

2009

# Strangers in the postcolonial world

Thomas F. Halloran

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*, [thomasfhalloran@yahoo.fr](mailto:thomasfhalloran@yahoo.fr)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Halloran, Thomas F, "Strangers in the postcolonial world" (2009). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 2595.  
[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/2595](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/2595)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

STRANGERS IN THE POSTCOLONIAL WORLD

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of English

By

Thomas F. Halloran

B.A., Wheaton College, Massachusetts 2001

M.A., Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick 2003

December 2009

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my committee, my peers, and my friends and family.

My committee was excellently steered by Pallavi Rastogi. Pallavi was a tremendous friend throughout my time at LSU. She worked tirelessly with me to improve all aspects of my work. Pallavi, I am very much indebted to you. Greg Stone is one of the few professors with whom I took multiple courses. His extensive knowledge on everything from the origins of Islam to contemporary literary theory continues to impress and inspire me. Solimar Otero has graciously improved my writing with her suggestions. Her enthusiasm for this work motivates me to keep going. One semester as Bill Demastes's teaching assistant changed the way that I taught. Mimicking his friendly, outgoing, and engaging personality has kept me in the running for graduate teacher of the year every year at LSU.

Joe Abrahams was not on my committee, but he is very much a mentor. Over countless lunches or office-hour conversations, he taught me the ins and outs of this teaching lifestyle. As a technical writer, his advice is constantly in my mind as I edit and as I teach college writing. Irvin Peckham supported me throughout my tenure at LSU, trusting me with various responsibilities and always treating me as an equal. Thank you to Michelle Massé for admitting me to the graduate program and serving on my general exam. Thanks to Nina Asher for all of her encouragement.

I also owe thanks to my friends from graduate school for reading my work and generally keeping me sane.

I cannot forget Eugene O'Brien and everyone at Mary Immaculate College. You put me in the position to succeed. Thanks as well to my old friends from the English Department at Wheaton College.

Most importantly, thank you to my family. None of my achievements would be possible without the constant support of you all who stick by me, thick and thin.

Lastly, in the words of my hero John F. Kennedy, "The highest duty of the writer, the composer, the artist is to remain true to himself and let the chips fall where they may."

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO AN UNGLAMOROUS EXPATRIATE IN IRELAND: J. P. DONLEAVY .....	19
CHAPTER THREE AMERICAN REFLECTIONS FROM THE MAGHREB: PAUL BOWLES AND EDITH WHARTON.....	60
CHAPTER FOUR MIDDLE CLASS AMERICA IN AFRICA AND INDIA: PAUL THEROUX.....	129
CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	193
REFERENCES.....	196
VITA.....	205

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation analyzes American writing from and about the former British and French colonies in order to critique postcolonial theory and also to establish a new genre of expatriate literature. Focusing on the works of J. P. Donleavy, Edith Wharton, Paul Bowles, and Paul Theroux, I argue that reading these Americans disrupts the binary concepts encouraged by postcolonial theory. This project rethinks important dichotomies such as colonizer/colonized, center/margin, metropolis/margin, civilized/primitive, and white/non-white by examining the ambiguous American character in the postcolonial context. I argue that by categorizing the themes of American literature in the colonies, and analyzing the similarities and differences with European colonial writing we will thus see these works emerge as a fascinating sub-genre of postcolonial literature. Furthermore, by examining these themes and this perspective it is possible to see a more complete picture of the complexities and gradations of identity in the postcolonial world.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

This dissertation addresses how fundamental concepts developed by postcolonial studies are complicated by the unique qualities of the American citizen in the postcolonial world.<sup>1</sup> To achieve this critique, I analyze a very specific type of American in the postcolonial period.<sup>2</sup> My subjects are white, middle to upper class Americans in countries where no direct colonial relationship with the United States exists.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, these Americans are not returning to ancestral lands nor are they drawn by nostalgia. Instead, they choose locations where they are often the only Americans. By analyzing the fiction and non-fiction by J.P. Donleavy, Paul Bowles, Edith Wharton, and Paul Theroux my work contributes a new perspective to the way that we understand interaction between individuals beyond the binary identity constructs that are so often employed in postcolonial theory. What I critique is the dualistic logic central to the writings and essentialized explanations of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's The Empire Writes Back (1989/2002), a work that reinforces the following dichotomies: colonizer/colonized, center/margin, metropolis/margin, civilized/primitive, white/non-white. While much of postcolonial theory is dedicated to deconstructing this type of logic, it is too often conflated into an exercise in finding and exploiting these dual

---

<sup>1</sup> American in this context refers specifically to United States citizens.

<sup>2</sup> My time period is generally the twentieth century. In other words, I am concerned with the end of the heyday of European colonization in Africa and India through the contemporary aftermath of decolonization.

<sup>3</sup> Granted, "white" is a rather imprecise term. However, these European-Americans are "performing whiteness," that is to say they act as if their race and ethnicity are the monolithic norm for Americans regardless of their individual backgrounds and differences.

constructions.<sup>4</sup> I also investigate how mimicry, cultural schizophrenia, and identity crisis are complicated by distinctive situations in postcolonial literature where American characters are present. In addition, the project will establish the key characteristics of the American citizen in the postcolonial world—thus exploring a new variety of expatriate postcolonial literature with its own distinct set of traits and themes.

### **Situating the Project and Methodology**

Studying how American characters function in the postcolonial context is a distinct perspective that needs to be distinguished from several misleading interpretations of the keywords “American” and “postcolonial.” First, this project is not a study of the United States nor will I deal with the topic of the American government as colonizer.<sup>5</sup> Research on the U.S. government’s treatment of Native America, the Pacific Islands, and the rest of the Americas has been done. The term “American” can also be confusing, but I use the word to signify only U. S. citizens. New research concerning America’s current position as neo-colonizer or neo-imperial power is emerging but such studies are peripheral to my interests.<sup>6</sup>

I have chosen white, middle to upper class Americans in postcolonial nations as the focus because they are, by virtue of their appearance and financial position, at least

---

<sup>4</sup> Example of this type of scholarship that is central to postcolonial criticism would include Albert Memmi’s The Colonizer and the Colonized (1957), Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks (1952), and Aimé Césaire’s Discourse on Colonialism (1950).

<sup>5</sup> Richard King’s collection Postcolonial America (2000) and Amy Kaplan’s collection Cultures of United States Imperialism (1993) would be prominent examples of this type of scholarship.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Bacevich’s American Empire: the Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy (2002), Ivan Eland’s The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed (2004), and Rahul Mahajan’s Full Spectrum Dominance: U.S. Power in Iraq and Beyond (2003) are but a few examples.



outwardly similar to the former colonizers of Ireland, and much of Africa and India.<sup>7</sup> Yet, Americans, unlike the colonists who came before them, decide their level of intimacy and affiliation with the postcolonial world without the same baggage of colonization that Europeans carry.<sup>8</sup> Although the U.S. citizen might be similar to the colonizer, he or she can choose to exercise or attempt to hide the privileges and powers that come with this association.<sup>9</sup> This creates unique circumstances unavailable to say British citizens who may desire to identify with the colonized but cannot because of the national history that they inherit. On the contrary, the Americans I study enter the postcolonial world for a variety of disparate reasons but their experiences are linked by their ambivalence with colonialism and their ambiguous relationship with their hosts.<sup>10</sup>

I also write about Americans because of my personal interest as an American and my desire to understand the complicated interaction that takes place when Americans fraternize with their hosts in the postcolonial world. Furthermore, this dissertation focuses on Americans because of the international mystique that the concept of “an American” and America can generate. However, it is important to stress that it is the wide variety of stereotypes that produce power rather than the actual power of being American

---

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent account of how British media and public opinion have portrayed the Irish as a backwards race, distinct and unconnected to the English, see Vincent J. Cheng’s Joyce, Race, and Empire (1995).

<sup>8</sup> Although Americans do not have colonial baggage per se, their nationality does carry other connotations.

<sup>9</sup> For this reason, I could not include any postcolonial countries that were once U.S. possessions or territories. For example, the American government’s interest in Haiti or Cuba creates a direct colonial relationship between nations. Therefore, to study the American perspective on either of these Caribbean islands would have to take into account a history of American colonialism that is not present in say Ireland or India.

<sup>10</sup> Much like Europeans, Americans in the texts I study visit the postcolonial world for: tourism, economic benefit, curiosity, sexual desire, thrill seeking, altruism, proselytizing, and governmental jobs.

that interests me most.<sup>11</sup> That is to say, Americans are regarded as having financial and diplomatic backing, an oversimplification that can influence the reception that Americans receive in the postcolonial world. Yet, the American character's financial position is sometimes questionable and the former colonial governments do not necessarily support them. So Americans may benefit by virtue of their nationality in a manner that I argue mimics the power typically held by the colonizer although they do not necessarily warrant this power or even want it. In other words, I try to locate the place that the American holds in the formerly colonized world to discover how their behavior mirrors or differs from the former colonizers.

Because this project pertains specifically to Americans in the postcolonial world, I have intentionally excluded a wider variety of Westerners. I focus on Americans in the former colonies to determine what role their complex identity position plays in these locations without addressing the separate nuances that would arise by treating similar situations of say British people in the French postcolonial world (or vice versa). I avoid the complications of other Americans (Canadians, Mexicans, etc.) and Commonwealth members for the same reason.

I agonized over the decision to include black Americans in my study. I seriously considered a chapter on Zora Neale Hurston's Haiti.<sup>12</sup> However, my goal to analyze how

---

<sup>11</sup> Speaking of stereotypes, I do not expect to find the exact same type of stereotype of the American. What an American means to the Irish may be different to what that concept means to a South African. However, the intersections and the differences will help me define the unique situation that exists in each situation.

<sup>12</sup> Another problem with this idea is that Haiti and America share a far more complicated history than the other postcolonial nations of this study. Considering the years of US occupation of Haiti, I cannot group the Haitian experience or even the Caribbean experience on a whole as similar to Ireland. That said, a future project that addresses the

Americans resemble the colonizer on the outside meant that adding black American writers would necessitate another level of sophistication and discussion about race and how black Americans differ from blacks in the Caribbean and Africa. But that is a subject that truly deserves a book length study rather than a cursory glance. I was also suspicious of adding Hurston, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, or Alice Walker because I did not want to study writers who desire a return to any type of origin, source, motherland, or fatherland.<sup>13</sup> The nostalgic return is another subject that affects a broad range of Americans. That direction is essentially just too large to be contained as a side note in this dissertation.<sup>14</sup>

In order to find the common thread between my texts, I look for the privilege of association and similarity with the former colonizer in countries without a complicated colonial relationship to America. White Americans offer a more striking resemblance with the archetypal colonizer that allows me to point to the obvious white/black binary and then demonstrate its complexities. Although this is a study of white authors, it is important to note that this dissertation focuses on postcolonial nations where the white subjects are constantly forced to consider their position as outsiders and as a racial minority. That is to say, this is not a project that fails to take the multidimensional category of race into account but rather one that will constantly be studying the

---

American experience in the Caribbean and which could take the more complicated role of the American government in the Caribbean into account would be fascinating.

<sup>13</sup> O’Keefe from The Ginger Man is poor, Catholic, and Irish-American. Therefore, he is an exception to the other characters in this study as he returns to his ancestral homeland. However, the protagonist, Sebastian Dangerfield, is a wealthy, American Protestant. To be an aristocratic, settler-class person makes his attachment to Ireland minimal or at least different from the “native land nostalgia” that I wish to avoid.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the African-American return to Africa, see James T. Campbell Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005 (2007) as one recent example of research in this field.

interaction between the idea of being a “white American” in countries that are decidedly “Other.” Like Black Atlantic studies, I propose a paradigm shift in the way that we think about postcolonial writing. As Black Atlantic studies highlights Africa’s impact on America and Europe, my work centers on how the American in the postcolonial world changes the way that we theorize beyond the binary of black and white.<sup>15</sup>

“Strangers in the Postcolonial World” contributes a unique perspective on American travel writing, postcolonial theory, and postcolonial literature because there are few similar studies to date. The work most closely resembling my project is David Espey’s 1997 conference paper at the University of Minnesota Conference on Travel Writing, “Paul Theroux, the Peace Corps, and Postcolonial Travel Literature.” Espey investigates how American Peace Corps volunteers draw from the experiences of European colonial writers in their reflections on postcolonial Africa. Espey also proposes that the Peace Corps writing constitutes a unique “subcategory of travel writing—a quintessentially American encounter with the postcolonial world” which he uses to “illuminate Theroux’s work.” Although this study was not expanded beyond a conference paper, the idea of studying American travel writing in postcolonial nations as a unique genre of American writing influenced by British colonial writing demonstrates a common interest with my dissertation.<sup>16</sup> Brian Edwards also approaches the American position in the postcolonial world in his study Morocco Bound: Disorienting America’s Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express (2005). In this text, Edwards analyzes a wide

---

<sup>15</sup> See Paul Gilroy The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness (1993).

<sup>16</sup> Espey’s abstract may be found online:

<http://english.cla.umn.edu/travelconf/abstracts/Espey.html>

Also see “Americans in Vietnam: Travel Writing and War,” *Studies in Travel Writing*, (8:1), September 2004, 141-178.

variety of American media (film, novels, travel writing, and anthropology reports) about Morocco to demonstrate America's fascination with the Maghreb and to encourage a new understanding of the way in which American authors represent other cultures. After these two works, there is a large body of works that is too specific, typically concentrating only on one author or geographic area.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, studies of Americans in postcolonial nations are not connected to literary studies.

### **A Brief General Overview**

"Strangers in the Postcolonial World" sets out to challenge the field of postcolonial studies by investigating how Americans disrupt traditionally accepted ideas of interaction between the colonizers and the colonized. I have selected texts from across the postcolonial world in order to demonstrate the different dynamics of each situation as well as to reveal how this phenomenon is not specific to just one postcolonial setting. I argue that postcolonial studies too often create a binary understanding of power; however, I also establish the themes of American writing in the postcolonial world. In the second chapter, I turn my attention to J.P. Donleavy, an American writing about the early years of Irish independence. Unlike the long list of Americans who inhabited metropolitan Paris and London, Donleavy exemplifies the American who chooses a life in an ex-British colony and uses his uncanny ability of mimicry to assimilate with the Irish as well as play the role of the British colonial aristocrat. The third chapter enters the

---

<sup>17</sup> Examples would include: Robert William D'Alonzo's MA Thesis Paul Bowles, The Sadness of Contact: The Intermediary in the Postcolonial Situation (1993), Greg A. Mullins Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester write Tangier (1991), John Urry The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies (1990), Georges Van den Abbeele "Sightseers: The Tourist as Theorist." Diacritics 10 (1980), and Ruth Mayer Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in the Times of Globalization (Re-Encounters with Colonialism) (2002).

more familiar territory for postcolonial studies, starting with North Africa. Using Paul Bowles and Edith Wharton, I discuss the relationships between Americans and their Maghrebi and French hosts. In the following chapter, I analyze how Paul Theroux marks a different type of fascination with exoticism in sub-Saharan Africa and India. Unlike the previously studied writers who offer explanations for their desire to live in the postcolonial world, Theroux brings a particularly American brand of pessimism to the subject. I will also use Theroux to discuss the American perspective on India, particularly America's fascination with the colonial stereotypes of a mystical, spiritual, and exploitable land.

### **Dean MacCannell and Tourism Studies**

Most of the subjects of my study would deny that they are tourists, preferring more serious titles such as traveler, explorer, writer, or journalist. Yet, in many ways these Americans are tourists. While I do not intend to make this study an analysis of tourism, it is useful to interfuse some of the ideas disseminated in Dean MacCannell's The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (1999). While MacCannell's work is ethnographic in nature, as opposed to my literary analysis, we share some common themes—most importantly, we both focus on the necessity of investigating ideas of modernity and authenticity.

MacCannell speculates that the desire to be a tourist is born out of some sort of frustration with modernity. While I am not confident about this general claim on such a large scale, it does seem to hold true for the majority of my subjects. MacCannell writes, “Our first apprehension of the modern civilization, it seems to me emerges in the mind of the tourist” (1). While I cannot wholly accept this assertion, I do agree that the American

characters in this study are sensitive to the problems of modernity in America and Europe and as a result actively seek alternatives to first world modernity in the former colonies. In other words, MacCannell equates the desire for tourism with some sort of postmodern condition.<sup>18</sup> While I can allow that some forms of tourism, such as visiting sites of inhumanity, may be born out of a desire to make the surreal more real, these instances do not account for the full possibility of experiences or motivation for travel. It may be that the most dramatic horrors of modernity warrant sights for tourism, but ironically the subjects of my study seem to desire escape from the more trivial details of modern (or postmodern) life. Frustrated by the noise, the rat race, the consumerism, and the perceived lack of authenticity, my authors send their characters and themselves in search of something else in the colonies.

The characters I study escape modernity and find authenticity with variable success. MacCannell suggests that certain criteria must be met to make the touristic venture successful in achieving some sort of acceptance of the postmodern condition, that is, perhaps, the separation between different cultures. He writes:

If the tourist simply collects experiences of difference (different peoples, different places, etc) he will emerge as a miniature clone of the old Western philosophical Subject, thinking itself unified, central, in control, universal, etc. mastering otherness and profiting from it. But if the various

---

<sup>18</sup> MacCannell writes that “The need to be *postmodern* can thus be read as the same as the desire to be a tourist: both seek to empower modern culture and its conscience by neutralizing everything that might destroy it from within. Postmodernism and tourism are only the positive form of our collective inarticulateness in the face of the horrors of modernity: of mustard gas and machine guns, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Dachau, Buchenwald, Dresden. Tourism is an alternate strategy for conserving and prolonging the modern and protecting it from its own tendencies towards self-destruction. Ground zero at Hiroshima, the Kennedy assassination site, the ovens at Dachau, the Berlin Wall—all figure in The Tourist as important attractions. Sightseeing, rather than suppressing these things from consciousness, brings them to our consciousness “as if” we might assimilate them.” (xix-xx).

attractions force themselves on consciousness as obstacles and barriers between tourist and other, that is, as objects of analysis, if the deconstruction of the attraction is the same as the reconstruction of authentic otherness (another person, another culture, another epoch) as having an intelligence that is not our intelligence, then tourism might contribute to the establishment of a utopia of difference. (xxi)

For the subjects of this study that are so often at odds with the disparity between the modern West and the pre-modern colonies, this concept of collecting experiences can be useful in grading each character's level of genuine interaction with their locality. For example Edith Wharton's inability to see Morocco beyond the Orientalist stereotypes contrasts with Paul Theroux's revelation on the nature of interaction between America and Africa. However, in neither case, in fact, in none of the cases studied in this dissertation do I find American travel in the colonies to establish this idea of a utopia of difference.

MacCannell speculates on the relationship between modernity and tourism, explaining that tourism is implicitly linked with the notion that modernity is not authentic—whereas foreign cultures and especially the primitive cultures *are* authentic.<sup>19</sup> MacCannell's point seems to be that modernization is the antithesis of authenticity in the modern general public's estimation. However, the perceived absence of authenticity in the modern period creates a great nostalgia and desire for authenticity. This desire

---

<sup>19</sup> . In this passage MacCannell explains how difference is equated with authenticity and furthermore how the pre-modern is linked with authenticity: "The progress of modernity ("modernization") depends on its very sense of instability and inauthenticity. For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles. In other words, the concern of moderns for "naturalness," their nostalgia and their search for authenticity are not merely casual and somewhat decadent, though harmless, attachments to the souvenirs of destroyed cultures and dead epochs. They are also components of the conquering spirit of modernity—the grounds of its unifying consciousness" (3).



produces a need for reviving what MacCannell calls the “souvenirs” of authenticity. In the case of the Americans in this study, souvenirs are not enough, but instead direct contact and physical displacement to the sites of authenticity are compulsory.

However, MacCannell perceives another common thread that I have found in my analysis of these texts—frustration among Westerners with the existence of modernity in the pre-modern location. MacCannell describes how modernity indiscriminately invades without regard to cultural lines:

Modernity first appears to everyone as it did to Levi-Strauss, as disorganized fragments, alienating, wasteful, violent, superficial, unplanned, unstable and inauthentic. On the second examination, however, this appearance seems almost a mask, for beneath the disorderly exterior, modern society hides a firm resolve to establish itself on a worldwide base. (2)

Nearly all of the American characters in this study express frustration with the existence of modernization in zones that they would like to keep separate and “authentic”. Of course, the nature of colonialism, international travel, the Diaspora, and the general desire to “improve” and “modernize” makes the concept of separate worlds untenable. While much of MacCannell’s argument thus far coincides with my analysis of American literature in the colonies, his case for the modern world’s recreation of pre-modern authenticity begins to diverge from my findings as he details modernity’s control over pre-modern souvenirs. Here he claims the victory of modernity may be witnessed through the appropriation of symbols of pre-modernity in modern culture.<sup>20</sup> While some of this

---

<sup>20</sup> “Interestingly, the best indication of the final victory of modernity over the other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and the reconstruction in modern society. The separation of nonmodern culture traits from their original contexts and their distribution as modern playthings are evident in the various social movements towards naturalism, so much a feature of modern societies: cults of folk music and medicine, adornment and behavior,

may be true, it is interesting that the Americans in my study need to go right to the source of the pre-modern authentic perhaps because they cannot accept any level of inauthenticity, no matter how “natural” these souvenirs from other more primitive cultures may appear. In my analysis, it seems that the non-modern world is not sufficiently preserved or appropriated for the types of Americans who travel to destinations like Ireland, North Africa, and India specifically to find the missing authenticity and pre-modernity that can no longer be found in America or Europe.

When MacCannell speculates on the nature of the tourist’s objective, I again find a point of separation between my specific type of American traveler and his, perhaps, more generic imagining of the tourist. Although there is certainly one type of tourist that seeks to find the most profound interaction and discovery of the host nation and its culture, there is certainly another mode of tourism that is less self-conscious and self-critical. MacCannell describes the pressure that tourists feel to see and understand the foreign land correctly.<sup>21</sup> Yet, in many cases, the Americans I study believe that they

---

peasant dress, Early American décor, efforts in short, to museumize the premodern, a suicidal recreation of guerrilla activities has recently appeared in the American avant-garde. These displaced forms embedded in modern society, are the spoils of the victory of the modern over the non-modern world. They establish in consciousness the definition not boundary of modernity by rendering concrete and immediate that by rendering concrete and immediate that which modernity is not” (8-9).

<sup>21</sup> “[Tourists are] reproached for being satisfied with superficial experiences of other peoples and other places. An educated respondent told me that he and his wife were “very nervous” when they visited the Winterthur museum because they did not know “the proper names of all the different styles of antiques,” and they were afraid their silence would betray their ignorance. In other words, touristic shame is not based on being a tourist but on not being tourist enough, on a failure to see everything the way it “ought” to be seen. The touristic critique of tourism is based on a desire to go beyond the other “mere” tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture, and it is by no means limited to intellectual statements. All tourists desire this deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel” (MacCannell 10).

already possess a level of mastery over the society and culture that they visit based upon their general or book knowledge. As Edward Said has argued in Orientalism (1978), the knowledge created about colonized cultures too often obscures our perspective on the actual culture and society of colonized nations. When Americans arrive looking for what they have read about (the stereotypes, prototypes, and relics of the host culture), their work misguidedly adds to the body of Orientalist thinking.

### **Challenging the Binary**

How does the colonial mission to “civilize” and/or “exploit” differ from objectives of the Americans who travel into the postcolonial world? How do these American travelers interact with others when Americans do not fit into the established lines of the colonial conflict? How do Americans impose their fantasies on postcolonial nations? Postcolonial theorists often stress the need to differentiate between the contrasting colonial experiences and literatures of each nation because of the range in historical time frame, level of colonization, and national history. However, despite these differences, some common themes emerge in the literatures and histories of these postcolonial nations. The colonization experience (arrival, dispossession of land, loss of customs, change in language, effort to coexist), the decolonization experience (rise of nationalism, organization of an oppositional movement, political and/or military war), and finally the aftermath of colonialism in the postcolonial period (creation of an independent government, isolationism, to return to the past or embrace a new hybrid identity, civil war) provides some commonalities when conjoining the topic of postcolonialism. But when these postcolonial nations are approached individually with the tools developed in seminal works by Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi,

Aimé Césaire, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the commonalities give way to generalizations and reductions that too often center on the relationships between holistic notions of “us” and “them”.<sup>22</sup>

Said's Orientalism describes how imperialism created a way of seeing and structuring the world. Essentially, Said presents the idea that the imperial powers create knowledge about the colonies in order to justify their rule and exploitation. Said's research therefore concerns the colonizer's view of the Other, yet he also inspired the next generation of postcolonial critics to seek ways of describing how we see the world through the lens of colonization. Beyond the description of the colonial worldview, postcolonial critics confront issues of decolonization via the deconstruction of colonial values and ideas in literature. In the rush to understand relations between these easily categorized groups (colonizer/colonized; black/white; master/slave), postcolonial theory has too often oversimplified the levels of complicity and integration possible in the postcolonial world. Expanding on the work of Said, Malini Johar Schueller complicates the term Orientalism in her study U.S. Orientalisms: Race Nation, and Gender in Literature 1790-1890 (1998). Schueller articulates some of the important differences between America and European colonial and imperial projects:

---

<sup>22</sup> Note that I am not arguing that all of these critics are generalizing but that the “big picture” of postcolonial theory often reduces the sum of all of this criticism to binary opposition. See Aijaz Ahmad In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures (1994). Also, in Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies (1998), Bill Ashcroft et al. describe the meaning of binarism for postcolonial studies: “The binary logic of imperialism is a development of that tendency of Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance. A simple distinction between centre/margin; colonizer/colonized; metropolis/empire; civilized/primitive represents very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates” (24).

Colonialism, with its ensuing violent contact with non-European others, ensured that for European countries, particularly England and France, the narrative of empire as unquestioned was inherently unstable and needed to be supported by ideas of firm national character. In the United States, however, imperialism, particularly with respect to the Orient, could be constructed much more benevolently, as teleology. Since the “discovery” of the America by Columbus was popularly transmitted as the outcome of a vision to reach the Orient, contemporary arguments about seizing Oriental trade or civilizing Orientals through missionary activity were accompanied by visionary statements about completing Columbus’s original mission. Tropes of expansion and control over various specific Orients were thus mystified as “natural” through the complex genealogy of the country’s intimate associations with the search for the Orient. (9)

Here Schueller articulates one of the most important distinctions between America and Europe: European colonialism was about nationalism and domination while American forays abroad could be more ambivalently characterized as individual efforts of proselytization or a natural extension of American Manifest Destiny. Although the scope of this study does not extend to the American government’s policy, keeping this distinction between the baggage of nationalism and nation that Europeans carried with them in the colonial world with that of the slightly more individualistic American mindset abroad is useful.

Consider the following schema as an example that we encounter in postcolonial studies. The authors of The Empire Writes Back first admit that contextualizing literature to regions is tricky because the larger the scope, the more likely we are to generalize. Ashcroft et al. continue by stating that postcolonial discourse essentially follows one of the following three forms, (1) a comparison of white Diaspora, (2) a comparison of Black Diaspora, (3) a comparison of mixed national Diaspora.<sup>23</sup> On one level, these categories include all of the possible links between postcolonial writings and situations. However, to

---

<sup>23</sup> Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffins, and Helen Tiffin. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures. London: Routledge, 1989. (19).

do so, these categories are left so open that it is difficult to imagine how they could be useful. I suppose my study could fall into the first category, but does that mean that Paul Bowles' Morocco could be read in conjunction with Kipling's India, Joyce's Ireland, Hemmingway's Kenya, Loti's Polynesia, Conrad's Congo, Haggard's Africa, and Camus' Algeria?<sup>24</sup> Demarcating postcolonial literature into writing by or about whites, blacks, and others hardly seems to account for the diversity that is actually experienced in postcolonial writing. The point that I am trying to make by listing a series of "white" Diaspora writers is that they could each be considered "mixed" when put into a more detailed context.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, I will turn our attention to specific cases of Americans in the postcolonial world because these figures disrupt the familiar white, black, and other presumptions. My first objective is to demonstrate the conceptual problems that Americans create in postcolonial studies. Second, I define a new way of categorizing expatriate literature to include American writing that focuses on the postcolonial world. The corpus of texts that I have assembled highlights some of the key issues about what it means to be an American in the postcolonial world. In this dissertation, I follow these themes related to Americans in the postcolonial world.

To begin with, Americans are often disappointed with the existence of modernity in the postcolonial world. This is because they want to escape the West; these Americans are both disillusioned and frustrated to find the conveniences as well as the annoyances of

---

<sup>24</sup> The same point could be made of comparing Black writing across time periods, cultures, and settings. To a greater extent, the third category of "mixed Diaspora" could mean almost anything.

<sup>25</sup> Of course Diaspora writing has become an important category of postcolonial literature on its own.

the United States in these exotic lands that are meant to be the antithesis of America. An outgrowth of their desire to find the opposite of the West is the Americans' tendency to ignore problems in the postcolonial nation. In idealizing the exotic, these Americans are inclined to devalue the dangers of postcolonial world.

Another trope common to this type of literature is the existence of relationships between a tourist/visitor and a guide/local that have similarities with our notions of colonizer/colonized. Although the Americans in this study arrive in the postcolonial world for a variety of reasons, they often mimic (and sometimes diverge) from the part of colonizer. An outshoot of this variety is the American love of the colonialist lifestyle. They may not agree with the politics of colonialism, but they enjoy mimicking the role of the colonist. One of the most typical manifestations of this mimicry is their lust for the colony and/or colonized person (either could be read as a metaphor for the other). Yet as much as they *play* the role of colonizer, they are tourists/visitors.

As tourists, they have a profound interest in finding the "authentic". The authentic is most often a notion derived from Orientalist scholarship, or Western representations and stereotypes about the colonies. However, the need to find the "real" is powerful and present in each of these works. Strangely, in contradiction with their desire for authenticity these Americans also desire a familiar American context despite the exotic location. In most of these works, the Americans grow frustrated with too much authenticity causing them to seek the known. Lying somewhere in-between the need for authenticity and the want for the familiar is the American fascination with situations where a white person has "gone local" or assumed a subservient position to a native. Perhaps because the Westerner "gone native" represents the epitome of embracing

authenticity and also the ultimate escape from the West, Americans are fascinated with this subject.

These themes vary in relevance to each specific case; however, I would like to demonstrate the presence of these commonalities as a means of uniting this field of American and postcolonial literature. Donleavy, Wharton, Bowles, and Theroux are all excellent and important writers, but for too long they have been studied individually or only in connection with the countries where their works are set. “Strangers in the Postcolonial World” joins these writers by their themes and by their perspective on postcolonialism. This dissertation conjoins these writers to make us question our understanding of expatriate literature and postcolonial studies.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**AN UNGLAMOROUS EXPATRIATE IN IRELAND:**  
**J.P. DONLEAVY**

**Introduction**

J. P. Donleavy (1926-) has never been studied as a postcolonial writer or as an important American expatriate.<sup>26</sup> Instead, The Ginger Man (1957), by far his most famous work, is more commonly interpreted as a mere oddity because the novel is thematically unlike any other work about Ireland as well as quite different from the prototypical American in Europe story.<sup>27</sup> However, I hope to demonstrate how reading Donleavy in a postcolonial context complicates our understanding of this American novel by presenting many of the key issues of this dissertation: the in-between position of Americans in the former colonies, the class confusion that an American can create in this context, and the unusual American perspective on a story more commonly told from the standpoint of the colonizer or the colonized.

Published amid great controversy, The Ginger Man was banned for obscenity in Ireland immediately upon publication. The reason behind this censorship lies in the history of postcolonial Ireland. After achieving independence from Great Britain in 1922, Ireland set out to define its national identity as exclusively Gaelic and Catholic while simultaneously and necessarily non-English. This circumstance meant that unprecedented

---

<sup>26</sup> Although Donleavy has been written about extensively in the popular press, Charles G. Masinton's J. P. Donleavy: The Style of His Sadness and Humor (1975) represents one of the few full-length academic studies of the writer's work. Yet the focus concerns the writer's life and the background to the novels with scant mention of any political interpretation.

<sup>27</sup> Briefly stated, The Ginger Man is the story of Sebastian Dangerfield, an American studying Law at Trinity College Dublin, and his English wife Marion. Along with his American friend Kenneth O'Keefe, Dangerfield descends into financial ruin while ironically trying to climb the class ladder in Ireland. When Dangerfield fails at all his endeavors, he escapes to England only to be saved by the wealth of his Irish girlfriend Mary.

power was given to the Catholic Church to mandate national morality while war-hero politicians took the opportunity to command a rigid, Gaelicized national policy. Under these conditions, Donleavy wrote one of the more shocking novels concerning Irish life and sexuality. However, in terms of this study, Donleavy's work expands upon a tradition of Americans in Europe by setting the novel in this impoverished and unstable nation where the protagonist's position as an American is significantly different from that of previous incarnations of Americans on the continent.<sup>28</sup> The protagonist, Sebastian Dangerfield, appears to be a rowdy American, a student of law, whose Protestant heritage combined with a position at Trinity College Dublin and American citizenship allow him a certain prestige in Dublin.<sup>29</sup> Yet behind these religious, national, and school affiliations, Dangerfield is not a true member of the old Irish-Protestant upper class. In fact, his American roots conflict with the life of privilege normally reserved for Trinity students.<sup>30</sup> As a means of survival and exploitation, Dangerfield learns how to mimic the upper class

---

<sup>28</sup> James Baldwin, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Henry James all approached the theme of the American abroad in Europe, but these writers located on the continent and did not approach issues of postcolonialism. If any of the Americans resemble Donleavy's work it would most likely be Henry Miller.

<sup>29</sup> Briefly described, The Ginger Man is the story of American Sebastian Dangerfield's life in Ireland shortly after the Second World War. Dangerfield, along with his American friend O'Keefe, pursues women and wealth using his Trinity College affiliation and foreign accent to take advantage of the locals. Comically, they both fail. Dangerfield's English wife leaves him; however, he finds an aspiring Irish actress to latch onto. The novel ends with both characters forced to leave Ireland due to a lack of opportunities.

<sup>30</sup> Johann A. Norstedt in his essay "Irishmen and Irish-Americans in the Fiction of J. P. Donleavy," mistakenly labels Dangerfield "*the* Irish-American who has gone back to the 'ould sod' with the romantic notion of finding his roots and restoring his spiritual values" (120). Norstedt is overlooking the importance of Donleavy's religious and class-based differences. As a Protestant in a country that is over 95% Roman Catholic and predominantly poor at this time period, Dangerfield has little in common with the Irish people. Furthermore, unlike O'Keefe, there is never a mention of Dangerfield having any relations, no matter how distant in Ireland. On this point, it is very important to understand that Dangerfield is in Ireland as an exploiter and a foreigner.

by affecting a British accent, alluding to his British wife, and his place at Trinity (“And don’t forget that I’m at Trinity either. No end to where I am”) when the circumstances favor such a position (152). Nevertheless, his actual financial position and love for poor Ireland results in a plethora of opportunities to enter areas of Irish society typically reserved for blue-collar Catholics.

It is important to understand that the Irish were treated as racially different from the rest of Europe and thus justifying colonization.<sup>31</sup> Prominent philologist and theorist Ernest Renan explains:

A like change is apparent, I am told, in passing from England into Wales, from the Lowlands of Scotland, English by language and manners, into the Gaelic Highlands; and too, though with a perceptible difference, when one buries oneself in the districts of Ireland where the race has remained pure from all admixture of alien blood. It seems like entering on the subterranean strata of another world, and one experiences in some measure the impression given us by Dante, when he leads us from one circle of his *Inferno* to another. (143)

Renan, a Frenchman, loved Ireland but as evidenced in this quotation also thought that the country was backwards, even hellish. These depictions of Ireland resonate and can be seen even in the work of Donleavy where Dangerfield parties in the “catacombs” that are full of “depravity” (161).<sup>32</sup> The impression that Ireland was an uncivilized and backwards

---

<sup>31</sup> See Vincent J. Cheng *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (1995). It was customary in much Irish postcolonial scholarship of the 1990s to begin with a preamble establishing the necessity of studying Ireland as a postcolonial nation, particularly in response to Ashcroft et al. who discouraged such a reading in their early and seminal text *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). Also see Halloran, Thomas F. "An Éirinneach nó Sassanach tú?" <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/halloran1.html>

<sup>32</sup> The justification for colonialism was based on exactly this type of condescending view towards the Irish. Consider the following excerpt from the *Anthropological Review* in 1868: “Why does the wretched man cling to the filthy hovel and scanty patch of ground? It is natural to his race. The Celt clings with tenacity to his patch of ground, because he has no self-confidence, no innate courage to meet the forest and the desert; without a leader he feels lost. He is entirely wanting in those qualities of enterprise and self-

race is echoed by Dangerfield in The Ginger Man, and it is this type of attitude that enforces the idea that Ireland needs foreign governance.<sup>33</sup>

In this chapter, I focus on many of the main overall themes of the dissertation in order to demonstrate the continuity between Americans in the postcolonial world while also highlighting the unique differences in Donleavy's Ireland. I draw attention to the unusual setting and situation that Dangerfield inhabits as an American in postcolonial Ireland. I also focus on the place of the Americans in this novel to emphasize how their perspective is unique as they both love Ireland and identify with the land in a way that the British colonizer does not. Yet Dangerfield and O'Keefe complain bitterly about the poverty they endure and the lack of class-based advantages in Ireland, exhibiting the same type of bias common to the colonizers.

Much of their complaining is related to the lack of modernity in Ireland. This desire for the comforts of the first world is what unites the Americans with the British, yet in typical colonial fashion the Americans are often also mesmerized by the simplicity and charm they find in the "authenticity" of old Ireland, which confirms their

---

reliance which make the Saxon par excellence the colonizer of the globe. . . With the Saxon all is order, wealth comfort; with the Celt, disorder, riot, destruction, waste" (Duffy 38).

<sup>33</sup> "Thus the Celtic race has worn itself out in resistance to its time, and in the defence of desperate causes. It does not seem as though in any epoch it had any aptitude for political life. The spirit of family stifled within it all attempts at more extended organization. Moreover, it does not appear that the peoples which form it are by themselves susceptible of progress. To them life appears as a fixed condition, which man has no power to alter. Endowed with little initiative, too much inclined to look upon themselves as minors and in tutelage, they are quick to believe in destiny and resign themselves to it. Seeing how little audacious they are against God, one would scarcely believe this race to be the daughter of Japhet" (147-8). In this passage Renan could just as easily be describing Jamaica or India and the need to suffer the "White Man's Burden," to borrow from Kipling's famous phrasing, in order to improve the lives of the unfortunate Irish.

perpetuation of a classic trope of colonial literature.<sup>34</sup> The Ginger Man also speculates on the stereotypes that the Irish, American, and British all have of each other. To this end, I consider how the American perception of Ireland is influenced by the history of British colonialism. In a related point, I continue this line of analysis by investigating how and why American characters attempt to mimic and identify with the British: as both a means of survival and exploitation. Unlike other works studied in this dissertation, The Ginger Man is expressly concerned with America as the characters reflect on the United States and desire to some day return as wealthy colonial tycoons. I will therefore explore how Dangerfield's desire to rise in class in the postcolony makes this work unusual compared to other American literature set in postcolonial nations.<sup>35</sup> Finally, I look at how Americans associate poverty with Irishness. Dangerfield and O'Keefe expose the poverty and class-based hierarchy of postcolonial Ireland as demonstrated by their inability to find acceptance in the ruling circles regardless of their nationality or attempts at assimilation. This demonstrates postcolonial Ireland's adherence to colonial power structures that are rooted in nationality and visible through accent, religion, and affiliation. Although the American characters can mimic the traits of the colonizer, they rarely enjoy the privileges of the colonial master. All combined, Donlevy's work

---

<sup>34</sup> Ireland has also been portrayed favorably as a land of authenticity. "In presence of the ever-encroaching progress of a civilization which is of no country, and can receive no name, other than that of modern or Europe, it would be puerile to hope that the Celtic race is in the future to succeed in obtaining isolated expression of its originality" (Renan 190). The jig is up so to speak because modernity and Europe have begun to erode tradition. The era of the quaint, simple Celtic life is ending and needs to be appreciated before it is all gone. For the metropolitan traveler, there is a desire to "save" the authentic culture despite the criticism for backwardness.

<sup>35</sup> Unlike other subjects of this dissertation, the American characters of The Ginger Man are not trying to escape modernity nor are they expressly chasing a vision of authenticity. These Americans arrive in Ireland as exploiters, but ironically, they also find themselves identifying with the Irish.

presents a conflicted position for these Americans in postcolonial Ireland. It is a time when the privileges of the British colonial world still exist; however, most of the excesses of the colonial heyday are gone leaving the Americans few opportunities to profiteer. Yet the Americans' vague agenda to prosper is tempered by a profound affection for the simple ways of a predominately pre-modern nation. The combination of all these factors makes for a fascinating novel that deserves a far more political reading than it has traditionally been given.

