THE NORTH AFRICAN ELEMENT
in
CONTEMPORARY FRENCH LITERATURE

A thesis presented for the degree of Master of Arts
by
EUGENE PAUL METOUR, B.L.

The Ohio State
University
1917

Approved by
Professor in charge
Head of Department of
Romance Languages
BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Eugène Fromentin. Uh Eté dans le Sahara.
  " " Une année dans le Sahel.
  " " Dominique.

Isabelle Eberhardt. Trimardeur
  " " Notes de Route
  " " Dans L'Ombre Chaude de L'Islam

Louis Bertrand. Le Sang des Races
  " " Pepete le bien-aimé
  " " La Cina
  " " Le Jardin de la Mort
  " " Saint Augustin

Gustave Flaubert. Salammbo

Pierre Loti. Au Maroc
  " " Les Trois Dames de la Kasbah

Maupassant. Au Soleil

Jean Lorrain. Heures d'Afrique

Marguerite brothers. Alger L'Hiver.
  " " L'Eau qui dort

Edgar Allen Forbes. The Land of the White Helmet
Introduction.

In a book entitled *The Land of the White Helmetyhies*, a few years ago, was received with marked favor by the American public, Edgar Allen Parkes, chief editor of one of the best known American periodicals, thus expresses himself in regard to France's newly acquired African empire:

"Suppose that a mehari camel with a speed of fifty miles a day, (the mehari is the Mauretania of the desert liners, just as the ordinary camel is a cargo beast) were to start Southward from Algiers and follow the straight course of a crew. He would come out at Kotonou, on the gulf of Guinea, forty-two days later. Let another mehari start from Dakar, on the West coast, and make a bee line for the Darfour boundary of the Egyptian Sudan. He would reach it two weeks after the first camel had greedingly anchored on the Guinea coast. Let a third camel start from Tangiers in the direction of Fez, and continue Southeastward at the fifty mile rate. He would reach the Barh-el Ghazal province of the Sudan in two months."

"The first camel would cover a distance equal to that between New York and Santa-Fe; the second would travel as far as it is from Pittsburgh to San Francisco; the trail of the third would reach from New York across the Continent to Portland, Oregon. Yet, every one of the eleven footprints of each camel would be in French soil or within the French sphere of influence. Such is the extent of France's continuous empire in the Dark Continent!..."

"Nobody knows how many people live in some parts of the empire, but it is safe to say the tricolour waves over thirty-eight millions
mit African subjects, counting the two and one half millions in Madagascar.

In thinking of the French, therefore, it is approximately accurate to consider every other Frenchman as either an Arab, or a Moor, or a negro..."

"A solid mass of thirty millions French Mahometans today stands facing a civilization which it can neither resist nor evade,—an economical fact that makes the Arab loom large against the African sky. All in all, there are probably fifty five millions of brown and black Moslems north of the equator,—and this is one of the large units in a Mohammedan population that numbers about two hundred and thirty five millions throughout the world."

"The fact that all North Africa is being revolutionized,—by the British in Egypt, and by the French along the Barbary coast,—fares into lesser significance in the light of the fact that a semi-barbarous race is now in the first stages of its regeneration."

"The country itself has been revolutionized many times, but not since the days of the prophet has the Arab changed in character... Were Islam only a religion, it might continue to flourish side by side with the altars that the white race is building under the shadow of every minaret. But the scheme of the Prophet made no provision for the guidance of his followers under other than Moslem rulers. The Muslim is now confronted with this dilemma: either he must renounce his ancestral faith which is equivalent to denationalization, or he must remodel his creed and make it fit into the white man's scheme of civilization. As I was leaving Algeria, news came that the French government had decided to require every Arab to pass through a term of service in the army. This may not be the best thing that ever happened to the French army, but it will
be a means of grace to the Arabs. If compulsory service shall result in universal citizenship, then, the old rankle will disappear. They have a chance, these thirty millions that are now blinking at the light. Perhaps France might be more paternal, but the conquered race may thank the stars that its destiny rests in a hand that seldom wears the rough gauntlet."

This is one of the aspects of the problem. A Russian woman has stated the other. In the book entitled: *Dans l'Ombre Chaude de l'Islam*, and under the heading: *Puissances d'Afrique*, Isabelle Eberhardt has parted the curtains of the future and shown us that the germs of the conflict lies less in the race than in the soil.

"J'ai voulu posséder ce pays, et ce pays m'a possédé. A certaines heures, je me demande si la terre du Sud ne ramènera pas à elle tous les conquérants qui viendront avec des rêves nouveaux de puissance et de liberté. Que sera l'Empire Européen d'Afrique dans quelques siècles, quand le soleil aura accompli dans le sang des races nouvelles son œuvre lente d'assimilation Africaine et d'adaptation aux rythmes profonds du climat et du sol. À quel moment nos races du Nord pourront elles se dire indigènes comme les Kabyles roux et les kasuriennes aux yeux pales? Les émanations Africaines, je les respire dans les nuits chaudes comme un encens qui montera toujours vers de cruelles et mystérieuses divinités. Nul ne pourra renier complètement ces idoles. Elles apparaîtront, encore monstrueuses, dans les soirs de fièvre, à tous ceux qui poseront leur nuque sur cette terre pour y dormir, les yeux dans les froides étoiles."

Between the comments of the Russian and the American travelers, we have perhaps the terms of a problem which the following pages will state again at greater length, if not with greater force.
One of the most vigorous races of mankind, and one of the most gifted, since, during the Andalusian and Sicilian middle ages it firmly held the flickering torch which had fallen from the trembling hand of Byzantium, is to day called upon to become the intermediary between the savagery of the South and the civilization of the North. This is a fact of tremendous import in an age when French natality is on the wane, while the North African birth rate remains one of the largest on record. When men are needed in France after the most destructive of all wars, North Africa will furnish them; and the union between the two can be considered indissoluble now that a million Franco Europeans have built a home on the North African shore, and since no thought of revolt can be entertained by native races in these days of machine guns.

Perhaps it is not too early to ask ourselves whether the medium which most immediately reflects the portentous changes which take place in a race, whether literature, will not be considerably affected by the new field open to French endeavour. In this connection, we cannot forget that French genius is social and not racial, and, as such, is, no doubt, elastic enough to accommodate itself of the introduction of a new ethnic element. But this does not necessarily mean that the North African is not expected to react on his conqueror. Indeed, the new literature which is being born as I write already reflects the all important fact that two civilizations cannot coexist without give and take. A discussion of the problem from the North African standpoint might be of little moment, but the reverse is far from true; and when a social organisation as highly perfected as that of France allows itself to be largely influenced by ultra Mediterranean interests, it is time we give free rein to curiosity and take cognizance of the new fact.
In a cursory way, this has been attempted here. The field was vast, and the difficulty to explore it at this distance from the source of first-hand information precluded, perhaps, the possibility of carrying the investigation very far. There were, however, three representative writers who seemed to epitomize in their life and work all that can be said of French North African writers. The first introduced North African exotism into French Literature, and is entitled to rank as the literary father of Pierre Loti. The other two can be classed as naturalized Africans. In different degrees, these writers have been affected by climate and betray one and all, unmistakable signs of having been touched by the North African sun. With them, therefore, we are dealing with literary types of strongly marked characteristics; and what is given here is an attempt to diagnose the symptoms of a psycho-physical change bearing all the marks of a sociological phenomenon.
EUGÈNE FROMENTIN

(Born at La Rochelle, Oct. 24, 1820, died in his native town Aug. 27, 1876. A pupil of Cabat and the rival of Descamps and Gerome. His pictures offer the same qualities as his literary style. He wrote Une Année dans le Sahara, Un Été dans le Sahara, an autobiographical novel entitled Dominique, and two volumes of art criticism: Visites artistiques et simples pèlerinages and Les Maîtres d'autrefois.)

