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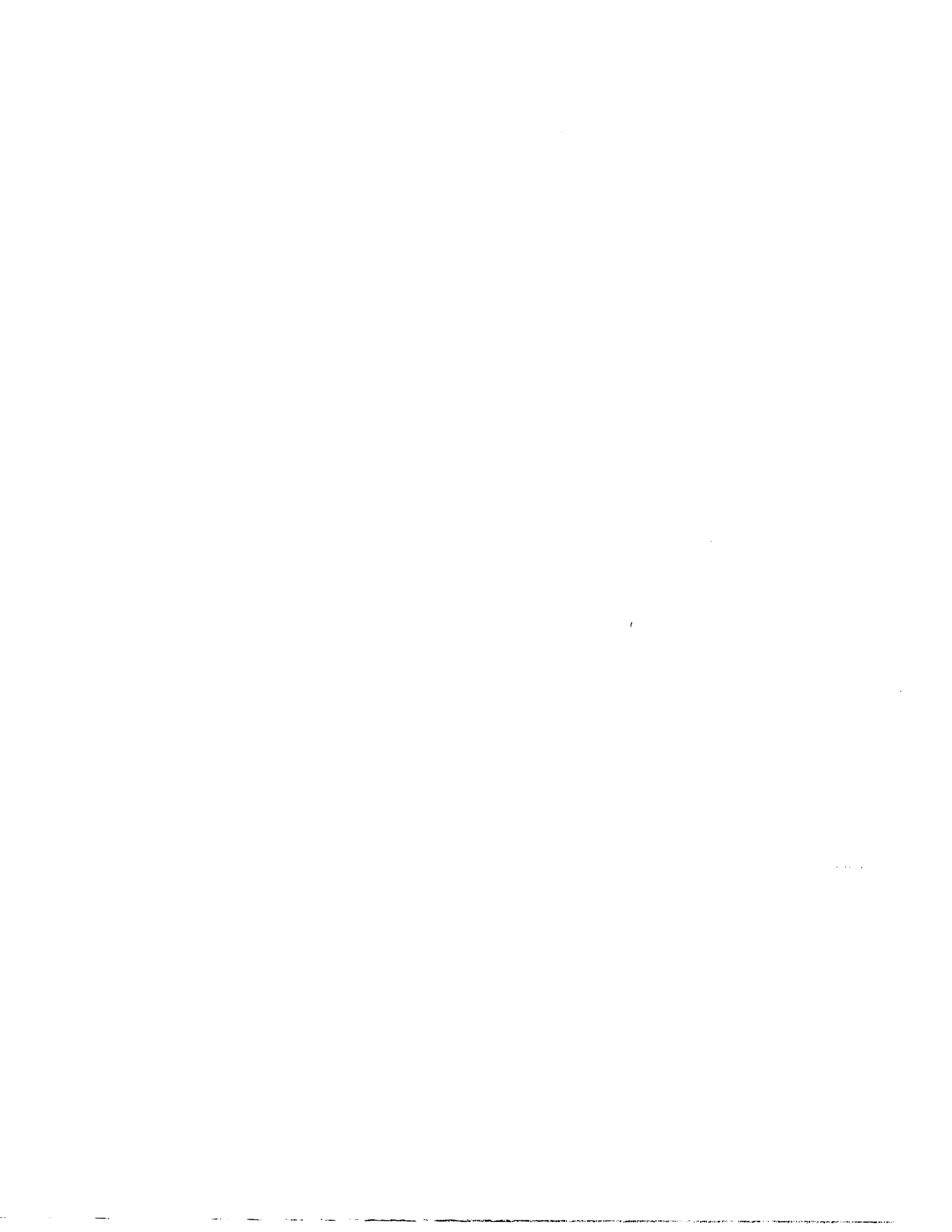
From cannibals to radicals: Towards a theory of exoticism

Celestin, Roger, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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**FROM CANNIBALS TO RADICALS:
TOWARDS A THEORY OF EXOTICISM**

**By
ROGER CELESTIN**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The
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For Roger, Simone, and Sonia.

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Revenons à cette question éminemment contingente que les historiens savent poser: pourquoi l'Europe, pourquoi pas la Chine? A propos de la navigation hauturière, Braudel demande pourquoi pas les navires chinois, ou même musulmans? Pourquoi pas Sinbad le Marin? Ce n'est pas la technique qui manque, la machine technique. N'est-ce pas plutôt le désir qui reste pris dans les rêts de l'Etat despotique, tout investi dans la machine du despote? "Alors le mérite de l'Occident, bloqué sur son étroit cap d'Asie, serait-il d'avoir eu besoin du monde, besoin de sortir de chez soi?"

Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, L'anti-Oedipe.

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street and methodically knocking people's hats off--then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.

Herman Melville, Moby-Dick.

INTRODUCTION

Exoticism, a term that designates an already crystallized concept in 19th century Europe, is being used here as an analytical tool to explore a more generic phenomenon: the representation of the foreign in Western literature. This displacement raises a problem. Can we, one may ask, apply the term exoticism to texts such as Naipaul's Guerrillas or Barthes' L'empire des signes, a term that both authors would themselves disclaim? Barthes, for example, uses it detractively:

Il y a ici une figure de secours: l'exotisme. L'Autre devient pur objet, spectacle, guignol: relégué aux confins de l'humanité, il n'attend plus à la sécurité du chez-soi. Ceci est surtout une figure petite-bourgeoise. Car, même s'il ne peut vivre l'Autre, le bourgeois peut du moins en imaginer la place: c'est ce qu'on appelle le libéralisme, qui est une sorte d'économie intellectuelle des places reconnues (Mythologies, 240).

Further: the attempt is to arrive at a "theory of exoticism" but, rather than concentrating exclusively on 19th century Europe where the term is extensively and specifically applied, this analysis proposes to also focus on Renaissance, Enlightenment and post-War representations of the foreign in Western texts.

Addressing this last point is a convenient way of arriving at an explanation of the choices implied in both

the wording of the proposed title and the choice of texts. Although the term exoticism is already invested with a set of connotations that seem to confine it in an already delineated period and place, it nevertheless contains the essential characteristics of what constitutes the more generic representation of otherness in Western texts: a hovering between two tendencies that can be summarized as exemplification and experimentation. The first, a tendency to inscribe the exotic against the background of center-elaborated systems, a background against which the Other, at the extreme of that tendency, ultimately disappears. The second, a tendency that is stamped by the individual will to explore the exotic, thus discovering (or recovering) material that confirms individuality rather than illustrate systems: paradoxically, at its extreme, this tendency sometimes result in the "loss of self" or "merging with the Other" that is sometimes referred to as "madness."

These two extremes can be seen in terms of their relation to the production of texts. The exemplification pole is characterized by the appropriation of the exotic through its representation for the center in terms of language, a language whose primary purpose is to unfold through classification, to provide a means of freezing, of controlling. The Ecoles des Langues Orientales in France (1795) or the Société de Géographie (for which Rimbaud--as a trader in coffee and not a poet--produced an article on

business opportunities on the Ogaden, which he was the first European to enter) are instances of this systematization. Ultimately, at this end of the spectrum, the exotic becomes a system of textual references--texts echoing, deciphering each other, their original object having receded into the background and only brought back into play when additional material is needed to update or verify the network. Although this is not always the desired goal, it is sometimes the result, as Susan Sontag points out:

Thus the man who submits himself to the exotic to confirm his own inner alienation as an urban intellectual ends by aiming to vanquish his subject by translating it into a purely formal code. The ambivalence towards the exotic, the primitive, is not overcome after all, but only given a complex restatement. The anthropologist, as a man, is engaged in saving his own soul. But he is also committed to recording and understanding his subject by a very high-powered mode of formal analysis--what Levi-Strauss call "structural anthropology"--which obliterates all traces of his personal experience and truly effaces the human features of his subject, a given primitive society ("The Anthropologist as Hero" in Against Interpretation, 77).

At the other end of the spectrum, there is no text, since the emitter has "disappeared," having shed the attributes of the Center and no longer finding the justification of his journey in what is sent, brought back, "added" to a Center from whose vantage point he is "lost" or "mad." In other words, Baudelaire's "vrais voyageurs. . . ceux-là seuls qui partent pour partir" ("Le voyage"). This study cannot, by definition, deal with those "true travellers" since they offer no text, no incremental return

from their journey to be scrutinized (thus leading to the production of more text, this time a dissertation. . .). In short, exoticism seems to include both extremes of a spectrum ranging from the disappearance of the peripheral Other--the subject of texts produced in the Center--to the disappearance of the central, Western Self--the emitter of texts produced "about the periphery." Using the term "exoticism" as a way into the more generic representation of Otherness seems not only justified, but also presents an advantage: the possibility of questioning the basis of the concept itself through semantic and historical displacement.

The objective of this study is, essentially, to arrive at a theory of exoticism through an analysis of the relation between the (Western) Self and the (exotic) Other using the Self's texts in a given period. In the process it becomes apparent that the basic questions of narrative voice in literature in general, of emitting voices in texts in general, are being formulated once again: Who is speaking? To whom?¹ From where? In fact, these questions can be said to contain the topic since, as will also become apparent,

¹The idea of audience is an essential aspect of this study since the very use of "exotic" implies identification of the narrative voice with a given territory, and separation from another that constitutes the territory being reported from. This general idea is encapsulated by Pascal in a manner at once more oblique and more incisive: "Curiosité n'est que vanité. Le plus souvent, on ne veut savoir que pour en parler. Autrement on ne voyagerait pas sur la mer pour ne jamais rien dire et le seul plaisir de voir, sans espérance d'en jamais rien communiquer (Pensées).

what defines exoticism is not merely a content but a relation, a relation between a narrative voice, its particularities, devices, points of view, and the presence of a foreign culture at textual center.

The equation Self = Western; Other, foreign, exotic = non-Western is obviously one of the working assumptions of this approach. The same topic could be seen from a different angle: The West as foreign, exotic. The following excerpt, taken from Alejo Carpentier's Explosion in a Cathedral, is an illustration of the possibility. One of the characters, a Cuban, is wandering in revolutionary Paris:

The Revolution had infused new life in the street--and the streets were of enormous importance to Esteban now that he lived in them and watched the Revolution from them. "The joy and exuberance of a free people," he thought, listening and watching, proud of the title "Foreigner, friend of Liberty," which everyone bestowed on him. Some people might perhaps have grown quickly accustomed to all this; but, suddenly uprooted as he was from his drowsy tropics, he felt he was surrounded by exoticism--that was the word--a much more picturesque exoticism than that of his own country with its palm trees and sugar canes, where he had grown up without imagining that anyone could ever find it exotic. Here the flag-poles and streamers, the symbolic tableaux and the standards, seemed exotic--truly exotic to him (130).

There is, however, the possibility that the very idea of exoticism is a specifically Western construct linked to certain peculiarities. Prominent among these is what can be called an exploring/conquering/cataloguing impulse which, although not confined to the West, finds its most perfected

expression in Western configurations and, for the purpose of this study, Western texts. There is the possibility that the relation between this impulse, the material basis that makes its realization possible, and texts themselves is not fortuitous, and cannot be generalized to other, non-Western cultures. Indeed there seems to be a specificity at work, as Jean-Francois Lyotard points out in L'économie libidinale:

Pas de signe, pas de pensée du signe qui ne soit de pouvoir à pouvoir. Le voyage de cette recherche (recherche d'un discours qui peut produire des métaphore repérables, prévisibles, contrôlables. . .) n'est pas la dérive des fous et des pestiférés ni l'exode transpatial des fantastiques, c'est l'équipée très préparée de l'explorateur, annonçant celle du curé, puis du militaire et du commerçant, c'est l'avant-garde du capital, qui n'est elle même que le capital déjà pour autant qu'il est activité perpétuelle de repousser ses frontières, incorporation de morceaux toujours nouveaux de la bande dans son système, mais incorporation à des fins de revenu, de rapport. Le signe va avec ce voyage d'affaires, et le voyage d'affaires crée le signe: qu'est-ce qu'un Africain pour un explorateur britannique, qu'est-ce qu'un Japonais pour un Jésuite du XIIIème siècle? Des organes et pulsions partiels à résorber dans le corps normal organique unique dit Humanité ou Création, des matériaux à dématérialiser et à faire signifier (59).

Meeting, then, of an impulse, the material basis for enacting it, and texts. To acknowledge this convergence is to acknowledge a progression in the perception and representation of the exotic. The evolving material conditions imply a constant shift of historical conditions, lines that would mark out, for example, the gradual shrinking of unknown territory of the planet's surface, or

the shift from ". . . the time of the Pharaohs, when women carried red pitchers to the Nile. . ." (V. Woolf, The Waves) to the OPEC oil embargo or the Union Carbide toxic gas leak in Bhopal.

Another series of lines is constituted by the different attributes of exoticism, tropes, particularities that appear consistently in the texts of exoticism: copia (an opulence of the surface); a feast of the grotesque, a telescoping into the "aberrant"; the thinning of the psychological; prosopopeia; the use of a specialized, scientific vocabulary (this is obviously applicable to certain ethno-anthropological texts, but finds its equivalent in fiction in an insistence on the ritualistic and the mystico-religious, examples of which can be found in D. H. Lawrence's Mexican material or Artaud's texts on the Tarahumara). To these we can add what can be grouped under the heading of causal properties: the reaffirmation of Self-as-Center through exoticization of an Other¹: the rite of passage syndrome; striating the void as existential antidote (travel as a tool of the taxonomic impulse); desire/nostalgia for a lost paradise, a sort of pre-linguistic peace (we can find the origins of the "bon

¹Foucault's definition of his study of madness as a history of limits could equally be applied to this notion: ". . . une histoire des limites--de ces gestes obscurs, nécessairement oubliés dès qu'accomplis, par lesquels une culture rejette quelque chose qui sera pour elle l'Extérieur" (Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique, 199).

sauvage" here. . .); the (alibi of) retracing the Great (and singular) historical continuum, the Common Past of Humanity, etc.

The "theory of exoticism" proposed by this study can be seen as a criss-crossing of two sets of lines: one, chronological and historical, begins with Montaigne and ends with V. S. Naipaul, the other, a rhetorical or stylistic line (composed of different series of tactics, figures, thematic consistencies, etc.), closed by the two poles of exoticism referred to above, exemplification and experimentation. The different figures that characterize the representation of the exotic appear with more or less intensity at a given square on the resulting grid, at a given point on the Montaigne-Naipaul line, sometimes clearly delineated, dominant, at other times merely accompanying, recessive characteristics. Thus taken from one pole to the other, through both its intrinsic properties and its historico-chronological evolution, the representation of the exotic exhausts its own possibilities in the trajectory. What is yielded is not a frozen, static picture of exoticism characterized by contents, but an understanding of a process, a mechanics, of, again, a relation.

The five authors this study focuses on--Montaigne, Diderot, Flaubert, Barthes, and Naipaul--fall into three categories that also coincide with both historical and rhetorical divisions: an orientation towards Systems,

Individuality, or, somewhere between the two, Ambivalence. In Systems (the Enlightenment. . . announced by Montaigne) the characteristics of exoticism that are clustered around its exemplification pole are the dominant one (prosopopeia, for example), whereas with Individuality the tropes and devices that are concentrated around the experimentation pole (copia for example) become the dominant ones. With Ambivalence (the 20th century and, more specifically, the post-War period), a hovering between the two is the prevalent characteristic, constantly marked by an acute awareness of the very process through which the subject matter (in this case, exotic otherness) is delineated, a constant questioning of the relation between representation and its means; in other words, self-awareness coupled with a radical reexamination of the properties of language itself.

With the exception of V. S. Naipaul all the authors involved here are French because exoticism as an identifiable tendance in a national literature is a peculiarly French phenomenon. The factors that, together, form the basis and the means of exoticism were most systematically gathered in that tradition: from the exploration and discovery of new territories to massive representation of the encounter, its results, and implications. In addition, the shift from "exotic" to "exoticism," the passage from qualifier to substantive, is most apparent in the French tradition in which the exotic

evolves from Rabelais' exotic (merchandise) to Montaigne's radically different (cannibal), Diderot's (Tahitian as) illustration, to Flaubert's and Barthes' object of desire and longing (Carthage, Japan, the "Orient"). We see, in this tradition, the passage from "exotic" as generalized designation used by an entire culture, to the subjectivisation of "exotic," the stage at which "exoticism" is practiced or felt by a Self. A crucial point: this passage from generalized and objectified usage ("exotic") to an individuated, subjective usage (where desire becomes a dominating force and figure) can also occur in a single author whose relation to his audience (Home) becomes more or less tenuous in the process.

Why place Montaigne at the beginning? Because, in short, he is strategically placed: he is the contemporary of a massive movement of exploration and discovery resulting in the literal appearance of what will become and produce the exotic, and he addresses himself systematically to that phenomenon and its implications in a text that also constitutes a means of (private) self-elaboration. It could be argued that, further back on a chronological line, Herodotus, whom Plutarch called "a lover of barbarians," also produced texts about (exotic) otherness in a similar context, the spread of a civilization through conquest and colonization; but the line between Herodotus and the contemporary period is not a continuous one. Montaigne

presented the advantage of dealing with a set of conditions that are still unraveling today, thus forming an unbroken line that enables us to retrace the evolution from "exotic" to "exoticism" in optimum conditions, from initial meeting of cultures, a sine qua non, to critical stage of representation (Naipaul's travels in the "Third World").

Montaigne is also a fitting point of departure for a study whose aim is to show that the attributes of exoticism operate at all times (whenever the foreign is represented), only being more or less dominant according to the period in question. Although not of the "appropriate" period, Montaigne is experiencing the linguistic/textual self-consciousness and adopting the critical stance (vis-a-vis what is today referred to as "Euro-centrism") that are often seen as characteristic features of the Twentieth century.

Montaigne also "announces" the Enlightenment and the figure of that period used in my study: Diderot. One hundred years after Montaigne, the movement of exploration and discovery had followed its course and is accordingly used in ways that have themselves evolved. In Le supplément au voyage de Bougainville, the exemplification pole of exoticism has one of its strongest texts: the Tahitians gradually disappear, overshadowed by the (philosophical) point whose conveyors or illustrations they are meant to be. Diderot's Supplément also reflects a tension that is symptomatic of the Enlightenment in general: a culture

majestically affirms its centrality through its conquests and science, while simultaneously experiencing the trauma of encountering its own relativity, unveiled by the same conquest and the same science.

Flaubert is emblematic of the period during which "exoticism" becomes an immediately identifiable trend and a "trendy" word (first listed in the Littré in 1866). Flaubert is also present in the study as the means of an opposition: between the freezing and framing of exotic otherness as practiced in the Enlightenment and as practiced in the 19th century. The opposition is between the uses made by an individual illustrating a point for a culture to which he remains more or less anchored, and an individual "going out there" to discover or recover an imagined, disappointed, or lost ideal that has the property of isolating him from his culture, of indeed, breaking that culture's codes. Flaubert and Salammbô are used in this study as 19th century paradigms of an individualized impulse coupled with an aesthetic stance that can be summed up as the victory of surface over depth: skins, jewels, fruits, fabrics, metals, (emblems of desire) rather than philosophical illustration; a Self contemplates an imagined spectacle devoid of the socio-historical vicissitudes of his own world/civilization/time.

Although Barthes and Naipaul repeat a similar pattern-- Barthes isolates himself in the radically different Japanese

empire of signs which becomes an exotic (and linguistic) utopia, and Naipaul finds (temporary) solace in a rediscovery of the English past and of his childhood--they belong more specifically to the stage of ambivalence. This is the last and critical stage of a progression that begins with the appearance of the material base of exoticism--another place and another people to be represented--and ends with the radical questioning of the means of representation themselves. In addition, Naipaul presents the particularity of coming "from the outside," "from the exotic," of problematizing our initial classification of certain "material" as "exotic."

In this last stage the conditions that had informed the representation of otherness are disrupted by the appearance and convergence of three developments: the shrunken surface, the fragmented Self, and the uttering Other.

The shrunken surface is the end-product of the gradual disappearance of unknown territory, a movement that is accelerated in the 20th century and accompanied by the massive representations of an increasingly uniform planet and the extension of the attributes (and privileges) of emitter to an increasingly larger group.

The fragmented Self marks the breakdown of a unit essential to exoticism: a clearly delineated Self that relies on the certainty of his difference and, to a great

extent, of his centrality and predominance, what we've called, borrowing from Foucault, his power.

The uttering Other is no longer the participant in a "negotiated reality" (Crapanzano) but the emitter of his own texts (even if these, too, are the products of a "negotiated reality"). The prosopopeia that underlies much of Enlightenment exoticism and the rich, silent surface that the Other becomes in much of 19th century exoticism have been displaced in the 20th century where the proximity of the Other, whether a result of massive representation or literal presence "in our midst," is underlined by his own utterance.

CHAPTER I: MONTAIGNE

No sooner does one discover the categories of the pure understanding for a Newtonian age than somebody draws up another list that would do nicely for an Aristotelian or Einsteinian one. No sooner does one draw up a categorical imperative for Christians than somebody draws up ne which works for cannibals.

Richard Rorty, The Consequences of Pragmatism.

He ties a rope to one of the prisoner's arms, by the end of which he holds him, a few steps away, for fear of being hurt, and gives his dearest friend the other arm to hold in the same way; and these two, in the presence of the whole assembly, kill him with their swords. This done, they roast him and eat him in common and send some pieces to their absent friends. This is not, as people think, for nourishment, as of old the Scythians used to do; it is to betoken an extreme revenge.

Montaigne, "Of cannibals," Essays.

Natural interpretations are not just added to a previously existing field of sensations, they are instrumental in constituting the field. Eliminate all natural interpretations and you also eliminate the ability to think and to perceive. . . . A person who faces a perceptual field without a single natural interpretation would be completely disoriented, he could not even start. . .

Paul Feyerabend, Against Method.

If anything made my soul lose its footing, it would never set it back upright; it probes and searches itself too keenly and deeply, and therefore would never let the wound that has pierced it close

Montaigne, "Of coaches," Essays.

INTRODUCTION

Le commerce des hommes y est merveilleusement propre, et la visite des pays estranger, non pour en rapporter seulement, à la mode de nostre noblesse Françoise, combien de pas a Santa Rotonda, ou la richesse des calessons de la Signora Livia, ou, comme d'autres, combien le visage de Neron, de quelque vieille ruyne de là, est plus long ou plus large que celui de quelque pareille medaille, mais pour en rapporter principalement les humeurs de ces nations et leurs façons, et pour frotter et limer nostre cervelle contre celle d'autruy ("De l'institution des enfans," 200).

Mixing with men is wonderfully useful, and visiting foreign countries, not merely to bring back in the manner of our French noblemen, knowledge of the measurements of the Santa Rotonda, or of the richness of Signora Livia's drawers, or like some other, how much longer or wider Nero's face is in some old ruin there than on some similar medallion: but to bring back knowledge of the characters and ways of those nations, and rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others ("Of the education of children," 112).

Montaigne never travelled to the exotic. His long trip--"17 mois, 8 jours" (Voyage en Italie, 236)--to Rome by way of Germany and Switzerland soon after the first edition of the Essais (Books I and II) was published, and following close to ten years of rest, retreat, and writing in his tower, was a trip confined to the West. Nevertheless, his distinction between those who remain intact, who "merely bring back" additional information to their point of departure and those who are changed by contact with the foreign is also a fundamental aspect of his own experience of the exotic. This experience is dispersed throughout the Essais, but contained essentially in "Des cannibales" (1578-

80, Book I) and "Des coches" (1585-88, Book III). Although references to the Essais in general are necessary, an analysis of Montaigne's relation to the exotic is basically a reading of these two essays.

Where should Montaigne be placed? Isn't his own experience of the exotic even more reduced and devoid of risk (the way Nietzsche, or even Gide, would use the word) than the experience of those who "go out there" even if they only "merely bring back" information? Doesn't the physically limited quality of his experience reduce or even eliminate the possibility of exposure and of (ex)change? Isn't his relation to the exotic ultimately limited to a discourse of exemplification (the exotic Other as an appropriated figure whose function is limited to a slot in a system in need of illustration)? One possible answer is provided by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville. The vice-admiral and explorer was obliquely looking at Rousseau when writing the following lines, but Montaigne who, in many ways heralds the Enlightenment philosophes¹ can be included among those who are being referred to here:

Je suis voyageur et marin, c'est à dire un menteur aux yeux de cette classe d'écrivains paresseux qui, dans l'ombre de leur cabinet, philosophent à perte de vue sur le monde et ses habitants, et soumettent impérieusement la nature à leur imagination (Voyage autour du monde, 19-20).

¹See chapter II for an analysis of Diderot's own use of Bougainville's Voyage autour du monde (1771).

Strongly stated here is an idea of the philosopher as a stay-at-home whose relation to the exotic can only be seen in terms of (a) a system and its illustration or (b) a lyrical Self whose exotic Other is imagined or imaginary, both equations requiring little if any epistemological enquiry.

Yet Montaigne is neither. Neither the agent of a steamrolling Center intent on "merely bringing back," whether philosophical illustrations or "pepper and pearls" ("Of Coaches, 695), on incorporating what is perceived as a deviant, chronologically "behind," in any case profitable, periphery, nor the builder of an imaginary dimension.¹ Montaigne does not travel to the exotic, but he is

¹This relation to the exotic is more characteristic of the Middle Ages and the post-Enlightenment, periods during which the lack of information or the refusal of information, respectively, produced either a collective vision of the exotic as the fabulous or the menacing (the Middle Ages) or an individual vision of the exotic as dreamlike fullness (Romanticism and after). For example, the Orient:

Ce nom d'Orient est l'un de ceux qui me sont un trésor. Je fais ici une remarque capitale. Pour que ce nom produise à l'esprit de quelqu'un son plein et entier effet, il faut, sur toute chose, n'avoir jamais été dans la contrée mal déterminée qu'il désigne. Il ne faut connaître par l'image, le récit, la lecture et quelques objets, que de la sorte la moins érudite, la plus inexacte, et même la plus confuse. C'est ainsi que l'on se compose une bonne matière de songe. Il faut un mélange d'espace et de temps, de pseudo-vrai et de faux certain, d'infimes détails et de vues grossièrement vastes. C'est là l'Orient de l'esprit (Roger Bezombes, L'exotisme dans l'art et la pensée, 1953).

nevertheless somewhere else than in the Center. His is a "voyage sur place," as Gilles Deleuze defines it:

Il y a des voyages sur place, des voyages en intensités, et même historiquement les nomades ce ne sont pas ceux qui bougent à la manière des migrants, au contraire ce sont ceux qui ne bougent pas, et qui se mettent à nomadiser pour rester à la même place en échappant aux codes (Nietzsche aujourd'hui?, 174).

Montaigne's project can also be seen in those terms: to remain in the Center while escaping its codes. Even more succinctly, like the Epechists he refers to in the Apology his position can be summarized by "επεχω," "I abstain."

Yet, he writes. His text paradoxically appears as the proclamation of his abstention. "Des cannibales" and "Des coches" as texts where the exotic is ostensibly the central concern thus seem to serve a project that undermines itself: the presentation of an exotic realm that is opposed by Montaigne to his Home culture as an affirmation of his own self-exclusion from that culture, is also the elaboration of a text that, in itself, regardless of its alleged primary concern, constitutes a link to Montaigne's own culture as audience--even if this connection is denied.

Thus, a continuous tension between the proclamation of an outside position and the simultaneous presence of a medium that is itself the marker of an inside position informs Montaigne's texts "on" the exotic, and is reflected in a series of figures and tactics that I propose to examine.

KNOWLEDGE

On the most literal level, the exotic for Montaigne is constituted by the presence of the new lands chartered by the relatively recent or contemporary voyages of exploration.¹ In "Des coches" and "Des cannibales" the expansion of the globe's known surface is also one more unveiling of the world's diversity (religious wars and the general Renaissance discovery of the Greco-Roman world are other unveilings). In "Des coches":

¹Montaigne's world view cannot be disassociated from the technological base that makes the very appearance of these new lands possible. The combination of the exploring/conquering/cataloguing impulse referred to in the introduction and of this technological underpinning is what makes the concept "exotic" possible. In his The Age of Reconnaissance J. H. Parry examines this combination. For example:

In the later fifteenth century, new advances in the arts of navigation and cartography, made by a new combination of academic knowledge and nautical experience, enabled explorers for the first time to observe and record the position--or at least the latitude--of a point on an unknown coast; and even, in favorable circumstances, of a ship at sea. New methods in the design of ships, consequent upon a marriage of European with Oriental traditions, made it possible for sailors not only to make long voyages of discovery, but to repeat them, and to establish regular communications with newly discovered lands. New developments in gunnery and the making of guns, particularly in ship-borne artillery, gave European explorers a great advantage over the inhabitants of even the most civilized countries to which they sailed; enabled them to defend themselves, upon arrival, sometimes against overwhelming numbers; and encouraged them to establish trading posts even in places where they were clearly unwelcome (31).

Nostre monde vient d'en trouver un autre (et qui nous respond si c'est le dernier de ses freres, puis que les Daemons, les Sybilles et nous, avons ignoré cettuy-cy jus-qu'asture?) non moins grand, plain et membru que luy (123).

Our world has just discovered another world (and who will guarantee us that it is the last of its brothers, since the daemons, the Sybils, and we ourselves have up to now been ignorant of this one?) no less great, full, and well-limbed than itself (693).

In "Des cannibales":

Cette decouverte d'un país infini semble estre de consideration. Je ne sçay si je me puis respondre que il ne s'en face à l'advenir quelqu'autre, tant de personnages plus grands que nous ayans esté trompez en cette-cy (251).

This discovery of a boundless country seems worthy of consideration. I don't know if I can guarantee that some other such discovery will not be made in the future, so many personages greater than ourselves having been mistaken about this one (150).

The impossibility of "guaranteeing" that discoveries will stop with this last one appears in both essays. It also appears in Montaigne's longest and most important essay, the Apologie de Raimond Sebond:

C'estoit heresie d'avouer des Antipodes;/voilà de nostre siecle une grandeur infinie de terre ferme, non pas une isle ou une contrée particuliere, mais une partie égale à peu près en grandeur à celle que nous cognoissions, qui vient d'estre decouverte. Les Geographe de ce temps ne faillent pas d'asseurer que meshuy tout est trouvé et que tout est veu,
'Nam quod adest praesto, placet, et pollere videtur' (237).

It was heresy to admit the existence of the Antipodes. Behold in our century an infinite expanse of terra firma, not an island or one particular country, but a portion nearly equal in size to the one we know, which has just been

discovered. The geographers of the present time do not fail to assure us that now all is discovered and all is seen, 'for what we have at hand always seems best of all,' (430).

What strikes Montaigne, one more time and from a different angle, in these discoveries is the absence of limits, the crumbling of any epistemological certainty. The allusion to heresy in the excerpt from the Apologie extends the implications to the realm of religion itself. In short, we cannot know. The impossibility of knowing constitutes the long preliminary of "Des coches" and precedes the "Our world has just discovered another world" which is posited as an illustration, a proof of the impossibility of certain, fixed knowledge. What the new discovery leads to, in other words, is this type of reasoning: we cannot know, since when we thought we knew we did not really know, so why should we assume that we now know? This realization is reaffirmed several times in "Des coches" before any direct mention is made of the Incas and the Aztecs, and, each time, the key word remains knowledge (cognoissance):

Je crains que nostre cognoissance soit foible en tous sens, nous ne voyons ny gueres loin, ny guere arriere; elle embrasse peu et vit peu, courte et en estandue de temps et en estandue de matiere (122).

I fear that our knowledge is weak in every direction; we do not see very far ahead or very far behind. It embraces little and has a short life, short in both extent of time and extent of matter (693).

Et de cette mesme image du monde qui coule pendant que nous y sommes, combien chetive et racourcie est la cognoissance des plus curieux! (122).

And of this very image of the world which glides along while we live on it, how puny and limited is the knowledge of even the most curious (693).

Il n'y a rien de seul et de rare eu esgard à nature, ouy bien eu esgard à nostre cognoissance, qui est un miserable fondement de nos regles et qui nous represente volontiers une très-fauce image des choses (123).

There is nothing unique and rare as regards nature, but there certainly is as regards our knowledge, which is a miserable foundation for our rules and which is apt to represent to us a very false picture of things (693).

What is presented then, even before the new lands and people are introduced in the essay, is the limitation and localized quality of knowledge. The exotic appears as either catalyst or illustration of a construct, in this case Montaigne's realization or affirmation of the relativity of knowledge. The construct is not totally independent of the exotic presence--since this presence is either causal or illustrative, "in relation to"--but it is already removed from this presence, already beyond it and directed at the Home as audience.

Still functioning within that pattern Montaigne grants the Self the theoretical ability ("if") to have knowledge of even those lands and civilizations that have not yet been discovered, those that have already been forgotten or were never even known. The result is a continuing Heraclitean

drift in time and space, a constant and infinitely diversified passing:

Si nous voyons autant du monde comme nous n'en voyons pas, nous apercevriens, comme il est à croire, une perpetuele multiplication et vicissitude de formes ("Des coches," 122-23).

If we saw as much of the world as we do not see, we would perceive, it is likely, a perpetual multiplication and vicissitude of forms ("Of coaches," 693).

"Si interminatam in omnes partes magnitudinem regionum videremus et temporum, in quam se injiciens animus et intendens ita late longeque peregrinatur ut nullam oram ultimi videat in qua possit insistere: in hac immensitate infinita vis innumerabilium appareret formarum" (122).

If we could view that expanse of countries and ages, boundless in every direction, into which the mind plunging and spreading itself, travels so far and wide that it can find no limit where it can stop, there would appear in that immensity an infinite capacity to produce innumerable forms (693).

Montaigne's initial discovery of the exotic thus presents itself as a confrontation with infinite variety, what elsewhere he refers to as le branle, the perennial seesaw, the swing ("Du repentir"). The next step is what at another time might be called existential discovery of the absurd or, later, the "absence of a centered structure. . . of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and reassuring certitude which is itself beyond the reach of play"

(Derrida, 279¹). Elsewhere, it is called "doubt, the heightened awareness of insistent variety" (Hallie, 117). At first, Montaigne's doubt--very different from Descartes' in its conclusions--appears as a question, already announcing Candide's (a traveller's. . .) questioning of Pangloss's precepts:

Quelle bonté est-ce que je voyois hier en credit, et demain plus, et que le traict d'une riviere faict crime? Quelle verité que ces montaignes bornent, qui est mensonge au monde qui se tient au delà? (Apologie, 245)

What am I to make of a virtue that I saw in credit yesterday, that will be discredited tomorrow, and that becomes a crime on the other side of the river? What of a truth that is bounded by these mountains and is falsehood in the world that lives beyond? (Apology, 437).

On one level Montaigne's questioning reflects socio-ethical concerns: the validity of laws and customs, their contextual grounding, the indeterminacy of morality, etc.; but, ultimately, it is his Self that Montaigne is concerned with, and not systems. Again, in a discourse apparently focussed on the exotic discovery, a personal, ego-centered (but not Euro-centered, as we will see) problematic precedes the main (what is supposed to be the main) development. Again, in the preliminary to "Des coches," preceding the (in contemporary terms) "anti-colonialist" requisitory that makes up much of the essay, Montaigne refers to himself:

¹In the same chapter of Dissemination ("Structure, Sign and Play") Derrida begins by quoting Montaigne: "We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things."

Qui auroit fait perdre pied é mon ame, ne la remettroit jamais droicte en sa place; elle se retaste et recherche trop vifvement et profondement, et pourtant, ne lairroit jamais ressouder et consolider la plaie qui l'auroit percée (115).

If anything made my soul lose its footing, it would never set it back upright in its place; it probes and searches itself too keenly and deeply, and therefore would never let the wound that had pierced it close up and heal (686).

Even if we take into account the sedimentary and peripatetic form and style of the Essais, the link between sneezing, fear, the variety of coaches throughout different historical periods, and the discovery of new lands by Montaigne's contemporaries, could seem tenuous. The connecting thread is provided by Montaigne's realization of such incongruous variety and his corresponding attempt at marking out a personal territory against the background formed by the clashing of these "innumerable forms."

The equivalent passage in "Des cannibales," also strategically placed at the beginning of the essays allows for a more direct link between the discovery of new lands, the ironic-critical stance vis-a-vis the very concrete discoverers/colonizers, and the more abstract impossibility of knowing; after mentioning the "boundless territory" where Villegaignon landed (in Brazil, 1557), Montaigne writes: "I am afraid we have eyes bigger than our stomachs, and more curiosity than capacity. We embrace everything but we clasp

only wind" (15).¹ Montaigne's digestive metaphors can be applied to either the colonial project or the underlying epistemological one; on one level, political indictment: what are we doing out there? On the other, philosophical considerations: do we really think that we can ever really know?

In short, the world has opened up. And Montaigne has no ground to stand on. His doubt, his questioning, now center upon an alternative, a means of continuing after seeing the initial breach:

Que nous dira dons en cette necessité la philosophie? Que nous suyvons les loix de nostre pays? c'est à dire cette mer flotante des opinions d'un peuple ou d'un Prince, qui me peindront la justice d'autant de couleurs et la reformeront en autant de visages qu'il y aura en eux de changements de passion? Je ne quis pas avoir le jugement si flexible (Apologie, 245).

¹The unfolding of the earth's unknown surface, and the ensuing "saving" of it (Kurtz's "higher ideal" in Heart of Darkness or, the Jesuits' "saving of souls"), the continuous movement of "bringing light to the dark places of the world" as antidote to existential anguish (even if that cause is not the one put forward), do not apply here: "we clasp only wind." Later, as the tentative forays of Europe into the exotic become a full-scale enterprise, the attributes of trade and commerce--what Montaigne calls "traffic in pearls and pepper"--as existential "ways out" become more systematized and apparent as such in the literature of the Center. For example, Louis, in Virginia Woolf's The Waves:

I like to be asked to come to Mr. Burchard's private room and report on our commitments to China. I hope to inherit the arm-chair and a Turkey carpet. My shoulder is to the wheel; I roll the dark before me, spreading commerce where there was chaos in the far parts of the world. If I press on, from chaos making order, I shall find myself where Chatman stood, and Pitt, Burke, and Sir Robert Peel (168).

What then will philosophy tell us in this our need? To follow the laws of our country--that is to say, the undulating sea of the opinions of a people or a prince, which will paint me justice in as many colors, and refashion it into as many faces as there are changes of passion in those men? I cannot have my judgment so flexible (Apology, 437).

Montaigne affirms here his inability to remain without certainty; but his relation to the exotic can only be delineated within a flexible structure. He "cannot have [his] judgment so flexible," but neither can he accept as firmly grounded laws, customs, even so-called scientific systems he knows to be relative. He cannot remain ensconced in his own society, a firmly contained identity within the Center, but neither will he completely shed the attributes of what he (after all) is. Montaigne will not go "out there," to the periphery and become the cannibal. Instead, he "nomadizes." He writes his Essais as a means of remaining, while simultaneously looking to the outside: Odysseus securely tied to the mast of the ship, listening to the sirens' song. Thus the Essais in general, and the representation of the exotic in particular, are a project of containment, an attempt at fixing:

Mais je trouve, variam semper dant otia mentem, que au rebours, faisant le cheval eschappé, il se donne cent fois plus d'affaire é soy mesmes, qu'il n'en prenoit pour autruy; et m'enfante tant de chimeres et monstres fantasques les uns sur les autres, sans ordre et sans propos, que pour contempler é mon aise l'ineptie et l'estrangeté, j'ay commancé de les mettre en rolle, esperant avec le temps luy en faire honte é luy mesmes ("De l'oisiveté," 70).

Like a runaway horse, it [his mind] gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself ("Of idleness," 21).

In other words, Montaigne attempts to "make sense," for the Self firmly grounded in its (assumed) centrality and validity, the outcome of such an attempt is usually synonymous with an incorporation of any extreme, peripheral, or otherwise recalcitrant data into The paradigm, one's own; or, when the new data is really too recalcitrant, with an extension of The paradigm in order to accommodate the added data. In any case, the perceived difference ends up being denied or, to use one of Montaigne's metaphors, digested.

