Redrawing the Territories of Desire and Melancholy: The Homoerotic Travel Writings and Films of Gide, Duvert, Barthes, Genet, Taia, Rachid O., Vallois and Bouzid

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REDRAWING THE TERRITORIES OF DESIRE AND MELANCHOLY: THE HOMOEROTIC TRAVEL WRITINGS AND FILMS OF GIDE, DUVERT, BARTHES, GENET, TAÏA, RACHID O., VALLOIS AND BOUZID

By

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REDRAWING THE TERRITORIES OF DESIRE AND MELANCHOLY: THE HOMOEROTIC TRAVEL WRITINGS AND FILMS OF GIDE, DUVERT, BARTHES, GENET, TAÏA, RACHID O., VALLOIS AND BOUZID

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This study proposes original analyses of an archive of twentieth and twenty-first century French-language texts and films that fall into what I define and articulate as the genre of “homoerotic travel literature and cinema.” I argue that within each of these works resides a body of questions on the politics, ethics, and erotics of a search for otherness (altérité). In contemplating the tourist’s desire to travel along a route vers le sud, I explore the allure of “Arab” and “Oriental” spaces, and expound on how and why the homoerotic traveler locates various forms of freedom while removed from the pressures of what Joseph Boone refers to as heterosexual priority. Through close and comparative readings of each work under consideration, I describe and analyze what I propose as the concept of homoerotic tourism—and its specific link to the dialectics of desire and melancholy—by identifying traces of the traveler’s quest to access alternate forms of self and being. My analysis of over a century’s worth of materials documents the narrative and visual strategies that distinguish this body of works. Central to this study is what I delineate throughout as the narrative process of rewriting, and how such procedure links to, displaces, and challenges our understanding of the topos of homoerotic tourism.
throughout the period under investigation. I begin by considering André Gide’s
*L’immoraliste* (1902), and then work my way throughout the twentieth century, reflecting
on subsequent “travel” writings by Tony Duvert, Roland Barthes, and Jean Genet. A
series of French-language films are also considered as they relate specifically to the
literature studied. I conclude this dissertation by elaborating on the thematic of “reverse”
homoerotic tourism. In so doing, I contemplate how contemporary Maghrebi writers
Abdellah Taïa and Rachid O. point to the Arab tourist’s ability to effectively reverse the
route south, thereby rewriting and displacing structures of power and desire in a
transnational and bi-cultural context.
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Introduction

Contextualizing Homoerotic Tourism as a Genre of Literary and Film Studies

This dissertation examines the relationship between travel writing and the tourist’s search for otherness as articulated in a constellation of French and Francophone texts and films that subscribe to the genre of homoerotic tourism. Through close and comparative readings of these works, I examine the confluence of sexuality and altérité as this joint thematic regime relates to what I refer to as the north/south binary.¹ I consider what the term “travel” connotes for each writer and filmmaker, and from there I explore the reasons why the tourist-writer is drawn toward the “South” or the “Orient.”² In each chapter, I describe and analyze the concept of homoerotic tourism and its specific link to the dialectics of desire and melancholy. My project spans the period between roughly 1902 and 2013, and documents the poetic, rhetoric, and narrative processes of rewriting within the genre. My readings underscore how each of the texts and films studied represents, to varying degrees and according to a diversity of modalities, a rewriting and displacement of the formal and substantial features of the homoerotic travel narrative. This project incites readers to contemplate the inter-relationship between the past and the present, as well as to consider the notion that these works have the potential to reshape how we view and respond to representations of homoerotic tourism over the past century.

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I elaborate on what I refer to as the “north/south” binary when speaking of transnational and transcultural relations between European and North African sexual tourists. In this vein, I am reminded of Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion of what she coins the “contact zone”; although, as I argue in Chapter 4, one can observe, in the contemporary Maghrebi travel narrative, a reversal of colonial domination patterns that evades Pratt’s analysis.

² Following Edward Saïd, when referring to the Orient, I imply the geographic regions of the Near and Middle East.
As primary works, I have selected texts by André Gide, Tony Duvert, Roland Barthes, Jean Genet, Rachid O., and Abdellah Taïa. The visual narratives, as I have elected to refer to them, include films by Philippe Vallois, Nouri Bouzid and Abdellah Taïa, and the photography of Bishan Samaddar. On-screen representations of the north/south encounter equally elucidate the topos of homoerotic tourism, and underscore yet another medium and viewpoint from which the tourist’s fantasy is narrated. In Chapters One, Two, and Four, I place a series of French-language films produced in France and the Maghreb into dialogue with the literature studied. In order to contextualize the close relationship between the filmic and written narratives at stake, I explore how the visual subject poses as a rewritten—and at times, *redefined*—traveler. Through close and cross-readings of these films with the literary texts, I attempt to underscore how the hermeneutics of the written narratives yield renewed analyses on the rhetoric of sexual tourism as spoken by the visual subject. As such, my own narrative aims to provide a unique, amalgamated analysis of homoerotic tourism in France and the Maghreb, while drawing attention to the reasons—either implied or visualized—for which the tourist is compelled to redefine his *ethos*—in search of alternate forms of self and being.

While my investigation focuses on the travel literature of several twentieth and twenty-first century French and North African authors and filmmakers, the origins of French-language homoerotic literary tourism can be traced at least to the nineteenth century. One such example from the late 1800s is a rarely cited “travel” text by Gustave

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1 In tracing the appearance of the early homoerotic travel text, Joseph Boone cites the writing of British author and traveler James Silk Buckingham. While traveling throughout Asia Minor, one could argue that Buckingham “prefaces” T.E. Lawrence’s subsequent descriptions of “oriental” homosexual
Flaubert titled *Par les champs et par les grèves* (1886) in which the writer foreshadows Gide’s aesthetic at the turn of the twentieth century. Speaking of this work and what could be qualified as Flaubert’s tendency for queer *flânerie* while touring the Brittany region of France, Naomi Schor proposes a definition of orientalism as it would have likely been understood by Flaubert and other period traveler-writers who sought escape from bourgeois ideologies. In “Domestic Orientalism: On the Road with Gustave and Maxime,” Schor’s analysis provides a general framework for my readings of later examples and variations within the genre:

Orientalism is, by definition and in general usage, the very opposite of the domestic. At least in the nineteenth century, it implies exoticism, a turn of the West to the East, an anthropological encounter of the European with the racial and ethnic other, first and foremost, the inhabitants of North Africa and the Middle East. The orientalist tourist is drawn East by his desire to leave behind his familiar, humdrum, bourgeois existence and, casting repression to the winds, to give himself over to sensations, experiences, and sexual pleasures forbidden in the supposedly civilized, superior Western societies. (“Domestic Orientalist” 57)

Motivated by such forbidden “sensation,” and while touring Quimper, France, the domestic traveler is struck by the beauty of a young Breton boy, and views him through the optic of a homoerotic tourist:

> Le jeune homme s’est agenouillé en ôtant son chapeau, et la grosse torsade de sa chevelure blonde s’est échappée dans une secousse en tombant le long de son dos. Un instant accroché au drap rude de sa veste, elle a gardé la trace des plis qui la roulaient tout à l’heure, peu à peu est descendue, s’est écartée, étalée, répandue comme une vraie chevelure de femme.” (“Domestic Orientalist” 60)

Although Flaubert is very infrequently read through a queer lens, his writing as observed here underscores the theme of same sex desire that will become increasingly inscribed in encounters when referring to the “vice” he witnesses in Iraq in the mid-1800s. Buckingham published his observations of such encounters in a volume that appeared in 1829 (*The Homoerotics of Orientalism* 40).
subsequent homoerotic texts by a growing number of French writers. The poetic and cryptic portraiture of *le jeune homme* is arguably the product of erotic fascination, which is borne out of the excitement Flaubert experiences while away from “home.”

During this same voyage and while traveling in the company of Maxime du Camp, Flaubert is often on the cusp of what I refer to as homoerotic tourism, and the writer’s wanderings outside of the bourgeois circles of Paris are curiously reminiscent of the homoerotic episodes that Gide/Michel will later narrate and rewrite in *L’immoraliste* (1902). Furthermore, the omnipresent theme of escape to which Schor attributes Flaubert’s desire to travel can be universally applied to each of the homoerotic tourist-writers I speak of in the corpus of this study. The orientalist tourist, to adopt Schor’s terminology, recognizes, and suffers from, the “limitations” of the Western experience, and therefore turns to travel—either domestic or international—as a means to resolve the repression associated with northern heteronormative ideologies. Traveling also provides an opportunity for the restless tourist to indulge in what is an underlying desire for new and perhaps previously “forbidden” liaisons. Through this brief but illustrious reference

4 Although beyond the immediate scope of my dissertation, Schor suggests that Flaubert was driven to travel to North Africa to fulfill his sexual longings, but that he was already entangled in a homoerotic relationship with Maxime du Camp. Their travels through Brittany in 1847, as Schor argues, pose as an important moment in their relationship—culminating in the exchange of rings. Although not published until after Flaubert’s death, the text *Par les champs et par les grèves* (1886) is a rarely examined collection of travel notes composed by both writers during their tour of Brittany. Quoting Charles Péguy, she reminds us that, “l’étranger n’est pas toujours au pays étranger.” In so doing, Schor reminds us that the homoerotic tourist does not necessary have to leave France in order to indulge in the fantasy of sexual tourism. Péguy’s assertion will return to the foreground in Chapter 2 when I consider Barthes’s affinity for what Schor refers to here as “domestic orientalism.”

5 I consider Gide’s *L’immoraliste* to be a paradigmatic work within the genre of homoerotic tourism, and refer to this important and “foundational” narrative throughout this study.

6 Schor relates Flaubert’s desire to eventually travel to North Africa to his foray into (homo)erotic travel: “If one of the forces driving Flaubert to North Africa was unfulfillable sexual longings, Brittany was already the site of a complex and unfocused set of desires: first and foremost, the intensely homoerotic relationship between Maxime and Gustave (“Domestic Orientalist” 60).
to Flaubert’s travels in Brittany, we can already begin to see as we navigate the emergence of the genre how the twentieth century author’s preoccupation with homoerotic travel writing was not an entirely new mode of expression.

The origins of what is articulated as the tourist’s fantasy of traveling along a route vers le sud is evidenced in the writings of several other prominent French authors who bear mentioning, including among them Pierre Loti, Henry de Montherlant, and Guy Hocquenghem. Gide, Duvert, Barthes, and Genet are all drawn to the south—a vast and foreign territory synonymous with an implied freedom of sexuality. In contemplating the historiography of the genre of homoerotic tourism as represented in this body of French and Francophone literature, I would like to refer now to two important texts by Montherlant and Hocquenghem in order to provide a sense of how I will read and interpret the more substantial examples that comprise this study.

Between 1934 and 1936, Montherlant resided in Algeria (Mauviel 50), a period synonymous with the composition of Encore un instant de bonheur (1934). Of particular significance is the poem included in this text titled “Thèmes pour une flûte arabe” in which the writer fantasizes about the beauty of an Arab boy. Highly suggestive of language that characterizes Gide’s portraiture of the North African éphèbe, Montherlant eroticizes the Arab male figure by poeticizing a boy’s physical attributes: “La douceur de

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7 In the case of Flaubert, Pierre de Biasi’s article titled “Gustave Flaubert: une manière spéciale de vivre” (2009) underscores Flaubert’s preoccupation with homosexual tourism, as described in his personal correspondence with Maxime du Camp.

8 I return to Loti’s work in more detail in Chapter 2 as it relates to Barthes’s corpus. Pierre Loti’s oeuvre also recalls the homosexual tourist’s voyage south. In Aziyadé (1879) and Mon frère Yves (1883), Loti’s writings underscore the fantasy of homosexual encounters in countries such as Turkey and Greece. Furthermore, in his novel Querelle de Brest (1947), Jean Genet references Loti’s homosexual wanderings.

9 Montherlant’s La Rose de sable (1938), also poses as an example of the sexual tourism narrative. In this work, the female heroine is actually a male, which yields yet another queer reading of the text.
sa poitrine, son cou noir, ses bras purs. Tout ce qu'il a de nocturne dans son corps et dans son obscurité éclairée” (39). The writer draws attention to the physical qualities of the garçon, recalling in many ways Michel’s eroticized description of the innocent Bachir in *L’immoraliste*. In this vein, let us consider for a moment the following excerpt from the 1902 text in which Gide contemplates Bachir’s “delicate” body: “Ses pieds nus; ses chevilles sont charmantes, et les attaches de ses poignets” (*Romans* 382). In cross-reading these two highly erotic yet cryptic passages, one could argue that both Gide and Montherlant share a salient desire to intimately interact with the éphèbe subject—while traveling. For both writers, then, the eroticization of the Arab boy “queers” the text through the use of veiled references to the traveler’s homosexuality—despite the vagueness of the narration and the implication of forbidden desire. Moreover, and drawing a parallel to Gide’s own experiences abroad, Montherlant also visits the southern destinations of Algeria, Italy, and Spain—all the while basking in the inherent beauty and exoticism attributed to the dark-skinned male body.¹¹

Further suggestive of an expansion of the genre, during the mid-twentieth century up until the 1970s, the French writer-traveler’s fascination with the south continued to inspire a corpus of related works. Guy Hocquenghem is another prominent figure within the genre of literary homoerotic tourism. Hocquenghem’s writing can be compared to Duvert’s highly politicized rhetoric, as we will see in the second half of Chapter 1. In *La beauté du métis*¹² (1979), Hocquenghem postulates:

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¹⁰ I explore this passage in more detail in Chapter 1.

¹¹ During the 1950s and 1960s, Montherlant is known to have traveled regularly along the southern route.

¹² Throughout this dissertation, I refer to the figure of the métis. For each of these writers, including Hocquenghem, the métis subject can be understood as he who is “not white,” and includes, but is
Nous, Français, sommes nés aveugles dans le monde clos d’un pays ‘sans rencontres, sans métissages. Notre blancheur, notre fadeur, notre maladresse de naissance sont l’oeuvre de l’Histoire: nous sommes loin du coeur, loin de la couleur, loin de la musique. (9)

Embedded in the poetics that qualify this passage, one can locate a number of similarities to Duvert’s *journal*, including Duvert’s inclination to describe social life in France as “hideous.”13 Additionally, and to expand on this very notion, there are also a number of similarities between Hocquenghem’s writing style and the narrative strategies we observe throughout Genet’s *oeuvre*. Hocquenghem’s preoccupation with race, as well as his narrator’s fascination with the *métis*, is reminiscent of Genet’s portraiture of the dark-skinned subject as encountered in works from *Les Nègres* (1948) to *Un captif amoureux* (1986). Further yet, both Duvert and Genet espouse Hocquenghem’s notion that the French are “blind” in many respects. On numerous occasions, each writer criticizes France and French society, thus underscoring a scathing postcolonial rhetoric on representations of race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Moreover, this passage recalls in many ways articulations on moral code and sexual independence as observed in *Journal d’un innocent*.

I would like to expand now on the theme of a search for otherness, and explore in more detail the French tourist-writer’s motivation to flee the *Hexagon*. Joseph Boone’s *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (2014) opens with a preface under the subheading “Re-Orienting Sexuality” (xvii). In referencing a number of orientalist motifs as observed in

not limited to, the Arab male character. Moreover, and in regards to *L’immoraliste*, it is possible to argue that the *métis* can be extended to include the French male *paysan*, who Gide likens to the Arab figure through a series of rhetorical and stylistic devices. It should be noted that, particularly for Gide, the *métis* is also synonymous with the figure of the *étranger*.

13 This passage is analyzed in the second half of Chapter 1 when I speak of the parallels between Gide’s *L’immoraliste* and Duvert’s *Journal d’un innocent*. 
popular culture, Boone contends that “[w]ithin Western fantasies of the “Orient” lies the potential for unexpected eruptions of sex between men, that however temporarily, disrupt European norms of masculinity and heterosexual priority” (xviii). While the West (or, the “north”) often parodies the so-called “Oriental fantasy,” there exists within Boone’s observation a discourse on otherness that draws a sharp divide between the north and the south, and one that largely informs my readings of these works. Beyond the dimly lit medinas of North Africa and the “exotic” villages and towns to which we travel along with these writers and filmmakers, the homoerotic traveler encounters cultures and peoples that quite easily—and often, indirectly—expose the fragility and hypocrisies of Western ideologies of sexual normativity. While some readers risk locating a discourse of aspersion in Gide’s or Duvert’s critical view of France, for example, one need only turn to Genet’s memoir to perhaps more clearly understand the root cause of the homoerotic traveler’s desire to escape to the south; and the reasons for which travel and travel writing function to displace widespread perceptions of the politics and ethics of transnational engagement.

Methodology

My methodological perspective has required me to focus on the various narrative strategies that qualify each of the works at stake, including thematic, rhetorical, poetical, and stylistic elements. I argue throughout this dissertation that the authors and filmmakers studied espouse homoerotic tourism as a praxis in their work, although the text of sexual tourism is rewritten in each case. Before proceeding, let us recall that at the turn of the twentieth century, travel became more regimented—thereby greatly influencing constructs of what we refer to as “tourism,” including forms of homoerotic
travel. At the crux of the argument overarching the ensemble of this study resides the assertion that within each of these narratives one can locate an important body of questions on the politics, ethics, and erotics of the north/south encounter. With this in mind, and taking inspiration from Jacques Derrida’s conceptualization of genre in his article “La loi du genre” (1980), I have tried to consider multiple layers of meaning in each selected work. While I do not take specific cue from Derrida, per se, his conceptualization of genre studies further grounds my assertion that these works can be classified in a number of different ways, thereby challenging and displacing how we read and interpret their content.\textsuperscript{14}

As I have by now partially alluded to, what I refer to herein as the narrative practice of “rewriting” is an interwoven theme throughout this study. Each of these French-language texts and films can be read as rewritings of earlier examples within the genre, and often displace previous constructs and articulations on the homoerotic voyage. In an effort to further elucidate the concept of narrative rewriting as it relates to these works, I would like to clarify my intended meaning of this proposed term. To illustrate a brief example of how I will proceed in this regard, I turn once again to Duvert’s \textit{Journal d’un innocent}, and explore how this text in particular can be read as a narrative rewriting of Gide’s \textit{L’immoraliste}. While Gide and Duvert’s writings represent vastly different narrative styles, Duvert’s unnamed narrator is strikingly similar to the character of Michel. In what can be qualified as a mode of postmodern dialectical positioning, Duvert capitalizes on graphic language as a vehicle to underscore the raw nature of his narrator’s

\textsuperscript{14} Derrida argues that “First, it is possible to have several genres, an intermixing of genres or a total genre, the genre ‘genre’ or the poetic or literary genre as genre of genres. Second, this re-mark can take on a great number of forms and can itself pertain to highly diverse types” (“The Law of Genre” 64).
erotic engagement. Yet embedded in such rhetoric is a body of questions on the tourist’s worldview—including his disapproval of French “politics.” By contrast, yet in a sense, if one might say, paradoxically similar, Gide often goes to great lengths to veil what are scathing references to bourgeois morals. In either case, both writers share the common narrative strategy of chastising France through the voice of the homoerotic tourist. In this way, Duvert’s sexually explicit text can be qualified as a rewriting and displacement of the poetics that qualify Michel’s earlier, and at times, codified homoerotic voyage. The author’s categorization of his work must also be considered. Gide refrains from labeling *L’immoraliste* as a novel, but does, however, separate the narrative into separate “Parties.” Moreover, whereas Duvert’s *Journal d’un innocent* is presented as a récit, Genet’s *Un captif amoureux* is divided into *Souvenirs I* and *II*. In each case, there are a number of elements that are suggestive of a memoir. Regarding Barthes’s work, the texts that constitute the posthumously published *Incidents* (1998) are often written in the form of a traveler’s “journal,” although the text is not presented as such.15 Interestingly, Abdellah Taïa’s *L’armée du salut* (2006) is the only work among the titles in my archive of texts to be categorized as a novel—yet this work bears an overwhelming similarity to the episodic writings that constitute other examples. The form and structure of each work will be considered as the various narrative procedures relate to articulations on the thematic of homoerotic tourism—and how the tropes of melancholy and desire resurface time and again throughout the period.

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15 This is particularly relevant to the text titled “Soirées de Paris” in which date markers are provided for each “entry.”
Framing and Theorizing the Genre:
Variations on the Homoerotic Tourism Narrative

In contemplating the various modes of travel writing as observed in this body of works, I am reminded once again of Derrida’s scholarship on genre theory. In referring to a text’s identity or “marker,” the critic asserts: “[the remark of belonging] can render the ‘explicit’ mention [of a text’s genre] mendacious, false, inadequate, or ironic according to all sorts of over-determined figures” (“The Law of Genre” 64). Following Derrida’s argument, I posit that each of these texts and films subscribes to the genre of sexual tourism, although the various narrative strategies, tropes, and modes of discourse that qualify each work are highly irregular—suggestive of a multiple genres approach. Indeed, we have yet to encounter the formal marker “Homoerotic Tourism,” despite the fact that the signs and symbols that point to such a genre are widely apparent.16 Along these lines, Christopher Robinson evokes the presence of “homosexuality as an independent phenomenon” in French literature, suggesting that throughout the twentieth century one can observe a preoccupation with representations of same sex desire (viii). While Robinson recognizes such thematic, his study is admittedly not all-inclusive. How, then, do we reconcile these highly diverse narrative strategies, and begin to more clearly define the genre in a cohesive and categorical manner?

While I contend that Gide’s L’immoraliste is an example of the homoerotic tourism narrative, it can also be classified as a bildungsroman. And there are a number of revealing parallels between Michel’s fictional wanderings in the 1902 text and Gide’s

16 While many scholars and literary critics recognize the presence of the topos of “sexual tourism” in several of the texts I discuss in this dissertation, I have yet to encounter a piece of scholarship that proposes the genre of “homoerotic tourism.” Further yet, and to my knowledge, the works I have chosen have never been categorized and cross-read from a multiple-genres perspective—linked by the narrative process of rewriting. Several critical texts, which I cite throughout this study, often only superficially consider the implications of what is reduced to a search for sexual encounters.
own travels in North Africa—begging suspicion of an auto-fictional bent to
*L’immoraliste*. Michel’s heteronormative and coming-of-age experiences in France with
his wife, Marceline, eventually give way to a more homoerotic existence when among
Arab males in the Maghreb. As such, Michel’s “story” appears to be an earlier version of
what we will later encounter in Gide’s autobiographical writings. As is perhaps apparent,
the cross-pollination of various motifs and modalities as noted here and elsewhere
underscores the hybridity of the genre of homoerotic tourism. Furthermore and to cite
Genet’s work for a moment, *Un captif amoureux* is very infrequently qualified as an
example of “sexual tourism,” and the text combines structural elements of the
autobiography, fiction, and travel memoir. Cognizant of these narrative qualities and
textual markers, I begin to better formulate my own theoretical positioning of these
works.

I propose a hybridized\(^\text{17}\) construct of the genre, which builds upon the work of
Edward Saïd and Jarrod Hayes. According to Saïd, who in many ways recalls a similar
observation made by T.E. Lawrence in the 1920s,\(^\text{18}\) the Orient was a place where one
could indulge in sexual experiences largely unattainable in Europe.\(^\text{19}\) But to what

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\(^{17}\) Each of these texts share, to different extents and in various proportions, three fundamental axes
that further link each one to the other: 1) the northerner’s desire for the south—or the southerner’s desire
for the north (in the case of “reverse sexual tourism”); 2) the sentiment of melancholy; and 3) the notion of
healing (e.g., *le bien-être; la guérison*). In regards to the trope of melancholy, the narrative voice of each of
these texts suggests a desire—ethical, political, and erotic—to flee, in search of otherness.

\(^{18}\) In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), Lawrence articulates a fascination with homosexual
practices in the region, and as John Mack reminds us, the traveler notes: “I’ve seen an abundance of man-
on-man loves: very lovely and fortunate some of them were” (*Prince of Our Disorder* 425).

\(^{19}\) Recalling Foucault’s argument in *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976), Saïd asserts the following:
“We may as well recognize that for nineteenth-century Europe, with its increasing *embourgeoisement*, sex
had been institutionalized to a very considerable degree” (*Orientalism* 190). Saïd’s rhetoric regarding the
institutionalizing of sex can be applied to the hermeneutics of Gide’s writing, particularly at the turn of the
twentieth century.
“experience” does Saïd refer? While void of specific references to same-sex desire, *Orientalism* (1978), captures the homoerotic tourist’s motivation to travel south, and to escape the north: the “unavailability” of gay and often erotic camaraderie in the north, as well as the promise and fantasy of homosexual encounters in what is perceived as the land of the exotic other.

The “living tableau of queerness” that is representative of Saïd’s depiction of the Orient is reflected more recently in Jarrod Hayes’s discussion of the northern tourist’s ability to travel to the region: “The colonization of the ‘Orient’ not only provided a convenient vacation spot for Western tourists, it also provided a playground for the relief of tension engendered by Western sexual normativity” (*Queer Nations* 23). Hayes reaffirms his understanding of oriental discourse by applying his theory to works by Gide and other French writers, and goes on to write that “What they [sexual tourists] looked for often—correctly, I think—was a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden” (*Orientalism* 190). This is actually a type of Foucauldian inspired rhetoric that can be universally applied to many of the literary and visual subjects under consideration who do not subscribe to what many readers may understand as heteronormative categories of sexuality. But while I find Hayes’s argument convincing on many levels, to presume that such encounters are merely “libertine,” or of the “playground” type, risks reducing the text to a type of eighteenth century discourse.21

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20 For Saïd, the “living tableau of queerness” is a reference to the exoticism associated with the Orient. Also recalling Foucault, Saïd suggests that the Orient is a space that lacks “order” and “discipline.” This easily yields commentary on the colonial hegemonies that Saïd underscores in *Orientalism*. For Hayes, who mirrors Saïd’s critical position in his discussion on sexual tourism in the Maghreb in *Queer Nations*, the sexual tourist’s journey is also an encounter between the colonizer and the colonized; or, in the case of more contemporary writings, the former colonizer and the former colonized.

21 For an extensive bibliography, see Pierre Saint-Amand’s *Séduire, ou la passion des lumières*. 
Such a reading may fail to uncover the multi-dimensional aspect of the narration, and how articulations on erotic engagement relate to a politics and ethics of otherness. Further yet, as we begin to examine the contemporary and Maghrebi travel narrative, it is quite possible to argue that the colonial and French traveler is not alone in his quest to access new forms of self and being—through travel. And let us not forget that Saïd argues that the Orient was a place where one could seek new experiences. But what has changed? As we more closely examine the contemporary and North African homoerotic narrative, it becomes increasingly clear that the Arab touriste effectively redraws cartographies of “oriental” desire and belonging.

In Chapter 4, I consider an alternate mode of the narrative process of rewriting, and apply my understanding of the rhetoric of homoerotic travel literature to contemporary works by Abdellah Taïa and Rachid O. In so doing, I explore how these Maghrebi writers “reverse” the French tourist’s route south. I approach these texts from an intra-Arab perspective, and discuss how, and why, the Maghrebi and homoerotic tourist travels to (and attempts to assimilate into the culture of) the north. In considering the reversal of homoerotic “migration” patterns that inform my readings of Taïa and Rachid O.’s works, it is helpful to reflect on Joseph Massad’s proposed way of reading colonial/post-colonial discourses on sexual identities in the Middle East. In *Desiring Arabs* (2007), Massad points to the emergence of what he refers to as the “International Gay,” and contends that the Western imposition of the Arab world has altered the way Arab peoples view their own cultures from within Arab spaces:

> When the Gay International incites discourse on homosexuality in the non-Western world, it claims that the “liberation” of those it defends lies in the balance. In espousing this liberation project, however, the Gay International is destroying social and sexual configurations of desire in the
interest of reproducing a world in its own image, one wherein its sexual categories and desires are safe from being questioned. (189)

It is precisely the relative non-existence of Western social and sexual identity categories that have rendered North Africa and other parts of the Arab world a utopic destination for writers from Gide to Genet. But as international tourists discover the region, the implied freedoms the traveler associates with the Orient become slowly but assuredly displaced, inciting problematic discourses on what has previously remained largely unspoken. Referring to Taïa’s novel, *L’armée du salut*, for example, one could argue that Abdellah’s status as a “post-colonial” gay traveler compels him to escape his native Morocco in search of a type of freedom that does not, as such, exist in the south. Yet the text is haunted with questions surrounding the viability of realizing newfound liberation upon the narrator’s arrival in Europe. But such “freedom” can also be quite deceiving. As partly a result of what Massad refers to as the “International Gay,” the homoerotic liaisons as observed in *L’immoraliste*, for example, are rewritten as an entirely different set of encounters in the contemporary Maghrebi narrative. This being said, although Taïa and Rachid O.’s texts underscore a reversal of the various cartographies and power structures associated with early forms of homoerotic tourism, these works share a number of similarities with nineteenth and twentieth century examples by French writers, including the tourist’s desire to redefine constructs of self.

Linking each of the texts in my archive are the tropes of desire and melancholy as they relate more specifically to various forms of healing—*la guérison*, in French. While each character studied is “healed” by varying forms of otherness, there is a desire to

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22 Discussing the politics of Massad’s essay is beyond the scope of this dissertation that intends to stay within the confines of literary and filmic poetics.
assimilate into an “adopted” homeland—while benefiting from its presumed alterity. But to suggest that these tourist-writers are in need of some type of healing is to imply that there exists a fracture. While such fissures are metaphorical in nature, the biographical and auto-fictional dimension of the works critically contemplated here establish the fact that these travelers desperately seek to redefine the fragile parameters of their problematized identity. This journey toward otherness, then, also functions to heal the wounds that result from varying forms of marginalization and loneliness.

**Dissertation Outline**

**Chapter 1: Veiled Desire and Postmodern Ecstasies: André Gide, Tony Duvert, and the Cinema of Philippe Vallois**

In this first chapter of my dissertation, I commence my study by examining André Gide’s *L’immoraliste* (1903), one of the first significant “travel narratives” written at the turn of the twentieth century. In an effort to trace Gide’s evolution as a writer and touriste, I also consider the autobiographical *Si le grain ne meurt* (1926), a text that bears a striking relation to *L’immoraliste*. *Corydon* (1920) and *Les Carnets d’Égypte* (1939) also figure into my textual analyses. I then argue that Tony Duvert’s *Journal d’un innocent* (1976) poses as a postmodern rewriting of Gide’s seminal text. As far as I know, my cross reading of Gide and Duvert is the first scholarly project that places their voices into dialogue with one another. I conclude this chapter by discussing Philippe Vallois’s *Un parfum nommé Saïd*, a 2003 film set in Morocco.

**Chapter 2: (Im)possible Delights: Barthes’s Homoerotic Travel Writing and the Photography of Bishen Samaddar**

In this chapter, I explore Roland Barthes’s travel “journals.” I devote particular attention to the posthumously published *Incidents* (2009). I inscribe this work—often
considered either as a kind of anomaly in Barthes’s *oeuvre*, or as a “draft” of something to come—in a series of fragmentary textual observations written by Barthes within (and concerning) the “Orient” (Japan, China), and consider the poetics and rhetoric of his portraiture of the male subject (*L’Empire des Signes, Carnets du voyage en Chine*). I also compare and contrast these texts placed under the seal of “exoticism” with “Soirées de Paris,” which narrates Barthes’s homoerotic wanderings *at home*, in France.

**Chapter 3: Traveling with Jean Genet: Toward A Homoerotic Politics and Ethics of “Otherness”**

In Chapter 3, I study Jean Genet’s *Un captif amoureux* (1986), along with a corpus of other texts, including a series of interviews that underscore the tropes of desire and melancholy as observed in the 1986 memoir. For Genet, homoerotic desire is located at the confluence of three primary axes: ethics, politics, and erotics. In speaking of what I refer to as the “narrative of Hamza” in *Prisoner of Love*, I trace Genet’s ascription to discourses of desire, ethics, and politics while traveling in Palestine and other parts of the Arab world.

**Chapter 4: (Re)Interpreting the Dialectics of Power and Desire: The Contemporary Narratives of Abdellah Taïa and Rachid O. And The Cinema of Nouri Bouzid and Abdellah Taïa**

In this final chapter, I introduce the concept of “reverse” literary homoerotic tourism. To this end, I argue that the dialectics of power and alienation as observed in the twentieth century travel narrative, including the writings of Gide, Barthes, Duvert, and Genet, are further rewritten and displaced, resulting in a structural reversal of the dialectics of desire and melancholy. It can be said that through the work of Abdellah Taïa (*L’armée du salut*) and Rachid O. (*L’enfant ébloui*) the voice of the *éphèbe* character is
not only finally “heard,” but is also “written,” as in Bouzid’s film Beznex, his “image” is revealed.
Chapter 1

Veiled Desire and Postmodern Ecstasies:
André Gide, Tony Duvert and the
Cinema of Philippe Vallois

Nous allons vers le sud, pensais-je; la chaleur me remettra.
*L’immoraliste* (Gide, *Romans* 377)

**Toward a Homoerotic Construct of “Otherness”**

Lawrence Schehr labels Gide, along with Proust, as a cartographer of queer
discourse, underscoring the writer’s role in transforming representations of homosexual
desire in French literature (*Modernism* 7). *L’immoraliste* (1902), which will be at the core
of this chapter, is an important point of departure in that each of the authors I consider in
this dissertation, whether explicitly or implicitly, situates and locates his writings and
travels within the horizon of this text. The narrative can also be interpreted as a
“confession” of what had been, what was, and what would become in regards to the
traveler’s search for “otherness.”

Before getting to *L’immoraliste*, I would like to turn for a moment to *Amyntas*23
(1906), a collection of travel notes written in the form of a tetralogy on the subject of
Gide’s voyages to North Africa at the end of the nineteenth century up until 1904. While
this work was published two years following the appearance of *L’immoraliste*, it frames
in many ways the homoerotic dimension of Michel’s travels south. It also establishes the
auto-fictional bent of the writer’s other travel texts, and illuminates a series of important
parallels between the character of Michel and Gide.

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23 The name “Amyntas” is used to describe a local *berger*: “Je me souviens de ce svelte berger,
dans les jardins d’El-Kantara, qui, du haut d’un abricotier énorme, pour son troupeau, faisait pleuvoir des
feuilles. Déjà colorées par l’automne, sitôt qu’il agitait la branche, elles tombaient” (99).
In the following scene from *Amyntas*, Gide observes a group of local children at play, creating a striking comparison to Michel’s attraction to Bachir:

Des petits enfants voient cela, rient, se répètent les obscènes mimiques de Caracous.—Difficile gymnastique de l’esprit: qu’il se réforme jusqu’à retrouver cela naturel…Le public d’enfants, rien que d’enfants, la plupart tout petits, qu’en pense-t-il? (32)

This passage is accompanied by a revealing albeit indirect and veiled attraction to the children of which he speaks. Gide’s desire to abandon his northern self can be observed in a subsequent passage, which more openly chastises “typical” French tourists: “Les Français vont régulièrement à des paradeurs à côté, qui font grand train et n’attirent que des touristes” (32). Through such procedure, the traveler clearly distinguishes himself from other French travelers. Like Michel, Gide demonstrates a desire to separate from his French identity. Echoing the narration of *L’immoraliste*, such discourse permits the traveler-writer to at least partially veil his homoerotic desire for Maghrebi boys, as well as his disapproval of European ideology.

One of the most erotically inscribed passages in *Amyntas* occurs in the context of Gide’s visit to Blida (Algeria) when he speaks of a local boy in what can be described as a form of indirect orientalist discourse. Gide frames the following entry by way of a melancholic observation (i.e., “le ciel est triste; il pleut”), punctuated by a portrait of local culture that many tourists might find unappealing—which he refers to as “ces éléments divers”:

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24 In the passage that immediately precedes this observation, the writer speaks of his desire to seek out a particular café where one could mingle with charming Sudanese men who sing and tell stories about their past, which the narrator refers back to through the use of “cela.”

25 “Ces trois petits enfants sur les marches de l’escalier qui mène au port—ils se partagent, non pas un poisson: une arête, qu’ils auront trouvée Dieu sait où (qui donne aux petits des oiseaux leur pâture). Il reste un peu de chair encore, près de la tête; c’est là qu’ils grattent; chacun en a gros comme un pois” (123).
...Mais de ces éléments divers se forme une race nouvelle, orgueilleuse, voluptueuse et hardie. Cela semble tenir de l’Andalou, du Basque, du Provençal, du Corse, du Sicilien, du Calabrais: c’est l’Algérien. On est tout étonné de l’entendre parler français. –Jeune il est beau, souvent très beau; son teint n’est pas éclatant, mais verdâtre; ses yeux sont grands, pleins de langueur; la fatigue chez lui se confond avec la paresse, et semble une lassitude amoureuse; il garde tard la bouche entr’ouverte, la lèvre, superieure soulevée, à la façon des très jeunes enfants. (123-24)

The poetics of this passage could easily be characterized by the writer’s subtle treatment of the beauty of the masculine body. The traveler’s attraction to the corps du sud is evidenced through the use of a series of adjectives that can often be attributed to the Arab body—a procedure that is replicated in L’immoraliste on multiple occasions. Such rhetoric of exoticism underscores Gide’s fascination with the perceived freedoms of North Africa, and can also be read as a nostalgic yearning for his early travels in the region. Amyntas therefore demonstrates that the writer was already entering into lines of queer-themed discourse prior to the turn of the twentieth century.

Traveling with Michel and André: Ecstasies of the Southern Route

Gide’s narrator, and in some cases Gide himself, does not always seek sexual gratification during moments of erotic engagement. What, then, is the significance of the homoerotic dimension of these texts, and how are such thematics articulated in these works? Speaking of the role of (homo) sexuality in Gide’s writing, Lawrence Schehr suggests that, “… Gide opens a space for desire and begins to articulate that desire in a tentative manner” (6). The metaphorical space to which Schehr refers is closely linked to the portrayal of utopic paradises that we discover in traveling with the writer to North Africa, including to Egypt. Schehr goes on to point out that Gide, along with Proust,

\[26\] Gide wrote Amyntas from Normandy.
“normalized male homosexuality as a valid subject for serious literary narrative” (7). In this way, Gide’s early writings, including *L’immoraliste*, should be treated as foundational works within the genre.

The texts I consider in this chapter vary widely in form and include examples of the novel, travel journal, personal correspondence, and autobiography. Each of them, written under varying circumstances, points to the European traveler’s search for new experiences—in search of a space that, contrary to France, allows him to more openly navigate the queerness of his own identity. Jonathan Dollimore qualifies Gide’s travels in Africa as being characterized by a sensation of forgetting, where the writer “feels liberated and the burden of an oppressive sense of self is dissolved” (6). Traveling mediates the burden to which Dollimore refers and yields a new way of viewing the world, as well as a redefining of the traveler’s own subjectivity.

Frank Lestringant asserts in his biography of the writer that “André Gide a créé le mot d’inquiéteur” (11). He brings up an important point regarding the connotation of this term à double sens:

> Ce terme péjoratif [inquiéteur], Gide, plus tard, se l’approprie en lui donnant un sens positif. Il en fait un programme de vie; il y découvre le sens de sa mission. Tel qu’il le conçoit alors, l’inquiéteur, c’est celui qui empêche la société de s’endormir, en la provoquant. (11)

While Lestringant portrays the writer as an inquiéteur, *L’immoraliste* can also be qualified as being a work that is inquiétant. The provocation is not so much about what is said, but rather what remains encapsulated in the “silence” of the text; or, otherwise stated, what is revealed through the silence that Gide imposes upon Michel—a character who can be described as the writer’s *alter ego*. Furthermore, while the text can be read as being informed by a colonial worldview, the singularity of the narrative resides in the fact
that Gide refrains from entering into discourses of colonial politics, and his writing is in many different ways totally divergent from what has been called la littérature coloniale.27

In speaking of the sensual experience in Gide’s writing, Michael Lucey writes, “Sexual experience, Gide claims, is more than just physical pleasure. As an experience, it challenges the boundaries of self; it furthers an understanding of how those boundaries are drawn and redrawn” (7). In L’immoraliste, the territories of the tourist’s northern identity are redefined as Michel’s senses are aroused by the possibility of an attraction to the métis,28 articulated in one primordial scene through the use of the word cela—a referent to the narrator’s inability to explain his fascination with the young Bachir:

Au bout d’un peu de temps, je ne suis plus gêné par sa présence. Je le regarde; il semble avoir oublié qu’il est là. Ses pieds sont nus; ses chevilles sont charmantes, et les attaches de ses poignets. Il manie son mauvais couteau avec une amusante adresse…Vraiment, vais-je m’intéresser à cela? (382)29

Michel’s portraiture of Bachir falls just short of revealing sexual desire, and is an expression of attraction that is both veiled and curiously salient at the same time. Could Michel really be interested in such things? And to what does Gide refer through the use

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27 In “La (para)littérature (pré)coloniale à la fin du XIX siècle,” Jean-Marie Seillan traces the emergence of colonial literature and writes “[les] voyageurs séjournent dans des lieux lointains sans y fixer durablement; la singularité des moeurs, la beauté de la nature qu’ils admirent et voudraient préserver, ils les louent à l’intention et dans la perspective des Français qui leur apportent la reconnaissance littéraire et parmi lesquels ils retournent s’installer” (Romantisme, revue du XIX siècle, 33). While L’immoraliste can be compared to “colonial” literature, let us recall that it was written during a period when France’s literature was saturated with what we understand today as colonial writing. What distinguishes Gide’s text from other works is the fact that France largely remains un-glorified by Gide, a traveler who, on the contrary, glorifies the African continent while distancing himself from a “French” perspective.

