Africa.
- 1936 Orson Welles commissions scores to *Horse Eats Hat* and *Doctor Faustus*. Writes score to *America's Disinherited*.
- 1938 Marries Jane Auer and leaves for Central America and France.
- 1939 Composes score to William Saroyan's *My Heart's in the Highlands* and *Love's Old Sweet Song*, and leaves for New Mexico.
- 1940 Settles in Taxco, Mexico, but returns to New York to write score for *Twelfth Night*, *Liberty Jones*, and *Watch On the Rhine*. Writes *Pastorela* for American Ballet Caravan.
- 1941 Receives Guggenheim Foundation grant, which he uses to write opera *The Wind Remains* while living in Mexico.
- 1942 Begins job as music critic for *New York Herald Tribune*.
- 1943 *The Wind Remains* premieres at the Museum of Modern Art.
- 1945 *The Glass Menagerie* opens in New York with music by Bowles. Edits *View*, and then travels to Central America.
- 1946 Translation of Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit* (directed by John Huston), wins Drama Critics' Circle Award for the best foreign play of the year. Completes scores for *Concerto for Two Pianos*, *Winds*, and *Percussion*, and several plays.
- 1947 "A Distant Episode" appears in *Partisan Review*, leaves for Morocco.
- 1948 Returns to New York to write the scores for *Summer and Smoke*.
- 1949 *The Sheltering Sky*. Sails for Ceylon to work on *Let It Come Down*.

- 1950 Travels in Ceylon and Southern India through the spring and returns to Tangier. Publishes *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* and “A Little Stone”.
- 1952 *Let It Come Down*. Purchases Taprobane, a small island off the coast of Ceylon.
- 1953 In Rome, writes script for Luchino Visconti’s film *Senso* with Tennessee Williams.
- 1954 After three-week attack of typhoid, begins his third novel *The Spider’s House*.
- 1955 *The Spider’s House*.
- 1956 *Yallah*, photographs by Peter W. Haeberlin. Publishes several essays in *Holiday* and *The Nation*.
- 1957 Jane suffers a stroke in April. *The Nation* and *Holiday* publish several pieces on India, Ceylon and Africa.
- 1958 Opera *Yerma* premieres.
- 1959 Writes score for Tennessee Williams’s *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Receives Rockefeller Foundation grant to record indigenous music of Morocco. Publishes *The Hours After Noon*.
- 1962 *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*.
- 1964 Translates *A Life Full of Holes* by Driss Ben Hamed Charhadi.
- 1965 Visits the United States, including a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico.
- 1966 *Up Above the World*.
- 1967 *The Time of Friendship*.
- 1968 *Pages from Cold Point, Scenes*. Teaches at San Fernando Valley State College.
- 1970 Named founding editor of magazine *Antaeus* in Tangier, begun by Daniel Halpern.
- 1972 *The Thickest of Spring* and the autobiography *Without Stopping*.
- 1973 Jane Bowles dies in Malaga on May 3rd.
- 1975 *Three Tales*.
- 1976 *Next to Nothing*.
- 1977 *Things Gone and Things Still Here*.
- 1979 *Collected Stories, 1939-1976*.
- 1980 Teaches writing at the School of the Visual Arts in Tangier while writing *Points in Time*.
- 1981 *Midnight Mass; Next to Nothing: Collected Poems, 1926-1977*.
- 1982 *In the Red Room; Points in Time*.
- 1984 Sounding Press publishes *Selected Songs*.
- 1988 *Unwelcome Words: Seven Stories*.
- 1989 Vintage Books pays “in the six figures” to reprint *The Sheltering Sky. Al Maghrib: Photographs*.

- 1990 Bernardo Bertolucci's movie *The Sheltering Sky* premieres. Publishes *Two Years Beside the Strait: Tangier Journal, 1987-1989*.
- 1991 *Days: Tangier Journal, 1978-1989*.
- 1992 *Too Far from Home: The Selective Writing of Paul Bowles*.
- 1993 *In Touch: The Letters of Paul Bowles. Paul Bowles Photographs: "How Could I Send a Picture into the Desert?"*
- 1999 Dies in Tangier.