The representation of such a difference, as a result, appears only within the confines of a rigid and imposed framework. The central Self elaborates a picture of the Other if not in his own image, at least according to his own image; and this is the representation of the perceived difference that appears as the Other's reality. There is no possibility of a negotiated relation within the representation which becomes a system closed upon itself. Further, the textual representation appears as the manifestation of an entire culture, rather than the utterance of an individual; what is exotic is resorbed and disappears within a vast, central taxonomy where differences

become mere variations or aberrations of a given, authentic, all-powerful original.

In "Des cannibales" and "Des coches" this is not the case: Montaigne's starting point is different. He is not the emissary of a system obliterating differences through incorporation, but in the process of negotiating what constitutes his Self; as he says: "It is myself that I portray" through the very act of writing the Essais. The exotic is not incorporated by a pre-defined, pre-legitimized structure, but becomes part of the defining process itself. As we have seen, Montaigne approaches the exotic already knowing--and reaffirming in the two essays--that any taxonomy is bound to be relative. But he "cannot have [his] judgment so flexible." This is yet another tension inherent in "Des coches" and "Des cannibales."

Montaigne continually attempts to resolve this tension. He hovers, struggling not to "allow his armor to be pierced." The image of the exotic shifts accordingly in the two essays: a discovered, accepted, affirmed, celebrated difference of which he partakes, but also the means to illustrate or allude to systems and concepts that are already beyond this difference and tend to reinscribe Montaigne within his own culture.

Ultimately, however, the prominent presence of Montaigne everywhere in the Essais, above and beyond all systems, consistently undermines the incorporation of the

exotic into a system--Montaigne's Essais as yet one more central text where the exotic would disappear into a single vast taxonomy--by turning Montaigne's text into the relation of an individual to the exotic, rather than that of an incorporating system to a peripheral difference.

ANTIQUITY

As we have seen, the exotic is both catalyst and illustration of what has been referred to as Montaigne's discovery of the relativity of knowledge, "insistent variety," etc. In that network, the exotic is incorporated insofar as it is used as an example, but remains intact insofar as it is presented as an irreducible and acknowledged difference.

A similar play occurs in the network of Antiquity as it appears in the two essays. Once again, Montaigne remains poised in the Center, now simultaneously looking to the exotic and the Ancients, each informed by the other, both representing, one in time, one in space, an ideal(ized) out there and back then. This is the configuration Michel Butor (Essais sur les Essais) sees in terms of Montaigne's exile:

Montaigne, à cause de l'extraordinaire éducation que lui avait donné son père, ayant eu le latin comme langue maternelle, s'est considéré comme un Romain exilé dans la France au XVI^e siècle; il a eu l'impression de trouver en La Boétie un autre exilé, comme en cet indigène dont is fit la connaissance à Rouen en octobre 1562.

Il y a donc au milieu du premier livre le portrait de trois frères d'exil: La Boétie au centre,

entouré de deux figures symétriques, celles de Montaigne et du Cannibale. Ces trois exilés forment une chaîne reliant les deux sociétés heureuses et vertueuses par-dessus le borbier de la France contemporaine: l'Antiquité, dont is faut repousser le bonheur jusqu'à l'âge d'or et l'Eldorado (64).

This link between the exotic and the Ancients is, to a great extent, a generalized one in the Renaissance. First, because of a chronological telescoping symptomatic of the period: the empires of Antiquity were seen as "almost contemporaneous" (Hodgen¹) with Renaissance Europe. Secondly, because these empires became the paradigms from which to view contemporary differences, the exotic cultures brought within the reach of Europe by the voyages of discovery: "Renaissance studies of Classical Antiquity not only stimulated a general interest in differences among men, they also provided models for such differences" (Rowe, 1).

Thus, in "Des cannibales" and "Des coches" the exotic often appears only through the prism of Antiquity because, at one level, that is the model available to Montaigne. The

¹Since the Old Testament chronology, as interpreted by medieval and Renaissance thought, usually allowed no more than six thousand years both for the Creation and for the enactment of subsequent historical periods, an awareness of greater distance was seldom present. Hence, the empires of Antiquity to which Renaissance scholarship gave unstinted admiration were thought of as almost contemporaneous, not as separated from Renaissance Europe by fifteen hundred or two thousand years. When therefore, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, existing Mediterranean cultures were chosen for description, their characteristics were not ascertained by independent contemporary investigation or re-appraisal. On the contrary, they were described as though these earlier empires were still in existence (182).

first paragraph of "Des cannibales" does not mention the cannibals but introduces the difference between the contemporary Center and the exotics by way of the "Barbarian" topos of Antiquity:

Quand le Roy Pyrrhus passa en Italie, après qu'il eut reconneu l'ordonnance de l'armée que les Romains luy envoioient au devant: "Je ne sçay, dit-il, quels barbares sont ceux-ci (car les Grecs appelloient ainsi toutes les nations estrangieres), mais la disposition de cette armée que je voy n'est aucunement barbare. "Autant en dirent les Grecs de celle que Flaminius fit passer en leur país, et Philippus, voyant d'un tertre l'ordre et distribution du camp Romain en son royaume, sous Publius Sulpicius Galba. Voylà comment il se faut garder de s'atacher aux opinions vulgaires, et les faut juger par la voye de la raison, non par la voix commune (251).

When King Pyrrhus passed over into Italy, after he had reconnoitered formation of the army that the Romans were sending to meet him, he said: "I do not know what barbarians these are" (for so the Greeks called all foreign nations), but the formation of this army that I see is not at all barbarous." The Greeks said as much of the army that Flaminius brought into their country, and so did Philip, seeing from a knoll the order and distribution of the Roman camp, in his kingdom under Publius Sulpicius Galba. Thus we should beware of clinging to vulgar opinions, and judge things by reason's way, not by popular say (150).

The reference to Antiquity, thus placed at the very beginning of the essay, and introducing its thesis (we should beware of clinging to vulgar opinions," etc.) appears as a validation of the points Montaigne is about to make about the cannibals.

In the two paragraphs immediately following this introductory one, Montaigne attempts twice to make the newly

discovered land coincide with Antiquity, to make of it a piece detached and having drifted from ancient lands:

Platon introduit Solon racontant avoir appris des Prestres de la ville de Saïs, en Aegypte, que, jadis et avant le deluge, il y avoit une grande Isle, nommée Athlantide. . . . Mais il n'y a pas grande apparence que cette Isle soit ce monde nouveau que nous venons de decouvrir; car elle touchoit quasi l'Espagne, et ce seroit un effect incroyable d'inundation de l'en avoir reculée, comme elle est, de plus de douze cens lieuës (251-52).

Plato brings in Solon, telling how he had learned from the priests of Sais in Egypt that in days of old, before the Flood, there was a great island named Atlantis. . . . But there is no great likelihood that that island was the new world which we have just discovered; for it almost touched Spain, and it would be an incredible result of a flood to have forced it away as far as it is, more than twelve hundred leagues. . . (150).

L'autre tesmoignage de l'antiquité, auquel on veut rapporter cette decouverte, est dans Aristote, au moins si ce petit livret Des merveilles inouïes est à luy. Il raconte là que certains Carthaginois, s'estant jettez au travers de la mer Athlantique, hors le destroit de Gibraltar, et navigué long temps, avoient decouvert en fin une grande isle fertile. . . . Cette narration d'Aristote n'a non plus d'accord avec nos terres neufves (253).

The other testimony of Antiquity, with which some would connect this discovery is in Aristotle, at least if that little book Of Unheard-of Wonders is by him. He there relates that certain Carthaginians, after setting out upon the Atlantic Ocean from the Strait of Gibraltar and sailing a long time, at last discovered a great fertile island. . . . This story of Aristotle does not fit our new lands any better than the other (151).

The procedure is the same in both attempts: to introduce a real link, genetic or geographical (Brazil as a "piece" of Antiquity having "drifted" from the whole, or the Tupinamba

as descendants of the Greeks) between Antiquity and the exotic, to explore the parallel at length, only to finally point out the impracticality of such a link. In spite of the two concluding denials, however, Montaigne reaches his (unavowed) aim: the possibility of a physical connection between the Ancients and the exotics, even if only because it has been extensively alluded to, reverberates throughout the essay.

To the end of "Des cannibales" Montaigne continues to refer to this possibility, to elaborate this validation of the Tupinambas through what sometimes amounts to an enumeration of the similarities between their world and Greco-Roman civilization. This is perhaps where the exotic becomes a mere palimpsest, only appearing at the points where it coincides with Antiquity. After quoting a Tupinamba song at the end of "Des cannibales," Montaigne writes: "Not only is there nothing barbarous in this fancy, but it is altogether Anacreontic. Their language, moreover, is a soft language, with an agreeable sound, somewhat like Greek in its endings (158).

Montaigne strains to establish connections that, physically, do not exist. Ultimately his desire/nostalgia for an exotics/Ancients equivalency leads to a configuration that includes the exotic, Antiquity, and Nature, but excludes his contemporaries. In "Des cannibales:"

Il me desplaît que Licurgus et Platon ne l'ayent eüe; car il me semble que ce que nous voyons par

experience en ces nations là, surpasse non seulement toutes les peintures dequoy la poësie a embelly l'age doré et toutes ses inventions à feindre une heureuse condition d'hommes, mais encore la conception et le desir mesme de la philosophie. Ils n'ont peu imaginer une nayfveté si pure et simple, comme nous la voyons par experience; ny n'ont peu d'artifice et de soudeure humaine (255).

I am sorry that Lycurgus and Plato did not know of them; for it seems to me that what we actually see in these nations surpasses not only all the pictures in which poets have idealized the golden age and all their inventions in imagining a happy state of man, but also the conceptions and the very desire of philosophy. I am sometimes vexed that they were unknown earlier, in the days when there were men able to judge them better than we (153).

In "Des coches:"

Que n'est tombée sous Alexandre ou sous ces anciens Grecs et Romains une si noble conquête, et une si grande mutation et alteration de tant d'empires et de peuples sous des mains qui eussent doucement poly et defriché ce qu'il y avoit de sauvage, et eussent conforté et promeu les bonnes semences que nature y avoit produit, meslant non seulement à la culture des terres et ornement des villes les arts de deçà, en tant qu'elles y eussent esté nécessaires, mais aussi meslant les vertus Grecques et Romaines aux originelles du pays! (125).

Why did not such a noble conquest fall to Alexander or to those ancient Greeks and Romans? Why did not such a great change and alteration of so many empires and peoples fall into hands that would have strengthened and fostered the good seeds that nature has produced in them, not only adding to the cultivation of the earth and the adornment of cities the art of our side of the ocean, in so far as they would have been necessary, but also adding the Greek and Roman virtues to those originally in that region? (695).

Although approximately half of "Des coches" consists of a sardonic and vigorous denunciation of the European

conquest of Central and South America--"So many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic in pearls and pepper! (695)--, here Montaigne, carried away by his admiration of the Greeks and Romans, does not direct his invective at the colonial project per se, but against a particular (contemporary) set of "participants."

The attraction of what appears to him as an ideal combination is too great. In a meeting of the contemporary exotics and the Ancients, Montaigne sees the possibility of perfection itself, of the bonheur Butor refers to above, The (imagined) Golden Age and the (lost) Garden of Eden would merge in the exotic landscape, assembling the basic properties of both: innocence, health, *communitas*, beauty, *copia*. In Montaigne's terms, a meeting of Nature and Reason, the "very desire of philosophy," the ultimate equilibrium that would provide a stability out of Heraclitean drift, out of the bramble he perceives, accepts, but in which ^{he} nevertheless attempts to achieve happiness.

There is no systematic presentation of a utopia in Montaigne's work, of a time and place where everything would be perfect all at once, only a repeated regret; in this case, that the Tupinambas, the Incas, and the Aztecs were "discovered" by the wrong people, his contemporaries. For Montaigne these contemporaries--cannot constitute a base

from which to evaluate the new civilizations opened up by exploration. Antiquity thus becomes the vital point of reference; to a certain extent, the exotic is valid, is perceived even, only insofar as it can be compared to that ideal model, even if sometimes it supersedes that model, at least according to Montaigne:

Quant à la pompe et magnificence, par où je suis entré en ce propos, ny Graece, ny Romme, ny Aegypte ne peut, soit en utilité, ou difficulté, ou noblesse, comparer aucun de ses ouvrages au chemin qui se voit au Peru, dressé par les Roys du pays, depuis la ville de Quito jusques à celle de Cusco (il y a trois cens lieuës) (129).

As for pomp and magnificence, whereby I entered this subject, neither Greece nor Rome nor Egypt can compare, whether in utility or difficulty or nobility, with the road which is seen in Peru, laid out by the kings of the country, from the city of Quito as far as Cuzco (a distance of three hundred leagues. . .) (698).

This is the point at which the exotic is no longer the aspiring element in a comparative equation ("almost as good as," "as good as"), and becomes a reality to be reckoned with, ("the best") even according to the Center's criteria. It has surpassed the "civilized" tradition as exemplified by both its most perfected avatar (the Greco-Roman world) and, it goes without saying for Montaigne, the degraded example represented by his own society, barely fit to judge these achievements, and in fact only able to do so by comparing the exotic to Antiquity, not to itself.¹

¹This is essentially the method employed by Las Casas to refute Juan Ginès de Sepulvéda's contention that the Indians were semi-animals whose property and services could

However, even though the exotic world displays the ability to produce such works, this is not, in Montaigne's text, what intrinsically characterizes it and radically divides it from his own civilization. Rather, in "Des cannibales" and "Des coches," the exotic is placed most consistently under the sign of Nature.

NATURE

Here we encounter another of the basic tensions in Montaigne's Essais: the play between "Nature" and "Art." The road from Quito to Cuzco referred to in "Des coches" is a production of the latter, but only appears in the exotic territory as a manifestation of the former:

Nature, pour montrer qu'il n'y a rien de sauvage
en ce qui est conduit par elle, faict naistre és
nations moins cultivées par art des productions

commandeered by the Spaniards and against whom war could be justly waged. De Sepulvéda, translator of Aristotle based his argument on an "Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery" at Vallalolid, Mexico, in 1551. Las Casas advanced the idea, which astonished the Spaniards of his day, that the American Indians compared very favorably with the peoples of ancient times, were eminently rational beings, and in fact fulfilled everyone of Aristotle's requirements for the good life:

Las Casas even develops the idea that the Greeks and Romans were, in several respects, inferior to the American Indians. The Indians are clearly more religious, for instance, because they offer more and better sacrifices to their gods than did any of the ancient peoples. The Mexican Indians are superior to the ancient peoples in rearing and educating their children. . . the temples in Yucatan are no less worthy of admiration than the pyramids. . . (L. Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians, 55).

d'esprit souvent, qui luittent les plus artistes productions (Du pedantisme," 184).

Nature, to show that there is nothing barbarous in what is under her guidance, often brings forth, in the nations least cultivated by art, productions of the mind that vie with the most artistic productions ("Of pedantry," 100).

The dismantling of the Civilized/Barbarian bi-polarity, already effected in the very first paragraph of "Des cannibales," continues here. Montaigne is also perversely attempting to play both sides of the board: praising the exotic world's capacity for matching and even surpassing the "civilized wonder" of Antiquity, but simultaneously pointing to Nature as the provenance of these productions. It is as if the road from Quite to Cuzco were a mark of independent and omnipotent origin, rather than the systematic affirmation of a specific people's talent, strength, and will.

The road to Cuzco appears to be as independent of those who produced it as are the evidences of the Christian faith-phenomena perceived as such my Montaigne--scattered, as it were, in the exotic landscape like so many signs of revealed, but apparently unacknowledged, religion. The absence of a consciousness that would perceive these signs the way Montaigne perceives them creates (for him) a rupture between phenomena and un-knowing subject. In Montaigne's eyes, the two co-exist side by side, but something is missing: the Indians do not seem to see the true significance of their rituals and objects because these,

like the road to Cuzco, are manifestations of something which, like Nature, rules their lives, but is beyond them:

Je me suis souvent esmerveillé de voir, en une très grande distance de lieux et de temps, les rencontres d'un grand nombre d'opinions populaires monstrueuses et des moeurs et creances sauvages, et qui, par aucun biais, ne semblent tenir à nostre naturel discours. . . . Car on y trouve des nations n'ayans, que nous sachons ouy nouvelles de nous, où la circoncision estoit en credit;. . . où nos jeusnes et nostre caresme estoit représenté. . . où nos croix estoient en diverses façon en credit. . . . Ces vains ombrages de nostre religion qui se voyent en aucuns exemples, en tesmoignent la dignité et la divinité. Non seulement elle s'est aucunement insinuée en toutes les nations infideles de deçà par quelque imitation, mais à ces barbares aussi comme par une commune et supernaturelle inspiration (Apologie 238-40).

I have often marveled to see, at a very great distance in time and space, the coincidences between a great number of fabulous popular opinions and savage customs and beliefs which do not seem from any angle to be connected with our natural reason. . . . For nations were found there that never, so far as we know, had heard anything about us, where circumcision was in credit;. . . where our fasts and our Lent were represented. . . where our crosses were in credit in various ways. . . . These empty shadows of our religion that are seen in some of these examples testify to its dignity and divinity. It has insinuated itself to some extent not only into all the infidel nations on this side of the world by some sort of imitation, but also into these barbarous ones as by common and supernatural inspiration (Apology, 433).

The theological parallels are not fortuitous. Indeed, trusting in Nature and relinquishing "Art" for what is "natural" is not only, according to Montaigne, the best way to live, but also--this is essentially his argument in the Apologie de Raimond Sebond where he posits fideism against

"Art" and "Reason"--the means to achieve true religion. Although they do not know the Christian faith, the cannibals are an example of why "it is not reasonable that Art should win the place of honor over our great and powerful mother Nature" ("Des cannibales," 152), as it has in his own civilization.

On a more concrete and physical level for Montaigne (who began to suffer from gallstones at the age of forty-five and did so until his death), the "état de Nature" is synonymous with Health. The cannibals "live in a country with a very pleasant and temperate climate, so that according to my witness it is rare to see a sick man there; and they have assured me that they never saw one palsied, bleary-eyed, toothless, or bent with age ("Des cannibales," 153). Health is one of the most intimate connections between Montaigne and the cannibals, just as, for him, it is one of the concrete manifestations of Nature. His relation to his own sensuous self, to his body, and to diseases constitutes one of the most direct channels between himself and the exotic, that is, the least informed by any desire to illustrate, to systematize, to convey to the Center.

Here again, the exotic and the Ancients meet, this time under the banner of what we could call a natural stoicism or an artless therapeutics:

Je suis de l'avis de Crantor, qu'il ne faut obstinément s'opposer aux maux, et à l'estourdi, ny leur succomber de mollesse, mais qu'il leur faut ceder naturellement, selon leur condition et

la nostre. On doit donner passage aux maladies; et je trouve qu'elles arrestent moins chez moy, qui les laisse faire; et en ay perdu, de celles qu'on estime plus opiniastres et tenaces, de leur propre decadence, sans ayde et sans art, et contre ses reigles. Laissons faire un peu à nature: elle entend mieux ses affaires que nous. . . . J'ay laissé envieillir et mourir en moy de mort naturelle des reumes, refluxions gouteuses, relaxation, battement de coeur, micraines et autres accidens, que j'ay perdu quand je m'estois à demy formé à les nourrir ("De l'experience," 299).

I agree with Crantor, that we must neither obstinately and heedlessly oppose evils nor weakly succumb to them, but give way to them naturally, according to their condition and our own. We should give free passage to diseases; and I find that they do not stay so long with me, who let them go ahead; and some of those that are considered the most stubborn and tenacious, I have shaken off by their own decadence, without help and without art, and against the rules of medicine. Let us give Nature a chance; she knows her business better than we do. . . . I have allowed colds, gouty discharges, looseness, palpitations of the heart, migraines and other ailment to grow old and die a natural death within me ("Of experience," 835-38).

Health, as the absence of pain and suffering, is also a kind of stability in the midst of le branle. Although Montaigne points out the relativity of a number of concepts and customs ranging from beauty and cruelty to dress codes and justice, nowhere does he ever subject "health" to such a procedure; to him it is one of the "givens," solid, if restrained, territory out of the flux, just as the exotic territory represents a stable dimension, away from the vicissitudes and "diseases," both figurative and literal, of his own time and place--religious intolerance, war, torture, extreme economic disparity, famine, epidemics. In

"Of the Education of Children," physical work is insisted on as part of an education because:

l'accoustumance à porter le travail est accoustumance à porter la douleur: "labor callum obducit dolori." Il le jaut rompre à la peine et aspreté de la deslouveure, de la colique, du caustere, et de la geaule, et de la torture. Car de ces derniers icy encore peut-il estre en prinse, qui regardent les bons, selon le temps, comme les meschans (201).

Practice at enduring work is practice at enduring pain: Work hardens one against pain. The boy must be broken in to the pain and harshness of dislocation, colic, cauterization, and the dungeon, and torture. For me may yet be prey to the last two, which threaten the good as well as the bad in a time like this (113).

The body for Montaigne, its health, its ability to withstand pain, becomes a means of "enjoying our being rightfully ("Of experience, 857), of resisting the chaos that undermines his own world. The closer the body is to what is "natural"--which, in the two essays in question here, is equivalent to the exotic world--the closer it is to reaching this objective.

In the Essais, animals also become emblematic of what is natural, of what is healthy:

Pour reglement de nostre santé, les medecins nous proposent l'exemple du vivre des bestes et leur façon; car ce mot est de tout temps en la bouche du peuple:

Tenez chauts les pieds et la teste;
Au demeurant, vivez en beste (Apologie, 137).

As a rule for our health, doctors propose to us the example of the way animals live and act; for this saying has in all times been in the mouths of the people:

Keep your head warm, and your feet;

For the rest, live like a beast (Apology, 345).

At one point in the same essay, the concept of health is widened to include the mental and the metaphysical; here, the "you must become like the little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven" of the New Testament, becomes "you must become like the animals to "be guided:"

Voulez vous un homme sain le voulez vous réglé et en ferme et seure posteure? affublez le de tenebres, d'oisiveté et de pesanteur. Il nous faut abestir pour nous assagir, et nous esblouir pour nous guider (159).

Do you want a man to be healthy, do you want him disciplined and firmly and securely poised? Wrap him in darkness, idleness and dullness. We must become like the animals in order to become wise, and be blinded in order to be guided (363).

Further, the analogy between the Tupinambas and animals is made explicit: both inhabit a world characterized by the absence of everything that, in Montaigne's world, causes the mind to be "unhealthy," and leads to madness¹:

¹The link between Nature and mental health is not an isolated one in the Western tradition. Here Foucault refers to a European Romantic view of this parallel:

Mais le fou dévoile la vérité terminale de l'homme: il montre jusqu'où ont pu le pousser les passions, la vie de société, tout ce qui l'écarte d'une nature primitive qui ne connaît pas la folie. Celle-ci est toujours liée à une civilisation et à son malaise. "D'après le témoignage des voyageurs, les sauvages ne sont pas sujets aux désordres des fonctions intellectuelles." La folie commence avec la vieillesse du monde; et chaque visage que prend la folie au cours des temps dit la forme et la vérité de cette corruption (Histoire de la folie, 538; quotes: Matthey, A., Nouvelles Recherches sur les maladies de l'esprit, Paris, 1816).

Les bestes nous montrent assez combien l'agitation de nostre esprit nous apporte de maladies. Ce qu'on nous dict de ceux du Bresil, qu'ils ne mouroyent que de vieillesse, et qu'on attribue à la tranquillité et serenité de leur ame, deschargée de toute passion et pensée et occupation tenduë ou desplaisant, comme gens qui passoyent leur vie en une admirable simplicité et ignorance, sans lettres, sans loy, sans roy, sans relligion quelconque (159).

The animals show us well enough how many maladies the agitation of the mind brings us. What they tell us of the Brazilians, that they died only of old age, which is attributed to the serenity and tranquility of the air, I attribute rather to the tranquility and serenity of their souls, unburdened with any tense or unpleasant passion or thought or occupation, as people who spent their life in admirable simplicity and ignorance, without letters, without law, without king, without religion of any kind (352).

Mens sana in corpore sano. The Roman ideal is transferred to the exotic by a student of Antiquity. In "Des cannibales" the negative enumeration is even more detailed:

C'est une nation, diroy je à Platon, en laquelle il n'y a aucune espece de trafique; nul cognoissance de lettres; nulle science de nombres; nul nom de magistrat, ny de superiorité politique; nul usage de service, de richesse ou de pauvreté; nuls contrats; nulles successions; nuls partages; nulles occupations qu'oysives; nul respect de parenté que commun; nuls vestemens; nulle agriculture; nul metal; nul usage de vin ou de bled (255).

This is a nation, I should say to Plato, in which there is no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for a magistrate or for political superiority, no custom of servitude, no riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupations but leisure ones, no care for any but common kinship, no clothes, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat (152).

The approach is comparative¹ ("what they don't have" and the--implied--"what we have"), but the comparison is not made by one who sees these absences as defects or aberrances², but by Montaigne to whom the lack is perceived on a positive mode. Montaigne breaks here with a tradition that has its roots in Antiquity. He abstains from the "scholastic epitomizations" (Hodgen) of the Middle Ages and of his own time. He refrains from the borrowing of "interesting facts," of the "grotesque," and their free transfer from one culture to another, a common practice in Antiquity:

In discussing barbarians, men felt free to transfer an interesting statement or a peculiar custom from one people to another. Thus, statements made by greek writers about Scythian customs were applied by Tacitus to the Germans. Evidently, differences among barbarians were not considered important enough to require accurate

¹Montaigne has no choice but to "speak from his own culture." If he is not "modern" enough to radically question the validity of his own language as a medium, he is nevertheless enough of a "precursor" to question the assumptions of his own interpretations.

²This is the stance adopted, for example, by Sepulvéda at Vallalolid:

Compare then those blessings enjoyed by Spaniards of prudence, genius, magnanimity, temperance, humanity and religion with those of the homunculi in whom you will scarcely find even vestiges of humanity, who not only possess no science but who also lack letters and preserve no monument of their history except certain vague and obscure reminiscences of some things in certain paintings. Neither do they have written laws but barbaric institutions and customs. They do not even have private property (L. Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians, 54).

reporting by historians and encyclopaedist. The result was the development of a series of ethnographic commonplaces such as that barbarians use neither images nor temples in their worship; that they live by war and pillage; that they do not appreciate the value of precious metals; and so forth (Rowe, 6).

This transferring of "ethnographic commonplace" from one culture to another by the authors of Antiquity mentioned by Rowe is tantamount to a disappearance of the barbarian in a web of textual cross-referencing. Since, in this configuration, the exotic is confined to the illustration of Center-originated and Center-validating systems, it can never appear as a desirable or viable alternative. In this type of relation, the differences between the periphery and the Center (the barbarian and the omphalos) can only appear on a negative mode. In Montaigne's text they appear as positive absences. The "absence" of laws in Brazil in the mid-15th century is not "savagery" but one more manifestation of the (beneficent) power of Nature:

Nature les donne tousjours plus heurieuses que ne sont celles que nous nous donnons. Tesmoing la peinture de l'aage doré des poètes, et l'estat où nous voyons vivre les nations qui n'en ont point d'autres. . . . Le Roy Ferdinand, envoyant des colonies aux Indes, prouveut sagement qu'on n'y menast aucuns escoliers de la jurisprudence, de crainte que les procès ne peuplassent en ce nouveau monde, comme estant science, de sa nature, generatrice d'altercation et division; jugeant avec Platon, que c'est une mauvaise provision de pays que jurisconsultes et medecins ("De l'experience," 276-77).

Nature always gives up happier laws than those we give ourselves. Witness the picture of the Golden Age of the poets, and the state in which we see nations live which have no laws. . . . King

Ferdinand, when he sent colonists to the Indies, wisely provided that no student of jurisprudence should accompany them, for fear that suits might breed in this new world, this being by nature a science generating altercation and division; judging, with Plato, that lawyers and doctors are a bad provision for a country ("Of experience," 816).

Even the "civilizing power" of Montaigne's world is negated here: not only are laws "absent" from the exotic territory, but the possibility of taking them to that realm is perceived as a negative enterprise. The tables have been turned.

The very idea of stable laws contradicts an essential aspect of Montaigne's philosophy, what he calls "this mobility of mine" (Apologie, 42). Immutable laws endlessly proliferating and dogmatically enforced run counter to his perception of reality as brangle.

Il y a peu de relation de nos actions, qui sont en perpetuelle mutation, avec les loix fixes et immobiles. Les plus desirables ce sont les plus rares, plus simples et generales; et encore crois-je qu'il vaudroit mieux n'en avoir point du tout que de les avoir en tel nombre que nous avons ("De l'experience," 276).

There is little relation between our actions, which are in perpetual mutation, and fixed and immutable laws. The most desirable laws are those that are rarest, simplest, and most general and I even think that would be better to have none at all than to have them in such numbers as we have ("Of experience," 816).

Here again the exotic appears as a viable alternative: what appears to Montaigne as the absence of laws among the Tupinambas is deemed more desirable than their proliferation in the Center. Laws, as they function in his world, are

equivalent to what is not in Nature, what creates "useless tensions," disturbs the "tranquillity and serenity of the soul," what renders mad.

Of course, in spite of what in his time is an unusual effort at gathering precise information and restraining from sweeping generalizations Montaigne cannot refrain from idealizing--V. S. Naipaul would say "romanticizing"--the exotic. What Montaigne perceives as the simplicity and even absence of laws among the Tupinambas is not only the actualization of a dissatisfied philosopher's wishful thinking, but the very real lack of recorded information on the exotic that characterizes his time. The world opened up by the "Age of Exploration and Discovery" is "turned upside down" by soldiers, merchants, and priests, but not yet striated by ethnographers.

Montaigne's perception of Tupinamba sexuality is an example of this idealization (with an admixture of wishful thinking):

Les hommes y ont plusieurs femmes, et en ont d'autant plus grand nombre qu'ils sont en meilleure reputation de vaillance; d'est une beauté remarquable en leurs mariages, que la mesme falousie que nos femmes ont pour nous empescher de l'amitié et bien-veillance d'autres femmes, les leurs l'ont toute pareille pour la leur acquerir("Des cannibales," 262).

The men here have several wives, and the higher their reputation for valor, the more wives they have. It is a remarkably beautiful thing about their marriage that the same jealousy our wives have to keep us from the affection and kindness of other women, theirs have to win this for them ("Of cannibals," 158).

The infrastructure of Montaigne's time has not yet developed the tools that, even considering their own informed status, would have made the following a possible reply to his text:

It turns out that in Menihaku culture female sexuality poses a grave psychological threat to males and all major institutions depend on rigid gender segregation. Males jealously guard their prerogatives, threatening gang rape for women unlucky enough to see or touch objects used in male rituals. And even though the Meninaku have a sophisticated knowledge of the genitalia, fame orgasm appears to be unknown to them (Paul, 1; writing about Anxious Pleasures: The Sexual Lives of an Amazonian People, 1985).

Montaigne easily accommodates what he personally approves of within a positive view of the exotic. But even those elements which he denounces in his own society are somewhat redeemed among the Tupinambas because, there, they are ruled by Nature. The most representative of these is war:

Leur guerre est toute noble et genereuse, et a autant d'excuse et de beauté que cette maladie humaine en peut recevoir; elle n'a autre fondement parmy eux que la seule jalousie de la vertu. . . . Ils sont encore en cet heureux point, de ne desirer qu'autant que leurs necessitez naturelles leur ordonnent; tout ce qui est au delà est superflu pour eux ("Des cannibales," 259).

Their warfare is wholly noble and generous, and as excusable and beautiful as this human disease can be; its only basis among them is their rivalry in valor. . . . They are still in that happy state of desiring only as much as their natural needs demand; anything beyond that is superfluous to them ("Of cannibals," 156).

War is redeemed because, there, it deviates from its usual aims: it is no longer brought about by the desire to acquire

additional wealth, territory, and power, but informed by that most representative attribute of Antiquity, valor. Montaigne is "astonished at what firmness they [the Tupinambas] show in their combats which never end but in slaughter and bloodshed" ("Of cannibals," 155) and "would not fear to oppose the examples [he] could find to the most famous ancient examples" (Des coches," 694). Once again the reference to the Ancients is brought in to validate the exotic; but this repeated intrusion of Antiquity into Montaigne's text on contemporary cannibals remains secondary. The ultimate point of reference is Nature; Antiquity is added as a rhetorical figure which appears in the text not only as a result of the deep affinity Montaigne feels with the Greco-Roman world, but as a means of persuading an audience to whom the Greek and Roman epitomized the achievements of their own tradition.

CANNIBALISM

Cannibalism, as Transgression and Difference incarnate is inscribed within this play between Nature and Antiquity. After a straightforward and lapidary account of the killing and eating of an enemy by the Tupinambas, Montaigne writes: "This is not, as people think, for nourishment. . . it is betoken of an extreme revenge" (Des cannibales," 155). Cannibalism, like war, is divested of its (usual) utilitarian end, and, as a result, is detached from a

delimited context in which it would appear as negative or aberrant. Epistemologically, the concept is no longer rooted to solid ground where it acquires meaning once and for all (precisely what Montaigne has against laws), but becomes loosely connected to a shifting network of positions in which it appears differently according to given arrangements at given coordinates in time and place. In Deleuze's terms, cannibalism is deterritorialized.

However, Montaigne does not stop there. Showing his contemporaries that cannibalism is practiced (even if not for the purpose of nourishment) in the exotic realm could be redundant strategy: a Center that judges exclusively according to its own standards (this is how it acquires its "centrality in the first place) is not moved by "examples" from elsewhere, but remains firmly grounded in its own certainty. This is the point at which Montaigne introduces the rhetorical figure of Antiquity; relocating the "aberrance" of the Other in the tradition of the Same, he can at least hope to provoke doubt, to administer a certain dose of skepticism:

Chrysippus et Zenon, chefs de la secte Stoïcque, ont bien pensé qu'il n'y avoit aucun mal de se servir de nostre charoigne à quoy que ce fut pour nostre besoin, et d'en tirer de la nourriture; comme nos ancestres, estans assiegez par Caesar en la ville de Alexia, se resolurent de soustenir la faim de ce siege par les corps des vieillars, des femmes et autres personnes inutiles au combat ("Des cannibales," 258).

Indeed, Chrysippus and Zeno, heads of the Stoic sect, thought there was nothing wrong in using our

carcasses for any purpose in case of need, and getting nourishment from them; just as our ancestors, when besieged by Caesar in the city of Alesia, resolved to relieve their famine by eating old men, women, and other people useless for fighting ("Of cannibals," 155).

Il n'est rien si horrible à imaginer que de manger son pere. Les peuples qui avoyent anciennement cette coustume, la prenoyent toutesfois pour tesmoignage de pieté et de bonne affection, cherchant par là à donner à leurs progeniteurs la plus digne et honorable sepulture, logeant en eux memes et comme en leurs moelles les corps de leurs peres et leurs reliques, les vivifiant aucunement et regenerant par la transmutation en leur chair vive au moyen de la digestion et du nourrissement. Il est aysé à considerer quelle cruauté et abomination c'eust esté, à des hommes abreuvez et imbus de cette superstition, de jeter la despouille des parens à la corruption de la terre et nourriture des bestes et des vers (Apologie, 246).

There is nothing so horrible to imagine as eating one's father. The nations which had this custom in ancient times, however, regarded it as testimony of piety and good affection, trying thereby to give their progenitors the most worthy and honorable sepulture, lodging in themselves as it were in their marrow the bodies of their fathers and their remains, bringing them to life in a way and regenerating them by transmutation into their living flesh by means of digestion and nourishment. It is easy to imagine what a cruelty and abomination it would have been, to men saturated and imbued with this superstition to abandon the mortal remains of their parents to the corruption of the earth and to let it become food of the beasts and worms (Apologie 438).

The "aberrant" is defused. At the very least, it is introduced into a network where it appears as a factor that must be confronted rather than relegated to the isolation (and safety) of "what is not me." Montaigne thus forces the Center to relinquish its own elaboration as Center through

the tracing of limits that designate, on a Hegelian mode, the Exterior.

Montaigne continues the demolition with the introduction of Nature as a uniformizing structure that eliminates all claims to centrality. All other points of reference disappear; all taxonomies become the elements of an even larger, more generic taxonomy that determines the "positivity" or "negativity" of concepts and customs according to their simple occurrence rather than their origin. In other words, "in Montaigne's eyes, anything that is part of the infinite complexity of Nature, the rare and the exceptional--be they earthquakes or Siamese twins [or cannibals]--are not unnatural" (Bowman,)

Having thus displaced the point of reference, Montaigne compares the Center to the exotic once again:

Il sont sauvages, de mesme que nous appellons sauvages le fruicts que nature, de soy et de son progresz ordinaire, a produicts: là où, à la verité, ce sont ceux que nous avons alterez par nostre artifice et detournez de l'ordre commun, que nous devrions appeller plutost sauvages. En ceux là sont vives et vigoureuses les vrayes et plus utiles et naturelles vertus et proprietes, lesquelles nous avons abastardies en ceux-cy, et les avons seulement accommodées au plaisir de nostre goust corrompu ("Des cannibales," 254).

These people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that nature produced by herself and in her normal course; whereas it is really those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order that we should rather call wild. The former retain alive and vigorous their genuine, their most useful and natural virtues and properties, which we have debased in the latter in adapting to gratify our corrupted taste ("Of cannibals," 152).

In this instance, the dismantling of the Center as paradigm of reference is extended to language. Montaigne does not propose to eliminate "wild" as a "signifier" but to reexamine its "signified." Although, his examination of language is never a radical and systematic questioning, he nevertheless obliquely, almost inadvertently discerns the wider implications of language that have become so widespread today.

Montaigne is aware of the possibilities offered by what we would call the "arbitrary nature of language" (what he might have called "rhetoric" or "sophistry"): "People are prone to apply the meaning of other men's writings to suit opinions that they have previously determined in their minds" (Apologie, 327). This is why he proposes the use of a "common language" ("Of experience," 816) following the example of Socrates "who makes his soul move with a natural and common motion. . . . His mouth full of nothing but carters, joiners, cobblers, and masons ("Of physiognomy," 793).

However, Montaigne's reassessment of his world's assumptions remains fundamentally a decentering of its points of view through the use of the exotic, Antiquity, and Nature as alternate points of reference, rather than a

reexamination of its linguistic postulates¹: "Truly here are real savages by our standard; for either they must be thoroughly so, or we must be; for there is an amazing distance between their character and ours" ("Des cannibales," 158). His irony, which we find again in the last line of "Des cannibales"--All this is not too bad but what's the use? They don't even wear breeches! (159)--distances him from the "we" and the "our" that seem to include him in the Center.

This distancing leads us back to the question: where should Montaigne be placed in his relation to the exotic? He has apparently eliminated any possibility of remaining fixed within his own culture's points of reference by pointing out their relative status, while his own contact

¹Montaigne's ultimate belief in the possibility of an uninformed language, of a language without ontology reinscribes him within his own time, within a Renaissance view of language, of language as part of Nature. Foucault here makes an allusion to one of Montaigne's favorite metaphors, the world as book:

Dans son être brut et historique du XVI^e siècle, le langage n'est pas un système arbitraire; il est déposé dans le monde et il en fait partie à la fois parceque les choses elles-mêmes cachent et manifestent leur énigme comme un langage, et parceque les mots se proposent comme des choses à déchiffrer. La grande métaphore du livre qu'on ouvre, qu'on épelle et qu'on lit pour connaître la nature, n'est que l'envers visible d'un autre transfert, beaucoup plus profond, qui contraint le langage à résider du côté du monde, parmi les plantes, les herbes, les pierres et les animaux (Les Mots et les choses, 50).

with the exotic consists of his readings¹, the account of an informant, "a simple, crude fellow--a character fit to bear witness" ("Of cannibals," 151), the objects he keeps in his house², and his own encounter with three of the Tupinambas at Rouen in 1562. This congeries of channels connecting him to the exotic do not constitute another world that would replace Montaigne's, providing him with a way out of the Center, a means of merging with the Other; rather, they constitute the basis of a relation in which neither one nor the other disappears. Montaigne does not "go native," and the Tupinambas, the Incas, and the Aztecs do not merge as undifferentiated elements of a textual web solely destined for consumption by the Center. ¶

The Center as receptor of Montaigne's text cannot be occulted; the Essais is also the product of a given culture, circulating within that culture--the Apologie de Raimond Sebond, for example, is addressed to Margarete de Valois, daughter of Henri II and Catherine de Medici, and wife of Henri de Navarre, the future Henri IV of France; the Essais is a concrete product of a specific infrastructure that also

¹He had read the books on the New world by Thevet, Lery, Benzoni, Gomara, and possibly Belleforest, whose work was in part a translation of Boemus and Muenster (Hodgen, 421).