28 In referencing the word “métis,” I adopt Guy Hocquenghem’s use of the term, as noted, for example, in La beauté du métis (1979). For Hocquenghem, the “métis” is a referent to the male body that is neither white (Caucasian) nor “French.”

of the word *cela*, a rather vague reference to something not acutely defined, yet highly erotic? While the writer speaks here through the voice of Michel, the passage also begs an auto-fictional reading—one that reveals his *own* fascination with the character of Bachir. The narrator is overcome by his desire to engage the erotics of his own imaginary, and is unable to resist the physical beauty of the métis who is dressed in a revealing *gandourah*. Michel subsequently states: “J’ai le besoin de la toucher” (382).

This scene draws the reader further into the narrator’s physical desire to interact with the boy. Such moments highlight an erotically charged impulse—one that Gide would go on to weave in and out of his writings during subsequent wanderings throughout the south.

The language that characterizes *L’immoraliste* is subtly erotic, yet requires the reader to “decrypt” the writer’s procedure, and to decipher the textual and semiotic clues that point to the traveler’s identity as a gay man who bears the burden of the puritan heteronormative constraints of France at the turn of the twentieth century.

The territories of Gide’s sexuality became increasingly redrawn as his writing moved away from encrypted references to gay sexuality toward a more open form of discourse. *Corydon*, Gide’s Socratic defense of homosexuality, further illuminates the queer dimension of his other texts and underscores his evolving aesthetic when read alongside these other works. According to Michael Lucey, “The most obvious way of describing [Gide’s] African career would be to say that he began simply as a rich European tourist looking for an escape into exoticism as well as for erotic adventure” (17). But Gide is not an “ordinary” tourist; his travels are linked not only to a desire to

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30 In regards to the term “cela,” let us not forget that Gide is also a bourgeois traveler who quite possibly feels superior in many ways to the children to whom he is attracted. Although my own reading of this passage suggests sexual attraction, one could also argue that the tourist-writer is also looking down on such children, as they represent a drastically different echelon of society.
“investigate” new cultures, but to also adopt a new way of viewing his own subjectivity.

The Maghreb can therefore be interpreted as a space of “otherness” that yields a new form of self and being. In “André Gide et le monde arabe,” David Ellison writes, “Le Maghreb apparaîtrait tout d’abord comme lieu de libération dans l’imaginaire gidien” (277). As Ellison points out, the writer’s fantasized vision of North Africa is like a painting that, upon close inspection, reveals multiple layers—of which representations of sex and sexuality are but one dimension. Of equal importance here, then, is the overarching relationship between travel and dual identity.

While the beauty of the éphèbe transfixes the narrator of L’immoraliste, the tourist’s sexual awakening is a springboard for further self-reflection. Michel challenges the moral code of early twentieth-century France and slowly disassociates himself from the pillars of a “proper” bourgeois lifestyle. The writer was aware that his text would be received amidst a sea of controversy, a realization that is reflected in his curiously “unapologetic” apology for Michel’s drame:

Que si quelques esprits distingués n’ont consenti de voir en ce drame que l’exposé d’un cas bizarre, et en son héros qu’un malade; s’ils ont méconnu que quelques idées très pressantes et d’intérêt très général pussent cependant l’habiter—la faute n’en est pas à ces idées ou à ce drame, mais à l’auteur. (368)

31 In his analysis, David Ellison argues that following multiple trips to the African continent, Gide ultimately returns to France with two separate visions of Africa: “l’une uniforme et barbare, étrange et déconcertante, l’autre différenciée et cultivé, exaltante dans son raffinement et sa spiritualité” (289). To completely engage with the writer’s dual portrait of Africa as Ellison sets forth, one would have to examine works that are situated outside of North Africa, including Voyage au Congo (1927).

32 It is important to recall that the preface to L’immoraliste was written after the book was published, a fact that further underscores the irony associated with the writer’s scathing portrait of his readership. In this regard, one could draw an illustrious comparison with Molière’s preface to Tartuffe (1664).
He questions those readers who he fears will fail to react to Michel’s dilemma—*sans jugement*. As Gide is careful to point out, “l’intérêt réel d’une oeuvre et celui que le public d’un jour y porte, ce sont deux choses très différentes” (368). In proceeding in this manner, the tourist-writer embraces the delicate nature of his hero, and is aware that Michel’s plight may be reduced to nothing more than a *maladie*—a condition he later reconsiders in *Corydon*.33

In the initial pages of *L’immoraliste*, the narrator appears to be a victim of an insular existence, unaware of the pleasures that he will soon discover in the edenic paradises of North Africa and southern Italy. His voyage toward self-discovery highlights a displacement of European moral values that both Michel and Gide desire to abandon. But how should the reader set forth to truly understand Michel’s bifurcated existence? In the preface to the work, the writer addresses this question, inviting his reader to travel with Michel at his or her own risk: “Au demeurant, je n’ai cherché de rien prouver, mais de bien peindre et d’éclairer bien ma peinture” (368). From the very first page of the work, one can sense the tension associated with Michel’s impending “confession,” as noted in his melancholic plea to a group of friends who have come to be by his side: “J’ai besoin de parler, vous dis-je” (372). As narrated through the voice of Gide’s *alter ego*, the text permits the writer to chastise the moral code that condemns Michel’s “trespasses,” which, in turn, allows him to criticize the “real” France.

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33 In the preface to the second edition of *Corydon* (1920), Gide alludes to the absurdity of reducing [homosexuality] to nothing more than a deplorable condition or *sickness*, “Ce que j’en dis ici, après tout, pensais-je, ne fait point que tout cela soit. Cela est. Je tâche d’expliquer ce qui est. Et puisque l’on ne veut point, à l’ordinaire, admettre que cela est, j’examine, je tâche d’examiner, s’il est vraiment aussi déplorable qu’on le dit—que cela soit” (12).
“Je suis triste à pleurer”:
Bachir Heals and Moktir Ravishes

Among the male characters to whom Michel is drawn during his initial voyage to North Africa, Bachir is the first figure that underscores his budding attraction to the éphèbe. Michel is initially puzzled by his interest in the young boy whom his wife, Marceline, has summoned to lift his waning spirits and ill health. In his initial encounter with the boy, Michel states: “Je suis plutôt un peu gêné, et cette gêne déjà me fatigue; je ne dis rien, parais fâché” (381). But is Michel really troubled by Bachir’s presence as suggested by the narration? In an accompanying passage, the erotics of the traveler’s imaginary become increasingly clear: “Je remarque qu’il est tout nu sous sa mince gandourah blanche et sous son burnous rapiécé” (381). Of the many characteristics that could be attributed to Bachir, why does Michel paint what is clearly an eroticized portrait of the garçon? The revealing quality of his gandourah accentuates his delicate features, which Gide portrays with subtle tenderness. While the descriptive language is not sexually explicit, it reveals an undercurrent of erotic tension. The narrator’s growing interest in Bachir is further defined when he anticipates the boy’s return the following day: “Le lendemain, pour la première fois, je m’ennuie; j’attends; j’attends quoi? Je me sens désœuvré, inquiet. Enfin, je n’y tiens plus: ‘Bachir ne vient donc pas, ce matin?’” (382). In this passage, cela is rewritten as quoi. The tourist anxiously awaits the reappearance of the boy, yet he is unable to completely embrace the homoerotics of his imaginary.

When Marceline returns the following day without Bachir, Michel is distraught by the thought of not spending time with him as he had the day before: “Qu’a fait de moi la maladie? Je suis triste à pleurer de la voir revenir sans Bachir” (382). Disappointed, he
later insists that his wife bring the boy to seem him the next day: “Au moins, tâche qu’il soit là demain” (382). On the verge of tears, Michel is devastated that his “little friend” has not returned for a second visit—evidence of a complete fascination with Bachir, as well as his dependence on him as a source of jouissance. As a result, a void is produced by his absence, thereby opening up a wound in Michel. Gide returns to this primordial scene in the final pages of *L’immoraliste*:

[La soeur d’Ali] est très belle et je souffrais, les premières semaines, que parfois elle passât la nuit près de moi. Mais, un matin, son frère, le petit Ali, nous a surpris couchés ensemble. Il s’est montré fort irrité et n’a pas voulu revenir de cinq jours. Pourtant il n’ignore pas comment ni de quoi vit sa soeur; il en parlait auparavant d’un ton qui n’indiquait aucune gêne…Est-ce donc qu’il était jaloux?—Du reste, ce farceur en est arrivé à ses fins; car moitié par ennui, moitié par peur de perdre Ali, depuis cette aventure je n’ai plus retenu cette fille. Elle ne s’en est pas fâchée; mais chaque fois que je la rencontre, elle rit et plaisante de ce que je lui préfère l’enfant. Elle prétend que c’est lui qui surtout me retient ici. Peut-être a-t-elle un peu raison…. (472)

Recalling his preference for Bachir, the tourist’s attraction to Ali inspires yet another homoerotic awakening. Uninterested in the female prostitute who is clearly “available,” the narrator is reinvigorated by the presence of her *brother*, thereby rupturing any possibility of ensuing heterosexual attraction.

The narrator’s ill health is central to uncovering Gide’s procedure in regards to the treatment of homosexual thematics in the text. In speaking of Bachir, Michel asserts: “La santé de ce petit corps était belle” (382). While the early twentieth-century reader may have quite possibly related to the narrator’s appreciation of the boy’s status as being young and healthy, the narration also points to veiled physical (and sexual) attraction. The brilliance of Bachir’s teeth and the vibrant color of his tongue are two characteristics the traveler attributes to his beautiful appearance. Such physical traits are often
representative of health and virility, two qualities the narrator is desperate to emulate, or at least experience, through Bachir. In what can be qualified as a stark contrast to this scene, Michel describes the appearance of his own blood following a series of hemorraghes as “un vilain sang presque noir, quelque chose de gluant…épouvantable…” (383), which he juxtaposes to the sight of Bachir’s blood, subsequently described as, “beau sang rutilant” (383). Consequently, the narrator associates the sight of his own blood with weakness as reflected in the adjectives “vilain, noir, épouvantable.” On the other hand, Bachir’s blood represents beauty and purity—blood which flows through the veins of the youthful child who exudes health as well as the promise of new experiences yet to come.

Michel capitalizes on his frail condition on multiple occasions, allowing Bachir, and later Ashour, to carry his shawl for him during seemingly “innocent” afternoon strolls.34 Despite his improving health, the traveler continues to maintain an appearance of frailty while in the presence of Marceline: “Parfois Marceline m’accompagnait encore; mais, plus souvent, dès l’entrée des vergers, je la quittais, lui persuadant que j’étais las…” (393). His insistence that he is too weak and too tired to keep up with his wife during afternoon outings functions as an excuse that affords him increased time away from her, thus providing him with an opportunity to further live out his oriental fantasy. While cruising for boys, he transforms himself from a frail man into a savvy sexual tourist. His bifurcated existence becomes increasingly inscribed in the text from this point forward,

34 In André and Oscar: The Literary Friendship of André Gide and Oscar Wilde (1998), Jonathan Fryer considers Gide’s travels to North Africa with the artist Paul Laurens, “Yet André’s illness did not prevent his going out to sit with Paul Laurens, as his friend painted local scenes, or persuaded local children to pose for him. The children fascinated André. Groups of boys would gather outside the hotel where the two friends were staying, out of curiosity or a wish to earn a few coins through some trivial service” (70). Gide’s identity as a homoerotic tourist is, by this point, becoming increasingly salient. It was also during this period when Gide met Ali, a local boy whom the author alludes to in Si le grain ne meurt.
and is a form of self and being that closely mirrors Gide’s own journey toward self-discovery as observed in *Si le grain ne meurt*.

In regards to Michel’s recovery, the narration suggests that the “air pur” and the “meilleure nourriture” (387) of North Africa are responsible for his improving health. While one could argue for the legitimacy of such a claim, the narrator’s emergence as a “changed” man is more closely linked to sexuality than to weather conditions or the healing properties of local cuisine. A key scene that supports this idea occurs when Michel laments the feeling of displeasure he associates with his wife, a figure who represents the burden of his heterosexual existence:

Mais ce qui me gênait, l’avouerai-je, ce n’étaient pas les enfants, c’était elle [Marceline]. Oui, si peu que ce fût, j’étais gêné par sa présence. Si je m’étais levé, elle m’aurait suivi; si j’avais enlevé mon châle, elle aurait voulu le porter; si je l’avais remis ensuite, elle aurait dit: “Tu n’as pas froid?” Et puis, parler aux enfants, je ne l’osais pas devant elle; je voyais qu’elle avait ses protégés; malgré moi, mais par parti pris, moi je m’intéressais aux autres.—Rentrons, lui dis-je; et je résolu à part moi de retourner seul au jardin. (388)

Despite her sincerest efforts to attend to her ailing husband, Marceline is unable to provide him with the form of pleasure he so desperately seeks. While the narrator continues to indulge his fantasies on the side, Marceline turns increasingly to religion and chooses to ignore Michel’s new habits: “Ne me dis rien, ajouta-t-elle; tout va bien” (470). The anguish inscribed in this passage can be interpreted as her preference to retain his image as one of a dutiful husband. Let us not forget that after all, he has not completely abandoned his wife. One can assume that Marceline is aware of her husband’s attraction to local boys, yet she chooses to look the other way, eventually plunging into a dismal state of denial. As Michel’s travels in the region continue, he backs further out of the trappings of his former self: “Je ne pus dormir cette nuit, tant le pressentiment de mes
nouvelles vertus me grisait” (385). The anticipation of new possibilities lingers in the shadows of his wife’s deteriorating health, challenging the fragile parameters of their relationship. Following this episode, the traveler’s interest in Bachir eventually wanes, as he begins to seek new experiences—and new boys: “Quelque plaisant que me parût Bachir, je le connaissais trop à présent, et j’étais heureux de changer” (389). But what changes does he seek? As part of such transformation, he becomes attracted to Moktir, a character that reverses the innocence associated with Bachir. The effect of Moktir on Michel represents a true break with bourgeois ideology. Gide carefully weaves the “bad boy” character into the narrator’s web of deceit. During the infamous scene of Moktir’s theft, Michel chooses to cast a blind eye:

Un matin j’eus une curieuse révélation sur moi-même: Moktir, le seul des protégés de ma femme qui ne m’irritait point (peut-être parce qu’il était beau), était seul avec moi dans ma chambre; jusqu’alors je l’aimais médiocrement, mais son regard brillant et sombre m’intriguait. Une curiosité que je ne m’expliquais pas bien me faisait surveiller ses gestes. J’étais debout auprès du feu, les deux coudes sur la cheminée, devant un livre, et je paraissais absorbé, mais pouvais voir se refléter dans la glace les mouvements de l’enfant à qui je tournais le dos. Moktir ne se savait pas observé et me croyait plongé dans la lecture. Je le vis s’approcher sans bruit d’une table où Marceline avait posé, près d’un ouvrage, une paire de petits ciseaux, s’en emparer furtivement, et d’un coup les engouffrer dans son burnous. Mon cœur battit avec force un instant, mais les plus sages raisonnements ne purent faire aboutir en moi le moindre sentiment de révolte. Bien plus! je ne parvins pas à me prouver que le sentiment qui m’emplit alors fut autre chose que de la joie. Quand j’eus laissé à Moktir tout le temps de me bien voler, je me tournai de nouveau vers lui et lui parlai comme si rien ne s’était passé. Marceline aimait beaucoup cet enfant; pourtant ce ne fut pas, je crois, la peur de la peiner qui me fit, quand je la revis, plutôt que dénoncer Moktir, imaginer je ne sais quelle fable pour expliquer la perte des ciseaux. À partir de ce jour, Moktir devint mon préféré. (395)

The inexplicable curiosity to which the narrator refers is linked to his attraction to Moktir, whom he observes with quiet fervor. Curiously, this scene recalls Michel’s first
encounter with Bachir, but is rewritten here with a more direct reference to homosexual attraction: “peut-être parce qu’il était beau.” While he is physically attracted to Moktir, he is also drawn to the character’s status as a “tough guy”—a figure who resides at the margins of society, and who poses as the antithesis of bourgeois identity. While Gide remains voluntarily passive, the narrator becomes nevertheless an active participant in the crime of theft, thereby protecting the boy from a possible accusation of having stolen his wife’s sewing scissors. But why does Michel feel the need to protect him? If he does not become an accomplice in the crime, he falls into erotic fascination. One possible explanation is that the narrator does not want to risk Moktir being expelled from the house. The dialectics of the passage also suggests that the traveler is attracted to the delinquent quality of the thief’s image: “À partir de ce jour, Moktir devint mon préféré” (395). Moktir’s flaws as a character, including his status as one who steals, are qualities that he is unable to resist, and are traits that represent a true break with bourgeois morals.  

However, while healed and fascinated by Moktir, Michel maintains control due to his social and monetary status; in other words, il reste le maître.  

The theme of prostitution as observed in L’immoraliste merits consideration, certainly in regards to the commodification of the Arab male body. Let us recall that Michel offers Bachir two sous at the completion of their initial visit: “[Bachir] veut partir. Marceline lui donne un gâteau, moi deux sous” (382). Why does the narrator feel compelled to “compensate” the young boy who has merely come to lift his waning spirits? The vagueness of the narration partially occults the exchange of currency by

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35 I consider the sexual tourist’s fascination with the “tough guy” figure in Chapter 2 when speaking of Roland Barthes’s attraction to the petit mec as observed in “Incidents.”

36 I will return to this notion in Chapter 4 when discussing Abdellah Taïa’s L’armée du salut.
drawing the reader’s attention to the boy’s image as one of an innocent child who appears more interested in playing marbles than procuring a “fee” for his services. Despite the vagueness of the narration, prostitution lingers just beneath the surface. Although Michel’s gesture may at first seem innocent, it can be interpreted as a calculated gesture to ensure that Bachir will return again. In offering the boy two sous, the tourist effectively entices him to come back—in this case for more money, which also means for Michel further erotic fascination.

Bachir is not the only recipient of some form of compensation in exchange for “companionship.” As Michel’s health continues to improve, he relishes the company of boys in subsequent scenes and often “buys” their friendship through subtle gestures: “Ashour et Moktir nous accompagnaient d’abord; je savourais encore leur légère amitié qui ne coûtait qu’un demi-franc par jour” (395). The légère amitié that he shares with these two characters is also pronounced through the exchange of currency, thus begging the question: would these boys continue to be “friends” with Michel—gratis? While Gide remains vague in this regard, the tourist becomes increasingly associated with money and prosperity, which he often uses to his advantage.

“De type étranger”
Michel’s Return to La Morinière

Upon his return to La Morinière, the location of his country estate, Michel is unable to disassociate with the pleasures he experienced while traveling in North Africa. In an effort to recapture the sense of jouissance he felt while traveling in the region, he cruises Charles, the son of Bocage, his estate caretaker:

C’était un beau gaillard, si riche de santé, si souple, si bien fait, que les affreux habits de ville qu’il avait mis en notre honneur ne parvenaient pas à le rendre trop ridicule. (412)
The narrator’s portraiture of Charles, a character who “semblait n’avoir que quinze ans, tant la clarté de son regard était demeurée enfantine” (412), recalls the beauty he associates with the éphèbe. Many of the same qualities that initially attract him to Bachir—including the boy’s good health and good looks—can also be attributed to Charles’s youthful appearance, described here through a series of veiled references that suggest an impending homoerotic fantasy. In what could be qualified as a desperate attempt to engage with the adolescent, he seizes on the first opportunity to revel in his masculine beauty. While fishing one afternoon on his farm, the homoerotic dimension of the narration assumes a bolder dimension. In what can be qualified as a particularly erotic moment, Charles enters the pond and removes his shoes and jacket. Such imagery poses as the first indicator of an ensuing eroticized encounter. The scene concludes with a brief moment of physical contact between the two characters: “nous unissions nos mains” (413). This seemingly innocent embrace briefly transports Michel back to the edenic paradise that is North Africa. Such physical contact draws further attention to the narrator’s omnipresent desire for the male body—a form of physical desiring that he is largely unable to “act upon” while in France—despite his best efforts at recreating his southern utopia—while at home in France.

Yet still a veritable sexual tourist in his native France, Michel further eroticizes the character of Charles by stating:

Le lendemain Charles emmena le poulain dans un recoin de prairie qu’ombrageait un noyer superbe et que contournait la rivière; je m’y rendis accompagné de Marceline. C’est un des me purs vifs souvenirs. Charles avait attaché le poulain, par une courde de quelques mètres, à un pieu solidement fiché dans le sol. Le poulain, trop nerveux, s’était, paraît-il, fougueusement débattu quelque temps; à present, assagi, lassé, il tournait en rond d’une façon plus calme; son trot, d’une élasticité surprenante, était
His gaze is focused here on the boy’s interaction with the horse, which can be read as an allegorical interpretation. But Charles is not the only boy whom Michel attempts to cruise while in France. Describing two brothers who have been summoned to work on his estate, Gide writes:

Il se joignait parfois, à cette bande de six hommes, deux fils Heurtevent; l’un âgé de vingt ans, l’autre de quinze, élancés, cambrés, les traits durs. Il semblaient de type étranger, et j’appris plus tard, en effet, que leur mère était espagnole. (445)

The boys portrayed in this passage are described as “élancés” and “cambrés” and having “les traits durs.” The very mentioning of such physical attributes reminds the traveler of his North African boy-lovers. Of particular significance here is Gide’s use of the word étranger. Michel implies that his attraction to these boys is based on the fact that their mother was Espagnole. Spain, a country along the Gidian southern route, is also the gateway to North Africa. The dark-skinned boys of Spain thus pose as a geographical and metaphorical extension of the “Arab” boys of the Maghreb.

Ménalque and Moktir Triumph

*Les Nourritures terrestres* (1897) is an important early work that points to Gide’s disapproval of bourgeois ideology. In the following passage, Ménalque appears for the first time, speaking here of the hypocrisies he associates with French society:
Familles, je vous hais! foyers clos; portes refermées; possessions jalouses du bonheur.—Parfois invisible de nuit, je suis resté penché vers une vitre, à longtemps regarder la coutume d’une maison. Le père était là, près de la lampe; la mère cousait; la place d’un aïeul restait vide; un enfant, près du père, étudiait,—et mon coeur se gonfla du désir de l’emmener avec moi sur les routes. (186)

This scathing portrait of bourgeois culture underscores the sexual tourist’s desire to flee the north and can be aptly applied to both Michel and Gide’s motivation for travelling south. Through the voice of Ménalque, Gide speaks of his desire to escape what is portrayed as a heteronormative scene enshrouded in hypocrisy.

In *L’immoraliste*, Ménalque reprises his position as a central figure as his character once again represents a clear scission with bourgeois morals. Speaking through the voice of Ménalque, Gide addresses the theme of Michel’s (homo) sexuality in slightly more direct terms. In sharing what he had learned of the narrator’s travels in North Africa, Ménalque boldly states: “Puis on m’a dit que vous sortiez volontiers seul, sans livre (et c’est là que j’ai commencé d’admirer), ou, lorsque vous n’étiez pas seul, accompagné moins volontiers de votre femme que d’enfants” (427). Ménalque is not interested in the narrator’s “scholarly” pursuits; rather, he is more intrigued by the tourist’s outings—*sans livre*—with local boys. Of particular significance is the fact that he refrains from judging Michel for his “cruisy” behavior, further empowering the traveler to disengage from his French identity. Ménalque’s comments inspire further reflection and Michel subsequently states: “la vie, le moindre geste de Ménalque, n’était-il pas plus éloquent mille fois que mon cours?” (429). With Ménalque’s discourse on the right to choose in the backbround, he carefully balances his dual identities and remains encouraged by Ménalque’s worldview.
Gide ultimately poses a question that he fears some readers will reject: should one satisfy his own desires, or attempt to emulate a fixed image imposed by society-at-large?

Ménalque is a diabolical figure and represents what Michel would like to do:

Ménalque s’inclina vers le feu, comme s’il eût voulu cacher son visage. Il se taisait. Il se tut si longtemps que j’en fus à la fin tout gêné, ne sachant non plus que lui dire. Je me levai, fis quelques pas, puis, m’approchant de lui, posai ma main sur son épaule. Alors, comme s’il continuait sa pensée: ‘Il faut choisir, murmura-t-il. L’important, c’est de savoir ce que l’on veut....’ (435)

Michel places his hands on Ménalque’s shoulders in what can be described as an instance of Gidean erotics.37 The implication of such scenes points to the narrator’s desire to escape the limits of his northern self. Such rhetoric also highlights a psycho-social desiring for the male subject: “Pour ce soir je veux boire avec vous, oublier que je pars demain, et causer comme si cette nuit était longue…” (435). Through Ménalque, the traveler experiences a feeling of jouissance similar to the liberation he felt during his travels in North Africa. Michel is also unable to suppress such desire while in Italy: “… je me relevais sans bruit, je me rhabillais sans lumière; je me glissais dehors comme un voleur” (461).

In the concluding pages of the text, Gide returns to the theme of the tourist’s longing for the south, describing Tunis as having a “lumière plus abondante que forte. L’ombre en est encore emplie. L’air lui-même semble un fluide lumineux où tout baigne, où l’on plonge, où l’on nage” (464). Traveling in North Africa yields an overwhelming feeling of freedom and happiness. However, while in Biskra in a subsequent scene, the tourist’s fantasy is partly broken when he discovers that the beauty he had once attributed to the éphèbe is no longer apparent:

37 This scene also points to a moment of solidarity between the two characters.
Quelle déconvenue! Que s’est-il donc passé? Ils ont affreusement grandi. En à peine un peu plus de deux ans,—cela n’est pas possible…quelles fatigues, quels vices, quelles paresse, ont déjà mit tant de laideur sur ces visages, où tant de jeunesse éclatait? Quels travaux vils ont déjeté si tôt ces beaux corps? (466)

But what has changed? And why does Michel appear unmoved by the site of his former boy-lovers? For Bachir and Ashour, the innocence of childhood has been replaced by servile labors. This moment reminds the French traveler of the limits of human existence, and also recalls his constant disdain for France: “Vais-je donc retrouver chez eux ce que je haïssais parmi nous?” (466). Further exacerbating the tension associated with this scene is the fact that Bachir has been forced into marriage: “Il s’est marié? Il n’a pas quinze ans. C’est grotesque” (466). Michel is disappointed that Bachir has entered into a heterosexual union, a reflection of his own discontent with his marriage to Marceline. Ménalque’s discourse on the “right to choose” resurfaces once again. In his final appearance in L’immoraliste, however, Moktir symptomatically retains his allure after all the years that have passed since the traveler’s initial trip to the region:

Et Moktir?—Ah! celui-là sort de prison. Il se cache. Les autres ne fraient plus avec lui. Je voudrais le revoir. Il était le plus beau d’eux tous; va-t-il me décevoir aussi? … On le retrouve. On me l’amène. Non! celui-là n’a pas failli. Même mon souvenir ne me le représentait pas si superbe. Sa force et sa beauté sont parfaits…. En me reconnaissant il sourit. (466)

The character’s status as a “tough guy” continues to attract Michel, despite the fact that Moktir, too, has aged. The imagery that qualifies this passage, including Moktir’s smile upon seeing Michel, represents the traveler’s ultimate triumph: while the tourist has returned to North Africa, and although emotionally wounded, he has not abandoned hope for new experiences, as the young African’s superb beauty continues to ravish him.
The conclusion is inscribed with both hope and despair. To this end, Michel states: “J’ai fini de vous raconter mon histoire. Qu’ajouterais-je de plus?” (470). Caught between his past and his future, he is reminded of an impending, dismal return to France:

Ce qui m’effraie c’est, je l’avoue, que je suis encore très jeune. Il me semble parfois que ma vraie vie n’a pas encore commencé. Arrachez-moi d’ici à présent, et donnez-moi des raisons d’être. Moi je ne sais plus en trouver. Je me suis délivré, c’est possible; mais qu’importe? je souffre de cette liberté sans emploi. Ce n’est pas, croyez-moi, que je suis fatigué de mon crime, s’il vous plaît de l’appeler ainsi,—mais je dois me prouver à moi-même que je n’ai pas outre-passé mon droit. (471)

Still seeking answers to the questions he began to consider following his initial sighting of Bachir, this concluding passage captures the ethics of the drame: it would appear that the narrator’s only “crime” is the possible suppression of his own authenticity. In a pensive final scene, Michel’s desire for the éphèbe remains unaltered despite the melancholic tone that characterizes the conclusion of his story. The narrator truly prefers the company of Ali, and concludes his story by asserting: “Elle prétend que c’est lui [Ali] qui surtout me reticent ici. Peut-être a-t-elle un peu raison….” (472). “Peut-être” is highly rhetorical, as what the female subject pretends to understand here is what Gide actually knows.

Si le grain ne meurt:
Sensual Awakenings and Erotic Entanglements

Although Si le grain ne meurt (1926) was published more than two decades after the appearance of L’immoraliste, there are numerous parallels between Gide’s own bifurcated existence and the character of Michel. The writer is careful to point out that the events and details described in his autobiography may fail to please some audiences, which he acknowledges could tarnish his reputation as a writer:
Je sais de reste le tort que je me fais en racontant ceci et ce qui va suivre; je pressens le parti qu’on en pourra tirer contre moi. Mais mon récit n’a raison d’être que véridique. Mettons que c’est par pénitence que je l’écris. (349)

Within this text is a chain of unhappy events, particularly when the writer discusses the so-called age of innocence, a period that he describes through a series of rather dismal adjectives: “OMBRE, LAIDEUR, SOURNOISERIE” (350). But among the tribulations associated with a strict religious upbringing, for example, there is also a series of significant sensual awakenings. Reminiscing about a boy from his childhood, he echoes Michel’s preference for Bachir: “Il y en avait un pour qui je m’étais épris d’une véritable passion. C’était un Russe.” (404). The sense of isolation is exacerbated by the disappearance of his little Russian friend. He states that he was too ashamed to inquire as to his friend’s whereabouts and that this loss was “UNE DES PREMIÈRES ET DES PLUS VIVES TRISTESSES DE [SA] VIE” (404).

Another important comparison can be drawn between Gide and Michel in regards to the writer’s relationship with his cousin, Emmanuèle:

Déjà, tout en lisant les lettres de sa sœur, j’avais distraitement évoqué Emmanuèle. Auprès de ces tristesses désenchantées, de quel rayonnement se nimbait le beau visage de mon amie! Le voeu que j’avais fait de lui donner tout l’amour de ma vie aillait mon cœur où foisonnait la joie; d’INDISTINCTES AMBITIONS déjà tout au fond de moi s’agitaient, mille velléités confuses; chants, rires, danses et bondissantes harmonies formaient cortège à mon amour…. (453)

The narration of this passage at least partly refers to homoerotic desire, as noted, for example, by the mentioning of a series of “indistinctes ambitions.” Michel, a distant yet dutiful husband refrains from altogether abandoning Marceline, although the homoerotic bent of his desire becomes increasingly difficult for him to ignore. Gide’s relationship with Emmanuèle is also “indistincte,” as the writer likely views her in “angelic” terms,
which means that she is relegated to a space that is void of sex and sexuality.\textsuperscript{38} Such a condition is also inscribed in the work \textit{Et nunc manet in te}.\textsuperscript{39} In order to understand what is here at stake, one should pay attention to the concluding pages of \textit{Partie I} of the autobiography, in which Roger Martin du Gard\textsuperscript{40} plays a pivotal role in Gide’s subsequent treatment of homosexual thematics. Speaking of du Gard, Gide writes:

Roger Martin du Gard, à qui je donne à lire ces Mémoires, leur reproche de ne jamais dire assez, et de laisser le lecteur sur sa soif. Mon intention pourtant a toujours été de tout dire. Mais il est un degré dans la confidence que l’on ne peut dépasser sans artifice, sans se forcer; et je cherche surtout le naturel. (547)

Gide’s “defense” in regards to Martin du Gard’s comments relates to how not to transform confidence into artificial over-exposure. According to Michael Lucey, “Gide thus turns Martin du Gard into a voice encouraging him on his new path, seconding Gide’s efforts to renovate his literary profile, to pursue a kind of avant-garde openness about his sexuality” (“Practices” 49). But what is the new path to which Lucey refers? Gide’s treatment of homosexual thematics in his autobiography is not necessarily a new procedure, but is representative of the writer’s evolving aesthetic, which also marks a shift in narrative technique as compared to \textit{L’immoraliste}.

The writer commences the second half of his biography with what could be read as a revealing confession:

Les faits dont je dois à présent le récit, les mouvements de mon coeur et de ma pensée, je veux les présenter dans cette même lumière qui me les

\textsuperscript{38} One could also argue that in speaking of “indistinctes ambitions,” Gide is also referring to his literary ambitions.

\textsuperscript{39} Dedicated to his wife, Madeleine, \textit{Et nunc manet in te} also highlights an erotic positioning of the male subject.

\textsuperscript{40} It is important to clarify that Roger Martin du Gard was heterosexual, and was considered to be one of the greatest French novelists at the time.
éclairait d’abord, et ne laisser point trop paraître le jugement que je portai sur eux par la suite. (549)

He at least partially relieves du Gard’s concerns in subsequently writing: “je raconterai néanmoins ce drame sans faire intervenir d’abord celui que je n’identifiai que longtemps plus tard” (549). For the tourist, travel yields a form of self-discovery that would not have been possible had he remained in France among the bourgeois circles that he longed to escape. The second half of *Si le grain ne meurt* can also be characterized by Gide’s subtle defense of homosexuality, calling for a cross reading with *Corydon*.

Like Gide, Michel also actively participates in homoerotic tourism. On one occasion, he speaks of an interaction with an Arab boy, recalling the tourist’s cruisy behavior in *L’immoraliste*:

Celui qui m’accompagna ce jour-là était un tout jeune Arabe à peau brune, que déjà les jours précédents j’avais remarqué parmi la bande de vauriens qui fainéantisaient aux abords de l’hôtel. Il était coiffé de la chéchia, comme les autres, et portait directement sur la peau une veste de grosse toile et de bouffantes culottes tunisiennes qui faisaient paraître plus fines encore ses jambes nues. (560)

At the beginning of Michel’s *drame*, the narrator comments on Bachir’s delicate features, which he asserts are visible beneath the boy’s revealing gandourah. In this passage from *Si le grain ne meurt*, the mentionning of the *jeune Arabe* is hardly coincidental. Having noticed the boy the day before, the traveler makes a conscious choice to find him. Similar to Roland Barthes’s infatuation with the *petit mec* as we will see in Chapter 2, Gide is also drawn to a group of “tough guys”:\(^41\)

À Kairouan, que je ne connaissais pas encore, et où j’allai sans Marceline, la nuit était très belle. Au moment de rentrer dormir à l’hôtel, je me

souviens d’un groupe d’Arabes couchés en plein air sur les nattes d’un petit café. Je m’en fus dormir tout contre eux. Je revins couvert de vermine.

(465)

In many ways, Kairouan is symbolic of Michel’s homosexual awakening, and visiting the Tunisian city without Marceline allows him to further indulge in his oriental fantasy. The dialectics of this passage point to a conscious decision to seek out a group of Arabs that the tourist had noticed while visiting the city earlier in the day as a “typical” tourist. But as opposed to retreating to the comfort of a hotel, he prefers to sleep in the street—on mats, like the Arabs he so desires. Despite the presence of vermin, this scene highlights the sense of jouissance associated with taking repose next to the bodies that fuel his erotic desire—despite the obvious differences between the two social classes, which here become intertwined in a rather ironic way.

From *Corydon* to *Les Carnets d’Égypte*: A Defense of Homoerotic Tourism

While *Corydon* is not a travel text per se, several passages from this work also underscore the tourist’s motivation for fleeing the north. It can also be described as a work through which the tourist “travels” back in time to ancient Greece.\(^{42}\) Gide began writing *Corydon* as early as 1907, less than five years following the publication of *L’immoraliste*. Consisting of four Socratic dialogues, it has been referred to by Daniel Moutote as a “scientific and historical study of human sensuality” (13). While one can agree with Moutote’s characterization, it should be added that these dialogues are also inscribed with revealing social commentary. In the preface to the 1920 edition, he writes: “Je me décide après huit ans d’attente à réimprimer ce petit livre. Il parut en 1911, tiré à

\(^{42}\) My project does not consider the complexities of homosexuality in North Africa and other parts of the Arab world and its relation to ancient Greece, as this is another topic.
douze exemplaires, lesquels furent remisés dans un tiroir—d’où ils ne sont pas encore sortis” (11). The writer had clearly given considerable thought to the ramifications of reprinting his *petit livre*, echoing his earlier hesitation in publishing *L’immoraliste*. In this regard, his “defense” of homosexuality was not an entirely new line of argumentation, but one that had been cryptically interwoven in Michel’s *drame* nearly a decade earlier.

The writer elaborates on his views on homosexuality in the concluding lines of the preface: “Ce que j’en dis ici, après tout, pensais-je, ne fait point que tout cela soit. Cela est” (12). Faced with the challenge of addressing the same social circles that had forced Michel to flee France in search of an alternate form of self and being, the writer, here through the voices of Corydon and an unnamed interlocutor, enters into a dialogue that addresses the topos of same sex desire. He suggests that normative homosexuality indeed exists, despite the Westerner’s best efforts to label such relations as a perverse vice—otherwise known as *la vice contre nature*. Even though *Corydon* is a Socratic dialogue, it can also be qualified as part of the writer’s autobiography. Furthermore and in this regard, the evolution of Gide as a writer is often subtle as he revisits events that he has previously discussed in slightly different contexts.

Gide’s work plays an important role in constructing imaginary representations of the Maghreb as a homoerotic paradise. Citing the natural occurrence of homosexuality in ancient Greece, the traveler is once again in search of a similar utopic paradise. While he locates “freedom” in North Africa, the situation of homosexuality in the region was quite different from the traveler’s fantasized vision of the region. Gide is a foreign tourist who interprets the complexity of social behaviors in a way that pleases his own sense of desire. The writer’s most celebrated attempt to normalize homosexuality occurs in the
first dialogue of *Corydon* when he proposes a revealing comparison to heterosexual behaviors:⁴³

… Comprenez-moi: l’homosexualité, tout comme l’hétérosexualité, comporte tous les degrés, toutes les nuances: du platonisme à la salacité, de l’abnégation au sadisme, de la santé joyeuse à la morosité, de la simple expansion à tous les raffinements du vice. L’inversion n’en est qu’une annexe. De plus tous les intermédiaires existent entre l’exclupanse homosexualité et l’hétérosexualité exclusive. Mais, d’ordinaire, il s’agit bonnement d’opposer à l’amour normal un amour réputé contre nature—et, pour plus de commodité, on met toute la joie, toute la passion noble ou tragique, toute la beauté du geste et de l’esprit d’un côté; de l’autre, je ne sais quel rebut fangeux de l’amour. (30)

The link between his defense of homosexuality in *Corydon* and homoerotic tourism in *L’immoraliste* and *Si le grain ne meurt* merits close consideration. Gide argues that heterosexuality is a complex mode of being, and asserts that heterosexuals do not fit neatly into one unified category. This is particularly revealing as such discourse highlights a complete disapproval of Western hegemonic culture. In what can be qualified as a veiled and scathing reference to European ideology, Gide implies that in the north, most people refuse to acknowledge homosexuality as being normal—in essence relegating the gay subject to the status of a criminal or “sick” individual. If the homosexual is a diverse subject like his heterosexual counterpart, why, then, does society insist upon placing characters like Michel (and Gide) in the category of those who are *malade*? Gide’s North Africa, much like the ancient Greece he speaks of in *Corydon*, permits the sexual tourist to indulge his desires without being trapped at the margins of

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⁴³ Concerning the passage that follows, such rhetoric can be applied to what Gide accused Proust of doing in regards to the latter’s treatment of homosexual thematics in his writing.
bourgeois society. In this regard, Lestringant rightfully considers *les Carnets d’Égypte* as a sequel to *Corydon*.44

In January of 1939, Gide traveled to Egypt where he remained for several months. While the primary reason for his visit was initially attributed to his intended participation in two literary conferences, his personal correspondence from the region suggests what can be read as a series of more intimate and personal experiences. Upon close examination, *les Carnets d’Égypte* and *Corydon* appear to share a number of interrelated motifs. The writer’s Socratic defense of homosexuality as well as his observations of the male subject while traveling in Egypt, reveal a number of critical similarities. In Egypt, the tourist encounters a society that he likens to ancient Greece, suggesting in his “journal” that the possibility of the homoerotic encounter exists and is readily available—if so desired. Writing from Luxor on February 3, 1939,45 he asserts:

Non, je n’ai plus grand désir de forniquer; du moins ce n’est plus un besoin comme au beau temps de ma jeunesse. Mais j’ai besoin de savoir que, si je voulais, je pourrais; comprenez-vous cela? Je veux dire qu’un pays ne me plaît que si de multiples occasions de fornication se présentent. Les plus beaux monuments du monde ne peuvent remplacer cela; pourquoi ne pas l’avouer franchement? (1052)

By now in his early seventies, the traveler reflects on his past—*au beau temps*—a melancholic reference to earlier times, earlier travels, and earlier “affairs.” He suggests that the possibility and “freedom” of the homosexual encounter is what qualifies for him the region as utopic. Further indicative of his identity as a literary sexual tourist, he writes in his journal earlier that same day: “Bien décidé à simplement me laisser vivre, tout

44 In the second volume of his biography on Gide, Lestringant writes “Assurément, les *Carnets d’Égypte* sont l’un des ouvrages les plus déconcertants de Gide. C’est comme une suite de *Corydon*, cette suite qu’il envisagea longtemps et qu’il n’écrivait jamais. Ou plutôt, une “Défense et illustration” de *Corydon*—un *Corydon* pratique en quelque sorte” (858).

45 By 1939, Gide’s “mask” has fallen.
aujourd’hui, comme un palmier. Je veux ignorer qu’il y a “des choses à voir,” à Louxor et aux environs” (1051). The tourist appears rather uninterested in Luxor’s historical attractions; he prefers instead to experience the pleasures of “everyday life” in North Africa, partly documented by his many casual observations of the Arab male at work, whom he views from a distance through the lens of a curious, sexual tourist.

