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Author(s): Joseph A. Boone

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Vacation Cruises; or, The Homoerotics of Orientalism

JOSEPH A. BOONE is associate professor of English at the University of Southern California, where he teaches courses in the novel and in gay and gender studies. He is the author of *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (*U of Chicago P*, 1987), as well as of an earlier essay in *PMLA* (1986), on Henry James, and he coedited *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism* (*Routledge*, 1990). He is at work on two book projects, one on issues of sexuality and narrative in modernist fiction and the other on the homoerotics of orientalism (from which this essay is excerpted).

Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat) . . . is not the province of my analysis here, alas, despite its frequently noted appearance.

Edward Said (188)

So we had sex, or at least I lay and allowed him to fuck me, and thought as his prick shot in and he kissed my neck, back, and shoulders, that it was a most unappetising position for a world-famous artist to be in.

Joe Orton in *Tangier* (174)

PERHAPS NOWHERE ELSE are the sexual politics of colonial narrative so explicitly thematized as in those voyages to the Near East recorded or imagined by Western men. “Since the time of the Prophet,” one of these records proclaims, “fabulous Araby has reeked of aphrodisiac excitement” (Edwardes and Masters 175). With various shades of prurience and sophistication, similar sentiments echo throughout the writings of novelists, poets, journalists, travel writers, sociologists, and ethnographers whose pursuit of eros has brought them, in Rana Kabbani’s phrase, “to the Orient on the flying-carpet of Orientalism” (*Passionate Nomad* x). For such men, the geopolitical realities of the Arabic Orient become a psychic screen on which to project fantasies of illicit sexuality and unbridled excess—including, as Malek Alloula has observed, visions of “*generalized perversion*” (95) and, as Edward Said puts it, “sexual experience unobtainable in Europe,” that is, “a different type of sexuality” (190). This appropriation of the so-called East in order to project onto it an otherness that mirrors Western psychosexual needs only confirms the phenomenon that Said calls “Orientalism” in his book of that name.¹

But exactly what others are being appropriated here? Despite Alloula’s italicizing of the word *perversion*, despite Said’s carefully

ambiguous rendering of the phrase “a different type of sexuality,” both Alloula’s and Said’s analyses of colonialist erotics remain ensconced in conspicuously heterosexual interpretative frameworks.² In contrast, the epigraph from Joe Orton’s diary makes explicit an aspect of the vacation agendas of many male tourists that remains unspoken in most commentaries on colonial narrative: namely, that the “sexual promise (and threat)” that Said attributes to the Orient is for countless Western travelers inextricably tied to their exposure abroad to what has come to be known within Western sexual discourse as male homosexual practice (188).³ Whether these homoerotically charged encounters figure as a voyeuristic spectacle—that is, as one more “exotic” item that the tourist views from a distance—or as a covert goal of the traveler’s journey, the fact remains that the possibility of sexual contact with and between men underwrites and at times even explains the historical appeal of orientalism as an occidental mode of male perception, appropriation, and control.

The number of gay and bisexual male writers and artists who have traveled through North Africa in pursuit of sexual gratification is legion as well as legend: André Gide lost his virginity on the dunes of Algeria in 1893 (where Oscar Wilde served as his procurer two years later), and E. M. Forster on the beaches of Alexandria in 1916. Morocco has also served as a mecca for the gay and bisexual literati vacationing in North Africa—many clustered around Tangier’s famous resident Paul Bowles—to say nothing of the nonliterati, those celebrities of ambiguous sexual persuasion ranging from Mick Jagger to Malcolm Forbes.⁴ Many heterosexually identified men have traveled to the Arabic Orient in pursuit of erotic fulfillment as well, but even these adventurers have had to confront the specter of male-male sex that lurks in their fantasies of a decadent and lawless East; such encounters put into crisis assumptions about male sexual desire, masculinity, and heterosexuality that are specific to Western culture. In the following pages I hope to address the way in which the public and personal texts produced by both straight and nonstraight travelers are implicated in a colonizing enterprise that often “others” the homosexually in-

scribed Arab male, a condition that obtains, albeit with differing valences and contexts, whether that “other” is perceived with dread or with desire. Simultaneously, in nearly all these texts, the imagined or actual encounter with exotic otherness engenders profound anxieties about one’s authority to narrate: the threat of being “unmanned” by the attractive yet dangerous lure of a polymorphous Eastern sexuality that exceeds representation is mirrored in many Western writers’ fears, in the face of such excess, of never writing again.

To delineate more precisely these discursive manifestations of displaced and discovered homoeroticism, this essay investigates three categories of occidental tourists whose writings eroticize the Near East. First, it looks at heterosexually identified writers whose transformation of Egypt’s perceived sexual bounty into a symbol of polymorphous perversity engenders their obsessive fascination with, and often anguished negotiation of, the homoerotic. Second, it examines the homoerotic undertow in representations of life on the desert, where the act of masquerading as the foreign other, sadomasochism, and gender ambiguities uneasily collide. Third, it turns to gay male enclaves established in the African Mahgreb since the beginning of the twentieth century, in order to consider the implications of the colonially sanctioned tradition of male prostitution for various narratives of gay self-affirmation. Driving and binding all these homoeroticizing strands of orientalist narrative are a series of interrelated sociopolitical, psychosexual, and aesthetic issues: the practice and economics of empire, perceptions of race, the collusion of phallic and colonial interests, constructions of sexual “deviance,” questions of narrative authority, crises of representation. Because of the number of texts—biographical, autobiographical, fictional—canvassed in the following pages, highlighting one topos over another is at times necessary, partly but not solely because of space limitations. Working by pastiche, letting the heterogenous strands of my analysis contribute to the illumination of a subject that is necessarily multifaceted and hybrid, rather than forcing each strand to illustrate every aspect of an emerging overview, seems an effective strategy with which to forestall the classic colonizing—and

indeed scholarly—move of defining each part in the name of an already assumed whole.

In tracing the trajectories outlined above, my own narrative aims to traverse and unsettle, even as it provisionally inscribes, a number of imposed boundaries—not least those separating “West” from “East” and “heterosexual” from “homosexual.” What follows is written as part of the growing academic discipline of gay and lesbian studies, whose boundaries I hope to push by showing how contingent and Western its conception of “homosexuality”—as an identity category, a sexual practice, and a site of theoretical speculation—often proves to be when brought into contact with the sexual epistemologies of non-Western cultures, particularly when encounters of “East” and “West” are crossed by issues of colonialism, race, nation, and class. Taking a cue from Homi K. Bhabha’s insightful formulation of the continually “unfixing” propensities of the colonial stereotype, I present a series of collisions between traditionally assumed Western sexual categories (the homosexual, the pederast) and equally stereotypical colonialist tropes (the beautiful brown boy, the hypervirile Arab, the wealthy Nazarene)—collisions that generate ambiguity and contradiction rather than reassert an unproblematic intellectual domination over a mythic East as an object of desire. For many white gay male subjects, that object of desire remains simultaneously same and other, a source of troubling and unresolved identification and differentiation. It is precisely in the space opened by this gap that a critique of orientalist homoerotics may usefully locate itself and begin the work of dismantling those paradigmatic fictions of otherness that have made the binarisms of West and East, of heterosexuality and homosexuality, at once powerful and oppressive.⁵

(Re)Orienting Sexuality

The three thematic categories I have outlined map out an imagined terrain of male desire that has specific geographic coordinates. Stretching from the North African countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia to Egypt and thence to the Syrian-Arabic peninsula, this vast territory, whose ethnic and cultural diversities have over the centuries been tenu-