Abbreviations

<i>CS</i>	<i>Collected Stories 1939-1976</i>
<i>IS</i>	<i>Invisible Spectator</i>
<i>LICD</i>	<i>Let It Come Down</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Midnight Mass</i>
<i>PB</i>	<i>Paul Bowles: A Life</i> (Virginia Spencer Carr)
<i>PB: Stories</i>	<i>Paul Bowles: Stories</i> (ed. Lasdun)
<i>SH</i>	<i>The Spider's House</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>The Sheltering Sky</i>
<i>THAG</i>	<i>Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue</i>
<i>WS</i>	<i>Without Stopping</i>

RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL DE LAS CONCLUSIONES DE LA TESIS

Paul Bowles (n. 1910 New York, m. 1999 Tánger, Marruecos) era músico y traductor, pero en este estudio, lo consideramos como autor de novelas y cuentos. Bowles escribía, a veces en secreto, desde niño y desde un principio intuía que una historia necesitaba drama y conflicto si quería triunfar. Así que, no nos debe extrañar que de mayor, Bowles usara su experiencia como viajero y aventurero para crear situaciones ficticias que llaman la atención por sus crisis y su drama, a veces de manera exagerada. Además, como vivía en un momento en que estaba de moda crear historias sobre figuras enajenadas dentro del marco del existencialismo, naturalmente, aprovechaba el concepto del personaje cuyo sentido de identidad se desintegra en un contexto de conflicto de culturas.

Como mujer marroquí, obviamente los textos de Bowles que más me han interesado son los que son ubicados en Marruecos o Argelia. Así que, este estudio enfoca las tres novelas localizadas en el Norte de África: *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), *Let It Come Down* (1952) y *The Spider's House* (1955). De su ficción corta he seleccionado los cuentos también ubicados en esta zona, que vemos publicados en las siguientes colecciones: *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories* (1950), *The Hours After Noon* (1959), *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* (1962), *The Time of Friendship* (1967), *Things Gone and Things Still Here* (1977), *Midnight Mass* (1981) y *Unwelcome Words* (1988).

Bowles también plasmó las hazañas de su vida en su autobiografía *Without Stopping* (1972) y sus observaciones en artículos para revistas de viajes y una colección de ensayos *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue* (1963). Como sus estancias en el Norte de África son el fundamento de sus escrituras sobre la zona, tomo este aspecto de su vida como punto de partida.

En el 1er capítulo examino la autobiografía *Without Stopping*, contrastándola con las biografías escritas sobre él, las de Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno (1989), Gena Dagel Caponi (1994) y Virginia Spencer Carr (2004). Esta comparación es importante porque no siempre se dice la verdad en una autobiografía. Hemos encontrado que callaba ciertos aspectos de su vida, por ejemplo, su necesidad de dejar Tánger durante un tiempo.

Sigue un estudio de *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue* para ver cómo Bowles enfoca sus descripciones de sus alrededores y qué valores entran en juego en sus juicios sobre estas tierras y sus gentes. Críticos como Bourara insisten en que Bowles no puede escapar la etiqueta de “Orientalista,” ya que su punto de vista era parcial y estaba escribiendo para lectores occidentales.

Los capítulos 2 y 3 son dedicados a las tres novelas y el capítulo 4 a la ficción corta. En el 2º capítulo enfoco las dos primeras novelas, *The Sheltering Sky* y *Let It Come Down* desde el punto de vista del existencialismo. Como esta filosofía o marco de pensamiento es problemática para los musulmanes, empiezo con una exposición corta del existencialismo y distintas actitudes hacia ello. Hablo de Bowles y el existencialismo y el impacto del escritor francés André Gide sobre Bowles en un momento de auge de la filosofía a principios del s. XX. Un resumen de las dos novelas va seguido de un análisis del tratamiento de los personajes y contextos que se pueden considerar existenciales. El 3er capítulo empieza con una consideración de los marcos de contacto intercultural en las tres novelas de Bowles ubicadas en el Norte de África. Después de un resumen de la 3era novela *The Spider’s House*, se utiliza esta novela para explorar las ideas sobre cultura y religión que Bowles plasma en su ficción.