²There may be seen in several places, including my own house, specimens of their beds, of their ropes, of the wooden swords and the bracelets with which they cover their wrists in combats, and the big canes, open at one end, by whose sound they keep time in their dances ("Of cannibals," 15).

generates improvements in ship-borne artillery; the Essais is also a certain number of editions, of volumes printed, sold and read within his world, and leading to the production of more text, etc.--, but Montaigne simultaneously undoes his own incorporation within his world through the same move that undermines the absorption of the exotic by a Singular Paradigm: he inscribes his text within the private sphere of self-elaboration. This double move of presenting and withdrawing is explicitly made even before the Essais actually begin, in the Avis au lecteur: "Thus reader, I am myself the matter of my book; you would be unreasonable to spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject. So farewell" (2). In the same paragraph, while thus dismissing the audience (Home), Montaigne maintains a connection to the exotic, what Michel Beaujour refers to as Montaigne's ability to "se ménager une sauvagerie et se réserver une jouissance" (Miroirs d'encre, 220). The exotic, as what is "natural" and "without artifice," coincides with Montaigne's project of total self-portraiture and disengages his text from his world as referential network:

Si c'eust esté pour rechercher la faveur du monde, je me fusse mieux paré et me presenterois en une marche extudiée. Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contantion et artifice: car c'est moy que je peins. . . . Que si j'eusse esté entre ces nations qu'on dict vivre encore sous la douce liberté des premieres loix de nature, je t'asseure que je m'y fusse très-volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nud.

If I had written to seek the world's favor, I should have bedecked myself better, and I should present myself in a studied posture. I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. . . . Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws, I assure you I should have portrayed myself entire and wholly naked.

Taken to its limits, it would seem that Montaigne's strategy should result in total revelation, in complete nakedness; but he recognizes his own position and, instead of severing all lines of communication, continuously nomadizes within the limits of a world that is given. Whether he acknowledges it or not, or attempts to refute it, the act of writing his text, the representation itself of what could have remained the heterogeneous fragments of a privately lived experience (his brief meeting with the three Tupinambas) or a privately acquired one (his readings, his recording of an "informant's" account, his collection of objects), the act of writing his text constitute a strong link to his culture.

The idea of a last stop, of a stability, has no place in Montaigne's scheme. It is as means and not as objective, as flux rather than state, that the exotic plays its vital role in his self-elaboration. He does not become the exotic, but he is involved with that Other in a dynamic,

dialogical relation¹ that is both subversive and contained. The exotic provides the means to remain inside while looking from the outside:

Ce grand monde, que les uns multiplient encore comme especes sous un genre, d'est le miroüer où il nous faut regarder pour nous connoistre de bon biais. Somme, je veux que ce soit le livre de mon escolier. Tant d'humeurs, de sectes, de jugemens, d'opinions, de loix et de coustumes nous apprennent à juger sainement des nostres, et apprennent nostre jugement à reconnoistre son imperfection et sa naturelle foiblesse: qui n'est pas un legier apprentissage ("De l'institution des enfans," 205-06).

¹Michail Bakhtine's "anthropological philosophy" provides a similar model:

Il existe une image très vivace, mais partielle et par conséquent fausse, selon laquelle pour mieux comprendre une culture étrangère, on devrait en quelque sorte l'habiter, et, oubliant la sienne propre, regarder le monde à travers les yeux de cette culture. Comme je l'ai dit, une telle image est partielle. Bien sûr, entrer dans une certaine mesure dans une culture étrangère, regarder le monde à travers ses yeux, est un moment nécessaire dans le processus de la compréhension mais celle-ci s'épuisait par ce seul moment, elle eut été un simple déboulement et n'eut rien apporté de neuf ni d'enrichissant. La compréhension créatrice ne renonce pas à soi, à sa place dans le temps à sa culture, et n'oublie rien. La grande affaire de la compréhension c'est l'exotopie de celui qui comprend--dans le temps, dans l'espace, dans la culture--par rapport à ce qu'il veut comprendre créativement. Même son propre aspect extérieur, l'homme ne peut vraiment le voir et l'interpréter en tant qu'un tout; les miroirs et les photographies ne l'aideront pas; son véritable aspect extérieur ne peut être vu et compris que par d'autres personnes, grâce à leur exotopie spatiale, et grâce au fait qu'ils sont autres (M. Bakhtine, "otvet na vopros redakcii Novogo Mira," Novyj Mir; 11, 1970 in T. Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtine et le principe dialogique, 169).

This great world, which some multiply further as being only a species under one genus, is the mirror in which we must look at ourselves to recognize ourselves from the proper angle. In short, I want it to be the book of my student. So many humors, sects, judgments, opinions, laws, and customs teach us to judge sanely of our own, and teach our judgment to recognize its own imperfection and natural weakness, which is no small lesson ("Of the education of children," 11).

Montaigne remains, but looks to the outside. The cannibal is cannibalized, but no digested.

CHAPTER II: DIDEROT AND BOUGAINVILLE

We export two chief kinds of Englishmen who in foreign parts divide themselves into two opposed classes. Some feel deeply the influence of the native people and try to adjust themselves to its atmosphere and spirit. To fit themselves modestly into the picture they suppress in themselves all that would be discordant with local habit and colors. They imitate the native as far as possible, and so avoid friction in their daily life. However, they cannot avoid the consequences of imitation, a hollow, worthless thing. They are like the people but not of the people, and their half-perceptible differences give them a sham influence often greater than their merit. They urge the people among who they live into strange, unnatural courses by imitating them so well that they are imitated back again.

The other class of Englishmen is the larger class. In the same circumstances of exile they reinforce their character by memories of the life they have left. In reaction against their foreign surroundings they take refuge in the England that was theirs. They assert their aloofness, their immunity, the more vividly for their loneliness and weakness. They impress the people among whom they live by reaction, by giving them an example of the complete Englishman, the foreigner intact.

T. E. Lawrence, preface to Charles Doughty's
Travels in Arabia Deserta.

Le pouvoir que son expansionism laisse intact est, en son principe, colonisateur. Il s'étend sans être changé. Il est tautologique, également immunisé contre l'alterité qui pourrait le transformer, et contre celle qui pourrait lui résister.

Michel de Certeau, L'écriture de l'histoire.

Je ne te propose pas de porter dans ton pays les moeurs d'Orou; mais Orou, ton hôte et ton ami, te supplie de te prêter aux moeurs de Tahiti.

Diderot, Supplément au voyage de
Bougainville.

INTRODUCTION: ORIGINAL TEXTS AND DERIVED TEXTS

In his Miroir d'Hérodote, an "essay on the representation of the Other," François Hartog divides representations of the exotic into two distinct categories in Herodotus' Histories: those based on an "espace de parcours" (space of travel) and those based on an "espace de savoir" (space of knowledge). According to this division, Scythian territory becomes either a space actually experienced (walked through, seen, touched etc.) by Herodotus, or a space elaborated, deduced as it were, through Center-originated sciences, (Greek) geometry among others. Sometimes, according to Hartog, Herodotus can be said to "cheat:" he presents information gathered through an "espace de savoir" as knowledge obtained from an "espace de parcours." his knowledge of certain peoples and places as he transcribes it in his Histories seems to be based on a direct and personal experience when, in fact, it is not. Herodotus mis-represents. His "I have been there, I saw, I recorded" to his audience (the Greek world, Home) is not exactly a lie since he has been there (if not everywhere, there), but eliminated the gap between the directly known and the indirectly known. "I have been there, I know" and "i know what it must be like to have been there" are conflated.

What vindicated Herodotus, if we consider those who would call him a teller of tales, or accuse him of

dispensing a "hollow knowledge based on nothing," is, of course, the fact that he has been to the confines of the world then known by his own civilization. His presentation of the non-Greek world is based not on pure imagination or exclusively on secondary sources, but on his own physical experience of (a large part of) that world, even if at a certain stage he had to rely on the assumed certainty that his own observations could be extended, that his deductions could form a dependable pattern no longer requiring his own presence, or a personal and direct gathering of data.

Hartog's distinction between the observed and the deduced seems to be particularly crucial when dealing with texts where the exotic is, at least ostensibly, the central topic of concern, and raises a certain number of questions: does the quality of the exotic as what is not the same, what is removed, consistently inform discourse about the exotic? Are there any means to verify the account of someone who is, by definition, the withholder--and dispenser--of an exclusive knowledge: At what point does the observed become the extrapolated and, even, the imagined?

In Enlightenment France the problem of verifiability is clearly not as acute as it had been for Herodotus' contemporaries. Europe is still in the process of "discovering" the rest of the world, but knowledge and personal experience of the non-Western is very far from being as exclusive as it was in 5th century Greece. The

great 15th and 16th century voyages of discovery have been extended and consolidated: the Center has established itself in the periphery, travel narratives proliferate.¹

Nevertheless, if the multiplication of narratives written by those who have been to the exotic realm makes a certain type of accountability possible through a "cross-checking" of texts, personal, commercial, imperial, etc. (a sailor's letters to his sweetheart, the records of a mining concern, or the geographical report of a State representative), it does not eliminate the use of the exotic as extrapolated element.

On the contrary. The infinitely greater scope, detail, and number of new texts about the exotic written by those who have a first-hand knowledge of it leads to a massive use of the exotic by--precisely--those who have not been there but avidly consume the new wealth of information about it: the philosophes.

Far from receding into the background, the problems of reliability and appropriation are more present than ever in Enlightenment France. Thus Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811), the French vice-admiral and explorer:

¹Closer to Herodotus, a comparable pattern can be found in the Hellenistic age when "exotic" travellers' tales became extremely popular after Alexander's expeditions. These expeditions led to the development of the fictitious travelogue as the "underside of geography" (Tarn). See "Travel Tales" in ch.8 of his Hellenistic Civilization; also: Arthur Heiserman's The Novel Before the Novel and Ben Perry's The Ancient Romances.

Je suis voyageur et marin, c'est à dire un menteur et un imbécile aux yeux de cette classe d'écrivains paresseux et superbes qui, dans l'ombre de leurs cabinets, philosophent à perte de vue sur le monde et ses habitants, et soumettent impérieusement la nature à leur imagination. Procédé bien singulier, bien inconcevable de la part de gens qui, n'ayant rien observé par eux mêmes, n'écrivent ne dogmatisent que d'après les observations empruntés de ces mêmes voyageurs auxquels ils refusent la faculté de voir et de penser (Voyage, 19-20).

De Bougainville's declaration, to be found in the very first pages of his Voyage autour du monde (1771), is no gratuitous or abstract exercise in establishing a dividing line between "philosopher-intellectual" and "traveler-man of action," but a retort to Rousseau's own jabs in his Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes (1755):

C'est que la philosophie ne voyage pas, qu'il n'y a guère que quatre sortes d'hommes qui fassent des voyages de long cours: les marins, les marchands, les soldats, les missionnaires. Quel voyage nous aurions si un Montesquieu, un Buffon, un Diderot, un Duclos, un d'Alembert, un Condillac, ou des hommes de cette trempe, voyageant pour instruire leurs compatriotes, observant et décrivant comme ils savent le faire, la Turquie, l'Égypte, la Barbarie, l'Empire du Maroc, la Guinée, le Pays des Cafres, l'intérieur d l'Afrique et ses côtes orientales, les Malabares, le Mogol, les rives du Gange, les Royaumes du Siam, de Pégu et d'Ave, la Chine, la Tartarie, et surtout le Japon; puis dans l'autre hémisphère le Mexique, le Pérou, le Chili, les Terres magellaniques, sans oublier les Patagons, vrais ou faux, le Tucuman, le Paraguay s'il était possible, le Brésil, enfin les Caraïbes, la Floride, et toutes les contrées sauvages, voyage le plus important de tous et celui qu'is faudrait faire avec le plus de soin . . . nous verrions nous mêmes sortir un monde nouveau de dessous leur plume, et nous apprendrions ainsi à connaître le nôtre. Je dis

que quand de pareils observateurs affirmeront d'un tel animal que c'est un homme, et d'un autre que c'est une bête, il faudrait les en croire; mais ce serait une grande simplicité de s'en rapporter la-dessus a des voyageurs grossiers, sur lesquels quelquefois on serait tenté de faire la même question qu'ils se mêlent de résoudre sur d'autres animaux (181-182).

Two types of discourses about the exotic thus seem to confront each other in 18th-century France: one based on a direct experience of the exotic realm but too ill-equipped (to say the least, according to Rousseau) to make judicious use of that direct contact; the other, that of the systems-acquainted, study-bound "class of writers" whose use of the primary experience of others only results in "dogmatique" and imaginary representations¹, according to Bougainville.

A reading of Bougainville's own Voyage autour du monde and of Diderot's Supplément au voyage de Bougainville (written shortly after the publication of Bougainville's Voyage, but posthumously published in 1796) reveals that the French Enlightenment's discourses about the exotic cannot be demarcated along such rigid oppositional lines. Diderot himself explicitly recognizes that Bougainville "est parti avec les lumières nécessaires" (Supplément, 322), while Bougainville makes sure to mention at the very beginning of his narrative that he was "initié aux sciences dès ma plus

¹The possibility that no representation can be "objective" in Bougainville's sense, that language already informs the travel narrative itself, is considered, but it does not become a central issue, as it does in many 20th-century texts about the exotic (see chapters IV and V, infra).

tendre jeunesse, où les leçons de M. d'Alembert me mirent dans le cas de présenter à l'indulgence du public ou ouvrage sur la géométrie" (Voyage, 19). This mutual recognition of the "other side's" value shows that far from being isolated, antagonistic, even mutually exclusive entities, the traveler's discourse and the philosophe's discourse on the exotic form a network of texts informing, supplementing, feeding one another, even if, ultimately, their purposes often diverge. The Enlightenment philosophe and the Enlightenment explorer are both confined to a framework that includes their own ruling systems--what Diderot calls "codes." They are both involved in a processing of the exotic that is mediated by the presence of Home at the receiving end. This process involves the tacit acceptance that a shared knowledge, a shared world is being appealed to, corroborated, addressed, questioned, or challenged, but never completely relinquished. Neither the philosophe nor the explorer of the 18th century seems to be subject to that inward turn--provoked by an outward, geographical movement--that characterizes later, Romantic discourses about the exotic. In this Enlightenment configuration the exotic is not the "fatal magnet that pulls over to the other side," the catalyst that leads an individual away from home and friends to "find," affirm, and sometimes "lose" himself. Here the non-Western is coldly observed, methodically

reported, used as illustration, and (only) to a certain extent emulated or internalized.

One way of summarizing the following reading of Bougainville's Voyage and of Diderot's Supplément is to ask: to what extent does Home recede behind the exotic in the respective texts? To what extent are the Center's codes disrupted? One could assume that the traveler who ventures into the exotic is not safe in his attempt at observing-and-collecting, especially if he is "grossier," unacquainted with and unsupported by the solid knowledge of the Center's systems, severed as he is from those who "have solid pavement under their feet, surrounded by kind neighbors, ready to cheer them . . . stepping delicately between the butcher and policeman" (Conrad, 85). There, the traveler might lose sight of whence he came, to the point where nothing is sent back Home, where the voyage out no longer yields any revenue¹ to the Center, and the self disappears (at least as far as the Center is concerned). The systems-acquainted philosophes seem to be the ones who, through their thorough knowledge of the central paradigms, "safely" ensconced "dans l'ombre de leurs cabinets," would sift through what is sent back by the "exposed" traveler, processing the raw material, incorporating the useful into the Center, amassing revenue.

¹I borrow the use of revenue in this context from Jean-Francois Lyotard's Economie Libidinale (Chapter II, "Le tenseur").

Instead of this consecrated schema, a reading of the Voyage autour du monde and of the Supplément yields the paradox of the traveler who remains at Home while traveling, consolidating the Center¹, and the stay-at-Home philosophe who travels in his study, undoing--to a certain extent--the Center's codes. The means by which Diderot appropriates Bougainville's Voyage, causes it to deviate, to go off-course, constitutes the focus of my reading.

¹In his article "Sightseers: the Tourist as Theorist," (based on Dean MacCannell's The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class) Georges Van Den Abbeele discerns a similar pattern in contemporary tourism:

The tourist's activity has taken on some sinister connotations indeed. Thinking he is engaging only in his own pleasure, the tourist is unconsciously contributing to a "strong society." Tourism is thus an institutional practice which assures the tourist's allegiance to the state through an activity which discreetly effaces whatever grievances, discontent or "alienation" that the tourist might have felt in regards to his society. The tourist enslaves himself at the very moment he believes himself to have attained the greatest liberty. Tourism, to paraphrase Marx is the opiate of the (modern) masses. Furthermore, institutionalized tourism establishes a double-edged imperialism since it involves just as much an imperialism over the foreign culture turned into a sight, an object of cultural consumption, as an imperialism over the tourist himself who in practicing tourism unwittingly contributes to the modern State's power both over its own and over foreign populations. The State can be seen to derive a certain surplus-value from the tourist's tour of and then back into his society. The tourist "works" to the State's benefit and "strength." (Diacritics, Vol. 10, pp. 5-6).

ESTABLISHING A STRONG PRECURSOR: THE EXOTIC AS PURE KNOWLEDGE

The very title of Diderot's text establishes his indebtedness to Bougainville and initiates a constant exchange between his Supplément and the Voyage. The title itself suggests that Diderot is not making a claim of personal experience (which is not his objective), but is basing his own discourse on that of a predecessor invested with the authority of one who has been to the exotic realm and has recorded his experience. Diderot thus begins with an apparent relinquishing of centrality and authority, placing himself in the (secondary) position of commentator. Nevertheless, the use of "supplément" also indicates that something is being added--"commentaire" might have been a more innocuous term, confining as it does the "extra" or "added" text to an ancillary status. In this interstice between "supplément" and "commentaire" we can already locate the room for difference and divergence, which gradually increases until Bougainville's text itself recedes so far into the background that it becomes if not invisible, at least only visible enough to provide a referent (one who can affirm with certainty: "I have been there, I have seen, I have recorded"). But before this erasure of the Voyage, Diderot establishes its authority. This is where the exchange between the Supplément and the Voyage takes place on the level of legitimization: in his own text Diderot perversely multiplies the markers that authenticate

Bougainville's Voyage, so that the Supplément can profit from a solid base, a corroborated source, before becoming an independent and divergent text that goes further.

This reliance on a prior, non-fictional text, itself the product of direct observation, raises the question of the fictionality of Diderot's Supplément and of the didactic and persuasive capacity of what Lyotard calls "narrative knowledge" (The Postmodern Condition)¹. In Supplément at least, Diderot finds it necessary to refer, even if

¹Narrative knowledge does not give priority to the question of its own legitimization . . . it constitutes itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation or proof. This is why its incomprehension of the problems of scientific discourse is accompanied by a certain tolerance: it approaches such discourse primarily as a variant in the family of narrative cultures. The opposite is not true. The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop (27).

Lyotard's statement makes it clear that the Rousseau/Bougainville quarrel is still very much and issue. . . . The Supplément's own hybrid quality makes it problematic to classify under the heading of "narrative knowledge" but that difficulty is also indicative of Diderot's purpose: the transmission of the Supplément to an audience he also wants to teach and persuade. Whence the incorporation of Bougainville's text which constitutes recourse to "argumentation and proof" outside the domain of "stories." Aut prodese, aut delectare.

obliquely, to "facts" (which he manipulates extensively), in order to produce his own imaginary Tahiti from the (already constructed) Tahiti of Bougainville.

The process of Diderot's authentication of the Voyage includes both the man and the text. Early on in the Supplément "B" declares to "A" ("A" and "B" are the two anonymous figures whose dialogue apparently comprises Diderot's original contribution to the Supplément, the remaining sections supposedly having been extracted in texto from Bougainville's Voyage):

Bougainville est parti avec les lumières nécessaires et les qualités propres à ses vues: de la philosophie, du courage, de la véracité; un coup d'oeil prompt qui saisit les choses et abrège le temps des observations; de la circonspection, de la patience; le désir de voir, de s'éclairer et d'instruire; la science du calcul, des mécaniques, de la géométrie, de l'astronomie; et une teinture suffisante d'histoire naturelle (Supplément, 322).

This piling of qualifiers establishes a reliable source, someone who, equipped with both the knowledge systems of his own civilization--Western, empirical, scientific--("les lumières nécessaire") and his own intrinsic and personal attributes ("les qualités propres") is able to leave Home, actually seize ("saisir") an exotic reality and transmit it like a freeze-frame, like a picture sent back home.

(Diderot is well aware of the limitations of this schema and, indeed, his own project, within the shell of Bougainville's text, as we will see, is partly to undo the

self-assurance and certainty that inevitably informs such a process.)

The authority of the source having been established, the qualities of his text are presented. Having listed and praised Bougainville's qualities Diderot nevertheless seems to strip his Voyage of any subjective influence: the vice-admiral's text appears as the truthful transcription of objective facts: "Il n'explique rien, is atteste le fait" (322). His style is "sans apprêt; le ton de la chose, de la simplicité et de la clarté, surtout quand on possède la langue des marins" (322). "Simple," "straightforward" language, the language of sailors, for example, is endowed here with the qualities of a precise, scientific instrument: there is no room for error, no desire to impress, no embellishment, only a concern for exactitude. In short, there is no room for fiction: Bougainville's Voyage "n'est point une fable" (Supplément, 327).

This strengthening of Bougainville's position as omniscient and impartial narrator is not merely a rhetorical device concocted by Diderot out of "pure fiction;" the original--"non-fictional"--text, the Voyage itself, provides him with ample means to set Bougainville up. The vice-admiral's presentation of himself and his text constitutes more than sufficient material to justify Diderot's tactic.

In the "Discours Préliminaire" and the "Dedication to the King," both forming a kind of preface to the Voyage,

Bougainville proceeds to situate and validate his "récit de voyage." The dedication to the king, "Au Roi," firmly inscribes him within the network of king and country; like a bard about to launch his epic, Bougainville seeks authentication in the approval of a higher, omnipotent source: "C'est l'histoire de nos efforts que j'ose présenter à VOTRE MAJESTE; votre approbation en fera le succès" (Voyage, 5). The KING (emblematic of all of France) gives his stamp of approval which automatically guarantees not only the "succès" of Bougainville's narrative, but simultaneously removes it from the realm of fictionality through its incorporation into the store of usable commodities owned by all of France. With this dedication Bougainville reaffirms his--and his text's--connection to Home/France/King. Indeed, the vice-admiral, the sailors, the ship he commands, the King, and France become interchangeable or, rather, become different aspects of one and the same thing: an omnipotent, unalterable presence that conquers all obstacles. In this tribute paid to the sailors' courage for example, the shift from "marins" to "nation" is automatic:

Leur constance a été à l'épreuve des positions les plus critiques et leur bonne volonté ne s'est pas un instant ralentie. C'est que la nation française est capable de vaincre les plus grandes difficultés, et que rien n'est impossible à ses efforts, toutes les fois qu'elle voudra se croire elle-même l'égale au moins de telle nation que ce soit au monde. (Voyage, 18).

Further in the narrative--the first lines of chapter I--when Bougainville begins to provide the background to his trip, the interchangeability of Nation, King, sailors, ship, and Bougainville is equally fluid, even if a respectful and diplomatic hierarchy is punctiliously observed:

Dans le mois de février 1764, la France¹ avait commencé un établissement aux Iles Malouines. L'Espagne revendiqua ces îles comme étant une dépendance du continent de l'Amérique méridionale et son droit ayant été reconnu par le Roi, je reçus ordre d'aller remettre notre établissement aux Espagnols, et de me rendre ensuite aux Indes Orientales, en traversant la mer du Sud entre les Tropiques. On me donna pour cette expédition le commandement de la frégate la Boudeuse, de vingt-six canons de douze, et je devais être rejoint aux Iles Malouines par la flûte l'Etoile, destinée à m'apporter les vivres nécessaires à notre longue navigation et à me suivre pendant le reste de la campagne. (23, *my italics*).

"On," "je," "La France," "le Roi," "la frégate," like the sailors, are all aspects of a single entity. Within his own narrative--"before Diderot"--Bougainville already multiplies the signs of his own legitimacy: inadvertently or not, they are present in the elasticity of a narrative voice that extends from the anonymous sailor and the singular "I" to the ultimate political power, "le Roi," and all-inclusive

¹It should be noted here that the Iles Malouines (the Falklands) had come under the hegemony of France through Bougainville's own efforts; he had been successful in establishing a French colony there and seemed to be the logical choice when an envoy was needed to turn these islands over to Spain once its claim was recognized by the king of France (see Bougainville: Sailor and Soldier, by M. Thiéry).

"la Nation" or "la France," all textually linked by the levelling and diffuse property of "on" and "nous."

The establishing of authority thus initiated by the merging of narrative voice with lesser and greater entities is completed with Bougainville's authentication of what unifies all these entities in a single space: his writing. Again, this prefigures Diderot's own schema of validation in which Bougainville appears, as we have seen, between two poles: as part of a whole greater than himself--"les lumières nécessaires"--and as repository of individualistic traits--"les qualités nécessaires." According to the vice-admiral, his narrative is written in a style whose exactitude and seriousness fit the scope and stature of its source (not only the "I" but also all the accretions that compose it and of which it is a component):

Avant de le faire [writing the account of his voyage] qu'il me soit permis de prévenir qu'on ne doit pas en regarder la relation comme un ouvrage d'amusement [lack of seriousness, absence of scientific method, presence of fictionality]: c'est surtout pour les marins qu'elle est faite. D'ailleurs cette longue navigation autour du globe n'offre pas les ressources des voyages de mer faits en temps de guerre, lesquels fournissent des scènes intéressantes pour les gens du monde. Encore si l'habitude d'écrire avait pu m'apprendre à sauver par la forme une partie de la sécheresse du fond! . . . Je suis maintenant bien loin du sanctuaire des sciences et des lettres; mes idées et mon style n'ont que trop pris l'empreinte de la vie errante et sauvage que je mène depuis douze ans (Voyage, 19).

Bougainville's style is thus presented--just as it is in Diderot's Supplément--as devoid of any embellishments, of

any inaccuracy, since it is "simple," since it is "wild." But "wild" is precisely what Bougainville's writing is not. Far from having "taken on the imprint" of its surroundings, the exotic territory the explorer has been operating in for twelve years, it remains as unaffected by change as the King/Nation, as serene and exact as the "sanctuaire des sciences et des lettres" Bougainville the traveler has supposedly left behind. Far from changing as a result of his exposure to the exotic, Bougainville remains the totally functional and connected emissary of Home, the envoy of a Center who is to navigate through the unstriated parts of the globe, an exotic realm to be marked, named, incorporated. His writing clearly belongs to that category composed of those Michel de Certeau sees as remaining "intact:"

Le pouvoir que son expansionisme laisse intact est, en son principe, colonisateur. Is s'étend sans être changé. Il est tautologique, également immunisé contre l'alterité qui pourrait le transformer et contre celle qui pourrait lui résister [The twenty-six "canons de douze," among other features of power, on the ship ensure this] . . . Pour que l'écriture fonctionne au loin, il faut qu'à la distance elle maintienne son rapport au lieu producteur [Here, France/the King, the "sanctuary of arts and letters"] . . . L'écriture dirige une opération conforme à un centre: les départs et les envois restent sous la dépendance du vouloir impersonnel auxquels ils reviennent. La multiplicité des procédures où s'inscrivent les "déclarations" de ce vouloir construit l'espace d'une occupation par le même, qui s'étend sans s'altérer (L'écriture de l'histoire, 226).

In de Certeau's words, Bougainville is the emissary of a power that "extends" itself but is not "altered." an "alteration" would consist of a shedding by the emissary of some attributes shared with the Center, the relinquishing of a common paradigm. As a result the two--Center and emissary--would stop communicating; what would be sent back from the exotic territory would no longer make sense to the Center because it would be processed by an entity who no longer perceived otherness in terms of the same: Kurtz's "ravings" from the heart of darkness, unprofitable, individual outpouring, free-flowing intensities that could no longer be channelled by regulating codes and systems, unusable text. Bougainville's style, on the contrary, produces a text that is the prolongation of the Center. Tahiti is not the scene of lyrical outpouring, the catalyst of a blurring of linguistic codes, but only a hitherto unknown element to be located and recorded so that the limits of "knowledge" can be pushed back. Language and purpose merge perfectly in the beginning of chapter X, "Description de la nouvelle île:"

L'île à laquelle on avait d'abord donné le nom de Nouvelle Cythère, reçoit de ses habitants celui de Tahiti. Sa latitude de dix-sept degrés trente-cinq minutes trois secondes à notre camp a été conclue de plusieurs hauteurs méridiennes du soleil observées à terre avec un quart de cercle. Sa longitude de cent cinquante degrés quarante minutes, dix sept secondes à l'ouest de Paris a été déterminée par onze observations de la lune, selon la méthode des angles horaires (Voyage, 17, *my italics*).

Now Tahiti is located, named, known, just as Scythian territory was translated through the application of Greek measurements to its hitherto unmarked space--Herodotus' measuring of that territory in terms of how many lengths of a Greek olympic stadium could fit within a given sector, for example. Tahiti is now inscribed in the surveyor's grid; it acquires the status of the known (discovered) by being positioned according to its relation to Paris (again, the "sanctuaire des arts et des lettres," the immobile Center), a "longitude of one hundred and fifty degrees to the West of Paris." Bougainville's continuing validation of his voyage/text can also be measured by the extent to which he is successful in presenting the exotic within a text governed by the central presence of his own origin rather than dictated by the impulses and subjective perception of an independent "I." This "I's" itinerary is fraught with the elements of exposure that characterize a pioneering undertaking, the-first-trip-around-the-world-by-a-Frenchman¹. However, when they are encountered, the

¹Bougainville is in fact not the first Frenchman to circumnavigate the globe. Maurice Thiéry's description of a previous such voyage further underlines the opposition between the individual/libidinal voyage and the official/contained voyage:

One Frenchman had accomplished this exploit, a certain captain Legentil Labordinais who, in 1714, had sailed in a privateer to engage in smuggling on the coasts of Chile and Peru. From thence he had gone to China, where, after a stay of one year, spent in moving about from one counting house to another, he had embarked on another

manifestations of (unknown) Nature's unruliness and menace become irregularities to be catalogued for the benefit of those who will follow in the "I"'s wake and not occasions for (useless) individual effusiveness. The "I" is not there for itself but for others, its actions in the exotic realm always mediated by its uninterrupted affiliation to a Center. In his description of the Cap d'Orange, Bougainville writes:

Ce Cap remarquable par un mondrain assez élevé et coupé du côté de la mer, forme au sud l'entrée du premier goulet. Sa pointe est dangereuse par une battue qui s'étend dans le nord-est du cap, au moins à trois lieus au large . . . j'ai vu fort distinctement la mer briser dessus (*Voyage*, 77; my italics).

The waves break, but the one who is observing this is not the solitary, romantic figure, complete with wind-blown hair and eyes fixed on the distant horizon: if Bougainville may be said to expose himself, it is for the purpose of data-gathering, not self-elaboration.

The "accumulation of knowledge" is indeed one of the principal figures used by Bougainville to justify his voyage and his text. The vice-admiral clearly places his own

vessel and had returned to Europe--a journey which had neither political or scientific importance. Now it considered the honor of the French navy that the circumnavigation of the globe should be made in one of His Majesty's ships, and by sailors in the service of the King. The South Seas had barely been explored and the expedition could count with certainty upon the discovery of islands and archipelagos over which they might hoist the fleur-de-lys (142).

circumnavigation among those which were made for the purpose of "increasing knowledge." At the beginning of his "Discours préliminaire," he writes: "J'ai pensé qu'il serait à propos de présenter à la tête de ce récit l'énumération de tous les voyages exécutés autour du monde, et les différentes découvertes faites jusqu'à ce jour dans la mer du Sud ou Pacifique." This is followed by an account of all the voyages around the world--13--from Magellan's in 1519 to the English captain Wallas' in 1767. After which Bougainville adds: "On voit que de ces treizes voyages autour du monde aucun n'appartient à la nation française, et que six seulement ont été faits avec l'esprit de découverte . . . les autres navigateurs, qui n'avaient pour objet que de s'enrichir par la course sur les espagnols, ont suivi des routes communes sans étendre la connaissance du globe (19, my italics). "knowledge of the globe" is what is observed and recorded during Bougainville's voyage and his only purpose is to gather such knowledge. His record of this voyage, his text, is only a transparency, only a means of gathering this knowledge and of bringing it back as an incremental return.

Bougainville's Voyage autour du monde is thus corroborated as authoritative source through a series of markers that continuously refer to its outside, to its connection to a static Center. This link is never broken in spite of the physical distance between Paris and himself.

The authority of Bougainville's text then ultimately rests on his ability not to change, to continuously contain himself, to remain intact in the midst of his exotic peregrinations. Since the main aspect of Bougainville's Voyage appropriated by Diderot in his Supplément is Tahitian sexuality--what Bougainville himself soberly refers to as "la polygamie générale ches eux"--the vice admiral's own reaction to this particular possibility of absorption into the exotic can serve as a first indication of an essential divergence between the two texts. "La Boudeuse," Bougainville's ship, is approaching Tahiti and is surrounded by hundreds of canoes containing greeting Tahitians:

Les pirogues étaient remplies de femmes qui ne le cèdent pas pour l'agrément de la figure au plus grand nombre des européennes et qui, par la beauté du corps, pouvaient le discuter à toutes avec avantage. Malgré toutes les précautions que nous pûmes prendre, il entra à bord une jeune fille, qui vint sur le gaillard d'arrière se placer à une des écoutilles qui sont au-dessus du cabestan; cette écoutille était ouverte pour donner de l'air à ceux qui viraient. La jeune fille laissa tomber négligemment une pagne qui la couvrait et parut aux yeux de tous telle que Vénus se fit voir au berger phrygien: elle en avait la forme céleste. Matelots et soldats s'empressaient pour parvenir à l'écoutille, et jamais cabestan ne fut viré avec une pareille activité. Nos soins réussirent cependant à contenir ces hommes ensorcelés; le moins difficile n'avait pat été de parvenir à se contenir soi-même (122, my italics).

Bougainville's circumlocution amounts simply to "I desired, but I did not give in." This stance, constant throughout the voyage--and not restricted to sexuality--is what makes possible the continued production of a text uninformed by

any personal forays that would mar its effectiveness. Wordworthian "emotion recollected in tranquility" or contemporary anthropology's contemplated "empathetic leap" (Crapanzano) are not in effect here. The narrating subject must keep himself intact in order to record "objectively," and this restraint becomes the guarantee of his trustworthiness.

Diderot is well aware of the vital importance of this "linked" and "intact" quality as a mechanism guaranteeing the power of a text, as what prevents it from being dismissed as "amusement," as "fiction," like so many other travellers' tales so common at that time. he is aware that to posit a philosophical construct on fabula ("la fable de Tahiti") is to build on sand. The Supplément is ultimately built on shifting ground, indeed its very structure reflects a perception of reality as flux, but nevertheless Diderot as didactic philosophe never loses sight of his audience, which is also, even if in a very different manner and for different purposes from Bougainville's, Home. accordingly, the first line of the Supplément (re)establishes Bougainville's essential immobility and connection:

A: Je n'entends rien à cet homme-là. L'étude des mathématiques qui suppose une vie sédentaire, a rempli le temps de ses jeunes années; et voilà qu'il passe subitement d'une condition méditative et retirée [in the midst of the sanctuary] au métier actif, pénible, errant et dissipé du voyageur.

B: Nullement. Si le vaisseau n'est qu'une maison flottante. et si vous considérez le

navigateur qui traverse des espaces immenses, vous le verrez faisant le tour du globe sur une planche. . . (322, my italics).

Bougainville's central (and static) position thus seems to be confirmed; but the dismantling of his voyage has already begun in this early exchange between "A" and "B:" "B" posits Bougainville's immobility but this is done within an argument that challenges "A" 's acceptance of appearances, of the norm, in this case, his observation of the "fact" that "les mathématiques" and "le métier actif du voyageur" are mutually exclusive. "B" 's "nullement" can be said to contain the entire Supplément, just as it is contained in its subtitle: "De l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à des actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas." The Supplément has hardly begun that "A" is being contradicted for the second time. The opening of the Supplément, immediately preceding this second contradiction sets the pattern for the entire work:

- A: Cette superbe voûte étoilée, sous laquelle nous revînmes hier, et qui semblait nous garantir un beau jour, ne nous a pas tenu parole.
- B: Qi'en savez-vous?
- A: Le brouillard est si épais qu'il dérobe la vue des arbres voisin.
- B: Il est vrai; mais si ce brouillard, qui ne reste dans la partie inférieure de l'atmosphère que parcequ'elle est suffisamment chargée d'humidité, retombe sur la terre?
- A: Mais si au contraire il traverse l'éponge, s'élève et gagne la région supérieure où

l'air est moins dense, et peut, comme disent les chimistes n'être pas saturé?

B: Il faut attendre (321, my italics).

"B" does not persuade "A" but is successful in introducing an element of doubt, of skepticism. "A" 's type of immobility, which rests on accepted notions linked to given tools--Feyerabend's "natural interpretations"--is put off-balance, off-center. Each apparent affirmation already contains the elements of its own contradiction. Somewhere between Socratic and Beckettian Dialogue, this Enlightenment exchange takes place between two anonymous figures who are arriving at the conclusion that "we have to wait" and "things are not always what they seem."

Diderot's Supplément is thus based on a previous text that is doubly authenticated; first, within its own limits, and then by Diderot's own text. However, where the purpose of Bougainville's validation is to strengthen his account and reinforce the centrality/power of the Home that, conversely, determines his text, Diderot's acceptance of his source is only and consistently temporary. His objective: the displacement of a Center, the pointing out of its relative status. This is why "A" will not be allowed to explore Bougainville's Voyage by himself; if he were, he would inevitably, given his propensity to accept the apparent, be completely swayed by Bougainville's account. "A" should be swayed by Bougainville's Voyage for the purposes of Diderot's strategy, but not completely: the

presence of Bougainville's text can never be completely obliterated. Diderot (partially) claims the authority of that text, but reserves the right to read it obliquely. The following exchange between "A" and "B" constitutes their last before what is supposed to be Bougainville's text begins:

- A: Est-ce que vous ne donneriez pas dans la fable de Tahiti?
 B: Ce n'est point une fable; et vous n'auriez aucun doute sur la sincérité de Bougainville, si vous connaissiez le supplément de son voyage.
 A: Et où trouve-t-on ce supplément?
 B: Là sur cette table.
 A: Est-ce que vous ne me le confierez pas?
 B: Non; mais nous pouvons le parcourir ensemble, si vous voulez.

And the other voyage begins, the philosophe's voyage. The circumnavigation, as it were, of Bougainville's trip around the world.

UNDERMINING THE PRECURSOR: THE EXOTIC AS COUNTER-ILLUSTRATION

The Voyage appears in the Supplément in a constantly shifting mode: given, but simultaneously withdrawn; presented, but only partially; added to, and subtracted from; followed, yet consistently deviated from.

First, only the section of Bougainville's voyage dealing with Tahiti (about one-tenth of the narrative) is referred to in the Supplément. Diderot ("B") cuts through what is unnecessary for his purpose: "Passez ce préambule

qui ne signifie rien, et allez droit aux adieux que fit un des chefs de l'île à nos voyageurs" (327).

A long speech entirely invented by Diderot follows, a speech which belongs to the long tradition of speeches by the "noble savage" to the Western conqueror, beginning with Columbus's Indians and continuing with Diderot and his contemporaries. In presenting this speech as part of Bougainville's Voyage Diderot doubly subverts that text: first by manipulating its form and length, then, within this addition, by using it to present arguments that radically question the very foundation of Bougainville's own journey and actions. The silent exotic of Bougainville's text is given words in Diderot's "version" to de-center, to question the Voyage and, beyond it, the Center/audience it is intended for.

