

Paul Bowles at the Cultural Crossroads

Mohammed Harrag

Teacher of ESP at the INPT-RABAT (Morocco)

A member of The Research Team on Space & Culture of the Laboratory of Languages, Cultures and Communication at the University
Mohamed I in Oujda/Morocco

Abstract: *This essay seeks to understand and unravel the reasons behind the expatriate American writers'-Paul Bowles is my concern here- disaffection with their civilization and their headlong flight from homeland realities in search of the exotic lure of foreign experiences. Bowles is considered by many critics as an American writer who, through his 'strangeness', 'throwness' and 'lostness', strives to make a name for himself within the literary circle of great American writers by offering a contribution to the world of letters worthy of the acclaim usually ascribed to his contemporaries. His contribution, some critics believe, is one which runs counter to what most avant-garde writers of his time seem to have added to the literature. In a nutshell, Bowles found it quintessential to delve deep into the North African exotic culture in a bid to come up with a new streak of writing that borrows material from a culture dissimilar to his own American culture. What does all this close and intimate relationship to the Moroccan culture make out of the author? Some reviewers of his work talk even of Bowles's 'Moroccaness'. This paper will then explore the author's presumed engagement with the Moroccan culture, and ultimately either substantiate his claim for an accurate portrayal of it or refute it for reasons to do mainly with myopic and superficial representation of the other.*

Keywords: avant-guard, expatriate writers, estrangement, throwness, lostness, Moroccaness

1. Introduction

Because of its rich culture and ancient history, Morocco has always lent itself to tourists' attraction whether these are Europeans or Americans. Chief amongst the American admirers of Morocco's cultural trappings are writers. Paul Bowles is one of the many American writers who fell for the charming magic of a foreign land geographically situated far from the eastern shores of the New World. His literary experience lived in Morocco will be probed throughout this paper, not least because his long settlement in the host country is exceptionally unfamiliar and can then help us better understand the interplay between his culture as lived at home at least up to a certain stage of his life, and that of the host country with both its abnormalities and resemblances to the culture from which Bowles originates. The fact that Bowles' experience in Morocco is unique does not mean that other American writers were ignorant of the appealing magnetism of an exotic Moroccan culture. Gertrude Stein, William Burroughs, Edith Wharton, Jane Ayer (Paul Bowles's wife), to cite only a few, have also been enthralled by the magic-like attractiveness of a culture believed to conjure up in the minds of its visitors feelings of some stepping-back into the romantic and the exotic in a way never seen before. Paul Bowles was the American writer, par excellence, who had dwelt for so long in Morocco and managed to leave a rich and successful legacy. Bowles finds in Morocco a place to which he could resort, to throw himself away from his homeland "USA" which reminded him of painful and sad memories. He borrowed his much drawn-upon concepts of "throwness" and "lostness" from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. For Bowles, his trip through the desert is this kind of *estrangement* into a new and distant land and people, instead of being in a degenerating western civilization. Early on in his literary career, Bowles demonstrated his discomfort and disaffection with the modern world he left behind in America and was adamant that the only way to rid himself of this encroaching modern life was to indulge himself in a culture still untouched by the harmful effects of western civilization, or

at least that is how the author saw it then and there. In this regard, it comes as no surprise that no sooner Bowles immersed himself in the daily discovery and exploration of the cultural components of his host country, he could distinguish between a tourist and a traveller. The former, according to him, stops occasionally in this place or the other of the visited land, and therefore leaves very soon back to his home. The latter is the traveller who spends enough time to visit, investigate and write a detailed report. In Bowles' understanding, the tourist's fleeting and passing wanderings across the country cannot match up to the more investigative and reflective thoughts of a journalist-like traveller eager to spot the missing bits usually uncovered by travelogues and tourist guide books. That Bowles experienced a cold reception from many critics at the time when he was carving out a literary career of his own is hardly ignorable given his avant-gardist tendencies, of the kind reminiscent of his famous avant-garde contemporaries. However, following in the footsteps of other avant-garde writers does not always lead to being a copycat writer. On the contrary, Bowles made it his vocation not to be in another writer's shoes. His writing ushered in a new age in American expatriate literature, one devoted to the portrayal of the other but this time in a rather more radical way than commonly known in the American literary circles of the time. What does all this close and intimate relationship with the Moroccan culture make out of the author? Some reviewers of his work talk even of Bowles's 'Moroccaness'. So was he really engaged in the Moroccan culture to portray a valid and authentic image of it?

2. Bowles and his Avant-Garde Contemporaries

In a surgical fashion worthy of a successful surgeon with a dab hand at spotting the defects ailing a body, Jerome Klinkowitz lays his hands on what ails the American literary tradition throughout its development process from a shallow literary practice concerned mainly with superficial issues of subjective or objective representation to a far deeper and

divisive movement reflecting the new and challenging mood of the era, especially one taking an interest in the priority of the subject as opposed to matters of object. Klinkowitz's dissecting endeavors are particularly made visible and strongly felt when he says that,

American fiction in the 1970s had stood at the brink of degeneration or transformation, of death or rebirth, according to which critical school one heeds. By the end of the previous decade its self-consciously problematic nature, dating back to Hawthorne's prefaces and Howells' theology of realism, clearly had reached the point of crisis. The issues were representation and mimesis—with one group of novelists and critics insisting that the true art of fiction lay in the writing, and the other more interested in what was written *about*. The division was much deeper than the earlier, nineteenth century debate between romanticism and realism, for the question ran deeper than the imaginative versus documentary approaches to one's subject. The need for subject was now under question. [Jerome Klinkowitz (1980, 125)]

In light of Klinkowitz's quote, one gets the impression that American writers of the time were greatly desperate for a fresh subject on which to base their fictions and about which they could write new narratives of their own making. Bowles was doubtless compared to the *avant-garde* writers in that he was striving to find new ways of literary productions instead of rehearsing what others wrote. To shed light on this new trend in the art production, the *avant-garde*, Richard Kostelanetz furnishes the following encompassing definition about it:

[The] term *avant-garde* refers to those out front, forging a path that others will take. Initially coined to characterize the shock troops of an army, the epithet passed over into art. Used precisely, *avant-garde* should refer, first, to rare work that satisfies three discriminatory criteria: it transcends current conventions in crucial respects, establishing discernible distance between itself and the mass of current practices, it will necessarily take considerable time to find its maximum audience; and it will probably inspire future, comparably advanced endeavors. Only a small minority can ever be *avant-garde*; for once the majority has caught up to something new, what is genuinely *avant-garde* will, by definition, be someplace else.

As a temporal term, *avant-garde* characterizes art that is "~~a~~head of its time"—that is beginning something—while "~~d~~ecadent" art, by contrast, stands at the end of a prosperous development. —~~A~~ademic" refers to art that is conceived according to rules that are learned in a classroom; it is temporally post decadent. Whereas decadent art is created in expectation of an immediate sale, academic artists expect approval from superiors, whether they be teachers or high-ranking

colleagues. Both academic art and decadent art are essentially opportunistic, created to realize immediate success, even at the cost of disappearing from that corpus of art that survives merely by being remembered. Another fact common to them is that both decadent art and academic art realize their maximal audience upon initial publication.' [Richard Kostelanetz (1984, 24)]

As it becomes obviously discernable from Kostelanetz's grounded definition above, for *avant-garde* art to take place and shine it needs to meet some conditions that distinguish it from any commonly known art form already in existence. Chief amongst these conditions, Kostelanetz argues, are the art's transcendence over common practice, its struggle to attract a devoted public and its presumed inspiration of future generations of *avant-garde* writers. All these conditions, he believes, could well play out to mark out an *avant-garde* art from others in circulation, but only a few artistic works will make it to the pantheon of highly regarded and appreciated art forms, only for these to be in turn superseded by up-coming innovative forms, and therefore perpetuating the cycle in an on-going but dissimilar fashion. Kostelanetz then goes on to reflect on the inherent liveliness usually attached to *avant-garde* works as starkly opposed to those works doomed to decay and recede in the face of a strident and pronounced art form that is making its way to the heartbeat of major works of art. Kostelanetz's theoretical insights left aside, his stark opposition of *avant-garde* innovative works from decaying ones reflects the way in which Bowles perceived the world in which he inhabits. The growingly modern world of his homeland decays and recedes in history as the promising world of his host country starts to take shape and reveal itself as the only viable world for the author. In parallel to that, the kind of literary career to which Bowles aspired and envisaged can be seen as echoing and reiterating the reality in which he found himself wrapped up. In other words, the real and the fictional become so closely intertwined in Bowles' life that it becomes difficult to imagine one in isolation from the other.