The erotics of the writer’s imaginary are further exposed in an entry dated February 15, in which he speaks of a petit jardinier to whom he is attracted:

Depuis hier, le petit jardinier qui me paraît le plus charmant s’est enfin départi de sa réserve; sans pour cela devenir moins désirable à mes yeux. Mais il est très surveillé par les autres, depuis que ceux-ci ont compris que celui-là seul me plaissait. Il s’est découvert à moi tout entier, gracieux et doré, plus exquis encore que ne le laissait supposer son visage. Quelle félicité ce serait de tenir entre ses bras, de presser contre soi, de caresser longuement ce corps grêle!... Mais il n’est pas question de cela. Eux semblent ne connaître ici, ou ne me proposer du moins, chacun, et cet enfant tout comme les autres, que des gestes quasi rituels, qu’une volupté sommaire et bâclée; à laquelle je préfère mon désir même et ce simple plaisir des yeux qui, comme l’éventail de Cléopâtre, en soufflant sur la convoitise, à la fois l’avive et l’apaise. (1060-1)

Gide’s erotic portraiture of the Egyptian male further identifies his attraction to the métis figure. Writing thus allows the traveler to articulate his erotic fantasies, thereby allowing him to return to France with a documented account of his wanderings.

The following scene, which occurs while boating on the Nile River, points to Gide’s physical attraction to his young Arab guide, but also draws attention to the perceived tolerant mindset of North Africa:

J’ai fait signe à [Ali] de venir dans ma barque et lui, tout aussitôt quittant l’Anglais, m’a rejoint à un point d’accostage. Le rameur nous a emmenés tous deux au milieu du fleuve, ou même, assez près de l’autre rive, en ce point déserte. Ali et moi, nous nous sommes couchés dans le fond de la barque et enlacés, sous les regards complaisants du rameur et d’un soleil accablant. (1072)
More significant than his attraction to Ali is the fact that this homoerotic scene occurs in Egypt, and in the presence of an Egyptian rameur who appears unmoved by the homoerotic scene before him. Whether the guide approves of the tourist’s behavior is of secondary importance. If Gide had “reenacted” this same scene on the Seine in Paris there would have been cause for calamity. This may also explain Michel’s desire to escape Paris and retreat to his farm in La Morinière—away from the pressures of Parisian society.

The beauty of the young Arab body as noted in Michel’s multiple descriptions of Bachir in L’immoraliste also informs the tourist’s vision of the male subject in les Carnets d’Égypte:

> Je me demande parfois ce que je penserais aujourd’hui de ceux qui me paraissaient autrefois si charmants, les revoyant tels qu’ils étaient jadis. Les reconnaîtrais-je? Certains, sans doute. Ce que j’aimais en eux, c’était leur jeunesse. Et c’est elle que je retrouve en d’autres aujourd’hui; ce qui me permet de n’être pas trop mélancolique, car la seule jeunesse qu’aucun printemps ne ramènera, c’est la mienne. Puissé-je avoir laissé d’elle quelque chaleur en mes écrits! À présent c’est le tour à d’autres. Mais la dépouille que je vais bientôt devoir au tombeau, je voudrais qu’elle ne fût pas trop refroidie. Je ne puis tenir pour sagesse l’effort d’éteindre les derniers tisons du désir; mais de les revivre au contraire. Laissons à faire à la mort; à quoi bon aider à son jeu? (1062)

The health and virility of the éphèbe continues to “heal” the traveler, despite his age. He escapes the looming threat of a melancholic condition by basking in the boy’s beauty whose youth is immortalized through writing. This passage can also be read as a tribute to the hope the writer extends to future travelers. The queer positioning of the journal therefore places Gide at the forefront of homoerotic travel writing, and also establishes his oeuvre as a solid precursor to a growing body of works on homosexual desire in French literature.
Lestringant suggests that in order to appreciate the depth of Gide’s travel journal from Egypt, once must place the work into dialogue with *Et nunc manet in te* (1951), a text he was in the final stages of completing during this same trip. Under the spell of the Egyptian male’s beauty, he confesses what can be interpreted as the ultimate betrayal: an erotic encounter on the train from Biskra to Algiers during his honeymoon trip:

> Les vacances de Pâques avaient pris fin. Dans le train qui nous ramenait de Biskra, trois écoliers, regagnant leur lycée, occupaient le compartiment voisin du nôtre à peu près plein. Ils s’étaient à demi dévêtus, la chaleur étant provocante, et, seuls dans ce compartiment, menaient un train d’enfer. Je les écoutais rire et se bousculer. À chacun des fréquents mais brefs arrêts du train, penché à la petite fenêtre, du côté que j’avais baissée, ma main pouvait atteindre le bras d’un des trois écoliers, qui s’amusait à se pencher vers moi, de la fenêtre voisine, se prêtait au jeu en riant; et je goûtais de suppliciantes délices à palper ce qu’il offrait à ma caresse de duveteuse chair ambrée. (1134)

Often traveling with Madeleine, Gide was forced to balance homoerotic desire with his duties as a husband, recalling once again Michel’s own dilemma in *L’immoraliste*. The descriptions of the boys in this passage parallel numerous other portrayals of the *éphèbe*, as well as the character of Charles whom the narrator attempts to seduce on his farm in *La Morinière*. The train itself is symbolic of the writer’s movement toward “something else.” Through listening to the boys laughing and playing in the adjoining compartment, the tourist is forced to confront his desire to “break free” from the constraints of his heterosexual existence, a condition that is consistently rewritten throughout the twentieth-century—with Gide’s writing in the background.

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46 *Et nunc manet in te* was likely published posthumously at the request of the writer.
Journal d'un innocent: A Postmodern Rewriting of Gide’s Travels South

In Postmodernist Fiction (1987), Brian McHale considers the theoretical differentiation between modern and postmodern writing. His analyses speak directly to the narrative style of Journal d’un innocent (1976) by Tony Duvert:

[A] superior construction of postmodernism would be one that produces new insights, new or richer connections, coherence of a different degree or kind, ultimately more discourse, in the form of follow-up research, new interpretations, criticism and refinements of the construct itself, counter proposals, refutations, polemics. (5)

Duvert reinterprets and redefines Gide’s portrait of France by unraveling the poetics of early twentieth-century modernist literature, including L’immoraliste, thus entering into a series of polemical debates in which Michel also but subtly participates. In this way, the narrator of Journal d’un innocent proposes a different kind of critique—one that transforms Michel’s discontent into a more direct and perhaps unforgiving form of discourse.

A close study of both texts reveals a number of similarities. In A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition (1998), Gregory Woods speaks of the intellectual boy lover and his quest. In his study, he transitions from L’immoraliste to Journal d’un innocent thereby placing the two works within the same category of homoerotic literature. He writes that “Duvert’s boys are still conspicuously innocent, but not in the sense that means sexless: these boys are innocent of guilt and guile” (334). Although he

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47 I base my understanding of postmodern writing on McHale’s overarching argument that postmodern fiction functions to give rise to questions about existence and the world in which we live. Such literary construct directly applies to Duvert’s procedure in Journal d’un innocent in that the narrator questions the validity of his “French” identity, while at the same time deconstructing the very essence of his redefined self. While one could argue that Gide also im(poses) such questions, texts including L’immoraliste at least partially retain a “protective” layer, which permits the narrator to maintain a certain ontological distance. In his writing, Duvert actively embraces such Gidean constraint—free of any possible rejection that may arise due to the supposed fragile nature of his repertoire, including what could be described as a semiotics of postmodernism in his oeuvre.
does not draw a direct comparison with Gide’s boy-companions, the éphèbe-lovers we encounter in *L’immoraliste* and *Si le grain ne meurt* are also innocent in the way Woods describes. Such a characterization fuels both tourists’ desire to separate from the hypocrisies of French culture. The following passage from Duvert’s text underscores such sentiment:

En tête à tête, beaucoup de garçons étaient cordiaux, sensuels, d’humeur légère et tendre, très libres de leur corps. Dans une situation qu’ils savaient inavouable, ils auraient pu se montrer cyniques, méchants, malhonnêtes: mais je ne vis presque jamais cela. Ils étaient plutôt désarmés au contraire, et débordaient de gentillesse innocente, de courtoisie, de contentement rieur, aimables et doux comme ils ne le seraient pas avec des femmes. (28)

The narrator finds solace while in the presence of boys who do not judge him against a value system like that of France, despite their partial hesitation to adopt a “gay” lifestyle. While the narration implies that homosexuality must be practiced in secrecy, these boys allow the traveler to experience liberation from Eurocentric ideology. Like Duvert’s narrator, Michel is also healed by the presence of Arab boys:

Les enfants, durant ces tristes jours, furent pour moi la seule distraction possible. Par la pluie, seuls les très familiers entraient; leurs vêtements étaient trempés; ils s’asseyaient devant le feu, en cercle. De longs temps se passaient sans rien dire. J’étais trop fatigué, trop souffrant pour une autre chose que les regarder; mais la présence de leur santé me guérissait. (394)

While Gidean discourse is often less direct when compared to Duvert’s style, the narrator accesses a similar form of pleasure while interacting with the North African éphèbe. The inferred virility of the boys of *Journal d’un innocent* can be easily observed in the characters of Bachir and Ashour who are often described as “healthy” and “young.”

In recent years, analyses of Tony Duvert’s work have largely waned. Despite the success of his critically acclaimed novel *Paysage de fantaisie* (1973), he was largely ostracized in France for his subsequent writings that dealt with questions of sexuality and
pederasty. *Journal d’un innocent* has been overlooked as a text of significance, a lingering remnant of the controversy surrounding its subject matter. Les Éditions de minuit, renowned for an ability to circumvent censorship laws prior to the liberation of Paris in 1944, agreed to publish the work. While the subject matter did not deter the publisher, the original title, *Journal d’un pornographe*, was ultimately changed. Michel Longuet speaks of the current title and how it materialized:

Je me souviens aussi de l’écriture de *Journal d’un innocent* dont le titre d’ailleurs a été trouvé par Jérôme Lindon. Le livre s’appelait d’abord *Journal d’un pornographe*. Tony était à Marrakech, il y resté plus d’une année, il a écrit le livre sur place, il l’a envoyé manuscrit par lettres aux Éditions de Minuit, au fur et à mesure, comme un véritable journal. On était loin de l’écriture nouveau roman du début. Avec ce livre, Tony était persuadé qu’il allait avoir un prix. (“Entretien Sebhan” Web)

A 1977 review of *Journal d’un innocent* suggests that, “Duvert’s latest book, a récit, is another nonconformist piece of fiction in the first person, in conformity with the contemporary tendency of literature to deal with subjects until recently considered indecent …” (Lakich 584-5). One of only a few brief critical reviews, it fails to recognize the text as a narrative rewriting or pastiche of earlier examples within the genre of homoerotic literature. Furthermore, the author of this review does not acknowledge the postmodernist aesthetic of the text. Although Duvert’s writing style is contrastingly different than Gide’s, the text is similar to *L’immoraliste* in that it can also be read as a multi-layered attack on the social institutions of France. The boys of *Journal d’un innocent*, whom the narrator renames after characters from a novel by Francisco de Quevedo titled *Historia de la vida del Buscón, llamado Don Pablos, ejemplo de*.

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48 The theme of pedophilia does not inform my textual analyses in this dissertation.

49 In *L’enfant silencieux*, Sebhan writes: “Son récit, il pense l’intituler *Journal d’un pornographe*, mais non dit [Jérôme] Lindon, qui y voit plutôt le témoignage d’une certaine pûreté” (89-90).
vagamundos y espejo de tacaños (1626), are postmodern recreations of Gide’s boy-lovers.\textsuperscript{50} While the language is at times (porno) graphic, the erotic dimension of the narration functions to underscore the traveler’s portrayal of France as a land of hypocrites—a country synonymous for its *homosexuels culpabilisés*.\textsuperscript{51}

In the preface to his English translation of the text (2010), Bruce Benderson writes “Duvert belongs, of course, to a well-known tradition of French *poètes maudits*, who aligned themselves with variations of the notion of evil and who include Sade, Baudelaire, Bataille, Huysmans and Genet” (11). But these writers, a group to whom Duvert rightly belongs, did much more than align themselves with notions of “evil.”\textsuperscript{52}

From the eighteenth-century libertine writings of Sade to the sexual entanglements we encounter in multiple works from Gide to Genet, portrayals of sex and (homo) sexuality are widely prevalent in French literature, and have been consistently rewritten throughout the period under investigation. Whereas Gide’s text highlights an ebb and flow of apologetic and slightly non-conformist language, Duvert’s *récit* displaces all traces of Gidian “mild-mannered” political discourse. Duvert aptly transforms the “secret” of Gidian sexuality into a postmodern version of Michel’s fantasy, rewritten here in the

\textsuperscript{50} The narrator states: “Il vaut mieux que je baptisée certains garçons. Je vais prendre les noms dans un roman de Quevedo, je n’ai guère de livres ici et cela peut convenir. Il n’y a qu’à suivre l’ordre du premier chapitre: je lis Francesco, prénom de l’auteur, puis Pablos, Pedro, Diego, Andrès, quelques autres” (10). In *L’enfant silencieux*, Gilles Sebhan writes that Duvert had never read Quevedo’s novel but that he was fond of its title.

\textsuperscript{51} “Andrès, comme nombre d’homosexuels culpabilisés que j’ai croisés en France, bâtit plutôt, avec quelques miettes de son passé, un évènement qui repousse sur autrui la responsabilité de ce qu’il est” (78).

\textsuperscript{52} Although beyond the parameters of my dissertation, Benderson’s analysis of Duvert’s text does not provide a salient definition of the term “evil.” In this regard, he is too vague with his use of the word in the context of the authors cited.
context of a sexually explicit novel (which one could argue is not really about sex, at all) that also functions as a tourist’s travel journal.

The work is a probable highly fictional account of a sexual tourist’s travels somewhere outside of France, although the writer does not explicitly identify the location of the narrator’s travels. One of the most revealing and primordial clues that the novel is situated in North Africa can be traced to the fact that in 1974, the writer took up residency in Marrakech, Morocco. In *L’enfant silencieux* \(^{53}\) (2010) Gilles Sebhan considers this important time period:

> Il y a dans le texte une grande cohérence. Et ce qui frappe surtout: cette transposition permanente, cet effacement de la couleur locale, ce refus absolu du pittoresque. Tony parle de carême au lieu de ramadan, d’église au lieu de mosquée, et il efface toutes les petites particularités qui pourraient enfermer le lecteur et l’empêcher d’atteindre d’expérience nue. (89)

Sebhan captures the writer’s ability to “deceive” his reader without compromising the narrative structure of the book. Whereas Gide informs his audience of the exact location of Michel’s whereabouts, Duvert contrastingly thrives on ambiguity. One could take this argument one step further in that not only is there a universal refusal of the *pittoresque* in the novel; the raw nature of the narration depicts a world bourgeois readers will likely find highly repulsive. Yet it is a world that infinitely pleases the narrator who is also a French *touriste*—like Gide. Another revealing reference to the novel’s location can be attributed to the cover art of Benderson’s translation. Adorning the front cover of *Diary of an Innocent* is an image of Habana Vieja, although nothing in particular is readily suggestive of Cuba. On the contrary, the photograph resembles any number of cities in

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\(^{53}\) *L’enfant silencieux* is the only biography on Duvert currently available.
North Africa. In this way, the artwork poses as an extension of the narration and visually respects the author’s postmodernist aesthetic.

Duvert’s sexual tourist lives life as he chooses without regard to the social institutions of France. In *L’immoraliste*, Ménalque also speaks to this idea, but as readers, we cannot be certain that Michel ultimately discards his French identity based on the text’s rather open-ended conclusion. In this regard, one can speak of a series of characters (and writers) within the genre that embrace the idea of “living for one’s self,” including Ménalque, the writer Oscar Wilde, and Duvert’s unnamed narrator, among others.

Let us return for a moment to the character of Ménalque who insists that Michel should live life as he chooses:

Ménalque s’inclina vers le feu, comme s’il eût voulu cacher son visage. Il se taisait. Il se tut si longtemps que j’en fus à la fin tout gêné, ne sachant non plus que lui dire. Je me levai, fis quelques pas, puis, m’approchant de lui, posai ma main sur son épaule, Alors, comme s’il continuait sa pensée: il faut choisir, mumura-t’il. L’important, c’est de savoir ce que l’on veut. (435)

This scene from *L’immoraliste* underscores the “limits” of the French experience, as Ménalque asserts that one should choose his own form of happiness—regardless of what others may think. The narrator truly desires to emulate Ménalque, which would liberate him from the burden of occidental/societal expectations. Such moments can often be characterized by an erotic charge.

To better understand such differentiation, in a scene during a visit to a café with Oscar Wilde while traveling in Algeria, the beauty of the Arab male subject strikes Gide, as it had Michel. In this passage from *Si le grain ne meurt*, Gide is initially somewhat

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54 The architecture is not immediately suggestive of Cuba. The image is composed primarily of rooftops with a seaview in the background. The photograph closely resembles comparable scenes of Moroccan buildings and landscapes, including images one often associates with the city of Tangiers.
reluctant to “mingle” in Wilde’s social circles, but is unable to deny the desire he feels for the Arab boy. Recalling the erotic scene with Ménalque, Gide further engages the (homo) erotics of his imaginary:

Rien ne signalait le café; sa porte était pareille à toutes les autres portes; entr’ouverte, et nous n’eûmes pas à frapper. Wilde était un habitué de ce lieu, que j’ai décrit dans Amyntas, car j’y retournai souvent par la suite. Quelques vieux Arabes étaient là, accroupis sur des nattes et fumant le kief, qui ne se dérangèrent pas lorsque nous prîmes place auprès d’eux. Et d’abord je ne compris pas ce qui, dans ce café, pouvait attirer Wilde; mais bientôt je distinguai, près du foyer plein de cendres, dans l’ombre, un caouadjî, assez jeune encore, qui prépara pour nous deux tasses de thé menthe, que Wilde préférerait au café. Et je me laissais assoupir à demi par la torpeur étrange de ce lieu, lorsque, dans l’entre-baillement de la porte, apparut un adolescent merveilleux. (590)

The Arab boy is described as “un adolescent merveilleux,” language that infuses the passage with an erotic undercurrent. In a subsequent scene, the traveler explores further his attraction to a certain Mohammed who is playing a flute exquise: “j’admirais l’allongement de ses doigts sur la flute, la sveltesse de son corps enfantin, la gracilité de ses jambes nues qui sortaient de la blanche culotte bouffante, l’une replitée sur le genou de l’autre” (590). This scene can be read as a rewriting of Michel’s initial encounter with Bachir. While he initially comments that the boy’s musical talent is remarkable, the dialectics of the passage suggest a physical attraction, as opposed to an admiration for music. What the narrator truly desires, as does Michel, is the embrace of another male who is, in this case, the ravishing éphèbe. The Arab boy, who Wilde claims is “celui de Bosy” (590), inspires the writer’s erotic re-awakening in what can be described as yet another parallel to the scene from L’immoraliste. While one could argue that Gide clearly understands Bosy’s “relationship” with Mohammed, Wilde offers the boy to him in what can be described as a reference to an impending sexual proposition: “Dear, vous voulez
le petit musicien?” (591). The verb *vouloir* in this instance poses as a reference to homoerotic desire and is Wilde’s salacious way of asking his comrade if he would like to have sex with the boy. Gide’s response to the British tourist’s salacious offer is one marked by both excitement and hesitation: “Oui, et de quelle voix étranglée” (591).

Duvert transforms such Gidean rhetoric into a more outspoken rendering of the sexual tourist’s search for otherness by removing all traces of occulted gay desire. In *Journal d’un innocent*, poetic language is rewritten through a series of graphic references to sex and sexuality. Whereas the scene at the café maure in Algiers depicts the stages of an erotic male encounter, Duvert’s aesthetic removes all traces of doubt:

> Un soir où je m’étais très rudement servi de lui, il demande à m’enfiler et, au lieu de refuser comme d’habitude, j’accepte. Je ne sais même pas où il jouissait les autres fois: au cabinet, peut-être. Il se couche sur mon dos, plante son membre, tremble de tout son corps, décharge aussitôt et retire sa queue. Il n’avait presque jamais l’occasion de foutre, la simple émotion de commencer le lui fit achever. Il ne me baisa pas, il me cocha. Si j’avais imaginé cela, j’aurais accepté plus souvent. Mais son petit pilon de pierre faisait mal. (85)

This scene points to a “freedom of self” that also motivates Michel’s (and Gide’s) desire to travel south. But Duvert’s text displaces vague and veiled references to sex and sexuality, including discourse related to the beauty and health of Arab boys, as well as the sexual acts that Gide implies, yet never explicity articulates in the way we observe in Duvert’s text.

Like the series of *éphèbes* we observe in Gide’s travel writings, including Bachir, Duvert’s boy-lovers also recognize the benefits of “mingling” with the northern tourist:

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55 This passage recalls a poem in Montherlant’s *Encore un instant du bonheur* (1934). In “Thèmes pour une flûte arabe,” the writer’s portrait of a young Arab musician mirrors Gide’s vision of Mohammed. In this regard, Montherlant’s verse poses as a mirror-like image of Bachir: “La douceur de sa poitrine, son cou noir, ses bras purs.”
J’habitais un endroit banal, deux pièces garnies dans un petit immeuble à jardin du quartier neuf, où les étrangers se logent plus facilement que dans l’immense vieille ville. C’était cher, clair, creux, moderne. Les garçons y venaient volontiers; ils mangeaient, fumaient, buvaient frais, s’asseyaient au balcon, prenaient des bains, barvardaient, dormaient. (15)

This passage begs a critical cross-comparison with *L’immoraliste* in that much like Gide’s way of narrating such encounters, it is void of graphic language; yet at the same time, it can be characterized by an undercurrent of erotic desire. While this scene can be easily justaposed to the more graphic encounters between the unnamed narrator and his tricks, it also points to a sense of jouissance associated with living “freely” and behaving exactly as he chooses—without the risk of being harshly judged.

Near the beginning of *Journal d’un innocent*, the theme of sexual tourism becomes increasingly salient when the narrator reveals quite abruptly that he is having occasional sex with a local garçon whose mother seems keen on “selling” all of her male children to him. The theme of prostitution that Gide carefully and often subtly weaves in and out of his writings is rewritten here in more direct and unapologetic terms:

Elle m’offre à admirer les deux garçonnetes de la famille, installés sur des cousins de chiffon en bas d’un mur nu. Ils portent des survêtements usés, mais sans trous ni taches, qui sont aussi leurs pyjamas; ils ne mangent pas, ils nous regardent fixement, en silence. Je les connais à peine. Celui qui a sept ans sourit comme une poupée, on le croit très joli, c’est le benjamin; il a des boucles, une longue figure au menton lourd, aux yeux de fille, avec des reflets méchants dans les joues, sur les lèvres; il m’attrape souvent les épaules et m’embrasse pour être flatté; je le repousse. (8)

While such descriptive language is not unlike Michel’s initial portraiture of Bachir, Duvert employs the verb “offrir” which is rather suggestive of prostitution, as the mother appears to offer her two sons for the tourist’s sexual pleasure. But like Bachir’s interactions with Michel, such moments are accompanied by the omnipresent expectation of some form of compensation.
Discourse of Innocence:  
The Ethics of Pornography

Whereas Gide attacks the moral code of his day, Duvert, echoing his thesis in *Le bon sexe illustré* (1974), intentionally draws the reader’s attention to the hypocritical values of France. The following passage from *Journal d’un innocent* underscores the narrator’s philosophical and moral positioning of sex and sexuality:

> L’amour entre garçons est interdit, mais les moeurs populaires en support-ent quelques vestiges: on s’accouple un peu sans filles ou sans femmes. Quant aux garçonnets, ils ne se jugent pas différents des hommes, on ne les éduque pas à l’innocence, le corps des adultes leur plaît et, s’ils sont délurés, ils veulent faire l’amour comme n’importe qui; même les impubères semblent trouver tout naturel qu’on s’intéresse à leur petit pénis dont ils ne sont pas à demi glorieux. (27)

For Duvert, the interdiction of love between boys does not preclude the natural occurrence of homosexuality—even among “supposed” heterosexual males. In doing so, Duvert “outs” what is expressly avoided in Western discourse. Speaking of France, the narrator asserts: “En France, la vie sociale est tellement hideuse que je ne regrette pas de me tenir à l’écart ou d’y être tenu” (29). Through graphic language use, the writer provoke his readership, and in doing so not only expects to be condemned by bourgeois audiences—he *actively* seeks their disapproval. In this way, much of the text’s language can be read as an oxymoron in that Duvert does not view his work as a “simple” example of pornography—but rather a treatise on the hypocracies of French culture and society, experienced here through and by *sex*.

The cultural institutions that drive Western hegemonic culture such as “traditional” family values, education, and marriage work against what Duvert might refer to as natural processes of socialization. Returning again to *Le bon sexe illustré*, the
writer speaks to this same idea, begging yet another cross comparison with the narrator’s portrait of France in *Journal d’un innocent*:

On voit la sexologie est, socialement, l’exercice d’un pouvoir abusif. Le discours sur la sexualité est—plus encore que le discours sur l’homme, l’art, la civilisation—le privilège culturel de la classe dirigeante. En France, le Conseil de l’Ordre des médecins, comme on sait, réunit des grands bourgeois qui adhèrent ouvertement à une idéologie conservatrice, et qui désavouent les praticiens dont le comportement professionnel est dissident…. (*illustre* 23)

This passage can be qualified as a critique of Western normative behavior. The writer seems to imply that when one trespasses the rules and regulations of this system, he or she becomes marginalized. Both Gide and Duvert are interested in the reasons for which this process occurs, and attempt to resolve the problematics of such discourse—through writing. All forms of sexuality, including so-called “deviant” sexual behaviors, are also regulated by this system and are governed by those whom Duvert describes as *des grands bourgeois*, a class of people who Michel also desires to escape in speaking of the “frivolité des salons, leur esprit” (*Romans*, 422). To this end, Michel’s retreat to his farm in La Morinière points to his desire to abandon the same bourgeois ethics that repulse Duvert.

In the following important scene from the 1902 text, Michel returns to his farm in the French countryside which doubles as an escape *intra-France* from the frivolity of Parisian salons. As opposed to the harsh characterization of the capital, Michel describes his farm as a peaceful retreat:

Nous arrivâmes à La Morinière dans les premiers jours de juillet, ne nous étant arrêtés à Paris que le temps strictement nécessaire pour nos approvisionnements et pour quelques rares visites. La Morinière, je vous l’ai dit, est située entre Lisieux et Pont-l’Évêque, dans le pays le plus ombreux, le plus mouillé que je connaisse. De multiples vallonnements,
Michel’s preference for the countryside is firmly established through the use of the word “strictement,” which indicates in this instance that he prefers to remain in Paris only long enough to prepare for his ensuing trip to the countryside. But why is he repulsed by the capital city? Paris suffocates his inner self, including the desire he feels for the male body. The peacefulness of the farm, accompanied by the presence of boys who remind him of the Maghreb, recall the simple and carefree existence that Duvert’s narrator enjoys while outside of the Hexagon. While the location of Journal d’un innocent may appear to be fraught with hardship, including the “deceptive” poverty of his boy-lovers, the society in which the narrator lives is, for him, an edenic paradise.

In the following scene, Duvert’s narrator once again underscores the disparity between the acceptances of homosexual behaviors in France versus the utopic region to which he travels:

J’avais demandé à Diego s’il continuerait longtemps à frequenter les hommes. Deux ans, dit-il, jusqu’à dix-huit ans. Date impérative. Il explique que, s’il va au-delà, il aimera trop ça et deviendra pédé. Je réponds que s’il aime ça je ne vois pas l’inconvénient. Il dit que oui mais c’est mal vu. Il n’a pas d’autre objection à faire; il ne veut pas de ces moeurs pour lui, il est indifférent à ce qu’un autre les adopte. (168)

While Diego believes that a negative stigma is attached to the adult pédé, he demonstrates no real concern with others who choose to lead a gay lifestyle: “il [Diego] est indifférent à ce qu’un autre les adopte” (168). This worldview is not entirely different from Ménalque’s. Such discourse is particularly critical of the writer’s approach in that the boy is symbolic of the “non-judgmental” (North African, perhaps…) subject. Let us consider for a moment that Diego is not “against” homosexuality, but prefers to remain at the edge
of underground queer culture. This poses as a curious reflection of a passage near the beginning of the text in which the narrator also prefers to take similar “distance” from the outward queerness of his own existence:

Puisque chacun use différemment des règles sociales, j’espérais au moins rencontrer ceux qui ne me les appliqueraient pas trop. Ce n’est pas une chose facile à apprécier, tant les situations la déterminant. J’évitais les raccrocheurs, ceux qui ont la parole facile et l’érotisme indigent. Je m’écartais généralement des homosexuels, qui me semblaient timorés, traqués, possessifs et retors. Je ne connaissais aucun adulte—je le suis bien assez pour mon usage. Enfin, mes besoins et mes habitudes me tenaient éloigné de la classe bourgeoise, grande ou petite, des étudiants, des autres étrangers. (29)

While the traveler does not refer here explicitly to Diego, the character easily fits the description of the type of lover he expects to encounter while traveling and residing in the region. Apart from his desire and willingness to engage in gay sex, Diego neither belongs to the upper class nor is he quintessentially gay in the sense that he exudes homosexuality. The character’s raw sexuality appears to be encapsulated in a “heterosexual shell,” which pleases the narrator.

While in the presence of the Arab male, including Ali whom he met while traveling in Egypt, Gide also experiences a form of jouissance made possible only through his travels outside of France. In les Carnets d’Égypte, the tourist’s utopic vision of North Africa is linked to a sense of freedom rather than pure sexual opportunity. Like Michel, Duvert’s narrator seeks more than sexual gratification. In Journal d’un innocent, Duvert reprises Gide’s position in this regard:

En tête à tête, beaucoup de garçons étaient cordiaux, sensuels, d’humeur légère, très libres de leur corps. Dans une situation qu’ils savaient inavouable, ils auraient pu se montrer cyniques, méchants, malhonnêtres; mais je ne vis presque jamais cela. Ils étaient plutôt désarmés au contraire, et débordaient de gentillesse innocente, de courtoisie, de contentement rieur, aimables et doux comme ils ne le seraient pas avec des femmes. (28)
The boys of Duvert’s text are able to somewhat easily navigate their queerness because they do not bear the burden of Occidental constructs of normativity that would otherwise condemn their behavior. Such scenes can be cross-read with a similar episode from *L’immoraliste* in which Michel is “healed” by the presence of Ashour—a character who exudes the same sense of light humor and gentle demeanor as the boy-lovers we encounter in *Journal d’un innocent*:

> Je n’eus pas fait vingt pas que mon châle me parut d’un poids insupportable; tout en sueur, je m’assis au premier banc que je trouvai. J’espérais qu’un enfant surviendrait qui me déchargerait de ce faix. Celui qui vint bientôt, ce fut un grand garçon de quatorze ans, noir comme un Soudanais, pas timide du tout, qui s’offrit de lui-même. Il se nommait Ashour. Il m’aurait paru beau s’il n’avait été borgne. Il aimait à causer, m’apprit d’où venait la rivière, et qu’après le jardin public elle fuyait dans l’oasis et la traversait en entier. Je l’écoutais, oubliant ma fatigue. (389)

Like Diego, Ashour relieves the pressures associated with the traveler’s heterosexual existence, although Gide partially occults this dimension of the text by referring to Michel’s weak condition as a result of his recent illness. In *Journal d’un innocent*, Michel’s fatigue is rewritten as an apparent search for lighthearted humor and companionship—the same qualities that Ashour exhibits, and which attract Michel—despite the boy in this case being blind in one eye. In what can be described as a narrative displacement of Bachir’s childlike innocence, Ashour “understands” the union into which he enters with the French traveler.

Speaking of *Journal d’un innocent*, Owen Heathcote writes:

> Since, for the narrator, sex and writing both benefit from the same conditions—cloistered privacy and obsessive fascination—there is a sense in which writing already imitates sex, in which sex is the natural and inevitable subject of writing, and whereby, therefore, it is impossible for writing not to substitute for sex and for writing not to chart that substitution. (Heathcote and Hughes 178)
Let us not forget that in Duvert’s text, the narrator is a sexual tourist writing a book *about* sex, which he says is “un livre pornographique que j’écris, il n’y faut que des bites” (75). Writing in this case also yields a source of income that may ultimately allow the narrator to maintain his new life abroad, thereby preventing what could be imagined as a forced return to his native France. Writing and sex are indeed related, and often represent a single, unified form of pleasure. In other words, neither exists without the other, and one could go so far as to suggest that writing produces the same europhoic sensation as the multiple sex acts that are described throughout the work.

Near the conclusion of *Journal d’un innocent*, the narrator’s two identities as sexual tourist and *écrivain* become conflated in the context of one final sexual encounter. But this moment is another textual “detour” characteristic of Duvert’s aesthetic:

> On recommence [les relations sexuelles], puis il se lève et, suppliant, il demande à utiliser ma machine à écrire. La table est à quatre pas du lit. Je le laisse. Enchanté, il s’assoit. Je mets une feuille, je lui explique quelques détails, et il tape de l’index. Ma machine est solide et grosse, belle à voir. Je découvre que mon adolescent est non seulement cagneux, mais demeuré. Pourtant, les gens normaux, eux, remarquent cela tout de suite. On doit s’occuper de lui, il est soigné et assez vêtu. (266-7)

Sex and writing yield a unified source of pleasure, which, for the narrator, is a necessary condition that must be met in order for the writing of his novel to be complete. Half-witted as his latest boy-lover may seem, the traveler finds him irresistibly attractive in a way that “normal” people might be unable to acknowledge. This boy, like the tourist, also needs to be “rescued,” and finds solace in the act of writing—or in the very least, the physical act of manipulating the traveler’s typewriter. In speaking of this scene, Sebhan writes: “[le narrateur] pense sans doute à ce jeune demeuré qui, à la fin du livre, tape aveuglément sur les touches d’une machine à écrire. La machine sur laquelle le récit vient
de s’écrire” (silencieux 90). The beauty the narrator attributes to his machine à écrire speaks further to the poeticized role of writing, and is a symbolic punctuation to the sexual encounter that has just occurred. Or, rather, that has just been “written.”

Although Journal d’un innocent may appear on the most superficial of levels as the pornographic text that the narrator so desperately seeks to produce, it is also, to adopt Roland Barthes’s qualification of Renaud Camus’s Tricks:

> [L]a rencontre qui n’a lieu qu’une fois: mieux qu’une drague, moins qu’un amour: une intensité, qui passe, sans regret. Dès lors, pour moi, Trick devient la métaphore de beaucoup d’aventures, et qui ne sont pas sexuelles: rencontre d’un regard, d’une idée, d’une image, compagnonnage éphémère et fort, qui accepte de se dénouer légèrement, bonté infidèle: une façon de ne pas s’empoisser dans le désir, sans cependant l’esquiver: une sagesse, en somme. (18)

The narrator’s sexual adventures are mere textual detours that unmask decorated perceptions of French society. But Duvert’s “transgressions” are far from original. What qualifies his text as a masterpiece of poetical criticism is his ability to de-idealize human behavior in a way that pleases him—which in turn destabilizes the fiber of a flawed system of hypocritical moral standards. In fleeing France and living his life as he chooses, the narrator asserts his “innocence” while at the same time, and quite ironically, turning his back on the very society that the writer adamantly condemns.

**Visualizing the (In)visible:**

**Philippe Vallois’s Un parfum nommé Saïd**

North African cinema has experienced a recent wave of notoriety, a trend that can be characterized in part by the increased appearance of queer-themed films produced in places like Morocco and Tunisia. A number of contemporary French-language films situated in the region have treated homosexual thematics, further underscoring the

56 I will discuss Barthes’s preface in more detail in Chapter 2.
growing visibility of the gay character in Maghrebi cinema. The medium of film represents a stage upon which the fantasy of homoerotic tourism becomes a visualized rewriting of the literary text at stake. One particular advantage of film is that it allows one to make visual contact with the bodies that the literary text portrays. Film can therefore be “read” as a moving language in which the camera poses as a central character of the visual narrative.

The narrative of film, particularly in the context of this current study, deals with the problematics of creating reciprocity among the central characters. In Un parfum nommé Saïd, the notion that there are two main characters (Saïd and Gérard) is firmly established by the filmmaker, which curiously is not the case in the literary texts under investigation. One could easily argue that Gide (the writer) and Michel are egocentric travelers. Moreover, the narration of L’immoraliste and Journal d’un innocent portrays the North African as a subject who is much less economically secure than the northern tourist, thereby establishing a sharp and perhaps unjust divide between two seemingly colliding worlds. But are these two worlds that different? To this end, the visual journey toward otherness that links text and film transcends the limits of traditional narration; both Gérard and Saïd equally achieve a sense of liberation that often escapes the éphèbe figure in the literary work.

In his article “Maghrebi-French Sexual Citizens: In and Out on the Big Screen,” Denis Provencher writes: “Queer Maghrebi characters are now finding their place front and center on the big screen in sexually-charged films that form a new wave sweeping French culture” (47). Whereas Provencher is primarily interested in the visibility of queer
Maghrebi cinema in France, one must also consider how these films underscore the European tourist’s desire to explore North Africa, and how such cultural cross-pollination influences cinematic artistry outside of the Hexagon. Provencher is correct to draw attention to the increased presence of queer subjects in the context of North African cinema, and I would add that these films also yield new interpretations of “Arab” queer culture—as filmed from within.

Philippe Vallois’s Un parfum nommé Saïd (2003) can be qualified as a filmic representation and “rewriting” of works including L’immoraliste and Si le grain ne meurt. Filmed in Morocco, it visualizes the joint thematic regime of desire and melancholy that is often inscribed in Gide’s travel writing. The camera’s gaze thus allows us to visualize the intricate relationship between the male characters, and in many cases further illuminates the poetics of the erotic encounter as articulated in the literary work.

In many ways echoing the texts under consideration, Vallois’s film documents the travels of a French tourist who embarks on a journey to North Africa. Gérard, one of the film’s two main characters, travels to Marrakech to film a documentary where he becomes enamored with Saïd, an attractive Moroccan Adonis. But like Michel, Gérard is seemingly unaware of the pleasures that await him upon his arrival in the region. Recalling Michel’s attraction to the éphebe in L’immoraliste, Gérard finds Saïd irresistibly alluring. One could go so far as to say that his attraction goes beyond a

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57 Provencher writes: “Recent films about ‘queer’ sexual citizens that include Franco-Maghrebis and their new forms of kinship have much to tell us not only about the multi-ethnic France, but a multicultural France that embraces a whole range of manifestations of difference” (49). The “manifestations of difference” to which Provencher refers is also linked to the European tourist’s search for “otherness” in North Africa. This thematic assumes yet another dimension when viewed through the optic of the “Arab” character, who, according to Provencher, turns to prostitution as a financial means of fleeing to France for a “better life.” In my view, Provencher’s argument in this regard diminishes the non-sexual dimension of sexual tourism, including Gérard’s desire to escape the very culture that Saïd supposedly wishes to participate in.
physical desiring of Saïd’s body, despite the sexual tension between the two characters—which in itself mirrors the erotic charge that often characterizes Michel (and Gide’s) interactions with Arab boys. Saïd, who refers to Gérard as “un Français à part,” exhibits an attraction to the tourist that suggests more than pure sexual desire. What sets him apart is his pleasantly erotic demeanor, which completely captivates Gérard. Both men are drawn to the “exotic” nature that characterizes their distinct cultures and backgrounds. In both film and text, then, “otherness” is linked to an omnipresent search for freedom. But the French traveler is not the only subject who seeks liberation from a static existence. The union they share therefore provides each character with a sought-after escape from the confines of his former self.

Gérard travels throughout Morocco, filming Saïd in a variety of settings that vacillate between “traditional” landscape scenes and more contemporary shots of present-day Morocco. In this regard, the film actually postfaces texts like L’immoraliste, a work written by an author who clearly envisions a “different” kind of world, yet can only dream of such reality. The film is an excellent attempt at “normalizing” homosexuality in a region that is often associated with homophobia and underground homosexuality. Like Gide’s attempt to defend same-sex relations in works including Corydon, the film takes audiences deeper into the realist dimension of Arab queer culture. This is achieved in part through the curiously seductive prowess of the camera’s gaze. Whether walking hand-in-hand in a traditional souk or traveling along a deserted road, both Saïd and Gérard emulate pure jouissance. Film in this case yields a visual representation—or rewriting—of Michel’s cruisy walks with Arab boys while traveling in North Africa. On one occasion, Gérard asserts “On est très, très heureux, on a passé un super séjour, tous les
deux.” Relieved of the constraints of European hegemonic culture, Gérard revels in the presence of the handsome Saïd—liberated from the limits of his French identity.

In the following frame, two worlds collide: “traditional” Morocco and Vallois’s contemporary vision of the North African nation. Projected onto what appears to be an entrance to a mosque, Vallois superimposes a half-naked image of Saïd who is wearing nothing but a bikini, which erotizes the shot. But what is the connection between religious imagery and the beauty of the male body as captured by the eye of the camera? The frame is immediately punctuated by a bare-skinned shot of Saïd’s upper body, coupling a symbolic marker of Islam (i.e., the Mosque) with what can be interpreted as a postmodern embodiment of Gide’s boy-lover. Whereas Michel confesses that Bachir’s beautiful skin is visible beneath his revealing gandourah, the camera’s rendering of Saïd’s body can be read as an unedited “reproduction” of the writer’s homoerotic fantasy. Similar to Gide’s narrative procedure, Vallois refrains from filming moments of explicit sexual encounter, yet both Saïd and Gérard exude sexuality.

