

FPS

Volume 3, Number 1

**L'INDE ET LA FRANCE:
REPRÉSENTATIONS CULTURELLES**

Introduction

Brian Stimpson and Myriam El Malzi

India in the French Renaissance: the example of Montaigne
Emily Butterworth

L'Ambassade indienne de 1788 au miroir d'Hérodote
Thomas Haller

The End of the British Raj: Representations of the
Decolonisation of India in French-language journalism
Kate Marsh

'I thought India was French': The images of India at the
Exposition Universelle, Paris 1931
Jyoti Mohan

Cultural relativism, colonial collecting and travel:
Henri Michaux's *Un Barbare en Asie*
Srilata Ravi

L'Inde: présence et influence dans l'univers de Marguerite Yourcenar
Pacharav Sudavna

In the Footsteps of Alexander?
Malraux, Lévi-Strauss, Le Corbusier and Chandigarh
Douglas Smith

Book Reviews

Charles Forsdick

Pierre-Philippe Fraiture

Roger Little



**SOCIETY FOR FRANCOPHONE
POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES**

Cover design by Ciarrhán Ó Scólaí

The SFPS logo is based on a Téké mask from
the Upper Sanga region (Congo-Brazzaville)

ISSN 1741-8283



3.1

**FRANCOPHONE
POSTCOLONIAL
STUDIES**

Francophone Postcolonial Studies

**Volume 3, Number 1
Spring/Summer 2005**

SPECIAL ISSUE:

**L'INDE ET LA FRANCE:
REPRÉSENTATIONS CULTURELLES**

Edited by Brian Stimpson and Myriem el Maïzi

Editorial team:

Sam Haigh (University of Warwick)
 Jane Hiddleston (University of Warwick)
 Nicki Hitchcott (University of Nottingham)
 Aedín Ní Loingsigh (University of Edinburgh)

Advisory Board:

Celia Britton (University College London)
 Laurent Dubois (Michigan State University)
 Mary Gallagher (University College Dublin)
 Alec Hargreaves (Florida State University)
 Peter Hawkins (University of Bristol)
 Roger Little (Trinity College, Dublin)
 Margaret Majumdar
 Pius Ngandu Nkashama (Louisiana State University)
 Winifred Woodhull (University of California, San Diego)

Editorial Board:

Nicola Cooper (University of Bristol)
 Patrick Corcoran (University of Surrey Roehampton)
 Charles Forsdick (University of Liverpool)
 Laïla Ibnlfassi (London Metropolitan University)
 Debra Kelly (University of Westminster)
 Maeve McCusker (Queen's University, Belfast)
 Ceri Morgan (Keele University)
 David Murphy (University of Stirling)
 Andy Stafford (University of Leeds)
 Michael Syrotinski (University of Aberdeen)
 Jennifer Yee (University of Oxford)

L'INDE ET LA FRANCE: REPRÉSENTATIONS CULTURELLES

Introduction <i>Brian Stimpson and Myriem El Maïzi</i>	7
India in the French Renaissance: the example of Montaigne <i>Emily Butterworth</i>	16
L'Ambassade indienne de 1788 au miroir d'Hérodote <i>Thomas Hallier</i>	29
The End of the British Raj: Representations of the Decolonisation of India in French-language journalism <i>Kate Marsh</i>	43
'I thought India was French': The images of India at the <i>Exposition Universelle</i> , Paris 1931 <i>Jyoti Mohan</i>	56
Cultural relativism, colonial collecting and travel: Henri Michaux's <i>Un Barbare en Asie</i> <i>Srilata Ravi</i>	69
L'Inde: présence et influence dans l'univers de Marguerite Yourcenar <i>Pacharee Sudasna</i>	83
In the Footsteps of Alexander? Malraux, Lévi-Strauss, Le Corbusier and Chandigarh <i>Douglas Smith</i>	96

BOOK REVIEWS

Charles Forsdick	110
Pierre-Philippe Fraiture	113
Roger Little	115

SFPS Membership

Membership of SFPS runs from 1 Jan-31 Dec and includes:

- subscription to the society's bi-annual journal, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies (FPS)*
- regular mailings on conferences and other meetings

Annual membership fees for 2005 are:

- £35 for salaried members and for institutions (free copy of SFPS journal, and entitles members to a reduced conference fee). NB There is a special reduced rate of £30 for *all* new members and for renewals before 31 January. This reduced rate is also available to all those who pay by direct debit.
- £15 for students and unwaged members (free copy of *FPS* and entitles members to a reduced conference fee).

To join SFPS or to renew membership, send remittance in sterling (cheque/banker's order made payable to Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies) to: Dr Laïla Ibnlfassi, Department of Language Studies, London Metropolitan University, Calcutta House, Old Castle Street, London E1 7ET, UK.

SFPS Executive Committee (elected at AGM, November 2004)

President: David Murphy

Vice-President: Patrick Corcoran

Secretary: Denise Ganderton

Conference Secretary: Pierre-Philippe Fraiture

Treasurer: Charles Forsdick

Membership Secretary: Laïla Ibnlfassi

Publicity Team: Patrick Crowley, Karine Chevalier, Susan McWilliams

Publications Team: Sam Haigh, Jane Hiddleston, Nicki Hitchcott, Aedín Ní Loingsigh

Postgraduate Rep: Natasha Cheetham

Editorial: Why 'Francophone Postcolonial Studies'?

Despite the impact of postcolonial theory on different academic disciplines over recent decades, the insight it can provide with regard to Francophone Studies has yet to be fully assessed. Equally, the contribution that French and Francophone Studies can make, and indeed have made, to a postcolonial theory largely perceived as Anglophone frequently remains unexplored.

By providing a forum for postcolonial perspectives, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* aims to promote theoretically driven, analytical studies of the Francophone world, which both question and reinvigorate the more established fields of French and Postcolonial Studies. The privileging of the postcolonial is in no way intended to imply that Francophone cultural production will be approached according to a single theoretical framework. On the contrary, *FPS* acknowledges the different theoretical trends within this multidisciplinary field, and believes that the complexity of postcolonial theory is best served by encouraging a variety of approaches. This theoretical complexity and multidisciplinaryity is, in turn, ideally suited to studying Francophone cultural production, which is frequently situated at the intersection of different historical, linguistic and social phenomena where synthesis is neither desirable nor possible.

As outlined in our first issue, *FPS* envisages an approach that highlights a distinctive but reciprocal relationship between Francophone Studies and Postcolonial Studies. We would like to invite contributions on any topic related to Francophone Postcolonial Studies for inclusion in future issues. Suggestions for themed issues to be co-ordinated by guest editors are also welcome. Authors should submit two copies of their article, of 6,000 words maximum, in English or in French, to a member of the editorial team (full contact details are given below). Articles should conform in presentation to the guidelines in the *MHRA Stylebook*, providing references in footnotes, rather than the

author-date system. All articles submitted to *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from our advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked to ensure that the manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. The editorial team will endeavour to inform contributors of the decision regarding the publication of their articles within 12-15 weeks of receiving the piece. Book reviews, conference reports (700-800 words max.), calls for papers, should also be sent to the editorial team.

Editorial Team

- Dr Sam Haigh, Dept of French Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK.
E-mail: samantha.haigh@warwick.ac.uk
- Dr Jane Hiddleston Dept of French Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK.
E-Mail: jane.hiddleston@warwick.ac.uk
- Dr Nicki Hitchcott, Dept of French, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK.
E-mail: nicki.hitchcott@nottingham.ac.uk
- Dr Aedin Ní Loingsigh, Dept of French, University of Edinburgh, 60 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JU, UK.
E-mail: a.niloingsigh@ed.ac.uk

L'Inde et la France: représentations culturelles

'L'Inde' – concept qui à travers les siècles a fait rêver maint aventurier, homme politique ou poète métropolitain, avant de devenir la dérive sous-continentale obligée du voyageur mondial contemporain. Terme d'autant plus puissant qu'il a toujours agi aussi fortement dans le domaine de l'imaginaire que dans celui du réel. Certes, depuis le dix-septième siècle, de nombreux Français – gouverneurs, marchands, missionnaires ou soldats de fortune – se sont installés plus ou moins définitivement dans les 'comptoirs', enclaves commerciales qui constituent 'L'Inde française'. Mais la distance entre ces territoires et la capitale était si grande et la communication entre eux si lente que, malgré leurs efforts soutenus pour informer le gouvernement et le peuple français des conditions, des mœurs, de l'histoire, de la religion et de la culture indiennes, toute information devait se voir recouvrir du voile du temps, du malentendu, voire de l'indifférence, et tout développement courait le risque d'être livré aux grands intérêts économiques ou politiques de la monarchie, puis de la République.

On constate ainsi une confrontation de points de vue, de perspectives différentes qui varient selon la situation de l'observateur. Vus de Paris, ces territoires lointains, dotés de la fascination du 'nouveau' et de l' 'exotique', semblaient offrir des possibilités pour s'enrichir par le commerce et les investissements, tout en étant le plus souvent réduits à n'être qu'un pion sur le grand échiquier politique, mais aussi colonial où rivalisaient, notamment, les deux puissances française et britannique. Tandis qu'à ceux qui cherchaient sur place à assurer l'administration du territoire, à convertir le peuple au christianisme, ou tout simplement à faire fortune personnelle, Paris semblait lointaine, désengagée, et tous les aspects de la vie indienne se présentaient

comme sujets d'émerveillement, de défi, de *différence*. Pour compléter la triangulation des regards, il faudrait considérer la perspective indienne sur ces étrangers venus de loin, un aspect qui, nous pouvons le regretter, dépasse les confins du présent volume, et inviterait sans aucun doute à une étude approfondie.¹ Nous nous bornerons ici à examiner le premier de ces points de vue, principe unificateur qui traverse une diversité d'époques, de formes ou de genres. Les sujets abordés auront trait à la culture, la religion, la politique et la littérature, du seizième au vingtième siècles. Les différentes sources et matériaux analysés comptent des documents contemporains, des archives, des cosmographies, des récits de voyages, des articles de presse, des manifestations destinées au grand public telles que les expositions, ainsi que des romans, des essais et la construction à la fois réelle et symbolique qu'est l'architecture – tous soumis à une diversité de perspectives critiques. L'étude des phénomènes culturels servira dès lors moins à retracer le déroulement des événements historiques qu'à saisir la manière dont un événement est *représenté* et *perçu* à une époque donnée, et à révéler comment ces productions sont sujettes à la réécriture et à la réinterprétation de nos jours.

Toute représentation suppose une image mentale et un système conceptuel ou cadre culturel dont elle fait partie. Les représentations de l'Inde étudiées dans ce recueil sont, pour la plupart, *unilatérales*, au sens où les analyses développées porteront

¹ Voir, par exemple, Ananda Ranga Pillai, *Les grandes pages du Journal d'Ananda Ranga Pillai: courtier de la Compagnie des Indes auprès des gouverneurs de Pondichéry, 1736-1760*, ed. by Pierre Bourdat (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2003); P. N. Copra, *Life and Letter under the Mughals* (Delhi: Ashajanak, 1975). Voir aussi, pour le tableau des ressources manuscrites disponibles dans les dépôts d'archives et bibliothèques de France et une bibliographie thématique détaillée: *L'Inde et la France: Deux siècles d'histoire commune, XVIIe- XVIIIe siècles: histoire, sources, bibliographie*, ed. by Philippe Le Tréguilly and Monique Morazé (Paris: Éd. du CNRS, 1998).

avant tout sur la perception de l'Inde prise dans des perspectives françaises – qu'il s'agisse de la réception en France de diplomates indiens, de l'exposition à Paris d'objets culturels du sous-continent, de l'exploitation d'images de l'Inde dans des écrits destinés au public français, de l'intégration de la philosophie indienne dans une œuvre littéraire française, ou encore du jugement porté par la presse française sur des événements contemporains. La direction principale de ces forces de représentation est celle de la transposition d'une certaine image de l'espace culturel, historique, religieux etc. de l'Inde dans l'optique métropolitaine: le regard est surtout un regard qui approprie, qui assimile, un regard de récupération. Et même lorsqu'il est question de se rendre 'sur place', comme l'ont fait Michaux, Malraux ou Le Corbusier, la dynamique des multiples points de vue suppose un processus complexe et ambigu de pouvoir, de négociation et de résistance.

Ce recueil de travaux, qui ne prétend aucunement être compréhensif ou représentatif de l'ensemble de l'histoire culturelle des rapports entre la France et l'Inde, se fait l'exploration, à différents moments de l'histoire, de représentations individuelles et parfois insolites qui éclairent peut-être davantage le mode de perception et la mentalité de l'observateur à telle ou telle époque que la réalité même de ce qui est observé. Ce faisant, ces représentations permettent néanmoins d'élucider le parti pris implicite de ces perspectives qui ne se révèlent jamais neutres, voire même ont déterminé les interventions sur le territoire de l'Inde, ou joué un rôle dans le cadre de la politique intérieure de la France. Le regard sur l'*ailleurs*, peut servir un but ultérieur *tout près*.

Ainsi, comme le démontre Emily Butterworth, les cosmographies de François de Belleforest au XVI^e siècle, intégrant aux sources classiques des éléments nouveaux tirés de témoignages de marchands et missionnaires, donnent à voir une représentation de l'Inde comme réceptacle de divers fantasmes,

tandis que Montaigne, dans ses *Essais*, commentera les pratiques indiennes dans le contexte des événements contemporains des assassinats et des guerres de la religion. Thomas Hallier analyse les récits ayant trait à la réception de l'ambassade indienne à Paris en 1788, afin de mettre en perspective comment, malgré une réaction initiale nourrie de curiosité et de tolérance, ils marquent non seulement, et en définitive, le refus de la différence et la dépréciation de l'autre mais servent aussi implicitement à soutenir et à renforcer l'ordre moral français. L'article de Kate Marsh montre que, cent cinquante ans plus tard, la fin du colonialisme britannique en Inde se présente dans la presse française comme une construction textuelle où sont projetées les idéologies marxistes et républicaines occidentales et les débats qui animent la scène contemporaine de la politique française: le changement dans les rapports anglo-indiens permet à la France d'affirmer la valeur de son propre modèle colonial. Le recours à l'Inde dans le contexte de la rivalité franco-britannique est manifeste encore une fois dans le travail de Jyoti Mohan qui porte sur l'Exposition Universelle de Paris en 1931; l'importance accordée dans les comptes rendus officiels au 'Pavillon de l'Inde française' et au 'Pavillon Hindoustan' répond au besoin idéologique de la France de définir ses motivations philanthropiques et réalisations culturelles dans le contexte colonial.

Les trois derniers articles abordent les problèmes de la représentation culturelle sous un angle différent, en ce qu'ils étudient diverses tentatives menées pour concilier des perspectives occidentales et orientales, examinant de près les tensions et les difficultés d'une telle entreprise. L'analyse de Srilata Ravi porte sur la poétique de représentation de la différence culturelle dans *Un Barbare en Asie* d'Henri Michaux, un texte qui incarne les complexités de traduction d'une culture dans une autre; elle montre comment Michaux exploite et adapte la forme conventionnelle du 'récit de voyage' par des techniques de distanciation et développe l'idée d'un espace textuel qui donne à

voir une série de 'zones de contacts' dynamiques et ambiguës. Pacharee Sudasna s'intéresse à l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar afin de démontrer à quel point celle-ci est marquée de la culture et de la philosophie indiennes. Elle identifie quatre pistes principales: la conception cyclique du temps qui mène à la structure non linéaire de certains récits; la mise en question de la notion de l'individu, manifeste dans la volonté de dépersonnalisation de l'écrivain; la réincarnation et la 'conscience du non soi'; le non-dualisme et la quête d'une harmonie universelle. Dans un texte de grande envergure, Douglas Smith examine la vision commune de l'Inde comme carrefour des cultures qui est en évidence – sous des formes nuancées – chez Alexandre le Grand, André Malraux, Claude Lévi-Strauss et Le Corbusier: si *Tristes Tropiques* ou la théorie du 'musée imaginaire' sont marqués par la nostalgie d'une opportunité manquée d'un échange culturel entre l'Est et l'Ouest, Le Corbusier, en revanche, est motivé par le désir de créer à Chandigarh un modèle contemporain de dialogue unificateur entre ces deux cultures.

L'histoire de l'Inde française est donc présente ici en filigrane plutôt qu'au premier plan.² Cette aventure est restée peu connue dans le monde anglophone actuel, bien que l'importance de la présence française dans les comptoirs de Pondichéry et de Chandernagor ait rivalisé avec celle des Anglais à Madras et Calcutta au dix-huitième siècle. Les premiers à arriver en Inde par bateau en contournant le cap de Bonne-Espérance furent les Portugais au XVI^e siècle, suivis peu après par les autres puissances

² Nous sommes redevables pour les indications qui suivent surtout à l'admirable collection d'essais, *L'aventure des Français en Inde: XVII^e – XX^e siècles*, ed. by Rose Vincent (Paris: Éd. Kailash, 1998). Voir aussi: *Compagnies et comptoirs de l'Inde des Français, XVII^e-XX^e siècles*, ed. by Jacques Weber (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1991); *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, ed. by Jacques Weber (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2002).

maritimes d'Europe – Hollande, Angleterre et France. Les missionnaires et les voyageurs furent les premiers Français à se rendre en Inde, au tout début du XVII^e siècle, et leurs récits et lettres furent la source principale des informations sur cette terre et ses habitants. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier entreprit cinq voyages en Inde, le premier en 1638, le dernier en 1663, et les livres qu'il en écrivit fournissent des renseignements précieux sur le terrain, les régions, les produits, les religions.³ François Bernier débarqua en Inde en 1659, et après son retour en France dix ans plus tard, il fit le récit de toutes ses expériences et détails de ses connaissances dans une correspondance soutenue qui eut un retentissement important parmi ses contemporains, y compris les ministres, philosophes et poètes de son époque; il y décrit les richesses du pays, les cérémonies, les connaissances scientifiques et médicales, la splendeur du paysage, et même son invitation à la cour de l'empereur des Mogols.⁴

Les relations commerciales commencèrent au début du XVII^e siècle; des expéditions furent envoyées sous le règne de Louis XIII, mais il fallut attendre 1664 avant la fondation, par Colbert, de la Compagnie des Indes orientales, dont l'État et le roi Louis XIV étaient les actionnaires principaux. Afin d'assurer le fonctionnement du commerce, la Compagnie créa une série de 'comptoirs', des terrains légués par les Mogols pour permettre l'installation de locaux autour d'un port, dont le premier, Pondichéry, fut fondé en 1674 par François Martin. Malgré le

³ J.-B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages de JB Tavernier en Perse et aux Indes* (Paris: Gervais Clouzier/George Bardin, 1676; repr. Saint Pierre de Salerne: Gérard Monfort, 2004)

⁴ François Bernier, *Voyages de François Bernier (...)* (Amsterdam: Paul Marriet, 1723 à 1724; repr. Paris: Fayard, 1981). Sur les voyageurs et écrivains français en Inde: Guy Deleury, *Le voyage en Inde: anthologie des voyageurs français 1750-1820* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2003) et Florence D'Souza, *Quand la France découvrit l'Inde: Les Écrivains-voyageurs français en Inde, 1757-1818* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).

succès commercial et la popularité en France des marchandises indiennes, les bénéfices financiers étaient limités par le coût des fortifications sur place, des guerres avec les Hollandais et des problèmes de réglementations douanières françaises, et il fallut attendre le XVIII^e siècle pour que ces difficultés soient suffisamment résolues pour pouvoir assurer un rendement profitable des investissements. Car le souci principal des actionnaires en France comme des Français en Inde était de faire fortune, et non pas de faire des conquêtes territoriales. Joseph Dupleix, arrivé en Inde en 1722, avait cependant d'autres idées en tête: il voulait consolider le commerce – qui dépendait trop, selon lui, de l'exportation des marchandises – par l'acquisition de territoires. Grâce à lui, l'influence française se répandit et fut telle que, entre 1750 et 1752, la plus grande partie de l'Inde du Sud était passée sous son contrôle. Cependant, ces démarches, qui excédaient les statuts de la Compagnie, avaient l'inconvénient de déplaire à la fois et à Paris et à l'Angleterre: une longue campagne militaire fut engagée sous la direction de Robert Clive, campagne qui marqua la fin de la présence française en Inde. Le traité de 1763 laissa à la France seulement ses cinq comptoirs de Pondichéry, Chandernagor, Karikal, Mahé et Yanam, qu'elle gardera pendant près de deux cents ans avant de les céder à l'Union indienne enfin libérée elle-même de toute présence britannique. Ces territoires éparpillés et non défendus, qui couvraient au total seulement 500 km², ne pouvaient rivaliser avec l'importance politique et géographique de l'empire britannique; leur économie remonta puis retomba de nouveau au cours du dix-neuvième siècle, permettant à certains exploitants de s'enrichir tandis que la majorité de la population restait dans une situation de pauvreté extrême.

L'image de 'l'Inde française' est restée très puissante à travers les siècles, dépassant sans doute de loin son importance économique ou politique, tout en suscitant des réactions très différentes, prises dans une tension entre une vision occidentale

imposée bon gré mal gré, et un regard réceptif sur l'Orient qui reconnaît sa différence tout en cherchant à comprendre. Dès le début, des divisions étaient manifestes entre les missionnaires qui soutenaient la propagation de l'enseignement chrétien, l'imposition des pratiques occidentales et l'affirmation du monothéisme, et ceux qui faisaient preuve de curiosité et de respect envers les traditions et la vie spirituelle des hindous; de même, dans les domaines philosophique, scientifique et médical, entre ceux qui se chargeaient de l'exportation des connaissances et des valeurs de l'Europe et ceux qui savaient apprécier l'érudition des Indiens, leurs connaissances dans les domaines de l'astronomie, de la pratique médicale, ou dans les beaux-arts, pour ne citer que ces exemples. Au dix-neuvième siècle, la diffusion des stéréotypes de l'Orient dans l'imaginaire poétique et musical européen offre des images du pittoresque et du fantastique intégrées dans une vision à la fois exotique et apprivoisée, agrémentant l'imagination tout en renforçant les valeurs occidentales: comme l'exprime Lyane Guillaume, le public français 'féru d'esthétisme baroque et d'émotion forte, [est] avide non pas tant de découvrir l'Autre que de retrouver le Même décuplé, démultiplié.'⁵ Mais, en même temps, dès la fin du XVIIIe siècle et surtout au XIXe siècle, des études sérieuses de philologie, d'histoire et de civilisation ont été poursuivies, des traductions des grands ouvrages épiques et sacrés ont été publiées, et les études orientales se sont développées dans les universités. Au vingtième siècle, une certaine désaffection envers les valeurs destructrices de l'Occident et le sentiment d'une sorte de vide spirituel ont servi à répandre ces connaissances auprès d'un public plus large, avide de connaître 'l'autre vie' de l'Inde. La tension entre l'Inde réelle et

l'Inde imaginaire subsistera toujours, mais on peut espérer que les articles proposés ici pourront nous aider à déceler davantage la part du réel et la part de l'imaginaire dans ces diverses *représentations culturelles de l'Inde*.

Brian Stimpson et Myriem el Maïzi
University of Newcastle upon Tyne

⁵ L. Guillaume, 'L'Inde retrouvée ou la nostalgie des origines' in *L'aventure des Français en Inde*, p. 195. Pour un aperçu général sur la représentation de l'Inde dans la littérature, voir Christian Petr, *L'Inde des romans* (Paris: Kailash, 1995).

India as example in Renaissance Cosmographies and Montaigne

Even before the first French expedition to establish commercial and trading rights in South Asia in 1601, French interest in India was significant.¹ Indeed, between 1480 and 1609, there were more printed books published on the 'Indes Orientales' than on the 'Indes Occidentales': more than 50 separate works were printed on India, and 40 on the Americas – the latter largely towards the end of the sixteenth century.² This article will explore some of the commonplaces of the representation of India in the sixteenth century and the uses writers made of them, taking as a starting point the singular example of Montaigne.

In the chapter 'De la vertu', Montaigne describes two Indian examples of courageous suicide and steadfastness in the face of death, taken from classical histories and travellers' tales of Asia: the Hindu widow who joins her dead husband on his funeral pyre; and the brahmin who constructs his own pyre when he feels his strength failing.³ Both provoke wonder for the constancy with which they prepare for this death throughout life: 'Cette constante

¹ On the 1601 voyage that ended in shipwreck, see *Voyage de François Pyrard de Laval, contenant sa navigation aux Indes Orientales, Maldives, Moloques, Brésil* (Paris: Samuel Thiboust and veuve Rémy Dallin, 1619); Diane C. Margolf, 'Wonders of Nature, Diversity of Events: the *Voyage de François Pyrard de Laval*', in *Distant Lands and Diverse Cultures: The French Experience in Asia, 1600-1700*, ed. by Glenn J. Ames and Ronald S. Love (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), pp. 111-33.

