NERVAL'S VOYAGE EN ORIENT:
THE QUEST FOR A LITERARY SIGN

by

FRANCES GRIFFITHS

B.A., THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Department of French

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date Oct. 4th, 1983
The aim of this thesis is to examine the nineteenth century novel *Voyage en Orient* by Gérard de Nerval, using the semiotic theories of Roland Barthes and Roman Jakobson. The word 'Orient' is, for the protagonist of the novel, a sign which represents an exotic fantasy land promising spiritual experience and "true love". His voyage through the Middle East and his various encounters teach the narrator here that the sign he longs for is empty, and he acquires a new image and understanding of the Orient. However, this more realistic concept is not as desirable as his original ideal and, in order to regain that lost paradise, the narrator immerses himself in oriental stories and legends.

In this study a triangular structure is used to depict the three-stage development of the narrator's notions of the Orient, from his first ideas to his awareness of the real situation and finally to the lengthy stories which depict once more the desired magical land. The first part of the triadic structure examines the Orient as an imaginary or literary sign which the narrator anticipates finding during his voyage. This sign is shown to be based on literary and artistic works and to have no real referent. The narrator's desire to find this ideal land permits him to anticipate and misunderstand events. This way of decoding information and projecting a personal image is called a connotative system of interpretation. This system is examined in rela-
tion to the romantic discourse with which the narrator describes his fantasies. The second stage in the triangular model corresponds to a change from a connotative system of decoding to a denotative system, as the narrator begins to perceive the real Orient. His actual experience and his need to communicate force the hero to recognize that the oriental sign he longs for is empty; the result is a documentation of the actual Middle East. This time, the first stage in the triangle emerges in an examination of the legends found in the novel. Nerval himself creates these new literary signs; their codes and their significance for the author provide the reader with a new point of departure for his own pursuit of the "oriental". Nerval's novel is seen to provide a commentary on the relationship between literature and experience, between signifiers and the signified.
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Dedication

With special thanks to my supervisor, Valerie Raoul, for her unending patience, to friends who encouraged and helped me; to my daughter Caitlin who faithfully stayed by me; to my husband Hiroyuki Kanabe who showed me the magical Orient Nerval could not find; and especially to the memory of my dear mother.
Nerval's Voyage en Orient.: The Quest for a Literary Sign

Introduction

The Voyage en Orient by Gérard de Nerval is a long account of a traveller who, as his journey progresses, learns that the Orient of his imagination is not real. There have been a number of valuable studies of this book: they all refer however at some point to biographical or psychological aspects of Nerval's life, pointing out that the ideals the narrator searches for are directly related to his 'crises de folie' and his love for Jenny Colon, as well as numerous other facts which can be understood as motivations for this novel. It is not the aim of this study to show the relationship between the novel and the psychological or biographical facts about the author. The present study is based on the premise that the text itself can reveal the various structures of the novel as well as the fundamental tension between imagination and reality which is crucial to all Nerval's works. The Nervalian discourse is rich in its diversity, and although the author's longing for an aesthetic universe is found in other works by him, the Voyage en Orient is distinct because of the narrator's insistence on describing reality as he experiences it, rather than describing dreams as he imagines them.

The Voyage is generally considered a novel, but the journal format of this text renders the reading contract ambiguous. The reader is repeatedly told that the accounts are authentic, thus he is apparently expected to read the book as though it were a document, faithfully describing a journey. For example, at the end of his travels the narrator addresses the reader, saying that he trusts his accounts will be of interest:
Quel intérêt auras-tu trouvé dans ces lettres heurtées, diffuses, mêlées à des fragments de journal de voyage et à des légendes recueillies au hasard? Ce désordre même est le garant de ma sincérité; ce que j'ai écrit, je l'ai vu, je l'ai senti. - Ai-je eu tort de rapporter ainsi naïvement mille incidents minutieux, dédaignés d'ordinaire dans les voyages pittoresques ou scientifiques? (p. 624).1

However, the work's division into chapters and sections points to its at least partially fictitious nature. Historically, Nerval travelled to the Middle East in 1843 for twelve months. When he returned to Paris he began to publish his accounts and impressions of the countries he visited in various newspapers. Over a period of ten years, he worked on rewriting and editing a group of articles on his voyage and in 1851 the definitive edition of the *Voyage en Orient* appeared. The differences in itinerary and adventures between his actual voyage and those in the text establish firmly that this work is largely fiction. The "Orient" referred to is the Middle East, not the Far East. We shall retain the nineteenth century use of the term.

The novel is divided into four parts: 'Introduction: vers l'Orient', 'Les femmes du Caire', 'Druses et Maronites' and 'Les nuits du Ramazan'. The 'Introduction' (which is 85 pages long) recounts Gérard's voyage from Paris to Greece. This section of the novel is a preparation for the dream Orient that Gerard expects to find. The second part of the novel (pp. 85-306), 'Les femmes du Caire', tells of Gérard's stay in Cairo, his adventures buying a slave and his journey to Lebanon. 'Druses et Maronites' (pp. 310-421), the third part, is the account of Gérard's falling in love and his marriage plans. It also includes the legend of Hakem. The last part, 'Les nuits du Ramazan' (p. 438-620), describes Gérard's stay in
Constantinople. In this section the longest legend is told, 'Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman, prince des génies'. (pp.503-596).

Since this book is a novel, it is important to differentiate between the narrator, Gérard, and the author, Nerval. Nerval, as author, creates a narrator following a similar journey to the one he took himself through the Middle East. Gérard goes in search of an idealized Orient, as Nerval did years before. The difference between the two is that Nerval knows that the dream will not be found, whereas Gérard must learn this through his travels.

Gérard, the narrator, has certain preconceived notions about the Orient which he longs to experience. The voyage presents the opportunity to immerse himself in the Orient's promised exoticism. However, his cherished, idealistic notions are progressively demystified as he travels and learns to accept the reality of the Orient.

The aim of this study will be first to examine how Gérard's expectations and perceptions of the Orient are based upon literary and other artistic works. It will then analyse the progress from his projection of an ideal to his acceptance of reality. Finally, we will see how and why the author integrates a new literary vision of the Orient into his text.

The methodology used will be based on semiotic theory, especially the work of Roland Barthes. The semiotic approach reveals certain elements in this work that descriptive or thematic analysis would fail to elucidate. The meta-language used to investigate the text can express relationships and structures of the narration as well as provide a conceptual framework for specific observations.
Semiotics is the study of sign systems; its vocabulary is quite specific and therefore must be clearly defined. Roland Barthes describes a sign as "a compound of a signifier and a signified." The plane of the signifiers constitutes the plane of expression and that of the signified the plane of content. The meaning of a sign depends on a mental concept of something (the signified) combined with a visual or acoustic image (the signifier). The process which binds the signifier and the signified is called signification. The signified is derived from a referent - that to which the concept refers. This referent can be real or imaginary. For example, the word "cow" is made up of a certain mental representation which is expressed in English by the letters or sounds COW. In this case the referent of this concept may be a real animal. On the other hand, the referent is imaginary in the world-sign "unicorn". In this case the signified does not refer to a real animal but one created in fairy-tales.

The sign functions as a way of communicating ideas by means of messages. These messages are transmitted by a code system. The receiver of the message must know the code to understand the intended messages, otherwise he may alter the meaning by a faulty interpretation. The interpretation of signs according to a personal bias is called connotation. Connotation is a system of interpretation: the receiver of a message raises the status of the signifier to that of a sign. The receiver then attributes to this 'new sign' his own signified, based on subjective values. Denotation is the opposite process. The receiver objectively conceives the signified as being something precise; he refuses personal interpretation but searches for the intended signification.
Connotation is emotional, whereas denotation is intellectual.  

A literary sign is an aesthetic message having more than the simple transitive function of communicating meaning: it has a value in itself. The literary sign is an aesthetic object affecting the reader, who subjectively determines its meaning.

The following model shows how the basic structure of the *Voyage en Orient* can be construed as a triangular pattern. The author, Nerval, has his narrator begin his voyage looking for signs which fit into his imaginary view of the Orient; here (A) the referent of the signified (Gérard's mental representation of the Orient) is entirely imaginary, being based on memory of historical and artistic works. The next step (B) is that of Gérard interpreting the oriental signs according to his experiences. The referent in this case is reality, the Orient loses its mystique as the narrator encounters situations which teach him the real oriental code. He learns that his preconceived ideas do not correspond to reality as he now experiences it. Finally (C); Gérard is forced back into literature in order to find the oriental signs he desires. It is at this point that the author produces new literary signs conveying the ideal signifieds which motivated the journey. Nerval consciously fabricates an Orient in which the signs are self-referential.
Model I

Looking for the signified of the received sign
(the referent is imaginary)

A

Creating a new sign (the referent is produced by the author himself)

C

Interpreting the perceived sign (the referent is reality)

B

This model depicts the process within the text. There is a movement from A, the desire or quest for the source of the oriental sign, to B, the recognition that the sign is empty of a real referent. At this point the narrator proceeds to C, where the source is to be found in a new literary sign. There is an interdependence or internal connection between C and A; the initial need to find an ideal ultimately leads to its creation through literature. Conversely, C will ultimately influence A by becoming a separate text, which will in turn become
part of the literary tradition and engender in its readers the desire
to find the origins of the exotic Orient.

As seen in the above model there are three basic movements within
the text: Gérard's quest for the oriental literary sign, the experience
which denies the validity of that sign, and finally the creation of
another literary sign. These changes are reflected in the different
discourses found within the text, showing the progress of the narrator
and his initiation into the experience of the Orient. The story unfolds
as a succession of hopes and disappointments. It contains the basic ele­
ments necessary for an initiation novel, as described by Barthes:

L'histoire qui est racontée par le narrateur a donc
tous les caractères dramatiques d'une initiation;
il s'agit d'une véritable mystagogie, articulée en
trois moments dialectiques; le désir ... l'échec ... l'assomption.6

Gérard, like most heroes of initiation novels, also desires true
love, the ideal woman: his vision of the Oriental woman is inseparable
from a culture in which he expects to be able to transcend his ration­
alist western background, to discover the sources of mysticism. None
of his desires will be fulfilled, but he will be able to write about
his experiences and offer a new and more accurate impression of the real
Oriental, as well as his own projection of the unattainable, mythical
"Orient".

The sign or word 'Orient' has specific meaning for Gerard: it is
like a text which he already knows and expects to 'read' during his trip.
But, as Barthes describes the ideal text, this text "est une galaxie de
signifiants, non une structure de signifiés!"7 There is no substance or
referent corresponding to the signified of the sign system which the narrator anticipates, the Orient is 'known' but without empirical content. It is during his journey that his knowledge will shift from mental knowledge to real knowledge. His 'reading' of the Orient will change as the narrator learns to decode the messages in real terms, rather than deciphering them according to a romantic code.

The first chapter of this study will analyse the process of projecting a desired meaning onto a situation. This occurs because Gerard decodes messages according to a connotative system. This system permits him to interpret signs in such a way that they fit into an idealized oriental image. The process of anticipation and misunderstanding signs also occurs when Gerard relates to women. He searches for the perfect 'type' who will offer him the joys of "true love". Each time he finds a woman who appears to fit his ideal image he feels certain that his quest for love is over. However, just as the desired Orient eludes him, so does the woman, and he must carry on his voyage.

The first part of the second chapter will examine the romantic discourse with which Gérard perceives and describes the Orient. This romantic ideology, affecting both his vision and expression, is the connotative system which Gérard uses to decode oriental signs, transforming them into his own personal dream world. The second part of this chapter looks at the problem of communication, for it is this obstacle that ultimately leads Gerard to accept the real Orient. Forced to understand new words and customs, Gerard moves away from preconceived notions and begins to acknowledge the authentic oriental
society. He no longer decodes situations according to a romantic code, but encodes new information into the journal.

In chapter three, we shall turn to Gérard's parallel quest for a mythical spiritual home, a return to the source of European religion and mysticism.

Chapter four focusses on two of the legends found in the *Voyage en Orient*. On one level they function as a means for Gérard to escape back into his imagination. As he transcribes these stories he is able to become a part of the Orient he longed to find. On another level these stories are aesthetic messages - literary signs, describing a mythical Orient as envisaged by Nerval himself. Based on religious tales, these legends can be read as fantasy narration or as allegorical representations of a religious experience; neither interpretation is conclusive. An examination of certain codes used by Nerval to create his imaginary Orient follows.

This novel has important historical value since it documents the nineteenth century Middle East. It also conveys the exotic dreams and myths which dominated European impressions of the time. Nerval carefully constructs a framework in which these two opposing images are juxtaposed. From an artistic point of view the text is remarkable, for the author creates a new literary sign describing his personal, desired universe. One of the legends in which Nerval depicts his fantasy Orient is 'Histoire du Calife Hakem'. In this tale the dialectic between reality and illusion mirrors an essential dilemma presented in the whole text. Gérard believes his dream of the exotic Orient exists, but he
can find only a reflection of it in legends. The question of whether
his ideal sign does have a real referent remains unanswered: only an
Oriental could know, and Gérard's fascination with the unknown oriental
other is essentially European.
Notes to the Introduction:

1. All quotations from the *Voyage en Orient* are taken from Gérard de Nerval, *Oeuvres II* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961). Page references will be given in the text.


Chapter I

Signifier and Signified: The Obscure Object of Desire.

Gérard, imagining adventures and romance, begins his voyage without a specific goal in mind. After a number of misadventures in Europe, he decides to travel to the Orient hoping that the East will fulfill his dream of an exotic journey. While in Vienna he anticipates its magical influence, which feels like a dream:

A Vienne, cet hiver, j'ai continuellement vécu dans un rêve. Est-ce déjà la douce atmosphère de l'Orient qui agit sur ma tête et sur mon coeur? (p. 60).

Gérard's expectation of an ideal Orient, which motivates his travels, will cause him to interpret oriental life according to preconceived notions. Later, he will learn to accept the Oriental reality for what it is, but initially his desires allow him to project meaning onto different situations.

The "Orient" is a sign for Gérard, a sign which he must learn to decode according to his experience rather than his anticipation. At one level, the signifieds in the Voyage en Orient are based on a system which we will call "Orientalism" (a complex of attitudes or concepts formulated by Western man since the Middle Ages).¹ Expressions of this oriental image can be found in occidental literature, philosophy and travellers' accounts, as well as in the visual and plastic arts. All of these, as well as the narrator's own imagination, contribute to Gérard's personal expectations of the Orient. This is why, referring
to the Orient, he exclaims: "C'est bien là, le pays des rêves et de l'illusion" (p. 92).

The journey to the Orient is an act of faith for Gérard; he is hopeful that he will find there a tangible reality which will confirm his expectations. He begins his travels by comparing himself to Captain Cook, who discovered the substance of his dreams:

... à la manière du capitaine Cook qui écrit avoir vu un tel jour un goéland ou un pingouin, tel autre jour n'avoir vu qu'un tronc d'arbre flottant, ici la mer était claire, là bourbeuse. Mais, à travers ces signes vains, ces flots changeants, il rêvait des îles inconnues et parfumées et finissait par aborder un soir dans ces retraits du pur amour et de l'éternelle beauté. (p. 31).