Para llevar esta discusión intercultural a una conclusión, se incluye consideraciones de género y sexualidad en las tres novelas. El capítulo termina con un estudio de los aspectos góticos de *The Sheltering Sky* y *Let It Come Down*. Desde niño, Bowles estaba fascinado por la literatura gótica –su autor preferido era Edgar Allan Poe. Después de exponer los principales factores que contribuyen a una atmósfera gótica, se aplican estas ideas a la novela. Las teorías sobre la literatura gótica americana se sacan de las obras de Mary Mulvey-Roberts (1988) y Charles Crow (1999).

El último capítulo es el más largo porque cubre siete colecciones de ficción corta. Como los cuentos de Bowles han sido estudiado considerablemente menos que sus novelas más conocidas, hemos querido detenernos para analizar cómo Bowles aplica técnicas para crear historias inolvidables. Empezamos con un resumen de las principales teorías sobre la ficción corta y procedemos a aplicarlas a los cuentos de mayor relevancia de estas colecciones. Teóricos que han aportado ideas útiles son tales como Allen (1981), Shaw (1983), Lohafer y Clary (1989) y May (1994). Técnicas como simetría y enfoque en una crisis se pueden detectar en el desarrollo narrativo, mientras que en la creación de personajes se nota el uso de personas normales y uso de lenguaje cotidiano, pero a veces incorporando lo mítico.

Los cuentos se analizan en tres fases: primero, el resumen, que introduce el contexto, los personajes y el tema; segundo, una discusión del tratamiento de los temas por el autor, y finalmente, la forma que Bowles les ha dado. Se puede concluir que en los cuentos Bowles continúa con los mismos temas que en su ficción larga, muchas veces enfocando un personaje que es extranjero, un occidental fuera de lugar en el Maghreb.

Todas las aventuras contadas tratan del Norte de África esencialmente tratándolo en relación con y contrastando con el Occidente. Muy pocas –“The Delicate Prey” viene a mente—tratan de acciones entre locales, pero aun en este cuento, la familia de viajeros se encuentra vulnerable y es atacada por miembros de otra tribu.

En *The Sheltering Sky*, que es representativa de las tres novelas, la confrontación cultural se halla en las mentes de los protagonistas Port y Kit, y aunque no se hablan entre ellos de la causa de su sufrimiento, el lector se da cuenta. La pareja ha decidido ir al Norte de África para olvidar todo relacionado con Occidente después de la barbarie de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Su primera reacción al Oriente, y sobre todo al Sáhara, desvela sus verdaderos sentimientos hacia su civilización y cultura. Resulta que han elegido cambiar su tierra y cultura por una que es totalmente diferente. Hay diferencias en los sistemas sociales, económicos, políticos e ideológicos. El cambio radical supone un choque para su sentido de identidad.

Sin duda, Port y Kit han estado buscando el lado exótico del país, en este caso Argelia, buscando incluso lo “primitivo” aunque pueda ser peligroso. Al final están decepcionados, tanto del país nuevo como de América. Cuando las dos culturas se hallan yuxtapuestas, los occidentales, en situaciones difíciles añoran lo conocido. Viven un dilema en que hay sufrimiento extremo, tanto físico como espiritual, porque quieren separarse de su pasado pero estar a la vez unidos a ello. Quieren inmiscuirse en la cultura oriental, que ven como “otra” y por tanto atractiva pero sin pagar un precio demasiado alto integrándose. La posición de Port alude a la imposibilidad de abrazar dos culturas tan diferentes simultáneamente.