In Bougainville, we read this description of the claim that accompanies the "discovery" of Tahiti. The vice-admiral is making ready to leave the island:

Nous travaillâmes tout le jour et une partie de la nuit à finir notre eau, à déblayer l'hôpital et le camp. J'enfouis près du hangar un acte de prise de possession inscrit sur une planche de chêne avec une bouteille bien fermée et lutée [emblematic of the intact, impermeable Center] contenant les noms des officiers des deux navires. J'ai suivi cette même méthode pour toutes les terres découvertes dans le cours de ce voyage (134, my italics).

The voyage of discovery as the acquisition of knowledge is accompanied not only by the naming but also by the acquisition of the land itself. Yet, "still buoyed up by

the good conscience of an assertive moment in the history of French colonialism" (Caplan, 84), Bougainville does not ever question this aspect of his journey. It is, in his view, a given, as "natural" as "knowledge" is "objective," as Paris is central, as his style is "simple and clear."

In Diderot's voyage the exotic, now given a voice within the multiplicity of voices that are heard in the Supplément--as opposed to the single, if extendable, "I" of the Voyage--challenges this view:

Tu n'es ni un dieu, ni un démon: qui es-tu donc, pour faire des esclaves! Orou! toi qui entends la langue de ces hommes-là, dis-nous à tous, comme tu me l'as dit à moi-même, ce qu'ils ont écrit sur cette lame de métal [no longer the oak plank of Bougainville's version]: Ce pays est à nous. Ce pays est à toi! Et pourquoi? Parceque tu y a mis le pied? Si un Tahitien débarquait un jour sur vos côtes, et qu'il gravât sur une de vos pierres ou sur l'écorce d'un de vos arbres: Ce pays est aux habitants de Tahiti, qu'en penserais-tu? (329).

Where the exotic voice is non-existent in Bougainville's Voyage, here it becomes strident, overwhelming, but it is nevertheless the voice of Europe contemplating itself¹, as "A," in one of his sudden flashes

¹In a certain type of narrative where the exotic is present, his voice appears as something uncoded, where deeper truths were detected through the application of Western tools of decipherment. The Tahitian voice in Diderot's Supplément can also be seen from that angle:

A la place où l'histoire la situe, la langue étrangère acquiert déjà la double fonction d'être la voie par laquelle une substance (l'effectivité de la vie sauvage) vient soutenir le discours d'un savoir européen, et d'être une fable, un parler qui ne sait pas ce qu'il dit avant qu'un

of intelligence, perceives: "Ce discours me paraît véhément; mais à travers je ne sais quoi d'abrupt et de sauvage, il me semble retrouver des idées et des tournures européennes" (332). About Orou's words, he makes a similar remark: Orou's discourse is "estimable. . . quoique un peu modelé a l'euro péenne." "B"'s two replies to these two comments mark a progression. The first reply is so farfetched, so much like a fable, that it can only be perceived as "B"'s sardonic taunting of "A":

Pensez-donc que c'est [the old man's speech] une traduction du Tahitien en espagnol, et de l'espagnol en français. Le vieillard s'était rendu, la nuit, chez cet Orou qu'il a interpellé, et dans la case duquel l'usage de la langue espagnol s'était conservé de temps immémorial. Orou avait écrit la harangue du vieillard et Bougainville avait une copie à la main, tandis que le Tahitien la prononçait (333).

We are in the midst of one of those incredible stories that appear elsewhere in Diderot's work (in Jacques le fataliste, for example). This explanation is no explanation at all, but Diderot's own undoing of a certain classic discourse posited on linear narrative and primarily oriented towards the revelation of some inalterable and central

 déchiffrage le pourvoie d'une signification et d'une utilité. L'être qui vérifie le discours n'est plus directement reçu de Dieu; on le fait venir de là-bas, où il est la mine d'or cachée sous une exteriorité exotique, la vérité à décèler sous le babil sauvage (Michel de Certeau, L'écriture de l'histoire (233)).

Of course, in Diderot's Supplément, we do not hear the "babil sauvage," only its translation.

Truth. "B" 's "explanation' is yet another oblique indication of "A" 's limitations: in order to be persuaded by (Diderot's version of) Bougainville's account, it must "make sense" to him, the narrative gaps have to be filled, some sort of scientific consistency must support the text he is reading. "B" 's explanation is an inverted, deviantly empirical "clarification:" the facts he advances are the stuff of fable, but if that will satisfy the audience. . . . The narrative line is re-established, but only apparently so, only so that the story can continue. The plausibility of the old man's speech being understood by Bougainville, the sheer possibility of this speech's existence, are "explained" to "A," but in fact nothing at all is explained. In the process, wrapped in its (deliberately) flimsy alibi, the speech gets through.

The reply to "A" 's second observation on the European cast of the Supplément's Tahitian voices is, by reason of its terseness and even more explicit lack of explanation, a definitive break with even the appearance of plausibility: to "A"'s "quoique un peu modelé à l'europpéenne, "B" 's reply is "Je n'en doute pas" (365). This laconic rejoinder is followed by no attempt at explanation, no justification, no tall tale, no shaggy dog story, only an abrupt continuation of the conversation. Diderot has established the authority of Bougainville's Voyage through a certain number of devices, but he stops at a certain point since what matters

is his own text, his refutation of ideas circulating in the Center.

For this purpose, he focuses on a particular section of Bougainville's account, Tahiti, and, of the exotic culture that is the subject of that section, he focuses on its sexuality. This turn to the sexual is not an individual movement to the exotic or a return to some sort of primal privacy, but a philosophe's use of the sexual and of the exotic as a means of developing an argument and of challenging governing codes. The exotic as the sexual is not internalized and released in texts whose primary purpose would be, in Frye's terms, "expressive." Rather, the exotic presence in Diderot's text is a didactic one and can be placed in the reformist philosophical tradition that characterized the French Enlightenment. The pattern is probably set by Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes in which the primitive is used, in part, as "didactic fable" (Werner). However, unlike the work of other philosophes, Diderot's Supplément does not make upon us any kind of total claim. Instead, and here Diderot's affinity with Montaigne is clear, both the form and the content of the Supplément point the way to a recognition of the relative status of any central claim. The exotic, here the Tahitians, as the representation of a difference that works--they are "heureux"--are linked to and illustrate Diderot's brand of vitalistic materialism. Much like Montaigne's cannibals

Diderot's Tahitians illustrate the flux¹ resulting from the presence of unlimited difference. To remain absolutely immobile, like Bougainville, of this diversity is to be blind to the limitations of Home's supposedly central position and to perpetuate the rule of codes that have no basis. (We are back again to the Suppléments subtitle.)

Acceptance and even celebration of mutability is, partly, what is illustrated by the freer sexuality of Tahiti, for, as Orou asks the chaplain (the representative of religion and institutions in the Supplément):

Rien, en effet, te paraît-il plus insensé qu'un précepte qui prescrit le changement qui est en nous; qui commande une constance qui n'y peut être et qui viole la nature et la liberté du mâle et de la femelle, en les enchaînant pour jamais l'un à l'autre. . . qu'un serment d'immobilité de deux êtres de chair, à la face d'un ciel qui n'est pas un instant le même, sous les antres qui menacent la ruine; au bas d'une roche qui tombe en poudre; au pied d'un arbre qui se gerce; sur une pierre qui sébranle? (339).

¹Stephen Werner ("Diderot's Supplément and Late Enlightenment Thought" in Studies on Voltaire and the 18th Century, 86 (1971), 229-292) places this theme within a tradition that goes back to Antiquity. Again, this placing of Diderot in a long western philosophical tradition displays the didactic quality of the exotic presence in his work:

It is obvious that these remarks on flux, a theme which was encountered with increasing frequency in the second half of the 18th century, hark back to Heraclitean theories on the mutability and transience of matter, to the teachings of various other Greek schools of philosophy already described in Encyclopedia articles like "parmidéenne" and "Héraclitisme," and to the Enlightenment's attempt to draw out the full consequences of Lockean sensualism (256).

In the midst of a continually changing universe how can we impose and enforce the immobility dictated by this channeling of sexuality? With this question Diderot begins to unravel much more than sexual behavior he finds ineffectual and hypocritical: the entire process of codification in the Center is at stake since the same mechanisms that function to give rise to the sexual code operate in the formation of the religious and political codes. The three are joined by a common and major flaw for Diderot: they are arbitrary, which is to say, they are not natural. The Tahitians themselves are not presented in the Supplément as "simple and happy children of Nature," but as an organized society whose laws are, inasmuch as possible, made to fit nature, rather than the opposite. Arbitrariness is measured for Diderot by the degree to which the opposite occurs. Orou's part of the dialogue is consistently concerned with the arbitrary quality of sexual "norms" in his interlocutor's world "où on s'est permis . . . d'ôter ou de donner un caractère arbitraire aux choses" (342). Elsewhere, Orou asks the chaplain: "veux-tu savoir, en tout temps et en tout lieu, ce qui est bon et mauvais? Attache-toi à la nature des choses et des actions. . . . Tu es en délire si tu crois qu'il y ait rien, soit en haut, soit en bas, dans l'univers, qui puisse ajouter ou retrancher aux lois de la nature" (340).

Diderot's critique of the Center through the voice of the exotic enables him to play two boards at once. Orou and the old man, the Tahitians of the Supplément, are Diderot's Tahitians and not "real" Tahitians; their words and their thoughts have "des tournures européennes" for the sake of making "their" arguments effective with a specific audience in mind, the Center, Home, Europe, Paris. Their arguments are, on a certain level, made in terms of paradigms shared by this intended audience. Simultaneously, Diderot capitalizes on the difference, the foreignness of his Tahitians when he wants to present the Center as exotic, to make its codes appear as the different, or the aberrant:

L'aumônier: Un père peut-il coucher avec sa fille, une mère avec son fils, un frère avec sa soeur, un mari avec la femme d'un autre?

Orou: Pourquoi non?

L'aumônier: Passe la fornication; mais l'inceste, mais l'adultère!

Orou: Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire avec tes mots, fornication, inceste, adultère?

L'aumônier: Des crimes, des crimes énormes pour l'un desquels on brûle dans mon pays.

Orou: Qu'on brûle, ou qu'on ne brûle pas dans ton pays, peu m'importe.

(Orou's arguments are, of course, copiously supported by his long answers to the chaplain's numerous questions, and his answers are in turn substantiated by the presentation of a happy society.)

The presentation of Europe as the exotic is taken to its extreme limit by means of another Tahitian whose particularity, in this text where everyone speaks at length, is that he does not speak. As opposed to Orou and the old

man, he is at least "half-real" since he appears several times in Bougainville's narrative and had actually come to Paris with the vice-admiral. He is re-introduced in the Supplément: A: avez-vous vu le Tahitien que Bougainville avait pris sur son bord, et transporter dans ce pays-ci? B: Je l'ai vu. Il s'appelait Aotourou" (325). When "A" finds out that Aotourou has returned home, he (typically) arrives at the wrong conclusions:

- A: O Aotourou! Que tu seras content de revoir ton père, ta mère, tes frères, tes soeurs, tes compatriotes, que leurs diras-tu de nous?
 B: Peu de choses et qu'ils ne croiront pas.
 A: Pourquoi peu de choses?
 B: Parcequ'il en a peu conçues, et qu'il ne trouvera dans sa langue aucun terme correspondant à celles dont il aura quelques idées.
 A: Et pouquoi ne le croiront-ils pas?
 B: Parceque comparant leurs moeurs aux nôtres, ils aimeront mieux prendre Aotourou pour un menteur que de nous croire si fou (326).

What Diderot arrives at here is the impossibility of Europe for the Tahitians. Aotourou cannot produce an appropriate discourse to convey Europe to the periphery: there is hardly a common language with his audience to represent what he has observed. Indeed, what he has observed cannot even be completely conceived. Europe is presented here as the ultimate exotic: what cannot even be conceived and conveyed in terms of the same. Diderot thus finds yet one more angle from which to display the inadequacy of the Center's ruling codes. In the process he also (inadvertently) acknowledges the Center's capacity to

apprehend and communicate what is exotic, what is different from itself, while "dans l'écrin du récit la parole du sauvage fait figure de bijoux absent" (de Certeau, 221). The exotic does not seem to be equipped with the systems that would enable it to perceive other cultures as so many variations to be catalogued, in a work like the Encyclopédie, for example. Of course, the "sauvages"'s words seem to be present in the text; Orou and the old man are quite articulate, but, as we have seen, they are only the means to an end, talking heads, Chief Crazy Horse or Hannibal played by Victor Mature in some Hollywoodian script, even if the end challenges accepted notions.

In fact, the dialogues between Orou and the chaplain, or the old man's speech, are both preceded and replayed by the dialogues between "A" and "B." In the Supplément, Europeans and exotics are interchangeable figures. "A" asks of "B" the same questions the chaplain asks of Orou, and he receives the same answers. To one of "A" 's questions "B" replies: "Orou l'a fait entendre dix fois à l'aumônier: écoutez donc, et tâchez de le retenir" (366). As for Orou, his choice of words to qualify Tahitians who transgress the rules of the island is straight out of Sade or Laclos: "Celle qui quitte ce voile [a veil worn by sterile women] et se mêle avec les hommes est une libertine, celui qui relève ce voile et s'approche de la femme stérile est un libertin (352).

Through his use of both "invented" characters (not appearing in Bougainville's Voyage or constructed from slight indications in that text) and "real" figures (mentioned and developed in Bougainville's account) Diderot manages to present a multivoiced critique of his own society. His Supplément hinges on the proposed existence of a culture that radically differs from that society but is nevertheless happy. In order to arrive at his Tahitians, Diderot had to adjust Bougainville's text to his purposes; cruel or arbitrary Tahitians would not do. One could object that "cruelty" and "arbitrariness" are, like sexual "norms," constructed notions and that the Supplément could just as well have been written to decenter those notions in the same way that Montaigne addresses cannibalism, for example. But since sexuality has been specifically chosen by Diderot as the focus of his argument in the Supplément, his Tahitians had to be otherwise appealing figures in order to be rhetorically effective. This is why passages such as the following one in Bougainville's Voyage are scrupulously ignored:

J'ai dit plus haut que les habitants de Tahiti nous avaient paru vivre dans un bonheur digne d'envie. Nous les avions cru presque égaux entre eux, ou du moins jouissant d'une liberté qui n'était soumise qu'aux lois établies pour le bonheur de tous. Je me trompais, la distinction des rangs est fort marquée à Tahiti, et la disproportion cruelle. Les rois et les grands ont droit de vie et de mort sur leurs esclaves et valets; je serais même tenté de croire qu'ils ont aussi ce droit barbare sur les gens du peuple qu'ils nomment Tata-einou, hommes vils; toujours

est-il sûr que c'est dans cette classe infortunée qu'on prend les victimes pour les sacrifices humains (154).

We are far from a happy society; in any case this is not one that could be used as a model for the Center. These Tahitians would not make very effective rhetorical figures. And so Diderot edits Bougainville's Tahiti. In the philosophe's defense, several observations could be made. First, Diderot has addressed this issue elsewhere and is not concerned with it here. In his Encyclopédie article on the Scythians, he writes:

Il y avait sans doute des âmes bien perfide autour du Jupiter de Phidias; mais la pierre informe du Scythe fût quelquefois arrosée de sang humain. Cependant, à parler vrai, j'aime mieux un crime atroce et momentané qu'une corruption policée et permanente, un violent accès de fièvre, que des tâches de gangrène ("Scythes" in the Encyclopédie).

In addition to this apparent endorsement of the Scythians over the Greeks, one could add that, for Diderot, the sexual is not (is it for anyone?) in the same category as the taking of a human life; it is "susceptible d'aucune moralité" (Duchet, 443).

Finally, Diderot's critique of Tahitian society itself--which is not his purpose here--although less obvious than that of French society--which is his purpose--can be found in the "policée" structure that underlies the apparent freedom of his Tahitians and which is developed by Orou for the chaplain:

L'aumônier: Vous ne connaissez guerre de jalousie, à ce que je vois; mais la tendresse maritale, l'amour paternelle, ces deux sentiments si puissants et si doux, s'ils ne sont pas étrangers ici, doivent y être assez faibles.
 Orou: Nous y avons suppléé par un autre, qui est tout autrement énergique et durable: l'intérêt . . . un enfant étant par lui-même un objet d'intérêt et de richesse, tu conçois que, parmi nous, les libertines sont rares, et que les jeunes garçons s'en éloignent (351).

The famous "enlightened self-interest" of 18th century Europe seems to find its realization in the exotic realm, at least textually. But the complex and rigidly enforced Tahitian system--also often appearing as intricate and farfetched as a meandering tale from Jacques le fataliste--in which the economic is modeled along the sexual (the "natural") and the sexual act institutionalized (a kind of libidinal economy) is also an indication that Diderot is not advocating an indiscriminate adoption of Tahitian ways by Europe¹. As Orou says to the chaplain: "Je ne te propose pas de porter dans ton pays les moeurs d'Orou; mais Orou, ton hôte et ton ami, te supplie de te prêter aux moeurs de Tahiti" (335). The chaplain does eventually give in to Orou's supplications and "fait la politesse de Tahiti" to

¹It is not irrelevant in this context that Diderot, like many of his contemporaries, was concerned by the declining birthrate in France. His argument for a freer sexuality cannot be seen independently of this concern (obvious in Encyclopédie articles like "population" and "dépopulation"). In the Supplément itself he has Polly Baker, a woman who has given birth to five "illegitimate children," declare to the tribunal she is facing in colonial Boston: "Est-ce un crime d'augmenter les sujets de sa majesté dans une nouvelle contrée qui manque d'habitants?" (348).

his friend and host's three daughters and wife while simultaneously screaming "Mais ma religion! Mais mon état!" But although Diderot's chaplain, unlike Bougainville, is not successful in containing himself, his embrace of Tahitian sexuality is not accompanied by a total relinquishing of Home. The Diderot of the Supplément is no longer the Diderot of the "Scythes" article. As Jerome Schwartz writes, the Supplément's Diderot "is not nostalgic for the state of nature. his point of view is not romantic, but ironical and skeptical: ironic because of his ambivalence with regard to reality and invention; skeptical because of his critical attitude towards both the primitive and the civilized (97).

Diderot reaches a point, like Montaigne, where he is poised between the perceived possibility of a harmonious and happy society and the reality of the "triste monstre tirailé, tourmenté, étendu sur la roue" (367) he perceives European man to be. Yet, unlike Montaigne whose own ambivalence is resorbed in the realm of (private) self-elaboration and fideistic embrace of religion, Diderot remains in society, where, for him, God is absent. He goes one step further and admits the possibility of stepping out of his society's codes in mind and in body.

This conclusion is essentially contained in the last dialogue between "A" and "B" at the end of the Supplément in which "A" asks: "Quelles conséquences utiles à tirer des

moeurs et des usages bizarres d'un peuple non-civilisé (361). This opening to the last section of the Supplément clearly recognizes the difference between the exotic and Europe--and also shows that Diderot, too, "brings back" some revenue from his exploration of the exotic¹--but opens the possibility of altering the Center through an exploration of the exotic. In "B" 's answer Tahiti is presented as an ideal, an equilibrium:

Je vois qu'aussitôt que quelques causes physiques, telles, par exemple, que la nécessité de vaincre l'ingratitude du sol, ont mis en jeu la sagacité de l'homme, cet élan le conduit bien au-delà du but, et le terme du besoin passé, on est porté dans l'océan sans bornes des fantaisies, d'où l'on ne se tire plus. Puisse l'heureux Tahitien s'arrêter où il est (362).

Explicit in this evaluation of Tahiti's position is a wish: may it not become what Europe has become. However, "A" is not to be satisfied with this detached and, to his taste, vague pronouncement; after such a long voyage, albeit

¹In Economie libidinale, Lyotard addresses himself to the process of "profit-making" that functions in the apparently most self-relinquishing of itineraries, including any desire to see the Westerner overwhelmed by the exotic:

Désirer que Nausicaa "perde" Ulysse, c'est encore l'Occident c'est le signe encore, à peine déplacé; après tout il y a des explorateurs qui se sont faits nègres, des curés païens, des jésuites polynésiens, des révoltés du Bounty--croit-on que l'intention de salut soit moins pressante chez ces gens-là que chez leurs maîtres de la City, de Rome, et de la Royal Navy? . . . il y a encore quelque chose qui se sauve dans ces parcours de perdition, encore de l'intention dans ces recherches d'intensité. On ne se débarasse pas du revenu, du rapport, par un départ et un export (62).

"sur notre parquet," he wants a more committed position, he wants a choice. He asks: Ainsi vous préférez l'état de nature brute et sauvage? . . . Que ferons nous donc? reviendrons nous à la Nature? nous soumettrons-nous aux lois?" (369). Of course, Diderot is not to be caught in the immobility of a direct and definitive answer to these questions. Any type of static position has been undermined throughout the Supplément, both by the ideas advocated (essentially, an unveiling of the Centers unfounded authority through its refutation by the Exotic) and by its form (the multiple layering of dialogues, what Barthes would call its "stereographic" quality, the absence of a central, dominating voice). Instead of the categorical reply sought by "A," "B" declares: "Nous parlerons contre les lois insensés jusqu'a ce qu'on les réforme; et, en attendant, nous nous y soumettrons. . . Imitons le bon aumônier, moine en France, sauvage dans Tahiti. . . Prendre le froc du pays où l'on va, et garder celui du pays où l'on est" (371).

The "answer" to "A" 's question is, again, an attempt at equilibrium, a balancing act that recognizes difference but stops short of completely relinquishing the sameness that negates it. Diderot is neither the Revolutionary of 1789 nor the Mad Romantic of the next century. To the rigid power of a Center that does not change, he opposes, instead, the possibility of oblique challenge. The philosophe as chameleon.

CHAPTER III: FLAUBERT

The discovery of Horror as a source of delight and beauty ended by reacting on man's actual conception of beauty itself: the Horrid, from being a category of the Beautiful, ended by becoming one of its essential elements, and the "beautifully horrid" passed by insensible degrees into the "horridly beautiful."

Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony.

Ils arrachèrent ce qui lui restait de vêtements--et l'horreur de sa personne apparut. Des ulcères couvraient cette masse sans nom; la graisse de ses jambes lui cachait les ongles des pieds; il pendait à ses doigts comme des lambeaux verdâtres; et les larmes qui ruisselaient entre les tubercules de ses joues donnaient à son visage quelque chose d'effroyablement triste.

Flaubert, Salammô.

Dans Salammô, Flaubert se révèle ampoulé, déclamatoire, mélodramatique, amoureux de la couleur épaisse.

Nietzsche, Fragments posthumes.

Nous commençons à savoir que les transgressions du langage possèdent un pouvoir d'offense au moins aussi fort que celui des transgressions morales, et que la "poésie," qui est le langage même des transgressions du langage, est de la sorte toujours contestataire.

Roland Barthes, Sade/Fourier/Loyola.

Soyons féroce! Versons de l'eau de vie sur ce siècle d'eau sucrée. Noyons le bourgeois dans un grog de XI mille degrés et que la gueule lui en brûle, qu'il rugisse de douleur! C'est peut être un moyen de l'émoustiller? On ne gagne rien à faire des concessions, à s'énonder, à se dolcifier, à vouloir plaire, en un mot.

Flaubert, Correspondance.

THE EXOTIC AS A BOOK ABOUT NOTHING

On November 23, 1863, Théophile Gautier wrote the following to Edmond and Jules de Goncourt in an effort to explain to them what "exoticism" meant to Gautier himself and to others, including Flaubert, with whom the term had become associated:

Il y a deux sens de l'exotisme: le premier vous donne le goût de l'exotisme à travers l'espace, le goût de l'Amérique, le goût des femmes jaunes, vertes, etc. Le goût plus raffiné, une corruption plus suprême, c'est le goût de l'exotisme à travers le temps: par exemple, Flaubert voudrait forniquer à Carthage; vous voudriez la Parabère; moi rien ne m'exciterait comme une momie (Journal, 134).

Flaubert would like to fornicate in Carthage (but cannot). With this concretely delimited example, Gautier both illustrates and points beyond what he calls a "more refined taste," a "more supreme corruption." In this second, temporal category of exoticism, Carthage becomes the scene of sumptuous decadence and erotic opulence, but, above all and forevermore, it is the ever-receding presence, the unattainable fullness: here, the exotic is under the sign of the impossible. The "Amérique" of Gautier's first category, like Montaigne's Brazil and Diderot's Tahiti, is remote, but it exists and is thus attainable; Carthage attracts because of its absence. This desire for what cannot be as a basic aspect of Flaubert's relation to Carthage is what Sartre, among others, meticulously sets out to show:

Gustave ne se soucierait pas de ressuciter un moment de la civilisation gréco-latine sur

laquelle il dispose en abondance de documents et de témoignages: la difficulté ne serait pas majeure. Celle-ci devient impossibilité quand on doit tirer du néant une société qui s'y est engloutie en emportant avec elle tous ses monuments. Elle a existé pourtant, donc elle est imaginable; c'est ce que tente Flaubert: révéler la vraie nature de l'imaginaire qui, néant lui-même, se manifeste dans sa pureté quand à partir du néant il se donne l'impossible tâche d'appréhender un être anéantié (L'Idiot de la famille, 2090).

Salammbô, Flaubert's "Carthaginian novel" thus appears as an attempt to frame the impossible, to frame nothingness, an attempt, in Flaubert's words, to "fixer un mirage" (Corr. IV, 332). At a certain point, the exotic, emblemized by Carthage, the non-Western, the non-Greek, the non-Roman¹ (what almost annihilated Rome) can no longer be considered just another aspect of Flaubert's work, another source of material, or even the multi-colored escape line from gray provincial landscape it is often dismissed

¹The Choice of Carthage is also "exotic" in the sense that it decenters, as Michel Butor says, the classic Romantic itinerary to Antiquity/the Orient: Quand les voyageurs Romantiques vont en Orient, ils font un pèlerinage aux origines de leur pensée, de leurs sensibilités, allant de ville essentielle en ville essentielle: Rome, Athènes, Jérusalem. Athènes et Jérusalem sont déjà repris par les deux aspects de Rome qui organise pour la première fois autour d'un centre le monde qui restera le seul connu jusqu'aux grandes découvertes de la Renaissance [during which the first isolated manifestations of a decentering appear--Montaigne's "Des cannibales" for example--culminating in the Enlightenment's systematic and widespread use of the exotic as illustration]. . . . Carthage est ce qui a failli empêcher cela, et c'est ce qui fascine Flaubert (Improvisations sur Flaubert, 115).

as,¹ and becomes a reflection of his entire project as he himself summarizes it in his famous statement on "a book about nothing:"

Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre, sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet, ou du moins où le sujet soit presque invisible, si cela se peut (Corr. II, 135)

Of all of Flaubert's novels, Salammbô is perhaps the one that comes closest to this book about nothing, a sort of objective correlative of the perfect text that would crystalize his visions of the Beautiful, at least of what the Beautiful would be if it could be represented, if it could be fixed. The book about nothing is (perhaps) by definition an impossibility (like the point of arrival of Baudelaire's "voyage antérieure" or Mallarmé's "exotique nature"), but it is against this impossibility or at least with this impossibility in mind, and with the paradoxical hope that it may, after all, not be an impossibility, that Flaubert chooses Carthage as the subject of his novel.

¹The exotic is always on the fringes of even Flaubert's most "local" novels, either as a possible extension of the daily and the familiar (Felicité's fascination with the prints depicting cannibals, a whale hunt, bedouins in the desert, and a monkey kidnaping a young lady in Un coeur simple; Emma's dream of lemon trees and domes of white marble in Madame Bovary), or as a lustrous, even gaudy, but nevertheless peripheral presence (the Alhambra dance hall and the vaguely "Oriental" brothel of "Mme Zoraïde in L'éducation sentimentale).

The plot itself of Salammbô can be quickly summarized. The novel takes place in 240 B.C. Carthage has lost to Rome in the First Punic War; the mercenaries it had hired to fight against the Romans revolt against the Carthaginian republic. In addition to describing the war between Carthage and the Barbarian tribes, Salammbô concerns the Carthaginian high priestess Salammbô (also the daughter of the Carthaginian general Hamilcar) and Mathô, the leader of the mercenary army, who falls in love with her. At the end of the novel the mercenaries are vanquished, Mathô is tortured and killed, and Salammbô dies as she watches him fall at the hands of the Carthaginian populace.

Even this summarized plot seems to be a bit much for a "book about nothing." One of my objectives is to show how, in fact, the plot is neutralized and even disappears under the opulence of a Carthage resuscitated from almost nothing by Flaubert the meticulous researcher-Realist. What takes place in and around Carthage may seem complex--war between two relentless armies, and the subplot of the two lovers from opposing sides--and it is set by Flaubert in a civilization that has practically vanished, leaving only the most tenuous of vestiges. But where one would expect the plot and its attending psychological development (or any number of devices usually employed to palliate the meagerness of historical data) to dominate, it is, instead, the setting that occupies the foreground, Carthage in all

its regained reality. To reconstruct from nothing in order to arrive at a maximum substance, which is itself eventually about nothing (but itself), this is Flaubert's apparently self-contradictory objective. In the nothingness that is Carthage, a vanished civilization, Flaubert finds the ever-receding objective and the indeterminate space occupied by the Beautiful in his aesthetic: "le beau, le rien," and the exotic converge in Carthage.

Flaubert does ingurgitate material (the Realist bulimic in him) but his ultimate objective remains "le livre sur rien." A paradox? How can we reconcile the colorful, frenzied, shimmering quality of Salammbô, the dense accumulation of jewels, foods, people, clothing, etc. (a layering typical, on one level, of 19th century exoticism) with that desire for nothing? In other words, how does Flaubert's own brand of exoticism subvert what we could call "classic 19th century exoticism?"

For some critics flaubert does not subvert but, rather, fails in his attempt. Sartre again:

Flaubert mesure la distance infinie qui sépare ce qu'il fait de ce qu'il voudrait faire. . . . Que faire? Planter là le manuscrit? Il y songe mais se l'interdit: puisqu'il a commencé le travail en connaissance de cause, puisqu'il a voulu l'impossible pour son impossibilité même. . . il faut qu'il tienne jusqu'au bout: jusqu'au moment où, de concession en concession, de torture en torture, il aura, sans quitter des yeux une inaccessible constellation, produit un méchant ouvrage qui entérinera sa défaite (L'idiot de la famille, 2091).

And, more recently, Dennis Porter, whose comment shows that, for him, the impossibility marker extends beyond Salammbô and the exotic writings to include L'éducation sentimentale, a work about failure and Bouvard et Pécuchet, an unfinished work:

If the form of Salammbô like that of L'éducation sentimentale and Bouvard et Pécuchet may be said to break down under the weight of the matter it was intended to articulate, it is apparently because there is an inherent contradiction between the realistic representation of the fullness of life and the demanding sense of plastic form of an artist such as Flaubert ("Aestheticism Versus the Novel" in Novel IV, 1971, 101-106).

While writing Salammbô (but not after its publication) Flaubert himself acknowledged, to a certain extent, the "failure" of his "Carthaginoise" and the status of his attempt as an impossible quest. To Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie: "Que de découragement et d'angoisses cet amour du beau ne donne-t-il pas? J'ai d'ailleurs entrepris une chose irréalisable (Corr. V.IV,). To Ernst Feydeau: "Celui-là ne sera pas un bon livre (Corr. IV. 214). To Jules Duplan: "Ce polisson de livre sera raté, j'en ai peur. . . (Corr. IV, 225). To Edmond and Jules de Goncourt: "je crois que j'ai eu les yeux plus grands que le ventre. La réalité est chose presque impossible dans un pareil sujet" (Corr. IV, 246).

However, like an accompanying refrain to each one of these intimations of failure or impossibility, another affirmation appears, offering beyond failure and incapacity,

the possibility of an indeterminate and more elevated "something else: "N'importe; si je fais rêver quelques nobles imaginations, je n'aurai pas perdu mon temps (Corr. IV, 181). Or: "Qu'importe! si je fais rêver à des grandes choses! Nous valons plus par nos aspirations que par nos oeuvres (Corr. IV, 214). Flaubert openly admits the possibility of failure but simultaneously exorcises its effects by pointing to an alternate objective located somewhere beyond the original one (the finished, written work) and acquiring meaning through its infinitely removed position.

This upward turn, away from the inadequacy of language (as Flaubert perceives it in his work in progress, here Salammbô in particular) towards an idealized realm where fact successfully becomes form is what Blanchot accurately calls Flaubert's "véritable platonisme." As we have seen, the same movement is perceived by Sartre on a more negative mode, as a "conduite d'échec protestataire," and a misanthropic relinquishing of the world. Considering Flaubert's strategy in terms of a strictly socio-political framework could lead to an image of Flaubert the writer as "irresponsible man" (and can equally lead to an evaluation of Salammbô as a "failure). But to proceed this way bypasses what could be called Flaubert's Romantic or even aesthetic responsibility. In Blanchot's words (---purposefully?---echoing Sartre's terminology):

L'engagement de l'écrivain Flaubert est engagement--responsabilité--à l'égard d'un langage encore inconnu qu'il s'efforce de maîtriser ou de soumettre à quelque raison (celle d'une valeur, beauté, vérité) afin de mieux éprouver le pouvoir hasardeux auquel l'inconnu de ce langage l'oblige à se heurter (L'entretien infini, 490).

This would seem to indicate that Flaubert's "raison" is a-historical or anti-historical. But it would be misguided to situate him in a mid-19th century ivory tower of aloof aestheticism where he would be merely reproducing the (now) inadequate forms of bygone eras (Mme Bovary by itself would be enough to negate this assumption). Flaubert's "aestheticism" is focused on "le beau" as language but a language that is voluntarily and actively historical: Flaubert's historical "engagement" is one with language. His treatment of the monstrous--an essential component of Salammbô--is often cited as proof of a refusal of engagement: the monstrous and the cruel as typically "decadent" means of escape from historical determination; not quite Caligula making whores of the ladies of the Roman aristocracy and setting the criminals loose, nor Nero watching Rome burn, nor even Sade setting his libertines' orgies in removed and enclosed spaces, Flaubert is nevertheless viewed by some as the removed observer of (textual) human suffering for his own delectation and out of his own boredom (the Baudelairian ennui that would become fin de siècle ennui). However, far from being Flaubert's escape hatch from the present/History/Reality, the monstrous

and the horrid in Salammbô serve a project that, like Flaubert's layering of language above plot, intensifies the real to the limits of its self-negation. What Lukacs, among others, sees as the absence or denial of history in Salammbô is in fact an intensification of History from outside, a refusal to deal with History on or in its own terms--which would be to acknowledge the validity of these terms. The "exoticism" of Salammbô, and the monstrous, one of the primary emblems of that exoticism, share two essential characteristics: they are outside, and they transgress, their outsideness itself often being enough to create their transgression.

The constant longing for language is, ultimately, what fuels Flaubert's desire and characterizes his writing, a process through which fact--the horrors, vicissitudes, and the discordant quality of History--is always becoming form:

Nous fixons des putréfactions de l'humanité des délectations pour elle-même, nous faisons pousser des bannettes de fleurs sur les misères étalées. Le fait se distille dans la forme et monte en haut, comme un pur encens de l'esprit vers l'Eternel, l'Absolu, l'Idéal (Corr. III, 407).

Because of its distance and difference, Carthage, like the Ideal, the Beautiful and the Monstrous, appears to be beyond the limits of the representable. Even the audience seems to disappear for Flaubert, leaving in its place a "happy few" who will be able to "dream." We are far from the barely sketched figures of a certain Enlightenment exoticism that exist solely through their utterances, almost

incorporeal characters emitting ideas directed at an audience which is to be educated or convinced. Salammbô itself appears as maximum substance, an opulent layering of language directed and arriving at nothing. This evacuation of meaning paradoxically accompanied by the extreme presence of language, its copiousness, is central to Salammbô. If the Carthaginian novel can be said "fail," it fails in the sense that it is the only possible result of an impossibility. Salammbô is the representation of what can neither be represented by language nor sensuously experienced. Rather than the serene representation of a perceivable reality or a lesson-to-be-learned (basic attributes of Enlightenment exoticism: linguistically untroubled, didactically secure), Salammbô emerges as the means of a (Romantic) search for a topos and (an already "modern") search for language as absolute end. Here, indeed, as Irving Babbit formulates it, "exoticism is the infinite of nostalgia" (Rousseau and Romanticism, 251). Or, reworking Gautier's image: Flaubert can never fornicate in Carthage. . . but he can attempt to represent Carthage, the ever-receding setting of that act, the scene where desire could be fulfilled and language found. Since Flaubert perceives the impossibility of his task, both language and subject matter in Salammbô take on the attributes of a frustrated desire, of an eternally unfulfilled longing.

In that light, to call Salammbô a "failure" is misleading. Flaubert does not fail, he exacerbates. The purpose of this reading is not to measure the distance between Flaubert's objective and its realization, to retrace the laborious steps of a failure, but to delineate the figures of desire that appear in Salammbô as a result of this distance between attempt and impossibility.

In the process it becomes apparent that, although Salammbô belongs to a Romantic tradition in which the exotic represents a "visionary alternative" (Saïd, 185) serving an individual will, it also breaks with that tradition. Flaubert subverts (Romantic) exoticism and jettisons the "typical" to reach an "Ideal" served by Realism. He is neither Chateaubriand nor Byron:

Le système de Chateaubriand me semble diamétralement opposé au mien. Il partait d'un point de vue tout idéal: il rêvait de martyrs typiques. Moi, j'ai voulu fixer un mirage en appliquant à l'Antiquité les procédés du roman moderne. . . (Corr. IV, 332). On a compris jusqu'à présent l'Orient comme quelque chose de miroitant, de hurlant, de passionné, de heurté. On n'a vu que des bayadères et des sabres recourbés, le fanatisme, la volupté, etc. En un mot, on en reste encore à Byron. Moi je l'ai senti différemment. Ce que j'aime au contraire dans l'Orient, c'est cette grandeur qui s'ignore, et cette harmonie des choses disparates. Je me rappelle un baigneur qui avait au bras gauche un bracelet d'argent, et à l'autre un vésicatoire. Voilà l'Orient vrai et, partant, poétique (Corr.*, XIV, 314).

MONSTERS

About Borges' list of animals found in "a certain

Chinese encyclopedia," Foucault writes:

Dans l'émerveillement de cette taxinomie, ce qu'on rejoint d'un bond, ce qui à la faveur de l'apologue, nous est indiqué comme le charme exotique d'une autre pensée, c'est la limite de la nôtre: l'impossibilité nue de penser cela (Les mots et les choses, 8).

The impossibility Foucault refers to is not that of the monstrous animal as a fabulous aberration of the real; there are monsters on the list, but they are neutralized (made unreal) by their inclusion in a taxonomy in which they are placed next to "a) animals belonging to the Emperor, b) stuffed, c) tamed. . . h) included in the present classification. . . k) drawn with a very fine brush made of camel's hair, l) et cetera, m) that just broke the jug. . ." etc. The impossibility he refers to, what is exotic is the space where these apparently disparate entities meet. "Where can they be juxtaposed," asks Foucault, "if not in the non-place of language? But, language, in laying them out so, only opens up an unthinkable space" (Les mots et les choses, 8: my translation).

Flaubert turns this configuration upside down. The unthinkable space exists in Salammbô as the realization of monstrosity since, there, it exists not only as language, but also as the reconstructed space of something that exists (and existed) outside language: Carthaginian civilization. In Salammbô monstrosity is not confined to the realm of the imaginary as language: it unfolds in the real space of a civilization brought forth from the real, even if the source

of this reality is reduced to some rare fragments left by History.

Two forms of Flaubert's desire for Carthage converge here: Carthage as the test of his ability to bring forth "la Beauté" from the (almost) inexistent (Sartre's "néant"), and Carthage as uncensored and idealized space: both the "Realist" and the "Romantic" Flaubert choose Carthage.

Carthage as a fragment of Antiquity is the scene of the uncensored in History (Roman orgies and gladiator contests are outdone by the sacrifice of children to Baal and the complete annihilation of the mercenaries); it exists before the establishment of a restraining bourgeois-democratic order,¹ but as a fragment of Antiquity it is also the space of uncensored language for Flaubert: The author of Madame Bovary, the "cause célèbre," was particularly sensitive to the unrestrained character of many ancient texts. About the Greeks, he writes:

Il n'y avait pas pour eux de choses que l'on ne puisse pas dire. Dans Aristophane, on chie sur la scène. Dans l'Ajax de Sophocle le sang des animaux égorgés ruisselle autour d'Ajax qui pleure (Corr.*, V. 14, 315).