The Orient is not simply a geographical location, but represents the origin of certain myths and ideals. Thus the Orient is a sign for Gérard, in the sense that Barthes gives the term"... the sign is not the 'thing', but the mental representation of the thing (concept)."^2 Egypt, for example, according to Gérard is "toujours le pays des énigmes et des mystères". (p. 90). It is a sign and its exotic qualities are the signified. One of the signifiers of the oriental sign is the veil worn by Egyptian women. The narrator transfers this veil image to the country itself: "la beauté s'y entoure, comme autrefois, de voiles et de bandelettes ..." (p. 90). He decides to remain in Cairo in order to 'lift' the veil which protects its mysteries and charms (the signifieds). He expresses his intention in the following lines:

Arrêtons-nous, et cherchons à soulever un coin du voile austère de la déesse de Sais ... Reste le voile ... qui, peut-être n'établit pas une barrière aussi farouche que l'on croit (p. 90).
In the same way that the woman's veil conceals her beauty, the veil symbolizes the barrier between the traveller and the mysteries of Egypt. Furthermore, the veil is the promise or sign that the oriental secrets exist, concealed from the casual voyager. Confident that the promise is real and that he can penetrate into the oriental world, Gérard decides to stay and become part of the Egyptian culture. He assumes that the tantalizing oriental enigma, symbolically hidden behind the veil, is attainable through patience and a willingness to participate in the daily life of the inhabitants. This conviction is firmly based on the belief that the oriental sign has in fact the desired referent. He explains in his journal that it is necessary to live in Egypt for a while in order to appreciate and enjoy the oriental magic:

...L'Egypte, grave et pieuse, est toujours le pays des énigmes et des mystères: la beauté s'y entoure, comme autrefois, de voiles et de bandelettes, et cette morné attitude décourage aisément l'europeen frivole. Il abandonne le Caire après huit jours, et se hâte d'aller vers les cataractes du Nil chercher d'autres déceptions que lui réserve la science, et dont il ne conviendra jamais.

La patience était la plus grande vertu des initiés antiques. Pourquoi passer si vite? ... D'ailleurs, n'est-il pas encourageant de voir qu'en des pays où les femmes passent pour être prisonnières, les bazars, les rues et les jardins nous les présentent par milliers, marchant seules à l'aventure, ou deux ensemble, ou accompagnées d'un enfant? ... Parmi les riches costumes arabes et turcs que la réforme épargne, l'habit mystérieux des femmes donne à la foule qui remplit les rues l'aspect joyeux d'un bal masqué ... L'imagination trouve son compte à cet incognito des visages féminins, qui ne s'étend pas à tous leurs charmes (pp. 90-91).

Just as the Orient intrigues Gérard because of its impenetrability, the oriental woman, concealed behind her veil, allows his imagination to
dream of her beauty and grace. She is projected as being the perfect wife and lover, especially after Gérard witnesses an Egyptian wedding.

One night he is awakened by the music of a wedding procession. At first he thinks he is dreaming, but realizes that the melody is actually outside his window. The blending of dream and reality seems natural in the magical city and Gérard describes his impressions in the following lines:

Mon premier sommeil se croisait d'une manière inexplicable avec les sons vagues d'une cornemuse et d'une viole enroulée, qui agaçait sensiblement mes nerfs. Cette musique obstinée répétait toujours sur divers tons la même phrase mélodique, qui réveillait en moi l'idée d'un vieux noël bourguignon ou provençal. Cela appartenait-il au songe ou à la vie? Mon esprit hésita quelque temps avant de s'éveiller tout à fait. (p. 93).

Wishing to become part of the dream, now metamorphosed into reality, Gérard follows the procession through the labyrinth of streets and finally joins the wedding party. The ritual of the ceremony strengthens the narrator's belief that the Orient does fit into his imaginary system. He returns home "tout ému de cette scène nocturne" (p. 99), and describes the bride as "mystérieuse sous son voile comme l'antique déesse du Nil" (p. 99). The description of the ideal woman or bride is important, but it is Gérard's concept of the bridegroom which is essential, for it reveals what he himself wishes to become: "un seul homme (qui) aura le secret de cette beauté ou de cette grace ignorée: un seul (qui) peut tout le jour poursuivre en paix son idéal et se croire le favori d'une sultane ou d'une fée". (p. 100). This desire to unite himself with an oriental woman indicates that Gérard is not only seeking the signified
of the sign 'the Orient', but also that he desires to become part of that signified. In this way he would learn the mysteries and magic of the Orient and be part of the dream he imagines is there. The veiled woman is no more real than the Orient from A Thousand and One Nights, but for Gérard she is "la déesse Isis", the veiled feminine principle. It is through her that Gerard dreams of attaining his ideal state of happiness.

Gérard projects meaning onto a situation, as seen in the above quotation, where he eulogizes the happy state of the oriental bridegroom. This projection of meaning is motivated by a system of signification in which the referent is imaginary. He fantasizes the oriental world or woman as being a certain way, as fitting an ideal model. The word 'Orient' acts as a catalyst for the narrator's imagination, allowing him to perceive the world evoked as a whole sign system. This process of attributing an imaginary character to the Orient is similar to Marcel's associations of proper names in A La Recherche du temps perdu. In his essay, Proust et les noms, Barthes describes the importance of the name as a sign for Marcel. This description is applicable to Gérard's conception of the Orient which is a sign or name "touffu de sens". According to Barthes:

Le Nom propre est lui aussi un signe et non, bien entendu, un simple indice qui désignerait, sans signifier ... Comme signe, le Nom s'offre à une exploration, à un dechiffrement: il est à la fois un 'milieu' (au sens biologique du terme), dans lequel il faut se plonger, baignant indéfiniment dans toutes les rêveries qu'il porte, et un objet précieux, comme une fleur. Autrement dit, si le Nom ... est un signe, c'est un signe volumineux, un signe toujours gros d'une épaisseur touffue de sens". 3
The Orient and the veiled women are "des signes volumineux" for Gérard in the same way that proper names are for Marcel. The word 'Orient' is the "open sesame" to a world of sultans, princesses, goddesses and heroes. The image of the veiled woman evokes longings and thoughts of happiness. Both are signs with imaginary referents which Gérard naively hopes to find.

The sources for Gérard's notions about the Orient are numerous: one is his own imagination, another important source is literature. Often Gérard refers to the cities he visits as being from the legends in A Thousand and One Nights. For example, while in Cairo he says "... c'est là, me disais-je, la ville des Mille et une Nuits, la capitale des califes fatimites et des soudans ..." (p. 92). Gérard integrates the fictional images found in that oriental fairy tale into his conceptual models of the Orient, and expects to discover them during his voyage. The stories and legends form a symbolic Orient for him, a potentially magical universe. Thus, while he travels, the people and objects he sees (which are the signifiers of Gérard's oriental sign) become secondary to the possibilities or ideas (signifieds) which they represent. Barthes describes this process of symbolism as occurring when "la forme (y) est sans cesse débordée par la puissance et le mouvement du contenu".

Gérard repeatedly illustrates a "conscience symbolique" in his interpretation of situations: for example, in his concept of the oriental bridegroom. Barthes defines the "conscience symbolique" in this way:

La conscience symbolique est essentiellement refus de la forme: dans le signe, c'est le signifié qui l'intéresse: le signifiant n'est jamais pour elle qu'un déterminé."
As Barthes points out, this symbolic consciousness is a refusal to see the form of the sign for what it is; rather it emphasises the signified (or concept) as the perceiver himself imagines it to be. In Gérard's case, his own ideas of the Orient dominate his perceptions. A closer analysis of Gérard's conceptualization is possible by applying the idea of a connotative system to his observations.

The theory of the connotative system is basically concerned with the system of signification, or the relation between the plane of expression and the plane of content in a sign. Hjelmslev represents this system in the formula E R C (where R is a relation between E, the plane of expression, and C, the plane of content). Barthes describes two systems of signification possible in the interpretation of a sign: one is the connotative system, the other is the denotative system.

In the first case, the first system (E R C) becomes the plane of expression, or signifier of the second system:

2 E R C
I ERC

or else (ERC) RC. This is the case which Hjelmslev calls connotative semiotics: the first system is then the plane of denotation and the second system (wider than the first) the plane of connotation. We shall therefore say that a connoted system is a system whose plane of expression is itself constituted by a signifying system ... The signifiers of connotation which we shall call cconnotators, are made up of signs (signifiers and signifieds united) of the denoted system.

According to Barthes these two systems of signification are built upon each other but staggered. In Gérard's case, the denoted system which is the plane of expression or signifier for his interpretations
(connotative system) is based upon books, paintings, and a number of other Western notions of the Orient, as well as his own desires. An example of the process of signification on the plane of connotation is found at the beginning of the journal. Gérard encounters an old woman who gestures for him to follow her. Gerard does so, expecting a fabulous adventure to ensue:

"Après tout, me dis-je, cette femme reconnaît en moi un étranger, elle veut peut-être me montrer quelque curiosité. Peut-être est-elle chargée d'un galant message, car nous sommes dans le Levant, pays d'aventures. Comme elle me faisait signe de la suivre, je la suivis (p. 86)."

Gérard does not know the meaning of the gesture, however he fits the old woman into an oriental image belonging to a system which he has inherited. For him she is a mediator between himself and an exotic adventure. The process of signification here is to attribute a romantic fantasy model or signified to the old woman, the signifier. Because he fits the sign into a personal system of signification, the signified (his idea of what lies behind the sign) is more important to him than the signifier (the gesture). The signifier is simply an indicator of a potentially rich experience. As Barthes points out, in the connotative system, the "character (of the signified) is at once general, global and diffuse; it is, if you like, a fragment of ideology." This ideology of Western Orientalism is united with the connotators (signifiers of connotation) in a process of connotation. Thus, the old woman is transmuted into a messenger or promise of a wonderful experience. In the following model the old woman's gesture, as interpreted by Gérard,
is seen as it fits into Hjelmslev's formula:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|}
\hline
2 & \text{orientalism} \\
\hline
\text{old woman's gesture} & \text{Sr} \\
\text{Sd} & \text{Sd} \\
\end{array}
\]

On the first level (the denoted system) the signifier and signified of the old woman's gesture have a certain meaning, but this meaning is altered when the gesture becomes a signifier of connotation.

This process of connotation, found throughout the journal, is the motivation behind the narrative action. Gérard endows people and situations with specific qualities, because he wants them to have them. In semiotic terms Gérard wishes to move from the connotative level where meaning is implicit to a denotative level where meaning is explicit. In that way he would no longer have to fantasize his ideals, but would be able to experience them.

The Orient is a world full of signs rich in symbolic meaning for Gérard. However, not all signs are propitious. Often Gerard recognizes misfortune in the shape of an animal or insect. For example, one evening a black dog follows him and a woman friend; for him the dog is a "mauvaise augure":

...comme je reconduisais la dame assez tard, il s'est mêlé dans nos amours un chien qui courait comme la barbe de Faust et qui avait l'air fou. J'ai vu tout de suite que c'était de mauvaise augure. La belle s'est mise à caresser le chien, qui était tout mouillé, puis elle m'a dit qu'il avait
sans doute perdu ses maîtres, et qu'elle voulait le recueillir chez elle. J'ai demandé à y entrer aussi, mais elle m'a répondu: nicht! ... Je me suis dit: C'est ce gredin de chien noir qui me porte malheur. Il est évident que, sans lui, j'aurais été reçu (p. 46).

Another time, Gérard is contemplating his future happiness with an oriental woman when he sees a large insect. He fears that it is also a sign of calamity:

Je n'ose te dire quel vulgaire incident vint me tirer de ces hautes reflexions pendant que je foulais d'un pied superbe le sable rouge du sentier. Un enorme insecte le traversait, en poussant devant lui une boule plus grosse que lui-même: c'était une sorte d'escargot qui me rappela les scarabées égyptiens, qui portent le monde au dessus de leur tête. Tu me connais pour superstitieux, et tu penses bien que je tirai une augure quelconque de cette intervention symbolique tracée à travers mon chemin. Je revins sur mes pas avec la pensée d'un obstacle contre lequel il me faudrait lutter. (p. 347-8).

Objects, insects, people and animals all become signs which fit into Gérard's interpretation of the world. He recognizes a number of them by association with literary sources. These references provide him with a system of identification: signs become significant according to a literary model. Gérard even contemplates his own self-image as corresponding to symbols and themes of his reading. In Cairo, for example, Gérard finds himself in a situation which he fantasizes as occurring in A Thousand and One Nights. He identifies with the young merchant in one of the stories to such an extent that he acts out his role, following two women and buying them some material:

Me voilà en pleines Mille et une Nuits. Que ne suis-je un des jeunes marchands auxquels les
Through his imagination, Gerard moves from the world of actuality to the world of fantasy and literary codes.

This marvelous universe of subjective projections, in which Gérard can be Casanova, Don Juan or a hero from an oriental fairy-tale, is also populated by images from the great painters. He finds in Munich "tous les types créés par les grands artistes de la terre ... on pouvait s'entretenir avec le Judith de Caravage, le magicien d'Albert Dürer ou le Madeleine de Rubens!" (p. 24).

Types, whether they are fictional characters or forms of beauty, are important to Gérard because they are an outward manifestation of an inner concept. In other words, the type is an expression, under the phenomena of form, of a system of relations, established by conventional codes of knowledge and understanding. Women especially are perceived according to a taxonomy of types. There are certain images that appeal emotionally and erotically to Gérard because they represent an abstract ideal of physical and mental perfection.

While in Vienna, Gérard meets a woman whom he recognizes as an archetypal mate. His enthusiastic description conveys the impression her presence makes on him:

Mon ami! imagine que c'est une beauté de celles que nous avons tant de fois rêvées, la femme idéale des tableaux de l'école italienne,
la Vénitienne de Gozzi, 'bionda e grassota',
la voilà trouvée! je regrette de n'être
pas assez fort en peinture pour t'en
indiquer exactement tous les traits. Figure-
toi ... une peau incroyable, à croire qu'on
l'aït conservée sous des verres: les traits
les plus nobles, le nez aquilin, le front
haut, la bouche en cerise; puis un col de
pigeon gros et gras, arrêté par un collier
de perles: puis des épaules blanches et
fermes, où il y a de la force d'Hercule et
de la faiblesse et du charme de l'enfant de
deux ans. J'ai expliqué à cette beauté
qu'elle me plaisait, surtout parce qu'elle
était pour ainsi dire Austro-vénitienne, et
qu'elle réalisait en elle seule le Saint-Empire
romain ... (p. 33).

This woman, Catarina, is never known to Gerard beyond a super-
ficial level because he cannot communicate with her due to their lan-
guage differences. This barrier is essential, however, for it enables
Gerard to continue in pursuit of his imaginary ideal. It is only her
appearance which is important to him, as it reminds him of another
image.

Later, while in Egypt, Gérard chooses to buy a slave girl, Zeynab,
because he recognizes her as being an exotic oriental type. His choice
is based on an undefinable feeling that he cannot resist. Upon seeing
her, he declares:

Je poussai un cri d'enthousiasme: je venais de
reconnaître l'œil en amande, la paupière oblique
des Javanaises dont j'ai vu des peintures en
Hollande: comme carnation, cette femme appartenait
évidemment à la race jaune. Je ne sais quel goût
de l'étrange et de l'imprévu, dont je ne pus me
défendre, me décida en sa faveur: (p. 172).

Zeynab is compared to a 'tableau' etched on Gerard's memory: the
focus of his attention is on the similarity of her face to that of a
painting. Although he cannot identify the origin of his feeling, it is obviously evoked by his recognition of her resemblance to another image. Her oriental features are a sign reminiscent of another sign, or, as Barthes writes: "le signe est une fracture qui ne s'ouvre jamais que sur le visage d'un autre signe."  

The oriental woman who becomes the central emotional focus for Gerard is Salema. This friend of Zeynab is first seen by Gérard while he is visiting his slave at a girls' school in Beirut. His first impression is that she is a 'gracieuse apparition' as her face is hidden behind a veil. Later, when her beauty is revealed, she becomes an object of admiration onto which he projects a mythology of the ideal woman. She has the characteristics of both the European and Oriental "types," as well as the traits of nobility:

Et la jeune fille, se laissant voir enfin, me permit d'admirer des traits ou la blancheur européenne s'alliait au dessin pur de ce type aquilin qui, en Asie comme chez nous, a quelque chose de royal. (p. 344).

Salema is an expression of the aesthetic and exotic ideals of which Gérard dreams. The daughter of a Druze sheik, she also fulfils the intellectual need of Gerard's imagination. She is cultured, intelligent and 'royal,' whereas Zeynab, on the other hand, could never be considered as a mate for Gérard because of her status of slave. Gérard decides immediately that he loves Salema and will marry her.