### **An Unusual Expatriate**

Unlike American characters in the wealthier and independent nations of Europe, Donleavy's protagonist inhabits a colonized, impoverished, and "primitive" land. Johann Norstedt states, "Donleavy had found the perfect *type* of country and the perfect *type* of human being for entertaining comic confrontation" [His emphasis] (121). Only Henry Miller's bleak visions of the Parisian underworld come close in comparison to the life of Sebastian Dangerfield. The story is unusual to begin with because the protagonist foregoes the comforts of continental Europe, and also because of the level of poverty that the American characters endure. While Ernest Hemingway may have moaned for food and warmth in *A Moveable Feast* (1964), he nevertheless perpetuates an idealized Paris where one could always find stimulating conversation and inspiration if not something to eat. Miller's Paris is far grittier, but the narrator seems to actively seek the seediest element. So while *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) may deconstruct some of the romantic notions of Paris, the narrator can be dismissed as a degenerate who chooses to find the worst in life. In contrast, Dangerfield is from a wealthy and well-connected American family, he is educated, and he served as an officer in the United States Navy. However, for reasons

that are never given in the novel, he chooses to pursue study in Ireland at Trinity Law. The prestige of Trinity College Dublin causes the Irish people in the novel to assume that Dangerfield is a wealthy aristocrat; however, Dangerfield's poverty is a running gag as his condition continually worsens. From the opening paragraphs we learn that he must pawn the heater for extra money (1).

Despite the seemingly endless examples of poverty, it is important to demonstrate that Dangerfield is aware of his lowly position on the periphery. He is aware that his compatriots in Paris are leading far more glamorous (or at least dignified) lives.<sup>36</sup> This is a character that has chosen to live on the margins of Europe—for this study, Donleavy's setting is important because it sets a precedent of exploring the postcolonial world through American characters.<sup>37</sup>

Returning to the themes and terms of postcolonialism that this dissertation critiques, Donleavy's novel explores Euro-centrism by creating an American character that both espouses and refutes the superiority of American, British, and Continental civilization in comparison to colonized Ireland. Trinity College Dublin figures as a traditional center of power in the peripheral colonial city. But while the Americans realize that Trinity once held the key to a life of carefree colonial exploitation, times have changed as a new independent free-state erodes the class-based advantages that were granted to wealthy and well-connected foreigners. The Ginger Man also toys with the

---

<sup>36</sup> For example, he fantasizes that his wife and baby might be killed, allowing him to escape Ireland: "Or maybe the two of you will get killed in a train wreck and your father foot the bill for burial. Well-bred people never fight over the price of death. And it's not cheap these days. Just look a bit glassy eyed for a month and take off for Paris. Some nice quiet hotel in Rue de Seine and float fresh fruit in a basin of cool water" (13). He is informed of the life in Paris, the more typical dream of Americans abroad.

<sup>37</sup> But while Dangerfield's motivation is unknown, Donleavy may have set the novel in Ireland for originality's sake if nothing else.

common postcolonial concept of exile, as Dangerfield and O'Keefe are expatriates who complain as if they were exiles.<sup>38</sup> Beyond the differences of Americans in the colonial centers of London and Paris, Dangerfield and O'Keefe negotiate the exile's complicated territory of race and ethnicity. Their desire to preserve racial (and class) distinction is common to the settler culture in the colonies. Likewise, these Americans express their sense of difference from the Irish and pronounce their identification with the British; or, with a distantly remembered America. As with much colonial literature, at times these Americans find their identity and allegiances are ambiguous as their attachment to Ireland grows as Dublin becomes their home; moreover, their America exists more in memory than in the actual possibility of return. Finally the setting also affirms that colonial perception of marginality, as Ireland is constantly described as an excluded distant land. Dangerfield and O'Keefe both revel in their distance from the center, but they also constantly lament the lack of modernity and life that they imagine in London and Paris.

### **Ireland and Postcolonial Modernity**

In the wake of colonization, the struggle for independence, civil war, and finally the creation of the Free-state (and later the Republic), Ireland was a young nation consumed by poverty and underdevelopment. Setting The Ginger Man in the early years of Irish independence means that the American characters are forced to confront the

---

<sup>38</sup> Although Dangerfield and O'Keefe are more travelers than exiles, their perspective is nevertheless unique. In his study of exile writing Writers in Exile (1981) Andrew Gurr explains the benefit of space for a writer: "The most obvious benefit is of course the insight which distance gives. The exile gains not only the perspective which allows him to see his home clearly but he also has immediate and pressing comparisons to make. Kipling derided the stay-at-home with the sort of expatriate assurance which also made Somerset Maugham declare that one positively must live in a minimum of three countries before one can begin to understand one's own home country. The exile on the other hand does not leave home with the intention of acquiring the superiority of the international traveler (the type known in West Africa as the 'been-to')" (25).



growing pains associated with modernization. Ashcroft et al. describe the connection between postcolonialism and modernity:

Europe constructed itself as ‘modern’ and constructed the non-European as ‘traditional’, ‘static’, ‘pre-historical.’ The imposition of European models of historical change became the tool by which these societies were denied any internal dynamic or capacity for development. (Key Terms 145)

In keeping with this common colonial binary understanding of cultures, Dangerfield and O’Keefe know Ireland as a traditional, static, and pre-historical land—we must understand that these attributes offer both positives and negatives. For example, like other works in this study, the American characters here generally detest the impoverished conditions and express longing for the comforts of America. Although Dangerfield and O’Keefe love and stay in Ireland, they are openly critical of the conditions that are inferior to the lives that they imagine they could be leading elsewhere. In the opening scene, O’Keefe compares the experience of being in America as opposed to Ireland:

I broke my ass washing my underwear and in those damn rooms in Trinity nothing will dry. In the end I sent my towel to the laundry. Back at Harvard I could nip into a tiled shower and dive into nice clean underwear (1).

In this example, O’Keefe’s positive memories of America draw attention to the small conveniences like fresh laundry. Dangerfield, in a similar vein, remembers, “[W]hen I was living in America I had a lot of good things. I never had to think about hot water” (110). Again, basic comforts are lacking in postcolonial Ireland. While dining with O’Keefe, Dangerfield remembers richer days, “And this is my first chicken since the night I left New York and the waiter asked me if I wanted to keep the menu as a memory and I sat there in the blue carpeted room and said yes” (9). These happier days in New York are also expressly tied to having money. This point again highlights the poverty of

Ireland, but also Dangerfield's romanticized vision of America. Depressed over losing his inheritance, Dangerfield explains what he is missing in New England to his friend

MacDoon:

I said I wasn't being sentimental but I had to tell him what it was like over there. How the leaves crackled and the bright moons. New England air rich and clear. Women good enough to eat. Ripe summer tans and arses which wagged, wow. But Mac, for display purposes only. Keep off the grass. And don't you see how it could drive me down on my knees weeping? And I thought I'd go back and settle in the Hudson Valley or along the Housatonic in Connecticut. But no I'm the month of October. Facing winter forever. And I can't go back. (320)

Again America is idealized as a land of wealth, prosperity, and easy living. There is far more reflection on America in this novel compared to the works of Wharton, Bowles, and Theroux. Perhaps this is partly because Dangerfield is a sentimental character, but the attention to America is also due to the unique juxtaposition between the newly independent poor nation and the wealth of the United States that Dangerfield and O'Keefe have left behind. Therefore, these memories of America present a stark contrast to the struggle for survival in postcolonial Ireland. It is this unusual American perspective that details the poverty and problems of Ireland at a moment when most of the observations were coming from the biased perspective of those already committed to a Irish Republican or British Unionist stance.<sup>39</sup>

Yet these memories of the richness of America also beg the question, why choose to remain in Ireland if conditions are so bad? Traveling by foot through central Dublin, Dangerfield reflects: "Rich up this way. Wriggle the fingers a bit. American flag hanging

---

<sup>39</sup> For more on the idea of reading Irish Literature as a colonized land and literature, see [Ireland and Postcolonial Theory](#). Ed. by Clare Carrol and Patricia King where critics like David Lloyd, Gauri Viswanathan, Amitav Ghosh, Luke Gibbons, and Edward Said argue that Ireland fits into the same postcolonial paradigms as the more commonly postcolonial zones (i.e. India or Morocco).

out there. That's my flag. Means money, cars and cigars. And I won't hear a word said against it" (24). These are expressions of patriotism and pride in being American. Despite Dangerfield's frequent and passionate defense of America, it is puzzling that he left and that he stays in Ireland. During one low moment Dangerfield contemplates returning to the U.S. to pursue all the opportunities he misses out on in Ireland. Alone in a bar he remembers picking up a lonely girl in Baltimore (115-7). This memory inspires his desire to go back:

This country [Ireland] is foreign to me. I want to go back to Baltimore. I've never had a chance to see everything, or ride the trains, or see all the little towns. Pick up girls in amusement parks. Or smell them with the peanuts in Suffolk, Virginia. I want to go back. (118).

Again, America is an idealized country of good times that contrasts with his current dejected state in Ireland. This type of scene resembles the typical exile's reconstruction of the homeland as an idealized space.<sup>40</sup> But despite the exile's tone, Dangerfield is unquestionably an expatriate with the resources and right to return to America if he chooses.

For Dangerfield and O'Keefe, America often figures as a source of happy memories to the point that good experiences in Ireland are associated with America. On

---

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Gurr describes this trait in émigré literature in his study Writers in Exile (1981): "In consequence of this separation from home in space as well as time, the writer characteristically centres his attention not so much on his sense of his history (that was the preoccupation of the stay-at-homes of whom Yeats is perhaps the greatest example), as on his sense of home as a unit in space and time together. For the colonial exiles the search for identity and the construction of a vision of home amount to the same thing. Typically the home is set in the past, in memories of childhood, as a *recherché* for the *temps perdu*, the home of memory, which is the only basis for a sense of identity which the exiled writer can maintain." (11). The other American writers in this study seem to care very little about their pasts in America. In fact they are escaping their pasts if anything and looking to start over. However, as evidenced by this example, Dangerfield often turns back to re-imagine America.

the rare occasion when Dangerfield and his English wife Marion do enjoy each other's company, Dangerfield simultaneously reflects on happy times with an American girl, Ginny (50). Unlike the other Americans in this study, Dangerfield leaves America with some regret. Or at least he chooses to remember more positives than negatives about his homeland.<sup>41</sup>

A separate level of complaint concerns the difficulty of survival in Ireland. For example, O'Keefe comments about Trinity, "This place is tough, not like Harvard. These boys work day and night" (29). This comment makes Ireland seem more cutthroat while perpetuating the idea the America is easy. On one level, portraying Ireland as a difficult land demonstrates the poverty and lack of opportunity in the newly independent nation. However, on another level, this portrayal subtly draws attention to the primitive Irish culture that requires hard work and ingenuity for survival unlike in America, where apparently, an upper-class background can still provide an easy life. Upon leaving Ireland Dangerfield exclaims, "Ireland's been too much for me. Badgering and insult;" he then continues, "I travel East. To the more established civilizations" (281-2). Here Dangerfield reiterates the idea that Ireland is too tough and also too backwards.

However, the American characters portray survival as difficult for the Irish as well. While picking up a foreign girl, Dangerfield asks, "You're not Irish," to which she responds, "What makes you say that? My voice?" Dangerfield replies, "No, your teeth. All the Irish's teeth are rotting. You have good teeth" (62-3). This comment both insults the Irish and conveys the poverty of the newly independent nation. O'Keefe in turn fears

---

<sup>41</sup> On a more melancholy note, Dangerfield thinks of August in relation to New England, "This is the month of August. Football season, a sunny New England afternoon" (75). It is as if happiness in general was an American phenomenon.

that his lack of personal hygiene is a newly acquired Irish trait; “I’m getting more like the Irish every day” (1). For Americans used to a basic level of comfort, Ireland is described as primitive. The lack of basic services makes the country unbearable for these Americans who aspire to live off of their class-based identities.

The Ginger Man also presents a perspective on how the Irish perceive America and Americans. Dangerfield’s relationship with his Irish landlord, Mr. Skully expresses some common Irish stereotypes of Americans. In this case, Dangerfield is criticized for not living up to the standards of modernity and civilization that the Irish expect of Americans. He receives an angry letter from Skully:

It is not for me to advise concerning your living methods, Mr Dangerfield, but it causes my wife great grief that an American gentleman such as yourself should perhaps not keep up the standards we mutually know as Americans, but my wife and I are still proud of the citizenship we acquired in that land across the seas. (183)

Interestingly, the passage indicates that the Irish concede that Americans have a higher standard of living, but Skully’s frustration arises from seeing Dangerfield disappoint his expectations of America. This point demonstrates the Irish self-consciousness in the postcolonial era and further adds to Dangerfield’s idealized remembrance of America. Furthermore, Skully expresses his own sense of pride in being an American, even if his citizenship is acquired and not a birthright like it is for Dangerfield and O’Keefe.

### **Criticism of the United States**

Occasionally, these American characters criticize the United States. On his days as a sailor on the East Coast, Dangerfield recalls, “All the time I was in that part of America I felt the closeness of the Great Dismal Swamp and broken boards and peeling signs and road houses isolated with greed and silence, drink and snakes” (114). This rare

admission of distaste for America seems strikingly similar to Dangerfield's complaints about Ireland. This thinking is also far more in line with the frustration that characters in the works of Paul Bowles and Paul Theroux express with America. That is to say these characters share a common dissatisfaction with the Western world and a desire to live in the simplicity and authenticity of the post-colony. This point also underscores the doubt we feel in sympathizing with his suffering in Ireland.<sup>42</sup> His admission makes the complaints about Ireland seem less founded and the idealization of America more unreasonable. These contradictory statements also trouble a national allegory reading, as it could be his personal failings that lead to the criticism of lack of modernity and opportunity in Ireland. However, the presence of Americans in postcolonial Ireland and their collective inability to prosper indicates the dire economic situation that Ireland faced upon independence. This also signifies the end of the era where colonizing outsiders could live off of the Irish on class-based privilege alone.

Yet despite the constant complaints and longing for the United States, Dangerfield and O'Keefe frequently conclude by praising Ireland. In this rant, Dangerfield begins by exclaiming his frustration with Ireland only to end by installing himself as the king and father of the land:

Two years in Ireland, shrunken teat on the chest of the cold Atlantic, Land of crut. And the drunk falling screaming into the ditches at night, blowing shrill whistles across the fields and brown buggered bogs. Out there they watch between the nettles, counting the blades of grass, waiting for each other to die, with the eyes of cows and the brains of snakes. Monsters

---

<sup>42</sup> Likewise, O'Keefe admits that his American childhood was one of poverty: "When someone farted in my house you could smell it in every room. At every meal there were seven pairs of hands reaching for a pile of spaghetti. Fights and yapping. Yap, yap, yap. I'm here because I want to get out of that forever and there's one thing that will get me out and that's money" (210-11). Once again, after grumbling about the lack of food and comfort in Ireland it seems that O'Keefe was not better off in America.

growling from their chains and wailing in the dark pits at night. And me. I think I am their father. Roaming in the laneways, giving comfort, telling them to lead better lives, and not to let the children see the bull serving the cow. I anoint their silver streams, sing laments from the round towers. I bring seed from Iowa and reblood their pastures. I am. I know I am Custodian of the Book of Kells. Ringer of the Great Bell, Lord King of Tara, “Prince of the West and heir to the Arran Islands.’ I tell you, you silly bunch of bastards, that I’m the father who sweetens the hay and lays the moist earth and potash to the roots and story teller of all the mouths. I’m out of the Viking ships. I am the fertilizer of royalty everywhere. And Tinker King who dances the goat dance and the Sugar Loaf and fox-trots in the Streets of Chirciveen. Sebastian, the eternal tourist, Dangerfield [sic] (72-3).

This quote begins by painting Ireland in stark, negative, and stereotypical terms: Ireland is a land of poverty, misery, greed, and evil. Yet Dangerfield transitions to describe himself as the father/king of all Ireland including the cultural achievements (Book of Kells) and the natural beauty of Ireland’s landscape (Arran Islands). Perhaps most puzzling of all, Dangerfield ends his rant as creator and ruler of Ireland by simultaneously admitting his position as a tourist.<sup>43</sup> Moments like this demonstrate the American’s ability to both distance himself from the colony and all of its faults or choose to identify with the best parts of the land and culture. This perspective is rarely found in colonial fiction but often expressed by the Americans in this study. Dangerfield and O’Keefe express a typically colonial sense of ambivalence. As Homi Bhabha argues in The Location of Culture (1994), there is an unsettled, non-exclusive relationship between colonizer and colonized. However, Dangerfield and O’Keefe are examples of how subjects outside of the sphere of colonizer and colonized also embody conflicting identities and desires. However, for these Americans, their identity involves a double mimicry, as they seek to impersonate the British colonist and imitate the Irish customs

---

<sup>43</sup> In fact, by describing himself as the “father” Dangerfield introduces colonist rhetoric, and a colonial-like desire to claim the land and the people as his own.

and political attitudes, while also retaining a sense of “home” in America and a preference for America when times turn difficult in Ireland. In other words, they express a class-driven desire to be British while simultaneously taking delight in their acceptance from the Irish. These Americans are therefore truly “mimic men” operating within the postcolonial identity dynamic in complex ways by pretending to be what they are not.

Part of Dangerfield and O’Keefe’s ambivalence is driven by their inability to assimilate in Ireland. As Dangerfield leaves Trinity he looks towards a laboratory window and reflects, “Up in the windows here I see things that make me feel that I’m a tourist. See a man with a beard behind the grease and steam stained glass” (269). This observation demonstrates how he remains different up until his last day in Ireland.

*Tourist* is an important keyword. Dangerfield remains an outsider to Ireland throughout the novel. He is always a visitor no matter how much he tries to pass himself off as Irish or British.

On the contrary, O’Keefe feels distraught upon failing to survive in Ireland. Depressed, he requests deportation back to the States commenting, “To me this is worse than death” then adding, “As tough as this country is I hate to leave it but if I don’t I’ll die” (235). For O’Keefe, leaving Ireland is much more difficult than it is for Dangerfield because of his affection for the land. What makes Dangerfield more interesting for this study is his detachment from Ireland. It is the detached position that allows for such a unique perspective and a connection to the other characters in this study. As Dangerfield is forced to leave Ireland after falling into trouble with the law, he finds a letter from O’Keefe with the following advice:

Now let me tell you just one thing; if you ever entertained the idea of coming back here, no matter what your condition there, I have one word



of advice. Don't. I turned on my accent full blast when I got to Boston but found little encouragement from friends. (331)

O'Keefe verifies that the era of getting by via class power alone is over. This is in part a personal failure, but the old ways of colonial class exploitation and privilege in Ireland are ending. O'Keefe adds, "I want you to remember this, that this is America and we out-produce, out-sell, out-manufacture, out-fight, and out-screw the rest of the world but the latter is elusive" (332). Still he is sexually frustrated, and metaphorically America is no longer what they remembered. O'Keefe finally admits that his memories from abroad were exaggerated idealizations. This scene also reads remarkably similar to the postcolonial exile's return to the homeland, where now, having been exposed to colonial life, he or she will be trapped in some sort of hybrid identity.<sup>44</sup>

When the novel is drawing to a close, Dangerfield remains more loyal to his Irish and newfound English alliances than to America because his ambivalent identity no longer fits in anywhere. When rich American guests arrive at a party in London, Dangerfield is initially excited to meet these snobby compatriots who achieved the wealth that he lusts after, but he is also disappointed with the encounter. During a taxi ride, one of the Americans asks Dangerfield if he likes London: "Very much. I think it might be said I love England" (333). At this point, Dangerfield seems comfortable in their company as well as pretending to be as rich as they are. However, quite suddenly, Dangerfield gets out of the taxi when these Americans overwhelm him, presumably with their class superiority or their authentic American richness (334). Yet Dangerfield's friend MacDoon persuades Dangerfield to come to the party with the good news, "[. . .]

---

<sup>44</sup> The most pertinent example of this phenomenon is V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men (1967).

we are keeping the British in their place tonight” (337). In this case, the Americans expose Dangerfield as a counterfeit as he is not an American or British aristocrat. This causes an identity crisis for Dangerfield because he is assured to be exposed as a fraud. Yet despite all the distancing he has done from Ireland, MacDoon gives him the opportunity to switch alliances back to being an Irishman, antagonizing the British oppressor, ironically the same oppressor he has been trying to impersonate throughout his stay in Ireland. This transcultural identity is a forced hybridity as Dangerfield is doomed to be an impersonator of power. Only when there is no possibility of impersonating power will Dangerfield at last seek refuge in an Irish identity as he looks down on the aristocracy that rejects him. With his gift of mimicry, Dangerfield is Irish to the English, English to the Irish and Americans, and American perhaps only in his head. In the next section, I investigate how Dangerfield understands the nationality dynamics and picks his moments to identify based upon personal gain.

### **Irish American Relations**

Speaking of their shared money woes, O’Keefe rejects Dangerfield’s offer to visit on the weekend because there will be no food. He explains: “Since I’ve arrived here everything has been down and these guys at Trinity think I’m loaded with dough. They think the G.I. Bill means I crap dollars or a diarrhea of dimes” (2). The Irish view of the Americans creates difficulties for Dangerfield and O’Keefe because the Irish think of Americans as wealthy and privileged, but without the same political baggage of the

British aristocracy.<sup>45</sup> In practical terms, being American means being an approachable source for a loan and that, of course, is not the case with the British aristocracy.

Although London was the imperial center for Ireland, New York (and more generally America) has been an alternative “center” which also provides opportunities. In this other binary construction, America as center and Ireland as margin nullifies some of the hierarchical relationship of civilized and savage land, as America and Ireland have largely coexisted and supported each other. But while America was far more benign in its relations with Ireland, the Irish stereotypically provided inexpensive labor in America while Americans and wealthy returning Irish-Americans patronized the “olde sod.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Americans figure as representatives of the non-colonial center. Both Dangerfield and O’Keefe acknowledge and perpetuate this perception of coming from a land of great culture, power, and superior civilization although their lives in Ireland seem to bear little difference to their positions back in the United States.<sup>47</sup> When Dangerfield and family move to a new house, the landlord

Mr. Egbert Skully took Dangerfield aside and said he was glad he could rent to an American because he and his wife had worked for twenty years

---

<sup>45</sup> Despite Dangerfield and O’Keefe’s positions of poverty, other Americans represent wealth in Ireland. Tone sleeps in a self-fashioned hammock made of “the coat a rich American gave me” to avoid all the rats (274). Tone is wearing “a purple scarf with tiny yellow and green stripes tucked carefully to hide garments that had seen better days on the back of a rich American” (276). Tone takes out a collection of large cigarette butts at the pub, “I got these out of the fireplace of an American in Trinity. They throw them away big” (278). It is interesting to note that in each case it is an American’s disregarded possessions that have been acquired.

<sup>46</sup> See famous examples from the cinema such as John Ford’s The Quiet Man (1952) or Jim Sheridan’s The Field (1990).

<sup>47</sup> There are exceptions. For example, Dangerfield reminisces about an Irish prostitute who complains to him about how the American Navy men were rough and mean to her (22). But despite this rare example of a negative opinion of Americans, most Irish tend to associate Americans with money and the upper class in The Ginger Man.

in Macy's Department Store and loved New York and was pleased he could find tenants like themselves. (39)

An impressed Skully adds, "you look like a gentleman" (39). Dangerfield can use this goodwill to his advantage and play up his American citizenship just as he can impersonate a British aristocrat when that persona will likely create greater dividends. In accepting Skully's compliments and deference Dangerfield perpetuates the representation of America as a source of civilization and power in relation to marginalized, backwards Ireland. In terms of postcolonial theory this conversation furthers the dichotomy of civilized America and savage Ireland. Doing so enforces the Irish mentality of inferiority.<sup>48</sup>

Dangerfield's treatment of the Irish varies considerably depending on the situation. Upon entering what must be the American embassy he notices, "Belaboring poor micks headed for that land across the seas. Giving them the first taste of being pushed around" (24). This comment demonstrates his sympathy for the Irish and awareness of their treatment in the United States as immigrants. Although Dangerfield can sympathize with the Irish and clearly understands the context under which they will work in America (at the bottom of the class ladder), he stops short of extending his sympathy when his money is involved. Yet moments later Dangerfield has an argument with the secretary who hesitates to give up his check because it is supposed to be given to his wife. Dangerfield loses his temper:

---

<sup>48</sup> Frantz Fanon describes how colonialism creates and enforces inferiority complexes: "Every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture which has been transformed into instinctive patterns of behavior, to recognize the unreality of his 'nation,' and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure" (Colonial Discourse 46).

You'll ask no one and unless that check is given me this instant I'll have you charged with theft. Do you understand me? Am I clear? I will not have an Irish serf interfering in my affairs. This irregularity will be reported to the proper authorities. I will take that check and no more nonsense. (25)

Dangerfield uses his American citizenship as a weapon of intimidation as he insults the Irish woman's nationality while implying his superiority. Using his American citizenship and class to belittle the "Unfallow Irishwoman of middle age and misery," then calling her a "serf" spreads this power construction of the American as powerful ruler in relation to the feudal servant who must remain subservient to her master (24). This scene also provides a nice contrast to the Englishman that Dangerfield plays for credit. Whereas his English aristocrat persona uses guile and charm, the American uses brute force. After leaving, in a much better mood with his check, he reflects "Celtic lout. I'm all for Christianity but insolence must be put down. With violence if necessary. People in their place, neater that way" (26). Here Dangerfield mimics the English colonial attitude towards Ireland. He feels that his behavior is only just, as the Irish must learn to be more respectful and to defer to those with power.

Contrary to his mimicry of the British disdain for the Irish, Dangerfield is occasionally defensive of the Irish which demonstrates the complexity of his character. When his British wife Marion complains of her surroundings, Dangerfield quickly points out the colonial irony of her position. In this scene, Marion tells Dangerfield that the Irish are "a foul lot. I understand now why they're only fit to be servants [. . .] America doesn't seem to help. Brings the worst out in them" (45).<sup>49</sup> Marion's speech represents the worst

---

<sup>49</sup> It is just this type of British venom that reminds us of the colonial discourse that justified colonization. "I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe that they are our fault. I believe that there are

British stereotypes of the Irish. She continues by slandering O'Keefe, "It's the revolting lechery of an Irish peasant. And he tries to give the impression of good breeding. Watch him eating" (45).<sup>50</sup> These class-based judgments are similar to Dangerfield's opinions of the Irish, but in this context he disagrees by reproaching Marion, "Now, now, a little patience with the people who have given your country a Garden of Eden to play in, make your fires and serve your tea" (46). Is this statement ironic or true? Dangerfield is at least expressly acknowledging the problems with a discriminating British colonial identity. Unlike his impersonations and expressions of desire for the British aristocrat's place in life, he criticizes Marion for expressing negative ideas about the Irish. It is as if Dangerfield feels he can play the British role with impunity because it is an act, whereas when Marion expresses her hatred for the Irish she is cruel. This Irish bashing excites Dangerfield, when Marion, sick of Ireland, writes to his father, "I hate it all, Ireland, everything in it" (96). Dangerfield reacts angrily, "You're rotten. Bloody British blond. Damn stupidity" (97). He is very serious here. However, critic Johann Norstedt interprets Marion as "an example of what happens to proper English girls who are foolish enough to marry Irishmen of any variety" (121). A more fitting description might be that Marion is an example of what happens to proper English girls who attempt to live off their nationality and class-based privilege in the postcolonial world that no longer honors such

---

not only more of them, but that they are happier, better, and more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except when tanned by exposure, as white as ours" (111-12). Quoted from Charles Kingsley in His Letters and memories of His Life (1881).

<sup>50</sup> Marion is not the only outsider to despise Ireland as Chris also complains to Dangerfield, "I hate these Irishmen. Seedy bodies, their drunken smirks. I hate them. To listen to their snide remarks and their tight sneaky little nasty jokes. I hate this country" (69). She may be part Irish, but this helps demonstrate the prevailing attitude of disgust for Ireland by the foreign characters.

advantages as it once did. Just as Dangerfield realizes that the era of colonial exploitation is ending in Ireland, so is Marion, and this anger manifests itself in her hatred of the Irish. For example, just after Marion's outburst of frustration, Dangerfield completely breaks down to become critical of Ireland and the Irish:

Jesus, what ever made me come to this God damn country? I'm finished. I'm finished. Finished. Not a hope. A God damn snake can't live here. Nothing can live here. Every Christ botched thing on top of me. Every side. Every minute. (98)

In comparison to Marion, who Dangerfield criticizes for being ungrateful, he feels he has every right to be angry at Ireland.<sup>51</sup> This distancing is important because it shows how Americans allow themselves a different standard from the British due to the lack of a overt colonial dynamic. Even so, Dangerfield extends typical colonizer attitudes even as he gives himself leeway as an American. This point clearly demonstrates one of the fundamental arguments of this dissertation—Americans willingly and unwillingly function in colonial power structures. Sometimes they are conscious of their participation and identification with the colonizer or the colonized, sometimes they are ignorant, but they must participate in the cultural dynamics created by colonialism. During his affair with Chris, Dangerfield tells her, “I have arrived at the conclusion that these people on this island are bogus.” Dangerfield continues, “The rudeness on this island is overwhelming” (124). Perhaps these comments are made in order to affect the British aristocrat; however, he also seems to take his own remarks seriously. Concerning his trip to England he states, “In my pocket is a ticket bought from the British & Irish Steam

---

<sup>51</sup> Norstedt traces the history of Donleavy's inspiration for The Ginger Man to an actual American living in Dublin at the same time as the author by the name of Gainor Crist. While much of Dangerfield's mannerism and comic situations were based on Crist, apparently one key difference is that Crist, unlike Dangerfield, loved Ireland (119).

Packet Co., Ltd. Guarantees to get this flesh of mine to a civilized shore” (268). This quote demonstrates how Dangerfield extends and supports the British/Irish binary. In typical fashion for his character, Dangerfield recognizes the center/margin dynamic when he identifies with the Irish, but he uses the American/Irish dynamic and the British/Irish center margin dynamic to his advantage when he has the opportunity. In order to understand how Dangerfield achieves this end I trace the specifics of how he mimics the British when British identity provides an advantage in the proceeding section.

### **Colonial British Mimicry**

When Dangerfield needs class power, he relies on his ability to mimic the British gentleman in accent, affiliation, appearance, and wealth. Although both the British and American accent can denote class power, Dangerfield finds that mimicking the British aristocrat produces greater results. Certainly Dangerfield’s greatest talent is his ability to charm his interlocutors. However, his ability to mimic the British aristocracy and exploit their position of economic and cultural dominance cannot be underestimated. This aspect of The Ginger Man helps us understand the power of the British in Ireland, even in postcolonial Ireland, as the British accent and Trinity College mean money and credibility. That said, times have changed, as these status symbols no longer have the backing of the colonial system; therefore, the more crude period of outright colonial exploitation has ended. Dangerfield explains that he has cut off a piece of his blanket in order to fool the shopkeepers into giving him credit:

Now Kenneth, watch me. See? Put this round the neck like this, tuck in the ragged edges and presto. I’m now wearing Trinity’s rowing blue. Always best to provide a flippant subtlety when using class power. Now we’ll see about a little credit. (4)



For his accent and demeanor Dangerfield is given credit at the local grocery. For his effort, Dangerfield is even called a “gentleman” by the shopkeeper (4-5). When O’Keefe is surprised that Dangerfield pulls off this feat, one that he never could, Dangerfield explains, “It’s the blue blood” (5). This bravado demonstrates Dangerfield’s self-confidence that is derived from his class based feeling of superiority whether as an American or in his British persona. This exchange also reveals the class-based advantages that colonialism offered in Ireland. Aristocratic British identity, even in postcolonial Ireland, provided social and economic advantages not available to the proletariat Irish. The fact that these advantages are still available to the British (or those who can convincingly mimic the British) after independence exposes how the Irish replicate the colonial system by continuing to recognize the British as a class deserving of special privileges.<sup>52</sup> This scenario is exactly what Dangerfield can best exploit.

Dangerfield also realizes that he moved his family to Ireland in part out of the romantic picture that he had of the colonized land, and of the life of luxury that the English aristocracy used to lead. Ireland in these terms is romanticized and exotified, a place where regional, cultural, and culinary delights (in the following example the local produce) can be combined with the leisure time associated with vacation.<sup>53</sup> Dangerfield remembers how when he married Marion in England he promised an idealistic life in Ireland:

I told her not to worry for things like that happened on honeymoons and soon we would be off for Ireland where there was bacon and butter and

---

<sup>52</sup> Although my point specifically concerns how Irish society mimicked the colonial power structure after independence, the same point could be made of many other postcolonial societies in general.

<sup>53</sup> This point contrasts with Dangerfield’s fantasies about America. As he remembers the best parts of America, so can we imagine him fantasizing about Ireland from abroad.

long evenings by the fire while I studied law and maybe even a quick love make on a woolly rug on the floor. (12)

This visualization says much more about the American's constructed understanding of Ireland and colonial lifestyles reflecting the actual experience of living in Ireland.

Dangerfield believes that he has a natural right to easy living in the colonies. It is a colonial mindset familiar to the novels of Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, and George Orwell. Clearly, Dangerfield is aware of the life in the colonies as he references British India while quarreling with Marion. Dangerfield thinks

I just don't like the British, a sterile genital-less race. Only their animals are interesting. Thank God they have dogs. She wants her life sitting on her fanny in India, whipping the natives. Wants Bond Street. Afternoon tea at Claridges. Lady Gawk tickling her twat with a Chinese fan. (61)

Dangerfield projects the stereotypical British fantasy of life in the colonies onto Marion. But "sitting on" his "fanny" is exactly what Dangerfield intends to do in Ireland. Typical to his behavior, he disassociates himself from Britishness that he finds unattractive; however, he affects his British upper-class persona when it is to his advantage.

The importance of the British accent is dramatized throughout The Ginger Man. For example, O'Keefe believes that accent played a role in his failure, "Jesus, if I had your accent I'd be set here. That's the whole thing, accent. I'm beat even before I get my nose in. Anyway it won't stop me in France" (29).<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the Americans are aware that they are in a stronger negotiating position in Ireland when they use the British accent. Dangerfield himself also points out the power of his accent when he confronts his wife: "Our good accents and manners will see us right. Didn't you know, Marion, they can't put Protestants in jail"? To which Marion responds, "You've no responsibility and to

---

<sup>54</sup> The British accent is inherently linked to class, power, and privilege. O'Keefe reiterates, "I'm crippled by my accent" (37).

have my child raised among a lot of savage Irish and to be branded with a brogue for the rest of her life” (46-7). Here Dangerfield is trying to claim the advantages of British identity; however, in this instance he forgets the animosities that come with the character: namely the derision for the Irish and stigma attached to going local. Marion’s point further reiterates the class-based meanings attached to accent as they both fear the brogue that marks one as poor. Dangerfield also reports his frustration when, “A man in Chicago accused me of having a Harvard accent” (61). He is offended because to be American is too common and lacks the advantages of the British identity in Ireland.<sup>55</sup>

Dangerfield also likes to fantasize about the devastating effect his British accent can have on the Irish. This point was earlier demonstrated in Dangerfield’s handling of the worker at the American embassy—his desire for class power is explicitly linked with his longing for a British accent that will strike fear into the Irish.<sup>56</sup> He wants to be the

---

<sup>55</sup> Although the British accent is reported throughout the novel, in this exchange with a butcher, the reader is exposed to the full extent of Dangerfield’s duplicity: “Good evening, sir./ ‘Good evening./ ‘And how can I help you, sir?/ ‘To be quite honest with you. I think I would like a nice piece of calf’s liver./ ‘Now, sir, I think I can see you with a lovely bit, fresh and steaming. Now I’ll only be a minute./ ‘Bang on. Wizard./ ‘Now here we are, sir. It’s a fine bit. On a bit of a holiday, sir? Nice to have a bit of fresh meat./ ‘Yes, a holiday./ ‘Ah England’s a great country, now isn’t it sir?/ ‘Fine little country you have here./ ‘Ah its got its points. Good and bad. And hasn’t everything now. And here we are, sir, enjoy your holiday. It’s a nice evening now./ ‘A great evening./ ‘I see you’re a man of learning and good-sized books they are too./ ‘They’re that. Bye bye, now./ ‘Grand evening. Good luck, sir.’ Wow, what a conversation. Doctor of Platitudes. Holiday my painful arse. But a nice bit of liver” (89-90). Dangerfield’s use of the British accent is mysterious in this scene. There seems to be little advantage in playing the aristocrat role—yet this interest develops a painful truth for Dangerfield, although he can pull off the impression, he is not living a life of holiday as the grocer imagines.

<sup>56</sup> While trying to avoid his fearsome landlord Mr. Skully, Dangerfield thinks “Telepathy having no effect. This Irish animal can’t have any brain to receive the message. How long can this pig keep it up. Boor. Philistine most odious. Right now I would like to become a particular Percival Buttermere O.B.E. and come to the door complete with walking stick and pajamas, look out, see Skully, step back and a great deal of British nasality, I say my good man, are you mad? What, just what are you trying to do. Would you mind awfully

aristocrat who can treat the Irish as servants as rudely as he likes; but, for unknown reasons, he only attempts to intimidate the Irish with the British accent because to be condescending and American apparently would not do.

As an additional benefit the British accent also deflects some of Dangerfield's offensive behavior on the British. His barroom brawl makes the papers: "A man described as 'foreign looking' with an English accent was reported to have entered above premises in a threatening mood and to have set upon the occupants in a wild way" (128). The Irish paper, in typical provincial fashion, points out the suspicious characteristics of a foreign looking person with an English accent. Of course, Dangerfield's behavior justifies the stereotypes that the paper implies in this case.<sup>57</sup> Playing with the center/margin dynamic, Dangerfield, the outsider, successfully impersonates the privileged Englishman, but with his drunken antics rather than sophisticated accent and manner of speech. However, as Dangerfield's fortunes wane, he realizes that the accent is all that is left. "They call me an apostate. They say I've tried to save my own rather blemished skin. Here I am reduced to accent. No hearth nor home" (290). Dangerfield's game can only get him so far as he acknowledges the limitation of playing the British aristocrat. The failure of Dangerfield's mimicry signifies the end of British cultural supremacy in postcolonial Ireland. Where his accent can still gain some credit, he cannot exploit the Irish as may have been possible in the colonial days.

---

not rapping on my windows and getting off my front porch. Are you the coal man? Then go around to the back, my cook will deal with you, if you're not, would you mind frightfully removing yourself, you're most suspicious looking" (139).

<sup>57</sup> Later, while causing a disturbance in a London pub, Dangerfield's accent causes the locals to proclaim, "damn Oxford intellectuals think they can tell us we're pigs" (299). In this scene, Dangerfield's accent and persona are so refined that he's even able to fool the British as to his origins and pull off the charade as an Oxford student.

O’Keefe might not be able to mimic the British accent or aristocratic ways, but his disdain for the Irish peasantry reflects a typical colonial bias against the colonized. O’Keefe nags, “The Irish are all the same wherever they go. Faces compressed into masks of suffering. Complaining and excuses. And the Irish rasping, squabbling and bickering. Hear me? I’m sick of it. I hate it” (211). While O’Keefe is not necessarily using the colonizer’s voice, he enforces the “us versus them” mentality by insulting the Irish in this fashion. O’Keefe complains in a similar manner to the colonial administrator who grows frustrated with the locals.<sup>58</sup> O’Keefe’s attitude towards the Irish portrays some of the issues that The Ginger Man raises about how Americans understand class in Ireland—the Americans are in awe of the British aristocracy’s dominance, but frustrated with their inability to join or successfully mimic the British. Dangerfield and O’Keefe attempt to play both sides to their advantage. In mimicking British colonial power, while simultaneously also occasionally aligning themselves with the Irish, the Americans inherently use class identification to their benefit. Exploring the implications of these class identifications more closely, we see that The Ginger Man also deals with postcolonial issues directly.

In London Dangerfield comes into more extensive contact with the British Empire. Subtle reminders like the Indian woman who serves him breakfast at his boarding house demonstrate Ireland’s connection to the commonwealth. Yet when Dangerfield converses with the Indian worker, he is confronted with the fact that the mystique of the colonizer is dissipating as colonial subjects rise. “I know these people are

---

<sup>58</sup> O’Keefe continues to extend this colonizer’s attitude with comments about British civilization view of Irish savagery, “Do you know that if it weren’t for the British this place would be so many wild savages” (239).

from the Commonwealth. That woman says her son has a new job. Yes, you know they decided to move him up. Madam, that's just great" (294). Indians and Irish get ahead, but Dangerfield continues to rely on class or at least class-based impersonations. Dangerfield comments on London's size and wealth reveal his awareness of the colonial exploitation conducted by the British Empire. He describes the importance of British architecture: "It's the size Mary, the size. And who paid for it" (305). Here Dangerfield attributes the monumental size of London's buildings to the plundered wealth garnered from abroad— Dangerfield is still mesmerized by the power and wealth of the British Empire. Shortly afterwards Mary internalizes Dangerfield's comment and extends his point as she asks:

You know Sebastian, how they have all these things here. Churches of all kinds and the trains running all over under the city and you'd think that the way they were doing with us in Ireland that they wouldn't have time to build all of this" (315).

However subtle, Mary asks the pertinent question: does the British Empire have any time for the colonies when the metropolitan center demands so much attention? Compared to the portion of The Ginger Man that takes place in Ireland, where Ireland is described as a very backwards place, the modernity and wealth of London is particularly striking.

However subtle, the novel draws attention to the disparity of wealth between England and Ireland. Furthermore, Mary's comment pointedly acknowledges that Ireland's poverty and lack of modernity is a direct result of British exploitation.