Antiquity is where anything can be uttered.

¹Flaubert's use of not only a variety of tropes from the epic tradition (catalogues, alternate scenes of deliberation and scenes of action, depiction of heroic deeds, etc.) but his choice of the mercenary revolt against Carthage as the subject of his novel, do blur Hegel's definition of the novel as a "bourgeois epic."

This dual move to Carthage as text and libidinal territory has often led to the perception of Salammbô as the gratuitously monstrous. From Sainte-Beuve on, critics seem unable to avoid this particular word when writing about Salammbô. Sainte-Beuve: "Je suis prêt à accorder beaucoup à la singularité et à la fantaisie. Mais encore une fois je le maintiens, l'art ne saurait être totalement indépendant de la sympathie, et portant tout entier sur des monstres. Si vous voulez nous attacher, peignez-nous nos semblables ou nos analogues (Nouveaux Lundis, IV, 85). Jonathan Culler: "The world of the novel, like the novel itself, is strange and monstrous, cruel and immobile" (The Uses of Uncertainty, 213). And, dealing more generally with Flaubert's "Orient" rather than Carthage and Salammbô (although they can be considered the central projections of Flaubert's fictional Orient), Eugenio Donato writes:

The Orient for Flaubert is actually made-up of the simultaneous conjunction of the different, the permanent, the original, the corrupt, as everyday occurrences. In other words, the Orient presents the monstrous as real rather than as textual construct" ("Flaubert and the Question of History: Salammbô," in Critical Essays on Flaubert, 99).

Although Donato, like Culler (c.f. his analysis of Flaubert's "use of uncertainty"), sees beyond Sainte-Beuve's analysis of Flaubert's relation to monstrosity and cruelty as something more than just à "pointe d'imagination sadique" (Sainte-Beuve), what he does not insist on here is that Flaubert looks for the "monstrous as real" in Carthage

precisely because it offers the monstrous in the form of vestige, of traces to be reconstructed: Carthage-the-vanished is the topos where, for flaubert, monstrosity can be found in an unrestrained form, but also where there is very little of it left as easily collectable data, as fact, as History. In Carthage, Flaubert finds both the monstrous as unrestrained desire and the imaginative space--opened up by the scarcity of facts; the vacuum and the resistance to mimetic realism created by the passage of time--in which to deploy his imagination. Where Borges neutralizes his monsters by laying them out in a series where they alternate with the normality of everyday animals, thus making them only possible in the "unthinkable space of language" (where imagination reigns, where he can write "from nothing"), Flaubert remains anchored to the pre-text of Carthage as a historically verifiable scene of cruelty. He needs to begin with the real, even if only to radically transform it: "Je voudrais écrire tout ce que je vois non tel qu'il est mais transfiguré. La narration exacte du fait réel le plus magnifique me serait impossible. Il me faudrait le broder encore" (Corr. VII, 281).

This "embroidering" of facts, or "over" facts, is what Lukacs considers, like Sainte-Beuve, a telescoping into the monstrous. He refers to the "pseudo-monumentality" of Salammbô which, "in spite of its archaeological exactness is

no more than a pictorial frame¹ in which a purely modern story unfolds" (The Historical Novel, 189). For Lukacs, one of the most important means of producing this "pseudo-monumentality" is, precisely, flaubert's "emphasis on the monstrous:"

Flaubert takes delight in giving detailed and cruel pictures of the suffering masses in and around Carthage. There is never any humanity in this suffering; it is simply horrible, senseless torment. . . . [With Salammbô] Flaubert begins a development [in the tradition of the historical novel] where the inhumanity of subject-matter and presentation, where atrocity and brutality become ends in themselves (The Historical Novel, 193).

Lukacs sees monstrosity ("cruelty in both subject-matter and presentation") and attempts to rationalize what to him seems senseless and gratuitous violence; the exotic (Carthage) is the place where Flaubert takes refuge "from the monotony of his everyday surroundings." The choice of Carthage is the result of his "longing to escape the suffocating narrowness of everyday life. . . . [Flaubert

¹Flaubert would be "framing out" history in the same way that Sade's libertines isolate their activities in the remoteness of a-historical spaces: the thick-walled castle, the impenetrable forest, the remote mountaintop: the exotic space as the scene of cruelty. Barthes' comments on the role played by travel in Sade's work display some of its similarities with Flaubert's displacement to Antiquity; the exotic space exists in Sade's work as a means of jettisoning the strictures of European society (the rising importance of "the people" in the late Enlightenment) but is stripped of any historical density: "Le voyage sadien n'enseigne rien. . . que ce soit à Astrakhan, à Angers, à Naples ou à Paris. . . c'est toujours la même géographie, la même population, les mêmes fonctions; ce qui'il importe de parcourir, ce ne sont pas des contingences plus ou moins exotiques, c'est la répétition d'une essence" (Sade, Fourier, Loyola, 21).

is] fated to search for more and more exquisitely abnormal, perverse themes in order to escape monotony" (Ibid., 193).¹

Flaubert's own declarations seem to corroborate to this interpretation. To Maurice Schlesinger: "Notre âge est si lamentable que je me plonge avec délice dans l'Antiquité. Cela me dégrasse des temps modernes" (Corr. IV, 233). To Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie: "Je suis las des choses laides et des vilains milieux; je vais pendant quelques années peut-être vivre dans un sujet splendide et loin du monde moderne dont j'en ai plein le dos" (Corr. IV, 31).

Lukacs equates this choice of Antiquity, and the attendant depiction of monstrosity, not only with an escape from the everyday but also with a voyeuristic stance: for him Flaubert both creates and remains outside an artificially framed and glossed moment in a more complex and complete historical continuum. Monstrosity is gratuitous unless it can be reinscribed within History, unless it can be held within a play of cause and effect (a dialectic. . .), unless, in short, it can be made to make sense. Instead, Flaubert's statements (and his novel) seem

¹This analysis of Salammbô and of Flaubert's "motives" seems more applicable to a later stage of the "Romantic agony." For example Huysmans' des Esseintes:

Après s'être désintéressé de l'existence contemporaine, il avait résolu de ne pas introduire dans sa cellule des larves de répugnance ou de regrets, aussi, avait-il voulu une peinture subtile, exquise, baignant dans un rêve ancien, dans une corruption antique, loin de nos moeurs, loin de nos jours (A Rebours, 104).

to point to exactly the opposite. For example, this remark in a letter to a friend while Flaubert was traveling in Egypt and sees crocodiles on the Nile: "Quelle belle idée que celle du monstre! l'animal méchant pour le plaisir d'être méchant" (Corr. II, 411).

What fascinates Flaubert, however, is not the very real (historical) crocodile aiming and killing fishermen or women washing clothing on the banks of the Nile, but its embodiment of what negates the apparent necessity and seriousness of things-as-they-are. We could even say that gratuitous cruelty for its own sake (which is only apparently redundant) is not what interests Flaubert but the possibility gratuitous cruelty represents of that for its own sake. The monster's attribute of gratuitousness,¹ like "le livre sur rien," like the impossibility of the exotic presence, is beyond but englobes the real/History. The monster's aberrance (its very being as aberrance rather than its gratuitous cruelty as aberrant action) operates in the same manner: about a five-legged sheep Flaubert takes to Maxime du Camp's living room, Jean-Pierre Richard writes:

Signe de l'infini plasticité du possible, le
monstre attaque la fixité du réel. Par sa seule

¹For Flaubert, laughter can have a similar function and is even often triggered by cruelty so extreme it reaches self-parody. Flaubert on Sade: "Comme personnages vicieux je ne connais que ceux du Marquis de Sade qui fassent rire. . . . Ici le crime arrive à être un ridicule. Car la nature est tellement exaltée, poussée à outrance qu'elle devient impossible et disparaît. . . (Corr. II, 368).

existence il nie la nécessaire réalité de tous les moutons à quatre pattes. "Idéal" tout comme Néron, il est déjà ce que les surréalistes nommeront un objet destructeur (195).

The monster is an "objet destructeur" because of this function of denial, which is not the self-indulgent denial of History, but the denial of the inevitability of things-as-they-are.

This is perhaps a generic trait of the romantic impulse still so evident in the "father of Realism" who wrote to Sainte-Beuve:

Je suis un vieux romantique enragé. Ne me jugez pas d'après ce roman [Mme Bovary]. Je ne suis pas de la génération dont vous parler--par le coeur du moins. Je tiens à être de la vôtre, j'entends de la bonne, celle de 1830. Tous mes amours sont par là (Lettres inédites de Flaubert à Sainte-Beuve, quoted in Flaubert, p. 9, by Victor Brombert).

And it is no accident that Byron, who is one of the icons of that generation of Romantics, is seen by Flaubert as an "objet destructeur" who shares with the crocodiles of the Nile the attribute of existing solely for the purpose of destroying: "Il ne croyait à rien, si ce n'est à tous les vices, à un Dieu vivant, existant pour le plaisir de faire le mal" ("Portrait de Lord Byron," in Oeuvres de jeunesse, I, 25).

As we have seen, Sainte-Beuve reproaches Flaubert for not depicting the same ("nos analogues ou nos semblables"), which is what he should do if he is to be "liked." But the monstrous in Salammbô is not only the exotic-as-fabulous object, invented or "embroidered" for the

purpose of (Romantic/individual) "aesthetic" contemplation or (public) edification; it signifies--and this is as didactic, as linked to an audience as Flaubert allows himself to be--through its shock value, its power to break socio-cultural norms. About certain sections of Salammbô, among them the sacrifice of children which he refers to as "la grillade des moutards" (the kiddy roast), Flaubert writes:

Soyons féroce! Versons de l'eau de vie sur ce siècle d'eau sucrée. Noyons le bourgeois dans un grog de XI mille degrés et que la gueule lui en brûle, qu'il rugisse de douleur! C'est peut être un moyen de l'énoustiller? On ne gagne rien à fair des concessions, à s'énonder, à se dolcifier, à vouloir plaire, en un mot (Corr. IV, 304).¹

FROM MAXIMUM SUBSTANCE TO NOTHING

In the preface to his Book of Imaginary Beings Borges mentions Flaubert:

Flaubert has rounded up in the last pages if his Temptation of Saint Anthony a number of medieval and classical monsters and has tried--so say his commentators--to concoct a few new ones; his sum total is hardly impressive, and but a few of them really stir our imaginations. Anyone looking into the pages of the present book will soon find out that the zoology of dreams is far poorer than the zoology of the maker (16).

¹Of course, the monstrous has been used to achieve diametrically opposed ends; in the medieval and Renaissance framework it sets a limit rather than open possibilities: the monsters of Hell (believe in the given religion, or else); the monsters out there on the flat earth and the fathomless seas (do not go beyond the limits of the knowable, or else).

Flaubert would agree; at least the Flaubert of Salammbô, if not the Flaubert who "tried to concoct a few new monsters." His Carthage is not a Carthage of dreams but a (vanished) "Carthage of the Maker" brought forth once again, re-created by Flaubert. However, it is reconstructed by a Flaubert who also affirms that "La réalité, selon moi, ne doit être qu'un tremplin" (Corr. VIII, 281). The Carthage of the Maker and of History is crucial to him, but it remains a jumping-off point that leads to the Carthage of dreams. Flaubert uses the metaphor of the springboard again to emphasize this relation between "material truth" and Slammbô:

Dieu seul sait a quel point je pousse le scrupule en fait de documents, livres, informations, voyages, etc. Eh bien, je regarde tout cela comme très secondaire et inférieur. La vérité matérielle (ce qu'on appelle ainsi) ne doit être qu'un tremplin pour s'élever plus haut. Me croyez-vous assez godiche pour être convaincu que j'ai dans Salammbô une vraie reproduction de Carthage? Ah! non! Mais je suis sûr d'avoir exprimé l'idéal qu'on en a aujourd'hui (Corr.*, XVI, 310).

In addition, Flaubert's scheme is based on an inverse relation of "material truth" to the "Ideal:" the more vestigial, rarefied, the original historical cluster, the more its representation erupts into a copious hyper-reality, a luxuriance apparently based on fact but breaking the frame of the real (the research, the trips to specific sights, etc.). This is why, commenting on the composition of Salammbô, Gide could affirm that, in the texts he uses in his research, Flaubert "n'a jamais tant cherché une

documentation qu'une permission" (Quoted by Jacques Suffel in his preface to Salammbô, 23).

Flaubert's research for Salammbô is extensive, "inhuman" even (Blanchot). It ranges from a systematic reading of classical texts, some dealing directly with Carthage and the Punic wars (Polybius and Appian), some less directly related (Pliny, Xenophon, Hippocrates, Athenaeus, Sallustius, Apuleius, the Bible, etc.). Contemporary sources are as plentiful and range from his own visit to Carthage in 1862 (after which he writes to Ernst Feydeau that "Carthage est complètement à refaire, ou plutôt à faire. Je démolis tout. C'était absurde! impossible! faux!" (Corr. IV, 179), to his interviews of Doctor Savigny and other survivors from the shipwreck of La Méduse, most of whose shipmates had died on a raft in the open sea (information to be used in Flaubert's descriptions of the mercenaries dying of hunger and thirst when trapped in a cul-de-sac by their Carthaginian pursuers). Perhaps the best illustration of this omnivorous intake of information (about which Gautier said that Flaubert had cut down an entire forest to make a book of matches) is to be found in the following example Flaubert mentions in a letter to Jules Duplan before beginning to write Salammbô:

Je voudrais bien commencer dans un mois ou deux. Il faut auparavant que je me livre à un travail archéologique formidable. Je suis en train de lire un mémoire de 400 pages in quarto sur le Cyprès Pyramidale parcequ'il y en avait dans la

cour du temple d'Astarté; cela peut te donner une idée du reste (Corr. IV, 320).

Not only does Flaubert undertake this research before beginning to write Salammbô, but he also defends it after publication against those who would question its "realism." The most comprehensive of these apologies of Salammbô is a letter written to Sainte-Beuve in reply to his own long commentary of Salammbô in a contemporary review. In his letter Flaubert systematically refutes each and every one of Sainte-Beuve's comments. His replies range from the most minute reference, as in this reference to certain medical practices used to cure leprosy (which Sainte-Beuve had called a "joke"):

Le lait de chienne, soit dit en passant, n'est point une "plaisanterie;" il était et est encore un remède contre la lèpre: voyez le Dictionnaire des sciences médicales, article lèpre; mauvais article d'ailleurs et dont j'ai rectifié les données d'après mes propres observations faites à Damas et en Nubie (Corr. IV, 335),

to more important reservations; for example, his reply to Sainte-Beuve's comments on his rendering of the temple of Tanit:

Je suis sûr de l'avoir reconstruit tel qu'il était, avec le traité de la Déesse de Syrie, avec les médailles du duc de Luynes, avec ce qu'on sait du Temple de Jérusalem, avec un passage de Saint Jérôme cité par Selden (De Diis Syriis), avec le plan du temple de Gozzo qui est bien Carthaginois, et mieux que tout cela, avec les ruines du temple de Thuggar que j'ai vu moi-même, de mes yeux, et dont aucun voyageur ni antiquaire, que je sache, n'a parlé (Corr. IV, 336).

Flaubert's sarcasm and punctiliousness, his insistence on addressing even the most minute points, and his reliance on his own observation of certain sites are also evident in his reply to M. Froehmer, editor-in-chief of the Revue Contemporaine and an eminent Orientalist:

Pourquoi avez-vous souligné le et dans cette phrase de ma page 156: "Achète-moi des Capadociens et des Asiatiques"? Est-ce pour briller en voulant faire croire aux badauds que je ne distingue pas la Cappadoce de l'Asie Mineure? Mais je la connais, Monsieur, je l'ai vue, je m'y suis promené! (Corr.).

Salammbô is thus both preceded by an overwhelming amount of research and followed by systematic, even heated replies to all questioning of its grounding in "material truth." Yet Flaubert repeatedly disavows (to the same interlocutors) any interest in archeological accuracy as an objective. To Sainte-Beuve: "Je me moque de l'archéologie." In the context of the public defense of his work by an author against critics and "specialists," these comments could be ascribed to a strategy of ironic humility: this is a novel, gentlemen, don't take it so seriously! However, the following, written while Flaubert was traveling in Egypt, that is, written in private, to a friend, outside the context of literary politics, is a similar type of comment:

Nous prenons des notes, nous faisons des voyages, misère, misère! Nous devenons savants, archéologues, historiens, médecins, gnaffes, gens de goût. Qu'est-ce tout cela y fait? Mais le coeur? Mais la verve, la sève; d'où partir et où aller? (Corr. II, 411).

Flaubert does not deny the necessity of gathering data summarized under the heading of "archaeology" in the statements quoted above), but he does place archaeology in a series that finally leads to preciousness, conformity, and sterility: "knowledgeable" people, people "with taste," tinkers. Salammbô itself is partly the result of a massive, bulimic¹ accumulation of related texts, yet Flaubert seems to undermine the importance of his research, placing, well above it, the nothing he strives to attain. These seem to be contradictory objectives. As Blanchot asks of Flaubert's -----

¹Flaubert's particular use of digestive metaphors for observing, researching, and writing warrant the use of "bulimic" which, beyond the processes of eating, digesting and eliminating waste, indicates a breaking of limits, a filling beyond the bounds, and the attendant intensity of copious outpouring. Flaubert upon arriving in Alexandria:

Pour débarquer ça a été le tintamare le plus assourdissant du monde, des nègres, des négresses, des chameaux, des turbans, des coups de bâton administrés de droite et de gauche avec des intonations gutturales à déchirer les oreilles. Je me foutais une ventrée de couleurs, comme un âne s'emplit d'avoine (my italics).

On researching ancient warfare for Salammbô:

Je suis comme un crapaud écrasé par un pavé, comme un chien étripé par une voiture de merde, comme un moriau sous la botte d'un gendarme, etc. L'art militaire des anciens m'étourdit, m'emplit; je vomis des catapultes, j'ai des tollénons dans le cul et je pisse des scorpions (my italics).

On the (historical) obligation to read more than the Ancients before being able to write:

. . . how much you have to read! You have to drink oceans and piss them out again (Corr. II, 409). See J. P. Richard's extensive study of Flaubert's "boulimie" in Stendhal/Flaubert.

art: "Comment peuvent coïncider, au niveau de la littérature, la totalité du savoir encyclopédique (donc le maximum de substance) et le rien sans lequel Flaubert soupçonne qu'il n'y a pas d'affirmation littéraire?" (L'entretien infini, 490).

The answer given by Flaubert to this question illustrates the affinity of his work with what we could call a post-modern pattern; his strength is to have been able to produce the self-referentiality central to this pattern within the framework of Salammbô's "maximum substance": he embroiders the already rich texture of Carthaginian civilization, reaching a material and textual fullness that, through its very exacerbation, undermines itself and points to "le rien." "Exotic" Carthage is particularly adequate for this objective, at least from Flaubert's particular position (mid-19th century France): Carthage is already overflowing: run by rich merchants, overflowing with wealth; worshipping a ("cruel") god who demands the sacrifice of children, overflowing with blood (to which should be added the specific moment of its history chosen by Flaubert, its decimation of mercenaries it had hired to fight its wars). Opulence and cruelty, are already transgressions of Flaubert's own world (one already regulated by limits absent from the decentered Antiquity of Carthage). Carthage is already "ripe for the shaking."

Flaubert exacerbates the already over ripe fullness of Carthage until it empties itself. Jean-Pierre Richard aptly names this paradoxical intensification of the real "chatoîement" (a term whose association with jewels-- ubiquitous in Salammbô--is immediate) and also points out its affinity with the exotic as context:

Les romans qui se situent dans un climat exotique. . . relèvent de cette inspiration frénétique; on y sent la tension, le soulèvement vibratoire de l'être et le désir de dépasser toujours l'expression acquise pour atteindre à une expression encore plus pleine et plus violente. . . . Le chatoîement dévoile donc le néant des choses et l'imposture de leur apparente plénitude; sous l'éclat de son mouvement contradictoire matière ou sentiment s'érodent, on soupçonne le rien (Littérature et sensation: Stendhal/Flaubert, 204).

Writing about Flaubert, Blanchot arrives at similar conclusions:

Plus l'art est somptueux, splendide, éclatant, plus il se manifeste par des prestiges seulement extérieurs, plus aussi, dénonçant par cette apparence trop glorieuse le vide qui s'y dérobe, il cherche à s'unir à son propre effacement ("L'absence de livre," in L'entretien infini, 490).

The sumptuousness of Carthage is unbearably present but simultaneously erases itself in Salammbô. Butor's comparison¹ of the function of Salammbô in 19th century Europe and that of Hollywood today is particularly relevant

¹Salammbô est une aventure qui va nous mener dans un monde tout différent [de celui de Mme Bovary], une Antiquité demi-fabuleuse, cruelle et splendide, qui correspond dans notre mythologie actuelle à la Rome Hollywoodienne du technicolor (Improvisations, 114).

here: the Hollywoodian columns are hollow, the castles are papier maché façades; they are "empty" but in order to appear as real as possible, they must appear as "full" as possible. However, the Hollywoodian, to which we should add the "italian peplum" of the sixties (Peter Wollen, Sign and Meaning in the Cinema, 12), insisting as it does so much on surface, reaches the excessive and becomes empty once again. This process may be involuntary in the super-productions that use Antiquity as subject matter, but in Flaubert's work it is the point.¹

The techniques of this erasure in Salammbô are varied but can be summarized under the two headings of crystallization and vaporization: Carthaginian reality becomes pure texture or inexplicable occurrence, both pointing to something outside Carthage and outside the text of Salammbô.

¹For Sartre this process, far from intensifying history, as proposed here, "disqualifies" it:

Ce magicien noir veut "ressuciter le passé": cela dit tout. Pour que celui-ci demeure le plus absent possible et le plus mort, il lui faut donner le maximum de présence. Autrement dit, de même que le fantastique n'est pleinement ressenti que si l'auteur le fait paraître dans la vie plate et réaliste de la banalité quotidienne, de même la Beauté n'apparaîtra comme séparation irrémédiable que si les fantômes suscités se manifestent dans l'oeuvre avec toute la violence (couleurs, mouvements, passions) qu'ils avaient. A cet instant vie et vérité archaéologique deviennent des exigences esthétiques. . . le but est [de] disqualifier la temporalisation par l'Eternité (L'idiot, 2102).

Flaubert is, on one level, attracted to Carthage as a repository of multiplicity, The sheer variety of origins, whether of men or of things, appeals to the realist researcher in him. Carthage is both merchant empire and scene of war, of both accumulated wealth and fighting men gathered from all parts of the known world (from Gaul to Egypt). This wealth of substance seems, at first, to be a display of a reality so rich it overwhelms the efforts to contain it (Dennis Porter's comment on the "crumbling of Salammbô"). At the beginning of the novel, the mercenaries, not yet in revolt, are feasting at a banquet offered by Carthage to appease their mounting anger:

Il y avait la des hommes de toutes les nations, des Ligures, des Lusitaniens, des Baléares, des Nègres, et des fugitifs de Rome. On entendait, à côté du lourd patois dorien, retentir les syllabes bruissantes comme des chars de bataille, et les terminaisons ioniennes se heurtaient aux consonnes du désert, âpres comme des cris de chacal. Le Grec se reconnaissait à sa taille mince, l'Egyptien à ses épaules remontées, le Cantabre à ses larges mollets. Des Cariens Balancaient orgueilleusement les plumes de leurs casques, des archers de Cappadoce s'étaient peints avec des jus d'herbes des larges fleurs sur le corps, et quelques Lydiens portant des robes de femmes dinaient en pantoufles avec des boucles d'oreilles. D'autres qui s'étaient par pompe barbouillés de vermillon ressemblaient à des statues de corail (29, my italics).

The paragraph unrolls (Proust called Flaubert's prose "ce grand Trottoir roulant"), the details accumulate, the facts are layered. Thus emerges what seems to be a description whose effectiveness is to be measured by the extent of its mimetic power and validated by historical and archaeological

exactitude. But Flaubert undoes this seriousness which would evaluate Salammbô exclusively or primarily on the basis of its realist attributes: all of the (extensively researched) facts of a feast taking place in Antiquity, in Carthage, in Megara, "suburb of Carthage," in Hamilcar's gardens, emerge on the rien of a frozen form: bodies become coral statues. (The process is already under way in the middle of the description as language itself becomes war machines and animal cries). It could be argued that the transformation is ("only") metaphorical, but that would be precisely the point: the factual, rather than overwhelming language--which would then be relegated to the status of transparent representational medium ("neutral signifier" may be another way of saying the same thing)--gives way to language. On two counts: the metaphor, by reason of its very presence as "textual blister (John Gardner), is a break in the "straightforward," "neutral," "exact" descriptions of "realism," a break that results in the exclusion of what it purports to represent from the realistic context. In other words, the painted bodies are no longer real painted bodies functioning in the real space of the feast in Hamilcar's gardens next to differently attired or shaped bodies (thin-waisted bodies, high-shouldered bodies, feathered bodies, helmeted bodies) but impossible coral statues that "can only exist in the unthinkable space of language."

The lyricism of high exoticism, posited on an acceptance of the seriousness of mimetic intent (the possibility that copious images and situations can be literally rendered through the imitative power of language with all their color and pathos¹) is defused. By extending its limits, Flaubert paradoxically divests the copious image of its primarily mimetic value; the naturalness of the realist pictures is erased by the rearrangement of its elements into forms that exclude themselves from that picture by becoming something else.²

One of the central metaphors operating this way in Salammbô is that of the column. It can already be found in Flaubert's correspondence about the composition of Salammbô.
To Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie:

Acharné contre moi-même je deracinais l'homme a pleines mains, deux mains pleines de force et d'orgueil. De cet arbre au feuillage verdoyant je voulais faire une colonne toute nue pour y poser tout en haut, comme sur un autel, je ne sais quelle flamme céleste (Corr. V, 4).³

¹The "Orientalist" works of Jean Léon Jérôme, Delacroix and, to a lesser extent, Gustave Moreau, are examples in painting.

²Klimt's bodies "disappearing" in the texture of fabrics.

³This transformation of the organic into the hard, the mineral, is a continuous theme in European poetry and prose, from Baudelaire's Les fleurs du mal to the Parnasse and the Decadents, from Des Esseintes literally encrusting a turtle with precious stones until it expires in his living room--Huysman's A rebours--to Oscar Wilde's pronouncements against Nature: "The more we study Art, the less we care about Nature." (In Wilde's Portrait of Dorian Gray the book given by Lord Henry Watton to Dorian is Huysman's A rebours).

The column, like the statue and the obelisk, is simultaneously a trope of Antiquity, mineralness, aesthetic stylization, and transcendence. The profusion of men, animals, plants, and even places could result in the teeming lushness of a rich realist image, but in Salammbô they are all fixed, glossed, and emptied through a specific array of metaphors.

The early Romantic exoticism of a Chateaubriand (René, Le voyage en Amérique) or a Bernadin de Saint-Pierre (Paul et Virginie) profusely and lyrically describes a wild and fecund Nature. In Salammbô, the organic is contained and stilled by the metaphor of columns and obelisks. Trees, plant, fruits:

Des figuiers entouraient les cuisines; un bois de sycomores se prolongeait jusqu'à des masses de verdure, où des grenades resplendissaient parmi les touffes blanches des cotonniers: des vignes, chargées de grappes, montaient dans le branchage des pins: un champ de roses s'épanouissait sous les platanes; de place en place sur les gazons, se balançaient des lis; un sable noir, mêlé à de la poudre de corail, parsemait les sentiers, et, au milieu, l'avenue des cyprès faisait d'un bout à l'autre comme une double colonnade d'obélisques verts (28, my italics).

Il y avait des troncs d'arbres, barbouillés de cinabre, qui ressemblaient à des colonnes sanglantes (35, my italics).

Men: Un homme était resté. Il apparaissait en noir sur le fond du ciel. La lune donnait derrière lui, et son ombre démesuré faisait au loin sur la plaine comme un obélisque qui marchait (235, my italics).

Places: Alors ils pénétrèrent dans une petite salle ronde, et si élevée qu'elle ressemblait à l'intérieur d'une colonne (97, my italics).

Organic, and even architectural and topographical variety is consistently undermined by a metaphorical operation that nullifies its teeming realist quality and emerges on "le rien sans quoi Flaubert sent qu'il n'y a pas de littérature." The realist entities become style. The fact that in one example the "inscribed columns" are mercenaries killing each other in a bloody contest in order to survive (a "least chance" given to "the strongest" by the Carthaginian victors) is subverted by the metaphor itself. For Flaubert,

Il n'y a ni beaux ni vilains sujets et on pourrait presque établir comme axiome, en se posant du point de vue de l'Art pur, qu'il n'y en a aucun, le style étant à lui tout seul une manière absolue de voir les choses (Corr. III, 248).

His affinity with subsequent literary and artistic styles and movements is particularly clear in this respect.

Compare for example the following description in Salammbô:

"Des grenadiers, des amandiers, des cyprès, des myrtes, immobiles comme des feuillages de bronze, alternaient

régulièrement (93, my italics), to this statement on "Camp:"

Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style. . . it is the love of the exaggerated, the "off," of things-being-what-they-are-not. . . . Art nouveau objects, typically, convert one thing into something else. . . . A remarkable example: the Paris Metro entrance designed by Hector Guimard in the late 1890s in the shape of cast-iron orchid stalks (Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp" in Against Interpretation, 279, my italics).¹

¹It is also fitting that Salammbô should have been put on stage in high camp style by Charles Ludlam's Theater of the Ridiculous, that Sontag's "Notes" should be dedicated to

Analogous to the metaphorical use of obelisks and columns in Salammbô is another means of deviation from the real: the realist depiction is not undone through the metamorphosis or rearrangement of elements but by their coalescence into a single, framed unity from which all differentiation has disappeared. Descriptions of war and weapons are particularly subject to this technique:

Les sarisses, les haches, les épieux, les bonnets de feutre et les casques de bronze, tout oscillait à la fois d'un seul mouvement (46, my italics).

Au milieu se hérissait la phalange, fermée par des syntagmes ou carrés pleins, ayant seize hommes de chaque côté. . . . Toutes les figures disparaissaient à moitié dans la visière des casques; des cnémides en bronze couvraient toutes les jambes droites; les larges boucliers cylindriques descendaient jusqu'aux genoux; et cette horrible masse quadrangulaire remuait d'une seule pièce (166, my italics).

It could be argued that the geometric quality of ancient warfare with its regulated formations lends itself to this kind of metaphor, just as it is realistically justifiable that soldiers should be "covered with slate-colored dust" (giving them the appearance of metal statues) and that Salammbô, high-priestess of Tanit and daughter of the rich

Oscar Wilde, and that, at lavish masquerade parties given by Pierre Loti, women should have gone as Salammbô.

Among Sontag's "random examples of items which are part of the canon of Camp: "seeing stag movies without lust" (277); Flaubert writing about his prospective trip to the Orient: "Ce n'est pas que je sois inspiré le moins du monde, mais j'ai envie de voir ça, c'est une sorte de curiosité et comme qui dirait un désir lubrique sans érection (To Jules Duplan, 1857).

and powerful Hamilcar, should be covered with jewels (giving her the appearance of a bejeweled column). Nevertheless, this compatibility of context and metaphor does not reduce the effect nor eliminate the presence of Flaubert's artifice.

The second major undermining technique is inscribed in the narrative itself rather than achieved through a metaphorical neutralization of the real. This undoing of mimetic realism is posited on an insistence on insubstantiality rather than a concentration or crystallization of substance. Again, however, the objective is the same, and multiplicity, that great source of lyricism (Oh-the-great-wide-world-and-all-its-variety), is cancelled.

Linguistic diversity, for example, is a (realistic) result of the historical situation itself (the mercenaries are from everywhere and speak scores of languages), but is narratively annulled. In Salammbô, language is either not understood, misunderstood, or eliminated. Salammbô's first appearance to the mercenaries:

Elle chantait dans un vieil idiome chananéen que n'entendaient pas les barbares. Ils se demandaient ce qu'elle pouvait bien leur dire avec les gestes affrayants dont elle accompagnait son discours; et montés autour d'elle sur les tables, sur les lits, dans les rameaux des sycomores, la bouche ouverte et allongeant la tête, ils tâchaient de saisir ces vagues histoires qui se balançaient devant leur imagination (38).

Hanon, the Carthaginian representative¹ comes to the mercenary camp after they have left Carthage, ostensibly to settle accounts (but his words, like his coffers, are "empty"):

Le vieux suffète entremêlait son discours de proverbes et d'apologues, tout en faisant des signes de tête pour solliciter quelque approbation. Il parlait punique et ceux qui l'entouraient (les plus alertes accourus sans leurs armes) étaient des Campaniens, des Gaulois et des Grecs, si bien que personne dans cette foule ne le comprenait (58, *my italics*).

Another attempt is made by Giscon, a Carthaginian general, to arrive at an understanding, but it also fails; the two sides either do not hear or do not understand each other: "Par dessus la foule, plusieurs fois, ils se lancèrent des injures, mais qu'ils n'entendirent pas" (83). The same general also attempts to break through the

¹Flaubert's description of him is perhaps the best example of the use of a realistic element (within a particular narrative context) to achieve metaphorical transformation; the display of his wealth and the methods attempted to cure his leprosy cause his body to become mineral:

. . . Les courtines de pourpre se relevèrent; et l'on découvrit sur un large oreiller une tête humaine tout impassible et boursouflée; les sourcils formaient comme deux arcs d'ébène se rejoignant par les pointes; des paillattes d'or étincellaient dans les cheveux crépus et la face était si blême qu'elle semblait saupoudrée avec de la rapûre de marbre. On aurait dit quelque grosse idole ébauché dans un bloc de pierre; car une lèpre pâle, étendue sur tout son corps, lui donnait l'apparence d'une chose inerte. Cependant son nez, crochu comme un bec de vautour, se dilatait, afin d'aspirer l'air, et ses petits yeux, aux cils colés, brillaient d'un éclat dur et métallique (57).

linguistic (and narrative) wall with interpreters. First, they are ironically described by Flaubert: they wear sphinx-like head gear, and on each of their chests is the tattoo of a parrot (already Loulou the parrot, the central exotic and transcendent image in Un coeur simple?): "Apparaissait ensuite la légion des Interprètes, coiffées comme des sphinx, et portant un perroquet tatoué sur la poitrine" (81). The voluble and superficial is cancelled by the eternally silent and mysterious (Flaubert as Yahweh removing the common language from Babel, leaving in its wake the empty violence of History and the nostalgia for a lost fullness). Then, the interpreters are removed from the narrative: they are (mysteriously) killed:

Quand il en sortit [Giscon leaving his tent at dawn] ses interprètes, qui couchaient en dehors, ne bougèrent point; ils se tenaient sur le dos, les yeux fixés, la langue au bord des dents et la face bleuâtre. Des mucosités blanches coulaient de leurs narines, et leurs membres étaient raides, comme si le froid pendant la nuit les eût tous gelés. Chacun portait autour du cou un petit lacet de jonc (84).

In the narrative itself, language as a means of settling the dispute is eliminated with their death. On another level, meaning is dissolved, semantic drift reigns.

The wealth of Carthage (with food, and ethnic origins and particularities, one of the primary markers of multiplicity in Salammbô) undergoes a similar operation: its sheer abundance--grain, precious stones and metals, fabrics, livestock, etc.--cannot be calculated; it overwhelms. At

one point, the attempt to contain gives way to acceptance of something infinite; the following is a description of only one category of Hannibal's riches:

Avec son flambeau, il alluma une lampe de mineur fixée au bonnet de l'idole; des feux verts, jaunes, bleus, violets, couleur de vin, couleur de sang, tout à coup illuminèrent la salle. Elle était pleine de pierreries qui se trouvaient dans des calebasses d'or accrochées comme des lampadaires aux lames d'airain, ou dans leurs blocs natifs rangés au bas du mur. C'était des callais arrachées des montagnes à coups de fronde, des escarboucles formées par l'urine des lynx, des glossopètres tombés de la lune, des tyanos, des diamants, des sandastrum, des beryls, avec les trois espèces d'émeraude. Elles fulguraient, pareilles à des éclaboussures de lait, à des glaçons bleus, à la poussière d'argent, et jetaient leurs lumières en nappes, en rayons, en étoiles. Les céraunies engendrées par le tonnerre étincelaient près des calcédoines qui guérissent les poisons. Il y avait des topazes du mont Zabarca pour prévenir les terreurs, des opales de la Bactriane qui empêchent les avortements, et des cornes d'Ammon que l'on place sous les lits afin d'avoir des songes. Les feux des pierres et les flammes de la lampe se miraient dans les grands boucliers d'or. Hamilcar debout souriait, les bras croisés;--et il se délectait moins dans le spectacle que dans la conscience de ses richesses. Elles étaient inaccessibles, inépuisables, infinies. . . . Avec son pouce, il frappa sept coups; et d'un seul bloc, toute une partie de la muraille tourna. Elle dissimulait une sorte de caveau, où étaient enfermées des choses mystérieuses, qui n'avaient pas de nom, et d'une incalculable valeur. . . (148, my italics).

The Zaimph, sacred veil of Tanit, emblematic of all Carthage (its theft by the mercenary leader almost leads to Carthage's defeat) is also a sign of this dual process: the presentation of a rich, colorful, material entity and its accompanying vaporization into transcendence, beyond the narrative context. The figures of these opposing but

(textually) coexisting operations are distributed throughout the description of the veil:

Mais au delà [beyond and literally above the riches amassed in the temple] on aurait dit un nuage où étincelaient des étoiles; des figures apparaissaient dans les profondeurs de ses plis: Eschmôun avec les Kabires, quelques uns des monstres déjà vus, des bêtes sacrées des Babyloniens, puis d'autres qu'il ne connaissait pas. Cela passait comme un manteau sous le visage de l'idole, et remontant étalé sur le mur, s'accrochait par les angles, tout à la fois bleuâtre comme la nuit, jaune comme l'aurore, pourpre comme le soleil, diaphane, étincelant, léger. C'était là le manteau de la déesse, le Zaïmph saint que l'on ne pouvait pas voir (98, my italics).

The veil's palpable reality is conveyed through an insistence on color (multicolored), design (it is embroidered with "monsters," among other figures), and texture (its deep folds), while its status as impossible object is simultaneously achieved with markers of lightness and transparency: it is above everything else, it is a cloud where stars twinkle, it is what should not be seen.

The Zaïmph is also central to the open-ended closure of Salammô. The veil of Tanit has been recovered by Salammô (who goes to Mâtho's tent in the mercenary camp, like Judith to Holophernes'). Mâtho, the last survivor of the mercenary revolt, is made to walk through the streets of Carthage and is literally stripped of his flesh by the populace. His heart is ripped from what is left of his body in front of the royal tribune where Salammô sits. She dies a moment later. Inexplicably. The last line of Salammô: "Ainsi

mourut la fille d'Hamilcar pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit" (311). With one sentence, Flaubert completes a pattern present throughout the entire novel: the (realistic) relation between cause and effect is nullified; the real is overwhelmed by the inexplicable, the serious unravelled by irony. The mercenaries' endless peregrinations, the political intrigues, the lavish descriptions, the entire reality of resuscitated Carthage at a specific period of its history, all originating in Flaubert's "inhuman" research and transformed by his "embroidering," are all obliquely, succinctly, ironically negated in a single line.

With this ending Salammbô also sheds its particularity as "exotic novel" and, like all of Flaubert's work, becomes one more attempt at the book about nothing. Madame Bovary, L'éducation sentimentale, Un coeur simple, and La légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier, for example are all cancelled in their endings in a similar manner: the ironic detail, the nostalgia for a brief interlude situated outside the narrative bulk, the upwards look to heaven, and the ironic reference to an inspirational source, respectively, all point to an outside, to a "denial" of the world of the novel itself.¹

¹In Madame Bovary, Homais' final victory sets the stage for a "new type" radically different from the novel's center, Emma Bovary: "Il vient de recevoir la croix d'honneur."

Because it is primarily what is outside, the exotic lends itself more literally (if not any more readily)¹ to

In the last chapter of L'éducation sentimentale Frederic's and Deslauriers' reference to the brief and abortive episode in Mme Zoraïde's brothel undermines the value of all their experiences outside that moment, thus of everything we have read about up to that moment (L'éducation sentimentale itself): "Oui, peut être bien. C'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur."