This decision to marry, however, is not suddenly reached on seeing Salema. In fact, the desire to find the perfect woman is part of the journey's quest. From the beginning of the voyage, Gérard wishes to
be "comme un héros de roman (p. 338). According to him, the novel "n'a que deux sortes de dénouements, le mariage ou la mort," therefore it is necessary that he attain "du moins à l'un des deux" (p. 338). Marriage to Salema will guarantee his position of hero. Through her love, his mundane role in the world will alter, and he will be perceived by her as the lover/hero. Thus, although Salema is the object of his own imagination, she is also the subject or catalyst for his being loved. The marriage ceremony will ensure his position as being the object of her desire, the husband.

The need to be loved, to unite with an ideal woman, is based on Gerard's own romantic notions of love. Salema will initiate him into the world of heroes, and also into the secrets of love. Although he has yet to learn the secrets she will reveal, the concepts of love are deeply rooted in Gerard's romantic models. Two saints, Polyphile and Polia, serve as examples of true love for Gérard (p. 67). Love is considered to be a mystical experience which projects the lovers beyond the real world into a transcendental atmosphere, rendering them saints and gods. However, the central myth in the story of Polyphile and Polia is not love but absence. The lovers never marry, because of their social situations, instead they join religious orders and wait for death to unite them. Only during their sleep do they dream that they are together. "L'amour celeste" is the imaginary state in which one person meditates on another. Solitude and a dream object are the two requirements for the pure love that Gérard seeks. His description of the feelings he experiences after seeing Salema reveal this aspect:
En quittant la maison de Madame Carles, j'ai emporté mon amour comme une proie dans la solitude. Oh! que j'étais heureux de me voir une idée, un but, une volonté, quelque chose à rêver, à tâcher d'atteindre! (p. 346).

The dream world, in which Gérard envisages himself and his love, is outside the actualities of time and space. Love will render him eternally happy, eternally young. Gérard describes his joy and paints the mental image of his happiness:

je n'étais plus seul: mon avenir se dessinait sur le fond lumineux de ce tableau: la femme idéale que chacun poursuit dans ses songes s'était réalisée pour moi (p. 347).

Gérard contemplates himself in the marvelous universe of his own reflections. This dream world can only be experienced in his imagination, in the same way that Salema, his dream woman, can never be known as a real person. Her perfection and mystique are guarded by the dreamer himself, who creates her qualities and renders her an ideal, an unattainable object of desire.

Gérard's desire to marry Salema is also motivated by his belief that in marrying an oriental woman he will attain the status and pride of one who is born in "la terre des patriarches" (p. 338). The marriage will enable him to become part of the Orient, instead of remaining simply a European traveller. Aware of these potentialities, Gérard writes:

Il faut que je m'unisse à quelque fille ingénue de ce sol sacré qui est notre première patrie à tous, que
Once he discovers Salema, Gerard feels his hopes of finding the ideal Orient are realizable. His wedding, like a ritual ceremony, will initiate him into the Oriental culture. Salema is the necessary connection between his Western past and an Eastern future, between a bourgeois French life and an exotic Oriental one. Marriage to Salema would be an affirmation of the oriental ideal cherished by Gérard. She is a product of this romantic culture and their life together is a promise of his being able to participate in it. The wedding ceremony gives reality to Gérard's dreams of love and of the Orient. Convinced that his life will alter completely, he perceives the marriage as a sort of rebirth, a rite of passage from rational existence to a poetic state.

Gérard construes marriage through an exotic code: it signifies at the same time ritual, union, and access to "le pays des rêves." Love and the Orient are signs for Gérard, so is marriage, and like the other two, it has no referent beyond his imagination. It is only through the experience of his travels that Gerard will realize his error in judgement. The signs will be unveiled and reveal an oriental reality which disappoints Gerard, but at the same time interests him as a chronicler. Gérard's perception of the Orient will be seen to change, as he shifts from a connotative system to a denotative system. The connotative system of perceiving the Orient is in part dependent on the romantic language codes that Gerard uses. Certain words and
phrases create images which colour his perception of situations, people, or objects. The romantic discourse that Gérard uses, which at first deludes him into seeing what he wants to, will be examined in the next chapter. This language changes as Gerard learns about the actual Orient and reflects the denotative process of perception.
Notes to Chapter One.


2. Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology, p. 50.


6. Roland Barthes, Elements of Semiology, p. 89.

7. ibid., pp. 89-90

8. ibid., p. 90

Chapter Two

Connotation and Denotation: Behind the Veil

Language is central to Gérard's perception of the Orient, as is the European romantic code, which he uses in describing women and events. This language conceals and protects him from real contact with the Orient. He is able to imagine situations as he wishes to: in other words, he is able to remain on a connotative level of interpretation. After examining the romantic code he uses, we shall turn to the way in which Gérard is forced into recognizing the Orient as it is, unveiled. Owing to the daily necessities of life and his own personal interest, Gerard learns the Oriental languages and becomes aware of his own misconceptions, and of those of the west. At this point, he interprets meaning on a denotative level. The "Orient" is no longer situated in relation to Europe and its culture, but is, in fact, a reality ... where Gérard is.

Connotation

As we have seen, Gerard's desire is to find the perfect woman and his ideal Orient influences his observations. Consequently, he believes that he recognizes objects, faces, and events, when in fact, he is only fitting them into his own mythological system. It is not only his desire which alters reality and enables Gerard to project meaning, but also his language. Gérard perceives the oriental world in a set of fixed images borrowed from a romantic code. This code is both the inspiration and guide for Gérard, who accepts the romantic
promise that feeling, passion, and dreams are real and can be conveyed by literature. Exotic prose and poetic images are the signifieds or concepts behind Gérard's interpretations. For Gérard, the fantasy universe exists and the romantic literature and arts attest to its verity. It is the romantic language which creates a vision and a goal.

In his book *Langage et connaissance*, A. Schaff describes how language influences one's notion of the world. This idea is clearly applicable to Gérard, who has faith in the actuality of his romantic dream. Schaff states: "le système d'une langue définit dans un certain sens notre vision du monde" and also, "la langue 'cree' effectivement l'image de la réalité." The romantic language is the starting point and the vehicle of Gérard's hopes. For example, he extols the novelist Nodier for his work, *Franciscus Columna*, which describes the love of Polyphile and Polia. As previously mentioned, this story represents for Gérard a perfect model of real love, the type of love he aspires to find. He writes:

> Reçois aussi ce souvenir d'un de tes amis inconnus, bon Nodier, belle âme divine, qui les (Polyphile and Polia) immortalisait en mourant! Comme toi je croyais en eux, et comme eux à l'amour céleste, dont Polia ranimait la flamme, et dont Polyphile reconstruisait en idée le palais splendide sur les rochers cythéréens. Vous savez aujourd'hui quels sont les vrais dieux, esprits doublement couronnés: païens par le génie, chrétiens par le coeur! (p. 67)

It is Nodier's vision and expression which touch Gérard. For Gérard, this novel not only constitutes the ultimate portrayal of love,
but also proves that its author is a sincere "apôtre de l'amour pur" (p. 67). In Gérard's mind, it is language alone which substantiates truth. Because of this, he writes as though Polyphile and Polia were not simply literary characters, but real people, and he praises Nodier, not for his style, but for the purity of his love:

Que Polyphile et Polia, ces saints martyrs d'amour, me pardonnent de toucher à leur mémoire! Le hasard...s'il est un hasard? - a remis en mes mains leur histoire mystique, et j'ignorais à cette heure-là même qu'un savant plus poète, un poète plus savant que moi, avait fait reluire sur ces pages le dernier éclat du génie que recelait son front penché. Il fut comme eux un des plus fidèles apôtres de l'amour pur ... et parmi nous l'un des derniers. (p. 67).

Gérard acknowledges with bitter regret that, unlike Nodier, he cannot remain faithful to language alone, but must travel to find his ideal. He laments that he needs to touch reality in order to believe in it.

Et moi qui vais descendre dans cette île sacrée que Francesco a décrite sans l'avoir vue, ne suis-je pas toujours, hêlas! le fils d'un siècle déshériter d'illusions, qui a besoin de toucher pour croire, et de rêver le passe ... sur ses débris? Il ne m'a pas suffi de mettre au tombeau mes amours de chair et de cendre, pour bien m'assurer que c'est nous, vivants, qui marchons dans un monde de fantômes.

Polyphile, plus sage, a connu la vraie Cythère pour ne l'avoir point visitée, et le véritable amour pour en avoir repoussé l'image mortelle (p. 67).

This confession is crucial to the understanding of Gérard's voyage, for it indicates the paradoxical undertaking of a man, motivated by dreams
evoked by language, who will find out that his ideals can only be sustained in words.

Several incidents demonstrate Gérard's preoccupation with poetic images and the associations he makes on their juxtaposition with reality. These sometimes produce comic effects, as in Greece, when he drinks some wine sold to him by a local wine seller. Gérard thinks he will taste the nectar of the gods, but soon realizes that it is simply bad wine. Out of deference to his respect for ancient Greek wine, he cannot spit it out, but does admit that it tastes horrible:

This passage indicates the recurring tendency Gérard has to perceive objects as signs (in this case, it is the goatskin bottle) and to interpret the signs according to his personal code system. The
ordinary goatskin bottle becomes "un outre homérique ruisselante et velue" containing the nectar of the gods. When he admits that the wine was not good, Gérard insists on the historical and literary importance of Samoan wine, rather than his disappointment in its taste. The sign, "... outre de vin" transcends its function as container to become a visual manifestation of a poetic image. In other words, one object, the goatskin bottle, is the 'word made visible' - the 'word' being a passage from Homer describing the wedding of Pelee.

As previously discussed, Gérard is decoding on a connotative level. He projects meaning onto a sign from his memory of other texts which contained the ideals or signifieds he hopes to find. In this way, Gérard is like a reader of a foreign book, decoding the characters on the pages into significant symbols by working within a code system he already knows. The correct code of the new text remains hidden. His misreading occurs voluntarily, because Gérard knows what he wants to understand. Consequently, he projects meaning onto signs, endowing them with the signified or another sign. As 'decoder' of the new text, Gérard's perceptions are simple copies of another anterior text. His memory preserves the original idea and his desire for that ideal motivates a rereading of it into a new text or sign. In this way, he demonstrates the process of decoding as described by Jakobson: "Le processus de décodage présente la direction du son au sens et des éléments aux symboles." Gérard himself is aware of this tendency, and expresses it in the following passage which describes his pleasure on seeing Beirut for the first time:
J'avais hate d'arriver au port et de m'abandonner entièrement à l'impression du spectacle qui m'y attendait.

O nature! beauté, grâce, ineffable des cités d'Orient bâties aux bords des mers, tableaux chatoyants de la vie, spectacle des plus belles races humaines ... comment peindre l'impression que vous causez à tout reveur, et qui n'est pourtant que la réalité d'un sentiment prévue? On a déjà lu cela dans les livres, on l'a admiré dans les tableaux, surtout dans ces vieilles peintures italiennes qui se rapportent à l'époque de la puissance maritime des Vénitiens et des Génois: mais ce qui surprend aujourd'hui, c'est de le trouver encore si pareil à l'idée qu'on s'en est formée (p. 303-304).

Gérard expresses enthusiasm for this city because it is so clearly a copy of his imaginary Beirut. He is not searching for originality or unknown cities; his quest is for the recognizable, the imitation of a preconceived image.

The connotative or subcodes which Gérard uses to decode signs are based on cultural conventions, as is the romantic language he uses. As Umberto Eco maintains: "An expression does not in principal designate any object, but on the contrary conveys a cultural content." Gérard does not objectively describe the oriental world, his writing reflects his own dreams and projections, based on romantic ideology. His romantic discourse is founded on the same codes as those he uses to decode signs and messages. The following quotation shows Gérard's romantic mode of expression and how he refers to mythological literature:
Underlying this passage is a romantic nostalgia for the Greece of the past, the home of the gods. Gérard, addressing a prayer to the muses and the goddess of fertility, laments the loss of beauty and abundance. The image of Greece as mother of men and gods is emphasized by the fact that Gérard prays to Greek mythical figures, thus giving them the status of receivers of his message.

Greece, once the symbol for beauty and art, is now seen as it really is, a dry landscape signifying absence and alienation. The very material presence of the barren mountains evokes a longing for the Greece of Gérard's imagination. According to Paul de Man, this conflict between nature and imagination is fundamental to romantic expression:

Le thème de l'imagination coïncidant avec le thème de la nature, telle est la fondamentale ambiguïté qui caractérise la poétique romantique. Qui dit objet naturel dit présence immédiate de la matière et des éléments physiques: qui dit image dit, par définition, non présence de l'objet.

Gérard's account contains both the elements described by de Man: the real Greek mountains and the presence of an imaginary Greece. The ambiguity of Gérard's narration is the result of the overshadowing of the natural or real elements (the barren mountains) by the romantic
Greece of the muses. For example, the metaphor equating the barren mountains to the powerful bones of the mother is important because Gérald does not compare the two, but insists that they are identical: "des monts rocailleux ... ce sont les os ..." They have the same essence, the same identity. The description of real Greece is minimal. Gérald's imagination and poetic language dominate the description of the actual landscape, and thus it is the absent Greece that is stressed.

Paul de Man describes this process characteristic of romantic thought:

Quelquefois la pensee et la poesie romantiques semblent si proches de s'abandonner entièrement à la nostalgie de l'objet qu'il devient difficile de distinguer entre langage expressif ou constituant et un language mimétiques ou littéraux.

Another example of the ambiguity between object and image created by Gérald's language is found in his description of a Greek woman whom he meets in Constantinople. The portrait of this woman seems to be objective because Gérald avoids the effusive metaphors associated with poetic language: rather he uses a predominantly mimetic mode of expression:

La quatrième, assise à l'extrémité du divan, était une jeune Grecque blonde ayant le profil pur popularisé par la statuaire antique. Un 'taktikos' de Smyrne aux festons et aux glands d'or posé coquettlement sur l'oreille et entouré par deux énormes tresses de cheveux tordus formant turban autour de la tête, accompagnant admirablement sa physionomie spirituelle, illuminée par un oeil bleu ou brillait la pensée, et contrastant avec l'éclat immobile et sans idée des grands yeux noirs de ses rivales en beauté ... (p.466).

Although Gérald creates the impression of presenting an objective
description, this is only an illusion. He sees and describes the woman through a fairytale vision derived from an oriental story. He says:

Il me semble, dis-je, voir un tableau des Mille et une Nuits et faire en ce moment 'le rêve du Dormeur éveillé' (p. 467)

It is Gérard's projection of this woman and how she fits into his image of 'le rêve du Dormeur éveillé' which is described, and not the real woman. In this portrait Gérard is capturing his own fantasy and the result is a posed and static image, as immobile as the Greek statues he mentions or words on a page.

This passage describing a Greek woman underlines the fundamental dialectic in the romantic discourse between imagination and perception. Gérard's vision of her as a type rather than a real person dominates the description. Paul de Man points out that in romantic language:

la vision se donne presque comme présence, comme paysage réel ... la fusion entre la matière et la conscience se fait en confondant perception et rêverie, en sacrifiant en fait la conscience à l'objet. 6

Throughout Gérard's narration the ontological status of the object dissolves, as his poetic language represents it as an archetypal mythos. But it is also his language which creates the vision and allows him to believe, if only for a while, that his dreams are reality. As his voyage progresses and Gérard learns new languages, he no longer confuses his perception with his projection but discovers the Orient as it is.
Denotation

The longing for an exotic Orient and the language Gérard uses to interpret his adventures permit him to remain on a fantasy level. However, numerous problems occur because he can only superficially understand foreign cultures and people, owing to his inability to communicate. For example, he writes that his encounters with women in Vienna were merely studies in customs, rather than the deep involvements he had first imagined them to be, because he could never exchange ideas or express himself to them:

Je m'étais laissé aller avec complaisance à décrire mes amours de rencontre, mais ce n'était que comme étude de mœurs lointaines: il s'agissait de femmes qui ne parlent à peu pres aucune langue européenne ... (p. 60)

Not only does Gérard regret his surface knowledge of the people and places he visits, but he is often put in humiliating or difficult situations because of his incapacity to understand. For instance, on one occasion in Greece, Gérard misinterprets the words of an old woman, just as he misinterpreted her gesture (as discussed in chapter one). Gérard thinks the woman is leading him to an adventure, but in fact she only wants to sell him the services of a young girl:

Une vieille femme s'approche de la table où j'étais assis et me dit: koxovitso! xoxi!
On sait déjà que le grec moderne s'éloigne beaucoup moins qu'on ne croit de l'ancien ...
Je ne me donne pas pour un helléniste de première force, mais je voyais bien par le second mot qu'il s'agissait de quelque chose de beau. Quant au substantif ... j'en cherchais en vain la racine dans ma mémoire meublée
seulement des dizaines classiques de Lancelot ...
Comme elle me faisait signe de la suivre, je la suivis ...
Tout à coup la vieille se mit à siffler, l'une des paysannes s'arrêta et passa précipitamment par une des ouvertures de la haie. Je compris tout de suite la signification du mot ... Il s'agissait d'une sorte de chasse aux jeunes filles (p. 86-87).