An example of Western colonialist fantasy disguised as anthropological study, this anonymous photograph, *The Captives* (c. 1930), purports to take the viewer into the forbidden world of the Near Eastern male brothel. But the presence of various studio props connoting “enslaved exoticism” (the arranged drapery, manacles, rope, conch shells) belies the photograph’s claim to authenticity. (*L’Amour bleu: Die homosexuelle Liebe in Kunst und Literatur des Abendlandes*, ed. Cecile Beurdeley [Berlin: Gmünder, 1988] 244. Reproduced by permission of Edita Companie, Lausanne.)

ously linked by a common language and shared Islamic faith,⁶ also corresponds to what Richard Burton, in the terminal essay of his 1885–86 translation of the *Thousand Nights and a Night*, dubbed the “Sotadic Zone.” Within this zone, as Burton argues for forty-some pages of exacting if dubious detail, sodomy, or “what our neighbors call *Le vice contre nature*,” “is popular and endemic, held at worst to be a mere peccadillo, whilst the races to the North and South of the[se] limits . . . as a rule, are physically incapable of performing the operation and look upon it with the liveliest disgust” (10: 177, 179). What Burton labels a “popular and endemic” Sotadic practice might more properly be called a “popular and endemic” stereotype of Eastern perversity, one firmly wedged in the dominant Western imaginary.⁷

By documenting this tradition of “Eastern” sodomitic “vice,” Burton offers a theory important less for its accuracy than for its frankness in articulating a widespread perception that had hitherto been filtered through codes of vague allusion. Readers of John Hindley’s English translation of *Persian Lyrics* (1800), for instance, are informed that “the disgusting object[s]” of these love poems have been feminized “for reasons too obvious to need any formal apology” (33). In his classic study of modern Egyptian life (1833–35), Edward W. Lane also draws on the trope of disgust to avoid making explicit the sodomitic antics performed on the streets of Cairo by a trickster and his boy assistant: “several indecent tricks which he perform[ed] with the boy I must refrain from describing; some of them are abominably disgusting” (391). And yet despite this aura of unmentionability, one can find textual evidence of a fascination with the Near East’s rumored homoeroticism scattered through commentaries that reach back to the time of the Crusades.⁸ By 1780 Jeremy Bentham could dispassionately write, “Even now, wherever the Mahometan religion prevails, such practices seem to be attended with but little dispute” (1: 175; see also Crompton 111).

In this light, Said’s failure to account for homoerotic elements in orientalist pursuits is a telling omission. Said’s theorization of orientalism has proved invaluable in drawing scholarly attention to the discursive paths whereby the Arabic Orient has come to represent “one [of the West’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). The threatening excess of this otherness, Said argues, has most often been gendered as feminine and hence sexually available so that it can be penetrated, cataloged, and thus contained by the “superior” rationality of the Western mind (40, 44, 137–38). Such metaphors for the West’s appropriation of the East are at least implicitly heterosexual. But as a close analysis of several specific Western experiences and representations of the Near East reveals, that which appears alluringly feminine is not always, or necessarily, female. A telling example of this reversal of expectation, as I have argued elsewhere, can be located in Said’s analysis of the notebooks and journals that Gustave Flaubert kept during his voyage to Egypt in 1849–50 (see “Map-

pings” 80–81). Said focuses on Flaubert’s heady account of his affair with the professional dancer Kuchuk Hanem. For Said, Flaubert’s transformation of Kuchuk’s material flesh into an occasion for poetic reverie forms a paradigmatic example of the mechanisms of orientalism: the masculinized, penetrating West possesses for its own purposes the East’s fecundity, gendered as female in Kuchuk’s “peculiarly Oriental” sensuality (187). Yet Said overlooks the crucial fact that the first exotic dancer to catch Flaubert’s eye is not the female Kuchuk but a famous male dancer and catamite. “But we have seen male dancers. Oh! Oh! Oh!” exclaims Flaubert in a letter to his best friend as, with barely contained excitement, he details Hasan el-Belbeissi’s lascivious pantomime, (semi)female garb, and kohl-painted eyes. This description in turn leads to a discussion of the practice of sodomy among Flaubert’s Egyptian acquaintances (“Here it is quite accepted. One admits one’s sodomy”) and thence to a declaration of his own attempt to “indulge in this form of ejaculation” at the local bath (83).

Some of the most blatantly heterosexual examples of orientalism—ranging from nineteenth-century travelogues to pseudoscientific surveys of “Eastern” sexual customs—reveal a similar proximity to the homoerotic.⁹ Likewise Burton, a serious orientalist, opens the boundaries of his textual body to a certain destabilizing pressure when he addresses the subject of desire between men in the Arabic Orient. For example, in his introduction to the *Nights* Burton begins with an anatomical metaphor that bestows on his translation a specifically male body. Prior bowdlerized editions, he complains, have “castrat[ed]” the tales, producing only “ennui and disappointment” in the reader, whereas his aim is to “produce a full, complete, unvarnished, copy of the great original” (1: xvii, ix). The means by which Burton seeks to restore the text to its “uncastrated” manhood is curious, however (xii); he proceeds to adorn it with footnotes, annotations, and appendixes whose copiousness rivals the primary text, creating a proliferation of multiple (one might argue feminine) sites of textual pleasure (see Naddaff) that threaten to explode the complete and contained male body he has assigned to his translation. Primary among these supple-

ments, moreover, is the terminal essay, whose lengthy fourth section is dedicated to *le vice contre nature*. Burton announces his intention to display this subject—again using a phallic metaphor—“in decent nudity, not in suggestive fig-leaf” in order to establish once and for all the prevalence of sodomy in the Arab Muslim world (10: 178). The “unvarnished,” uncastrated male body assigned to the text in the introduction, here exposed “in decent nudity” and without “fig-leaf,” becomes a sodomitic subject in both senses of the phrase.

Moreover, like the language used to frame this discussion of Near Eastern sodomy, the contents of the terminal essay work against Burton’s anthropological and orientalist predilection to contain and classify his subject. As his inquiry into sexual relations between men broadens, so too the initially circumscribed Mediterranean “belt” (10: 201) wherein the vice is said to flourish expands eastward—till, by the conclusion of the essay, it encompasses the Far East and the continents of the precolonized Americas. As East spins back into West, Burton is forced to confirm *le vice’s* growing presence even in “our modern capitals, London, Berlin, and Paris” (10: 213), although he has earlier set the West off-limits, claiming that the northern European races are “as a rule . . . physically incapable of performing the operation” (10: 179). Burton’s definition of sodomy collapses in contradiction and repeats in its global uncontainability the operation that his notes perform on a textual level, exposing the sanctity of the male body’s claim to uncastrated completeness as another masculinist myth. Or to put it another way, as long as Burton can maintain an anthropological pose, he does not mind parading the non-European homosexual subject of the *Nights* in “decent nudity”; but when he must envision himself as a reader, one whose authority over content yields to vicarious participation in the fictions being relayed, he finds himself restoring the “fig-leaf” beneath which he has previously declared himself willing to glimpse. For many Western men the act of exploring, writing about, and theorizing an eroticized Near East is coterminous with unlocking a Pandora’s box of phantasmic homoerotic desire, desire whose propensity to spread without check threatens to

contaminate, if not to re-orient, the heterosexual “essence” of occidental male subjectivity.