In the last paragraph of La légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier Flaubert uses the first person singular (an uncharacteristic move) and reinscribes the work within the confines of the fairy tale, of fictionality: "Et voilà l'histoire de saint Julien l'Hospitalier, telle à peu près qu'on la trouve, sur un vitrail d'église dans mon pays."

The Exotic and the transcendent (ironically) beckon at the end of Un coeur simple: ". . . et quand elle exhala son dernier soupir, elle crut voir, dans les cieux entr'ouverts, un perroquet gigantesque, planant au-dessus de sa tête."

¹The "being outside" leading to the undoing of culture, a text, (a Self) requires a distance not as automatically or evidently achieved from within as it is from without. The requisite shift in perception is more obviously effected from the "other place," even if this is not necessarily so. The shift triggered by physical displacement (going to the "exotic territory")--ranging from the tourist's 4 nights/3 days in Acapulco to Artaud's stay with the Tarahumaras--must be replaced by "something" less evident when the Self does not physically move from Center to Periphery. Husserl's "phenomenological reduction" and the drug experiences characteristic of the Romantic tradition from Byron to Baudelaire are examples. The "homebody" character of Louis Malle's My Dinner With André experiences such a shift in (appropriately) a restaurant:

Why do we require a trip to Mount Everest in order to be able to perceive a moment of reality? Is Mount Everest more real than New York? Isn't New York real? I mean I think if you could become fully aware of what existed in the cigar store next door to this restaurant, it would blow your brains out. I mean isn't there as much reality to be perceived in a cigar store as there is Mount Everest? What do you think? I mean, I think that not only is there nothing more real about Mount Everest, I think there's nothing different, in

this operation than the familiar and the known. To write about Carthage is already to write about the foreign and the exterior; the pointing to a beyond, whether ideal book or realm of fulfillment, is already inscribed within the subject itself. What Flaubert does in Salammbô-the-exotic-novel and Salammbô-the-book-about-nothing is to step out of his world and out of his text simultaneously. "In the end" they always reveal their inadequacy: they do not lead to fullness but to (more) desire.

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 certain ways (90).

More perverse than the homebody, des Esseintes, in A rebours, arrives at his non-migratory displacement in typically Decadent fashion, through a "captieuse déviation:"

Le mouvement lui paraissait d'ailleurs inutile et l'imagination lui semblait pouvoir aisément suppléer à la vulgaire réalité des faits. . . nul doute, par exemple, qu'on ne puisse se livrer à de longues explorations, au coin du feu, en aidant au besoin, l'esprit rétif ou lent, par la suggestive lecture d'un ouvrage racontant de lointains voyages, nul doute aussi, qu'on ne puisse,--sans bouger de Paris--acquérir la bienfaisante impression d'un bain de mer; il suffirait, tout bonnement de se rendre au bain Vigier, situé, sur un bateau, en pleine Seine. Là, en faisant saler l'eau de sa baignoire. . . (79).

The exotic is no longer in "Nature," in the movement through "real" territory, as it was in Enlightenment and early Romantic literature.

CHAPTER IV: BARTHES

- Inquirer: Yet a far greater danger threatens. It concerns both of us; it is all the more menacing just by being more inconspicuous.
- Japanese: How?
- Inquirer: The danger is threatening from a region where we do not suspect it, and which is yet precisely the region where we would have to experience it.
- Japanese: You have, then, experienced it already; otherwise you could not point it out.
- Inquirer: I am far from having experienced the danger to its full extent, but I have sensed it--in my dialogues with Count Kuki.
- Japanese: Did you speak with him about it?
- Inquirer: No. The danger arose from the dialogues themselves, in that they were dialogues.
- Japanese: I do not understand what you mean.
- Inquirer: The danger of our dialogues was hidden in language itself, not in what we discussed, nor in the way in which we tried to do so.

Heidegger, On the Way to Language.

. . . le zen japonais, que l'on ne saurait évidemment traduire par meditation sans y ramener le sujet et le dieu: chassez-les, ils reviennent, et c'est notre langue qu'ils chevauchent. Ces faits et bien d'autres persuadent combien il est dérisoire de vouloir contester notre société sans jamais penser les limites mêmes de la langue par laquelle nous prétendons la contester; c'est vouloir détruire le loup en se logeant confortablement dans sa gueule.

Barthes, L'empire des signes.

INTRODUCTION: AMBIVALENCE (CAN BARTHES HAVE IT BOTH WAYS?)

Roland Barthes' L'empire des signes (1970) seems to be about Japan. Unless one reads the opening fragment, entitled là-bas, "out there," with particular attention. At the outset of this book ostensibly "about" Japan, Barthes states that the designation "Japan" is, for him, only a convenient figure, a name for something else that is part of what he designates more generically as là-bas, an "out there" which, in the present context, we will call the "exotic."

Given Barthes' temporal or "historical" position-- "post-colonial" or "post-modern"¹--and his own ("deconstructive") analysis of the term, the use of "exotic" and of its derivation, "exoticism," does present a problem. Nevertheless, although problematic, this usage is neither arbitrary nor self-serving (a "convenience" made to "fit" in the context of my own objective within a "theory of exoticism"). Rather, I believe, it can be inscribed without force in Barthes' own discourse by means of a syllogism.

The essential link is Mallarmé: Barthes calls the Japan that

¹The concept of "center," a crucial one in this analysis of exoticism and L'empire des signes, has often been used as a means of defining both of these terms. for example, in an article essentially concerned with art and architecture: "Post-modernism is a sign of the loss of the colonial model of a universal culture spread out to educate the world at large. It is, rather, a theory for a post-colonial world of products made and sold in different places without a center" (J. Rajchman, "Post-modernism in a Nominalist Frame" in Flash-Art, Nov./Dec. 1987).

is the object of his discourse ". . . le cabinet des Signes (qui était l'habitat mallarméen), c'est à dire, là-bas..." For Mallarmé, "là-bas" is also the exotic: "Fuir, là-bas, fuir . . ./Steamer balançant ta mature/Lève l'ancre pour une exotique nature ("Brise marine"). Barthes' own "empire of signs" which is the Mallarmean "cabinet des signes" is also the "exotic."

Yet his own allegiances are fiercely antagonistic to exoticism. In fact, Barthes' entire oeuvre can be said to be gathered around--he would reject this positioning of a center--what one interviewer calls "demystification." Barthes also refuses to endorse "demystification" for the same reasons he would refuse the "gathered around" used above: it too posits a centered origin, a Truth to be revealed by the demystifying subject, the existence of a solid, basic, "natural" core to be unveiled by the demystifier as keeper and revealer of The Truth. Instead, he offers, in place of "demystification," a formula more in tune with his project:

Pas vraiment à démystifier, car de quel droit parlerais-je au nom de la vérité. Mais à battre en brèche inlassablement la naturalité du signe; ça oui. (L'Express, 165)

This affirmation of a will to continuously challenge any assumption of "naturalness" also negates the foundation of exoticism: a culture that perceives itself as the ("natural") Center and which, from that vantage point constructs a certain image of otherness (quickly becoming

the exoticized) made up of a restricted set of attributes presented as "natural," "objective," and "complete."

Where then do we place Barthes' l'empire des signes in the context of exoticism (insofar as his subject, here "Japan," lends itself to this configuration)? The answer seems given: since the essentials of his own project are antithetical to the prerequisites of exoticism, he can only be perceived as a figure "against exoticism."

In fact Barthes himself specifically and systematically examines exoticism in his own early study of myths (Mythologies, 1957) in which "exoticism" is a ubiquitous term, itself a recurring myth. Any attempt to read L'empire des signes in the context of exoticism must then first stop at Mythologies. And there we find that, although Barthes' own analysis of exoticism seems to inevitably make of him a "counter-exoticist," he himself, in both the preface and conclusion, sets up an ambivalent situation, or, at least, room for doubt. First he points to the subjectivity of his own dismantling of myths (exoticism among them). In the preface: "Est-ce que ce sont mes significations? Autrement dit, est-ce qu'il y a une mythologie du mythologue? (10). This opening up or beckoning to a future (or simply: other) reader is in the logic of Barthes' recurring (to avoid: "central") concern: to question "naturalness" or "centrality," including his own already thoroughly (self-) questioned status. To a certain extent he invites another

"mythologist" to apply his (Barthes') own method to L'empire des signes.

In the preface to Mythologies Barthes thus already points to the uncertainty of success in dismantling exoticism without being somehow subject to its mechanism.

In the conclusion, the term "ambivalence" is more directly applicable; in it, Barthes again points to the limits of "demystification," but also acknowledges an unexpected result: demystifying necessarily involves an assumed distance vis-a-vis the "consumers of myth," which leads to what Barthes calls the "solitude of the mythologist," a condition that provokes a "thickening" or "estheticizing" of the object of analysis, the mythologist's attempt to hold on to something:

Nous voguons sans cesse entre l'objet et sa démystification, impuissant à rendre sa totalité; car si nous pénétrons l'objet, nous le libérons mais nous le détruisons; et si nous lui laissons son poids, nous le respectons, mais nous le rendons encore mystifié (247).

The object of analysis, whether it be the "good old wine of France" or cinema, progressively disappears or disintegrates under the scrutiny of the mythologist who, in the process of demystifying (or: "deconstructing"), simultaneously removes himself from the possibility of partaking of or "enjoying" these objects. Thus the tendency (or: temptation) to find a way "to have it both way:"

Parfois, ici même, dans ces mythologies, j'ai rusé: souffrant de travailler sans cesse sur l'évaporation du réel, je me suis mis à l'épaissir

excessivement, à lui trouver une compacité
surprenante à moi-même (247).

Ultimately, it is the Self that might disappear, or, in Barthes' terms, le corps, the body, if one is completely successful in dismantling its "myth." This double bind is a recurring dilemma for anyone attempting to "step out" of a given situation, whether cultural, historical, social, political, psychological, scientific, mythical, etc.-- Kuhn's "paradigm" and Foucault's "épistémé" are possible equivalents.¹ Closer to the terms of a theory of exoticism and to L'empire des signes, the following questions are raised: is the alternative between an exoticized Japan (Japan as myth) or no Japan at all? Does the mythologist's consciousness and self-reflexivity necessarily eliminate the possibility of exoticizing? Or, more succinctly: can Barthes have it both ways?

¹To completely "step out" (to "become other") seems an impossibility, unless the Self is relinquished. And that way madness lies. . . . Something has to be retained if one is to continue. In the French tradition, Descartes' cogito retains the possibility of perception and utterance, but also retains the subject. Montaigne (c.f. chapter I) sees that the cannibals of Brazil represent an equally valid context, but chooses to remain in his own culture: relativism completely acknowledged and systematically enacted leads to an unbearable shedding:

If anything made my soul lose its footing, it would never set it back upright; it probes and searches itself to keenly, and therefore would never let the wound that has pierced it close ("Of coaches," in Essays).

EXOTICISM AS MYTH

In Mythologies, Barthes attempts to go beyond "simple denunciation" ("la dénonciation pieuse") and to give a detailed account of the mystification that turns (Western) bourgeois culture into universal value (Mythologies, 7). It is no accident that exoticism, both as a specific myth being dismantled and a process at work in other "mythologies" appears a number of times throughout the text: "exoticism" is not only used by Barthes to name something at work in the representation of non-Western cultures but also in specifically Western--"modern"--configurations and objects (In Le grain de la voix, he mentions the disappearance of the terrain of "classic" ethnology--of so-called "primitive" peoples--and describes some aspects of his work as an "ethnology of modernity," 219).

Barthes writes, for example, about an "exoticism of endurance" in "star sports," as opposed to team sports or "collective sports:"

L'effort n'y fonde pas un apprentissage de l'homme à son groupe, mais plutôt une morale de la vanité, un exotisme de l'endurance, une petite mystique de l'aventure, coupée monstrueusement de toute préoccupation de sociabilité (65).

This is one of Barthes' uses of exoticism as a generic mystification; there is no foreign culture involved in this instance, and Barthes insists here on what, to him, is the primary meaning of "exoticism:" the obscuring of a given mechanism and the ensuing presentation of a simplified,

glossed and glorified end-result, in this case, the daring, detached, solitary (Romantic) athlete (detached not only from a team, but from an entire process that leads to him: training, financing, etc.). In another essay, this time on strip-tease, "exoticism" is used in a context closer to its "classic" (19th century) connotations; the term's cultural and geographic specificity becomes more apparent:

On aura dans le strip-tease toute une série de couvertures opposées sur le corps de la femme, au fur et à mesure qu'elle feint de se dénuder. L'exotisme est la première des ces distances, car il s'agit d'un exotisme figé qui éloigne le corps dans le fabuleux ou le romanesque: Chinoise munie d'une pipe à opium (symbole obligé de la sinité), vamp onduleuse au fume-cigarette gigantesque, décor vénitien avec gondole. . . (147).

Although the scene is different--from the solitary athlete to the strip-teaser on stage--a similar mechanism is functioning: the body is taken out-of-context, invested with a specific and restricted selection of attributes that come to signify for its entire history: no more "woman," "social class," "working conditions," etc.: all "irrelevant" attributes are occulted on the strip-tease stage and woman becomes (gradually revealed) body¹. (On another level, China itself not only becomes a woman, but a woman with an opium pipe.)

¹This "feminization" of exotic cultures is not a recent or particularly "modern" development and perhaps finds its most perfected development in the 19th century "femme fatale," especially in the Decadent tradition (See Mario Praz's The Romantic Agony and "The Orient as Woman in Flaubert's Salammbô," by Lisa Lowe, in Comparative Literature Studies, Spring 86 (Vol. 23. no.1).

In a third essay, concerning a documentary on "the Orient"--The Lost Continent--Barthes deals with "exoticism proper." The "Orient" in question is reduced to a series of colorful, "essentialized" images of which the most common equivalent are the pictures of Pan Am calendars of the Fifties and Sixties: tropical, palm-lined beach with turquoise sea in the background, snow-capped Mount Fuji with cherry blossoms in the foreground, etc. For Barthes, The lost Continent occults the Orient in two basic and complementary ways: first, it stops short of depicting the "how-to" aspect of any process (fishing, for example) and, instead, presents a perfectly framed, estheticized picture (the colorful photograph as essence):

S'il s'agit de pêcheurs, ce n'est nullement le mode de pêche qui est montré: c'est plutôt, noyée dans l'éternité d'un couchant de chromo, une essence romantique de pêcheur (165).

The fisherman is "unhooked" or "unfastened" from the process of fishing as a congeries of mastered techniques or as economic activity, like the athlete from the team or the strip-tease dancer (also called in English an "exotic dancer") from whatever is not her body, and becomes THE FISHERMAN. In addition, the fisherman, having been isolated from fishing as a specific activity with concrete and particular developments, becomes a sign of the universality of Man's-activities-on-the-planet-Earth:

C'est ce même "tout est semblable" qu'insinuent nos ethnographes: "Orient et Occident, tout est égal, il n'y a que des différences de couleurs,

l'essentiel est identique, qui est la postulation éternel, de l'homme vers Dieu, le caractère dérisoire et éternelle des géographies par rapport à cette nature humaine (164).

Barthes arrives at the same conclusion in one of the most famous essays in Mythologies; "The Family of Man," whose subject lends itself particularly well to his demystifying intentions: "The Family of Man" is a photo exhibit whose objective was to show the universality of human behavior; for Barthes, one more myth:

Ce mythe fonctionne à deux temps: on affirme d'abord la différence des morphologies humaines, on surrenchérit sur l'exotisme, on manifeste les infinies variations de l'espèce, la diversité des peaux, des crânes, des usages, on babélise à plaisir l'image du monde: l'homme naît, travaille, rit et meurt partout de la même façon (174).

Exoticism, which presents itself as a celebration of "difference," is thus really a homogenizing process since these "differences" are (apparently) resorbed in the (assumed) neutrality of an all-encompassing "sameness." This leveling effect of exoticism--which levels nothing at all since, for example, the Oriental fisherman of "The Lost Continent," once reconnected to the concrete features of his activity and his culture also reenters a world where "superficial" and "exotic" differences become what Barthes "simply calls injustices"--this leveling effect is, in Barthes' analysis, a refusal of History or, rather, a transformation of History into Nature:

En somme l'exotisme révèle bien ici sa justification profonde, qui est de nier toute situation de l'histoire, En affectant la réalité

orientale de quelques bons signes indigènes, on la vaccine sûrement de tout contenu responsable (165).

Barthes sees his own responsibility as, essentially, a continuous inversion of the terms of this "imposture," to ". . . décaper sans cesse la nature, ses "lois," et ses limites pour y découvrir l'Histoire et poser enfin la Nature comme elle-même historique" (175).

In Barthes' scheme, the conflation of History and Nature is, metaphorically, an absence of thickness: exoticism remains on the surface, it is a thin, unidimensional layer emptied of any "responsible" content ("responsible" in both the Marxist and Sartrean-existentialist meanings, two of the major influences on Barthes). This is also true of "classic" language, and Voltaire is perhaps the most pertinent figure in Barthes' work to illustrate this equivalency between a certain kind of language and exoticism as myths. They are myths because, basically, they present themselves as "natural" and "universal" while Barthes calls Voltaire "the last happy writer" because, precisely, he perceived himself as the representative of a universal culture. In his preface to Voltaire's Romans et contes Barthes writes:

La bourgeoisie était si près du pouvoir [Voltaire's class prior to the French Revolution] qu'elle pouvait commencer à ne pas croire à l'Histoire. Elle pouvait aussi commencer à refuser tout système, suspecter toute philosophie organisée, c'est à dire poser sa propre pensée, son propre bon sens comme une Nature à laquelle toute doctrine, tout système intellectuel ferait

offense. C'est-ce que fit Voltaire avec éclat (12).

The exotic cultures always present in Voltaire's tales and novels are thus not perceived as historically grounded differences, but (only) as variations of a universal essence of Man, European man, that is (we are back to the "Family of Man" photo exhibit). The territories incessantly traveled by Voltaire's European characters are not populated by the Other but by the Same, albeit in modified garb and habitat. Voltaire's European characters do not explore and discover, they survey and re-confirm:

L'espace que Voltaire parcourt d'une marche forcenée (car on ne fait que voyager dans ses Contes) n'est pas un espace d'explorateur, c'est un espace d'arpenteur, et ce que Voltaire emprunte à l'humanité allogène des Chinois et des Persans, c'est une nouvelle limite, non une nouvelle substance; de nouveaux habitacles sont attribués à l'essence humaine, elle prospère de la Seine au Gange, et les romans de Voltaire sont moins des enquêtes que des tours de propriétaires . . . où l'on discute non de ce que l'on voit mais de ce que l'on est (14).

By the time Voltaire writes these tales and novels, the Enlightenment tradition has already established a "digest of exoticism," "une typologie de l'homme exotique" from which the wise Egyptian, the urbane Persian, and the naive North-American Indian can be plucked out, like so many rhetorical tropes from a reserve (the Enlightenment discovery of the exotic as exemplar). Because of this conceptualization of the exotic in the tales and novels Barthes finds that "le voyage voltairien n'a aucune épaisseur (14, my italics).

The link to language is immediate; even the metaphor remains the same: "L'art classique ne pouvait se sentir comme un langage, il était langage, c'est à dire transparence, circulation sans dépôt, concours idéal d'un esprit universel et d'un signe décoratif sans épaisseur et sans responsabilité." This description of a "transparent language" is not taken from the preface to Voltaire's tales but from Barthes' Degré zéro d l'écriture (195). The use of "thickness" as a metaphor in this early work reveals again the consistency in Barthes' project: exoticism and language are both myths to be dismantled, to be divested of their false "naturalness" and reinscribed within a historical dimension. In Mythologies Barthes refers to Le degré zéro as a text ". . . qui n'était à tout prendre, qu'une mythologie du langage littéraire" (221) and, further, "Au fond, il n'y aurait que le degré zéro qui pourrait résister au mythe" (221). Myth itself, generically defined by Barthes in the conclusion of Mythologies shares the same attributes as language and exoticism: the leveling of differences and their reclassification in a system of essences, the occultation or absence of history, its immersion into Nature, all summarized by the metaphorical lack of depth:

En passant de l'histoire à la nature, le mythe fait une économie: il abolit la complexité des actes humains, leur donne la simplicité des essences, il supprime toute dialectique, toute

remontée au-là du visible immédiat¹, il organise un monde sans contradiction parce que sans profondeur, un monde étalé dans l'évidence, il fonde une clarté heureuse: les choses ont l'air de signifier toutes seules (231).

This "world without contradiction" strangely resembles one of the preeminent tropes of Enlightenment literature: utopia (often placed in an exotic setting, Voltaire's Eldorado being the best known), a place where all (history) has been resolved and suspended in a static realm of essences; for Barthes, ". . . la fin même des mythes, c'est d'immobiliser le monde: il faut que les mythes suggèrent et même une économie universelle qui a fixé une fois pour toutes la hiérarchie des professions" (243, my italics).

The mythologist's apprehension of the historical in the midst of the (apparently) natural is then a refusal of utopia, the anti-historical. Operating in a century where the exotic carried a philosophy, Voltaire did not perceive this and it is precisely his blindness that makes him a "happy writer," the last according to Barthes, subsequent writers having inherited from Rousseau the poisoned gift of awareness and responsibility in the guise of a new manner of perceiving History:

L'anti-Voltaire, c'est bien Rousseau. En posant avec force l'idée d'une corruption de l'homme par

¹The same metaphor reappears throughout Mythologies; about "La grande famille des hommes," and a certain "liberal sentimentality" Barthes writes: "Nous sommes retenus à la surface d'une identité, empêché par la sentimentalité même de pénétrer dans cette zone ultérieure des conduites humaines" (174, my italics).

la société, Rousseau remettait l'Histoire en mouvement, établissait le principe d'un dépassement de l'Histoire. Mais, par là même, il faisait à la littérature un cadeau empoisonné. Désormais, sans cesse assoiffé et blessé d'une responsabilité qu'il ne pourra plus complètement honorer, ni complètement éluder, l'intellectuel va se définir par sa mauvaise conscience: Voltaire fût un écrivain heureux mais ce fût sans doute le dernier (Romans, 17).

Barthes thus places himself in a historical continuum in which a certain kind of happiness is no longer possible: the writer/intellectual can no longer allow himself to consider language a universal and neutral transparency, just as he cannot deny the mystifying operation that informs exoticism. This is the extent to which writing about exoticism "after Rousseau" becomes synonymous with the problematics of language and leads us to conceive of a (paradoxical) "post-modern exoticism", that is, exoticism ". . . at a time when everything has become language . . . when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse" (Derrida, 280). In other words, "How can I write about non-Western cultures without producing exoticism?" becomes "How can I write?" Both approaches involve the similar problems of inherited past, "universal" culture, "transparent" language, those "items" that can no longer be allowed by the ("post-Rousseau) writer/intellectual to adhere to his own production. But does he have the choice? This is the fundamental dilemma for Barthes:

Devant sa page blanche, au moment de choisir les mots qui doivent franchement signaler sa place dans l'Histoire et témoigner qu'il en assume les données, il observe une disparité tragique entre ce qu'il fait et ce qu'il voit: entre ses doigts l'Histoire place un instrument décoratif et compromettant, une écriture qu'il a hérité d'une histoire antérieure et différente, dont il n'est pas responsable et qui est pourtant la seule dont il puisse user. Ainsi naît un tragique de l'écriture. . . (Degré zéro, 75).

The awareness of this disparity is also, as we have seen what produces the mythologist's solitude: in order to dismantle myth, he must distance himself from the object of his demystification, otherwise he remains within the reach of its mythological "pull," but the moment he is out of reach is also the moment when he has severed any ties with what is, after all, his own culture, his reality:

Le mythologue s'exclut de tous les consommateurs de mythes et ce n'est pas rien. Passe encore pour tel public particulier. Mais lorsque le mythe atteint la collectivité entière si l'on veut libérer le mythe, c'est la communauté entière dont il faut s'éloigner (Mythologies, 245).

JAPAN AS UTOPIA AS LANGUAGE

Again, the operation must begin with language. Even with this realization, however, the problem remains: what language to use, since only one, with all its inherited weight is available. This is the point where the typically exotic trope of utopia re-enters the Barthian system: no longer the symmetrical roads and plentiful harvest of an Eldorado, utopia becomes language in the guise of a textual "Japan," a language that would be a language outside of

one's own, a language that would constitute a way out of the mythologist's dilemma made of solitude, incapacity, and guilt:

Se sentant sans cesse coupable de sa propre solitude elle ["démistification"/"Révolution"] n'en est pas moins une imagi-avide d'un bonheur des mots, elle se hâte vers un langage rêvé dont la fraîcheur, par une sorte d'anticipation idéale, figurerait la perfection d'un nouveau monde adamique où le langage ne serait plus aliéné . . . la littérature devient l'utopie du langage (Degré zéro, 76).

The objective is a utopic language that would no longer be alienated, but this language always seems to be beyond reach by reason of a dilemma that has also been playing itself out in literature (Beckett's "I can't go on, I'll go on") and philosophy (Heidegger's and Derrida's "écriture sous rature"). Any attempt at extricating one's self must begin with language which becomes not only objective, but also point of departure and method. These multiple functions of language are explicitly recognized at the outset in L'empire des signes:

Is est dérisoire de vouloir contester notre société sans jamais penser les limites mêmes de la langue par laquelle (rapport instrumental) nous prétendons la contester: c'est vouloir détruire le loup en se logeant dans sa gueule (13).

The exotic becomes the means out of the wolf's mouth, and the means of destroying it from the outside (we will see that "undoing"--rather than "destroying"--which, in addition to the idea of elimination, also expresses continuity and an absence of finality, is a more fitting term).

L'écrivain, en cela, solitaire, spécial, oppose à tous les parleurs et écrivains, est celui qui ne laisse pas les obligations de la langue parler pour lui, qui connaît et ressent les manques de son idiome et imagine utopiquement une langue où rien n'est obligatoire . . . toutes ces positions linguistiques [the different structures of Greek, Hebrew, Japanese, etc.] en même temps qu'elles forment la vaste imagination du langage, attestent qu'il est possible de construire le rapport du sujet à l'énonciation en le centrant ou en le décentrant d'une façon inouïe pour nous et notre langue mère (Tel quel/Théorie d'ensemble, 38)

Utopia is a language in which centrality and transcendence are no longer "givens," where, as a result, "nothing has to be," where "the sign is empty." This what Barthes finds in the "out there" he calls "Japan," his own version of utopia:

Le Japon offre l'exemple d'une civilisation où l'articulation des signes est extrêmement fine, développée, où rien n'est laissée au non-signé, exprimant à mes yeux ainsi l'utopie d'un monde tout à la fois strictement sémantique et strictement athée ("Sur S/Z et L'empire des signes" in Le grain de la voix, 82)

Barthes' utopia shares at least two characteristics with what we could call more "classic" utopias: it is both the imaginary elaboration of a private desire (Romantic mode) and the means of a systematic critique of one's own culture (Enlightenment mode). "Japan" qua "empire of signs" enables Barthes to leave a culture (inevitably his own) that he rejects and presents him with the possibility of challenging that culture's codes "from without" by providing him with a topos from which to produce his own (hopefully) uninformed and deconstructive discourse:

Comme beaucoup d'entre nous je refuse profondément ma civilisation, jusqu'à la nausée. Ce livre [L'empire des signes] exprime la revendication absolue d'une altérité totale qui m'est devenue nécessaire et peut seule provoquer la fissure de notre symbolique (Le grain de la voix, 82).

The "nausea" provoked by his culture is the same "nausea" he refers to as a property of myths in Mythologies: proclaiming its centrality, its universality, its "naturalness," myth becomes "too much," surfeiting:

L'écoeurant dans le mythe, c'est le recours à une fausse nature, c'est le luxe des formes significatives, comme ces objets qui décorent leur utilité d'une apparence naturelle, la volonté d'aloudir la signification de toute la caution de la nature provoque une sorte de nausée (Mythologies, 212).

The empire of (empty) signs offers a way out of this (false) fullness: origin, identity, centrality, all intensively yet furtively present in the West, are "shaken up" in Barthes' Japan. The exotic realm is no longer tropical luxuriance, Oriental splendor or North-American innocence, but a way out of aporia, an unblocking of language accompanied by a certain evaporation of the Self, rather than its arrogant ("Self-centered") affirmation:

L'auteur n'a jamais en aucun sens photographié le Japon. Ce serait plutôt le contraire: Le Japon l'a éclairé d'éclairs multiples; ou mieux: le Japon l'a mis en situation d'écriture (L'empire, 9).

Under the influence of displacement or "outsideness" writing becomes possible, something "gives," or "clicks," unalienated discourse becomes at least conceivable; utopia

becomes the possibility of uttering without endorsing an inherited past:

Face au présent, à mon present, l'utopie est un terme second qui permet de faire jouer le déclic du signe: le discours sur le réel devient possible, je sors de l'aphasie où me plonge l'affolement de tout ce qui ne va pas en moi, dans ce monde qui est le mien (Barthes par Barthes, 81).

Japan as utopia enables Barthes to write without the anguish or guilt inherited from Rousseau's break; the very existence of a world he perceives as being devoid of center is simultaneously the proof that other ways exist (tool function of the exotic), that he can write about another realm that welcomes this kind of language (adequacy of the exotic). In short, the new and different (the exotic, utopia) leads to a vacillating of the old, one of the leitmotifs of L'empire des signes. "Japan" functions like a "texte de jouissance" which, in Barthes' definition, is ". . . celui qui met en état de perte, celui qui déconforte. . . fait vaciller les assises historiques, culturelles, psychologiques du lecteur, la consistance de ses goûts, de ses valeurs, de ses souvenirs, met en crise son rapport au langage" (Plaisir du texte, 18). Barthes' description of his "descent into Japanese" is even more exclusively linguistic:

Découvrir des positions inouïes du sujet dans l'énonciation, en éprouver la secousse sans jamais l'amortir, jusqu'à ce qu'en nous tout l'Occident s'ébranle et que vacille les droits de la langue paternelle (L'empire, 11).

Even his own method in L'empire des signes reflects a refusal to assume a position of strength that would consolidate the Center rather than dis-Orient it, which is also a refusal to proceed to a static, linear deciphering of Japan-as-text; about the photographs that accompany the text of L'empire des signes, he writes: "Le texte ne commente pas les images; les images n'illustrent pas le texte: chacune a été seulement pour moi le départ d'une sorte de vacillement visuel, analogue peut être à cette perte de sens que le Zen appelle un satori" (10).

The pattern is repeated throughout L'empire des signes: the encounter with the radically different leads to a "shaking up" or vacillating of the familiar, inherited codes and produces, not a rearrangement (this would simply lead to a "last stop" to "ultimate meanings, and reintroduce the original dilemma) but to unheard-of ("inouies") combinations in which the old meanings no longer even have a place¹. In the Western/exotic encounter of Euripides' The Bacchae, for example, the breaking of the Greek order² (its "vessels" break: jail walls crumble, chains fall off, castle walls disintegrate) is a result of its inability to contain

¹Gilles Deleuze, an early influence on Barthes, especially through their common attachment to Nietzsche, addresses the same problematic in his Nietzsche et la philosophie: "En faisant de la théologie une anthropologie, en mettant l'homme à la place de Dieu, supprimons-nous l'essentiel, c'est à dire la place?" (103).

²For an analysis of dionysus as a "breaker of vessels" in The Bacchae see E. R. Dodds' introduction to the play.

Dionysus and ultimately leads to a new order where the exotic god from the East rules; his power now recognized, he assumes what he deems to be his rightful place. After the break, one power, one center, is replaced by another, whereas in Barthes' scheme the fragmentation is constant (a Nietzschean becoming) and emerges on emptiness, on absence. Even "absence" remains inadequate since it implies (the absence of) something formerly there. Derrida, for one, attempts to circumvent this reappearance of metaphysical identity (or: presence) by using the term trace, which reappears in Barthes' empire of signs where it becomes an even more crucial concept (if indeed it can be called a concept) because of the pervasiveness of the textual in his perception. About the numerous small incidents that make up any given day for him in Japan, Barthes writes: "Ce qu'elles donnent à lire, c'est la rectitude de la trace, sans sillage, sans marge, sans vibration; tant de menus comportements . . . deviennent, chez les Japonais de simples façons de passer, de tracer (105, my italics).

This tracing without limit and ultimate objective or referent (in the Moslem tradition, arabesques would be an equivalent if they were not devoted to the glory of Allah) is what Barthes finds repeatedly in his "reader"'s peregrinations throughout Japan: Zen, cooking, architecture, theatre (Bunraku), literature (haikus), etc. are, like the "zones of reading" of S/Z, so many points of

departure (or: entry) only held together by their common non-referential, "empty," uncentered quality and by the fact that they are being "read" by Barthes.

In each one of these instances language is acknowledged and is simultaneously refused its (previously assumed) representative function. On the goal of Zen, which is not a "goal" at all, Barthes writes: "Il y a un moment où le langage cesse (moment obtenu a grand renfort d'exercices) et c'est cette coupure sans écho qui institue à la fois la vérité du Zen et la forme brève, vide du haiku" (96). In other instances, this silence, this absence of echo finds its equivalent in the absence of center. Food and its preparation form one of the major clusters in this category. First, as is the case for all the other points of entry, the relation to language is metaphorically established as Barthes writes of:

. . . les caractères élémentaires de l'écriture, établie sur une sorte de vacillation du langage, et telle apparaît bien la nourriture japonaise: une nourriture écrite, tributaire des gestes de division et de prélèvement qui inscrivent l'aliment non sur le plateau du repas mais dans un espace profond (22).

Food, like everything else in the empire of signs, is language, but of a particular kind: devoid of the bloated, self-centered quality Barthes sees as an inevitable element in the West. In Japan ". . . aucun plat n'est pourvu d'un centre. . . la nourriture n'est qu'une collection de fragments, dont aucun n'est privilégié. . ." and, with

sukiyaki, the linguistic metaphors are even more specific-- as if we were reading Barthes' reading of Balzac's Sarrasine in S/Z rather than a description of a particular Japanese dish:

[le sukiyaki] n'a de marqué que son point de départ (le plateau plein d'aliments que l'on apporte. . .) "parti," il n'a plus de moments ou de lieux distinctifs: il devient décentré, comme un texte ininterrompu (L'empire, 33).

To this a-centered structure Barthes opposes the center-based, linear serving of a Western meal which presents itself as determined, as "inevitable" as Greek tragedy: "Hors d'oeuvres, entrées, rôtis, fromage, desserts, selon un ordre inexorable; c'est l'ordre logicotemporel du récit classique. . ." (L'Express, 167).

This type of opposition is a recurring theme in L'empire des signes. In fact, Barthes' "post-modern" discourse cannot avoid comparison: even "without center" implies the existence of the concept or idea of "center" elsewhere, which is Home (the West, in this case). The typical view of the exotic in texts ranging from Herodotus' Histories to some contemporary anthropology is on this mode of "lack:" the most widespread formula being "They are a people who have no" followed by any number of items that are found in the Home culture, from the worship of certain idols to the existence of roads or laws. The difference in L'empire des signes, of course, is that "lack" (or "absence") in utopia becomes a positive trait. In many

Renaissance and Enlightenment texts this positive lack also manifests itself in constructions such as: "There, they have no pestilence, no famine, no war"--Montaigne's analysis of what he perceives as the absence of laws among the Tupinambas of Brazil and Diderot's analysis of what he perceives as "free sexuality" in Tahiti, are examples (see chapters I and II, infra.). Barthes' ultimate objective is to go beyond even this positive use of lack: what he wants is to arrive at "la fissure de notre symbolique," an even more radical breach than the critique of Home through comparison with the exotic periphery. The use of lack as positive trait continuously and inevitably reinscribes him within a comparative mode in which the Other can only be perceived in terms of the Same, his own language continuing to govern his perception of the exotic and, vice versa, his perception continuing to reinforce his language. But he cannot completely abandon a dialectic, analogical, or comparative approach: the old codes inevitably manifest themselves in the (would-be) utopic territory/language, even if only as examples of negativity. Mentions of Home keep reappearing throughout the text as point of reference. The Japanese way of preparing food is opposed in one instance to the Western use of the kitchen as "sacred room:" ". . . le mets n'est plus un produit réifié, dont la préparation est chez nous pudiquement éloignée dans le temps et dans l'espace (repas élaborés à l'avance derrière la cloison

d'une cuisine, pièce secrète où tout est permis" (20)¹. The "smallness" of Japanese food, its "opening up on the infinitesimal" (Empire, 24) is described in opposition to ". . . la nourriture occidentale, gonflée jusqu'au majestueux, liée à quelque opération de prestige, s'en va toujours vers le gros, le grand, l'abondant, le plantureux. . ." (24).

Barthes is well aware that the comparative is present in the language he is using and that the danger is always there of "appropriating," or "reducing" otherness in the net of a conceptual system that cannot approach or "represent" without a priori; whence his constant groping for words which is perhaps all that is available to him for pointing to his awareness of that danger and his continuing attempt at avoiding what we could also call "myth." About Zen, he writes: "On ne saurait traduire "zen" par méditation sans y ramener le sujet et le dieu: chassez-les, ils reviennent, et c'est notre langue qu'ils chevauchent. . ." (13). Words and constructions are continuously qualified, "streamlined," so that their inadequacy or their "loaded" quality can at least

¹Buñuel's The Phantom of Liberty presents the example of a similar critique, but "from the inside" (without recourse to an exotic point of reference): in Buñuel's film the room has changed but the idea is the same: a chic dinner party is taking place in the "dining room" but the guests are sitting on toilets set around a table, defecating and not eating; when one of them discreetly asks for the "secret room" where defecating usually takes place, it is to engage in the solitary, furtive act of eating a meal "behind closed doors."

become apparent. In a description of a haiku he mentions "hearing" a frog, but adds, ". . . bien que ce soit une manière trop occidentale de parler" (96). Also in a discussion of haikus, he uses the word "vision" and immediately adds between parentheses, "(le mot est encore trop occidental)." This constant questioning and (dis-)qualifying of language is not restricted to texts "about" the exotic but is also present in the most "intimate" discourse, discourse about the Self which, in Barthes' case is best represented by Barthes par Barthes in which he writes about the "assertiveness" of a statement he has just made: "Il manque en français (et peut être en toute langue) un mode grammatical qui dirait légèrement (notre conditionnel est bien trop lourd). . . (59). Even the title L'empire des signes is subject to this operation: "Empire des signes? Oui, si l'on entend que ces signes sont vides et que le rituel est sans dieu" (Empire, 145).

Ideally, Barthes would like his own text, his own language, to be as devoid of inherited weight as the "text" he perceives Japan to be. Writing about any particular activity or object, whether it be Bunraku ("broken, striated, devoid of metaphysics"), Tokyo ("the city without center"), or haikus ("a space of pure fragments"), he insists on the fact that they "offer no grasp," that they simply are; they are, as he writes, tel! "Such! (an allusion to Tel quel?).

At one point Barthes recognizes that such a way of being which he, of course, sees in terms of language, is beyond his reach: about haikus he writes that they are in ". . . un langage qui nous [Westerners] est refusé" (105) but L'empire des signes itself is the sign of a possibility: within the limits dictated by the medium (the language it is written in), it points, by means of "play" (its groping, its self-referential tactics), to the truly utopic text that would be the ideal version of itself, the text that would just be tel!

Perhaps the best way to arrive at a definition (without closure) of what L'empire des signes represents as an attempt or process is to select, although admittedly not as randomly as Barthes professes to in his own cutting up of S/Z, a fragment of L'empire des signes, his own definition of the haiku:

On pourrait dire que le corps collectif des haikus est un réseau de bijoux, dans lequel chaque joyau reflète tous les autres et ainsi de suite, à l'infini, sans qu'il y ait jamais à saisir un noyau premier d'irradiation; pour nous l'image la plus juste de ce rebondissement sans moteur et sans butée, de ce jeu d'éclats sans origine, serait celle du dictionnaire, dans lequel le mot ne peut se définir que par d'autres mots (104).

The different fragments of L'empire des signes, as Barthes would like them to be, do not refer to any "Japanese reality" to be rendered or captured ("photographed"), but to each other, like jewels reflecting each other, like words in a dictionary.