![Fig. 1. “Postmodern Embodiment of Desire,” Un parfum nomme Said, Philippe Vallois (2003), Film Screenshot.](image)

In one of the film’s more captivating scenes, the following frame depicts two men who are walking hand-in-hand in a Moroccan souk. While such behavior is not
immediately suggestive of homosexuality, the image requires critical consideration of the cultural nuances that distinguish France from North Africa. In *L’immoraliste*, for example, Michel’s strolls with young Arab boys yields a form of pleasure that is synonymous with traveling in the region. What attracts Michel (and Gide) to the Maghreb is the dual possibility of sexual excitement and erotic male bonding—*sans limites*. One could easily imagine Michel’s image in this scene as being substituted for Gérard’s. Saïd therefore becomes a visualized interpretation of “Gide’s” boys, including the ones with whom Michel walks while liberated from Marceline.

![Fig. 2. “Male Bonding,” *Un parfum nommé Saïd*, Philippe Vallois (2003), Film Screenshot](image)

The following two images are complimented by what could easily be interpreted as a form of homoerotic dialogue: “il m’invitait à découvrir un nouveau parfum.” The sexual tourist, here in search of new “encounters,” basks in the beauty of the Arab body. If these shots occupy a privileged position in the film, its implication is that it is a foreshadowing of the homoerotic *engagement* that the camera goes on to capture in subsequent scenes. The shots that we have just viewed play with our senses, and quite possibly ignite the viewer’s tendency to more easily read the erotic charge between the
two characters. Whether the perfume transports the Arab male to a locus of sensory excitement is of secondary importance. What the eye of the camera achieves in this frame is the filming of an erotic moment, juxtaposed against the traditional practice of producing aromas—which in this case is symbolic of both lust and escape.

In this film, then, the filmmaker’s most noteworthy accomplishment is his ability to eroticize a series of encounters between Gérard and Saïd without entering into a visual space characterized by nudity and explicit sexuality. This is not to imply that such a technique would diminish the erotic charge of the director’s vision, but in this instance, as in the case of Gide’s narrative approach, the inference is more seductive than the well—and often over-emphasized—sex act [itself].

In conclusion, what comes to the fore in comparing film to literature is the question of reciprocity, a topos that is reconfigured by the powerful effects of the camera’s lens. To what extent do “Gide’s” boys actually exist? Michel informs his audience that his boy friends carry his shawl for him during presumably innocent strolls, which is quite different than two adult men whom we witness walking hand-in-hand as in the case of Gérard and Saïd. In Vallois’s moving narrative, both the North African and
the northern tourist who is enamored with him appear to equally benefit from one
another’s presence; all traces of Gidean egocentrism are “rewritten” on more equal terms.
In this way, the contemporary work produces an actual reciprocity in that there is a
salient negotiation whereby the “Arab” character does not automatically submit to the
European.
Chapter 2

(Im)Possible Delights:
Barthes’s Homoerotic Travel Writing and
the Photography of Bishan Samaddar

*Paix d’une djellaba (de dos) sur un âne, le signe qui se répète de temps en temps dans la campagne.*

*Roland Barthes (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 267)*

**Unfolding the Cryptogram of Cruising**

Barthes first traveled to North Africa in 1949 as a visiting professor at the University of Alexandria, where he remained for only one year before returning to France in 1950. The 1960s, however, ushered in a new era of tourism and writing. During this period, he traveled to Morocco on numerous occasions, including in his itinerary the cities of Tangiers, Rabat, and Marrakech. In an effort to escape the unstable political climate of France in the wake of the 1968 student uprisings, Barthes eventually settled in Rabat, accepting a position as a visiting professor at the *Université Mohammed V*. By this time a *résident* of Morocco, the “intellectual” traveler entered into an increasingly intimate relationship with the North African country, combining academe with homoerotic tourism.

*Incidents* (2009), *L’Empire des signes* (1970) and *Carnets du voyage en Chine* (2009)\(^{58}\) equally establish Barthes’s writing as being inscribed within the genre of homoerotic travel writing. His portraiture of the male subject while traveling in the Far East may at first appear to stand in stark contrast to the dialectics that characterize his North African travel narrative. Although the texts on China and Japan are arguably less erotic on a superficial level, his descriptions of the Oriental body yields a striking

\(^{58}\) Like *Incidents, Carnets du voyage en Chine* was published posthumously.
comparison to his “observations” while in Morocco—and Paris. These texts, in each case reminiscent of a *journal intime*,\(^{59}\) exhibit an intertextual likeness to one another through signs that are deceptive, yet curiously familiar. Each of these works can be characterized by a series of detours that function to disguise the erotic dimension of the narration.

Regarding *Incidents*, I will focus on the two short pieces titled: “Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris.” The two additional sub-texts that comprise *Incidents* had been previously published prior to their inclusion in the book edited by François Wahl.\(^{60}\) “La Lumière de Sud-Ouest” appeared in *L’Humanité* in 1977, followed by the publication of “Au Palace ce soir” in *Vogue-Hommes* in 1978. In the latter two texts, which do not adhere to diaristic form, Barthes laments his childhood spent in the Adour and Bayonne regions of France, and also discusses his adoration for *Le Palace*, a “post-Proustian” space\(^{61}\) that he confesses allows him to assume an alternate identity: “Au Palace, les lieux

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\(^{59}\) The text “Incidents” is not a traditional “journal.” Furthermore, the text is void of date markers, a peculiarity I will return to a bit later in this chapter. One must also consider the intended audience for these texts, as well as the circumstances surrounding their posthumous publication.

\(^{60}\) *Incidents* was published posthumously in 2009 by Éditions du Seuil, under the direction of François Wahl. A purely editorial invention in its current format, most scholars agree that Barthes never intended to publish these four texts as a single, unifying work. These texts are referred to in the framework for one of the writer’s final literary projects before his death in 1980: a book proposal referred to as the *Vita Nova*. In this project, which never materialized due to his untimely death, he set forth to explore the intricate process of writing a novel. The writer also speaks of his interest in the novel form in a series of lectures published shortly before his death titled “La Préparation du roman.” These travel texts pose as an invitation to experience Barthes’s world; that is, those aspects of his life that were the least mediated. As Wahl points out, Barthes qualified the texts that comprise *Incidents* as a series of “… mini-textes, plis, haïkus, notations, jeux de sens, tout ce qui tombe, comme une feuille” (9). The editor is correct to point out that the narration of these “mini-textes” seems to fall into place with no apparent order. Linking both texts, however, is the omnipresent theme of homoerotic attraction to the male body. “Incidents,” referred to by Wahl as a series *a recueils*, was written from Morocco between 1968 and 1969. While Barthes alluded to the possibility of publishing the text in *Tel Quel*, the transcripts included in the *Oeuvres Complètes* suggest that these journals were likely destined to appear in the *Vita Nova* in one form or another. “Soirées de Paris,” on the other hand, was written from Paris over a period of about twenty days in September of 1979 and offers an intimate look at how the writer cruised the queer spaces of Paris, which he navigates as if he were a tourist visiting from a foreign country.

\(^{61}\) “Proust aurait-il aimé? Je ne sais: il n’y a plus de duchesses. Pourtant, me penchant de haut sur le parterre du Palace agité de rayons colorés et de silhouettes dansantes, devinant autour de moi dans l’ombre des gradins et des loges découvertes tout un va-et-vient de jeunes corps affairés à je ne sais quels
familiers sont multipliés: salon pour bavarder, bars pour accueillir, se reposer entre deux danses, belvédère pour plonger, au-delà de l’échelonnement des balustrades, sur l’immense spectacle de la danse des lumières et des corps” (66-7). In speaking of the Parisian theater in “Au Palace ce soir,” he goes on to write: “Au Palace, je ne suis pas obligé de danser pour nouer avec ce lieu à l’écart” (Incidents 68). His feelings of liberation observable in these two passages can be compared to the jouissance inscribed in his travel writings from the Far East and North Africa. The need to escape, coupled with the desire to adopt an alternate form of self and being, lingered in Barthes’s imaginary throughout his career, culminating in the writing of two of his most revealing texts. While “Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris” appeared posthumously, he likely intended to return to these writings for a separate project.63

“Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris” decline various motifs and modalities that suggest a sexual tourist’s search for self, both at home and abroad. The homoerotic depiction of Moroccan boys can be juxtaposed with Barthes’s own self-portrait while cruising the queer spaces of the French capital. In his article “Cruising (Through)

circuits, il me semblait retrouver, transposé à la moderne, quelque chose que j’avais lu dans Proust: cette soirée à l’Opéra, ou la salle et les baignoires forment, sous l’œil passionné du jeune Narrateur, un milieu aquatique, doucement éclairé d’aigrettes, de regards, de piergeries, de visages, de gestes ébauchés comme ceux de déités marines, au milieu desquelles trônait la duchesse de Guermantes. Rien qu’une métaphore en somme, voyageant de loin dans ma mémoire et venant embellir le Palace d’un dernier charme: celui qui nous vient des fictions de la culture” (Incidents 69).

62 Barthes’s use of the words “theatre” and “nightclub” displaces traditional connotations of these terms: “Le Palace n’est pas une “boîte” comme les autres: il rassemble dans un lieu original des plaisirs ordinairement dispersés: celui du théâtre comme édifice amoureusement préservé, jouissance de la vue; l’excitation du Moderne, l’exploration de sensations visuelles neuves, dues à des techniques nouvelles; la joie de la danse, le charme de rencontres possibles” (Incidents 68).

63 In the transcript for the Vita Nova, the writer alludes to these texts on a number of occasions. In the outlined prologue for his impending novel, included are a series of references to his eroticized travels in Morocco, as well as his “dissatisfaction” with life in Paris. For a complete reference, see pp. 1011-1014 of the Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. V (2002).
Encounters,” Michael Worton addresses the use of the term “cruising” in Barthes’s writing:

… in order to understand what cruising means in Barthes’s work, and to understand how useful a model it can be for reading and writing (for straights and gays), one must recognize how, in Barthes’s thinking, cruising emerges both from his own personal, unhappy lived experiences as an unfulfilled lover and from the doxa that presents gay love as essentially transitory and multiple. (36)

Worton’s discussion of Barthes’s sexual and textual cruising is linked to the trope of melancholia that characterizes the two sub-texts here at stake. While the narrator does not seem to actively seek sexual fulfillment while traveling and residing in Morocco, the tourist as dragueur is an omnipresent figure in “Incidents.” In “Soirées de Paris,” however, his sexual escapades are explicitly referred to in an endless search for erotic encounters. One could argue that the writer’s personality is reflected in the tone of the text, which underscores the very profound “structure” of his outlook.

In “Vingt mots-clés pour Roland Barthes,” the writer speaks of la drague, providing critical insight into his procedure in “Incidents” and other texts:

En en parlant [de la drague], j’arriverai peut-être à le définir. C’est un thème important pour moi. La drague, c’est le voyage du désir. C’est le corps qui est en état d’alerte, de recherche par rapport à son propre désir. Et puis, la drague implique une temporalité qui met l’accent sur la rencontre, sur la “première fois.” Comme si la première rencontre possédait un privilège inouï: celui d’être retirée hors de toute répétition. (Oeuvres Complètes, IV: 873)

This interview, recorded in 1975 and published in Le Magazine Littéraire, yields consideration of his framing of desire as evidenced in “Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris.”

For Barthes, cruising and traveling go hand-in-hand and are thematic elements of the sexual tourist’s travel diary. As the fragments that constitute the tourist’s portrait of Morocco and Paris suggest, “L’acte de draguer est un acte qui se répète, mais son
contenu est une primeur absolue” (873). Homoerotic tourism is not limited to travels outside of the Hexagon, as “Soirées de Paris” aptly demonstrates. Writers like Barthes did not necessarily have to leave home in order to participate in sexual tourism and, in this way, the north/south dichotomy can be applied to the dual identities of touriste and resident. Whether at home in Paris or in his adopted “homeland” of Morocco, the writer navigates the spaces he inhabits much like a tourist who is in search of new experiences; he is also a traveler who seeks to escape the mundane.

Throughout Barthes’s travelogues, the topos of sexual tourism is often veiled, despite the occasional eroticized language that characterizes the fragmentary notations. As Claude Coste puts it, “c’est au lecteur de déplier les informations qui lui sont données” (Barthes 231-2). Déplier is the most effective procedure for uncovering the queer dimension of Barthes’s travel writing narrative strategies. In this regard, let us turn to Michelet par lui-même (1954). In contemplating the nineteenth-century French historian, Barthes writes:

Il n’est donc pas excessif de parler d’une véritable herméneutique du texte micheletiste. On ne peut lire Michelet linéairement, il faut restituer au texte ses assises et son réseau de thèmes: le discours de Michelet est un véritable cryptogramme. (Michelet 182)

He suggests that one cannot engage in a linear reading of Michelet’s text, an assertion that also speaks to the narration of Incidents. Barthes’s participation in homoerotic tourism is woven in and out of his travel writings, and is poetically inscribed in vivid depictions of everyday life, often with a particular focus on the male body. One such example occurs in “Incidents” when the narrator speaks of a boy whom he observes with quiet fervor: “Un garçon fin, presque doux, aux mains déjà un peu épaisses, a soudain, rapide comme un déclic, le geste qui dit le petit mec: faire sauter la cendre de cigarette
d’un revers de l’ongle” (956). As I will try to illustrate further in this chapter, drawing from Barthes’s qualification of Michelet’s text as a cryptogramme, one could decipher the clues that are suggestive of the tourist’s erotic gaze—here focused on a boy who he finds sensually attractive.

**Queer Writing against the Grain**

Barthes’s sexuality has fueled numerous debates within the academy, particularly following his death. In “The Secretive Body: Roland Barthes’s Gay Erotics,” Pierre Saint-Amand writes: “A terrible quarantine has been imposed on Roland Barthes: it is connected with the absence of an explicit admission of his homosexuality in his work, or, more precisely, with the workings of repression in his writing” (153). But to suggest that such quarantine has been imposed on the writer is perhaps without merit. I would tend to argue that it is precisely the absence of explicit admission to his sexuality that allows Barthes to navigate his queerness through writing, which he accomplishes in implementing various signs and symbols, including codified descriptions of homosexual desire. Saint-Amand rightfully approaches Barthes’s writing not through the secret of sexuality, but rather through the mechanism of such secret. 64 It is here that the reading I propose of Incidents reveals the traveler’s alternate identity, or as Saint-Amand describes it, a “new availability of the body and being” (155). As the author’s travel texts suggest, the availability of alternative sexuality is synonymous with his desire to go abroad, particularly to the Far East and North Africa. In such constellation, Morocco becomes a space of possibility—one that Ridha Boulaâbi describes as “[un] lieu de belles

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64 Saint-Amand writes the following: “It is possible, I think, to arrive at a more sympathetic relationship with Barthes, to look beyond the mechanism of the secret for a particular and marginal (or minority) erotics” (155).
The humanistic experience of traveling and living abroad is also a vehicle toward self-discovery, even as, and perhaps because, it is encapsulated in a queer experience. Furthermore, one could argue that Barthes did not have to leave the closet because he actually never entered [it]. For Claude Coste, “La construction secrète de soi correspond, chez Barthes, à la volonté de maîtriser son image” (“Secret” 30). In “Incidents,” for instance, the writer manipulates representations of his “gay” image by employing various linguistic signifiers that suggest his participation in homoerotic tourism, returning to what Coste names the art de la formule. Nicholas de Villiers also weighs in on this debate, suggesting that the writer’s treatment of veiled homosexuality is “not proof of the closet, but is rather proof of the relatively “exoteric” status of homosexuality for Barthes” (n.p.).

In Bringing Out Roland Barthes (1992), D. A. Miller states that “However intimately Barthes’s writing proved its connection with gay sexuality, the link was so discreet that it seemed to emerge only in the coy or hapless intermittences of what under the circumstances I could hardly pretend to reduce to just his repression” (6). Parting with Miller’s position, the discretion to which he refers poses as the writer’s most effective rhetorical device. Ironically, and as opposed to pointing to a discretionary approach as Miller suggests, Incidents portrays a sexual tourist who is actively engaged with his

65 Ridha Boulaâbi, “Barthes et l’Orient,” in Roland Barthes au Maroc, p. 37. In his article, Boulaâbi points out that Barthes’s friendship with several Moroccan figures, including the writer Khatabi, further solidifies his affinity for Morocco. The letter to which Boulââbi refers appeared in 1971 and foreshadowed the writer’s interest in homoerotic travel in North Africa. The letter begins with “Ce qui est raconté, ce n’est pas une aventure, ce sont des incidents: il faut prendre le mot dans un sens aussi mince, aussi pudique que possible” (“Barthes et l’Orient: lecture d’Incidents,” p. 37). For Barthes, the “adventure” as literary mode has a definitive beginning and end, whereas the incident produces a different narrative effect, allowing the writer (Barthes) to avoid the limitations of linear narration.

66 “L’écriture de Barthes est une écriture qui se protège: la fragmentation, l’autocommentaire, l’art de la formule, déroutent l’analyse” (“Secret” 31).
(homo) sexuality, yet free from the binary constraints of Western ideological discourse. The singular “freedom” as related to the latter is also inscribed in the tourist-writer’s observations of the male subject while travelling in China and Japan. In qualifying Barthes’s work as needing to be “outed,” Miller’s reading of Incidents leads to a misunderstanding of the writer’s literary way of expressing his sexuality.

In Is The Rectum A Grave and Other Essays (2010), Leo Bersani, following Michael Warner, characterizes Barthes’s modality of expressing his sexuality as “thinking against the grain of the normal” (32). One could add that in refusing to adopt “normative” constructs of homosexual discourse, Barthes has developed his own way of queer writing against the grain, a procedure that is often misunderstood when referring to the treatment of homosexual thematics in his works.

A literary consideration of the writer’s symbolic relationship with his mother may provide further insight into how he navigated his queerness through (his) writing. In Reading Boyishly (2008), Carol Mavor describes such relation as “Barthes’s bliss, his jouissance” (132), suggesting that the metaphorical umbilical cord alluded to in works such as La chambre claire (1980) is a queer symbol that anchors the writer’s endless search for love. Mavor also locates traces of Barthes’s mother in Incidents.67 Rather than evoking the sentiment of sadness or shame, the mother-image permits the writer to visually displace his fear of solitude, thereby protecting the traveler still bound by the ties that continue to unite mother and son. The close bond he shared with his mother is also

67 Speaking of the mother-image, Mavor writes that “Just as Barthes’s search for perfect lovers in A Lover’s Discourse—and also in the posthumously published Incidents—often hinges on memories of, or experiences with, the mother, Barthes’s search for the most meaningful, most moving, most touching, most poignant, most wounding photograph turns out to be a search for the perfect photograph of her … (134). To this end, Mavor aptly captures the desperation associated with the writer’s search for emotional (and sexual) companionship.
alluded to in the *Vita Nova* transcript in which he equates the loss of his mother to the loss of his *Guide*. The loneliness the traveler feels following her death can be compared to the void the narrator experiences in “Soirées de Paris” when a trick fails to appear one evening, in Paris:

Toujours cette difficulté à travailler l’après-midi. Je suis sorti vers six heures et demie, à l’aventure; aperçu rue de Rennes un gigolo nouveau, cheveux sur la figure, mince boucle à l’oreille; comme la rue B. Palissy était entièrement déserte, nous nous sommes parlés; il s’appelait François; mais l’hôtel était plein; je lui ai donné de l’argent, il m’a juré d’être au rendez-vous une heure plus tard, et naturellement il n’y était pas. (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. V: 983)

This scene depicts a sexual tourist in search of an erotic encounter, despite the melancholy that informs his negative outlook. The narrator views himself as being the victim of “une vie triste” (115), confessing that his search for sex has left him with only one source of companionship: “que les gigolos” (116). Erotic moments *de passage* in Paris do not yield the same sense of jouissance associated with traveling in North Africa.

Now that the writer is no longer able to turn to his mother as a source of companionship, Paris represents an empty space, exacerbated by the fact that the tourist is often unable to ultimately “close a deal.” Indicative of his negative outlook, the narrator states that “naturellement” the gigolo failed to return. But why is the narrator not

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69 Reference to *A Lover’s Discourse*, as noted by Mavor in *Reading Boyishly*, p. 153.

70 In the outline of the prologue to the *Vita Nova*, Barthes proposes a section titled “Maîtres du discours,” in which he speaks of the gigolo by way of the following schematic: “le Gigolo—comme Autre—Peuple la Boulangère,” which he places in the same category as “l’Ami” and “le jeune homme inconnu.” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. V: 1011).

71 Henriette Binger Barthes died on 25 October 1977. Speaking of her death in *La chambre claire*, Barthes writes: “Ce que j’ai perdu, ce n’est pas une Figure (la Mère), mais un être; et pas un être, mais une qualité (une âme): non pas l’indispensable mais l’irremplaçable.” Cited from Louis-Jean Calvet’s biography titled *Roland Barthes* (1990), p. 271.
surprised that François failed to keep up his end of the bargain? And what is the significance of this passage when compared to similar encounters in the Morocco of “Incidents?” François is actually empowered by his status as a gigolo—a position that enables him to capitalize on the “tourist’s” fragile state, as there is now no mother to whom to return within the realm of his symbolic economy.

Barthes invites the reader further into his personal world in the meta/para autobiographical (and partly autofictive) Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (1975). Of particular significance is his discussion of la vie privée, a concept that elucidates his views on sexual conduct:

C’est en effet lorsque je divulgue mon privé que je m’expose le plus: non par risque du “scandale,” mais parce que, alors, je présente mon imaginaire dans sa consistance la plus forte; et l’imaginaire, c’est cela même sur quoi les autres on barre: ce qui n’est protégé par aucun renversement, aucun déboîtement. Cependant le “privé” change selon la doxa à laquelle on s’adresse: si c’est une doxa de droite (bourgeoise ou petite-bourgeoise: institutions, lois, presse), c’est le privé sexuel qui expose le plus. (Oeuvres Complètes, IV: 659)

The writer acknowledges his own vulnerability, a condition that often resurfaces throughout his travel writing. Thus begs the question, How does Barthes view his private life? For the traveler, who states, “je suis moins exposé en déclarant une perversion qu’en énonçant un goût,” (Barthes, Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 659) there is no shame in sexual desire, including behaviors that risk being equated with perversion. Moreover, it is important to clarify that the concepts of discretion and shame are not necessarily interchangeable in Barthes’s writing.

For the literary sexual tourist embodied in Barthes’s écriture viatique, travel is writing and writing is travel. In Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing (1997), Diana Knight suggests that in writing “Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris,” “Barthes was
clearly trying to combine his life and his writing, and to give homosexuality its due place
in the latter” (122). Although the trope of melancholia lingers throughout “Incidents,”
this text also features implied representations of moments of sexual pleasure. “Incidents”
reveals an undercurrent of serenity and happiness, which often runs parallel to the
melancholic isotopy overarching of the ensemble. When read alongside “Soirées de
Paris,” the sexual encounters alluded to in “Incidents” could often appear highly
pleasurable, although such bliss is never even tentatively described or commented upon.
In striking contrast, the writing of cruising escapades in Paris is completely marked by a
rhetoric of sadness varying from the discreet to the acute. Still a symbolic “place” or
space is left for jouissance, which is all what matters, and whose price to pay for is not
the money extorted by the hustler, but the melancholy the writer is left with and which is,
after all, the “matrix” of his scriptural endeavor:

Je me suis demandé si j’avais eu vraiment tort (tout le monde
s’exclamerait: donner à l’avance de l’argent à un gigolo!), et je me suis dit
que, puisque au fond je n’avais pas tellement envie de lui (ni même de
coucher), le résultat était le même: couché ou non, à huit heures je me
serais retrouvé au même point de ma vie; et, comme le simple contact des
yeux, de la parole, m’érotise, c’est cette jouissance que j’ai payée
(emphasis added). (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 983)

The narrator is neither highly attracted to the gigolo, nor does he believe that the failed
encounter would have resulted in any form of real pleasure. He resigns to a melancholic
existence, unable to escape the confines of his own imaginary. But this is precisely what
he is writing about, and what motivates him to write.

To further contrast the poetics of the 1968 and 1978 “travel” diaries, let us
consider the following fragment from “Incidents” that partly reverses the dialectics of the
Comment faire? –Donne-moi ton adresse” (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 965). The trope of absolute melancholy is substituted with a sense of at least potential happiness that points to the dual possibility of sex and love. But it should be noted that such possibility is immediately expelled from the frame of the melancholic reference, as to be in love is referred to as being “ennuyeux,” carrying the risk of its own dissolution, which leaves the subject in an even more melancholic state. This being underlined, as opposed to a union borne out of monetary exchange, in Morocco the traveler accesses a form of companionship he is unable to experience while in Paris. As always minimalist in the portrayal of the narrator’s encounters, there are no textual signs that indicate this experience with an unnamed lover ended with dismal results. Moreover, the brevity of the fragment, which concludes with “Donne-moi ton adresse,” could potentially suggest that the “tourist/resident” further engaged with the boy, although Barthes remains neutral in this regard. This stylistic procedure further accentuates the indirect rhetorical strategy of the narration.

Renaud Camus’s Tricks and Fragments d’un discours amoureux: Post-Prefacing Incidents

Another important text that points to Barthes’s treatment of gay sexuality is the 1979 preface he wrote to Renaud Camus’s Tricks, in which he states:

L’homosexualité choque moins, mais elle continue à intéresser; elle en est encore à ce stade d’excitation où elle provoque ce qu’on pourrait appeler des prouesses de discours. (327)

The writer is not concerned with Renaud Camus’s sexuality per se; rather, he is motivated by the silence of the text, which, for him, “relève [d’un] art supérieur: l’écriture” (328). To this end, the deceptivity of the queer dimension of the text (which is, in this case, rather obvious) is more revealing than any form of “open” discourse. To
overstate the sexuality of his subject would lead to adhering to a type of Eurocentric ideology, reifying his “homosexuality”—something Barthes precisely rejects. Closely resembling the haiku form, the fragments that constitute the sexual tourist’s narrative are indeed somehow abstract, and therefore open to semantic negotiation.\(^\text{72}\) The deceptivity of Barthes’s writing is further linked to his interest in the Japanese art form. He is, for instance, intrigued by “les préparatifs”\(^\text{73}\) in Camus’s text—modalities that challenge the realist dimension of the narration.

Barthes also asserts that “Les Tricks de Renaud Camus sont simples” (328). The simplicity to which he refers is key to decoding the mechanism of the secret, to use Saint-Amand’s expression, which modelizes and informs the subtle eroticism of some of his travel “notes,” including fragmentary portraits of young men in China and Japan. Addressing yet again the indirect reference to homosexuality in Camus’s text, Barthes is actually, if one might say, “post-facing” the preface to his own “Incidents” written in 1968-1969:

Cela veut dire qu’ils [les Tricks] parlent de l’homosexualité, mais ne parlent jamais d’elle: à aucun moment ils ne l’invoquent (la simplicité serait ceci: ne jamais invoquer, ne pas laisser venir au langage les Noms, source de disputes, d’arrogances et de morales. (328)

The onus falls on the reader to déplier the queer dimension of the fragments, thereby revealing the true depth of the narration. In approaching the text in this manner, the

\(^{72}\) Diana Knight also considers this aspect of Barthes’s writing. Speaking of the haiku form, she writes, “Barthes finds in the haiku an ideal solution to the literary problem of how to write about the world. Whereas Western modern writing typically tries to get beyond ideological connotations by making its discourse incomprehensible, these poems achieve their ‘exemption from meaning’ within a simple, readable, and referential discourse…” (“Utopia” 154).

\(^{73}\) “Mais ce que je préfère dans Tricks, ce sont les “préparatifs”: la déambulation, l’alerte, les manèges, l’approche, la conversation, le départ vers la chambre, l’ordre (ou le désordre) ménager du lieu” (“Le Bruissement” 329).
reader participates in a discourse of negotiation—or what Barthes refers to as a *prouesses de discours*.

Commenting on the fragmentary form in Barthes’s “Incidents,” Michael Worton suggests that it “is not a mark of loss or of non-integrity but is a seductive promise: it functions as the promise of a future encounter, an encounter not with a fixed identity but with an identity whose desirability lies in its essential and eternal mobility (30). The non-linear style of “Incidents” challenges the reader’s perception of time and space. In Barthes’s text from Morocco, the narration jumps from one event to another. In this regard, the fragment demonstrates neither a beginning nor an end, permitting the tourist to reinvent his fantasy in each individual *aperçu*, avoiding a definitive conclusion. In *La pensée fragmentée* (1988), Ralph Heyndels speaks to such a discontinuity of discourse:

… la discontinuité défait cependant et désordonne les prétendus “reflets” du réel: plutôt que d’exprimer seulement l’envers de la continuité (*il n’y a pas d’ordre pré-établi*...), elle en néantise l’apparente harmonie, elle en abolit “l’équilibre mutuel des parties,” *elle ruine un édifice* “qui n’aura pas lieu. (29)

Because the narrator’s condition also doubles as Barthes’s “reality,” the discontinuous narration of “Incidents” allows the traveler to avoid a definitive and abrupt ending to his lived experiences in Morocco. To apply Heyndels’s concept of discontinuity to the narrative structure of “Incidents,” one can point to the absence of any pre-established order of events in the text, an approach that permits the writer to further disassociate himself from traditional modes of journal composition. Such an approach extends the infinitude of both melancholic and erotic experiences, as these are, for Barthes, intimately related. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the writer speaks to such procedure in “Le cercle des fragments”: “Écrire par fragments: les fragments sont alors des pierres sur
le pourtour du cercle: je m’étale en rond: tout mon petit univers en miettes; au centre, quoi?” (Barthes, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. IV: 670). In what could be described as a salient reference to the type of fragmented narration we observe in *Incidents*, he subsequently asserts: “Non seulement le fragment est coupé de ses voisins, mais encore à l’intérieur de chaque fragment règne la parataxe” (Barthes, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. IV: 670). The heteroclite quality of “Incidents” permits the writer to maintain a certain distance from the melancholy that is his own solitude, yet each notation can be qualified by complete parataxis.

Published in 1977, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* may well be read as yet another implied reflection on Barthes’s narrative strategy in his travel writings: “Peu importe, au fond, que la dispersion du texte soit riche ici et pauvre là; il y a des temps morts, bien des figures tournent court; certaines, étant des hypostases de tout le discours amoureux, ont la rareté même—la pauvreté—des essences” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. V: 30). The discontinuous “incidents” of cruising are subsequently and symptomatically alluded to:

Tout le long de la vie amoureuse, les figures surgissent dans la tête du sujet amoureux sans aucun ordre, car elles dépendent chaque fois d’un hasard (intérieur ou extérieur). À chacun de ces incidents (ce qui lui “tombe” dessus), l’amoureux puise dans la réserve (le trésor?) des figures …. (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. V: 31)

Barthesian sexuality appears in itself incidental, as it is the case for *la vie amoureuse*. The erotic encounter (i.e., the “incident”) is often fortuitous, subtle, discreet, and nearly evanescent.
Barthes and Loti: Displacing Queer Oriental Fantasies

It is no coincidence that Barthes was drawn to Loti’s novel *Aziyadé* (1879) given the implied queer dimension of the text, as well as the writer’s treatment of veiled homoerotic relationships. Despite critics like Richard Berrong who suggest that Barthes misinterprets the gay bent of the novel, a revealing relation can be traced between the preface to *Aziyadé* and *Incidents*. Loti’s Turkey is portrayed as a space of endless possibilities, and, as Diana Knight puts it, “[Barthes’s] reading of *Aziyadé* exemplifies a sexualization of utopian discourse” (Utopia 169). Barthes actually interprets Loti’s text in a very subjective way when he characterizes Loti’s hero by his boundless freedom. The Turkey of Loti’s novel becomes the Morocco of Barthes’s intimate journal; or, in the words of Philippe Roger, “an ideal literary residence, a Morocco of the mind.”

When further considering the exotic dimension of Loti’s eroticized traveling in Turkey, Barthes’s portrait of “Loti I” seems to fall right out of “Incidents”:

Loti I (le héros du livre) affronte bien des interdits: le harem, l’adultère, la langue turque, la religion islamique, le costume oriental; que d’enclos dont il doit trouver la passe, en imitant ceux qui peuvent y entrer! (Degré 177)

While the particularities of language, religion and sexuality are topoi also encountered in his Moroccan “journal,” referring to Loti’s Turkey, Barthes writes: “l’Interdit est une

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74 Barthes’s preface to the Italian translation of Loti’s novel was published in 1971.

75 I refer here to the homoerotic link readable between the narrator and the character of Samuel.

76 In his article “Portraying Male Same-sex Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Pierre Loti’s *Aziyadé*,” Richard Berrong asserts “Unfortunately, rather than examining Viaud’s several strategies for presenting the subject [same-sex desire] in a remarkably positive albeit somewhat clandestine way, the French critic [Barthes], despite his concluding praise for the work, spent much time lambasting the author [Loti] for not being open about incidents that do not, in fact, involve homosexual activity” (92).

77 I underline.

idée; peu importe, en somme, de le transgresser réellement” (Degré 177). In his revealing characterization of Viaud’s dual “Lotis,” he addresses the topic of the forbidden, asserting that “l’important, sans cesse énoncé, c’est de le poser et de se poser par rapport à lui” (177), designating a way of bypassing prohibitions, which is at the very core of “Incidents.” In doing so, he (re) posits the interdict in relation to his own subjectivity in its explicit or implied enunciation and pursues his desire(s)—all of this in an (un) said denial of what is actually not permitted. From the beginning of Aziyadé, the text connotes a homoerotic dimension, despite the veiling of gay erotics that characterizes the narration:

Mais j’ai vu d’étranges choses la nuit avec ce vagabond, une prostitution étrange, dans les caves où se consomment jusqu’à complète ivresse le mastic et le raki. (Aziyadé 43)

The narrator’s description of “strange things seen in the night” is perhaps suggestive of gay prostitution and it is such uncertainty that gives to the use of the word “strange” his repertoire of potential queer meanings.

Particular attention should be paid to fragment twelve of Barthes’s preface, titled “Le voyage, le séjour.” It is curiously reminiscent of the very situation of the author of “Incidents”:

Loti connaît en somme, transposés en termes modernes, les trois moments gradués de tout dépaysement: le voyage, le séjour et la naturalisation; il est successivement touriste (à Salonique), résident (à Eyboub), national (officier de l’armée turque). De ces trois moments, le plus contradictoire est le séjour (la résidence): le sujet n’y a plus l’irresponsabilité éthique du touriste (qui est simplement un national en voyage), il n’y a pas encore la responsabilité (civile, politique, militaire) du citoyen; il est posé entre deux status forts …. (Degré 183)

A traveler and resident of Morocco (Boulaâbi, “Barthes” 36), he satisfies two out of the three categories here applied to Loti, as his own “oriental” narrative diegetically affirms
both its narrator’s status as an outsider (a “touriste”) and an insider (a “résident”), immersed in what Ralph Heyndels qualifies as la rumeur langagière (“Au Maroc,” 61).

Barthes and the Far East: (Re) Orienting Desire

In what could be interpreted as a symptomatic convergence, it is in Morocco that Barthes concluded the writing of L’Empire des signes (1968), nearly three years following his initial visit to Japan. While not being a travel text per se, the text can be read as a subtle account of the freedom the sexual tourist associates with his status as a voyageur. Barthes sees in Japan what is, for him, “écrire,” while escaping “la sémiocratie occidentale,” which yields an ambiguous series of veiled homoerotic observations. The text often poses as a cryptic gay tourist’s guide of Tokyo that is woven in and out of the narration in a way Claude Coste considers as “tout simplement ludique (“Secret” 30), and contains a hand-drawn map alluding to the locations of gay meeting places. While the modality of homosexual tourism is realized in a series of textual detours, the secret of the writer’s gay travels in Japan appears as a misnomer including its recourse to the haiku, which, in an ironic way, may very well be highly legible as “Le

79 In considering the differentiation between tourist and resident, one must take into account that in Paris, Barthes lives by and through habit and custom, whereas in Morocco, he benefits from the temporary suspension of what could be referred to as a banal “French” existence.


81 While traveling in the People’s Republic of China, Barthes was afforded very little personal freedom. His writings in Carnets du voyage en Chine indicate that he followed a very strict itinerary and had little time away from the other members of the official delegation. As such, this trip was quite different from his experiences in Japan as observed in L’Empire des signes.

82 “Pourquoi le Japon? Parce que c’est le pays de l’écriture: de tous les pays que l’auteur a pu connaître, le Japon est celui où il a rencontré le travail du signe le plus proche de ses convictions et de ses fantasmes, ou, si l’on préfère, le plus éloigné des dégoûts, des irritations et des refus que suscite en lui la semiocratie occidentale (Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III; 346).
travail du haïku, c’est que l’exemption du sens s’accomplit à travers un discours parfaitment lisible” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. III: 413).

In *Le Texte Japon* (2009), Maurice Pinguet suggests that “le Japon de Barthes n’est pas seulement un objet de savoir, mais comme l’Italie de Stendhal, le lieu rêvé d’une autre vie, le pays d’un bonheur possible” (31). Pinguet places considerable emphasis on the fact that Barthes’s travels in Japan are an intensely personal experience, allowing him to view Japanese culture as an opportunity to “[tracer] le profil moins de ce qui dépasse l’homme que de ce qui en lui-même se dérobe à lui” (43). The traveler’s way of qualifying Japan (that is, the Japan he chooses to see) is often operated through the optic of a sexual tourist, but in the most allusive and indirect way, as noted for example in the following *aperçu* that appears near the beginning of the text:

Le cuisinier (qui ne cuit rien du tout) prend une anguille vivante, lui fiche une longue pointe dans la tête et la racle, la dépiaute. (38)

The narrator’s gaze, focused here on the *cuisinier* as opposed to the Japanese cuisine being prepared, reveals a sense of eroticism that is driven by his desire for the male body. If the chef is not really cooking, what captures the writer’s attention, compelling him to include this observation in his text? This scene points to a very unique, almost imperceptible stylistic manner of communicating erotic attraction—without mentioning it outright. Homoerotic desire is actually embedded in what at first may appear as a banal “daily life” observation. Such instances of Barthesian tenuous erotic stylistics are often overlooked.

The same procedure can also be often observed in “Incidents.” The following passage could be qualified as an erotic portrayal framed implicitly in an otherwise unassuming scene: “Sur la plage de Tanger (familles, tantes, garçons), de vieux ouvriers,
comme des insectes très anciens et très lents, déblayent le sable” (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 959). The writer’s use of the term “tantes” is of particular significance. Who are these tantes, and why are they there? A reference to “old faggots” who have come to the beach to cruise and observe Moroccan boys eroticizes this scene, which the writer himself participates in quite attentively. Barthes’s own image could be substituted for that of the “tante” of whom he speaks.

Published posthumously in 2009, Carnets du voyage en Chine also presents occasional occurrences of eroticized rhetoric of discretion in both the common and the specifically semiotic meanings of the term—one actually in some way controlling the other. In his article titled “Alors la Chine,” Barthes mentions such discretion, but relates it to the very specificity of the country itself, that way avoiding to take subjective responsibility for it, as he writes: “Nous laissons alors derrière nous la turbulence des symboles, nous abordons un pays très vaste, très vieux et très neuf, où la signification est discrète jusqu’à la rareté” (Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. IV: 517). While the writer obviously and specifically speaks here of China, one can apply his depiction of the Far East to his descriptions of Morocco. In traveling to each of these countries, he was in search of a type of liberation from what he refers to as the “turbulence of symbols,” related to the symbolic oppression he attributes to Western/”French” social and ideological codes.

The modality of discretely inserting eroticism in the apparently most trivial observations also plays with what could be qualified as sudden “lapsuses of truth” or subtle avowals, as in the following comment punctuated by the mention of “sourires,” which tends to produce the effect of a potential collusion between the observer and the young soldiers his gaze is attracted to: “Alors, la Chine?...” “Jeunes soldats: l’impression
de rien sous leur tunique” (Barthes, *Carnets du Voyage en Chine* 21). The minimalist but highly selective descriptions of young Chinese soldiers recalls the narrator’s portraiture of several Moroccan boys in “Incidents.” But contrary to what is the case in Morocco, sexuality in Barthes’s China is itself discreet to the point of seeming totally absent, and it is actually the writer’s subjectivity that inserts it in some of his notations, as noted in the following observation: “Deux jeunes garçons se tiennent par le cou. Mais plus tard—passé quartorze ans—aucun. Donc refoulement. Donc sexualité?” (24). In another revealing passage, Barthes abruptly confesses: “[Et avec tout ça, je n’aurai pas vu le kiki d’un seul Chinois. Or que connaître d’un peuple, si on ne connaît pas son sexe?]” (117). Here, he expresses suddenly both his unsatisfied desire and a frustration, which he is able to circumvent in what is, for him, not the country of the out-of-reach “kiki,” but of the omnipresent and easily available “zob”—that is Morocco.83

**Queer Spaces and Close Encounters:**
**The Incidents of a Melancholic Sexual Tourist**

The Morocco of “Incidents” is synonymous with an availability of boys, combined with what is perceived as a lack of prejudice against older males, including European sexual tourists who like them. North Africa represents an edenic and utopian territory of desire and pleasure. This dimension of the text becomes further salient when juxtaposed against the harshness of the narrator’s sexual life (or absence thereof), as related in “Soirées de Paris,” written ten years later.

The erotic language in Barthes’s text from Morocco vacillates between ambiguously occulted references to homosexual desire and direct allusions to sexual

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83 In French, the word “kiki” is usually used in reference to the male sex organ of a child, whereas the Arab word “zob” assumes a more sexual, virile connotation.
opportunities, which remain un-described. But as Barthes is assuredly not a “typical”
tourist, his notations, including the ones related to sexuality, are often reflective of an
interest in linguistics and semiotics, which produces a series of “distanciation effects.”
This procedure characterizes the narrator’s subjectivity, enabling him to maintain a
neutrality of tone often marked by irony. “Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris” highlight the
writer’s ability to manipulate words and their meaning, including his treatment of veiled
erotic discourse.