Fantasizing the “Delight . . . and Infamy of the Egyptians”

Of all the regions of the Near East, Western writers most readily associate ancient and modern Egypt with the spreading “contagion” of homosexuality. Curiously, Egypt’s reputation as “that classical region of all abominations,” in Richard Burton’s phrase (10: 194), has proved to be an irresistible draw to the literary ambitions of a score of occidental writers from Gérard de Nerval and Flaubert to Lawrence Durrell and Norman Mailer—writers intent on producing texts as gargantuan as their (hetero)sexual appetites. In these writers’ prose the dazzling spectacle of Cairene and Alexandrian street life is transformed into an emblem of the psyche’s overflowing polymorphous desires. As such, this spectacle becomes a convenient screen on which to project fantasies of illicit, unbridled eroticism. In *Colonizing Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell has forcefully shown how such psychological projections onto the foreign other derive from a general Western representational tendency to treat all things Egyptian—including Egyptian visitors to Europe—as objects on display, as exhibition pieces whose “carefully chaotic” arrangement is orchestrated solely to satisfy the “isolated gaze” of a European viewer (1, 9). Experiencing Egypt’s curiosities as panoramas and tableaux depends, of course, on the illusion of some ineffable but inviolate boundary dividing spectator and spectacle, subject and object, self and other. Despite the strategic mystification of foreign otherness at work in this process, however, Egypt’s historical positioning as a conduit between East and West, Europe and Africa, the familiar and the foreign has meant that, contrary to expectation, it has never functioned merely or solely as the Occident’s other. Rather, as Antonia Lant suggests, Egypt has come to represent in the Western imagination an intermediate zone, “a foothold, a staging point,” that signifies liminality and indeterminacy itself (98). As a realm of nonfixity, moreover, it has become a ready-made symbol for that interior world of the polymorphously perverse that its Western

visitors find uncannily familiar and, as an effect of repression, unimarginably estranging.

Colonized as other but never susceptible to total differentiation from or appropriation by the West, Egypt in all its exotic appeal thus presents the occidental tourist with an unsuspected challenge. Hence the note of hysteria infiltrating the late-eighteenth-century *Travels* of C. S. Sonnini, a former engineer in the French navy, who pauses in his narrative to lament

[t]he passion contrary to nature . . . [that] constitute[s] the delight, or to use a juster term, the infamy of the Egyptians. It is not for women that their amorous ditties are composed. . . . [F]ar different objects inflame them. . . . This horrid depravation, which, to the disgrace of polished nations, is not altogether unknown to them, is generally diffused all over Egypt: the rich and poor are equally infected with it. (1: 251–52)

Part of the horror is that this “inconceivable appetite” (1: 251) “is not altogether unknown” to civilized Europe: if the Egyptian vice knows no class (“rich and poor are equally infected with it”), can it be expected to respect the boundaries of colonizer and colonized? Thirty years later, a similar image of unchecked infection appears in Lane’s *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* when the Victorian author addresses, with characteristic understatement, this aspect of Egyptian “immorality.” “A vice for which the Memlooks . . . were infamous,” Lane writes of the Ottoman rulers, “was so spread by them in [Egypt] as to become not less rare here than in almost any other country of the East.” Here Egypt is the victim of contagion, the Turks are the culprits, and one assumes (since Lane asserts that “of late years *it is said* [the vice has] much decreased”) that the civilizing machinery of British Empire is the solution (304; emphasis added). Once again, aspersions of “unnatural” sexuality become markers of larger competing global and colonial interests.

This mythicizing of the magnitude of Near Eastern “vice” is not unrelated to a Western obsession with the genital size of Egyptian men that filters into even the driest orientalist discourse. For while the figure of the effeminate Asiatic—embodied, for instance, in the transvestic dancer—represents one

“face” of orientalist homoerotic fantasy, the reverse image, that of the hypervirile, mythically endowed sheikh holds equal currency in orientalist homoerotic discourse. Thus Burton, in his *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1893) argues that members of “the Nilotic race, although commonly called ‘Arabs,’” are more closely related to African blacks because of the size of their sexual organs (2: 83); that this information is buried in a footnote—one written in Latin, no less, to ward off the nonspecialist—would seem to indicate that what is at stake here is a certain European male anxiety or sense of inferiority that needs to be kept under wraps. That white, male, implicitly heterosexual subjectivity is the real issue underlying this prurient obsession with indigenous body parts is made even more blatant in the linking of racial stereotyping with sexual perversion in Jacob Sutor’s *L’amour aux colonies* (1893), published under the pseudonym Dr. Jacobus X. An army surgeon posted to various French outposts, Sutor claims that his clinical experience proves beyond a doubt that the Arab, “an active pederast, is provided with a genital organ which, for size and length, rivals that of the Negro” (298), and adds that “[w]ith such a weapon does the Arab seek for anal copulation. He is not particular in his choice, and age or sex makes no difference” (300). If foreignness, genital endowment, and sodomy are of a piece for Sutor, so too do exoticism and excess come together to form the more clearly homoerotic frisson of Allen Edwardes’s surveys of Eastern eroticism. “As hitherto noted, the penile proportions of the Egyptians were as notorious as their promiscuity,” he states as fact, then proceeds, with more than a touch of prurience, to describe bas-reliefs that purportedly depict “Nilotic peasants and labourers with their loin-clothes” hoisted “to reveal fleshy genitalia” (*Erotica Judaica* 93); elsewhere he records the “impressive sight” presented by orgies of “round-robin sodomy” in the Egyptian hammam (*Jewel* 207), where “well-proportioned” nude bath-boys service willing customers of all classes (246). The guise of orientalist scholarship allows Edwardes to express a surfeit of subconscious homoerotic fantasy.

In a like manner, the autobiographical and literary productions of Flaubert and Durrell—which I



Egypt's historical positioning as a meeting point between Europe and Africa, the familiar and the foreign, lends itself to racial and homoerotic codings in George Quaintance's *Egyptian Wrestlers* (1952), where the pharaoh's court provides the context for a spectacle of gay erotica pitting two virile, loin-clothed slaves—one African, one Aryan—against each other in a taboo embrace. (*The Art of George Quaintance: Catalogue of the Fifty-Fourth Exhibition of the Janssen Gallery*, ed. Volker Janssen [Berlin: Janssen, 1989] 33. Reproduced by permission of Janssen-Verlag, Berlin.)

discuss in greater depth elsewhere (“Mappings”)—transform Egypt into a landscape of unbridled libidinal desires, a landscape in which same-sex activity is conspicuously highlighted. Figuratively exploring such “foreign” terrain may give these writers an excuse to inhabit textually the other whom their phallogocentrically constituted heterosexuality must otherwise disavow, but these imag-

inative ventures into alien territory only highlight the problematic, indeed unstable, construction of Western discourses of masculinity under the sign of the phallus. And for both Flaubert and Durrell the fantasized projection of sexual otherness onto Egypt eventually occasions a crisis of writing, of narrative authority, when the writing subject is confronted by (imagined) sensual excess.

Bombarded on his arrival in Egypt by “such a bewildering chaos of colours [and sound] that [his] poor imagination is dazzled as though by continuous fireworks,” Flaubert quickly embraces the exotic otherness of Egypt as a source of artistic inspiration and sexual gratification (79). Part of these “fireworks” is the erotic dance of the “marvellous Hasan el-Belbeissi,” whose talent at putting “additional spice into a thing that is already quite clear in itself” injects into Flaubert’s correspondence and diaries a stream of homoerotic banter and speculation that becomes a source of titillation and eventually a spur to experimentation without radically disturbing Flaubert’s heterosexual self-definition (“Here . . . it is spoken of at table.

Sometimes you do a bit of denying, and then everyone teases you and you end up confessing” [84]). Simultaneously, however, the possibilities unlocked by this flirtation with Egyptian sodomy become the source of a subliminal anxiety linked to Flaubert’s literary ambitions. Having traveled to Egypt in search of creative inspiration, Flaubert expresses his writerly potential in metaphors of

(hetero)sexual reproduction (“but—the real thing! To ejaculate, beget the child!” [199]) and conversely expresses his despair at not having realized his literary goals in images of nonreproductive sexual play (198–99); he subtly figures the exotic otherness of sexual perversion as the threat of erasure, the negation of artistic vitality or sap, when “the lines don’t come” (87; see Boone, “Mappings” 102). For all Flaubert’s openness to his Near Eastern experiences, then, his encounter with foreign homosexuality triggers an uneasiness about what it means to be a writer and a man; in consciously striving to become one of the West’s great writers, Flaubert subconsciously regards his narrative authority as equivalent to, and dependent on, a sexual authority associated with Western codes of heterosexual potency.