Son personajes existenciales y se hunden en los intersticios del vacío que existe entre las dos culturas. De Port se dice:

The room meant very little to him; he was deeply immersed in the non being from which he has just come [...] he was somewhere, he has come back through vast regions from nowhere; there was the certitude at the core of his consciousness, but the sadness was reassuring because it alone was familiar. (*The Sheltering Sky*, 9)

Así que hacia el final de su vida, en el Sáhara, que esperaba que le fuera a restaurar su salud física y mental, se encuentra totalmente solo: “It is an existence of exile from the world. He never saw a human face or an animal; there were no familiar objects along the way, there was no ground [...]” (178).

Mayormente, se puede deducir que los occidentales no están dispuestos a aceptar otra cultura que no sea la suya, o por lo menos, no quieren abandonar aquellos aspectos que consideran superiores. Bowles demuestra a través de sus personajes que los occidentales perciben que otras culturas son inferiores a la suya, perpetuando el punto de vista Orientalista de que escribió tanto Edward Said (*Orientalism* 1978):

The Orient was overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitiveness and so forth [...] yet the Orient suddenly appeared lamentably under humanized, anti democratic, backward, barbaric [...] the Orient was undervalued. (Said 1978, 150)

El hecho de que Bowles elige sus personajes nativos entre los más atrasados puede caracterizar su descripción como partidaria. No podemos negar que existan personas de poca educación en el Maghreb, como en cualquier parte del mundo, pero hay que reconocer que él no da de entender que todos los hombres son camareros, limpiabotas sucios, ladrones y mentirosos. Igualmente, no todas las mujeres son muchachas, prostitutas o incluso esclavas. Sin embargo, no se puede negar que presenta estereotipos para representar a orientales y sin embargo los occidentales son individualizados.

Sopesamos juicios de críticos como Bourara (2012) que afirman que Bowles no puede escapar la nomenclatura de Orientalista, mientras que otros, como Aidi, quieren exonerarlo. Hay que admitir que Bowles normalmente sigue su afán de ser objetivo, un espectador “invisible” como se dice de él. Un ejemplo es cuando Port acusa a Abdelkader de robar su pasaporte: el teniente francés que manda en el campamento colonial intenta persuadirlo que no debe acusar al hombre local simplemente porque no es occidental, ya que hay ladrones en Nueva York. Al final se ve que el ladrón es el europeo Eric Lyle. Al crear un ladrón que es occidental, Bowles afirma que los occidentales no son la raza superior que creen, y los nativos no son inexorablemente inmorales según el canon de la cultura occidental. Incluso, al convertir a Kit en la esclava voluntaria de Belqasim al final, da la vuelta a las relaciones de poder colonial: un árabe esclaviza a una persona occidental y no viceversa. Así Bowles cuestiona las oposiciones binarias blanco/negro que

encontramos en los contextos coloniales. Igualmente en *Let It Come Down* el asesino no es el nativo sino un occidental:

Dyar's criminal act of killing the sleeping Thami [...] undermines quite profoundly the pre-established assumption of the [orientalist prejudices]. Hence the key notion that the novel's Orientalism is unwittingly subverted and interrogated from within its proper discourse. (Elkouche, 110)

Los personajes de Bowles se encuentran atrapados por sus propias identidades mentales encaminadas a la disolución. El ambiente físico hostil en que se encuentran también los atrapa. Bowles utiliza el paisaje de dos maneras en su ficción. Forma el contexto hostil que supone una prueba de carácter: "Bowles relies on a kind of stimulus/response form as each of his characters continues to develop in response to the environment." (Foltz 2000, 101) Parece que su comportamiento depende del paisaje en que se hallan, ya que afecta sus emociones. En el caso de Kit: "The wind celebrated her dark sensation of having attained a new depth of solitude." (*The Sheltering Sky*, 174) Y la muerte de Port "se celebra" con imágenes impactantes en la naturaleza: "A black star appears, a point of darkness and gateway to repose [...] pierce the fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose." (188) Bowles utiliza la naturaleza, por tanto, un poco como los románicos, pero sin olvidar el impacto de los modernistas.