### **Americans and Identity in Ireland**

As a Protestant, Dangerfield is marked as different, mysterious, and odd to the Irish. Yet, the Protestant faith carries with it the association of Britishness and aristocracy in Ireland. So, when Marion finds new accommodations for herself and the baby, the landlord situation appears to be a better fit because the Protestants owners are delighted

to rent to a British mother and a Trinity student. The landlord states, “And we were so upset about renting at first, the sort of people one might get these days, Dublin isn’t as it used to be of course, people making money with shops and these people running the country” (134). With typical post-independence bitterness, the couple embodies the stereotypical opinion of the ruling minority.<sup>59</sup> Dangerfield is elated to be accepted by these upper-class people.<sup>60</sup> However, in keeping with his unusual behavior, Dangerfield looks to cause problems by suggesting they sublet a room to a Catholic. Marion replies, “I won’t have a Catholic living in my house. They can’t be trusted. Nor do they bathe” followed by, “I hate Catholics” (135). Still, in this context Dangerfield is comfortable when surrounded by British Protestants because he can use his religion and place at Trinity to gain acceptance.

Religion and accent provide two of the most important factors in determining class in the early years of Irish postcoloniality.<sup>61</sup> However, a source of tension for Dangerfield resides in his inability to get ahead despite forged accent, Protestant affiliation, and his class-based privileges. In one scene, he is refused alcohol for being too drunk (110). Angry about not being served, he responds, “I hate this country. I think I hate this country more than anything else I know” (111). Unable to get served in Dublin,

---

<sup>59</sup> For more on this subject see Gyan Prakash’s After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements (1995).

<sup>60</sup> “I am deeply delighted to be dealing with those people of Protestant stock” (134).

<sup>61</sup> Religious difference is the root of sectarianism in Ireland. In fact, Much of Irish identity is created through religious affiliation. The following explanation is provided in Hilary Tovey and Perry Share’s A Sociology of Ireland (2003): “Given these similarities [between Irish Catholics and Protestants], the interesting questions then are: how and why were the two groups so clearly differentiated? McVeigh (1995) argues that this process of differentiation can best be brought under the term ‘sectarianism.’ This is the process, familiar to nearly all Irish people, whereby religious differences are noted—through picking up clues from names, accent, school attended, sports—then evaluated and sometimes acted upon in a way that is discriminatory” (394).

he takes the train out to Dalkey, to be “around the rich” (112). In this rich drunk he thinks, “I went to a proper preparatory school, preparing for college. I never felt that these schools were good enough for me” (113). He continues in this vein, which shows how Dangerfield uses his class identity as a form of escapism in the face of the poverty and insignificance of his life in Ireland. Dangerfield goes back to the bar where he was not served and starts trouble with the bartender by calling him a “Celtic lout” (120). Again, he becomes aggressively anti-Irish, breaking whatever he can in the bar, causing a fight, and stealing alcohol before running away. Dangerfield continues his spree by robbing a man on the street, causing a police chase. The scene portrays Dangerfield’s growing frustration with the Irish and Ireland. His use of derogatory terms and violence towards the bar patrons is a symptom of his general frustration of failing in Ireland despite his advantages.

Dangerfield continues this abusive behavior towards the Irish on a carriage ride home from a party. When the cab driver asks for an expensive fare, Dangerfield calls him a “Catholic arse” and implies he could send him to prison (164). Dangerfield threatens, “I’ll “give you a Celtic baptizing in the Liffey you vulgar thug” (164). When Dangerfield’s anger subsides, he resorts to mocking the Irish as a lazy proletarian race.<sup>62</sup> While making his final escape from Ireland, Dangerfield continues to insult the people he has used. As he steals all that he can from Mrs. Frost and the rented house, he thinks of a story of some “Miserable micks” who stole too much and sunk their own boat (263). The situation then intensifies when Skully appears to demand payment for his ruined house.

---

<sup>62</sup> Of Catherine, an Irish waitress who serves him, Dangerfield thinks “Blue-eyed, and a bit of the Celtic bovinity around the ankles,” thus describing the girl as beastlike. Shortly afterwards Dangerfield ruminates on how the Irish young people are lazy (167-8).



Dangerfield thinks, “Skully, despite your predilection for gold I think you must come from the bottom of the lowest bog” (265). All of these examples contribute to a pattern of behavior that places Dangerfield as a bitter loser who blames the locals for his failures. On another level, this bitterness exemplifies Dangerfield’s ability to internalize the British colonial biases and stereotypes about the Irish. Although Dangerfield merely aspires to be an aristocrat, he successfully mimics a British colonial’s disdain for the Irish. Yet Dangerfield remains indignant even as he is disgraced. When Tone threatens to sell his blood for money Dangerfield replies, “[. . .] never mix it Tone, Never do that. Our day will come. Just stave off the starving and a few other things and our day will come” (277). In this strange mishmash Dangerfield paraphrases the Irish Republican Army’s (IRA) motto to combine extreme Irish nationalism with his desire for blue-blooded British aristocracy.<sup>63</sup> This point is significant; Dangerfield merely appropriates the markers of disparate and conflicting identities without any loyalty or actual identification with any one identity. It is exactly this type of ambivalence that marks the Americans characters in this study as a people who are in-between the colonizers and the colonized—they are able to choose and change their identification to whatever suits them best at the time.

In similar terms Dangerfield mourns the loss of class-based advantages in general:

---

<sup>63</sup> In other scenes, Dangerfield ruefully describes his sadness at the failure of class to guarantee a comfortable living as it used to. Here he laments the failure of his plans: “But what has confounded me is blood. I was such a believer in blood, establishing the dynasty of Dangerfield, honorable kings of kingdoms and I have gotten as far as 1 Mohammed where the shit falls from the ceiling in a most sickening way and the bread is a week old and the tea like iron filings. I desire to be away in a more civilized country” (125-6). In this case, Dangerfield blames Ireland for his poverty, as if the Irish have failed to support him, as they should have because of his superior social position.

O where is the dignity? Old families and estates? Carriages and footmen?  
The vulgarity that has come to pass. Put them back down. Back down.  
And Marion with them. Sneak off, go ahead. Get out. Stay out. Wouldn't  
give me a chance. Some day you'll show up when I'm back where I  
belong in this world. When I have what I ought to have. My due. And  
when you do. My gamekeepers will drive you out and away for good.  
(188)

Clearly Dangerfield's anger seems to be as a result of the misfortunes that arise of his own creation. Driving Marion and the baby out of the house, enduring poverty, and failing at school are all results of Dangerfield's lazy and selfish behavior. However, Dangerfield imagines that at one time, such behavior would have been tolerated because of his social class and citizenship. This point further demonstrates the erosion of class-based advantage in Ireland. The dream of the colonial life in Ireland has vanished in the new postcolonial context.

Dangerfield is not alone in this situation of expectation. At the pawnbroker he meets an old friend, Percy Clocklan, who was educated at Congowes Wood College, one of the most prestigious boarding schools in Ireland. However, Clocklan is cleaning toilets and getting drunk, unable to prosper on his name and background alone (148). Yet unlike Clocklan, Dangerfield is unable to consider, much less undertake, manual labor. While tailoring his fantasy about a life of ease with housemate Lilly Frost, Dangerfield creates a few conditions, "I would have helped Lilly sow the potatoes although I don't like to use my hands too much" (256). On looking at his garden, "To put one's hand to the cold earth on a morning such as this would be hardship" (261). Even in his fantasy of living off of Frost's wages, Dangerfield is unable to consider working. His preferences for luxury and derision for any sort of labor demonstrate why Dangerfield was attracted to the colonial life, but his efforts to secure such privilege are unsuccessful.

## Poor as the Irish: Americans Going Local

These Americans strive for British colonial power; however, unable to achieve this type of success the pair falls in poverty. Their lifestyle resembles Ireland's working-class Catholic poor more than what we expect of Trinity students. Despite their resemblance to the masses, Dangerfield and O'Keefe are occasionally taken as outsiders: "They looked a curious pair and a group of small boys called after them, Jews, Jews, and O'Keefe spun back with an accusing finger, Irish, Irish, and they stood barefooted in silence" (37). This quote demonstrates how Dangerfield and O'Keefe stand out as being different, but because of their dilapidated appearance, they do not come off as superiors to the Irish. One method of demonstrating authenticity as foreigners who have fully integrated themselves into Irish life is via a constant enumeration of money problems and examples of poverty. Dangerfield, whose pants are held up by wire, searches for opportunities to draw attention to his position of poverty when with friends despite his pretensions of wealth.<sup>64</sup> O'Keefe later expresses his awe that Dangerfield has a working toilet:

If we had something to eat we'd be able to use it. They've got one of those big shops down there in town, why don't you pop down with that English accent of yours and get some credit. As much as I like your company, Dangerfield, I'd prefer it on a full stomach. (3)

At this point, the poverty is comical. But later O'Keefe warns Dangerfield, "You'll be eating spaghetti as I had to as a kid till it comes out your eyes or else you'll have to take your English wife and English kids and screw back to America" (7). Interestingly, O'Keefe remembers America as poor, but also threatens Dangerfield that he will have to

---

<sup>64</sup> In the opening scene of the novel the state of Dangerfield's house creates some comic moments. When O'Keefe asks, "Some place. What holds it up?" Dangerfield replies "Faith" (3).

go back to avoid total ruin in Ireland.<sup>65</sup> Like other American characters in this study, Dangerfield and O’Keefe present a strong aversion for America, as they would rather glean a meager existence abroad than return. Still, shortly thereafter Dangerfield is seen driving an axe into his bed and screaming “money” illustrating his desperation (19). As the novel progresses, Dangerfield’s fortunes continue to wane.<sup>66</sup> The poverty that these characters experience helps them relate to the Irish around them. Despite their accents, nationality, and Trinity school ties, they are desperately poor. This part of the novel also draws attention to the level of poverty that postcolonial Ireland suffered in the years after independence. Although the Americans’ poverty is mostly used as a comic device, it portrays the hardships of this early postcolonial experience in a way that American writers largely ignored.

Using a more direct method, O’Keefe blackmails his family friends in Ireland for money to leave for France.<sup>67</sup> He threatens to ask the “Consulate for deportation and see that it gets an ample airing in the “Irish Press” and “Irish Independent” who would find it extremely amusing and good gas that an American is in the ould country without a penny, ignored by his relatives” (34). Father Moynihan, outraged, calls O’Keefe: “[A]n insult to the American people” (35). Father Moynihan, like other characters in the novel, goes

---

<sup>65</sup> Later O’Keefe reluctantly gives Dangerfield a very small amount of money because he needs to be able to eat (14-5).

<sup>66</sup> He begins breaking furniture for making a fire (102).

<sup>67</sup> The desire for wealth is also portrayed as a typical poor Irish trait. O’Keefe’s distant relatives in Ireland initially welcome him, but their attitude changes quickly when they realize his level of poverty. “But when I first arrived they gave me the best of what they had but it was embarrassing. I’d be sitting at the other end of the table with a table cloth and napkin and they’d be gobbling off the bare boards. I’d say, look why can’t I be the same as you and eat off the bare boards and they’d tell me, O no, you’re from America and we want you to feel at home” (36). But once the family realizes that he has no money the hospitality stops. Ironically, the Irish treat O’Keefe the same way that he treats them.

directly to the class-based insults.<sup>68</sup> As words of encouragement for O’Keefe while both men are down on their luck, Dangerfield offers, “I think we are natural aristocrats of the race. Come before our time” (216). As if only the timing was off. Changing tactics, Dangerfield tells O’Keefe to give up his material desires and class desires, and then adds, “All I want out of this life, Kenneth, is my rightful place and for others to keep theirs. The common people back down where they belong” (217). Although Dangerfield is attempting to lighten the mood with this comment, the sentiment conveys his true desire for a life of class-based privilege. Furthermore, the Dangerfield family’s descent into poverty is a constant source of bitterness for their marriage. Marion claims, “You’ve ruined me socially” (60). He has never got on with her well-to-do friends or made an effort to live up to his high-class persona, instead Dangerfield merely desired the life of luxury from afar.

Perhaps as a result of their impoverished conditions in Ireland, Dangerfield and O’Keefe repeatedly express their desire for wealth. While achieving the dream of the aristocrat’s easy life is unrealistic for both characters, their lust for money highlights one of the more plausible justifications for their being in Ireland: the pursuit of the colonist’s lifestyle, which they discover is coming to an end before their eyes. O’Keefe details his background as a poor Irish-American and as a result, his class-driven fantasy:

I would have married her but she didn’t want to get stuck at the bottom of the social ladder with me. [. . .] When I go back to the States when I’m fat with dough, wearing my Saville Row suits, with black briar, M.G. and my man driving, I’m going to turn on my English accent full blast. Pull up to some suburban house where she’s married a mick, turned down by all the old Bostonians, and leave my man at the wheel. I’ll walk up the front path

---

<sup>68</sup> Dangerfield congratulates O’Keefe, “One thing can be said for you, Kenneth, you’re resourceful. If you ever go back to America you’ll be rich” (36). This comment again begs the question—Why do they stay in Ireland?

knocking the kid's toys out of the way with my walking stick and give the door a few impatient raps. She comes out. A smudge of flour on her cheek and the reek of boiled cabbage coming from the kitchen. I look at her with shocked surprise. I recover slowly and then in my best accent, delivered with devastating resonance, I say Constance. . . you've turned out. . . just as I thought you would (8).

O'Keefe's vindictive fantasy sheds light on his sojourn in Ireland. Unable to rise in class in America, even at Harvard, he hopes to transgress his peers by affecting the character of the British aristocrat, a character who speaks eloquently, wears fashionable clothes, and drives a fancy car. It is about trying to take advantage of a different class position, and that is what these two want to exploit in postcolonial Ireland, a situation where they can parlay their American nationality (or fake British aristocracy) into credit and good times. O'Keefe's interpretation of marriage, sex, and class extends to his relations in Ireland.<sup>69</sup> O'Keefe's violent desire for sex gives way to his even greater fear of poverty. If Ireland fails to provide the rise in class he desires, his only other hope is an upward marriage, thereby excluding Irish women from his consideration. Ironically, O'Keefe describes his hesitations about marrying an Irishwoman because of his fear of poverty although he is ethnically Irish and a Catholic.<sup>70</sup> O'Keefe, as desperate as he may be for sex, stakes his

---

<sup>69</sup> O'Keefe describes how he will not marry an Irish woman because of his fear of poverty: "I'd get her all breathless and saying she'd do anything if I'd take her to the States and marry her. I tried that for three nights running, standing out there in the rain up to our ankles in mud and cow flop, me trying to get her in the ditch, knock her down, but she was too strong. So I told her she was a tub of lard and I wouldn't take her to East Jesus. Have to get them a visa before you can touch an arm." / "Marry her, Kenneth." / "Get tangled with that beast of burden for the rest of me days? Be all right if I could chain her to the stove to cook but to marry the Irish is to look for poverty. I'd marry Constance Kelly out of spite." (9)

<sup>70</sup> In conversation with Dangerfield O'Keefe explains: "Why can't I feel I could ever marry one of these girls?" / "Nothing more fashionable these days than to marry down, Kenneth." / "Be marrying one of my own, that's the trouble." / "I like your blood, darling." / "Yeah. My whole sexual life depends on the nuances of wealth. Come back from a good hard ride around the edges of the estate looking for poachers." (240).

highest priority on marrying up into wealth. Despite his own identity as a descendent of Irish Catholics and his current status as a destitute foreigner, he still refuses to relent in his desire and perpetuates his fantasy.

Part of Dangerfield's desire for wealth is a need to disassociate himself from the Irish commoners that he feels are so far beneath him. Part of this derision is likely a result of his desire to seem more British, while another part may be his general fear of hardship. While taking public transportation, Dangerfield grows angry at what he feels are the rude stares of his fellow passengers, "Expect rudeness like this in the third class" (91). He notices others acting strangely and thinks of insults for them, "For Hell, deliver me. Never again ride third class" (91-2).<sup>71</sup> Dangerfield becomes upset when a store person does not want to sell a very small quantity of butter, "O you sly gombeen man. The backs of these stores, most sordid places in the world. In there with his big-busted wife, two barrels banging. You stupid, intolerable oaf" (101). In these scenes we see the extent to which Dangerfield has absorbed the biases and hatreds of Ireland. In this sense The Ginger Man reveals the troubles of postcolonial Ireland by representing the crippling hatred caused by old colonial grudges. It is these grudges that Dangerfield picks up on and replicates that widen the sectarian gap in Ireland.

Only towards the end of the novel, when Dangerfield is forced out of Ireland and destitute in London, does he begin to admit that his dreams of class-granted wealth are unreasonable. For example, Dangerfield realizes that joining the Trinity College Dublin dinner club in London has become irrational, "I keep telling myself that I'm one of you

---

<sup>71</sup> When the man tells him that a "part of him is showing," Dangerfield thinks of his hands, "Holy Catholic Ireland, have to wear gloves. Don't want to be indecent with uncovered fingers" (93).

because I never want to lose faith. Something to hang on to” (248). Here, he is at least close to admitting that the fortune magazines, talk of inheritance, and desire for wealth all serve as an emotional crutch, but none of these are realistic goals. O’Keefe first becomes aware of the inability to become the British aristocrat in this scene where he gives away some possessions while explaining how he failed to impress the uppity Irish aristocracy:

I thought things would be like Harvard only I’d be able to crack into a few of the clubs as I was never able to do in Harvard. I felt it would be best to start the furnishing with a few bedroom items, so I bought that jug for one and four as you can plainly see, and that was that. Needless to say I never cracked or rubbed shoulders with these public school boys. They talk to me but think I’m a little coarse. (28-9)

Even if he is American, he is not of the same class as the Anglo-Irish. O’Keefe is frustrated by his inability to break into the upper social circles as well as his unfortunate luck at attracting poor friends. The class hierarchy and colonial pecking order is too rigidly enforced and ingrained for the likes of these Americans to succeed. When frustrated by Dangerfield’s request for money O’Keefe asks, “Jesus, why do I know poor people?” (33). That said, Dangerfield in turn is capable of insulting O’Keefe’s lack of social connections when he angrily responds to the suggestion that he too often runs away from his problems: “Kenneth, do you know I think you have the arse of a servant” (236). True to form, the class-based insult is the most biting for these characters.

For Dangerfield, the pub offers a sanctuary where he is treated kindly by the barman and can fantasize about a life of money (23). Dangerfield imagines that the desire for wealth is so common, that when the toilet breaks covering Marion in shit, he attempts to cheer her up with “a fashion magazine filled with richery,” again imposing his desire for wealth on her (43). Even when Dangerfield begins cheating on Marion and lying to her about his whereabouts, “they talk about America and mansions” (70). It is as if the



adultery, like the daydreaming, is a side effect of their poverty.<sup>72</sup> This aspect of The Ginger Man draws attention to Ireland's poverty in the early years of the Free State, but it also highlights the rigid class system that prevents outsiders from ascending to positions of power occupied by the British even after independence.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, Donleavy's The Ginger Man portrays Americans who are interested in profiteering in postcolonial Ireland. They come with colonial style dreams of achieving wealth and power in a poor country based on their nationality and class, but discover that the age of the colonial estate owners with class-based privileges is both coming to an end and shutting them out from the little opportunity for exploitation that remains. While Dangerfield learns to mimic the persona of the wealthy British aristocrat enough to get credit, he is unable to use his scheme to fool those American and British who actually hold and control the power he so desires. Like other works in this study, The Ginger Man depicts Americans who are in-between the advantages of being a colonizer and the communalism of being the local. The Americans shift allegiances and identification to demonstrate a unique picture of life and class in the early years of Irish postcoloniality.

---

<sup>72</sup> The money situation deteriorates, yet Dangerfield still thinks "Take a look in the window of this fashionable men's shop. I think a bowler hat with my next check. Simply must. Keep the dignity. Dignity in debt, a personal motto. In fact a coat of arms" (67). Comically, he makes his poverty seem royal. Although Dangerfield's complaints are occasionally humorous, his frustration can become more pointed and despairing: "I have never felt so sad or pained. Because I feel it all seems so useless and impossible. I want to own something. I want to get us out of this. Get out of this goddamn country which I hate with all my blood and which has ruined me" (72).

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**AMERICAN REFLECTIONS FROM THE MAGHREB:**  
**PAUL BOWLES AND EDITH WHARTON**

**Introduction**

Mark Twain once astutely said, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.” However, he followed that wise counsel with a comment describing an Ottoman Sultan, Abdelaziz of Turkey, as a representative of “a people by nature and training filthy, brutish, ignorant, unprogressive, [and] superstitious.”<sup>73</sup> Although Twain is not the subject of this study because his time in the Maghreb was too brief, it is useful to note how a major American writer so quickly summarized this Muslim leader simply by sizing up the Sultan during a brief encounter in Paris. This chapter turns to North Africa as an important scene of French colonialism, and also American writing. Studying the work of Edith Wharton and Paul Bowles, I expand my thesis to discuss how these Americans reflected the Maghreb through the complex and competing perspectives of America, French Orientalism and colonialism, and lived experience in North Africa.

The Maghreb stretches from Morocco to Libya; it is a geographical area linked by the common borders of the Mediterranean Sea to the North and the Saharan desert to the South. The nations in this area of North Africa also share similar colonial histories. The majority of the Maghreb is Arab and Muslim. However, Berbers, Spanish, French, and sub-Saharan Africans add to the diverse makeup of the region. Perhaps it is because of this intersection of cultures as a land full of color, intrigue, and mystery that the United States has often shown an interest in this territory as evidenced in everything from

---

<sup>73</sup> See Lotfi Ben Rejeb’s “Mark Twain, the Ottoman Empire and Palestine” for more information on Twain’s reflections.

American foreign policy acts such as the Treaty of Marrakesh (1786) to travelogues like Twain's The Innocents Abroad (1868) to American films such as Casablanca (1942).<sup>74</sup> By the 1960s, a generation of American writers had descended upon Tangiers and Algiers to escape and/or to experience the exotic, chaotic, and peripheral postcolonial world.<sup>75</sup>

But before writers like William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac arrived to paint their American vision of North Africa, acclaimed novelist Edith Wharton (1862-1937) whose travel writing project In Morocco (1920) offered a different perspective, described the region in great detail. Wharton, already an established author from one of the most prestigious New England families, writes of her month long journey through the desert as she meets indigenous tribes and visits historical monuments in the company of French colonials. However, it is her observations on the Moroccan people, her visits to the harems of this colonial state, and her admiration for French colonialism that provide the most interest for this study. In this section I study how Wharton voyeuristically observes Morocco as if no one can see her, and as if her perspective is without any bias. Like many Americans in the postcolonial world, Wharton searches for the authentic encounter; moreover, she arrives with clearly defined preconceived notions about what is

---

<sup>74</sup> Other famous examples include Alfred Hitchcock's The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956) set in Marrakech, Ornette Coleman's or Brian Jones' musical projects with the "Masters Musicians of Jajouka," or Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's recent film Babel (2006).

<sup>75</sup> American interest in the Maghreb has never been innocent, but it has shifted between a source of potential aid and a potential threat. In one telling anecdote, Brian Edwards describes the American presence in Morocco: "Postcolonial Moroccan cultural production—francophone or arabophone—from the start is operating in a global context in which the United States is deeply present as a liberating alternative and, simultaneously, as a new form of domination. If after leaving the Cinéma Renaissance, you travel south on Mohammed V, passing Rue Patrice Lumumba, you'll eventually come to Avenue Franklin Roosevelt. America as liberator and America as cold war betrayer are both near at hand" (72).

authentically Moroccan but then seeks and even conforms what she finds to fit to her vision. As is the case so often with this type of American travelogue, Wharton identifies the pre-modern, simple, and barbaric as the authentic culture; furthermore, she wants to see this culture “saved,” whereas the modernizing city and the modern Moroccan people are by and large odious to her tastes. While a part of Wharton’s vision of Morocco is framed by vague, pre-existent Orientalist stereotypes, her French tour guides order her experience and greatly color her assessment of Morocco. Guided by colonial administrators like General Lyautney and volumes of French Orientalist scholarship, Wharton’s Morocco is seen through a French lens. Her sympathy for the French colonial mission colors much of her observations and analysis; therefore, part of this French perspective means turning a blind eye towards colonial practices that a more objective observer might find problematic. Instead, Wharton chooses to focus on the pleasure of exploring a wild country that is at the same time under the constraints of colonial law. Thus, Wharton can explore a wild and dangerous civilization while simultaneously feeling quite safe because of her French protectors.

Paul Bowles (1910-1999) is perhaps the most famous example of the American writer in North Africa.<sup>76</sup> Having spent the majority of his writing life in Tangier, Bowles exemplifies the American writer in the postcolonial world both in terms of his biography and his subject matter. His works of fiction and non-fiction are most often set in North Africa—in these works Americans often interact with the local population in surprising and even disturbing ways. By analyzing his novel The Sheltering Sky (1949) as well

---

<sup>76</sup> Bowles is important for his role in establishing an American writing community in Tangiers. Other American writers who have touched on similar themes in North Africa include William S. Burroughs, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Eldridge Cleaver, and Timothy Leary.

considering the context of his *oeuvre*, I return to the principle tropes of this field: sexual exploitation, escapism, racial difference/hierarchy, consumerism, obsession with the exotic and finally American relations with the colonizer.<sup>77</sup> In this section I begin by addressing the context of The Sheltering Sky, specifically analyzing why the American characters choose Morocco as their zone for escape and rejuvenation.<sup>78</sup> Like other works in this study, these Americans transpose European colonial ideas about the colony as being the opposite of Western civilization; thus, these Americans look to escape the problems of the modern West in the authentic, backwards, and rural colony. Yet, despite the desire to escape, these Americans arrive with loaded ideas about what is authentic North Africa. While they search for the authentic experience, they also try to disassociate themselves from the French colonizers, preferring to think of themselves as travelers—not as tourists or colonizers.<sup>79</sup> But this distinction has flaws as well, as they often search for the comforts of home, such as champagne, food, accommodation, or French protection in the face of too much “authentic” North Africa. This ambiguous position that the Americans set out to inhabit means that they wish to have unique relationships with

---

<sup>77</sup> Although an abundance of critical works on Paul Bowles exists, the outlook of Margaret Hathaway’s Fulbright project “A Study of American Writers in the Maghreb” most closely resembles my study. Yet, Hathaway’s findings have thus far gone unpublished. While The Sheltering Sky provides ample substance for my analysis but it is useful to consider Bowles’ autobiographical work Days: A Tangier Journal (1992) and his novel Spider’s House (1943) as further examples of many of the themes developed in The Sheltering Sky.

<sup>78</sup> The Sheltering Sky concerns a married American couple, Port and Kit who, have travelled to North Africa with their friend Tunner in an attempt to find adventure and also rekindle their relationship. Disillusioned with Western society, they go deeper and deeper into the Maghreb looking for the “authentic.” However, Port dies due to a lack of caution and Kit sets out on her own into the desert. Tunner attempts to find Kit and bring her back, but Kit stays.

<sup>79</sup> On reason the Americans go ever deeper into the dessert may be their desire to escape the French who remind the Americans of their own position.

the North Africans and French rather than fit into the race-or nation-based power structure that colonialism creates and enforces. Despite their efforts, I find that these Americans often treat the Moroccans and Algerians with the exact same condescending attitude of the typical colonizer. Furthermore, while they do not seek the friendship of the French and openly critique them, the Americans are forced to recognize the similarity of their position. Eventually, the Americans even have to beg the French for protection (as Wharton did). As with all the Americans in the postcolonial world studied in this dissertation, they lust for the colonized subjects. To this end, I study how The Sheltering Sky treats the sexual dynamic between Americans and North Africans. Finally, this novel presents the most extreme case of the American desire to “go local.” Echoing Heart of Darkness, I analyze Kit’s total immersion and loss of self.

Both of these works engage the fundamental themes of this dissertation. They draw attention to the colonizer/colonized dichotomy and demonstrate the possibility of being both of these identities. Furthermore, Bowles and Wharton employ the familiar tropes of Americans in the postcolonial world as they attempt to escape modernity, find authenticity, define their own identities, and try playing colonizer while conversely relating to the colonized.

### **Wharton**

In Morocco concerns Wharton’s experience in French Colonial Morocco as a tourist, historian, ethnographer, and most of all a voyeur. Wharton expresses her intention to focus on the touristic opportunities that exist in Morocco; nevertheless, her writing often touches on the historical background that creates such a rich and complex,

colonized culture.<sup>80</sup> Although Wharton rarely directly acknowledges the colonial power dynamic, she visits Morocco as a distinguished guest of France and is personally guided throughout the country by officers of the French military rule. While Wharton may be reluctant to discuss the means by which the French have established power, in this quotation for example, we witness the enormous wealth created in such a poor land via colonial trade:

The Cadis [. . .] led us by many passages into the sudden wonder of gardens and fountains; the bright-earringed negresses peering down from painted balconies; the pilgrims and clients dozing in the sun against hot walls; the deserted halls with plaster lace-work and gold pendentives in tiled niches; the Venetian chandeliers and tawdry rococo beds; the terraces from which pigeons whirled up in a white cloud while we walked on a carpet of their feathers—were all these ghosts of vanished state, or the actual setting of the life of some rich merchant with ‘business connections’ in Liverpool and Lyons, or some Government official at that very moment speeding to Meknez or Casablanca in his 60 h.p. motor? (76).

Wharton carefully itemizes many luxury items and status symbols. These are signs of power and exploitation. Here she even notes that this wealth is created with the help of some of France and England’s most famous industrial centers. Wharton follows the standard tropes of “Strangers in the Postcolonial World” as *In Morocco* idealizes an authentic and pre-modern Arab culture, yet also detests the backwardness and cruelty of Moroccans. In this sense, Wharton’s guide is a form of colonial discourse; it is the type of literature produced by Europe that arranges, orders, creates, and controls the non-

---

<sup>80</sup> Despite her study of the subject and desire to paint a vivid picture of Moroccan history, her French Orientalist perspective often produces vague generalizations about Moroccan history. The following quotation is an example of Wharton’s remarks on the land its people: “Overripeness is indeed the characteristic of this rich and stagnant civilization. Buildings, people, customs, seem all about to crumble and fall of their own weight: the present is a perpetually prolonged past” (76).

European world.<sup>81</sup> It is precisely this genre of writing that enables European colonial power. Yet, as an American, her writing seems independent compared to the Orientalist scholarship of France at the time that had more overt political interests in writing the Maghreb.<sup>82</sup> Her vision of the wayward Arab culture legitimizes (and even openly lauds) French colonialism. What is more, Wharton's impressions demonstrate a desire to find her expectations. In the next section, I examine Wharton's attention to instances of what she glorifies as pre-modern authentic culture. Yet while some examples are overvalued, other occasions are highlighted as barbarianism to confirm the pre-existing stereotypes of North Africa and echo French colonial Orientalism. In "finding" these examples, by confirming the stereotypes, Wharton provides ample justification for French colonial governance.

### **The Authentic Morocco**

One of my favorite passages from James Joyce concerns Leopold Bloom's stereotypical imaginings of the Oriental world, which he quickly follows with the realization of the absurdity of his vision (Ulysses 73). Wharton, on the contrary, does have actual experience in country, but rather than discover a new place independent from the stereotypical images of the Oriental world, she goes in search of the stereotypes. For instance, she describes the following scene:

Fanatics in sheepskins glowering from the guarded thresholds of the mosques, fierce tribesmen with inlaid arms in their belts and the fighters' tufts of wiry hair escaping from camel's-hair turbans, mad negroes

---

<sup>81</sup> For more on the idea of "colonial discourse" see Edward Said Culture and Imperialism (1993).

<sup>82</sup> In the introduction to Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1642-1797 (1992), Peter Hulme does an excellent job defining the concept of "colonial discourse." It is Hulme's definition as much as Edward Said's that I think of when using this concept.



standing stark naked in niches of the walls and pouring down Soudanese incantations upon the fascinated crowd, consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips, lusty slave-girls with earthen oil-jars resting fat merchants by the hand, and bare-legged Berber women, tattooed and insolently gay, trading their striped blankets, or bags of dried roses and irises, for sugar, tea, or Manchester cottons—from all these hundreds of unknown and unknowable people, bound together by secret affinities, or intriguing against each other with secret hate, there emanated an atmosphere of mystery and menace more stifling than the smell of camels and spices and black bodies and smoking fry which hangs like a fog under the close roofing of the *souks*. (112-3)

This intensely descriptive passage reveals Wharton's Orientalist perception of Morocco. Exotic races are noted in detail, with adjectives that connote the danger of this situation: the tribesmen are fierce; the Negroes are mad, naked, and babble in an undecipherable tongue; the Jews look suspicious and cunning; the slave girls seem lusty; the merchants greedy; and the Berber women display their striking tattoos. While Wharton's account might be exaggerated for dramatic purposes, nevertheless the validity of her initial perception of Morocco cannot be questioned, as it is merely her opinion (albeit one heavily influenced by Orientalist scholarship). Thus Wharton makes an authorial choice to present what appears to be a racially prejudiced condescension towards her Moroccan hosts. This account is important because it comes from an American whose perception could be free of the French colonial lens that views Morocco as an extension of France, and also as an inferior culture in need of French guidance. By echoing the French Orientalist stereotypes, Wharton solidifies and justifies French colonialism in Morocco.

In Morocco echoes many French Orientalist stereotypes, but one common refrain concerns the lack of activity. In this regard, Wharton's writing reads like an example of the French Orientalism typical of the time. Scholars like Louis Massignon shaped the discourse about the Orient to influence French thinking about how France should interact

and in fact colonize North Africa. Although many of Massignon's findings were based on his personal prejudices and political opinions, his weight as Professor at the *Collège de France* helped guide French policy and public opinion. In his study of this subject, Morocco Bound: Disorienting America's Maghreb, From Casablanca to the Marrakech Express, Brian T. Edwards describes how French artists and thinkers such as Delacroix, Ingres, Matisse, Flaubert, Fromentin, Pierre Loti, Gide, and Camus all contributed to the American understanding of Morocco:

Americans who traveled to the Maghreb—whether physically or via books or visual representations—traveled through French frames: in literature, painting, maps, ethnography, histories and travel accounts, as well as the urban design and theories of the exercise of power. American portraits did not merely extend the constructions and presumptions of European Orientalism, however, nor did they discard them. They shift the frame itself. In literary and popular representations of the Maghreb, American authors pay nearly as much attention to the French Empire as they do to those Berber and Arab cultures and North African landscapes. (2)

Wharton's description of Morocco as a wasteland country mired in an inhospitable climate that inspires a general laziness among the Moroccan people is merely a continuation of this type of French colonial discourse. In comparison, consider how Wharton describes the malaise in this extract:

Nothing endures in Islam except what human inertia has left standing and its own solidity has preserved from the elements. Or rather, nothing remains intact, and nothing wholly perishes, but the architecture, like all else, lingers on half-ruined and half-unchanged. (72)

This vision of colonial North Africa features the perception of "timelessness" so common to the Orientalist conception of the "other" pre-world.<sup>83</sup> This vision of a state without progress will later be contradicted by claims that there is too much transformation, but for

---

<sup>83</sup> Bowles would later dedicate an entire career to developing this dichotomy between the modern West and the pre-modern Maghreb.

now, the belief that colonial states offer refuge from the West's unrelenting modernity is a central feature of American writing in the postcolonial world.<sup>84</sup> Although Wharton's impressions are fleeting and surface level, they are also striking because they lack nuance and sophistication; however, as a result, she offers a more frank (if naïve and typical) American attitude towards the North African French colonies.<sup>85</sup> This point is illustrated when Wharton becomes nostalgic for the pre-modern, Orientalist's vision of Morocco that will soon be lost almost immediately after her arrival in country. From the beginning, we see the desire to find the common concept of local authenticity in its pre-modern form and the lament that European modernization will obliterate the beauty of the pre-modern culture:

Morocco is too curious, too beautiful, too rich in landscape and architecture, and above all too much of a novelty, not to attract one of the main streams of spring travel as soon as Mediterranean passenger traffic is resumed. Now that the war is over, only a few months' work on roads and railways divide it from the great torrent of "tourism"; and once that deluge is let loose, no eye will ever again see Moulay Idriss and Fez and Marrakech as I saw them. (10)

With little sense of irony, Wharton describes how the pre-modern authenticity of Morocco will soon be lost on account of the influx of tourism. It is strange that a self-styled guidebook would lament an increase in tourism; however, her point seems to

---

<sup>84</sup> For example, Wharton describes Moulay Idriss with a stark binary contrast between the ruins of Roman civilization and Muslim chaos. "So the two dominations look at each other across the valley: one, the lifeless Roman ruin, representing a system, an order, a social conception that still run through all our modern ways; the other, the untouched Moslem city, more dead and sucked back into an unintelligible past than any broken architrave of Greece or Rome" (48-9). It is this type of writing that favors Western civilization and discounts the very existence of Arab/Muslim culture and achievement.

<sup>85</sup> However, like the characters of *The Sheltering Sky*, Wharton is determined to find the "real" North Africa that lingers in decay independent of European influence. The difference is that Port and Kit want to escape Western modernity—whereas for Wharton, North Africa merely represents a curious glimpse into a dissipating heart of darkness.

indicate that the arrival of modern construction, in the form of transportation improvements, will soon diminish the innocence of “true” Morocco.<sup>86</sup> Of course, these comments are careful to distinguish the fact that Wharton did experience the “true” Morocco if only just in the nick of time. The fear of tourism is not an isolated claim; later Wharton describes the French administration’s struggle to preserve Moroccan authenticity:

In spite of the incessant efforts of General Lyautey’s administration to preserve the old monuments of Morocco from injury, and her native arts and industries from the corruption of European bad taste, the impression of mystery and remoteness which the country now produces must inevitably vanish with the approach of the “Circular Ticket.” (10)<sup>87</sup>

Again, the writer grieves for the effects of tourism, but interestingly, it is noted that European tourism specifically will ruin the authenticity of Morocco. This familiar argument to preserve the pre-modern coincides with other American characters in this dissertation that need to escape the ugly, modern Western world.

Despite the constant threat of Western tourists contaminating the traditions of Morocco, there remain some unspoiled treasures, according to Wharton. The city of Salé is authentic because it has literally been closed off to outsiders:

Not till two or three years ago was it completely pacified, and when it opened its gates to the infidel it was still, as it is to-day, the type of the untouched Moroccan city—so untouched that, with the sunlight irradiating its cream-coloured walls and the blue-white domes above them, it rests on

---

<sup>86</sup> James Buzzard comments on the tourist’s desire to not be a tourist (in his words to be an “anti-tourist”) in his work The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918 (1993). Buzzard writes the following: “No tourist ‘intends’ the transformation or violation of visited places; yet, in complicity with powerful social, culture, and economic forces, each tourist helps to effect such transformation. While tourists pursue their anti-touristic ends, they fuel tourism’s industry and its coercive constructions of the foreign” (12). Still, Wharton seems reluctant to admit that her “research” is part of the tourism industry.

<sup>87</sup> More on General Lyautey in the section on the French colonial victories.

its carpet of rich fruit-gardens like some rare specimen of Arab art on a strip of old Oriental velvet. (35-6)

First of all, this desire to discover the untouched native soil is common in colonial literature. Be it Conrad's Heart of Darkness or Hemingway's explorations into East Africa, the Western voyeur wants to be the first Caucasian to interact and observe the "real thing." Secondly, touching on a subject I will address later, Salé is especially "authentic" because of its reputation for danger and barbarity. Now that the doors to the city have been forced open to outsiders by the French, its purity is revealed and may be commodified for the tourist. Wharton unapologetically gazes upon this forbidden city and relishes the occasion to look at an idealized vision of pure Arabian culture. Salé delights because it lives up to the stereotypes that literature has created about the Arab world:

Everything that the reader of the Arabian Nights expects to find is here: the whitewashed niches wherein pale youths sit weaving the fine matting's for which the town is still famous; the tunneled passages where indolent merchants with bare feet crouch in their little kennels hung with richly ornamented saddlery and arms, or with slippers of pale citron leather and bright embroidered babouches; the stalls with fruit, olives, tunny-fish, vague syrupy sweets, candles for saint's tombs, Mantegnesque garlands of red and green peppers, griddle-cakes sizzling on red-hot pans, and all the varied wares and cakes and condiments that the lady in the tale of 'The Three Calendars'. (36)

These descriptions seem to alternate between what is actually observed and what the eye wants to find. Although The Book of One Thousand and One Nights may evoke images of the Arab world, modern Morocco must be a bit different than the Persian setting in the imaginative vision of that collection.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Wharton finds other occasions to imply that present-day Morocco retains much of its ancient past. In this scene she studies a festival that commemorates St. Hamadch and his slave who committed suicide when Hamadch died. It is interesting in the colonial context that we have a report of worshipping a slave who loved his master. Wharton concludes that only blacks are cutting themselves (identifying with the slave) while the whites just dance

This type of description by Wharton illustrates Edward Said's point that Orientalist discourse shapes our perception of reality, and therefore our perception of reality is skewed by our exposure to Western "learning" about the other.<sup>89</sup> That is to say, Orientalist writing as such is not concerned so much with what is actually apparent "in Morocco" but instead acts as a conduit for furthering the stereotype or shared common knowledge created by the Western scholarly community to explain and control the East. Although it may not be Wharton's express desire to "control the East" her writing in this manner extends the tropes of Orientalism, and it also contributes to the great body of French writing that "writes" Morocco.