It is perhaps fortunate that Eugène Fromentin, the first in date among the French writers who sought to discover in North Africa the Fountain of Youth of exotism, should have looked upon the newly conquered territory with the eyes of a painter. Had his training been merely literary, he would not have so soon marked French exotic literature with the stamp of classicism. The tradition he transplanted is properly the tradition of the Masters. It is rooted in a quality which is peculiarly French: sanity; and while his artistic formula seems scarcely applicable to flights of genius such as Rudyard Kipling, for instance, it is capable of in his best hours, he undoubtedly marked for his brother craftmen the boundaries which mere talent should not attempt to carry any further.

Ere the reader closes this admirable book of his entitled: "Une Année dans le Sahara", he will come across an artistic profession de foi so clearly thought out that we will find it invaluable in attempting to define standards of comparison in a field encumbered with unclassified material. The rules he sets down are so rigorously logical, and yet so seldom followed that, in quoting him at length, I feel that I will not abuse the indulgence of the reader.

"We were then on the market place," he writes. "A group of native children were playing a game which I believe to be cosmopolitan because it is played in Ireland as well as in the East. The game consists
in throwing a ball, or a stick, or anything which can be rapidly carried forward and hurled afar off. Each player yields a stick and strives to reach the ball first and to send it spinning again. The players were eight-to ten years old children, good looking and graceful."

It was two in the afternoon and the piazza was deserted. A square of low, roofless buildings, one or two cypresses rising above the terraces, a mountain beyond, sharply delineated against the empty sky, a large and bare foreground, this will do for the landscape. The mountain was frankly green, the sky blue, the foreground dust laden, that is to say lilac colored."

"The scene is familiar and falls within the boundaries of what, in painting, is known as genre. The background itself possesses the double advantage of being very simple, albeit typically local. L'Orient peut, à la rigueur, tenir dans ce cadre étroit."

"What do we see? Is it children playing in the sunlight, or a sumptuous piazza in the midst of which children are playing? The question is not useless, because it differentiates between two different viewpoints. In the first case, we consider human forms with the landscape as an accessory. In the second we behold a landscape where the human figure falls in the background, in a subordinate, wholly sacrificed place. Whether considered from near or far, the children will be all or nothing; and if we place them near enough the painter to endow the group with the dominating interest, then a singular modification will occur in the simple scene. The landscape will disappear; scarcely will there remain indications of Oriental staging on a foreground bathed in strong light."

What then becomes of the white piazza, the cypresses, the blazing sun of the meridian hour which are so essential if one is to
localize the scene, but which will become useless if the painter seeks to
generalize its significance. I know painters who will take nothing there
beyond the necessary. This process of the mind which consists in cho-
sing the point of interest, in isolating it, in making nature serve one's
ends without falling into the parallel pitfalls of servile copy or ent-
ire neglect, this difficult equilibrium which compels the painter to re-
main true to nature without seeking to be exact, all this is conveyed
by a very ordinary word which has never been satisfactorily explained:
I mean interpretation."

"We might, therefore, examine whether Oriental countries admit
of interpretation, and, if so, in what measure?"

The East is very peculiar. Its least shortcoming is to be new and
unknown and to arouse curiosity, a feeling incompatible with true art.
It is exceptional, and history is there to remind us that nothing, either
beautiful nor durable can be made with exceptions. Last, but not least,
it appeals to the eyes, not to the mind. It insists upon recognition by
the newness of its aspects, the originality of its costumes and of its
types. For fear of disfiguring such an effigy, we must admit it in its
entirety, and, if we do, I challenge any one to resist the temptation
of expressing first of all its more bizarre aspects."

"Three men, in the last twenty years resume about all that
modern critics have called Orientalism in painting. The greatest of the
three has seen in the East human spectacles. He is a Venetian who
delights in contemporaneous subjects, analogous in color and form to the
passionate remembrances he has kept of his masters. He is the more
traditional, the least Oriental of the three, and this is the smallest
of the reasons why I esteem him so great. Be sure that it is precisely-
ly the more general element which is finest in his work."
If we should, then, appear to discover later in Fromentin an acuity of vision ranking next to that of Chateaubriand, and a sensitiveness to impressions almost equal to that of Pierre Loti, we will not forget that he meant to remain the more traditional, the less Oriental of the writers who trod the North African soil. The principles enunciated above explain much of his self-restraint, and also his great mistake: namely that the East is exceptional. With so firm a grasp on the exclusively French point of view, he can be considered the continuator of the Poussin tradition. In the clear, classic conceptions of his art, he found perhaps less intrinsic truth than moderation, but it provided him with a moral discipline. His case is unique in that he resisted victoriously the influence of a dangerous climate notoriously trying to will power.

"Je commence une absence dont je ne veux pas encore déterminer la durée," he writes in the first pages of Une Année dans le Sahel. "mais sois tranquille, je ne viens pas au pays des Lotothages pur y manger le fruit qui fait oublier la patrie!"

This resolve not to yield entirely to local influences is assuredly remarkable in a writer who has fathomed enough of the mysteries of North African life to be held as the model of interpreters. Indeed, he transmits impressions so intelligently that we are led to conclude that his feeling for method is the mainspring of his success. His method of observation he clearly describes at the beginning of "Une Année dans le Sahel.

"I shall try to be at home in this strange land through which, until now, I have only passed, stopping at inns and caravanserais. This time, I come to live in it. The best way to learn much is, to my mind to see little and to see well by observing a great deal. If I travel, it
will be from some fixed point around which the changing panorama may
revolve. All is in all, and why should not the synopsis of the Algerine
countryside be framed between the boundaries of my window?"

It is well known that Fromentin, when he attempts to describe,
can rival Gautier and Maupassant; and this mastery will appear all the
more remarkable when it is remembered that, at the time he wrote his
North African books, he was, not only experimenting with his pen, but
blazing a new trail. The Algiers he knew in the fifties offered, between
two civilizations, a contrast which time has since softened. We meet in
his works enchanting pages where we are allowed to peep into the distant
Algiers of the Corsairs, the Algiers of the renegades and of the galley
slaves, where monks a la Saint Vincent de Paul came to redeem European
captives, and where Christian concubines sometimes fell in love with a
knight of Malta or a prisoner like Cervantes.

The impartial sympathy Fromentin bestows on native races we
could not, perhaps, expect from anybody but a painter. He very much
admires Jewish girls. He notes that, unlike Moorish women, they are to
be seen unveiled at all hours of the day. Sheathed in silk, they go
dragging their heelless sandals: "le visage au vent; et ces femmes en ro-
bes collantes, aux joues découvertes, aux beaux yeux fixes, accoutumées
à toutes les hardiesse du regard, semblent toutes singulières dans ce
monde universellement voilé. De petites filles mal tenues, dans des
accoutrements plus somptueux que choisis, accompagnent ces matronnes au
corps mince et aux talons sales, qu’on prendrait pour leurs sœurs aînées.
La peau rose de ces enfants ne blâmit pas a l’action de la chaleur,
comme celle des petits Maures. Leurs joues s’empourprent aisément, et
comme une forêt de cheveux roux accompagne ordinairement le teint de ces
visages où le sang fleurit, ces têtes enluminées et coiffées d’une
broussaille ardente, sont d’un effet qu’on imagine malaisément, surtout
quand le soleil les enflamme."

One might easily conclude from the preceding that Frémontin’s
feeling for color is, at times, apt to lead him far enough from the
boundaries he has himself surveyed and described as the exclusive realm
of classicism. In spite of himself, he has felt the lure of impressionism,
and the fact is not without importance, since we suspected from the first
that he would not remain entirely unresponsive to the influence of
climate. We have only to turn to his own testimony to discover that, at
this early date, he occasionally shared the emotions which, to day,
delight the clan of the ultra colorists led by Mortimer Menpes and
Albert Besnard.