² Geoffroy Atkinson, *Nouveaux horizons de la Renaissance française* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1969), p. 11.

³ Montaigne, 'De la vertu', *Essais* II, 29, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 683-90. The term 'sati' was not, of course, available to Montaigne.

premeditation de toute la vie, c'est ce qui faict le miracle'.⁴ Another chapter, 'Coustume de l'isle de Cea', in a discussion of honourable suicide, considers two more Asian examples: an indigenous governor of Malacca – now Melaka, Malaysia – who, dressed in ceremonial robes, threw himself on to a burning pyre rather than suffer the dishonour of being replaced as governor by the Portuguese; and the holy self-sacrifice of the juggernaut, in which Hindu devotees in Tuticorin on the Coromandel coast on the extreme south-west of the peninsula threw themselves under the wheels of a chariot carrying idols.⁵ Montaigne comments on a collective fervour that dominates any individual reason in these stories of suicide: 'Ce que le discours ne feroit en chacun, il le faict en tous; l'ardeur de la société ravissant les particuliers jugemens'.⁶ 'De la vertu', in particular, is a chapter that considers questions of exemplarity and the modelling of behaviour: that is, precisely how the individual can be seduced by social pressures. These Indian examples offer strange and awful spectacles of a disdain for death to Montaigne's late sixteenth-century readers; all exhibit a detachment and disregard for pain as indifferent and an admirable — or, as Montaigne qualifies it, miraculous — staunchness in the face of their imminent death.

Montaigne drew his examples from a wide range of sources: contemporary travellers' tales, Portuguese histories of their territorial conquests, and classical histories. In this compilation of sources, he was typical. There was no single, coherent image of Indian civilization in the sixteenth century: rather, a composite picture was built up from various sources both ancient and

⁴ Montaigne, 'De la vertu', *Essais* II, 29, p. 687.

⁵ Montaigne, 'Coustume de l'isle de Cea', *Essais* II, 3, pp. 330-43 (pp. 339 and 342). The examples are taken from Simon Goulard, *Histoire du Portugal* (Paris: Robert Le Magnier, 1581), fol. 278; and Juan González de Mendoza, *Histoire du grand royaume de la Chine*, trans. by Luc de la Porte (Paris: Jeremie Perier, 1589), fols 318^v-319^r.

⁶ Montaigne, *Essais* II, 3, p. 341.

modern. Any idea of 'India' itself as a coherent whole was fragmented by its large number of provinces and kingdoms, and the political instability that upset Western accounts of it.⁷ Standard references on India included geographer-historians such as Pliny, Strabo and Arrian, who relied for much of their information on the account of Alexander's campaign in India by Megasthenes, written around 300 BCE. In classical histories, India appeared as a nebulous, mythical country of origins, a vast and extremely fertile land that was seasonally bathed in heat and swamped in rain, whose inhabitants lived a simple even ascetic life and where reports of strange beasts such as the elephant and the crocodile gave rise and possibly credence to reports of more fantastical creatures such as the unicorn and the basilisk.⁸ Indian civilization appeared clearly demarcated by the limits of its territory, bordered by the Himalayas to the north and divided by its great rivers. These clear boundaries enclosed a harmonious, even innocent country: the image of a static society, without emigration, laws or war was recurrent in classical histories, and generally approved by sixteenth-century cosmographers as a sign of a healthy, uncorrupted nation.⁹ And yet this is not the whole picture: India was never imagined as a simple, monolithic whole. Monsters and

⁷ See Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 4 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965-1993); Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ Arrian, *Indica*, trans. by E. Iliff Robson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 323. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 2, book 2, pp. 85-116.

⁹ Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. by H. Rackham, 10 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), II, 381-83 (book 6); Strabo, *Geography*, trans. by Horace Leonard Jones, 8 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), VII, 15 (book 15). On ideas about emigration, see Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1964), pp. 257-63.

devils existed on the fringes of a sophisticated civilization.¹⁰ Thus, representations of India were multi-faceted, never a simple 'other' through which to define the 'self'.

In the sixteenth century, traditional, mythological views of India as a land of monsters and marvels, inherited from the Greek historians of Alexander and their imitators and inflected by medieval legends of St Thomas and Prester John, were being modified by Portuguese accounts of colonial missions to the coastal areas.¹¹ France, however, had no colonial or financial interest in India in this period, and so information from Portuguese and Florentine voyages and incursions into the country remained fragmentary, coloured by older traditions and stories.¹² This fragmentary and patchwork account holds true more generally for the cosmography, a universal history of the known world compiled from all the sources available to its author, which included ancient histories, eyewitness accounts, travellers' tales, myths and legends.¹³ François de Belleforest described his sources in the preface to his version of Sebastian Münster's cosmography as 'tant d'escrits, de rapports, memoires, advertissements et instructions'.¹⁴ This method integrated the shock of the new and strange into a familiar system, while providing a preliminary catalogue of the 'discovered' world for colonial purposes. I propose to look briefly at how two cosmographies – both translated and considerably

¹⁰ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 2, book 2, p. 90.

¹¹ Geneviève Bouchon, 'L'Image de l'Inde dans l'Europe de la Renaissance', in *L'Inde et l'imaginaire*, ed. by Catherine Weinberger-Thomas (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1988), pp. 69-90.

¹² On Portuguese accounts, see Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, pp. 201-22.

¹³ On cosmographies, see Frank Lestringant, *L'Atelier du cosmographe, ou l'image du monde à la Renaissance* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991); Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, pp. 143-54.

¹⁴ François de Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde*, 2 vols (Paris: Michel Sonnius, 1575), II, fol. a iii^r.

adapted from their original Latin by Belleforest – imagine India, in order to sketch a background for Montaigne's examples.

L'Histoire universelle (1570) is Belleforest's version of Johann Boemus's hugely successful *Omnium gentium mores* (1520); Belleforest added so much supplementary material of his own that it has been described as an original work.¹⁵ *L'Histoire universelle* contains two chapters on India (fols 46^v-58^r), allowing for less regional specificity than Sebastian Münster's cosmography, one of the most influential of the sixteenth century. Belleforest's 1575 *Cosmographie universelle* was again an extended version of the original; additions included a description of 'le royaume de Narsinga', the Hindu empire of Vijayanagara, in fact destroyed in 1565, ten years before Belleforest published his edition.¹⁶ Belleforest was always more than a translator, adapting and expanding the work of Münster and even, at times, criticising his source – for example, for his credulity in regard to fantastic tales of strange animals.¹⁷

In the first of the seventeen chapters on India in the *Cosmographie*, a 'description generale des Indes', there is an emphasis on the virtue and truth of Indian society, straight from ancient histories, especially Strabo: the people are disciplined, virtuous and lead a simple life.¹⁸ Laws are unnecessary, since society functions on trust: 'ils n'ont que la simple parole, a laquelle on peut ajoûter foy sans deffiance quelconque', proving

Indians' 'simplicité, et défaut de loix'.¹⁹ *L'Histoire universelle* offers a similar image: India is described in general as a vast, fertile land, with invigorating air and abundant rivers.²⁰ The people are simple, sober and happy, and their qualities are described in the negative: 's'abstenans de larcin sur toute chose, et avoyent des loix non escrites, car ils n'avoyent aucun usage des lettres, ains ils aprenoyent par coeur les uns des autres, si que pour ceste simplicité de vie, ils estoient heureux en toute affaire'.²¹ Margaret Hodgen points out that these descriptions in the negative were common in sixteenth-century cosmographies: the foreign culture was thus presented as the negative image of European culture, a natural or prelapsarian condition that could appear either pure or corrupt.²² Indian peoples, according to the *Histoire*, are free of the decadent corruptions of European society and thus innocent, inhabitants of a lost Golden Age. Recounting the common practice of leaving houses unlocked and unguarded, Boemus comments that these practices are 'signes d'une grande bonté et innocence de ce peuple'.²³ Indian sobriety, health and truthfulness are repeatedly emphasised.²⁴

In both the *Histoire* and the *Cosmographie*, the greatest admiration is reserved for the brahmins, their asceticism considered an extreme of Indian simplicity. The *Cosmographie* classifies tales of men who live on the sole perfume of fruit as

¹⁵ François de Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle du monde* (Paris: Gervais Mallot, 1570). See Michel Simonin, *Vivre de sa plume au XVI^e siècle, ou la carrière de François de Belleforest* (Geneva: Droz, 1992), p. 114.

¹⁶ On *La Cosmographie universelle*, see Michel Simonin, 'Les Élités chorographes ou de la Description de la France dans *La Cosmographie universelle* de Belleforest', in *Voyager à la Renaissance*, ed. by Jean Céard and Jean-Claude Margolin (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 1987), pp. 433-51; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology*, pp. 293-94.

¹⁷ Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle*, p. 1587.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1582-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1583.

²⁰ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fols 46^v-47^r.

²¹ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 47^r.

²² Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, pp. 196-201. Conventional elements in this negative formula were no letters; no laws; no kings, magistrates, or governments; no arts; no traffic; no husbandry; no money; no weapons; no clothes; no marriage; no boundaries (p. 199). See also Pliny, *Natural History*, II, 407; and Montaigne, 'Des cannibales', *Essais* I, 31, pp. 200-13 (p. 204).

²³ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 47^v.

²⁴ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fols 47^{r-v}.

'folies',²⁵ yet carefully emphasises the extreme simplicity of the brahmin life:

Ces Philosophes vivoyent dedans les boys [...] et s'y tenoyent assemblez comme font les religieux en leurs monasteres, vivants fort sobrement, couchants sur des materaz, et peaux de bestes, ne mangeans chair quelconque (comme encore ils ne font) et s'abstenans des femmes (ce que maintenant ils n'ont garde d'observer) ne parlants que de choses serieuses.²⁶

The comparison to the monastery means that the reference point, despite the details, remains European. Brahmins embrace an ethic of self-reliance and independence: 'Car ceux qui mesprisent et la mort, et la douleur, qui ne se soucie ny du plaisir, ny des aises, ny de la mesme vie, qui ne veut estre sujet a personne, ains deffend sa liberté, tel est par eux estimé bon, et la femme preude, et vertueuse'.²⁷ The feats of endurance of the 'Gymnosophistes', or Yogi, are singled out: 'ne se soucient de passer tout le jour entier se soustenants sur un pied, et iceluy tout nud sur le sablon ardent, et eschauffé par les chaleurs, et rayons violents du Soleil'.²⁸ The *Histoire* concurs: 'endurans constamment de vivre sans aucun logis [...] les rigeurs des glaces et neiges en hiver, et les chaleurs vehementes de l'esté'.²⁹ Brahmins did not suffer illness, since 'Leur medecine c'estoit la sobriété'.³⁰ Their time is spent contemplating the universe and its 'causes secretes'; they have no interest in commerce or trade, dangerous supplementary occupations, it is suggested, that devour energy and attention. The speech of these wise men is equally simple and straightforward,

'sans fard, ny ornement, et laquelle leur donnoit ce seul enseignement de ne point mentir'.³¹ This 'zero degree' of eloquence was an ideal in sixteenth-century debates on the limits of rhetoric and the ethics of persuasion – and not least for Montaigne, who vows in his preface 'Au lecteur' that 'Je veus qu'on m'y voie en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans contantion et artifice'.³² As the discussion and implications of the simple life of the brahmins suggest, India remained for cosmographers a mysterious and somewhat empty receptacle of various fantasies. This was encouraged rather than arrested by the amount of new information that was becoming available about the customs, habits and religions of India, fed back by travellers, merchants and missionaries; and in the cosmography in particular, new was combined with old in order to create a definitive, universal history in which the historical and geographic variations were often occluded.

Descriptions of sati are theatrical and spectacular in both the *Cosmographie* and the *Histoire*. Such descriptions quickly became conventional and ubiquitous in cosmographies and travel narratives, belying brahmanical treatises in which sati is very much an exception, not a rule.³³ In his interpolated chapter on Narsinga in the *Cosmographie* (ch. 23), Belleforest emphasises both an element of coercion ('les femmes sont obligees a se brusler, lors que leurs maris vont de vie a trespas') and independence: 'la femme pour l'honorer, se sacrifie d'elle mesme en cette sorte'.³⁴ A rich widow would invite her relatives to witness her self-immolation. After a period of celebration, she would dress in 'des plus riches habits' for the ceremony: distributing jewels

²⁵ Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle*, p. 1587.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1585.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1585.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1586.

²⁹ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 49^v.

³⁰ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 50^r.

³¹ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 50^r.

³² Montaigne, 'Au lecteur', *Essais*, p. 9.

³³ John Stratton Hawley, 'Introduction', in *Sati: The Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 3–26 (p. 3).

³⁴ Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle*, p. 1665.

and presents to her family, she addresses them 'avec une contenance, aussi joyeuse, comme si elle ne devoit point mourir'.³⁵ She praises the fidelity of the wives, and claims that she is setting them an example; she then throws herself into the fire 'avec pareille gaillardise, que si elle se jettoit dedans un bain delicieux'.³⁶ Belleforest insists on the dishonour that falls on any wife who does not perform this duty; and comments of the spectacle, 'est une grande pitié, et horreur tout ensemble de voir'.³⁷ The widow's example horrifies the European observer, who sketches an attitude that will become habitual for the European traveller: that of pity for the widow, sacrificed for a brutal custom.³⁸

In the *Histoire*, sati is described in two separate religious and geographical categories: the first in the discussion of the Cathéians; the second in the description of Calicut and the surrounding area. The first description is rather brief: after a hearing in front of a judge, the widow who is deemed the best wife, 'toute joyeuse, et de face riante comme victorieuse', joins her dead husband in the pyre, 'sans effroy quelconque du feu'.³⁹ The second account occurs in the description of the inhabitants of Cambay (Gujarat), and starts to temper the accounts of Indian sobriety with those of witchcraft and sorcery: 's'ils ont ceste modestie au vivre [...], si sont ils corrompuz outre l'idolatrie en plusieurs autres choses, et sur tout en ce qu'ils sont des plus grands sorciers de la terre'.⁴⁰ This second account of sati, located like that of the *Cosmographie* in Calicut and the southern tip, is

³⁵ Belleforest, *La Cosmographie universelle*, p. 1666.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ On sati in particular as an invitation to European intervention, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271-313 (p. 297).

³⁹ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 50^v.

⁴⁰ Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 52^r.

nevertheless quite different, describing a diabolical pact and evoking images of the fire of hell.⁴¹ The ceremony, exclusive to certain 'grandes Dames', is again accompanied by a celebration and dance, but the participants are disguised as 'diaboles', and the widow appears in a kind of maddened frenzy: 'comme toute forcennée, et joyeusement dançant'; the pit in which the body of the husband lies is 'tout en feu, et vomissant les flammes'.⁴² The rite becomes a spectacle of diabolical exoticism, a quite different image than that of stoic constancy. Since Plutarch, the aim of the historical genre was to offer examples to emulate or to criticise.⁴³ This precept is obviously also at work in the cosmographies as universal histories that work the strange and the wild into a familiar framework and provide examples (the brahmans' simplicity) and counter-examples (diabolic rites) for the contemporary reader.

In conclusion, I return to Montaigne's Indian examples of suicide – and specifically, to the description of sati in 'De la vertu'. The chapter takes the stoic distinction between efforts of the soul and long-practised habit to discuss courage and constancy in the face of certain death. Such courage is often a superhuman effort, spurred on by the example of others: 'eslancer par fois nostre ame, esveillée par les discours ou exemples d'autrui, bien loing au delà de son ordinaire; mais c'est une espece de passion qui la pousse et agite, et qui la ravit aucunement hors de soy'.⁴⁴

⁴¹ On the inexplicit similarities between widow burning and witch burning in this period, see Pompa Banerjee, 'Burning Questions: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travel Narratives of India', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 29 (1999), 529-61.

⁴² Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fol. 56^r.

⁴³ On the use of exempla in the Renaissance, see Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ Montaigne, 'De la vertu', *Essais* II, 29, p. 683.

This appears as a heroic kind of passion – a force acting on the soul, seducing it outside of itself for an instant. It is unnatural, or at least unusual, behaviour encouraged or solicited by others' example or persuasion. The Indian wife plays the role of heroic exemplar, achieving the almost impossible feat of habitual steadfast courage in the face of death. Like the cosmographers, Montaigne takes both ancient writing and contemporary reports as his source; in the first version of the text, he borrows from Plutarch's *Moralia* and, more explicitly, from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, which itself deals with pain as the greatest obstacle to virtue. Montaigne demonstrates a much more ambivalent attitude towards his subject than the Roman writer, however. While Cicero has unqualified admiration for the Hindu woman who 'goes joyfully to join her husband on the funeral pyre', Montaigne is equivocal about the violence of this kind of fanatical virtue.⁴⁵ In a later addition to the chapter, written between 1580 and 1588, Montaigne prefaces his discussion with a lengthy quotation from Propertius's *Elegies* which celebrates the victorious wife's last burning embrace with her dead husband.⁴⁶ Significantly, for both Propertius and Cicero, the virtuous Hindu widow is used as a counter example for what the writer considers a degraded and vicious present; neither can imagine Roman women emulating her. At first glance Montaigne seems to agree with this judgement for his own time: 'certes cette foy, dequoy nous remplissons tant la bouche, est merueilleusement legiere en nos siecles', he writes of the stoic fatalism in the first version of the chapter.⁴⁷ However, a later addition to the chapter casts doubt on the desirability of this virtue, as Montaigne argues that its epitome is the assassin, holding steadfastly to his murderous task despite the risks to his

⁴⁵ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. by J. E. King (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 5:27, p. 505.

⁴⁶ Propertius, [*Elegies*], trans. by H. E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 3:13, pp. 220-27.

⁴⁷ Montaigne, 'De la vertu', *Essais* II, 29, p. 687.

own life. The examples of the assassinations of Guillaume d'Orange (in 1584) and François de Guise (in 1563) leave us in no doubt as to the damage Montaigne considered such an understanding of virtue had caused in his own time.

A later, post-1588 addition to the passage on widow burning draws on a contemporary account of a voyage to India by a contemporary traveller – possibly the Venetian merchant Cesare Frederici, whose account, published in 1587, is strikingly similar to that of the *Essais*.⁴⁸ Montaigne shows detachment rather than unqualified admiration in his description of the widow's measured and considered ritual death. Like the Hindu widows themselves in the *Cosmographie*, Montaigne suggests that the suicide serves as an example for the widow's community: it is cast as a 'spectacle', taking place 'au lieu public destiné à tels spectacles'⁴⁹, with a large audience. As in the cosmographies, the scene has a highly theatrical quality, as the widow rides towards the pyre with the ritualised items of a mirror and an arrow in her hands; after the symbolic cleansing of the river, she climbs a small mound to speak to the gathered people and to recommend her children to them.⁵⁰ Montaigne presents the widow as a kind of inimitable but also dangerous example for the religious conflicts of late sixteenth century France, where imitation produces the assassin. Thus an initial admiration is later moderated by Montaigne's reactions to contemporary French events. Like the cosmographers, Montaigne

⁴⁸ See Caesar Federicke, 'Voyage and Travel', in *The Principal Navigations*, ed. by Richard Hakluyt, 10 vols (London: Dent, 1927), first published 1599-1600, III, 198-269 (pp. 214-16). Other travel narratives of sati retain very similar details: there is perhaps no original source for this commonplace description.

⁴⁹ Montaigne, 'De la vertu', *Essais* II, 29, p. 686. On sati as a spectacle, see Veena Talwar Oldenburg, 'The Roop Kanwar Case: Feminist Responses', in *Sati: The Blessing and the Curse*, pp. 101-30 (pp. 104-5).

⁵⁰ Montaigne's depiction of stoic acts of virtue – and in particular, of Cato the Younger's suicide – often emphasise this theatrical quality: see David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy: Ethical and Political Themes in the 'Essais'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 45-49.

represents India as a distant and foreign place to be filled with fantastical feats of unimaginable bravery or savagery, and displaces Indian examples into his own frame of reference. Unlike the cosmographers, he gives valid contemporary political reasons for doing so.

Emily Butterworth
University of Sheffield

L'Ambassade indienne de 1788 au miroir d'Hérodote

Au début du mois de juin 1788, dans la rade de Toulon, l'*Aurore*, frégate de la marine française, arrive avec à son bord une ambassade indienne qui se rend à Versailles. On sait quel retentissement avaient déjà eu dans la vie parisienne des ambassades venues d'Orient, celle du Siam en 1688, celle du Persan Reza-Begh en 1716, ou encore celles des Turcs Mehemet-Effendi en 1721 et Zaïd-Pacha-Effendi en 1742. Dans ces rapports cérémoniels et protocolaires, ce sont, après tout, les nations qui s'affrontent et s'apprivoisent bien plus que les individus, et chacun a donc soin de déployer les ors et la pompe qui siéent pour l'occasion.

Par-delà l'intérêt pour les fastes propres à la vie diplomatique, cette ambassade met abruptement la France du XVIII^e siècle au contact direct d'une Inde que l'on ne goûtait jusque-là qu'à travers des relations de voyages plus ou moins romancées. 'Comment peut-on être persan?', se demandait-on depuis 1721! La réponse apportée par ces ambassadeurs est tout aussi ambiguë que la question de Montesquieu. De fait, à la lecture des journaux d'époque, de diverses correspondances administratives et des mémorialistes qui y font allusion, c'est autant la réalité objective de cette ambassade qui apparaît, que la perception 'orientée' et subjective de cette réalité biaisée par les catégories d'un entendement français du XVIII^e siècle, qui résiste à l'examen et s'enferme dans la vision d'un Orient exotique et décevant. On assiste donc à l'élaboration d'une rhétorique de l'altérité qui met à jour à la fois la réalité d'une ambassade indienne venant en Occident à la fin du XVIII^e siècle et la vision fantasmée de

l'Orient qui circule en France à la même époque, par un effet de miroir déformant.¹

Dans toutes ces traces scripturaires qui obéissent chacune à leur logique propre, la question posée reste la même: que se passe-t-il lorsque le sujet écrivain intègre à des formes narratives conventionnelles et au code linguistique d'une culture de référence les traits marquants d'une culture qui lui est étrangère? Cette relation entre le sujet et l'objet qu'instaure un langage qui se veut spontané, n'est-elle pas somme toute et avant tout un rapport de force? Enfin, sommes-nous à ce point enfoncés dans un contexte historique et géopolitique que la perversion de la représentation est une nécessité structurelle, ou est-il permis de garder l'espoir d'une part de vérité?

Portrait de l'ambassade indienne de 1788: personnel, coutumes, négociations

Partie de Pondichéry en juillet 1787, l'ambassade de Tipoo-Sahib avait un quadruple but: au premier chef venait le souci de réaffirmer de façon solennelle et formelle l'amitié entre la France et le Mysore, avec l'espoir de réussir à négocier un traité d'alliance offensive et défensive pour bouter les Anglais hors d'Inde; ensuite venait la négociation d'un accord commercial; puis les ambassadeurs étaient chargés de ramener en Inde des ouvriers et des artistes en tous genres (imprimeurs en langues orientales, physiciens, artificiers, fondeurs, verriers, jardiniers...); enfin, la possibilité d'envoyer l'un des fils du sultan à la cour de Versailles devait être étudiée. Mais pris au beau milieu des embarras financiers qui devaient amener peu après la Révolution, Louis XVI se contenta de cimenter l'alliance déjà établie entre la France et

¹ Cf. François Hartog, *Le Miroir d'Hérodote, Essai sur la représentation de l'autre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980; coll. 'Folio Histoire', 2001).

Tipoo-Sahib, de faciliter l'embauche de quelques ouvriers, et d'envoyer en Inde quelques plantes, graines et oignons du Jardin du Roi.