Continuing on the theme of reaffirming stereotypes, Wharton describes the flowers, the springs, color and feeling of one area called Chella in Morocco as having the following effect, "[. . .] to the traveler new to Africa, the very type and embodiment of its old contrasts of heat and freshness, of fire and languor. It is like a desert traveller's dream in his last fever" (40). Again, what interests me is the idea that a "traveler new to Africa" would find this setting, these contrasts to be specifically authentic because of the dreamlike quality of this vision that validates Africa as a mystical land—a validation

---

(identifying with the saint). She writes the following: "it enables the devotees to divide their ritual duties into two classes, the devotions of the free men being addressed to the saint who died in his bed, while the slaves belong to the slave, and must therefore simulate his horrid end. And this is the reason why most of the white caftans simply rock and writhe, while most of the humble blue shirts drip with blood" (57). Here Wharton can point both the existence of racism and barbarity all in one instance.

<sup>89</sup> Briefly stated, Said explains this concept as follows in Orientalism: "Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact" (20-21).

achieved not only in literature, but also observed in person by Wharton. Furthermore, Wharton condenses the great differences between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa into just “Africa.” While normally North Africa engenders very different stereotypes than the sub-Saharan, here Chella is emblematic of the entire continent. In any case, it is precisely this sort of reportage that justifies stereotypes and generalizations of Africa.

Wharton continues to affirm her prior convictions about Morocco, finding her previous research valid when she observes the “Oriental life” that she wants to see. In this case she finds the timelessness, or what might otherwise be described as the lack of progress:

Every step of the way in North Africa corroborates the close observations of the early travellers, whether painters or narrators, and shows the unchanged character of the Oriental life that the Venetians pictured, and Leo Africanus and Windus and Charles Cochelet described. (71-2)

The earlier travelers shape what Wharton sees in Morocco. This discovery is a self-fulfilling prophecy; thus, when there is a desire to find the touchstone Oriental picturesque, it is easily done. Likewise, when Wharton wants to find the dark side of the Oriental character, that as well may be found. In either case, searching for a certain characteristic produces a heavily biased vision of Morocco. Consider also how Wharton can admit that reality occasionally falls short of expectations. In describing the bazaars of Fez she comments, “They are less ‘Oriental’ than one had expected, if ‘Oriental’ means colour and gaiety” (94). Here we find disappointment as the bazaar fails to live up to colorful Oriental expectations. Furthermore, this also portrays the bazaars as fake or not Oriental, as if the “real” Moroccan bazaars were elsewhere. The “if” in this quote also tacitly acknowledges that the Orient can be the inverse, a dull and sullen place, when it is not so colorful and gay.

Another element of authenticity concerns geographic proximity to Europe. It is a simple equation: the closer one remains to the Mediterranean, the more Moroccan culture is influenced by Europe, and the more Morocco has been influenced by Europe, the less authentic it is. Typical of the Americans in this study, Wharton finds the multicultural Moroccan cities ugly versions of Western modernity:

For Tangier swarms with people in European clothes, there are English, French and Spanish signs above its shops, and cab-stands in its squares; it belongs, as much as Algiers, to the familiar dog-eared world of travel—and there, beyond the last dip of ‘the Mountain’ lies the world of mystery, with the rosy dawn just breaking over it. (23-4)

This quotation could read as a prelude for The Sheltering Sky or Dark Star Safari because it portrays the exact same attitude. It expresses distaste for Western culture and an extreme loathing for bastardized Western culture. Again the idea remains that the real country begins where all Western culture ends.

Conversely, sometimes European influence can be positive:

The gay bazaars, the gaily –painted houses, the flowers and flute-playing of North Africa, are found in her Mediterranean ports, in contact with European influences. The farther west she extends, the more she becomes self-contained, somber, uninfluenced, a gloomy fanatic with her back to the walls of the Atlantic and the Atlas [. . .] This ashen crowd swarming gloomily through the dark tunnels represents the real Moghreb that is close to the wild tribes of the ‘hinterland’ and the grim feudal fortresses of the Atlas. (94-5)

Yet again, authenticity is distance from Europe. The more removed you are from Western culture the closer you get to the authentic. While Wharton expresses some admiration for the picturesque beauty of seaside Morocco, clearly emphasis is focused on the forbidding “Europeless” interior that remains wild, pre-historic, dangerous, bizarre, and of course—authentic. Thus, the tone of this reflection shows some ambivalence in Wharton’s perception of Morocco. It seems that she is unable to reconcile the opposing Orientalist



tropes of beauty and barbarity; nevertheless, she does admit that European influence can be both good and bad, and that Morocco can be cultured or wild. What is missing is the synthesis of these realizations that would allow her to proclaim that Morocco, like perhaps the rest of the world, is too multi-dynamic to be simply understood as its stereotype.<sup>90</sup>

However, upon further reflection, Wharton reminds readers that one can go too far into the heart of darkness. The following presentation of North Africa reflects Wharton's frustration when her Orientalist stereotypes cannot be confirmed. While traveling to the deep south of the Moroccan interior she finds an "un Arab morocco," a place where there is no evidence of Islam just "animal worship, and all the gross fetishistic beliefs from which Mohammed dreamed of freeing Africa" (96-7). This vision of the interior culture (or as it is implied, the lack of culture) is also something of a disappointment for Wharton because it does not conform to her ideas about Morocco being an Islamic state. Having gone too far, Wharton is left without a criterion to judge these people, and so her guide skips over these difficult-to-categorize regions. This point is important because it demonstrates how Wharton's reflections are based upon Orientalist stereotypes. She actively seeks to find proof of the stereotypes while glazing over the inconsistencies.

---

<sup>90</sup> Describing the relationship between colonial discourse and ambivalence, Homi Bhabha writes "[. . .] colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce slippage, its excess, its difference" (The Location of Culture 122).

Shortly after these comments, Wharton returns to more familiar territory, the extremes of Fez where the Oriental stereotypes can still be found in abundance. She describes the scene:

Far off, from the red purgatory between the walls, sounds the savage thrum-thrum of a negro orgy; here all is peace and perfume. A minaret springs up between the roofs like a palm, and from its balcony the little white figure bends over and drops a blessing on all the loveliness and all the squalor. (102)

Here Wharton portrays the familiar Orientalist Morocco, as Fez is both a “negro orgy” and peace and perfume; Fez is Arabesque minaret and European balcony, beauty and squalor, that is to say—it is the typical binary illogic of Orientalist representation.<sup>91</sup>

Wharton looks for the extreme and stereotypical elements of Arab culture and finds them. Her results justify the stereotypes she arrived with. It is clear at this point that Wharton seeks a very particular type of authenticity in Morocco, one that is not the actual experience of being there, but the romanticized vision of the past perpetuated by Orientalist art and scholarship.

### **The Search for Authentic Pre-modern Morocco and Disdain for Modernity**

The search for authenticity and the joy of finding that perfect picturesque or horrifyingly accurate vision of the Orient is offset by the frustration of discovering Morocco to be an evolving and modernizing land. Finding what you are looking for is a complicated balance between accessibility and authenticity, worship for the pre-modern, and distaste for modernity. Wole Soyinka describes this phenomenon in colonial

---

<sup>91</sup> Jyotsna G. Singh comments on this phenomenon in Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues (1996): “From the earliest encounters with non-European natives, going as far back as antiquity, Europeans have described their travels in terms of discovering marvels and monstrosities” (2). Although Wharton is American, I believe her travelogue fits into this grand tradition of reporting the extremes from an exotic location back to Western readers.

literature as “Tarzanism.” Thus the European fetishizes any element of African culture that seems pre-modern (rituals, dress, dances, art, etc) even in the face of the existence of modern life.<sup>92</sup> Wharton clearly wants to value the pre-modern elements of Morocco as instances of authenticity, while she simultaneously rejects examples of modernity as European trespassing on Moroccan soil. Ironically, the growth of the tourism industry undoubtedly plays a large part in the modernization of Morocco. Wharton notes that French improvements to the transportation system as well as a growing awareness in Europe of Morocco’s proximity and temperate climate has increased tourism traffic:

[. . .] in the interval since my visit this guide-book-less and almost roadless empire has become one of the most popular and customary scenes of winter travel—travel by rail and motor; still more difficult to conceive that, in spite of its accessibility and its conveniences, it has kept nearly all the magic and mystery of forbidden days. (15)

Indeed, Wharton considers modernization dangerous as it could erode the “magic and mystery” of an inaccessible land that was once seldom seen by outsiders. However, she blames the French colonial improvements for destroying this allure. Paradoxically these are the same improvements that also allow passage into the interior of Morocco. Adding another layer to this complex understanding of authenticity, Wharton admires the efficiency of the modernization project so long as it allows for unobstructed gawking into the authentic culture. That is to say, Wharton wants a version of Morocco that is far from Europe but not too far, barbaric but safe, and accessible but not touristy. For example, Wharton describes how the French roads and tourist industry allow for easy access into the culture of Morocco:

---

<sup>92</sup> See Soyinka, Wole. “Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition”. Transitions 48, 1975: 38-44.

So skillfully, in fact, have the 5,000 kilometers of rail and road been insinuated into the folds of the brown hills, so tastefully and tactfully have crumbling Moorish palaces been transformed into luxurious modern hotels, that, from the vantage-ground of the new Morocco, the tourist may still peep down at ease into the old. (15)

This sentiment seems a bit more paradoxical. Although the desire to peep into the old authentic Morocco is still there, former palaces are being modernized to accommodate the foreign tourists. This point encompasses the desire to have first-world amenities while witnessing the pre-modernity and untouched authenticity of the local. Keeping the colony in a state of static representation of otherness remains a recurring desire of the colonist and also the American it seems.

Striking a different note, Wharton cautions that the authentic Morocco that seems to have only existed before World War One is dissipating at the expense of modernization. She writes the following:

To see Morocco during the war was therefore to see it in the last phase of its curiously abrupt transition from remoteness and danger to security and accessibility; at a moment when its aspect and its customs were still almost unaffected by European influences, and when the 'Christian' might taste the transient joy of wandering unmolested in cities of ancient mystery and hostility, whose inhabitants seemed hardly aware of his intrusion. (23)

The desire to see the un-European and authentic non-Western world is juxtaposed by the desire to be comfortable and safe. It is confusing to try to understand why accessibility, safety, and comfort are being praised if hostility and danger make up the authentic experience. This passage also raises the rather naive idea that the tourist can be an invisible voyeur.<sup>93</sup> While Wharton has admitted that an influx of tourism will surely

---

<sup>93</sup> On this point Buzard makes the following comment: "Anti-tourists wanted to show a uniquely meaningful relationship with visited places, but they were wary of exerting any

erode the charm of Morocco, she does not include her own intrusions as destructive, a point that highlights Evelyn Waugh's witticism that "the tourist is the other fellow."

Part of being a tourist typically involves searching for examples of local culture. Yet, Wharton's search primarily concerns looking exclusively for examples of pre-modern culture, as only the pre-modern Moroccan culture is valued as authentic and worthy of admiration. This section is in reference to what to do on the drive away from Spanish Morocco and towards the French frontier:

At the first turn out of Tangier, Europe and the European disappear, and as soon as the motor begins to dip and rise over the arid little hills beyond the last gardens one is sure that every figure on the road will be picturesque instead of prosaic, every garment graceful instead of grotesque. One knows, too, that there will be no more omnibuses or trams or motor-cyclists, but only long lines of camels rising up in Brown friezes against the sky, little black donkeys trotting across the scrub under bulging pack-saddles, and noble draped figures walking beside them or majestically perching on their rumps. (25)

Notice how Wharton reports not what she witnesses but what she wants to see. She desires, like many of the other Americans in this study, to observe the disappearance of European modernity, to be swept away by a vision of Africa that does not have any machines or instruments but instead remains rutted in the past.<sup>94</sup>

---

of the transformative force so visibly and clumsily wielded by tourists and the industry they fostered" (12).

<sup>94</sup> As Wharton ventures further away from Europe, she finds varying degrees of modernity, but the desire to find the pre-modern holds. In this further example she describes the feeling of looking at Rabat and Salé: "One seems to be not in Africa itself, but in the Africa that northern crusaders may have dreamed of in snow-bound castles by colder shores of the same ocean. This is what Moghreb must have looked like to the confused imagination of the Middle Ages, to Norman knights burning to ransom the Holy Places, or Hansa merchants devising, in steep-roofed towns, of Barbary and the long caravans bringing apes and gold-powder from the south" (32). In this passage Wharton speculates as to how others may have imagined Africa in the Middle Ages. Here we find confusion with the actual appearance of these Moroccan cities as well as a wish to see Rabat and Salé as pre-modern.

Although Wharton typically applauds colonialism, specifically the present French administration, she is critical of colonial projects that interfere with her idea of authentic, that is to say pre-modern, Moroccan architecture. Wharton proposes that one justification for colonial modernization might be a perverse desire to explore Moroccan neighborhoods that had previously excluded Europeans:

Before Morocco passed under the rule of the great governor who now administers it, the European colonists made short work of the beauty and privacy of the Old Arab towns in which they established themselves. [. . .] The modern European colonist apparently imagined that to plant his warehouses, cafés and cinema-palaces within the walls which for so long had fiercely excluded him was the most impressive way of proclaiming his domination. (34-5)<sup>95</sup>

Although this quotation admits that North African towns have been colonized and interfered with for thousands of years, it seems to miss the point that the results of these years of interference are the basis for the present day authentic culture of Morocco. This means that much of the building throughout Moroccan history is due to organic, but also colonial, growth. To prevent the French from modernizing these towns would seem to be an argument for keeping Morocco as some sort of museum piece, and thereby enforce a static culture that remains in place to be visited for its antique qualities. This example demonstrates how complicated Wharton's position actually is: She can argue both for and against colonialism in this situation.<sup>96</sup> Wharton's position is in-between advocating

---

<sup>95</sup> More specifically, Wharton cites the following legacy of colonialism: "On the west coast, especially, where the Mediterranean peoples, from the Phoenicians to the Portuguese, have had trading-posts for over two thousand years, the harm done to such seaboard towns as Tangier, Rabat and Casablanca is hard to estimate" (35).

<sup>96</sup> Wharton extends this point when discussing the effects of General Lyautney's campaign: "Before General Lyautney came to Morocco Rabat had been subjected to the indignity of European 'improvements', and one must traverse boulevards scored with tram-lines, and pass between hotel-terraces and cafes and cinema—palaces, to reach the surviving nucleus of the once beautiful native town. Then, at the turn of a commonplace

colonialism (because it stabilizes the region for tourism) and condemning colonialism (for advancing the culture into modernity thus destroying the rustic charm). Her argument is from the selfish perspective of a tourist, but her voice is important because she is an “independent” observer of the colonial struggle between Morocco and France.

Wharton derides colonial modernization, the construction of transportation services, accommodation, and food and recreation services because apparently they are too much in the style of Europe. Without consideration for the improvements that these services might contribute to the average Moroccan’s quality of life, the new services are solely lamented for bringing the problems of modernity (which seems to be primarily noise). This line of argument implies that it is only the aesthetic value of a place that matters—of particular importance is the location’s ability to please the tourist’s eye. Wharton’s point might have seemed more understandable if she were to criticize the problems of European culture, of modernity, or of forced modernization via colonialism, but instead she implies that the problem is superficial.<sup>97</sup> Yet this criticism of newer or more foreign aspects of Morocco’s image are mixed with an extreme distaste for the stagnancy of Moroccan culture:

[Moroccans are a people] who have gone on wearing the same clothes, observing the same customs, believing in the same fetishes, and using the same saddles, ploughs, looms, and dye-stuffs as in the days when the foundations of the first mosque of El Kairouiyin were laid. (199)

---

street, one comes upon it suddenly. The shops and cafes cease, the jingle of trams and the trumpeting of motor-horns die out, and here, all at once, are silence and solitude, and the dignified reticence of the windowless Arab house-fronts” (144).

<sup>97</sup> Although the Americans in this dissertation are surely disillusioned with the West as a result of the World Wars, they rarely articulate modern warfare as the primary cause for suspicion with modernity. In this example, Wharton (like Theroux in Africa) seems to merely want to escape the trappings of her social and city life.

This observation could be read as a nonjudgmental comment on Morocco's lack of cultural evolution or progression towards modernity; however, she reiterates the point shortly afterwards by clearly critiquing the backwardness of this society. Wharton claims, "The whole of civilian Moslem architecture from Persia to Morocco is based on four unchanging conditions: a hot climate, slavery, polygamy, and the segregation of women" (202). This quote stretches its claim to include all Arab cultures from the Middle East and across North Africa, but besides this gross generalization, the comment condemns the same lack of change and lack of modernity that had earlier been praised. This ambivalence typifies her position on Morocco—Wharton wants to praise and condemn Morocco, she articulates these criticism on the theme of modernity (or lack there of); however, modernity is both good and bad depending on her humor at the time of each observation.

Wharton labors this point of modernity and authenticity as she travels further inland. She continues by insulting Moroccans and admiring the French. While the French might be occasionally reprimanded for ushering modernity into the picturesque Moroccan street scene, In Morocco is fiercely pro-French yet anti-modern. In this passage Wharton describes the difficulty of communication with the women of Moroccan harems. It is important to note how the failure is blamed on the locals:

The farther one travels from the Mediterranean and Europe the closer the curtains of the women's quarters are drawn. The only harem in which we were allowed an interpreter was that of the Sultan himself; in the private harems of Fez and Rabat a French-speaking relative transmitted (or professed to transmit) our remarks; in Marrakech, the great nobleman and dignitary who kindly invited me to visit his household was deaf to our hint that the presence of a lady from one of the French Government schools might facilitate our intercourse. (154-5)



This statement asserts that the farther you get from Europe the more exciting and authentic Morocco becomes, but at the same time, the people and way of life also become more primitive. This passage also mocks the local inability to speak French. Finally, for all of the attention paid to the uneducated and boring nature of the Arab girls, she does not allow the possibility that this situation is created partly because she cannot speak Arabic and she does not have a good translation of the conversation. All in all, behind the demand for authentic, pure, and all-Arab Morocco, there is a deep distrust of and condescending attitude towards Arab culture. The problem of translation and the French influence on Wharton's experience in Morocco are the subjects of the next section.

### **View From Above**

Wharton admires the French colonial administration of Morocco. While she occasionally has slight reservations, mostly concerning the upkeep and outward appearance of the country, France is commended for saving Arab culture from self-destruction, for providing a better-quality government, and for inspiring the Moroccan people by demonstrating the superiority of French culture. There are two main reasons that France is so heavily lauded in *In Morocco*; for one, Wharton draws much of her information from French Orientalist scholarship about North Africa.<sup>98</sup> Secondly, French officials conduct her tour of the country.

Wharton recognizes a series of French works of scholarship as well as “the many other cultivated and cordial French officials, military and civilian, who, at each stage of my journey, did their amiable best to answer my questions and open my eyes” (13). It

---

<sup>98</sup> She cites M. Augustin Bernard, M. H. Saladin, M. Alfred de Tarde, and M. Gaston Migeon, titles such as *Le Maroc*, *Conferences Marocaines*, and *France-Maroc*. In sum, all works by French scholars of Morocco.

seems peculiar that Wharton studies Morocco through French eyes without considering how this perspective could influence her perception of Morocco. In turn, no thanks are offered to any of her Moroccan hosts, nor is there any real effort to meet Moroccans without a French chaperone. The French officials provide access to rarely seen events such as a large religious ceremony, the sacrifice of the sheep, which women are typically forbidden from (131). Wharton's inclusion in this festival is only because of the French official's force, yet she fails to consider the context of how she participates at this event.

The French provide safety in events like the sacrifice ceremony. This level of safety encourages Wharton to feel that her presence is not a disruption to the normalcy of these celebrations. That said, Wharton fails to consider the likelihood that the view from the position of power offers a distorted image of Morocco. For example, on the arrival in Meknez Wharton writes, "All that evening, from the garden of the Military Subdivision on the opposite height, we sat and looked across at the dark tree-clumps and moonlit walls of Meknez, and listened to its fantastic history" (58). Even while actually in country, she remains at a very safe distance from the Moroccan people while inside the French military complex listening to stories of Moroccan history told by French soldiers and administrators. Although present, she remains removed from the experience and the perspective of Moroccans. This point is very important because it questions the legitimacy of Wharton's impressions. If her observations from the visit are essentially an extension of French Orientalist scholarship, conducted with the guiding influence of the French colonial administrators of Morocco, then Wharton does not offer a unique perspective on Morocco. Instead, she further validates France by concurring with its history and interpretation.

Yet, Wharton continues to portray her stay as the authentic Moroccan experience. While it is true that she ventures farther into the country than most Americans of her time, her level of safety, luxury, and comfort is always assured. Accommodations range from the Sutlan's former summer-palace/harem to the home of the Resident-General (73). She stays in a very luxurious room while in Marrakech, the room of the Grand Vizier's Favorite (108-9). Meals are often taken with the French colonial military forces while on the road, further limiting interaction with locals and continuing to isolate her experience in a pocket of French influence (103). It should be noted, at least this far, that she has far more interaction with French colonials than Arabs. Essentially Wharton is replicating the French notions and experience of Morocco while positioning herself as an independent observer.

On two telling occasions Wharton draws attention to the sweeping view afforded to her thanks to her connections in Morocco. Both of these cases are metaphors for her general approach to studying Morocco. In the first instance, Wharton expands for several pages about the beauty and mystery of the mosque El Kairouiyin. Part of what makes El Kairouiyin so attractive is the fact that Christians are not allowed to enter. That being so, the Director of Fine Arts (a Frenchman) finds a rooftop vantage point that allows outsiders to peak into the secret world from which they are excluded. Wharton writes, "It was so closely guarded from below that from our secret coign of vantage we seemed to be looking down into the heart of forbidden things" (87). For Wharton, there is no shame in doing so. Her perspective is distorted, literally looking down on the Moroccans thanks to the power of her French guide, but Wharton fails to realize that such a "view" of the mosque is an outsider's and a colonizer's gaze. Secondly, in one rare instance when

Wharton is invited to the house of a Moroccan “high Government official” who has a house with an amazing view, we are briefly encouraged to think that she is interacting with Moroccans (144-5). Yet, even in this setting, the official is clearly wealthy and privileged. The view from his house seems an appropriate metaphor for Wharton’s general outlook on Morocco, a sweeping view from a position of privilege that confirms stereotypes by ignoring the specifics on the ground level of Moroccan society.<sup>99</sup>

### **Beastly Moroccan People**

As a direct result of Wharton’s lack of interaction with Moroccans, and her biased French perspective, Moroccans are, by and large, portrayed as an uncivilized, backwards, and inferior people. Predictably, when Moroccans are seen in more primitive or pre-modern settings they are romanticized for their simple ways. However, she also observes signs of cruelty, laziness, and corruption. In Wharton’s portrayal of the Moroccan people it is evident that her Orientalist perspective dominates her understanding of Morocco.

Wharton finds the rural villages to be inhabited by animal-like natives. In this excerpt, she describes an incident of asking for directions from these beastly people: “One of these villages seemed to be inhabited entirely by blacks, big friendly creatures who came out to tell us by which trail to reach the bridge over the yellow *oued*” (47).

---

<sup>99</sup> Along these lines it may be helpful to consider Wharton’s impressions of a festival in Morocco. Here I am demonstrating how Wharton’s aesthetics heavily influence her perception of these events. In this case, the festival is grotesque, but it is also worthy of Wharton’s attention because it is authentic and savage: “Any normal person who has seen a dance of the Aïssaouas and watched them swallow thorns and hot coals, slash themselves with knives, and roll on the floor in epilepsy, must have privately longed, after the first excitement was over, to fly from the repulsive scene. The Hamadchas are much more savage than Aïssaouas, and carry much farther their display of cataleptic anaesthesia; and, knowing this, I had wondered how long I should be able to stand the sight of what was going on below our terrace. But the beauty of the setting redeemed the bestial horror” (54).

Less than human, these black “creatures” are at least friendly and helpful. But even if Wharton is mildly sympathetic towards these villagers, her description echoes the racism so common to colonial thinking. Besides portraying the Moroccan people in general as savages, Wharton also objectifies the women in this same village:

They were handsome blue-bronze creatures, bare to the waist, with tight astrakhan curls and firmly sculptured legs and ankles; and all around them, like a swarm of gnats, danced countless jolly children, naked as lizards, with the spindle legs and globular stomachs of children fed only on cereals. (47)

All of the typical colonial stereotypes are included here. These are dark, sensual women with great bodies. They are animal like in their sexuality, producing too many children, and they are mired in poverty and malnourishment. Yet there is pre-modern delight in admiring these exotic, beautiful women.<sup>100</sup> Although there is clearly less joy in examining their poverty stricken children. This ambivalence is typical of her observations—she wants to find the beauty and also the horror in the exotic.

While the black men and women of one village are portrayed as physically and culturally primitive, Moroccans in general are depicted as intolerant. For instance, the Jews are confined, a point that draws comparison to Middle Age Europe:

North African Jews are still compelled to live in ghettos, into which they are locked at night, as in France and Germany in the Middle Ages; and until latterly the men have been compelled to go unarmed, to wear black gabardines and black slippers, to take off their shoes when they passed near a mosque or a saint’s tomb, and in various other ways to manifest their subjection to the ruling race. (98)

In this case, Moroccans are cruel and primitive. The development of Arab culture is directly compared to Europe, a comparison that determines that North Africa is inferior.

---

<sup>100</sup> While visiting a festival, Wharton describes one of the dancers as “an inspired-looking creature” (55). This description further highlights her tendency to label Moroccans as beastly.

However, despite Wharton's concerns about the injustice of such anti-Semitism, Morocco's static culture does allow the tourist to visit a Jewish ghetto in original, authentic condition, "before foreign sanitation has lighted up its dark places" (99). The opportunity to experience medieval Europe in Morocco is clearly one of the most valuable draws for the country.

The locals' savagery extends beyond anti-Semitism to include the support of an active and vicious slave trade too. Describing the local ways, Wharton comments on the slave trade: "[. . .] yellow deserts whence negroes are secretly brought across the Atlas to that most recess of the bazaar where the ancient traffic in flesh and blood still surreptitiously goes on" (112).<sup>101</sup> Clearly Wharton is not supportive of the slave trade, and she implies that it continues only in secret without French consent. Nevertheless, the poetic quality of the "yellow deserts;" the awe inspiring history of this example of an "ancient traffic;" and the raw, sensual description of "flesh and blood" creates a vision of Morocco that is captivating to the voyeur's eye even as the culture may be brutal. It is also worth noting that these comments, while continually disparaging of Arabs, are never critical of the French.

Wharton exposes Moroccans as a cruel and backwards people, but she also mocks what she sees as their vain attempt at modernity and sophistication by labeling their culture "non-mechanical." She describes a general ineptitude and longing for modernity that falls short of European standards. For example, she writes:

---

<sup>101</sup> Continuing from the last comment "All of these many threads of the native life, woven of greed and lust, of fetishism and fear and blind hate of the stranger, form, in the *souks*, a thick network in which at times one's feet seem literally to stumble" (112). Interesting how Wharton is aware of the "hate for the stranger," but also gives her attention to the savagery of these people.

The passion for clocks and other mechanical contrivances is common to all un-mechanical races, and every chief's palace in North Africa contains a collection of timepieces which might be called striking if so many had not ceased to go. (137)

Wharton's turn of phrase is witty, but this point is just plain bizarre and racist. This argument is based upon one tailored observation in order to pronounce the entire culture as primitive. The overarching result of these thoughts on Morocco suggests that the culture is completely inferior to Europe. This point implies that Morocco is in need of the guiding hand of France. In addition, Morocco is backwards in a gruesome but also picturesque way that allows the tourist to experience the barbarity of his or her ancestors' distant past.

In a more introspective moment, Wharton conveys how she believes she is being perceived by a group of Moroccan women. In doing so she allows us to imagine how alien her attitudes and judgments must be to the locals. These women speculate that Wharton must be sad to be without children. They also describe Wharton's clothing as ugly. This degree of candor allows a rare glimpse of the North African impression of Wharton. However, Wharton seizes this moment to again expose the lack of a sophisticated culture in Morocco. This rebuttal can be read as a vindictive swipe at the women who mock her. The scene is created when Wharton inquires about the family origins of a French/Algerian woman:

A bewildered pause. Finally: 'I don't know...from Switzerland, I think,' brought out this shining example of the Higher Education. In spite of Algerian 'advantages' the poor girl could speak only a few words of her mother's tongue. She had kept the European features and complexion, but her soul was the soul of Islam. The harem had placed its powerful imprint upon her, and she looked at me with the same remote and passive eyes as the daughters of the house. (147)

The concept of the “soul of Islam” enters a dangerous arena of racial and religious stereotypes as well as faux-science. Also, Wharton’s mocking of the Algerian education seems bitter, as does her opinion of the girl’s inability to speak French despite her heritage and Gallic features. Wharton seems to imply that the destructive pull of Islamic anti-culture is so strong and persuasive that even a girl of partial European heritage can be corrupted into the lazy and unthinking ways of the harem.<sup>102</sup>

Wharton continues her assault by drawing attention to the Moroccan inability to speak French or produce stimulating conversation: “[T]here are few points of contact between the open-air Occidental mind and beings imprisoned in a conception of sexual and domestic life based on slave-service and incessant espionage” (152). This quotation enforces the stereotype of the differences between the Oriental and Occidental mind. Wharton is critical of those unable to speak French, and she laments the inability to communicate naturally with these women, yet Wharton never expresses any personal desire to learn Arabic. By not attempting to communicate through Arabic, Wharton emphasizes the legitimacy of French colonialism in expecting these Moroccans to communicate with her via the colonizer’s language. In addition, this critique also insults Moroccan intelligence by implying that the lazy and opulent life of the harem discourages learning. Wharton continues to emphasize this point by asserting the uselessness of Moroccan women:

The Moroccan lady knows little of cooking, needle-work, or any household arts. When her child is ill she can only hang it with amulets and

---

<sup>102</sup> Ironically, almost comically, when the conversation is over “slaves and tea” arrive (147). Yet the slave tea service is not questioned—instead, Wharton compares the black slave women to parrots. Essentially, the slaves are admired for their exotic appearance (151).



wail over it; the great lady of the Fazi palace is as ignorant of hygiene as the peasant-woman of the bled. (152)

This bitter estimation may seem contrary to her praise for the colorful, Arabesque architecture, marketplaces, and countryside; however, these stereotypes and this type of ambivalence have always co-existed comfortably in Orientalist discourse.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, it sometimes appears that Wharton's sole frustration with Morocco is the presence of too many Moroccans. The critique of an inactive life in the Moroccan home, the male dominated household, and the superstitious approach towards healthcare are also the general qualities that are valued for their authenticity, backwardness, pre-modernity, and picturesque qualities that draw tourists to Morocco. Still, Wharton's critique continues in this scene to also touch on education and sexuality:

Ignorance, unhealthiness and a precocious sexual initiation prevail in all classes. Education consists in learning by heart endless passages of the Koran, and amusement in assisting at spectacles that would be unintelligible to Western children, but that the pleasantries of the harem make perfectly comprehensible to Moroccan infancy. At eight or nine the little girls are married, at twelve the son of the house is 'given his first negress'; and thereafter, in the rich and leisured class, both sexes live till old age in an atmosphere of sensuality without seduction. (153)

Wharton seems to assume that Moroccan culture is inferior because it is unintelligible to Westerners, without considering the fact that some Westerners fail to try to appreciate how Moroccan culture is different. Typical Orientalist claims are reinforced, as Morocco is overly religious—in her example for memorizing the Koran; yet conversely, Moroccans are also morally backwards in their treatment of women and usage of slave

---

<sup>103</sup> It should be noted that Wharton is also critical of Moroccan men: "And all these colourless eventless lives depend on the favour of one fat tyrannical man, bloated with good living and authority, himself almost as inert and sedentary as his women, and accustomed to impose his whims on them ever since he ran about the same patio as a little short smocked boy" (152).

labor. Here Moroccan women are portrayed as sexualized objects that somehow simultaneously lack the higher powers of persuasion and sophisticated sex appeal. These women are animal like in their sexuality, an analogy that Wharton makes herself when she notices a dove in the room, “[the dove] looked at me with the same resigned and vacant eyes as the ladies I had just left” (153). These dignified Moroccan “ladies” seem to be nothing more than curiosities. Certainly they are not worthy of Wharton’s respect as they lack any intellectual power or cultural sophistication. Yet Wharton reminds the readers that this harem fares better than most because of its European connections.<sup>104</sup> I draw repeated attention to these observations because they reinforce French Orientalism. Wharton’s claims help validate colonialism because she presents her research as an unbiased, and independent American perspective on Morocco.

The women of European heritage and upbringing simply exude a sense of greater experience and class. However, despite these alleged cultural and racial advantages, Wharton senses some sense of longing as these Georgian girls sadly look at photographs of themselves during happier days in Europe:

But to the sumptuously-clad exiles these faded photographs and ugly dresses represented freedom, happiness, and all they had forfeited when fate (probably in the shape of an opulent Hebrew couple ‘travelling with their daughters’) carried them from the Bosphorus to the Atlas. (159)

Even a frumpy life in Eastern Europe is better than North Africa. Somehow it seems unsurprising that suspicious Jewish people are to blame for indenturing these Eastern Europeans.

---

<sup>104</sup> Notice Wharton’s description of these women with European lineage: “My companions had told me that the Caid’s harem was recruited from Georgia, and that the ladies receiving us had been brought up in the relative freedom of life in Constantinople, and it was easy to read in their wistfully smiling eyes memories of a life unknown to the passive daughters of Morocco” (158).

While Wharton is ruthless in her criticism of Moroccan women, she is also critical of Moroccan men. When invited into the home of the Caid, she describes the “great man” who controls his estate and harem as both loyal servant to France and a dramatically exotic figure, in other words, like someone from a Henry Rider Haggard novel.<sup>105</sup> This noble savage may look suspect, but Wharton commends his bravery and loyalty. Nevertheless, her marginally positive description continues to become suspicious of the Caid’s intelligence and motivation:

Like all Orientals, this hero of the Atlas, who spends half his life with his fighting clansmen in a mediaeval stronghold among the snows, and the other half rolling in a 60 h.p. motor over smooth French roads, seems unaware of any degrees of beauty or appropriateness in objects of European design, and places against the exquisite mosaics and traceries of his Fazi craftsmen the tawdriest bric-a-brac of the cheap department-store. (156)

After starting with the sweeping generalization about “Orientals,” Wharton continues to specifically critique the Caid’s work. She paints him as in-between the unchanging pre-modern existence of military strategy, yet conversely, also comfortable in an automobile driving over the French colonial roads. However, in both scenarios, the Caid is too simple to appreciate his surroundings, as he never realizes the value of traditional crafts.<sup>106</sup> Even

---

<sup>105</sup> Wharton writes the following: “This great fighter and loyal friend of France is a magnificent eagle-beaked man, brown, lean and sinewy, with vigilant eyes looking out under his carefully draped muslin turban, and negroid lips half hidden by a close black beard” (156).

<sup>106</sup> Wharton continues her assault by stating that although the Caid represents a decent sort of Arab man, he still falls far short of European sophistication: “[He held] Morocco against alien enemies and internal rebellion, played a preponderant part in the defence of the French colonies in North Africa during the long struggle of the war. Enlightened, cultivated, a friend of the arts, a scholar and diplomatist, he seems, unlike many Orientals, to have selected the best in assimilating European influences. Yet when I looked at the tiny creature watching him with those anxious joyless eyes I felt once more the abyss that slavery and the seraglio put between the most Europeanized Mohammedan and the Western conception of life. The Caid’s little black slaves are well known in

the very best of the Arabs, the ones who accept Europe as their master, are still far too backwards. Hammering this point home is a final observation from the Caid's residence, where a sick boy is covered in superstitious items in an attempt to cure his illness (160). Wharton uses this last example as a means of convincing the reader that Morocco, despite its best efforts in one of the wealthiest, most powerful, and most European of homes is still a pre-modern, uncivilized, and irrational land.

More generally, Wharton comments on the ineptitude of Arab leadership. She describes Yacoub-el-Mansour as the greatest of the Moroccan sultans, but, "After his death, the Almohad empire followed the downward curve to which all Oriental rule seems destined" (187). This statement implies that European empires do not fall or falter in the absence of a strong leader. Baseless claims and generalizations about the nature of Oriental rule only serve to perpetuate Orientalist thinking about North Africa. Part of this weakness according to Wharton is the nature of Islam, a religion that inspires unquestioning servitude with a desire for criminality in the name of Allah. She writes, "The longing for a Mahdi, a Saviour, the craving for purification combined with an opportunity to murder and rob, always gave the Moslem apostle a ready opening" (189). Wharton offers an explanation for the barbarity of Islam: it was a religion and culture left too much alone.<sup>107</sup> Basically, history stops when Islamic culture is left alone. Progress in North Africa was only possible with the intervention of Europe.

---

Morocco, and behind the sad child leaning in the archway stood all the shadowy evils of the social system that hangs like a millstone about the neck of Islam" (157).

<sup>107</sup> See the following passage: "Cut off from civilizing influences, the Moslems isolated themselves in a lonely fanaticism, far more racial than religious, and the history of the country from the fall of the Merinids till the French annexation is mainly a dull tale of tribal warfare" (192).

Lastly, Wharton reiterates the savage nature of Moroccans by cataloging their inhospitable behavior towards foreigners. Wharton admits that some of the prejudice against Europeans and outsiders is the result of Spanish and Portuguese attempts at colonization, but she does not include the French (191). She also details the atrocities of the Moroccans committed against French colonists, but likewise fails to account for the Moroccan motivation for their uprisings (161-2). Wharton concludes this position by describing the French conquest of Algeria in 1830 as a breakthrough, ending the years of isolation, and she explains how the rebellious locals who resisted French authority were the real villains (195). Wharton's conclusions about French colonialism in Morocco are important not only for demonstrating the influence of French Orientalism, but also because her writing reflects Morocco back to the English speaking world from an independent American perspective. By perpetuating the claims of French Orientalist scholarship, Wharton encourages the French colonial mission in Morocco.

### **Blind Eye**

Despite the long catalog of grievances against the Moroccan people and their culture, the French are rarely criticized for the colonial administration that engenders the poverty and backwardness that Wharton perceives. But then again, the spirit of In Morocco is that of an adventurer's tale that is more of an American's perception and experience rather than an objective reportage and investigation. From the beginning, Wharton describes her entrance in Morocco from the tourist's perspective, "To step on board a steamer in a Spanish port, and three hours later to land in a country without a guide-book, is a sensation to rouse the hunger of the repletest sight-seer" (21). It is telling that the vantage point concerns how the individual Westerner may feel entering a new

territory for exploration, how Morocco offers a challenge for those bored by the commonness of Europe. This is because Morocco offers a challenge for experienced tourists because of its dangerous unknown qualities. Much like Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Morocco is unknown and unmapped; therefore, it is a dangerous yet exciting zone of possibilities for adventurous Westerners. In this quote, Wharton explains the feeling of setting foot in Africa:

The sensation is attainable by anyone who will take the trouble to row out into the harbour of Algeciras and scramble on to a little black boat headed across the straits. Hardly has the rock of Gibraltar turned to cloud when one's foot is on the soil of an almost unknown Africa (21).