In his reflection on the difficulty with which *avant-garde* works are usually received by modern readers, Kostelanetz argues that problems of reception, which most critics of *avant-garde* link to the presumed insularity of such works from those to whom they are addressed, boil down more to the perceptual habits of an educated readership than to matters of mere interpretation or comprehension. In Kostelanetz claim, it is the reader's demanding and ardent belief in the new and the innovative that prompt writers to seek similar innovative voices to match up to such a highly challenging and yearning desire for uncharted territories, of the kind covered by *avant-garde* writers. To resolve problems of comprehension and intelligibility, Kostelanetz believes that readers ought to resort to unconventional cognitive and thinking patterns unknown up to a certain stage in the progressive development of a reader's literary competence. Once such obstacles are ultimately bypassed, the reader's capacity to glean the meanings of an *avant-garde* work becomes accessible. To put it bluntly, the prospect of achieving the familiar - in a way the ultimate

goal of readers engaging with a literary text- can only be possible by making use of unfamiliar means. This interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar runs through a large body of the formalist theorizing in literary criticism. It makes sense that Kostelanetz dwells heavily on formalist insights in a bid to justify the Structuralist streak lying behind avant-gardism, broadly speaking. That said, however, Kostelanetz argues that the scope of cognitive comprehension of avant-garde works can be widened to incorporate readers whose modest literary competences precluded them from enjoying the manifold interpretive possibilities made available by such innovative works. Accordingly, much of the audience's favorable acceptance of these novel works is done through learning, which in turn leads logically to the appropriation of a much needed perceptual experience.

Kostelanetz's insights into the dialectics of production/reception in the lifespan of any art work qualified as avant-gardist remain attractive and noteworthy, even when his optimism as to the possible increase in the number of readers endowed with substantially cognitive competences remain a wishful thinking and can hardly account for the on-going dissatisfaction of an audience with avant-garde works. Overall, Kostelanetz's merits lie in his insightful inclusion of the reader in the meaning-making practice as often experienced by readers across time and place.

One reason why avant-garde works should be initially hard to comprehend is not that they are intrinsically inscrutable or hermetic but that they challenge the perceptual procedures of artistically educated people. They forbid easy access or easy acceptance, as an audience perceives them as inexplicably different, if not forbidding revolutionary. In order to begin to comprehend them, people must work and think in unfamiliar ways. Nonetheless, if the audience learns to accept innovative work, it will stretch their perceptual capabilities, affording them kinds of perceptual experience previously unknown. [Richard Kostelanetz (1984, 25)]

It becomes all too clear from Kostelanetz's take on the Avant-garde artistic tradition that what distinguishes avant-garde or vanguard artists from their contemporaries is the originality of their works. The fact that such innovative artists struggle to carve out a space of their own among the plethora of other type of writing traditions and even find it hard to compete for a readership less eager to accept unconventional writing experiences is by no means a discouraging factor to avant-garde artists. On the contrary, their original works of art help cement the edifice they strive to establish for themselves and others following in their footsteps. Paul Bowles is one artist who better illustrates this unflinching and resolute endeavor to stand out as a precursor of a new wave of writing less concerned with the conventional ways of doing things, and more inclined to bring new subjectivities and realities from other social contexts. Despite the fact that avant-garde works break away with tradition and embrace new and fresh ways of dealing with the enterprise of writing works of fiction, they

nonetheless become acceptable by the public as time goes by. What makes such works continuously well received and endorsed is that their sheer value becomes closer to the imaginary worlds of readers, and therefore supersedes those works already in circulation. Take the example of William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, which with the processing of time it became an original and a less offensive work. [Ibid., p. 28]

Evan Brier believes that Paul Bowles's grappling with the problems of publication ought not to be seen as having been the author's main struggle compared to his contemporaries. Others have experienced the same debilitating issues. His *'the Sheltering Sky'* could only find its way to publication after many arduous and nerve-racking attempts to persuade his publisher of its due value and merit. Some go as far as to believe that his novel was written with the intention of seeing his collection of short stories published in the first place. It all seems like the author has to work out a blueprint for a highly regarded position on the pantheon of famous American writers of all time. This position could only be achievable when the writer came up with a groundbreaking work of the caliber of *'the Sheltering Sky'*. Logically speaking, however, Bowles' radical change in terms of his choice of subject for his works of fiction meant that American readers would find it hard to relate and identify with his characters, not least because they reflect realities and subjectivities that are alien to them, and which represent the socio-cultural context of another society and culture altogether. To resolve this anomaly, Bowles had to play on the strings of the exotic and the magical in order to appeal to an American audience highly concerned with American cultural components, and less likely to succumb to innovative and outlandish social contexts. Furthermore, the difficulties Bowles faced at the start could by no means preclude him from marketing his works through the medium of television, which helped draw his works of fiction closer to the American reader. Yet any new technology is a double-edged weapon: it has some negative characteristics it contains undoubtedly some positive ones. Television, so to speak, had instead contributed to the shaping of a new era of marketing that is going to boost sells in general, and books in particular. Simply put, the production of books is going to gain precedence and importance by benefiting more and more from that technology and putting in the know the author and his or her productions alike to a large number of readers [Evan Brier (2006, 187)]. It is important to note that, before publishing, *'The Sheltering Sky'*, Bowles had been already a published poet", having had his work included in the March 1928 issue of *Transition* alongside James Joyce, André Breton, and Gertrude Stein... Bowles idolized Stein...[who] exerted her influence upon him into two important ways. First, she effectively shattered his poetic ambitions by telling him his poetry showed no promise. Second, more constructively, she advised him to visit Tangier, which he did, for the first time in 1931."

I should say that Stein's lack of interest in Bowles poetry pushed him to shift towards composing music; working in the same artistic and sometimes the same social circles as Copland, Virgil Thomson, and Benjamin Britten... But Bowles's reluctance to write was banned by his wife Jane's inspiration particularly that she got published her novel,

–Serious Ladies” in 1941. [Ibid., p.188] Strauss and Bowles’s relationship is going to put on the track of success the literary authorship of Bowles but seeing in his career and credentials a potential source of business and money. [Ibid., p.189]

Henceforward, Bowles’ commercial potential and fund advances inspired him to embark on his trip to Tangier and Sahara that inspired the writing of the novel (i.e., *The Sheltering Sky*); thus he departed for his literary projects hosted by Strauss and Doubleday, the biggest Hollywood agency who are admitted going to take care of his literary produced material, but unfortunately it did not prove a success with these agents. He, therefore, was obliged to knock at every single publisher’s door, without any Agent’s help, to get it finally published by James Laughlin of New Directions. [Ibid., p.190]

Despite the hardship Bowles went through to set up himself he was finally acknowledged by the critics. Wayne Pounds states that Bowles’s achievement is twofold; the first phase is within this time span from “The Scorpion” in 1945 to the *Spider’s House* in 1955; the second one started from 1954 when he produced a series of collaborative translation from oral-tradition Moroccan storytellers. [Wayne Bowles (1986, 302-3)] According to the same critic aforementioned Bowles was really comfortable with the established tradition and norms of the American novel, hence (quoting Kramer) Pounds points out that “Bowles novels are marred by a failure of —modulation and control” of their “—locking events” Like Williams and Mrs. McCullers, Bowles suffers from a disability in regard to the novel form; it requires an idea of society and character, and ideas in general, with which his mind has little traffic. Kramer’s criticism centers on the traditional formal elements of the well crafted novel—character and plot. [Ibid., p.304]

Bowles rejected the idea of being likened to his American peers, Capote, McCullers, and Williams in the sense they are better than him; but in the same time he recognized that he has some common ground with like his being neurotic, gentle and autodidact. [Ibid., p.306] Unlike the modernist writers like Dostoyevsky, Kafka and Faulkner who make authentic use of the terrible” by accepting “the necessary subjection” of Art to life, [Ibid., p.305] Bowles characteristically asserts a lack in himself [Ibid., p.307]. To put it bluntly, he does not found the material of his novels on the American social context but he is after quenching his own thirsty self. The author was probably writing about the American – hence occidental- social and cultural issues, but he did it his own way, “[T]o the charge that his characters are neurotic Bowles now has the answer: —most of the occidentals I know are neurotic. But that’s to be expected; that’s what we’re producing now.” [Ibid., p.308] Writing for Bowles is valorizing violence instead of just focusing on the theme plot character and setting. “This is very close to R.D. Laing’s critique we have first internalized as culture, the violence of a —civilization apparently drives to its own destruction.” [Ibid.] Bowles adopts this theory of violence and states that “violence has either a therapeutic or a didactic value for the reader, and the writing has a therapeutic effect for the writer. In the Evans interview he asserts a didactic value for the reader and a therapeutic one for himself.” [Ibid.]