La délégation comprenait trois ambassadeurs, Mahomet-Dervich-Khan, Akbar-Ali-Kan et Mahomet-Ousman-Khan, tous trois musulmans et non hindous. Ils parlaient le maure et le persan qui fut la langue de négociation. Mahomet-Dervich-Khan, chef officiel de la mission, était un homme d'une quarantaine d'années, issu d'une tribu descendant soi-disant du Prophète. Akbar-Ali-Khan, lettré septuagénaire, apportait dans ses bagages un exemplaire de ses œuvres! Il était accompagné de son fils, Aga-Saheb. Enfin, bien que ne se recommandant ni par d'illustres origines ni par ses productions intellectuelles, Mahomet-Ousman-Khan était en fait le véritable chef de la mission et prenait toujours les décisions et l'initiative des entretiens. Il était également accompagné d'un neveu, Youlami-Saheb. Une suite nombreuse leur était attachée: une dizaine de domestiques, un porteur de flambeaux, six porteurs de bâtons de bois et d'argent, des cuisiniers, deux interprètes noirs, deux écrivains, un porteur d'eau, un barbier, un frotteur, un blanchisseur, huit cipayes et leur chef... soit une cinquantaine de personnes en tout.²

Assumant leur rôle de représentation jusqu'au bout, les ambassadeurs ne vinrent pas seulement négocier au nom du sultan de Mysore, ils donnèrent consistance aux représentations plus ou moins fantastiques que les curieux de l'époque pouvaient se faire de l'Inde. Contre toute attente, le premier mouvement fut empreint de curiosité et de respect des mœurs exotiques que l'on s'abstint de juger, et même, fait révélateur, de traduire. Or l'opération de traduction n'est pas la moindre des stratégies déployées par toute rhétorique de l'altérité. Elle fait passer de l'autre au même, elle refuse la différence. Ici, au contraire, la différence est source de

² AN B³ 803 (Archives Nationales, Paris). État nominatif des personnes attachées aux ambassadeurs du Nabab Tipoo Sultan.

connaissance. Débarqués à Toulon puis arrivés à Paris via Marseille, Aix, Lyon, Fontainebleau, ces ambassadeurs indiens et leur suite éveillèrent la plus vive curiosité et alimentèrent pendant des mois les conversations et les gazettes, notamment d'un vocabulaire nouveau: ainsi, les ambassadeurs reçurent les visites formelles en *darbar*, c'est-à-dire en audience solennelle où les règles appliquées étaient celles qui prévalaient en Inde, comme si l'hôtel des Menus-Plaisirs qu'ils occupèrent rue Bergère, à Paris, avait connu un régime d'extraterritorialité avant la lettre! La politesse circonspecte dont firent preuve les invités ne manque pas d'humour:

On apporta sur un bassin un vase d'argent dans lequel étaient différents compartiments, avec plusieurs petites graines que l'on ne put connaître, de la cannelle & des parfums. MM. le Comte d'Albert & M. de Possel, assis à côté des Ambassadeurs dans des fauteuils, prirent chacun quelques graines qu'ils mâchèrent, & on en présenta ensuite à tous les Officiers du cortège, qui en firent autant.³

À l'occasion, la tolérance se fit même royale lors de l'audience que Louis XVI leur accorda le 10 août 1788, au cours de laquelle il se prêta volontiers à la cérémonie du *nazer* (ou *nazir*), dérogeant en cela au cérémonial traditionnel:

Mouhammed-Derviche-Khan a remis au Roi leur lettre-de-crédence, & tous les trois ont présenté à Sa Majesté, sur des mouchoirs, 21 pièces d'or, ce qui est, dans les usages de leur pays, l'hommage du plus profond respect. Sa Majesté a accepté une de ces pièces de chacun d'eux.⁴

³ *Les Indiens ou Tipou-Sultan, fils d'Ayder-Aly, & c., avec quelques particularités sur ce prince, ses ambassadeurs en France, sur l'audience qui leur a été donnée par sa Majesté Louis XVI à Versailles le 10 août 1788*..., 8 vols (Londres et Paris: Le Jay, 1788), I, p. 181.

⁴ *Gazette de France*, 15 août 1788, no. 66, p. 283.

Enfin, signe d'une diffusion culturelle de l'orientalisme pris dans son acception la moins péjorative, la moins saidienne si l'on veut, on ne cessait de gloser les devoirs et les interdits liés à l'observance du culte musulman dans toutes ses nuances. De fait, il revint à l'interprète, M. Ruffin, d'éclairer son ministre sur certaine

fête de Mouharrem, dont il vous a parlé pour éloigner de 12 jours sa sortie de son appartement. Akbar est de la secte d'Aly, dont il porte le nom; et c'est au commencement de l'année lunaire que les alides célèbrent la mémoire du martyr de Hassan et de Hussein, fils de leur patron massacrés dans la plaine de Kerbéla par l'usurpateur Moavié.⁵

À longueur de correspondance reviennent ensuite les recommandations de 'leur donner des tapis de la Savonnerie pourvu qu'il n'y entre aucune espèce de figures d'êtres vivants',⁶ les rappels que le 'vendredi [est] considéré par les Indiens comme un jour malheureux',⁷ sans oublier l'importance cruciale de la question culinaire:

La nourriture des Asiatiques est essentiellement du riz, on [a] soin de s'en procurer de plusieurs sortes; & attendu qu'ils ne mangent de viande que celle des animaux tués par eux-mêmes, on [a] également eu la précaution de s'approvisionner de moutons, de gibier, & de volailles de différentes espèces, tous vivants.⁸

⁵ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 30 septembre 1788.

⁶ AN O¹ 1920, F^o103, État des objets en porcelaine, meubles et autres reflets qui paraissent les plus propres à entrer dans le présent à faire à Typo-Saïb et à son ambassadeur, 17 avril 1788.

⁷ Cité par A. Jacques Parès, 'Une ambassade hindoue à Toulon', *Bulletin de l'Académie du Var*, Toulon, 1914-1915, 82^e-83^e année, p. 100.

⁸ Cité par A. Jacques Parès, *Bulletin de l'Académie du Var*, p. 92.

Plus tard, on conçut des alarmes pour un cuisinier malade qui 'n'est pas un personnage peu intéressant pour l'ambassade',⁹ on ne s'étonna plus de les voir 'manger par terre sur des tapis',¹⁰ et l'on sacrifia au 'dîner musulman'¹¹ le temps qu'il fallait pour le préparer. Une autre fois, à Lorient,

le maire leur fit une courte harangue et leur offrit les présents d'usage, qui consistent en 24 bouteilles de liqueurs et à peu près autant de boîtes de thé. Le 1^{er} article, qui n'eût jamais dû être présenté à des musulmans, [fut] soustrait dès le soir même.¹²

C'est donc, semble-t-il, dans la plus parfaite tolérance que se dévoilaient petit à petit l'Orient et ses mystères transportés au cœur de Paris. Le costume de ces ambassadeurs fut étudié avec soin: '[il] consiste en grandes robes de mousseline ou de soie blanche sans apprêt, parsemée de fleurs d'or; et ces robes, espèces de tuniques avec de larges manches plissées en travers, étaient retenues par de riches ceintures; [tandis que] leur suite était vêtue d'indienne'.¹³ La curiosité, ou la politesse, poussèrent même certains à s'essayer aux us et coutumes exotiques: 'pendant le bal [donné à Toulon], le premier Ambassadeur [présenta] un calumet au comte d'Albert qui, pour répondre à cette marque d'honneur, [fut] obligé d'en aspirer quelques gorgées'.¹⁴ Mais certaines expérimentations tournèrent cependant court:

ce n'était point un des objets les moins intéressants pour la curiosité publique, que d'aller voir, dans les souterrains de Trianon, la préparation de leurs repas. La quantité d'épices, de piment, de kari et

surtout d'ail qu'ils mettaient [dans leur cuisine] rendaient leurs ragoûts [...] intolérables à un palais européen.¹⁵

Comme les courtisans, Marie-Antoinette voulut, elle aussi, goûter à cette cuisine, mais ne put la supporter.

En l'absence de sources, impossible de se livrer à une lecture symétrique pour révéler l'idée que les ambassadeurs purent se faire de Paris ou, par exemple, hasard de la programmation, de cette soirée du vendredi 13 juin 1788 où ils virent une représentation d'*Azémiâ, ou les Sauvages*, suivie d'un ballet turc!¹⁶

De l'autre côté du miroir d'Hérodote: de l'Orient face à l'Occident, à l'Orient créé par l'Occident

Le succès de curiosité que remportèrent les envoyés de Tipoo-Sahib auprès d'un public épris d'exotisme, pourrait être perçu comme l'effet d'une capacité d'émerveillement presque puérile, mais il renvoie surtout à la nature purement factice de l'Orient considéré. L'Orient est une idée qui a une histoire et une tradition de pensée, une imagerie et un vocabulaire qui lui ont donné réalité et présence en Occident et pour l'Occident.

Le passage d'une joyeuse découverte de l'Orient placée sous le signe de la tolérance à la prégnance d'une idéologie orientaliste délétère éclaire deux facettes d'un même discours qui ne s'excluent pas forcément mutuellement. Un discours est, certes, déterminé par ce sur quoi il porte; mais à côté de ce contenu évident il en est un autre, parfois inconscient et presque toujours implicite, qui lui vient de ses utilisateurs: auteurs et lecteurs, orateurs et public. Ceux-ci exercent une pression sur la formation des discours, en d'autres termes, l'idéologie. C'est donc

⁹ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 20 octobre 1788.

¹⁰ Cité par A. Jacques Parès, *Bulletin de l'Académie du Var*, p. 101.

¹¹ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 11 octobre 1788.

¹² AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 25 octobre 1788.

¹³ Cité par A. Jacques Parès, *Bulletin de l'Académie du Var*, p. 101.

¹⁴ Cité par A. Jacques Parès, *Bulletin de l'Académie du Var*, p. 98.

¹⁵ Comte Félix de France d'Hézecques, *Souvenirs d'un page de la Cour de Louis XVI* (Brionne: Gérard Montfort, repr. 1983), p. 234.

¹⁶ *Les Indiens ou Tipou-Sultan, fils d'Ayder-Aly, &c.*, p. 183.

l'existence d'une culture de dépréciation de l'autre qu'il s'agit de mettre à jour. Selon les termes mêmes de Tzvetan Todorov, 'l'histoire du discours sur l'autre est accablante',¹⁷ et le dénigrement du voisin une constante des sociétés humaines. Chacun définit en effet sa norme de (p)référence par un double mouvement complémentaire: d'une part, on considère son propre cadre de référence comme étant unique, ou tout au moins normal; de l'autre, on constate que les autres, par rapport à ce cadre, nous sont inférieurs. On peint donc le portrait de l'autre en projetant sur lui nos propres faiblesses; il nous est à la fois semblable et inférieur. Ce qu'on lui a refusé avant tout c'est d'être différent: ni inférieur ni (même) supérieur, mais autre, justement.¹⁸

La mécanique idéologique à l'œuvre dans des témoignages où la représentation ne vaut que comme représentation, non comme description 'naturelle' de l'Orient, peut être démont(r)ée. Apparaissent alors les rapports d'attraction et de répulsion mutuels qu'entretiennent l'Occident et l'Orient, dans lesquels défiance et incompréhension jouent à plein: la scène entre La Luzerne, ministre de la Marine, et les ambassadeurs à la manufacture de Sèvres en est absolument emblématique: 'il a paru à ma gauche un nègre avec un plat d'or ou de vermeil sur lequel était un flacon et une cuiller recourbée; suivant les apparences il voulait mettre de l'essence sur la manche de mon habit ce que j'ai empêché en lui présentant un mouchoir blanc'.¹⁹ Spectacle considéré dans sa seule dimension spectaculaire, l'ambassade indienne est ravalée au rang

¹⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, 'Préface', in Edward Said, *L'Orientalisme, l'Orient créé par l'Occident*, traduit par Catherine Malamoud (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, coll. 'La couleur des idées', 1997), pp. 7-10.

¹⁸ Sans nécessairement en partager l'extension hyperbolique, c'est à la pensée d'Edward Said que j'emprunte ici des outils d'analyse du discours sur l'Orient. Cf. Edward Said, *L'Orientalisme*.

¹⁹ Lettre de Régnier, directeur de la manufacture de Sèvres, à La Luzerne, 11 septembre 1788, citée par Marcelle Brunet, 'Incidences de l'ambassade de Tipoo-Saib (1788) sur la porcelaine de Sèvres', *Cahiers de la céramique et des arts du feu*, 24 (1961), p. 277.

de divertissement, on ne tarde pas à voir les figures des ambassadeurs dans le cabinet de Curtius²⁰ au Palais-Royal. 'Les Indiens m'amènent à parler de la ménagerie...', note ailleurs un voyageur danois.²¹

Régime narratif issu de la rencontre historique entre cultures, entre observateurs et observés, entre le moi occidental et les autres, l'exotisme a certes servi sur la longue durée à appréhender l'altérité, mais il s'est surtout identifié à un processus d'exclusion utilisant la stéréotypie: l'Autre étant le plus souvent réduit à un cliché négatif dont on doit se méfier ou que l'on doit s'approprier, subjuguer voire supprimer, ou plus banalement décrire sur le mode caricatural: 'j'ai peint dans ma vie deux diplomates, qui pour être cuivrés, n'en avaient pas moins des têtes superbes [...] extraordinairement pittoresques', rapporte Vigée-Lebrun.²²

La bestialité n'est pas le moindre de ces clichés, et le dîner partagé ensuite par Vigée-Lebrun ne rassasie visiblement que sa curiosité:

dîner servi par terre, ce qui nous obligea à nous tenir comme eux presque couchées autour de la table. Ils nous servirent avec leurs mains ce qu'ils prenaient dans les plats, dont l'un contenait une fricassée de pieds de mouton à la sauce blanche très épicée, et l'autre, je ne sais quel ragoût. [...] Triste repas: il nous répugnait trop de les voir employer leurs mains bronzées en guise de cuillères.²³

La dimension politique n'est pas absente. Il n'est pas fortuit que le terme 'orientalisme' apparaisse en français juste un an après

²⁰ Ancêtre du musée Grévin.

²¹ Gerhard Anton von Halem, *Paris en 1790*, traduit par A. Chuquet (Paris: L. Chailley, 1896), p. 246.

²² Louise-Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Mme Louise-Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun*, 3 vols (Paris: H. Fournier, 1835-1837), I, p. 58.

²³ Vigée-Lebrun, p. 60.

l'expédition d'Égypte. Ainsi, Louis XVI accepte de se prêter au jeu du *nazir*, mais il s'emploie surtout à empêcher toute identification entre le pouvoir souverain dont il est investi, et celui que les ambassadeurs représentent. L'importance assez faible qu'on leur accorde transparaît nettement à la faveur d'un 'Vous sentez qu'il faut que leur harangue soit courte',²⁴ ou dans le mépris logé à l'encontre des cadeaux de Tipoo-Sahib que l'on désire voir 'portés sans pompe':²⁵

S[a] M[ajesté] désireroit que les présents des ambassadeurs ne fussent point portés à l'audience publique, mais envoyés dans le cabinet. Faites leur sentir que tel est l'usage. [...] Après les exagérations des journaux, la modicité de ces dons jetteroit un ridicule sur l'ambassade que les gazettes étrangères et spécialement les papiers anglois se permettoient mille plaisanteries.²⁶

L'exotisme est libre de s'exprimer tant qu'il ne nuit pas au spectacle de la monarchie absolue dont les fastes et la pompe ne peuvent être ternis par la tenue négligée des ambassadeurs:

Il seroit nécessaire d'inspecter leurs vêtements avant votre audience. Toute la capitale voudra voir cette cérémonie. Nous devons respecter le costume de ces étrangers; mais pour que le public ait pour lui le même respect, il faut au moins qu'il soit propre, et s'il est possible, qu'il ait un air d'opulence. Je ne peux point me persuader que les ambassadeurs n'aient point un habillement plus décent et plus riche que celui que je leur vois.²⁷

Tout l'éventail des stéréotypes orientaux ne tarde pas à défiler: l'Est éternel et immuable, l'Arabe insatiable sur le plan sexuel, l'exotique féminin, le despotisme corrompu, et enfin la religiosité

²⁴ AN B³ 803, lettre de La Luzerne à Ruffin, 4 août 1788, première lettre.

²⁵ AN B³ 803, lettre de La Luzerne à Ruffin, 11 août 1788.

²⁶ AN B³ 803, lettre de La Luzerne à Ruffin, 4 août 1788, seconde lettre.

²⁷ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 21 juillet 1788.

mystique. Le procès de cette dernière est particulièrement chargé car non seulement l'islam est explicitement déprécié par un roi qui 'n'est point dans l'usage de recevoir les ambassadeurs musulmans si ce n'est en leur accordant une audience séparée',²⁸ mais en plus on condamne

L'esprit de superstition qui les domine, ne permet pas de rien fixer d'une manière positive, ils ont dans le cours de chaque lune, tant de jours malheureux et dans lesquels on ne leur ferait pas montrer le nez au soleil, qu'on ne peut statuer sur rien.²⁹

Sans doute est-ce néanmoins l'insatiable appétit sexuel qui fournit la matière la plus généreuse de cet orientalisme fécond en stéréotypes. À la même époque, le motif exotisme/érotisme est d'ailleurs mis en scène jusqu'à l'obsession dans le genre lyrique qui se lance dans l'exploration des Indes fabuleuses. L'image est typique d'une Inde mythologique rendue ici suggestive par l'accointance salace de la religion et du sexe et par la conjonction fascinante du désir et de la mort dans cette ambassade qui repart avec un mourant, Mahomet-Dervich-Khan et un septuagénaire, Akbar-Ali-Khan, atteint de maladie vénérienne! Dès leur arrivée à Toulon, les ambassadeurs avaient beaucoup loué 'le caractère aimable des dames françaises'.³⁰ Plus tard, une fois installé à Paris, l'interprète Ruffin, aperçoit dans la chambre de Mohamet-Dervich-Khan 'des plumes et un chapeau',³¹ synecdoque assez suggestive. Mais le sommet de la drôlerie est atteint avec la colère de Mohamed-Osman-Khan,

²⁸ AN B³ 803, lettre de La Luzerne à Ruffin, 22 août 1788.

²⁹ Archives municipales de Toulon, BB 113, lettre des consuls de Toulon au comte de Caraman, citée par A. Jacques Parès, *Bulletin de l'Académie du Var*, p. 101.

³⁰ *Les Indiens ou Tipou-Sultan, fils d'Ayder-Aly, &c.*, p. 186.

³¹ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 21 août 1788.

indigné de voir Dervich livré aux femmes; [...] que le 2nd ambassadeur presque octogénaire vit avec la fille du Suisse de l'hôtel, passe les nuits avec elle et permet qu'elle voye pendant le jour son fils Ayassay, [...] véritable raison du peu d'empressement actuel d'Akbar Aly à retourner dans l'Inde'.³²

Et au retour,

Dervich Khan emporte le souvenir le plus cuisant des plaisirs, auxquels il s'est livré sans goût et sans choix à Paris. Il est enflé et son embonpoint trop subit ne trompe plus personne. Il ne peut plus ni rester en place, ni souffrir longtemps le mouvement de la voiture.³³

L'orientalisme, en outre, possède une structure propre, il part du contraste pour généraliser la différence et constituer un type identifiable. Ainsi peut-on qualifier l'esprit oriental, l'Islam dans son ensemble, les Arabes en général, à partir des trois ambassadeurs indiens. C'est Ruffin qui évoque 'les scrupules de nos musulmans pour leur cuisine et leur répugnance à cheminer de nuit',³⁴ c'est la description des ambassadeurs comme 'ombrageux, jaloux et mécontents'³⁵ par le marquis de Bombelles. 'Je sais par expérience', poursuit Ruffin, 'que ce n'est point une petite affaire que de déterminer les Orientaux d'exercer leur mémoire'.³⁶ Plus loin il ajoute: 'Osman [ne] connaît aucun [obstacle], comme tous les Orientaux, qui sont habitués à voir toutes les formes & tous les principes plier à la volonté de leur despote', tandis que l'on en vient à louer la façon dont les ambassadeurs 'se sont comportés

³² AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 23 août 1788.

³³ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 20 octobre 1788.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Marquis Marc-Marie de Bombelles, *Journal*, 5 vols (Genève: Droz, 1977-2002), II, p. 217.

³⁶ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 21 juillet 1788.

hier au Collège Royal avec une honnêteté et une décence qui ont été applaudies'.³⁷

Enfin, malgré l'assiduité certaine des ambassadeurs aux différents spectacles de la capitale, il est inconcevable que ceux-ci puissent goûter les chefs-d'œuvre de l'esprit occidental, que ceux-ci soient musicaux:

Tout Paris était ce soir à l'Opéra pour y voir les ambassadeurs de Tipposahib. J'ai suivi le torrent et j'ai vu ces magots. L'un d'eux a eu longtemps les genoux touchant à son menton. On donnait *Armide*. Ils ont paru en goûter quelques beautés, mais on prétend qu'ils n'aiment pas la musique.³⁸

Ou picturaux:

Lorsque le portrait de Davich Khan fut sec, je l'envoyai chercher; mais il l'avait caché derrière son lit et ne voulait point le rendre, prétendant qu'il fallait une âme à ce portrait.

Ce refus donna lieu à de fort jolis vers qui me furent adressés et que je copie ici.

À MADAME LEBRUN

*Au sujet du portrait de Davich Khan, et du préjugé
des Orientaux contre la peinture.*

Ce n'est point aux climats où règnent les sultans
Que le marbre s'anime et la toile respire.
Les préjugés de leurs imans
Du dieu des arts ont renversé l'empire.
Ils ont rêvé qu'*Allah*, jaloux de nos talents,
Doit, en jugeant les mondes et les âges,
Donner une âme à ces images
Qui sauvent la beauté du ravage des temps.

³⁷ AN B³ 803, lettre de Ruffin à La Luzerne, 24 août 1788.

³⁸ Marquis Marc-Marie de Bombelles, *Journal*, p. 217.

Sublime Allah! Tu ris de cette erreur impie!
 Tu conviendras, voyant cette copie,
 [...]
 Et que Lebrun, en peignant des portraits,
 Sait aussi leur donner une âme.³⁹

La vérité du langage, selon Nietzsche, serait 'une multitude mouvante de métaphores, de métonymies, d'anthropomorphismes – bref une somme de relations humaines, qui ont été rehaussées, transposées et ornées par la poésie et par la rhétorique, et qui, après un long usage, paraissent établies, canoniques et contraignantes à un peuple: les vérités sont des illusions dont on a oublié qu'elles le sont'.⁴⁰ Cette multitude mouvante, cette capacité d'oubli peut s'avérer dangereuse. Lorsque l'Occident se penche sur l'Orient, invariablement viennent se superposer une quantité d'écrans sémantiques hérités d'une pratique pluriséculaire de l'investigation orientaliste. Les sources disponibles sur l'ambassade indienne de 1788 illustrent parfaitement ce danger. Aussi, voudrait-on, avec Guillaume Postel, auteur de *Des merveilles du monde* (1552), 'admonester le lecteur de prendre garde aux choses orientales' et de s'inscrire résolument dans l'ère du soupçon.

Thomas Hallier
 Paris-IV Sorbonne

³⁹ Vigée-Lebrun, pp. 61-62.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 'Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral', in *Œuvres philosophiques complètes*, 14 vols (Paris: Gallimard, coll. 'NRF', 1967-1990), I, p. 178.

The End of the British Raj: Representations of the Decolonisation of India in French-language journalism (1923-47)

The present article confines itself to giving a brief overview of how the issue of Indian decolonisation was represented by the Parisian press, from the launching of Gandhi's *hartal* (general strike) in 1919, when the Parisian-based *Le Populaire* first started to show an interest in Gandhi's struggle, until 1947, when the two independent states of India and Pakistan seceded from the British Empire. The texts considered here, therefore, are not assessed for their 'factual accuracy', nor for the breadth of knowledge which they display about the Indian issue; rather, following the example of Natalie Zemon Davis, the aim is to 'let the "fictional" aspects of these documents be the centre of analysis'.¹

Journalistic representations of the end of the British Raj in 1947 betray two key notions underpinning the topos of 'India' in French-language texts. First, there is the discursive dislocation between India as a distinct geographical and historical referent — the ostensible subject matter of the articles — and India as a *hyperreal* term (to adopt Dipesh Chakrabarty's use of the neologism):² a space in the imagination to be occupied, and appropriated either as antithesis or analogue, by Western perceptions. Secondly, given Britain's position as dominant coloniser on the subcontinent, French-language journalism encourages a three-way interpretation of colonisation and colonialism. Although after 1763 the French empire in the Indies was reduced to a rump of five *comptoirs*, Pondichéry, Karikal,

¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 3.

² Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?', *Representations*, 37 (1992), 1-26 (p. 1).

Mahé, Yanaon and Chandernagor, which were economically and territorially subordinate to the British Raj, the French political presence in India lasted until 1954 and interrogation of French-language journalism reveals that representations cannot be fully appreciated without engaging methodologically with France's politically subordinate status in India. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) argues that colonial discourse depends upon the binary opposition of the negative foil of the East, 'the other', to the superior Western self.³ Whilst such a model underpins French-language reporting on the end of the British Raj, it is the aim of this article to demonstrate that such reporting is additionally predicated on the establishment of an *other* coloniser: the British. In other words, rather than a binary relationship between France and India, a triangular discursive model between France, India and Britain is apparent in representing Indian decolonisation.