In Morocco clearly demonstrates, by Wharton's own superficial research, that Morocco is not unknown. While the majority of the scholarship about North Africa may have been in French, a very concerted effort to analyze and "know" North Africa was in place.<sup>108</sup> To continue to portray Morocco as a black spot on the map only contributes to the sensational idea of mystery and danger. A further sense of confusion about this point concerns Wharton's position that Morocco is dangerous because of its history, barbarous people, and lack of culture; conversely, it is well controlled and manageable now thanks to the French colonial administration. In the ensuing extract, Wharton oscillates between tantalizing the reader with the unique quality and danger of her journey while also reminding us that the French have secured her safe passage:

This feeling of adventure is heightened by the contrast between Tangier—cosmopolitan, frowsy, familiar Tangier, that every tourist has visited for the last forty years—and the vast unknown just beyond. One has met, of course, travellers who have been to Fez; but they have gone there on special missions, under escort, mysteriously, perhaps perilously; the

---

<sup>108</sup> She specifically cites M. Augustin Bernard, M. H. Saladin, M. Alfred de Tarde, and M. Gaston Migeon, titles such as *Le Maroc*, *Conferences Marocaines*, and *France-Maroc*. In sum, all works by French scholars of Morocco.

expedition has seemed, till lately, a considerable affair. And when one opens the records of Moroccan travellers written within the last twenty years, how many, even of the most adventurous, are found to have gone beyond Fez? And what, to this day, do the names Meknez and Marrakech, of Mogador, Saffi or Rabat, signify to any but a few students of political history, a few explorers and naturalists? Not within the last year has Morocco been open to travel from Tangier to the Great Atlas, and from Moulay Idriss to the Atlantic. Three years ago Christians were being massacred in the streets of Salé, the pirate town across the river from Rabat, and two years ago no European had been allowed to enter the Sacred City of Moulay Idriss, the burial-place of the lawful descendant of Ali, founder of the Idrissite dynasty. Now, thanks to the energy and the imagination of one of the greatest of colonial administrators, the country, at least in the French zone, is as safe and open as the opposite shore of Spain. All that remains is to tell the traveler how to find his way about it. (21-22)

This quote highlights the voyeur's pleasure of finding the authentic in Morocco, and then praises French colonialism. This passage, which resembles a short-hand version of the entire work, continues on familiar themes of Morocco's place outside of history, hinting that the limited interaction with Europe is directly related to the area's lack of significance. Wharton aggrandizes her own visit by drawing attention to the danger of the area and the rare quality of her visit. To this end, Wharton details the cruelty of the locals, the difficulty and rarity of visiting these sites. When she concludes by thanking the French for opening up this hostile land to outsiders she is praising the French for allowing her tourist's gaze. Doing so invites us to admire the strength of French colonial power and to laud their efforts to civilize Morocco. To better understand the value of Wharton's observations, consider Peter Hulme's definition of colonial discourse:

[. . .] during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were produced for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery, normally separated out into the discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir and so on. (2)

Wharton's work is very much based upon this set of imbricated ideas. Her writing is precisely this type of colonial discourse. However, her American identity is easily misunderstood as an independent American perspective. But by presenting Wharton's Morocco as an independent American perspective on the situation, these findings perpetuate the justifications for French colonialism. While the French consistently provide safety for Wharton from the barbarous Moroccans, nervous tension abounds when the car breaks down and they are lost:

Every detail of our trip from Tangier to Rabat had been carefully planned to keep us in unbroken contact with civilization. We were to 'tub' in one European hotel, and to dine in another, with just enough picnicking between to give a touch of local colour. But let one little cog slip and the whole plan falls to bits, and we are alone in the old untamed Moghreb, as remote from Europe as any mediaeval adventurer. If one loses one's way in Morocco, civilization vanishes as though it were a magic carpet rolled up by a djinn. (28)

Here the excitement of witnessing Morocco's lack of civilization is disrupted by a brief delay on the side of the road, placing Wharton in the uncomfortable position of direct interaction with her situation rather than the passive voyeurism of looking at the country through the car window. Furthermore, the luxurious European accommodations highlight their removal from local experience. Morocco is to be seen from a safe distance, interaction with the locals is only for an occasional touch of color.<sup>109</sup> How can the tourist who "tubs" in European hotels while traveling through the country under the protection

---

<sup>109</sup> Shortly after the car breakdown experience, Wharton reflects on the fatalism of Africa and the necessity of understanding the empty, unknown Moroccan wilderness: "It is a good thing to begin with such a mishap, not only because it develops the fatalism necessary to the enjoyment of Africa, but because it lets one at once into the mysterious heart of the country: a country so deeply conditioned by its miles and miles of uncited wilderness that until one has known the wilderness one cannot begin to understand the cities" (29). Wharton's knowledge of the mysterious heart of the country is questionable.



of the French military proclaim the need to appreciate the wild in order to understand Morocco? This hyperbolic statement paints much of Wharton's observations as little more than generalizations founded on French Orientalist lore about Africa. These comments, made at a distance away from the Moroccan people and in the hands of French military protection, are based on the scholarship of French Orientalist academics. From this skewed perspective Wharton's interpretation of Morocco is an extension of French Orientalism with hardly any originality. Concluding on that note, Wharton reminds her readers that, "Dawn is the romantic hour in Africa. Dirt and dilapidation disappear under a pearly haze, and a breeze from the sea blows away the memory of fetid markets and sordid heaps of humanity" (43). Indeed, Africa contains exactly what Wharton hoped to find: a land of contradictions, a place that inspires amidst the chaos. In the next section, we turn our attention to Paul Bowles whose presentation of North Africa is far more nuanced and complicated.

### **Paul Bowles: Searching for Something in the Colonies**

One of the many mysteries of The Sheltering Sky concerns the motivation for this band of Americans. Kit, Port, and Tunner choose North Africa as their destination for an extended stay and adventure perhaps because they are bored by their comfortable, upper-class lives in New York City. It is clear that they are disappointed with the state of post-war Europe (the traditional stomping ground for well-to-do Americans); so, with little else in the way of explanation they choose the Maghreb. Early on in the novel, the narrator describes how these three Americans "have all the time in the world for everything" (4-5). From this position of privilege, we learn that they are "traveling" and

not “touring” in the typical tourist fashion.<sup>110</sup> The narrator further elaborates on this distinction:

Another important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with the others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking. And the war was one facet of the mechanized age he wanted to forget. (5-6)

From this lucky position of being financially able to pick and choose their location and cultural preference, these Americans disown the ugly side of the West. They acknowledge their elitism, as not everyone has this unique opportunity to question their culture from afar; however, this statement implies that the tourist experiences the world on a base level, while the traveler is able to better understand cultural difference and choose his/her identification with place rather than be inexplicitly linked to a “home.”<sup>111</sup> While the desire to be in a sense “homeless” pervades The Sheltering Sky, it is difficult for these characters to maintain such a stance in the face of the hardships they face.

---

<sup>110</sup> See Paul Fussell Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars (1980) as an early study that has some ideas about the distinction between tourists and travelers.

<sup>111</sup> Andrew Gurr discusses the qualities of the expatriate American writer in Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature (1981). Gurr engages Mary McCarthy’s article “Exiles, Expatriates and Internal Emigrés” to argue that “Mary McCarthy has made a useful distinction between expatriates, in whom she sees as wholly voluntary detachments from their original home, and exiles, the banished victims deracinated and tortured by the long wait to go home. She puts Henry James in the first category, Joyce in the second. The expatriate she regards as a rather hedonistic escaper, typified by Fitzgerald, Hemingway and the American community of Paris in the 1920s. As she notes, the financial crash of 1929 sent most of them home—thus proving them expatriates when they had thought of themselves as exiles. “Expatriate writing”, she adds, “a pot-pourri of the avant-garde and the decadent, has almost faded away. Henry James had set the themes once and for all.” The exile on the other hand is like a bird forced by chill weather at home to migrate but always poised to fly back.” (18) This is a useful way to consider differences between these writers. However, Donleavy and Bowles were neither this type of expatriate nor exile . . . nor were their characters.

However, as is so often the case with these stories of Americans in the postcolonial world, there is also a desire for difference and escape from the problems of the Western world. In this manner, Morocco offers the possibility of vanishing into the antithesis of the West. This desire to find a foil for the West leads Kit to remark, “The people of each country get more like the people of every other country. They have no character, no beauty, no ideals, no culture—nothing, nothing” (7). This rather vague frustration with globalization means that only in the remote, untouched pockets of pre-modernity can some sanctuary be found. Such a position is ironic in the context of postcolonial theory. Africa (and the postcolonial world in general) is often portrayed as a dark and primitive land that exists outside of civilization. For example, Chinua Achebe explains in “An Image of Africa” how Africa is used as an oppositional force to help the West define itself in literature as civilized and therefore superior.<sup>112</sup> But this typical “civilization versus savagery” binary is familiar to postcolonial theory and literature.<sup>113</sup> Notice this common assertion—harking back to Renan and Arnold, the “savage” other

---

<sup>112</sup> Achebe writes the following: “For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry, the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparing it with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity, it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently, Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man’s jeopardous integrity. Keep away from Africa, or else!” (“An Image of Africa”).

<sup>113</sup> This is also an idea that can be traced at least as far back as Dryden’s The Conquest of Granada (1672). It is a philosophy in support of primitivism, whereby the humans have been corrupted by the “education” of civilization to which Richard Steele and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are also often associated.

can save the West from the inhumanity of modernity.<sup>114</sup> Frustrated and disillusioned with the ideas of modernity, civilization, and progress, these Westerners disavow the superiority of the West while at the same time reinforcing this binary by acknowledging the alleged separation.

The trope of the savage land as sanctuary for the Western mind is often cited as the reason for American travel in the postcolonial world (consider Paul Theroux's justification for Dark Star Safari). But this point seems somewhat problematic for Bowles' characters as North Africa at this time was so heavily influenced by French rule. Therefore, Port finds the cities and towns of North Africa ugly because they have been planned and laid out in a modern European style (89). Frustrated to find Africa within Europe's sphere of influence, Port discusses humanity and how Europe is "ruining the world" (92). This frustration largely stems from the inability to escape the Western world as even Africa contains familiar elements and hindrances of modern life in the West. The desire to escape modernity is expressly stated by Kit when the landscape to the south changes from stone to sand. We learn, "For the first time she felt a faint thrill of excitement. "It is rather wonderful," she thought, "to be riding past such people in the Atomic Age" (193). Of course "such people" are those who are pre-Atomic: they are the pre-modern ideal for the jaded American. She values Africa for its pre-modernity and laments all modern influence, thus condemning Africa to an inert role. Without the possibility of progress, no matter how problematic modernity may be for America and Europe, insisting on African stagnation is an incredibly arrogant demand. While most

---

<sup>114</sup> As mentioned earlier, theorists like Renan and Arnold had speculated on the capacity for the weaker or more feminine races to offer a balance to the powerful and masculine European civilizations.

Americans of their generation were content to explore Europe, these Americans want to escape. Their desire to escape modernity (or in other words “the West”) leads to a romanticized craving for the pre-modern. Therefore, while these Americans may agree with the typical colonial rationale concerning the moral and racial superiority of West, they differ with the essential colonial desire to impose the technological advances, governmental authority, and Western organizational tactics that are typically understood as the modernizing and positive aspects of colonization.

Initially the idealization of the pre-modern/non-Western world is so strong that the American characters ignore the problems that exist in the Maghreb. In order to convince Kit to come to North Africa, Port carefully edits his presentation of their destination—he leaves out the travel advisory bulletins advising Americans not to travel in French Africa; instead, Port shows her picturesque images of the region. Despite the dangers, Port’s imagination is inspired by his romantic vision of adventure in Africa:

In a sense this state of affairs pleased him, it made him feel that he was pioneering—he felt more closely identified with his great-grandparents when he was rolling along out here in the desert than he did sitting at home looking out over the reservoir in Central Park—but at the same time he wondered how seriously one ought to take the travel bulletins in their attempts to discourage such pioneering. (107)

This passage both foreshadows the danger of ignoring those bulletins while also providing deeper insight into Port’s decision to travel to Africa. The West is not only ugly and overly-modernized, it is also boring. Seeking adventure and danger, Africa represents an opportunity for these Americans to test their resolve by escaping the safety, the security, and monotony of their own culture. Needing to go beyond Europe, the traditional escape for bored Americans, these characters call for the challenges and

originality of Africa. Of course, this again assumes that Africa is the inverse of America: meaning that Africa is dangerous, violent, but also invigorating.

Despite Port's efforts to persuade Kit to embrace the danger and excitement of North Africa, tension arises while staying at the Grand Hotel. Ironically, the hotel is an old colonial office (112-3). This detail draws attention to both the American position of assuming a colonizers role, while also implying that the old colonial order has broken down as the colonial office is no longer in service. Yet while Kit expresses her regret that they did not travel to Italy, Port turns the conversation towards his desire to prolong their stay by justifying their right to inhabit North Africa. He states "I feel that this town, this river, this sky all belong to me as much as to them" (120). Kit disagrees with this position. Why would North Africa belong to Port? Is he speaking in some sort of communal "the world belongs to all of us," or is this the arrogance of someone who thinks he deserves to have whatever he wants? This scene seems particularly loaded with metaphors, as these Americans inhabit a building once used for colonial administration; additionally, Port disassociates himself from the similarities between the colonizers and his own position despite his pronouncements of rights to a land that does not belong to him. Port fails to realize the irony of his declarations about ownership of foreign land even as he stays in the former seat of the colonial administration. As is the case with many of the Americans in the study, Port ignores or is ignorant of how his identity and his position resemble the colonizers.

The disconnect between the Americans and the French colonial administration is again brought to the forefront when Port meets with Lieutenant d'Armagnac, commander of the French camp at Bou Noura. The Lieutenant tries to communicate his wisdom on

dealing with the Arabs; moreover, the Lieutenant wants to demonstrate his “reasonable conclusions” on Arabs by explaining that he came to North Africa with the idea of liking Arabs and learning from them. However, after a period of about three years, he became sick of his Arab mistress, and then he grew to hate the locals. While d’Armagnac’s confessions might be fairly typical colonialist sentiment, this scene is telling because of Port’s shocked reaction to this information. Port becomes uncomfortable when “the inevitable anecdotes of the colonist came out, all having to do with the juxtaposition, sometimes tragic, but usually ludicrous, of the two incongruous and incompatible cultures” (179). Port is blind to the similarities between his position and the Lieutenant’s. Both feel that they have a right to be there, both take advantage of local women, both look down on the locals, and both of these characters rely on the economic and diplomatic backing of their respective governments to justify their existence in this foreign land. Furthermore, Port fails to consider how his initial idealization of North Africa compares to the Lieutenant’s naive desire to learn from the locals. Both of these characters arrive looking for an authentic experience only to become disappointed and spiteful when North Africa fails to live up to their stereotypes.

The Lieutenant’s thought of Port and Kit’s situation affords us the French opinion of Americans in Morocco. Essentially, he is thankful that Port’s illness did not happen in his jurisdiction because of the administrative problems that it would create, as France would be obligated to protect them. This tells us that the French, at least grudgingly, treat Americans to the same privileges as their own people. But, the Lieutenant also finds the nature of these problems to be quintessentially American:

Only an American could do anything so unheard of as to lock her sick husband into a room and run off into the desert, leaving him behind to die

alone. It was inexcusable, of course, but he could not be really horrified at the idea, it seemed Broussard was. But Broussard was a Puritan. (266)

d'Armagnac's opinion here is confusing. He seems to find Americans amusing but also frustrating. Perhaps this is because these Americans come to North Africa with disdain for the French administration, but then they expect French sympathy and cooperation when needed. In this case, the French, while angry, are unable to ignore the American requests. But why is cooperation given out of Western or white solidarity? The Lieutenant's question asks us to consider—why are Americans so reckless? Is it because they view their travels in postcolonial nations as merely vacation, or as some sort of fantasyland where they can do whatever they please? This point is partially validated when we learn that Port failed to take any shots or medical precautions before arriving in North Africa. His lack of caution or sense of invincibility seems recklessly naïve. An outgrowth of this naivety is the Americans' attitude towards their surroundings in this novel. In the next section, I study how these characters ignore the warning signs and flaunt their power in North Africa.

### **Recreating America**

Despite the longing for difference, the familiar desire to make the exotic local as familiar as possible re-emerges. One of the most telling examples of this parallel existence in any of the works in my study concerns Tunner and Kit's train ride. Trying to calm Kit's nerves, Tunner has reserved a private first-class car just for the two of them. Further hoping to loosen the mood, he produces several bottles of real French champagne. After consuming such a delicacy, Kit becomes drunk. In her fearless state of intoxication she insults an old Arab lady who is snooping outside their cabin. Perhaps Kit enjoys the power trip, but this action might also be for the opportunity to be rude and get



away with it. However, her insult is curious—the scene is described: “Kit walked to the doorway, stood in it, and said loudly: “She’s just a *voyeuse*” (78). While it is true that the woman may be spying on them, labeling her as a voyeur seems paradoxical from Kit’s position in the country peering into North Africa with little or no invitation to do so. Furthermore, the same rules do not apply to Kit when she decides to investigate the state of the lower class carriages. Kit is severely sobered by her walk through the fourth class cars entirely because of her role as a *voyeuse*. These cars are made up of the poor, and her presence in fancy clothing and smelling of alcohol amongst the actuality of third world poverty serves as a telling reminder of how close the Americans flirt with the harsh reality of this location (80-2). The Americans are able to recreate first-world comforts but venturing beyond their enclosed world (or private first-class cabin in this case) risks the dangers of the real world. Ironically, part of the attraction of visiting North Africa is in seeing the actual local life, but it seems they would like to see real North Africa through a window without the risk of actually interacting with the locals.

While the Americans, at least Port, may have been disappointed with the modernity of the larger port cities in the North, they are likewise concerned as they find that the amenities dwindle the further they travel South and thus go deeper into Africa. For Kit, the lack leads to frustration when she rather suddenly begins to unpack the entirety of her belongings out of a need to see something “civilized” (167). Kit’s outburst demonstrates the fragility of the balance between enjoying North African authenticity with becoming unnerved by the foreignness of a non-European culture. As a way of explaining her actions Kit states, “I’m still American, you know. And I’m not even trying to be anything else” (167). At this moment, Kit is becoming more comfortable with the

idea that she is a tourist rather than a traveler. Or perhaps this moment shows Kit admitting her shortcomings as a traveler and realizing the separation between her position and the setting. While it was possible to ignore the bitter opinions of the French upon arrival, here Kit is articulating a common colonialist's gripe with her life abroad. Port thinks as he watches Kit, "it amused him to watch her building her pathetic little fortress of Western culture in the middle of the wilderness" (167). Port's comment is yet another colonial metaphor that goes without making the connection between their situation in North Africa with that of the French.

Regardless of these hardships, Port and Kit push on through the interior of the country. At this point in the novel, Port's health problems are becoming increasingly alarming. When they reach El Ga'a, hoping to find refuge in this oasis town, they are instead greeted by a serious health crisis. Lucky for them, a handsome, young Arab man offers to help find a hotel in the midst of the chaos. Ironically, during such a stressful moment the narrator proclaims El Ga'a to be the ideal aesthetic that the group has been in search of since their arrival:

Outside in the dust was the disorder of Africa, but for the first time without any visible sign of European influence, so that the scene had a purity which had been lacking in the other towns, an unexpected quality of being complete which dissipated the feeling of chaos. (195-6)

Bowles presents an ironic situation as the Americans finally find the aesthetic beauty of a town free of any European influence, but at the same time they are ravished by an outbreak of meningitis. The combination seems to imply both the joy of finally reaching beyond the comfortable boundaries of Western civilization while simultaneously offering a warning about the dangers of escaping the same modernity that drove these Americans

from the West in the first place. The reckless pursuit of the “pure” Maghreb aesthetic exposes the Americans’ frail understanding of the postcolonial situation.

Continuing on this theme, it is worth mentioning one scene towards the end of Kit’s journey. After escaping her imprisoned situation, Kit finds some of her belongings, specifically one bag in particular, which contains items she associates with civilization:

[S]he used her compact, lipstick and perfume; the folded thousand-franc notes fell out onto the bed. For a long time she stared at the other articles: small white handkerchiefs, shiny nail-scissors, a pair of tan silk pyjamas, little jars of facial cream. Then she handled them absently; they were like the fascinating and mysterious objects left by a vanished civilization. She felt that each one was a symbol of something forgotten. (313)

As the novel reaches its conclusion, Kit has realized Port’s desire of escaping Western civilization with mixed results. Objects that are identified with Western modernity have now become foreign and exotic. Kit mechanically remembers and employs the use of the make-up, but she finds the value of the money and the meaning of other objects to be lost in this place beyond the West. Her personal Western belongings once offered a respite from the chaos, but without the ability to return they are meaningless. More than any of the other works in this study, Kit’s displacement from the West represents the postcolonial trope of “going native”. Ashcroft et al describe this phenomenon as follows:

The term indicates the colonizers’ fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs. The construction of native cultures as either primitive or degenerate in a binary discourse of colonizer/colonized led, especially at the turn of the century, to a widespread fear of ‘going native’ amongst the colonizers in many colonial societies. (Key 115)

Like Conrad’s Kurtz before her, Kit has passed the point of return. However, Kit’s adaptation is complicated since she is not exactly a colonizer. Therefore, her process of assimilation is ambiguous: is it a choice to stay with Belqassim? Is Kit brainwashed when

she escapes the “rescue” of the American consulate? I explore these questions in the coming sections.

### **Americans and Their Servants**

As an introduction to this section, let us consider the French Lieutenant’s reaction to hearing that an American has accused the popular and influential hotel manager, Abdelkader, of stealing an American passport. In this scene, the Lieutenant imagines that the American must be “a gorilla-like brute with a fierce frown on his face, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, and probably an automatic in his hip pocket” (159). Clearly, the Lieutenant is familiar with the stereotypical American gangster, but less so with other Americans. But this fear of the American is enhanced by the fact that an American is so unusual and unsettling in this setting. The Lieutenant thinks, “With a Frenchman he would have known how to go about persuading him to do it without the unpleasantness. But with an American!” (159). While the Lieutenant may harbor unrealistic fears about how an American will behave, his further comment on the issue reveals a deeper concern in regards to why an American will be unpredictable while a Frenchman could be placated in this situation.

The bedridden Frenchman thinks “The most unpleasant part of the situation to him was the fact that he would be in bed, while the American would be free to roam about the room, would enjoy all the advantages, physical and moral” (159-160). It is easy to understand why a sick man would be jealous of another’s good physical health, but more puzzling is the moral advantage. This point seems to imply that the American is faultless, whereas a Frenchman is hindered by the complications of the colonial situation. This perplexing attitude is certainly apparent in the behavior of the Americans in The

Sheltering Sky who feel entitled to treat the North Africans like inferiors, perhaps because they do not wrestle with the colonial-guilt issues that the Lieutenant implies that the French suffer from. It is also tempting to read this scene as an allegory for America's growing military and economic might in world politics at a time when the French colonial grip was weakening, much like the Lieutenant in this scene. Despite this type of occasional contact between French and Americans, the majority of Kit, Port, and Tunner's encounters in the first two-thirds of the novel are with North African servants. In this section, I emphasize American interaction with North African servants and the French colonial system in order to understand how these Americans conceptualize their identity in the Maghreb.

To begin with, the Americans in The Sheltering Sky consider the Arabs to be a separate civilization, an alien species, or in more familiar postcolonial terminology, the "Other." In this dichotomy popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Lacan, the Other serves as a foil to the self. In colonial terms, the Other is the colonized subject whose characteristics allow for the colonizing self to define him/herself in opposition to the Other. For example, the colonized Other is savage because the self is civilized. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak elaborates on this concept with her term "othering," which is the literary process of creating the Other via colonial discourse, and then using this created colonial discourse of othering to control the Other.<sup>115</sup> Fearful of the North Africans he sees, Port remarks upon their arrival that the locals' faces are like masks—they are

---

<sup>115</sup> "The Rani of Simur" Francis Barker et al. (eds) Europe and Its Others Vol. 1 Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, Colchester: University of Essex. 1985.

unknowable. In this scene, Port fears these people because they seem completely alien or other to him. His interior monologue is described as thus:

“How friendly are they? Their faces are masks. They all look a thousand years old. What little energy they have is only the blind, mass desire to live, since not one of them eats enough to give him his own personal force. But what do they think of me? Probably nothing. Would one of them help me if I were to have an accident? Or would I lie here in the street until the police found me? What motive could any one of them have for helping me? They have no religion left. Are they Moslems or Christians? They don’t know. They know money, and when they get it all they want is to eat. But what’s wrong with that? Why do I feel this way about them? Guilt at being well fed and healthy among them? But suffering is equally divided among all men; each has the same amount to undergo.” (13)

In this fascinating passage, Port plays an interesting game of attributing characteristics to Arab culture or the “Arab mind.” Port then takes his impressions a step further by imagining the Arab perception of him. Clearly his general opinion of these people is disparaging. They are animal-like in their singular desire for survival, they lack morals, and they are without a coherent religious belief. Port pities the Arab population, but he is simultaneously frightened by their potential for barbarity. This type of thinking is quite familiar to the traditional colonialist perspective—what Port describes differs very little from Marlow’s perspective in Heart of Darkness.<sup>116</sup> Yet Port ends his train of thought with the presumption that he has suffered an equal portion by comparison. However, he

---

<sup>116</sup> Marlow looks out from the boat to think the following: “Still, I had also judged the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable—and yet eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us. The riverside bushes were certainly very thick; but the undergrowth behind was evidently penetrable. However, during the short lift I had seen no canoes anywhere in the reach -- certainly not abreast of the steamer. But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me was the nature of the noise—of the cries we had heard. They had not the fierce character boding immediate hostile intention. Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. Even extreme grief may ultimately vent itself in violence” (114).

soon corrects himself: “Emotionally he felt that this last idea was untrue, but at the moment it was a necessary belief: it is not always easy to support the stares of hungry people” (13). Gradually, Port recognizes the self-serving nature for this justification of his philosophy of suffering. He comes closest to admitting his place of privilege when he remembers the Spanish maid at the hotel who remarked “*La vida es pena*” to which Port replies “Of Course.” Yet even in that moment, Port recognizes a “feeling of false[ness] even as he spoke, asking himself if any American can truthfully accept a definition of life which makes it synonymous with suffering” (14). In this singular self-conscious moment, Port considers his position. Here Port seems to realize that his idealization of the non-Western world is slightly problematic. He is turning away from a civilization that afforded him a comfortable if dull life, and despite the rather vague protestations of the rampage of modernization, he must at some level realize that modernization has produced the wealth that allows his position of privileged traveler. Yet because of this disparity between the idealized non-Western world and the actuality of colonial poverty, Port must resort to subconscious and occasionally conscious acts of denial to justify his journey through North Africa. In addition to Port’s self-conscious awareness of American privilege, we see Kit use the idea of being American as an insult. When Tunner complains about the “filth” in Aïn Krorfa, Kit returns, “Yes, you’re a real American, I know.” Although Tunner replies, “You’re damned right,” it is clear that to be American in this context means to lack the spirit of adventure and the detachment from privilege that Kit and Port pride themselves on (111). The inability to withstand the bugs, the bad food, and the horrible smells of this town are also seen as a weakness for the simple material or modern comforts of the West or of American life. Tunner’s admission that he

desires such conveniences is a sign of weakness and common Americanness (or Westernness) in this context.

Although the American characters come to North Africa with their biases, the loathsome Lyle family reinforces their Orientalist stereotypes. I draw attention to these British characters because their treatment of the Moroccan people could be read as an extension of the dying British Empire. The Lyles take notes of their impressions in order to update a travel guide of the area; however, they both hate North Africa. They share a stereotypical British disdain for the French but also espouse derogatory views of Arabs and Jews alike. Mrs. Lyle insists that the Arabs are always spying on them, a point that seems a bit ironic considering her role as observer and guest of this country (66). Mrs. Lyle also blames her son's venereal disease on "Some filthy swine of an Arab woman." As outrageous as this opinion may seem, Port has a difficult time dismissing the claim. When Mrs. Lyle asks Port, "I do hope you don't go near them" he replies, "Arabs, you mean? I don't know any personally. But it's rather hard not to go near them, since they're all over the place" (87). Even if Port is being comic or ironic, his comment almost expresses tacit agreement with Mrs. Lyle's advice on avoiding Arabs. Again, this expresses the "us vs. them" dichotomy of colonialism. The British assume that the Americans are on "their side," perhaps as whites or as Westerners, but either way as opposites of the Arabs. While Port might be able to marginally condone this type of racist language, his silence encourages Tunner to express similar racist sentiments. When their room reservations are botched, Port initially expresses anger, but Tunner suggests that the servants move their bags for them, "Righto. We'll get one of these monkeys to make the



shift for us” (92). This insult, however brief, demonstrates a typical colonial contempt for the local population, a sense of superiority, and an oppositional type of logic.

On the subject of Tunner’s view of Arabs, it is interesting to observe how his scorn grows to hatred by the latter half of the novel. The narrator notes, “There were days when he felt contempt for these absurd people; they were unreal, not to be counted seriously among the earth’s inhabitants” (274). Although Tunner’s sentiments are extremely racist, he seems to offer some sort of explanation:

These were the same days he was so infuriated by the soft hands of the little children when they unconsciously clutched at his clothing and pushed against him in a street full of people. At first he thought they were pickpockets, and then he had realized they were merely using him for leverage to propel themselves along more quickly in the crowd, as if he had been a tree or a wall. (274-5)

This scene invites a metaphoric interpretation of Tunner’s position as an outsider. He is not the important figure that he imagines himself to be; instead he is an inanimate object in the lives of these children. Perhaps it is in light of this sort of revelation that Tunner has to accept a more humble view of his self-image. Unlike Kit and Port, he is the one American character able to develop an equal relationship with an Arab. His “firm friend” Abdelkader, the hotelier, shares Pernod and chess with Tunner (275). Their friendship is mutual and without the sexual or monetary dynamics that mark Port and Kit’s relations with Arabs.

Such equality in this relationship stands out compared to Port and Kit’s treatment of locals in the service industry. In these examples, Arab strangers offer their help or provide services for the Americans, but they are treated with ungratefulness in return. In El Ga’a, a young Arab man secures some sort of lodging for the Americans; moreover, he attempts to comfort Port in a time of serious illness, and finally he arranges transportation

out of the city when no other option is available. None of these tasks could have been completed by Kit or Port without his help; that said, at the moment of departure Kit prevents the young man from getting onto the truck—thus leaving him on the side of the road (204). Her ingratitude is unexplained, but using the young man and treating him as a servant when he was actually just a kind soul seems particularly cruel. Port is also capable of this sort of lack of appreciation. Rather than wait for Tunner to arrive from Messad, Port hastily checks out of the hotel on very cold terms with Abdelkader (182-183). In hurrying to the station, Port is forced to disrupt Kit in the middle of applying her lipstick—the nuisance of the interruption along with the journey to the bus causes Kit to think the following:

“I only hope there are no mountains to cross,” she said to herself, wishing again, but more fervently now, that they had gone to Italy, or any small country with boundaries, where the villages had churches and one went to the station in a taxi or a carriage, and could travel by daylight. And where one was not inevitably on display every time one stirred out of the hotel. (184)

Kit’s position seems particularly hypocritical in regards to her mockery of Tunner’s tolerance for the “filth” of North Africa. Her desire for the familiar Western and Christian world is telling of the superficial nature of the whole American group’s attraction to North Africa. Port reaffirms his colonialist, binary thinking by portraying the Moroccans as unimportant while at the same time affirming his importance solely on the basis of being American and not one of “them.”<sup>117</sup> Despite the derision for the servants, these

---

<sup>117</sup> At the bus station, Port bribes a transportation official in order to obtain sold-out seats on the only bus that week for El Ga’a that is leaving that very night. In order not to upset the locals, particularly those who have lost their seats, it is necessary for Kit to pretend that she is ill. Despite this minor consolation on their part, at least play acting, Port offers little genuine sympathy as he explains his justification to Kit about bribing others off the bus, “What’s a week to them? Time doesn’t exist for them” (184). They have to act in the

Americans are sexually attracted to the locals. Continuing in a well-known trope of colonial literature, I study the sexual dynamics of Americans in The Sheltering Sky in the next section.

### **Lusting for the Locals**

I began the previous section with the example of the Lieutenant's perception of Americans as morally superior to the French. Therefore, it is fitting that I begin this section with Port's exploitation of this perception. Almost immediately upon arrival, Port sets off by himself at night into an Arab neighborhood. He walks further from the hotel until reaching the point of exhaustion. As Port sits down, Smail, an Arab man, approaches him asking "M'sieu! Qu'est-ce ti vo?" (18).<sup>118</sup> The question hints at the possibility of mischief. When Smail asks for a name, Port almost instinctively replies "Jean" (18). What does indeed turn out to be a visit to a prostitute is colored by this role-play. Unwilling to be himself, to assume the moral issue (or perhaps just the unusual quality) of being an American, this instance is a lone case when Port overtly identifies himself as French. In doing so, Port grants himself the freedom to act as outrageously as he wishes in the name of France. In this section, I turn our attention towards the sexual relationships that American characters create with their hosts.

Port's encounter with a North African prostitute exemplifies some of his basic stereotypes about Moroccans: he views them as lesser beings, for sale, dangerous, and beautifully exotic. Smail seems to risk some danger by bringing Port to this tent city as

---

bus as if Kit is ill, as an old man and a young man who have lost their seats look on with displeasure. This attitude only furthers the gap between the American characters and their Moroccan hosts.

<sup>118</sup> The quote mimics the North African French accent, "Sir! What is it you want?"

they sneak into the girl's room. Marhnia arrives looking exactly like the exotic savage beauty that Port idealizes:

And suddenly she stepped inside—a slim, wild-looking girl with dark great eyes. She was dressed in spotless white, with a white turban-like headdress that pulled her hair tightly backwards, accentuating the indigo designs tattooed on her forehead. Once inside the tent, she stood quite still, looking at Port with something of the expression, he thought, the young bull often wears as he takes the first few steps into the glare of the arena. There was bewilderment, fear, and passive expectancy in her face as she stared quietly at him. (27-8)

The girl's appearance pleases Port because her exotic look conforms to his preconceived notions about North Africa. She is both wild and yet pure in her white dress, authentically tattooed and turbaned yet also animal and savage. It is reasonable to assume that this appearance is intentionally created in order to appeal to the French Orientalist conception of the "Arab woman" or the "Arab whore." Port's attraction to this stereotype of Arab womanhood is an implicit alignment with French Orientalism. While playing the role of the Frenchman, he finds himself attracted to the French idealization of Arab sexuality. Unlike his intellectually stimulating but sexually incomplete relationship with Kit, Marhnia offers a purely sexual and inarticulate source of pleasure. This attraction to the colonized Other; the silent, sexualized, and powerless woman is familiar to colonial literature and to the American characters throughout this study. Continuing in typical Orientalist fashion, Port reports conflicting examples of extreme innocence, and yet also treachery in her appearance and actions:

It seemed to Port that she was much more like a young nun than a café dancer. At the same time he did not in the least trust her, being content to sit and marvel at the delicate movements of her nimble, henna-stained fingers as she tore the stalks of mint apart and stuffed them into the little teapot. (29)

Idealizing the girl as a nun seems excessive, but the following condemnation of untrustworthiness seems equally perplexing. Essentially, these judgments are being made entirely by projecting his Western context or Western symbols upon Mahrina. In spite of that, some of Port's stereotypes are confirmed by Mahrina's apparent attempt to rob him.<sup>119</sup>

Having experienced the rush of such a dangerous meeting, Port searches for more of this type of encounter that confirms his stereotypes and allows him to play out his fantasies. On their last night in Ain Krofa before departing for Bou Noura, Mohammed, from the hotel, invites Port out. Mohammed brings Port to a brothel that is run more like a family home. Women, children, and pets play throughout the house and courtyard as men converse and drink tea. However, Port finds the women bland, "He could appreciate now what a find Marhnia had been, her treachery notwithstanding" (139). Although the women in Ain Krofa are tattooed, Arab speaking, dressed in traditional clothes and jewelry, Port finds that "There was something vaguely workaday about both of them" (139). That is, these women could be prostitutes anywhere. Port's curiosity is only peaked when he discovers a blind dancing girl. Port's attraction for this girl is based upon the power he imagines he will have over her. He demands that Mohammed arrange an encounter with the girl, grossly overpaying his guide for this intervention, but when the

---

<sup>119</sup> In the darkness of the tent after their blurred sexual encounter, Port abruptly decides to leave. However, Mahrina implores him to stay by putting her arms around him. After initially fending her arms off, Port grows suspicious, "Some indefinable false movement there made him reach inside to put his hand on hers. His wallet was already between her fingers" (34). After he throws her to the floor, Mahrina screams thus drawing the attention of the men in other tents. Port is forced to make a dangerous and painful getaway, yet the danger and excitement of this risk also seem to validate its authenticity. Mahrina has proven herself to be both a beautiful and innocent wild girl as well as a thieving whore.

meeting cannot be arranged Port loses his temper. After searching for the girl on his own, he laments what has been lost.<sup>120</sup> From Port's perspective, the blind girl is without the pretensions or worldliness of the other working girls. Furthermore, her handicap would allow his complete dominance over her. Similar to Port's initial fantasy of possessing Marhina, who was too poor and naïve to dismiss him, the blind girl would be dependent upon him for his money and more so because of his physical advantage over her. This craving shows an escalation in Port's desire to dominate and control the locals. When his efforts to secure an arrangement with the blind girl are foiled, he instead makes a great commotion by ordering the women to make tea in the middle of the night. In order to have such an extravagant desire met, he is forced to pay an exorbitant fee of 200 francs. Although Mohammed and the other men laugh at such a foolish waste of money, Port feels "relaxed" by his show of power (146). While money is not able to buy a relationship with the blind girl, he was at least able to have his bizarre wish fulfilled. Clearly, these actions demonstrate a need to dominate and control the locals. Port behaves worse than the French colonials who visit the same brothel regularly, but create no problems.<sup>121</sup> Port's sexual desire is primarily excited by the idea of exploitation and power. For him, North Africa allows the opportunity to buy the authenticity and the naivety of a local girl who represents all of his fantasies about North Africa.

---

<sup>120</sup> "She would have sniffed the brilliantine in his hair and examined his garments with care. And in bed, without eyes to see beyond the bed, she would have been completely there, a prisoner. He thought of the little games he would have played with her, pretending to have disappeared when he was really still there; he thought of the countless ways he could have made her grateful to him [. . .] He felt a sudden shudder of self pity that was almost pleasurable, it was such a complete expression of his mood. It was a physical shudder; he was alone, abandoned, lost, hopeless, cold" (143).

<sup>121</sup> It is noted that a well-known black police dog belonging to Colonel Lefilleul patrols the compound while Port and Mohammed wait in the courtyard. It is implied that the dog (and therefore the Colonel) are regulars (138).

For the most part, Americans stand out as different by virtue of their power and their similarity to the French; however, I now turn to Americans who integrate themselves in North Africa. Of course, one of the more shocking aspects of The Sheltering Sky concerns Kit's transformation from privileged American traveler to concubine. While this relationship certainly falls under the heading of sexual interaction between Americans and locals, Kit is the North African man's object of desire. Therefore, I explore Kit's decision to erase her American identity and accept a position in Belqassim's family as a concubine as an extreme example of the American-going-local trope.

### **Going Local**

Writing specifically of Heart of Darkness, Achebe comments on the usage of Africa as backdrop for the frustrated Western mind. Achebe's argument seems just as applicable to Wharton, Bowles, or Theroux as it does to Conrad:

Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Of course, there is a preposterous and perverse kind of arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind. But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. ("An Image of Africa")

More than in any other text in this study, these characters go local. As the quote from Achebe explains, there is a danger in Americans treating Africa as merely a zone for self-exploration.<sup>122</sup> While Achebe may have been speaking more directly on the danger of

---

<sup>122</sup> Although Achebe writes "European mind," I am treating these Americans as an extension of European thought about Africa. However, it is interesting to consider how these Americans choose to identify with the European motif of using Africa as a proving ground for personal identity issues rather than interact with Africa independent of these colonial trappings.

such egotistical and racist behavior, there is also a significant personal danger to these Americas in underestimating the seriousness of their actions. It is important to understand how Port and Kit's nonchalance towards their situation leads to peril.

At first, Port mocks the French colonial authority by refusing to enter a profession on their official papers. When he does enter "*écrivain*," Port laughs at the French for becoming agitated, and also for their stereotypical French stubbornness (208). This disembarkation encounter reveals Port's (and the others') poor evaluation of the strength of the French colonial project. What might seem like unnecessary busy work, actually foreshadows the administrative, legal, and military might of French colonialism. While in good health and safe, the Americans may be able to openly mock the French, but in a time of need, they are forced to gratefully accept French aid. Only with the safety of French protection can these Americans entertain their fantasies of integration with the locals. Without fully understanding the situation that they enter, the Americans treat the French as administrators that actually stand in the way of their "authentic" experience in the Maghreb.

In comparison to their initial bravado upon arrival in North Africa, Port and Kit are forced to accept their total reliance on the locals (be they Arab or French) when Port becomes ill. In this regard, the Americans are *forced* to go local. Lieutenant d'Armagnac, although frustrated that Kit failed to take greater precaution during the meningitis outbreak in El Ga'a, provides essential medical care for the Americans, offering shelter and medicine. Although Lieutenant d'Armagnac's hospitality and charity is much appreciated, it does come at the cost of a call for some sort of implicit, perhaps even forced, acknowledgement from the Americans that the French are the masters in North



Africa. For the first time the Americans must acknowledge their need for the French. In this sense, they go local by integrating into the French power structure. Lieutenant d'Armagnac assumes a role of teacher, as he instructs Kit on how to conduct herself with Arabs: "all natives need to be watched always" (211). Broussard can reprimand the Americans with reminders like "Sba is not Paris." Although Port and Kit are lucky to be allowed admittance into the French fortress, their stay may not be negotiable as they are locked-in and supervised. The rapid change from a disdainful condescendence towards the French colonialists to a total reliance on their charity demonstrates how these Americans must ultimately side with the French. Furthermore, by accepting this charity, the Americans tacitly condone the colonial position.

While the French may have been passport-stamping bureaucrats early, Lieutenant d'Armagnac continues to flex his administrative power over Kit and Port by regulating their movements and demanding to see their papers as he grows suspicious of Kit's behavior. His estimation of Kit changes from initially some sort of "aventuress" to that of a "truly suspicious character" (239). The condemnation of the French is a serious blow for Kit. Unable to accept this power arrangement, she turns to Tunner. However, the time that they spend outside of the fortress walls leads to a lockout; thus, they are no longer under French protection (248). The lockout is a turning point for Kit, she has lost face and power with the French—she does not want to go back to American Tunner's protection either, so she looks for other alternatives. At the outset, she approaches the only other minority in Sba, the Jewish shopkeeper, Daoud Zozeph.<sup>123</sup> While Zozeph and

---

<sup>123</sup> Kit gives her impression of Zozeph: "it seemed to her that his dark eyes glowed with sympathy. Even this faint impression, unconfirmed as it was, made her aware for the first time of how cruelly lacking in that sentiment was the human landscape here, and of how

his family willingly shelter and support Kit, she is dissatisfied with this arrangement, instead choosing to escape Zozeph's home to run into the desert (257). Once this shelter is abandoned, Kit is at the mercy of the desert. Although her first night is spent blissfully under a tree, she cannot survive alone.