Bowles makes it explicit by recognizing that he is psycho and that his characters are part of his quest for therapy, “I needed to clarify an issue for myself, and the only way of doing it was to create a fake psychodrama in which I could be everybody...Bowles sees violence as a radical datum of all life.” [Wayne Bowles (1986: 309)] His resort to different places is this kind of quest Bowles was after to conceal and reveal alternatively character and landscape, “[A] more insistent reading would say that what composes the —situation” in a Bowles story is precisely character and landscape, concealing and revealing each other: landscape, the externalization of character; character, the internalization of landscape. [Ibid.] Bowles assigns his artistic project on the jungle.

3. Bowles’s estrangement

Like so many American writers of his generation, Bowles sought a new setting both for himself and for his fictions. His choice of Morocco as the setting for his works of fiction came from a yearning desire to come up with new and fresh storylines that celebrate the exotic and the magical away from an American setting marred by a modernity growing continuously rapacious and oblivious to the romantic endeavor of men of letters. In an America falling into the grip of modernity and fear of anything un-American (communism, more precisely), it was too obvious that Bowles would follow in the footsteps of his fellow American writers, whose decisions not to succumb to the temptations of modernism, helped create an expatriate literary tradition abroad. Michael Spindler contends that Bowles, who has been a controversial writer for many critics, has thus brought a lot of interest to his writing. He is placed within the expatriate tradition in American literature just like any other American expatriate writer,

[O]ne way of placing Bowles is to situate him within the expatriate tradition in American literature. The major modern figures associated with voluntary exile in Europe are, of course, James, Pound and Eliot. Then in the 1920s the “lost generation” associated with Gertrude Stein, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and some 80 other writers made Paris their base. Bowles met and became friends with Stein and Alice B. Toklas in Paris in 1930, and it was at their suggestion that he first went to Tangier which struck him as a “magic place”. [Michael Spindler (1989, 35)]

Bowles’ estrangement from his own homeland and embrace of Moroccan culture testifies to his strong desire to embrace life with all its overall trappings and trepidations without exception. His stepping away from the culture in which he grew up becoming a writer, and sudden adoption of a foreign culture, amounts to an attempt to seek a breathing space wherein he could undergo some sort of rebirth and live life to the full. His American experience at home proved to be a disaster both to his ego and the creative spirit lurking within his self. It is like the writer needed a new geography and mindset to reactivate the hidden creative components made redundant for too long as a result of his dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in his homeland.

That Bowles had to go the extra mile to ensure that his newly adopted host culture would provide the necessary conditions for the resurgence of his creative potentials can be understandable, not least because losing his ego was deemed much more tolerable than keeping it in a place no longer attractive to him. Forgoing the ego that defined who he was and his American identity was preferable on the grounds of enabling him to fully enjoy life and acquire the much sought-after knowledge to which he aspired in the first place. Wayne Pounds highlights these points in more subtle and straightforward ways by saying that,

Bowles gave his overall project its most succinct statement when he told Lawrence D. Stewart in 1969. "The destruction of the ego has always seemed an important thing. I took it for granted that that was what really one was looking for in order to attain knowledge and the ability to live. [Wayne Pounds (1986, 320)]

Prior to the breakout of the Second World War's hostilities, European cities like London and Paris lured many American expatriate writers. Their appeal stemmed mostly from the fact that these locations were predominantly European in every sense of the word. Because American writers sought exile in these foreign lands in response to their growing discomfort with everything American of the time, London and Paris were highly regarded and provided just what they had been looking for and did not find in the America they left behind. Following the end of the War, American writers grew up disaffected and disappointed with the process of Americanization to which such places were subdued. No longer were the noticeable charm and attractiveness of London and Paris discernable in such cities opening up to the ravaging and rapacious power of American consumerism and capitalism. Once again, American writers had to set sail for new locations but this time in rather quite different cultures from the ones they have known in the US or Europe. These locations offered some guarantee that the abhorred 'conformist and mechanized America', to use Spindler's words, is inexistant in places untouched by an American consumerism and capitalism growing continuously global. Spindler points out, in this regard, that,

[A]fter the Second World War the pattern of expatriation changed and it became more bohemian in character. Richard Wright and James Baldwin settled in Paris for a while, but what is significant is that with the Americanization of Europe after 1945 London and Paris lost their attraction, and, with the rise of the Beats, other more exotic places in Africa, Asia, and South America became preferred destinations. Ginsberg, Kerouac, Burroughs and others, such as Truman Capote and Gore Vidal, left the United States and ended up at one time or another in Tangier in the company of Paul Bowles. All of them were escaping from a conformist mechanized America—described by the Parisian expatriate of the 1930s Henry Miller as 'the air-conditioned nightmare' and by Bowles himself as 'a prison'—in search of ways of life that seemed more spontaneous, less

consumerist, less restrictive. [Michael Spindler (1989, 36)]

Aside from whether Bowles ought to be considered as part and parcel of the Beats movement or whether his literary trajectory amounts to a different streak in the American literary tradition, it is noteworthy that Bowles' exilic experience and expatriation subscribe to the rise of a new breed of American intellectuals growing at the time alienated from the demands of an American society seeing them as bound to conform to the norms set out by the exigencies of an American identity. America in those days was living its highly appreciated century, of the kind coined by Henry Luce, the famous US publisher, editor and Time co-founder. What makes Bowles and his fellow contemporaries, particularly those sharing his views and aspirations, stand out from the bulk of other literary voices existing at the time was their marked and pronounced disregard for the kind of industrial and civilized society America has grown up to become and the subsequent receding of the true American pre-modern values and character. Against the backdrop of the America they cherished, all these writers could see is utter degeneration and downfall in the moral and humanist tradition. Industrialism and civilization brought with it chaos and mayhem just as it did before in Britain in the aftermath of the industrial revolution. Rationalism and mechanization made available by the American industrial age helped speed up the then on-going process of destroying the romantic character of rural and/or semi-urban America. Spindler explains the cultural malaise inflicted upon America by the sudden emergence of industrialism and rationalism in what follows:

Norman Mailer placed Bowles within the context of the American Beats when he wrote: 'Paul Bowles opened the world of hip. He let in the murder, the drugs, the incest, the death of the Square (Port Moresby), the call of the orgy, the end of civilization.' And, as Eric Mottram points out, Bowles' early works are contemporary with the beginnings of Beat Generation writings and the Materials that went into Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (composed incidentally in tangier). Common to them all is a strong disaffection with the official America, a rejection of its industrialized, rationalized civilization, and a generational revolt against its repressions and expectations. [Ibid.]

If we have to single out one particular factor that better defines Bowles' infatuation with Morocco drugs would stand out as the primary and quintessential drive behind his seeking to exile himself in a foreign place. Sex is another important aspect of his life which must have pushed the writer to experience new venues in that domain. Given the fact that Bowles was sexually gay and owing to the then reputation of Tangier as the Moroccan gay city par excellence, it was too logical that the writer chose to establish himself in the international zone in order to be able to enjoy his sex life fully and without restriction. After all, the America Bowles left behind was too gay-unfriendly and

conventional, and Tangier offered just the right libertarian sexuality he strove to embrace. As Spindler makes it clear below, the drugs sought by Bowles and his contemporaries helped them subject their consciousness to changes that triggered their creative talents hidden in the darkest recesses of their minds. Spindler points to the impact of drugs on the conscious minds of such writers in what follows,

[A]nother common factor is the interest in psychoactive drugs. Bowles shares with Ginsberg, Timothy Leary and Carlos Castaneda a fascination with drug-induced changes of consciousness. One of his collections of stories *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard* (1962)—a title drawn from a Moroccan saying that a pipe of kif in the morning gives you the strength of a hundred camels in a courtyard—details kif-created states of mind. He himself, enjoyed majoun, a kind of jam made with cannabis, to help him write the last sections of *The Sheltering Sky* and *Let It Come Down*. And his last novel, *Up Above the World*, deals with the derangement of the senses brought about by hallucinogens administered to two unwitting American tourists. [Ibid., p.37]

Traveling is central to Bowles's writings. It is what makes him this different writer from the main line of conventional American writers. Traveling conjures up in the mind of the traveler a feeling of estrangement and alienation unknown for the untraveled ones. The stark contrast between America's urban city-space juxtaposed with Morocco's rural and arid landscape must have left an indelible impact on the psyche of Bowles and many a travel writers. The Moroccan alien life proved more attractive to the writer than an American conformist and mechanized life offering no breathing space for the writer to experience novel and spontaneous subjectivities, of the kind enabled by drugs and the immersion in violent mindsets and sensual activities. It becomes clear from Spindler's quote that Bowles' primary intention was to reach the unfamiliar and unknown since the familiar and known was too unattractive and uninteresting a purpose to stick to and keep alive. Bowles was more interested in unraveling the dirty and ugly aspects of the Human condition than its rosy and polished realities already abundant in works of fiction, and therefore do not represent genuinely the true spirit of real life as lived by people in their day-to-day grappling with the vicissitudes of mundane life.