A similarly disabling equation of sexual aberration and writerly debilitation haunts Durrell while he is stationed in Egypt during World War II. “Love, hashish, and boys [are] the obvious solution to anyone stuck here for more than a few years,” he writes Henry Miller from Alexandria in 1944, a few months later adding, “One could not continue to live here without practising a sort of death—hashish or boys or food” (Wickes 190, 195). A parallel “sort of death” faces Darley, the narrator-protagonist of the *Alexandria Quartet*. Confronted with Alexandria’s dazzling yet numbing spectacle of sensual excess—“the sexual provender that lies at hand is staggering in its variety and profusion,” Darley notes on arrival with envy and some fear—this would-be writer experiences a breakdown that is both sexual and textual, finding himself unable to write and “even to make love” (1: 4, 11). Darley’s feelings of impotence and inadequacy, compounded by Justine’s betrayal, increasingly lead him to doubt his “manhood.” In turn these doubts trigger a flood of repressed memories and events that implicate him in an expanding web of homosexual desire and panic. The welling up of these taboo desires is made possible largely by the psychodramatic resonances that Egypt assumes in Darley’s psyche and in Durrell’s fiction, its “foreign” landscape transformed into an emblem of the fragmented, anarchic terrain of the component instincts through which the questing writer must pass on his way to artistic manhood.

Ironically, only when Darley has purged himself of all expressions of polymorphous play and perversity can he break through the writer’s block that plagues him for four volumes and emerge on the last page of the *Quartet* as a productive writer and successful heterosexual lover.

These displacements shed additional light on Durrell’s letter equating the enjoyment of “hashish or boys or food” with “death” of the self. For Durrell proceeds to describe the “wonderful novel on Alexandria” he has just conceived, “a sort of spiritual butcher’s shop with girls on the slab” (2: 196). Underlying this inspiration of the written text of the *Quartet* as a heterosexist fantasy of girls as meat to be devoured glimmers the fear of sodomy as an ultimate indulgence in passive pleasures (like drugs, like food) that spell a “sort of death” to active, or “masculine,” artistic (pro)creativity. The homoerotic fantasies unleashed by Durrell’s projection onto Egypt of the “dark tides of Eros” hidden within every psyche generate a crisis of masculine subjectivity that compels Durrell to Promethean efforts to contain the very desires on which his exploration of foreign otherness depends (2: 185). To a lesser degree, the same paradox overwhelms Flaubert’s exploration of Egyptian sensuality. In the process, “the homoerotics of orientalism” constantly threatens to become another name for occidental homophobia.

Dressing Down the Desert Androgyne

While writers like Flaubert and Durrell locate their visions of a sexualized, mythic Near East in the spectacle and stimulation of Egypt’s infinite variety, the homoerotic impulse infiltrating occidental visions of the Near East also manifests itself in adventurers who search out the nomadic life of the desert and embrace ascetic solitude rather than profusion. Seeking to blend into their surroundings by taking on the apparel of the Bedouin, such figures attempt not merely to possess but, more important, to become the desired other. Putting on “Arab drag” provides the desert androgyne with a disguise that allows for the play of sexual and gender ambiguity. Coupled with a persistent misogyny, this ambiguity issues forth in a complicated modality of homoerotic desire that is expressed

sometimes in puritanical asceticism and sublimation, sometimes in sadistic outbreaks of violence, and sometimes in swooning surrender to the desert's harsh beauty. These desert androgynes transform their short lives into the subject of scandal and eventually the stuff of myth—a status that may overshadow but cannot eclipse the specific scenarios of empire and colonialism that make possible their legendary romances with the desert.

This blend of sexual repression, homosexual yearning, and sadomasochistic surrender finds quintessential expression in T. E. Lawrence, the twentieth century's most famous icon of the thrill and contradictions of assuming Arab drag. For Lawrence dressing in desert gear was foremost a means of “[quitting him] of [his] English self,” of attempting to become the other rather than the colonizer. At the same time he admitted that he “could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only” (*Seven Pillars* 30). This contradictory doubleness—which Marjorie Garber links to psychic transvestism (304–09) and Kaja Silverman to the “double mimesis” of psychic colonialism (17–19)—characterized all aspects of Lawrence's life, including the powerful if elusive homoerotic strain that he writes into *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the official story of his engagement in the Arab revolt of 1914–18. The homoerotics of this epic tug in two directions: toward an impossibly idealized Bedouin homosexuality and toward its nightmarish opposite, utter degradation—conditions that both pivot on (dis)simulations of dress and disguise. The first strain is proclaimed in chapter 1, as Lawrence frankly addresses the “strange longings” that blossom in the “virile heat” of the desert as his youthful Bedouin followers “slake one another's few needs in their own clean bodies.” The passion of “friends quivering together in the yielding sand with intimate hot limbs in supreme embrace,” Lawrence continues, is but “a *sensual* co-efficient of the *mental* passion which was wielding our souls in one flaming effort” (28; emphases added). An erotic ideal thus finds its reflection in a political ideal that, under the sign of male-male love, tenuously combines British colonial interests and the movement toward Arab sovereignty. This idealizing strain is continued in the story of the Bedouin lovers Daud and



While T. E. Lawrence's famous white robes were part of his self-constructed image of ascetic masculinity, this photograph, appearing in Lowell Thomas's *With Lawrence in Arabia* (London: Hutchinson, 1924), purports to offer evidence of Lawrence's participation in a more ambiguous form of boundary crossing: “Lawrence occasionally visited enemy territory disguised as a gypsy woman of Syria,” Thomas's caption reads (facing 96). (Courtesy of the estate of Lowell Thomas and Hutchinson Co., London.)

Saad—“an instance,” Lawrence writes approvingly, “of the eastern boy and boy affection which the segregation of women [makes] inevitable” (244). Finally, this idealization of love between

men is set forth as the *raison d'être* of Lawrence's participation in the Arab conflict in the volume's dedicatory poem, "To S. A.," which begins "I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands . . . To earn you Freedom." Again, the sexual ideal coexists with and expresses the political goal.

Most biographers agree that the dedication refers to Sheikh Ahmed, otherwise known as Dahoum, the fourteen-year-old water boy with whom Lawrence became infatuated during his first extended stay in the Middle East. Onto this constant companion Lawrence projected an idealized vision of the Arabic race as pure, simple, and untainted by Western culture. The determination with which Lawrence set out to construct Dahoum as an ideal foreign other mirrors the determination with which Lawrence willed his own self-image into being, confident that through sheer self-mastery he could "mak[e] himself," in his biographer's words, "a perfected and refined instrument" (Mack 97, 86). One by-product of this discipline was Lawrence's puritanical sublimation of his homosexual inclinations. Yet in renouncing the flesh, Lawrence also set himself up for a vicious return of the repressed, which in *Seven Pillars* takes the form of the nightmarish inverse of the text's representation of idealized male bonds: the brutal rape he claims he endured when taken prisoner by the Turks at Der'a and the psychologically devastating loss of self-mastery that experience signified for him. These two faces of homosexuality assume unmistakably ideological valences in Lawrence's imaginary: the Arab freedom fighters whose cause he has undertaken engage in "clean" sex, while the Turks—Britain's foes—are "beastly" rapists (28, 452).

But for all the detail with which Lawrence represents his humiliation and degradation—exhibitionistically offering his bloodied body to his readers as a fetishized spectacle—what actually happened at Der'a remains lost in what biographers agree to be Lawrence's inability to distinguish between fact and fantasy. After telling how he spurned the Turkish bey's "fawn[ing]" (452) sexual advances, Lawrence reports being taken into the hall by the bey's soldiers and repeatedly beaten, lashed, and sodomized. Yet it is indicative of the narrative's confusion that Lawrence's de-

scriptions of torture and sexual abuse are indistinguishable: in the nightmarish fear of sexual contact that forms the inverse of Lawrence's idealization of homoerotic relations, submitting sexually and being tortured are the same fantasy.¹⁰ What emerges is Lawrence's guilt for having surrendered his vaunted self-mastery to the mastery of another; the threat of anal penetration signifies a loss of will that in turn signifies a loss of self.