Parisian reporting on Indian moves towards the end of British colonisation of the subcontinent in the inter-war period was invariably distilled into one discrete form of representation: 'le gandhisme' and Gandhi, 'l'homme qui personifie — qu'on le veuille ou non — la lutte de 350 millions d'Hindous'.⁴ This specific focus on Gandhi, however, does not mean that there existed a monolithic representation of India, either politically or in the techniques used. Indeed, the textual nature of 'India', and its dislocation from its geographical and historical referent of the same name, is particularly evident in the conflicting appropriations of Gandhi in the debate between the different factions of the French Left after the split of the socialist party at the eighteenth national congress at Tours in 1920. The dialogue between the

columnists of *L'Humanité*, the central organ of the majority 'Parti communiste français', and socialist newspapers such as *Clarté*, associated with the minority 'Section française de l'internationale ouvrière', obviously highlights the nebulous 'contested space' which constituted Marxism; yet, in addition, the refraction of this debate through the prism of 'India' seriously challenges Said's theory of an essentialist West and an essentialist East, instead revealing both identities as fluid and approximate.

Detailed reports on India begin in *L'Humanité* in 1923 on the occasion of the thirty-seventh annual conference of the Indian National Congress. Unsurprisingly, Marxist rhetoric predominates, and the reporting yokes the Indian struggle to the Marxist view of world history. The subsuming of the Indian story under the *grand récit* of Marxism flattens out the specificities of the Indian national struggle to work it into a teleological progression. Thus, A. N. Roy, writing in *L'Humanité*, represents the movement of non-cooperation, led by Gandhi, as an inevitable step on the road to communist revolution in India; he achieves this principally by negating the role of Gandhi. Coining the term 'gandhisme' to describe Gandhi and his adherents, Gandhi and the movement of *hartal* are presented within the communist revolutionary model, not as the decisive phase but as the stage prior to revolution, namely that of the reactionary bourgeoisie who thwart the true will of the people: 'la petite bourgeoisie réactionnaire qui s'exprime par le *pur-gandhisme*'.⁵ Gandhi is, therefore, not depicted as essential *per se* to the liberation movement; instead he is deemed to abet the middle-class betrayal of the revolution, a point emphasised through typical Marxist rhetoric which juxtaposes Gandhi and 'la petite bourgeoisie' with the masses of 'travailleurs révolutionnaires des villes et des campagnes'.⁶ The Indian example

³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 [1978]), *passim*.

⁴ Claude Markovits, *Gandhi* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2000), p. 104; Daniel Guérin, 'Après l'échec de la Conférence de "La Table Ronde": Gandhi à Paris', *La Révolution Prolétarienne*, 122 (December 1931), 306–09 (p. 306).

⁵ A. N. Roy, 'Aux Indes Anglaises: Le Congrès National de Gaya, Vers la disparition du quiétisme de Gandhi', *L'Humanité*, 3 March 1923, p. 3.

⁶ Roy, p. 3.

hence appears to be the paradigm of the 'révolution escamotée': revolutionary power usurped by the bourgeoisie and precipitating the failure of the 'will of the people'.⁷

Conversely, Henri Barbusse, writing in *Clarté* in July 1923, instead of presenting Gandhi as the antithesis of communism, depicts him as its apotheosis, imagery which reaches its climax on the penultimate page with a direct comparison with Lenin: 'Si Lénine s'était trouvé à la place de Gandhi, il aurait parlé et agi comme lui'.⁸ Whilst the dualism of East and West is not textually evident in Roy's article, the binary device is a prerequisite for Barbusse's exposition. Although the Orient and the Occident are rhetorically juxtaposed, the West is encouraged to see itself in *l'autre indien*, for 'l'on discerne plus de ressemblances que de différences entre sa doctrine et celles des révolutionnaires d'Occident, autrement dit les communistes'.⁹ Explicitly, Gandhi and the moves towards Indian independence are presented as analogous with the European struggle towards communism; as a corollary of this, 'India' as a referent external to its representation, with its 'différence de milieu',¹⁰ is overtly neglected in favour of the internationalist and humanist rhetoric of the common progress of humanity: 'Tous les vrais révolutionnaires doivent fatalement se ressembler, comme se ressemblent tous les hommes'.¹¹ Barbusse, in subsuming Indian decolonisation under a humanist view of world history, emphasising equality and respect for the right of men to govern themselves, exemplifies one of the anticolonialist trends of the *gauche française*, and, in doing so, demonstrates the

contradictory traditions which divided and plagued the anticolonialism of the French Left during the 1920s. Hitherto overlooked, however, is the discursive role that the topos of 'India' plays in this political debate. Politically, the articles in both *L'Humanité* and *Clarté* advocate an end to the British Raj; yet, in appropriating 'India' for conflicting rhetorical and political ends, both equally demonstrate the truism that the 'India' in question is primarily a textual construction, linguistically used to reflect the European self and its concerns. Indeed, the self-reflexive nature of the discourse is stressed at the end of Barbusse's article with the introduction of a third perspective into the dualist debate constituted by French communism and *gandhisme*: namely British imperialism. In calling for *all* French socialists and communists to unite with Gandhi against the common enemy – 'les Anglais, brigands somptueux du monde'¹² – Barbusse establishes an additional *other*, the British: an ever-present third factor on which the representation of the France/India relationship is dependent.

The subject of India effectively disappears from the Parisian press until 1930, when, on 12 March, Gandhi left his *ashram* and began the march that would end with his challenge to the British monopoly on salt production on the Indian subcontinent. Whereas critics such as Markovits have attempted to divide representations along political lines,¹³ the 'India' which emerges from the Parisian press illuminates a more complex range of representations than traditional colonial discourse analysis has allowed.

A pertinent example of this complexity is the subtle subsuming of the Indian struggle into the French revolutionary model of history. This discursive technique, it should be stressed, was not new to the 1930s. Rolland, in his 1924 biography of Gandhi, frequently uses analogies with 1789 as a means of stressing the

⁷ Compare this, for example, with Marxist assessments of the 1830 revolution in France. See Pamela Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 10.

⁸ Henri Barbusse, 'Révolutionnaires d'Orient et d'Occident: A propos de Gandhi', *Clarté*, 13 July 1923, pp. 314–20 (p. 318).

⁹ Barbusse, p. 314.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. My emphasis.

¹² Barbusse, p. 320.

¹³ Markovits, p. 42.

symbolic importance of Gandhi's launching of the *hartal*.¹⁴ One of the aims of situating any form of anticolonialist action by the colonised within such a heritage was to accord it political legitimacy and hence create support in France, a pertinent example being the language employed to formulate demands by Berbers, such as Fährat Abbas, during the 1930s.¹⁵ The case of the *British* domination of the subcontinent, however, does not fit such a model: there was no need to legitimise the Indians' actions through the prism of the history of the *Hexagone*, as what was at stake was a 'foreign affair'. More importantly, the *grand récit* of French Republicanism is adduced in *pro-colonial* papers, which display what Markovits has dubbed 'la solidarité inter-impérialiste'.¹⁶ In short, India is a trope, deployed to pit French colonialism against British colonialism.

This is particularly evident in right-wing papers such as *Le Temps* and *Le Figaro*. In the editorial comment of *Le Figaro* of 30 April 1930, for example, support for the British colonial policy in India is undisguised: 'C'est l'Angleterre qui a maintenu l'ordre, accompli des travaux publics, construit les chemins de fer, et amélioré la condition du peuple.' At the same time, a lack of political maturity in India is stressed: 'Le mouvement qui s'est développé est à peine politique.'¹⁷ Political immaturity is a key theme underpinning the analysis of the Indian situation in *Le Temps*, which asserts that British imperialism is not immediately under threat for, in contrast with British colonialism, India is politically undeveloped: 'le nationalisme hindou manque

d'organisation, de maturité politique, de buts clairement définis.'¹⁸ Yet, this notwithstanding, both papers make repeated use of the term 'la gabelle' with reference to Gandhi's campaign of disobedience.¹⁹ Although strictly a generic term for any salt tax, its use in colloquial French, post-1789, is specific: a reference to the monopoly which the king, under the *ancien régime*, had on the manufacture and the sale of salt, and which frequently provoked rebellion.²⁰ The use of the term in both *Le Figaro* and *Le Temps* therefore creates a linguistic connection between Gandhi and the establishment of the French Republic. This association between India and France, effectively positing Indian decolonization as a retarded French revolution, contrasts both India and France with Britain and her political traditions. Again, representations of India are dependent on the establishment not only of *l'autre indien*, but of an 'other' coloniser: the British.

Reporting on the Salt March of 1930, *L'Humanité* reduces the textual 'India' to a ground for competing discourses. Continuing the tradition established by its coverage in the 1920s, Gandhi and the Indian Congress are represented as the bourgeois betrayers of the revolution in India, in a paradigm of the communist revolutionary model of history, and with typically choice rhetoric: 'Les chefs du mouvement nationaliste de l'Inde continuent leur manœuvre ignoble, destinée à tromper les masses et briser leur

¹⁴ Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Paris: Stock, 1993 [1924]), p. 108.

¹⁵ See Dominique Borne and Henri Dubief, 'La crise coloniale et les débuts du nationalisme', in Dominique Borne and Henri Dubief, *La crise des années 30: 1929-1938*, 2nd edn (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989 [1976]), pp. 69-72 (p. 71).

¹⁶ Markovits, p. 44.

¹⁷ André Chaumeix, 'Les Affaires de l'Inde', *Le Figaro*, 30 April 1930, p. 1.

¹⁸ [Editorial], 'La Campagne Gandhiste dans l'Inde', *Le Temps*, 17 April 1930, p. 1.

¹⁹ The term appears in three separate articles: [Editorial], 'Le Geste symbolique de Gandhi', *Le Temps*, 8 April 1930, p. 1; [Editorial], 'La Crise de l'Inde', *Le Temps*, 6 May 1930, p. 1; and [Editorial], 'Dans l'Inde britannique: la campagne de Gandhi contre l'Angleterre', *Le Figaro*, 8 April 1930, p. 3.

²⁰ *Dictionnaire du français vivant*, ed. by Maurice Davau, Marcel Cohen and Maurice Lallemand (Paris: Bordas, 1972), unpaginated.

élan révolutionnaire contre l'impérialisme anglais.²¹ Ironically, however, despite its anti-imperialist agenda, *L'Humanité* relies on the explicit use of colonial discourse in its representation of Gandhi. In an article comparing Gandhi's Salt March with a strike carried out by the Bolshevik-inspired workers of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, the editorial encourages its readers to contrast Bolshevik rhetoric with Gandhi's assertions: 'Comparez, nous vous en prions, ce mâle langage, cette fière apostrophe aux tisanes sucrées que Gandhi prodigue à ses fidèles.'²² In addition to the exploitation of the cultural stereotype of afternoon tea-drinking to satirise the association between Gandhi and the British imperialists, the binary opposition here is explicit. Bolsheviks are male, whereas Gandhi and his followers, with their effeminate 'tisanes sucrées', are necessarily their antithesis. The otherness, and inferiority, of Indian nationalism is thus emphasised through the language of sexual difference, and a supposedly anti-imperialist French communist paper exploits an archetypal example of imperial rhetoric.²³ On one level, once again, this highlights the tractable nature of Marxism. More strikingly, the competing discourses of anticolonialist Marxism and colonialism give the construction of 'India' in *L'Humanité*, despite journalism's claims to facticity, an incoherence which reflects more on the European self (the French Communist Party) than on

²¹ [Foreign correspondent], 'La trahison nationaliste aux Indes: Jawaharlal Nehru préconise la capitulation du peuple hindou dans la lutte contre l'impérialisme anglais', *L'Humanité*, 22 January 1930, p. 3.

²² [Editorial], 'Comparaison édifiante: Lutte révolutionnaire et parade nationaliste aux Indes', *L'Humanité*, 8 April 1930, pp. 1–3 (p. 3).

²³ Ashis Nandy, for example, discusses how the British Raj pejoratively categorised Indians, with the exception of those who were perceived as belonging to martial cultures (Sikhs and Gurkhas), as feminine, in contrast with the conquering virility of Victorian Britons: Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 4–7.

its apparent subject: Indian decolonisation. Despite the column inches given to Gandhi and Indian issues (five of the six articles cited appeared on the first page as the leading article in 1930), the India of the inter-war period is essentially a linguistic trope, contingent on European concerns and neuroses, and ultimately malleable in accordance with the politically, philosophically and culturally negotiated identity of the place of production: France.

The press reports which emerge in 1947, with the partition of India, reveal four key discursive practices: the presentation of 1947 as a British narrative; the deployment of a Marxist model of world history; the continuation of colonial discourse with the dualistic depiction of India as the West's inferior other; and the subsuming of Indian independence under the transnational discourse of a humanist liberation narrative. Emplotting the creation of India and Pakistan into a 'British narrative' is central to many of the reports on the end of the Raj. On a narrative level, Indian history is overlooked in favour of a European teleology. For example, in *Le Monde*'s report on the handover of power, the 'India' depicted belies the assertion of the headline, 'L'Indépendance de l'Inde'. Instead of discussing the birth of a new state, *Le Monde* asserts the *death* of the British empire in India: 'À minuit ce soir, l'empire des Indes aura vécu.'²⁴ *Le Figaro* similarly yokes 'Indian history' to a master European narrative of colonialism, twice using the headline 'L'Inde sans les Anglais' — an overt appropriation of the title of Pierre Loti's 1903 novel, *L'Inde (sans les Anglais)*. In contrast with Loti's title, however, the phrase 'sans les Anglais' lacks the parentheses which Loti uses to invite the reader to ignore the presence of the British on the subcontinent, the Raj being all too evident at his time of writing.

²⁴ [Editorial], 'L'Indépendance de l'Inde', *Le Monde*, 15–16 August 1947, p. 1.

Instead, 'sans les Anglais' is a hypothetical reference to how India will survive without the presence of the English role of 'tutelle'.²⁵

This subordination of India to the *grand récit* of British colonialism is, however, not universally straightforward. In the account which *L'Humanité* provides of the end of the Raj, India is again an adjunct to the British narrative of history, as the ironic headline, 'Indépendance: "Made in England"', suggests.²⁶ In this instance, the influence of the second discursive technique, Marxist appropriation, becomes apparent. Although there is the impression that India is subordinate to British history (emphasised through the use of the English language), rhetorically the title is employed to stress the notion that capitalist Britain has swindled the masses out of their Indian (communist) revolution. In short, the British narrative is itself included in an appropriation of Indian decolonisation by the Marxist model of world history.

This presentation of Indian independence as an element of a master British narrative has a corollary for the representation of the *Union française*. Through the rhetorical emphasis on the 'British story' behind Indian decolonisation, and the concurrent neglect in the French press of reports on the *comptoirs*, the strong impression is created that decolonisation is not a phenomenon which will include France and her colonies in Asia. Thus, particularly in the more politically conservative papers (*Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *France-Soir*), there is continuity in the representation of India, in the form of the third discursive technique: colonial discourse in which India is depicted as an inferior 'other' to France, in need of her tutelage despite the act of decolonisation. In one of the few articles to deal with the subject of *l'Inde française* in 1947, the *comptoirs* are differentiated from

²⁵ André François-Poncet, 'L'Inde sans les Anglais: Le fédéralisme formule des temps à venir', *Le Figaro*, 14 May 1947, p. 1 and p. 3.

²⁶ [Editorial], 'Indépendance: "Made in England"', *L'Humanité*, 16 August 1947, p. 1.

British India through the subtle use of French colonial rhetoric. *Le Monde* terms the inhabitants of the *comptoirs* specifically as 'citoyens français': a resonant use of the language of the French policy of assimilation, which was central to France's colonial survival after 1946. Accordingly, whilst the rest of the subcontinent is 'un formidable volcan', even the communists in Pondichéry are depicted as uninterested in independence and still respectful of superior French law and order: 'ils craignent, non sans raison peut-être, de ne pas y [en Inde indépendante] jouir des mêmes libertés dont ils bénéficient dans l'Inde française'.²⁷ Even at the moment of Indian independence, therefore, an essential technique is the binary representation of India as France's inferior. The reference here to the new rights granted to the citizens of *l'Inde française* with the creation of the *Union française* in 1946 introduces a French-versus-British perspective into the depiction of decolonisation. Not only are the primitive reactions of the Indians asserted, but also, implicitly, the failings of British colonialism in comparison with the superior French system. The article thus exemplifies the degree to which French journalistic writing on India could be subsumed within France's wider colonial question, and is of particular historical significance given the beleaguered position of the *Union française* in Indochina and Madagascar at that time. After political decolonisation 'India' remains a space for rhetorical appropriation: a means of exploring and reinforcing the identity of the *Union française*.

The fourth discursive technique, the inclusion of the events of 1947 in a *grand récit* of liberation, once more posits Indian independence as a retarded French revolution. The left-leaning *Libération*, for example, recalls the founding rhetoric of the first French Republic (the *devise* 'liberté, égalité, fraternité') in the

²⁷ [Editorial], 'Dans l'Inde en fièvre: Nos cinq comptoirs réclament eux aussi leur rattachement à "la mère patrie indigène"', *Le Monde*, 5 August 1947, pp. 1-2.

headline 'Indes: Deux états libres naissent demain'.²⁸ Imagery associated with new birth immediately gives the impression of discontinuity in India, and posits Indian decolonisation as the inaugural event of a new era. This is particularly illustrated by the somewhat clichéd metaphor of the sun setting on the British Empire and rising on India to symbolise the hopes of a new world, as used in *France-Soir*: 'Le soleil couche sur le plus grand empire du monde. Il se lèvera demain sur les espoirs d'un monde nouveau.'²⁹ The juxtaposition of this language of novelty with the republican rhetoric of *liberté*, however, continues to associate Indian liberation with the French republican paradigm of history. Geo-political realities, superficially the subject matter of the genre of journalism, and of particular moment in 1947, thus appear thoroughly divorced from the signifier 'India', which functions primarily as a space for competing ideologies: republicanism in the case of *Libération* and *France-Soir*, and Marxism in the case of *L'Humanité*.

Across the political spectrum, journalistic writing on India reveals that, as Said asserts, European culture, philosophy and politics are validated through an opposition with an oriental 'other'. Reporting on 'India' is as much about constructing a French identity as an 'Indian' one. Journalism, however, reveals a distinctive 'Indian discourse' in French-language writing. First, the marked tendency to present 'India' as a 'space' to be occupied by Western epistemologies, Marxist and French republican, resonates with other French-language texts: intellectual writing, such as that of Jean Rous, which exploits India as a paradigm of decolonisation, and the fictional works of Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous, which explore India in 1947 as a utopia for French

²⁸ [Editorial], 'Indes: Deux états libres naissent demain', *Libération*, 14 August 1947, p. 4.

²⁹ A. de Segonzac, 'George VI n'est plus empereur', *France-Soir*, 20–21 July 1947, p. 3.

feminist ideals and writing.³⁰ The qualitatively different genre of journalism, a genre which, in the words of Walter Benjamin, is 'so shot through with explanation',³¹ thus augments a wider twentieth-century French-language tradition of writing on India. Secondly, the Parisian press provides evidence of French-language discourse on India being deployed against Britain, the dominant coloniser of the subcontinent. Tropes are not used as a means of establishing and maintaining colonial power (viz. Said), but to challenge rhetorically another colonial power. In this respect, India appears as a discursive interface: a means of examining not only French colonial identity, but that of the *frère ennemi*: Britain.

Kate Marsh
University of Liverpool

³⁰ Jean Rous's *chronique* 'L'impérialisme colonial et ses derniers sophismes', in *Chronique de la décolonisation* (Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine, 1965), pp. 381–92 (pp. 381–2), advocates the British decolonisation of India as an example which should be followed by France, and is examined in Kate Marsh, 'Fictions of 1947: Representations of Indian Decolonization in French-Language Literary, Journalistic and Political Texts' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool, 2004), pp. 139–41. The positing of India in 1947 as a utopia for the practice of *écriture féminine* by Hélène Cixous in her play *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* (Paris: Théâtre du Soleil, 1987) and Catherine Clément in her novel *Pour l'amour de l'Inde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) is similarly discussed in the above-cited doctoral thesis (pp. 31–40).

³¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 83–107 (p. 89).

'I thought India was French': Images of India at the *Exposition Coloniale*

India was highly significant to the French notions of colony and Empire. Despite possessing a mere handful of outposts in India surrounded by the might of the British Raj, the French India Establishments retained an identity of 'Frenchness', defiant in the face of Anglican *sahibdom*. This paper explores the problematic representation of India in the International Colonial Exhibition, held in Paris in 1931, specifically in the context of the clear construction of India as devoid of British rule.

The grand Colonial Exhibition, held in Paris from May 6 to November 15, 1931 celebrated France's accomplishments in civilizing the 'noble savage'. It was the last great demonstration of colonial power and attracted more than 33 million entries from France and abroad. Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Italy and the United States all joined France in this unashamed showcase of Empire. Apart from Germany which had been stripped of its colonies after World War I, and Japan which was only starting out on her colonial venture, the only colonial power missing was Britain, financially unable to participate after her own aggrandizing Colonial Exhibition at Wembley in 1924-1925 and reluctant, moreover, to play second fiddle to France.

The mastermind behind the brave showing at Vincennes was Maréchal Lyautey who envisaged two larger goals for the Exhibition: the promotion of French industrial and business investment in the colonies and the raising of French public awareness of their nation's colonial grandeur. National pride was at stake and the exhibition was meant to counter the image of the lethargic French who cared nothing for their colonial holdings.¹ It

¹ Patricia Morton, 'National and Colonial: the Musée des colonies at the Colonial Exposition Paris 1931', *Art Bulletin*, 80 (June 1998), p. 357.

was an effort to galvanize the French public to participate in the colonial effort.

I argue that the representation of India at the *Exposition coloniale* was really a microcosm of France's attitudes and policy towards the French settlements in India and of greater India as a cultural entity. Despite having lost her principal Indian empire to Britain in the late eighteenth century, France continued to retain certain outposts for the prestige of possessing parts of India within her colonial empire. While the French comptoirs were certainly prosperous, they were by no means comparable to French colonies like Algeria or Indo-China in terms of the geographical extent of rule. It seems probable, therefore, that the primary aim of France in showcasing her Indian posts to a far greater degree than their actual importance to French colonial interest warranted, was due to the ideological need to define 'Frenchness', in the colonial context, as an enlightened colonial power that truly cared about her colonies and made genuine efforts to develop them philanthropically and raise their people to a 'civilized' level.²

Representations of India at the 1931 Exhibition were structural, cultural, political and economic. Structurally, India was represented through two pavilions – the Establishments of French India as part of the French global colonial presence, and the pavilion of Hindustan. Culturally, events such as the Hindu dance night, operas reflecting Indian influence, films, paintings and frescoes depicting India, the arts and crafts of India and even Indian cuisine formed a solid corpus of a typically Indian experience.

Inaugurated on May 22 1931, the rose-colored pavilion consisted of three rooms, devoted in turn to India's arts, economy and history. The pavilion was entered by way of a grand entrance, which was flanked by sculptures of two huge white elephants.

² This was the crucial ideological component of French colonial policy and the key to Anglo-French colonial rivalry.

These sculptures were alien to Indian architecture and evocative more of a temple entrance than the entrance to a Hindu house, which was the aim of the Commissaire. The temple-like appearance of the pavilion was further heightened by the construction of a flat roof and a small tower over the entrance, and by the ornate pillars supporting the roof. The most striking aspect of the interior of the pavilion was the central sculpture of the interior courtyard depicting Shiva as Nataraja, the Prince of Dancers. Presumably, Lyautey's directives to interpret loosely the architecture of a typical Hindu house were taken rather literally to present an exoticised version of the Hindu house as a cross between the interior of a well-to-do Hindu house with rooms constructed around a central courtyard, and the exterior, which was almost entirely the façade of a local temple except for the scale and grandeur on which it was built, which was less ornate than a normal temple. Each of the three rooms in the interior of the pavilion was painted with frescoes to heighten the effect of the themes of the room. The first, the artistic room, contained scenes from Hindu mythology and also examples of arts and crafts by the local schools of arts and industries in Pondicherry. The second room displayed the agricultural and industrial products of French India as well as an important contribution of beautiful lace and needlework items for domestic and decorative use done by local women under the teaching of the Sisters of Saint-Joseph of Cluny in Pondicherry.³ The last, the historical room, contained rich and precious souvenirs, parchments and maps, engravings and local archival curiosities and included frescoes of the French campaigns in India.