Without actual knowledge of the old woman's language, Gérard can only guess her intention. But, unlike gestures or objects, language is not decodable according to a connotative system. He must learn the languages in order to decipher real meaning.

The language problem hinders real social contact. On one hand this non-communication permits Gérard to remain in his imaginary world as he simply guesses meaning, on the other hand, it forces him more and more into solitude. For example, although he knows one word in Egyptian, 'tayeb', which is a general expression of good will, Gérard is unable to communicate anything beyond this greeting. Thus he is alienated from the private and social life of the native people even when the opportunity to involve himself arises. In one instance, he disguises himself as an Egyptian in order to participate in a wedding ceremony. When invited into the family's house to continue the celebration, he had to renounce the adventure because he is unfamiliar with the language and "pas encore assez sûr de la prononciation du mot 'tayeb'" (p. 98).

At a more critical level, Gérard is helpless in dealing with his slave girl, Zeynab, because they cannot speak to each other. Although he tries to interact with her, the inability to communicate causes many problems. For example, on the first day of her arrival she refuses to
Je sentais qu'il valait mieux parler, même avec la certitude de ne pas être compris, que de se livrer à une pantomime ridicule. Elle répondait quelques mots qui signifiaient probablement qu'elle ne comprenait pas, et auxquels je repliquai: Tayeb. C'était toujours un commencement de dialogue (p. 185).

However, there is no dialogue: Zeynab answers "Mafisch" and Gérard admits that it is a "mot inconnu dont l'expression m'attrista beaucoup" (p. 185).

On another occasion Gérard enters the room of his slave and is surprised to find rows of onions hanging from the ceiling. Unfamiliar with this Egyptian custom, and unable to understand Zeynab's explanation, he pulls down the onions. He consequently upsets the slave who repeatedly calls him "pharaon". This word puzzles Gerard until he learns of it's significance:

... imagine ma surprise, lorsqu'en entrant un matin dans la chambre de l'esclave, je trouvai une guirlande d'oignons suspendue en travers de la porte, et d'autres oignons disposés avec symétrie au-dessus de la place où elle dormait. Croyant que c'était un simple enfantillage, je détachai ces ornements peu propres à parer la chambre, et je les envoyai négligemment dans la cour; mais voilà l'esclave qui se lève furieuse et désolée, s'en va ramasser les oignons en pleurant et les remet à leur place avec de grands signes d'adoration. Il fallut, pour s'expliquer, attendre l'arrivée de Mansour. Provisoirement je recevais un déluge d'imprécactions dont la plus claire était le mot 'pharaon'! je ne savais trop si je devais me fâcher ou la plaindre. Enfin Mansour arriva, et j'appris que j'avais renversé un sort, que j'étais cause des malheurs les plus terribles qui fondraient sur elle et sur moi. Après tout, dis-je à Mansour, nous sommes
dans un pays où les oignons ont été des dieux ...
Mais l'esclave ne voulait rien entendre et répétait en se tournant vers moi: Pharaon!
Mansour m'apprit que cela voulait dire "un être impie et tyrannique!": je fus affecté de ce reproche, mais bien aise d'apprendre que le nom des anciens rois de ce pays était devenu une unjure (p. 211).

Gérard is fascinated with words. As seen in the above passage, he is more interested in the use of the word "pharaon" and its meaning than with Zeynab's abuse. He rises above a subjective response to the situation, such as being hurt or angry at the insult, because he is more concerned with knowledge than with his own feelings. This is why he is able to put aside his illusions in favour of authenticity. Consequently, in attempting to approach the truth of oriental cultures, Gérard must abandon his fantasies. He replaces them with facts and translations of customs, thus proving to the reader that he is apparently more concerned with a real account of the Orient than with his illusions about it. He has a sense of responsibility towards words and truth. In such a context, inaccuracy and self-indulgence would be tantamount to betraying his intellectual honesty.

There are numerous instances of misunderstandings due to Gérard's inability to communicate. One of these, however, occurs because of a cultural nuance in meaning. The misadventure on the boat from Egypt to Lebanon happens because Gérard unfortunately addresses the ship's boy by an endearment, rather than the insult he intends. The captain, assuming that Gérard loves the boy, offers to trade him for the slave Zeynab. Contemplating the problem, Gérard comments upon the difficulty
of meaning and language for a foreigner:

L'étonnement de l'Armenien me fit apercevoir qu'il y avait dans cette affaire un de ces absurdes quiproquos philologiques si communs entre les personnes qui savent mediocrement les langues. Le mot 'kabibe', si singulièrement traduit la veille par l'Armenien, avait, au contraire, la signification la plus charmante et la plus amoureuse du monde. Je ne sais pourquoi le mot 'petit drôle' lui avait paru rendre parfaitement cette idée en français. (p. 267).

The need to communicate basic ideas and his desire to learn about the places and people he visits force Gérard to learn new languages. Hence, he moves away from decoding according to preconceived notions, to decoding from real experience. The learning of languages opens the way for him to understand the complexities of oriental society. It is not only by familiarizing himself with the new language codes that Gérard gains new insights into the Orient, but also by experiencing situations in daily life. Before involving himself in running a house in Cairo and acquiring the knowledge needed for the task, Gérard projected a fantasy image of a carefree life. His anticipation proved unfounded when tested against the reality of living day to day in a foreign culture. No longer able to apply the theoretical constructs of his own hypothetical system to real situations, he has to learn new codes. This process illustrates what Jakobson calls "recoding" or "code switching". 7

Although Gérard, as a European, always remains an observer of the oriental culture, he moves from being outside the cultural system (alienation due to his personal expectations), to being inside the
system. He proceeds beyond the point of merely observing the signifiers and attributing known signifieds to them. The referent of the signs becomes for him extra-linguistic reality. Within the text itself this process can be seen as the narrator shifting position from that of 'reader' of a marvelous Orient, to being a 'writer' of the real Orient. Gérard 'tells' about the things he learns, thus becoming the encoder of new information. The passages which describe the real Orient have a denotative emphasis. Gérard articulates the new meaning he has learned, and performs what Jakobson refers to as "le processus d'encodage (qui) va du sens au son".8

One of the myths that the narrator eventually discounts is that of the fabulous oriental harem:

Voilà donc une illusion qu'il faut perdre encore, les délices du harem, la toute-puissance du mari ou du maître, des femmes charmantes s'unissant pour faire le bonheur d'un seul: la religion ou les coutumes tempèrent singulièrement cet idéal, qui a séduit tant d'Européens. Tous ceux qui sur la foi de nos préjugés, avaient compris ainsi la vie orientale, se sont vus découragés en bien peu de temps (p. 202).

Gérard continues with a long explanation of the real situation of the oriental harem. In this quotation the discourse has changed from romantic anticipation to an objective and analytical mode of expression. The nouns such as "illusion" and "préjugés", the imperative, "il faut perdre", the verb "a séduit" and the participle "découragés" all reinforce the pragmatic message. The reader of the journal is being taught the reality of oriental harems and is made aware of the false European notions.
Gérard, writing like an ethnologist, describes his observations based on empirical evidence and corrects certain misconceptions.

Comparing Gérard's voyage, in which the narrator alters his romantic view, to that of Chateaubriand, who persists in seeing only how and what he wishes, Michel Butor writes: "Le pélerinage de Chateaubriand est un voyage dans l'histoire, celui de Gérard dans le mensonge de l'histoire." By revealing the reality of oriental society, Gérard exposes the fiction of occidental opinions. He denies exoticism in favor of historical authenticity. Barthes discusses this confrontation in *Mythologies*:

> En somme l'exotisme révèle bien sa justification profonde, qui est de nier toute situation de l'histoire. 10

As Gérard's voyage progresses, his personal ideals about the Orient are rejected as illusions. He undergoes an unexpected initiation, gaining wisdom and experience at the expense of the fantastic "fles inconnues et parfumées" he so desired. The transition from dreams to reality is difficult; Gérard still yearns to "soulever un coin du voile austère de la déesse Saïs" (p. 90), but must be satisfied with simply observing the veiled women in the market place. Hence, his lucid observations contain a note of disappointment, a sense of loss. When Gérard re-evaluates popular ideas about oriental harems, the description of how they were thought to be is more appealing than how they are in reality. The images of "les délices du harème, la toutepuissance du mari ou du maître, des femmes charmentes s'unissant pour
faire le bonheur d'un seul', indicate Gérard's nostalgia for the ideal harem. Stripped of its exoticism, the harem becomes a mundane social fact.

Gérard alters his ideals about the Orient and he also learns to question his own desire for the ideal woman. He is attracted by the exotic qualities of oriental woman and hopes that in her difference he will find true love. But he later questions the validity of his desire, and wonders if the impression the woman's charms have on him will last:

Il y a quelque chose de très seduisant dans une femme d'un pays lointain et singulier, qui parle une langue inconnue, dont le costume et les habitudes frappent déjà par l'étrangeté seule, et qui enfin n'a rien de ces vulgarités de détail que l'habitude nous révèle chez les femmes de notre patrie. Je subis quelque temps cette fascination de couleur locale, je l'écoute babiller, je la vois étaler la bigarrure de ses vêtements: c'était comme un oiseau splendide que je possédais en cage: mais cette impression pouvait-elle toujours durer? (p. 179).

In the case of Zeynab his fascination does not last, and before he leaves the Orient he gives her away to another family.

In rectifying various occidental myths about the Orient, Gerard puts into question his very reason for travelling. His search for signs (to confirm imaginary signifieds) and the desire to live like a hero in a novel become illusory goals when confronted with reality. The voyage, which seemed a promise of marvelous adventures, becomes simply a process of revealing reality. Unlike the hopeful explorer in search of islands of eternal beauty that he believed himself to be,
Gérard admits that he only finds the "humble vérité". The "combinaisons dramatiques ou romanesques" which he so longed for are rejected as being lies:

L'humble vérité n'a pas les ressources immenses des combinaisons dramatiques ou romanesques. Je receuille un à un des événements qui n'ont de mérite que par leur simplicité même, et je sais qu'il serait aisé pourtant, fût-ce dans la relation d'une traversée aussi vulgaire que celle du golfe de Syrie, de faire naître des peripéties vraiment dignes d'attention: mais la réalité grimace à côté du mensonge, et il vaut mieux, ce me semble, dire naïvement, comme les anciens navigateurs: "Tel jour, nous n'avons rien vu en mer qu'un morceau de bois qui flottait à l'aventure: tel autre, qu'un goëland aux ailes grises ..." jusqu'au moment trop rare au l'action se réchauffe et se complique d'un canot de sauvages qui viennent apporter des ignames et des cochons de lait rotis" (p. 267).

The disappointment and disillusionment Gérard experiences while visiting various countries is gradual. As he moves from one place to another, he optimistically searches for signs he recognizes. Once he realizes the sign is empty, void of the desired signified, Gérard expresses sorrow for the loss of a dream. For example, on leaving Cairo, once the city of *A Thousand and One Nights*, Gerard notes that it is now in ruins, destroyed by the passage of time and modern progress:

Ce Caire-la gît sous la cendre et la poussière: l'esprit et les progrès modernes en ont triomphé comme la mort. Encore quelques mois, et des rues européennes auront coupé à angles droits la vieille ville poussière et muette qui croule en paix sur les pauvres fellahs. Ce qui reluit, ce qui brille, s'accroît, c'est le quartier des Francs,
Gerard carries with him the knowledge that Cairo is no longer a city of dreams and illusions, but of memories and modern change.

In the earlier chapters of Gerard's journal there is a basic conflict between his quest for a dream and his sincere interest in other cultures and languages. This opposition in attitude creates an ambiguous tone in his narration which vacillates between enthusiastic romantic expression and careful analysis of the oriental situation. In the later stage of the voyage Gerard abandons his dream quest and is content with simple descriptions of Constantinople and its festivals. The change occurs after Gerard is forced to leave his Lebanese fiancée, owing to his ill health and the news of his best friend's death. Gerard writes:

Du pied de la tour de Galata, - ayant devant moi tout le panorama de Constantinople, de son Bosphore et de ses mers, - je tourne encore une fois mes regards vers l'Egypte, depuis longtemps disparue!

Au dela de l'horizon paisible qui m'entoure, sur cette terre d'Europe, musulmane, il est vrai, mais rappelant déjà la patrie, je sens toujours l'éblouissement de ce mirage lointain qui flamboie et poudroie dans mon souvenir ... comme l'image du soleil qu'on regarde fixement poursuit longtemps l'œil fatigué qui s'est replongé dans l'ombre.
Ce qui m'entoure ajoute à cette impression: un cimetière turc, à l'ombre des murs de Galata ... ... Tout cela n'a rien de bien gai pour le moment. Rentrons dans le passé. Ce que je regrette aujourd'hui de l'Egypte, ce ne sont pas les oignons monstrueux dont les Hebreux pleuraient l'absence sur la terre de Chanaan. C'est un ami, c'est une femme, - l'un séparé de moi seulement par la tombe, l'autre à jamais perdue (pp. 433-434).

The rest of the voyage is written in a direct and realistic narration. Gérard's personal feelings and illusions are no longer as dramatically conveyed.

One important aspect of Gerard's quest is his spiritual longing. This desire for a transcendental experience is intrinsically associated with his knowledge of ancient myths. These literary signs point to the Orient as the home of the gods and divine truth. However, as with the other dreams this goal is unattainable because it too is an imaginary ideal. Gérard must return to the literary sign and listen to legends and religious stories in order to find an exotic Orient or spiritual experience. Before examining the legends Gerard listens to, it is necessary to investigate his religious quest.
Notes to Chapter Two:


5. *ibid.*., p. 75.

6. *ibid.*., p. 75.

7. Roman Jakobson, *op. cit.*, p. 95

8. *ibid.*., p. 93.


Chapter Three

Myth and Mysticism: The Empty Chalice

In chapter one, we described Gérard's journey to the Orient as being undertaken through an act of faith. His search for the referent of the signifier, the Orient behind the veil, alluded to in literature, legend and myth, is a quest which inevitably invokes a religious character. To some extent, we have already explored the initial phase of the triadic structure (as shown on page six) of Gérard's longing and disappointment and can see the relationship between sign and referent, signifier and signified as one of opposition rather than being complementary. In this chapter, we will examine how this schism will invite a theological resolution.

This discussion will go farther in the elaboration of the triadic structure of desire and signification that has been examined so far. As we have seen, "A" (the naive idealization of what the Orient can offer, as signifier), is ultimately deflated by "B" (the experiences Gérard undergoes throughout his travels). The process resulted in a demystification of Gérard's conception of the Orient and the reader's conception of the promise of reference made by the signifier. The Orient he visits does not conform to the Orient he imagined at the onset of his voyage. This deflation of "A" results in a sense of loss, represented on one plane as the abandonment of romantic idealism, which is replaced by a descriptive or historical narrative. In a sense, Gérard's encounter with oriental religion will undergo the same process
of demystification, but not necessarily in the same way nor with the same results.