"Picture to yourself," he writes a propos of a negro festival,
"a thousand or more women clad in red, the pure red which the palette
can scarcely express, an immittible red blazing in full sun, and
deriving still greater intensity from all sorts of irritating contrasts.
This wondrous display of scarlet clothes was spread on an expanse of turf
at its greenest, next to a marine background which the wind lashed into
a deeper blue. Everything paled before this flaming red which would have
frightened Rubens. Tall wenches with sparkling eyes, their cheeks as firm
in contour as polished basalt, reminded me of a troop of Amazons, and
suggested the harem of some fabulous sultan. They were so vigorous that,
under their garments, their muscles were to be discerned as plainly as
under wet draperies. It was fine, this unexpected welding of costume and
statuary! But it bore the marks of a detestable taste. We have here a
picture without discipline, and which has almost nothing in common with
art."

As he writes elsewhere, "Je n’ai de goût sérieux que pour les choses
durables, et je ne considère avec un sentiment passionné que les choses
qui sont fixes! it does not seem in vain, after all, that he warned us against curiosity, that he reminded us that the East appeals more often to the eye than to the mind, and that he challenged us to resist the temptation of expressing first of all its more bizarre aspects. Still, we are glad to know that he could take such notes. Our education to color has, in the last fifty years progressed far enough to enable the most curious minded among us to visualize, with the help of what we remember of impressionism at its best, the scene he had in mind. Yet, many more pages like these would unfailingly lead us to suspect that the author is somewhat hampered by the strictness of his own standards.

Perhaps he was, and the point worthy of attention is that, in the barbaric land to which Jean Lorrain will later ascribe a mixed pungency of charnel and frankincense, he felt the necessity of holding himself in hand. Indeed, we have already found an indication of this at the page where he tells us that he did not come to the shores of the lotus-eater to eat of the fruit which would make him lose the memory of the fatherland. This unexplained allusion to the travels of Ulysses is far from being mere rhetoric. We will see later, while studying the strange case of Isabelle Eberhardt, that North Africa is one of those countries that take such a hold on the heart and the senses as to stamp forever with its imprint whoever he is has been so fortunate as to live there a few never-to-be-forgotten hours. There are other lands like it, other climes where voluptuous nature makes to the traveller an irresistible appeal. Such, no doubt, are the South seas which kept Stevenson; Japan, perhaps, with its memories of Lafcadio Hearn; Turkey, which inspired such ascents to Melchior de Vogue, Marion Crawford and Loti; and such, is, no doubt, the Western land that lives and pulsates in the works of John Muir.
Such a country could not but strongly appeal to the future author of Dominique, for it is in this book, written in later years, and largely autobiographical, that we discover Fromentin such as he was, a delicate and sensitive soul. Nothing except regrets, melancholy and overcast skies in this other book, written in France, and dealing with French landscapes. But these things are, to day, so characteristic of Pierre Loti that I wonder whether Fromentin, had he happened to yield entirely to the influence of climate, would have given us something very different from the books we have come to expect from the pen of the contemporary French writer. He is as eager as Loti to absorb all he can of the Universe through his eyes. He hails from the same province and there is a mysterious affinity even in the way both men express some strikingly similar feelings.

"For instance:

"Il y a une heure que je préfère aux heures lumineuses dans cette ville en ruines. C'est le soir, à la tombée de la nuit, le court moment d'incertitude qui suit immédiatement la fin du jour et précède l'obscurité. L'ombre descend, accompagnée en cette saison d'un épais brouillard qui bleuit l'extrémité des rues. Le pavé se mouille et le pied glisse un peu dans ces demi-teintes. Le côté du couchant nage alors dans des lueurs violettes; les architectures deviennent singulières et le ciel, qui peu à peu se décolore, semble, l'une après l'autre, les faire évaporer. Alors, pur peu qu'on ait le goût des rêves et des conjectures, il est permis de recomposer toute une société morte et permis de supposer beaucoup de choses qui n'existent pas en fait d'art comme en fait de galanterie!"
"Pour peu qu'on ait le goût des rêves et des conjectures!" But this is Loti himself, and, in the next sentence, we recognize Loti's preoccupation of the dead past, of forgotten love and of ancient art. Il est permis de supposer! "But all his life Loti has made suppositions like these. Does he not, for instance, assume, very gratuitously, that the Mameluke sultans of Egypt took very good care of their tombs, and does he not accuse the British of conspiring to destroy these marvels of architecture. As if the sultan ever lived who cared a snap of his fingers for the mosques and palaces of his predecessors!

While in North Africa, Fromentin had an adventure typically Lotiesque and which may, who knows, have contained the very germ of Asyade. In the shop of a Moorish merchant, he met, one day, a native woman, closely veiled, whose singularly musical voice struck him at once. Later, when the acquaintance had matured, he speaks of that voice in the very terms Loti employs when minutely describing Rarahu and Madame Chrysantheme.

"Hacua's voice is a music. I told you so the day I heard it for the first time. She speaks like birds sing. But, to take any pleasure in her conversation, one must have a love for uncertain melodies and must listen to her as one listens to the rustle of the wind."

What woman will fail to detect in this short paragraph the patronizing, conquering attitude which Loti will later develop until it became, if not a system, at least a feature? Rarahu, Asyade, Madame Chrysantheme, all the graceful figures, the misty remembrances which materialized, one after the other, from their exotic environment, have they not also been listened to as one listens to the rustle of the wind?"
Hagua dies, and this again suggests Loti's endings. Both men, moreover, betray a deep pity for the unfortunate and include all races in their all pervading human fellowship.

If only to point out the magnificent beginnings of a literary feature which the French have perhaps exploited more consistently than any other race, here is a page which Loti might well envy to Fromentin, and which proclaims the painter of the fifties his direct progenitor. It goes without saying that no translation of mine could do justice to so fine a piece of descriptive writing.

"Je me souviens d'une nuit d'hiver, aigre et glaçée, passée dans un petit douar, vers l'extremité du Tell de Constantine. C'était en pleine montagne, et dans un pays des plus durs. J'étais arrivé le soir même après une longue étape. Autour, il n'y avait qu'un terrain pétri de boues, d'ordures et de débris. Le sol était couvert de carcasses d'animaux morts de misère. L'hiver était dur, et dans les petits douars, la détresse était affreuse."

"Toute la nuit, les chèvres et les petits moutons, reflugis le plus près possible des tentes, belèrent de souffrance et toussèrent. Les enfants froid, et ne pouvant dormir, géignaient sous le pauvre abri et les femmes gémissaient en les berçant sans parvenir à chasser ni le froid ni l'insomnie. Inquiétés par le feu de ma lanterne, les chiens entouraient ma tente. Dès que ma lumière fut éteinte, leur cercle se recroît encore, et jusqu'au matin, je pus les entendre gratter la terre, passer leur museau sous la toile en reniflant, et je sentis sur ma figure leur haleine de bête fauve."

Indeed, if any proof that Fromentin is not merely a painter hypnotised by color and form was still needed, we have it here where he saw
deeper than the external appearance and where none of the essential characteristics escaped him. After pages like these, we will regret that he should have resisted the temptation of becoming a traveller. Had he, like Pierre Loti, chosen to disseminate his soul all over the planet, he might have found, if not among his immediate contemporaries, at least in the generation that followed his, a larger and more appreciative following. It is indeed possible that an art not so chastised and self-contained, not so preoccupied with not overstepping the boundaries of good taste, would have given his natural genius a better chance to express itself in one of those unforgettable pages that live forever in the history of a race; and he would not have been denied the écrans de librairie which counts for so much with the modern reviewer. It is also certain that our insatiable thirst for document would have been highly gratified had he elected to write one of those books which thinly veil an autobiography, for there will be many among us who will complain that the "Ego nomim Leo" of Dominique is not loud enough. Yet we can understand his reticence. He was tempted. Climate and local color, the voluptuousness, the dolce far niente of the East, gratifying as they must be to a man of his temperament, aroused in him emotions which he instinctively distrusted. They intruded upon the canons of his taste; they were unfrench, and when he chose to remain merely a tourist, it was merely because he feared to reappear before a French public with the accent of a foreigner.