The pavilion of French India was larger than those of many other older colonies such as Martinique and Guadeloupe. It was situated in clear view on the Avenue des Colonies, and altogether formed a more important part of the Exhibition than the actual

³ *Rapport Général* p. 620.

possession of the India posts warranted for French colonial ambitions. The pavilion had an enormous number of visitors. The average was calculated based on estimates made ten times each month for the duration of the Exhibition and totalled 40,000 people during the week and between 60-75,000 on Sunday.⁴ The pavilion was also highly visible in the awards that the Exhibition officials made to various categories of products and artifacts displayed by the colonies.

Apart from the pavilion there were other exhibits, and cultural performances that provided the visitor with a range of 'India images', including the *Section Retrospective* at the *Musée des Colonies*, as well as frescoes and images with Indian motifs which decorated the palace of Fine Arts, musical and dance performances by Indians (especially showcased on the Hindu night, which formed one of the many *nuits coloniales* that were among the highlights of the Exhibition), as well as a number of Indian films which were screened at the *Cité des Informations*.

The Hindustan Pavilion was a late and intriguing addition to the Exhibition. Apparently completely overlooked in the *Rapport Général* which was published in 1933, two years after the Exhibition and which, therefore, had no excuse to exclude even late additions, the pavilion does not seem to have had any official opening ceremony or any receptions, though these were a standard feature of all other pavilions, and faithfully catalogued in the daily calendar of events presented in the *Rapport*. The pavilion was situated next to the pavilion of the United States, right on the railway line which transported visitors around the Exhibition, ensuring, therefore, that it could not have been overlooked.

The committee overlooking the activities of the pavilion consisted of an assemblage of high Indians – both Muslims and Hindus – including the maharajas of Kapurthala, Baroda, Patiala, Burdwan, the Aga Khan, the Begum Shah Nawaz, Sir Mirza

⁴ *Rapport Général* p. 624.

Muhammed Ismail and other grand persons who came to attend the Round Table conference in England.⁵ The monument represented was the tomb of Itmad-ud Daulah, commissioned by his daughter, the Mughal Empress Nur Jahan, wife of Jahangir in 1623. The architectural style was classic Mughal, with arches. The original monument was built in white marble and inlaid with precious and semi-precious stones in the *pietra dura* style that became popular in the late Mughal period. The pavilion was surrounded by gardens and fountains in true Mughal style. At one side was a reproduction of the Badshahi mosque of Lahore and the Kahs Mahal of Agra, which also held an Indian restaurant and a theatre.⁶ The pavilion contained treasures from the private collection of members of the committee as well as examples of the arts and industries of India.

The description of the Hindustan pavilion being absent from official accounts of the Exhibition, I have relied primarily on sketchy descriptions in two guide books. While one could suggest that this exclusion was due to an oversight, it is far more likely that the political repercussions of the inclusion of the Hindustan pavilion were far too great from the point of view of Anglo-French relations, even though the pavilion itself existed as an ironic testament to civil disobedience to British rule. It is no coincidence that the committee for the Hindustan pavilion was composed entirely of royalty or high-ranking Indians who had come to England to attend the first Round Table Conference to discuss the issue of Home Rule for India.⁷ It was a statement of the capability

⁵ André Demaison, *À Paris en 1931. Exposition Coloniale Internationale 'Votre Guide'* (Paris: Éditions Mayeux, 1931), pp. 176-77.

⁶ Demaison, pp. 176-77. See also *Le Guide. Exposition Coloniale Internationale. Paris 1931* (Paris: Éditions de l'Imprimerie Union, 1931), p. 54.

⁷ The members of the committee were by and large supporters of British. This allowed them to rule their kingdoms, at least nominally, and most had British residents at their courts. However, whilst outwardly they remained loyal

of indigenous rulers to rule India successfully while not being a direct challenge to British authority.

In 1921, the Minister of Colonies had invited Great Britain and her colonies and dependencies to participate.⁸ Britain had declined due to financial reasons and in October 1929, Sir Edward Crowe, Controller of the Department of Commerce, had communicated to M. Condurier de Chassaigne, on mission to London, his government's acceptance of participating in the foreign section in the *Cité des Informations*, which was formally reiterated in November 1929.⁹ Great Britain's Dominions and Colonies also declined the offer to participate in the Exhibition due to the prevailing atmosphere of economic depression (with the exception of the Union of South Africa and Canada who also participated in the *Cité*¹⁰). It is clear then that the Hindustan pavilion was not part of the British stand.

The monument represented a subtle exercise in political tact. The representation of a Mughal monument was a testimony to the unity of Indians, Mughal culture being one of the few issues that bound the diverse cultures of India together and a key issue debated at the Round Table conference. Moreover, the representation of the glory of Indian architectural and cultural achievement prior to British conquest simultaneously made it impossible for England to take offence and sent out a subtle message of the glories of India that had been destroyed by the advent of British rule.¹¹ The pavilion was guarded by troops of

supporters of the Crown they also played important roles in the organization of the nationalist movement underground,

⁸ *Rapport Général*, vol I, p. 347.

⁹ *Rapport Général*, pp. 350-51.

¹⁰ *Rapport Général*, p. 351.

¹¹ This image of an unsullied India before the British ravished the fabulously wealthy land was glorified in colonial paintings depicting the French conquest in India under Dupleix, Lally and Bussy in the eighteenth century. The French campaigns in India were reproduced and prominently displayed in fantastic

Indians thus heightening the sense of exoticism for the visitor as well as reinforcing the message that the rulers of India were well capable of self-rule.

This was a constant theme in the guidebooks. As Demaison wrote: 'Contemplate and reflect once again upon India, before the tap of manufacture and the truck of the automobile brutally transformed the people and dried up the human sources of their beauty.'¹² Franco-British rivalry emerges even in the choice of terms to denote the people and the country. The French described their settlements in India as the 'Establishments of French India', yet chose to use, in fact erroneously, an indigenous term – *Hindu* – to describe a country when it really connoted a religious or cultural community. The Indian committee naturally chose to represent their contribution as 'Hindustan' since this was a hybrid term that was inclusive of the diverse peoples of India and yet not an English import. While their choice of words was an obvious part of passive non-cooperation with the British government, the insistence on using the word Hindu to describe Indians, and Hindustan to describe India in all French accounts of the pavilion is significant. It is indicative of a whole imagery of exoticism and romance, indeed of another country that was not overrun by Britain. Demaison extolled the pristine culture of India as,

... the land of the Vedas – immortal books of the wisdom of the sages; of the epics the Ramayana and Mahabharata, where divine animals play as an important role in a single lifetime, as the heroes

paintings and frescoes in the Retrospective Section of the *Musée Permanent des Colonies*. See *Rapport*, p. 622. Ironically it was acceptable for France to wage a war of colonial conquest on India but the British were described implicitly as marauders and looters.

¹² Demaison, pp. 176-77. 'Manufacture' here obviously refers to the introduction of modern industry, transport and communication by the British in order better to exploit the resources of India.

and demi-Gods. It is the land of many languages, spoken by numerous castes and which has given us many literary masterpieces.

It is the land of famous monuments, of unimaginable joys, of thousands of tradesmen, who are world renowned for their work, the country of grand human movements and of sacred temples which represent the inspired fantasies of magnificent artists perfected by their extreme attention to detail.¹³

While the French had always been far more impressed by the theology and culture of India they had tempered their admiration of India by reference to the lack of reason, the pervasiveness of superstition and prejudice, the strange, sometimes barbaric acts of Indians. While the description of a once-great country that had fallen prey to disorder and moral corruption fits perfectly into the imperial episteme, Demaison's whole-hearted paean to Hindu culture was strangely unlike his tempered descriptions of the French India establishments.

In his description of the monument, Demaison described the construction of the tomb for the Empress Nur Jahan,

whose filial piety was as renowned as her beauty. Nur Jahan, or as she was known, 'Light of the Day', was the wife of the Mongol Emperor Shah Jahan. When she died, Shah Jahan was inconsolable and in her memory, he ordered that a splendid mausoleum be constructed in her memory in Agra. He built the Taj Mahal – one of the world's architectural wonders. This memorial is a timeless testament to the nobility and beauty of Nur Jahan.¹⁴

The passage had several errors. Nur Jahan, literally 'Light of the World', was the wife of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir who was actually the father of Shah Jahan. The Taj Mahal was in fact constructed by Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal.

¹³ Demaison, p. 177.

¹⁴ Demaison, p. 176.

This inaccurate description of the glories of India and the great and ancient culture, which had been trampled upon ruthlessly by British conquest, was a theme of the guidebooks describing the Hindustan pavilion. As Patricia Morton notes, the description of pavilions was important to Western visitors, whose gaze and understanding of events was mediated by the frequently false explanations contained in the guidebooks.¹⁵ The French-India pavilion, on the other hand, was represented as the classic colonial French effort to preserve indigenous cultures and yet introduce them to the material advantages of Western civilization. Thus the arts and crafts of French India were presented as original and authentic manufactures produced under the tutelage of French colonial rule.

This aspect of veiled rivalry between France and Britain was apparent even in scholarly writings on India at the Exhibition. Sir Aurel Stein, distinguished British Indologist, visited Paris during the Colonial Exhibition of 1931. His description of the importance of the exhibition for showcasing Indian culture formed a scholarly, informed view which eluded most visitors to the Exhibition but was influential among other Indologists and their propagation of Indology as a discipline.¹⁶ Stein emphasized the impact of Indian culture on Indo-China, on cultural exchanges with China and with the Middle Eastern and African parts of the French empire, as an indication of the influences that India both had and felt during several centuries of civilization in Asia before Imperialism. His description of the Sanskrit inscriptions in Indo-China and the powerful Hindu architectural traditions of Angkor Vat and Borobodur spoke of the long cultural and religious impact that India had on South-East Asia. Moreover, Stein's suggestion that Indo-

¹⁵ Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press, 2000).

¹⁶ See Aurel Stein, 'The International Colonial Exhibition in Paris and the Indian Visitor', *The Asiatic Review*, 27 (October 1931).

China had been colonized by a South Indian dynasty propelled the studies which eventually established that the Chola Empire of South India had in fact extended their empire to Sri Lanka and Indo-China. Stein thus extended the importance of India to include Indo-China and beyond.

Presenting the greatness of Indian civilization as a Western discovery, and, therefore, part of the showcasing of Western Empires, Stein's descriptions of Indian culture credited the Archaeological Survey of India with the 'unearthing' of India's past. Similarly, he credited the French *École française d'Extrême Orient* with the discovery and careful preservation of the cultural heritage of Indo-China, and Marshall Lyautey with efforts to preserve the 'authenticity' of traditional crafts in Morocco. Stein advised the Indian visitor to the Exhibition to use this opportunity to learn about the greatness of their country's past by correlating the Indian elements in the Exhibition architecture with India's cultural impact in Asia.

In this spirit of veiled rivalries, one can clearly discern a competing discourse for claiming credit for 'discovering' the pasts of colonial countries. While Stein praised the efforts of French scholars in this aspect, he unequivocally established the greater antiquity and influence of the Indian civilization upon the civilization of Indo-China.

Among French writers, however, there was no reference to the cultural exchange, far less the cultural colonization of Indo-China by South India. Only one writer, Claude Farrère, acknowledged the heavy Hindu and Indian influence in the pavilion of Indochina. Describing the immense kilometre long bas-relief on the walls of Angkor from the Ramayana, he marvelled at the depiction of *apsaras* (nymphs) and serpents, the representation of a civilization of Sikandar (Alexander the Great), and the conquest of the Ganges valley by Alexander in these panels.¹⁷ However Farrère did not fail

¹⁷ Claude Farrère, 'Angkor et l'Indochine', *L'Illustration*, 23 Mai, 1931.

to mention the movement for independence against the British at the time, led primarily by the Bengalis. French descriptions of Indo-China by and large limited themselves to descriptions of the indigenous history and culture of the area, with marginal reference to the impact of colonization by South India in the late middle ages – the introduction of Hinduism and of Sanskrit, Tamil and regional Indian languages, Indian literary epics, dance, music, and architectural forms in particular. The re-enactment of the Ramayana as an Indo-Chinese classic comprising over 200 actors, was a spectacular performance during the Exhibition and had no reference at all to the importation of the epic and its dance form from India, underscoring the French gloss over the colonial influence of India in Indo-China.¹⁸ Instead the political unrest and the growing movement for independence in British India was a constant theme of French writings on India. Here was a case of French superiority. Clearly the peaceful India posts and the faithfulness of their population were testimony to the superior nature of French colonization. The *Livre d'Or* sums up this attitude succinctly. Mentioning that the French India posts had experienced some political troubles, which the Governor-General, M. Juvanon termed regrettable, isolated incidents which were under control, a distinction was created between the political upheavals in British India and those in French India. Thus pre-colonial pasts became grounds of rival claims of superiority between Britain and France in the imperial enterprise. The political significance of the pavilion, indeed of the French India Posts, was summed up by Maurice Larrouy who hailed the pavilion as 'a testimonial to the vibrant culture of the French India posts, which faithfully persist in their allegiance to France'.¹⁹ French India was a showcase of France to the British, who at this time were struggling with the nationalist movement in India.

¹⁸ *Rapport Général*, vol 6, part I, p. 320.

¹⁹ Maurice Larrouy, 'Les possessions océaniques', *L'Illustration*, 23 Mai 1931

Burton Benedict points out that the Exhibitions were key to the definition of national identity in the inter-war years when many colonial empires were threatened by rising movements for independence. Contemporary observers too noted this fact: 'The fact that the French Republic has gathered and held together a rich, varied and colorful world empire was impressed upon us over and over again.'²⁰ The Exhibitions served to reinforce power both for the imperial nations as well as for the colonies that they were striving so desperately to control. According to Benedict, 'the imperial powers were displaying their colonies as the era of empires was drawing to a close.'²¹

The importance of India and, in fact the representation of what was a minor colony of the French, lay in many strands of colonialist propaganda and claims. Firstly, as Carol Breckenridge has pointed out, India was represented at all the major world exhibitions, a process which continues today. At some fairs, illustrative collections of India's objects were framed and shaped in the India court or the India pavilion by traders, and at other fairs by professionals and/or officials in government service.²² India served to remind spectators that France too possessed part of what had come to be known as a huge treasure of wealth and exoticism. French India was, after all, the remains of a glorious period in French colonial history. It was all that remained of the wise administration of great colonists like Dupleix, Mahé de la Bourdonnais, Bussy, Lally-Tollendal and Dumas. These figures had achieved great feats of development and colonization in India

²⁰ Frances Parkinson Keyes, 'Tricolor and Stars and Stripes Float Together Over The Greatest Show on Earth', *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, November 1931, p. 196.

²¹ Burton Benedict, 'International Exhibitions and National Identity', *Anthropology Today*, 7.3 (June 1991), p. 8.

²² Carol Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs', *Comparative Study of Society and History*, 31.2 (April 1989), p. 201.

in keeping with the grand enterprise of the French civilizing mission. The India Posts represented all that remained of the moral patrimony of France in the glorious epoch of colonialism.²³

While I by no means propose that the driving ambition behind the representation of India in 1931 and, for that matter, French colonial policy in India was motivated solely by Anglo-French rivalry, this was, nonetheless, an important factor in the consistent dissemination — in schools, popular fiction and in the powerful visual impact of Exhibitions such as that of 1931 — of the idea that India was 'French'. Taya Zinkin, who grew up in France, went to America for a university education and eventually married a member of the Indian Civil Service, was by no means the only Frenchwoman to exclaim with surprise when she learnt otherwise, 'I thought India was French!'²⁴

Jyoti Mohan

University of Maryland, College Park

²³ *Le Livre d'Or de l'Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris 1931* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931), p. 176. This tiny colony was the object of much attention on the part of the mother country (France) in the past. Unfortunately, by the nineteenth century, when France claimed her vast colonial Empire in Asia and Africa, the position of French India had been reduced to a mere mention in histories of past colonial enterprises.

²⁴ Taya Zinkin, *French Memsahib* (London: Thomas Harmsworth, 1989), p. 1.

Cultural relativism, colonial collecting and travel: Henri Michaux's *Un Barbare en Asie*

*D'ailleurs ce n'est pas la jungle qui fait le tigre,
mais le tigre qui va dans la jungle de préférence*

In the most minimalist sense, travel would translate as the movement between geographical locations and cultural experiences. Travel may not be perpetual motion in the geographical sense of the term but it is arguably an experience that is characterized by a continual act of displacement. By looking at how this movement operates physically, metaphorically, politically and literarily, we notice that in narratives of displacement the relationships between home and abroad, travel and encounter, movement and rest, writing and representation are both varied and complicated. The exhilarating sensation of groundlessness that travel experience as voluntary exile engenders is integral to Fussell's understanding of travel, traveller and travel writing.¹ Like Fussell's British travel heroes, early twentieth century French travel writers like Victor Segalen, Saint-John Perse, Paul Morand, and Blaise Cendrars used the literary translation of their travel experiences, their 'récits de voyage', as experiences to validate their sense of Self when confronted with the Other in voluntary exile. These writings responded critically to the features that travel literature had adopted at the time. Their literary objective was first and foremost to rid the word exoticism of its gaudy banalities and to fashion the term as a philosophical means to confront difference. On the one hand literary travel appeared as a reaction to the new science of ethnography and, on the other, it was seen as the sophisticated traveller's response to mass tourism.

¹ See Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: OUP, 1980).

This paper investigates the politics of representation of India in Henri Michaux's *Un Barbare en Asie*. The examination will show that while Michaux's brand of cultural relativism and stylized poetics of travel eliminate cheap exoticism, his text also displays the ambivalence inherent to representing cultural difference. Michaux's text *Un Barbare en Asie* has been primarily read as constituting a part of this tradition of literary travel. Most critics, therefore, believe that *Un Barbare en Asie* represents a formal innovation of some importance within the genre of travel writing.² Malcolm Bowie writes:

In writing about the inexhaustible diversity of Asia, Michaux came nearest to the ideal poetry of travel which he evoked in 'Les poètes voyagent'. A finer balance is struck here than anywhere else in his work between the urge to self-reconnaissance and the urge to self-analysis, between the representation of external people and things and the internal forces which they activate in the writer.³

At another level, however, contemporary cultural studies critics like Appadurai view the ethnographical strategies used by travel writers as a way of localizing non-western people as 'natives' and confining them through a process of 'representational essentializing'.⁴

Michaux's *récit de voyage* was first published in 1933 by Gallimard, and subsequently republished with a new preface in 1945. Over the years the author's opinions of places he visited changed and he made some revisions (by way of footnotes only) to the original text and wrote yet another preface for the 1967

² See Malcolm Bowie, *Henri Michaux: A Study of his Literary Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 53-65.

³ Bowie, p. 63.

⁴ Arjun Appadurai, 'Putting Hierarchy in its Place', *Cultural Anthropology*, 3(1) (1988), 36-49, quoted in James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

republishing.⁵ The book was first translated into English in 1949 with a special preface by Michaux for the American edition.⁶ To use the author's own terms *Un Barbare en Asie* is a collection of *passages* and *parcours* – a textual reconstitution of Michaux's travel to the Indian sub-continent and to the Far East, in the years 1930-31. The reader learns little about the journey *per se*, in terms of the exact route covered, time spent, transport taken, interactions with people, etc. In terms of textual space covered, eight chapters take the 'Barbarian' on a tour of India and South-East Asia. The distribution of chapters is irregular, more than half the book (112 pages) is devoted to India, 48 pages to China and the rest to Ceylon, Malaysia and Japan. In a series of miniature essays the reader is taken from Calcutta in the north-east of India, described in the first few pages, to Delhi via Serampore. The descriptions traverse Benares, rejoin Calcutta and then move to Darjeeling. Then, in a grand sweeping movement the text travels from Madras in the south of India to Siliguri in the Himalayas in the north only to return to Madras and to discover Ceylon (eastern and coastal). In the same north-south alternating movement the pages take the reader to Canton, Peking, Macao and back to Peking. Tokyo and Okayama represent the Japanese sections of Michaux's voyage to the Far East. The last phase mentions Malaysia, Java, Sumatra, Bali and Singapore. One could infer that the literary space corresponds to the geographic importance of the country described, but the brevity of certain sections does not necessarily correspond to the displeasure of the traveller (as in the case of the Himalayas, where the effect is very positive). The present study is concerned only with the sections on India.

⁵ All references in this paper will be made to the 1967 edition of *Un Barbare en Asie*.

⁶ Henri Michaux, *A Barbarian in Asia*, trans. by Sylvia Beach (New York: New Directions Books, 1949).

In comparison to conventional forms of travel writing, one immediately discerns that there is no identifiable narrator who emerges on his return home as the hero of a difficult journey. There are some episodes of encounters of an 'I' with local landscape, architecture and people but these are displaced immediately by random reflections. As such, there is no significant chronology of events, no dates and no self chastised or renewed Self at the end of the journey. Arguably, the use of the term 'barbarian' to describe the travelling Self appears at the first instance to debunk the superiority of Occidental civilisation. The perceptions are related in the past tense thus providing an impression of instituting a temporal, spatial and a psychological distance between the narrator and the world he describes. By thus detaching the narrating Self from the experiencing Self, Michaux, the author, gives the reader the impression of providing 'as accurate a picture as possible without allowing his emotional responses to interfere'.⁷ Ideally, travel as movement should necessarily bring about distancing and consequently the perception of difference and its acceptance. But critical studies have shown that exoticism is a form of appropriation and that the perceiving Self aims primarily to reaffirm its identity when confronted with the Other. Ridon⁸ argues that Michaux's text cannot escape the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism despite the author's narrative strategies of distancing. As a matter of fact, the narrating Self posited in the title as a 'barbarian' provides a convenient framework to negate culture as interaction ('Ici barbare on fut, barbare on doit rester'). Michaux's use of aphorisms and

⁷ See Laurie Edson, *Henri Michaux and the Poetics of Movement* (Stanford: Anma Libri, 1985), p. 51.

⁸ See Jean Xavier Ridon, *Henri Michaux, J.M.G. Clezio, L'Exil des mots* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1995), p.38.

generalizations⁹ could be read as representational acts of 'metonymic freezing' that lock cultures into exaggerated pockets of cultural essentialisms.

On the one hand, the style of comparative observations appear to translate the reductive nature of cultural relativism, but on the other, it could be argued that Michaux's stylistic distancing, through the use of metaphor and 'surreal' correspondences, problematizes the representation of cultural difference. When Michaux writes, 'en Inde, il n'y a rien à voir, tout à interpréter',¹⁰ he seems to privilege the intellectual over the sensory in the experience of confrontation with the Other. Yet, the very form of the text, fragmented reflections that annul geographical movement and action at the level of the travel narrative, can be considered as that which favours spontaneous, emotional observation over rationalized reflected reporting.

Dans une même séquence, Michaux mélangera plusieurs tonalités: sagesse et sarcasme, bonhomie et violence, colère et sérénité, froideur et malice... Il ne travaille pas son texte: peut-on travailler une émotion?¹¹

Michaux's account of his travel to Asia subverts a genre that conventionally records physical movement, by imbricating the opposing effects of mobility and immobility into the form and content of the narrative. His *récit de voyage* fluctuates continually, between the rational and the emotional, between containment and

⁹ 'L'Hindou est religieux. Il se sent relié à tout' (Michaux, p. 25); 'L'Indien ne court jamais, ni dans la rue, ni sa pensée dans son cerveau' (p. 34); 'L'Asiatique est étudiant-né' (p. 77).

¹⁰ Michaux, p. 19.

¹¹ Gérard Farasse, 'Le sens de la désorientation', in Michaux, *Un Barbare en Asie: L'autre et l'ailleurs*, ed. by Joël Askénazi and others (Paris: Ellipses Marketing, coll. 'Analyses et réflexions', 1992), p. 104.

excess to reveal a series of dynamic zones of 'identity making' that encapsulate the complex nature of cultural difference.