While walking through the timeless desert, Kit realizes that she actively interprets omens that previously left her passive. Upon her arrival in the Maghreb, Kit expresses a passive attitude towards her destiny:

She would say: 'Other people rule my life,' and it was true. But she allowed them to do it only because her superstitious fancy had invested them with magical importance regarding her own destiny, and never because their personalities awoke any profound sympathy or understanding in her. (38)

Ironically, Kit's identity issues mimic the problems that the colonized people of the Maghreb face. While Kit may feel powerless about her future at the outset, we see a change in attitude as she forces a caravan of local men on camels to stop for her. Without much thought, Kit attaches her bags and assumes a seat on one of the camels with a man (287). These men feed her and try to have sex with her during the siesta time. Kit is not happy about this sort of attention, but she does not complain when the older Belqassim touches her (292). It seems that she has fallen into a routine of having sex with Belqassim as well as another man every night. Finally, after passing through a very hot desert, they reach a road. Belqassim returns from a solo journey with clothes for Kit. The clothes are to make her look like a man, and when she sees the tan that she has acquired she looks like an Arab boy (297-298). When they finally reach his home, he takes Kit to a small

---

acutely she had been missing it without realizing she was missing it" (223-4). Interesting that this Jewish character is one of the few others who stand out as foreign and he is also a symbol of humanity against the backdrop of the backwards and cruel Maghreb.

room and locks her inside of it (301). Mimicking her pseudo-imprisonment in the French fortress (which was for her safety), Kit is now at the mercy of her captor (for his pleasure).

Yet, Kit escapes her confinements only to find out that she is no longer sure of her identity. Out in the light, with the sky and sea she feels that she is no longer anyone (323). Kit drinks some milk from a shop, but when she tries to pay with a franc note a major scene is created because the money is foreign. When a cop arrives, Kit thinks that he will pick her up and onto to his horse, but he merely looks at her and rides off (324). A black man who speaks French, wearing dirty western style pants, helps Kit. He tries to take her to a hotel where the patron speaks French, but the patron, who is black, does not want an Arab whore in her hotel. The owner apologizes when she realizes that Kit is not Arab, but then kicks them out again when she sees that Kit will not take a room with this stranger, Amar (326). This scene is a fascinating study of how an American is taken for French and then Arab when she's really neither and unable to do anything about her position. Kit sends a telegram that reads, "Cannot get back" and then begins running wildly through the streets while the Black man chases after her (329). When Amar arranges a room for her, she kisses him. They have sex, and then he tells her that she is rich for going around with a bag of money (331). Amar offers some comforting words but she knows that this is the end—in the morning the shop owner is counting her money. Lastly, Kit is rejected and rejects an American government representative (a point that marks her enduring desire to escape America). Yet, conversely she is also bound to First World privilege. Mrs. Ferry, the American, is annoyed to have to pick up this "crackpot" from the Sudan:

This was not the first time she had been sent to be officially kind to a sick or stranded female compatriot. About once a year the task fell to her, and she disliked it intensely. “There’s something repulsive about an American without money in his pocket,” she had said to Mr. Clarke. (337)

Mrs. Ferry’s estimation of the situation reiterates familiar stereotypes about the materialistic modern America from which Kit and Port are trying to escape. Yet, this passage also alludes to the commonness of Kit’s situation, as every year some American ends up in a similar situation in need of the American consulate’s aid. Mrs. Ferry continues to wonder why any American would be involved with these people, this landscape, and the culture of the desert: “She asked herself what possible attraction the parched interior of Africa could have for any civilized person” (337-8). The meeting is made awkward by a French mechanic who wants to help, but the Consulate insists on conducting the proceedings without any intervention (338-9). Again, it is tempting to read a passage in terms of a greater metaphor about colonialism in North Africa, where the French serve a workman-like role of mechanics while the Americans entertain more lofty goals and a greater sense of self-importance. With typical disdain, Mrs. Ferry alludes to the fact that she is trying to get transferred to Copenhagen due to her aversion for North Africa. Therefore, she is disgusted by Kit, who smells and looks as if she might carry diseases (340). Of course Kit also represents the inverse of her desire for civilization, order, cleanliness, and whatever other binaries that this colonial thinking engenders. Mrs. Ferry insists that nothing ever gets lost in the desert, and she tells Kit that she has informed Tunner. When Kit remains unresponsive, Mrs. Ferry realizes that something is very wrong, and thus goes into the hotel for help, but when she returns Kit is gone, ending the novel. Much like Kurtz, Kit is now unable to return to the West.

While Wharton extends the French Orientalist perspective and buttresses the justifications for the colonialist project in North Africa with her travel writing, Bowles offers a far more complicated vision of the situation. Bowles illustrates how the Americans come to view North Africa through a French lens, and he also demonstrates the American naivety about life in the Maghreb in The Sheltering Sky. Still, these are both works that make us question the position of Americans in North Africa. We must recognize these works as a different genre from European colonial literature because of this unusual American perspective that is trapped between French colonialism and a desire to see and experience the Maghreb independently. Similar to the other works studied in this dissertation, these American characters are searching for an “authentic” experience in the colonial world. “Authenticity” most often means pre-modernity, the picturesque, and danger. However, the chase for these stereotypes is largely fueled by French Orientalist ideas about the Maghreb. These Americans view the Maghreb from the sheltered comfort of French protection. But when the protagonists are without the French, disaster strikes. Thus these situations remind us of how influential and essential French protection is to the North African experience for these Americans. These characters attempt to balance their role as tourists (visiting places of interest and enjoying themselves) with their identification with the romantic personage of “the traveler.” However, their identities are fluid. When it is advantageous to be French (hiring an Arab prostitute) they are French; when it is helpful to be American (seeking French aid) they are American; and when it is gainful to be a nomad (needing salvation in the desert) they are nomadic. While they do not always have the freedom to negotiate their choice of

identity or do so consciously, we learn much about how the colonial system works by witnessing the interplay of the American in the Maghreb.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**MIDDLE CLASS AMERICA IN AFRICA AND INDIA:**  
**PAUL THEROUX**

**Introduction**

Paul Theroux (1941-) is a contemporary popular writer best known for travelogues set in exotic locations that often follow old trade routes or railway lines.<sup>124</sup> Yet, besides his most popular works, Theroux has also written extensively about the postcolonial world. Theroux gained considerable experience in this area based on his service in Malawi as a Peace Corps Volunteer, as a Professor at Makerere University, and as a Professor at the University of Singapore. That said, Theroux's reflections often convey distaste for the disorder and poverty of the Third-World similar to those of his former close friend V.S. Naipaul.<sup>125</sup> Yet Theroux, unlike the Nobel Laureate, lacks some of the justifications often given to Naipaul for such harsh criticism. Naipaul, by virtue of his Trinidadian upbringing and Indian heritage, seems marginally more within his rights to criticize the failings of "his" people; while Theroux as a privileged, middle-class, white American seems to oscillate from being racist to ignorant to brutally honest.<sup>126</sup> In this chapter, I will cover one of Theroux's major travelogues, Dark Star Safari (2002),

---

<sup>124</sup> Some of the more prominent examples include: The Great Railway Bazaar (1975), The Old Patagonian Express (1979), The Kingdom By the Sea (1983), Sailing Through China (1984), The Imperial Way (1985), The Happy Isles of Oceania (1992), and his most popular work of fiction: The Mosquito Coast (1981).

<sup>125</sup> Early in his writing career Theroux published V.S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work (1973) and later reflected on their friendship in Sir Vidia's Shadow (1999)

<sup>126</sup> For example Theroux's hatred for aid-workers in Africa can be interpreted as the following: (1) his belief that Africans are currently incapable of supporting themselves and need to learn responsibility with the crutch of Western aid, (2) his lack of awareness about the complexity of how international aid functions in Africa, or (3) an astute comment about how international aid is being misused.

which depicts his journey by land from Egypt to South Africa.<sup>127</sup> As in the previous chapters, I will investigate the relationships that Theroux develops between Americans and locals in his writing, paying special attention to the complexities of American identity in various postcolonial settings. It is important to note that Theroux's travelogue follows a long line of European travel writing in Africa including works such as A. Cornwall Harri's Ethiopian Travels: The Highlands of Ethiopia Described of 1844, H. Clapperton's Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa (1829), Richard and John Lander's Journal to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger (1830), Mungo Park's Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa (1860), and Dr. Livingstone's Travels and Researches (1857). Thus Theroux enters a well-beaten path of white explorers and adventurers. While his observations are often shaped (with or without acknowledging his predecessors) by previous generations of Europeans, Theroux's American perspective on contemporary Africa provides a window on how Americans both emulate European colonialist traits and diverge to offer fresh insights.

I then turn my attention to Theroux's latest work The Elephanta Suite: Three Novellas (2007). Set in present-day India, the first story deals with an American couple enjoying the comforts and opportunities of a luxury hotel while religious tension brews outside the compound walls.<sup>128</sup> In part two, another American, who is initially afraid of India, gathers his wits to exploit the sex tourism scene before ultimately finding a

---

<sup>127</sup> Future study may discover additional examples from his fictional works set in Africa Fong and the Indians (1968), Jungle Lovers (1971), and My Secret History (1989) to determine how his vision of Africa and Africans is constructed as well as to study the reception Theroux receives from his hosts.

<sup>128</sup> A familiar theme from Payne's Sister India



spiritual calling.<sup>129</sup> Finally, an American woman teaching English pronunciation classes to a call center is disheartened to find India nothing like her romantic vision of the country. Her experience goes from disappointment to tragedy directly because of the Americanization of India. With this collection, I will argue that Theroux presents the postcolonial situation that challenges the sentimental notions that many of his readers (like the characters in his work) share. On a surface level, Theroux's challenge exposes the complications of postcolonial India. However, in presenting the horrors of modernization and Americanization as well as the dangers that Americans are exposed to, Theroux also replicates familiar colonial representations of the other.

This chapter is organized by dividing the works as a section on Africa and a section on India. Due to the length and nature of a travelogue, I discuss Dark Star Safari thematically. I first study the familiar trope to this thesis, the American perception of a lack of modernity in the postcolonial world. As usual, the lack of modernity allows for an idealized, romanticized vision of a simpler life without the ugliness of modern, Western life. A large aspect of Theroux's thesis in this work concerns the need for Africa to "return" to its "traditional" ways, as a simple land, and cast-off the failed attempt to modernize enforced by the European colonial powers. As a travelogue, Theroux is also a tourist. Therefore, this work returns to the typical motif of the search for authenticity. Here I investigate Theroux's approach to "finding" the real Africa as well as how his Africa is shaped by the experience he wants to find. Thinking himself apart from the mechanisms and history of the white man in Africa, Theroux feels free to speculate on the legacy of colonialism in the nations he visits. Customary colonial motifs of white

---

<sup>129</sup> Which is a fascinating sub-genre of postcolonial literature in itself.

superiority, African lack of technical know-how, and Africa's lack of culture arise. Theroux describes how Africans commit atrocities and oppress their own people in crueler ways than Europeans ever had. However, Theroux's criticism also extends to the present day European and American presence in Africa. In the next section, I examine how Theroux allies foreign aid with colonialism: to make the analogy that foreign aid continues the destructive practice of fostering welfare states. Finally, in regards to Dark Star Safari, I study the well-known motif of the colonizer's lust for the local women. Displaying an arrogance and lust so common to colonial literature, Theroux replicates the colonial sexualization of Africans. In the second part of this chapter, many of these themes and motifs are revisited, but fictionalized and set in India. In the second section, I briefly introduce each of the short stories and proceed to analyze, via close reading, how Theroux develops themes related to this dissertation in his fiction.

Theroux is a professional travel writer who chooses Africa as a means of vicariously maximizing shock value and discomfort for his American middle-class readers' sensibilities and values. His mood upon embarking on this particular expedition and his wish to encounter the unpleasant African experience needs to be remembered in comparison to what Theroux finds. In other words, his desire to find the stereotypical Western representation of impoverished, backwards, and ruthless Africa is a fait accompli. Theroux begins his journey with this thought:

I had gotten to Lower Egypt, and was heading south, in my usual traveling mood: hoping for the picturesque, expecting misery, braced for the appalling. Happiness was unthinkable, for although happiness is desirable, it is a banal subject for travel. Therefore, Africa seemed perfect for a long journey. (5)

From this opening statement, Africa is the ideal subject for misery. It is his objective to find wretchedness, the appalling, and the picturesque in Africa. However, this project is not only about shock value.

### **The Lack of Modernity in Africa**

Theroux assumes that one travels to escape. Furthermore, the only reason anyone from the West would want to travel through Africa is to experience the most extreme end of escapism. It is a place without phones, answering machines, and the other “homebound writer’s irritants” (3). Theroux imagines that Africa means total isolation for a Westerner. But this is not just escape from personal relationships and responsibilities in the United States; it is more importantly, the possibility of escaping modernity. For Theroux, Africa is a backwards continent that has never developed the infrastructure to allow modernity. On this premise, Theroux posits that Africa’s backwardness is its strength because it can serve as a foil to the modern West, a line of argument not far removed from Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold’s conception of Ireland’s role as a feminine counterbalance to masculine England.<sup>130</sup> Theroux posits that Africa offers Westerners a vision into the primitive nature of man and allows the modern man to see his origins, as the “markets in Africa show us how we once lived and traded” (62). Although the African city in Theroux’s opinion may be desperate, sad, and violent, it offers a portal for Westerners to experience medieval Europe:

I was reminded again that medieval cities were all like this. African cities recapitulate the sort of street life that had vanished from European cities—

---

<sup>130</sup> See, “The Poetry of the Celtic Races.” Ernest Renan. The Harvard Classics. Vol. 32 Ed. Charles W. Eliot LLD. New York: PF Collier and Son Company 1910. As well as, “On the Study of Celtic Literature.” Matthew Arnold. 1866.

a motley liveliness that lends color and vitality to old folktales and much of early English literature. (178)

Yet despite this preservation of medieval conditions and atmosphere, the urban African cityscape is the “nastiest” in the world. The African city, or the “snake pit,” could only be appreciated by misguided foreigners who fail to understand how mistaken it is to mix urbanization and Africa (255). These foreigners are most likely unaware of the “simpler, happier bush” that Theroux remembers from his days in the Peace Corps (188). One of the central arguments of Dark Star Safari is the necessity to encourage “traditional” and “authentic” African modes of life, in other words, the mud huts and subsistence farming of Theroux’s rural imaginings and simultaneously to discourage Western influence and aid which leads to modernization and urbanization.

Theroux continually looks for examples of how efforts to modernize Africa are failures. For example, when he stumbles across the ruins of an unused, modern style, German built housing complex in Harar, Ethiopia, Theroux deduces that its failure is due to the locals’ desire to live in mud huts (113).<sup>131</sup> However, this ruined site allows for speculation that such backwardness is the reason that Westerners like Arthur Rimbaud love Africa. Theroux imagines and contemplates on Africa as a foil for the West:

[Rimbaud] had liked Africa for being the anti-Europe, the anti-West, which it is, sometimes defiantly, sometimes lazily. I liked it for those reasons, too, for there was nothing of home here. Being in Africa was like being on a dark star. (117)

---

<sup>131</sup> For a similar line of thinking, see his implication that universities are illogical in Africa whereas dwelling in mud huts and living hand-to-mouth is natural (205).

In this quote, Theroux uses the most fundamental type of binary logic: Africa is that which is not Western and not modern.<sup>132</sup> To travel to Africa is to therefore escape the Western world and modernity. Furthermore, the West is Earth, and Africa is extraterrestrial, the West is white, and Africa is dark. A whole host of other positions are signified in this statement revolving around darkness, the unknowable, strangeness, and backwardness.

### **Searching the Authentic and the Familiar**

The search for the authentic local experience is a familiar theme in travel literature in general as well as an easily recognized goal of anyone who has been a tourist. Guidebooks promise to help us find the non-touristy activities that are “off the beaten path” so that we may experience something deeper and more meaningful than what the overtly orchestrated tourism industry provides. Yet no matter how self-satisfying it may be to eat in a neighborhood restaurant, to find a beach without other tourists, or to form a bond with a local, tourists enter a power dynamic that orders their relationship with the community. Nevertheless, Theroux is delighted by a local dance performance that he deems to be authentic because, “[T]his was not a spectacle put on for photographers and tourists but rather a weekly rite, done for the pure joy of it” (68). The distinction between an inauthentic spectacle and an authentic performance seems tenuous, as the authenticity in this construction seems measured by the level of inaccessibility to the tourist. Theroux is equally aware and annoyed when his position as tourist is obvious, in other words, when the power structure is most visible. He complains

---

<sup>132</sup> As noted elsewhere, see Achebe, Chinua. “An Image of Africa.” The Massachusetts Review. Vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter 1977), pp. 782-794.

when people in the service industry smile at him, clearly expecting a tip (46). Interaction between the tourist and the local equates to the same power play involved in the service industry as a whole in any country. The local is expected to play the role of the authentic host, a play wherein the tourist/guest is meant to provide some form of compensation. Yet tourists desire to feel as though there is not actually a service being provided, that their experience is an “authentic” interaction between cultures.<sup>133</sup>

When the reality of the tourist/service industry becomes too visible for Theroux, he demonstrates his frustration by expressing his disappointment with the necessity for tips in Africa and the thought that the people are smiling at him for money. More to the point, Theroux confirms his dissatisfaction when stuck in the resort town, Hurghada, because it is so alien to his notions of Africa. Although this resort manager begs him to relax, Theroux replies, “I don’t want to relax. If I wanted to relax, I would not have come to Africa” (51). The “real” Africa for Theroux cannot be experienced while sitting comfortably on the beach; no matter how “real” this experience might actually be, real Africa cannot be this relaxing. In this section, I investigate Theroux’s search for the authentic in juxtaposition to his tendency to also seek out the familiar. That is to say, Theroux’s desire to find the non-touristed zones of danger which he associates with authenticity, and also the “backwards” Africa of his fantasies.

---

<sup>133</sup> James Buzard’s The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture 1800-1918 (1993) concerns a different time period and area than this study, but his observation that tourists’ need to feel that they are creating authentic culture interactions and not merely performances, pre-scripted plays holds true for my subjects: “If there is one dominant and recurrent image in the annals of the modern tour, it is surely that of the beaten track, which succinctly designates the space of the ‘touristic’ as a region in which all experience is predictable and repetitive, all cultures and objects mere ‘touristy’ self-parodies” (4).

Towards the conclusion of his journey, Theroux attempts to describe the tourism rapport between South Africa and Mozambique using an analogy about how Americans visit Mexico. This analogy assumes that his American readers interpret Mexico as a colorful and exotic playground where the dollar goes far in everything from food to merchandise to sex. Theroux writes the following:

South Africans went to Mozambique for some of the reasons Americans went to Mexico: for “color” and a whiff of the gutter and the slum; for cheap eats, fresh tiger prawns especially; for “the real Africa,” authenticity, and ugly knickknacks, also for snorkeling and swimming and whoring. (420)

Although the phrasing of this excerpt might seem to indicate an awareness of the essentialism and gross characterizations that such an analogy creates, further review problematizes such a sympathetic reading. By putting color in quotation marks, Theroux seems to be drawing attention to the shallowness of such a search; however, much of his travelogue has been a search for authentic local color. Therefore this statement reads more like a condemnation of the South African tourist’s bad taste in local color than a condemnation of the tourist’s search for color itself. According to Jonathan Culler:

The distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristic, is a powerful semiotic operator within tourism. The idea of seeing the real Spain, the real Jamaica, something unspoiled, how the natives really work or live, is a major touristic *topos*, essential to the structure of tourism. (159)

Unintentionally it seems, Theroux acknowledges the tourist’s search for the “real” or “authentic” while simultaneously failing to recognize the touristic nature of his own search for the “real Africa.” As Culler explains, the problem for tourists “is to find an ‘unspoiled’ place, an attraction that has not attracted tourists or become encrusted with renown” (163). Theroux haughtily critiques the tourist (American or South African)

while distinguishing himself as a traveler who seeks out the authentic places. Not only does this distinction tie Theroux's mission to the exploits of European colonists before him, but it also makes his own quest for authenticity seem all the more quixotic.

In a similar vein, Theroux highlights the concept of "the real Africa," but he critiques the South African vision of Mozambique, not the premise that there exists something that is the "real Africa." Furthermore, this quotation highlights the assumptions that Theroux makes about his audience, namely that he is speaking to an American, middle-class, and male reader who can appreciate the pleasures that the gutter, the slum, the consumable object, the recreational activities, and the women of a poor country can offer. Theroux assumes that his audience is capable of viewing Mexico or Africa as playgrounds for Western desires.<sup>134</sup>

In terms of finding the authentic and the familiar in Africa, we must also consider the phenomenon of finding what we look for. The first sentence of Dark Star Safari announces, "All news out of Africa is bad. It made me want to go there, through the horror, the hot spots, the massacre--and earthquake stories you read in the newspaper; I wanted the pleasure of being in Africa again" (1).<sup>135</sup> From the perspective of the American reader, the first, most logical interpretation is that Theroux implies that the pleasure of Africa exists in finding the "real" Africa, a joyous and pleasurable continent that exists behind the myth of misery and terror depicted in the mainstream U.S. media. However, such a naïve perspective could perhaps suggest that Africa's problems are

---

<sup>134</sup> As was the case with my analysis of The Sheltering Sky, we can see how Chinua Achebe's argument in "An Image of Africa" concerning Western literature's proclivity for using Africa as a staging ground for exploring Western consciousness is again relevant.

<sup>135</sup> The word choice here echoes Theroux's indebtedness and usage of Conrad's Heart of Darkness as an organizing feature for Dark Star Safari.



relatively minor compared to the everyday joy of spending time there. What becomes increasingly clear throughout the narrative is that the misery and the terror constitute the pleasure of being in Africa. Theroux confirms this reading as he summarizes his experience upon re-entry to the States after all of his possessions were stolen from a hotel and he is sick from food eaten in Ethiopia on the way home. He writes, “I arrived home Africanized—robbed and diseased” (472). The shock of such a statement is muted by the knowledge that this was exactly the African experience he wanted.

### **An American Perspective on the Aftereffects of Colonialism in Africa**

In this section, I draw attention to Theroux’s comments on the legacy of colonialism in Africa. Imagining himself to be a completely independent and objective reporter, Theroux describes how decolonization has been unsuccessful, and how Europe has failed Africa. Yet despite these judgments of African and European failure, Theroux never allows for any American culpability. On one level, Theroux notes how colonization continues to shape Africa by observing the way that Africans interact with outsiders. He finds that the former colonizers are still present, continuing to create problems; for example, he notes that the French soldiers in Djibouti have a reputation for taking advantage of child prostitution (93). Regardless of the validity of such a claim, putting the animosity against whites on the French helps explain the hostile reception that Theroux often receives. In Harar, the people scream “foreigner” at Theroux and try to spit on him. Theroux explains that the foreigner is considered unlucky and unsafe, no doubt as a result of the European colonial legacy (104). But strangely, as a means of clarifying such a treatment Theroux writes, “Since aloneness is the human condition, a stark example of the perfect stranger was the white man in black Africa, alone in his post, the

odd man out” (106). Theroux actually does not make specific reference to colonialism but instead implies that it is the difference between races that actually explains the hostile African reception. By portraying the hostile reception as a racially motivated prejudice, Theroux denigrates Africans as bigots without allowing for the logical explanation that his presence is something of a reminder of the “white man in black Africa” *working* his “post” as a colonizer, be it a lonely job or not.

While in Sudan, following President Clinton’s bombing of the country, Theroux finds himself participating in a conversation between Western diplomats who are recounting various horror stories about Africa (16). When one of the speakers proclaims that Africa is returning to a pre-colonial state (read pre-modern and forsaking the gifts of colonization), Theroux offers this judgment of the situation:

This was a crudely coded way of saying that Africans were reverting to savagery. Yet in another respect what he was saying was true. After a spell of being familiar and promising, Africa had slipped into a stereotype of itself: starving people in a blighted land governed by tyrants, rumors of unspeakable atrocities, despair and darkness. (17)

Missing from this assessment is one evident detail; the Western perspective spins the story on Africa to reflect the stereotype. Yet Theroux’s firsthand experience makes his anecdotal argument persuasive. Using race as the primary marker to discuss the differences between Africa and the West allows Theroux to make many inflammatory statements about failures of African civilization. So while Theroux may be presenting a bold perspective on Africa that shocks his more liberal readers used to a more colorful, sugarcoated picture of rural bliss and exotic African people, he also replicates those same news stories he mentions in the opening, the backwards, violent chaos that is the inverse stereotype of Africa. Whether choosing to dig beneath the surface of the idealistic Africa

of Western media's portrayal of Africa as hell on earth, Theroux ultimately arrives at a conclusion that supports one of the extreme stereotypes about the continent.

In line with colonial era stereotypes, and justifications for colonialism, Theroux describes whites as being technically superior to Africans. Occasionally this position is expressed through brief asides; such as a lament for the uncompleted colonial railway lines that could have done so much for Africa if only revolution had not come so soon (97). On a more personal level he notes how the white British men that offer him a ride are far more proficient at fixing a blown tire than the Africans, "Mick and Abel jacked up the truck, Ben supervising. The tire was changed in half an hour. This speed was in great contrast to the cackhanded incompetence shown by Mustafa and his men the day before" (161-2). But these brief observations are less pronounced than specific cases of management and organization that Theroux uses to present an image of black Africa as backwards. While visiting a white Zimbabwean farm, he admires the efficiency and organization of such an operation, which is clearly a pointed jab at everywhere else that he visited during the trip. Making this case even more directly, Theroux visits one of the black squatters on this white farmer's land. He finds the black man to be buffoonish and ridiculous (369). By describing the plight of Zimbabwe's white farmers with such stark contrasts as this particular example of the efficient and sensible white compared to the unreasonable and foolish black squatter, Theroux achieves his effect of demonstrating black Africa's inability to organize and govern. He further strengthens this claim by giving voice to a group of white émigrés from Zimbabwe: these disposed farmers argue for a return to a white government for the sake of organization and economy (385). Although this minority opinion might be useful in the larger debate, Theroux juxtaposes

their argument along images of massacre and chaos in Zimbabwe since Robert Mugabe's takeover. For instance, in Cape Town, Theroux makes detailed note of the rare book Volksmoord/Genocide a grizzly collection of crime photography from the farms where whites have been killed, often in barbaric ways (461). Yet why go to such lengths to promote such a work in this context if not to reaffirm his racial bias against black African civilization? Theroux seems to argue that postcolonial Africa has suffered at the hands of Black leadership. However, on occasion, Theroux's attitude towards race is more complicated. His criticism of Zimbabwe's black government contains a gesture towards some sort of greater awareness:

Mugabe spent a great deal of time attacking whites and trying to make Zimbabwe's failure into a racial issue, but in fact black Zimbabweans accounted for most of the victims of human rights abuse—the government-sanctioned torture and murder, the electric shocks and beatings in police stations. (480)

In this case, Theroux attempts to reaffirm his point that whites have been discriminated against in Zimbabwe while also highlighting how blacks have suffered the majority of Zimbabwe's ills if for no other reason than because they are the majority. While such a stance seems to indicate sympathy for the whole of Zimbabwe, Theroux's larger claim is that the black government is cruel and backwards.<sup>136</sup>

Furthermore, Theroux carefully details the examples of African cruelty as a means of pointing out just how far African civilization has slipped without the guidance of colonial masters. While in South Africa, Theroux makes a pilgrimage, against the

---

<sup>136</sup> I am aware that this line of argument could be interpreted as a sort of defense of Mugabe. Although I am well aware of the international condemnation of Mugabe's government, I wish to draw attention to Theroux's fixation with white percussion in Africa. Therefore, I highlight Theroux's criticism in order to demonstrate a pattern of attention towards corrupt and cruel Africa, while admitting that instances like Mugabe's policy or the slaying of white farmers are, of course, reprehensible.

advice of all the locals, to visit the squatter camp where a young American Stanford graduate was killed by an angry mob because of her race (455).<sup>137</sup> As is often the case in Dark Star Safari, this anecdote taken individually evokes no suspicion. However, when presented in the company of so many other examples of African cruelty, this story seems like an inflammatory comment on the oppression of whites in Africa. Later while aboard a train that passes through a South African squatter camp, he notes how stones are thrown at him when he refuses to pass food out the window (469). While I do not wish to debate the validity of this experience nor deny that a white person might experience such situations, I do wish to draw attention to Theroux's problematic, one-sided representation of the events and his ordering of these experiences which create an overall impression of Africa as barbaric.

When Theroux finds his own novel, Jungle Lovers, on the banned book list in Malawi, he explains that Malawi bans the works that would be the classics of "any enlightened country" (315). Although this comment is directed at a government that denies access to Western classics, Theroux is equally critical of common individuals as well. He describes in detail the ignorance of a boatman who believes that the Indian merchants get their wealth by taking the hearts of black virgin girls and using them to pull in fish that are full of diamonds (344). While these descriptions may be made in a comic fashion, Theroux presents these events as truthful depictions of his actual experience. By giving voice to the strain of sub-Saharan indophobia, Theroux is exposing an ugly consequence of postcolonialism. Colonialism engenders racism, but Theroux chooses to mock the "backwardness" of these views rather than draw attention to the

---

<sup>137</sup> 1998 Sindiwe Magona, a native of the township Guguletu where the murder took place, wrote Mother to Mother, a work that fictionalizes and recreates the famous murder.

colonial condition that created this hostility. Indians immigrated to Africa to perform clerical, administrative, and banking work for the British Empire; however, independence movements often lumped these Indians together as “others,” “exploiters,” or “collaborators” with the British. While this case played out most dramatically in Idi Amin’s Uganda, resulting in a massive deportation of Indians, the lingering aftereffects of British colonial prejudice that circulated in response to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and ensuing years of struggle for independence trickled down to affect common citizens like the boatman.<sup>138</sup> Again, I do not deny the validity of these encounters, or the existence of those sentiments, but their presentation lends credence to the stereotype of Africa as backwards. By drawing attention to a well-known source of racial tension in Africa (in this case postcolonial intolerance towards Indians), Theroux supports his thesis that Africa is backwards.

Not only are Africans described as technically inferior, but they are also presented as beastly. One bus ride causes Theroux to remark on the bad smell of the local people (275). But despite such basic sensory insults, Theroux insinuates something more sinister when he is sick. He writes that “Africans who seemed to understand that I was weak pursued me, the way predators harry slower or uncertain prey animals, and they demanded money, as though knowing that I was too weak to refuse them” (329). This example is only one instance when Theroux likens Africans to predatory animals. His notions hark back to the early colonial impressions of Africa, where rather than noble savages, Africans were recast as plain savages or beasts paving the way for the “White Man’s Burden,” the moral imperative to colonize and proselytize. In describing the locals

---

<sup>138</sup> See Kasozi, A. B. K. The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994.

as beastly, Theroux also lingers dangerously close to the justifications for slavery: reminding one of the anthropological and physiological studies and application of social Darwinism that buttressed the slave trade. Later, when he gives in to his desire to visit the protected big game parks (no matter how touristy they may be) he consoles himself with the following:

The most dangerous creatures I had seen so far in Africa had been the shifta bandits firing their rifles over the truck I was riding in just north of Marsabit: wild men. The most exotic were the Ugandan hookers in their nighttime plumage, hissing at me from the roadside trees in Kampala: wild women. (404)

Here Theroux is conflating the local people with the exotic animals. This description paints Africans as more dangerous than the continent's exotic animals while simultaneously dehumanizing the people. Theroux continues on this topic when describing his comfort and safety during a ride through the countryside in a truck carrying cattle. Although physically uncomfortable, Theroux relays how his mind is at rest since the life of cattle is worth more than African human life. Therefore he assumes the driver will likely be extra careful thereby insuring his personal safety (154). Again, this point confirms Theroux's low opinion of African civilization and humanity while also demonstrating his regurgitation of older colonial era stereotypes about Africans. By presenting these encounters as fresh evidence of African life from his "unbiased" American perspective, Theroux entices his readers to relearn the colonial stereotypes about Africa.

Echoing the observations of other postcolonial writers from Graham Greene to V.S. Naipual, Theroux observes how Africans have become worse oppressors than their

Europeans colonizers.<sup>139</sup> Yet ironically, Theroux delights in the colonialist lifestyle. He comments on how he feels like a real Orientalist while sitting beside the pyramids at night (81). Later when he catches up with an old British civil servant, whom he admires for the man's good motives, Theroux imagines that he might like to retire to Africa to run a school if only it were not for what people back in America would say about him (289). This daydream seems particularly troubling based upon his overall condemnation of international aid. However, the most worrying example involves Theroux's meeting with a South African who runs a farm in rural Mozambique. In this encounter, the South African asks, "are those your chaps?" when Theroux buys his guides some soda. Theroux interprets this question in colonial terms: "It was a significant question, the moment when one muzungu sized up another's workers. 'My Africans are better than your Africans' was a serious colonial boast [...]" (342-3). It is unclear why Theroux would choose this particular interpretation; however, this example clearly demonstrates that Theroux views his guides as subservient and himself as a colonial master.

Further condemning African civilization, Theroux's perceives the African elite as unwilling to solve Africa's problems:

Medical and teaching skills were not lacking in Africa, even in distressed countries like Malawi. But the will to use them was often non-existent. The question was, should outsiders go on doing jobs and taking risks that Africans refused? (298)

Although it is difficult to criticize his firsthand knowledge, this sort of circumstantial and anecdotal presentation, combined with his condemnation of international aid in Africa, supports the agenda for reproving African self-management. The result of this partial

---

<sup>139</sup> Prominent examples would include Greene's The Comedians (1965) (a novel that Theroux recently wrote an Introduction for in the Penguin Classics series) and Naipaul's A Bend in the River (1979).



blame based on anecdote is that Western readers unfamiliar with Africa are prone to take Theroux's observations as fact. When readers, like the author of the following book review, take Theroux's observations as accurate and unproblematic, then the stereotypes of Africa are reaffirmed:

Theroux is a curmudgeon, a brave traveler and a skeptic, honestly offering readers portraits of cruel post-colonial tyranny, heartbreaking poverty, and desperate hopelessness. For anyone wanting an unfiltered picture of early twenty-first century Africa, Theroux's account will be eye-opening. Not only does he detail his own adventures in vivid prose, but he also recounts--often in their own words--the hardships of the Africans whom he meets. The towns, villages, and open lands he passes through from Cairo to Cape Town hardly resemble the places he remembers so fondly. Everywhere he goes he finds devastated villages, hunger, petty dictators, fear, and the threat of violence. Yet despite the depressing realities of this changed Africa, Theroux tells his stories and those of the Africa he explores as a solo traveler with honesty, compassion, and gusto, leaving the reader glad to have shared his journey. (Barth)

For readers seeking tyranny, poverty, hopelessness, hunger, devastation, fear, and violence, Theroux's perspective is a compatible choice. For reviews of this nature, the fact that these conclusions come from a well established writer and include the evidence of some interviews with Africans seems to be enough to validate Theroux's claims. Furthermore, Theroux's work is presented as an independent American prospective, however; he is actually perpetuating common European colonialist assumptions about Africa. This type of interpretation tends to treat the journey itself as the most important element of the work rather than the findings; which is a point that echoes the familiar theme of the Western mind using Africa as a proving ground.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> It is interesting that even reviewers who claim no experience with Africa agree wholeheartedly with Theroux's skepticism. Stephen J. Lyons, in his review "'Safari' spans Africa's heart of darkness" begins, "The destinations that veteran American traveler Paul Theroux frequents in his latest book are places most of us would be wise to avoid"

## The Analogy Between Foreign Aid and Colonialism

Theroux has a complicated relationship with foreign aid considering that the Peace Corps first brought him to Africa. Of his initiation into African society, he fondly remembers, “I had encountered my first dictator, had my first dose of the clap, and had a gun shoved in my face by an idiot soldier enraged by my color” (278). This memory presents his introduction to Africa as a place of extremes. Whether focused on the corruption of national politics, racism directed at whites, or his own pursuit of sexual encounters, Africa is out of control. Furthermore, Theroux’s behavior as an aid worker and representative of the United States seems paradoxical to the aims of the Peace Corps.<sup>141</sup> Instead, the desire to seek pleasure regardless of the local situation and take advantage of his power and position reads more like a typical colonial response to life in the Third World.

One of the sub-themes of Theroux’s work is his critique of foreign aid in Africa. It is a point that evolves over the course of his writing but first manifests itself as he notices the following: “Charities and aid programs seemed to turn African problems into permanent conditions that were bigger and messier” (61). After this initial comment, Theroux continues to reflect on the correlation between aid and poverty in African.

Several countries later, Theroux comments more decisively on the subject:

I sketched out my theory that some governments in Africa depended on underdevelopment to survive—bad schools, poor communications, a

---

<sup>141</sup> The Peace Corps’ mission consists of the following goals: “1. Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women. 2. Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served. 3. Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans” ([www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)). While Theroux may have contributed to the primary objective, his lust for local women and his desire for self advancement seem at odds with goals two and three.

feeble press, and ragged people. The leaders needed poverty to obtain foreign aid, needed an uneducated and passive populace to keep themselves in office for decades. A great education system in an open society would produce rivals, competitors, and an effective opposition to people who wanted only to cling to power. It was heresy to say such things here, but this was how it seemed to me. (318)

Theroux's position validates the conservative *laissez-faire* philosophy. This position provides a justification for cutting aid or perhaps ties in general with the poor. It is an argument that condemns Western intervention and puts the responsibility for recuperating the destruction imposed by years of colonialism and economic exploitation by the West solely in the hands of Africa. In his review of Dark Star Safari, John Western wonders:

[W]here does such a stance place the genuine efforts of the good expatriates, who do their jobs well and honorably (as Naipaul puts it approvingly somewhere in A Bend in the River) [. . .] and among whom, surely, Theroux would place his youthful, useful self? And the Rosevears? What is the value of an entire life so lived? Misguided paternalists, contributing only to disempowerment, colonial cast-offs in the dustbin of history? What of the inherent value to them, to their own joy of service among Africans—surely that is to be valued? (306)

Although Western is almost entirely admiring of Theroux's adventure and writing, he does point to the telling problem of vilifying a humanitarian project that often produces positive results. While it may be true that there are many examples of failed humanitarian projects in Africa, Theroux seems to discount any possible good in international assistance. It seems particularly defeating to disallow any cooperation between the West and Africa for fear of reinstating colonial power structures. Yet in this extract, I would only disagree with Western's assumption that Theroux values his own contribution to Malawi; Theroux criticizes all attempts at aid to Africa.

## **Theroux's Colonial Male Gaze**

Part of Theroux's presentation of Africa includes the subtheme of his lust for African women, which, in colonial literature, often reads as a metaphor for national allegory or colonial desire. This phenomenon of sexual desire was approached in Frantz Fanon's groundbreaking and seminal text Black Skin White Masks (1952). In his chapter "The Woman of Color and the White Man," Fanon explores interracial attraction, speculating on how racism and inferiority complexes lead to complex, sexual colonial relationships (41). More recently, Robert J. C. Young's book length study Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race details the ways in which the European conception of race creates a simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards the colonized other. Young writes the following:

The ideology of race, a semiotic system in the guise of ethnology, 'the science of races,' from the 1840s onwards necessarily worked according to a doubled logic, according to which it both enforced and policed the difference between the whites and the non-whites, but at the same time focused fetishistically upon the product of the contacts between them. [. . .] Folded within the scientific accounts of race, a central assumption and paranoid fantasy was endlessly repeated: the uncontrollable sexual drive of the non-white races and their limitless fertility. What was clearly so fascinating was not just the power of other sexuality as such, the 'promiscuous', 'illicit intercourse' and 'excessive debauchery' of a licentious primitive sexuality, so salaciously imagined [by European minds]. (180-1)

Sexualizing the colonized other is based in part on the Orientalist scholarship and in part on the Westerner's imagination transferring his own sexual fantasies onto the other. The result is a highly contrived presentation of the other as a wildly sexual being. Returning to Theroux, we see that examples of this colonial desire abound throughout his journey. In North Africa, he remarks on the how the veil is extremely erotic as it allows him to imagine what is underneath (62). Ignoring or perhaps even flaunting the purpose of the

veil in Muslim societies, Theroux sexualizes all veiled women by imagining the hidden body underneath. In doing so, Theroux revives a common colonial fantasy of exploring the hidden body underneath the veil.<sup>142</sup> Later while visiting a Red Cross station run by a group of nuns, in a less intellectual observation, but no less salacious, Theroux becomes excited at the thought of the nuns sharing a bed (114). As in the case of the veil, Theroux chooses women who, by their outward appearance, discourage sexual advance as the object of his lust. In Ethiopia, Theroux announces that the women of the southern region are more beautiful. Although such a judgment would seem shallow under any circumstances, it is particularly so in this case because his claim is based on such a limited stay in the country. Continuing his appreciation for the women of southern Ethiopia, Theroux comments, “I loved watching the pretty girls gorging themselves on the fruit, the pulp on their fingers, the juice on their lips and running down their chins” (145). These explicitly erotic images present Theroux’s voyeuristic lust for African women. In each of these examples Theroux describes African women who perform quite normal, everyday actions, and turns each case into a sexual fantasy. Seen from the perspective of colonial desire, it is these women in their identity as Muslim, as religious, or as innocent that excites Theroux’s desire to have them.