To this day, he remains the clearest, the easiest to understand of French Orientalists; no small merit for a pioneer, for a painter who died unaware that his first two books were not merely the result of an amateurish effort. Had he only taught us to measure Exotism with the
help of classical standards that we would not read him without profit, but he did more; he was first in perceiving the pitfalls which African nature opens under the feet of the Northern emigrant. He resisted; but it was not without a struggle; and perhaps we may wonder what would have happened had he spent years instead of months in the countries of the sun. Let us not forget that Loti proclaims himself a Moslem in spite of all he experienced in other corners of the planet, and let us turn; there is no stronger case of denaturalization available, to the strange adventure of Isabelle Eberhardt.
Isabelle Eberhardt.

Isabelle Nathalie Dorothee d'Eberhardt was twenty years of age when, in 1897, she set foot in North Africa for the first time. Her mother came to these sunny shores in search of health; but she failed to find there anything beyond the peace of the soul which led her, on her death bed, to embrace the religion of Islam. After her death, Isabelle Eberhardt went back to Geneva, and spent there the few months which elapsed before the death of Alexander Trophimowski, her great uncle. From him, she inherited a little fortune, which she devoted to the realization of a dream which she had caressed since the first communion of her sensitive and independent nature with the countries of the sun.

Seldom, if ever, has a literary career, the career which perhaps counts most in the realm of sensitiveness, and tells more completely the history of a soul in the grip of a sensual and exotic wanderlust, illustrated more completely the hidden meaning of the Greek fable of the lotus eaters. The lure of the road, the yearning after the caress of the wind in the dusty solitude of virgin plains, the yielding to the charm of unlimited spaces ablaze with light, the charm of sunstuck horizons whose immobility appease all restlessness, this had not been met in a woman since the death of Lady Stanhope, and Lady Stanhope was not a writer.

The 14th of June 1899, Isabelle Eberhardt was back in Tunis where she bought a horse, purchased a native costume, and under the assumed and masculine name of Mahmoud, started for the Sahara desert.

Her strange mode of life could not fail to give rise to suspicion. The military authorities who held the border in the hollow of
their hand, inquired from her whether she was not a methodist mission-
ary in disguise and let it be known that evangelistic work among the
natives was not looked upon with favor in high quarters. When Isabelle
Eberhardt declared that she was a Moslem and that this life suited her
Russian temperament, they still failed to understand, and the watch
instituted by a military oligarchy jealous of its power and prerogatives
became stricter than ever.

Yet, she did not contemplate then anything more tragic than her
approaching marriage to an intelligent, handsome and well educated non-
commissioned officer of native cavalry. A romantic courtship, a l’indi-
gène, with domestic duties looming on the horizon of the sanddunes,
explained, at that date, her lack of literary activity. Isabelle Eberhardt
has ever known how to live her life; and the quiet heroism with which
she was, later, to face misfortune is our surest warrant for believing
that she knew then how to enjoy happiness to the full.

The details of this unusual love affair are unknown beyond the
fact, recorded by Isabelle herself, that the wedding was celebrated
according to the Islamic ritual, and not according to French law, a fact
fraught with possibilities, as will appear later on.

Although she had as yet written very little beyond some notes of
travel which had been communicated to various newspapers, it seems that
she had already acquired some sort of a notoriety by the opportunity
which now came to her to antagonize the high-handed methods of the
military Bureaux Arabes who handled native affairs with a severity not
always impartial. Be as it may, we find that, in June 1901, she felt call-
ed upon to defend herself against the attacks of a part of the
Algerine press.

"Vous m’avez fait l’honneur", she wrote to the editor of the
Denâche Algérienne," de m'attribuer une certaine influence religieuse sur les indigènes du cercle de Tougourth. Non, je ne suis pas une politicienne. Je ne suis l'agent d'aucun parti, car, par moi, ils ont tous égalem ent tort de se donner comme ils le font. Je ne suis qu'une rêveuse qui veut vivre loin du monde, vivre de la vie libre et nomade, pour essayer ensuite de dire ce qu'elle a vu, et peut-être de communiquer à quelques uns le frisson mélancolique et charme qu'elle ressent en face des splendeurs tristes du Sahara. Je ne désire qu'un bon cheval, fidèle et myst compagne d'une vie rêveuse et solitaire, quelques serviteurs à peine plus compliqués que ma monture, et vivre en paix, le plus loin possible de l'agitation, stérile à mon humble avis, du monde civilisé on je me sens de trop."

Here we have an attitude towards life which is properly contemplative. We must recognize in it an intellectual nihilism in which the several restlessness of Rousseau, Bernardin, Chateaubriand and Loti have only contributed the literary material. It possesses an Olympian calmness which French literature had not known hitherto outside of the contribution of Lecerle de Lisle. Isabelle Eberhardt has dreamt of a Nirvana of light where nothing moves, but I am much mistaken if she does not merely represent more completely than others a tendency, an attitude, a habit of thought which she borrowed from native life and which has largely become the common patrimony of all African writers.

Very unexpectedly, she found herself expelled from the Algerine Territory. This occurred during a temporary vacancy in the Governor's office, at a time when the military caste was insufficiently controlled by civil government; and no time was lost in ridding the Southern
districts of a representative of the press who spoke Arabic, who had
listened a great deal, and perhaps was in a position to tell too much.
Isabelle Eberhardt vainly sought to avail herself of the only means at
her disposal to evade the consequences of the administrative order. Her
husband was a naturalized Frenchman, and she knew that no Frenchwoman
could without due process of law, be expelled from a colony which
elects members to the French parliament and which enjoys all the metropo-
-litan privileges. She therefore claimed French citizenship, but only to
be told that the marriage which she had contracted a few months previ-
ously was merely the religious Moslem ceremony customary among na-
tives. The French code had not been consulted and could not be expected
to protect her.

Technically, she was not married. Her husband and herself the
sought to regularize their situation by marrying again before the civil
authorities, but a new objection was opposed to this new attempt. A non-
commissioned officer could not, in those days, marry without the consent
of his colonel; and for obvious reasons, this consent, so seldom
withheld, was not granted in this case; and despite the protests of the
Algerine press, she was compelled to take the steamer which was to
leave her, despairing and penniless, on the French shore of the Medi-
terranean.

In Marseilles, unable to find employment in a newspaper's office
she knew destitution at its worst, worse, and sank immediately to the lev-
el of the Italian dockers. The novel which she was to publish later
under the title of Trinarijor, is most of the time a transposition of
her adventures in those dark days of total penury. She was compelled to
share the degrading labor of stevedores and longshoremen. But happily for her, she was tall and robust. Garbed as a boy, her bust concealed in a sailor's cash, she worked for months at the loading and unloading of merchantmen, ate her bread on the barrels of oil, wine and salted fish lining the Joliette dock, and, for want of tobacco, smoked the leaves of the plane trees.

The grim resolution with which, in this hour of trial, she accepted the unavoidable, marks the rue virility of her nature, marks her as belonging to the genuine cossack type which was to become so marked in her later works. Fortunately, this period of probation was drawing to an end. Her husband, still a noncommissioned officer in a regiment of Spahis, wrote to Marseilles, asking to exchange places with somebody holding the same rank in a regiment of hussars. As service among African troops entails many privileges denied to metropolitan cavalry, the permutation was soon arranged, and Sliman Ebnhi joined his wife.