The incredible narrative projections of fear and desire that arise from Lawrence's contemplation of one man's penetration by another are usefully explained by Leo Bersani in his influential essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?" Bersani argues that phallogocentric culture promotes a powerfully subliminal equation between passive anal sex, which represents the breakdown of bodily boundaries, and a shattering of the male ego that is tantamount to death. Underlying the cultural prohibition against being penetrated by another man is the irrational fear of dissolution of the psychic boundaries of the self—a notion that, as Bersani shows, reflects a specifically modern and Western conception of the ego as a self-contained and integral fortress. "That night the citadel of my integrity [was] irrevocably lost," Lawrence concludes the published account of the Der'a rape (*Seven Pillars* 456); in a private explanation to Charlotte Shaw, he confesses, "[T]o earn five minutes respite from . . . pain . . . I gave away the only possession we are born into the world with—our bodily integrity" (*Letters* 47–48).

This specifically male fear of the loss of corporeal integrity and ego boundaries cannot be separated from a concurrent desire to experience sexual surrender, as Bersani also makes clear: the desire expressed in Lawrence's evocation of "the delicious warmth, probably sexual, . . . swelling through [him]" as he is brutally kicked and then whipped in the groin (*Seven Pillars* 454). This experience forces on Lawrence the humiliating knowledge that he can allow himself to experience sexual pleasure only if pain and coercion are part of the scenario—his resistance has to be whipped out of him by an external force. And Lawrence becomes conscious of this hitherto repressed knowledge precisely through his psychodramatic projections onto the Near East of his attraction to and terror of sexual surrender as feminizing (see

also Silverman on how this experience transforms Lawrence from a “reflexive” to a “feminine” masochist [35]).¹¹

Lawrence’s masochism marks his subsequent relation to writing. He obsessively rewrites the Der’a incident from 1919 to 1925, elaborating and revising its details, just as he obsessively revises the unruly manuscript of *Seven Pillars*, which has become a text that is out of control, that cannot be mastered. This crisis of narrative authority reenacts the loss of bodily integrity and sexual control that Lawrence has grafted onto the experience of his rape. As a result, Lawrence increasingly expresses disgust toward the act of writing in terms that conflate authorial and biological functions: “I can’t write . . . since creation . . . is only a nasty vice. You have to be very eager-spirited to overcome the disgust of reproduction” (Mack 423). Ironically, this metaphoric association of textual production and sexual reproduction demonstrates Lawrence’s subliminal allegiance to the phallogocentric model that inhibits him sexually: a model whose link between regained masculine potency and successful literary production recurs in Flaubert and Durrell. Hence, as the fantasized site of male prowess, of spermatic reproduction, the textual body that arouses Lawrence’s “disgust” mirrors the disgust he expresses in *Seven Pillars* toward his “soiled”—because mastered—sexual body. And he now equates the “rankling fraudulence” of this body with his “daily posturing in alien dress”—desert drag no longer serves as an adequate vehicle for mediating his homoerotic urges. The desublimation of his homosexuality through masochistic degradation not only curtails the idealized fantasy of “clean” Bedouin sex but also forces Lawrence to see his role in “the national uprising of another race” as a “fraud” perpetuated by English interests (*Seven Pillars* 514). The man who has traveled to the Arabic desert filled with confidence, privately transforming himself into the foreign other he wants to be (and to have) while publicly transforming himself into the heroic liberator of the land of his desires, returns home to England in self-defeat. Having failed to become the colonial object of his desire, Lawrence settles, ironically, for a pale imitation: psychic existence as a mastered subject, in thrall to an “impe-

rial” notion of masculine will that transforms his homosexual yearnings into a feminine surrender for which he can only punish himself in rites of degradation and self-abnegation.¹²

The Tourist Trade in Boys

Not all imaginative travelers to the Near East remain so resigned as Lawrence or so resistant as Durrell to the homoerotic pulsations fueling many occidental visions of Arabic sexuality. For over a century, numerous gay men have journeyed to North Africa to discover what they already suspected was there: a colonized Third World in which the availability of casual sex is based on an economics of boys. Seized by the French in 1834, Algeria became a popular cruising site for Gide, Wilde, Alfred Douglas, Ronald Firbank, and many other homosexual men of means by the century’s end.¹³ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Algeria’s reputation for gay tourism was superseded by that of the French-Spanish colony of Morocco. Tangier’s establishment as an international zone by Western interests from 1923 to 1956 played a role in this shift by encouraging suspect activities ranging from international monetary speculation and a black market in drugs to underage prostitution.¹⁴ This atmosphere inevitably nurtured a reputation for sexual permissiveness; behaviors unthinkable in much of Europe and America became local badges of honor. Writing in the 1950s, William Burroughs sums up the appeal of Tangier as a haven for those gay, bisexual, and otherwise sexually marginalized Anglo-American artists and intellectuals whose desires were a source of persecution back home: “The special attraction of Tangier can be put in one word: exemption. Exemption from interference, legal or otherwise. Your private life is your own, to act exactly as you please. . . . It is a sanctuary of non-interference” (59).

Given the reality of homosexual persecution that drove a number of Europeans and Americans to make Tangier their home,¹⁵ I do not mean to undervalue the degree to which these gay enclaves created self-affirming communities impossible elsewhere or to overlook the degree to which these expatriate communities, however privileged



Best known for his photographs of nude Italian boys of North African origin striking various Hellenic poses, Wilhelm von Gloeden capitalizes on the orientalist motif of the beautiful Arab boy in his portrait series Ahmed, 1890–1900, which was reproduced as tourist postcards. (Collection Lebeck. Reproduced by permission of Agfa Foto-Historama, Cologne.)

in their trappings, sometimes allowed for the emergence of desires and practices resistant to the dominant Western erotology of romantic coupling. But the “sanctuary of non-interference” that Burroughs applauds was no gay utopia. The intersection of this “sanctuary” for gay men with certain historical and economic factors of Western colonialism allowed a level of exploitation potentially as objectionable as the experience of marginalization and harassment that sent these Western voyagers abroad in the first place. Sex for

sale provides an obvious but far from simple example. As Alfred Chester notes, “[i]t is traditional in Morocco to pay for sex,” and although the Westerner may find the price nominal, “to the Moslem it can be enough to live on—and when it is, there is no escaping the fact that, however gilded it is by tradition, prostitution is taking place.” Chester then wickedly adds, in reference to the vaunted primacy of ends over means in Moroccan men’s sex practices, “What makes it adorable to people at either end of the banknote is that, though the Moslem is an employee, he really and truly loves his work” (225). There may be more than a grain of truth in Chester’s final turn of phrase: local economies of Moroccan sex can latch onto, participate in, and even exploit “exploitative” Western practices in complex and unpredictable ways. “Love” of work, however, does not erase the dynamics of power that many employers would rather believe their employees consider mere technicalities of the trade. The novelist Robin Maugham, a longtime Tangier

resident, anecdotally sums up the political subtext of such tensions in relating an incident that occurred after the granting of Moroccan independence in 1956. Hassled during a walk with visitors by the persistent propositions of a young boy, one of Maugham’s companions snaps, “Oh do go home”; to this rebuke the boy replies in English, “*You go home, you go home . . . and don’t come back to my country*” (“Peter Burton” 145; emphases added). In a colonial context, what and where is “home,” and whose home is it?