[C]ultured American away from the conventional and urban come up against extreme environments of jungle or desert, an alien way of life, and opportunities for tabooed sensuality and violence. In Bowles' bleak world traveling and the estrangement it produces (psychoactive drugs are also productive of estrangement act as a prism breaking up the harmonious illusions of the familiar and projecting the ugly colours constituent of the human condition. [Michael Spindler (1989 : 37).]

To be described a traveler means indeed first, to shake oneself free from the inhibitions fostered by society and so be able to indulge libidinous impulses tabooed at home; second, to be a traveler is to put oneself outside society, outside the social nexus, and therefore beyond the protection it offers its members through shared values, communal feeling, and the law'. Third, to be a traveler... [is] to be stripped of the familial and supportive, to be thrown back entirely on one's self in extreme situations.' [Ibid., p.38] Bowles and his peers from USA were neither happy nor satisfied with their civilisation; therefore, they run away (travel) and give free vent to their intrinsic and psychological entity to express itself, and to delve into experimental life considering principles insufficient for the well-being of the person for the well-being of the person as a member of a given civilisation. Spindler states very importantly, '[The] cultural encounter also lays bare an aspect of civilisation pointed to by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). There, he came to the conclusion that our civilization is largely responsible for our misery and that we would be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions. The lure of the exotic arises then out of the desire to escape the repressions of civilisation and to achieve the liberation of the instinctual self promised by primitiveness. But, as he had already proposed in *Beyond The pleasure Principle*, there is within the psyche not only the drive towards erotic gratification but also, startlingly, as drive towards death and self-destruction, which directed outward becomes aggression. So, for Freud, civilization is ever in danger of succumbing to, and breaking down on the face of, the strains and pressures exerted by the opposing forces of Eros and thanatos.' [Ibid., p.39]

Furthermore, Spindler points to the key role played by travel in isolating the individual and alienating him from the core community in which he usually lives in a state of stability. The transition from a situation of stability to one of continuous movement made possible through travel reinforces and deepens a process of estrangement felt by a traveler at the moment he sets foot in a foreign country. It is the absence of a recognizable community in a foreign setting that somewhat intensifies the feeling of alienation and insularity from the many elusive trappings of a discernable community, and plunges the individual into an utterly alien one with which he has hardly any emotional attachment, of the kind made accessible through one's social and cultural background and environment.

As a result, the individual's self-deception, to use Spindler's terms, and absence of genuine faith in the merits of the community recedes in the face of an overwhelmingly rampant estrangement that becomes the norm that governs the individual's day-to-day engagement with the newly adopted community of his host country. Spindler sums up this in the following:

[E]strangement produced by travel unfolds the essential isolation of the individual. It strips the self of those comforting illusions of community fostered by familiar surroundings and penetrates what Sartre terms *mauvaise foi*—bad faith or self-deception. [Ibid.]

Bowles went through a lot of hard times in New York when he was still an infant to the extent that his rough dad was about to kill him. Paul developed all kind of evil feelings vis-à-vis his father to the extent he thought a lot to retaliate when the occasion presented itself. He did not play like the other kids; because of his father bad-treatment he became lonely and isolated. He even preferred and 'enjoyed' to lay on bed sick rather than to meet the abhorred face of his father. His father was indeed aware of that.

Reynolds believes that Bowles held high hopes for post-colonial Morocco ridden of both French colonialism and the kind of civilization the French brought with them as they enforced the signing up of the protectorate mandate with Morocco. What Bowles ignored then and there was that the Moroccan political forces resisting French colonialism were less concerned with the damaging effects of western civilization, and more interested in regaining control over their homeland. The temptations of Western modernity- at least in its French manifestation- were far more attractive to the post-colonial powers that be than did the lure of the medieval-like state of affairs characterizing the pre-colonial Moroccan life. That Morocco's postcolonial political regime opted out of the preservation of old ways of doing things is rather understandable owing to the fact that the pre-colonial Morocco ceased to exist no sooner the protectorate was agreed upon between French and Moroccan authorities. Granted that Moroccan culture was believed at the time to be jeopardized by an utter and blind embrace of French modernity but the temptations of modern life at the time were strong enough to drive the development of Moroccan society away from the debilitating effects of a decadent and stagnant society and more towards the establishment of the building blocks of civilization and urbanization. That event made the author rather frustrated because he was looking for some 'virgin' and exotic culture, not yet tainted with the Western civilisation. In this regard, Bowles acknowledged that he had misunderstood the modernizing drive of anticolonial nationalism, a force he figured in an image of motorized energy. [Guy Reynolds (2008, 56)] if we take for instance Bowles's *The Spider's House* addressed a country in the throes of what anthropologist Ernest Gellner described as the 'eute period of the crisis from '53 to the end of '55' but the novelist claimed to have initiated his work with a sense of distance from political turmoil. [Ibid.]

In his introduction to *The Selected Writings of Paul Bowles*, Joyce Carol Oates argues that Paul Bowles led a strained life with his abusive father, who had allegedly tried to kill him, when he was still an infant. An event Paul Bowles carried for life to take revenge on his harsh father. As for his technique of writing, he did not follow the same methods of writings his fellow American writers used to follow before him; Bowles's egoless detachment from his own life has allowed him, through the decades of his career, to cast a cold eye upon the world and his own position within it. How significant then that he did find a permanent home in a part of the world that to the American sensibility would indeed seem like a region outside God's jurisdiction—a region where nothing, save the infinite, is real. [Daniel Halpern (1993, XVII-XVIII)]

Steven O. Olson among others argues that Bowles treated the western civilisation with contempt, 'The progress of Western civilization is treated even more contemptuously in Bowles's third and finest novel, *The Spider's House* (1955), which dramatizes the dissolution of traditional patterns of life in Fez during the Moroccan revolution. Yet characters do not derive their unhappiness chiefly from a cultural consciousness nor from the anxiety of living in the Atomic Age. Cultural uprootedness function always as an effect rather than a cause in Bowles's fiction. Expatriation and deracination are by-products of a much deeper alienation, an alienation of the self. Security and happiness have not been destroyed by World War II, but have vanished far earlier, in childhood. Bowles's characters are expatriates manqués, individuals who inhabit alien terrains of the self. The vertiginous landscapes of Morocco, like those of Central or South America, provide a projected topography of the psychic fissures, cliffs, and abysses formed in a vanished geological age—the age of childhood.