In the first process of opposition between A and B, the historical signifier (the experiences Gérard has of the real Orient) displaces Gérard's literary image of the Orient. The result of this is that there is no reconciliation between the literary or imaginary signifier and the historical signifier: in fact, the literary signifier has no signified, it is empty. This nothingness on the experiential plane, however, is not inconsistent with religious experience. The failure of meaning in the mundane world is what gives rise to the possibility of transcendent meaning beyond this world. This transcendental beyond is the basis of religious belief; it provides a domain of infinite possibility and promise of spiritual existence. Thus, the failure of signification (when the imaginary signified A is displaced by the historical signified B) reinforces the project of spirituality, "C".

The religions Gérard encounters on his journey are historically determined and are consequently institutions which suffer the same limits as all the other features of the Orient. Their variation and interchangeability are proof of their profane inconstancy. Nevertheless, this is not sufficient to undermine the spiritual project; Gérard persists in looking for a transcendental experience. This, however, will only be possible when he listens to religious stories.

Gérard is fascinated by oriental religions for both emotional and theoretical reasons. He is knowledgeable about Middle Eastern mythology
and religious beliefs and is interested in the associations between the ancient religions and their modern counterparts. For example, he describes at length how the Greek goddess Venus was incorporated into the Christian Virgin Mary:

Mais j'ai voulu surtout montrer que le culte des Grecs s'adressait principalement à la Vénus austère, idéale et mystique, que les néo-platoniciens d'Alexandrie purent opposer, sans honte, à la Vierge des chrétiens. Cette dernière, plus humaine, plus facile à comprendre pour tous, a vaincu désormais la philosophique Uranie. Aujourd'hui la Panagia grecque a succédé sur ces mêmes rivages aux honneurs de l'antique Aphrodite: l'église ou la chapelle se rebâtit des ruines du temple ... (pp. 77-78).

Intrigued by various oriental ceremonies and cults, Gérard associates them with the ancient practices of high priests, which he considers the true beginnings of religion. While watching a Muslim festival in Constantinople he notes that, although the modern customs are only vestiges of the earlier rites, they are reminders of the sacred practices of antiquity. He writes:

On peut s'arrêter un instant aux spectacles de la place du Serasquier, à ces scènes de folie qui se renouvelles dans tous les quartiers populaires, et qui prennent partout une teinte mystique inexplicable pour nous autres Européens. Qu'est-ce, par exemple, que Caragueuz, ce type extraordinaire de fantaisie et impureté, qui ne se produit publiquement que dans les fêtes religieuses? N'est-ce pas un souvenir égaré du dieu de Lampsaque, de ce Pan, père universel, que l'Asie pleure encore? (pp. 488-489).

Gérard's theories reinforce his emotional conviction that the Orient retains primal holy truths. He hopes that by learning and participating in these religious practices he will come closer to an authentic
religious experience and discover for himself the hidden gods and truth which originated in the Orient.

The multiplication of churches and sects in the Orient reveals the dissemination of the sacred, but also bears witness to it by the resemblance between them. Profoundly intrigued by the diversity of oriental religions, Gérard attempts to define their affinities. He refuses to choose between the various religions he finds, rather he seeks to connect them to a common origin and proposes a syncretic hypothesis uniting them all. When he denies his own Catholic background - "catholique, vraiment je l'avais oublié" (p. 83) - it is not in order to adopt another belief, but to liberate himself from an exclusive and absolute faith. He avoids missionaries and zealots who perpetrate the idea of an exclusive religion. He opposes all varieties of fanaticism, but admires the tolerance of the Muslims in Constantinople who live in peaceful coexistence with different cults and beliefs. At the end of his voyage Gérard notes that it is the tolerance of the dervishes in Turkey which leads him to admire their faith above all other oriental faiths. It is the dervishes who blend different dogmas and avoid strict religious laws, in other words they practice a sort of universal religion. This form of worship appeals to Gérard and he declares:

Oui, je me suis senti païen en Grèce, musulman en Égypte, panthéiste au milieu des Druses et dévot sur les mers aux astres-dieux de la Chaldée; mais à Constantinople, j'ai compris la grandeur de cette tolerance universelle qu'exercent aujourd'hui les Turcs. ... J'ai été fort touché à Constantinople en voyant de bons derviches assister à la messe. La
parole de Dieu leur paraissait bonne dans toutes les langues. Du reste, ils n'obligeant personne à tourner comme un volant au son des flûtes, ce qui pour eux-mêmes est la plus sublime façon d'honorer le ciel (p. 624).

Gérard's personal syncretic belief system is so vast and consequently so vague that it embraces, and risks confusing, all systems. He states: "Pour moi Dieu est partout, quelque nom qu'on lui donne" (p. 469). However, this universal deism is so infinite, "God" seems to evade Gérard and he is unable to feel the divine presence anywhere. It is the desire to experience this presence that partially motivates Gérard to continue his quest. But, between the two poles of his voyage, Greece and Constantinople, Gérard cannot find the hypothetical heart of the Orient which promises to reveal a spiritual truth. Believing in a syncretic system, Gérard rejects all established religions. Unable to adopt one religious faith, he must remain outside them. All the faiths he encounters, although equal and interchangeable, are not complete in themselves. In Gérard's imagination they all refer to another more venerable and purer religion. For him these modern religions have no signification in themselves, they are signs referring back to an older and truer faith, that of antiquity when men spoke the true word of God:

... Les génies des premiers temps ont puise pour nous la sagesse. Ils pénétraient avec terreur dans ces sanctuaires étranges où s'élaborait l'avenir des hommes, et ressortaient plus tard, le front ceint de lueurs divines, pour révéler à leurs peuples des traditions antérieures au déluge et remontant aux premiers jours du monde (p. 177).
It is this experience of sacred initiation and revelation of the divine word that Gérard hopes to find. The modern oriental religions become for him only an endless chain of substitutions which never correspond to his ideal.

The first country which Gérard hopes will be a spiritual refuge is Greece. Before arriving there he anticipates discovering the holy temples and sacred grounds of the gods. He tells the story of Polyphile and Polia who made a pilgrimage to the Greek island Cythère. There, the two lovers travel to the temple of Venus where their spiritual union is fulfilled:

C'est alors qu'avait lieu et se continuait nuit par nuit ce pèlerinage, qui, à travers les plaines et les monts rajeunis de la Grèce, conduisait nos deux amants à tous les temples renommés de Vénus céleste et faisait arriver enfin au principal sanctuaire de la déesse, à l'île de Cythère, où s'accomplissait l'union spirituelle des deux religieux, Polyphile et Polia (pp. 69-70).

Gérard also gives a long account of the religious ceremony 'la messe de Vénus' in which Polyphile and Polia participate at the end of their quest. This story serves as an inspiration for Gérard, as an example both of love and of religious devotion. He wants to visit the temples of Venus, just as Polyphile and Polia did, in order to relive their experience and to discover his own spiritual fulfilment. He notes: "Pouvais-je faire mieux que de relire avant de toucher à Cythère le livre étrange de Polyphile et Polia?" (p. 70).

However, Gérard soon learns that his dream of finding a religious haven in Greece is impossible. Modern Greece no longer pays hommage to
its ancient gods and goddesses. Gérard laments: "Voilà mon rêve ... et voici mon réveil ... les dieux sont envoûtés" (p. 64). The ancient temples are ruined and neglected, often replaced by churches. The symbols of the gods have been supplanted by buildings which, according to Gérard, signify the expulsion of the ancient gods. In the following prayer to the forsaken gods, Gérard expresses his despair and outrage at the thoughtlessness of men, who have abandoned the true gods of antiquity:

J'évoquais de la mer déserte et du sol aride
je m'étais dit en voyant si triste et si nu
tout cet archipel des Cyclades, ces côtes
dépourvues, ces baies inhospitalières, que la
malediction de Neptune avait frappé la Grèce
oubliée: ... La verte naiade est morte
épuisée dans sa grotte, les dieux des bocages
ont disparu de cette terre sans ombre, et toutes
ces divines animations de la matière se sont
retirées peu à peu comme la vie d'un corps glacé.
Oh! n'a-t-on pas compris ce dernier cri jeté
par un monde mourant, quand les pâles navigateurs
s'en vinrent raconter qu'en passant, la nuit, près
des côtes de Tjessalie, ils avaient entendu une
grande voix qui criait: "Pan est mort!" Mort,
eh quoi, lui, le compagnon des esprits simples
et joyeux, le dieu qui béniissait l'hymen fécond
de l'homme et de la terre! il est mort, lui
par qui tout avait coutume de vivre! mort sans
lutte au pied de l'Olympe profane, mort comme
un dieu peut seulement mourir, faute d'encens
et d'hommages, et frappé au cœur comme un père
par l'ingratitude et l'oubli! (p. 83).

Gérard leaves Greece disappointed: "J'aurais mieux aimé les
souvenirs de l'antiquité grecque" mais tout cela est détruit, rasé,
méconnaissable" (p. 89). He turns towards Egypt in hopes of finding
the land of his spiritual dream.
... l'Egypte, grave et pieuse, est toujours le pays des énigmes et des mystères ... La patience était la plus grande vertu des initiés antiques. Pourquoi passer si vite? Arrêtons-nous et cherchons à soulever un coin du voile austère de la déesse de Saïs (p. 90).

The pyramids are the universal symbol of Egypt's history and grandeur. They are also architectural monuments which permit the explorer to enter into physical contact with the sacred past. The ancient hieroglyphics on the walls reveal the progress of the initiate who travels from life into death and then to rebirth. Gérard and a fellow traveller discuss the meaning of these symbols and their universal significance in all religions. Their academic analysis inspires Gérard to note that the Egyptian system can be seen as the prototype of all religious systems. But the discussion of religion is not in itself spiritually satisfying, it is only theoretically interesting.

Avec ce système, dis-je, il est possible d'expliquer matériellement toutes les religions. Mais qu'y gagnerons-nous? Rien. Nous venons seulement de passer deux heures en causant d'origines d'histoire. Maintenant le soir vient, il s'agit de chercher un gîte. (p. 227).

The mysteries surrounding the pyramids remind Gérard of a feeling he has for Mozart's 'La Flute enchantée': he enthusiastically describes the possibility of such a spectacle being held within one of the pyramids, but this does not provide him with the desired sense of the holy, nor a sense of communion with Egyptian antiquity. He is conscious, rather, of the unreality of the pyramids which seem like a theatrical stage set.

The next stop on Gérard's itinerary is Lebanon, where he feels that
he has finally arrived at the true land of his spiritual expectations:

Ce pays qui a ranimé toutes les forces et les inspirations de ma jeunesse ne me devait pas moins sans doute; j'avais bien senti déjà qu'en mettant le pied sur cette terre maternelle, en me replongeant aux sources vénérées de notre histoire et de nos croyances, j'allais arrêter le cours de mes ans, que je me refaisais enfant à ce berceau du monde, jeune encore au sein de cette jeunesse éternelle (p. 347).

Gérard quickly realizes that this is not the inspired country he imagined. The earlier religious purity and tolerance of the people have been destroyed by war and the antagonism of cults and institutions which teem with discord. Gérard reflects on this situation and notes:

Au fond, ces peuples s'estiment entre eux plus qu'on ne croit, et ne peuvent oublier les liens qui les unissaient jadis. Tourmentés et excités soit par les missionnaires, soit par les moines, dans l'intérêt des influences européennes, il se ménagent à la manière des condottieri d'autrefois, qui livraient de grands combats sans effusion de sang. Les moines prêchent, il faut bien courir aux armes: les missionnaires angleis declament et payent, il faut bien se montrer vaillant: mais il y a au fond de tout cela doute et découragement (p. 334).

Gérard discovers that the Holy Land, once a signifier of spiritual revelation, retains only vestiges of truth, poor substitutes of Paradise and dying traces of a lost Unity. The ideal seems continually to evade Gérard, or to be just beyond his reach: "En Afrique, on rêve l'Inde comme en Europe on rêve l'Afrique: l'idéal rayonne toujours au-delà de notre horizon actuel" (p. 196). This remark indicates that Gérard is aware that his quest has no end, and that the desired experience is nothing but a projection or vain ambition.
However, he does not abandon his dream and continues his voyage in hopes of attaining his goal.

One ancient religion that Gérard admires is that of the Egyptian goddess Isis. His account of the initiation rites and the goal of the neophyte in the Isis cult is reminiscent of Gérard's own aim to "soulever un coin du voile austère de la déesse de Saïs" (p. 90). The neophyte, who successfully accomplishes the required trials, is rewarded with a glimpse of the goddess, the supreme spiritual experience.

It was the hidden goddess behind the veil which embodied divine truth for the Egyptian priest. For Gérard, the oriental woman is like the image of Isis and she is the ultimate object of desire.

Gérard's "désir de l'Orient" (p. 717), is similar to his desire for the perfect woman; both are unattainable ideals and possess spiritual truths. The veiled oriental woman represents a mystery and promise of complete fulfillment. He concludes that an Eastern marriage is one source of happiness:

Il faut que je m'unisse à quelque fille ingénue de ce sol sacré qui est notre première patrie à tous, que je me retrempe à ces sources vivifiantes de l'humanité, d'où ont découlé
Union with a woman of the Orient seems a way of establishing roots in this spiritual centre of the world; his projected marriage also promises to provide access to the lost harmony of the golden age and a participation in the regeneration of his vital forces. Gérard's search for metaphysical truth is superimposed on his desire to find the garden of Eden, to be reborn and return to the maternal origins of man which both the woman and the Orient represent for him.

Eventually Gérard finds the girl of his dreams, a young Druze princess. Her religion appeals to Gérard because "elle est très tolérante et (qu') elle admet toutes les formes possibles de cultes et toutes les révélations connues des manifestations diverses, mais également saintes, de la Divinité" (p. 426). Gérard's acceptance into the Druze faith becomes a sort of initiation. In the beginning he is forbidden to marry the princess because the Druze religion allows no converts, but by providing proof of his affiliation with the Masons, Gérard succeeds in convincing the girl's father that he is a descendent of this faith:

La franc-maçonnerie a, comme tu sais, hérité de la doctrine des templiers; voilà le rapport établi, voilà pourquoi les Druses parlent de leurs coreligionnaires d'Europe, dispersés dans divers pays, et principalement dans les montagnes de l'Ecosse ... Mais tu sais que je suis moi-même l'un des enfants de la veuve, un louveteau (fils de maître), que j'ai été nourri dans l'horreur du meurtre d'Adoniram et dans l'admiration du saint Temple ... je ne suis plus pour les Druses un infidèle, je suis un 'muta-darassin! un étudiant (p. 429).
Once accepted by the Druze priest Gérard believes that his dream has been accomplished: "Mon rêve absurde devient ma vie, l'impossible s'est réalisé!" (p. 428).

Circumstances, however, force Gérard to renounce his plans: he becomes ill because of the climate and has to leave. He accepts his disappointment as the result of his personal destiny: "Mon ami, l'homme s'agit et Dieu le mène" (p. 432).

Gérard's marriage does not take place and his spiritual journey is not completed. However, the possibility remains that if Gérard had been able to marry, his quest would have been fulfilled. Being denied his dream does not invalidate its potentiality, and Gérard is able to retain his idealized image of marriage.

