

## Rêverie Orientale

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### L'Écriture Conquérante

Où finit l'aventure et où commence l'écriture ?

L'aventure coloniale Française au Maghreb, et plus particulièrement en Algérie, aura poussé les portes de l'imaginaire dans maintes directions. Hommes de sciences et hommes de lettres, diplomates et aventuriers, linguistes et ethnographes, historiens et géographes, romanciers et peintres, explorateurs et voyageurs cyniques en mal d'exotisme, se sont tous relayés pour arracher au Maghreb le secret de sa constitution, pour lever le voile sur le mystère de son humanité et sonder le labyrinthe de ses mœurs. Entièrement impliqués dans cette gigantesque aventure portée par l'esprit du temps, projetée en avant par le sacre de ces hommes promus en héros de la Civilisation, ils se feront les chantres de cette région et auront vite éclipsé les véritables inventeurs de l'algerianisme. Car le véritable orientalisme commence avec la conquête de l'Algérie, en 1830 au moment où l'Armada Française entre en « Barbarie ». Les premières visions de cette rencontre avec « l'autre », les premiers témoignages de cette marche inexorable vers l'inconnu, nous les devons d'abord aux officiers militaires qui ont mené la conquête et qui ont laissé un important arsenal de documents.

C'est un de ces textes fondateurs de l'aventure coloniale et qui en matérialise brillamment l'esprit que je considérerai ici, un texte tombé dans l'oubli mais dont les principes et accents résonnent dans de nombreux textes coloniaux. Je veux parler de La Femme Arabe, écrit par le Général Eugène Daumas entre 1850 et 1870 et qui ne sera publié qu'en 1910. Ce texte intrigue non seulement par son sujet (c'est un des premiers textes, si ce n'est le premier, sur les femmes colonisées) mais aussi par son approche, sa rhétorique et surtout par son ambition politique qui place les femmes colonisées au centre d'une grande machination coloniale dont l'importance ne sera reconnue et exploitée que bien plus tard au vingtième siècle. Dès 1850, Eugène Daumas, homme de sabre et de lettres, aura énoncé ouvertement et sans préambule le lien fondamental entre la question féminine, la domination coloniale et la constitution de savoir. Dans ce petit manuel, il nous livre un curieux mélange de récit ethnographique, fragments historiques, vision poétique, visée politique et stratégie de pouvoir. Il s'agit là d'un exemple fascinant de ce que Michel de Certeau appellera l'écriture conquérante.

Ce sont les principes et la portée de cette écriture conquérante que je me propose d'examiner ici. Comment est-ce que Daumas représente les femmes ? En quoi son approche diffère-t-elle de celle d'autres orientalistes ? Comment justifie-t-il son savoir ? Comment le justifie-t-il en tant que savoir ? Par quelles stratégies d'écriture allie-t-il le pouvoir et le savoir ? Comment introduit-il en filigrane sa vision politique et le rôle qu'il destine aux femmes ? Comment transforme-t-il un objet d'études (les femmes) en un instrument de pouvoir ?

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### Daudet's Remappings

Daudet's characters tend to be out of place. The condition of displacement, for the young "Petit Chose" and Jack as well as for the half-foreign Nabab Bernard Jansoulet, the *Méridional* Numa Roumestan, or the irrepressible Tartarin, is necessary both for the realization of the constitutive role played by their places of origin in the creation of their personal identities of as well as for Daudet's representation of the fundamental split between the cultural identities of North and South. The austere and unrelenting Protestantism of *L'évangéliste* marks the chilly boreal extreme that contrasts with the heated brashness of Roumestan or the warm expansive mendaciousness of the famous lion hunter. The Paris of the *romans de mœurs* that dominate Daudet's output is a liminal space between the calculating and self-interested Northerner and the authentic, if uncouth Southerner who is destined to lose because his notion of social interaction is of play without rules, as ludic and unrestrained self-invention.

As a space of a discursive excess and duplicity intended to be disbelieved, the South is a continuous zone that extends from the Loire to the Sahara. Tartarin's misadventures in Algeria are due to his inability to see the fundamental sameness of the land of the "Teurs" to his native Provence, while being astounded by how much they look alike. This surface sameness, ostensibly the result of colonialist intrusions, is more fundamentally for Daudet an effect of the deeply rooted affinities between the Maghreb and the Midi. If, as he acknowledges in a preface to *Tartarin de Tarascon*, the critique of the colonial presence in Algeria is relatively weak in that novel, it is, I would claim, because the North African and the *Méridional* are imagined as sharing a cultural fraternity, a blurring of boundaries that naturalizes a colonial domination whose moral dubiousness is thereby occluded.