Bowles first depicted the violent failure of a parent-child relationship in the 'The Echo' (1946)...[Steven E. Olson (1986, 335-6)] his story *The Echo* echoes somehow Bowles's estrangement he felt vis-à-vis his father and his life with him. Hence he uses this story, if I dare to say so, as a kind of catharsis to release his inside loads and burdens left by his father's torture and pressure wielded upon him during his childhood. Olson points out that Bowles in *The Sheltering Sky* expressed what would carry on to be the salient issues of his fiction, i.e., loss, alienation, and flight. [Ibid., p.339] In addition, it is important to note that Bowles's second novel, *Let It Come Down* (1952), again dramatizes the self-destructive flight of an alienated American who travels to Morocco. [Ibid.] It sounds really weird how Paul Bowles was deeply impacted by his child's terrible life he led with his father; yet he dedicated his novel *The Spider's House* to him 'FOR MY FATHER'. But Olson has an other view in stating that, '[T]he concept of child-as-redeemer which Bowles adumbrates in *Let It Come Down* receives full and tragic expression in his child and most brilliant novel *The Spider's House*... It seems ironically appropriate that Bowles dedicated the book to his father, for the novel brings together the author's most persistent filial and anti-patriarchal themes concerning the adult betrayal of childhood innocence.' [Ibid., p.342]

4. Bowles's Moroccaness

Bowles' expatriate experience and his settlement in Morocco had been qualified by some critics as bordering on the absurd, not least because he left the highly regarded and appreciated land of plenty and confined himself to a medieval-looking land not yet touched by modern life. But the country in which Bowles chose to settle was considered by the author as the best place for which he could have ever asked. In a way, Bowles choice of place can be explained by his intention to be totally immersed into the social life of the host country. This immersion was meant to prepare the writer to achieve a much higher understanding of 'the Moslem mind', to use Reynolds' words. It is only when a westerner engages with local people on a daily basis and strives to observe their behavior that the ultimate goal of reaching out to their deepest mindsets becomes possibly

achievable. This ability to get deeply involved and embroiled with the day-to-day local community is well and truly embodied by Stendham, Bowles' main character in 'the Spider's house'. Looking closely to Bowles' biographical accounts of his life in Morocco reveals how similar Bowles' early encounter with the 'other' is to Stendham's. Bowles' good command of Arabic and his extensive knowledge of Moroccan culture enabled him to have an insider's view of Moroccan society by and large. One can almost say with quite certainty that Stendham's character is the fictional spokesperson of Bowles' views and ideas. He is the westerner whom Bowles endows with linguistic and knowledge skills and positions him at a higher state compared to other characters in the novel. His political views were sharply honed throughout the unfolding of the subsequent events to convey to the reader the intended message. All in all, Bowles' 'Moroccanness' might be seen as an expression of his attentiveness to pick up meticulous details about Morocco. Bowles' attentiveness to details is well explained by Reynolds when he said that,

[T]o the quotidian behavior, rituals, and manners of the native people. He is fascinated with what he called the Moslem mind... [his main character] Stenham prides himself on knowing more about the locals than the other Westerners. He imagined himself as a form of insider, a man with the linguistic and cultural knowledge to get beneath the skin of this strange place. [Guy Reynolds (2008, 57)]

However, Bowles' claim for acquiring the necessary components enabling him to have a close approach to the Moslem mind can only be materialized in the presence of a genuinely profound mastery of the various linguistic and cultural constituents forming the overall body of Moroccan culture. There is no guarantee that the appropriation of knowledge of a country's cultural heritage would lead to the ultimate understanding of Moroccan mind if we consider the difficulty and challenge of achieving the same aim by Moroccans themselves. Bowles' claim for a recognizable social status in Moroccan society parallels that claimed by true citizens born and raised in Morocco, and therefore more qualified than Bowles to aspire to the hard-to-achieve goal of a definite understanding of the Moroccan/Islamic complex mind. Because Bowles' first encounter with culture, as we know it, takes place in the US and predates his newly adopted land and culture, it is more likely that his cultural affinities and nuances, drummed into him during his homeland life, would tamper with his aspiringly overarching and all-encompassing ambition to make sense of such a complex enterprise as understanding the Moslem/Moroccan mind. However hard one tries to isolate the self and strives to be objective in his attempts to get to the bottom of what makes a Moslem/Moroccan so different as to entail a particular probe, the cultural heritage one brings to the whole exercise hinders the intended objectivity and forces one to succumb to the powerful forces of subjectivism. To put it bluntly, Bowles' inflated self-confidence and exaggerated belief in his cognitive and linguistic capabilities stand no chance in the face of the enervating oddities and complexities of a close-packed Moroccan culture. Through the creation of his character Moss, Stenham's rich English

friend', Bowles legitimises the French occupation of Morocco as a step [or transition] towards modernisation and progress. [Ibid., p.58] Admittedly, Bowles was not happy about the liberation movement's endorsement of the modernisation project, not least because adopting a French- and by extension Western- modernist scheme amounts to an eminent dilution of the precepts and principles upon which the Moroccan Islamic society is founded. [T]he result would be that people would be neither Moroccan nor European-in between. [Ibid., p.59] And as a way to stand on the fence vis-à-vis the Moroccan state of liberalisation from the French's yoke of colonisation, Bowles turned to his won identity and to American self. 'I'm a tourist,'...A tourist by no means becomes a part of a society he's visiting. Consequently, Bowles knows that he is an American, but he does not like America. He never goes there. He has not been there for 26 years, and hoping never to go again. He means that he was born in New York and reared there, and the city has gone completely to pieces. Putting more emphasis on his sturdy position vis-à-vis the mother-land, Bowles said, 'It would be better if it didn't exist at all [he means his homeland New York], and a nice atom bomb would finish it off. I would be pleased, except that my money is there in a bank.' [Ibid.] (59) What a coarse position towards his culture! Is not this a proof of 'expatriation', 'throwness' and 'lostness'? I should say the difficult life he led with his parents, mainly with his dad and his feeling of boredom with the American civilisation, and by extension the Western civilisation as a whole, have incited him to head towards North Africa, particularly to Morocco where he was going to spend the flower of both his personal and professional life alike. During the interview given toward the end of his life, Bowles is honest about cultural gulf he still sensed, even though he had lived in Morocco for decades. His writing can thus be read as an extended exercise in refutation: as a struggle to transcend accusations that he is merely a 'tourist,' a rich American in a seductive foreign land, although he was perfectly prepared to exploit the financial benefits of expatriatism. [Ibid., p. 60]

Under a subtitle 'A "Political" Book', Reynolds contends that Bowles has certain apparent political aspects a reader and a critic can overcome. Bowles has disfigured Moroccan history for the sake of Stenham's politics of disengagement. In 1930 the French had issued the *Dahir Berbère*, a decree that regulated the pacified Berber territories; Ernest Gellner notes: 'its essence was to offer these areas the option of remaining separate from the national Moroccan Muslim legal system, and to continue to be ruled by tribal customary law under supervision of the new French administration. French policy suggested that Europeans wanted to convert the Berbers from Islam; it also suggested approval for the Berbers' heterodox practices, since they would now be placed outside the state's Islamic law'. [Ibid., p.61] But what happened was the opposite result. That is to say the nationalists mobilised all Moroccans around them to fight for a fair cause against a coloniser who opted for 'separate to rule' policy, to distort the Moroccan personality and culture, and to make a great use of the potential division that may follow the possible putting into practice this malign plot against the Moroccan unity. This is what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz blamed the French colonisation for. In other words he sets out to clarify that the French Berber Decree

has intensified the Moroccan resistance, mainly the one based on the fervent religious zeal. Guy Reynolds, in Bowles's words, confirmed the maybe unintentional political address of the Moroccan cause; Bowles in his 1982 preface reveals a quite detailed and highly personal connection to Morocco politics: "Thus, whether I liked or not, when I had finished, I found that I had written a 'political' book which deplored the attitudes of both the French and the Moroccans." [Ibid., p.62] What made *Allal Fassi* approve of the *Spider's House* was a sort of endorsement of that political project. Put differently, this may usher us as readers to think of Bowles's Moroccaness. In a passage uttered by Polly Burroughs in *The Spider's House*, she grieves over the fact that there isn't even a window in the room: "wouldn't you think that with this fantastic view outside they'd have at least some peep-hole, instead of shutting themselves into a cell this way?" (SH, 186) That is the kind of country, destination and culture Stenham, and by extension Bowles looked for to establish himself for good. Yet with the advent of the modernisation the French culture has tainted and damaged the authenticity of that primitive Moroccan culture full of magic. Bowles does not spare the occasion to talk about the USA's involvement into the French colonisation of Morocco, or to perpetuate its existence for pragmatic interests of hers. This passage from *The Spider's House* makes it explicit, "America sends France two hundred billion francs. America gives France a hundred billion more. France would like to leave Morocco, but America insists on her staying, because of the bases. Without America there would be no France." (SH, 385)