“Incidents” opens with the inscription “Au Maroc, naguère,” a phraseology
associated with the art of storytelling (In Morocco, not long ago…). The writer frames
the text by alluding to the nostalgia for his experiences while traveling and residing in the
Maghrebi country. This inscription underscores the trope of melancholia that applies to
the entirety of the journal, although melancholia does not always preclude jouissance,
particularly when traveling and residing outside of the Hexagon. The word “naguère” has
a double functioning in French, which Barthes uses to his advantage. “Naguère” can be
declared as “Il y a peu de temps. Récemment.” But the term also has another connotative
meaning: “autrefois.” Examining the significance of the text’s inscription, Ralph
Heyndels writes:

l’adverbe est souvent utilisé de façon abusive dans le sens de jadis alors
qu’il désigne, au contraire, un passé récent. L’effet connotatif tend à
recouvrir la dénotation correcte en renvoyant à l’éloignement temporel de
cé qui est définitivement révolu, impression renforcée par les points de
suspension qui ouvrent un écart (à vrai dire: incommensurable) à l’égard
cé qui n’est plus– que ce soit pour le sujet de l’écriture, le lecteur des
fragments que celle-ci indexe, ou par rapport à l’objet désigné : « Ce
pays : », dont cependant l’usage de la langue française qui y circule
produit un certain effet textuel de proximité. (“Naguère” 1)

84 “Je ferai tout ce que vous voudrez… Et cela veut dire: je vous niquerai, et cela seulement”
(Incidents 53).
In comparing the two English translations of *Incidents*, a disparity appears among the rendering of Barthes’s inscription. Teresa Lavender Fagan’s translation (2010) reads as “In Morocco, once upon a time,” while Richard Howard writes in his rendition (1992) “In Morocco, not long ago.” Heyndels best captures the temporal quality of “Incidents,” which he proposes to understand as follows: “un ‘Maroc’ de là, naguère, et aujourd’hui, demain aussi pour longtemps peut-être” (9). In that interpretation, the writer continues to live by and through his Moroccan experiences—the only source of pleasure available to him following his return to France. This is precisely the effect that Barthes achieves in his use of the word *naguère*. Thanks to the ambiguity that characterizes the text’s inscription, the reader enters the world of the traveler in which temporality is replaced by a series of disconnected signs and symbols that, however, find connection through an internal logic.

In the initial *aperçu* of “Incidents” that somehow parallels the writer’s portraiture of the Japanese cook in *L’Empire des signes*, a rather unassuming observation of a restaurant employee points to an implied eroticizing of the Arab male body:

> Le barman, à une gare, est descendu cueillir une fleur de géranium rouge et l’a mise dans un verre d’eau, entre la machine à café et le débarras assez crasseux où il laisse trainer tasses et serviettes sales. (*Oeuvres Complètes* Vol. V: 955)

The placement of this fragment at the beginning of the journal indirectly establishes the parameters of the narrator’s erotic tonality. The writer could have begun his text with any number of non-erotic scenes, but instead he immediately introduces his reader to the Arab male body in the context of an observation that at first appears disassociated with any erotic imagery. The scene at the Moroccan train station is not suggestive of an incidental appearance of the *barman*, but is rather a sign of the tourist’s sexuality. Ironically, the
“silence” of the text\(^85\) points to the narrator’s queer identity, but it is a form that must be deciphered based on the textual clues embedded within each telling fragment.

“Incidents” is one of Barthes’s most subjective texts. The ambiguous identity of the narrator can be attributed to his *je de l’écriture*. The pronoun “je” does not appear in “Incidents,” yet the writer directly participates in the narration in a number of other ways, including the use of self-reflective grammatical signs.\(^86\) This linguistic construction permits him to maintain a certain distance from the narration while at the same time being part of [it]. The absent/present *je* of “Incidents” therefore poses as a deceptive symbol of the writer’s identity.

For Barthes, the in between space of narration is a fundamental aspect of writing, including in the travel journal. In *Le grain de la voix* (1981), he discusses the linguistic function of the pronoun “*je*” in speaking of *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*:

… celui qui dit “*je*” dans le livre est le *je* de l’écriture. C’est vraiment tout ce qu’on peut en dire. Naturellement, sur ce point-là, on peut m’entraîner à dire qu’il s’agit de moi. Je fais alors une réponse de Normand: c’est moi et ce n’est pas moi. (*Le grain de la voix* 267)

Such argumentation provides further insight into the writer’s procedure in “Incidents.” The relationship between writer and *personnage* is of the fictional “type,” yielding a curious space of in between that separates the voice of the author from the narrator’s identity in the text. Barthes qualifies his conception of the *discours amoureux* as one that

\(^85\) In “Au Maroc naguère: ce pays où comment (ne pas) lire *Incidents*,” Ralph Heyndels considers the silence of Barthes’s text in this way: “A cette rumeur langagière (au premier et au second degré), fait contraste ce que l’on voudrait appeler le silence de la portée descriptive ou narrative, que ce soit celui de la saynète muette” (3).

\(^86\) In “Au Maroc, naguère…” “Ce pays:” où comment (ne pas) lire *Incidents,*” Ralph Heyndels considers this dimension of Barthes’s writing. *Roland Barthes au Maroc, op.cit*, p. 63.
is “une vision essentiellement fragmentée, discontinue, papillonnante,” something which can be equally applied to the tourist’s erotic engagement while traveling in Morocco.

Throughout “Incidents,” the narrator describes the boys with which he is interfering by using adjectives and expressions such as “fin” (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 956), “voluptueux” (962) and “beaux yeux marocains” (967), all of which are indicative of his erotic attraction to the Arab male body. These words, actually quite “common” and deprived of poetic lyricism, are not erotic when considered outside of their positioning within the narration, which compels a homoerotic interpretation. In the following passage, the “délicatesse” of the Moroccan garçon eroticizes the narration in a way we have already observed in Carnets du voyage en Chine:

Un garçon fin, presque doux, aux mains déjà un peu épaisses, a soudain, rapide comme un déclic, le geste qui dit le petit mec: faire sauter la cendre de cigarette d’un revers de l’ongle. (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 956)

The tourist’s attraction to the boy, whom he describes as “almost gentle, his hands already a little course,” becomes eroticized through the inference of his virility, indicated by the gesture of the “petit mec.” The boy’s délicatesse is literally interrupted by the narrator’s realization that he is actually a tough guy, which produces a highly erotic image. The garçon thus represents the antithesis of the narrator’s own passivity, arousing his sense of desire.

The modality of the rencontre in “Incidents” is not presented as a search, further demarcating the Moroccan text from “Soirées de Paris.” In the following scene, the sexual tourist’s interaction with a Moroccan boy is unsolicited, yet points to his desire to consciously and erotically engage the subject:

Closely resembling Barthes’s own lexicon, the boys’ assertions refrain from voicing explicit references to sex, yet their discourse is characterized by a Barthesian dialectics: a sexual pact is established, would it be to satisfy a “natural” need, or to express a certain “tenderness.” This narrative process can be part of an orientalist discourse, as noted for instance several fragments later when a petit instituteur de Marrakech says that he will do “anything” that the narrator wants, which, for the tourist-writer, is interpreted as a codified message for je vous niquerai. But is mutual pleasure all that this boy seeks? In Bêtise de Barthes (2011), Claude Coste considers the theme of prostitution and states that “De Gide à Barthes, la rédaction de ces rencontres sexuelles répond à des objections implicites qui tournent toutes autour de l’argent et de la prostitution” (231). As Coste rightfully notes, Barthes’s writing is void of specific reference to monetary exchange for sex. However, in this passage, the writer actually avoids to be confronted with the stigmata of prostitution in a quite indirect way, as Coste comments, “Il s’agit certes, d’un ‘petit instituteur,’ mais il faut bien comprendre que le personnage bénéficie d’un traitement décent et d’une véritable position sociale” (232). The Marrakech schoolteacher thus poses as the opposite of the hustlers the writer later refers to in “Soirées de Paris.”

Now, who is cruising whom? In the absence of an explicit omission to cruising for sex

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87 In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, the writer speaks to the notion of such pact in “Éloge ambigu du contrat”: La première image qu’il a du contrat (du pacte) est en somme objective: le signe, la langue, le récit, la société fonctionnent par contrat, mais comme ce contrat est le plus souvent masqué, l’opération critique consiste à déchiffrer l’embarras des raisons, des alibis, des apparences, bref tout le naturel social, pour rendre manifeste l’échange réglé sur quoi reposent la marche sémantique et la vie collective” (Cited from Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. IV, p. 638).

88 Barthes’s use of the term “petit” in reference to the Marrakech schoolteacher underscores the orientalist positioning of the narration.
while in Morocco, prostitution lingers in the text—visible, yet veiled by the semiotics of Barthesian dialectics. According to Coste, “les signes extérieures de la pauvreté émaillent tous ces fragments et rappellent indirectement que la prostitution se tient à l’arrière-plan comme une éventualité ou comme un non-dit” (232).

The fragments that “constitute” the tourist’s homoerotic Morocco are often infused with sexually charged language, despite the absence of graphic homoerotic references:

Abder—veut une serviette propre que, par crainte religieuse de la souillure, il faut poser là, à part, pour se purifier plus tard de l’amour (Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. V 956).

The narration here implies the erotic scene. Furthermore, the narrator is familiar with the lieu (i.e., “il faut poser [la serviette] là”); that is, the place where Abder will engage in a sexual act with him. Referring to the eradication of any trace of sperm following the sexual act, the narrator conflates Abder’s sexual repression with his desire to be intimate with the European tourist. Despite the absence of the pronoun je, a procedure Barthes once again uses to his advantage, this passage illustrates the tourist’s familiarity with Abder’s ritual of purification following sex, indicating that they will have a sexual encounter. One can also see here how the motif of silence informs the fragments of Barthes’s journal. The traveler was drawn to the non-dit aspect of North African culture, and as these passages suggest, was attracted to the very rhetoric of permanent indirect implication used by his Arab-boy lovers.89 This resurfaces in a subsequent passage in which the narrator describes yet another sexual encounter:

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89 In speaking of the non-verbalization of the sexual act in an Arab context, Barthes writes: “Penser la sexualité comme un continent noir, c’est encore la soumettre au sens (blanc/noir). L’aliénation de la sexualité est consubstantiellement liée à l’aliénation du sens, par le sens. Ce qui est difficile, ce n’est pas de libérer la sexualité selon un projet plus ou moins libertaire, c’est de la dégager du sens, y compris de
Mustapha est amoureux de sa casquette, “Ma casquette, je l’aime.” Il ne veut pas la quitter pour faire l’amour. (*Oeuvres Complètes* Vol. V: 959)

This fragment is another example of the Barthesian stylistics of narrating instances of homoerotic tourism through the rhetorical participation of the very boys the tourist is engaged with, a procedure making subjective the constructed “objectivity” of Moroccan male sexuality the text is projecting. For Éric Marty, the writer’s aesthetic in “Incidents” “[ne] relève pas de la pratique graphique ordinaire et triviale du quotidien mais d’un [*travail*]” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. III: 10). By describing Mustapha’s preference to wear his cap during sex, the narrator’s participation in the intimate exchange is unquestionable, and does not need to be said. The erotics of his imaginary reveal the intricate narrative process of travel writing or what Marty refers to as Barthes’s [*travail*].

**“Soirées de Paris”:**
**Early Evenings of Desperate Wanderings**

Addressing the contrast between “Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris” in *Loiterature* (1999), Ross Chambers explores the tension that exists between what he considers as the writer’s two identities through a positioning of the at home/abroad dichotomy:

… the melancholia that surfaces in this Barthes, especially in “Soirées de Paris,” is a sign of his forgetfulness, as an ordinary fellow, of the critical intellectual’s function, which is to remember other contexts and to be conscious of contextual alterity: to recall, for example, that “at home” is linked to “out there” and “out there” to “at home.” (256)
In order to avoid the psychologizing of such divergence, one could say that in “Incidents,” the narrator’s textual identity as a leading French intellectual is largely supplanted by the written impulse of the sexual tourist, as if the narrator almost forgets his alternate self, as well as the reason why he has been invited “out there” as a distinguished scholar (which is, by the way, never mentioned). But this is the purpose of the text.

In counterpart, the “intellectual figure” haunts and overshadows the narration of “Soirées de Paris,” and it is not anymore “compensated” (or even taken over) by the almost endless sexual opportunities offered in Morocco by a plethora of available young boys:

Hier, en fin d’après-midi, au Flore, je lisais les Pensées de Pascal; à côté de moi un adolescent mince au visage très blanc, glabre, joli et étrange, insensuel (pantalons de simili-cuir), était affairé à recopier sur un cahier, les prenant sur des feuilles volantes, des phrases, des schémas; on ne savait si s’était de la poésie ou des mathématiques. (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 989)

In this scene, two worlds collide: the intellectual “community” to which the narrator who is reading the Pensées obviously belongs; and the realm of (at least) potential cruising—both of which coexist at the Flore. This scene is later reproduced at the Deux Magots when the narrator, still reading the Pensées, comments on the presence of folles genre mode (985). He confesses that there is nothing (i.e., nobody) in Paris for him: “Personne à fixer” (979). When trying to reactuate the sexual tourist’s experience in the French capital, the narrator is actually engulfed in the dry consideration of a failure, as he cannot reproduce the oriental libidinal fantasy inscribed in “Incidents.”

The evocation of his erotic encounters in Morocco point not only to sexual jouissance, but to a true plaisir du texte for which he argues in his preface to Sade,
Fourier, Loyola (1980). What he refers to as l’écriture de l’Autre displaces the jouissance of the narrator’s “Moroccan” identity, certainly when juxtaposed to the banality of everyday Parisian life. In “Soirées de Paris,” the narrator reasserts his French identity, haunted by the limits of the Western experience that he so desperately sought to escape by traveling south. While “Incidents” reveals the erotic dimension of the traveler’s imaginary, it is important to also consider the narrator’s sexuality as expressed in “Soirées de Paris.” Traveling in Paris is dangerous for Barthes because it forces him to confront his melancholic condition, which he is otherwise able to modulate while “out there,” owing to the permanent mediation of sexual availability.

Despite the noted presence of Arab boys in Paris, particularly Moroccan ones for whom he demonstrates a clear preference, the writer is unable to recreate the fragments of utopic sensation disseminated through “Incidents.” This is somehow “free-falling” toward the profound sadness that marks the conclusion of the text: “Puis je l’ai renvoyé, disant que j’avais à travailler, sachant que c’était fini, et qu’au-delà de lui quelque chose était fini: l’amour d’un garçon” (993). In the journal’s initial entry, dated 24 August 1979, Barthes’s depiction of Paris is in itself melancholic:

Le quartier était désert, sale, un vent froid d’orage soufflait très fort et soulevait d’énormes déchets d’emballage, résidus du traffic de ce quartier de confection en gros; j’ai découvert une petite place triangulaire (rue d’Alexandrin, je crois); c’était charmant et sordide, il y avait trois vieux platanes (je souffrais de leur manque d’air)…. (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 977-978)

90 “… le plaisir du Texte s’accomplit d’une façon plus profonde (et c’est alors que l’on peut vraiment dire qu’il y a Texte): lorsque le texte “littéraire” (le Livre) transmigre dans notre vie, lorsqu’une autre écriture (l’écriture de l’Autre) parvient à écrire des fragments de notre propre quotidienneté, bref quand il se produit une co-existence” (Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III: 704).

91 It is important to recall that when Barthes wrote “Soirées de Paris,” he was much older than he was during the composition of “Incidents.” In this regard, one could argue that the writer’s advanced age also contributes to the melancholic tone of the Parisian journal.
For the narrator who identifies with the trees’ *manque d’air*, the desertion of the Parisian *quartier* is reflective of the general feeling of emptiness he experiences while wandering the streets of the capital. His description of the square he stumbles upon—not unlike how a foreign tourist might discover the space—juxtaposes the terms *charmant* and *sordide*, drawing attention to the fact that the experience is both a positive and negative one. The exotic erotic inscription of travel in “Incidents” is replaced with a much more morose form of *flânerie*. “Soirées de Paris” functions also as an outlet for the traveler to negotiate the inevitable process of aging, which contrasts with the trope of jouissance he associated ten years prior with traveling in Morocco. The dirtiness of the French neighborhood, the unappealing weather, and the traffic infuse the narration with a desire to escape and return to happier places and times, like when he was describing the Moroccan landscape as “très vaste et très noble (971).” In “Incidents,” the narrator is keen to emphasize the sensual beauty of Morocco, also reflected in the portrait of a boy named Moha: “vendeur de pierres: sourire, réserve, sérieux, distance du garçon” (971). Although Moha is not as outgoing as other boys, his “distance” seems to appeal to the narrator’s erotic desire, certainly when compared to the prostitutes in Paris who linger on the Rue Saint-Denis and who demonstrate no real “promise.”

In the following passage from “Soirées de Paris,” the sexual tourist’s loneliness is self-portrayed as resulting from him having been abandoned by his own desire to pursue sexual satisfaction:

[Mére Madeleine] était en train de sortir un beau Marocain qui voudrait bien m’accrocher et me regarde longuement; il attendra dans la salle à manger que je redescende, paraît déçu que je ne le prenne tout de suite. *(Oeuvres Complètes* Vol. V: 989)
Resigned to the melancholy of his northern self, the narrator hopes to find sexual release at *Le Dragon*, a local porno cinema: “je ressors et vais voir le nouveau film porno du Dragon: comme toujours—et peut-être encore plus—, lamentable” (989). Cruisy scenes are misleading and the cinema also fails to deliver. The utopian discourse of “Incidents” is rewritten here in the shadows of an undeniable fear of rejection, “Je n’ose guère draguer mon voisin, pourtant possible sans doute (peur idiote d’être refusé)” (989).

Of particular significance is the fact that the narrator’s “peur idiote d’être refusé” occurs in France. Contrastingly, “Au Maroc naguère” was, for him, a time and space of acceptance where melancholy could be negotiated for temporary appeasement—perhaps even fragments of happiness.

**Visualizing the Invisible:**
**The Photography of Bishan Samaddar**

In 2010, Teresa Lavender Fagan published a new translation of *Incidents*, which includes the photography of Bishan Samaddar. 92 The combination of Barthes’s *fragments* with visual imagery by Fagan and Samaddar could be qualified as a mise en abyme of the writer’s own interest in photography embodied in *La chambre claire*.

Samaddar’s photographs are echoing the writer’s treatment of homoerotic discourse in *Incidents* as they do not depict moments of graphic sexuality. 93 Let us consider for instance the following image:

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92 Bishan Samaddar was born in Ranchi, Jharkhand (India). His photography has appeared in numerous newspapers and journals, including the *Telegraph*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *India Currents*.

93 In *La chambre claire* (1980), Barthes speaks briefly on the subject of pornographic photography, “Une autre photo unaire, c’est la photo pornographique (je ne dis pas érotique: l’érotique est un pornographique dérangé, fissuré). Rien de plus homogène qu’une photographie pornographique” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. V: 821). The writer’s discussion of erotic imagery can be likened to his portraiture of the male body in texts such as “Incidents” and “Soirées de Paris.” To clearly state the erotic
Light as captured in this shot merits close analysis. The photograph is framed by darkness, illuminated only by the background light of what appears to be a *ruelle* in a Moroccan souk. Darkness, a visual representation of the *non-dit*, is associated with the possibility of the erotic encounter—a recurring motif throughout the text. Forbidden love made possible via darkness informs the Occidental tourist’s construct of Arab sexuality and fuels his desire for the exotic other. In the passage that accompanies this photograph, the narrator recalls Mohammed’s insistence that the Jewish synagogue is desolate on Saturdays: “la mosquée des juifs est éteinte le samedi” (957). The narration highlights an erotic undertone, as if Mohammed were inviting the narrator to “meet him” when the lights are out for a sexual encounter. In this way, desire as represented through the mediums of literature and photography becomes associated with the darkness of the image and the cryptic erotics of the discourse.

Drawing a further parallel between Samaddar’s photographs and “Incidents,” the “mystery” of the North African erotic encounter is also visualized in the following image dimension of his imaginary would produce a homogenous image of the male body, which does not support Barthes’s unique form of self-expression.
of a staircase. This photograph supplements the erotic dimension of the dialogue with the

*petit instituteur de Marrakech*:

![Image of staircase](image.png)

Fig. 6. “Steps of Otherness,” Photography by Bishan Samaddar (from Fagan's Translation of *Incidents*).

The passage that accompanies this image, one of the journal’s more sexually explicit moments, speaks to unspoken sex for hire, although prostitution, per se, is neither *explicitly* established in the narration of “Incidents,” nor depicted in Samaddar’s photographs. The image of the staircase leading to a dark and unassuming spot reflects the vagueness of the narration, in which the “petit instituteur” promises to do “all what” the narrator wants. But the “unsaid” to which such declaration refers is itself “translated” by the narrator in the phrase “Je vous niquerai et cela seulement” (Barthes, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. V: 972). In Samaddar’s photography, such “translation” of the unsaid is projected on the invisible and we are left to assume that the “little teacher” will “niquer” the tourist “down there”—in the dark space of underground homosexuality.

Among the images accompanying “Soirées de Paris,” a collage of three photographs is located at the end of the text. It encapsulates sexuality, solitude and
otherness, which collide to form a powerful visual representation of the narrator’s increasingly melancholic outlook.

The setting of the sun as captured in the top two shots is symbolic of the text’s conclusion, which also states an end to that latest period of the writer’s life. In the final lines of the text, Barthes writes: Puis je l’ai renvoyé, disant que j’avais à travailler, sachant que c’était fini, et qu’au delà de lui quelque chose était fini: l’amour d’un garçon” (Oeuvres Complètes Vol. V: 993). The narrator confronts his irremediable sexual and sensual solitude, and faces the inevitable: “Il ne me restera plus que les gigolos” (993).

The bottom, center image visually infuses the text with one final promise of potential sexual offering, as the three boys pictured appear to embrace the camera with curiosity, engaging with the figure before them in what could be interpreted as an allusion to the narrator’s desire. But for him, this particular journey has come to an end. Only the promise of possible further escapes (Au Maroc, naguère…?) punctuates the terribly melancholic and sobering conclusion.
Chapter 3

Traveling with Jean Genet:
Toward a Homoerotic Politics
and Ethics of Otherness

Comment naît un voyage? Quels prétextes se donne-t-on?
Jean Genet (Un captif amoureux, 558)

The Desire for the South and the Captivity of Love

Jean Genet’s oeuvre highlights a complete and radical rewriting of the homoerotic travel narrative. The author’s weavings in and out of the Arab world underscore what Caroline Daviron describes as une passion méditerranéenne, a sentimental and affective positioning inscribed in homoeroticism, and has, from the very onset of Genet’s career, been linked to a politics and ethics of otherness—beginning with his military service in Syria in 1930. During this first voyage to the Middle East, Genet develops an affinity for the poor, the exploited, the neglected, and the damnés de la terre (to use Fanon’s expression), which inspires subsequent and lifelong support of alienated peoples in Morocco, a pro-stance in favor of the Algerian revolution, advocacy for Arab immigrants in France, and a well-documented commitment to the Palestinian resistance. Edmund White best summarizes the writer’s affectivity in writing: “For the first time [Genet] saw with his own eyes the confusion and resentment that French colonialism could breed in an Arab population” (87). As we will see, many illustrious parallels can be drawn


96 One should also bear in mind Jean Genet’s engagement in favor of, and with, the Black Panthers in the U.S.A., an aspect of his work and life that is not considered in this chapter. See Dryer, “Black Panthers” and Heyndels, “Les noirs.”
between the oppression the traveler witnesses in the Arab world and his own experiences as a marginalized and second-class citizen of France. At the core of this chapter is the premise that Genet’s works relevant to homoerotic traveling, particularly *Un captif amoureux* (1986), point to a displacement and rewriting of the narrative strategies that characterize earlier examples within the genre, thereby distinguishing his unique form of “tourism” from other French writers’ travels and related literature.

In *Genet sur les routes du Sud* (2002), Jérôme Neutres speaks of the writer’s desire to travel south and references the beginnings of what will become for him a long and intimate relationship with the Arab world:


Such qualification of Genet’s travels quite easily underscores a salient need to escape the confines of the *Hexagon*. What is particularly noteworthy in regards to the writer’s time in Syria, and his search for otherness, is that while there he falls in love with a young Arab barber—a figure who resides at the genesis of a succession of Mediterranean

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97 Genet grew up as a child of the *Assistance Publique* and remained in the “custody” of the State of France until the age of twenty-one.

98 In his book, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gaultier to Baudrillard* (2004), David Scott elaborates on an interesting parallel between André Gide and later homoerotic tourist-writers, including Jean Genet. Speaking of Gide’s *engagement* in Africa, Scott postulates: “Genuine though Gide’s concern for the well-being of natives may be, his prime interest in them is a function of sexual fantasy, a symptom of his unacknowledged but clearly evident homo-eroticism” (167). As we will see throughout this chapter, Genet, on the other hand, is motivated by a politics and ethics of otherness that is merely *punctuated*—not grounded—in the erotic desire he feels for the dark-skinned male subject.

99 Genet does not provide a name for the Syrian barber in any of his writings.
lovers, including Abdallah\textsuperscript{100} le Funambule. This initial “oriental” love affair could be interpreted as an allegory of the emergence of a very different poetics of homoerotic travel. Unlike Michel in \textit{L’immoraliste} who slips into a highly erotic and selfish fascination with the young Bachir, Genet appears to be authentically in love with the Syrian barber, which yields a strikingly distinct traveling experience—as well as a complete engagement of the tourist’s heart and mind. Moreover, Genet’s travels in the Mediterranean region are highly prototypical in that he often conflates erotic desire and love with an outspoken and marked anti-colonial and anti-French politics.

Daviron has also studied Genet’s relationship with the young Syrian coiffeur and suggests that:

En Syrie, Genet découvre la charge érotique des Syriens. Il avoue, quelques années avant sa mort, avoir été amoureux à dix-huit ans d’un jeune Syrien de seize ans. En fait, Genet avait dix-neuf ans. Il est surpris car les hommes l’encouragent à aller dire son amour à ce jeune et beau coiffeur. Le jeune homme est à l’aise avec son homosexualité, le présente à sa famille. Genet se sent bien à Damas, se rendant dans les souks, sans arme, heureux de l’accueil qui lui est fait. (76)

Although Genet revels in the erotic charge of the Syrian men, including the sixteen-year-old barber, he also feels unconditionally accepted while in Damascus—despite his identity as a colonial and admitted gay soldier. What is important, and as Daviron

\textsuperscript{100} In 1957, Genet wrote a short, fragmented text titled \textit{Le funambule} in which he considers the art of tightrope walking. The writer speaks of the intimate bond between the tightrope walker and his wire, which is symbolic of the union Genet shares with the acrobat to whom the book is dedicated. Genet met Abdallah Bentaga in 1955 when he was forty-five years old; at the time, Bentaga was eighteen. Of Algerian and German origin, Bentaga joined the circus as a tightrope walker soon after meeting the French writer. Genet provided the financial support for his tightrope lessons, and later encouraged him to break away from the French army when he was eventually called into service. Upon Genet’s recommendation, Bentaga deserted his military post and traveled around Europe with the writer in an effort to escape the consequences of his decision. The early 1960s is a period marked by an accidental fall by the acrobat, which left him seriously injured. Despite a continued affection for Bentaga, Genet eventually became involved with other lovers, which had a devastating psychological effect on Abdallah—resulting in his suicide. See Marie-Claude Hubert, “Abdallah” in \textit{Dictionnaire Jean Genet}. 
indirectly suggests, the writer’s travels in Syria underscore a freedom of sexuality that he increasingly associates with the Arab world; and while in the region, he is, in many ways, liberated from the metaphorical prison that is his native France. But while Syria is an important and initial geographical and symbolic marker of the traveler’s journey toward a new form of self and being, Morocco, Spain, and Italy also figure into the southern Genetian itinerary. \(^{101}\)

Traveling with the French colonial army provides the writer with an opportunity to witness the trauma of war, as well as the widespread suffering of many Arab peoples. Furthermore, Genet does not possess an abstract vision of colonialism and therefore becomes an anti-colonialist from within—largely through emotional and erotic attachment to the Arab male subject. Such a highly politicized erotic engagement in a way culminates in the figure of Hamza, \(^{102}\) the ultimate “fictional” love. In the sections that follow, I examine the complex structure of the 1986 text, and focus on the conditions of its composition, including the silence that sparks Hamza’s return—a procedure that gives way to a complex and multi-dimensional memoir.

Myriam Bendhif-Syllas refers to Genet’s latest and posthumously published text as an oeuvre hybride and her reading underscores the stylistic elements of the narration that inform my own critical positioning of Un captif amoureux:

Apparence de littérature engagée, illusion de reportage—Genet emploie à plusieurs reprises ce terme—, le Captif tisse de façon inattendue un récit mettant à la fois en oeuvre et en question l’autobiographie et le

\(^{101}\) In addition to wandering throughout these areas, Genet also traveled several thousand miles from July 1936 until July 1937. In an attempt to evade French authorities that were looking for him following a defect from the French colonial army, he traveled extensively by foot throughout Italy and Eastern Europe. But according to Edmund White, Genet is quick to assert that “the Eastern police were all too efficient,” (113), which may also explain his attraction to the less ‘policed’ south.

\(^{102}\) See Hélène Baty-Delalande, “Hamza” in Dictionnaire Jean Genet.
témoinage historique, faisant basculer dans l’ordre du poétique les notions de réel, de vérité. (359)

While the work is part autobiography, the narration also gives way to poetic recollections of historical facts. There are a number of temporal shifts that function to displace linear constructs of time and space—an approach that aptly reflects the fragmentary and diaristic qualities of the work. One such shift occurs near the conclusion of the memoir when the writer poses the following question that is both pensive and melancholic: “Comment naît un voyage? Quels prétextes se donne-t-on?” (558). For Genet, the voyage itself is a pretext for political engagement—a theme that characterizes the ensemble of the entire work; and one that distinguishes Genet from other French homoerotic tourist-writers. Yet linking Genet to other intellectual tourists, including Gide and Barthes, traveling is also a way of experiencing a form of erotic pleasure that cannot be fully and freely experienced while within the confines of metropolitan France.

At the crux of my argumentation in this chapter is the assertion that Genet’s ascription to a politics and ethics of otherness distinguishes his aesthetic from other literary travelers. The writer’s participation in homoerotic tourism is linked to an existential condition, and is often narrated as an attempt to escape the north while seeking refuge outside of France—and preferably in the south:

La décision devint plus exigeante quand quelques détenus politiques me pressèrent d’écourter mes voyages, de diminuer mes séjours en France. Tout ce qui n’était pas ce livre me devint lointain, jusqu’à l’invisibilité. Le peuple palestinien, ma recherche de Hamza, de sa mère, mes voyages en Orient, en Jordanie surtout, mon livre enfin, et la France, l’Europe, tout l’Occident n’existent plus. La visite que je fis en certaines parties d’Afrique, mon séjour à Aljoun, me détachèrent de cette Europe, comme des Européens, qui déjà comptaient si peu. Je fus, dès le milieu de 1983, assez libre pour commencer à rediger mes souvenirs qui devraient être lus comme un reportage. (Un captif amoureux 609-10)
Genet speaks of a disdain for France, and his comments here adroitly portray his lifelong detachment from his native land. In this regard, his travels appear to at least partially reverse the trauma of years associated with rejection and abandonment while in the north. One could risk saying that the male characters that he meets during his multiple trips abroad also function to replace the family that he never truly possesses while in France.

Although Genet’s writing at times points to an erotic attraction to the dark-skinned male subject, his travels in North Africa and Palestine, in particular, transcend mere physical attraction. As Edward Saïd has rightfully argued, Genet was partially attracted to the Palestinian cause because the revolution in Algeria had been forgotten.\textsuperscript{103} This is certainly not to say, however, that the writer had completely fallen out of love with the Algerians. Let us consider that as opposed to being driven by pure sexual desire for Algerian revolutionary fighters, the Fedayeen and, of course, Hamza, the traveler is nourished by physical attraction, yet the erotics of his imaginary do not distract him from what is often an ambitious political agenda. But let’s try to understand further the writer’s unique way of conflating sexuality with politics and ethics.

A number of essayistic texts and interviews may help us to illuminate the topos of sexual tourism in \textit{Un captif amoureux}. In one such publication titled “Quatre Heures à Chatila” (1982), Genet links the beauty of the Palestinian people with a desire to defend their struggle:

\begin{quote}
Le choix que l’on fait d’une communauté privilégiée, en dehors de la naissance alors que l’appartenance à ce peuple est native, ce choix s’opère par la grâce d’une adhésion non raisonnée, non que la justice n’y ait sa part, mais cette justice et toute la défense de cette communauté se font en
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{103} In his essay “On Jean Genet’s Late Works,” Edward Saïd demonstrates how, in the concluding pages of \textit{Un captif amoureux}, Genet makes clear that “what ties him [Genet] to Palestine is revolution continued thereafter it was forgotten in Algeria.”
The writer confesses that his interest in the Palestinians is both sentimental and sensual, but simultaneously states that injustice is what primarily motivates his attraction to (and love for) them. Such rhetoric could actually be in a way a sincere “desire” for Hamza in that what makes the soldier irresistible is not restrictively his physical appearance, but the fact that he is a symbolic and constant marker of the Palestinian resistance.

Furthermore, in stating “je suis français, mais entièrement, sans jugement, je défends les Palestiniens,” Genet reveals his own *différence* by refusing to accept a French colonial mindset that he finds repulsive; as if to infer that French people would likely not defend, or perhaps even understand, his engagement in favor of the Palestinian cause.

In a much earlier instance, an interview conducted by Madeleine Gobeil (MG) in 1964 for *Playboy* magazine, Genet (G) addresses more generally the relationship between his sexuality and ethics in a way that can further highlight his unique form of homoerotic tourism:

**MG:** *Quel sens la pédérastie* a-t-elle en ce moment dans votre vie?

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104 It should be noted that Genet never provides a detailed description of Hamza’s physical appearance.

105 Historical timing here matters. For Genet, the Fedayeen represent both a resistance and a revolutionary movement. See Annick Asso, “Palestine” in *Dictionnaire Jean Genet*.

106 Madeleine Gobeil was born in Ottawa, Canada, and is a well-known journalist and academic; she has taught in both Canada and France. Gobeil has also interviewed a number of other French writers including Jean-Paul Sartre, Marguerite Duras, and Simone de Beauvoir.

107 In his English transition (2004) of *L’ennemi déclaré*, Jeff Fort translates “pédérastie” as “homosexual.” It is important for the English reader to note that, in this instance, the French term does not correspond to the English word “pederast,” but is a reference to (homo) sexuality, in general.
G: Je voudrais vous parler de son côté pédagogique. Il est bien entendu que j’ai fait l’amour avec tous les garçons dont je me suis occupé. Mais je ne me suis pas occupé seulement de faire l’amour. J’ai cherché à refaire avec eux l’aventure que j’ai vécue dont le symbole est la bâtardise, la trahison, le refus de la société et enfin l’écriture, c’est-à-dire le retour à la société mais par d’autres moyens. Est-ce une attitude qui tient à moi seulement? La pédérastie, parce qu’elle met le pédéaste hors la loi, l’oblige à une remise en question des valeurs sociales et s’il décide de s’occuper d’un jeune garçon, il ne s’en occupera pas d’une façon normale. (L’ennemi déclaré 24)

Genet’s comments here once again establish the fact that, for him, political, racial, and/or ethical “activism” is not borne out of pure sexual desire. While he admits that he became physically involved with young men, he is careful to assert that such amorous entanglements are not his primary motivation for becoming involved with them. Transforming this type of assertion to the problematic of sexual tourism, one could go so far as to say that physical contact—either real or imaginary—is a mere catalyst for political activism, and permits the traveler to develop an unconventional bond with the peoples whose liberation impulses he endorses. Such procedure poses as a common topos in much of Genet’s travel writing, and it produces a thematic economy, along with rhetorical strategies, that must be identified in order to interpret the relationship between sexual tourism and politics and ethics in his work. Let us therefore first consider a number of works that can be read intertextually with Genet’s memoir.

_Harrouda Haunts: Engagement, Homoerotic Tourism and Genet’s Image_

Harrouda, the narrator of Tahar Ben Jelloun’s text (1973) of the same title, is a mythical figure that lingers in the imagination of Moroccan boys, including among them traitors and thieves who are presumably obsessed with sex. Her “lair,” the city of Tangiers, can be qualified as a locus that is synonymous with a betrayal of culture and
national identity (Heyndels, “Tanger”). In a section of the book titled “Tanger-la-
Trahison,” the narrator evokes Genet’s preference to travel to Morocco—a moment that
provides Ben Jelloun with an opportunity to speak indirectly to the tourist-writer: “Je ne
sais pas si Genet dira encore aujourd’hui: “…j’irai à Tanger, et peut-être serai-je parmi
les traîtres et deviendrai-je l’un d’eux…” (146). The phrase “Encore aujourd’hui” is
suggestive of a cultural and social evolution that can only be elucidated by juxtaposing
the past to the present. Harrouda (i.e., Ben Jelloun) encourages the traveler to
contemplate how the city has changed, and to consider how this marks a possible shift in
the tourist’s own portrayal of the city as a utopic destination. But what qualifies a
destination as “utopic” in Genetian terms? In order to respond to this question, one must
contemplate the writer’s unique form of tourism, and how his travels displace
conventional constructs of homoerotic engagement, as experienced through travel.

The reference to Tangiers is particularly significant for a number of reasons.
During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Tangiers grew to become an
international center for gay sexual tourism, but also became known as a famous writers’
retreat. Genet traveled to Tangiers in order to seek a kind of “mental” refuge from the
West, and to bask in the perceived freedoms of life in North Africa. Although just across
the strait from Spain, Tangiers represents a clear scission with Occidental culture.
However, the allure of the city eventually dissipated and the writer was increasingly
drawn to Fez and Rabat—destinations that attract fewer international tourists. The
“untouched” qualities of these two areas in particular appeal to Genet’s tendency for
homoerotic flânerie, which he indulges in while relieved of his French “identity”—and in
the relative absence of French and other Western tourists. Interestingly, the writer’s
fascination with what Tangiers once represented for him can be traced to his early work, *Journal du voleur* (1949), in which he evokes the legendary signification of the Moroccan city:

> J’aurais voulu m’embarquer pour Tanger. Les films et les romans ont fait de cette ville un lieu terrible, une sorte de tripot où les joueurs marchandent les plans secrets de toutes les armées du monde. De la côte espagnole, Tanger me paraissait une cité fabuleuse. Elle était le symbole de la trahison. (*Journal du voleur* 93)

In addition to being the site *par excellence* of betrayal (a seminal feature of Genet’s imaginary and literary thematic), Tangiers represents what is, for the writer, a mythical and edenic paradise of freedom and debauchery. This passage from the *Thief’s Journal* not only echoes the writer’s own fascination with the Moroccan city, but also coincides with Genet’s early travels in the region prior to the “internationalization” of North Africa; and what is interesting here is that Genet refers to, without mentioning it, a country that he has previously traveled to.108

Ben Jelloun’s narrator questions whether Tangiers, as a destination for writing and “other things,” would continue to captivate Genet. The imagery associated with Harrouda’s description of the Maghrebi city is inscribed with a sense of hesitation:

> “L’aventure est dans les livres. Il existe encore quelques traîtres, mais ils vivent cachés, dans la montagne ou sous le sable” (146). The society of traitors and thieves that initially attracted the tourist-writer is now relegated to a space of silence due to the influx of Western travelers, which in turn displaces the author’s previous vision of Tangiers as a

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108 As Ralph Heyndels points out in “Tanger,” “Genet a effectivement traversé l’Espagne, comme le *Journal du voleur* le relate, jusqu’à l’extrême Sud puisqu’elle [une lettre à Ibis] est postée de Malaga. Genet y indique à sa correspondante sa prochaine adresse: ‘Poste restante à Algésiras.’ Et probablement a-t-il tenté d’aller à Tanger. Mais ce que Genet ne dit pas, c’est qu’il s’était déjà rendu au Maroc (à Casablanca, à Midelt, à Meknès) de juin 1931 à début février 1933, alors qu’il s’était engagé dans le 7ème régiment de tirailleurs marocains (White, Dichy / *Lettres à Ibis*).”
refuge from the Western world. The literature that had once been inspired by a sense of freedom associated with North African culture remains the only remnant of the authentic experience that the tourist continues to crave for. What was once an exotic writers’ retreat—shrouded in mystery and coupled with the possibility of veiled erotic encounters—now appears quite different. But what has changed, and how is such thematic reflected in the voice of Harrouda?

Harrouda infers that Tangiers has become too westernized for Genet, as observed in the following passage that is characterized by a number of clues regarding such metamorphosis:

Genet
parleras-tu encore du prestige de cette ville qui n’est plus le repaire des trai
tres que tu aimes? plus personne n’ose trahir des jeunes gens dés
eoeuvrés traînent dans le socco chico à la recherche d’une quelconque séduction.
croyant trahir l’ordre croyant trahir le pouvoir croyant trahir la famille ils viennent d’Amérique et d’Europe au moment où notre continent perd sa différence et pourtant d’autres installent la différence quotidiennement: un échange de violence pour une identité entrez dans un café asseyez-vous par terre croisez les jambes écoutez. (147-8)

The narrator suggests that Tangiers, no longer a “marginal” city of thieves and traitors, may not subscribe anymore to Genet’s utopic vision. Would the traveler, in the early 1970s, still write of the allure of the region? And what effect would the masses of international tourists potentially have on the ability of seeking a “mental” refuge in the “oriental” difference? Once invaded by foreigners, the city becomes stripped of its

109 In quoting this passage, I respect Ben Jelloun’s typography.
singularity, and more closely resembles an extension of the West, rather than an escape from the European mindset that Genet refuses universally. As set forth in his book *The Last Genet*\(^{110}\) (2010), Hadrien Laroche considers the parallels between *Harrouda* and *Un captif amoureux*: “the sentences of *Harrouda* weave a portrait of Genet: the different styles each open onto paragraphs of *Prisoner of Love*. Oral style for the dialogues, separate memories, chance transitions, each time a new juxtaposition to consider” (58).