Within this tradition of gay occidental tourism, Gide's 1902 novel of sexual discovery, *L'immoraliste* (*The Immoralist*) is paradigmatic, relentlessly disclosing beneath its veneer of reticence a narrative of homosexual—and specifically pederastic—awakening.¹⁶ The text opens with Michel's confessing to a group of friends summoned from France the story of his marriage and near-fatal honeymoon trip to an Arabic world that, as a scholar of orientalism, he has hitherto possessed only through books. After almost dying in Tunis from a tubercular attack, Michel is nursed back to health in Algeria, where he undergoes a voluptuous awakening to the exotic foreign landscape, which envelops him in its "richer, hotter blood" and penetrates to "the most . . . secret fibers of [his] being" (52). The Nietzschean dialectic of freedom versus culture, body versus mind, that evolves as Michel embraces a life of sensual abandon barely covers the homoerotic subtext that the text continually teases the reader to decode.

The first clue to this coded subtext is Gide's representation of Michel's gaze, which uncovers in brief flashes the naked limbs of Arab boys and youths beneath loose clothing. A second, related clue to Gide's gay subtext is the procession of pubescent boys who pass through Michel's quarters or whom Michel encounters on walks during his convalescence. A third clue lies in Michel's growing obsession with masks, deceit, and concealment—an obsession, in effect, with the homosexual art of passing and getting away with it. A fourth clue involves Gide's manipulation of Michel's language so that the words always seem on the verge of saying something other than what they ultimately reveal.¹⁷ That the reader is being actively solicited to decode the "open secret" of these passages is spelled out in an aside in which Michel compares himself to a text—specifically, to a palimpsest beneath whose "more recent" layers the scholar digs to find the "more precious ancient text," that of the repressed self (51).

But the possibility of leading (and writing) a double life, coupled with Michel's growing recognition of his own latent desires, breeds profound ambivalence, for in a complex process of internalization that amounts to a fetishizing of the closet,

Michel's psyche translates secret desires into necessarily criminal ones. The ultimate measure of Michel's "criminality" is his neglect of Marceline, whose health has declined as his has improved and whose death Michel guarantees by forcing her to return with him to North Africa, the scene of his homoerotic awakening—symbolically her death ensures that Michel can live as a free man. But to be free translates for Michel into utter immersion in sensual self-gratification at the expense of other selves. "I'm afraid that what I have suppressed will take its revenge," he tells his auditors, and then, in a revelation withheld till the novel's final lines, the reader learns of Michel's pederastic relationship with the Kabyl child Ali, whose caresses, "in exchange for a few sous," are "what keeps [Michel there] more than anything else" (170–71), sunk into torpid surrender to inner passions projected outward onto the African landscape. "This climate, I believe, is what's responsible for the change," he says. "Nothing discourages thought so much as this perpetual blue sky. Here any exertion is impossible, so closely does pleasure follow desire" (170).

The disturbing conflation that this conclusion effects between homoerotic surrender and the lure of North African otherness points to the unconscious colonialism involved in Gide's projection of a narrative of gay awakening onto the Near East. Michel's awakening depends on the orientalist move of equating the Near East almost exclusively with the body and with surfeit: for Michel, North Africa can be apprehended only sensually, and that mode of apprehension leaves no room for art or intellect. "Art is leaving me, I feel it," says Michel, "[but] to make room for . . . what?" (163). Michel's awakening also depends on his refusal to see the actual foreign others who embody his desire as anything other than objects: boys, once Michel realizes he desires them, form an endless chain of anonymous, available bodies, the means to his awakening, never subjects of their own stories or desires.

The economic underpinnings of this exchange in boys as objects of Western consumption, only hinted at in Gide, are made explicit in Orton's diary account of his and Ken Halliwell's sexual escapades in Tangier in 1967. Orton's diary in fact

owes its inspiration to his agent's suggestion that Orton start a "journal *à la Gide*" of his travels (Lahr 12). The Morocco entries emulate Gide with a vengeance, recording the constant stream of youths trooping in and out of Orton's Tangier flat. The flat, however, is not all that is paid for: Orton takes as a given, indeed as a source of stimulation, that you get what you pay for and pay for what you get in terms of Tangier trade, and he records with cynical humor the bargaining that undergirds sexual pleasure in Morocco. Who could want more, he sardonically muses, than "the [daily] company of beautiful fifteen-year-old boys who find (for a small fee) fucking with me a delightful sensation"? (186).

A corollary of the occidental tourist's fantasy that all boys are available for the right price is the assumption that they represent interchangeable versions of the same commodity: (nearly) underage sex. The number of identically named Mohammeds that Orton meets thus becomes a running joke in his diary ("His name, inevitably, was Mohammed" [193]), and to keep his schedule of assignments from becoming hopelessly muddled, Orton assigns the boys farcical surnames: Mohammed (I), Mohammed Yellow-jersey, Mohammed Gold-tooth. What may be humorous in the abstract is of course dehumanizing in reality, for such type-casting only reinforces the boys' anonymity and dispensability.¹⁸ Tellingly, Orton not only turns against the one Mohammed who attempts to assert his individuality—proudly declaring to Joe and company that he is off to Gibraltar to make a life for himself, with a legitimate job—but also belittles this ambition as bourgeois careerism and then claims, to top it off, that Mohammed is a bad lay. Not coincidentally, it is also this Mohammed who has asserted his subjectivity by complaining to Orton, "You give me money, yes—but me want *l'amour*. Me like you. Me want *l'amour*" (174). *L'amour*, of course, is the one item missing from the vacation cruise package Orton has signed up for.

As a gay adventurer in Tangier, then, Orton manifests the contradictions of the colonialist abroad; he hates and mocks the general run of tourists for ruining "our town" (187), while at the same time he depends on the hierarchical dynamic of (moneyed) white man/(purchased) brown boy to

make his own vacation a success. This doubleness repeats itself in the contradiction between Orton's courageous rebellion against sexual orthodoxy (exemplified in his enjoyment of sex for its own sake) and his basic phallocentrism (categorizing each boy he has had as a "very valuable addition to [his] collection" [186]). Finally, this appropriation of the East manifests itself on the level where sexual and textual pleasures combine for Orton. For his diary entries, as a record of conquests meant to keep the excitement going, become yet another means of possessing the foreign other, but as textual image rather than as physical body. As Orton writes of one particularly steamy encounter: "At [that] moment with my cock in his arse the *image* was, and *as I write still* is, overpoweringly erotic" (207; emphases added). If Orton does not manifest the anxieties of textual and sexual authority or the loss of the desire to write present in many writers' homoerotic negotiations with the Near East, it is because Orton's confidence in his gay identity allows him to reassert the coupling of writerly authority and male potency that has always characterized phallocentric discourse, but now in the name of homosexual rather than heterosexual pleasure.

The continuities represented by Gide's and Orton's responses to the North African trade in boys are played out in numerous Western narratives written by gay or bisexual men.¹⁹ In contrast, the Moroccan storyteller Mohammed Mrabet's *Love with a Few Hairs* dramatically recasts the plot of *L'immoraliste* from the perspective of the kept Arab boy: here the sexual object—also named Mohammed—becomes the subject of his own story, a story that renders the Westerner, or Nazarene, the anonymous other.²⁰ The first sentence of Mrabet's tale—"Mohammed lived with Mr. David, an Englishman who owned a small hotel near the beach"—introduces the kept-boy theme matter-of-factly, indeed as a fact of life. The reader next learns that "only [one] thing about Mohammed's life . . . [had] made his father sad . . . during the four years he had been living with Mr. David." Any expectation that the father's unhappiness may involve the propriety of Mohammed's having maintained a sexual relationship since the age of thirteen with a man the father's age is quickly deflated: the vice that disturbs the father is not sex

but alcohol abuse: “One day soon you’ll be getting married. Do you want your wife and children to see you drunk?” (1). Here the structural opposition is between drinking and marriage, not between marriage and a pederastic relationship, for in the narrative that unfolds—the story of Mohammed’s ill-fated infatuation with a girl named Mina—the relationship with Mr. David hovers uninterrupted in the background, in a stratum of Tangier life proximate to, but held at a distance from, the story of “love with a few hairs”—a reference to the magic potion Mohammed procures to make Mina love him.