It is noteworthy to wonder how a westerner deeply rooted in American Christian and Jewish culture can write a book to represent "the different consciousness of a young Moslem into [his] own language? Not only did Bowles choose to represent the Moslem —mind," but he designated to focus on a protagonist far removed from the Western order of things. Amar is, after all, a deeply anti modern figure, unable to speak French, educated in a religious family and separated from politics. He is to adjust the terminology of Daniel Lerner or Everett Stonequist, far from being that transitional figure or marginal man who swings between the borders of tradition and modernity. Instead he represents one of Bowles's recurrent attempts to imagine what forms tradition—specially religious tradition— might take in a world moving towards modernity. He is the son of Si Driss; his family are "ehorfa, descendants of the prophet" his domestic life is marked by "his father's fierce insistence on teaching him the laws of their religion". The family is apolitical; its concerns are private and mystical rather than secular-political. Amar stands for that "magical" Morocco that Stenham saw as threatened by progress. Bowles then creates a character imbued with magical authority...[talking about Amar's origin as belonging to Si Driss Chorfa family its lineage back to the prophet and that they have extraordinary power bestowed upon by God and so on.]...Amar, embodiment of mystical Islam, is a political naive, a character through whose innocent eyes Bowles presents French colonial injustices. [Guy Reynolds (2008, 69-70)]

Guy Reynolds points out in this regard, "Geertz, like most of the great tradition of Moroccan anthropologists, sees religion

as the foundational structure of the society. His account of the protectorate during the colonial period, for instance, is strikingly focused on the non-materialistic, mystical continuities of the culture, and argues for indigenous spirituality's resistance of European power. Geertz eventually claimed that the colonial imperative never breached the Moroccan self, safely cocooned in spiritual otherness." [Ibid., p.73] It sounds really important if someone like an expatriate American writer could represent authentically a hosting and complicated culture like the Moroccan one.

Reynolds goes on to reflect on the issue of representation and how endemic it is in the kind of literary works which strive to paint a picture of social contexts occurring beyond the scope of Western secularism and modernism, tout court. What transpires from Reynolds' analysis of Bowles' representation of the exotic and magical culture of Morocco is at once enlightening and problematic. It is enlightening in the sense that Bowles must have found it pretty hard to free himself from all the preconceived prejudices and distorted truths about Moroccan culture prior to his direct contact with it soon after he settled down in Tangier. His yearning desire to represent faithfully the authenticity and idiosyncrasy of the "magic world" was impeded by the many secular and western ideals and expectations his American culture drilled into him long before he chose to leave it for a new home and country. Reynolds' analysis of Bowles' representation of Moroccan culture can also be seen as problematic, not least because it tends to see the world of the *marabout* as the overarching representative symbol of Moroccan culture, even when we all know too well the fact that an insignificant proportion of the population identified with and observed the rites of the *marabout*. Reynolds says nothing about those Moroccans who fall beyond that world. Do they really fit within his understanding of Moroccan culture? This complicates his argument for the insularity and imperviousness of Moroccan culture to foreign influences.

Further along in his analysis, Reynolds argues that the hermetic and insulated nature of the *marabout* makes it difficult for secular and Western values and precepts to exert their influences, and penetrate the thick mysticism and primitiveness in which Moroccan society is wrapped up. Because of its frigidity and resistance to anything other than mystical and primitive, the *marabout*, Reynolds contends, becomes the prime symbol of a state of mind and affairs unaffected by outside influences and sensitive to the damaging effects of being exposed to the trials and tribulations of a blind embrace of modernity and secularism exemplified by Western culture. Broadly speaking, Reynolds' problematic approach to Bowles' fictitious representation of the world of the *marabout* casts a shadow of doubt over his slightly more insightful analysis of the difficulty encountered by Bowles and other western writers in their attempts to make sense of complex non-western societies. Whatever enlightening meanings readers glean from Reynolds' insights are unmatched by his myopic homogenising of Moroccan cultural components. His overstated belief in and personal feelings of the magical and the mystical pervading Moroccan society clouded his judgement and obscured him from seeing other worlds in

Morocco, particularly those opening up to the west and its secularism.

[I]t is extremely difficult to disentangle the representation of the “authentic” world of the marabout from the projections and distortions and idealizations brought to that world by the Western writer/ethnographer. In a sense, the marabout represents an ultimate emblem of what the mystical or primitive world might be: a frozen, resistant culture impervious to secularism and the West. [Ibid., p.74]

Generally speaking, if someone is born and raised in a given social, cultural and religious context and he/she then moves to another different context, I presume that he/she would find it difficult to change himself from scratch. Simply put, it would be out of the question that this man/woman will be reborn and become all of a sudden one of the locals. This is the same situation we have with Bowles in trying to represent the society he appropriates for decades till he passed away in Tangiers. Bearing in mind the hardships led by the author when he was an infant by his father and the gloomy mood he develops by this to the extent he wishes to destroy his father and to wipe out even the entire New York. Reynolds explains this tendency in the author mentality when he fails to preserve the exotic culture he travelled for, from the most industrialised country in the world. He felt from this perspective that the French colonisation of these land and people is a real catastrophe. That is the Morocco society is down here with the French civilising mission in about modernising transition. Reynolds thus explains this, “[I]f one cannot preserve, if one cannot prevent North Africa from becoming the “European slum” of those who push for the transition into modernity, then it is better for the culture to be destroyed. *The Spider’s House* thus offers a contorted representational logic, where destruction is the other side of the coin to Stenham’s nostalgic restorationism. In this sense, the figure of Amar, however “other” he might seem at first, is in fact ultimately part and parcel of Bowles’s Orientalism.” [Ibid., p.74] Bowles is thus frustrated by the advent of the French colonisation to some extent, that the Moroccan Muslim pure culture is doomed to disappear by the birth of a distorted one. Because of this we find Bowles ending his novel by this swinging binarity and the unpleasant encounter between Idealisms (Amar’s mysticism and Stenham’s aesthetic nostalgia) and the messiness of history. Unable to bend the world to their wills. [Ibid., p.75]

While Reynolds chose to analyze Bowles’ works away from any comparison with his fellow American contemporaries, Halpern did just the opposite. In comparing Bowles’ writing techniques and imaginary with those of Edgar Allan Poe, Halpern came to the conclusion that both writers share some common features as regards their literary outputs. Poe’s idiosyncratic Gothicism put aside, his bleak imaginary of the “nightmare”, to use Halpern’s terms, resembles that of Bowles. Both writers dwelt heavily on the sinister and the perverse in their fictions to such a point that their respective contributions to American literature will be marked out distinctly from those left by other American writers. Halpern makes it clear that Poe’s narratives conjuring up in the minds of readers images of murders and violence are present in Bowles’ imagined and drug-induced stories of demoniac

qualities. They tend to pervade Bowles’ fictions in a manner that suggests Poe’s literary influence on Bowles.

To back up his argument for the great interplay between Bowles’ and Poe’s fictional worlds, Halpern cites works from Bowles which better demonstrate the fatalist outcome awaiting his characters in a fashion not dissimilar to that displayed by Poe throughout his works of fiction.

If there is one thread that runs through both Writers’ fictions it must be that unwarranted and uncalled-for tragic ending to which their characters are subjected. Travellers (American travellers, more precisely) in Bowles’ understanding are doomed to perish in alien lands as a result of their ignorance of the danger and risk embedded in the strangeness and difference of the societies that inhabit those lands. The American traveller to foreign lands becomes, to Bowles’ mind, a victim of circumstances above his understanding and beyond his powers. Compared to Reynolds’ analytical insights, Halpern’s comparative approach to both Bowles’ and Poe’s literary legacies suggests that his understanding transcends Reynolds’ debatable concern with issues of representation to reach a level of criticism more inclined to unearth the most defining aspects of Bowles’ contribution to American literature. In so doing, Halpern needed to tap into the resourcefulness and richness of Poe’s literary heritage in a bid to delineate and highlight those aspects from Poe’s fiction resurfacing in Bowles’ later works of fiction. The merits of literary comparative studies lie in the fact that they are conducive to some insight and clarity less likely to be achieved under other approaches; of the kind Reynolds’ is one among many.