The dream of spiritual fulfillment through marriage is based on Gérard's idealization of the oriental woman, the Isis myth and other cultural and personal images of veiled women. Referring back to the triadic model (page 6 of the introduction), this image of marriage is 'A' in the model, the referent of the signified being entirely imaginary. But, unlike other situations during his travels when Gérard learned that his anticipation of a dreamlike Orient was not real, his failed marriage plan allows him to create a new imaginary sign, 'C' in the model. Since the ideal image of his marriage is not demystified, this idea remains in the realm of possibility. Spiritual fulfillment through marriage retains its imaginary status but is now a sign whose referent is produced by Gérard himself.
An interesting event occurs while Gérard is in Lebanon: he witnesses a second miracle (the first occurred in Egypt). The burial of a Dervish priest is disrupted by the recalcitrant nature of the dead man, who hinders the procession from entering the tomb. This incident reminds Gérard of a story by Lucien in 'La Déesse Syrienne':

C'était le second miracle turc que j'eusse été admis à voir (on se souvient de celui de la Dhossa, ou le chérif de La Mecque passe à cheval sur un chemin pavé par les corps des croyants): mais ici le spectacle de ce mort capricieux, qui s'agitait dans les bras des porteurs et refusait d'entrer dans son tombeau, me remit en mémoire un passage de Lucien, qui attribue les mêmes fantaisies à une statue de bronze de l'Apollon syrien (p. 308).

Witnessing this miracle also inspires Gérard to describe his own belief in the miraculous:

Selon Lucien, cette manoeuvre tenait à une certaine habileté gymnastique des prêtres; mais faut-il avoir pleine confiance en cette assertion du Voltaire de l'antiquité? Pour moi, j'ai toujours été plus disposé à tout croire qu'à tout nier, et la Bible admettant les prodiges attribués à l'Apollon syrien, lequel n'est autre que Baal, je ne vois pas pourquoi cette puissance accordée aux génies rebelles et aux esprits de Python n'aurait pas produit de tels effets; je ne vois pas non plus pourquoi l'âme immortelle d'un pauvre santon n'exercerait pas une action magnétique sur les croyants convaincus de sa sainteté (p. 308).

There is a conflict between Gérard's perception of himself as a sceptical European, "... moi-même ... un Parisien nourri d'idées philosophiques, un fils de Voltaire" (p. 263), and his claim to be a deeply
religious man: this is demonstrated in his confession of belief in miracles. His search for a personal religious experience is genuine and overrides any Western cynicism. However, it is his refusal to adopt a specific dogma which makes him avoid a commitment to any one Oriental religion. Even his decision to become a Druze is due less to religious conviction than to his desire to marry the princess. Their conjugal life, he feels will be the door to spiritual happiness.

Gérard leaves Lebanon unmarried and without fulfilling his quest. Beyond his personal disappointment, there is a sense of loss for the spiritual land he anticipated. But on arriving in the Holy Land he remarks that here is indeed the cradle of all religions:

Ce rivage n'est-il pas le berceau même de toutes les croyances du monde? Interrogez le premier montagnard qui passe: il vous dira que c'est sur ce point de la terre qu'eurent lieu les scènes primitives de la Bible; il vous conduira à l'endroit où fumèrent les premiers sacrifices; il vous montrera le rocher tâché du sang d'Abel; plus loin existait la ville d'Enochia, bâtie par les géants, et dont on distingue encore les traces; ailleurs c'est le tombeau de Chanaan, fils de Cham. Placez-vous au point de vue de l'antiquité grecque, et vous verrez aussi descendre de ces monts tout le riant cortège des divinités dont la Grèce accepta et transforma le culte, propageé par les émigrations phéniciennes. Ces bois et ces montagnes ont retenti des cris de Venus pleurant Adonis, et c'était dans ces grottes mystérieuses, où quelques sectes idolâtres célébrent encore des orgies nocturnes, qu'on allait prier et pleurer sur l'image de la victime, pâle idole de marbre ou d'ivoire aux blessures saignantes, autour de laquelle les femmes apolorrées imitaient les cris plaintifs de la déesse (pp. 308-9).

The Holy Land is a sign, meaningful only when it is decoded
according to biblical or mythological codes. Once another code is applied, that of personal experience and observation, Gérard can no longer consider the sign as before. The promise of a spiritual centre and experience vanishes as he realizes the land is corrupted by war and prejudice.

Gérard's last stop in his travels is Constantinople. He arrives at the time of Ramadar, an important Muslim festival. However, unlike the other cities in the Orient, this one is not a religious centre for Gérard. Here, he remains an observer, enjoying the festivities but not trying to become personally involved. He notes the contrast between the religious tolerance that he finds in Constantinople and the varieties of fanaticism he found in other countries. At the end of his travel account, Gérard retells a fable about the dervishes, who mix various dogmas and, without accepting any strict doctrine or observances, practice a sort of universal religion:

Ces derniers ont une légende des plus belles que je connaisse: "Quatre compagnons de route, un Turc, un Arabe, un Persan et un Grec, voulurent faire un goûter ensemble. Ils se cotisèrent de dix paras chacun. Mais il s'agissait de savoir ce qu'on chèterait: - "Uxum", dit le Turc. - "Ineb", dit l'Arabe. - "Inghur", dit le Parsan. - "Stafilion", dit le Grec. Chacun voulant faire prévaloir son goût sur celui des autres, ils en étaient venus aux coups, lorsqu'un derviche qui savait les quatre langues appela un marchand de raisins, et il se trouva que c'était ce que chacun avait demandé" (p. 624).

This tale of the wise dervish is an allegory for the kind of religious tolerance and wisdom that Gérard searched for in the Orient.
The spiritual centre he longed for proves to be diffuse. Gérard can find only vague and partial remains of ancient beliefs and practices in the contemporary ceremonies. Lebanon attracted him because of its mixture of old faiths:

... le mélange de ses populations, qui résument peut-être en elles toutes les croyances et toutes les superstitions de la terre. Moïse, Orphée. Zoroastre, Jésus, Mahomet, et jusqu'au Bouddha indien ont des disciples plus ou moins nombreux (p. 309).

However, it is this very promiscuity of groups which caused the dissemination and confusion of the older and truer faith. Gérard's anticipation of an experience of the Sacred is intimately connected with the idea of a holy centre; it is precisely this focus which he cannot find. All the oriental cities he visits prove to be disparate, providing a confusing mélange of races and cults. Cairo is a linguistic and racial Babylon, Beirut and Constantinople contain all nationalities and customs, so that the traveller no longer knows if he is in the East or the West, at home or in a foreign country. Europe is already in Asia and he finds beliefs and places equivalent and interchangeable. The Orient, once the sign of a religious centre, is now only a geographical area, void of any personal significance for Gérard. However, the appeal of a magic Orient and religious centre remains his principal desire. In order to transcend the world of experience, he must revert back to his imagination and once again find the literary signs which motivated his journey in the beginning.
Chapter Four

From History to Story: The Magic Carpet

Gérard's desire for spiritual transcendence is not realized by any Middle Eastern religious dogma. At the end of his journey, the values of A and B in the triadic model go through a reversal: the real Orient, which deflates Gérard's literary image of the Orient, ends up subverting itself. The real Orient is less interesting than the literary image it has given rise to throughout history. For Nerval, the absence of referent of the literary image is no longer a negative aspect of the literary sign. In other words, this negativity redirects the search for referent from a historically determined signified (the real Orient), to an imaginatively determined one (the literary Orient). In this case, no new sign is produced and the texts remain almost the same. But the reading of the literary sign is no longer confined to the historical determination of its production. The referent of Nerval's stories seems to turn back on itself, through a kind of hermetic self-reflection. However, the two tales studied in this chapter complicate this formulation. Although these stories appear to be completely literary and invite the reader to enter into their imaginary world, they have religious origins. These tales have historically functioned as allegorical representations of a religious experience and thus refer to an order that would either transcend the literary aspects or at least amalgamate the literary with a sense of Oriental spirituality. Nerval's stories indicate that religious experience is founded in the literary sign, in its non-referentiality. We shall examine these
stories in the following chapter and analyze the code system that Nerval uses in their elaboration.

As has been established, the Orient Gérard visits does not fulfil his ideals or anticipations of a charmed exotic country. Although he repeatedly searches for adventures and spiritual fulfilment, and endows the veiled women with imaginary qualities, he finally admits that: "L'humble vérité n'a pas les ressources immenses des combinaisons dramatiques ou romanesques" (p. 267). The dreams he cherished, inspired by legends and stories, cannot be found, and so Gérard finds solace and satisfaction in new narrative fantasies. Throughout his voyage he requests that people tell him stories; in this way he is able to suspend his disappointment momentarily, lost in visions of a mythical past. For example, while in Egypt, he learns about the great pyramids and their beginnings:

J'écoutais cette légende avec grande attention, et je dis au consul qu'elle me semblait beaucoup plus satisfaisante que la supposition acceptée en Europe, que ces monstrueuses constructions auraient été seulement des tombeaux ... (p. 196).

The story of the pyramids, like the other tales that Gérard hears during his journey, fits into his image of a fairy-tale Orient. Unlike the real places he visits, which disappoint him when his anticipations are not realized, the legends do not require any projection, their meaning is engendered by the narration itself. In other words, when Gérard listens to a story, he is decoding its meaning within a poetic
code system and consequently is free to interpret and imagine according to his own associations. It is no longer necessary for Gérard to hope for his dream Orient while listening to legends, for it is there within the aesthetic message. He is able to forget his unfulfilled desire, while suspended in a state of aesthetic appreciation. This movement from yearning to satisfaction is described by René Girard:

The aesthetic emotion is not desire but the ending of all desire, a return to calm and joy. 1

In his journal, Gérard transcribes the stories he hears, and notes before each one that he is not the author, but merely a captivated listener. For example, he prefaces the story of "La Reine du Matin" by saying:

Quoique ayant commencé fort jeune
l'étude des langues de l'Orient, je
n'en sais que les mots les plus
indispensables; cependant l'animation
du récit m'intéressait toujours et,
avec l'aide de mes amis du caravanserail,
j'arrivais à me rendre compte au moins
du sujet.
   Je puis donc rendre à peu pres
l'effet d'une de ces narrations imagées
ou se plaît le génie traditionnel des
Orientaux. (p. 504)

Although Gérard's tastes and desires indicate a "poetic mind," he is not depicted as a literary artist. His role within the Voyage en Orient is that of a traveller, who faithfully records his thoughts and observations and copies down legends for the reader. It is Nerval himself who creates these stories that intrigue Gérard and the reader.
Through the legends, Nerval expresses his personal vision of the Orient; he creates new literary signs which describe an oriental world full of cabbalistic magic, Masonic imagery and divine heroes. Nerval borrows the two legends described in this chapter from Muslim traditions. However, he retells them in such a way that they are unique expressions of his own vision.

It is important to establish a distinction between the stories which Nerval writes and the literary fantasies which motivated Gérard at the beginning of his voyage. Using the same triadic model as before, the tales that inspired Gérard can be referred to as A. 'A' is the literary sign which is historically and culturally engendered. It is the signified of this sign that Gérard searches for in his travels; however, experience teaches him that the referent of that sign is non-existent, or at least imaginary. The stories or literary signs that Nerval writes belong to the category 'C', because these tales have a religious origin and their referent can be either a real event or a spiritual one. The ambiguity allows the reader to decide his own interpretation.
Nerval's stories (C) can be read as fantasy or allegory. Neither interpretation can be definitively proved because the status of the referent remains unknown. On one level Nerval's legend can serve as a motivation for the reader to travel to the Orient in the same way as Gérard did, in hope of finding the origin of the literary message. In this way 'A' in the triangle, once the catalyst for undertaking the voyage to the Orient, is replaced by 'C'. 'C' becomes the sign whose referent is unknown. Although 'C' does not equal 'A' for Nerval or Gérard, it can become 'A' for the reader.

"Histoire Du Calife Hakem".

The first legend examined here is the 'Histoire du Calife Hakem'. This story is based on the life of the Druze messiah, Hakem, who lived in Egypt in 1000 A.D. Nerval studied the Druze religion during his travels to the Orient and retells Hakem's tragedy in this novel. Before examining this legend it is useful to resume the story.

One evening the Caliph Hakem, disguised as a commoner, visits an Okal (a public drinking place), where he befriends a fisherman named Yousouf. They both partake of some hashish and Hakem has a vision that he is God. In this drugged, ecstatic state Hakem decides to declare his love to his sister, Setamulc, and informs her that they are to marry. When the effects of the drug wear off, Hakem fears his feeling of omnipotence was illusory, but nevertheless he insists that the marriage take place. Setamulc and the grand-vizier, Argevan, (who has
personal ambitions for the throne) - plot to destroy Hakem and they imprison him in an insane asylum. While there, Hakem regains confidence that he is indeed God. He leads the madmen out of captivity; they then set fire to the city and kill the grand-vizier. On returning to the palace to marry his sister, Hakem realizes that she has a lover (Hakem's friend Yousouf) whom he perceives for the first time as being his physical double. Setalmulc tells Yousouf to assassinate the caliph, which he agrees to do. However, when Yousouf recognizes Hakem as being his mysterious friend, he attempts to protect him. Setalmulc's soldiers overpower them and they both die.

This tale conforms to a universal scheme or "structure matricielle atemporelle" as described by Claude Levi-Strauss. He points out that there are three basic elements to every story; a conflict, a struggle and finally a resolution. In this legend, Hakem's love for his sister causes the initial conflict, the action develops as she resists him and the resolution comes with Hakem's murder. There is another conflict within this legend which is intricately connected to the first action; that of Hakem's vision of being God. This conviction (considered authentic by Hakem's followers) gives the final resolution, his murder, a special status. Hakem's death is regarded as having profound religious meaning.

The spiritual significance of this story is due to its structure, according to A. Niel, who explains this idea in his L'Analyse structurale des textes:
En fait, dans chaque récit combatif (myth, fable, tragédie ou roman), l'élimination - qui porte sur un ou plusieurs protagonistes - s'opère progressivement à travers une dialectique qui épouse la forme d'un sacrifice presque rituel.

Tout récit aurait, dans son essence, quelque chose de religieux, étant destiné à procurer le sentiment mystique d'une unité retrouvée. 4

Using A. Niel's model, the dramatic development of this legend can be analysed in sequences, according to specific moments in the 'temps narratif'. These moments or 'instants du recit' oscillate between two movements of extension and recession, imitating the alternation of victory and failure in the hero's struggle. Hakem's story ends in tragedy, as he fails to win his sister's love and is eventually murdered by her. There are eight fundamental sequences in this story, alternating between positive and negative moments in Hakem's personal life. The first action is Hakem's insight that he is God. This idea is the catalyst for the succeeding actions ultimately leading to his murder. The positive assertion (that he is God) is followed by negative doubts. The belief in himself as a divinity remains the internal conflict with which Hakem must come to terms. Towards the end of his life he is convinced of his divinity, and so Hakem's personal resolution is positive. Therefore, in terms of Hakem's inner dilemma, this legend has a happy ending; the hero no longer doubts that he is God.

Both content and form of the legend are necessary to its religious significance. In almost all religious myths, the ritual sacrifice
of the messiah is an essential element. The Druze doctrine considers Hakem's murder a vehicle for his transcendence from bodily form to a holy state. His death serves as a focus for meditation, which gives the devotee a mystical sense of unity with the sacred.

This story, interpreted within the system of the Druze religious code, describes the struggles and death of Hakem, who is considered as God. This code justifies Hakem's actions and desires as being part of Hakem's divinity. For example, his wish to marry his sister is without blame or guilt when considered as part of this system, for as Hakem says:

Mon amour n'a rien des impuretés terrestres. Ce n'est pas la volupté qui me pousse vers ma soeur, bien qu'elle égale en beauté le fantôme de mes visions; c'est un attrait indefinissable, une affection profonde comme la mer, vaste comme le ciel, et telle que pourrait l'éprouver un dieu. L'idée que ma soeur pourrait s'unir à un homme m'inspire le dégoût et l'horreur comme un sacrilège: il y a chez elle quelque chose de céleste que je devine à travers les voiles de la chair. Malgré le nom dont la terre la nomme, c'est l'épouse de mon âme divine, la vierge qui me fut destinée dès les premiers jours de la création (p. 363).

The doubts of his omnipotence, which Hakem experiences in the beginning, are considered as a part of his earthly struggles, necessary before the realization of his godhood. His death is the liberation required to transcend the limitations of his bodily form. Hakem himself is aware of the restrictions of his human form, as he discovers his sister's betrayal: he wants to display his divine anger, but remains
silent because of his powerlessness. The narrator describes Hakem's frustration:

... dans son courroux, il eut voulu produire un tremblement de terre, un déluge, une pluie de feu ou un cataclysme quelconque; mais il se ressouvint que, lié à une statue d'argile terrestre, il ne pouvait employer que des mesures humaines (p. 390).