Theroux’s fascination with prostitution in Africa is an undercurrent that runs throughout his journey. Although his remarks on this subject are often brief and in the general context of curiosities in Africa, his frequent return to the subject of prostitution

---

<sup>142</sup> For more on the colonial and postcolonial history of sexualization of the veil see Reina Lewis’s essay “On Veiling, Vision and Voyage: Cross-Cultural Dressing and Narratives of Identity” and Meyda Yegenoglu’s “Veiled Fantasies: Cultural and Sexual Difference in the Discourse of Orientalism.” *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills. London: Routledge, 2003.

links Theroux with the overall colonial trope of sexual desire for the colonized woman. Examples include his aside that the prostitutes near a modern Western style hotel denote the presence of civilization (172). However, after this first remark from afar, Theroux continues to become more familiar with the prostitution scene. He notes his satisfaction with the attention he receives from one group of particularly young and attractive girls to note that African prostitutes are attracted to aid workers (202). Although Theroux may have intended this comment to explain the prostitutes' interest in him, it also serves as a backhanded swipe at the morality of the aid workers, a point of further emphasis against foreign aid in Africa. Shortly thereafter, Theroux returns to this subject to express his excitement at spending yet more time with local prostitutes (211-13). Later Theroux happens to find himself in a bar full of prostitutes; in this case he states that he bought drinks for these women, but would not have sex with them for fear of catching AIDS (290-300). The AIDS epidemic in Africa has been widely reported in the Western media, thereby allowing Theroux to play up the danger that he exposes himself to in these high-risk situations. Nearing the end of his journey in South Africa, Theroux finds a local paper with an article detailing the wide array of sexual services offered in the locality (377). These comments also serve to overly sexualize Africa for the Western reader as we are presented with case after case of the opportunities for buying sex including the more unusual fetishes. Yet Theroux does very little to explain why he wants these experiences, we can only infer that he delights in the power of his position with these women and in the thrill he feels from danger. Continuing this theme to the last pages, Theroux visits a dangerous ghetto and finds a bar with "fat prostitutes" (457). And finally, on the train from Cape Town he recognizes the names of some stops from the "Adult Entertainment

section” of the local paper where erotic advertisements announce the services available in each of these areas (465). Although it is difficult to speculate on what Theroux is trying to accomplish by so often returning to this particular sub-culture, it would be interesting to know the full extent of his journey into his own sexual desire or at least fascination with African prostitution.<sup>143</sup>

During his journey, Theroux admits that the idea of finding his own personal rejuvenation in Africa is another one of his “African fantasies” (198). This rare moment of confession seems to admit that many of these observations on Africa say more about Theroux’s penchant for finding his predetermined authentic Africa: for his desire to disavow American responsibility in Africa, for forwarding his mistrust of international aid, and for playing out his sexual fantasies. Falling into the same colonial paradigm as Young describes in Colonial Desire, Theroux is both attracted to and repulsed by Africa because it operates as the binary opposite of his Western sense of self. Therefore, the best of Africa is what least resembles the West (the pre-modern bush), and the worst of Africa is the modern African city. This binary thinking extends to African people as well, as Theroux feels attracted to the raw, sexual women of Africa while at the same time he is revolted by the inhumanity and chaos. Yet despite the thousands of miles traveled and the countless personalities he meets along the way, Theroux’s journey is an interior, self-conscious exploration of the past and his personal feelings towards Africa. Basically using Africa as a zone for personal exploration and failing to attempt an objective

---

<sup>143</sup> An interesting side note to Theroux’s exploration of prostitution in Africa is his literary project that he alludes to throughout the travelogue. Although we never learn the specific details of his subject matter, we know that Theroux often retreats into the writing of an erotic novel during his voyage. Later this work was published under the title The Stranger at the Palazzo d’Oro (2004).

interpretation of Africa, Theroux falls into Achebe's archetype of the colonizer using Africa to discover himself or challenge her will. Like many of the Americans in this study, Theroux falls into the "not quite" a colonizer category. As a white American, he looks like the former colonizers, but he consciously, or unconsciously, emulates colonial paradigms, but always under the guise of an innocent and detached American. Continuing on this common Western desire to rejuvenate in the Third World, I will now shift the focus from Theroux's travel writing to his novella collection The Elephanta Suite, where fictional American characters explore their fantasies and desires in India.

### **Introduction to The Elephanta Suite**

This novella collection, published in 2007, currently represents Theroux's latest exploration of many of the same topics developed in Dark Star Safari. These topics include the American perspective on the following themes: modernity in postcolonial India, the romantization of pre-modern India, Americans using the postcolonial world as a zone for exploring their desire without ethical boundaries, the Orientalist paradigm of using India as a zone for spiritual rejuvenation, comparing American involvement with British colonialism, and the American search for "authentic" India.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, Theroux explores how American businesses exploit similar dynamics as the previous

---

<sup>144</sup> Long before Theroux described some of the most sensationalist aspects of India to an American audience, Katherine Mayo (1867-1940) provided an analysis and controversial argument against Indian independence in Mother India (1927). Mayo's writing expresses her indignation with the subservience of Indian women. She attacks the lack of minimum age for marriage, denounces the tradition of matchmaking, and criticizes the young age of motherhood for many Indian women. Although Indian writers and politicians furiously protested this slandering of their nation, Mayo managed to draw attention to her issues both in India and the States (I say slandering because much of Mayo's evidence was anecdotal and exaggerated).



generations of European colonizers once had.<sup>145</sup> Finally, Theroux surveys the sexual dynamics of relationships between Americans and Indians, a trope that extends the tradition of colonial writing about relations between white Europeans and their colonized subjects. However, as a work of fiction, unraveling the thoughts of the characters takes on a different tone. In this case, I will be discussing the novellas without concentrating so much on the author. Even so, it is still interesting to speculate on how the author's travel experience has informed these fictional works. Comprised of three separate novellas that may be read independently, Theroux maintains a common thread where characters make cameo appearances in each of the stories. On another level, the collection is synthesized by these themes: being American in India, the juxtaposition of safety and danger in India, sexual relations between Americans and Indians, and the growth of Indian's economy. In this collection India is portrayed as a land of extremes: comforts, riches, power, poverty, and cruelty are all elevated to shocking levels for an American audience. Sometimes reading like travelogues of old, Theroux encourages the wild stereotypes of an exotic land where anything and everything is possible. In this section, I will concentrate on one novella at a time, discussing each work in its entirety, rather than move thematically as I have with Dark Star Safari, simply because each short story contains its own set of circumstances. Therefore, I discuss the specifics of each story chronologically, while making reference to the large issues of the work as a whole and more generally to the themes of Americans in the postcolonial world found in each of the texts discussed in this dissertation.

---

<sup>145</sup> This point may be interpreted as an extension of Theroux's treatment of foreign aid in Africa.

## **Monkey Hill**

The first novella's title encapsulates the main thrust of the story, namely the inability of the American characters to adapt to their location. The American characters, Audie and Beth Blunden are very wealthy, experienced world travelers who have come to Agni, a luxury spa and hotel combination located near the Township of Hanuman Nagar for relaxation.<sup>146</sup> Their Indian hosts repeatedly correct the Blundens' for mislabeling the area "Monkey Hill." Although the region may be of interest to outsiders because of the local monkey population, it is important to note that their naming trivializes the importance of the area, particularly the disputed site for worship that is the source of tension between Indian Hindus and Muslims in the story. Yet while fires and tension burns below in Hanuman Nagar, the Blundens remain secluded in the safety of Agni, renewing their stay week to week as they enjoy yoga courses and therapeutic massages. However, Audie develops an interest in a young masseuse and hotel worker, Anna. Meanwhile, Beth has her first extramarital affair with a young man, Satish, who works at the spa. As a result of these relationships, the Blundens begin to explore the "real" India beyond the security fences of the spa, thereby disregarding Agni's rules. The consequences of entering into relationships with the staff and leaving the property are disastrous, the Blundens are asked to leave, and their only remaining friend, Dr. Nagaraj, mistakenly drives them directly into a riot.

The majority of the Blunden's misfortunes are caused by their misperceptions. Although "Monkey Hill" may be "easier to remember than its Indian name" the Blunden's misinterpretation of the significance of their location seriously undermines

---

<sup>146</sup> The unusual family name Blunden combined with their behavior certainly invites us to think of the idea of blunder and the Blundens as blunders.

their safety (5). From the introduction to the story, the Blundens interpret the monkeys as evil creatures only to learn shortly afterwards from Dr. Nagaraj that the monkeys are friendly, and once saved him when he was lost (6).<sup>147</sup> In a similar instance, Beth continually refers to Dr. Nagaraj's Ganesh statues as "elephant figurines" (14). Lacking basic knowledge or a general curiosity about the local culture, the Blundens are content to look for the preconceived notions that they had of India. However, when India presents situations that straddle the extremes of poverty and luxury, frustration arises for the Blundens. In these cases, the country only makes sense when it conforms to "dirty chaotic India" stereotype observed during the cab ride or when it is the spiritual luxury spa. In the following instance, the Blundens are bothered by the ambiguity of the monkeys who patrol the outer limits of the spa:

The few times at Agni they'd seen something exotic or strange—like the monkeys staring at the sunset, or had they been looking at the town?—it was not anything they'd anticipated, not the India of stereotype, and that was so disconcerting, they withdrew into the Agni gate and shut India out. (18)

Here the Blundens are confronted with an unsettling image of their surroundings. These monkeys, according to the locals, are watching the fires that burn in protest below in the town, and not just looking at the picturesque scenery. Since the Blundens are uninterested in the local religious tensions, they retreat from the disturbing reality around them to the

---

<sup>147</sup> The narrator briefly mentions that the Blundens had had a negative experience with monkeys in Kenya. Without wishing to over-interpret this theme, it is nevertheless interesting to note that the local animals are portrayed as both human and evil. Furthermore, be it intentional or not on Theroux's part, the monkey serves as an important symbol in Hindu imagination and religion. Hauman, the monkey-God, is a popular focus of worship and admired for both his piety and bravery in battle particularly against the brutal ruler Ravana detailed in the Ramayana (Kapur). The theme of miscommunication and perhaps also the reference to monkeys invites comparison with Forster's A Passage to India (1924).

comforts of the spa. This decision foreshadows the danger of ignoring their surroundings when the local does not conform to their desire. Regardless of their disappointment with India's failure to live up to the stereotype, the Blundens must take caution as the religious tension mounts. Their inability to interpret the monkeys reads as a metaphor for their general inability to correctly understand the situation in India. Choosing to see what they want to see (the picturesque, the mystical, the strange India) means ignoring the warning signs around them. These moments allow the story to forecast the hazards of an American perspective that fails to recognize the dangerous element of Indian society that lies beneath the colorful religious celebrations and lush scenery.<sup>148</sup>

A similar occasion, also a motif throughout The Elephanta Suite, concerns negative comments about Indian fiction. In one instance Beth expresses her disappointment with "one of these novels by an Indian! About India! Not a lot of jokes! I don't think I ever want to go there!" (22). Beth's dissatisfaction with this unnamed Indian novel further alludes to the Blundens' unwillingness to confront the actual situation in India. When other images of India conflict with Beth's preconceived ideas, she rejects them. Occasionally the Blundens seem to realize that their conception of Indian is too simple. Before falling asleep Audie thinks the following:

India was a land of repetitions, a land of nothing new. You couldn't say anything in Indian that hadn't been said before, and if you succumbed to India's vivid temptation to generalize, all you could do was utter a platitude so obvious it looked like a lie: *The poverty's a problem* or *All these cows in the street* or *It's real dirty.*" (36)

Ironically, at this point, Audie's experience with India is entirely through the gate of the spa or behind the closed windows of his air-conditioned taxi ride to the spa from the

---

<sup>148</sup> Not that a beautiful, colorful country with a hidden sinister side is, of course, merely another stereotype of India.

airport. Furthermore, this excuse is based on only partial knowledge of the country and little desire to understand the local situation. Therefore Audie clings to the stereotype of India as a mystical land that has always been poor and dirty. According to Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal in their study Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy, which deals with the Western perception of India, the Blundens' preconceived image of India is fairly standard. They write the following:

[I]n the Western popular consciousness the Indian subcontinent tends to evoke two contrary images. On the one hand it is lauded as an ancient land of mystery and romance, extraordinary wealth and profound spirituality. On the other hand it is denounced for its irrationality and inhumanity and derided for its destitution and squalor.

Yet this common Western perception of India in "Monkey Hill" leads to a double entendre. At first reading, we may be critical of the Blundens' inability to think beyond these reductive stereotypes about India as a land of extremes. However, it must also be noted that Theroux essentially portrays India as a land of extreme wealth and comfort while inside the Spa. But this isolated pocket of peace and luxury obscures the existence of Indian fanaticism and poverty beyond the resort's gates. This point reinforces the typical stereotypes that Bose and Jalal draw attention to, namely that India is a land of contradictions a romantic, spiritual land and an irrational, cruel society.

India for the Blundens in this case is a commodity; they can experience the mystical nature and exoticism of the land while avoiding the reality beyond the security fences. Beth is physically shocked by the extent of poverty in India during the cab ride, but like Audie, "She was not disgusted, she accepted these as the facts of life" (38). Beth's reaction to the poverty portrays shock rather than empathy; it is as if the "greasy water in the sacred tanks, the emaciated animals, the tortured looking trees, the women

washing dirty clothes in a dirty stream” are merely examples of authenticity of India (38).

However, this initial shock turns to excitement when she leaves the spa:

It was dreadful and disorderly, yet she was roused by its truth, as the revelation of something that had lain hidden from her but was hidden no longer—no one hiding, no one groveling, the sight of smoke and fire and open conflict. She was shocked and excited by it. It was India with the gilt scraped off, hungry India. The India of struggle, India at odds with itself. She had seen Indians at Agni, but they didn’t live there. This was where Indians lived, in the smoke and flames of Hanuman Nagar. (42)

For Beth, the excitement of discovering her conception of authentic India in all its poverty and struggle is invigorating. Having become bored with the sheltered and artificial spiritual experience at Agni, the sight of reality produces a transcendent feeling of accessing “real” India. Such an excitement exceeds the typical *memsahib* caricature that colonial Indian literature often mocks. Jenny Sharpe describes the typical *memsahib*:

[She is] a notorious female figure who comes into her own during the post-Mutiny period. Historically, *memsahib* is a class-restrictive term of address meaning “lady master,” which was used for the wives of high-ranking civil servants and officers. Stereotypically, she is a small-minded, social snob who tyrannically rules over a household of servants and refuses to associate with Indians. (91)

In many ways Beth is the typical *memsahib* even if she is an American in the new millennium. In the context of Theroux’s work, she is an upper-class white woman attached to her decision-making husband, she is a social snob and she is certainly used to bossing around the spa employees. Yet like Forster’s *A Passage to India*, which Theroux’s work continues to draw allusions to, the plot intensifies when the *memsahib* comes into contact with the local Indian men. This contact enters the exciting zone of interaction between those of different race, nationality, and class, while simultaneously introducing an undercurrent of sexual desire and possibility. While Sharpe argues that the role of the typical *memsahib* was to cultivate an “innocent space” at home where racial

segregation is strictly enforced, the lines for the White male are far less rigid (92). For Audie, India serves as a foil to his experience in America. India is a place of timeless history and endless nuance:

But nothing I have ever done or said, no family name, no meal I've eaten, has any past or present, no meaning beyond its ordinariness: it is only what it looks like. Which is better, he wondered, the primary colors of my American life or the subtleties of Monkey Hill? I am what I appear to be, and the Indian never is." (66)

In a very Saidian/Orientalist framework, Audie conceives America as ordinary and standard while India is extraordinary and mysterious. This dichotomy plays into the typical colonial paradigm of othering the colony/colonized.<sup>149</sup> Such an explanation in this case also serves to compel India to remain as is in order to offer a counterbalance to American ordinariness, a message that harks back to Renan and Arnold's assessment of Ireland acting as a counterbalance to England. Perhaps it is because the ensuing feelings (of difference and possibility) encourage men like Audie to explore the limits of their personality and desire. So if the Blundens are not trying to understand where they are, they are instead focusing on achieving as much individual pleasure as possible. Perhaps as a metaphor for the colonial mission to gut the colony of the natural resources, the Blundens, in this case, state their overt interest in acquiring sex and commodities while in India.

Audie's sexual interest in Anna is about possession. Unlike sexual desire in other American travel writing, this type of desire in the colonies invokes a desire for power over the woman through sex, which can be read as national allegory.<sup>150</sup> After describing

---

<sup>149</sup> This point is the one of the basic tenants of Edward Said's Orientalism (1978).

<sup>150</sup> See Justin D. Edwards. Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature 1840-1930. Hanover: UP of New England, 2001.

Anna's body, the narrator describes Audie's lust: "She was lovely, and although she was still talking about Jesus the fish, Audie was fascinated. He could take her so easily into his arms, could scoop her up and possess her" (31). Audie makes little effort to listen to Anna; instead, he fixates on how he could physically dominate her. Later, when Anna begins to suggest the possibility of a sexual encounter, Audie escalates the affair by introducing the idea of bringing her to America as his mistress (51). However, when Audie leaves Agni's grounds with Anna, he has an opportunity to have sex with her, but instead chooses to only touch her and give her a significant amount of money (64). The feeling of giving to Anna without taking sex in return gives Audie an enormous sense of satisfaction. He goes to see Anna shortly after this visit and is "eager to see what sort of reception he'd get from Anna, who owed him—he felt—unlimited gratitude. For hadn't he let her off the hook? He wanted to experience her grateful hands" (69). Negating the charity of his action, Audie instead now expects total power over Anna. Rather than sexual conquest, he seeks appreciation for his role as *savoir*. Briefly diverging from the trope of colonial desire, Audie and Anna enter another well-known postcolonial theme: the master/slave relationship.<sup>151</sup> In familiar territory for postcolonial studies and colonial

---

<sup>151</sup> In Georg Hegel's discussion of the master-slave dialectic from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), we begin with the myth of the initial encounter in which the first step towards consciousness may be achieved when one asserts his dominance over the other. For the dominant, this relationship affirms his existence and produces self-realization by virtue of the opportunity to see the recognition of personal achievement through the slave's perspective. The slave's self-realization is in his awareness that he has a subservient position to the greater being, which is nevertheless a position, and perhaps in a theoretical sense, an improvement from nothingness. Hegel describes this relationship as being problematic because the master is enslaved to the justification that he receives in the eyes of the slave. Simultaneously the slave is more obviously burdened by this arrangement. However, the problem for Hegel may be solved by the synthesis of these positions, which leads to abolition because of the eventual realization that both individuals are autonomous and require freedom. For postcolonial studies the metaphor is



literature, Audie shapes this unbalanced relationship by controlling Anna with money and guilt. He uses his superior wealth and his threat of sexual conquest as an underhanded means of control.

Beth has a different power dynamic in her relationship with Indian men. She only notices Indians if they are good looking, she ignores what most of the locals have to say (12). Her affair at the spa begins with a young Indian man who is more desirable for his image than anything else; furthermore, she achieves the self-image makeover by having an affair with him. However, Beth's sexual relationship with Satish begins with her initial fear of rape. This fear again seems like an allusion to A Passage to India; however, the fear of rape in the colonies is of course a common theme of colonial literature in general. In Allegories of Empire, Sharpe explains that the anti-imperialist theme of Forster's work is that "the crime lies in a system capable of reducing an Indian man to his pathological lust for white women" (119). Yet the ease at which such blame is placed and believed, until Adela's spectacular retracement, demonstrates how easily the colonial hysteria over the possibility of any attack on white womanhood in the colonies can be created. Little has changed in the context of these Americans in independent India, so while Beth is attracted to the handsome young Indian men she is also fearful of a violent attack. As in

---

less abstract. The master is the colonizer and the slave is the colonized. Based on the scholarship of Memmi and Fanon, postcolonial theory critiques this binary power construction that has allowed the West to dominate the rest of the world. Here, Fanon rejects the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, where for every subject there must be a converse because he believes that the black man "must" be black in relation to the white man, while paradoxically, the white man is a whole onto himself. This thought is summarized by Fanon's statement, "I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance" (Black Skins, White Masks 116).

the introduction where monkeys are compared to humans, a threatening monkey steals Beth's sandwich by the pool. She thinks

In her instant memory it was a monkey; at the moment of muddled confrontation she had seen the thing as a hairy hostile child—like one of the mocking boys she'd seen at Hanuman Nagar—and she was too panicked to scream, though her hands were raised to protect her face and breasts. (47)

It is puzzling that the monkey is briefly taken for a child and that this association leads to a fear or rape. Is this yet again an allusion to A Passage to India and the fear experienced by the Englishwomen in the cave? Allusion or not, this fear of the animal side of the Indians is quickly displaced by the counter stereotype of the Indian mystic. Satish is a young man who tries to impress Beth with his massage techniques, his paintings, and his accomplishments in yoga (56-7). In her desire to experience authentic India, Satish presents another level of local delicacy: He is the picture of the Indian lover. Although Satish fits the image and the stereotype of the Indian lover perfectly, Beth is unsure what to say to him. She wonders if all affairs begin with “predictable phrases and clichés” if this type of relationship is based on “repetition, as mimicry, as passionate clichés,” however, regardless of the air of banality about this relationship Beth “wanted to believe that the feeling was real and originated within her” (57). The desire for the relationship to be original and unique is an extension of her desire for the experience of India to be profound and “real.” Yet even at this point Beth is aware that behind her desire for authenticity there lurks the more likely scenario that this experience is highly formulaic and clichéd; therefore, she is only demonstrating a slightly better grasp of reality than her husband. Her suspicions are confirmed when Beth visits Satish's home, eats some of his food, and eventually has sex with him. The sexual encounter is not pleasant, particularly

when Satish asks her for money afterwards (68). Although Beth is reluctant to admit it, the relationship with Satish was clearly exploitative and demeaning for both Beth and Satish.

Besides sex, one minor plot digression concerns Beth's interest in buying a shatoosh shawl. This item is contraband because of its Tibetan or Kashmiri origins and because of the exotic nature of the material. After initially inquiring with the hotel employees about a shatoosh, Beth finds that it will be difficult. According to Dr. Nataraj who takes Beth to a shop in the town, the shatoosh is "made from chin hairs of very rare Tibetan antelope. Woven in Kashmir. This man is Kashmiri himself" (43). The shatoosh, like the experience in the town is "authentic." The price for such an item is around five-thousand U.S. dollars; however, the cost is driven not only by the quality of the work but also because "this antelope is almost extinct" (45). Yet Beth feels no shame in buying an item that is both illegal and questionably produced. The shatoosh episode is an extension of the Americans' general attitude towards India. They consider their position in India as above the law and beyond the ethical boundaries that constrain them in the West (a point that we see echoing throughout all of the writers and characters of this dissertation). Just as the locals can be bought for sex, so can this ultra rare and illegal product.

The metaphor of colonialism seems particularly plausible because of the repeated reference to Indians as good servants—it is as if the country's colonial heritage could be credited for producing an accommodating people best suited for giving these Americans pleasure. Although British colonialism was more concerned with control and wealth, these Americans seem thankful that the British have created a servile people. For example, the narrator explains the Blundens' perception of their hosts:

Everyone was pleasant to them, the staff always pausing to say hello or *namaskar*. Always smiling, deferential without groveling, they waited on the Blundens, devoted servants, prescient too, anticipating their desires. “Carrot juice again, sir?” “Green tea sorbet again, madam?” And when the Blundens skipped meals the waiters would say, “We missed you last night sir,” as though their absence mattered and was a diminishment. (16)

While the narrator may allow for a sense of irony or pessimism that the Indian workers could possibly be assuming such subservient attitudes out of economic interest, the Blundens seem unaware.<sup>152</sup> The inclusion of a single local word for “hello” adds a certain touch of authenticity that appeals to the tourist, and the feeling that they are actually missed seems hopeful at best. In Translating Orients Timothy Weiss explains how tourists like the Blundens are consumers of these created moments of authentic foreign culture:

[T]ourists would seem to be less the authors of their voyages than consumers of a prefabricated script of sights and activities. The rationale, or generative desire, of the tour is largely imitative: tourists desire to see and do those things that others like them have seen and done. If the voyage as tour package does anything more than reinforce the tourists’ identity and cultural and social predilections, it accomplishes this secondarily, because its primary purpose is to gratify the tourists’ desires and to bring back their business another time. We might say that the tour as performative process operates at the conjunction of the tourist’ sense of self, their idealization of their destination, and the spectacle of that place as it is presented and staged by the apparatuses of tourism within the locale. (52)

In this context, we can see how the Blundens take part in a scripted performance of Indianness. The India that is performed by the hotel staff mimics both the idea of colonial luxury (groveling locals at your beck and call) and postcolonial tourism (learning the local word for “hello”).

---

<sup>152</sup> See Homi Bhabha’s notion of “sly civility” in The Location of Culture 93-101. The idea is basically that the colonized subject can appear to submit to authority, while actually undermining it.

However, the result of such royal pampering leads Audie to consider India as an outsourcing base for his company specifically because of the compliant nature of the hotel staff (16). The characteristic of the Indian worker that Audie most admires is the willingness to serve: he notes how this trait is a nice change from the greedy and lazy American working class: “Indian workers were different, neither presumptuous nor servile, well spoken, educated, and skilled they were like people from another planet whose belief was *we need you*” (16). Valuing the Indian labor market, interpreting this hospitality as a servile nature reminds readers of the British desire to retain India as the “crown jewel” of the empire. In other words, Audie realizes the enormous potential for financial gain in exploiting a nation with an enormous skilled work force. Yet as in many colonial stories, this perceived passivity and respect is taken for granted as the Blundens look for ways to exploit their hosts. However, by the conclusion of the novella, it is clear that the workers are capable of expecting a certain level of decency from their guests. This moment is most clearly demonstrated when a pool worker chastises Beth for being dirty and the manager politely but firmly asks the Blundens to leave after presumably having fired Satish and Anna. The ending serves a reminder that postcolonial India now has some authority and resources to deal with exploiters like the Blundens. Although the Blundens’ wealth buys them a level of servitude, sexual favor, and exotic mementos, they are ultimately banished for the insult and aggravation that they have caused. This conclusion reminds the reader how contemporary India, while often similar to the experiences of previous colonial exploiters, has significantly changed.

## **The Gateway of India**

The second novella continues the theme of American exploitation of India, for it invites us to make the connections between American outsourcing and colonialism. From the title, this novella draws comparison to the British colonization of India. The British built the Gateway in 1927 as a testament to their might. Therefore, we are encouraged to read Theroux's work as a commentary on Britain's legacy and the nature of American globalization in India. The national allegory motif surfaces in Dwight's imaginings of the country, "And then he left, going to India as to a waiting lover, a patient mistress" (112). Therefore the idea of the "Gateway" in to India, particularly in the case of Audie and Dwight, is an Indian's woman's body. In this case, the woman's body provides an entry point to Indian culture. However, the national allegory is encouraged by Dwight's reflections on his ruined marriage; namely, he determines that it is impossible for two people to prosper equally in a relationship (128-9). This analogy resonates as we see how American businesses exploit cheap labor in India as well as how American men exploit poor Indian women. However, the dynamic between Dwight and Shah presents a more complicated picture of American influence in India and conversely the forecasting of Indian influence on Americans and America as a result of this collaboration.

The protagonist, Dwight Huntsinger, is an American "lawyer and moneyman" in Mumbai. Initially sent to India against his will to negotiate contracts for his Boston based firm, Dwight soon discovers new freedoms on account of his powerful negotiating position and his relationships with Indian prostitutes. Yet strangely, "The Gateway to India" is a story very much in keeping with the Orientalist paradigm of spiritual

rejuvenation for a Westerner in India.<sup>153</sup> Dwight's journey is sordid. His awakening seems more like a duping than a realization; consequently, this novella is unusual and complicated. The narrative features several key issues important to this study: a double edged stereotyping of India as both hell and as an escape, a fascination with the power of money in India, a desire among Americans to exploit their power for sexual favors, and an ongoing comparison of American involvement in India with British colonialism. This novella also diverges from the typical Western spiritual rejuvenation model as Dwight's Indian counterpart Shah tricks Dwight into accepting an austere spiritual existence in exchange for the American's possessions and profession.

Once again, Theroux presents us with an American vision of India as a land of extremes. While Dwight's conception of India changes throughout the work, other Americans interpret the significance of going to India in the usual stereotypes of spiritual rejuvenation or mortal peril. This thinking is best exemplified in Dwight's initial reaction to being sent to India and his use of India as a bargaining tool with his ex-wife:

Get me out of here had been his constant thought. India has been an ordeal for him, but he had chosen it in a willful way, knowing it was reckless. It was deliberate. Recently divorced, he had said to his ex-wife in their last phone call, "Maureen, listen carefully. I'm going to India," as if he were jumping off a bridge. It was the day he received her engagement ring back—no note, just the diamond ring, sent by FedEx to his office—and he was hoping she'd feel bad. But as though to spite him, she said, "It'll probably change your life," and he thought, Bitch! (84)

For Dwight, India is a worst-case scenario. It is a hellish experience, but it is also one that can lead to promotions at work, and it can be used as a threat to his ex-wife as he portrays traveling to India as a form of suicide. However, Maureen demonstrates the inverse

---

<sup>153</sup> Peggy Payne's novel Sister India (2002) and Wes Anderson's film The Darjeeling Limited (2007) would be but two recent examples of the American who goes to India in search of spiritual rejuvenation.

stereotype of India. She suggests that it is a place for Westerners to find themselves. Dissatisfied with their relationship, Maureen hopes that India will teach Dwight something. If nothing else, she can at least use Dwight's melodramatic threat as an opportunity to sarcastically mock him. Dwight initially rejects the "spiritual country" stereotype because of the climate within his company. A senior partner at the firm, Sheely, states the following:

"Go to India?" [. . .] The very name could set him off. "Why should I go to India? Indians don't even want to go to India! Everyone's leaving India, or else wants to leave, and I don't blame them. I understand why—I'd want to leave too if I lived there. Which I don't, nor do I ever want to go to that shitty place ever again. Don't talk to me about India!" (85)

Such hostility towards India affects Dwight's perception of the country. When Mr. Shah, the firm's principal contact in India, gently inquires about Dwight's comfort in Mumbai, Dwight angrily replies, "I'm disgusted. I'm frightened. I am appalled. Don't you see that I want to go home?" (85). However, Dwight soon discovers that India is a far more complex country than he had initially estimated. Although Dwight's understanding of India changes, he swings from one extreme to another. In this passage, Dwight realizes that India is not the sensual yet sexually frustrated country he first imagined:

He was wrong about this—wrong about everything, wrong in all his assumptions. India was sensual. If India seemed puritanical, it was because at the bottom of its Puritanism was a repressed sensuality that was hungrier and nakeder and more voracious than anything he'd known. The strict rules kept most people in their place, yet there were exceptions everywhere, and where there were exceptions, there was anarchy and desire. If India had a human face, it was that of a hungry skinny girl, starved for love, famished for money. (135)

This personification of India is telling in that it highlights the elements of the country to which Dwight is attracted: that is the image of the hungry, naked, and desperate girl. He



looks for opportunities for economic exploitation, and also for occasions to take sexual advantage of the locals, the exploitation is possible in both cases because of his superior wealth. Furthermore, this motivation is particularly important because it is the main reason for his continued stay in India, “in all that misery, there was money” (85). In this sense, the novella takes on more of the British colonial paradigm of economic exploitation.

Money and power are explicitly linked in “The Gateway of India.” For the American firm, India is an exploitable resource for cheap labor. For Dwight,

India was a foreign country where he’d been assigned to find outsourcing deals, not a place to enjoy but one to endure, like going down a dark hole to find jewels. He worked in the boardroom, wrangling with manufacturers; he sat in his suite and watched CNN [. . .] He suffered, and the firm was grateful, for India proved to be outsourcing heaven. (86)

This extract continues the negative view of India. But, we also discover a link to colonialism in the mining of natural resources. As Europe’s colonies were initially exploited because of their natural resources, now we see American interests attempting to profiteer in the same locations due to inexpensive labor and low manufacturing costs. The chief benefits are financial; however, India is also treated as a place where the labor can truly be exploited without any concern for business ethics: Dwight reasons that the Indians will build a roof tile that costs 8 times the price when produced in Rhode Island. In so doing, the American company will also avoid further lawsuits from the workers because of the dangerous fumes (88). Without any regard to the dangers or immorality of this practice, Dwight and his firm push for cheaper labor regardless of the hazards. As his work intensifies in India, Dwight pays more attention to his role as exploiter: “The smell of failure in India wasn’t only Indian failure. It was a universal smell of human weakness,

the stink of humanity, his own failure too. His firm of lawyers was bringing so many people down” (128).<sup>154</sup> Dwight’s neo-colonizer’s shame reminds us of European colonial guilt. In this passage, his opinion of India has changed to include some level of responsibility. He continues:

Perhaps failure was the severest kind of truth. His work was a punishment and a wrecking ball: he took manufacturing away from American companies and brought it to India. The American manufacturers hated him—and they failed; the Indian companies were cynical, knowing that if they could not produce goods cheaply enough, they would be rejected. Every success meant someone’s failure. He could not take any pride in that process: he was part of it. (131)

Here Dwight is becoming self-conscious of the havoc his firm and his own actions have created. The self-realization of his role in the erosion of the American economy, as well as the questionable business tactics used in India, pushes Dwight to act in a more self-destructive manner. Yet it is because of his guilt as an exploiter and his eventual punishment that Dwight achieves his (ironic) spiritual awakening.

Later, when Shah insists that they attend a charity gala for abducted and abused women in order to make business connections, Dwight takes the opportunity to meet Surekha Shankar Vellore (or Winky). Like the Indian street prostitutes, Winky is for sale, but the price is much more expensive. Although Winky will spend time with Dwight in exchange for some valuable earrings, she will not have sex with him. Furthermore, she insists on taking a point that demonstrates her control in the relationship. Winky is so confident that her conversation ventures into subjects that Dwight clearly finds disagreeable. In response, Dwight abandons the encounter with Winky to return to the

---

<sup>154</sup> See A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures Continental Europe and its Empires (2009) Ed. Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. Patke and Lars Jensen. The origins of the phrase “colonial guilt” are traced back to Germany’s empire (215-224).

Gateway in search for Indru or someone similar because he is attracted to the total power that his money can buy from India's poor. In this sense, Winky represents the growing middle-class in India. She is a figure similar to Shah, as she is aware of her value to this American, and looks to exploit the relationship to her advantage. Therefore Dwight, unable to turn this relationship in his favor, chooses to prey on weaker women.

Dwight's spiritual awakening in India is brought on by his sexual relations with local prostitutes. His initial encounter begins by playing the role of a savior when a man with a stick threatens a teenage girl and some children. The power of the savior, also a justification for participation in relations with these women, echoes the British justifications for the colonization of India. When Dwight defends the girl, an old lady gratefully invites him to have tea with the children as a way of giving thanks for his heroic deed. Upon entering some decrepit accommodation, the old lady proposes that Dwight watch the girl dance for a small fee in a private room. Alone in the room with the girl, Dwight becomes excited at the power that he holds over someone for such a small fee. He thinks of her as both a servant and an object of desire: "Soon she was half naked, with small breasts, with sallow skin, and she was not a servant girl anymore but an object of desire, with flashing eyes, stamping feet, twirling and skipping until the music stopped" (95). The power relationship between Dwight and Sumitra is quite similar to that between Audie and Anna. Both American men are turned on by the control that they have over these young girls; moreover, it is a dominance derived from their economic might. This type of attraction is both physical and psychological. The girl is young, weak, easily dominated, and cheap. By commodifying Sumitra, Dwight dehumanizes her while also making himself all-powerful. However, after taking her, Dwight immediately feels

corrupted. Ironically, he blames the Indians for tricking him.<sup>155</sup> Losing his nerve after possessing Sumitra, Dwight briefly sees himself as a creepy exploiter, shamefully taking advantage of this girl. While this sexual power play had been a turn on in the heat of the moment, Dwight is also capable of realizing how his actions are unethical. Nevertheless, despite his initially misgivings and self-loathing, Dwight continues this relationship (and others) by allowing himself the fantasy of saving the girl from a life of prostitution. The theme of saving the colonial prostitute is a familiar one, perhaps most famously explored in William Somerset Maugham's "Rain" from The Trembling of a Leaf (1921). In this familiar colonial power structure, Dwight justifies his relationship by imagining himself as savior.<sup>156</sup> Once again, Theroux repeats this motif as Audie also imagined bringing Anna back to the United States to give her a better life. But even if Dwight permits himself these savior fantasies he continues to visit Sumitra as a prostitute, eventually asking her not to dance, but only to have sex. Ironically, sex with Sumitra makes him feel worse, but it also produces the feeling that he belongs in India:

All through the following day he reminded himself that he was corrupt and weak. He felt sorrowful whenever he thought of Sumitra, her yellow eyes and small shoulders and thin fingers with the chipped polish on her fingernails. This sad and sentimental feeling penetrated him with the sense

---

<sup>155</sup> "He was debauched, that was the word for how he felt—a corrupt man trifling with a teenage whore. It was bad enough that she was so young, somehow much worse than she could actually dance expertly—she knew the steps; she could have performed in a dance troupe, becoming brilliant. Instead she danced to titillate and seduce the greedy American who'd given her money" (96-7).

<sup>156</sup> Robert Young explains how colonialism produces the European savior who desires power and control as well as sexual conquest in the colonies: "Colonialism, in short, was not only a machine of war and administration, it was also a desiring machine. This desiring machine, with its unlimited appetite for territorial expansion, for 'endless growth and self-reproduction', for making connections and disjunctions, continuously forced disparate territories, histories and people to be thrust together like foreign bodies in the night. In that sense it was itself the instrument that produced its own darkest fantasy—the unlimited and ungovernable fertility of 'un-natural' unions" (Colonial Desire 98).

that he belonged in India and nowhere else, that he had begun to live there in a way that he could not explain to anyone. (100)

Inexplicitly, India transforms from being a “hellhole” to a salvation point for the corrupted Westerner. Is it because Dwight feels that there is no order or reason to India that he can abandon his morals here? Perhaps this is the case because soon after, Dwight reports seeing an American women enter the hotel lobby in tears, shaken up from the five mile drive from Mumbai Airport, a trip that “had once shocked Dwight” too (101).

Furthermore, when Dwight picks up another young girl, Indru, he asks, “If I buy you a drink, what will you give me?” (103). His brazen, unveiled demand is out of character, and although Dwight would never try such a line in Boston he allows the transgression here because “It was reckless, but he was in India. Who cared?” (103). Such a comment assumes that his actions in India are inconsequential and that these Indian girls do not deserve the same amount of respect or dignity as Americans. Perhaps it is because these women can be bought that Dwight feels that they are less than human. As soon as his trip ends, Dwight yearns to return to the new freedom and excitement discovered in India. Based on his encounters with the “dancer” and the “waif,” he is no longer scared of India.<sup>157</sup> In fact the sexual liberation and the taste of power create a desire to return to Mumbai.<sup>158</sup> This new attitude is heightened by the reception that he receives upon returning to work in the States. Dwight’s co-workers now see him as a hero for spending

---

<sup>157</sup> Even Dwight reflects on how this transformation in his reception, “On the first trip, and for part of the second, he had seen India as a hostile, thronged, and poisoned land where a riot might break out at any moment, triggered by the slightest event, the simplest word, the sight of an American. And he would be overwhelmed by an advancing tide of boisterous humans, rising and drowning him amid their angry bodies” (108).

<sup>158</sup> “The whole of India looked different to him now, brighter, livelier. But more, he was himself changed. I am a different man here, he thought, as the plane roared down the runway and lifted above the billion lights of Mumbai. I want to go back and be that man again” (108).

so much time in India, which “represented everything negative—chaos and night” to his firm (109). Plus, these deals are very lucrative for the company. The combined effect of the boost in self-confidence mixed with the adulation of his peers greatly enhances Dwight’s sense of self-worth: “After the fiasco of his brief marriage, it was nice to be thought of as brave, and he like being regarded as a kind of conqueror—it was how a success in India was seen by the Boston office. It was unexpectedly pleasant to be thought of as a hero” (110). Similar to the narratives of British colonials who found social advancement easier in the colonies, Dwight likewise enjoys an enormous boost in status both in India and at home because of his successful capitalization on India.<sup>159</sup> This opportunity for self-improvement is one of the clearest links between American neo-colonialism and European colonization. While the majority of Americans in this study venture into the postcolonial world for a variety of disparate reasons, Dwight is, at least initially, a self-advancer and exploiter in the mold of European colonists. Dwight continues to build his new self-image in wake of his exploits in India and his prospects of returning:

He was strengthened by believing that India was the land of yes. And for the five months he remained in Boston he felt he was like the exiled king of a glittering country that was full of possibilities and pleasures. What made this sense of exile even more satisfying was the knowledge that his colleagues regarded his having gone there as an enormous sacrifice, a trip fraught with danger and difficulty. (111)

Here we see both the transformation in Dwight’s perception of India and of himself. We also discover how Dwight begins to take pleasure in duping his colleagues who still

---

<sup>159</sup> Take George Orwell’s *Burmese Days* (1934) for example. In Orwell’s novel, the British protagonist John Flory is unhappy in the colonies yet unable to return to England which would mean forgoing all of the luxuries afforded to him in Burma (maids, butlers, mistresses, the European Club). This point is highlighted when social disgrace befalls him in a remote Burmese village, yet Flory chooses suicide rather than return to England.

consider India hellish. But rather than correct their assumptions, Dwight instead reinforces them, as “it was always a relief for people to hear a stereotype confirmed” (110).

