

Colonial Encounters II

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Allouma et Marocca : la femme orientale vue par Guy de Maupassant

Les nouvelles *Allouma* et *Marocca* évoquent la femme orientale rencontrée par un colon en Algérie. Ces nouvelles parlent d'identité et d'altérité et du choc de la rencontre de deux cultures différentes. Le narrateur découvre l'Autre qu'il ne reconnaît pas. Maupassant tente de retranscrire ici toute l'originalité exotique des sujets rencontrés dans le cœur du mystérieux Maghreb. Il se fait l'observateur passionné des femmes de l'Algérie du XIXe siècle.

La femme orientale est au cœur du texte et suscite le désir du narrateur. D'ailleurs ces deux contes ont été rassemblés sous le titre de « Contes *grivois* » en 2004. Le narrateur de *Marocca* écrit : « On sent, dès les premiers jours, une sorte d'ardeur frémissante, un soulèvement, une brusque tension des désirs, un énervement courant au bout des doigts, qui surexcitent à les exaspérer nos puissances amoureuses et toutes nos facultés de sensation physique [...]. » Ici les femmes n'inspirent pas l'amour mais le désir, elles sont des objets sexuels. Elles sont d'une grande beauté, d'une beauté rare, elles sont impudiques, capricieuses, sensuelles. Elles ont un besoin d'amour insatiable mais elles n'appartiennent à personne, elles sont libres, alors que le narrateur devient esclave de son désir pour elles. Cette excitation des sens rend l'homme esclave des plaisirs de chair, elle le ramène à des désirs primitifs, elle l'« embestialise » comme le souligne Maupassant. La femme orientale envoûte, ensorcelle le narrateur. Il devient « hanté par ce goût de la femme ». Il n'est plus maître de lui.

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“Colonial Encounters of the Third Kind: UFOs, Natives, and the Novel in Verne’s *Cinq semaines en ballon*”

Verne’s first novel, which narrates the geographical quest three explorers from the United Kingdom take across Africa in a hot-air balloon to identify the origins of the Nile, seems to offer a rather conventional expression of European racist ideology. The inhabitants of the Dark Continent are generally portrayed as hostile, superstitious, cannibalistic sub-humans in contrast to the intellectually, culturally, morally, and technologically superior Europeans. Africa itself—which, for the most part, the travelers experience as a spectacle from the elevated, panoptical viewpoint provided by their balloon—is a wasteland, a deadly vortex for European explorers and missionaries. But Verne’s text actually expresses a great deal of ambivalence and anxiety concerning the European drive to explore, map, and conquer Africa, and, in so doing, it also questions the novel’s implication in this colonial mission.

There can be no doubt that Verne engaged in the exposure of Africa for the consumption of a large Western audience, a project that was facilitated by the invention of a conceit—a special balloon—that would enable both his travelers and the novel itself to go where no white man had gone before. But the intrusive, incongruous presence of the balloon in the African landscape alerts us to a possible deviation from standard exoticist representation. The sheer surreality (and

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even comic absurdity) of the balloon itself contributes to the portrayal of the explorers as unwanted aliens visiting from another world, and it also suggests that there are places where Europeans and their culture simply do not belong. In this way, we can read *Cinq semaines en ballon* as a meditation not just on the ethics of exoticism but on the boundaries of representation in general. A sort of mobile, all-seeing eye (as Nadar depicted it in a famous cartoon) that offered access to even the most obscure, unreachable spaces, the balloon becomes a symbol of the novel itself, a concretization of the genre's own claims to unlimited mimetic possibilities. But Verne's text repeatedly questions the very purpose of the expedition it narrates, casting doubt on both the cartographic and novelistic pursuits of omniscience.

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A Fearful Lack of Empire: Accounting for Louisiana's Ghosts

In her *Contes du nouveau Palais de Cristal*, Anaïs Ségalas employed a managerial narrator to sum up the value of the Second Empire's fabulous Exposition Universel de 1855. With the essentials of all five continents comfortably tucked into the Palais de l'Industrie, the hexagonal visitor could waft from country to country with practically disembodied ease: "Fussiez-vous le Juif errant, vous n'en feriez pas moins le tour du monde en quelques heures." Efficient and self-restrained, this narrator proceeds to deploy a team of subcontracting storytellers, who all seem to agree that disembodiment is a small price to pay for imperial mobility.

Two years later, however, Claude Vignon's *Contes à faire peur* (1857) threatened to rattle the serene skylights of the Palace of Industry. Shadowier and jumpier than Ségalas's storytellers, Vignon's narrators dwell on the fear that, from the title onward, deprives principal characters of their self-possession. They end up adrift like the Wandering Jew among clichéd metaphors of broken identity; the tales abound with such images as shattered mirrors and scalpels that still hurt the cadavers they dismember. Thus it is that François Naigeot, an impoverished accountant suddenly tempted by a fortune in "Les dix mille francs du diable," loses self-control shred by shred in his hallucinatory passage from Paris to New Orleans, just as readers of his story find themselves increasingly disoriented among the fractured shades of John Law's nascent imperial ambition, Jules Massenet's post-imperial *Manon Lescaut*, the seventeenth-century Claude Vignon's painted *Croesus* and the nineteenth-century Claude Vignon's chiseled resculpting of Balzac's surgically rewritten (dis)embodiment of Gustave Planche.

By navigating between Ségalas's and Vignon's collections of tales, this paper aims to consider their mutually haunting movement through a Second Empire that neither fully crystallizes outside the mind nor entirely cowers inside it.