The text’s opening also spells out the economics of the occidental trade in boys, but from a Moroccan perspective. The family, it is clear, looks on Mr. David as a benefactor who periodically brings Mohammed’s father “gifts” that the father can sell on the black market (2). This understood exchange, whereby Mohammed is passed from father to paternal lover, is only one of the many monetary exchanges that Mrabet depicts as affecting all facets of Moroccan life. Within this framework, the Western tourist’s guiding principle of promiscuous sexual consumerism—you get what you pay for—gives way to the more pervasive local economies of barter. Sex, as a result, becomes Mohammed’s most effective bargaining chip, both in manipulating Mr. David for the money to finance marriage to Mina and in maneuvering to stay in Mr. David’s good graces despite the marriage. Here Mrabet’s artistry is at its most subtle, as carefully placed variations on the sentence “That night Mohammed slept with Mr. David” signal the economic and emotional pressures of Mohammed’s adjacent heterosexual love life: when he needs money or feels unhappy, Mohammed knows where to go and what to do. In this recasting of the Gidean fantasy from the perspective of the indigenous subject, it is the Western benefactor and not the Moroccan boy who is kept virtually anonymous: the reader never even learns whether *David* is Mr. David’s given name or his surname. Whatever the degree of his seemingly real affection for Mr. David, Mohammed ultimately sees his patron as indistinguishable from the other Nazarenes hanging out in Tangier, and this perspective dramatically reverses the dynamics of otherness that rule in Gide and in Orton.

Yet Mrabet’s demystification of the colonialist fantasy of the trade in boys coexists with acceptance of the misogyny and sexism that mark many of the Western narratives discussed here. This contiguity between Eastern and Western sexism is most pronounced in the collusion of Moroccan male culture and of Mr. David’s occidental cohorts in supporting Mohammed’s scheme to get his marriage annulled by treating Mina so badly that she will beg to be let go. The narrative’s entire trajectory works toward a demonstration of the correctness of Mr. David’s admonition “Don’t trust any woman” (177), which in turn reinforces Mina’s expendability in the plot’s economy of desire. While Mr. David takes Mohammed’s bisexuality as a given, he also encourages Mohammed to maintain a string of girlfriends, rather than a single relationship. It is Mohammed’s acceptance of this advice that forms Mrabet’s conclusion: a reformed Mohammed moves back in with Mr. David, “ha[s] other girls but [does] not let himself love any of them,” and lives happily ever after (196). The text’s erasure of Mina is finalized when, years later, Mohammed encounters her when he is on the way to visit his father (from whom Mohammed has been estranged because of his marriage to Mina). After escaping Mina, Mohammed hurries, in the text’s last line, “quickly [on] to his father’s house” (198). The closing words thus reestablish the alignment between Mohammed’s father and Mr. David, between Eastern and Western patriarchy, that opens the narrative, proving that *fathers* know best: “You should be like the Englishman,” Mohammed’s father scolds him in the novel’s opening scene. “He doesn’t go out into the street drunk” (2). And one of the last things the reader learns about Mohammed is that he now rarely drinks—he has become not only a “good” Muslim like his religiously observant father but also a mirror of his Western paternal lover.

These pages trace a number of crossings over hypothetical borders or divisions: East/West, female/male, homosexual/heterosexual, colonized/colonizer, among others. As the lines between these terms blur, neither the dichotomies that these pairings purport to describe nor the hierarchical arrangements they are meant to enforce prove to be

so apparent. In particular, by gridding the geographical and sexual oppositions—West/East, heterosexual/homosexual—onto and across each other's axes, I have attempted to call attention to the sexual and textual politics that complicate many Western male travelers' encounters with a homoerotized Near East. In accounts of orientalism that assume the heterosexuality of the erotic adventurer, for example, the confrontation with the specter of homosexuality that lurks in Western fantasies of Eastern decadence destabilizes the assumed authority of the tourist as a distant, uncontaminated spectator. In narratives where the occidental traveler by virtue of his homosexuality is already the other, the presumed *equivalence* of Eastern homosexuality and occidental personal liberation may disguise the specter of colonial privilege and exploitation encoded in the hierarchy white man/brown boy. And reading Mrabet against Gide's and Orton's narratives shows not only how the *other* other's story can unsettle the assumed hierarchy colonizer/colonized but also how, despite this political critique, a complicitous equivalence between East and West can reestablish itself under the aegis of patriarchy precisely when the tension marking the hierarchy male/female becomes palpable. This return to the gender binary on which sexual hierarchy within patriarchy is based serves as a reminder that the story of many Western men's encounters with the Near East, whatever these tourists' putative sexual orientations, has also been the story of a crisis in male subjectivity—the crisis that by definition is occidental masculinity itself. Every rereading of this story may help Western readers re-orient their perceptions of the complex undercurrents of those fantasized geographies of male desire that depend on, even as they resist, the homoerotics of an orientaling discourse whose phallogocentric collusions and resistant excitations this essay has just begun to uncover.²¹

Notes

¹By *Orient* Said means the Near and Middle East; for insightful critiques of the ways in which Said's terminology unintentionally produces a unified Orient all the more easily

dominated by a discursively all-powerful West, see Mani and Frankenberg; Bhabha; and Sharpe. Likewise, while I attempt to make my use of the terms *West* and *East* as specific as possible, it is impossible not to generalize at times; I hope that the context of my statements makes clear when I am using these rhetorical markers as shorthand for much more complex geographic and psychological realities.

²While Alloula's phrase occurs in a chapter titled "Oriental Sapphism," his interest lies in the heterosexual viewer for whom images of lesbian love in the harem are created. Said's sidestepping of the homoerotic dimensions of this "promise (and threat)" is not unique; see the way in which Kabbani raises the specter of homoeroticism only to subsume it into the sexuality of the oriental woman (*Europe's Myths* 80–81). Homosexual practice in the British Empire is addressed by Ronald Hyam, who notes that "the empire was often an ideal arena for the practice of sexual variation" (5–6); however, his exclusive focus on official British guardians of empire, coupled with his dismissal of feminist criticism, limits his usefulness in analyzing the sexual politics of colonialism. The most thoughtful examination to date of the homoerotic subtexts in Western visions of the Arabic Orient is Marjorie Garber's often dazzling chapter "The Chic of Araby."

³Here terminology becomes, if not a problem, a reminder that defining "the homosexual" as such is very much a Western enterprise; while male-male sexual practice is plentiful in Muslim culture, there is no Arabic word equivalent to *homosexuality*. The closest approximation is the classical Arabic *liwat*, which designates an act of sodomy performed on or by means of (not with) a boy (Schmitt 5, 9–11).

⁴These literary-artistic vacationers and sojourners have included, among others, Orton, Jean Genet, Tennessee Williams, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Ronald Firbank, Robin Maugham, Angus Stewart, Rupert Croft-Cooke, Michael Davidson, Harold Norse, Truman Capote, Alfred Chester, Ned Rorem, and Roland Barthes.

⁵In conceiving this project, I am mindful of Jenny Sharpe's warning that "[i]t might well be argued that studies [written within an authorizing Western discourse on] the domination of dominant discourses merely add to their totalizing effects" (138); my presentation attempts to avoid this trap as much as is possible by focusing on an aspect of colonialist discourse—sexuality between men—that remains relatively unauthorized and censored in those "totalizing" Western discourses to which Sharpe refers. If this investigation owes much to the critiques of European colonialism that have followed in the wake of Said, its gendered analysis is indebted not only to queer theory but also to those many feminist analyses that have engaged issues of colonialism; see Sharpe; Abu-Lughod; El Saadawi; Mernissi; Shaarawi; Lowe; and Woodhull, as well as Spivak's and Mohanty's analyses of the intersections of Western feminist and Third World criticism. I do not focus on same-sex activity between women in this essay, but lesbianism within the harem has also been the subject of much orientaling commentary since Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*; see the critiques offered by Behdad; Alloula; Croutier. For an account of how some Euro-

pean women have appropriated iconography of the harem as a way of encoding lesbian desire, see Apter's "Female Trouble."