Then he renewed, with the colonel of his new regiment, the application he had vainly made a few months earlier, the right to regularize his situation by marrying his wife before the French magistrate was this time granted him, and Isabelle Eberhardt at last acquired French citizenship.

Nothing now could keep her away from Algeria. The period of enlistment of her husband was drawing to its close. In a few months he would be returned to civil life and would find employment as an interpreter. Meantime, it behooved her to keep the wolf away from the door by resuming her occupation as a journalist. A few days after her remarriage,
she reappeared triumphant in Algiers, where Victor Barrucand associated her to the permanent staff of his newspaper: l'Akbar.

Thus far, Isabelle Eberhardt had published little beyond an unimportant novel entitled Yamina, interesting more on account of the gift of observation it revealed than because of the polish of its style. Fond of literature as she had always been, it would seem that she was too much of a Russian and of a Moslem not to prefer revery to persistent effort. Primarily, she was a contemplative. The uselessness of all human effort, she felt perhaps with greater force than any of her generation, and if we see her becoming so suddenly active in the literary field, it is, as has been intimated before, that the wolf was at the door.

Yet, we might have expected such a revolt on the part of the creature who had supported destitution in Marseilles with such virility. Specifically, her revolt took the shape of the autobiographical novel of Trimardeur which, when first published bore the title of: A la Dérive. This was followed at a short interval by the appearance in the same newspaper of the notes of travel which Eugène Fasquelle was to publish later in bookform under the title of Noted de Route. Meanwhile, Isabelle Eberhardt was also contributing, in La Dépêche Algérienne, to the Chroniques which are such features of French newspapers.

Neither of these works brought her fame or even the large monetary success which so frequently takes its place. To the last, Isabelle Eberhardt was to count her admirers on her fingers. She belongs to the set of writers whom the French class as documentary, and whose list, already long, from Cyrano de Bergerac to Senancourt, included a
score of writers in the last century, among them such delicate artists as Paul Louis Philippe and Jules Renard. They remain the choice few, endowed with true originality, who, frequently die too young. They are the pioneers who blaze new trails and whose mark is all too frequently found on brother craftsmen who wax fat on the spoils.

Towards the close of the year 1901, Sliman Emahi left the army. Returning to Algeria, he soon obtained a position of secretary and interpreter in the city hall of Tenes. His wife joined him. But, in the little Algerine town, divided against itself on all questions of etiquette, life soon became unendurable to the woman who had lived the life of the nomad and of the longshoreman.

Isabelle Eberhardt withstood for two years the attacks and the persecutions of which she was the victim. Then, unable to bear her burden any longer, she accepted an offer to act as guide and interpreter to a party of newspaper men who were planning a visit to the Moroccan border. Then, as it was her intention to push further into Morocco than the rest of the party, she told her friends that perhaps she would never be seen again, and, on the day she left for the South, she placed in the hands of Victor Barrucand her papers and correspondence.

"Au cas où il m'arriverait malheur, vous débrouilleriez tout cela," she said, "et vous vous en servirez pour composer mon caisson funèbre."

She came back, but not the whole way. After six months spent in the solitude of Kenadsa, she was driven by Saharan fever to rejoin the frontier post of Ain-Sefra. Ain-Sefra is an important military post spread on bottom lands, and surrounded by barren mountains on every side. The first rains of autumn usually fall there with great violence, and, on
the 24th of October 1904 a freshet washed out the settlement.

On that day, Isabelle Eberhardt, then twenty seven years of age, found her death. Her husband was at her side when the swollen torrent, crushing the frail obstacle of the earthen levee, broke upon the hapless to wa. In the account of the accident published on October 30th in La Depeche Algerienne, Isabelle's husband tells us that the young woman kept her presence of mind to the last. Facing the flood of mud she saw coming towards them: "I can swim. I shall take care of you!" she said.

Intending to make a raft, she was already tearing planks from the roof, when the adobe house, a flimsy construction of native make, caved down upon her.

Her body was recovered two days later. General Liautey, later governor of Morocco and a member of the French Academy, with the fine feeling which caused him to be universally acknowledged as the most thoroughly likable of French military men, directed that she should be buried in the Moslem cemetery of Ain -Sefra, facing the South which she loved, in the driest, purest air in the world, asleep in the light after the most tragic adventure of which literary women have left us any record.

The manuscript of her last work, inbedded in mud, and written on coarse wrapping paper, was found in an earthen vase. Partly destroyed and very brittle, it constituted at best an interesting chronicle of what she had seen in Kenadsa. Victor Barrucand had great difficulty in connecting its different parts by means of the notes which its author had left in his hands at the time of her departure. Yet, such as it is, this incomplete work is a masterpiece. Isabelle Eberhardt's image lives in her reflections on life and love, and the scenic and picturesque
documentation of the book is such that *Dans l'Ombre Chaud de l'Islam* may be said to already constitute a historical source, not of events, but of manners. The North African of the past and of the present will, in future ages, emerge from its pages with perhaps as great a relief as the fourteenth century Frenchman from the chronicle of Froissart.

Isabelle Eberhardt knew so thoroughly the native races that the types of which she wrote never repeat each other. In clean cut, incisive sentences full of Oriental imagery, she describes very dramatically the joyless life of the fellah and his incessant, poorly paid labor. The dark tent where the women grind semolina in a mortar, unravel the many strings of their loom sand, like the witches of Macbeth, watch with eyes reddened by acrid smoke the large digesters of hammered brass where the _chourba_ of the family is cooking; the keeping of the scant flock of shorn ewes in the river bed; the wife and the donkey dragging the plow in front of the indiscriminate male whose reed raises the dust on one and then on the other; the paramour whose daring does not stop short of entering the tent where the jealous husband sleeps with his gun; the disruption of family life brought about by contact with the European settler; money lending on the market, the progress of alcoholism among the tribes, the ruin of the family followed by the enlistment of the younger son among mercenary troops, these are her favorite themes. Isabelle Eberhardt was a Russian. As such, she felt and depicted misery with the large humaneness of a Dostoievski and a Tolstoi.

Much would remain unsaid if we now neglected the subjective undertone of her works, if we failed to point out that her whole literary
output is impregnated with contemplative nihilism. As a writer, if not as a horseman, she was afflicted with true Slavic lack of confidence; but she made up for her incapacity to undertake by unlocking for us the magnificient gardens of a truly sensitive soul. When barely twenty years of age she wrote to the native scholar Abd-ul-Wahab a letter where we discover that she was already faithful to the lesson taught by the Greek philosopher.

"J'écris parce que j'aime le processus de création littéraire, j'écris comme j'aime, parce que telle est ma vraie destinée probablement. Et c'est ma seule vraie consolation. Il y a en moi des choses que je ne comprends pas encore où que je ne sais que commencer à comprendre. Et ces mystères la sont fort nombreux. Cependant, je me dépense ma énergie pour mettre en pratique l'aphorisme stoïcien: "Connais toi toi-même." C'est une tâche difficile, attrayante et douloureuse. Ce qui me fait le plus de mal, c'est la prodigieuse mobilité de ma nature, et l'instabilité vraiment désolante de mes états d'esprit qui se succèdent les uns aux autres avec une rapidité insoucie. Cela me fait souffrir, et je n'y connais d'autre remède que la contemplation muette de la nature, loin des hommes, face à face avec le grand inconcevable, unique refuge des âmes en détresse."

Had she lived, her works might have been greater than her life, full to the brim as it was. Time, which taught her the perfection of literary style, might have taught her to husband her energies until her generosity of soul could be directed into those channels where flow all immortal literature. She died twenty years too soon.