In order to explore how mobility/immobility and representational practice function in the narrative, it would be useful at this stage to look at the distinctions introduced by Michel de Certeau which are valuable to an initial understanding of how 'space' and 'place' function in discourses of movement.¹² This distinction will enable us to explore how the illusion of immobility in Michaux's representational practice, in fact represents movement as a signifying practice at the level of reception. For de Certeau, a place is fixed; it is a location where elements are distributed in relationships of co-existence. He describes space as the binary opposite of place, as that which is determined by operations attributable to historical subjects: space for de Certeau is a 'practised place'. Furthermore he opposes what he calls the map discourse and the tour discourse. According to his definition, the map discourse lists where sites are located and the tour discourse describes a location through a set of actions.¹³ This binary distinction, however useful, does open itself to some questioning. In actual fact the traveller is constantly shifting between two poles, between the desire to retain the excitement of the unpredictable and the desire to experience the pleasure of knowing where one is. Oscillating between the discourse of space (where the geography is formless) and the discourse of place (where the geography is known), travel texts struggle to represent Otherness and cultural difference. In the case of *Un Barbare en Asie*, Michaux deliberately ignores the map discourse as a geographical practice. However, his tour discourse is inscribed not so much in a set of successive geographical movements as in a set

of random 'interpretative interactions' that fluctuate between representations of mobility and immobility.

At another level, Michaux's *récit* can be read as a 'museum', a collector's repertory, which transforms the geographical space of Asia into a multiplicity of *places* or contact zones. The following quote from Clifford's essay on museums explains this idea:

When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship – a power charged set of exchanges, of push and pull. [...] A centre and a periphery are assumed: the center a point of gathering, the periphery an area of discovery. The museum, usually located in a metropolitan city, is the historical destination for the cultural productions it lovingly and authoritatively salvages, cares for and interprets.¹⁴

If we consider the travel text as an act of colonial collecting i.e., a textually translated act of observing, describing, valuing and displaying, it can be perceived to function in exactly the same way as Clifford's museum where the author as gatherer creates a textual space, a cultural 'tour' for metropolitan consumption. Unlike Clifford's operation of loving salvage, the act of collecting in the case of Michaux, is more like aiming and seizing, a violent movement that seeks to grasp the essence, the very core of the perceived object.

Il s'agit donc pour lui de saisir l'Asiatique, sa civilisation, son univers dans ce qu'ils ont de plus profond par un regard acéré, aigu et pénétrant: C'est tout l'art de rapt, dont l'Hindou lui a donné un exemple fascinant.¹⁵

¹² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of everyday life*, trans. by S. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

¹³ de Certeau, pp. 119 and 121.

¹⁴ Clifford, p. 192

¹⁵ Jacques Perrin, 'Le rapt fécond de l'autre et de l'ailleurs', in Michaux, *Un Barbare en Asie: L'autre et l'ailleurs*, p. 32.

In his evocation of Hindu religion and religious practices in India, Michaux writes that the Hindu religion brings out the strength of man unlike Christianity which reminds him of his weakness. He compares the Hindu act of prayer to a 'rapt' or a form of strategic *enlèvement* in the etymological sense of the word: 'Une prière est un rapt. Il y faut une bonne tactique'.¹⁶ Further on, he compares European modernity to an irresistible form of religion that the Indian worships.¹⁷ Through this process of 'metaphoric transfer', we can infer that, in Michaux's view, the travellers' act of gathering or collecting can only be like 'un rapt', worshipful and violent at the same time.

Furthermore, the text continually foregrounds the fact that civilization is a construct. Michel Butor, drawing on Michaux's travel writings, claims that when in Asia, the traveller is confronted with a repertory of possibilities from which he invents the Other: 'Quand on voyage en Asie, on se trouve devant un répertoire, un éventail de possibilités à partir desquelles on devrait pouvoir construire une civilisation autre.'¹⁸

Yet, at another level, this cultural construction is questioned. Michaux's 'rapt' is not an act of fulfilling consumption, it brings about alienation, an estrangement between himself and a 'constructed' Other. The text or the constructed reality deceives. Civilization can only be invented through this act of collecting, but the inevitable violence of this act translates the difficulty of a process that eventually misleads.

Y croyais-je complètement? Voyage réel entre deux imaginaires.
Peut-être au fond de moi les observais-je comme des voyages

¹⁶ Michaux, p. 31.

¹⁷ Michaux, p. 102.

¹⁸ Michel Butor, *Le Sismographe aventureux* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1999), p. 39.

imaginaires qui se seraient réalisés sans moi, œuvre d'autres. Pays qu'un autre aurait inventé.¹⁹

Therefore even if the text presupposes 'a power charged set of exchanges' it cannot be dismissed as uniformly hegemonic. The constant fluctuation between the literal and figurative ideas of mobility and immobility through the use of metaphor shows how the 'de-centered' text ('réalisé sans moi') is continually in the process of grappling with the difficulties of dialogue, alliance, inequality and translation.²⁰ Consider the following description of Calcutta: 'Figurez-vous une ville exclusivement composée de chanoines. Sept cent mille chanoines.'²¹ The image evoked is that of a city full of ecclesiastics, a religious congregation of male bodies on to which is superposed the doubly exaggerated idea of weight (that of religious responsibility and that of human mass). The sheer density of human presence in real space passively obstructs onward mobility in the geographical sense – an image that is redeployed at the end of the description of the crowds: 'Immobiles et n'attendant rien de personne'. The visual paradox created in the opposing imagery of mobility (Bengali pedestrians) and immobility (mass of seven hundred thousand clergymen) creates a contact zone of negotiation and resistance that foregrounds the ambiguities produced when translating the cultural reality of crowded streets in the Indian city of Calcutta.

In a similar manner, in the following lines, it is the perceived absence of movement ('sans élan') that displaces the reader from the geographical space of cows and elephants on to that peopled by lawyers: 'A propos des vaches et des éléphants, j'ai quelque chose à dire. Moi je n'aime pas les notaires. Les vaches et les éléphants, des bêtes sans élan, des notaires.'²² Michaux takes up the challenge

¹⁹ Michaux, p. 14.

²⁰ Clifford, p. 213.

²¹ Michaux, p. 19.

²² Michaux, p. 24.

of translating the unknown cultural space – streets of Calcutta where animals and human co-habit – into textual reality by creating a contact zone between cows, elephants and lawyers, symbolizing the two different cultures in confrontation. No dialogue can take place in this unequal encounter, but through the use of metaphor a form of transculturation has occurred through the unifying image of passive compliance.

Similarly, what could possibly bring together the image of a decaying French colonial town and Parisian suburb?: 'À Chandernagore, qui est plus petit qu'Asnières il y a seize cents étangs, plus le Gange dont les eaux sont sacrées.'²³ Michaux's tour discourse of Chandernagore takes the reader metaphorically through the unmapped *space* of Chandernagore to a *place* like Asnières through the evocation of the signifying practice of bathing. Bathing is a religious activity in the perceived culture and a leisure activity in the perceiving one. The practices are different but they remain sacred/signifying practices in both cultures.

Jean-Pierre Bigel in his essay on the poetics of Michaux's travelogue considers these confrontations as 'insolite[s], bizarre[s] et même saugrenu[s]'²⁴ but these literary encounters translate a form of intellectual mobility that calls into question the unequal nature of exchange and the difficulties of cultural translation. What occurs is not a static aesthetic process of juxtaposition (considered as Michaux's experimentation with surrealism) but the more dynamic representational act of transculturation as in Pratt's definition.²⁵

Michaux ends his text with a question: 'Qu'est-ce qu'une civilisation? Une impasse'.²⁶ Paradoxically, immobility suggested

²³ Michaux, p.41.

²⁴ Bigel, 'Le ton poétique d'*Un Barbare en Asie*', in Michaux, *Un Barbare en Asie: L'autre et l'ailleurs*, p. 97.

²⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and Transculturation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

²⁶ Michaux, p. 232.

by the image of an 'impasse' is, in fact, an awareness that can be perceived only by experiencing displacement in the form of geographical distancing.

Asia and Europe have been thrown together by both destructive and creative forces of empire, history and travel and each uses the other's tradition to remake its own. Transculturation is not necessarily a hierarchical process, one that naturalizes power imbalance and claims that only the group can define history and authenticity. It may seem that the experiencing Self of the traveller has the facility to exhibit Asia in his own terms (language) and terrain (Eurocentrism) but the narrating Self in *Un Barbare en Asie* foregrounds the complexities of showcasing cultural difference.

When Michaux writes, 'J'arrive aux Indes, j'ouvre les yeux, j'écris un livre',²⁷ he exposes a series of contact zones that go beyond colonial relations in that he separates the viewing self, the exhibit, the geographical displacement and the text in order to show that their coming together to produce a culture is a continual process of exploitation, negotiation and resistance. Hence, the resulting ambiguity or elusiveness ('qu'il ne saisit pas') that defines cultural difference.

Si les regards des Indiens l'agacent, il ne se fâchera pas, il ne dira pas: 'Ces yeux de mules me font enrager', il saura que ces yeux l'agacent parce que contenant un élément élevé ou pas élevé, mais qu'il ne saisit pas.²⁸

The above observation follows Michaux's efforts in coming to terms with the pantheon of Hindu gods, their lack of abstemiousness and the omnipresence of *lingams*. The random reflection on Hindu religion and society is juxtaposed with the more concrete representation of the vastness of the Indian railway

²⁷ Michaux, p. 99.

²⁸ Michaux, p. 67.

network. The enormity of the geographical distances covered in India recalls the bewildering multiplicity of Indian religious traditions and practices and the reaction to the railway, in what can be termed as displaced metaphor, can be inferred as the text's grappling with the ambiguities characterizing the representation of cultural difference.

Cultural difference cannot be translated, in the literal sense of the term; a form of negotiation takes place wherein the authenticity of representation is questioned. Consider the following line: 'Les douze mille kilomètres sont d'usage. Il ne se les imposera pas'.²⁹ Travelling long distances in India is normal but not obligatory to the visitor. Travel as a cultural practice is therefore negated by the narrating Self. The futility of movement as a means to interpret the Other is expressed further on: 'Aux Indes, si vous ne priez pas, vous avez perdu votre voyage.'³⁰ But at the same time the image of prayer transports the reader to the idea of Hindu prayer represented by the narrator as a violent act of appropriation, 'un rapt'.

The narrating Self oscillates between his desire to covet and his awareness of the difficulty to translate, eventually finding himself, the viewing subject, as the bewildered object of the pitiful gaze of the translated 'Other'. Herein resides the ambiguity of representing cultural difference. Contrary to Appadurai's view that the work of travellers and anthropologists is an example of 'representational essentializing', Michaux's apparent act of 'metonymic freezing' (by way of aphorisms as a writing technique) in actual fact, subverts the hierarchy of cultural difference: 'Il me regarda moi et ma destinée, avec une sorte d'acquiescement et de réjouissance, mais un fil de compassion et presque de pitié y passa et je me demande ce que cela signifie.'³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Michaux, p. 69.

³¹ Michaux, p. 93.

The frequent references to varying phonetics in different Indian languages, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Tamil³² are not the scientific observations of a linguist. They suggest how the textual voice is negotiated in the contact zone. This idea is further reinforced in his representation of theatrical performance in different languages.³³ Theatre is a contact zone where meaning is made at the point of intersection between actor and spectator. In his various prefaces, Michaux the reader separates the constructed textual reality, *Un Barbare en Asie*, from himself and his narrating Self within the text. The ambiguity resides in the 'tone' of the text, the textual voice which, is in fact, produced in the Clifford's museum like contact zones of exploitation, negotiation and challenge that bring together the experiencing Self and the perceived Other in the textual space of representational practice.

Il a sa résistance...

Il a un ton.

A cause de son ton, tout ce que je voudrais en contrepoids y introduire de plus grave, de plus réfléchi, de plus approfondi, de plus expérimenté, de plus instruit, me revient, m'est renvoyé... comme ne lui convenant pas.³⁴

Michaux's writing disorients the reader because it questions the boundary between the real and the imagined. His text troubles and embarrasses the reader by its contradictory mixture of subjective responses and objective evaluations.³⁵ Critics have found his poetics of cultural translation either harshly Eurocentric or mockingly relativistic, but all things considered, the study

³² Michaux, pp. 25, 35 and 122.

³³ Michaux, pp. 213-214.

³⁴ Michaux, p.14.

³⁵ In his preface to the 1967 republication of the text, Michaux, the reader, writes: 'Ce livre qui ne me convient plus, qui me gêne, me heurte...' (p. 14).

shows that it foregrounds the complexities and ambiguities of translating cultural difference.

Srilata Ravi
University of Western Australia

L'Inde: présence et influence dans l'univers de Marguerite Yourcenar

Tout lecteur attentif de Marguerite Yourcenar sait à quel point l'auteur est sensible à la finesse de la pensée et de la civilisation indiennes. Sa rencontre avec l'Inde remonte, selon son propre témoignage, aux années vingt, période où l'Europe se trouve en pleine crise après la Première Guerre mondiale. Pour les Européens de l'époque, le recours à la source orientale se présente comme une sorte de compensation aux frustrations infligées par la modernité, comme une possibilité de sauvegarder des valeurs et la primauté de l'esprit. Horizon mental, terre de synthèse et de réconciliation, l'Orient, et surtout l'Inde, semble réunir et conserver en un tout harmonieux tout ce qui en Europe a été déchiré et opposé. La sagesse indienne est censée donner un espoir, une nouvelle vigueur aux traditions occidentales menacées de déclin.

Marguerite Yourcenar a très tôt découvert la culture de l'Inde à travers ses lectures. C'est entre ses dix-huitième et vingtième années qu'elle s'est mise à lire des traductions de textes indiens. Cette lecture qui sera poursuivie et complétée durant toute sa vie aura une grande influence sur sa pensée et son œuvre. Dans sa bibliothèque personnelle à Petite Plaisance, à l'Île des Monts-Déserts aux États-Unis, on compte plus de 110 ouvrages consacrés à la civilisation de l'Inde.¹ Les philosophies indiennes sont en grande abondance: le bouddhisme, l'hindouisme, le yoga et le tantrisme. Aussi foisonnante est la littérature, classique et contemporaine, assez souvent en traduction anglaise.

¹ Voir la liste de ces livres dans l'inventaire que nous avons établi et inclus dans Pacharee Sudasna, *Marguerite Yourcenar et la voie bouddhiste: étude de l'œuvre romanesque* (Lille: ANRT, 2003), pp. 499-533.

En 1983, Marguerite Yourcenar est partie pour un mois en Inde où elle retournerait en 1985. '[L]'Inde aura été, se surajoutant au Japon, une des grandes expériences de ma vie – ou exactement de la vie', dit-elle dans ses notes inédites sur le voyage en Inde en 1983.² Elle a prévu deux autres visites en Inde, en 1986 et en 1987, mais ces projets n'ont pu être réalisés.

C'est le côté exotique et légendaire de l'Inde qui a passionné au départ Marguerite Yourcenar. Les figures mythiques de l'Inde, comme Kâli, Krishna et Bouddha, apparaissent déjà dans ses premiers écrits.³ Cette position plutôt stéréotypée correspond, en effet, à l'orientalisme de l'époque. Après presque dix ans de retraite littéraire pendant les années quarante, l'auteur arrive à sa période de la maturité où l'influence orientale est très marquée sur sa vie. Elle trouve son épanouissement spirituel dans l'étude de la pensée philosophique et mystique de l'Inde: bouddhisme, hindouisme et tantrisme. Ces philosophies, qui correspondent parfaitement à l'élan spirituel de l'auteur, semblent lui apporter des réponses aux questions qu'elle s'est depuis longtemps posées.

Il nous paraît donc intéressant d'examiner cette sagesse telle qu'elle se présente dans l'œuvre et dans la pensée de l'écrivain. Nous concentrerons notre étude sur quatre traits originaux de la pensée et de la civilisation indiennes: l'idée du temps cyclique, la conception de l'individu en tant qu'illusion métaphysique, la croyance au caractère universel et perpétuel de la réincarnation, et le non-dualisme.

² Josyane Savigneau, *Marguerite Yourcenar. L'Invention d'une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 433.

³ Voir son conte 'Kâli décapitée', *La Revue Européenne*, avril 1928, 392-96, et ses essais des années vingt et trente: 'Suites d'estampes pour Kou-Kou-Haï', 'Diagnostic de l'Europe', 'La Symphonie héroïque', 'Grèce et Sicile', 'Essai de généalogie du saint', in *Essais et Mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1991).

Le temps cyclique

Selon la pensée classique de l'Inde, le temps cosmique est conçu comme cyclique, rythmé par l'alternance de périodes de déploiement et de dissolution. Il en va de même pour le processus de l'existence: tout se transforme et se renouvelle d'un instant à l'autre. Les phénomènes s'enchaînent perpétuellement et forment un cercle du devenir qui n'a ni commencement ni fin concevable. Tous les êtres sont engagés dans cet enchaînement incessant de naissance et de mort.

Marguerite Yourcenar est très marquée par cette notion qui sous-tend toute son œuvre. Si sa conception du temps cyclique a été initialement préparée par les philosophies antiques de l'Occident, elle semble être mûrie par la pensée de l'Inde qui sert non seulement de point d'appui aux connaissances précédentes, mais de complément.

Pour l'écrivain, 'tout recommence en un cercle perpétuel'.⁴ Comprenant la loi de l'impermanence universelle selon laquelle la naissance et la mort se succèdent éternellement, Yourcenar affirme que 'la vie tourne en cercle',⁵ et donc 'rien ne finit'.⁶ Cette conclusion qu'elle fait murmurer à Valentine agonisante, dans *Anna, soror...*, montre que rien n'est absolu, même la mort qui n'est qu'un passage, et non une fin dans le processus cyclique de la vie.

Les images de cycle, ou de cercle sont abondantes chez l'écrivain. Nous trouvons dans de nombreux ouvrages, comme *L'Œuvre au Noir*, *Un homme obscur*, ou la nouvelle 'Le Dernier amour du prince Genghi', la description des rondes saisonnières

⁴ François-Marie Samuelson, 'Marguerite Yourcenar: il ne faut jamais être défaitiste', *Le Figaro Magazine*, 31 octobre 1980, p. 81.

⁵ Samuelson, p. 81.

⁶ Marguerite Yourcenar, *Anna, soror...*, in *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1982; repr. 1991), p. 893.

illustrant le changement et le recommencement perpétuels du monde. La circulation du denier dans le roman *Denier du rêve* représente le cercle vicieux de la condition humaine dans lequel les vicissitudes se renouvellent sans fin.

A plusieurs endroits, l'auteur fait allusion à ce processus cyclique dans la description du mouvement rotatoire de la terre. *La Nouvelle Eurydice* présente une image qui exprime le changement universel et naturel d'un tout dont l'homme est inséparable:

La terre tourne, traînant avec elle ses nuages, entourée de son atmosphère, de ses quelques milliers de mètres d'air respirable, sans lesquels n'existerait pas l'homme. La terre tourne avec ses villes, avec ses champs, avec ses tombes. Couché, la tête levée vers l'immense étendue vide, encore fatigué des larmes, j'ai l'illusion de sentir dans tout mon corps ce tournoiement planétaire. Il est apaisant de penser que la terre nous emporte tous dans cette rotation éternelle; que ceux même qui ne se sont pas rejoints, qui n'ont pu se rejoindre, continuent côte à côte le fraternel voyage et que les hommes, qu'ils se haïssent ou qu'ils s'aiment, n'en sont pas moins portés par le rythme égal, incessant, monotone, de cette giration sans fin [...].⁷

'Tournoiement planétaire', 'rotation éternelle', 'giration sans fin', toutes ces images font penser au 'samsâra', cycle de l'existence. Tous les êtres, vivants et non vivants sans exception, participent à ce mouvement giratoire et ininterrompu de l'univers.

Dans *L'Œuvre au Noir*, Zénon constate que la terre tourne, indifférente au temps humain, formant un 'cercle sans commencement ni fin comme un anneau lisse'.⁸ Cette structure cyclique détruit tous les repères de la durée et les dualités.

⁷ Marguerite Yourcenar, *La Nouvelle Eurydice*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 1295.

⁸ Marguerite Yourcenar, *L'Œuvre au Noir*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 702. Il est d'ailleurs intéressant de constater que les aventures de Zénon sont, en

L'image du cercle sans commencement ni fin sert à expliciter la conception indienne du temps. La structure cyclique rend impossible tout repérage chronologique ou distinction temporelle. Les notions dualistes telles que début/fin, avant/après, naissance/mort, s'entremêlent, autrement dit n'ont plus aucun sens dans ce cercle où tout se renouvelle constamment. Marguerite Yourcenar affirme maintes fois cette conception. Dans *Quoi? L'éternité*, elle annonce: 'Dès ma petite enfance, le sentiment du temps m'a toujours fait défaut: aujourd'hui est la même chose que toujours'.⁹ Les cloisons entre passé/présent/avenir lui paraissent factices. 'Demain le présent, cet héritier d'hier, sera du passé', explique-t-elle lors d'une interview.¹⁰ La dernière scène d'*Anna, soror...* montre la disparition des frontières temporelles ce qui permet à Anna vieillie et agonisante de revivre sa jeunesse.

Dans *La Nouvelle Eurydice*, nous retrouvons l'image de la roue qui associe sur le même plan le présent, le passé et le futur: 'chaque tour de roue, me faisant entrer dans cet avenir si passionnément imaginé d'avance, intégrait celui-ci au présent et bientôt au passé'.¹¹

Pour une telle vision, il n'y a, comme l'auteur l'indique dans son essai 'Sixtine', ni passé, ni futur, mais simplement une série de présents successifs. C'est ce que Yourcenar aime appeler un

conformité avec le processus cyclique de l'existence, perçues en forme sphérique. Le parcours de sa vie, jalonné par des voyages renouvelés qui le ramènent sur ses pas et à lui-même, prend la forme d'une 'spirale' (p. 829). Pendant la méditation, sa quête de l'esprit tourne en 'cercle': 'Tout semblait avoir lieu au fond d'une série infinie de courbes fermées' (p. 706). Toutes les expériences de Zénon le ramènent à cette conclusion: 'tout était sujet à des redites et à des répétitions infinies' (p. 705). Dans ce sens, l'expérience humaine est itérative, cumulative, produite en un mouvement circulaire et non linéaire.

⁹ Yourcenar, *Essais et Mémoires*, p. 1291.

¹⁰ Jean-C. Texier, 'Rencontre avec Marguerite Yourcenar', *La Croix*, 19 sept. 1971, p. 14.

¹¹ Yourcenar, *La Nouvelle Eurydice*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 1254.

'présent éternel'¹² qui est, à bien considérer, la plénitude et l'éternité de l'instant. Cette vision du temps fait comprendre pourquoi la structure du récit de Marguerite Yourcenar est souvent non-linéaire. Les notions logiques et habituelles du temps sont annihilées: le passé, le présent, et l'avenir se superposent ou se confondent. L'ordre chronologique est renversé. Cette technique baptisée par la romancière 'jeux de miroirs du temps'¹³ lui permet de contempler simultanément les époques différentes et de rencontrer des 'êtres placés dans d'autres compartiments du temps'.¹⁴

Selon ce point de vue, aucune dualité relative aux concepts temporels ou spatiaux n'est valable. Le rapprochement entre enfance et vieillesse, naissance et mort, revient ainsi régulièrement sous sa plume. La mort qui précède la naissance de Nathanaël dans l'ordre narratif du récit *Un homme obscur* détruit les notions habituelles de la naissance comme commencement et de la mort comme fin. En fait, la vie de Nathanaël se caractérise par un aspect cyclique: le récit s'ouvre sur sa mort, suivie par l'évocation de sa naissance, et se clôt en rejoignant le début, c'est-à-dire par son agonie. La structure circulaire du récit, symbolisant celle de l'existence, unifie les deux événements dépendants, dissipant ainsi leur contraste qui fait habituellement souffrir les êtres humains. Rapprochés, naître et mourir sont comme 'neutralisés', dédramatisés.

Lorsque 'le temps [a] jeté bas ses barrières et rompu ses grilles',¹⁵ tout se rejoint. Cette conception est devenue la règle d'or de l'écriture de Marguerite Yourcenar, notamment celle de la dernière moitié de sa vie.

¹² Serge Bimpagne, 'Marguerite Yourcenar, écrivain subversif', *Journal de Genève*, 9 nov. 1985, p. 1.

¹³ Yourcenar, *Essais et Mémoires*, p. 841.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁵ Yourcenar, *Un homme obscur*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 929.

L'illusion du 'moi'

Le problème du moi reste de tout temps un problème capital qui hante l'univers yourcenarien. On y trouve régulièrement un moi flottant, passager, ignorant et déchiré, qui s'interroge sur son identité. Il est obsédé par la brièveté du temps, contraint par sa situation historique, ou par la sphère étroite du dogmatisme, du rationalisme, des conventions sociales. L'œuvre de Yourcenar témoigne d'une tentative continue de connaître son moi, et surtout de dépasser l'horizon limité et dispersé de ce moi de plus en plus mis en cause.