The chance transitions Laroche is referring to contribute to the ebb and flow of the tourist’s stream of consciousness, permitting him to juxtapose his love and adoration of the Palestinians and his disapproval of Western ideological discourses. Distinguishing Genet from other homoerotic travelers motivated primarily by sexual impulse, such disapproval is spoken through the voice of a political activist. Examining dialectically the writer’s hybrid status as a “tourist” aligned with the Palestinian freedom fighters also provides us with a better understanding of the positioning of both his politics and his sexuality vis-à-vis Arab immigrants in France. Elaborating on what she names his *désir militant* toward Arab immigrants in France, Subha Xavier reads the writer’s sexual engagement through a post-colonial lens: “… la franchise de Genet opère un revirement important face à la pratique coloniale qui ne manquait de rejeter l’objet de sa convoitise aussitôt son désir assouvi” (109). The writer’s outspoken position in favor of North African immigrants in France is rooted in the early desire he feels for the Arab male subject, which is a springboard for years of subsequent involvement in various political movements, including the Algerian FLN, the Palestinian revolutionary resistance—and, of course, pro-immigrant activism. His various forms and modes of engagement are all

made possible by the confluence of erotic desire and an ethics of otherness. As Xavier reminds us, Genet made the acquaintance of Ben Jelloun in the early 1970s, shortly after the publication of *Harrouda*. They then became friends engaged in both the fight against anti-Arab racism and xenophobia in France and the support of the Palestinian people’s rights and combat. But recognizing Genet’s own *différence*, one cannot label him as yet another Occidental tourist-writer who sexually exploits Arab boys. Laroche rightly draws attention to the theme of sexual exploitation in Genet’s work, which should not be confused with conventional forms of “prostitution” as observed in other examples within the genre:

> Genet can no longer speak and write in the same manner about immigrants. Because the writer is a participant in the misery of this relation with immigrants, since he recognizes himself, at least partially, in this Western practice of using the dispossessed—practice both private and public, sexual and economic, in a word, political—he must make his own relationship with these men, and transform it. (60)

In fact, Genet radically displaces the image of the Arab’s (or the Black’s) supposed submission to the colonizing subject (both in and outside France). In so doing, he views himself, for instance, as being hypothetically and problematically “similar” to the Palestinians, despite the whiteness of his skin—\(^{111}\) and despite his French nationality, while he remains conscious of belonging to the colonial world. For this singular type of tourist-writer, traveling therefore subjectively permits a displacement of colonial politics, yielding, and perhaps even nurturing, the formation of an alternate (and preferred) identity.

\(^{111}\) In the interview with Hubert Fichte, Genet speaks about race and the color of [his] skin, “… je ne pouvais me retrouver que dans les opprimés de couleur et dans les opprimés révoltés contre le Blanc. Je suis peut-être un Noir qui a les couleurs blanches ou roses, mais un Noir. Je ne connais pas ma famille” (*L’ennemi déclaré* 149).
Central to my reading of Genet’s singularity, one could argue that the writer travels to Palestine because of his interest in, and passion for, the Palestinian resistance—not out of an anticipation of, or a desiring for, erotic entanglements with Fedayeen soldiers. The traveler is sincerely attracted by the specific mode of resistance the Palestinian people represent. Moreover, while many northern tourists are perceived of as looking for meaningless sexual encounter, Genet displaces such stereotype by drawing attention to the implied negative dimension of sexual tourism—which he accomplishes in part by chastising northern colonialist and imperialist ideology. In this way, Harrouda’s voice haunts the pages of *Un captif amoureux*, and lingers in the narrator’s imaginary:

> La trahison est partout. Tout gosse qui me surveillait cherchait à se vendre son père ou sa mère et le père sa fille de cinq ans. Il faisait bon. Le monde se défaisaït. Le ciel existait ailleurs, mais un inexplicable repos était ici, où ne subsistaient que des fonctions. (102)

The same form of betrayal that informs Harrouda’s portrayal of Tangiers also enters into what is, for Genet, a fictional account of Western dominance. In being perceived as a “typical” sexual tourist, the writer becomes uncontrollably linked to the north, and is reduced to the status of a traveler in search of nothing more than meaningless erotic exchange. But the dialectics of this passage in particular suggest that Genet prefers to be conceived of as being similar to the peoples and bodies he desires, despite the racial and ethnic markers that separate him from them. Contrary to other homoerotic tourists, then, Genet refrains from capitalizing on what is often presumed to be a position of power. On the contrary, he transforms the discourses on, and of, the commodification of the Arab body into a complex “dialogue” with (and about) struggles and fights for liberation and independence.
In *Queer Nations* (2000), Jarrod Hayes posits that the writer’s worldview distinguishes Genet from what could be named “standard” sexual tourism: “What most complicates Genet’s career as a sexual tourist, however, is his antiracist and anticolonial commitments” (42). I would rather propose that such ethical and political engagement does not necessarily “complicate” the traveler’s identity as a sexual tourist, but that it underscores the singularity of such engagement, and begs revealing cross analyses with the accounts of other writer-travelers who are motivated primarily by sexual impulse. Interestingly, Hayes somewhat reverses his original position in citing the following interview conducted by Hubert Fichte,112 which Genet granted in 1976. The writer’s comments here once again suggest that for the tourist, sexual attraction and homoerotic engagement are undeniably linked to political activism:

… les Palestiniens sont des Arabes. J’aurais du mal à expliquer pourquoi les choses se font comme ça, mais ces deux groupements ont une charge érotique très forte. Je me demande si j’aurais pu adhérer à des mouvements révolutionnaires qui soient aussi justes que—je les trouve très justes, le mouvement des Panthères et le mouvement des Palestiniens—mais cette adhésion, cette sympathie, est-ce qu’elle n’est pas commandée en même temps par la charge érotique que représente le monde arabe dans sa totalité ou le monde noir américain, pour moi, pour ma sexualité. (*L’ennemi déclaré* 156)

While addressing the question of the relation between sexual desire and politics, Genet implicitly confesses that his preference for men of color initially sparks his desire to travel to the Middle East and North Africa; in so doing, he quite possibly slips into a brief moment of erotic fascination. But unlike other sexual tourist-writers, Genet’s sexuality actually fosters his relationship with Arab peoples, and gives rise to a legacy that is linked to his political engagement—as opposed to what has until now often been referred

112 Hubert Fichte is a German-born novelist and anthropologist. The cited interview appeared in the German national weekly newspaper, *Die Zeit*, on 13 February 1976.
to as purely sexual tourism.\textsuperscript{113} Hayes alludes to such thematic when he goes on to argue that “Genet, perhaps more than any other French writer, has provoked a great deal of interest and a number of positive writings from Maghrebians, many of whom focus on his political commitments without mentioning his erotic attachments” (43).\textsuperscript{114} For Genet, writing about the metaphorical “prison” that is the suppression associated with people of color is in itself a form of otherness, and permits the writer to bridge two separate and opposing identities (i.e., French and “Arab”), which in turn results in a redefined ethos—made possible through travel and travel writing.

In this regard, let us return to a consideration made by Jérôme Neutres in \textit{Genet sur les routes du Sud}: “Genet raconte dans \textit{Un captif amoureux} cette autre prison, celle du désir qui ne doit pas se dire. Le captif est d’abord prisonnier de son propre désir: il est captif \textit{parce qu’}amoureux” (107). Writing thus also poses for the tourist as a way out of the darkness of his own subjectivity. Fueled by an overarching desire for liberation and independence, and punctuated by the erotics of his imaginary, politics and (homo) sexuality are, for Genet, equally responsible for his engagement with bodies of color. Through his travels in the Arab world, and owing in part to a universal support of marginalized peoples, Genet becomes existentially submerged in the Palestinian struggle.

If interpreted this way, the biographical dimension of \textit{Un captif amoureux} also speaks to

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{113} In “Nuit politique du désir: l’engagement amoureux de Jean Genet” (2011) Ralph Heyndels writes: \textit{Politique}, lors même et \textit{parce que} des motivations et des modalités en apparence “non politiques” on produit existentiellement et scripturalement l’émergence chez Genet d’une véritable pensée politique “en creux.” Celle-ci est à la fois principielle et vigoureuse, violente même. Elle est aussi tournée contre l’obéissance sinistre et les régulations abstraites et réifiées “du” politique, en ce qu’elle est fissurée du dedans par ce que Genet appelle, dans son superb texte sur \textit{Le Funambule}, c’est-à-dire aussi sur son amant Abdellah, “la blessure secrète où tout homme vient se réfugier si l’on attente à son orgueil, quand on le blesse.”

\textsuperscript{114} Momentarily, I will discuss a short text by Abdellah Taïa titled “De Jenith à Genet,” from \textit{Le rouge du tarbouche} (2004), in which the Moroccan writer invents a character who points to such legacy.
\end{footnotesize}
Genet’s personal “war” against the “West.” By traveling abroad, the writer joyfully tries to escape the desperation he associates with his homeland. While his encounters with the Arab male subject during such voyages may at first be seen as superficially erotic, a close reading of the viatic texts they produce give rise to a traveler whose political radicalism and subjective and existential humility transcend physical desire.

Jean Genet Speaks of Love through Abdellah Taïa

In a story titled “De Jenih à Genet,” which is part of the text *Le rouge du tarbouche* (2004) by Abdellah Taïa, and which is totally fictional, the narrator elaborates on his attraction to Ali, a Moroccan character whose exchange with the young Abdellah—which takes place in the cemetery of Larache where Genet is buried—draws attention to the writer’s legacy: “Ali, bien-sûr, me plaisait beaucoup, je le regardais discrètement, je l’adorais des yeux en douce, et dans le coeur j’avais un désir fort d’être avec lui, de sortir avec lui un moment, rien que lui et moi un moment” (46). While the encounter with Ali yields brief erotic fascination, in an accompanying scene Ali speaks of Genet’s relationship with Mohamed El-Katrani, and references the genuine bond the two men share: “Oui il [Genet] l’aimait…il l’aimait” (48). In this passage, Ali is alluding to the homosexual relation between Genet and El-Katrani, while in many ways displacing the poetics of homoerotic traveling precisely because of this specific reference to love.

Moreover, such sentiment is expressed by a Moroccan, which somehow could tend to

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116 Mohamed El-Katrani is Genet’s last-known lover who he met while residing in Tangiers in September of 1974. El-Katrani fathered a child who was born in the spring of 1979, whom Genet “adopted” and treated as if he were his own. Genet named him Azzedine in memory of his friend, Azzedine El-Kalak, a representative of the P.L.O. who was assassinated in Paris in 1978, whom he met in Tangiers.
mean that Genet is “absolved” of the negative stigma of potential sexual tourism.

Furthermore, the writer’s tomb functions in the text as an allegory of the erotic desire the narrator feels for Ali. As such, the “sacred” burial site can be viewed as a refuge, and it is at this location where the young Abdellah begins to bring Genet within his own imaginary—and perhaps even establishes contiguity.

Of particular significance in relation to this story is the fact that Taïa (an Arab writer) “invents” an Arab character (Ali) who indirectly participates in El-Katrani’s asserted love for Genet, who himself is depicted as having shared an amorous bond with El-Katrani. When the narrator takes the young boy to Genet’s burial site, the French writer, who is referred to as such, is the only foreigner in the concatenation of Ali, Mohammed, and Abdellah—yet he almost becomes an Arab himself as he continues to live post-mortem among these Arabs:

> On était sur la tombe de Jenih depuis une demi-heure et Ali ne voulait toujours pas la quitter. Il fallait rentrer à la maison manger le coucous de Malika. “Restons encore un peu ici, Abdellah. Tu n’aimes pas ce lieu…tu n’aimes pas la mer, tu n’aimes pas les mots, le soleil…Juste quelques minutes encore…” Il avait un autre visage en prononçant ces mots, ses traits étaient empreints d’une souffrance profonde, vive, d’une nostalgie poignante et impossible à évacuer. (Le rouge du tarbouche 49)

The figure of Genet operates here as a mediator by speaking to Abdellah through the voice of Ali in the context of an implied homoerotic encounter between two Moroccan young men. While Ali does not reappear in the story following this important scene, Genet’s voice continues to occupy Abdellah’s imaginary: “Il avait raison Ali, j’ai fini par

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117 On 15 April 1986, Genet was buried in a Spanish cemetery in Larache, Morocco. Ironically, his grave points toward the Holy site of Mecca.

118 That Mohamed El-Katrani sincerely loved Jean Genet is actually attested by Mohamed Choukri; see Ralph Heyndels, “Mohamed El-Katrani.”
connaître toute l’histoire de Jenih” (51). By this point, the narrator understands the “complete” story that he was first exposed to on the writer’s tomb—a space that now doubles as a site of self-discovery. Although Taïa’s description of such encounter suggests that he is in a way himself completely enamored with the French author, he is by far not the only Arab writer to underscore Genet’s proximity within difference toward the Arab peoples from an intra-arabe perspective, while accepting the homoerotic impulse of such proximity.

**Edward Saïd Reflects on Jean Genet: Politics and/of Desire**

Coming from an icon of the Palestinian cause and founding theoretician of orientalism, Saïd’s portrait of Genet further elucidates the French writer’s redefined ethos—from an Arab point of view. Saïd admits that he knew very little about the writer’s political engagement in Palestine prior to his first meeting with Genet in Beirut in 1972. The critic speaks of this important encounter in his article “On Jean Genet’s Late Works”: “[I] had no idea of Genet’s already quite long involvement with the Palestinians, nor, in fact, did I know anything at all about his North African engagements, personal or political” (29). This provides Saïd with the opportunity to react to Genet’s political engagement from a fresh and unfiltered viewpoint.

Addressing Genet’s différence, Saïd points to the traveler’s identity as a distinct kind of sexual tourist, which leads to an understanding of the specificity of the type of sexual tourism that is at stake when considering the writer’s life and work:  

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Does his [Genet’s] love for the Palestinians nevertheless amount to a kind of overturned or exploded Orientalism? Or is it a sort of reformulated colonialist love of handsomely dark men? Genet did allow his love for Arabs to be his approach to them, but there is no indication that he aspired to a special position, like some benevolent White Father, when he was with them or wrote about them. On the other hand, he never tried to go native, be someone other than he was. There is no evidence at all that he relied on colonial knowledge or lore to guide him, and he did not resort in what he wrote or said to clichés about Arab customs, or mentality, or a tribal past, which he might have used to interpret what he saw or felt. However he might have made his initial contacts with the Arabs, he entered the Arab space and lived in it not as an investigator of exoticism, but as someone for whom the Arabs had actuality and a presence that he enjoyed, felt comfortable with, even though he was, and remained, different. (“Late Works” 33-34)

Saïd, a Palestinian—and a pro-Palestinian militant thinker—feels compelled to adopt and, if one might say, “absolve” Genet’s sexual drive toward Arab men as it triggered his political engagements and his overall worldview. The traveler’s existential, ethical, and political positioning in the Arab world is so different when compared to other writer-tourists that Saïd’s argument seems well grounded. Although Genet feels an erotic pull toward the Arab male body, sexual attraction also allows him to navigate his own subjectivity in a self-reflective way, which informs his political and ethical thinking and acting, along with the questioning of his own occidental ethos. As reflected in the overwhelming negation characteristic of this passage, Saïd is not preoccupied with the reasons for which Genet is initially drawn to Arabs. And distinguishing Genet from other French (or, more broadly, Western) homoerotic tourists, the critic refuses to identify him with the “White Father” image. Moreover, it could be added to Saïd’s statement that

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120 A similar position toward Genet’s intimately mixed sexual drive, loving passion, and political commitment for the Palestinian Fedayeen is to be found in Edmond El Maleh’s work, Jean Genet, Le captif amoureux et autres essais (1988). El Maleh is a Jewish-Moroccan writer and philosopher. On this problematic, see also Heyndels, “Ce point.”

121 In Genet sur les routes du Sud (2002), Jérôme Neutres also considers the question of race in Genet’s writing: “Blanc de peau, Genet a décidé d’être noir dans l’âme et dans l’imagination. La politique
for the writer, and in referring to his play *Les Nègres* (1959), “noir” is not merely a color; it is also a social condition—which extends to include Arab peoples. The geography of blackness that occupies Genet’s imaginary led him to travel to regions where the dark-skinned subject finds himself at odds with his white counterpart and often dispossessed of a homeland, while allowing him to further destabilize, and take critical distance from, his own positioning in the “white” world that he rejects and wishes to escape.

Saïd goes on to suggest that “Genet was no ordinary visitor, no simple observer or Western traveler in search of exotic peoples and places to write up in some future book” (9). The writer’s status as a different kind of tourist can be attributed to the fact that he is not restrictively only able to visualize such peoples through the lens of a traveler, but also as someone who is voluntarily self-ostracized from his own motherland of France. He has both the poetical and political will and capacity to participate into the bodies, the cultural features and practices, the sufferings, and revolts of the peoples he is engaged toward—and actually loves. While the erotic dimension of the writer’s imaginary is traceable throughout *Un captif amoureux*, the overarching tropes of desire and melancholy are overwhelmingly linked to the writer’s alignment on marginalized peoples.

In a revealing interview conducted in 1981 for *Le Magazine Littéraire* (Genet 19), Genet conflates sexuality and political engagement, prompting further consideration of the signification of homoerotic tourism in his writing:

> des Blancs ne l’intéresse que dans son rapport à celle des Noirs. Il réagit politiquement à la guerre d’Algérie, au mouvement des Black Panthers, à la cause palestinienne, à la révolution iranienne, à la misère marocaine, aux conditions de vie et de travail des travailleurs africains immigrés en France” (26).

123 I propose this terminology.

124 Frieda Ekotto has studied Genet’s ascription to a revolutionary reconceptualization of negritude politics and her work illuminates the question of race in works including *Un captif amoureux*. 
C’est l’homosexualité qui a fait de moi un écrivain et m’a permis de comprendre les humains. Sans prétendre que ce fut le seul élément de mon engagement, je n’aurais peut-être pas soutenu la cause du F.L.N. si je n’avais pas couché avec des Algériens. (19)

The writer asserts (not without some restrictions and precautions) that his sexuality not only enabled him to engage on a more intimate level with the marginalized male figure, but that it has literally permitted his understanding of the human condition (in this case, Algerian immigrants in France). Yet while a physical desiring for Algerian males admittedly ignited his initial interest in the Algerian revolutionary struggle, Genet adds that it also led him subjectively to the otherwise purely abstract evidence that “les Algériens n’étaient pas différents des autres hommes” (19). Sexuality, politics, and ethics equally contribute to the traveler’s self-conceptualization and practice of homoerotic tourism.

“Comment naît un voyage”

In the spring of 1984, Genet departed once again for the Middle East, returning to the Palestinian camp of Irbid. The journey was prompted by the writer’s desire to reunite with Hamza, a young feddai soldier whom he had met only once years prior. Despite the brevity of their initial encounter more than a decade earlier, Hamza would become the single-most important figure in *Un captif amoureux*. In his article “Genet among the Palestinians,” James Penney traces Hamza’s advent and presence in Genet’s imaginary and its complex relation to both the writer’s actual desire for the Palestinian freedom fighters iconized by the beautiful feddai and its inscription within a profound, almost archaic, subjective psychogenesis:

Situated at the very nexus of the socio-historical and the psychical, this hybrid memory-fantasy [of Hamza and the soldier’s mother] both protects Genet from, and threatens to expose him to, the real of his desire vis-à-vis
the Palestinians. The properly psychical dimension of this image—its function, very precisely, as an index of the fundamental fantasy’s structuring power—reveals itself most strikingly when Genet makes the patently illogical claim that its construction predates his Jordanian experience. It is as if, in other words, the image of Hamza and his mother retroactively compensates for Genet’s abandonment at the hands of his own biographical mother to the care of the French public services. Linked in the text, naturally enough, to the Pieta tradition in Christian art and iconography, this “incestuous” textual image of Hamza and his mother is therefore the signifier that knots together Genet’s psychical structure.

Through what he refers to as the writer’s “psychological dimension,” Penney captures perhaps the very essence of Genet’s subjective, intimate, and personal viewing of the Palestinians, including Hamza—to whom he is attracted in a very erotic, yet allegorical and almost abstractly phantasmatical way. The “saintly” couple composed by Hamza and his mother provides a necessary “familial” structure for the writer, and permits him to establish both a physical and spiritual connection—that is actually made possible by (and through) his travel to Palestine. Such relationship performs a double function vis-à-vis the traveler’s search for otherness in that it exacerbates—and exalts—feelings of abandonment associated with a void left open since his early youth by the disappearance of his birth mother, as well as years of desperation following the vanishing of Hamza later in his life.

Speaking of his return voyage to the region, Genet evokes in an auto-reflective manner the interwoven existential questioning of himself and the implied longing for (a) self as observed repeatedly throughout his travel memoir:

Comment naît un voyage? Quels prétextes se donne-t-on? Pas plus que je n’allai à Amman afin de rendre compte en France de la brutalité de Hussein je n’entrepris en juin 1984 mes déplacements pour dire la situation des feddayin dispersés entre Alger et Aden. Le point fixe, cette sorte d’étoile Polaire sur laquelle je me guidais, c’était toujours Hamza, sa mère, la disparition de Hamza, ses tortures, sa mort presque certaine; mais
alors reconnaître sa tombe et la survie possible de sa mère, mais alors sa vieillesse? Ce point fixe se nomma peut-être l’amour, mais quelle sorte d’amour avait germé, cru, s’était étendue en moi pendant quatorze ans pour un gamin et une vieille que j’avais vus, en tout et pour tout, vingt-deux heures? (Un captif amoureux 558)

This melancholic allusion by the writer to his deceptive search for Hamza is located near the conclusion of Un captif amoureux, but could easily pose as an inscription (or even a preface) to the entire work. In situating this passage in the final pages of the narrative, Genet displaces conceptualizations of time and space by returning to the past in an effort to avoid an inevitable end(ing). Despite any erotic attraction Genet may perhaps continue to feel for Hamza at this point of his life, and this moment in his writing, he asserts in a very lyrical and directly non-explicitly sexual way that the feddai’s image has guided him like “a fixed mark” whose name is “perhaps love.” While such dialectical positioning is suggestive of the homoerotic bent of the traveler’s imaginary, the passage is void of erotic imagery, while expressing, with a self-ironical tone, a deep sense of resilient loss.

While in Irbid, Genet learns that Hamza is still alive, but that he is living in Europe. In his extensive and well-researched biography of the writer, Edmund White points out that in Un captif amoureux, Genet does not mention that on his way back from the Middle East, he returns via Germany to visit Hamza who has become an immigrant worker in the Ruhr Valley (623). According to Leila Shahid, (Baquey, “Leïla Shahid”) who was one of Genet’s closest confidants during this period, the writer’s visit with the former freedom fighter provides him with a sense of the design of Un captif amoureux: it would be conceived as a search for someone the writer had met only once and very briefly, yet is a figure who would occupy a significant place in the ensemble of the text (de Ceccatty). Hamza would indeed become Genet’s “guiding star,” and the character
resurfaces throughout the narrative—including moments when he appears to be absent from the narration. One such example of the implied omnipresence of Hamza’s image occurs near the beginning of the text when the writer makes a brief eroticized allusion to being “guided” by light and surrounded by the arms of an unnamed man, while falling in a kind of dreamlike and vertiginous torpor:

Bien qu’immobile dans mes couvertures, le nez au ciel, guidé par la lumière je me sentais pris dans un tourbillon où la douceur des bras musclés me chavirait et me rassurait. J’endendis dans la nuit, à deux pas, couler l’eau du Jourdain. Je gelais. (*Un captif amoureux* 20-21)

Rather than detracting from the character’s importance, such rhetorical and narrative strategy could very well establish, from the first pages of the text, that Hamza (or better said: the dream-thinking of him) perhaps is central to the reconciling of the text’s political, affective, and sentimental significations.

While Hamza’s physical appearance is never actually described by Genet, the writer does infer that the feddai has charisma, and that he is an icon among his peers:

Beaucoup de gens, probablement tout le monde dans le camp, connaissaient Hamza. On lui lançait un salut en passant, un sourire, un clin d’œil. Il répondait par un sourire. (*Un captif amoureux* 260)

The motif of desire participates in a complex rhetoric of allusion and indirect unification, permitting the writer to take distance from what could be perceived as “typical” modes of sexual tourism, and to locate his own desiring passion for Hamza (and, more broadly, the innumerable young, beautiful, and sexually attractive Palestinian Fedayeen) in a totally and irreducibly different aesthetic—and erotic, political, and ethical nexus of meanings. Moreover, Genet inscribes in the text instances of severely ironical criticism of “(neo) colonial” sexual tourism, while inserting it in an overall despise toward the negative and
alienating impact of Western tourism, in general, in the Arab world—and on the cultures, ethos, dignity, and the very social fabric of its peoples:

La jeunesse en Tunisie c’était cela et vous avez déjà compris que j’ai dit qu’une partie était comme je l’ai décrite, l’autre se préparant à devenir un peuple de garçons de café, serveurs de restaurants, garçons de rang, chefs de rang. Garçons d’étage étant la dernière marche du Ciel: les beaux garçons d’étage presque nus, quelquefois mariés quittaient la Tunisie, en première classe avec un banquier Suisse, plus rarement une banquière, et 1968 s’acheva. (*Un captif amoureux* 33)

But embedded in such a strategy of differentiation, which is also part of what Genet himself would name “une démarche morale,” remains a constant marker of his physical desire. In this regard, the juxtaposition of an almost naked young male Arab body (which, as such, is, in a Genetian perspective, in itself sexually attractive), to the implied notion of European domination, collides to form a scathing message on the politics and ethics of “traditional” forms of sexual tourism. The *banquier Suisse*, perhaps the ultimate symbol of European power and excess, is portrayed as having little to no regard for the Tunisian boys who provide various forms of pleasure to the dominant other—who is, in this scene, synonymous with wealth and exploitation. Nevertheless, the physical attraction exercised by Arab male bodies on some Western men (and women…) is almost “palpable” in this passage, and the writer’s voice, would it be even *laterally* and critically, participates into the very fascination it is simultaneously denouncing. Such rhetorical displacements permit Genet to draw attention to the ambivalences at stake in economies of desire while indulging his own fantasies in a way that does not undermine his ethical stand. The following observation could, for example, be qualified in these terms as a critical and self-reflective *mise en abyme* of sexual tourism in which Genet fantasizes about Tunisian young men:
Les jeunes Tunisiens que je vis alors dans le sud du pays avaient aux alentours de dix-huit et vingt ans: c’est l’âge du rut, de la séduction, de la raillerie des morales parentales brandies et jamais vécues. La jeunesse était d’autant plus effrénée, effrontée même, que Nasser encourageait sa révolte et qu’ailleurs on se préparait à mourir. (Un captif amoureux 32)

Although the dialectics of this passage subtly point to desire, the traveler’s imaginary continues to be at least partially linked to politics and ethics. In conflating the explicitly sexual representation of Tunisian young males with the inherent consequences of the war between Egypt and Israel, erotic discourse functions as a mode of writing that magnifies the harsh reality of tragedy and politically induced death.

What sets Genet apart from other homosexual tourist-writers who have traveled the Arab world is undeniably his radical political engagement epitomized in his alignment with the Palestinian people. Such position is one largely marked by a sincere empathy and recognition of the struggles and hardships they endure. But it is not an abstract one that would be artificially scotomized from the subjectivity of the writer’s sexual inclinations. On the contrary, it is emerging from, and immersed in, such configuration of desire; and it is worked through a complex and delicate poetical art of indirect enunciation. In this regard, the poetics of Hamza’s presence in Un captif amoureux is centrally significant. Genet appears to, if one might say, “protect” and “preserve” Hamza’s image through the refusal to describe his body in a way that would risk reducing him to the status (or role) of an object of desire in the image (and the mind) of what would then be a predatory sexual tourist.

The Narrative of Hamza: Desire, Melancholy, and Living Memory

The poetics of Hamza’s presence, and its inscription in a symbolic economy in which loving desire and political engagement are consubstantially united, is literally
expressed through tropes conveying (often implicitly and indirectly) what Jérôme Neutres
designates as a “magnétisme,” exerted on the writer and reflected in, and by, the very
writing of *Un captif amoureux*. As Neutres illustrates, such stylistic procedure literally
embodies the political in the physicality of corporeal semiotics: “La polique de ces
groupes se lit d’abord dans leur geste, selon un code de signes physiques et sexuels”
(*Routes du Sud* 108). In this way, one could say that Hamza crystallizes and sediments
such dialectical semiotics of desire and politics. But in addition to Hamza’s poetical (non)
representation and its, so to speak, both “meta” and highly erotic signification, the very
narrative that this character is simultaneously the agent (and the object) of must be taken
into consideration, as it somehow provides, at least marginally, the overall discontinuous
and fragmented form of *Un captif amoureux* with an “anchoring” point—a “point fixe”
encapsulated in “love.” All what Hamza means for the writer extends to the entire
Palestinian people—and further yet, the “wretched of the earth” struggling against
Western (neo) colonialism (Ben-Jelloun, “Palestiniens” 87). Neutres rightfully states in
*Un captif amoureux ou les antimémoires de Jean Genet* that the writer “donne à lire un
texte qui rend difficile une lecture continue, qui gêne la recherche d’une continuité dans
le récit” (147). But while the text’s structure challenges and displaces traditional modes
of memoir writing, Hamza’s constant, yet interwoven image operates as a common thread
that supports the fabric of the entire work.

Hamza’s initial significant appearance occurs in the context of a *souvenir* during
the traveler’s visit to the Abbey of Montserrat.\(^{124}\)

> Après avoir vu, avec un peu d’émotion, on comprendra plus loin le sens de
cette émotion avant la rencontre de Hamza et de sa mère, la Vierge noire

\(^{124}\) The Santa Maria de Montserrat Abbey is located in Catalonia, Spain.
exhibant son gosse—un voyou montre ainsi son phallus qui serait noir—je m’assis sur un banc à une place quelconque. (*Un captif amoureux* 60)

For René de Ceccatty, “Ce couple de la mère et du fils devient une espèce de double de la Vierge et du Christ” (5). While the religious dimension of this scene quite easily begs a cross-comparison between Hamza and his mother and the Virgin and Christ, let us recall that Genet was a self-proclaimed agnostic, which would lead to interpreting such religious reference as allegorical, poetical, and even subliminal. What Genet is operating here is the sacralizing of Hamza (and therefore of his mother, too). But would the writer attempt to present Hamza and his mother in sacred terms, if not, at least in part, in order to give them a kind of transcendent status, which symbolically elevates Hamza above mere humanity? Such poetical procedure blends into its narrative use as Hédi Khélil suggests that: “le couple de la mère et de son fils Hamza apparaît, disparaît, réapparaît selon une composition hiératique” (173). Khélil’s reading recognizes the fragmented quality of the narration while at the same time pointing to the omnipresent image of the two characters, which Genet consistently portrays as “supreme” beings. One such moment can be observed in the following recollection that is both poetic and sentimental. This scene is particularly important as it subscribes to the traveler-writer’s participation in the Palestinian resistance, and to the way such resistance has taken form in his discourse and his thinking of [it]:

Que j’évoque Hamza et sa famille, les rapports probablement imaginés par moi, de la mère et du fils, cela suffit à entretenir la permanence de cette

125 In what can be described as a direct reference to a lack of religious belief, Genet states: “Au début de ce livre j’ai tenté de décrire une partie de cartes sous une charnille. Je l’ai dit, tous les gestes furent vrais mais les cartes nulles. Non seulement elles n’étaient pas à cette table, mais elles n’existayaient pas, donc la partie de cartes n’en était pas une. Les cartes n’étaient ni présentes ni absentes, comme Dieu pour moi elles n’existaient pas” (178). Speaking of his disdain for the Catholic religion, Genet writes “L’Église catholique étant aussi le pouvoir autant que la morale biblique, je faisais des représentants de ces deux superpuissances mes ennemis” (*Un captif amoureux* 284).
double vie devenue aussi indispensable qu’un organisme vital dont je ne dois accepter l’ablation ni son dépérissement; que cette présence en moi fût nécessaire afin qu’y demeurât ma fidélité à la résistance, je n’en étais pas tout à fait sûr, je n’en suis pas tout à fait incertain; que cette existence de Hamza avec sa mère—ou plus exactement leur rapport mère-fils et fils-responsable—se poursuivit en moi au point d’y vivre une vie autonome aussi libre qu’un organe envahisseur, un fibroma multipliant son audace et ses pousses, me semblait de l’ordre de la vie animale et de la végétation des tropiques; que ce couple en moi symbolisait la résistance, au moins cette résistance qui avait pris forme dans mon discours et mes pensées sur elle. (Un captif amoureux 418)

The sacred status of the mother and son association leads also to the sanctity that is the relationship between the writer himself and Hamza (and his mother), and it actually opens a space of otherness that permits the traveler to displace the burden of his northern self while establishing an imaginary locus where such burden can be transformed into some type of appeasement and reconciliation with a renewed “oneself.” This very subjective and almost phantasmatic enterprise is also representative of both his proximity to his beloved hero and the symbolic (sacred) belonging of the feddai to his community to which the traveler is, and remains, only a “compagnon de route”: “Les jambes de Hamza noircies par la torture, les plaies qu’êtaient ses deux jambes vues, me suffisaient, sachant pourtant que deux jambes torturées appartenaient plus à la communauté palestinienne à moi” (Un captif amoureux 432). Such physically rendered symbolic unification with Hamza and his mother also connotes a profound and perhaps unexpected sense of happiness, while being embedded in a discourse punctuated by ethics and politics. For instance, when evoking the possible torturing of Hamza if captured, the writer expresses the specific way in which the traveler formulates his emotional solidarity with the condition of the Palestinian people, as the following passage shows evidence of:

Les rapports de Hamza-Sa Mère étaient-ils la singularité de ces deux êtres, obéissaient-ils, elle et lui, à une loi générale chez les Palestiniens où un
fils aimé et la mère veuve ne sont qu’un? Aujourd’hui, après avoir porté et
nourri en moi ce couple, une sorte d’inceste s’y trouvait niche. (432)

René de Ceccatty argues that Genet’s text can be read as “Une histoire d’amour
qui demeure très précieuse sur la révolution palestinienne” (“Révolution” 5). If Genet’s
love affair with the Fedayeen is fueled by the Palestinian revolution as de Ceccatty
suggests, what, then, is the relationship between erotic attachment and the Palestinian
resistance in his writing? It is precisely here that a response is somehow given by the very
reminiscence of Hamza in the writer’s written life,126 and in the entire writing process
that will lead to the posthumous publishing of his last work.127 Actually, the void left
open by Hamza’s disappearance renders his kind of “absent presence” in Un captif
amoureux all the more imposing. The mystery of Hamza’s fate haunted the writer for
more than fourteen years, and allegorically and (metaphorically said) in a “radiant”
manner, guided him during several travels: “En quartorze ans, mes voyages qui m’avaient
conduit dans plus de seize pays, que je fusse sous n’importe quel ciel, je mesurais la
surface terrestre que ce rayonnement avait irradié” (Un captif amoureux 558). As
opposed to dissipating over time, the feddai’s image becomes increasingly impossible for
Genet to evade. Hamza can therefore be regarded as a constant marker of the tourist’s
overarching homoerotic desire—yet, in a mode that radically displaces or even
decomposes the tropes and topoi of sexual tourism, the character is never portrayed in the
context of a sexual encounter, despite the erotic tension that lingers in the narration.

126 I borrow this expression from Jean-Bernard Moraly’s work.

127 Un captif amoureux was written over several years. See Stéphane Baquey, “Un captif
amoureux.”
Although the writer declares that Hamza at first sight appears no different than any other Fedayeen soldier, their first encounter could slightly resemble what would be a latent exchange:

Mon nom est Hamza,” “Le mien…,” “Je sais, Khaleb me l’a dit. C’est lui qui m’a dit ton nom. Il avait compris que je connaissais quelques mots d’arabe maghrébin, il les employa avec moi. Il était environ midi, vers le milieu du mois de Ramadan, le mois où les musulmans ne mangent, boivent, fument, baisent, que lorsque le soleil s’est couché. Selon la parole du Prophète, c’est dans la joie et non l’irritation ni la bouderie qu’on offre à Dieu un mois de jeûne—de l’aube au crépuscule—compensé par des fêtes nocturnes. Presque aussi visible qu’une neige, le calme s’étalait sur toute la ville d’Irbid et son camp palestinien. Les hommes, les femmes, les choses avaient ce détachement indiquant une grande paix, ou annonçant une détermination si grave que le moindre éclat eût pu la faire se dissoudre. (Un captif amoureux 258-59)

Genet’s reputation seems to have preceded his initial encounter with the feddai, who is aware that the traveler comprehends and speaks a few words and expressions in Maghrebian Arabic. Language thus functions here as a type of semiotic “escape” from which Genet benefits. Because of his very rudimentary knowledge of Arabic, the communication, while denotatively limited, can be acted by the protagonist, processed by the writer, and imagined by both himself and the reader as connotatively profound as having meanings beyond the purely verbal—and leading toward the physical that potentially involves the fantasy of a sentimental encounter. While the desiring mode of the writer’s imaginary remains veiled through such a deceptive rhetorical strategy (which is, of course, also informed by the very objective conditions of the exchange between the French outsider/traveler and the young Palestinian freedom fighter), this scene can also

128 “Nous entendions, mais assez loin, le bruit des armes lourdes. Elles devaient être à Jerash qui était en 1970 un très petit village, avec des maisons en pisé, près d’un site romain où quelques colonnes étaient debout, d’autres couchées, mais l’expression “site romain” suffit. Hamza voulut porter mon sac. Tout d’abord je ne remarquai rien en lui que je n’eusse vu sur d’autres feddayin: il en avait le sourire, la gaieté, une voix si douce qu’elle était presque dangereuse, avec une sorte de désinvolture et de la gravité soudainement. En cela semblable à tous, il n’avait rien de hâbleur” (Un captif amoureux 258).
be characterized by a revealing moment of pure *jouissance* in which Genet enters into an imaginary homoerotic relationship with Hamza. Such encounter, although probably at least partially imagined, is void of any implication of seductive power, as Hamza does not take advantage of his position as the *desired*\(^\text{129}\)—nor does Genet capitalize on his presumed Western “prestige.”

During his first visit to the camp at Irbid, Genet resided at the home of Hamza and his mother. The writer briefly mentions sleeping in Hamza’s bed, which gives way to yet another of these potentially eroticized scenes in which homoerotic desire is alluded to without even the slightest reference to [it] through what could be named “an unspoken avowal”: “Hamza me montra son lit où je dormirais cette nuit …” (*Un captif amoureux* 271). The (un-referred to) pleasure associated with lying in the feddai’s bed will compel a probable fable when the writer returns years later to this same room, which can be imagined as a utopic refuge amidst the turmoil of an unsettled land. The “prisoner” of (an unsaid and unpronounced) love fears “losing” Hamza, and prefaces the melancholy that will haunt him for years to come: “À la légère mélancholie qu’il laisse en moi s’il me quitte, je sais que ce trouble ne cessera pas” (272). But it is not only Hamza, per se, who will be lost. It is the absolute, irreductible singularity, the almost mythical uniqueness of that moment, which will disappear forever. Such vanishing (allowing for the reduplication of Hamza I in Hamza II\(^\text{130}\)) can even be read in the voice and the gaze of the feddai’s mother when the writer meets with her for the second and last time: “La

\(^{129}\) It should be noted that this is quite different from many of the encounters related by Gide or Barthes.

\(^{130}\) Reference to what I refer to as the vanishing of “Hamza I” who is replaced by “Hamza II.” See here *Un captif amoureux* p. 418, for example.
visite que je fis à Irbid en juillet 1984, la découverte de la ville, du camp, de la maison, de la mère, tout le glorieux passé de Hamza était en effet le passé: nul orgueil, fierté, contentement ne restait dans la voix, le regard de la mère (340-41). In this way, the ultimate page of Un captif amoureux, which is also the conclusion of the narrative of Hamza, is simultaneously enigmatic and, as the writer states, “transparent”:

J’ai fait ce que j’ai pu pour comprendre à quel point cette révolution ressemblait peu aux autres et d’une certaine façon je l’ai compris, mais ce qu’il m’en reste sera cette petite maison d’Irbid où une nuit je dormis, et quatorze ans durant lesquels je tentai de savoir si cette nuit avait eu lieu. Cette dernière page de mon livre est transparente. (Un captif amoureux 611)

It is enigmatic as it questions the very referential “reality” of the night supposedly spent in Hamza’s bed in Irbid. It is transparent as it questions, through the very assertiveness of the ending formula, the notion of referential “reality” itself when transferred in a literary work. Or, better said, it is the transparence that is enigmatic. The narrative of Hamza traces its discontinuous and convoluted but reiterative and tenacious itinerary through such enigmatic transparence, which has provided for both poetical and ethical ways of transferring what used to be called “sexual tourism” into a radically different espace littéraire, to cite Maurice Blanchot’s famous title.132 If this concluding page of Genet’s memoir is transparent as the writer suggests, his souvenirs retain an element of mystery that renders his message all the more poetic. On his deathbed, the writer scribbled on his manuscript—indeed the last line he is known to have written—that his memoir is a “story about the Palestinians.” Yet it can also be described as Genet’s story. It is therefore a story about a traveler who is a prisoner of love.