The significance of this legend as interpreted by the Druze religious code system is clear: literally, Hakem is a man-god who endures a process of doubt and strife before his final spiritual release in death. However, explained in a more critical fashion, which the narration also suggests, this story can be read as the description of a megalomaniac. The authenticity of Hakem's vision is discredited by the descriptions of his irrational behavior. For example, when he escapes from the insane asylum, he and the other inmates set fire to the city. Before doing so they kill men, women and children, pillage houses and destroy public buildings. Hakem tells the populace that he is punishing them for their wicked ways:

"A vous, enfants, cette ville enrichie par la fraude, par l'usure, par les injustices et la rapine: à vous ces trésors pillés, ces richesses volées ... Le feu, le feu partout à cette ville que mon aïeul Moezzeldin avait fondée sous les auspices de la victoire ..., et qui deviendrait le monument de votre lâcheté!

En peu d'instants, la flamme avait dévoré les bizars au toit de cèdre et les palais aux terrasses sculptées, ...

L'incendie et le sac de la ville durèrent trois jours ... (p. 385).

Hakem is encouraged by the army of insane men who escaped from
the asylum with him; they all cry: "C'est Allah qui vient juger le monde!" (p. 384). The validity of Hakem's actions, as well as his conviction that he is God, is questionable. It is the chronology of the narration (Hakem first thinks he is God while under the influence of a drug and is later convinced that his vision was not a hallucination while in the asylum) which casts doubt on the credibility of the legend. Hakem himself considers the possibility that he is a victim of his own illusions, as he listens to his friend Yousouf describe his confused state after taking hashish:

J'arrive à croire parfois que tout cela n'était qu'une illusion de cette herbe perfide, qui attaque ma raison ... si bien que je ne sais plus déjà même distinguer ce qui est rêve de ce qui est réalité'.
Le crois-tu? dit Hakem avec inquiétude (p. 376).

Thus, there are at least two ways of interpreting this legend, both of which are suggested within the narration itself. Nerval offers images of Hakem which are contradictory: one is of a religious figure, the other of a mad man. There is no definitive representation of Hakem. For example, when he is hailed by the raving inmates as God, the narrator notes that, just as with Christ, it is the poor in spirit who are the first to believe in the divine word:

N'est-ce pas une chose étrange que la parole divine trouve toujours ses premiers fidèles parmi les misérables? Ainsi mille ans auparavant le Messie voyait son auditoire composé surtout de gens de mauvaise vie, de pécheurs et de publicains (p. 382).
The ambiguity which results from this juxtaposition of codes within the narration is further complicated by the unresolved question of "ce qui est rêve et ce qui est réalité." This idea is exemplified by the experiences of Hakem's friend Yousouf. While under the influence of hashish, Yousouf has visions of a celestial being who visits him in all her splendor. He describes his dream to Hakem:

Moi, j'ai un rêve qui repaîrt sans cesse, toujours le même et toujours varié: lorsque je me retire dans ma cange, chancelant sous la splendeur de mes visions, fermant la paupière à ce ruissellement perpétuel d'hyacinthes, d'escarboucles, d'émeraudes, de rubis, qui forment le fond sur lequel le hachich dessine des fantasies merveilleuses ..., comme au sein de l'infini j'aperçois une figure céleste, plus belle que toutes les créations des poètes, qui me sourit avec une pénétrante douceur, et qui descend des cieux pour venir jusqu'à moi. Est-ce un ange, une péré? Je ne sais, Elle s'assied à mes cotes dans la barque, dont le bois grossier se change aussitôt en nacre de perle et flotte sur une rivière d'argent, poussée par une brise chargée de parfums (p. 361).

This fabulous experience proves to be real, the "figure céleste" is no other than Hakem's sister Setalmulc, who has fallen in love with the fisherman. She ultimately marries Yousouf, thus realizing all his dreams. The case of Yousouf, who discovers that his hallucinations are predictions of reality, suggests that Hakem's visions could also be real. By introducing a number of conflicting code systems within the legend, Nerval demonstrates how various interpretations are possible in a story. Hakem can be seen as a divine messiah or an oriental legendary figure. In a more general sense, this idea is true for all religious
stories, as each messiah or god can be considered as a true or false one. The meaning of any legend is determined by the process of decoding used to interpret it. Therefore, depending upon the individual's belief, a story may be secular or sacred. Either reading is possible according to Nerval, who carefully constructs the legend of Hakem so that it can be perceived in both ways.

The story of Hakem, which introduces the reader to the various possible significations of a text, prepares the reader to consider the 'Histoire de la Reine du Matin' in a serious manner and not only as a fairytale. Hakem's legend is fundamental to the Druze religion: "l'Histoire de la Reine du Matin" is the basis of the Masonic order. There is a connection between the two legends in terms of the structure of the Voyage en Orient: according to Gérard, the Druze religion is an oriental sect of the Masons. "Au fond, la religion druze n'est qu'une sorte de franc-maçonnerie, pour parler selon les idées modernes" (p. 298). As will be seen, it is the Masonic belief system which fascinates Nerval; for him it is the spiritual link between the East and West.

"La Reine du Matin"

The legend "La Reine du Matin," is important to the text because it clearly contains the code system upon which Nerval constructs his ideal Orient. The characters in this legend are symbolic of different esoteric principles, meaningful within a Masonic context. In order to
elucidate the hidden meaning of the messages within this story, some of the symbols must be explored according to Masonic lore. The place of this legend in The Voyage will then be clear. As with the previous legend, it is necessary to first outline the story:

The queen of Sheba travels to Jerusalem in order to test Solomon's wisdom and admire his works. From the first, her contempt for Solomon is balanced by her admiration for Adoniram. He is the chief engineer and master builder of King Solomon and has rebuilt Jerusalem and constructed the famous temple. Adoniram's impressive discipline over thousands of workers is a source of uneasiness to Solomon, as are his impious opinions of the Jewish religion. Thus, when Solomon hears that three workers are plotting Adoniram's downfall, he refuses to act. The disloyal workmen sabotage the pouring of the molten sea of bronze, Adoniram's greatest project. The result is a disastrous explosion. Alone and dishonoured, Adoniram withdraws into his own working area. There a strange voice calls his name three times and he then sees an apparition who takes him to the centre of the earth, to Enochia, the land of his ancestors. The descent into the underworld is also a voyage into the past. Adoniram allows himself to be lead through the earth's heart to a world of people living in the inner realms. His mysterious guide, with whom Adoniram feels an affinity, reveals his name as Tubal Cain. Adoniram is taken to the centre of Mount Kaf, Adam's burial place. In Mount Kaf's gallery hang the pictures of seventy emperors who had reigned seventy thousand years before the
creation of man, when the earth was inhabited by four giant races. Tubal-Cain and his ancestors are descendants of these giant races whose essence is that of fire. These giants displeased God, who cursed them and exiled them from earth. He then created a second race — man. Adoniram learns that he is one of the sons of Tubal-Cain, doomed to solitude and despair during his earthly existence. He converses with the gigantic people in these cavernous realms and studies their art. Tubal-Cain reveals that Adoniram will beget a new line of Kings, who will restore the forgotten cult of fire.

Adoniram returns to earth and, with the knowledge gained in the underworld, repairs the damage done to the 'molten sea' and is widely acclaimed for his success. Adoniram tells Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, that they are brother and sister, both descendants of Tubal-Cain. They plan to escape and marry, but before this can happen Adoniram is murdered by three workmen, who try to extract the secret of his art. Leading her caravan out of Jerusalem that night, Balkis (pregnant with Adoniram's child) does not realize that her lover is dead.

This version of the Soloman-Sheba-Adoniram myth is significant, both for its romantic imagery and its use of Masonic lore. Adoniram (or Hiram), for the Mason, is a master builder, a generative power. Through his creative instinct and his labors, he transmutes himself into a more spiritually oriented human being.

At the beginning of the tale, Adoniram has already built Solomon's temple and therefore has already completed a certain stage in his
initiation. He reveals both his power and his wisdom in controlling his thousands of workers with the Tau sign. According to Masonic belief, the Tau sign indicates "rectitude in action." But Adoniram's power is not complete, as he is a victim of treachery, the implication being that he has not yet learned to control either his own weakness or his creative impulses. According to Masonic symbolism, the deceit of the three workers is a reflection of Adoniram's vanity, of his inability to see himself in proper perspective.

Adoniram's descent into the realm of Cain represents a withdrawal from the outside world into his inner self. It is there that Adoniram comes in contact with the divine spark that lives within him. Through a process of inner discovery, he learns that he is descended from the fire people. Once in contact with these elements of truth and fire, he returns to the upper world resurrected. Now he can create the immortal works that he imagined in his fantasy. It is only through great failure and withdrawal (forms of initiation) that Adoniram realizes the transcendental forces within himself. This process is reflected in the Masonic credo: "Visita interior terrae, rectificandoque, invenies occultum."8

Tubal-Cain gives Adoniram a hammer for his work. This instrument, basic to the Masonic cult, represents the tool necessary to achieve one's goal ... to build a temple. According to the Masons, the temple stands for the mind, the abode of the spirit or divine essence.
Adoniram is murdered for not revealing the secret word which controls his men. In Masonic terms, the secret word stands for the creative process, the secret that Masons today are not supposed to disclose. His death and resurrection (in the son Balkis bears him) make Adoniram eternal. The reborn Adoniram is considered omnipresent in each Masonic initiate, thus the Masons call themselves "Children of the Widow."

Adoniram is also presented in this legend as the archetypal rebel-artist figure. Solitary and anguished, Adoniram creates and dreams of monuments of unearthly beauty and stature. This hero is the incarnation of a certain romantic figure, the artist who dares to delve into the dark side of his imagination in order to invent forms feared by men and damned by God. Adoniram expresses his disgust with conventional art, and describes his ideas about true creation to his slave, Benoni:

"Décadence et chute! tu copies la nature avec froideur, tu t'occupes comme la ménagère qui tisse un voile de lin; ton esprit hébété se fait tour à tour l'esclave d'une vache, d'un lion ... et ton travail a pour but de rivaliser par l'imitation avec une génisse, une lionne, une tigresse?... ces bêtes font ce que tu exécutes, et plus encore, car elles transmettent la vie avec la forme. Enfant, l'art n'est point là: il consiste à créer .... Souviens-toi des vieux Égyptiens, des artistes hardis et naïfs de l'Assyrie. N'ont-ils pas arraché des flancs de granit ces sphinx, ces cynocéphales, ces divinités de bélalte dont l'aspect revolait le Jehovah du vieux Daoud? En revoyant d'âge
en âge ces symboles redoutables, on répétera qu'il exista jadis des génies audacieux. Ces gens-là songeaient-ils à la forme? Ils s'en raillaient, et forts de leurs inventions, ils pouvaient crier à celui qui créa tout: Ces êtres de granit, tu ne les devines point et tu n'oserais les animer. Mais le Dieu multiple de la nature vous a ployés sous le joug: la matière vous limite: votre génie dégénéré se plonge dans les vulgarités de la forme; l'art est perdu" (p. 509).

The decadence of modern art reflects the materialistic attitude represented by King Solomon's views and tastes. Adoniram breaks with Solomon's conventions in order to fulfil his calling, to create new forms. Confiding in Balkis, Adoniram reveals the secrets of his artistic beginnings, which are also essential elements of his aestheticism:

-Mon premier maître fut la solitude; dans mes voyages, depuis, j'en ai utilisé les leçons. J'ai tourné mes regards sur les souvenirs du passé; j'ai contemplé les monuments, et j'ai fui la société des humains .... (p. 528)

Adoniram's contact with nature gave him the essential keys for creation, memory and imagination ... which evoke and nourish dreams. The images seen in visions and dreams of the past, or recreated by his imagination, inspire the artist to go beyond that which he sees in nature or in ancient monuments. For Adoniram, the artist must reconstruct the internal vision composed from external images, thus creating a private universe in the real world.

Adoniram realizes also that the desires of the heart are not
satisfied in solitude. It is only through his love for Balkis that Adoniram becomes a complete man. The union of man with woman liberates the artist from loneliness and permits the ultimate creation, that of his child.

Solomon, the conservative figure in the legend, is opposite in temperament to Adoniram. A son of the earth, worshipper of Adonai, Solomon is vain, arrogant and deceitful. He is determined to have Balkis as his wife, even if he must trick her into accepting him. Throughout her visit, Balki exposes Solomon's wisdom to ridicule by showing its inherent inconsistencies. As a type, Solomon exemplifies the Classicist, opposed to romantic theories of art based on dreams and imagination. For Solomon, form and imitation are essential features of art, consequently he disapproves of Adoniram's theories. He explains his position to Balkis while they discuss certain example of ancient architecture in Lebanon:

La renommée de ces œuvres sans nom est venue jusqu'à nous, dit Soliman, pensif: là, dit-on dans les contrées maudites, on voit surgir les débris de la ville impie submergée par les eaux du déluge, les vertiges de la criminelle Henochia ... construite par la gigantesque lignée de Tubal: la cité des enfants de Kain. Anathème sur cet art d'impie et de ténèbres! Notre nouveau temple réfléchit les clarités du soleil; les lignes en sont simples et pures, et l'ordre, l'unité du plan traduisent la droiture de notre foi jusque dans le style de ces demeures que j'éleve à l'Eternel. Telle est notre volonté: c'est celle d'Adonai, qui l'a transmise à mon père (p. 529).
Not only does Solomon disagree with Adoniram's artistic ideas, he is also the enemy of Tubal-Cain's race. Upholder of Adonai's laws, Solomon abhors the impious rebel giants. His role as king is to maintain order, as set out in the Ten Commandments. Therefore he resists all deviation from custom in both thought and expression. His character and function in this tale are diametrically opposed to those of Adoniram. This opposition, however, is essential for the growth of Adoniram. For it is because of Solomon that the architect must struggle against the will of the king and against his status and power over Balkis. Solomon represents both the obstacle and the glory of Adoniram, who ultimately defeats the king by winning Balkis' love and completing his legendary molten sea.

Although the two men differ completely, they both fall in love with the same woman, Balkis. She alone captivates and attracts all men. Proud, regal and beautiful, this queen dazzles everyone who sees her. Benoni, Adoniram's slave, describes his first impressions of her:

Sa beauté éblouit. Je l'ai entrevue comme on entrevoit le soleil levant, qui bientôt vous brûle et vous fait baisser la paupière. Chacun à son aspect, est tombé posteine, moi comme les autres (p. 512).

Balkis is described as "l'idéale et mystique figure de la déesse Isis" (p. 517). A Sabean star worshipper, she regulates her life according to the movement of the sun and the planet Venus. Knowledgeable in astrology, the workings of nature and magic arts, she is a woman-goddess.
Balkis argues with Solomon, humiliates him, but also seduces him so that he loves her passionately. Solomon avows his love for her and his frustration at her disinterest in him:

"Jamais femme exerça-t-elle un empire plus absolu ... j'étais irrité, vous m'apaisez à votre gré ... vous me trompez, je le sens, et je conspire avec vous à abuser Soliman ..." (p. 593).

Although Balkis is impressed by Adoniram, she does not fall in love with him, but only remarks to herself, "Voilà un homme" (p. 539). It is only later, when Adoniram tells her that they are of the same race, and her magic bird indicates that he is destined to be her husband, that Balkis falls in love with him. She bows to her destiny and agrees to go away with Adoniram:

"Il faut bien que je m'incline devant mon maître, dit Balkis lui tendant la main, puisque, d'après l'arrêt du destin, il n'est pas permis d'accueillir un autre amour que celui d'Adoniram (p. 575)."