La découverte de la philosophie de l'Inde semble permettre d'emblée à l'écrivain d'être sensible au contours et aux limites du moi tel qu'il est perçu dans la culture occidentale. Les circonstances des deux après-guerres qui ébranlent les fondements de l'humanisme et de l'individualisme de l'Occident rendent d'ailleurs nécessaire le recours aux nouvelles sources de sagesse. A l'angoisse de l'instabilité de l'existence, l'Inde répond par son idée du moi ou de la personne comme illusion. L'individu n'est qu'un simple 'nœud de relations'. Il n'a pas d'unité et de consistance en lui-même. Loin d'être reconnu comme fondement des valeurs, le 'moi' est assimilé à la particularisation contingente, arbitraire et 'impersonnelle'.

Les écrits de jeunesse comme 'Kâli décapitée' ou *Denier du rêve* annoncent bien la présence de cette idée. 'Nous sommes tous partagés, fragments, ombres, fantômes sans consistance. Nous avons tous cru pleurer et cru jouir depuis des séquelles de siècles', dit le Maître de la grande compassion à Kâli.¹⁶ Dans cette période, Yourcenar se sert souvent des images symboliques, celles du rêve et des spectres notamment, pour exprimer son idée concernant la réalité relative et chimérique de l'individu.

¹⁶ Yourcenar, 'Kâli décapitée', in *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 1238.

Ce sont assurément les œuvres de l'âge mûr qui montrent le plus explicitement que l'individu, si fort, si capable qu'il soit, n'est pas une entité qui s'impose, mais un agrégat transitoire dans un univers qui passe. L'auteur ne cesse de confirmer à son public sa position nettement marquée par sa 'volonté de dépersonnalisation'.¹⁷

Dans l'œuvre romanesque, l'idée est bien soulignée par le protagoniste des *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, mais elle se trouve pleinement mise en œuvre dans *Un homme obscur*, œuvre 'testamentaire' de l'auteur. Ce dernier grand récit marque une étape importante et décisive dans l'évolution de la pensée yourcenarienne qui conduit l'homme d'une position centrale dans l'univers à l'état d'élément parmi d'autres au sein de la nature. L'image de 'l'homme obscur' remet totalement en cause le discours occidental sur la stabilité des formes maîtrisées qui font croire à la pérennité de l'être. Homme sans contours identitaire qui se laisse emporter sur une 'eau qui coule', avec une acceptation lucide, et qui s'efface simplement dans l'immensité de l'univers, Nathanaël représente par excellence l'idéal du non-soi que Yourcenar rêve d'atteindre.

Cette même idée exerce également une influence notable sur le plan de la technique d'écriture adoptée par Yourcenar. Ses méthodes contemplatives, empruntées aux principes méditatifs de l'Inde, sont basées sur la destruction de la limite du moi. En se détachant de son propre moi, l'écrivain méditant entre profondément dans une situation ou dans un être évoqué. C'est dans cet état de concentration, d'absorption profonde que disparaissent les frontières entre le réel et l'imaginaire, entre le soi et l'autre, et que s'établit la sympathie universelle. Avec cette

¹⁷ Patrick de Rosbo, *Entretiens radiophoniques avec Marguerite Yourcenar* (Paris: Le Mercure de France, 1972; repr. 1980), p. 116.

pratique qu'elle considère comme 'une lente ascèse',¹⁸ Yourcenar crée ses personnages qui deviennent ainsi, à ses propres yeux, aussi réels ou plus réels qu'elle-même.¹⁹

La réincarnation

'Mais, sans croire à l'immortalité personnelle, je suis convaincue que la vie continue après la mort', proclame ainsi Marguerite Yourcenar lors d'un entretien paru dans *Journal de Genève*.²⁰ En effet, l'écrivain s'intéresse toujours à la question de l'avant-vie et de la réincarnation. Dans son essai 'Sur quelques lignes de Bède le Vénérable', la parabole sur le vol d'un passereau qui, sorti de l'ouragan noir, traverse rapidement la salle éclairée avant de rentrer dans la tempête, fait réfléchir notre auteur autant sur l'éphémère vie des hommes que sur ce qui la précède et la suivra. Yourcenar décrit ces espaces obscurs remplis de rafales de pluie et de neige, qui représentent l'avant-vie et l'après-vie, comme un 'tourbillonnement des atomes', des 'cyclones de formes des sùtras hindous'.²¹ Elle critique d'ailleurs les chrétiens qui 'se soucient assez peu de l'avant-vie'. Sa tendance à croire à l'autre vie semble plus explicite lorsqu'elle parle de sa propre naissance dans *Souvenirs pieux*:

Peut-être a-t-elle déjà expérimenté des sorties et des entrées analogues, situées dans une autre part du temps; de confuses bribes de souvenirs, abolis chez l'adulte, ni plus ni moins que ceux de la

¹⁸ Marguerite Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts, Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1980; repr. 1993), p. 224.

¹⁹ Elle affirme d'ailleurs dans 'Carnets de notes' de *L'Œuvre au Noir*: 'Tant qu'un être inventé ne nous importe pas autant que nous-mêmes, il n'est rien' (p. 864).

²⁰ Bimpagne, p. 2.

²¹ Yourcenar, *Essais et Mémoires*, p. 279.

gestation et de la naissance, flottent peut-être sous ce petit crâne encore mal suturé. Nous ne savons rien de tout cela: les portes de la vie et de la mort sont opaques, et elles sont vite et bien refermées.²²

L'idée bouddhique de la maturation des actes ou de l'énergie karmique semble avoir une influence particulière sur la pensée de l'auteur et aussi sur la réflexion de ses derniers héros. Selon cette idée, toute existence est une manifestation temporaire des actes ou de la combinaison d'énergies karmiques, et la continuité d'une vie à l'autre se fait de façon impersonnelle. Après la mort physique d'un être, ces forces karmiques changeantes continuent à s'exercer sous une autre forme, d'où ce que l'on appelle renaissance ou réincarnation. Il ne s'agit point de la transmigration supposant un 'soi' omniprésent et éternel.

Cette notion de la continuité sans identité propre est illustrée dans la tradition bouddhique par la parabole de la flamme. A plusieurs reprises, Yourcenar évoque cette image symbolique dans son œuvre. Un exemple bien précis se trouve dans les dernières pages du récit *Un homme obscur*:

A mesure que son délabrement charnel augmentait, comme celui d'une habitation de terre battue ou d'argile délitée par l'eau, on ne sait quoi de fort et de clair lui semblait luire davantage au sommet de lui-même, comme une bougie dans la plus haute chambre de la maison menacée. Il supposait que cette chandelle s'éteindrait sous la mesure effondrée; il n'en était pas sûr. [...] Ou peut-être la petite flamme claire continuerait à brûler, ou à se rallumer, dans d'autres corps de cire, sans même le savoir, ou se soucier d'avoir déjà eu un nom.²³

Se référant à la doctrine bouddhique, Yourcenar explique que cette continuité au-delà même de la mort est due à 'la loi de

²² Yourcenar, *Essais et Mémoires*, p. 723.

²³ Yourcenar, *Un homme obscur*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, pp. 1036-37.

conservation de l'énergie'. Voici ce qu'elle dit dans son entretien avec Brigitte Méaulle: 'L'énergie, elle, ne se perd pas, donc sous une forme ou sous une autre, nous continuons mais ce n'est peut-être pas une forme que nous reconnâtrions facilement.'²⁴ L'idée que l'être n'est qu'un courant d'énergie toujours transformée apparaît constamment dans son œuvre. Elle nous permet de comprendre pourquoi Yourcenar note ceci dans son journal intime: 'Cette force qui passe à travers moi'.²⁵ Le héros d'*Un homme obscur* considère de même son propre être comme un simple passage de l'énergie vitale.

Pendant ses entretiens avec Matthieu Galey, Yourcenar revient à plusieurs reprises sur la loi de conservation de l'énergie. Elle parle de 'l'immense foule anonyme dont nous sommes faits' et des 'molécules humaines dont nous avons été bâtis',²⁶ en soulignant que 'toute l'humanité et toute la vie passent en nous'.²⁷

Nous retrouvons la même idée dans la 'Postface' d'*Anna, soror...*: '[...] tout a déjà été vécu et revécu des milliers de fois par les disparus que nous portons dans nos fibres, tout comme nous portons en elles les milliers d'êtres qui seront un jour.'²⁸ De ce point de vue, il n'y a pas de survivance personnelle. Le sens de la notion de réincarnation est la conscience du non-soi, et par conséquent, la compassion envers d'autres êtres. C'est cette idée de l'amour universel qui marque le plus l'évolution de l'écrivain dans sa période de maturité.

²⁴ Brigitte Méaulle, 'Rencontre avec Marguerite Yourcenar', *L'Eveil Normand*, 13 mars 1980, p. 29.

²⁵ Yourcenar, *Sources II*, texte établi et annoté par Elyane Dezon Jones, présenté par Michèle Sarde (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 248.

²⁶ Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts*, p. 203.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

²⁸ Yourcenar, *Anna, soror...*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, p. 936.

Le non-dualisme

Une autre vue indienne qui importe pour Marguerite Yourcenar est le refus de la pensée dualiste. L'orientaliste Roger-Pol Droit constate:

L'Inde désignait un univers d'où étaient absentes nos séparations, où étaient ignorés nos antagonismes. Cette aube sans scission est supposée par exemple ne pas connaître de distinction entre Dieu et le monde, pas plus qu'entre le concept et l'intuition, la science et la poésie, la religion et la philosophie, la pensée et l'expression, le sujet et l'objet, le collectif et l'individuel.²⁹

Une des erreurs irréparables dont Yourcenar accuse l'Occident est d'avoir conceptualisé la réalité sous la forme antithétique, manichéenne, comme l'opposition bien/mal, âme/corps, salut/damnation. Le discours que développe l'œuvre de Marguerite Yourcenar s'articule ainsi presque toujours autour de la question posée à l'homme par la présence des forces contraignantes et antithétiques. Les personnages, vivant dans un univers de dysharmonie et de solitude, sont perpétuellement en quête de l'unité intérieure et de l'accord entre le moi et l'autre. Ils aspirent tous à un salut caractérisé par une totalité harmonieuse.

A partir de 'Kâli décapitée', son premier récit au sujet oriental, l'écrivain cherche sans relâche une relation essentielle entre la sagesse et la sensualité, entre l'âme et le corps, relation reniée par la tradition morale qu'elle a connue dans son enfance, et entre l'individu et l'univers. La compatibilité des deux pôles est trouvée au sein de la pensée orientale. Le corps et l'amour sensuel se voient reconnaître une vertu sacrée et transcendante selon les principes mystiques du tantrisme.

²⁹ Roger-Pol Droit, *Le culte du néant. Les philosophes et le Bouddha* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p. 165.

La sensibilité indienne à l'analogie universelle, à cette unité de la vie à travers sa dispersion apparente, revient à anéantir tout problème lié à l'individualisme. Le salut de l'individu dans les œuvres tardives de Yourcenar est associé à une prise de conscience de l'individu lui-même comme identique, ou tout au moins relié à ce tout infini et impersonnel d'où procède et où se résorbe la manifestation cosmique. Par le truchement de Nathanaël, son personnage 'testamentaire', Marguerite Yourcenar en vient à atteindre le but constant auquel tend toute son œuvre: ce personnage a découvert, écrit-elle dans 'Voyages dans l'espace et voyages dans le temps', 'l'un des secrets de la vie de tous lieux et en tous temps: l'uniformité sous la variété des apparences'.³⁰ Il se délivre de sa condition d'individu en se faisant un avec la nature. C'est, en effet, cet élan vers l'harmonie cosmique et impersonnelle, inspiré en grande partie des philosophies de l'Inde, qui assure à l'œuvre son autorité.

Toutes ces idées dominantes de l'Inde classique ouvrent à Yourcenar une nouvelle voie où se joignent ses anciennes convictions. En lui offrant des possibilités de réponse aux questions qu'elle s'est depuis longtemps posées, cette pensée orientale amène l'écrivain à définir sa propre sagesse. L'Inde est ainsi devenue pour elle une patrie spirituelle, mais aussi terre d'harmonie où tout conflit disparaît.

Pacharee Sudasna

Université de Chiang Mai (Thaïlande)

³⁰ Yourcenar, *Essais et Mémoires*, p. 694.

In the Footsteps of Alexander? Malraux, Lévi-Strauss, Le Corbusier and Chandigarh

The post-war post-independence era brought a significant cultural encounter between France and India, monumentalised by the construction of Chandigarh, the new city created as the post-partition capital of the Punjab under the direction of the Modernist architect Le Corbusier from 1951 to 1965. But Chandigarh is merely the most visible trace of post-war French cultural contact with India. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss visited India and Pakistan in 1950, a trip subsequently recounted in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). In 1958, the writer and politician André Malraux made the first of a series of official ministerial visits to India, renewing contact with a country he had first encountered in the 1930s. The aim of this article is to explore how the work of Le Corbusier relates to the discourse on India found in the texts of Lévi-Strauss and Malraux. For all three figures, India represents the intersection of different cultures (Eastern and Western, Buddhist and Greek, Hindu and Moslem, traditional and modern), and thus, the threat of division and the promise of reconciliation. While the writing of Malraux and Lévi-Strauss is marked by nostalgia for the missed opportunity of a fusion between Buddhist East and Greek West at the time of Alexander the Great, Le Corbusier is motivated rather by the contemporary possibility of contributing to a new model of social and technological development capable of avoiding the social damage of the industrial West. If this too is a Western fantasy, it at least engages with the hopes and ambitions of post-independence Indian culture and politics.

Alexander Frustrated: Malraux, Lévi-Strauss and Islam

It is hard to imagine two more antithetical intellectual figures than Malraux and Lévi-Strauss. Their widely differing views on culture are revealed by their respective attitudes to two of the abiding preoccupations of their generation: globalisation and humanism. Malraux sees in cultural globalisation the basis of a renewed humanism, as wider contact between different cultures serves to reveal their underlying common denominator — namely the defiance of the shared human condition of mortality through the creation of art.¹ Thus Malraux's theory of the *musée imaginaire*, envisaged as a virtual archive of the world's culture, both past and present, is underpinned by an existentialist ontology, where humanity is defined precisely through its confrontation with death.² The historical condition of the imaginary museum is the global cultural contact that begins with colonialism and whose artistic potential is discovered in the West through Modernism and its attendant primitivism. This historical condition is accompanied by a technological one: the development of sophisticated techniques of photographic reproduction. Both historical and technological conditions are of course specific to the development of the West. More importantly, the essential logic of Malraux's imaginary museum is itself ethnocentric in its quest to discover existentialist humanism in the art of other cultures whose understanding of life and death is radically different.

In contrast, Lévi-Strauss consistently denounces a Western humanism that he views as ethnocentric and discriminatory, an ostensibly philanthropic alibi designed to allow the untrammelled

¹ See André Malraux, 'L'Homme et la culture' (1946), in *La Politique, la culture: discours, articles, entretiens (1925-1975)*, ed. by Janine Mossuz-Lavau (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp. 151-61.

² See André Malraux, *Essais de psychologie de l'art I: le musée imaginaire* (Geneva: Skira, 1947).

exploitation of other cultures and natural resources.³ Western humanism is for Lévi-Strauss simply the ideology of globalisation, understood as a destructive process of cultural homogenisation. The ethical purpose of ethnography is to record and if possible protect the diversity represented by non-Western cultures. Since Lévi-Strauss perceives this as ultimately impossible, anthropology is doomed to be entropology, the study of the decay of difference.⁴ So while Malraux celebrates the new global humanism of the post-war era and its basis in a common world culture, Lévi-Strauss laments the loss of diversity and the imposition of Western values that this represents.

Notwithstanding these differences, there is substantive agreement between both thinkers in their view of India and its place in cultural history. For Malraux, India represents the meeting place of East and West, the furthest point of extension of Greek influence in the time of Alexander and the site of the creation of Greco-Buddhist art. In the second part of *Les Voix du silence*, Malraux traces the migration of 'le sourire d'Apollon', the characteristic expression of Greek sculpture, in its course westwards towards the Roman Empire and eastwards towards Ghandara, culminating in the independent developments of European Gothic and Asian Greco-Buddhist art.⁵

Lévi-Strauss too sees the northwest of India as the site of an encounter between East and West, the Greek and Buddhist worlds.⁶ But for Lévi-Strauss, the promise of a productive exchange between cultures at the time of Alexander is frustrated by later historical developments, namely the development of Christianity and Islam as world religions. For Lévi-Strauss, the rise

of Islam separates East from West and forces the Christian world in on itself. The ultimate result is a homogeneous and expansionist West, which imposes its values on other cultures rather than seeking to learn from them. Lévi-Strauss criticises Islam as the 'West of the East', a simultaneously closed and aggressive world-view allergic to cultural diversity.⁷ According to Lévi-Strauss, then, the origins of Western intolerance to diversity are not to be found in the West itself but in Islam, which is thereby rendered responsible for the ravages of Western globalisation and racism. This is obviously an extreme and contentious argument, and one that begs numerous questions on historical, political and ethical levels, not least in terms of the way it shifts responsibility for the behaviour of the West on to another culture and itself displays little tolerance and respect for diversity in its negative portrayal of that culture.⁸

In a sense, Lévi-Strauss radicalises Malraux's version of cultural history. The historical opportunity of cultural dialogue between East and West identified by Malraux is missed, according to Lévi-Strauss, because of the intervention of Islam. Lévi-Strauss might be said to articulate a suspicion of Islam that remains implicit in Malraux, as their respective treatment of Islamic art reveals. Lévi-Strauss asserts that Islamic art is characterised historically by a tendency to ossification and repetition rather than creative development, tracing the reason for such inflexibility back to its rejection of the representation of a living and changing nature.⁹ This aesthetic criticism of Islam overlaps to a certain extent with the place that Malraux accords Islamic art in his imaginary museum. Essentially humanist in conception, the imaginary museum privileges works that represent the human

³ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Les Trois Humanismes' (1956), in *Anthropologie structurale II* (Paris: Plon, 1973, 1996), pp. 319-22.

⁴ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), p. 496.

⁵ See André Malraux, 'Les Métamorphoses d'Apollon', in *Les Voix du silence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), pp. 127-270.

⁶ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, pp. 455-76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Lévi-Strauss's view of Islam, see Christopher Johnson, 'Elective Affinities, Other Cultures', *Paragraph*, 16:1 (1993), 66-77.

⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, pp. 461-62.

figure and face. An important consequence of this emphasis is the marginalisation of cultures whose visual arts are defined by a prohibition of the human figure, including Islam.

Architecture after Empire: Le Corbusier and Chandigarh

In his funeral oration for Le Corbusier, Malraux absorbed the architect into the narrative of cultural history outlined above, describing his work as a reconciliation of West and East, a revelation of the 'fraternité secrète de la Grèce et de l'Inde'.¹⁰ Malraux transforms Le Corbusier into an architectural Alexander, capable of uniting East and West in the architecture and planning of Chandigarh. It is unclear, however, whether Le Corbusier would have welcomed this assimilation and to what extent it accurately describes his work in India. Malraux had visited Chandigarh with the architect in December 1958¹¹, and Le Corbusier had appealed to Malraux for support in his effort to complete the project as he envisaged it, but this does not necessarily imply an ideological convergence.

Chandigarh has been one of Le Corbusier's most discussed projects for both aesthetic and political reasons. The aesthetic debate focuses on the fact that Chandigarh represents the only integrated urban project realised by Le Corbusier. The political discussion centres on its Indian location.¹² In particular, an

¹⁰ See André Malraux, 'Funérailles de Le Corbusier' (1965), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Marius-François Guyard (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), III, 944-47 (p. 946).

¹¹ Malraux, *Œuvres complètes*, III, p. 254.

¹² For a detailed monographic account of Le Corbusier's work at Chandigarh, see Norma Evenson, *Chandigarh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). For studies of Le Corbusier that usefully place Chandigarh in the context of his overall career, see William J. R. Curtis, *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), and Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

argument has raged over the extent to which Chandigarh simply represents the imposition of a Western aesthetic on a non-Western country and culture.¹³ Certain critics have stressed the redeployment of Western scale and proportions: the length of the axes between the main public buildings is based on the distance between the Place de la Concorde and the Arc de Triomphe in Paris (800 m); and the overall layout of monumental public buildings evokes the spatial planning of the English architect Edwin Lutyens's Vice-Regal Residence in New Delhi. But, as others have pointed out, such an emphasis on Western models neglects the evident indigenous influences visible at Chandigarh: echoes of the scale and organisation of Moghul Palaces; a re-appropriation of the proto-Modernist forms of the eighteenth-century Observatory at Jaipur; the quotation of local religious or mythological motifs in the organisation of decor; and finally the consideration given to the location and climate of the site (the setting of the buildings against a view of the Himalayas, and the arrangements for protection from the sun and for circulation of air).¹⁴

The architectural historian Stanislaus von Moos displaces the terms of this critical argument over ethnocentric and neo-colonial architecture by re-inserting Chandigarh into a different context, namely that of an internal Indian political, social and cultural

¹³ For a critique of Chandigarh's urban planning, see Madhu Sarin, 'Chandigarh as a Place to Live', in *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, ed. by Russell Walden (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 374-411.

¹⁴ See Peter Serenyi, 'Timeless but of its Time: Le Corbusier's Architecture in India', in *Architectural Design*, 55:7/8 (1985), 55-75; William J. R. Curtis, 'The Ancient in the Modern', in *Architecture in India*, ed. by Raj Rewal, Jean-Louis Vernet and Rama Sharma (Paris: Electa/Association Française d'Action Artistique, 1985), pp. 81-86; and Sunand Prasad, 'Le Corbusier in India', in *Le Corbusier, Architect of the Century*, ed. by Michael Raeburn and Victoria Wilson (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987), pp. 278-305.

debate about the value of modernity versus tradition.¹⁵ Immediately pre- and post-independence India was riven by arguments about the proper direction the state should take after achieving autonomy, arguments closely associated with Gandhi and Nehru respectively. While Gandhi envisaged India as a rural pre-industrial country that would continue to cherish traditional pieties, Nehru saw the future rather in terms of technological and economic development. In this light, the act of commissioning Le Corbusier to design and build Chandigarh represents a conscious choice on the part of the new Indian administration to construct a symbol of its commitment to modernisation.

But Le Corbusier's work in India is not the product of an absolute insistence on the values of modernisation. In fact, the Indian debate between modernity and tradition proved congenial to Le Corbusier for reasons of his own. First, it enabled him to stress the origin of modern European architecture in fundamental architectural principles that were universally applicable. Second, it accorded with his view of global industrial and social development. Le Corbusier saw in India the opportunity for a still largely agricultural nation to avoid the economic, social and environmental damage associated with the First Machine Age of the Industrial Revolution undergone by the West. India's underdevelopment would allow it to move directly into a Second Machine Age of social cohesion and sustainable industrial development, where tradition could survive alongside technological modernisation.¹⁶ For Le Corbusier, India represents a second chance for economic and social development, the possibility of a utopian solution to the ills of the developed West. Hence the architect's sensitivity to

¹⁵ See Stanislaus von Moos, 'The Politics of the Open Hand: Notes on Le Corbusier and Nehru at Chandigarh', in Walden (ed.), *The Open Hand*, pp. 412-57.

¹⁶ See Le Corbusier's letters to Nehru of 26-27 November 1954 and 21 July 1955 in Rewal (ed.), *Architecture in India*, pp. 103-04 and von Moos, 'The Politics of the Open Hand', pp. 445-46.

vernacular Indian architecture and his absorption of Hindu myths and motifs into his own idiosyncratic iconography.

Le Corbusier's openness to traditional Indian culture notwithstanding, it was the secular modernity of Chandigarh that interested his employers. Accordingly, Chandigarh is not simply an updated version of Lutyens's New Delhi. Rather than a traditionally monumental setting for an imperial administration, Chandigarh offers an image of modern democratic government in its promotion of the architectural values of open space, transparency and circulation. The modernity of this first major post-independence public building project contrasts markedly with Lutyens's work, the last major example of imperial architecture in India, not least in its commitment to asymmetry rather than symmetry in its placing of the main public buildings.