Like Kurtz in The Heart of Darkness, the colony offers Dwight the chance to be a bigger and more powerful man than he could have dreamed of at home. Dwight takes his associations with the locals further than ever as he entertains the wild desire of adopting Indru and then moving her to the American suburbs and buying her a pony (114). As a self-described “debauched American,” he finds even greater freedoms through his sex life.<sup>160</sup> Dwight’s newfound self-confidence is evident in the way that he looks at women: “These days, when he met a woman in India, he thought, Would I?” (148). Always sexualizing and objectifying the women he encounters, Dwight continues to push the limits of his debauchery. Dwight’s unrestrained desire allows him to forego the justifications for his relationships. In fact, he even becomes bored of Indru’s stories of abuse although admitting, “He needed the stories. They gave him the right to sleep with her and to be her benefactor” (157). Realizing this weakness, Dwight begins to see his position as one of baseless desire. After being accosted by Sumitra’s old pimp, Dwight realizes that he is a “bad man” and his actions alone are responsible for the situation he has created in India. We learn the following:

---

<sup>160</sup> The narrator describes how Dwight feels in about his sexual opportunities in India: “He had never known such sexual freedom, had not realized that it was in him to behave like this. It was India, he told himself; he would not have lived like this back in the States. All he had to do was leave India and he would be returned to the person he’d been before—forty-something, oblique in business deals, cautious with women, cynical of their motives, not looking for a wife, still smarting from his divorce, even a bit shy, and, like many shy men, prone to laughing too loudly and making sudden gauche remarks” (133).

Dwight tried to laugh, but he was numb all over. The thought that saved him was: I created this. I brought these people here. I gave them my wedding ring to rent the place—it's all mine. And so I can do whatever I want. (162)

Dwight's thoughts demonstrate a crude understanding of power. However, he now questions his personal responsibility to act more ethically; consequently, he feels ashamed of his behavior. As a form of contrition, Dwight begins looking for a spiritual means to cleanse his past. Repenting for his sexual awakening and exploits in India provides the opening for the concluding action and surprise of the novella. To analyze Dwight's about-face it is necessary to understand Shah, a character who represents India's middle-class ambitions, and also India's new power in the neo-colonial paradigm.

Although Shah is initially described as a local who is subservient to Dwight, this character works as a foil to the American; moreover, he is a poignant metaphor to the nature of Indian and American motives and futures. As Shah moves towards independence he transitions from exploited to exploiter. Meanwhile, Dwight's initial intention of exploiting India turns to an inward search for spiritual salvation.

Shah does most of the work in the meetings while Dwight serves as a symbol of the American presence. Dwight rarely says anything, but he dangles money and opportunity. Symbolically this arrangement seems to replicate the outsourcing system as a whole. In other words, American investments in India produce capital without much actual American work. Although Shah seems initially content with this pact, Dwight begins to offer him a greater role in their endeavors in order to take better advantage of his free-time in India. Eventually, Shah is offered a visit to the headquarters in Boston. After his return from the States, Shah begins to displace Dwight by taking on a larger role



for the firm and speaking to Dwight with more authority (113).<sup>161</sup> By the time that a team from Harvard University arrives to study the economic situation, Shah has displaced Dwight to the point of excluding him from any dealings with the American visitors. Although the reason for leaving Dwight out seems to be vaguely connected to his moral failings in India, it also seems that Shah is personally motivated to arrange a spiritual journey for Dwight that will essentially erase him.

To orchestrate Dwight's displacement, Shah invites him into his plush home where "all of India had been shut out." Shah talks of his father who gave up everything to become a beggar and follow his religious beliefs, a point that fascinates Dwight (148-151). In this scene, Shah exploits the American's stereotypical desire for spiritual rejuvenation in India. Although Dwight is hurt by exclusion from the company and fears for his professional life when he learns that Shah is planning to move to America, he eventually accepts these events because "Maybe nothing mattered" (156). This concession on Dwight's part confirms that Shah's plan will work.

Upon his return from America, Dwight finds Shah changed for the worse. He mocks Shah's Brooks Brother's suit for being made in India, but he admits that Shah's work ethic is strong and his moral code is impeccable (170). Feeling broken after his debauchery and loss of position, Dwight is relieved when Shah announces, "Now we will go on our spiritual journey" (174). There are multiple ironies in this scene. For one, the roles of master and student have been reversed as Shah now takes care of Dwight. Secondly, despite his Brooks Brothers clothing and Western aspirations, Shah is willing to play the role of guru in order to displace Dwight; therefore, this is a shame that mocks

---

<sup>161</sup> Notice this similarity between this moment and the manager that throws Audie and Beth out of spa for their behavior in "Monkey Hill."

the Western stereotype of Indians as spiritual masters. Finally, Dwight's willingness to accept the spiritual journey demonstrates how his feelings towards India have evolved from derision and fear to acceptance and awe.

While Shah moves towards America, Dwight embraces his new self in India. We notice a gradual shift in thinking that begins with his acceptance of local food; however, his affairs with Indru and Padmini, eventually living with them rather than in the Elephanta Suite, and kadi [sic] vest of homespun rather than his baseball cap style Western dress further demonstrate Dwight's shift in identity.<sup>162</sup> In the following passage, the narrator describes Dwight's imagination and his need to see himself through the eyes of other Americans. This passage highlights the lack of spiritual rejuvenation as Dwight only affects the appearance of a "spiritual" Indian while remaining quite shallow:

He tried to imagine what Maureen would say had she seen him looking so at home in the Imperial. "I'm going to India" didn't sound suicidal anymore; it meant "I don't need you." Had Sheely or Kohut been in the restaurant with him they'd be wiggling out—frightened, rigid with culture shock, dying to go back to the hotel, or on their cell phones reconfirming their flights home so as not to have to stay a moment longer. Beyond the dumb arrogance of mere bigotry, they would be terrified and angry, hating the place and the people. Dwight knew: he had once felt that way himself, like India's victim. (138)

No longer imprisoned in India, Dwight is in-between the freedom of his powerful position and his despair at how this power is so disturbingly gained. He expresses optimism for his personal situation: "India no longer scared him—rather the opposite: it aroused him, made him feel engaged with the world, most of all made him feel powerful" (139). In this case, the colonial-state serves as an ideal location to build up self-

---

<sup>162</sup> Here Dwight is fitting into the classic colonial theme of "going native." See Chinua Achebe "An Image of Africa" (1977) and Ashcroft et al. Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies (1998).

confidence. However, Dwight exhibits disillusionment with the American exploitation of India as he realizes his role and as he begins to find fault in the American pursuit of money.<sup>163</sup> Dwight summarizes the big picture:

The middle-aged American with the pretty and pliant Indian girlfriend, the American woman with her saluting driver, the American lawyer with his submissive hacks, the young American traveler being helped by the groveling concierge, the Pinskens [. . .] everyone had a scheme to hook up the Indians and make money and behave badly. (166)

Dwight worries that the Indians will be corrupted by the materialistic American influence. Perhaps sickened and remorseful of his own behavior in India, he also looks for examples of similar transgression by his fellow Americans. Nevertheless, Dwight continues to value the spiritual side of India by identifying with Shah's father who he sees as a man of principle shunning the material world. Such identification sets Dwight up dramatically for the conclusion of the novella. In what could equally be interpreted as an act of kindness or treachery, Shah delivers Dwight to a spiritual refuge, an ashram, without electricity and devoid of modernity. Upon arrival Dwight turns over his laptop and cell phone to Shah a symbolic gesture that makes his new direction in life (and Shah's) clear. As a result Dwight "felt lighter, out of touch, relaxed. Nothing would ring or buzz; nothing would interrupt him. He followed the two men to the dining area, feeling happy" (183). Like an echo of Theroux's own desire for escape in Dark Star Safari, Dwight has found the right place in the Third World to both leave modernity behind and reassert his sexual prowess by paying women for sex. Although aware that Shah has usurped him and taken all of his valuables, Dwight is happy. The final paragraph confirms the finality of a personal desire to find himself in India:

---

<sup>163</sup> For more on the concept of "colonial guilt," a familiar theme to colonial literature and postcolonial theory, see Ania Loomba's Colonialism/Postcolonialism (1998).

Dwight had had a vision of himself as a holy man on a dusty road, swinging a stick, eating an apple. He had laughed then, because it had seemed so improbable, and it had been a way of jeering at himself. Now, lying on a narrow cot in the tidy room freshened by the fizz of leaves and the morning air at his open window, he saw himself again, a skinny sunburned geek in a turban and loincloth, carrying a wooden staff, and strolling down a country road, craving nothing except more life—happy, seeing things as they were. (186)

Dwight is going native, or at least he envisions his future as a holy man as he desires to become the inverse of his former self. Strangely this conclusion reaffirms the stereotype of India as a land most suitable for self-discovery. Although in this case, the route taken is very indirect. Of course the level of insight and rejuvenation is also in question as Dwight is duped into this exile making the transformation seem hollow.

### **The Elephant God**

The final novella of the collection shares similarities with its predecessors. The American protagonist, Alice Durand, is a recent college graduate on a backpacking trip through India. After being ditched by her traveling companion, Alice is forced to fend for herself. Being alone yields an initial boost in self-confidence as Alice pays her own way by teaching English while simultaneously enriching her soul at an ashram in Bangalore. The first half concentrates on American impressions and stereotypes of India, but the story principally focuses on the results of the Americanization of Indian culture. The consequences of this form of globalization are shown as the Indian workers become more fluent in the American accent and more aware of the American mentality. However, these Indian employees also learn to mimic the crassest American ways. This form of mimicry seems in line with the notions of ambiguity and parody described by Homi Bhabha in “Of Mimicry and Man.” While Bhabha draws on Lord Macaulay’s “Minute to Parliament” to demonstrate how the colonial policy of encouraging mimicry among a servant class in

India produces a distorted version of the Englishman who “menaces” colonial authority, Theroux’s characters exhibit a physically threatening regurgitation of American mentality.<sup>164</sup> This similarity is one of the more important connections between British colonialism and American neo-colonialism in Theroux’s novella. Eventually, “The Elephant God” returns to the motif of demonstrating how dangerous India is behind its veneer as a colorful and spiritual land in the minds of Westerners. Finally, Alice’s rape and retribution ends the collection on a pessimistic note on the future for American-Indian relations while also making allusions to classic colonial literary tropes.

Theroux’s American characters range from ignorant indifference to complete derision towards India before their arrival, but Alice lands with an idealized vision of a spiritual and culturally rich land (another classic trope of colonial literature). The reality is mostly a disappointment to her, so Alice is constantly balancing between finding her stereotypes confirmed and being frustrated with the disparity between imagined and real India. From the start “The smells of India terrified her. From a distance, India was splendor; up close, misery” (189). “From a distance” refers to Alice’s previous study of India via literature. The narrator describes the contrast between the India of Alice’s reading lists with what she actually finds:

The Indian novels she’d read in the States had not prepared her for what she saw here. Where were the big fruitful families from these novels? Where were the jokes, the love affairs, the lavish marriage ceremonies, the solemn pieties, the virtuous peasants, the environmentalists, the musicians, the magic, the plausible young men? They seemed concocted to her now, and besieged in up-close India, all she thought of was Hieronymus Bosch, turtle-faced crones, stumpy men, deformed children. (190)

---

<sup>164</sup> See Bhabha, Homi. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.

Harking back to Beth's similar complaint about Indian Literature, Alice describes her frustration in contrast to the idealized India created in her American imagination and the poverty that she finds in person.<sup>165</sup> Alice's vision of India is also influenced by film. From her initial meeting in the train with Amitabh, she thinks of the "Merchant-Ivory" films aimed at presenting India to an international market in English (199). Yet even as Alice realizes that artistic representations of India often obscure local poverty, she is delighted to find images that correspond with the spiritual vision of India. While visiting a park, the narrator comments on Alice's impressions: "Indian families roamed in the gardens, lapping at ice creams, and Alice regarded these people [. . .] as worshipers of the most devout sort, without dogma, lovers of the natural world" (202). It is difficult to discern from this description if there is any difference between the way that these Indian families spend their time in the park and the way that American or European families would, but Alice elevates these typical and mundane leisure activities into an act of worship.

Furthermore, Alice applies these stereotypes of India to the people as well. Thus her interpretation of her roommate Priyanka at the ashram is infused with a condescending air towards what she perceives as affectation: "Priyanka had a haughty,

---

<sup>165</sup> Even after spending more time in India, Alice continues to be shocked by the disparity between Indian Literature and her own experience: "She began to read another Indian novel, much praised, by an Indian woman who lived in the States. Was this merely sentimentality? The book did not speak to her. The problem with it and the others she'd read was that they did not describe the India she had encountered or the people she'd met. Where were these families? The novels described a tidier India, full of ambitions, not the India of pleading beggars or weirdly comic salesmen or people so pompous they were like parodies" (238). On another note, this theme of disappointment with the location not living up to the literature can also be found in the other direction; see V.S. Naipaul's The Engima of Arrival (1987) which concerns the Trinidadian's impressions of the English and the English countryside.

well-brought-up way of speaking that annoyed Alice, not for its Indian attitude but its English pretension” (204). Here it is as if Priyanka has no right to her moods or manners because she is Indian; therefore, she should act like an Indian. For Alice, this means fitting into the roles ascribed by her Indian novels or the Merchant-Ivory picaresque.<sup>166</sup> The idea that Priyanka (and other Indians) invent Alice as they see fit does not seem far off from Alice’s own ideas about how Indians should behave.

Alice is aware of the irony of her position. By working in Electronics City and bringing her earnings back to the ashram, she embodies divergent movements in India. The dual existence of the high-tech industry and the ancient temples is clearly a contrast that makes Bangalore useful for demonstrating the complexity of India to a Western audience; however, the role that the novella assigns Americans (via Alice) as both spiritual converts and globalizing converters is particularly provocative.<sup>167</sup> Alice is aware that balancing “Swami’s talk of dignity and destiny, to the other world of Bangalore, of tech support and skill sets and her students, who dealt with cold calling, hot leads, and diagnostic parameters” is slightly scandalous. Yet she insists on compartmentalizing the

---

<sup>166</sup> Ironically, Alice is aware that Indians generalize about her Americanness: “Alice was used to the Indian habit of inventing the person others supposed you to be, assigning you particular traits. Alice was American, middle class, good school, funny about food, careful with money, always with her nose in a book, a bit too quick to point out that some Indians were poor, not quick enough to venerate Swami, with a deplorable tendency to treat him as a fallible human, because Americans made a point, didn’t they, of being hard to please” (217). It is difficult to discern if the narrator is mocking Alice or if these generalizations are meant to be taken as facts.

<sup>167</sup> Bangalore is commonly referred to as the “Silicon Valley of India” due to the number of information and technology companies and the existence of several prominent Indian universities and research centers. However, Bangalore was also the center of the Kingdom of Mysore, a spiritual land full of ancient temples. In recent colonial history, the British and French were repeatedly repelled by the Kingdom until the British eventually gained administrative control after the Anglo-Mysore war. See the History of South India (2003) for more details.

two worlds and hiding her whereabouts from both (222-3). For Alice personally, the division between the two is even beneficial: “The ashram was a retreat from the ambition and worldliness of Electronics City. Electronics City was a refuge from the selfish spiritualism and escapism of the ashram” (229). Thus India can be two stereotypes at one time for the American.

As an American, Alice serves as a representative for the United States in India. However, her teaching position in Electronics City makes her an involved component in the Americanization of India and an important cog in the outsourcing movement of American industries. By teaching American “accent and intonation” Alice is marking an important shift in the state of the Indian economy and India’s disposition towards the West (214). Her Indian students are foregoing their Indian and British accents to become Americanized. But the novella clearly demonstrates that this Americanization expands beyond accent. Characters like Amitabh/Shan even take on new names while on the phone with American callers. However, the following excerpt reveals the greater extent of Alice’s teaching:

All of them were altered by speaking American English, given new personalities, but Amitabh was changed the most. On the train he had been a strange figure, with his obsolescent words. India clung to the past, and so far all the new buildings and new money, nothing changed very much. These were the words the East India Company had brought from England hundreds of years before, and still they were spoken and written, however musty they seemed. Perhaps Indians used these archaic words to give themselves dignity, power, or presence, but the effect was comic. (219)

The narration mocks Indian-English as outdated while also drawing attention to the origins of Indian-English in the East India Company. To a greater extent than at other junctures in the collection, the narrator makes a specific connection between British colonialism and American involvement in India. Once again Bhabha’s argument is



evoked as Indians are mocked for mimicking English and American accents. By drawing attention to the Indian desire to imitate the American accent, the story seems to comment on India's attention shifting away from England and towards America. Amitabh is also noted for demonstrating the most dramatic acquisition of American English and attitude. In fact, Amitabh's English and demeanor "improves" so dramatically that he is given a raise.

When speaking American he was someone else. He bore no resemblance to the awkward, slightly comic, rather oblique, and old-fashioned job seeker she'd met on the train. He was radically changed from the mimic she'd met at Vishnu Hotel and Lunch House, who'd said, "This is real positive, seeing you." He was a new man. (223)

The dramatic change in personality is directly created by the adoption of American English. Although we can infer that the new job, life in Bangalore, and new skill may combine to change Amitabh, the novella strictly associates his personal transformation with language. Though these changes seem quirky at first, more telling details are revealed concerning the results of Indians learning to speak American English:

It seemed to Alice that Indians were much ruder speaking American. They sounded more impatient. Naturally confrontational, these Indians now had a language to bolster that tendency and no longer had to rely on the subtleties of Hindi. The obliqueness of Indian English, with its goofy charm that created distance, was a thing of the past. The students were without doubt more familiar, even obnoxious in American. *Can you please inform me, what is your good name, madam?* had become *So who am I talking to?*" (223)

Here the novella comments on the dangerous result of mixing rude American culture with the confrontational Indian national character. Over generalized as this position might be, it allows the narrator to argue that the fusion of American English with the desire for advancement and success in India will lead to a more obnoxious world. This point sounds similar to the argument of Dark Star Safari where Africa was being corrupted by

modernization. In “The Elephant God,” it seems India is losing its peculiar local color and much like Theroux’s complaint about Africa being its best in the pre-modern bush, Alice confronts the director to complain that the students are losing “an Indian obliqueness and charm, a fundamental courtesy” in learning American English (227). Without exactly saying that Indians are better people without these jobs, that sentiment is clearly implied. The result of American English begins to transgress speaking patterns when Alice notices a change in her students’ mannerisms like touching each other. Although she admits her teaching has made her students strong negotiators on the phone, Alice believes she is also making them boorish. In fact, the Indian call center is even monstrous as Alice compares the Indians working the call room to animals, insects, and birds because of the way they speak on the phone. Perhaps most insulting of all is the comparison to dogs, “I’m thinking of that line about a dog walking on its hind legs. You don’t care that it’s done well—you’re amazed that it’s done at all” (229).<sup>168</sup> Whether being compared to insects, dogs, or monsters, this metamorphosis in character is clearly a result of American teaching (240). It may also be interesting to note that labeling the locals as animals or describing their beast-like qualities links back to Theroux’s own observations in Dark Star Safari.<sup>169</sup>

As with the previous novellas in the collection, “The Elephant God” concludes with a shocking, in this case violent, ending. After an initial period of disgust with Indian

---

<sup>168</sup> A similar description can be found in *Heart of Darkness* “And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap” (33).

<sup>169</sup> Again, the same type of impressions, comparing Africans to animals, could be read as references to Kurtz in Heart of Darkness who describes the locals as the “brutes.”

poverty, Alice begins to feel self-assured and confident moving about between her Electronics City job and the ashram. Her thoughts are summarized shortly before the attack: “Though these Indians were difficult, India was not hostile. It was indifferent, a great, hot, uncaring mob of trampling feet in an enormous and blind landscape, damaged people scrambling on ruins” (235-6). Although Alice paints an unflattering picture of India, she assumes that she passes by unnoticed as a minor figure in the overall chaos. However, Amitabh soon proves these thoughts to be misleading by demonstrating the violence in India that Alice fails to realize.<sup>170</sup> Suddenly the tables are turned on Alice. Amitabh demonstrates that all of Alice’s actions have been transparent. He insinuates the existence of a vast spy network that keeps an eye on the foreigner, a point that seems all the more plausible based on Shah’s exploitation of Dwight’s moral failings in the previous story. Finally, he draws attention to the language issue in unfamiliar terms. Rather than continuing to numerate the benefits of speaking English, Amitabh reminds Alice that Hindi provides a code between locals who keep the foreigner out of the conversation.

---

<sup>170</sup> During one of their confrontations he states: “You look at India and see people everywhere and it seems like a mob,” he said. “But it’s not—it’s like a family. We know each other. There are no secrets in India. Hey, this isn’t China! Everything is known here. And where a *ferringi* is concerned it’s all public knowledge.” He was smiling at her, then he opened his mouth to laugh and she got a whiff of the hot stink of his breath. “It’s funny how people come here from overseas—Americans, like you—and don’t realize how we are in constant touch with each other. We’re always talking. You have no idea what we’re saying. Because we speak English so proficiently, you have no need to learn Hindi. We know what’s going on!” (240).

The conclusion of the novella concerns an ambiguously described rape and a subsequent act of revenge.<sup>171</sup> During their final confrontation, Amitabh explains the frustration felt for foreigners: “You can bribe anyone, you can do anything if you have money. That’s why we hate foreigners. We know they always bend the rules too, just like us, except they always get away with it” (241-2). Amitabh, frustrated by the influence Americans exert via power and money, contends that Americans exploit India and that Indians are aware of this exploitation. In the various points of contact between Americans and Indians in the collection, the American characters often assume that paying for services and favors (even at bargain prices) forgives their transgressions. But in hindsight, a far more bitter relation between Americans and Indians exists.

Following the rape and tribulations that follow, Alice goes through the various stages of grief and anger before setting on a plan to kill Amitabh. By luring him into a mad elephant’s pen, Alice essentially kills her attacker. The conclusion seems to confirm Amitabh’s frustration with power as the final scene traces Alice riding in the “Ladies Only” train for Mumbai, chanting her favorite Indian hymn. Without having to resort to lawyers or favors from Americans, she still manages to exact revenge and seemingly escape. Thus India is confirmed as a lawless zone where Americans must meet violence with violence or be killed (the Blundens), brainwashed (Dwight), or raped. By surviving, perhaps Alice’s actions seem to advocate extreme aggression as the appropriate American response to hostile India.

---

<sup>171</sup> See Jenny Sharpe’s Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text (1993) for more on the subject of white women being raped by Indians as a trope of colonial literature and anthropology.

## Conclusion

In Dark Star Safari, Paul Theroux travels through Africa by land looking for a horror story and he finds it. His characters in The Elephanta Suite go to India looking for relaxation, exploitation, and spirituality and while they meet these desires, these same Americans are also killed, raped, and robbed. On an individual level, Theroux's work describes travel for Americans as being a method of escapism and a search for pleasure. While his novellas explore Indian economic exploitation as problematic and perhaps immoral, taking advantage of one's power and money for sexual favors is tacitly approved. It is as if the experiences gained abroad are in a vacuum. Speaking of Alice, the narrator offers this telling piece of advice:

She had made the traveler's most important discovery. You went away from home and moved among strangers. No one knew your history or who you were: you started afresh, a kind of rebirth. Being whoever you wished to be, whoever you claimed to be, was a liberation. She wrote the thought in her diary and ended, *So now I know why people go away*". (215)

It is interesting to compare how this advice interacts between Theroux's own experiences as reported in Dark Star Safari and that of his characters in The Elephanta Suite. For his characters, the anonymity of these locations mixed with their increased purchasing power often allows for extravagant and impulsive acts of selfish gratification. Or in Alice's case, a dangerous amount of self-confidence in a hostile environment. While people may go away to discover the limits of their personality or desires, the outcome of this collection seems to warn us that pushing those limits abroad only feels safe because we are unknown. Yet while Theroux's own voyage through Africa is dangerous, he arrives safe and largely unchanged. If anything, his experience has merely allowed him to pontificate on the problems of Africa with some token examples. The result of both works seems to

clearly indicate one common message: modernization of the former colonies is dangerous because it erodes the beauty and difference of the Third World and the people of these formerly colonized nations who are not ready for modernization. Whether lamenting the loss of traditional ways or forecasting the dangers of the Third-World city, Theroux seems adamant that modernization for these nations means the loss of local color for the American traveler. Yet as arrogant and self-interested as this point may be, it is not uncommon in the literature of Americans in the postcolonial world. Theroux's secondary concern, that modernization in Africa and India will lead to a more brutal life for the Third World seems more concerned with what this will mean for Westerners. For example it is his personal safety that creates the drama in Dark Star Safari. In turn, the safety and injustice against the American protagonists (murder, exploitation, and rape) are the focus of The Elephanta Suite. The improvements and concerns for the people who actually live in these locations are touched on only so far as it concerns Westerners, meaning that Africans in African cities lack the charm of the bush and Indians are developing useful skills for American capitalism, but at the same time they are becoming ruthless and ugly.

## CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

J.P. Donleavy, Edith Wharton, Paul Bowles, and Paul Theroux are writers linked by their nationality and interest in the former British and French colonies. These Americans offer a unique perspective on the colonized lands of Ireland, of French and British Africa, and of India—that is to say, a large portion of the colonized world. Reading these authors specifically for their valuable point of view on colonialism allows us to critique some of the dichotomies that postcolonial theory has created. These American writers and their American characters demonstrate that relationships in the colonies are quite complex—the role of the colonizer and colonized is slippery, and one can seem to be both a representative of the center and of the margin. As contemporary postcolonial critical theory readjusts to allow gradations to any binary constructions of identity, the Americans in this study further prove that cultural interactions in the former colonies are full of nuances and complications that prevent facile generalizations about national and race relations.<sup>172</sup> These Caucasian Westerners do not arrive to civilize, but they pursue opportunities to exploit in familiar colonial ways. Their interaction with the locals varies widely from mimicking the colonizers to trying to assimilate. Americans come with stereotypes and fantasies about their destinations often fueled by European Orientalist scholarship, but also seek to exorcise their personal demons in these foreign lands.

The American writers in this study share many characteristics with European colonial writers, but they arrive without the historical/national baggage of a Kipling or a

---

<sup>172</sup> For example, take Pallavi Rastogi's *Afrindian Fictions* (2008). Rastogi's work approaches South African fiction from the perspective of the Indian minority, thus providing a unique viewpoint from the periphery of South African culture.

Loti. Furthermore, these Americans are linked by common themes of disappointment with modernity, the desire to find the “authentic” non-Western culture, the taboo of “going local,” a fascination with the colonialist lifestyle, and a lust for indigenous people. These themes unify this body of American writing about the postcolonial world. Part of my objective in this study has been to demonstrate the existence of these common themes, so that we can better understand the relations between these American writers and analyze their work as a specific type of literature.

The first logical outgrowth of “Strangers in the Postcolonial World” will be a more exhaustive study that incorporates more American writers in the postcolonial world.<sup>173</sup> Minor novels, memoirs, travelogues, and perhaps plays and poetry exist that could further challenge or add to this study. Yet an equally, or perhaps even more exciting future project will investigate how postcolonial writers write about Americans. Although I considered concluding my research with a brief study of how postcolonial writers represent Americans in their fiction, to do so with limited depth would be a disservice to something worthy of a full-length and independent study. Imagine joining Sindiwe Magona, Shashi Tharoor, and Dany Laferrière to examine how American characters are depicted in South African, Indian, and Haitian literature.<sup>174</sup> In doing so, we

---

<sup>173</sup> Katherine Mayo and Peggy Payne are two that deserve attention.

<sup>174</sup> Contemporary Indian writer Shashi Tharoor (1956-) provides a different perspective on Americans by portraying a female American volunteer as a “do-gooder who creates problems.” *Riot* (2001) demonstrates the complications that arise when an American aid worker, Priscilla, conducts an affair with an Indian man and meddles with an unhappy Indian marriage. Priscilla is ultimately murdered, an action which points to the extreme pitfalls of American intervention. South African Writer Sindiwe Magona (1943-) approaches a similar topic as she recreates the 1993 murder of American aid worker Amy Biehl in her novel *Mother to Mother* (2000). Magona describes the events leading to Biehl’s death by explaining the conditions of an underprivileged, segregated all-black township. Using the voice of the murder’s mother, Magona responds to the loss that the



could better understand questions discussed in “Strangers in the Postcolonial World.” How does the postcolonial world interpret Americans? What similarities do these Americans in the postcolonial world share? And what similarities do these Americans share with Europeans? To answer these questions future work must catalog and study such instances when postcolonial writers create American characters.

While further work remains, “Strangers in the Postcolonial World” at least begins the process of understanding the American perspective on European colonialism and American characters in the postcolonial world. Although the tone of this dissertation is often critical, these writers and American characters are pioneers whose unique perspective on the postcolonial world offers a fascinating take on the dynamics of identity, colonialism, and world politics.

---

American family must feel by describing her personal agony over losing her son to a hopeless future. Haitian Dany Laferrière’s (1953-) Vers Le Sud (2006) addresses the phenomenon of female sex tourism in Haiti. Laferrière allegorically depicts the complicated relationship between America and Haiti by adapting the national power relations to an individual level. Laferrière’s work also ties into the related genre of sex and exploitation tourism in the postcolonial world. For example, Michel Houellebecq’s (1958-) Platform (2001) concerning French sex tourism in the postcolonial world and Terry McMillan’s (1951-) How Stella Got Her Groove Back (1996) deals with an American’s sexual exploits with a younger Jamaican man.

## REFERENCES

### Primary Resources

- Bowles, Paul. A Distant Episode: The Selected Stories. New York: Ecco Press, 1988.  
---. Days: Tangier Journal, 1987-1989. New York: Ecco Press, 1991.  
---. Morocco. New York: H. N. Abrams, 1993.  
---. The Sheltering Sky. 1949. London: Penguin, 2006.

Donleavy, J.P. The Ginger Man. 1955. London: Abacus, 1999.

- Theroux, Paul. Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.  
---. Fong and the Indians. New York: Ivy Books, 1968.  
---. Jungle Lovers. New York: Ivy Books, 1971.  
---. My Secret History. New York: Ivy Books, 1989  
---. The Elephanta Suite. Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Wharton, Edith. In Morocco. 1920. London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006.

### Secondary Resources

Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa." The Massachusetts Review. Vol. 18, no. 4 Winter. 1977: 782-794.

Adams, Percy. Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1983.

Anarchy U.S.A. Video Images (Firm). Sandy Hook: Video Images, 1983. (video)

Appadurai, Arjun. Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.

Appiah, Anthony. In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Apter, Emily. Continental Drift: From National to Virtual Subjects. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Balzano, Wanda. "Irishness: Feminist and Post-colonial." The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons. Ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. London: Routledge, 1996.

Barfoot, C.C. and Theo d'Haen. Oriental Prospects: Western Literature and the Lure of the East. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1988.

Barth, Melissa E. Dark Star Safari: Overland From Cairo to Cape Town. Magill Book Reviews 08/01 (2003)

- Baru. Road to America. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2002.
- Behdad, Ali. Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution. Durham: Duke, 1994.
- Bernard, André. The Elephanta Suite. Kenyon Review 30.2 2008: 6-7.
- Bertens, Johannes Willem. The Fiction of Paul Bowles: The Soul is the Weariest Part of the Body. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979.
- Bhabha, Homi. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Bose, Gugata and Ayesha Jalal. Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy. New York: Routledge, 1998
- Bowles, Paul. Conversations with Paul Bowles. Ed. Gena Dagal Caponi. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993.
- Burroughs, William S. Naked Lunch. Ed. James Grauerholz and Barry Miles. New York: Grove Press, 1959.
- Caesar, Terry. Forgiving the Boundaries: Home as Abroad in American Travel Writing. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995.
- Canclini, Nestor Garcia. Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity. U of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Caponi, Gena Dagal. Paul Bowles: Romantic Savage. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University P, 1994.
- Carr, Virginia Spencer. Paul Bowles: A Life. New York: Scribner, 2004.
- Carrol, Clare and Patricia King ed. Ireland and Postcolonial Theory. Notre Dame: UP Notre Dame, 2003.
- Césaire, Aimé. Discours sur le colonialisme. 1953. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.
- Chaliand, Gérard. Revolution in the Third World: Myths and Prospects. New York: Viking Press, 1977.
- Chopra, P.N. T.K. Ravindran, N. Subrahmanian eds. History of South Indian: Ancient, Medieval & Modern. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company, 2003.
- Cleaver, Eldridge. Soul on Ice. 1968. New York: Dell Publishing Co, 1973.

- Clifford, James. Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- . Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists. Santa Cruz: California UP, 1989.
- Culler, Jonathan. Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.
- D'Alonzo, Robert William. Paul Bowles, The Sadness of Contact: The Intermediary in the Postcolonial Situation. 1993. University of California, Riverside. Thesis (M.A.).
- Dillon, Millicent. You are not I: A Portrait of Paul Bowles. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Edwards, Brian T. Morocco Bound: Disorienting America's Maghreb, From Casablanca to the Marrakech Express. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.
- Edwards, Justin D. Exotic Journeys: Exploring the Erotics of U.S. Travel Literature 1840-1930. Hanover: University of New Hampshire, 2001.
- Faath, Sigrid. Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World. London: Hurst & Co., 2006.
- Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. 1953. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- . The Wretched of the Earth. 1963. London: Penguin, 2001.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural geographies of Encounter. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.
- Fussell, Paul. Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars. New York: Oxford UP, 1980.
- Garland, Alex. The Beach. New York: Riverhead Trade, 1998.
- Gerhart, Gail M. "Dark Star Safari: Overland From Cairo to Cape Town (Book)." Foreign Affairs 82.6. 2003.
- Gerges, Fawaz A. America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests? Cambridge, UK; Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Ghosh, Amitav. The Hungry Tide. London: Harper Collins, 2004.
- Gilroy, Paul. The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.

- Green, Michelle. The Dream at the End of the World: Paul Bowles and the Literary Renegades of Tangier. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.
- Greene, Graham. Journey Without Maps: A Travel Book. 1936. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: William Heinemann, 1962.
- Hemingway, Ernest. Green Hills of Africa. New York: Scribner. 1935.
- Holland, Patrick, and Graham Huggan. Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988.
- Hibbard, Allen. Paul Bowles: A Study of the Short Fiction. New York: Maxwell Macmillan, 1993.
- . Paul Bowles: Magic & Morocco. San Francisco: Cadmus, 2004.
- Hulme, Peter. Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica. New York: Perennial, 1990.
- Kaplan, Caren. Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of Displacement. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
- Kasozi, A. B. K. The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.
- King, Richard. Ed. Postcolonial America Champaign: U of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Kingsley, Charles. His Letters and Memories of His Life. Vol. II, Tenth edition. London: 1881.
- Laferrière, Dany. Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans fatiguer. Paris: Éditions VLB, 1985.
- . Cette grenade dans la main du jeune nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit? Paris: Éditions VLB, 1993.
- . Vers le sud. Paris: Grasset, 2006.
- Lambert, Frank. The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005.
- Latour, Bruno, and Catherine Porter. We Have Never Been Modern. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1993.
- Leary, Timothy. Jail Notes. New York: Douglas Book Corporation, 1970.

- Leed, Eric J. The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism. New York: Basic, 1991.
- Lennon, Joseph. Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2004.
- Lesser, Ian O. Southern Europe and the Maghreb: U.S. Interests and Policy Perspectives. Santa Monica; RAND, 1996.
- Lewis, Reina. "On Veiling, Vision and Yoyage: Cross-Cultural Dressing and Narratives of Identity." Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader. Ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Logan, Owen. Al Maghrib: Photographs from Morocco, 1983-1988. Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1989.
- Loomba, Ania. Colonialism/Postcolonialism. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Lutwack, Leonard. The Role of Place in Literature. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1984.
- Lyons, Stephen J. " 'Safari' spans Africa's heart of darkness" USA Today; 04/15/2003.
- MacPhee, Graham. Ed. Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007.
- Magona, Sindiwe. Mother to Mother. Boston: Beacon, 2000.
- Maiello, Amedeo. "Ethnic Conflict in Post-colonial India." The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons. Ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Malley, Robert. The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1996.
- Masinton, Charles G. J.P. Donleavy: The Style of His Sadness and Humor. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975.
- Mayer, Ruth. Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in the Times of Globalization (Re-Encounters with Colonialism) Hanover, UP of New England, 2002.
- Mayo, Katherine. Mother India. New York: Harcourt, 1933.
- Mbembé, Achille. On the Postcolony. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Memmi, Albert. The Colonizer and the Colonized. 1957. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.

- McMillian, Terry. How Stella Got Her Groove Back. New York: Signet, 1997.
- Migdalovitz, Carol. Algeria in Crisis: Democracy, Islamism, and Implications for U.S. Policy. Washington: Congressional Research Service, 1991.
- . Algeria in Crisis: Situation Update. Washington: Congressional Research Service, 1994.
- . Algeria: Four Years of Crisis. Washington: Congressional Research Service, 1996.
- . Algeria: Developments and Dilemmas. Washington: Congressional Research Service, 1998.
- Miller, Jeffrey. Paul Bowles: A Descriptive Bibliography. Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1986.
- Mills, Sara. Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Morgan, Ted. My Battle of Algiers: A Memoir. New York: Smithsonian Books, 2005.
- Mowat, John. Strangers Ourselves: The Adventures of Paul Theroux. Mumbai: Frog Books, 2006.
- Mullins, Greg A. Colonial Affairs: Bowles, Burroughs, and Chester write Tangier. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.
- Munif, Abdelrahman. Cities of Salt. New York: Vintage International, 1989.
- . The Trench. New York: Vintage International, 1993.
- Norstedt, Johann A. "Irishmen and Irish-Americans in the Fiction of J.P. Donleavy." Irish-American Fiction: Essays in Criticism. Ed. Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes. New York: AMS, 1979.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Decolonizing the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature. London: Heinemann, 1986.
- Ong, Aihwa. Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.
- Oren, Michael B. Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007.
- Papayanis, Marily Adler. Writing in the Margins: The Ethics of Expatriation from Lawrence to Ondaatje. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005
- Payne, Peggy. Sister India. New York: Riverhead Trade, 2002.

- Patterson, Richard F. A World Outside: The Fiction of Paul Bowles. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987.
- Poddar, Prem, Rajeev S. Patke, Lars Jensen, John Beverley Ed. A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures. Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2009.
- Pounds, Wayne. Paul Bowles: The Inner Geography. New York: P. Lang, 1985.
- Prakash, Gyan. After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Pryce-Jones David "French Orientalism: The Mystique of Louis Massignon." Convenant: Global Jewish Magazine. Vol. 1, Issue 2. April 2007.
- Rapport, Nigel, and Andrew Dawson. Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World Movement. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1998.
- Richmond, Anthony H. Readings in Race and Ethnic Relations. Oxford; Pergamon Press, 1972.
- Robertson, G. Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Rogerson, Barnaby and Rose Baring. Ed. Meetings with Remarkable Muslims: A Collection. London: Eland, 2005.
- Rogerson, Barnaby. Through a Glass Darkly: North Africa as Seen Through English Travel Writing. In [www.travelintelligence.net/swd/articles/art\\_534.html](http://www.travelintelligence.net/swd/articles/art_534.html)
- Rogerson, Barnaby and Steven Lavington. Marrakech: The Red City. London: Sickle Moon, 2003.
- Ruedy, John. Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation. Indiana UP, 2005.
- Rushdie, Salman. Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991. London: Granta/Viking, 1991.
- Said, Edward. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Knopf, 1993.  
--. Orientalism. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Schalk, David L. War and the Ivory Tower: Algeria and Vietnam. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.



- Schueller, Malini Johar. U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998.
- Scott, Paul. The Jewel in the Crown. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Share, Perry and Hilary Tovey. A Sociology of Ireland 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 2003.
- Skerl, Jennie. A Tawdry Place of Salvation: The Art of Jane Bowles. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1997.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "The Rani of Simur" Francis Barker et al. (eds) Europe and Its Others Vol. 1 Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, Colchester: University of Essex. 1985.
- Spurr, David. The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- Stewart, Lawrence D. Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1974.
- Social Text Collective: Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation.
- Soyinka, Wole. "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition" Transitions 48, 1975: 38-44.
- Stora, Benjamin. Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.
- Tharoor, Shashi. Riot. New York: Arcade, 2001.
- Urry, John. The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies. London: Sage, 1990.
- Van den Abbeele, Georges. "Sightseers: The Tourist as Theorist." Diacritics 10 1980: 2-14.
- Weinberger, Eric. "Around the World in 80 Ways" Nation 276.12 2003: 40-45.
- Western, John. "Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town (Book)." By Paul Theroux. Professional Geographer 56.2 2004: 304-06
- Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman (eds). Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Wilson, Richard Guy, Shaun Eyring, and Kenny Marotta. Re-creating the American Past. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.

Young, Robert. Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Young, Tim. "Punctuating Travel: Paul Theroux and Bruce Chatwin." *Literature and History* 6.2 1997: 73-88

Yegenoglu, Meyda. "Veiled Fantasies: Cultural and Sexual Difference in the Discourse of Orientalism." Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader. Ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills. London: Routledge, 2003.

## VITA

Thomas F. Halloran was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Educated at Wheaton College in Massachusetts and Mary Immaculate College at the University of Limerick in Ireland, Halloran is currently a doctoral candidate at Louisiana State University. He has taught at Mary Immaculate College, Université du Maine au Mans in France, and at Louisiana State University. A great admirer of Irish literature and culture, he is the author of James Joyce: Developing Irish Identity (2009). His research interests also concern the history and development of postcolonial theory, as well as American expatriate writing from postcolonial nations. Halloran's work has previously appeared in publications such as New Voices in Irish Criticism, Antenea, and In-Between. Upon completion of his doctorate in English, Halloran will begin teaching at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Lyon, France.