Como dijo Said, los no-Orientales convierten cosas –a veces inocentes—en símbolos para todo el Oriente:

My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations, *as representations*, not as "natural" depictions of the Orient. This evidence is found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treaties) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e. openly imaginative) text. The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. (Said 1978, 21)

Lo que afirma Said en general sobre textos occidentales sobre el Oriente se puede aplicar a Bowles, a pesar de que él pasara la mayor parte de su vida en Tánger y tenía un conocimiento íntimo de que la mayoría de escritores occidentales no podían disfrutar. Aquí Said critica los escritores de textos de no-ficción, como puede ser Bowles como

escritor de artículos para revistas de viajes. Exonera a los escritores de ficción, que tienen otros propósitos. Bourara (2012) es particularmente acerbo con Bowles en su papel de autor de descripciones supuestamente exóticas. Y no hay que olvidar que incluso un novelista puede pecar perpetuando versiones falsas o puntos de vista parciales.

No nos sorprende que haya sombras de romanticismo decimonónico en la manea que Bowles utiliza la naturaleza ya que sabemos que le fascinaban los cuentos de Poe. El medio ambiente, acogedor u hostil —y normalmente es éste— forma la base de las trampas de todos los personajes principales de Bowles.

Mi análisis del marco gótico de las tres novelas de Bowles confirma la sospecha que podría haber más densidad de síntomas góticos allí. El medio ambiente hostil, el desierto, el laberinto de calles estrechas en el contorno urbano, suponen solo el comienzo. Otro aspecto que Bowles utiliza es la situación amenazante en cuanto a la política, el contexto de relaciones de poder bajo el colonialismo. Esto amenaza a los personajes occidentales y Bowles llena las escenas de imágenes oscuras tanto en lo físico como en lo psicológico. El hombre amenazante, el contratiempo imprevisto y la falta de compasión en la gente son factores que se acumulan para llegar a un clímax del cual no hay escapatoria.

Los dos puntos conclusivos a que he llegado en cuanto a la manera en que Bowles hace uso del gótico son: primero, lo utiliza de manera sutil, nos damos cuenta solo muy lentamente de que se van acumulando factores oscuros y que la aventura se está volviendo gótica y esto se confirma al final con mayor impacto. También su uso del gótico en relación con el contexto colonial y poscolonial no es nuevo, pero es inusual e individual. Segundo, la manera en que Bowles utiliza el gótico suave y sutilmente une todas las corrientes tanto temática como formalmente: el dilema existencial, la crisis de identidad posmoderna y el contexto poscolonial de conflicto de culturas y relaciones de poder se unen a través de problemas, crisis, dolor corporal, angustia mental y normalmente culminan en tragedia. Todos estos componentes contribuyen a una narrativa muy dramática. El modo gótico, que perdura, ha dado nueva vida a la ficción existencial de Bowles.

Aunque la mayoría de los lectores no conocen más que su primera novela, la más famosa, *The Sheltering Sky*, que los críticos alaban como la mejor de sus cuatro novelas, no deben estar decepcionados con las otras dos novelas o sus cuentos ubicados en el Norte de África, ya que los mismos temas intrigantes se repiten con variaciones a veces basadas en la ironía que señalan la maestría de Bowles como constructor de situaciones dramáticas y sutilezas de personalidad. El análisis pormenorizado de algunos cuentos clave demuestra que Bowles controlaba las palabras, el lenguaje y el discurso, aun cuando confesaba

estar bajo los efectos de narcóticos para soltar la mente. Acertaba con la elección de la palabra exacta para conseguir el efecto deseado o bien gradualmente con el concepto de lo “sutilmente gótico” o en una crisis que cierra la obra con un impacto no previsto por el lector. Si los hechos de su larga vida han aportado material para la ficción, sus lecturas y su análisis –consciente o no– de las técnicas narrativas, le han provisto de las herramientas para aplicarlo a este material con el fin de producir historias muy conseguidas y perdurables.