[T]hough differing in obvious way from Poe’s insular, claustrophobic, and wildly surrealist tales, as much in their coolness of language as in their keenly recorded camera’s eye observations of Morocco, Mexico..., Bowles’ fictional works share with Poe’s the imagination of nightmare; a simplicity of vision that would seem to predate history; a sense that a man’s or woman’s character is after, and that both are impersonally prescribed. The demonic self-destructive images to which Poe gave the memorable name “the imp of the perverse” are ubiquitous in Bowles’ worlds. From the earliest stories and novels through *Too Far From Home*, the new novella set in the Niger River Valley, we encounter men and women, travelers from America, at the mercy of buried wishes experienced as external fate. Indeed, in his 1980 preface to *Let It Come Down*, originally published in 1952, Bowles speaks bluntly of his hero Dyar as a “nonentity, a victim with a personality” defined solely in terms of situation. [Ibid., pp.XIV-XV]

Reflecting on the kind of relationship between Bowles and his readership, Halpern qualifies it as uneasy and fraught with difficulty. Contrary to readers’ reception of other American writers’ books, Bowles’ avant-gardist nature of his fictions acts as a discouraging fact about his

unconventional and anti-hero tendencies. Not only does the reader fail to recognize the familiar in Bowles' works, but he/she also faces the difficulty of Bowles' utter disregard for the individual, at least in the way the literary tradition makes use of it. Early on in his literary experience Bowles demonstrated his pronounced dissociation from discernable subjectivities and preoccupations found in other writers' fictions. His determination to steer clear from the traditional way of doing things in terms of writing fiction complicated his much sought-after appeal to his readership. Bowles' intention to shock his readers with the ugly face of human condition was meant to destabilize the rosy realities usually depicted by writers keen to retain the respect and glorification owed to tradition and convention. His avant-gardist preconceptions precluded him from taking on board what his contemporaries judged as normative, and thereby more intelligible to modern readers. In Bowles' viewpoint, facing readers with their most abhorrent demons amounts to being honest with them. Such honesty could only be expected from a writer when he ceases to distort the truth about human condition and displays some humility and modesty with regard to his creative competence and cognitive strength. Unlike many writers of his generation, Bowles chose not to fall into the trap of identifying with his characters for fear that readers might take his identification for granted and follow suit. For him, readers need to fend for themselves and glean the meanings and insights from their reading experiences and no writer ought to tinker with the meaning-making process, which the author believes to be the preserve of the reader alone.

Readers coming to Paul Bowles for the first time are invariably startled by the *uncanniness* his fiction exudes. We are habituated to writers who identify with their characters and whose aim is to maneuver us into an identification with them too. We are habituated to writers whose preoccupations are with human affairs—family crises, politics, marriages, comedies or tragedies of manners. We may be disoriented by a writer whose focus of attention is not upon primitive forces—land – or cityscapes—that express themselves through human beings. The humanist tradition which most educated readers share does not accommodate itself readily to ironic perspectives; we wish to believe, even in the face of Darwinian logic, that the individual matters, and matters greatly. In Bowles's imagination, no such tradition is honored, nor even evoked except ironically. Tennessee Williams, himself the object of passionate attack for his work, waned Bowles, after having read "The Delicate Prey," that he would be considered a monster if he published it. Yet in such monstrosity, such an anti-heroic downscaling of man's spiritual possibilities, is there not oddly, a kind of honesty?—a most reasonable modesty? [Ibid., p.xv]

Looking back on Bowles' account of his early days in Morocco, Daniel Halpern comes up with a passage in *'Without Stopping'* (Bowles' autobiography) wherein the writer reveals the incentives behind his intention to settle in Morocco in the first place. As the passage makes it clear,

Bowles' trip to Morocco was intended to be temporary and fun seeking. In response to a New York growing hideously metropolitan and too modern for his own taste, it was too unnatural for a romantic artist like him to fall for its bewildering urban charms. No sooner life in New York started to become unbearable than Bowles thought about a place that could help him forget about his homeland with all its excesses and oddities. A reader of Bowles' *'Without Stopping'* can hardly miss the sense of adventure and carefreeness manifested by the writer prior to his actual journey to Morocco. However, Bowles' show of bravura and daring in the face of the unknown and the unpredictable is not totally what the writer makes us believe it looked like then and there. After all, his choice of Morocco came as a response to Alice Copeland's suggestion. The idea of his ignorance of what was awaiting him in a foreign country is slightly exaggerated on the grounds that the many provisions set up for him in advance belie all that.

For a privileged foreigner like him visiting Morocco in those days, there was no such a thing as struggle or deprivation. Nevertheless, what transpires from Bowles' account is that in the presence of a home, a piano and the good weather anything else become of trivial importance. Bowles was able to let go most things that reminded him of his homeland and modernity, except his love for and appreciation of music. Bowles' main motivation to seek refuge in Morocco was well and truly the richness of Moroccan music, particularly that of the Atlas Mountains, and his aim was to record it for future generations. His interest in writing fiction came later on in defiance of his wife's talent as a novelist.

The trip to Morocco would be a rest, a lark, a one-summer stand. The idea suited my overall desire, that of getting as far away as possible from New York. Being wholly ignorant of what I should find there, I did not care, I had been told there would be a house somewhere, a piano somehow, and sun everyday. That seemed to me enough.

5. Murder as social Impropriety: Paul Bowles's "Evil Heroes":

While previously seen aspects of Bowles' life and discussed elements of his fiction seem to have revolved around either slices of his personal life or some defining features of his creative works, Wendy Lesser's approach to Bowles' works of fiction tend to focus on the thematic potentials inherent in such works as *'the Sheltering Sky'* or *'The Spider's House'*, to cite but these two, owing to their significant contributions to the making of Bowles, the novelist. At first blush, the reader of Bowles' most promising novel *'the Spider's House'* is baffled by the extent to which the novel gravitates towards the juxtaposition of two irreconcilable cultures in their struggles to come to terms with each others. Bowles' intention from setting one culture against the other seems to have been prompted by the desire to expose their fragilities and discomforts when both cultures have to co-exist - or rather pretend to co-exist- within a shared space. With all due respect to Lesser's analysis, the clash of civilization and cultures was less of an issue then than it turned out to be some decades later. What Bowles found alarmingly worrying about Moroccan culture was its possible receding

under the crushing forces of modernity made available by the French. Having said that, it is noteworthy that the idea of pitting one culture against another was intended from the writer to highlight the merits of preserving Moroccan culture and forgoing modernity with all its excesses and trepidations.

This intention on the part of Bowles to prioritize the continuing existence of one culture to the detriment of the other explains the uneasy and unorthodox relationship between the writer and his characters. As we know all too well, one of the tenets of the humanist tradition - at least in terms of literary works- entails from the writer to make his characters endorse his views and ideas in the hope that the public by and large identify with the characters, and therefore come to take on board the writer's take on the subject. Bowles' innovative and radical departure from the humanist tradition resides in his marked dissociation from what his characters believe to be the ultimate explanation to issues with which they are faced. His detachment from the unfolding of events and how his characters engage with them suggests that his views and understandings are not directly pressed on his readers. Bowles was one of the believers in the paramount importance of the reader in the meaning-making enterprise. However, denying his characters the ability to make sense of the unfolding events before their eyes runs counter to the avant-garde movement, which came to existence as a reaction against the omnipresence of the author and his pretense to possess a god-like grip on his characters. It is true that Bowles manifests most of the avant-gardist precepts and principles, but he does on occasions write in a manner that belies his trendsetting credentials.

All in all, what transpires from works like *the Sheltering Sky* and *the Spider's house* is the absence of murders and evil heroes. Unlike his other works of fiction, the two novels mentioned above go against the grain of what is usually symptomatic of Bowles' fictitious storylines. The absence of murder and violence from such works might be explained by his intention to shed light on another aspect of life in the history of Morocco with its colonizer as is the case in the *Spider's House*, and the collision of westerners with values and conditions alien to them in a hostile environment as the one exemplified by *the Sheltering Sky*.

Looking at the works from another angle, however, reveals that downplaying violence at a moment in the lifespan of Morocco that is charged with history is problematic and disturbing, not least because Bowles must have judged the suffering of Moroccans as insignificant compared to the meaningless lives of some confused and self-deluded individuals. In the case of *the Sheltering Sky*, one could still give the writer some credit with his choice not to dwell too much on violence and murder. There was no baddies and criminals against whom his characters could fight for their lives. They were fighting against the overwhelming harshness of nature and the impact of it on their fragile beings.

Because *the Spider's House* marks a crucial time in the history of Morocco's fight for independence, Bowles ought not to have glossed over the bloody conflict between Moroccan resistance forces and French military powers.

That violence was opted out of his novel can be explained by his insistence on the soft conflict existing between the two cultures, or that is what the writer makes us believe as we continue digging deeper into the novel's unfolding of events.