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### *L'Éducation Sentimentale* and the Pornographic Imagination

Frédéric Moreau is a dreamer caught between two different imaginative modes. His primary love object in *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, Madame Arnoux, appears to him as if from the pages of a "livre romantique," and consequently comes to symbolize Frédéric's romantic imaginary, both sexual and artistic. It is for Madame Arnoux that Frédéric decides to indulge his creative yearnings, with no more success than he has as Madame Arnoux's lover; he never manages to transcend a "passion...inactive." Frédéric's antidote to the sterility of romantic reverie is the courtesan Rosanette. Where Madame Arnoux is chaste and pure, Rosanette's sexuality is explicitly associated with pornographic imagery of the day. Sold into prostitution at the age of fifteen by her parents, the young Rosanette one day discovers "une sorte d'album... des images obscènes." If Frédéric's imaginings of Madame Arnoux have the romantic allure of "le scintillement des étoiles," Rosanette has the allure of the excitement of obscene images. She incarnates an imagination that is erotic, obscene, explicit—and fare more productive.

Mediating between these two imaginaries is a third textual presence. Twenty years before writing *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, Flaubert took a trip to the Egypt, during which he

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wrote a series of letters that are pornographic in their descriptions of his sexual encounters during his journey. Oriental allusions are woven into the cloth of the novel, following both of Frédéric's two loves, like a theme song for erotic desire. Madame Arnoux's appearance on the boat is heralded by a "romance orientale;" Rosanette, on the other hand, makes her first appearance in the novel (although she is not named at that moment) at a ball called the Alhambra, whose "galeries moresques" and "toiture chinoise" constitute a nightmare of conflated Orientalist stereotypes. Both Frédéric's Romantic and pornographic muses, then, share one thing: an association with the excessive sexuality of Flaubert's travels to the Orient.

According to Edward Said, the Orient appears in Flaubert's work only as a manifestation of "the escapism of sexual fantasy." By examining the Oriental allusions of the novel in the context of Flaubert's letters, however, this paper suggests a different set of relationships between sexuality, the creative imagination, and the Orient. Indeed, the Oriental, Romantic and pornographic in the novel ultimately establish not only sexual and imaginative paradigms but models of social and political interaction that serve as viable and productive alternatives to the inactive passions Flaubert attributes not merely to Frédéric, but to his entire generation. The sexual imaginary that emerges in the novel out of the tension between the pornographic and the Romantic, an imaginary inseparable from Flaubert's Orientalism, is not to be banished to the realm of escapist fantasy, but is proffered to the reader as the antidote to Romantic sterility in all spheres of action.

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### Inventing North Africa: Colonial Fantasy and Journalistic Sensationalism in Maupassant's *Bel Ami*

In Guy de Maupassant's *Bel Ami* (1885) journalists discuss and invent North Africa from their bourgeois positions in the Paris city-center. Set in 1881 when Morocco and Tunisia are becoming French colonies, protagonist Georges Duroy returns to Paris from Algeria where he has served as a French soldier. Nostalgic for the power and wealth that he enjoyed in the colony, Duroy achieves these benefits in the metropole by selling stories of his experiences *d'ailleurs*. The director of the French newspaper *La Vie française* assures him: "Mais faites-nous tout de suite une petite série fantaisiste sur l'Algérie. Vous raconterez vos souvenirs, et vous mêlerez à ça la question de la colonisation... C'est d'actualité, tout à fait d'actualité, et je suis sûr que ça plaira beaucoup à nos lecteurs" (69). In his articles "Souvenirs d'un chasseur d'Afrique" and "De Tunis à Tanger," Duroy caters to the reading public's fascination with the "other" by overlooking the political conflicts present between France and North Africa. He exaggerates his first-hand experiences in Algeria and offers exotic depictions of the region's people and landscapes.

Through *Bel Ami*, this paper traces how late nineteenth-century journalism in Paris functions as a key political and cultural tool to shape the metropole's impressions of France's colonies. Colonial fantasy and journalistic sensationalism invent a Europeanized North Africa--nothing like the indigenous one that North African writers will fight to portray in the twentieth-century.

#### Reference

Maupassant, Guy de. *Bel ami*. 1885. Paris: GF Flammarion, 1999.