⁶The Arab world that I subsume under the rubric of the Arabic Orient follows, loosely, the definitions unfolded by Bernard Lewis, who traces the historical emergence of an "Arab" identity that resides as much in a common language, a shared religious faith, and a loose confederation of multiple, often highly variable, cultures and nation-states as it does in a single ethnicity or nationality.

⁷This assertion is not intended to deny the practice or specificity of sexual relations between males in many strata of Muslim Arabic society. A number of historical factors have influenced the prevalence and (to Western perception) relative tolerance of same-sex love within the nonetheless predominantly heterosexual cultures of the Arabic Orient: the Prophet's relative indifference to male homosexuality (Daniel 40), reflected in stipulations in the Koran that make legal prosecution highly unlikely; the general celebration of all male sexual pleasure in Islamic cultures; the tendency to measure sexuality in terms of activity or passivity rather than in terms of gender; the medieval Persian tradition of pederasty; the latitude offered by sociocommunal codes of propriety and discretion (see Bouhdiba 103–04, 140–42, 200–10; Daniel 40–42; Schmitt, esp. 7; Schmitt and Sofers).

⁸For reports of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century testimony, see Boswell 281–82 and Daniel 62 on Jacques de Vitry's propagandistic *Oriental History*, William of Ada, and Friar Guillaume Adam. For seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts reporting the frequency of male-male sexuality in the Near East, see the orientaling travelogues of Rycout on Turkey, of Covell on the Levant, and of Sonnini and of Denon on Egypt just before and during the Napoleonic invasion.

⁹For further examples of this phenomenon, see my analysis of Hector France's turn-of-the-century travelogue *Musk, Hashish, and Blood* in "Framing the Phallus" and my reading of the adult film *Sahara Heat* in "Rubbing Aladdin's Lamp."

¹⁰Lawrence's collapse of the distinctions between sexual contact and rape should be taken not as a general comment on the physical or psychic abuse experienced by rape victims but as an example of the fantasies engendered by a specifically male cultural fear of anal penetration.

¹¹After Lawrence returned home to England, the masochistic desire awakened by this shattering of will no longer had to masquerade in Arab drag. For the final ten years of his life, which he spent in England, he engaged in an elaborate ritual of birchings to repeat his original surrender while punishing himself for the pleasure that this punishment stimulated. According to an anonymous eyewitness, Lawrence stipulated that "the beatings be severe enough to produce a seminal emission" [Mack 433; see also D. Stewart 244, 275; Maugham, *Escape* 104].

¹²Space limitations prevent me from tracing the homoeroticizing possibilities of donning Arabic dress through their many subsequent permutations. But one might consider Rudolph Valentino's filmic performances as "the Sheik." One might also ponder the homoerotic current that persists even when, as with Isabelle Eberhardt, the white "man" in Arab drag turns out to be a woman or the frisson that Bowles exploits when Kit

Moresby's captor disguises her as an Arab boy in *The Sheltering Sky* (see also Garber 309–11, 325–26, 335). The pathos of these instances is that the Western subject—real or fictionalized—can imagine male homosexuality only as a total surrender to surfeit, passivity, or violation (desired rather than, as with Lawrence, both desired and feared), because the command to yield takes the decision, the agency, out of one's hands. By attempting to become part of a culture whose fatalistic creed is summed up in the saying *mektoub* "it is written," the occidental tourist recasts "deviance" as part of an immutable decree beyond individual or authorial control.

¹³It is no coincidence that the decade that saw the creation of the pathological category of the homosexual intensified the search for non-European outlets, such as Algeria, for sexual energies increasingly persecuted within Western culture.

¹⁴My phrase "underage prostitution" begs further definition, as does subsequent use of the term *boys*. Many writers who describe voyages to the Near East use the term *boy* to refer to any male youth from adolescence to late teens and even early twenties. Indeed, the myth of "younger is better" is so potent a part of gay tourist lore that many Westerners pretend to be engaging in underage sex even when they are not. But for men whose desires are definitionally pederastic, pubescent and prepubescent boys, especially those who come down from the Riffian mountains to eke out a living in the city, are by all accounts readily available. Within a Near Eastern perspective, the term *underage sex* carries little or no meaning and little of the sense of taboo or moral condemnation that it bears within Western constructions of sexuality as an adult activity; a child, particularly one of the peasantry or working class, is never a sexual innocent, indeed is a practicing adult from the time he takes to the streets on his own. See A. Stewart's and Davidson's pederastic narratives, as well as Rossman's survey (100–02, 116–21) of the North African "pederast underground."

¹⁵For example, scandals and prison sentences forced both the respected journalist Michael Davidson (169–81) and the novelist Rupert Croft-Cooke to leave England for Morocco.

¹⁶For a report of Gide's similar sexual initiation in Algeria, see his autobiography *If It Die . . .* (267–69, 303), and for a perceptive analysis of the book's colonialist underpinnings, see Michael Lucey ("Gide Writing" 30; "Consequence" 182, 185).

¹⁷Apter identifies the rhetorical strategy whereby the gap in Michel's sentences prefigures an "unstated subtext of homoeroticism" as anacoluthon (*Gide* 113–15).

¹⁸Since part of the Moroccan vacation fantasy has to do not simply with availability but with youth, Orton's other means of differentiating among his prospects is to assign an age to each (a "very attractive fifteen-year-old boy," "a quite nice looking boy of seventeen," "a very pretty boy of about eleven" [174, 184, 209]). And yet so strong is the myth that younger is better that Orton scales down his original estimates: thus Mohammed, "a very beautiful sixteen-year-old boy" at the beginning of the 9 May entry, is "about fifteen" by 25 May and "fourteen" by 11 June (160, 185, 260).

¹⁹Examples include Maugham's *The Wrong People* (1964), Norse's "Six for Mohammed Riffi" (1962–63), Chester's "Glory Hole: Nickel Views of the Infidel in Tangiers" (1963–65),

Croft-Cooke's *Exiles* (1970), Angus Stewart's *Tangier: A Writer's Notebook* (1977), Scott Symon's *Helmet of Flesh* (1986), and Aldo Busi's *Sodomies in Eleven Point* (1992).

²⁰Transcribed and translated from the Maghrebi by Bowles, Mrabet's text also illustrates an ironic "payoff" of the colonial trade in boys: for Bowles has not only worked indefatigably for over three decades to secure publication and recognition for rising young Moroccan writers but also made handsome protégés like Mrabet into favored male companions. The implicit power dynamic of Western patron/Moroccan youth underpinning these touted "literary collaborations" thus participates in and complicates the erotic transactions that form this essay's subject. Another narrative told from the point of view of the kept Moroccan boy is Larbi Layachi's *A Life Full of Holes*.

²¹This essay has benefited greatly from the responsive audiences it has met at the University of California, Berkeley; the Humanities Center at the University of California, Davis; Georgetown University's 1990 Conference on Literary Theory; the 1991 Unauthorized Sexual Behaviors conference at the University of California, Riverside; and the University of Southern California's Life of the Mind series. Thanks are also due to Earl Jackson, Ed Cohen, Lee Edelman, David Román, Hilary Schor, Jim Kincaid, Jonathan Strong, and Scott Elledge for their insightful comments, as well as to Parama Roy, Sandra Naddaff, Emily Apter, Karen Lawrence, Michael Lucey, Nancy Paxton, and Greg Mullins for sharing ideas, work, and citations from related projects.

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