Elsewhere (an interview on L'empire des signes), Barthes develops this image of the dictionary, pointing out its limitations: at a certain stage, even the dictionary or, another way of putting it, the inventory of all things in the world, stops with God, who is its foundation ("la clé de voûte"), since God can only be a signified and never a signifier (could we admit that he signifies anything else but himself? asks Barthes). This is what does not exist in his Japan: "Tandis qu'au Japon, tel que je l'ai lu, il n'y a pas de signifié qui arrête la chaîne des signes (L'Express, 166).

What we arrive at, then (to the extent that one can speak of arriving in this context) is not only an exotic realm/utopia--Japan as Barthes "read" it--where the chain of signifiers never stops, where language is not systematically reduced to signifying or representing essences, but also (which is at the same time the same and different) a discourse about this utopia made possible by its existence. Ideally (Barthes' objective or desire) the last line of L'empire des signes, "Il n'y a rien à saisir," there is nothing to seize, applies to both (utopic) "Japan" qua empire of signs and to L'empire des signes, Barthes' text.

Japan-as-text becomes a paradoxical utopia indeed: it offers the possibility of being without the (now neutralized) sine qua non of stasis, finality, or metaphysical reference, the possibility of using language

without being subject to language. Barthes does seem to have succeeded in having it both ways: Japan without exoticism, a non-mythical language in which to write about the foreign.

A MYTHOLOGY OF THE MYTHOLOGIST

Yet, just as this text, which Barthes both anticipates and "invites," (the "mythology of the mythologist" he refers to in Mythologies) can be seized¹ by yet another commentator, a few aspects of L'empire des signes can be seized at this point and perhaps lead us to something we could call a "post-modern exoticism," a residue of myth in barthes' would-be myth-free language. One way to do so and still remain within the confines of Barthes' own strategy is to expose his text to his own analysis of exoticism.

"Classic" or "pre-modern" exoticism, which is not a strictly chronological qualifier, is, to a great extent, only possible if the (Western) subject does not really know the exotic culture involved in any specifically historical sense. Exoticism, in other words, can only function fully if the outsider remains outside, his relation to the exotic stopping at the superficial, a word which is used here not

¹I use "seize" here following Barthes' own use of the word in a similar context in another work, Système de la mode: Un jour viendra inévitablement où l'analyse structurale passera au rang de langage-objet et sera saisie dans un système supérieur" qui à son tour l'expliquera" (263). I should add, however, that I read "supérieur" and "expliquera" as "other" and "comment."

for its judgmental, moralistic, or even accusatory connotation, but, rather, for its primary sense of "stopping at the surface, of not going in depth (the Latin superficialis: top, surface). This is, as we have seen, exactly the metaphor used by Barthes for a number of exoticizing or mythologizing operations: the Voltairian journeys "without depth or thickness," classic language as a "decorative sign without depth," or myth's organization of a world without contradiction, a world "without depth."

In the exoticizing process, surface and, a possible variation, form, are crucial: the exoticizing eye gazes over the surfaces of skins, jewels, fruits, walls (a copia of surfaces) and continuously glides without ever directing its glance beyond, lest the vision disappear, the beautiful but fragile layer crumble under the weight of socio-historical mass; the origin of apparent plentifulness and "happiness" (Baudelaire's "Luxe, calme et volupté") would be perceived in the revealed "injustices," as Barthes calls them, of a given class structure, for example; rubies and emeralds would be forced out of their frames and re-displayed in their historical gangue (miners' strikes, mining accidents, etc.). Exoticism involves not seeing, a certain amount of ignorance, otherwise the possibility of gliding stops and the exotic becomes too much like Home, where familiarity breeds knowledge and knowledge demands action (especially since Voltaire, Barthes' "last happy writer"). Exoticism,

in other words, is the possibility of continuing posited on not knowing or, in the Sartrean sense, not choosing, or, in the Marxist sense, not acting.

Commenting on a writer who, perhaps more than any other in the French tradition, emblemizes a certain fin-de-siècle and colonial exoticism, Pierre Loti, Barthes concentrate on this relation between action and choice as results of knowledge, and exoticism as "irresponsibility; about Loti's Azyadée, set in "the Orient," Barthes writes:

Turc ou magrébin, l'Orient n'est que la case d'un jeu, le terme marqué d'une alternative: l'Occident ou autre chose. Tant que l'opposition est irrésolue, soumise seulement à des forces de temptation, le sens fonctionne à plein: le livre est possible, il se développe. Lorsque Loti [the protagonist, who is also called Loti] se trouve contraint d'opter (comme on dit en langage administratif) il lui faut passer du niveau imaginaire au niveau réel, d'une éthique à un statut, d'un mode de vie à la responsabilité politique, céder devant la contrainte d'une praxis: le sens cesse, le livre s'arrête car il n'y a plus de signifiants, le signifié reprend sa tyrannie ("Le nom d'Azyadée in Nouveaux essais critiques).

This comment on one of the basic texts of "high exoticism" is also a slightly different restatement of Barthes' own dilemma: the impossibility of discourse without the tacit endorsement of a certain irresponsibility, the necessary sacrifice of a certain amount of awareness to the possibility of utterance; the refusal of myth, which is the equivalent of "going beyond the surface and finding History under the "natural," inexorably leads to the end (of even the possibility) of language: "meaning ceases to be, the

book stops." In Barthes' analysis, for Loti (both the author and the protagonist of Azyadée, who share the same name) the "Orient" must retain its exoticized difference, kept out of a historical context (involving responsibility, action, etc.) in order to function as textual catalyst. The implication, again: the book about otherness can only exist if otherness is exoticized, uprooted from reality/History.

This encapsulates Barthes' view of one of the major figures of an exoticism he himself deprecates in L'empire des signes by assimilating it with "known," trivialized (and trivializing) languages ("langages connus"); at the outset of L'empire des signes he calls for a knowledge of Japan that would replace outdated or essentialized views, which are ". . . l'Orient de Voltaire, de la Revue Asiatique, de Loti ou d'Air France" [the colorful calendars] (8). But one could ask whether Barthes is not, in his attempt to find a break in the Western symbolic order, proceeding to a similar essentializing, one that begins with an arbitrary delimiting of boundaries; in the first few lines of L'empire des signes he declares that he wants to "compromise no real country in his fantasy" but continues:

Sans prétendre en rien représenter ou analyser la moindre réalité (ce sont les gestes majeurs du discours occidental) prélever quelque part dans le monde (là-bas) un certain nombre de traits (mots graphique et linguistique), et de ces traits former délibérément un système, c'est ce système que j'appellerai: le Japon [qui] me fournit simplement une réserve de traits dont la mise en batterie, le jeu inventé, me permettent de

"flatter" l'idée d'un système symbolique inouï
entièrement dépris du nôtre (7).

Again, as is the case for Loti's Orient, the reasoning seems to be that, in order for Japan to function fully as catalyst and topic, so that discourse can begin and continue, that country had to be held to a restricted number of "traits." This is Barthes' way of avoiding the "representing" and "analyzing" he sees as the major tactics of Western discourse, both amounting to a reduction of otherness that attempts to "pass" as "natural" and "objective" while his own discourse would be admittedly and openly "subjective" and thus devoid of the exoticizing pretense of universality.

The same method is used in S/Z, published the same year: the critic does not pretend to render Balzac's meaning, and his subjectivity (the "historicity" of his act) is underlined by his own admittance of randomness. Just as Barthes "arbitrarily" chooses certain "traits" to form an "invented system" he calls "Japan," a place that does not exist, Barthes, the critic of Balzac's Sarrasine "cuts into" the text and delineates "fictitious zones of reading:"

Tel l'augure y découpeant du bout de son bâton un rectangle fictif pour y interroger selon certains principes le vol des oiseaux, le commentateur trace le long du texte des zones de lecture, afin d'y observer la migration des sens, l'affleurement des codes, le passage des citations (21).

There is a major difference, however: Balzac and the world of his writing are familiar to Barthes, they belong to the

category of the Same; his apparent arbitrariness and his wanderings through the text of Sarrasine are never informed by cultural foreignness/outsideness. Barthes "subjectively" or "arbitrarily" cuts into the text but he knows what he is cutting into; a consciousness that comes from familiarity consistently (if not overtly) rules his decisions. In Japan, something else occurs: because of his foreignness Barthes is no longer subject to the type of perception produced by familiarity and sameness and can bypass the Center's codes:

La masse bruissante d'une langue inconnue constitue une protection délicieuse, enveloppe l'étranger (pour peu que le pays ne lui soit pas hostile) d'une pellicule sonore qui arrête à ses oreilles les aliénations de la langue maternelle: l'origine régionale et sociale, de qui la parle, son degré de culture, d'intelligence, de goût, etc. (17).

The absence of ability to understand Japanese eliminated the referentiality inherent in a known language: language, like everything else (gestures, objects, etc.) can just be tell to the outsider. However, the same attributes of "not understanding" that remove one type of "alienation" (being subject to the referential weight inevitable in a known language) also keep Barthes on the surface and, as he himself writes, keeps him in an "artificial" realm: "La langue inconnue m'entraîne dans un vide artificiel qui ne s'accomplit que pour moi: je vis dans l'interstice, débarassé de tout sens plein" (17).

Barthes is thus successful in eluding one type of reduction: the "analysis" and "representation" of Japan ("photographing" it), based on the observation of "equivalent" socio-cultural structures an observer who knew the language would use in his text. But he cannot avoid another: "his" Japan becomes a world of (invented) forms and surfaces which, because of his foreignness, he can make signify at will. He declares his Japan fictitious at the outset, and this proviso would seem to "compromise no real country in his fantasy," but, nevertheless, the "real" Japan remains the topic of discourse, even if only as a restricted number of chosen "traits," even if it is isolated in the formal realm of a system of signs.

Barthes' status as removed observer, acquired through lack of knowledge (or a will not to know, or a will not to apply knowledge about Japan that he in fact has) enables him to concentrate on particular aspects, on specific "zones." Many of the photographs he uses are at least fifty years old¹ and allow him to concentrate on a Japan that no longer exists; he chooses to bypass the core of Japanese literature of the past one thousand years--Waku poems, novels, the diary, comic works, etc., all of which rely heavily on association of ideas, metaphors and implied references--and

¹All of the "conflicting information" used here is from a review of the English translation of L'empire des signes written by a Japanese philosopher teaching in the United States; see Hidé Ishiguro's "Barthes' The Empire of Signs in the Times Literary Supplement, 8/3/83, p. 853.

to concentrate on haiku which comes to represent all of Japanese literature and is also a convenient illustration of a "non-referential literature." In the same attempt to make of Japan an empire of "lightness," as opposed to "heavy" (Western) referentiality,¹ Barthes also focuses on particular aspects of food and its preparation and claims, for example, that "nappage" or cooking of foodstuff with cream, or pastry is unknown; yet Japanese cooks pride themselves on the ground walnut sauce, fermented soybean and citron paste or sesame cream with which they coat their vegetables (TLS, 853).

It is true that Barthes does not claim exactitude of detail within a scientific and historical framework but, rather, the play of fantasy within an invented system. Nevertheless, even acknowledged, his "fiction" is a sign of his inability to completely avoid the "gestures" of exoticism he dismantles in other texts, especially

¹Japan as an "a-centered empire of lightness" also seems to fit in the framework of a "post-modern utopia;" oddly enough, it is compared to the United States in this respect, both being united under the banner of "pragmatic utopias" in Jean Baudrillard's Amérique:

L'Amérique n'a pas de problèmes d'identité. Or la puissance future est dédiée aux peuples sans origine, sans authenticité, et qui savent exploiter cette situation jusqu'au bout. Voyez le Japon, qui dans une certaine mesure réalise ce pari mieux que les États-Unis eux mêmes, réussissant dans un paradoxe pour nous inintelligible, à transformer la puissance de la territorialité et de la féodalité en celle de la déterritorialité et de l'apesanteur (from the chapter entitled "L'utopie réalisée," 152).

Mythologies. A quick juxtaposition of a few passages from this text and L'empire des signes (subjecting Barthes' text on the non-Western to his own analysis of exoticism) reveals the difficulty of bypassing some of the givens not only of culture and language, but of the hedonistic self. These quotations from Mythologies, L'empire des signes and other relevant texts are given here with no commentary but their presentation under headings, the "contradictions" they imply being self-evident.

POSTCARD PRETTY

Starting with the literal surface of L'empire des signes: its cover: an old postcard depicting a Japanese woman in (to my untrained eyes) "traditional" clothes; the colors of her kimono and of the surrounding objects are bright and varied but subdued by time; she sits at a "traditional" writing table; she belongs to the Japan of another time.

Mythologies (from "Continent perdu"): "Et cet Orient qui précisément aujourd'hui est devenue le centre du monde, on le fide ici tout aplati, poncé et colorié, comme une carte postale demodée: (163).

"ROMANESQUE"

Mythologies ("Bichon chez les nègres"): "Le voyage des parents de Bichon dans une contrée située d'ailleurs très vaguement, et donnée surtout comme le Pays des Nègres

Rouges, sorte de lieu romanesque dont on atténue, sans en avoir l'air, les caractères trop réels" (65, *my italics*).

Mythologies ("Le strip-tease): "L'exotisme du strip-tease est un exotisme figé qui éloigne le corps de la femme dans le fabuleux ou le romanesque" (147, *my italics*).

Le grain de la voix ("Sur S/Z et L'empire des signes"): "Ce livre [L'empire des signes] est un peu une entrée, non pas dans le roman, mais dans le romanesque: c'est à dire le signifiant et le recul du signifié, fût-il hautement estimable par sa nature politique" (83, *my italics*).

L'empire des signes: "Combien. . . il serait bienfaisant de se transporter dans une vision des différences irréductibles. . . tel propos d'un ami sur le japonais ouvre le romanesque intégral, dont seuls quelques textes modernes peuvent donner l'idée (mais aucun roman). . . ." (12).

ESTHETIC/ESTHETECIZING

Mythologies ("La grande famille des hommes"): "Que le travail soit un fait ancestral ne l'empêche nullement d'être un fait historique. . . . C'est de ce travail, entièrement historifié, qu'il faudrait nous parler, et non d'une éternelle esthétique des gestes laborieux" (176, *my italics*).

About L'empire des signes: "Le Japon m'a beaucoup libéré sur le plan de l'écriture en me fournissant des occasions de sujets très quotidiens qui soient, contrairement à ceux des Mythologies, des sujets heureux."

Parceque, précisément, au Japon, le quotidien est esthétisé.
C'est tout au moins comme cela que je l'ai perçue et c'est
cela qui m'a séduit" (Le grain de la voix, 26, *my italics*).

LANGUAGE

Théorie d'ensemble ("Drame, roman"): Ce qui est en
cause c'est d'aggrandir la déchirure du système symbolique
dans lequel vient de vivre et vit encore l'Occident moderne;
cette entreprise de vacillation est impossible tant que l'on
ne change pas le lieu même de la coutume occidentale, à
savoir, son langage; si l'on ignore ou réduit ce
langage. . . on ne fait que le respecter" (27).

About L'Empire des signes: "Mais pour être honnête, je
ne connais pas la langue japonaise, et c'est à travers la
langue qu'on pourrait accéder le plus directement aux
structures mentales du Japon (L'Express, 168).

Barthes' ambivalence manifests itself in intertextual
inconsistencies. However, to conclude that the above
comparisons or juxtapositions reveal factual errors or
contradictions, or that L'empire des signes "is exoticism,"
is itself a reduction and, more importantly, misses the
point.

First, these conclusions overlook a crucial difference
between Barthes' Japan and an exoticized Japan: throughout
L'empire des signes there is a constant awareness of the
method being applied and specific references made to its
choices. Barthes' opening is probably the best example of

this: he acknowledges the limitation and "traces the limits" of his own "representation"--establishing it as a "fiction"--and thus undermines any claim to objectivity or "naturalness."

Secondly, these comparisons, rather than contradict Barthes, instead, inscribe themselves in his own project: they illustrate the difficulty of any attempt to extricate one's self from culture/language, which is Barthes' point, and invite the contribution of an outsider whose own seizing of these fragments of his texts will itself be commented by yet another outsider, and so on; thus is formed a continuous drift which may be judged "isolated," "removed," "anarchic" or "esthetic," but at least has the merit of containing its own questioning.

Lastly, these juxtapositions display a turning point in Barthes' work and open-up space for his own analysis of what we temporarily called his "contradictions." The basic question can be asked once again through the figure of utopia: is the objective of Barthes' search to be achieved only in an isolated or removed realm? Is the post-modern groping for an otherness that would undermine the present and free itself from it only to be conceived in a theoretical or a-historical dimension similar to the ivory tower of 19th century exoticists?

To a certain extent, Barthes admits this option which he places in the context of private desire and had already

pointed out in Mythologies as a yielding to temptation resulting from the mythologist's solitude:

Je dois dire que cet assai [L'empire des signes] se situe à un moment où j'ai éprouvé le désir d'entrer entièrement dans le signifiant, c'est à dire de décrocher de l'instance idéologique comme signifié (Le grain de la voix, 217).

About his "censoring" (the interviewer's word) the "frantic, hyperindustrialized," "modern," "contemporary," "real" Japan from L'empire des signes, Barthes acquiesces and adds:

"C'est le début du décrochage qui s'est accentué dans Le plaisir du texte (Le grain de la voix, 217).

We seem to be left with a Barthes who yields to the impossibility of demystifying language, or de-exoticizing the foreign as subject matter, if language itself is to be the means of the operation, and, as a result, immerses himself in individual "bliss," whether "le corps" or the text as continuous "vacillation" or flux, eternally aiming at a world to come:

It is this experience of writing as deconstruction, as decentering, that I was trying to read next to the difficult discourse of Derridean grammatology, a discourse that might be defined as utopian in that it aims at a beyond (of metaphysics) which is never realized except in the negative image of destruction (Le grain de la voix,)

Are we to arrive at the conclusion that, even in considering his own inclinations and the post-modern context in which he operates, Barthes' writing "about" Japan is essentially a re-enactment or continuation of "classic" exoticism? Some of the figures and methods used in

L'empire des signes seem to warrant this conclusion: the reduction of Japan to a few essential "traits," the "estheticizing" or "formalizing" of the "real" Japan, etc.

Yet these are in turn undone by his own indications and gropings within the text: the repeated denials of having "photographed" Japan, the repeated affirmations of an absence of Center, the constant pointing to the inadequacy of (Western) language, its incapacity to "render" otherness without reintroducing its own myths and its own hierarchy of power, all contributing to the creation of a continuous fragmentation and erasure of language that cannot be accommodated by exoticism.

Barthes' own response has already been formulated elsewhere; his conclusion, while distancing him from the "Classics" and the Romantics, does place him in the tradition of those who, starting with Rousseau, and continuing with Beckett, situate themselves in uncertain territory, outside of the stable terrain where the Center is claimed to lie, and somewhere in the periphery: having left Eldorado, or having fallen from utopia, but not having returned Home and opting, instead, for Candide's garden:

Il est trop tard pour garder le texte comme un fétiche, à la façon des classiques et des romantiques; is est déjà trop tard pour couper ce texte fétiche avec le couteau du savoir castrateur, comme le font les scientifiques, les positivistes, et parfois les marxistes; il est encore trop tôt pour couper la coupure, barrer le savoir, sans que cela apparaisse comme une seconde castration, une castration de la castration. Nous

en sommes là; il nous faut vivre dans
l'inhabitable ("Sur S/Z et L'empire des signes,
86)

CHAPTER V: NAIPAUL

There was imagination in the carpets and curtains, in the pictures and books, in the garden behind the house, where certain old brown walls were muffled in creepers that appeared to me to have been copied from a masterpiece of one of the Pre-Raphaelites. That was the way many things struck me at that time in England--as reproductions of something that existed primarily in art or literature. It was not the picture, the poem, the fictive page, that seemed to me a copy; these things were the originals. . .

Henry James, "The Author of Beltraffio."

My disappointment was the disappointment one momentarily feels when, after reading of the house at Combray, we see the photographs of the house at Illiers. The vision is correct; but it is a child's myth creating vision. No city or landscape is truly real; unless it has been given the quality of myth by writer, painter or by its association with great events. Simla will never cease to be Kipling's city: a child's vision of Home, doubly a fairyland. India distorts and enlarges.

V. S. Naipaul, An Area of Darkness.

I had hated the sun and the unchanging seasons. I had believed that the foliage had no variety and could never understand why the word "tropical" held romance for so many. . . . Everyone has to learn to see the West Indies tropics for himself. The landscape has never been recorded.

V. S. Naipaul, The Overcrowded Barracoon.

The frontiers are actual. It is possible with a model globe and a free afternoon to sketch the geography of the exotic. Isn't it a large rectangle on the other side of the earth, with lines running from Samarkand south to Africa and the east through Peking to the Pacific? It is Persia and Egypt, Arabia and Burma, Central Asia and the Tropics. Its capital--and its geographical center--is Shangri-la. The cruellest irony is that most of these lands comprise what is commonly known today as the Third World, but nothing is more valuable than irony in suggesting that the exotic is partly illusion.

Paul Theroux, "The Exotic View."

INTRODUCTION: EXOTICISM IN CRISIS?

It isn't easy for the exotic writer to get his work accepted as being more than something exotic, something to be judged on its own merits. The very originality of the material makes the work suspect (The Overcrowded Barracoon).

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul's work does not seem to belong in a progression that begins in the Renaissance with Montaigne's "Des cannibales," continues in the Enlightenment and the 19th century with Diderot's Supplément au voyage de Bougainville and Flaubert's Salammbô, to emerge in modernity with Roland Barthes' L'Empire des signes. Naipaul and his work do not belong because they seem to disrupt a smooth, homogeneous pattern: the representation of the exotic in a European and, more specifically, French, tradition, from the literal appearance of the exotic in the "age of exploration and discovery" to the contemporary period.

In fact, rather than a disruption, Naipaul's work is the culmination of a succession of breaks in the apparently ordered and repeated pattern of Western-writer-representing-the-exotic-for-a-Western-audience: his own aberrance is already announced by Montaigne's withdrawal and difference, whether his retreat into his tower or his desire to reveal himself "totally naked like those cannibals of Brazil," Diderot's chameleon-philosopher who is "French at home and Tahitian abroad," Flaubert's longing for the Orient and Carthage, away from the "suffocating narrowness" of his contemporaries, or Barthes' "nausea" when facing his own culture, and the resulting individual and hedonistic

immersion into the (Japanese) "empire of signs." The boundary between Western and exotic is blurred as the Western self representing the exotic is also creating his (exotic) difference from his own culture, from the Center. Naipaul's own "ready-(and twice)-made difference" (the "East-Indian" born in the "West Indies") easily inscribes him in this pattern of disruption.

There is, however, a persisting divergence, and a factor that makes his work a culmination rather than just one more disruption in a series of disruptions: his difference is given, whereas the others, from Montaigne to Barthes choose and actively elaborate a withdrawal and a difference from a tradition that, whether they accept it or not, is theirs at the outset. In other words, Naipaul's own exotic difference imposes an a priori distance that informs his representation of the exotic. The elements of identity and self, of language and tradition, given from Montaigne to Barthes, even if only to be later denied or dismantled, are, in Naipaul's case, already in crisis:

The writing of books, the publishing of books, may be taken for granted by people who belong to a society in which those activities are part of the social routine. . . . But I don't spring out of this kind of society and that is why I have felt that I am floating in a vacuum. I am an oddity, and have always felt that I was an oddity, since I have always been writing. . . . I am an exotic to people who read my work. . . (Salmagundi,⁵ My italics).

With the inclusion of Naipaul in the Montaigne-Barthes tradition, the word exoticism itself is, yet one more time,

uprooted from its traditionally accepted context (19th century Europe); but this time, the displacement is effected from the vantage point of an undefined identity, from a "vacuum." "Exoticism" requires the presence of a grounded identity for whom there is a recognizable "rest," identifiable as "what is not me," what is "other," what is "exotic." The stable ground in the Montaigne-Barthes tradition is present; it is the Western cultural and technological infrastructure that provides the vantage point from which (exotic) difference is perceived. To designate the non-Western as exotic is thus to work from the givens of a Western tradition, even if, at some ulterior stage and through some sort of empathetic leap, whether altruistic, naive, hedonistic, revolutionary, iconoclastic, solipsistic, or adventurous, the Western self merges with the exotic. But when Naipaul, in the context of the present "theory of exoticism," uses "exotic," the usual coordinates, already shaken-up in the Montaigne-Barthes spectrum, are obliterated because of the absence of stable ground from which the concept is invested with a priori meaning.

In the statement quoted above (in particular: "I am an exotic to those who read me"), this break is not yet explicit: "exotic," in Naipaul's usage, still conforms to the paradigm postulated in the present "theory of exoticism," at least up to this point: viewed from the (Western) Center, in this instance the reading public he

refers to, Naipaul is a peripheral exotic, and this is the sense in which he uses the word here. His use of the word to qualify Trinidad, his place of birth, conforms to the same scheme: "I didn't really belong in the exotic world I was born into and felt I had to write about. That life I wrote about in Biswas couldn't be the true nature of my life because I hadn't grown up in it feeling that it was mine (Salmagundi, 8; my italics). To refer to Trinidad and to Naipaul as "exotic," as is the case here, is to remain within the bounds of the exotic = non-Western construct central to our working definition, up to this point. Nevertheless, the fact that Naipaul uses it does already strain the assumption, leading to the following question, among others: is what is exotic to the exotic the same as what is exotic to me? The answer is problematic.

The next step makes the distinction even more problematic and simultaneously introduces the creation of Naipaul's "vacuum:" the disappearance of solid ground. The following statement, from The Middle Passage (1962) and The Overcrowded Barracoon (1972) both deal with being an East-Indian in the West Indies and are centered around the word "exotic:"

[In Trinidad] The Negro makes less effort than the average English person to pronounce Indian names. This is partly because of the attitude that nothing which is not white is worth bothering about; partly because Indians are difficult to know; and partly because so many Indians have been modernizing themselves at such a rate that Indian customs have come to be regarded as things out of which people

grow. So although Indians make up more than one third of the population, their customs and ceremonies remain quaint and even exotic (Middle Passage, 81; my italics).

The second, like the first statement, emphasizes the "exoticization" of the Indian in Trinidad (of the exotic in the exotic) but also adds the dimension of a disappeared origin, a vanished homeland (India):

The holy city of Benares is far away, but the young Hindu at his initiation ceremony in Port of Spain will still take up his staff and beggar's bowl and say that he is off to Benares to study. His relatives will plead with him, and in the end he will lay down his staff, and there will be a ritual expression of relief. It is the play of a people who have been cut-off. To be an Indian from Trinidad, then, is to be unlikely and exotic. It is also to be a little fraudulent (Barracoon, 35).¹

Two things happen at once. First, the rug is pulled from under Naipaul's feet: for him there is no stable and nurturing topos--neither India, nor Trinidad nor the West; and, if we add his own decision, like Joyce's Daedalus, to withdraw from (what is left of) family and clan in the midst of exotic Trinidad, his "vacuum" becomes ever more evident. Secondly, and simultaneously, "exotic" is decontextualized

¹The acute awareness of being "exotic" in Trinidad is also evident in Naipaul's fiction. In A House for Mr. Biswas, for example:

[About talk concerning moving to another city in Trinidad] Mr. Biswas didn't take such talk seriously. . . . And he could not imagine the Tulsis anywhere except at Arwacas. Separate from their house and lands, they would be separate from the laborers, tenants and friends who respected them for their piety and the memory of Pundit Tulsi; their Hindu status would be worthless and, as had happened during their descent on the house in Port of Spain, they would only be exotic (390).

in a rather paradoxical manner: it becomes at once generic and historically grounded. While "exotic" is no longer necessarily defined from within a given and unique set of conditions, since we now see it used "from without," applied "elsewhere," this revealed possibility of multiple applications also unveils "exotic" in a specifically historical context where power creates meaning (the épistèmè of "exotic" is revealed).

The comparison of Naipaul to Daedalus (or to Joyce) is a particularly enlightening one in this instance because, precisely, of its limitations. It displays not only the similarity between Naipaul's relation to "exotic" and that of a Western figure, but also the limits of this similarity, the point where the parallel stops and something breaks. It is a comparison that Naipaul himself makes and which he begins by quoting Joyce:

James Joyce wrote of the difficulty for him--or his hero--of the English language. "That language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. My soul frets in the shadow of his language" (New York Review, 7).

We could replace "home, Christ, ale," etc. by exotic and still remain within the tradition of the comparison; but, Naipaul adds:

James Joyce was an experimenter in pure form--form divorced from content. And the James Joyce point about language is not the point I am making. I never felt that problem with the English language--language as language. The point that worried me was on of vocabulary, of the differing meanings or

associations of words. Garden, house, plantation, gardener, estate: these words mean one thing in England and mean something quite different to the man from Trinidad, an agricultural colony settled for the purpose of plantation agriculture.

The crucial difference between Naipaul and the other writers in the series is that, for him, language cannot be a problematics of "pure form" (exoticism can be perceived as a play of opulent surfaces), but is, instead, irremediably connected to history and geography. Whether or not we agree with Naipaul's interpretation of Joyce's concern and, further, choose not to explore, among other possibilities, Barthes' idea of history itself being "just one more form," we are left with Naipaul's own idea of what constitutes a crucial difference and his dilemma: his relation to language (English) is different from that of others whose relation to the language is not just his own but who nevertheless make-up his audience: "how then could I write honestly or fairly if the very words I used with my private meanings for me, were yet for the reader outside shot through with the associations of the older literature?" (TLS, 1). In Naipaul's case the problematics of exoticism becomes simultaneously a problematics of language, history, and self-knowledge; since he and his writing do not start from a tradition: "I felt that truly to render what I saw, I had to define myself as writer or narrator; I had to reinterpret things. I have tried to do this in different ways throughout my career" (TLS, 7).

Naipaul's nonfiction is the particular aspect of his career that I propose to examine. The works involved range from The Middle Passage (1962), the first of his travel books, to The Enigma of Arrival (1986), his last work to date, curiously labelled a "novel."

Between Naipaul's first travel book, in which he "takes refuge in satire. . ." because his material ". . . had not sufficiently hallowed by a tradition. . . [because] some embarrassment remained" (Overcrowded Barracoon, 26) to The Enigma of Arrival ". . . in which at last [he has] managed to integrate this business of reinterpreting within [his] narrative (New York Review, 7), there is an evolution: the (writing) identity takes shape in the space of travel (and writing) constituted by an area that shifts from "colonial world" to "Third World." To investigate this process in the context of a "theory of exoticism" is to put the concept of exoticism itself in crisis; it is being (re-)defined as Naipaul's relation to his writing and to his material evolves. Exoticism "means something," but this placing of Naipaul and his work shows that that "something" shifts, that language, like geography and history is fabricated.

A Western writer could well have written the following comment (written by Naipaul about a visit to Indonesia):

At Bandung, of the famous post-colonial conference of 1955. . . we had to ask our way, street by street almost to the Institute [of Technology] and the mosque. It was in the older, colonial part of the town: impressions, in the darkness and lamplight, of wide, silent streets, houses set back, and of a big

administrative building in whose carved roof Java had become only an architectural motif, a piece of Dutch colonial exoticism (Among the Believers, 339).

The same observation, written by a Western writer would also expose the historical or relative dimensions of exoticism (the far from neutral or innocent juxtaposition of "exoticism" and "colonial" would be enough), but the difference (and the break) is that it is written by an identity whose very presence (the very presence of whose text) is, in the process of its own discovery and affirmation, also dismantling what it is commenting on. When the exotic speaks from the Center, no longer the textual product of that Center (The Cannibal, the Persian, the Tahitian, the Zen Master, etc.) The coordinates of language and geography are scrambled, exoticism is in crisis. Naipaul in Wiltshire:

I felt that my presence in that old valley was part of something like an upheaval, a change in the course of the history of the country. . . . Jack himself [the "Westerner"], I considered to be part of the view: I saw his life as genuine, rooted, fitting: man fitting the landscape. I now saw him as a remnant of the past (the undoing of which my own presence portended) (Enigma, 15).

We could be reading a passage from so many seminal or classic texts of (Western) exoticism--from Herodotus to Columbus, from Rousseau to Levi-Strauss--in which the exotic appears or what is connected, "fitting," part of an age-old symbiosis with time and landscape, part of a peace and equilibrium about to be broken by the intrusion of a foreign, powerful presence. Only in this case we seem to

have gone full circle: the exotic presence augurs the crumbling of a central, Western order.

Does this inversion of the poles in the dialectics of exoticism radically alter its mechanism and its productions? Does Naipaul's presence and work render a classic exoticism (the West as central and familiar) impossible, much in the same way it could be asked whether post-modern linguistic self-consciousness and self-referentiality preempts exoticism as a lyrical manifestation of language?¹ Or does Naipaul, Facing his own lack, his essential foreignness in a world ruled by the Western order (at least on the level of power, which for many is the one that "counts") in fact duplicate and perpetuate the (old) pattern of exoticism? Does his discovery of flux and disorder lead to a desire for origin and stability, even a nostalgia for empire?

Through usage of "exotic" in a Naipaulian context, the following statements display the tensions inherent to this congeries of questions and offer the beginnings of an answer.

About Miguel Street, Naipaul's first fiction, Charles Michener writes in an issue of Newsweek on whose cover Naipaul is touted as "the greatest living writer in the English language: "Naipaul's great gift, present at the beginning, is to sound utterly unworked: the characters are -----

¹See Chapter 4 on Barthes' L'empire des signes.

exotic [my italics] but there is no sense of quaintness" (Michener's italics; Newsweek, 108).

About Naipaul's latest travel book, Among the Believers, Edward Saïd writes in an article entitled "Bitter Dispatches from the Third World:" "But he [Naipaul] adds: ". . .for the colonial there can be no true return.' Nevertheless, there was plenty to explore in the interim, the quite literal space between lost origin and present scene; hence the exotic fun, the sensitive embarrassments, the odd fantasy of characters." (The Nation, 11; my italics).

CENTER OR PERIPHERY?

The use of "Center" and "Periphery" to designate industrialized and developing countries respectively first appears in a text written by an Egyptian economist in the 1970s.¹ This coinage is meant to reflect the respective dominant and subservient positions of the West and the "Third World" (another term coined by an economist²) in an economic configuration in which the conceptualization and manufacturing of products (especially software) is localized in a specific and restrained area while the rest of the world essentially consumes and "mimics" (a Naipaulian word), far from the true locus of production, far from the Center.

¹Samir Amin, Le Développement inégal, 1972

²The Frenchman Alfred Sauvy who first used in the 1950s.

Naipaul's own use of this terminology not only covers its economic implications but takes on additional dimensions: the products are present but also become emblems of a deeply felt lack and of a romantic yearning. About a type of advertisement found in Trinidad during his childhood and adolescence, Naipaul writes: "These enameled tin advertisements were used sometimes as building material. . . . So I was used to living in a world where the signs were without meaning, or without the meaning intended by the makers. . . . In Trinidad, feeling myself far away, I had held myself back for life at the center of things (Enigma, 130).¹ In the exotic periphery things are not what they are supposed to be, only a simulacrum, a word which, in this particular context designates uncharacteristically concrete conditions, and whose origin in Platonic philosophy is reflected in Naipaul's poignant evaluation of his education:

[He is newly arrived in New York, on his way to London, out of Trinidad for the first time, and looking at an advertisement for a French film playing in New York] I had never seen a French film in my life. . . . So much of my education had been like that, abstract, a test of memory: like a man

¹Being "in a vacuum" in the Center is also to remain "peripheral" in it:

I am aware that it is nearly impossible for me to have the great pleasure of a direct response from an audience. . . . By the nature of one's situation one is really writing in a vacuum. I couldn't have become a writer without London: the whole physical apparatus enables a man to make a living. London is my metropolitan center; it is my commercial center; and yet I know that it is a kind of limbo and that I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral (Critical Perspectives, 41).

denied the chance of visiting famous cities, learning their street maps instead (Enigma, 116).

Because he perceives his position as being far from "the center of things," Naipaul's desire and intellectual energy are directed to the outside, to the origin of production, economic or otherwise, whether French films, enameled signs, or the products they advertise, otherwise he would be functioning in a world--Trinidad--which, in his eyes, is inadequate, incomplete. Because Trinidad is nevertheless all he has at that point, what comes from the outside is inevitably processed through the Trinidadian context, otherwise he would not even be able to function. This is the limit of his own world: a recognized necessity--it is there, it is his--but also a world that is not validated ("hallowed," in the Naipaulian terminology) by the strength of original productions, or, which is the same, a tradition (industrial or literary) of production.¹ For Naipaul, at this stage, Trinidad cannot be material for writing, only the (unavoidable) processing chamber of material (economic or cultural products) from the outside:

I might adapt Dickens to Trinidad; but it seemed impossible that the life I knew in Trinidad could ever be turned into a book. If landscapes do not start to be real until they have been interpreted by an artist, so, until they have been written about,

¹Naipaul's notorious statement on history and the West Indies also supports this interpretation: "The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built on achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (Middle Passage, 29).

societies appear to be without shape and embarrassing. It was embarrassing to be reminded by a Dickens illustration of the absurdity of my adaptations; it was equally embarrassing to write about what I saw. Very little of what I read was of help. It would have been possible to assume the sensibility of a particular writer. But. . . the vision was alien; it diminished my own and it did not give me the courage to do a simple thing like mentioning the name of a Port-of-Spain street (Overcrowded Barracoon, 25).

The center lies outside. Trinidad itself cannot (by definition) be made to endorse the attributes of centrality; its own intrinsic peripheralness cancels this possibility. Naipaul cannot write about the Periphery because it is not yet consecrated by a writing tradition. Trinidad is not yet written about: like economic underdevelopment, a vicious circle, until something breaks the pattern. At this stage, however, Naipaul is not ready to attempt this and can only deal with his dilemma through fantasy, a relinquishing or denial of history and geography which, ironically, makes his own concepts imitations themselves:

The wish to be a writer didn't go with a wish or a need to actually write. It went only with the idea I had been given of the writer, a fantasy of nobility. It was something that lay ahead, and outside of the life I knew--for from family, clan, city, colony. . . (Finding the Center, 32).

This vision/version of the "writer" offers not only the means to jettison the determining (or: "crippling," in another, and perhaps equally valid interpretation) weight imposed by a particular time and geography; it also offers the (assumed) possibility of seeing the whole world (not only a "peripheral" portion of it) as the scene of the

"writer"'s romantic peregrinations. The world can be perceived as a collection of fragments to be made to signify in a "vision," detached from the vicissitudes of history, that is, to a great extent, exoticized. Trinidad is peripheral, but, as a result of that status, it is also static, isolated, and being devoid of standards of comparisons, does not sanction:

To be a colonial was to know a kind of security; it was to inhabit a fixed world. And I suppose that in my fantasy I had seen myself coming to England as to some purely literary region, where, untrammelled by the accidents of history or background, I could make a romantic career for myself as a writer (The Return of Eva Perón, 5).

Leaving the Periphery thus becomes a prerequisite to becoming a writer, and being a writer is equated with the possibility of inhabiting a "purely literary region" in which the idea (and process) of literature itself is already an established one. The leaving itself to become a writer, to be "away from home and friends, to learn what the heart is and what it feels (Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 253), the leaving itself would not put Naipaul in a self-deceiving situation. After all, it is a consecrated, "hallowed" move, a trope, even sometimes the basic material of a genre (the bildungsroman); but, precisely, these are conventions that have evolved out of tradition that is not Naipaul's and, there, he faces the limits of his romantic image through the "accidents" of geography, history, economics; thus, his difference becomes manifest: he cannot partake:

In an unlikely way, the ideas of the aesthetic movement of the end of the Nineteenth Century and the ideas of Bloomsbury, ideas bred essentially out of empire, wealth and imperial security, had been transmitted to me in Trinidad [through his "abstract education"]. To be that kind of writer (as I interpret it) I had to be false; I had to pretend to be other than I was, other than my background could be. Concealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing personality, I did both my material and my self great damage (Enigma, 146).