Sympathetic to all revolted souls, she had no political creed and she took less interest in the utopian dreams of would-be-reformers.
than in the training of the soul. She held that beauty and happiness do not exist outside of us, that both are essentially subjective. Convinced that neither will appear at the command of the seers who dream of a future social order, her understanding of freedom was a passionate desire to unshackle personality. This tendency was not new to the East where contemplation so frequently goes hand in hand with ascetism. The doctrine of renunciation is the very quintessence of Sufism. Isabelle Eberhardt has merely carried further than other Europeans living in the East the horror of useless exertion, the desire to free the spirit by dissociating it from the body. Her individualism relied on evasion rather than revolt; and when she took the burdens of the horseman to tour the Southern tribes she was an escaping prisoner.

And if she deserves an epitaph, it is surely these lines which she penned herself in an hour of fever.

"Etre sain de corps, pur de toute souillure, après de grands bains d'eau fraîche; être simple et croire, n'avoir jamais douté, n'avoir jamais lutté contre soi-même, atteindre, sans crainte et sans impatience, l'heure inévitable de l'éternité, voilà la paix, le bonheur musulman, et, qui sait, voici peut-être bien la sagesse."

"Ce que tant de rêveurs ont cherché, des simples l'ont trouvé. Par delà la science et le progrès des siècles, sous les rideaux levés de l'avenir, je vois passer l'homme futur... Et je comprends aussi qu'on puisse finir dans la paix et le silence de quelque zaouia du Sud, finir en extase, sans regrets ni desirs, en face des horizons splendides."
Louis Bertrand.

We have no direct record of Louis Bertrand's first impressions when he landed in Algiers. But he must have felt with tremendous force the shock which Fromentin dreaded and was so careful to avoid, for, years later, when he wrote Le Jardin de la Mort, he speaks of meeting, in the Sahara, a Swedish painter, just arrived in North Africa, who waxed eloquent in his praises of the country. Then he adds significantly:

"Je ne puis m'empêcher de transcrire cette profession de foi qui exprime, en somme, ce que j'ai senti moi-même en arrivant en Algérie".

This confession, in which we might choose to see the counterpart of Fromentin's theory of Orientalism in art, confirms, on the whole, the conclusions already formulated while studying the case of Isabelle Eberhardt. As we are dealing here with a literary temperament very far removed from that of the two representative writers who precede him, it might prove interesting to note the points of contact. The confession of the Swedish painter runs thus in the main lines.

"You see, I am now convinced that it takes Northerners like you and I to understand the countries of the South. Southerners are either calloused by climate, or else are too easily satisfied with the joy of life. It may be that their senses are too eager, that their craving for immediate action is too imperious to leave them time to be interested interested in their surroundings. Even the sensitiveness of the most artistically inclined among them has been dulled by the continuity of brilliant images and the superabundance of voluptuous emotions. All the gamut of graded tones, a quantity of objects which force themselves
upon our attention utterly fail to strike them, while we import here a brand new sensitiveness which has been so often balked and thwarted by the rigors of our climate that here it blossoms like a delicate plant transplanted in a more clement soil. Last, but not least, we owe to the habit of constant introspection bled in us by our fog and our drizzle, a capacity for revery which enables us to forget our habitual self, to leave it home, so to speak, so that we may take part in the pageant outside of ourselves. This is why I contend that the eye of the Northerner, if at all trained to observation, is far more fit to analyze and to reflect than the eye of the Meridional."

"Now, I shall not conceal from you that that which intoxicates us, we Barbarians, in your African land, is the violence, the frenzy of the sensations. Here, our taste is satisfied. The lines of the landscape are rigid and clean-cut, the tonalities are of an extraordinary intensity. Forms enter our eyes willy-nilly, with a furia which causes our very marrow to tingle. And what unlooked for and disconcerting contrasts, in this country of living antithesis! Do you know another land at once as reposeful and as brutal, as sober and as coarse, as grandiose and as graceful? No doubt, you will tell me that Northern nature is capable of effects as powerful, and you will point to the fantastic and gorgeous tonalities of our Northern lights. But bear in mind that this magic is an exception. While color here is the marvel of all hours of the day, in the North it always strikes a false note. To sum up, it is romantic!"

"But, above all, Northern nature is mournful. While Africa is full of joy, the North, even when it smiles, is tinged with sadness. In direct contrast with the warmth which here exalts all the energies, depression lurks in the icy blasts of our skies. You remember Ibsen and those sentences of his on the ever ending rainy days where nothing smiles or shines, when a yearning for death creeps into your soul with
the penetrating dampness. I feel in my veins all the shivers, all the longings for warmth of a race whose teeth have been chattering for centuries. There never will shine over the African plains enough sun to melt the ice which has accumulated in the blood of my ancestors!"

No more, certainly will be needed to place Louis Bertrand where he belongs among the impressionists. His direct literary ancestors may include Zola, but he has not escaped the spell of the Goncourts. And exactly as impressionism in painting signifies faithfulness of representation and painstaking efforts in reproducing the atmosphere coupled with a horror of all conventionalities of arrangement, we note in his first works surprising qualities of characterization marred to some extent by a tendency towards ultra naturalism. In *Le Sang des Races*, *La Cina*, *Rêvée le Bistre aîné*, all of them studies of low life among the North African Spaniards, Louis Bertrand undertook to delineate some unusual and not oversympathetic types. But whatever may be said of his choice of models it must be confessed that the characterization teems with life. An exquisite, and wholly personal quality is also apparent from the first: brilliant skies which Monet might have painted, a marvelous atmosphere dazzling with a light which never before had been put into words. This quality, Louis Bertrand properly owes to the African climate, and it is a good half of his talent.

But in surrendering himself entirely to the influence of climate, Mr. Bertrand seems to have been moved by a love of Latin antiquity which reached its full development during years of brilliant professorship in the lycée of Algiers. Instead of combating the influence which he felt at work unrooting him from the soil of his native Lorraine, he deliberately
made up his mind,—and what a contrast between this attitude and that of his famous countryman, Maurice Barrès, to eat of the lotus, and he latin jumped with his eyes open. To this love of antiquity coupled with the keenest appreciation of what the present holds of pictorial and color-ful, we owe an interpretation of North Africa that stands absolutely without a peer in the field of descriptive literature: Le Jardin de la Mort.

It might be asked why a man who appears in his first books as the glorifier of vigorous life, the exponent of the new latinity which, in Algeria, is slowly crowding the native off the seashore, suddenly renounced his project of leaving after him an exhaustive record of immigrant types to turn to the study of solitudes strewn with Roman ruin. But Louis Bertrand tells us himself that his ambition to link the hope-ful present with the unforgettable past, to restitute to the new French Empire "ses titres de noblesse" was not born in a day, and that he did not start, one fine morning, with the purpose of discovering an unknown country. The genesis of his development as a writer is not difficult to reconstitute. During the embryonic stage, he looked around him with eyes so unsophisticated that he saw Algeria as everybody else saw it, as an un-finished job, a playground for colonial experiments marked by the struggle between the patient individualism of the Latin colonist and governmental regulation and blundering. But, little by little, the scales fell from his eyes. The main fact, disentangled from all complications of exoticism and local color, at last monopolised his attention: Algeria is a Mediterranean country not essentially different from Andalusia, Sicily or Greece. It is the same climate, the same vegetation, the same fauna.
and it was not surprising that Provençals and Languedociens, Spaniards, Italians, Corsicans, Maltese and Mahonese should have resolved to live here a typically Latin life.

This life, Mr. Bertrand has excellently described in the three novels spoken of above. Algiers has much in common with Marseilles, Barcelona and Valencia. Tunis recalls Palermo, Messina and Naples. The first among French literary men, Louis Bertrand has shown us in Algeria a Christian land, and his first books are attempts to glorify Latin renaissance in a country which remained Latin until the fourth century of our era.