[D]espite its progress toward disintegration-characteristic of all Bowles's novels-*The Spider's House* is perhaps the most hopeful of the four novels, in that it seems to have faith in the validity of presenting two conflicting cultures from the inside of each. It presumes, that is, that understanding is authorially possible even if the characters in the novel cannot attain it... like *The Sheltering Sky*, *The Spider's House* has no real murderers, no "evil heroes"-only confused and self-centered characters who make some bad mistakes. [Ibid., p. 404]

This brings us to Bowles' morality, which Wendy Lesser qualifies by saying that "Bowles is that rare item, a moralist who does not come down on the side of morality." [Ibid., p.407]

The fact that Bowles does not preach to the converted, or even practice what he preaches is suggestive of the state of his confused mind and egocentric persona, of the kind made visible and exemplified by his characters, particularly in *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House*.

6. Paul Bowles's expatriate writer

Bowles' expatriate experience in Morocco stands out as the most exceptional expatriation compared to that of those American expatriate writers who preceded him to the world of exile as well as others whose expatriation succeeded that of the writer. His exceptional experience stems not merely from his idiosyncratic and unprecedented relation to the host culture, but also from the sheer investment he had in the cultural life of the country in question. Much of the studies conducted on the writer's artistic and literary legacy tend to emphasize the prosaic creativity of Bowles and few have cast a light on the key role he played in the preservation of the musical heritage of the Berber community. Another aspect in the life of Bowles' expatriation relates to his quasi-permanent settlement in Morocco in contrast to most of his fellow contemporaries whose expatriation was the form of short-term exilic residences. Settlement compared with short period residency means that the writer is almost fully embedded in the social tissue of the host country while the temporary resident's relation to the country of residence is marked by a flight from any possibility to fall for the magnetic charms of acculturation, even when most of those writers were born and raised in a predominantly Eurocentric culture.

What distinguishes Bowles' experience from that of others is the fact that it was the only one that drew so close to the host culture that one gets the impression that his American experience prior to his arrival to Morocco almost receded, and had acculturated to Morocco. Bowles' assimilation to the Moroccan culture is of course open to discussion and I am by no means arguing for its plausibility. However, in

perceiving of Bowles' Moroccan experience as distinct from those experiences revolving around a geographical and social space of some sort we are reinforcing the specificity of his contribution to the American literary tradition. Steven E. Olson explains this clearly in what follows "...all of his fiction is set abroad, either in North Africa or Central or South America; only three of his thirty-nine short stories are set in the United States. Critics have emphasized Bowles's —foreignness," his fascination with the non-Western mind and remote." [Steven E. Olson (1986, 334)]

It is this obsession with the foreign and the exotic that led some of his contemporaries not to think very highly of him. Take the example of Gore Vidal and his scathing criticism of Bowles' creative credentials. He is believed to have said "[...] that the triumph of Bowles' art can be traced to the fact that he laudably ignored —that greatest of all human themes: the *American Experience*... Bowles is still odd man out; he writes as if *Moby Dick* had never been written... Yet Fiedler relegates Bowles to a circle of —minor novelists" writing in the gothic tradition of —highbrow terror-fiction" that runs from Charles Brockden Brown through John Hawkes, ultimately dismissing Bowles as a kind of voyeuristic peddler of —horror-pornography." [Ibid.]

The main spring of Bowles's anti-patriarchalism emanates clearly from his own childhood, where he met with persistent humiliations and cruelties from his father. Bowles describes his relationship to his father with characteristic indifference in his autobiography, *Without Stopping*. Bowles's youth was predicated on the —absolute necessity" of winning the struggle with his dentist father, who reportedly had first attempted to kill his only child at the age of six weeks by holding him out an open window on a freezing night. The father, Claude, was a humorless, neurotic parent and husband who ruled his household with —unremitting firmness"... Paul early withdrew into the privacy of his own room and imagination to escape his father's despotic presence. Paul, who at the age of five had never spoken to another child nor seen children playing together... He enjoyed being sick because illness constituted a victory over his father..." [Ibid., p.335]

7. Conclusion

In our arduous attempt to discern what is exceptionally avant-gardist about such a controversial writer as Paul Bowles, we faced many difficulties ranging from his social standing within the pantheon of avant-garde literary tradition, his estrangement from the humanist school of thought, his highly contested 'Moroccanness', the absence of violence and murder from some of his highly acclaimed works of fiction, and finally the idiosyncrasy of his expatriate experience. Having based, however, our probe of the writer's legacy on insights and analyses offered by some scholars helped us in the process deconstruct partially the controversy and obscurity surrounding Bowles' works of fiction. In dealing with the difficulties mentioned above we had to adopt a critical analysis aware of the strengths and weaknesses of most critical studies conducted on Bowles' works of fiction. Our analysis of the issues discussed so far throughout the accomplishment of this paper can be summed up in five major points.

Firstly, Bowles' position within the avant-garde movement of his time was confirmed by his innovative approach to literature. Seeking 'new pastures', to use Milton's words, in the creative imaginary of his world, Bowles opted for the 'Moroccan experience' in preference to 'the American experience' simply because he wanted to avoid falling into the trap of redundancy and repetition. Had the writer followed in the footsteps of other writers of his generation, he would not have achieved the same acclaim he enjoyed as a result of his readers' reception of his works of fiction. That said, however, our paper has shown that his avant-gardist credentials were not always consistently faithful to the spirit of the avant-garde, and therefore taking him squarely for an avant-garde writer would be highly contested, not least because of the confusion and ambiguity that transpire from his works.

Secondly, issues of whether Bowles should be regarded as an avant-garde writer or whether his innovative additions to American literature were a flash in the pan lead us to the other difficulty inherent in Bowles' works. If a given shadow of doubt is cast upon his avant-gardist credentials, this does not mean that his belonging to the humanist tradition should be taken lightly on the grounds that the ways in which he handled his fictitious events and characters amounts to a departure from the basic tenets and precepts of the humanist tradition. Broadly speaking, Bowles' literary pathway runs counter to the conventional and orthodox guidelines set up for writers to follow in their own attempts to create works of fiction.

Thirdly, Bowles' settlement in Morocco for a long period of time might have offered him the opportunity to claim his ability to be a fully Moroccan citizen, not in the official sense of the word but in the sense that his embrace of the culture might have enabled him to assimilate the many nuances and affinities usually hard to grasp and digest by foreigners unfamiliar with the complex nature of Moroccan culture. Whether Bowles' 'Moroccanness' retains some credibility or whether it is a wishful thinking on the part of the writer remain highly contested, not least because to be totally detached from one's original culture and embrace fully an alternative one demands a great deal of sacrifice and some reworking of all the prejudices and preconceived ideas about the country one is supposed to adopt.

Fourthly, the absence of murder and violence from Bowles' most literary defining works such as 'The Sheltering Sky' and 'The Spider's House' is quite unlike the writer whose readers were accustomed to seeing the proliferation of violent scenes in his works. The disturbing thing about the missing violence in his two works is that it distracts the reader's attention away from the main bloody conflict then taking place between the Moroccan resistance and the French military powers. Such a scaling down of violence can arguably be seen as overplaying the cultural conflicts existing between both autochthon and colonial cultures whilst understating the armed conflict between the colonized and the colonizer.

Finally, Bowles' expatriate experience has always been disturbing to some and awe-inspiring to others. For those

feeling uncomfortable with his decision to establish himself in a primitive and medieval-like society Bowles testifies to some sort of lunacy to say the least. His emotional detachment from his country of birth have been judged as an expression of ingratitude to the extent that some thought of him as becoming un-American. Choosing to live in a foreign land does not necessarily mean that one ceases to relate to his own country, even when emotionally he tends to veer towards the host country. This tendency to lean more to the adopted culture is what drives admirers of his expatriate experience to think of him as the American expatriate writer who sought to capture the essence of foreignness, even when his endeavor to do so only scratched the surface of such a rich and complex culture like the one Bowles encountered in Morocco.

In a nutshell, Bowles' multifaceted cultural output challenges anyone striving to get to the bottom of his literary heritage and its avant-garde components. Despite the many critical studies conducted on his works of fiction, more ought to be done in order to come up with a definite and conclusive study of his literary genius. For example, parts of his cultural contribution to world musical heritage need to be probed in the future. As to his literary legacy, most studies tend to focus on those works written by the writer himself, but few have paid attention to his collaborative works of translation, especially those written in concert with some Moroccan storytellers. It would be interesting and enlightening to delve deep into those other important aspects of his life that remain inaccessible to readers across the globe.

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