131 This passage can also be read as an implied reference to the forthcoming vanishing of the revolutionary ethos of the Palestinian struggle symbolized by the Fedayeen and Hamza.

Chapter 4

(Re)Interpreting the Dialectics of Power and Homoerotic Desire: The Contemporary Travel Narratives of Abdellah Taïa and Rachid O. and the Cinema of Nouri Bouzid and Abdellah Taïa

Je marchais sans savoir vers où je me dirigeais. J’avançais comme ça, peu important où j’allais atterrir.

(L’armée du salut 116)

Framing the Contemporary Gay Travel Narrative: Magrebi Voices in Context

Rachid O.’s *L’enfant ébloui* (1995) speaks to the sentimental and psychological transformations of a child coming of age in postcolonial Morocco. While the work contributes to what is a growing archive of contemporary North African gay-themed literature, one could also make a comparison of the text to André Gide’s *L’immoraliste* (1902), published at the turn of the twentieth century. In many ways, *L’enfant ébloui* could be viewed as a narrative rewriting of the 1902 novel, as it, too, can be interpreted as an intimate portrait of another traveler’s very own search for *self*. Not only are there French travelers (“sexual tourists”) as characters within the text, but the work can also be qualified as an example of travel writing as its author ends up at leaving Morocco for France, where his work is written—and then published, by Gallimard. Such traveling toward the North is implied and inscribed within the text itself, although the way the passage to France operates is never alluded to.\(^\text{133}\) Yet radically distinguishing Rachid O.’s work from earlier examples within the genre is the pronounced voice of the Arab *éphèbe* character.

\(^\text{133}\) See, for instance, in “Musulman,” “Les gens ici (en France)” (p. 123), and in “Mon père, mon héros,” “Mais tout cela, c’est en français et en France, pas au Maroc” (p. 144). *(L’enfant ébloui)*
The narrator of *L’enfant ébloui* often appears innocent, humble, and above all—seductive. However, the motif of seduction in the context of this deceptively simplistic but actually very complex and multi-layered text is void of any “negative” implication in that Rachid does not seek to merely capitalize on his burgeoning erotic prowess. On the contrary, moments of homoerotic engagement exemplify the boy’s charismatic demeanor, which is inscribed throughout the work in a series of poetic observations that are also highly melancholic. But this is certainly not to say that the narrator is not attuned to his own wishes and desires. Through each of the *récits* that make up the fabric of the text, the traveler’s voyage toward a new form of self and being is articulated through an auto-fictional rhetoric that can also be read as Rachid’s carefully constructed *Autre*—a procedure that recalls Gide’s curiously “autobiographical” portraiture of Michel.

Speaking of the narrative positioning of the work, Ralph Heyndels writes: “il ne s’agit pas ici d’une littérature ‘monumentale,’ mais d’une forme d’art modeste, qui cependant ne manque pas de superbe au sens de sa beauté et de son orgeuil” (“Travail”). If the text’s apparent simplistic and modest façade occupies an important position in its overall narrative structure, the implication is that these *mini-textes* or “journals” collide in the end to form a powerful and moving *histoire*—narrated through the voice of a postcolonial North African boy who is a modern traveler in his own right.134

According to a 1995 review of *L’enfant ébloui* published in *Libération*, “Lire ces souvenirs d’un jeune homme de 25 ans, c’est traverser le miroir, entrer au creux et au coeur des familles marocaines d’aujourd’hui, sans médiation romanesque ni rhétorique”

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134 In “Not Your Uncle: Text, Sex, and the Globalized Moroccan Author,” Richard Serrano also considers the postcolonial positioning of *L’enfant ébloui* and writes: “What disappears between the 1950s and 1990s is any sense of France either as the source of a civilization or a set of values towards which the Moroccan may aspire, or as the source of an oppression against which he may revolt.” (185).
(“Histoire d’O.” Web). The critic subtly inserts the phrase “familles marocaines
d’aujourd’hui,” as if to suggest that we are now confronted by a new subset of cultural
values and norms. Such critique seems to fall right out of the text itself when the narrator
asserts near the end of the work: “Et, ensuite, avoir une note de critique dans Libération,
j’étais fier” (L’enfant ébloui 143), which can be read as a reference to the pride the
traveler-writer associates with the reception of his work in the Hexagon. Such je to which
I will return momentarily is central to identifying what is, for Rachid O., Autre. By
stepping through the metaphorical looking glass that doubles as the writer’s
bildungsroman, the reader enters a complex world of gay Arab sexuality, seen here
through the optic of a seemingly innocent but strong-willed child.

L’enfant ébloui is comprised of five récits. Rachid O. inscribes each sub-text with
poignant memories from the narrator’s early youth and recent past, punctuated by
moments of pain and sadness; but there are also several instances of interwoven
jouissance. Adding another dimension to the writer’s narrative procedure, the line
between fiction and reality is often blurred. In this regard, one could establish a number
of parallels to Gide’s travel writings, including L’immoraliste and even extending to Si le
grain ne meurt (1926). The auto-fictional qualities of L’enfant ébloui underscores the
omnipresent tropes of desire and melancholy as related to the plight of what can be
perceived of as a real—as opposed to purely imagined—personnage. This aspect of the
text begs close consideration of the use of the pronoun je, and in this instance one should
be reminded of the following declaration by Roland Barthes in Le grain de la voix
(1981): “Celui qui dit ‘je’ dans ce livre est le je de l’écriture” (267). But whereas Barthes
often remains vague through his use of carefully employed pronouns—and often goes to
extreme lengths, if one might say, to avoid his own image in much of his early writing—Rachid O.’s *je de l’écriture* does not subscribe to such Barthesian rhetoric.\(^{135}\) Moreover, while Barthes’s writing is often presented—or perhaps “disguised”—as a study on semiotics, Rachid O. uses language as a way of looking freely into the metaphorical *miroir* that the twentieth century French critic largely prefers to avoid. Such a narrative rewriting of the homoerotic travel text highlights the pronounced queer dimension of *L’enfant ébloui*, as well as the writer’s ability to effortlessly “out” what has until now been expressly expected to remain hidden in North African culture. In this way, the writer displaces the veiled erotics of *L’immoraliste* (and other period works) in part through the voice of the *éphèbe* character who now appears not only more sure of himself, but also capable of speaking directly about his desire for the male body.

In each of the works under consideration in this dissertation, there is an undeniable tension between what can be understood as two oppositional identities linked to two different cultures. Denis Provencher captures the pronounced gay bent of *L’enfant ébloui* and writes: “Rachid O. … creates a significant voice in the Francophone context that adapts to, benefits from, and reshapes a queer French experience” (“Queer French” 195). I would add that it is not only a queer French experience, but is also a queer *Maghrebi* experience—articulated in the language of the former colonial power, which is still the idiom of Moroccan social and intellectual elites,\(^{136}\) yet lived through the life of a

\(^{135}\) As I have previously argued in Chapter 2, the erotic bent of Barthes’s later travel writings is increasingly less “cryptic,” as noted, for example, in the texts that comprise the posthumously published *Incidents*.

\(^{136}\) In the “Préambule” of *L’enfant ébloui*, Rachid O. addresses the question of language in these terms: “Écrire en arabe, à la limite, c’était possible, c’est ma langue, ce sont les études que je fais et que j’aime. Ce n’est pas que je me sentais incapable d’écrire en français, c’est que c’était impensable pour moi, c’est une chose que je n’ai jamais imaginée. Maintenant que je la parle, que je maîtrise cette langue, que
gay Moroccan adolescent. Interestingly, Rachid’s father does not speak French, a condition that is inscribed in the text. And to suggest that Rachid’s experience is purely “French” may be slipping into the very textual space—presumably defined by a desire to completely abandon Morocco—that the writer (and narrator) desperately seek to redefine, as opposed to merely escape.

While the text was composed in France, the lexical and geographical divide between le monde arabe and l’Hexagone draws attention to the narrator’s condition as both Magrébin and touriste, which is partly described in the beginning of the work as a need to bridge the gap between what is the traveler’s dichotomized Franco-Moroccan identity: “… j’espère que le jour où j’écrirai en arabe ce sera aussi lisible et compréhensible qu’en français” (L’enfant ébloui 10). The very fact that this text is written in French resides at the core of the traveler’s voyage toward otherness, but can also be read as a desire to impart a wish for a gay-friendly Morocco; one that can ultimately be described in Arabic—a lingua that functions in the writer’s imaginary as a symbolic marker of his true roots.

Although Rachid ultimately immigrates to France,

137 See the sub-text titled “Mon père, mon héros”: “J’ai dit: “Voilà. J’ai fait ce texte et ensuite il a été publié.” Il a dit: “Un texte? C’est-à-dire: tu as écrit?” Pour lui, le domaine de l’écriture n’est pas son domaine. J’ai dit: “Oui, et en plus j’ai eu une critique dans un journal.” J’ai dit: “Mais tout cela, c’est en français et en France, pas au Maroc.” Il avait un sourire beaucoup plus large, beaucoup plus grand, et ça m’a rassuré. Je me suis dit que le degré de joie de mon père augmentait, le fait qu’en plus ce soit en français et pas en arabe, que son fils faisait quelque chose en plus de ce qu’il le pensait capable de faire. Je lui ai dit: “Oui, c’est en français.” Il m’a dit: “Pourquoi pas en arabe?” J’étais gêné, j’étais à la fois gêné et je ne savais pas quoi dire, j’ai dit que c’était personnel mais que, en France, ça s’était fait par un ami que j’avais et qui était dans le milieu de la littérature française” (144).

138 In Maghreb Littératures de Langue Française (1993), Jean Déjeux considers the cross pollination of language, literature, and culture in an Arabo-European context: “Il est facile de remarquer que l’intitulé montre tout de suite qu’à travers “Maghreb” et “langue française” deux univers culturels se rencontrent, sont confrontés s’enrichissent. C’est le lieu des interférences des valeurs, des mentalités et des méttissages culturels, le lieu des ouvertures et des possibilités offertes par la langue étrangère” (7).
he does not altogether discard his Moroccan identity. Moreover, in the years following Morocco’s independence, and certainly during the 1980s and 1990s, one could argue that the image of France as the superior other has dissipated. In this regard, Rachid’s travels therefore displace the Arab’s sense of “urgency” to latch onto the European tourist as a desperate attempt to assimilate into an adopted homeland. But this begs the question: what is the overarching meaning of Autre in the economy of Rachid’s travels—both at home and abroad? To respond to this question, I propose to consider the theme of sexual tourism from the perspective of the North African tourist whose travels challenge and displace “historical” constructs of power and desire as articulated in variations on the homoerotic voyage. In cross-reading L’enfant ébloui with Gide’s work, for example, it becomes increasingly clear that Rachid O. reverses Gide’s often-fragile position by underscoring his Arab narrator’s newfound and growing independence.

Un voyage vers l’Autre: Breaking the Silence of Otherness

L’enfant ébloui, the first in a series of five queer-themed works by Rachid O.,\textsuperscript{139} is particularly noteworthy in that since the publication of Le pain nu (1973) by Mohamed Choukri,\textsuperscript{140} there had been a void—one might even say a pronounced absence—in gay-themed literature written in the first person by North African authors. Today we tend to afford much attention to the burgeoning genre of queer Arab literatures, but let us not forget that Rachid O.’s text assumes its rightful place at the forefront of the contemporary


\textsuperscript{140} It should be noted that Choukri was not homosexual, although his writing is at times highly homoerotic. Le pain nu was originally published in Arabic, but gained international visibility following an English translation (1974) by Paul Bowles. There are several sexually explicit moments in the text, which led to its censorship in many parts of the Arab world, including Morocco.
gay Maghrebi literary movement. In subjectively breaking the silence of Maghrebi homosexuality that Choukri has brought to our attention, linking many of the contemporary works on the present-day North African literary scene is the theme of a path toward something “else,” which is often also encapsulated in a desire to remain close to the pillars of one’s Muslim identity. *L’enfant ébloui* can be read and interpreted as a *voyage vers l’Autre* during which the narrator slowly redefines his own subjectivity through a series of intimate and homoerotic exchanges with both Arab and French lovers. Yet such exchange points to a shift in the paradigm of sexual tourism in that the boy lover is now coming out of the shadows that have previously and overwhelmingly limited his ability to be effectively heard.

When *L’enfant ébloui* is critically juxtaposed to Gide’s *L’immoraliste*, it appears that a sexual tourist of a “different kind,” Michel, articulates a search for freedom that is not entirely unlike Rachid O.’s own desire to break free from a melancholic existence more than a century later. But what might a bourgeois French tourist-writer have in common with a child-turned-sexual tourist from North Africa? It would be quite possible to imagine the narrator of *L’immoraliste* as subscribing to a vision that Rachid O. develops in the *préambule* to *L’enfant ébloui*: “Tout à coup, j’ai pensé que ce que je voulais, je n’osais pas le dire, c’était d’être le héros d’un livre, le personnage principal dans le roman d’un écrivain” (9). Such a poeticizing of a child’s aspirations can be likened to Michel’s “oriental” fantasy, reproduced here in the imaginary of a boy who one could envision as looking similar to the innocent Bachir as portrayed on one occasion by Gide as “[un enfant] de grands yeux silencieux” (*Romans* 381). But while Bachir appears younger than Rachid, and is easily manipulated by Michel, the child of the “new
Morocco”\textsuperscript{141} is not silent in a Gidean sense. One could say that Bachir “speaks” in Rachid O.’s text in that the narrator of \textit{L’enfant ébloui} has a \textit{long awaited for} voice. On the mode of postcolonial erotics, Rachid O. demonstrates that while time may not have healed all wounds, it has certainly given birth to a new generation of Moroccans, embodied here by the dazzled \textit{enfant} who is literally discovering his ability to redefine his ethos.

In Rachid O.’s work, the dialectics of power and desire as observed in other texts by French writers are noticeably reversed. The narrator of \textit{L’enfant ébloui} asserts various forms of dominance and influence over the French travelers to which he is drawn, including Antoine and Julien, French \textit{coopérants} who occupy an important place in the text’s homoerotic economy. But it bears mentioning that Rachid’s sentimental and affective qualities are also portrayed in an \textit{intra-Arab} homoerotic relationship that he shares with his Moroccan teacher of Arabic. In the context of each homoerotic union, the narrator’s seductive powers quite often pose as the writer’s most effective rhetorical device, which he articulates in an inter-space of otherness situated between two colliding cultural worlds.

In this regard, Richard Serrano speaks to the notion of difference in the writer’s \textit{oeuvre} in stating: “Various types of homosexual practice that we might label either ‘European’ or ‘Arabo-Mediterranean’ co-exist in Morocco, although neither Rachid O. nor his narrator label them as such, nor do his characters show much understanding of, or curiosity about, whence their sexual practices might come” (185). Serrano is correct to point out that texts including \textit{L’enfant ébloui} show little evidence of such preoccupation,

\textsuperscript{141} I borrow this term from Valérie Orlando.
which in a way reverses the trauma that homoerotic tourists like Michel (and Gide) must inevitably confront when forced to reconcile the contentious labels that are largely borne out of European ideology. But as these roles and power structures continue to evolve, Rachid O. appears to at least partially desire to assimilate into the same culture that Gide and other northern travelers desperately seek to renounce. In this vein, what we are now at liberty to refer to as a type of globalized Arab queer identity underscores a shift in the very meaning of arabité in a redefined and transnational context.

**Enfance(s): Articulations of the non-dit**

“Mounir est le premier vrai jeune garçon par qui j’ai été attiré. Je ne l’oublierai jamais” (59). This passage from “Amours” (the third section of *L’enfant ébloui*, which was originally published as a separate piece) could be cross-read with a scene from Gide’s *Si le grain ne meurt* in which the narrator recalls a first homoerotic loving attraction for his “little Russian friend.” While Gide encrypts his infatuation for his Russian classmate (which seems to have been strictly platonic), the narration of *L’enfant ébloui* displays such rhetoric by exposing its very concrete and physical effects:

> Ce qui se passait entre nous, je n’y étais pas indifférent. On se touchait, se caressait en classe. Il avait toujours, souvent, sa main sur ma main, ses genoux contre les miens. C’était la seule classe où il n’y avait que des garçons, les autres étaient mélangées. Je n’ai jamais accepté la proposition de Mounir de coucher avec lui. (60)

While the allusive rhetoric that often characterizes Gidean erotic discourse as noted here is obviously rewritten in more direct and telling terms, any graphic mentioning of crude sexuality is avoided, even if a sexual encounter is in a way deceptively referred to. To

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142 “Il y en avait un pour qui je m’étais épris d’une véritable passion. C’était un Russe” (*Journal* 404).
suggest yet another cross-reading with Gide, this passage from *L’enfant ébloui* could also be juxtaposed to the scene framing the use of the word *cela* in *L’immoraliste*, as it has been discussed in Chapter 1: “Il n’était pas amoureux, je l’étais plus, j’étais plus sentimental, plus romantique, mais j’avais peur de coucher avec lui et qu’il le dise à tous les garçons de la classe, tous mes amis, et qu’on me traite de petit pédé” (60). But if the narrator demonstrates that he is aware of the negative implications of being labeled *pédé*, he neither attempts to “heterosexualize” his image during his formative years, nor will he do so later in life when he will be socially and culturally expected to emulate a heterosexual lifestyle. As it can be observed by examining these textual instances and cross-reading them with some narrative occurrences from Gide’s work, Rachidian rhetoric could therefore be seen as deploying a form of otherness, which is non-problematically, but very effectively, “detached” from any pretense of hetero-erotic normativity. Such a rhetorical procedure somehow permits Rachid O.’s narration to avoid what Didier Eribon, writing in *Échapper à la psychanalyse* (2005), sees as the traps and manipulations of psycho-analysis: “Par conséquent, l’homosexuel est un individu “total”, et l’homosexualité—comme sexualité, comme affectivité et comme mode de vie—ne saurait être pensée comme une simple dimension parmi d’autres de la personnalité et qui ne retentirait pas sur les autres registres qui composent la personne” (33-4). Even drawing a comparison to a similar argument that Gide weaves in and out of *Corydon* (1920), Rachid’s homosexuality, or, more precisely, its “recognition” and “avowal,” is narratively and poetically articulated in a way that tends to subjectively “normalize” same-sex desire—spoken here through the voice of an Arab boy who continues to break

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143 In the sub-text “Mes Femmes,” Rachid O. evokes two prior, if one might say, more “archaic,” infantile, or homoerotic loves for young companions. (46-50).
down multiple psychological and socio-cultural barriers. But what empowers Rachid to speak this way, and how does his discourse challenge early Maghrébi constructs of sexuality and gender roles? Actually—and this looks quite different from what happens in Gide’s, Barthes’s, or Genet’s homoerotic configurations—it could very well be that the presence of women in a way helps to further identify the narrator as being perhaps surprisingly and unexpectedly comfortable with his sexual orientation, as opposed to feeling timid and unsure of himself. In a section of the narrative titled “Mes Femmes,” Rachid O. indirectly addresses gender roles in this regard, and implicitly proposes a new construct of queer masculinity in an Arabo-Muslim context: “J’étais tout le temps avec elles. Et avec les autres femmes, les voisines. J’étais toujours derrière, derrière ou devant mais je préférais derrière car quand elles étaient entre elles à parler des hommes et qu’elles s’apercevaient que j’étais là, elles disaient: ‘Qu’est-ce que tu fais là? Va jouer avec les garçons’” (25). While stemming from the imposed respect to secure and maintain the well-guarded division between males and females in traditional Moroccan society, this exclusively feminine togetherness permits the young homosexual boy to grow and develop out of the “prison” that would be, for him, “un-distanced from,” “un-questioned,” and “un-ironically” perceived heteronormativity. Moreover, as opposed to feeling repressed by such social phallocratic gender code and segregation, and despite the fact that he recognizes that being derrière is perhaps better than being à l’avant, the narrator relishes in the opportunity to assimilate into the feminine as a space that is also the locus of a fascination with, and attraction to, the very masculinity from which it is separated—would it be in the very situation and process of being distanced from [it]. These cherished moments spent among “ses femmes” have nurtured the narrator’s ability
to engage with his sexuality, and have somehow protected him from the male figure that might otherwise function to suppress his genuine sense of desire. In *Francophone Voices of the “New” Morocco in Print and Film: (Re)presenting a Society in Transition* (2009), Valérie Orlando rightly notes that “throughout *L’enfant ébloui* the protagonist’s sexual orientation is more or less ignored by people around him” (114). But it is not so much the (at least apparently) “uncomplicated” sexual childhood as self-narrated by Rachid O. that is here the most significant. What is to be illuminated is the poetical, rhetorical, and narrative framing of that early youth by a still young writer who takes control of his sexuality within a symbolic space that any Occidental tourist ignores *de facto*—and which is actively used by him for his sentimental education, as well as his affective and libidinal development. Ralph Heyndels points out: “C’est tout d’abord par les récits de femmes, en arabe, que Rachid est séduit par les hommes” (“Travail” 17).

While Mounir propels Rachid’s sexual inclination, the boy’s attractive qualities are further highlighted when it becomes apparent that his dazzling attributes are what seduce their Arab maître. Speaking of their teacher’s flirtatious behavior toward Rachid, Mounir asserts in a sarcastic and jealous tone: “J’ai raison, regarde ce qu’il est en train de te faire.” (62). One could wonder to what this “ce que” refers, but it is clear that Mounir and Rachid represent two opposing viewpoints; the latter being more concerned with an “authentic” outcome, as opposed to an immediate “pay-off.” Referring to the relation between the narrator and his professor of Arabic, Richard Serrano writes:

> The erotic dimension of the teacher-student relationship has been a component of Mediterranean culture since at least the height of classical Athenian culture, but it would be a mistake for us to consider it merely a

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144 In “Mes Femmes,” Rachid O. narrates his first sexual encounter as a young boy with a very handsome, wealthy, and powerful Moroccan man in his thirties named Hamza. (*L’enfant ébloui* 50-55)
shard of the past that has survived in present-day Morocco, since the ensuing 2,500 years and the great distance separating the Aegean from the Atlas have remade the context of these practices many times over. Rachid O’s stories demonstrate how complicated the reality of teacher-student love in contemporary Morocco has become. Stereotypically such a relationship would end once the junior partner reaches manhood. In other words, the junior partner’s termination of the relationship would mark the latter’s entry into adulthood. (177)

But what is for Serrano interpreted as an increasingly muddied homo-social dynamic is actually Rachid’s O.’s way of conceiving and writing the affair with his teacher as a completely unproblematic one (as far as its homosexual reality is concerned), and as a very sentimental, and even poetical, union. While the teacher eventually falls victim to heteronormative priority, Rachid assertively wants to convey the idea that there is hope for a new generation of young Moroccans—embodied here by the child who is certainly not afraid to fully and outspokenly embrace his homosexual desire, but without any urge for militant proclamation or polemical controversy.

The relation between the Arab teacher and the young Rachid is the first significant amour in the narrator’s voyage toward an increasingly queer form of self and being: “Je n’allais plus avec les autres garçons, je ne pensais qu’à lui, je travaillais plus, me donnais plus de mal pour être le premier, pour le satisfaire, lui plaire encore plus” (63). Rachid dreams of the moment when homoerotic infatuation will become tangible reality: “Entre-temps j’étais tout excité: j’attendais ce jour-là” (64). His Arab teacher is more than willing to return the sentiment, although such ecstasy is temporarily displaced when the boy’s older lover succumbs to the pressures of being implicitly labeled “gay”:

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145 The “normalcy” narratively and rhetorically characterizing such relation can be compared with the way Abdellah Taïa evokes “brotherly love” in L’armée du salut: “Ça me semblait normal d’avoir ce genre de désir pour tout ce qui était en relation avec Abdelkébir. Et c’est, dans ma tête, toujours normal. Avec mon frère je ne m’interdisais rien. Tout était naturel. Tout ce qu’il était me convenait, me touchait à l’intérieur avec force et délicatesse” (35).
“Tu ne devrais plus faire ça. Un garçon doit s’intéresser aux filles pour devenir un homme. On ne devrait plus se voir” (72). Serrano asserts that “[A]s far as we can tell (and we do not have much access into his interior world), the teacher is not and would not consider himself gay” (178). But, further yet, in the overall socio-cultural context of what Jean Zaganiaris has recently named an emerging “Queer Maroc,” and within the very specific imaginary boundaries of Rachid O.’s narrative space, one should of course be extremely cautious when attempting to qualify what constitutes “gay” behavior. This does not seem to trouble the young Rachid who, despite his deceptive naïveté, seems to be somehow aware that being gay in Morocco is quite different than what it could mean in Europe (which is in itself evidently complex and plurisemantic). By refusing to be banished to the prison of imposed heteronormativity, Rachid effectively redraws the territory of Arab male identity to now include the possibility of a lived gay Moroccan sexuality. This is certainly not to say, however, that he evades the impulse to escape his innermost circle as he recognizes the advantages of venturing outside of his familial structure. It is here where one should consider the significance of homoerotically traveling “at home” in an inter-Arab context. The city of Tangiers becomes a site of escape for Rachid and his teacher-turned-lover: “Le lendemain, on est rentrés tous les deux chez mes parents en leur demandant si je pouvais l’accompagner à Tanger pour un mois” (76-7). Eventually returning to Rabat after a less than “successful” sojourn, the wounded narrator is further initiated into a world comprised of cruel intentions, yet does

146 I borrow this term from Jean Zaganiaris’s book title.

147 In the episode related to the sexual encounter with Hamza, Rachid O. explicitly refers to the significance of traveling in his coming-of-age: “C’était une chose que je n’avais jamais faite, un voyage tout seul dans une voiture, avec le soleil qui commençait à se lever (54).
not succumb to the darkness that he at least partially associates with being gay and North African. For the narrator-traveler, one way out of such metaphorical darkness is to associate with the northern tourist or “resident” (to use Barthes’s terminology), Antoine, who represents perceived notions of freedom, and, on the horizon, at least the implied possibility to emigrate to France—a country that fascinates the Moroccan boy who dreams of a different kind of life somewhere “out there.”

**Reversing the Power Dynamics of Homoerotic Tourism: vers le nord**

Rachid O. portrays the narrator’s relationship with Antoine, a French resident in Rabat who is said to be enamored with him, in a way that completely “normalizes” the union. Such relation is presented in unproblematic terms as its un-referred to queer status is concerned: “Antoine est devenu réellement amoureux de moi, il m’aimait, faisait plein de projets avec moi, voulait vivre avec moi. Et on vivait ensemble” (92). The narrator, for instance, reports the following conversation with his aunt, through which it appears that she has indirectly understood, without further comment, the nature of his relation with the French coopérant: “Quand [ma tante] a su que j’habitais chez Antoine, elle n’a pas fait d’histoires. Moi, j’ai mis un moment à lui dire que j’habitais avec un Français, c’est-à-dire pas un Marocain, pas un musulman mais un chrétien. Elle a su ce qu’était la relation sans poser de questions directes mais des indirectes” (125). While Antoine is not uniquely invested in Rachid as far as his sexual affairs are concerned, and also

148 Rachid’s fascination with France is one of the multiple themes to be found in *Chocolat Chaud* (1998).

149 While the aunt’s understanding is to be signaled here, one should also highlight the very significant narrative *mise en abyme* of the implicitly, but unequivocally, acceptance by Rachid O.’s father in a primordial passage that concludes *L’enfant ébloui*, and which has been analyzed by Ralph Heyndels (“Travail” 142-145)
demonstrates considerable interest in Hicham and other Moroccan boys,\(^\text{150}\) Rachid states: “... notre relation n’a pas évolué comme ça se passe d’habitude, quand il y a un moment où on se dit “Je t’aime” et on donne les clés à l’autre” (92). He also confidently remarks: “On a eu une vraie vie de couple, que ce soit un couple paternel ou amoureux: tous les matins il me réveillait et m’emmenait à l’école” (93). Antoine thus also doubles as a father figure with whom the narrator feels protected, despite the fragile parameters of their relationship, and despite any negative implication that could become associated with their union while outside of the protective oasis that is Antoine’s “French” residence in Morocco. But while the French protagonist may appear to be in control, the Moroccan éphèbe remains conscious of his own erotic prowess and aptly capitalizes on his seductive qualities, even if the sexual tourist/coopérant largely views his young lover as an outlet for erotic jouissance, and is described by the narrator as someone who “couchait à droite et à gauche avec d’autre garçons” (100). Although Rachid is deeply wounded by Antoine’s infidelity (100-105), a lover who is “succeeding” to the Moroccan Arabic teacher in Rachid’s coming-of-age story and sentimental education journey, the omnipresent trope of melancholy lingers in such scenes as the French coopérant nevertheless acts as a facilitator for the narrator in yet another necessary escape from the pressures of heteronormative existence. In this regard, their “exchange” is at least a partially mutual one, and temporarily stabilizes what can be described as a continuous fragile state of affairs—certainly from the perspective of the Arab subject who must

\(^{150}\)“Antoine m’aimait, il était devenu vraiment amoureux de moi, content de moi. Je crois—mais pas ‘je crois’: je l’ai rendu stable. Il faut dire aussi que quand il habitait hors de Rabat, loin des coopérants et des services de l’ambassade, il faisait tout ce qu’il voulait, il vivait un délire pour les garçons, passait souvent tout un week-end enfermé avec les garçons. Quand il a été avec moi, il a continué à voir d’autres garçons, mais en cachette, ce n’était plus cette folie. Il est devenu un peu sage. Il faisait des projets avec moi, comme si on allait vivre ensemble longtemps. Un jour, ça m’a fait très plaisir, il est entré dans ma chambre, très amoureux, juste pour me dire: ‘On a bien fait l’amour ce matin.’” (98)
balance his desire for the northern tourist with the growing possibility of being replaced by younger boys.

In order to compensate for the inevitable process of outgrowing his youthful looks, Rachid actually turns to what could be described as a modality of reverse sexual tourism, permitting him to take the initiative and the lead, while staying within the confines of implied power structures whose objective economy he is subjectively taking advantage of—as it becomes salient following the appearance of Julien. By this point now older, the narrator literally cruises the French man:

Julien était là. Il m’a tout de suite plu, je l’ai regardé, je l’avais pris pour un coopérant, il ne faisait pas du tout touriste, la façon dont il était habillé, il avait un cartable comme un enseignant au Maroc. Il attendait pour payer sa communication et à un moment il a perdu un billet d’argent et je me suis précipité pour le ramasser et le lui rendre. C’était une façon d’attirer son attention. Il avait un regard hésitant, bizarre, pas comme les regards que j’avais l’habitude d’avoir sur moi. (106)

Through the narration of this scene, we are somehow projected within the spoken/written subjective viewpoint of the North African boy who is inscribing himself into the parameters of sexual tourism opportunities and demands as represented and formulated in the homoerotic travel writings of Gide, Barthes and even, on a more complicated level, Genet, but from the other side of the “inequal equation” of desire. The narrator explicitly states that he made a conscious and calculated decision to “catch” Julien, which he will actually succeed at doing a bit later. But the phrase “Il m’a tout de suite plu” initiates


152 “Et, en marchant sur une place, je croise Julien. Et là, le même regard, c’est-à-dire très bref, alors que moi j’étais beaucoup plus insistant. Là, comme on s’était vus trois heures avant et qu’il a bien reconnu que c’était moi qui étais à la poste, j’avais une raison de plus de lui adresser la parole. Il s’est dirigé vers une vitrine pour regarder des livres. Je suis allé vers lui et en lui disant ‘Bonjour’ et en lui rappelant qu’on s’était vus ce matin. Je lui ai dit que c’était drôle, on s’était vus ce matin et on se revoir. Je ne lui as pas laissé le temps de dire “On s’est vus ce matin. Et alors?”’ je lui ai tout de suite proposé de
Rachid’s seduction endeavor and establishes the tonal quality of the passage. However, despite the narrator’s best efforts at seducing Julien, the Frenchman is not interested in him as a sexual object, which marks an important and defining moment in the text.

Rachid confesses in a melancholic observation: “Je me voyais encore une fois, une troisième fois, amoureux d’un homme qui aime les jeunes garçons que je ne suis plus. Je l’aime énormément” (112). In an interesting parallel, such reflection is highly reminiscent of Barthes’s dismal self-portrait at the conclusion of “Soirées de Paris,” and draws attention to a vulnerability, which is, in this case, projected onto the actually very young Arab man who suffers, in a sense for reasons both diametrically opposite and somehow convergent, from the same condition as the aging French tourist-writer. While Rachid O.’s text in many ways redefines the dynamics of gay travel literature, Abdellah Taïa’s novel *L’armée du salut* (2006) poses as a further rewriting within the genre, and recalls a number of themes we have observed in *L’enfant ébloui*.

This is interesting to compare to the relation of the encounter with Antoine, in which the latter takes the initiative and exercises control: “J’ai connu Antoine en allant l’école. Il fallait prendre l’autobus. Ce jour-là, je me suis dit que j’allais garder de la monnaie et irais à pied ou en me faisant déposer par quelqu’un. À un feu rouge, j’ai fait de l’auto-stop. Il y avait plusieurs voitures. Antoine n’était pas au début de la file mais vraiment au fond, derrière. Il m’a fait signe de monter dans sa voiture. Je suis monté. Il m’a proposé de faire un tour. Comme je n’avais pas spécialement envie d’aller à l’école, j’ai fini chez lui, à l’extérieur de Rabat, au bord de la plage. Il n’a pas hésité à me sauter, pas à me violer, à me sauter dans le salon, alors que la bonne pouvait tout voir de la cuisine” (87).

“Je voyais dans l’évidence qu’il me fallait renoncer aux garçons, parce qu’il n’y avait pas de désir d’eux à moi, et que je suis ou trop scrupuleux ou trop maladroit pour imposer le mien; que c’est là un fait incontournable, avéré, par toutes mes tentatives de flirt, que j’en ai une vie triste, que, finalement, je m’ennuie, et qu’il me faut sortir cet intérêt, ou cet espoir, de ma vie” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. V: 267).
In “L’homosexualité expliquée à ma mère,” Abdellah Taïa speaks to the psycho-social struggles he went through in embarking on an existential, sentimental, and literary journey, which led him to the public self-affirmation of his sexuality:

Au delà de mon homosexualité, que je revendique et assume, je sais que ce qui vous surprend, vous fait peur, c’est que je vous échappe: je suis le même, toujours maigre, toujours cet éternal visage d’enfant; je ne suis plus le même. Vous ne me reconnaissiez plus et vous vous dites: “Mais d’où lui viennent ces idées bizarres? D’où lui vient cette audace? On ne l’a pas éduqué comme ça…Non seulement il parle publiquement de sexualité, non, non, cela ne lui suffit pas, il parle d’homosexualité, de politique, de liberté…pour qui se prend-il? (Têtu Web)

While Rachid O. in *L’enfant ébloui* subtly develops a non-dramatic narrative, rhetoric, and poetical representation of what could appear as a kind of relatively asserted “normality” of his gay outcome in Morocco, Taïa casts a very different perspective on the entire question of making explicit the queer non-dit in a contemporary Maghrebi context. In this regard, this letter “post-frames” *L’armée du salut*, a text that appeared nearly four years earlier. For the traveler-narrator of this auto-fictional novel, liberation is linked to new forms of self-expression, and is ensconced in a form of discourse that exposes the “tourist’s” vulnerability as an emigrant and “emerging” gay subject when he undergoes a kind of diegetic coming out, anchored in the romantically-expressed narration of an

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155 One plays here, of course, with the title of Goethe’s novel.

156 The narrator first travels from Salé to Tangiers, and from page 42 until page 71 what we read is supposed to be his travelogue. Then, at the beginning of section III, he is suddenly “de l’autre côté” (p. 75), in Geneva, and we learn that he has actually been “en Suisse deux fois,” and that he has also traveled with his French lover within Morocco to Marrakech, Tangiers, and Ouarzazate (p. 85). During his second trip to Geneva, he passed the strait of Gibraltar by boat, and then crossed by train into Switzerland (147). At the very end of the novel, the reader understands that Abdellah will finally end up in Paris: “Entre-temps, je serais devenu plus fort, mais plus maigre, et mon rêve d’être un intellectuel à Paris serait peut-être une réalité” (154).
impossible *passion première* (“l’amour évidemment,” 113) for his older brother.  

“J’en pleure, tellement j’aimais mon frère. J’en pleure, tellement Abdelkébir m’a donné du bonheur. J’en pleure d’avoir un frère comme lui qui était là pour nous, pour moi” (36). The adolescent’s affective fascination, and very concretely and efficiently expressed physical attraction to his sibling, assumes an increasingly erotic and sensual dimension and demarcates the first in a series of key “transgressions.” Such emotion is lyrically celebrated, as opposed to being relegated to a space of silence. Rather than suggesting a mere physical gravitation toward his sibling, the relationship between the narrator and Abdelkébir ignites the young Abdellah’s desire, perhaps subconsciously at first, compelling him to navigate his sexuality on his own terms. Such a “voyage,” as related to sexual awakening and development, plays a significant role in what is also a *bildungsroman*; and from such perspective, the narrative could be divided into three imaginary moments—or, rather, three travel destinations. In each case, it could be said that the narrator’s homoerotic desire is intimately and metaphorically linked to an impulse to physically and emotionally engage the northern tourist.

**Tangiers: ville de tous les trafics**  

One of the narrator’s first moments of real autonomy and freedom, far away from his family and his neighborhood of Hay Salam, occurs in Tangiers, a destination he describes as having “quelque chose d’unique” (53). Although he shows mixed feelings toward the city, his visit is acutely perceived by him as an almost foreign enclave and a liminal site (48, 51-53), which is also haunted by the obsessive attraction exerted by its

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157 The Dutch translation of the book’s title (in English) is *Brotherly Love*.

158 This association of Tangiers with betrayal and trafficking, present in *L’armée du salut*, comes from Jean Genet’s *Journal du voleur*. 
proximity to Europe and the often tragic shadows of immigration. What makes the town in a sense appealing (recalling Barthes’s and Genet’s travels and writings) is the possibility of homoerotic flânerie, which the young boy indulges in while his older brother is away, and despite his best efforts at remaining “loyal” to him. It is that Abdellah commits, in the city of all traffics, what he subsequently refers to as the ultimate treason by intimately and erotically engaging with Salim, an older sexual tourist from Paris. Although Salim is Moroccan by birth, he more readily identifies with his French identity: “Parce que je vis à Paris. Je ne connais aucun mot arabe!” (L’armée du salut 60). While the boy is traumatized over the fact that he has, in his phantasmatic mind, betrayed his brother with whom he continues to share an imaginary relationship, the erotic encounter with Salim further underscores a desire to embrace his burgeoning gay self. Language use in this case (they both converse in French) yields a semiotic escape, permitting Abdellah to penetrate Salim’s European world, regardless of their physical presence in Morocco—and regardless of the fact that both characters share a Moroccan heritage. Moreover, such advantage is shared and accounts to what is, in the end, (and recognized by the narrator), as an exchange of sexual pleasure of which he has obviously benefited. Such scenario is very similar to an “incident” of anonymous sex that occurs later on:

Mon homme de quarante ans, toujours autoritaire, ne me laissa pas jouer longtemps de cette scène où l’humanité des êtres en Suisse se révélait enfin à moi. Il me prit par le bras et m’entraîna dans les toilettes. Il ferma derrière lui la porte violemment et se mit aussitôt à genoux. Il ouvrit lentement, doucement, ma braguette, sortit délicatement mon sexe et le mit dans sa bouche pour le réveiller. Il suçait bien, tellement bien que j’en oubliai de me retirer pour jouir. Il avait l’air en extase: il avala mon sperme, tout mon sperme, en fermant les yeux. Puis il se releva, s’essuya les lèvres et le menton avec un mouchoir, m’embrassa sur le cou, les deux joues et les lèvres. Son odeur forte d’homme m’envahit alors tout entier.
Je fermai les yeux à mon tour deux ou trois secondes pour bien l’identifier et l’enregistrer au fond de moi-même, dans mon ventre et mon cœur. Il plongea sa main droite dans la poche de sa veste et en sortit une orange. Une orange! Il me la donna en disant, cette fois-ci avec une voix remplie de tendresse, épuisée de plaisir: “Merci! Je passe par ici tous les jours vers 18 heures sauf les week-ends. À demain!” Et il repartit. Je restai un petit moment dans les toilettes pour me ressaisir, réaliser ce que venait de m’arriver avec cet homme, jouir encore, après coup, de mon plaisir en mettant l’orange sous mon nez pour sentir son esquise odeur. J’étais heureux, de ce plaisir, soulagé. Il ne m’avait pas pris finalement pour un prostitué. Je lui avais plu, il voulait goûter à moi, et c’était aussi simple que ça. Rien de plus. Un échange équitable de jouissance. (L’armée du salut 132)

Envisioned in such perspective, this sequence of L’armée du salut actually displaces the cartography of sexual tourism by reversing the “route south.” Moreover, as it is also the case in Rachid O.’s narrative, the reader is here located within the viewpoint of the “local” subject, somehow like if one would have entered the subjectivity of a Maghrebi boy encountered by André Gide, Roland Barthes, or Jean Genet. And such subjectivity is not only narrating the events, it is commenting on them—including in terms of power dialectics and sexual jouissance:

Vendredi

— Que fais-tu à Tanger, seul?
— En vacances. Je suis accompagné de mon petit frère qui joue au football là-bas et de mon grand frère qui est parti à Tétouan pour la journée.
— Tu es seul alors?
— Oui, si on veut.
— Tu voudrais qu’on aille quelque part tous les deux?
— Où?
— Au cinéma par exemple.
— Il y a un cinéma à l’entrée de la médina qui s’appelle Mauritanya.
— Je le connais très bien. Tu veux qu’on y aille regarder un film?
— Oui, je veux bien, j’adore le cinéma… Mais il y a un problème… mon petit frère.
— Il peut rester ici à jouer au football. On n’en aura pas pour très longtemps, deux heures tout au plus. On prendra un petit taxi pour revenir à la plage.
— C’est d’accord. Je vais le prévenir.