The writers who had preceded him, attracted by North African picturesque, and hampered by a lingering remembrance of romanticism, had concerned themselves with the vanquished rather than with the victor. Louis Bertrand accuses them: "de s'être précipité vers le tire-l'œil du costume indigène, vers le fragile décor d'une civilisation misérable et agonisante." And he prides himself upon having rectified this injustice, upon having pointed out that, if sixty years after the conquest the face of the land had been totally changed, this could not have been accomplished without an enormous expenditure of labor and patience on the part of the new master of the hitherto barren soil.

We might already conclude that Mr. Bertrand is too much of a Latin ever to approach with sympathy the study of Moslem psychology. But in a land where the native outnumber the European ten to one and breeds immeasurably faster, there cannot very well be any agonizing civilization, and Mr. Bertrand does not seem to have asked himself whether these growing millions will fail to respond to the call of the new age, and whether, with half a continent to supply them with the raw material they will not enter at an early date the field of industrial competition. This implies, of course, that the North African native must to some extent become lati-
-nized. But what happened once in history can happen again. It would there-
fore seem that, in summarily disposing of the claims of a miserable and
agonizing civilization, Louis Bertrand labored under the impression that
in Roman times, there had been an absolute identity of customs in the
Latium and in Mauretania. And in failing to realize that the Latin colonies
of that period really took as much as he gave, and that, between Rome and
Carthage, there had been an exchange of material civilization which left
the mentality of the native race substantially what it was before all
conquest, and what it still is, the author of Le Sang des Races does not
seem to have seen as deep and as far into human nature as Isabelle
Eberhardt.

But, if he has imperfectly faced the problem of the future, with
what ascent he speaks of the past! After pointing to North Africa as the
melting pot: "ou se mêlent tous les types de race latine, où les diffé-
rences d'origine et de tempérément s'exagèrent par le contraste et se
developpent par les nécessites de la concurrence, où les caractères
s'affirment avec une vigueur souvent extrême sous l'action d'un climat
prodigieusement instable et violent", he conceived the project of study-
ing at close range, far from the centers of population, in the soli-
tudes of the interior, the nature which worked out such changes, and he
embarked upon the pilgrimage which was to result in the writing of this
curious book: Le Jardin de la Mort.

In the table lands lying to the South of Algiers, back of the
Djurdjura range, he found so much light that it is the verse of the psal-
mist; "Amicus lumine sicut vestimento," that he inscribes on the title
page. And seldom was a quotation more appropriate. In this book, all
oppositions of light and shade are noted with an acuity of vision, and
translated into words with a rectitude of expression so admirable that,
after perusal of the work, we will be tempted to accuse Loti of vagueness
and we will reprove Teophile Gautier with the tricks learned during his
apprenticeship as a painter. For instance:

"Transporté par la splendeur unique du spectacle, je sens que c'est
pour cela que je suis venu. À l'infini, la plaine flamboie sous un ruisel-
lement d'or; les moindres objets en sont nimbés. L'étendue est toute rose,
d'un rose qui se dégrade en une infinité de nuances ou qui s'embrase
jusqu'au tons les plus ardents, depuis ce rose détrempe de blanc, ce rose
aérien et pour ainsi dire céleste, ce rose de nuée qui flotte dans les
ciels de Tiepolo, jusqu'à ces roses blondes, ces roses roux dont s'obom-
bront les duvets des chairs féminines, ces rougeurs de braises dont
s'allument les visages fardés et comme incendiées de désirs dans les toiles
mythologiques de Boucher... Cette opulence, cette joie des couleurs est un
délire pour l'œil. La volupté en est si intense et si délicate que mes
yeux eux-mêmes me semblent devenus des choses précieuses."

From Rousseau to Loti, nobody, to my knowledge, ever described
nature with so much sumptuousity and with a finer feeling. The lines quoted
above have the flowing quality of good music. Above all, Louis Bertrand is
an arranger of dreams, an edifier of airy architectures; and when we
contrast this with the stern, squalid pictures he has left us of Raphael
the teamster, of Pepote the fisherman, of Carmelo the popular orator, and
of Puig, the archbishop, the range of his power of characterization will
appear all the greater. Being primarily the relation of a voyage among
ruins and solitudes, Le Jardin de la Mort contains unforgettable pages on
the magic of light effects. But others, and not the least admirable, are
devoted to an evocation of the Roman greatness of the past.

This is suggested to Bertrand by the Roman ruins which, in North
Africa, are more impressive than anywhere else because their character is
not altered by the vicinity of modern constructions, as is so often the case in France, Spain and Italy. The stamp with which the genius of Rome
marked for eternity these provinces which once ranked among the most
active, the most cultured and the richest of the empire is unmistakable.
With Bertrand, we are made to rub elbows and converse familiarly with
personnages which had almost ceased to appear human as they were handed
down from scribe to scribe. Indeed, we will find them alive, these
African ruins! and the people that move among them only perpetuate, without
being aware of it, the thoughts and the gestures of the heroes who
established here the foundation of Roman power.

In Italy, Spain and France, the feverish activity of a material
civilisation has very certainly dwarfed the ruins. In North Africa nothing
has changed. Even the Bedouins who roam in the neighborhood of Thimgad
and Tebessa recall, with their cheap cotton gamadourah and their white
woollen burnous the genus togata of old times.

Indeed, the modern city itself, with its narrow streets smelling
of wine, garlic and rancid oil, differs in no essential particular from
the Latin city in which Plautus set the gross, the boisterous prototypes
of his comedies. The modern barber shop is frequently the theater where
Louis Bertrand, to gratify his mania of studying Latin types, observes and
notes down reminiscences of the play of mini and attellami and takes an
interest in the lowest comedy with the true Latin spirit which never
dissociated the lower from the higher man.
In this connection, we might add that Bertrand’s jocularity is frequently Rabelaisian. For instance, when he describes the scenery of Thimgad, he speculates on the witty sayings which may have caused laughter in this sanctuary of Crepitu, im exactly the same mood as Monsieur Bergeret, when confronted with the cynical chalk effigy proclaiming the unfaithfulness of his wife takes his misfortune as befits the lineal descendant of Professor Pangloss, and, led astray by an association of ideas, passes a scholarly judgement on the meaning of certain graffitti chiselled on a wall by a Roman soldier.

Shall we say that Monsieur Bergeret’s propensity to live his life in a world no less real, even if somewhat distant from our own is matched by Bertrand’s knack of transporting his contemporaries back twenty centuries into some crowded Suburra of Carthage and of Rome, to show us a past which we can touch, which we can feel, a past reeking with smells, and yet no more disconcerting perhaps as the familiar Lower New York.

We read: "Voici la taverne odorante et graisseuse, avec ses guirlandes de roses et de jasmins, l’_uncta copina_ des satires d’Horace et de Juvenal. Voici le comique ingénú des anciens en sa simplicité enfantine: giffles, coups de pieds et coups de trique, gestes obscènes, propos crapuleux, drôles qu’on rosse, vieillards qu’on berne, parasites battus et contés! Les accessoires et les compagnons y sont toujours: le baton d’abord, l’esclave, le portefaix, la courtisane, et l’âne, le petit âne rusé et lascif qui remplit de ses tours les métamorphoses d’Apulée après avoir amusé les vieux conteurs d’Ionie... C’est pourquoi, en aucun pays latin les ruines ne sont plus évocatrices que dans l’Afrique du Nord.”