There is of course another Indian context for Chandigarh, that of partition and relations with Pakistan. It was the partition of 1947 that created the need for a new state capital in the Indian Punjab once the old capital of Lahore had been ceded to Pakistan. So Chandigarh is not just an assertion of distinct Indian identity and nationhood with respect to former colonisers but also in relation to new and rival neighbours. The clarity and space of a low-density Modernist cityscape contrasts dramatically with the crowded and traditional urban identity of Lahore. In spite of this contrast, and the ethnic and religious divisions it articulates, it would be fatuous to characterise Le Corbusier's architecture as in itself anti-Islamic. Many of his fundamental Modernist principles derived from his travels in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1911, which marked his discovery not simply of the origins of classical Western architecture in the Parthenon but also of the vernacular building styles of Turkey: flat roofs, open-plan circulation around a central well, solariums and sun-breaks are all elements of the

indigenous Islamic architecture of the region.¹⁷ The visual and physical traces of this Islamic architecture persist in Le Corbusier's supposedly 'European' style. This is true also of Chandigarh, in spite of its particular place in the history of India and its relations with Pakistan.

Le Corbusier's Chandigarh is not then simply a Western imposition on a non-Western culture, nor in any sense an illustration of a certain French view of the role of Islam in cultural history, as instanced in the work of Malraux and Lévi-Strauss. Perhaps this should come as no surprise: Lévi-Strauss is hostile to any kind of Modernist art, including International Style architecture, while Malraux excluded architecture from the imaginary museum on the grounds that its intrinsically three-dimensional character could not be accommodated adequately by photographic reproduction.¹⁸ Further, both writers offer critical evaluations of the indigenous Indian architecture that Le Corbusier admired. Malraux described his impressions of Peshawar in the following ambivalent terms: 'dans l'Islam rugueux des montagnes surgissait la luxuriance de l'architecture moghole qui, lorsqu'elle n'est pas en ruine, tient à la fois de l'épopée et de la sucrerie'.¹⁹ Lévi-Strauss's comments on the Red Fort at Delhi are much more pejorative:

Rien d'architectural dans tout cela, qui dément l'impression d'un palais: plutôt un assemblage de tentes montées 'en dur', dans un jardin qui serait lui-même un campement idéalisé [...] L'ensemble

fait une belle masse, chaque détail est exquis, mais il est impossible de saisir un lien organique entre les parties et le tout.²⁰

Given these divergences between Le Corbusier and the views of Malraux and Lévi-Strauss, Chandigarh might be said to escape in part at least a certain discourse on Islam and the geopolitics it implies.

Imaginary Museum or Open Hand? The Geopolitics of the French Indian Ocean

The different engagements of Malraux, Lévi-Strauss and Le Corbusier with Indian culture share a wider context. Malraux explicitly associated his theory of the imaginary museum, first formulated in 1947, with decolonisation: 'le Musée Imaginaire naît avec l'indépendance du Tiers Monde, et le procédé photographique sans lequel il serait né beaucoup plus tard, la détrame, est curieusement contemporain de la libération de l'Inde'.²¹ In this context, the imaginary museum arguably functions as the cultural version of Gaullist foreign policy from the late 1950s on. Its vision of a global culture first accessed from France embodies a post-colonial strategy designed to preserve the influence of a former colonial power through the cultivation of cultural contacts with newly independent nations. By means of a combination of three factors — Republican ideology, the policy of withdrawal from its own former colonies, and the manipulation of the image of a country that had itself recently undergone foreign occupation and exploitation — Gaullist foreign policy managed to create substantial links with various members of the non-aligned bloc of

¹⁷ See Le Corbusier, *Le Voyage d'Orient* (Paris: Les Éditions Forces Vives, 1966). On the Islamic influence on Le Corbusier and his attitude to Islamic culture in general, see Zeynep Çelik, 'Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism', *Assemblage*, 17 (1992), 59-77.

¹⁸ See Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Plon, 1961), pp. 83-93 and André Malraux, *Le Musée imaginaire*, third definitive edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 161.

¹⁹ Malraux, *Œuvres complètes*, III, p. 80.

²⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, p. 459.

²¹ André Malraux, 'Inauguration de l'exposition "André Malraux et le Musée imaginaire"' (1973), in *Œuvres complètes* III, 880-96 (pp. 892-93).

newly independent nations, of which India was the largest and most influential. So India was the second country Malraux visited on his first round of overseas ministerial visits in November-December 1958. The ten-day schedule included a meeting with Nehru and culminated in the signing of an 'accord culturel' between India and France. Then, in May 1960, Nehru himself made a state visit to France, coinciding with a major exhibition at the Petit Palais entitled 'Trésors de l'Inde'. Cultural exchange here opened the way for political rapprochement.

The Gaullist administration sought a privileged relation with India and other non-aligned nations in order to create axes of political alliance and action independent of those dominated by the Cold War superpowers. In brief, the aim was to create a geopolitics of the 'French Indian Ocean', an alternative geopolitics that might counterbalance that of the North Atlantic, which was overdetermined by unequal relations with the vastly more powerful United States. The creation of such a network of alliances obviously entails a new attempt at dialogue between East and West, a new Alexandrian moment of opportunity. And this opportunity is once again threatened by outside factors — the countervailing influences of the United States and Soviet Russia on an international level, and by Islam on a cultural and religious level. Politically, theocratic versions of Islam do not recognise the fundamental Gaullist notion of the secular republican nation-state, the vehicle for the French version of the New World Order circa 1960. Culturally, the prohibition of the image excludes orthodox Islamic cultures from the kind of dialogue envisaged by the imaginary museum and consistently used by the Gaullist administration as the basis for political rapprochement.

I have argued that Le Corbusier remains to a certain extent apart from the cultural geopolitics evoked here, largely through a genuine interest in adapting his aesthetic to local conditions. But there is another possible view. One of Le Corbusier's preferred

symbols, and the one that he envisaged as the single most visible emblem of Chandigarh, was *La Main ouverte*, a large-scale revolving sculpture of a vertical raised hand, its thumb extended at right angles to the slightly outspread fingers. The symbol was initially conceived in 1948 independently of the Chandigarh project.²² For Le Corbusier, the Open Hand was a symbol of the aspiration to universal peace and reconciliation:

Ce signe qui me préoccupe depuis de nombreuses années en mon subconscient doit exister pour porter un témoignage d'harmonie. Il faut annuler les travaux de guerre, la guerre froide doit cesser de faire vivre les hommes [...] Ce signe de la main ouverte pour recevoir les richesses créées, pour distribuer aux peuples du monde, doit être le signe de notre époque.²³

The monumental realisation of this symbol was always a matter of controversy and it was only finally constructed twenty years after Le Corbusier's death in 1985. Malraux alludes obliquely to this disagreement in his memoirs when recounting a visit to Nehru's private residence:

Il y avait au-dessus d'une bibliothèque, un grand dessin de Le Corbusier: le palais de Chandigarh, surmonté de l'immense Main de la Paix, qui tenait de l'emblème et de la girouette géante; et un modèle de la Main, en bronze, d'une cinquantaine de centimètres. Le Corbusier y tenait beaucoup. Nehru, moins.²⁴

The disagreement between architect and politician apparently turned on the appropriateness of the monument — was it really a viable public symbol of the values of the new city or rather an

²² See Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvres complètes V: 1946-1952*, ed. by Willy Böesiger (Zurich: Ginsberger, 1953), p. 158.

²³ See Le Corbusier, *Mise au point* (Paris: Éditions Forces-Vives, 1966), pp. 52-53.

²⁴ Malraux, *Œuvres complètes*, III, p. 254.

exaggerated private signature of the architect? While Chandigarh was meant by those who commissioned it to function as a symbol of the secular democratic modernity of the new nation, Le Corbusier seemed intent on imposing an obscure private iconography that alluded to existing religious symbols while simultaneously suggesting a rejection of politics in a city supposedly dedicated to local government:

Le monument de la Main ouverte [...] n'est pas un signe politique, une création de politicien. C'est une création d'architecte, c'est un fruit d'architecture. Il y a dans cette création un cas spécifique de neutralité humaine.²⁵

The meaning of the The Open Hand is ambiguous: an ostensibly universal gesture of peace and friendship for Le Corbusier, the hand possesses strong religious resonances for many ethnic groups, including Hindus and Moslems, while its birdlike profile also invokes and revokes Picasso's Communist-sponsored dove of peace, suggesting itself as an alternative emblem of Cold War non-alignment. It is then potentially as divisive as it is unifying. Critics continue to dispute its meaning. William J. R. Curtis has described the Open Hand as 'a compound of modern popular art and ancient symbols of benediction' intended as 'Le Corbusier's emblem of post-colonial harmony and peace'.²⁶ Stanislaus von Moos views it rather as 'the fiction of a state art, elementary and nevertheless occult, because there is no state religion behind it'.²⁷ The polysemic and unstable character of the Open Hand could in itself explain Nehru's reservations. But it is also possible that he read the symbol as possessing yet another meaning, sensing that the open hand of peace and cultural exchange proffered by Le Corbusier might not simply symbolise the politics

of non-alignment but also conceal the Gaullist geopolitical agenda of Malraux's imaginary museum.

To return in conclusion to the Alexandrian motif of a certain French view of India, Le Corbusier occupies an ambiguous place in relation to it, both importing a European aesthetic but also open to the influence of local cultures. Unlike Malraux and Lévi-Strauss, his utopian view of India's place in cultural history is not premised on a demonisation of Islam as the force that divides East and West. Even if the Open Hand may, among other things, inadvertently symbolise the Gaullist project of post-imperial cultural influence, the architect's work at Chandigarh turns other Western assumptions upside-down. In other words, rather than simply following a long-standing Western tradition mapped out centuries before and revived in the work of Malraux and Lévi-Strauss, Le Corbusier at Chandigarh does a handstand in the footsteps of Alexander.

Douglas Smith
University College Dublin

²⁵ Le Corbusier, *Mise au point*, pp. 51-52.

²⁶ Curtis, 'The Ancient in the Modern', pp. 89 and 84 respectively.

²⁷ Von Moos, 'The Politics of the Open Hand', p. 445.

Book Reviews

Gérard Nauroy, ed., *L'Écriture du massacre en littérature entre histoire et mythe: des mondes antiques à l'aube du XXI^e siècle*, Recherches en littérature et spiritualité 6 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004). ISBN 3-03910-372-5. £35

'The turn to the francophone', writes Dominick LaCapra, 'should in fact mean a turning of both the francophone and the metropolitan towards one another in order to elicit their tangled relations, their often lost opportunities, and their possibilities for the future'.¹ If an innovative and creative Francophone Postcolonial Studies depends, along these lines, and as a number of the contributions to the first three issues of this journal have also suggested, on an openness to comparatism, highlighting transhistorical and transcultural (dis)connections between different French-speaking spaces, then it is possible to adopt a number of critical strategies to permit this practice. Most common perhaps is an attention to the actual interactions between metropolitan France and its former colonies, relationships that have been, in LaCapra's terms, 'complex, often hegemonically skewed, and typically strained' (*ibid.*). It is at the same time feasible, however, to identify a number of key themes that may serve as the focus of such comparative attention, with the aim of the juxtaposition this allows being not so much conflation of often radical differences as the exploration of divergences, convergences and transformations of phenomena as they move between various times, spaces and cultural contexts. Given the centrality of violence – both textual

and actual – to much postcolonial literature in French,² the representation of the massacre may be seen as one such potential focus of attention, and it might be argued that Gérard Nauroy's edited collection of essays gathers together the type of material that would permit this type of comparatism.

The eleven essays in this volume, originally presented at the 'Littérature et spiritualité' seminar at the University of Metz, cover a chronologically wide and formally diverse corpus. Divided into three sections – classical and biblical; early modern to nineteenth-century; twentieth-century – they track the representation of the massacre from some of its earliest manifestations (Odysseus's slaughter of Penelope's suitors, and Herod's slaying of the innocents) to some of the most recent scenes of genocide in contemporary Rwanda. The two essays likely to be of particular interest to Francophone specialists are Danièle Henky's interpretation of the writing of massacre in two children's books, and Noël Nel's reflection on the representation of the massacre in the contemporary televised media. Henky reads two accounts of the Rwandan genocide in children's literature: Pierre Calame's *Les Héritiers du pays des collines* and Reine-Marguerite Bayle's *Souviens-toi, Akeza!* (both 1997), suggesting that the unusual adoption of such a violent theme in writing for children is characterized by the progressive individualization of the victims and by a privileging of the place of young people in postcolonial violence. His comments on Bayle's text foreground its generic status partway between fiction and testimony, underlining the adoption of the conventions of *reportage*. It is the actual representation of the massacre in the contemporary media that is central to Nel's chapter, an often alarming study of the ways in which technology permits live broadcast of what he classes an 'événement-limite', 'par nature irréprésentable, incompréhensible,

¹ Dominick LaCapra, 'Reconfiguring French Studies', in *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault and French Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp.167-226 (p.225).

² See, for instance, 'Penser la violence', special issue of *Notre Librairie*, 148 (2002).

insoutenable, immonde et incroyable' (p.254). Although he describes broadcast media, it is striking how his analysis illuminates the structuring of one of the most powerful representations of a massacre in recent postcolonial literature in French, Williams Sassine's *Wirriyamu* (1976), where the protagonist's (and the reader's) proximity to events and the refusal of retrospective narration of their aftermath themselves create an equally acute unease.

The challenge for the reader addressing the whole volume (and not focussing on its specific parts) is to tease out the recurrent strategies adopted by artists and writers in their representation of massacre, and to suggest how these strategies have evolved over time, according to both context and the creator's own location. In Nauroy's terms, the volume constitutes a 'réflexion pluridisciplinaire et diachronique' on the ways in which writers, 'confrontés à la violence collective et fanatique, [...] ont trouvé dans l'écriture des moyens stylistiques d'exprimer leur indignation, l'horreur ressentie face au massacre' (p.1). There remains a specificity – both historical and affective – to postcolonial representations of massacre, the viewpoint of which is often, either literally or implicitly, that of the victim; yet such representations may be read additionally either in counterpoint to or as a continuation of a longer French-language tradition of writing the massacre, in which authors such as Voltaire are recurrent and often subverted points of reference. Postcolonial descriptions regularly challenge an earlier complacency or lack of compassion linked to the fact, as Ingrid Brenez explains in her contribution to this volume, that the victim was often a member of another national or ethnic group and the massacre a marker of victory. Yet the writing of massacre is commonly characterized by a sense of excess as an author is challenged to represent what for many is beyond representation; at the same time, the duty or necessity to represent is linked to a tendency – described by Cullière in his contribution to this volume on the Saint-

Bartholomew's Massacre – for subsequent figurings of an event to grant it 'une valeur fondatrice, explicative, référentielle' (p.127). Representation thus becomes a means of constructing and perpetuating memory (as Catherine Bourdieu-Weiss demonstrates here in her chapter on religious painting).

This volume's attention to the postcolonial representation of the massacre remains partial, and a number of key events in the collapse of the French Empire that might have been addressed, such as Yen Bay, Thiaroye, Sétif, Madagascar and the Bataille de Paris (all the focus of literary attention, and described by Yves Benot in his *Massacres coloniaux*), are absent. The collection nevertheless sketches out the fruitful potential of a cautiously historicizing comparatism that reads postcolonial texts and other cultural representations in relation to – and not in the light of – a wider representational tradition.

Charles Forsdick
University of Liverpool

H.M. Stanley, *Cinq années au Congo* (Brussels: Archives Générales du Royaume, 2002), 'Notice introductive' par Nadine Fettweis et Émile Van Balberghe.

The Congo has, since the first Portuguese explorations at the end of the 15th Century, inspired a wealth of documents, surveys and studies. Very few texts, however, have marked the collective imagination as much as Henry Morton Stanley's *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State. A Story of Work and Exploration* (1885). This adventurous and picturesque travel-log was translated into French by the Belgian Gérard Harry as *Cinq années au*

Congo. 1879-1884. Voyages. Explorations. Fondation de l'État libre du Congo and is now regarded as one of the key documents available in order to understand Léopold II's motives for colonising, more as a private *entrepreneur* than as a constitutional monarch, a territory 80 times bigger than Belgium. In their erudite introduction, Émile Van Balberghe and Nadine Fettweis, two Brussels-based researchers and bibliophiles with extensive experience in the field — they co-edited in 1992 *Papier blanc, encre noire. Cent ans de culture francophone en Afrique centrale* (published in the collection 'Archives du Futur' by Édition Labor) — present the material and intellectual circumstances that led to the publication of Stanley's account of the newly-founded state. This introduction provides an excellent survey of the existing literature about the early period of the leopoldian venture and situates *Cinq années au Congo* in relation to major cultural actors such as the publisher Pierre Maes, the poet Max Waller and the geographer Élisée Reclus; it also gives a succinct but useful overview of the factors and extraordinary chain of events that paved the way to the creation of the Congo Free State: from the Conference of Brussels (1876), from which resulted the part scientific, part commercially-minded and part philanthropic Association Internationale Africaine (A.I.A.) to the Berlin Conference (1884-5). More importantly, however, Van Balberghe's and Fettweis's 'Notice introductive' (pp.iii-xx) focuses on the Europe-wide launch of the book in its various national formats and translations. Their analysis also concentrates on its readership and reception in France and in Belgium where *Cinq années au Congo* acquired the much envied status of 'livre d'étrennes', i.e. a luxuriously bound, richly illustrated book reminiscent of the Hetzel tradition (as used in Jules Verne's novels) and which was also meant to appeal to different age groups. Finally, this introduction analyses the iconographic materials of the original covers ('Des cartonnages qui parlent', pp.xix-xx) and shows how Stanley's and above all Léopold's

portraits were used to convey in most dualistic terms the victory of science and civilisation.

Pierre-Philippe Fraiture
Oxford Brookes University

Kojo Tovalou Houénou, précurseur, 1887-1936: pannégrisme et modernité. By Émile Derlin Zinsou and Luc Zouménou. Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004. 239pp. ISBN 2-7068-1801-8. 32€.

Lilyan Kesteloot's ground-breaking *Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature*, of 1963, set the tone: Négritude marked a totally new beginning. Preceding it had been *doudouisme*, pale imitations of European models, and the Harlem renaissance. René Maran's *Batouala* of 1921 shone like a lonely beacon. This suited both literary critics (and course-planners) seeking to circumscribe their compass and the Négritude writers themselves, who did nothing to discourage the flattering view of themselves as emerging as if *ex nihilo*. Historians have been less parsimonious in the interest they have taken in the preceding generation of French-speaking black activists but, significantly, they were not based in France: Roi Ottley, James Spiegler, Imanuel Geiss and James Ayodele Langley. Recent years have seen attempts, notably in English by Christopher Miller and Robert Young, to redress the imbalance and place such figures as Kojo Tovalou Houénou, Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté and Lamine Senghor (the last also championed by Papa Samba Diop) within the compass of postcolonial literary discourse. In French, Philippe Dewitte's *Les Mouvements nègres en France, 1919-1939* made a major contribution towards bringing them out of the shadows and

remains essential reading on the subject. Both it and Zouménou's book (for Zinsou merely wrote the anecdotal preface, being presented as co-author out of misplaced deference for a former president of Benin) were first presented as theses in Paris in 1985. However, whereas Dewitte's appeared in book form the same year, Zouménou's has waited this long and, scandalously, not been updated. The most recent bibliographical reference dates from 1981! This not only means that more recent work is ignored but also that no account is taken of a complete shift of critical mindset. Postcolonial critics will need to rewrite the book, in mind if not in fact, to adapt its presentation to their viewpoint.

The virtues of this study are none the less considerable. Background information is provided on the history of Dahomey, renamed Benin in 1975. A fully documented biographical picture is given of Prince Kojo Tovalou Houénou, the nephew of the independent-minded king Behanzin, and his role in various (generally fruitless) efforts at having France allow his fellow-countrymen and other nations colonised by France either citizenship and equality or independence, as immanent justice required. He qualified as an lawyer and in parallel pursued medical training. Regrettably, Tovalou's First World War records have not survived, but the cover photograph (from the archives of his relative, the novelist Olympe Bhêly-Quenum) prompts a striking revision of assumptions about the role of Africans in it as much as does Louise Faure-Favier's representation of a WW1 black pilot in her 1928 *Blanche et Noir*. A smiling, self-confident Tovalou is shown as a medical officer, complete with Red-Cross arm-band.

His aristocratic stance and convoluted writing style lacked the common touch to produce a major leader, but his foundation in 1924 of the Ligue universelle pour la défense de la race noire and its fortnightly, if short-lived, organ *Les Continents* promoted principles deserving wide consideration and application. They were shared actively by Maran, also born in 1887 (as was Marcus Garvey, with whom Tovalou fell out, preferring Du Bois's more

moderate approach) and also – but this goes unmentioned – schooled at Bordeaux. The unctuous and self-serving Blaise Diagne, on behalf of the colonialist lobby, whose memoranda here reveal utter contempt for native peoples and an absolute resolution to prevent any serious questioning (invariably condemned as communist) of ruling authority, torpedoed this and other initiatives.

Appendices reproduce Tovalou's notable address to the United Negro Improvement Association in New York, given in August 1924 while Maran took over responsibility for *Les Continents*, and his 1926 letter from prison in Dahomey to the French minister of justice. Protesting his innocence against charges of political interference in his homeland, the latter reinforces our sense of him as a man of principle but also as someone out of step with his time, indeed, well in advance of it in many respects. It furthermore puts into sharp focus the paradox of a Republic which, having declared 'les droits de l'homme et du citoyen' – and Tovalou was both, after all –, proceeded consistently to deny those rights to its colonial citizens... not to mention its subjects.

That this important study, likely to remain the major reference for Tovalou for many years, has no index adds injury to the insult of its time-warp. But its publication is to be welcomed for the light it throws on one of the significant precursors of Négritude and an early champion of rights for Blacks.

Roger Little
Trinity College Dublin

SFPS ANNUAL CONFERENCES 2005-06

The French Atlantic French Institute, London 2-3 December 2005

In November 2005, SFPS will hold a two-day conference of invited speakers at the French Institute on the theme of 'The French Atlantic'. The conference will be co-organised by SFPS and Professor Bill Marshall (University of Glasgow), and will coincide with the publication of Bill's groundbreaking *Encyclopedia of France and the Americas*. This major new work teases out the links between France, Africa, the Caribbean, North America and South America, and the conference should thus be of interest to a wide audience. Further information on the conference will be available on the SFPS website (www.sfps.ac.uk) early in June 2005.

Boundaries and Limits of Postcolonialism: Anglophone, Francophone, Global

International Conference

Under the auspices of the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies and the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies

Florida State University, Tallahassee
November 30-December 2, 2006

Keynote speakers

Graham Huggan (University of Leeds, UK)

Françoise Lionnet (UCLA)

Tyler Stovall (Berkeley)

In recent years, the questioning of the boundaries and limits of postcolonial studies has taken on new dimensions. Within its heartland in English literature departments, postcolonial studies has increasingly been challenged by new theoretical models, particularly globalization theory, together with transnational, transcultural and intercultural paradigms. At the same time, within French/Francophone Studies departments, there have been numerous attempts to draw more extensively on the postcolonial paradigm and to define more clearly the nature of Francophone postcolonial studies, simultaneously borrowing from and challenging the established 'norms' of Anglophone postcolonial criticism. In charting new directions in the field of postcolonial studies, this conference will draw together scholars from both sides of the Anglophone/Francophone divide, those attempting to bridge the gap between them, and those who support the development of new theoretical paradigms that move beyond the postcolonial.

The conference is co-organised with, and hosted by, the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies. The conference will be an excellent opportunity for SFPS to make its work known to colleagues in North America and we hope that as many British and Irish-based colleagues as possible will be able to attend. For further information on the conference, visit the Winthrop-King Institute's website: http://www.fsu.edu/~icffs/boundaries_gen_info.html.

SPECIAL OFFER
ASCALF Publications Back Catalogue
Only £60

As SFPS moves towards a new future, we are also keen to make our back catalogue of work available to both individual scholars and university libraries, as we believe this will provide an excellent research resource for both academics and students. The *ASCALF Bulletin* and the *ASCALF Yearbook* aimed both to disseminate the research work presented at ASCALF's annual conferences and day workshops, and to publish other innovative material in the field of Francophone postcolonial literature: 25 issues of the *ASCALF Bulletin* (issues 1-3 and 16-17 are no longer available), and 5 issues of the *ASCALF Yearbook* (issues 1 and 2 are no longer available) were published.

Individual issues of both *Bulletin* and *Yearbook* can be purchased and their prices are listed below. However, we are also proposing a **special offer of £60 (inc. p&p)** for individuals and libraries purchasing the entire back catalogue (21 *Bulletins* and 3 *Yearbooks*). Cheques, made payable to Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies, should be sent to: **Dr David Murphy, School of Modern Languages, French Section, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland.**

Price of individual issues:

ASCALF Bulletin

Issues 4-15 & 18-19: £2.50 each

Issues 20-25: £5 each

ASCALF Yearbook

Issues 3 & 5: £5 each

Issue 4: £7