\textit{Samedi}

— Je me sens mal, mal, mal.
— Je suis un traître.
— J’ai trahi Abdelkébir.
— Au cinéma, avec Salim.
— Et le pire, c’est que j’ai aimé ça, être entouré par les bras forts de cet homme de 40 ans qui sentait bon et qui me parlait dans l’oreille En français tout en essayent de trouver un chemin vers mon sexe, mes fesses. Je me suis donné à lui. Il ne m’a pas fait souffrir. Oui, j’ai aimé ça. Mon Dieu! (\textit{L’armée du salut} 60-61)

Assuredly, Salim, the older Moroccan/French character, has taken the initiative of, and the lead in, seducing and somehow controlling and enticing the young Abdellah:

Un homme d’un certain âge (35 ans? 49 ans?) est venu vers moi. Il a touché délicatement mon épaule et m’a dit, en français: “Il faut se méfier du soleil. C’est dangereux. Tu as une crème solaire?” Il ne m’a pas laissé le temps de répondre et m’a proposé la sienne. Je m’en suis mis partout sur le corps et la lui ai rendu en le remerciant. Il est aussitôt revenu à la charge: “Le dos. Tu as oublié d’en mettre sur le dos. Tourne-toi, je vais t’aider…le…dos…c’est difficile à…” J’ai fait ce qu’il me disait. Il a mis sa main gauche sur mon épaule et a commencé à étaler avec sa main droite sa crème solaire sur mon dos. Cela n’a pas duré lontemps, a peine une minute. (\textit{L’armée du salut} 59)

But the narrator, while subtly placing signs that refer to this situation of objective inequality, does not mention any attempt at resisting to the fondling exerted quite rapidly on him by the man who is using such situation to his advantage.

\textbf{Redrawing the Territories of Arab Homoerotic Engagement in a Transnational and Bi-Cultural Context}

The third and final section of \textit{L’armée du salut} is situated in Switzerland, the site of Abdellah’s initial contact with the north, where he arrived after having actively and efficiently cruised and seduced a Swiss professor lecturing at the University of Rabat.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{159} This sequence has been studied by Ralph Heyndels (‘‘L’amour évidemment,’’ 81-85).
In a highly melancholic observation, the narrator confesses: “De l’autre côté, loin, si loin, seul, désenparé, affolé, perdu, déjà je criais ‘Au secours.’ J’appelai le Maroc, j’appelai ma mère au Maroc” (75). The traveler is suspended between two cultures, a condition Dennis Altman speaks to in his article “Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities”: “The problem [of identity] thus becomes one of finding the right balance between tradition and modernity, while recognizing that these terms are vague, problematic, and politically contested” (79). Altman’s argument points to what is, for Abdellah, the onset of an emerging identity crisis in a European-Maghrebi context. While eventually traveling to (and in) the north quite possibly represents the ultimate form of freedom, such condition also draws a clear scission between contemporary and traditional Moroccan values. And what is particularly important to consider here is the very problematic of an incitement to Western discourse of which Joseph Massad speaks in *Desiring Arabs* (2007), which applies most certainly to the post-colonial homoerotic tourist, including Abdellah: “When the Gay International incites discourse on homosexuality in the non-Western world, it claims that the ‘liberation’ of those it defends lies in the balance” (189). But what Abdellah in this case has not fully realized until his arrival in Geneva, however, is that the situation is, in many ways, not that much better in the north—the very geographic space that will later be described by the narrator as a place that is cold and lonely.

Nevertheless, the narrator has unapologetically and assertively made the choice to leave Morocco, and while there may never have been an element of authentic love and attraction, he has at least partially used the Swiss professor, Jean, in his difficult quest of relocating to Europe. Moreover, he shows an inclination to travel north as part of a larger,
more encompassing plan to redefine his new identity as he visits the continent with his body and his sexuality, as noted during his crossing to Spain with Matthias and Rafaël (147-151). In this way, *L’armée du salut* poses as another rewriting of the “reverse” homoerotic voyage, as Abdellah is more compelling as an older and more mature subject, as opposed to the “innocent” growing child that Rachid represents in *L’enfant ébloui*. Linking both novels, however, is a traceable effort to impress and seduce the northern post-colonial sexual tourist—and in Taïa’s case, with an ability to speak of European culture, including French literature.\(^{160}\)

Geneva is initially described by the narrator as unforgiving and falls short of meeting the traveler’s expectations: “Les rues de Genève étaient vides, pire que Rabat un soir d’hiver” (86). Abandoned by Jean, he ends up at the Salvation Army, which proves to be a temporary and precarious space of forgetting, where the narrator is able to at least temporarily displace what is a vulnerable and fragile state: “Je n’avais plus peur. J’avais oublié ma vie, mon histoire. Je n’avais qu’un seul but: trouver l’Armée du Salut. Dormir. Oublier, m’oublier. Ne plus penser” (95). In the shadows of such melancholic desperation, the young Arab subject, who is attempting to assimilate into his adopted culture, offers an explicit reference to Benjamin Constant’s *Adolphe*, thereby distinguishing himself as a “cultured” traveler (95). In a subsequent and similar occurrence, he also remarks that the Salvation Army receptionist resembles Michel Foucault: “l’homme que j’avais devant moi était Michel Foucault. Il ressemblait au philosophe français, il avait tout come lui: l’allure, le crâne rasé et même les lunettes. J’étais troublé, ému. Je fus immédiatement séduit” (96). Whereas Gide’s (and even

\(^{160}\) One should note that in both cases, the acquisition and mastering of the French language also plays a significant role in such seduction strategy.
Barthes’s boy lovers are often reduced to orientalist puppets, if one might say, Taïa’s narrator rewrites the éphèbe’s ability to break free from the numerous stereotypes often associated with the Arab boy—who in this case also no longer depends on his European “sponsor” as a source of survival. Moreover, this scene highlights a recognized (and unproblematically assumed) fascination with French and European culture, which supersedes the difficulties and challenges encountered by the traveler in becoming a “resident” who is also, in post-colonial Europe, an immigrant.

While the narrator will eventually realize his dream of venturing north, he temporarily visits Morocco with Jean, reassuming his position as a traveler within his own country. Their arrival in Marrakech is initially described as pure bliss:

Tout allait bien entre nous. L’entente, après Rabat, se révélait réelle. L’amour physique y contribuait beaucoup, même si cela n’était pas l’essentiel, pour moi en tout cas. Je ne résistais pas face à lui, j’étais ravi d’avoir un homme pour moi, qui s’intéressait à moi, qui me sortait momentanément de mon milieu populaire, un homme occidental, cultivé, quelque part un homme-rêve. (98)

Yet the episode is subsequently haunted by both remnants of colonial superiority and domination, and highlights an evident reference to the stigma of being the object of a sexual tourism transaction. This is articulated in the following scene that is narrated through the voices of two Moroccan police officers that are suspect of Abdellah’s interactions with Jean:

Un soir, nous nous prenions, Jean et moi, dans les rues calmes du quartier chic de l’Hivernage, avant de regagner l’hôtel. Soudain, deux policiers, qui avaient l’air gentil pourtant, nous arrêtèrent. Ils s’adressèrent à moi avec beaucoup de violence, de mépris, en arabe: “Qu’est-ce que tu fais avec cet homme? Pourquoi tu l’embêtes? Ne sais-tu pas qu’il est

\[161\] “D’abord, à quel point la fascination qu’exerçait sur moi la culture occidentale était réelle. Et ensuite, à quel point ce même Occident était une autre chose à vivre au quotidien, une autre réalité que celle que j’avais pendant des années imaginée à travers les films et les livres (122).

The policemen’s discourse, which is spoken in Arabic, points to a rhetorical positioning of assumed northern sexual tourism practices. But the narrator, referring to his “friend,” displaces previous images of the Arabo-European binary by what has been previously portrayed by many northern writer-travelers as a union borne out of sex and exploitation. Taïa repositions such dynamic by empowering the Arab traveler to redefine his role in the context of a homoerotic voyage—here “at home,” even if it is not without having to endure sarcessms and insults, and without breaking down in tears: “Cette nuit-là je n’ai pas dormi. J’ai pleuré toutes les larmes de mon corps sans que cela me soulage pour autant. Je ne sais pas si Jean avait compris ce qui s’était réellement passé” (100).

The trope of melancholia overarching the ensemble of the novel resurfaces in the concluding section of the narrative in which Abdellah must once again face his solitude. Following a sexual escapade with two young fellows on a train en route back to Switzerland to visit Jean, the traveler’s utopic vision of life in the north (and with his European lover) is ruptured once again. Speaking to Jean of his erotic experience on the train upon his arrival in Geneva, the traveler confesses: “Je devais être débordant d’enthousiasme, trop sans doute, ravi de cette belle chose de la vie qui venait de m’arriver. Jean et devenu quelqu’un d’autre, juste après le récit de mon voyage. La jalousie?” (151). One could argue that through his entanglements with the Swiss scholar, the narrator acquires the necessary confidence to bridge the distance between his bifurcated identities—but at what cost? Having experienced sexual liberation through
traveling abroad, the narrator poses the following, sobering question: “La liberté en Occident? Quelle liberté?” (152). Not unlike Rachid O., Taïa is writing against the grain of the normative by always trying to subjectively reinvent, through the very poetical processes, spaces, forms, and sentiments of normalcy, would it be by avowing and depicting an early youth passionate love, and sexual obsession with, an older brother\textsuperscript{162}; by redrawing the confines of an authentic sentimental and intellectual attachment for a first European mentor and lover\textsuperscript{163}; by reinterpreting the meaning of group sex in Europe and bridging it with the experience of a Moroccan childhood\textsuperscript{164}; or, by achieving romantic ecstasy through the affective and erotic complexities of a threesome and questioning the supposedly moral legitimacy of an imposed and constrictive monogamous relation.\textsuperscript{165} *L’armée du salut* is a text about uprisings; but it is also a story about a traveler who finds solace in his ability to challenge the limits of Maghrebi queer identity. While his voyage toward self-discovery obliges him to bypass numerous challenges, it portrays a young Moroccan’s coming-of-age, and coming out, in the most difficult, but also the most powerful, of terms:

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Je changeais de vie. J’allais devenir quelqu’un d’autre que je ne connaissais pas encore, j’allais rire, pleurer, m’instruire, aimer, décevoir les autres, me décevoir, commettre des erreurs, avancer malgré tout, construire quelque chose pour moi, rien que pour moi, rien que pour moi et plus tard pour ma famille, chanter, danser, être seul, être avec des gens nouveaux, paniquer, crier, faire l’amour, courir, mourir un petit peu,
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\textsuperscript{162} See p. 35: “Ça me semblait normal d’avoir ce genre de désir pour tout ce qui était en relation avec Abdelkébir. Et c’est, dans ma tête, toujours normal. Avec mon frère je ne m’interdisais rien. Tout était naturel. Tout ce qu’il était me convenait, me touchait à l’intérieur avec force et délicatesse.”

\textsuperscript{163} The status of the relationship between Abdellah and Jean is analyzed by Ralph Heyndels (“‘L’amour évidemment’”).

\textsuperscript{164} See p. 131: “Ces hommes n’étaient pas en couple, ils faisaient l’amour debout tous ensemble.”

\textsuperscript{165} See p. 148: “Nous n’avons pas dormi. Jeunes et heureux.”
To accomplish his self-reflective search through traveling and writing, Taïa embarks his narrator into a complex and multi-layered literary exercise of reverse sexual tourism—also mirroring and transforming an existential experience (Heyndels, “Abdellah” 149-162). At the core of the latter resides, as a haunting risk traversing the text, the permanent proximity with, and the complicated distancing from, the stigmatizing possibility or eventuality of prostitution, illustrated in the novel by the episode of the encounter (during Abdellah’s second visit to Tangiers, this time with Jean) of a stunningly beautiful and sexual rent boy named Mohamed. This very seductive lad, who directly refers to Morocco as being a playground for sexual tourism, is desperately trying to leave the country for the north (would it be Europe or America). The narrator’s (potential or relative) similarity with Mohamed’s condition is alluded to: “Il savait que j’étais comme lui de ce pays-bordel…” (107). Symptomatically, the sequence ends with the mentioning of Jean’s invitation extended to Abdellah and of his resolution to obtain the

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166 This topic has been studied by Ralph Heyndels in “La prostitution sur la scène de l’écriture: Abdellah Taïa,” forthcoming in Socles.

167 “Il s’appelait Mohamed. Et, comme tant d’autres, il rêvait de quitter un jour le Maroc pour la France, l’Espagne, l’Allemagne, peu importait, évidemment, les États-Unis serait le rêve absolu….” (105)

168 “Aujourd’hui, au Maroc, il n’y avait que le sexe qui marchait, le sexe, le sexe, le sexe, du matin au soir, et même toute la nuit, du sexe partout, entre tout le monde, même à la mosquée. Le sexe, disait-il, c’est la première matière brute de ce pays, son trésor, sa première attraction touristique” (105).

169 See also, this time on the “other side” in Geneva: “Jean lui avait visiblement tout raconté, je n’étais plus pour elle le petit Marocain qui découvrait l’Europe, je m’étais métamorphosé en petit démon, briseur de coeur, un arriviste, une petite pute finalement. Même pour elle, j’étais un autre. Pas celui que je pensais être, moi Chacun avait son image de moi-même” (116); and the related episode (123-24) that ends with: “Pour beaucoup de monde, et le monsieur qui venait de me donner sa carte ne pouvait que me le confirmer, je n’étais que ça finalement, une pute, une petite pute.”
invaluable visa permitting him to get into Europe: “À la fin de ce séjour de deux semaines à Tanger, Jean m’invita à venir chez lui en Suisse l’été suivant. Il allait s’occuper dès son retour des formalités pour l’obtention du visa” (109). Could one risk to deduct that in a sense, Abdellah has succeeded in obtaining what Mohamed seems to have at this point of the narration always failed to secure? The question is evidently left open, but what is highly significant is that the doubt has been casted here by the writer and induced within the narrator’s auto-fictional diegesis. One should add that at no moment is the evocation of Mohamed’s way of life framed in any morally (or, for that matter, “politically”) judgmental discourse. Two filmic mediations could perhaps help to further understand the complexities of such existential situation, in which young Maghrebi men are in a way objectively trapped: a 1992 movie by Tunisian director Nouri Bouzid and Abdellah Taïa’s directed cinematographic rendering of *Salvation Army*, released in 2013.

**The Cinema of Nouri Bouzid: Re-imagining the Arab Homoerotic Traveler**

Nouri Bouzid’s (1945, Nouri Bouzid studied cinema formally in Belgium between 1968 and 1972. *Bezness* is his fourth film. 170) *Bezness* (1992) was filmed in Tunisia and can be interpreted as a cinematic rewriting of the sexual tourism narrative. Similar in many ways to the literary examples that have been studied in this dissertation, Bouzid’s sexual tourists also figure quite well into the north/south dichotomy. The film is set in the seaside resort and historical town of Sousse and follows the adventures of the main character, Roufa, who is cruising European tourists. But distinguishing Roufa from Rachid and Abdellah, for

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170 Born in Sfax (Tunisia) in 1945, Nouri Bouzid studied cinema formally in Belgium between 1968 and 1972. *Bezness* is his fourth film.

171 Distributed by Artmattan Productions and produced in France. In French and Arabic (with French subtitles). The film was an official selection of the 1992 Cannes Film Festival.
example, is the fact that he is apparently heterosexual. Yet he is also “for hire” in the context of what is an interwoven motif of homoerotic situations and scenarios—many of which having presumably already occurred prior to the camera’s first shot. But this is not to say that Bouzid relegates the thematic of gay desire outside of the viewer’s imagination, as one of the first images we see of Roufa is as he is just getting out of the shower, his chest exposed, and his skin glistening from the water; it is an image that “opens,” if one might say, the homoerotic tonality of the film.

In New Tunisian Cinema: Allegories of Resistance (2014), Robert Wang writes: “Tunisian cinema is often described as the most daring of all the Arab cinemas, reflecting the country’s widely perceived status as the most “open” and “tolerant” of the twenty-two Arab states, the one in which Western modernity has been consciously but not indiscriminately embraced…” (ix). In examining Bouzid’s work, what do the so-called “daring” aspects of the film suggest about the economy of homoerotic tourism? While the actual exchange of “currency” is quite often more or less veiled in the literary works here previously analyzed, the power of European monies is both spoken and visualized in Bezness.

The secondary main character, Fred, is a French photographer who travels to Tunisia to take pictures of local inhabitants for what is, we assume, a professional project. In a sense, Fred is also a sexual tourist in his own right who appears to suffer from scopophilia. As the film shows on a number of occasions, Fred is all too keen to

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172 In considering Roufa’s sexuality in this regard, one is reminded of a passage from Abdellah Taïa’s Le rouge du tarbouche. In a piece titled “Terminus des anges,” the narrator states (in speaking of the character M’Hamed): “Il a vingt-cinq ans. Il sait qu’il est un peu beau, qu’il plaît, aux étrangers surtout. Femmes, hommes. Au début il allait seulement vers les femmes, il allait vers elles en conquérant, sûr de ses moyens, sûr de son pouvoir de séduction auprès de ces Européennes (la plupart d’entre elles étaient blondes, ou décolorées) affamées d’hommes machos qui ne renoncent pas à leur rôle de mec, comme cela est fréquent chez elles” (114).
relish in the presence of beautiful Tunisian women who wander the medina under the
watchful eye of the camera, which doubles as the lens of Fred’s own picture taking
apparatus—and is a sort of *mise en abyme*. For Wang, one of the few critics who has
studied extensively Bouzid’s cinema, the medina is also a space “that is represented as a
body to be discovered—penetrated, photographed, and investigated” (102). This
labyrinthine space easily recalls the “playgrounds” that Gide writes about, reproduced
here in a postcolonial setting that still bears the burden of the “superior other.” As the
film critic goes on to state, the French photographer, who is portrayed as a straight man,
is a character that operates in a dual sexual register, whose actions are “repeated in the
motif of homosexuality” (102). But in the context of what could be described as the
filmic “diaries” of two supposedly heterosexual subjects caught up in a queer-inclined
plot, what is the link to the topos of homoerotic *flânerie*—a thematic that lingers in the
shadows of what is also a postcolonial commentary on transnational relations?

Near the beginning of the film, the dialogue provides an initial clue as to one
possible meaning of “bezness” in Tunisia. This brief but important moment captures
the homoerotic bent characteristic of the entire film. The so-called *bezness* is to serve as a
guide for tourists—including gay ones—who travel to the region for sexual adventure. In
the context of a visit with a police officer—who is a kind of metaphorical *maquereau* for
Tunisia’s sex trade—Roufa confesses that he views himself as a *trésor national*, but that
his “specialty” is [now] women. The secondary character pictured in the background of
the following frame actually enhances Roufa’s self-portrait as a carefree gigolo who is

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173 According to Robert Wang, the term “bezness” can be understood as “a generic expression in
Tunisia for someone resourceful, or the activities of such a person who tries to set up a ‘small business’
with no capital at all” (99).
not only sure of himself, but is also convinced that even though he is “finished” with being *pédé* for hire, he can still procure an exit out of Tunisia through sexual tourism with women. This moment also underscores a rather poetic juxtaposition between two conflicting viewpoints in an *intra*-Arab context: while Roufa is first and foremost a “Tunisian,” his past acts of gay prostitution have resulted in a rather morose reputation in Sousse that the policeman pictured in the background seems unable to overlook based on the expression on his face and the distance he keeps from Roufa.

The ensuing discourse actually emphasizes the desperation of the Tunisian hustler who desires to immigrate to Europe—at any and all costs. Yet in the film, and for Roufa, traveling north is purely for financial gain, so it seems, as his primary concern is to find “work” in Europe for a short while in order to earn enough money to return to Tunisia and marry his bride. This is, of course, Roufa’s way of backing out of the trappings of *gay* sexual tourism, and is also a symbolic marker of his “Arab” heterosexual masculinity. But in a rather ironic twist, what makes Roufa’s *voyage* (and future marriage) possible in the first place is the aid of a former *male* German lover who can likely assist him in procuring the necessary papers to travel to Europe. The German sexual tourist somehow recalls Jean’s ambivalent entanglements with Abdellah in
L’armée du salut, as he is also unable to completely sympathize with Roufa’s postcolonial dilemma. Much like the Swiss professor—and despite his best efforts—the German finds it difficult to disavow his image as the “colonizer,” which haunts his interactions with his Arab lovers. When Roufa arrives one evening at his former client’s residence in Sousse, he is distraught and states: “je n’ai plus de rêves.” The dream of creating a better life is by this point ruptured, and Roufa is left to reconstruct his image as a dutiful Arab, which may not be entirely possible. In the following frame, Roufa is reluctant to look into the German’s eyes, which in a way encapsulates his dismal outlook.

But, if one might say, on the other side, Bouzid does not allow Fred to return to France unaltered. In a final and quite powerful shot, the French photographer realizes the trouble his camera (a curious replication of the evil eye we see near the beginning of the film) has caused. The expression on Fred’s face is in a way curiously similar to the one we have just observed in the shot with Roufa and the German, as both men are equally responsible for their own predicament. What we do not see in the following frame is the symbolic smashing of the camera, which Fred throws against an abandoned boat that has washed ashore. Bouzid, whose camera’s transnational gaze does not discriminate against race or nationality, captures the very essence of Bezness, which is the ever-present search
for something “else,” often by very tricky or convoluted means. And the film recognizes all too well that these scenes are like an allegory of resistance—waiting to be unraveled.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Fig. 10. “Allegory of Resistance,” Bezness, Nouri Bouzid (1992), Film Screenshot**

**The Cinema of Abdellah Taïa: From Text to Film**

I would like to conclude this chapter by transitioning to Abdellah Taïa’s debut film, *L’armée du salut* (2013). This work is particularly interesting to compare and juxtapose to Bouzid’s *Bezness*, as one could argue that Taïa’s visual narrative can partly be read as a rewriting of the 1992 film. The three overarching themes in *Salvation Army*—coming-of-age, sexuality, and homoerotic tourism—give way to the singularity of the main character’s différence. The film is itself an adaptation of the 2006 novel that bears the same title, although there are several striking differences between the literary and cinematographic versions, including significant changes in/of places, the elimination of several episodes, and a kind of “reinterpretation” of the Moroccan “traveler’s” disposition following his voyage to Europe as a young adult. The visually poetic composition thus poses as a reworking of the earlier text, and permits the author-

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174 Abdellah Taïa directed *L’armée du salut*. The film has been awarded a number of accolades including *le Grand prix du Jury* at the 26th Annual Angers European Film Festival (2014).

175 In the film, there is only one abruptly composed “passage” from Morocco to Geneva.
filmmaker to further, and somehow very differently, often enigmatically, redraw the trajectory of Abdellah’s travel north.

Often comforted by his sibling in whom he is intimately and emotionally vested, Abdellah embraces from an early age the desire he feels for same sex encounters. Echoing the narrator from the book, the on-screen character gradually indulges in erotic experiences beyond the walls of his familial abode, which is located in the bustling city of Casablanca, as opposed to Hay Salam. Slimane, his renamed older brother, exudes masculine sexuality in a slightly erotic way, and conforms to the heterosexual lifestyle expected of all “proper” Moroccan males. Abdellah, on the other hand, is unable to deny his homosexuality, and seems at least partially comfortable—yet initially cautious—with his decision to have affairs with men, despite the objective dangers that such relations may impose. The thematic of gay (and incestuous) desire characterizes a powerful scene near the beginning of the film during which Abdellah experiences erotic pleasure by lying on his brother’s bed and smelling the pillow that bears his scent:

![Fig. 11. “Brotherly Sanctuary,” L’armée du salut (2013), Film Screenshot.](image)

The kind of “sanctuary” that is Slimane’s room functions to eroticize the scene. In what is a semiotic rendition of an asserted poetical—and even lyrical—defense of “normalcy” that has been analyzed in the novel, Abdellah does not appear ashamed or bothered in any way by the feelings he harbors for Slimane. Moreover, and in “escaping” to this symbolic
and utopic spot, he is already beginning to embark on his own journey toward a new form of self and being.

In a subsequent scene in which the two brothers are together on a beach, Slimane literally campaigns for the usefulness of the French language, which in a way indirectly implies the superiority of the cultural other—France—while also reflecting on the socio-cultural reality and social divide of Morocco. Yet, ironically, this scene permits Taïa to alert us to the reversal of discourses of past colonial domination. While Slimane is symptomatic of the sought-after freedom many contemporary Moroccans associate with the former colonial nation, Abdellah is not entirely convinced. In the following frame, the adolescent is hesitant, and his body language emphasizes the fact that he is not yet prepared to embrace the idea of succumbing to the allure of traveling north:

![Fig. 12. “Reading in French,” L’armée du salut (2013), Film Screenshot.](image)

While sunbathing, Slimane is filmed reading a book that is written in French, which the gay youth does not appear to understand. The ensuing dialogue draws attention to Abdellah’s condition as being caught between two opposing worldviews, in the liminal space of that difficult transition between adolescence and young adulthood. The brother asserts: “There’s no harm in speaking French. It will help you succeed.” In a way perhaps

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176 The entire first Tangiers episode (with Abdelkébir/Slimane) has been relocated to El Jadida (a coastal city south of Casablanca); the second one (with Jean) has been suppressed.
foreshadowing his own implied desire to escape to the north, Slimane poses a sobering question, which actually could also be proleptically projected onto the forthcoming adult: “Do you want to remain in Morocco your entire life?” The boy’s response, which is also an indirect avowal of his love for his brother, is qualified by uncertainty: “You’re here; why would I leave?”

But as Slimane eventually constructs a life for himself in Morocco, Abdellah turns to travel as a means to navigate the fragile parameters of his sexuality, which is exacerbated by the thought of being “alone”—and without Slimane.

Later on, Abdellah, whose own sentimental feelings are literally illegible (or better said, invisible), is suddenly seen in the company of a European lover—a Swiss professor he met in unspecified circumstances—who will appear toward the end of the film in a scene charged by verbal violence and deep distrust. Interestingly, the entire sequence of the young Moroccan student encountering and seducing the Swiss scholar, and almost all details of their ensuing and evolving relation, have been removed from the film which is entirely traversed by a “visual rhetoric” and semiotic of silence, narrative discontinuity, ellipses, and purposely unresolved ambiguity. In the aforementioned scene, whose action is supposed to be set in a university classroom in Geneva, a quite abyssal distance, a complete and even vertiginous sense of reciprocal misunderstanding, as well as a growing mutual verbal violence between Abdellah and Jean, is filmically framed and semiotically visualized. The two protagonists are confrontationally and radically apart, separated by an opaque division of perspectives that in a compelling symbolic way opposes the Moroccan traveler to the north and the European one once fascinated by the south. Through what could be formulated as being a dramatic polemical

177 For the literary/written version of this incident, see page 52 in the novel.
staging of an antagonistic dialectics between reverse sexual tourism and the western hegemonic form of it, it becomes increasingly clear that Abdellah has assumed, but at the highest cost of solitude, primary control of his destiny.

![Fig. 13. “Redefining Power and Desire,” L’armée du salut (2013), Film Screenshot.](image)

In this frame, Jean questions Abdellah’s intentions, and asserts that his young lover may no longer “need” him, adding: “You have changed; you have used me; it’s all you have ever done.” In a modality that recalls several instances in which the narrator in the novel is interrogating his own at least apparent proximity to “meta-prostitutional” intentions, an increasingly forceful and self-serving character appears at this moment of the film. Such behavior undeniably reflects a shift in the power dynamics of Arab-European relations in the context of a homosexual and transnational love affair. This scene in a way culminates in the figure of the redefined North African traveler, and forces us to reexamine the north/south binary as it relates to twenty-first century representations of power and desire. Although the film’s sudden ending elucidates Taïa’s creative vision, plenty of questions remain unanswered, inciting critical reflection. In the final and pensive scene of the film, the deceptive simplicity that qualifies the narration of the 2006 novel reappears by way of a song that is played in Arabic. Even though the lyrics are not subtitled or
translated, for many audiences the music will succeed in breaking the silence of
otherness, thereby punctuating a traveler’s daunting and melancholic search for self.
Conclusion

I think it bears mentioning how I arrived at my topic, and how the present dissertation has evolved. In my title, I evoke the notion of redrawing territories of poetics and ethics, which in a way may propel us to consider from the onset the very reasons for which cartographies of desire have undergone a series of shifts and transformations throughout the period under investigation. And linked to this idea is the thematic of desire as it relates to the trope of melancholia that resonates in the voices of each of the writer-tourists in the works here at stake. Having examined this body of literature and film as it relates to the topos of homoerotic travel writing, it appeared to me that the various narrative procedures that characterize each text or film—in a singular, yet unifying manner—points to a salient commonality in that each work shares a set of narrative traits that underscore the presence of a tourist who finds himself in search of varying forms of otherness at the frontline that I define as the north/south intersection.

I begin my study in earnest with a consideration of Gide’s L’immoraliste (1902)—a work that I argue is a defining pillar of the genre. From there, my subsequent readings become largely informed by Gide’s unique way of escaping his northern self, through writing, while seeking refuge in a region that I delineate as the “South” or the “Orient.” What is particularly illustrious, I believe, is the fact that each of these authors and filmmakers “rewrites” a narrative that has been previously told under different circumstances—and through highly diverse modalities of expression. As such, I have placed late nineteenth and twentieth century works into dialogue with a corpus of more contemporary texts. By comparing and contrasting the (at times) vastly different narrative techniques that qualify such literary and visual journeys, I have tried to demonstrate that
once we penetrate the artificial layer of the text or film, we locate a common thread of alterity that functions as a foundation for the very mode of homoerotic travel writing.

As I argue in Chapter One, Tony Duvert’s writing in *Journal d’un innocent* (1976) highlights a radical shift in rhetorical stylistics when compared to the poetics that we observe in Gide’s work. The post-modern writer’s procedure can be traced to Gide’s way of (re)constructing, if one might say, the literary topos of the “escape.” And, further yet, while Jean Genet is drawn to the dark-skinned male subject, including the Arab male figure, I argue that he is first and foremost propelled by his desire to politically and ethically position his physical and emotional longing; and there resides within his work an inclination to redraw the territories of his own *ethos*, as well as to take distance from the many problematic paradigms that one could risk linking to Western ideologies of sexual normativity—dating back, perhaps, as early as Gustave Flaubert’s homoerotic wanderings throughout the French countryside—and then leading into the foundational writings of Gide.

In the case of Roland Barthes, as I argue in Chapter Two, the semiotics that characterize the French critic’s way of writing about (and of) his sexual desire equally illuminate the inherent fragility of navigating what is, for each tourist-writer, a bifurcated identity. What is particularly interesting to examine in Barthes’s *oeuvre* is the evolution of his writing that slowly (and carefully; perhaps almost methodically) moves away from rather veiled references to homoerotic tourism (as noted in his preface to *Aziyadé*, for example) to increasingly less “cryptic” descriptions of queer desire in works including the posthumously published *Incidents* (2009). At this point, by now well into the mid-
twentieth century, one could attempt to trace, as I have, the expansion of the genre as it begins to give way to more outspoken and confident tourists.

In my study of Jean Genet in Chapter Three, I propose a reading of *Un captif amoureux* (1986) that focuses on the thematic of homoerotic tourism as it relates to the writer’s unique and long-standing commitment to the marginalized figure. In my close study of this multi-layered and complex text, I was particularly drawn to the writer’s highly poetic, and often enigmatic, ability to position his desire in a way that draws further attention to the many reasons for which other northern tourist-writers also reject the north. Yet, in a way, and permitting me to lead into Chapter Four and a study of writings by Abdellah Taïa and Rachid O., Genet appears to preface the rising power and visibility of the more contemporary Arab subject who will grow to embody the very poetics that characterize all that Hamza appears to represent in Genet’s last published work.

With these earlier texts and films in mind, and taking into account the various narrative rewritings as observed during the previous 100 years, in the final chapter of my study I propose the concept of “reverse” homoerotic tourism. Here, I underscore a reversal of the dialectics of power and desire in *L’armée du salut* (2006) and *L’enfant ébloui* (1995), while remaining conscious of the trope of melancholia that poses as yet another constant and interwoven motif. I (cross) read and critically position the contemporary writings by Taïa and Rachid O., and my textual analyses elucidate what I argue to be a reversal of a route *vers le sud* that is evidenced in the writings of Gide, Duvert, Barthes, and Genet—giving way to what is, for the contemporary and Maghrebi traveler, a journey *vers le nord*. But as I argue and even question in my dissertation when
contemplating this very problematic: what has changed? In his work *Desiring Arabs* (2007), Joseph Massad speaks of the rise of what he refers to as the “International Gay,” and suggests that the Western imposition of the Arab world has in essence imposed sexual identity categories, which function to break down the very fiber of the *non-dit* type of sexuality that attracts the northern tourist-writer.

Throughout my dissertation, and I would argue that this is part of its specificity and even, if I might permit myself to say this, its originality, I tried to remain focused on the on poetical and ethical modalities of the dialectics of desire and melancholy, without entering in judgmental, socio-moral and / or political considerations. While each chapter focuses on a “central” work (*L’immoraliste, Incidents, Un Captif amoureux, L’enfant ébloui, L’armée du salut*) it not only allows for cross-readings within the broader *opus* of each writer, but also for the study of transitions, changes, shifts and “reversals” between them, and it includes cinema and photography.

I chose to conclude my dissertation with an epilogue returning to Gide’s work and his relationship with Athman Ben Salah, a figure who seems to embody the desire that frees the northern traveler while prefacing the Maghrebi voices of Abdellah and Rachid. In so doing, the *limitations* of the northern experience in a way become resolved—as the redefined southern tourist enters into—and “rewrites”—the very space of otherness that haunts the imaginaries of the twentieth century French homoerotic tourist who is somehow also liberated by the travels north by the Arab subject to whom he is drawn.
Epilogue

Gide and Athman: Postfacing the Homoerotic Travel Narrative and Foreshadowing the Contemporary Gay Viatic Literature of the Maghreb

Nous passâmes dans cet eden deux jours paradisiaques, dont le souvenir n’a rien que de souriant et de pur.  

André Gide (Journal 604)

Having explored the various rewritings of (and within) the genre of homoerotic travel literature and cinema, I would like to bring this study full circle by returning to an aspect of Gide’s corpus, and relocating it within the perspectives recently opened by Arab gay writers such as Abdellah Taïa and Rachid O. As I argued in Chapter 1, Gide resides at the genesis of a series of French writers who seek to redefine their identity through travel and homoerotic engagement. As we glean from his autobiography, Si le grain ne meurt, among Gide’s more significant Maghrebi compagnons was the fourteen-year-old Algerian boy named Athman Ben Salah. Working as Gide’s guide and servant during the writer’s tour of Algeria in the late 1880s, Athman in many ways encapsulates, and even literally embodies, the northerner’s desire to flee to the south. Such sentiment is reflected in one of Gide’s recollections of a séjour while in the company of Athman, which he describes as “two blissful days spent together in an edenic paradise.” Gide also

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178 In reference to Gide, who is speaking on the subject of his time with Athman.

179 For a contextualization, see Robert Aldrich’s Colonialism and Homosexuality.

180 See Guy Dugas, “André Gide et Athman: le roman d’une amitié vraie.” According to Dugas, the relationship between the Algerian boy and the French writer was not of a sexual nature (an assertion that has also been proposed by Tamara Levitz in Modernist Mysteries, p. 61). But Michael Lucey (Gide’s Bent, 65) very appropriately comments in this regard: “But for a relationship to be relevant to a given sexuality or to constitute a resistance to a particular sexual economy, it is not necessary to ‘have sex.’”
recalls an initial encounter with Athman in the passage below—a scene characterized by

the motif of homoerotic desire, even as veiled and implied as it is:

J’ai déjà tant de fois décrit Biskra: je n’y reviens pas. L’appartement enveloppé de terrasses, que j’ai peint dans L’immoraliste, et que l’hôtel de l’Oasis mit à notre disposition, était celui-là même qu’on avait préparé pour le cardinal Lavigerie, et où il s’apprêtait à descendre lorsque la mort vint l’enlever à la mission des Pères Blans. J’occupai donc le propre lit du cardinal, dans la plus grande chambre, dont nous fimes également notre salon: une plus petite pièce, à côté, nous servit de salle à manger—car nous entendions bien ne pas prendre nos repas en commun avec les pensionnaires de l’hôtel. Les plats nous étaient apportés dans une stufa, par un jeune Arabe du nom d’Athman, que nous avions pris à notre service. Il n’avait guère que quartorze ans; mais très grand, très important sinon très fort parmi les autres enfants qui venaient sur nos terrasses, à la sortie de l’école, jouer aux billes et à la troupie, Athman les dépassait tous la tête, ce qui rendait presque naturel l’air protecteur qu’il prenait avec eux. (561-2)

In “André Gide et Athman: le roman d’une amitié vraie,” Guy Dugas explores Gide’s rapport with Athman and writes: “il est cependant faux de prétendre que ce sont seulement de tels avantages qui attirèrent Gide. Athman avait assûrément, pour séduire, bien d’autres qualités d’âme, et non des moindres” (248). Although Gide’s correspondence suggests that he is erotically drawn to his Algerian servant, the writer is also intrigued by his ethics and disposition: “Au demeurant le meilleur et le plus honnête garçon qu’on pût voir, incapable de marcher sur les pieds d’autrui, et aussi peu fait pour gagner de l’argent qu’un poète, mais au contraire toujours prêt et à donner” (562). As such, how could one try to hear Gide’s voice as somehow resonating in the imaginaries of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa? As they both demonstrate in their writings (and as noted in Taïa’s film), the rewritten Arab subject—much like we could imagine Athman to be—is also restless, and seeks to redefine his own role at the intersection of two different social and cultural domains. In a kind of prelude to the reversal of the power dynamics of
homoerotic tourism that has been analyzed in *L’armée du salut* and *L’enfant ébloui*, Gide somehow empowers Athman in a way that could signal the outlook of these twenty-first century Maghrebi writers. Speaking of Athman in 1896, Gide recalls having shared with his companion a manuscript in what was perhaps an unprecedented move by a well-known, bourgeois, French writer-traveler. Moreover, he notes that Athman’s reaction to his text was as follows: “Il trouve ma *Tentative* mal écrite.” For Gide to have shared with Athman an early copy of *La Tentative amoureuse* (1893) suggests that his connection with him bypassed—and surpassed—the limits of the “traditional” relationship he would have had with one of the numerous Arab boys surrounding him, and certainly with a “servant.” Furthermore, and, if one might say, prefacing Abdellah’s emboldened discourse toward Jean in both the literary and cinematic versions of *L’armée du salut*, Athman is obviously not too concerned about offending Gide—a figure who, let us recall, represents the colonial and superior other. In another bold move, Gide was determined to bring Athman back to France with him following his second trip to Algeria. In *Si le grain ne meurt*, the writer mentions this episode: “L’idée d’emmener Athman à Paris grandissait lentement en mon coeur. Je commençais de m’en ouvrir dans mes lettres à ma mère” (601). Despite the writer’s best efforts at justifying Athman’s installation in France, his intentions are repeatedly met with hesitation. In a letter written to his wife, Madeleine Rondeaux, in March of 1895, he argues an emotionally charged defense of his servant: “Tout ce que tu me dis à propos d’Athman est inouï de ridicule…” (“Vraie” 256). In many ways further empowering the Arab subject to whom he is drawn, Gide elevates Athman to a superior position to even that of his family and friends. We

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181 See the text “Biskra” in *Journal (1889-1939)*, March 1896.
can also observe that Madeleine, contrary to Marceline in *L’immoraliste*, is much less tolerant of her husband’s “interests” in Arab young boys, including Athman, and does not refrain from openly voicing her disapproval. Whereas Madeleine expresses an un-problematized colonial worldview, Gide’s position represents a much more ambivalent, and even broken-up and *cracked* from within, version of it—that is not without in a way “announcing” the post-colonial psychological and existential ethos of Antoine in *L’enfant ébloui* or Jean in *L’armée du salut*. On the *other side* of the equation or relation, and if considering Athman together with Rachid and Abdellah, one could argue that they are somehow to be healed from their own internal identity divisions and shifts by the resilience that qualifies their search for modes of otherness that also nourishes the Occidental sexual tourist.

In a future project, I intend to pursue the critical examining of the symbolic and imaginary economies embedded in dialogical literary discourses of homoerotic desire across the Mediterranean. Therefore, I will broaden the scope of my research toward an opening on the recent (and sometimes referred to as “tout contemporains”) texts by gay Maghrebi writers, such as Eyet-Chékib Djaziri, *Un poisson sur la balançoire*; Aniss A., *Par-dessus la meïda*; Malik Kuzman, *Tout le monde aime Mohamed*; Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed, *Le Coran et la chair*; and works by French authors including Guy Hocquenghem, *L’amour en relief*; David Dumortier, *La pioche de Salah*; Michel Giliberti, *Derrière les portes bleues*; Gregory Bastien, *Khalid*; François-Olivier Rousseau, *Le passeur*; Dominique Fernandez, *Une fleur de jasmin à l’oreille*; Pierre Fabene, *Inch Allah ou les destins parallèles*; and Mathieu Lindon, *Ma catastrophe adorée*; among others whose
works are evidently part of the rewritings within the “genre” I have tried to delineate in the present dissertation.


Gobeil, Madeleine. “‘Interview with Jean Genet.’” *Playboy* April 1964: 45-55. Print.