It must already have appeared that Mr. Bertrand, while possessed of extreme strength when he deals with forceful and often squalid realities, is nevertheless able to express, as perhaps no man did before
him, delightful emotions of a purely aesthetic order. This is a union of qualities seldom enough met in any writer to warrant a pause. Much, of course is to be ascribed to the powers of the interpreter. But after having also perused works by Maupassant, Lorrain and the Marguerite brothers in which I find a like feeling and qualities of the same order, I am tempted to conclude that, for all the superior qualities which, as an African writer, marked Mr. Bertrand as an object for this study, he is no exception when he links contemplation with realism. Fromentim already led us to expect this, and substantially the same characteristics mark the books of Loti and Isabelle Eberhardt. This is, no doubt, because realism has singular attractions in a land where passions are so naked and necessities so concrete. For the same climatic reasons, we have come to expect only realism from the Spaniards. But the love of contemplation is not a Spanish characteristic. It is an unchristian outlook, a new state of mind born from direct contact with civilizations who look more frequently towards the past than towards the present, and who practice spiritual renunciation as a voluptuous form of mystic ascetism. Since Rousseau, French literature has been frequently descriptive, but the noting of light effects for its own sake, contemplation as a substitute for opium and hasheesh, this was unknown before the advent of the North African writers.

I greatly regret that the limits of this study cannot be stretched to include an extensive discussion of Louis Bertrand's chief title to lasting fame. I am aware that, in neglecting the Saint Augustine, I miss an opportunity to connect its author with the author of Salammbo, and to dwell at some length on the African element in the works of Gustave Flaubert. But a comparison between the pictures of Carthaginian life left us by both authors would perhaps be open to the criticism that it unnecessarily overloads the discussion, and that, after all, five centuries of Roman
civilization separate the Carthage of Hamilcar from the Carthage of the 
African rhetor. A single point ought to retain our attention. Mr. Bertrand 
reminds us that, when we turn with disdain, and often in horror from 
the chaos of the Low Empire, we sometimes forget that we ourselves pro-
ceed from this troublous epoch. The Augustin we find in his works, albeit 
an African, is very decidedly an Occidental. This is not without importance 
when we ask ourselves whether North Africa will not be the rock which 
will wreck French ideals. It is assuredly reassuring to note that the third 
century had much in common with ours, that a period of weakness, cowardice 
and corruption can also be a time of frantic activity, fecund in endeavours 
and adventures of all sorts, and where morality triumphed as often as 
the adventurers. Augustin's sensitiveness is ours, since it is the sensitiveness 
of the periods of extreme culture. With him, as with us, introspection has 
multiplied the causes of suffering; and Louis Bertrand, who sees in him 
the ideal of the African Latin, on the whole permits us to close the 
book with the hope that, if East is East, and West is West, it is by no 
means impossible that they should approximate each other.
Conclusion

Were we now to ask ourselves whether there is, at the date of the present writing, a North African literature, we will have to admit that, strictly speaking, no North African worthy of notice has, as yet, made himself the interpreter of his native land, since Jean Richepin, the only Algerian who, so far, rose to a commanding position among the literary men of the day does not reflect in his themes the familiar surroundings among which he spent his youth.

But there are many reasons for this silence. A period of construction and organization is seldom productive of literary masterpieces, and when this process of adjustment is complicated by the necessity of providing for the future of an alien race, the conqueror's energies are so absorbed by life's struggle as to leave him little time in which to formulate a new philosophy. We may therefore have to wait another generation before a native speaks with some authority on purely African subjects, and attempts to reconcile the divergences we now observe between the Moor and his conqueror.

In the meantime, we cannot overlook the extent to which has pro-
gressed the process of adjustment between France and its colony. The new relation has already reflected on French standards of taste, and Fromentin, who so aptly defined these standards strayed from them often enough to impress us with the fact that North Africa would not allow itself to be shelved, in French minds, in the same pigeonhole with the countries it resembles most: Egypt and the Near East. The contact was so immediate that the rules the painter writer lays down in regard to Orientalism in Art and Literature proved far too narrow and were immediately broken by his successors.
Louis Bertrand has excellently described how North Africa impresses the Northerner. The violence, the frenzy of sensations which he himself felt on his arrival, were the very things which Fromentin dreaded, and the same element of flaming contrasts and crude antithesis to which Isabelle Eberhardt yielded without a struggle, and he who reads may find again in Maupassant, Lorrain and the Marguerite brothers.

Shall we now intimate that the intemperance of such oppositions will make for strength in the same measure as it will weaken taste? We will not be surprised at this discovery when we remember that intemperance was ever characteristic of the Semitic race, and that it moulded the national character of the Spaniard.

But, in a literature chiefly remarkable for its sanity, there is no immediate danger of a reversal of all traditions in regard to taste—which so frequently outlives vitality,—and we may acclaim the introduction of a new element of vigor. At least once in history, French Literature dried up and shrivelled while prostrate in abject adoration of time worn standards. It was saved by the introduction of the new elements of romanticism and realism; and, in both cases, sobriety prevailed after the first disorders of intoxication. We may reasonably expect that this will happen again. In the meantime, we can hail with some exaltation of the spirit the introduction of a new, colorful and sumptuous material in the literary stores of a race which, so far, has proven its aptitude to trim, arrange, and present in an acceptable form the disparate elements which it borrowed from the foreigner.

France has found, in the pure light of the African table land, a distinctly new element. I am, of course, aware that its importance will, at, first, be contested. But this will be chiefly because the education
of the eye is yet to be made, and because, in the realm of color, the literary man has not kept pace with the painter.

Impressionism is a literary, as well as an artistic, fact, and the world of pure light is as yet unexplored. It seems highly significant that its magic should have uniformly affected the North African writers. While many among us profess that they can understand the feeling of the Japanese who goes to sit in his garden in order to contemplate his peach tree in full bloom, it would be gross illogic to deny the extraordinary merit of the successful effort Bertrand made when he attempted to convey the impression he received while gazing upon the rose gardens of Cherchell.

Of all the literatures of the day, the French is preeminently descriptive. With the North African writers, it becomes contemplative, a state of affairs worthy of attention since it presupposes a deep alteration in the philosophical outlook. Natural to the native, this attitude has already so permeated the European invader as to raise the question whether it will not infaillibly lead to fatalism with its attendant changes in moral standards.

There seems to be no question that a long sojourn in a country of harsh and sudden changes, in contact with a race without nerves, and as devoid of imagination as the balance of the Semitic groupings, hardens the moral fiber, where stronger passions prevail a looser code of manners may be expected. The extent to which this adjustment of standards will affect French literature remains the problem of the future. But meanwhile, the vocabulary is being enriched. The French accept Semitic words and Semitic ideas with sympathy. They have already conceived the hope of duplicating the miracle of Roman times. They know that, at the close of the struggle which divided Pompey and Cesar, Rome was in full decadence, and far worse off, economically and morally, than France will find itself after the
present war. But they also knew that the wise administration of the Empire, that the wisdom of the Julian laws preserved the life of the Roman community for another six centuries. They propose, therefore to follow the example of antiquity, and to admit North Africa to French right, even as the emperors gave a senate to African cities and paid for the erection of an aqueduct and an amphitheater. For the rest, they are also ready to accept foreign gods, and to enrich their Pantheon with all the idols to be found between the Darfour and the Mediterranean. This is already expressed in the neo-classicism of Bertrand as well as in the Islamism of Isabelle Eberhardt.

Perhaps it is not too early to speculate touching the ultimate significance of so momentous a change. But whoever does so should avoid in his conclusions the excess either of optimism or pessimism. If France, and France alone, had made the crusades, and felt the influence of the Renaissance, we might, to-day, wonder whether French history and literature would not have been essentially different if neither event had taken place. But why such a question when England, Italy, Germany and Spain were affected to a like degree? Whatever the result of the present tendencies, we know that the movement will be paralleled in Egypt and the Near East. We can further rely on the increasing cosmopolitanism of civilization to counter all tendencies which would prove ultra individualistic. Different as the morality of the East may be from our own, we cannot avoid Herbert Spencer's conclusion that it is based on the economic necessities of the people; and since these necessities will ever tend to a level with ours, there seems little reason to fear that France is retracing her historical steps when she shows herself sympathetic to Islam.