The writer from the Periphery cannot act upon the (abstractly) learned, the borrowed, the second-hand even; where the writer from the Center can rely on the security produced by affiliation to a complex support-system steeped in tradition and glide over the surface of a planet made safe and smooth by power Naipaul finds lack, limits, inadequacy. Colloquially but appropriately: you can take Naipaul out of Trinidad but you can't take Trinidad out of Naipaul. Just as Montaigne or Diderot discover that, ultimately they are of the Center, Naipaul confronts his own foreignness (his own "exoticness") in the Center he is attempting to appropriate for himself. In the process, he loses the possibility of an (exotic) other place; not only is there no gain, there is a loss:

And something else occurred in those early days, the first days of arrival [in England]. I lost a faculty that had been part of me and precious to me for years. I lost the gift of fantasy, the dream of the future, the far-off place where I was going. . . Now in the place that for all those years had been the "elsewhere," no further dream was possible (Enigma, 134).

Subsequently, there is an attempt to at least recover the possibility of a Romantic topos by re-appropriating the

Periphery that had been left behind. Naipaul's The Loss of El Dorado (1969) is an attempt to "reinststate" Trinidad/the Periphery in a tradition, to make it something "hallowed," something that has been part of a (writing and historical or cultural) tradition. Returning to Trinidad, at one point, is perceived as the possibility of relinquishing the dream of England (gone sour), of functioning in a hallowed Periphery. The expectation: Trinidad as a world made safe for romanticism. The reality:

Trinidad to which I had gone back with a vision of romance, and had found black men with threatening hair [the Rastafarians, among others, whose own "other place" is not England, but Africa. . .] I found an island full of racial tensions and close to revolution. So as soon as I had arrived at a new idea about the place, it had ceased to be mine. Through writing I had arrived at a new idea of myself and the world. But the world had not stood still (Enigma, 171).

There is nowhere to run. Naipaul' attempt at defining a new identity for himself was, as the cliché goes, "doomed from the start" because, like Roche, in Guerrillas, he was, as the cliché goes, "building [his] life on sand" (99). The return to England is more specifically a return to London, the Western metropolis becomes the a-topos, the scene of Naipaul's "vacuum:"

I came to London. It had become the center of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost. London was not the center of my world. I had been misled; but there was nowhere else to go. It was a good place for getting lost in, a city no one ever knew. . . All mythical lands faded, out in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known. I became my flat, my desk, my name (An Area of Darkness, 45).

There is no longer any question of endorsing or appropriating Center or Periphery: the Self is stripped to the bare essentials (analogous to a Cartesian or even Husserlian process of reduction in order to begin anew). The point of departure is no longer affiliation to a greater entity, cultural, economic, or otherwise but instead, self-elaboration from "the bottom up," from a smaller base than England, Trinidad, clan, or family.

Speaking at a symposium at the university of the West Indies, "East Asians in the Caribbean" Naipaul, having returned from the illusion of a secure or romantic place for himself insists on the affinity between speaking from the outside and self-questioning:

It might appear that I am saying that our [East Asian-Caribbean] approach to our ancestral culture has to be the approach of a stranger. And this is to a certain extent true. I don't think any other approach is possible. But it doesn't lessen the importance of the attempt to understand. It may be, of course, that I speak as a writer and what the basis of my work is, . . . I would say I begin with myself: this man, this language, this island, this background, this school, this time. I begin from all that and I try to investigate it, I try to understand it. I try to arrive at some degree of self-knowledge, and it is the kind of knowledge that cannot deny any aspect of the truth (7).

Naipaul abandons any attempt to assume a Center-linked identity, but does not (re-) immerse himself in the security of an ancestral world or at least one that would be conditioned by a tradition. Both of these options were in fact never available without a price; one required self-

deceit, the other a world that simply does not exist for him: the West cannot be his unless he becomes "false" (and even then. . .), and India, the origin, the fullness, was left behind by ancestors who had come to Trinidad as indentured laborers (a particular aspect of the immense migratory upheavals caused, in part at least, by "empire").

All that is left is the attempt to understand the resulting void, the "vacuum," and the refusal to fall back on alternate and deceptive options. The acknowledging of history, however, cannot become, in Naipaul's case, the basis for political action, nor can the refusal to speak for a particular clan or culture lead to a total disappearance of identity ("distinguishing marks," in the language of bureaucracy) camouflaged as "cosmopolitanism":

The last thing that self-knowledge should do is make us provincial or narrow. That is as futile as the man who says--out of despair, defeat, and usually ignorance--that he is a citizen of the world. This is the cry of a man who has dropped out, who can't face the present and can't face his position in the world. I don't think that understanding one's self, the strands of one's background, brings about tangible gains. I don't think it changes one's position in the world the slightest. I know we are all to some extent political beings. Our position in the world depends on the wealth of our countries, the passports we have, the countries we are from, all the standard things. The self-knowledge of which I speak is not meant as a kind of political assertion. I think if it becomes that it is corrupting. It is a misuse of the mind (7).

All that is left, then is a becoming. The identity Naipaul arrives at is a precarious one and leads to nothing

but its own pursuit. Self-awareness becomes a project unto itself.

As we have seen even this fragmented self is arrived at through a progressive acceptance of socio-historical and geographical coordinates: the romantic idea of "writer" could only exist in vision that ignores these coordinates.

THE "THIRD WORLD:" MIRROR OR MATERIAL

The only acceptable material is, in this romantic configuration, already hallowed. This cannot be the case for Naipaul, and the writer he becomes, at least according to him, is one who accepts this fact as unavoidable: "So the past for me--as colonial and writer--was full of shame and mortifications. Yet as a writer I could train myself to face them. Indeed they become my subjects (Enigma, 245).

However, Naipaul's "subjects," which he refers to here as his "shame and mortifications," are only one aspect of his subject: rather than his subjects, it would be more exact to say that they are what leads him to and informs his subject. There is a relation between Naipaul's own project of self-examination and his material, but they are not one and the same thing: the concern remains to reach some form of self-knowledge but the material itself is what is today called the "Third World," Naipaul's own "half-made" status and his ensuing search is reflected in that historico-geographical entity's own "half-made" condition. The

security and status he at first attempts to achieve were "built on sand" and, to a certain extent, this in itself becomes "material," but the "Third World" and its own particularities reflect his own realization of inadequacy (an attempt to build on sand), and become his material:

But in the new world I felt [the] ground move below me. The new politics, the curious reliance of men on institutions they were yet working to undermine, the simplicity of belief and the hidden simplicity of actions, the corruption of causes, half-made societies that seemed doomed to remain half-made: these were the things that began to preoccupy me. They were not things from which I could detach myself ("A New King for the Congo," in The Return of Eva Perón, 233).

The journalistic labels that turn Naipaul into the "bard of disenchantment" or the "interpreter of the maelstrom of the Third World" concentrate on the fact that his work is "about" the Third World, is set in it, but fail to render the affinity of his material with his own needs, his personal problematics. Naipaul himself repeatedly acknowledges this link in all of his non-fiction. For example, this statement from The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro, set in the Ivory Coast:

I travel to discover other states of mind. And if for this intellectual adventure I go to places where people live restricted lives, it is because my curiosity is still dictated in part by my colonial Trinidad background. I go to places which, however alien, connect in some way with what I already know (90).

However "alien" those outpost that map out Naipaul's itinerary in the Periphery, they cannot be exotic to him: he has already been there; not like Conrad, about whom Naipaul

writes that he "has already been there before [Naipaul]," but like one whose familiarity and viewpoint stem from having actually belonged (culturally, geographically, etc.). Naipaul already knows the "exotic" and he has already, at this stage, relinquished the "alien vision" which is essential to the exoticizing gaze.

However, the affinity itself that, on one level, blocks the exoticizing mode for Naipaul, emerges on a different problem: how to keep a certain distance vis-a-vis something that, by very reason of its affinity, beckons the traveler, implicates (or attempts to implicate) him in a kind of complicity. The demands of self-knowledge which led Naipaul to the Third World as material now produce a different set of questions: who is speaking? To whom? About what? The answers, clearly given in classic exoticism (especially its colonial variant), reappear with new implications:

When it came to the writing I was uncertain to the value I should give to the traveler's "I." This point of direct participation came awkwardly to me, and the literary problem was partly a personal one. In 1960 I was still a colonial, traveling to far-off places that were still colonies, in a world still more or less ruled by colonial ideas. In Surinam, in 1961, in a banana plantation. . . the Indian official who--with a Dutch official in attendance--was showing me around broke off to say in a semiconspirational way, "You are the first one of us to come out on a mission like this ("Author's foreword," in Finding the Center, X).

Here, Naipaul is positioned in a definite historical context--a "colonial traveling in a colonial world" in the

early 1960s. This would seem to imply a post-colonial world in which the components of the problem have evolved. For Naipaul, they have not: the affinity and the implications are essentially the same. In Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey (1981) the scene is no longer "colonial" Surinam but "post-colonial" Alexandria, yet the relation Naipaul - "material" is still the same. In Alexandria, Naipaul sees

. . . reminders of imperialisms that had withdrawn . . . in the sad whispering of the French hairdresser that French perfumes could no longer be obtained and that one had to make do with heavy Egyptian scents; in the disparaging references of the Lebanese businessmen to "natives," all of whom he distrusted except for his assistant who quietly to me spoke of the day when all the Lebanese and Europeans would be driven out of the country (14; my italics).

Even if Naipaul had decided to be "false," to adopt an "alien" (Western) vision, his own "material"--which is not only his own "past shame and mortification," but, also and foremost, the Third World--his own "material" would have made it impossible, or at least ludicrous, for him to function as the romantic, exoticizing, Western writer (at least one version of the Western writer).

Naipaul is inevitably (objectively) and relentlessly (subjectively, by choice) outside, different, whether in the Center or the Periphery. Travel becomes a way of life, the means of oscillating between one and the other. Naipaul, the constantly mobile subject, is neither buoyed by the security of the Center (many argue that he is) nor

participating in the Periphery's claims. The Naipaul who had attempted to enter the heart of Empire but found only the vestiges of a former grandeur, that is, the Naipaul, who had attempted to become the romanticized Western writer through his use of the Third World as material now writes about his difference from that type of writer through his use of the Third World as material. Driving through Wiltshire "where he mostly lives and writes," Naipaul says to his interlocutor, an American journalist:

I have to travel. Unless my imagination can be released from all these familiar deadening scenes, I will go stale. My travel is so different from that of Graham Greene and others. They're travelers in a world made safe for them by empire. They write books in which they can imagine the Europeanness of their characters against the native background. The primary difference between my travel and theirs is that while they travel for the picturesque, I'm desperately concerned about the country I'm in. [But what is to be done about the inhabitants of the Periphery?] Nothing! There's nothing to be done. Except we must not romanticize them (Newsweek, 109).

Naipaul cannot be Greene or Hemingway.¹ He is claimed by the Periphery qua subject in a way they are not. Because of who he is--the specifics of his own identity--and of the way he has arrived at who he is--a reluctance and refusal to accept certain coordinates, ultimately replaced by acknowledgement, albeit from a "vacuum"--he does not possess the attributes of security that make exoticizing possible

¹Naipaul often uses Hemingway in his definition of what he calls the "imperialist period novel:" ". . . The novel written by Hemingway or someone like that who always has the right passport and continues to pretend that it doesn't matter" (Salmagundi, 8).

(inevitable, even). To romanticize the non-Western, which, in the present context, becomes a variant of exoticism, is to detach it from a historical network. Only luxuriating in its own (assumed) security and the knowledge of its own position as withholder of power or as subject of a powerful realm can the self romanticize the Periphery. According to Naipaul, this "romanticism." which he calls "doctrinaire romanticism,"

. . . begins by sympathizing with the oppressed and ends by exalting their values. It solves differences between classes, races, continents by denying that these differences are important. "A man is a man." It is the tidy attitude. It would civilize Africans simply by denying that they are primitive;¹ it would remove untouchability in India simply by denying that untouchability has any rational basis. But we reject this attitude when, in Kenya, we see naked young savages, chalked white after some ceremony of the forest, prancing beside the highway, as though the world were still all bush. We reject the attitude when, in India, we see that the untouchables' main function is the removal of excrement in wicker baskets (Barracoon, 37).

Again, Naipaul places himself outside both Center and Periphery: his own outsideness takes him beyond a certain Western liberalism (an equivalent of "doctrinaire romanticism?") that, lodged in the space of its own security,

¹"Primitive" as Naipaul uses it--this is at least his explanation to detractors of this usage--is a generic term in the sense that it is not to be applied exclusively to the non-Western. "It isn't only Africans who are bow-and-arrow people, it's so many people here, living at a very high material level, who have allowed their mind to go slack. The English bourgeoisie are mimicking their former roles. They express their soul by the color of their walls. They put dreadful pictures on their walls and stagger them (Newsweek, 112).

can accommodate the exotic voice, "exalt" it even. What some have called Naipaul's "bitterness" (Saïd) and "castration" (Laming) could also be perceived as his own frustration and despair when confronting a world that remains exotic to the Center. His "bitterness" could also be the nostalgia of one who was not able to achieve a romantic image of the writer and, as a result, castigates all the more fiercely the shortcomings of that previously yearned-for and now (ostensibly) scorned identity. Whatever the case--whether one sees the origin of his stance in bitterness and disappointment, in his own lack, or in the integral refusal to accept "slackness," in India or England, Argentina or France, Naipaul is in a privileged position to see. Paradoxically, this privilege is to be in a position of insecurity, which is only an aspect of being outside. From his outsideness, then, he is strategically placed to see, like one untouched by the effects of a generalized daze. Those who have a "solid" identity and in whose midst he sometimes operates can afford (in more than one sense of the word) to not see, and to have the Other as exotic and play the game of exposing themselves.

In The Killings in Trinidad, the text in his non-fiction perhaps most marked by a virulent "anti-exoticism," Naipaul concentrates on Malik, alias Michael X, a Trinidadian "radical" who had become as Naipaul sees it, the

darling of London, is misled and ultimately abandoned by the same people:

England made things easy for Malik. But England in the end undid him. . . he failed to understand that section of the middle class that knows only that it is secure, has no views, only reflexes and scattered irritations, and sometimes indulges in play: the people who keep up with "revolution" as with the theatre, the revolutionaries who visit centers of revolution, but with return air tickets, the people for whom Malik's kind of black power was an exotic but safe brothel (31; my italics).

Exoticism and security are linked in a dialectics of reinforcement. The "play" Naipaul refers to can only be practiced by a Self firmly convinced of its own invincibility. When this proves to be illusory (an English woman is killed in Trinidad by Malik and some of his followers) Naipaul sees a corroboration of his refusal to either "romanticize" the non-Western or to assume the certainty of any form of identity. The brutal killing of the English woman in the Caribbean island (the Center fully exposed in the Periphery) is the end of the road of a certain type of exoticism: the tropical luxuriance of early Romantic exoticism and the sexual fantasy of Romantic Orientalism (Malik's fictional counterpart in Naipaul's Guerrillas is both black and Chinese) are negated by the sudden irruption of history as violence. Further, to the straightforward account of the killing and of its circumstances, Naipaul adds, on a different but consistently maintained tone, a more "abstract" commentary that accompanies the "journalistic" and documented like a moral

pronouncement: "She [the woman who is killed] took, on her journey away from home, the assumptions, however little acknowledged, not only of her class and race and the rich countries to which she belonged, but also of her ultimate security" (75). The spare quality of the description and the second level of commentary that accompanies it are antagonistic to exoticism because, together, they form a style that cannot accommodate the lyricism it requires: the exoticizing gaze perceives phenomena in surfaces and frames (color, texture; luxuriance and order) or as depth (metaphysical longing for a-historical space), and the exoticizing text reflects this mode of perception in its lyricism and copiousness. The Self that produces this lyricism can be narratively present in the text; this is the Romantic mode: the Self is inflated to its limits (mountains, oceans, forests are areas of predilection) in an effort to intake or partake of the Absolute, the All (metaphysical longing) and the "I" is textually present.

On another register, the Self takes on the attributes of objective, all-seeing eye: its subjective perception becomes unmediated Perception: the multiplicity and relative status of individual perceptions are replaced by ordered frames and surfaces that seem to come from nowhere, validated by their sole presence; the specific, individualized Self seems to be only the means of an objective perception (like the epic bard, only the medium

through whom the gods speak), and, textually, the "I" is absent.

Naipaul's non-fictional texts break this pattern. First, his problematic identity does not offer a simplicity (non-multiplicity) of origin that would enable him to go unperceived or, which is an equivalent, to be immediately definable. At one point in Among the Believers (1981), Naipaul is in Iran, has taken on a guide-interpreter and is about to be introduced to Khomeini's "hanging judge," the Ayatollah Khomeini. His guide's question and Naipaul's answer reveal not only the urgency of possessing an easily slotted identity in post-shah Iran but, more importantly for our purpose, the difficulty or, perhaps, impossibility for him to produce a text even seemingly devoid of origin:

-I'll say you're a writer. Where shall I say you come from?

That was a problem. England would be truest, but would be misleading. Trinidad would be mystifying, and equally misleading. South America was a possibility, but the associations were wrong (42).

Where the writer from the Center arrives with an already defined identity that can "skip a step" and proceed from there, the "East-Indian born in the Caribbean" making his way through the Periphery is constantly in the process of negotiating, elaborating an identity. The central Self can choose to make of the Periphery a territory of exposure, a ritualistic testing ground, a point of critical comparison, or the utopic other place where ties with home

have been severed. All of these options are conditioned by the fact that the Periphery is exotic to him. Naipaul, on the contrary, is already re-appropriating, re-membering, re-encountering, all requiring the particularity of having belonged.

Naipaul, like the Western writer, also perceives and textually re-produces and describes forms, surfaces, and textures, but the Self in the process of definition systematically re-appears in the text and breaks the frame; Naipaul and his guide are now in the audience room of another powerful Ayatollah, with dozens of others who have come to petition pay homage, etc.:

Shariatmadari seemed to smile all the while, barely seeing the people who dropped before him and did as they pleased with his hand. He was already preoccupied with the petitions that two or three people, braving the crowd-controllers and the Mullahs, had given him. Mullahs with their fancy turbans, black and white, and beards, black and white, pressed around him. The leaning bodies, the pale colors of the gowns, the angled heads; the turbans, the beards, all against the blank entrance wall in strong light: the effect was pictorial, almost posed (70).

There is something of Carpaccio or of a number of 19th century painters of the Orientalist tradition (Jean Léon Gerôme, for example) in part of the description (the turbans, the gowns, the beards), but the opulent surface is, as it is being elaborated, already being subverted by the circumstances of the image simultaneously presented (the petitions, the subservience, etc.). In addition, the occurrence is not given as framed, as if this quality of

being "pictorial" were its essence; instead, the perceiving narrator (and producer of text) becomes increasingly more present (after emerging, at first, with the presentation of circumstances preceding the scene) through utterances that measure, and thus reveal, the distance between "occurrence" and "framed occurrence:" "the effect was pictorial, almost posed." Lastly, the narrative "I" irrupts into the frame or, what produces the same results, elements from the supposedly framed and confined to opulent surface irrupt into the narrator's space as subjective, independent fragments (like a character in a painting on a wall suddenly detaching himself and addressing the onlooker):

We [Naipaul and his guide] were sitting right up at the front, and we had no clear course. We had no petition, no camera; we weren't kissing the hand. We began to attract attention. Once or twice Shariatmadari himself gave us a brief, questioning look. Behzad thought it was time to move (70).

The classic exoticist narrative is subverted by the presentation of an exchange between phenomenon/subject/material, and narrative voice. Elsewhere in Naipaul's work this is achieved by the introduction of elements that do not "belong" in the array constituting a given scene: the Baudelairian "Ordre et beauté, luxe, calme et volupté" reveals it underbelly, that which rots beneath the apparent fullness (the equally Baudelairian carrion).
Poolside at a luxury hotel in the Ivory Coast:

In the garden of the hotel, around the swimming pool, with its artificial rocks, its hollow plastic elephants, and its water chute, children played, and

the topless women sunbathed. African guards in brown uniforms sat at various security points. The white sand of what looked like a beach had been artificially mounted up: the sand rested on a concrete base, which showed two or three feet high at the water's edge. It was against this concrete that the tainted lagoon rocked (The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro in Finding the Center, 111).

Even if given in a first movement, the framed, luxurious image is always withdrawn, undone by the tainted, the artificial ("reality" and "artificiality" because oddly synonymous here. . .); whether, one of Naipaul's favorites, the rusty corrugated iron roof in the midst of lush, tropical landscape (the "industrial" in the "natural") or, the concrete in the lagoon, the process of (industrial) production always appears beneath the beautiful, finished, exotic object or scene.

In fact, the entire Periphery, the Third World as Naipaul sees it--and as the label "Third World" already implies--is characterized by this particularity: the discordance between appearance and reality, between what is offered to the gaze that remains on the surface and what lies beneath this surface. The exploration of this discordance is a constant in Naipaul's work but is most succinctly summarized by the theme or figure of reliance. This theme is only an extension of Naipaul's own early perception of the Periphery (before he leaves Trinidad and the reason why he leaves) as unoriginal, a region merely mimicking the patterns set by the Center. The colonial

world's unoriginality in Naipaul's earlier works becomes the Third World's reliance in the works that follow.

In Among the Believers, this reliance is specifically technological, especially in Khomeini's Iran: "During the days of the Prophet swords were used to fight, now they have been replaced by Phantom aircraft. 'Phantom:' not: American, nor the products of a foreign science, but as international as swords, part of the stock of the great world bazaar, and rendered Islamic by purchase (40).

The "quaint bazaar" of the Orientalist tradition, fairy-tales, and travel brochures is the uprooted--no longer set in the "East"--post-colonial, post-modern, a-centered bazaar of the contemporary world; another dead end of exoticism.

It should also be noted that "colonial" and "dependent" (like "primitive") become not only equivalent in Naipaul's project but acquire a generic quality: they can be applied to the Periphery as well as the Center. To Uruguay: "Their habits of wealth made them, profoundly, a colonial people, educated but intellectually null, consumers, parasitic on the culture and technology of others" (The Return of Eva Perón, 147). Or to England: "I think the people in England have become more colonial themselves. They have begun to feel this total security, because they are attached to America. They have begun not to be interested, not to feel threatened in any way" (Critical Perspectives, 40).

Reliance eliminates the utopia of exoticizing narrative; the possibility of difference, of a territory cut-off and far-away from Home, is eliminated by the presence of a link between Home and the formerly exotic realm: the exotic cannot be sustained as an independent fantasy. The possibility of eliminating the links, technological or otherwise, between Center and Periphery is an alternative that brings out a deep ambivalence in Naipaul. If he repeatedly affirms that "we must do nothing to help them" (with the implicit: So that they may help themselves), he also believes that the proposals of a "return to basics" or to the "organic" are empty, irresponsible, cruel even, and made by people safely ensconced in their own security. These proposals are variations of the "romanticizing" which is, as we have seen, the prerogative of those who are protected by a civilization built on a "rational," technological (Western) basis. There is a deep respect in Naipaul for what he sees as the self-sustaining civilization of the West, a respect accompanied by an equally strong Conradian fear of the "darkness." Concluding An Area of Darkness he mentions "how close in the past year [he] had come to the total Indian negation" (281), but the continent that emblemizes this fear most dramatically in his writing is, as it was for Conrad, Africa.

Throughout his travels in the Ivory Coast (The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro, in Finding the Center, 1984) Naipaul's focus is the country's reliance on foreign input and the possibility (or not) of surviving a withdrawal of the West. The instances of Naipaul's doubt and questioning range from the most trivial and circumscribed contexts to the possibility of an entire civilization's collapse:

[A restaurant:] It was more than a matter of an off day. The waiters, impeccable the day before, were casual, vacant. There were long delays, mistakes; some of the portions were absurdly small; the bill, when it came, was wrong. Someone was missing, perhaps the French or European manager. And with him more than good service had gone: the whole restaurant idea had vanished. An elaborate organization had collapsed (141).

[A city:] The metropolis of Yamoussoukro awaited full use. But it had been created by foreigners. It was something that had been imported and paid for; and modern buildings, like the university were not simply physical monuments that would last; they were, like pieces of machinery, liable to decay. The new world existed in the mind of others. The skills could be learned, but faith in the new world was fragile. When the president went, and the foreigners went away (as some people wanted them to), would the faith survive? Or would Africans be claimed by another idea of reality? (149).

[A country:] And even the success of the Ivory Coast induces a kind of anxiety. Will it last? Will the Africans be able to take over from the French and the Israelis and the others who have built it all for them and still effectively run it? (78).

This insistent questioning is the sign of a consistency in Naipaul's project. He is more accurate than he himself thinks when he writes that "the world had not stood still while [he] was arriving at a new idea of [himself] (Enigma 171). The "colonial" who leaves the Periphery because he

wants to be "in the center of things," where the original patterns originate, is still absorbed, decades later, by the same concern: the colonial world devoid of "originality" has become for Naipaul, the Third World unable to produce the same patterns. The common point of reference is the center out there, the West. Whatever its limitations--Naipaul, very seldom alludes to them, but it may be fair to add that this is not his concern--the West is the model to be followed, at the very least, the standard according to which all other cultures are perceived and evaluated. If in Naipaul's vision the so-called Third World is not exoticized, if exoticism finds some of its limits in his writing, it is not because the "Third World" represents the antithesis of Western civilization, the foreign, what "cannot be me." This radical difference is on the contrary, prime material for the exoticizing process: Montaigne is fascinated by cannibals partly because they radically transgress the rules of his own culture, Diderot's narrator in the Supplément marvels at Tahiti's "free (non-European) sexuality," Flaubert is attracted to Carthage (the Other) because it is what almost annihilated Rome (the Same), while Barthes' Japan is the repository of "unheard of difference" (différences inouïes). But in the post-colonial Periphery, cannibals and Indians are extinct, cordoned off, disappearing, or assimilating. There is no irreducible difference in Naipaul's vision, no Other, only degraded

versions of the Same, failed appropriations that only produce mimicry:

[In Argentina] Within the imported metropolis [Buenos Aires] there is the structure of a developed society. But men can often appear to be mimicking their functions. So many words have acquired lesser meanings in Argentina: general, artist, journalist, historian, professor, university, director, executive, industrialist, aristocrat, library, museum, zoo . . . (The Return of Eva Perón, 163).

THE CENTER AS MATERIAL: EXOTICISM REDUX?

If exoticizing, the possibility of fantasy and "romance" exists for Naipaul, it is not in the Periphery where language itself has become the imitation of the imitation of an imitation. . .

Naipaul's exoticism, if the word can still be used, is not an encounter with the irreducibly different--his own fragmentation prevents this encounter--but an encounter with an ideal. His England, his England becomes the scene of this ideal, a territory where the objects, ideas, and experiences of childhood and adolescence, where language itself, are (re-) discovered in their original context. Exoticism as a paradoxical remembrance of things past. Paradoxical on two counts: first, there is no longer any need to remember since the objects of remembrance are actually there, revealed in their "original" context, palpable in their corporeality; secondly, because these entities had initially been "experienced" by Naipaul in Trinidad. . . "as if by a man denied the chance of visiting

famous cities, learning their street maps instead." Remembrance becomes the very act of experiencing "the real thing." This paradox is best illustrated (and worked out) through what can be summarized as "the episode of the cow on the tin can and the real cow:"

[In Wiltshire] I had seen the cows on the hillsides against the sky, heads down, grazing or looking with timorous interest at the passing man. And they had seemed like the cows in the drawing on the label of the condensed-milk tins I knew in Trinidad as a child: something to me as a result at the very heart of romance, a child's fantasy of the beautiful other place, something which when I saw it on the downs, was like something I had always known (*Enigma*, 84)

The valley in Wiltshire becomes the scene of a communion with language and childhood, the past and the present in harmony, whole, hallowed at last (by art, literature, and the "right" context):

Apart from the romance of the Constable reproduction, the knowledge I brought to my setting was linguistic. I knew that "avon" originally meant river, just as "hound" originally just meant "dog," any kind of dog. . . the hay in [the] shed was new, with a sweet warm smell, and the bales unstacked into golden, clean, warm-smelling steps, which made me think of the story about spinning straw with gold and of references in books with European settings to men sleeping on straw in barns. That had never been comprehensible to me in Trinidad where grass was always freshly cut for cattle, always green and never browned into hay. . . so much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of a stranger,, and yet with knowledge of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy (*Enigma*, 7-18, my italics).

If there is an irruption of history in this framed scene of romance, it is only as tradition: history as the

long succession of events, the almost primeval passing of time that hallows experience and elevates the most disparate and insignificant objects and experiences. Naipaul's England is no longer the "heart of Empire," but it partakes of a tradition that takes him beyond even his own (nostalgic? idealized?) images of England, to the Roman world, to Antiquity itself (to a time when the idea of Trinidad is meaningless):

I heard on the radio one morning that in the days of the Roman Empire geese could be walked to market all the way from the province of Gaul to Rome. After this the high-hearted, dung-dropping geese that strutted across the muddy rutted way at the bottom of the valley. . . developed a kind of historical life for me, something that went beyond the idea of medieval peasantry, old English country ways, and the drawing of geese in children's books. . . that sense of Antiquity gave another scale to the activities around me. But at the same time. . . there was a feeling of continuity. . . so the idea of Antiquity. . . as well as the ideas of literature enveloped this world (Enigma, 18-20).

England partakes of Time and Tradition and, as such partakes of originality, of centrality. The England that Naipaul lives in and has called a country of "second-rate universities and crooked politicians," a "colonial" country (in the other sense of the word: not England as Empire, but England as dependent culture), this England has not lived up to his Dickensian image, his great expectations; but Wiltshire, that "corner of England" where he ends up after all other possibilities were shutoff, fulfills the promises of childhood, the promises made (by way of an "abstract

education") to an inhabitant of a distant province of Empire. One (framed) scene among many:

I saw a sheep-shearing only once. . . the ceremony was like something out of an old novel, perhaps by Hardy, or out of a Victorian country diary. . . as though, in that little spot around the famous buildings. . . time had stood still, for a little while (Enigma, 13).

"For a little while," and "with a part of my mind:" Naipaul's fullness is always relative, incomplete, precarious. In his novel, The Mimic Men (1967), he mentions the "shipwrecked" Isabella, the Trinidad-like fictional country where most of the action takes place, and the "greater shipwreck out there," beyond the small tropical island. Naipaul leaves Trinidad and, in between the (indispensable) travels in the "Third World," the "shipwrecked" Isabellas, "things from which he could not detach [himself]," he returns to Wiltshire where the greater shipwreck awaits in the midst of apparent, exotic plenitude:

New to the valley [Wiltshire]. . . I had seen everything as a kind of perfection, perfectly evolved. But I had hardly begun to look at the land and its life had hardly begun to shape itself about me, when things begun to change. And I had fallen back on old ideas, ideas not so much of decay, as of flux and the constancy of change, to fight the distress I felt at everything--a death, a fence, a departure--that undid or threatened the perfection I had found (Enigma, 52).

The territory of exoticism as ideal revealed/
remembered/experienced (a possible definition of utopia?)
has shrunk to intermittent, ephemeral moments, reduced and
restrained spaces. The language that would produce

exoticism, the medium that would render even a passing fullness is itself, for Naipaul, always a sign of his own difference and peripheralness. He tells the story of his finding out the name of a flower that he had known from childhood: "Jasmine! so I had known it all these years. . . . Jasmine, jasmine. But the word and the flower had been separate in my mind for too long. they did not come together." (Salmagundi, 51).

CONCLUSION

"EXOTIC CHINESE FOODS." These words appear on the business card and above the entrance of a Chinese restaurant on New York City's Columbus Avenue. Beyond indicating the simple existence of this particular Chinese restaurant and of the food it serves, the words are, in this context, meant to advertise, to attract. As such, they aim to differentiate the restaurant in question and its food from all other Chinese restaurants and foods in New York City (at least). The word chosen to achieve this is exotic: the food served by this particular Chinese restaurant is different from the food served by all the others because it is exotic.

This juxtaposition of "exotic" and "Chinese" raises several questions. In an advertising effort at creating difference, this particular disposition of the two words might be said to emerge on a redundancy: isn't Chinese food already exotic? Or does the choice of words imply and promise that the kind of food served in this particular Chinese restaurant is something that even the specialists, gourmets or habitués (after years and even decades of eating Chinese food) would not know? (just when you thought that you knew everything there was to know about Chinese food. . .). In other words, has the property of being "Chinese" lost its "exotic" quality in New York, in New York with its large Chinese and Chinese-American population, in New York where to "go for Chinese" and "to go for a

cheeseburger" have become equivalent alternatives, both equally trivial(ized) (and often gastronomically tedious) in their dailiness and ubiquitousness? In this case, there would be no redundancy, only the usual "one better" of advertising, and maybe even a bit of truth: the food advertised is, in relation to the food already experienced for years, is different, exotic.

The truth probably lies somewhere between the two sets of questions: "exotic" is used on the business card and the entrance sign to both differentiate and repeat. Holding out as it does the promise of something new, the word does create, on one level, an aura of difference, at least on the card and the entrance sign (the food itself may or may not be the same as that served in other Chinese restaurants in New York), while it also re-emphasizes the adherence of things Chinese to the more generic classification of things exotic.

This usage of "exotic" in 1988 takes us back to the original meaning of the word, at least in the French tradition this study has focused on, and also indicates the limits of that tradition, much in the same way V. S. Naipaul continues a certain tradition of exoticism while also constituting a break or initiating a crisis.

The first recorded use of "exotic" in this French

tradition (and also the earliest in Europe¹) is by Rabelais, who mentions ". . . diverses marchandises exotiques et pérégrines qui estoient par les halles du port" in Pantagruel (1548). "Exotic" was at first applied specifically to products, flora and fauna, that came from far away, far from Europe, from Asia and Africa. The use of "exotic" to qualify food in our example of the Chinese restaurant belongs to this tradition, one that can be traced back to the roots of the word in ancient Greece where exotikos designated products from the non-Greek world.

Through its apparent redundancy, "exotic Chinese foods" also indicates the limits of this tradition: the origin of products (and of people) has become diffuse, fragmented, rendering the use of the word itself problematic. This is the point where the affinity between the Chinese restaurant's card and sign, and V. S. Naipaul and his work becomes apparent.

Yet we may ask, even if we acknowledge that the coordinates have changed, whether "exotic" and "exoticism" have retained something we might call a kernel, a hard core, a generic or stable meaning that would remain valid whatever the geographical or historical variations. We have already admitted, for example, that the words could be used outside the Western locus: Carpentier's Cuban feeling "surrounded by

¹In English, the first recorded use is in Ben Jonson's Every Man out of Humanity (1599) in which he mentions ". . . . Magick, witchcraft, or other such exotick arts."

exoticism" in revolutionary Paris, as opposed to his familiar "drowsy tropics;" Naipaul's east Indian "exotics" in the Caribbean, and even Tete Michel Kpomassie, the author of An African in Greenland, who found the Eskimos "exotic" (thus belying or at least opposing Segalen's notion that there is no "polar exoticism" (Essai sur l'exotisme)). We could also consider contemporary dictionary definitions, if we isolate them from the sentences usually given as examples of a given word's usage, which would resituate "exotic" and "exoticism" within the specifics of the culture or country that produces the dictionary. Webster's definition of "exotic:" 1. introduced from another country 2. (archaic) OUTLANDISH, ALIEN 3a. Strikingly or excitingly different b. strikingly unusual in color or design." If we restrain ourselves to the definitions, then, and exclude the examples of usage, we are left with definitions that are essentially posited on difference, what is "not me," which is itself posited in turn on the existence of an identifiable "I" or "Self." These would constitute a hard core of meaning for "exotic:" what is not me, what is (very) different from me and is identifiable as such.

In the Western tradition this study mainly focuses on, this "I" traditionally begins to be identifiable in the Renaissance (a trend summarized in part by Sidney's "Man is the measure of all things") in opposition to, among other things, the established Church and existence organized

around an afterlife. In addition, as we have seen in the case of Montaigne, the Self is delineated against the background of the newly "discovered" peoples of other lands, clearly identifiable as "what is not me," even if Montaigne's "Des cannibales" and "Des coches" already display the limits of this particular means of self-definition.

In the Enlightenment, the "hinge of consciousness" (Lyons) in the Western tradition, the Self is further delineated, now more specifically in opposition to State and government (rather than the Christian Medieval order): the modern political subject makes his appearance, and here too non-Europeans constitute clear points of reference mapping out "what is not me." Diderot's Tahitians may be mouthpieces spouting a philosophy elaborated at Home, but they are also, like Montaigne's cannibals, identifiable as what is different.

The Romantic Self can be considered the culminating point of this development: "what is me" (Home) has become very distinct, while "what is not me" (Abroad) has become a territory of exposure, of experimentation, as we have called it, an attribute that does not prevent the outside from being, still, clearly identifiable (the "Orient," to name a territory of Romantic predilection).

Throughout this development, from the Renaissance to the Romantics in the Western tradition, the basic

requirement for a generic definition of "exotic" and "exoticism" is thus present. However, there is perhaps a point where it disappears, the point, perhaps, where the phrase "exotic Chinese foods" becomes possible.

The Romantic impulse to sever the Self from Home by "going out there" is not confined chronologically to a "Romantic period," even if it is strongest at that point of the line (Montaigne to Naipaul) we have chosen to concentrate on. Observing this impulse at work in our own present, the critical point of our theory of exoticism, we see a clear indication of the break that occurs in the hitherto smooth opposition of Self and (exotic) Other. In Lévi-Strauss' Tristes tropiques, we read:

Le seul moyen de forcer le sort serait de se risquer sur ces franges périlleuses où les normes sociales cessent d'avoir un sens en même temps que s'évanouissent les garanties et les exigences du groupe: aller jusqu'aux frontières du territoire policé, jusqu'aux limites de la résistance physiologique ou de la souffrance physique et morale. Car c'est sur cette bordure instable qu'on s'expose soit à tomber de l'autre côté pour ne plus revenir, soit au contraire à capter, dans l'immense océan des forces inexploitées qui entoure une humanité bien réglée, une provision personnelle de puissance grâce à quoi un ordre social autrement immuable sera revoqué en faveur du risque-tout (41).

The impulse is there, but the territory that would be clearly identifiable as the different is no longer as clearly delineated as it once was: elsewhere in the same chapter of Tristes tropiques, appropriately titled "La fin des voyages," Lévi-Strauss laments the fact that the first

thing a Western traveler notices in non-Western countries is the "garbage of his own civilization" strewn about. Under the heading of "garbage" Lévi-Strauss includes not only industrial waste but also standardized hotel rooms (strictly similar from New York to Bandoeng) and the massive quantities of useless goods. The power that initiated the appearance of difference in the first place (in the "Age of Exploration and Discovery" when the first cannibals appear. . .) has paradoxically obliterated this difference in what was once the "exotic" territory, while, simultaneously, the "exotic" has become, through the same process ("international capitalism" is a possible designation) part of Home. The "inside" and the "outside" are conflated in our present.

Barthes and Naipaul, like Lévi-Strauss, belong to this present which, in this theory of exoticism, also happens to be the critical stage. Is this juxtaposition of our present and of a critical stage, like "EXOTIC CHINESE FOODS," a forced arrangement (for the purpose of effect)? A redundancy? Both?

Without even insinuating that we might be "at the end of history"--besides being antagonistic to my own bent, this alone would both defeat the presence of "towards" in my title and remove the connotations of "tentative" and

"ungoing" present in "theory"¹--without insinuating, then, I am proposing that it is inevitable, in the case of exoticism, that our present coincides with the critical stage. Exoticism as I conceive and define it in the introduction to the study is not a content but a relation, not a fixed set of conditions, but an event, a passing, evolving configuration.

There are specific, identifiable markers in the segment I chose to examine: "Montaigne-Naipaul," "exploration and discovery," colonialism," "first recorded use of exotic," first recorded use of exoticism," etc., and in this particular historical configuration exoticism has clearly reached a critical stage that happens to coincide with our present. But in addition, these elements are themselves always subject to redefinition because, ultimately, their meaning hinges on what "one" "means" by "different," and the moment we stop to work with a particular set of definitions is also the moment when these definitions have (already) reached their limits. Thus: "Towards a Theory of Exoticism," which enables me to acknowledge the value of a specific and unique historical development, the value of my own definitions, and the relative status of both.

¹One of Webster's definitions of theory: a proposed explanation whose status is still conjectural in contrast to well-established propositions that are reporting matters of actual fact.

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