Balkis embodies both the divine and human woman, she typifies the female ideal desired by all men. Descriptions of Balkis are opaque, hiding her unique features. Therefore she remains mysterious and beautiful to the listener to the legend, who is free to imagine her according to his own fantasy. The narrator describes her thus:

"Ajoutez aux avantages de la reine de Saba la majesté d'une déesse et les attraits de la plus enivrante beauté, un profil d'une pureté où rayonne un œil noir comme ceux des gazelles, et si bien fendu, si allongé"
qu'il apparaît toujours de face à ceux qu'il perç de ses traits; une bouche incertaine entre le rire et la volupté, un corps souple et d'une magnificence qui se devine au travers de la gaze ...(p. 517).

The style covers up the features of the woman, rather than revealing them; the adjectives distance the reader from Balkis' human qualities, she is a goddess because we are told only that. Just as one can guess the "magnificence" of her body through the gauze, one can imagine her face through the veil of language. For the reader, Balkis is as seductive as she is for Solomon or Adoniram. This is because she remains always hidden, at a distance from realistic description. In this way, she fascinates anyone who tries to imagine what she is really like. Derrida has described this process of attraction which is dependent upon distance:

La séduction de la femme opère à distance, la distance est l'élément de son pouvoir. Mais de ce chant, de ce charme il faut se tenir à distance, non seulement, comme on pourrait le croire, pour se garder contre cette fascination, mais aussi bien pour l'éprouver. 9

Balkis is the ideal woman because she is so completely absent; her presence is conveyed only through words or ideas.

The romantic world created by the language used in this legend is as imaginary as the Queen of Sheba. The fantasy presented, filled with occult forces, giants and Biblical characters, is reminiscent of A Thousand and One Nights. By avoiding realistic descriptions of
characters, yet painting imaginary landscapes in detail, Nerval conjures up dreamlike visions, as in the following passage describing Adoniram's descent into the underworld:

Ils pénétrèrent ensemble dans un jardin éclairé des tendres lueurs d'un feu doux, peuplé d'arbres de flamme, projetant, au lieu d'ombre, des clartés plus vives sur le sol d'émeraude, diapré de fleurs d'une forme bizarre, et de couleurs d'une vivacité suprenante. Encloses du feu interieur dans le terrain des métaux, ces fleurs en étaient les émanations les plus fluides et les plus pures (p. 556).

This type of description is characteristic of Nerval's style, in which his imagination freely creates visions of a personal oriental fairytale. The legend has become a vehicle for the artist's ideas of the perfect hero and heroine, placed in a background equal to them in its extravagance. As well as depicting his own image of an ideal Orient, Nerval incorporates several levels of meaning into this story. Consequently, the images which captivate the reader by their ethereal qualities are charged with meaning according to Nerval's particular beliefs. It is because of this complex nature of Nerval's literary message that Geoffrey Hartman describes Nerval's style as a "peristyle", which charms and casts spells over the reader:

The 'peristyle' is not simple a style forced to be peripheral or subterranean, and moving with stolen feet of mythic bricolage. It is genuinely, dangerously, the style of the peri: of oriental music,
when the "fairyway of writing" is taken seriously, and constitutes the "immense" border or indefinite periphery of purer religion. 10

Nerval's style goes beyond the projection of a mythical world and borders on "purer religion" because of the many levels of meaning he incorporates into the text. Nerval presents a dream world and, like all dreams, it is completely dominated by symbols. Names, colours, and even sounds, have special significance. In 'La Reine du Matin,' the Masonic symbolic system elevates the story to the status of a spiritual message.

Nerval's interest in retelling this legend stems primarily from his knowledge and love of the occult. His real affiliation with the Masonic order is not completely known. However, the story 'La Reine du Matin' shows his awareness of the Masonic code and a personal fascination with the order. He gives special status to this legend through its length, and the many careful details included in the description. During his travels in the Middle East, Nerval studied aspects of the myth upon which the Masons build their philosophical system. Faithful to the Masonic interpretation of the Bible (as related in Chronicles 11 and Kings 1), Nerval portrays Solomon as a materialistic, lustful monarch. He also gives Balkis (the Queen of Sheba) and Adoniram the essential roles in this legend. By including this story in his novel, Nerval is able to express the esoteric and spiritual fascination it holds for him. Moreover, he propounds a certain system or philosophy (the Masonic code) in which secret and magical forces are basic
concepts.

For the Mason, this story is not only a legend telling of the origins of his order, it reveals higher truths about the workings of the universe. Secret signs used by the Mason are believed to reflect cosmic mysteries and truths. For example, the sign of TAU, which Adoniram uses to control his workers, represents the powerful geometric organization of the universe. The creation of significant images and the retelling of Adoniram's life and death serve as a religious technique for the Mason in his efforts to reach a higher unity (or God). Nerval deploys the legend 'La Reine du Matin' in much the same way: the arrangement of significant images within the story is a technique which reveals his own belief system. Although Nerval expresses himself skilfully and entertains his reader, his account of the legend is also significant for its underlying conceptual framework. His use of language creates an imaginary time and space which fulfil his aesthetic desires, and are symbolic of his personal, spiritual and occult ideas. Barthes describes the process of concealing meaning within language as essential to literature:

... la première condition de la littérature,
c'est paradoxalement, d'accomplir un langage indirect: nommer en détail les choses afin de ne pas nommer leur sens dernier et tenir cependant sans cesse ce sens menaçant, désigner le monde comme un repertoire de signes dont on ne dit pas ce qu'ils signifient ... d'être indirect, pour un langage, c'est de se référer le plus constamment possible aux objects et non à leurs concepts: car le sens de l'object tremble toujours, non celui du concept.
The "langage indirect" which Barthes speaks of is the symbolic language which gives the work a multiplicity of meaning. The legend 'La Reine du Matin' is a literary sign in which the signifiers refer to a complex system of signifieds. Interpretation, therefore, may be on different levels, depending on the reader's knowledge of the Nervalian code. However, because the story is an aesthetic creation which engenders meaning, the reader is free to apply his own code system and thereby perceive the images given in a personal manner. Consequently, the Orient described in this legend can become the private fantasy of the reader, just as the image of Balkis can become like Setalmulc, the (male) reader's vision of an ideal woman - the sister ("ame soeur" or twin soul) who is desired but unattainable.
Notes to Chapter Four:


4. ibid., p. 101.

5. ibid., p. 105.


8. 'Visit the inner earth and by making corrections you shall find what is hidden.'


Nerval carefully constructs his *Voyage en Orient* to resemble a genuine record of a journey. He gives the account a sense of having been experienced not only by the precision of his documentation but also in the rhythm of the narration. Gérard repeats several times that he likes to travel without a plan, to be guided by the adventures or accidents he encounters: "J'aime à dépendre un peu du hasard" (p. 31). The narration appears to follow faithfully the capricious wanderings of the narrator, "Je prends le parti de te mander au hasard tout ce qui m'arrive" (p. 31). The main character travels freely about the Orient and the realistic text also has the appearance of roving. By renouncing the "ressources immenses des combinaisons dramatiques ou romanesques" (p. 267) and the great literary models in order to reproduce the discontinuity and chance happenings in the experience of the traveller, the narrator hopes to describe the Orient as he actually perceived it. Gérard insists on the authenticity of his account:

_Ce que j'ai écrit, je l'ai vu, je l'ai senti. Ai-je eu tort de rapporter ainsi naïvement mille incidents minutieux, dédaignés d'ordinaire dans les voyages pittoresques ou scientifiques? (p. 624)._

This declaration is important as an attempt to direct the reader to read the text as a real diary, but it is false. Numerous episodes narrated by Gérard are completely fictitious. A great part of
Nerval's information is borrowed from other sources. The experiences which he attributes to Gérard and other characters, as well as the ethnographical material (marriage, slaves, religion) are second-hand. Although Nerval did journey to the Orient, there was a long interval of about ten years between his voyage and the final writing of the *Voyage en Orient*. The time between his experience and his composing of the novel provided distance between Nerval and his past adventures; it also permitted him to objectify his hero.

Irony is the clearest indication of this dissociation between Gérard and Nerval. Nerval uses irony continually throughout his work to give comic relief to many episodes. Gérard is not only the sincere traveler, but at times the naïve one. For example, while Gérard is in Egypt he watches some exotic Egyptian dancers. At first he is excited by their movement, costumes and beauty. However, he eventually realizes that the dancers are men:

Et maintenant voici les almées qui nous apparaissent dans un nuage de poussière, de fumée, de tabac. Elles me frappèrent au premier abord par l'éclat des calottes d'or qui surmontaient leur chevelure tressée. Leurs talons qui frappaient le sol, pendant que les bras levés en répétaient la rude secousse, faisaient résonner des clochettes et des anneaux; les hanches frémissaient d'un mouvement voluptueux; la taille apparaissait nue sous la mousseline dans l'intervalle de la veste et de la riche ceinture relâchée et tombant très bas, comme le ceston de Vénus. À peine, au milieu du tournoiement rapide, pouvait-on distinguer les traits de ces séduisantes personnes, dont les doigts agitaient de petites cymbales, grandes comme des castagnettes, et qui se démenaient vaillamment aux sons primitifs de la flûte et du tambourin. Il y en avait deux fort
belles, à la mine fière, aux yeux arabes avivés par le 'cohel', aux joues pleines et délicates légèrement fardées; mais la troisième, il faut bien le dire, trahissait un sexe moins tendre avec une barbe de huit jours: de sorte qu'à bien examiner les choses, et quand, la danse étant finie, il me fut possible de distinguer mieux les traits des deux autres, je ne tardai pas à me convaincre que nous n'avions affaire là qu'à des almees ... mâles.

O vie orientale, voilà de tes surprises! et moi, j'allais m'enflammer imprudemment pour ces êtres douteux ... (p. 138, 9).

This example is typical of Gérard's anticipation followed by disappointment. Throughout his journey he repeatedly projects meaning into a sign or situation which ultimately proves to have an entirely different significance.

Gérard's search for love is often tinged with a mundane desire for an amorous conquest. The mystic unions of Polyphile, of Hakem or Adoniram encourage Gérard to dream of an ideal marriage with the Druze princess: but there are numerous other situations in which he attempts flirtations of a less serious nature, and these inevitably result in Gérard being reduced to the level of a comic seducer. He continually calls himself a 'Don Juan' or 'Casanova', both roles he never succeeds in perfecting. In Vienna he falls in love with a young woman and does his best to seduce her, all the while declaring undying passion and devotion. But when she finally invites him into her house, he discovers that she is married with three children, and quickly loses interest:
It is through his ironic treatment of the hero and the Orient that Nerval can contemplate the East at a distance and can objectify his own fantasies about exotic promises. However, he can also reincorporate his own desires and dreams into the hero's quest, and tell stories which fulfil those dreams of adventure not actually found in the Orient.

The basic structure of the novel is consistent: Gérard projects an ideal of the Orient based on literary images or artistic ideals, he discovers an oriental reality and finally he listens to the legends which create a new fantasy universe. This pattern repeats itself continuously and the text reflects a triangular tension throughout.

The movement from imagination to reality is illustrated at the beginning of the *Voyage*. Gérard excitedly observes Mont Blanc in all its splendor, but soon realizes that he is only admiring the clouds. The real Mont Blanc is a disappointment:

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Est-ce à vous, ces enfants? - Oui. - Diable!
Il y en a trois, blonds comme des épis, blonds comme elle. J'ai trouvé cela si respectable, qui je ne suis pas revenu encore dans la maison (p. 48).

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Ce sont bien les hautes Alpes que l'on découvre de tous côtés à l'horizon. Mais où est le mont Blanc? me dis-je le premier soir; j'ai suivi les bords du lac, j'ai fait le tour des remparts, n'osant demander à personne: Où est donc le mont Blanc? Et j'ai fini par l'admirer sous la forme d'un immense nuage blanc et rouge, qui réalisait le rêve de mon imagination. Malheureusement, pendant que je calculais en moi-même les dangers que pouvait présenter le projet d'aller planter tout en haut un drapeau tricolore, pendant
qu'il me semblait voir circuler des ours noirs sur la neige immaculée de sa cime, voilà que ma montagne a manqué de base tout à coup; quant au véritable mont Blanc, tu comprendras qu'ensuite il m'ait causé peu d'impression (pp. 12-13).

By placing his hero in contact with reality, Nerval constantly demystifies his exotic dreams and substitutes the 'facts' which are mediocre when compared to the fantasy. At the beginning of his stay in Cairo, Gérard perceives the city as if it were a place from A Thousand and One Nights. The atmosphere surrounding the veiled women, the marriage festival and the promise of initiation all seem to lead towards his goal. The end of 'Les Femmes du Caire' depicts the traveller conscious of the real situation and no longer deluded by hopeful projections. His desire to unveil the mysteries of Isis is deceiving and the charms of Egypt dissolve little by little. When he finally leaves Egypt it seems to Gérard that it is a dead country, ruined by time and racial divisions. This example is repeated again and again as Gérard's subjective projections cannot withstand the tests of experience.

Nerval wrote a letter to his friend Théophile Gautier indicating his own disenchantment with the Orient. "Moi, j'ai déjà perdu, royaume à royaume, et province à province, la plus belle moitié de l'univers, et bientôt je ne vais plus savoir où refugier mes rêves."² Nerval consciously incorporates this disappointment into the narrative structure of the text, making Gérard express the same sentiment. However, instead of describing simply the loss of a dream,
Nerval gives this experience a positive aspect. He confines the fantasies to their proper place, the imagination, and he shows how the disappointed traveller discovers reality. Demystification occurs in all the countries the author describes and all Gérard's experiences are reduced to daily banality. The narrative structure which is repeated throughout the whole text shows the protagonist being woken from his dream or expectations into reality, to discover that human relations function badly and the ideal of an exotic refuge is a chimera.

The story of Zeynab, Gérard's slave girl, may be read as an "anti-marriage". At the beginning she is perceived as mysterious, a source of mystical eastern knowledge. But she, like the Egyptian woman's veil, eventually symbolizes rupture of any possible union. Zeynab remains untouchable and hidden behind her difference. The magic word "tayeb" - the open sesame of communication with Zeynab and others - is replaced by the curse "mafishch" - the sign of mistrust and division. The obstacle of languages in the East, the social inequalities, the ethnic and religious dissidences, all create suspicion and misunderstanding within that society and alienate Gérard from any real communication with the Orient.

The narrative mechanism demystifies the fantasy of unity with the unknown other and substitutes the singularity of distinct beings seen in their true unicity. Gérard, continually rejected and forced into a position as outsider, adopts a new role, that of observer. The narration eliminates the fantasies of an ideal union in order to
establish, between Gérard and others, a normal subject-object rapport. By becoming a sort of ethnologist, Gérard regains a certain consciousness of himself and no longer tries to disguise himself as an Oriental. He becomes an orientalist, and he readopts the European vision, which regards the East as the 'others' world. He observes the various customs (slavery, the harem, domestic life) and instead of falling back on his fantasies, he gathers valuable documentary material. Even marriage and religion, at first objects of desire and projection, are put back into the literary imagery which first inspired him to look for them. Condemned to be outside, Gérard becomes the spectator of events rather than trying to join in or interfere with them.

Nerval carefully constructs his work in a way which depicts the projections of his hero's presumptuous imagination and then upsets these mental structures by describing the Orient as an external and ontological reality. However, there is also the third movement within the novel, that of projecting the Orient onto a higher form of aesthetic creation. The author transforms the mundane East into a personal poetic myth through the legends and stories found in the text.

In the Voyage, Nerval creates his own oriental universe, a sign which both describes his own restructured vision and engenders meaning and dreams for the reader. The referent of the signified of this new sign is once again imaginary, but whereas Gérard's mental representation of the Orient is initially based on previous historical and literary works, the new referent is the artistic creation produced by
Nerval himself.

Nerval's friend Gautier also recreated the lost exoticism of the Orient, in an opera. Nerval wrote to Gautier praising him, saying that it was this imaginary sign which appealed to him and remained his sacred idea of the real Orient:

Je retrouverai à l'Opéra le Caire véritable, l'Egypte immaculée, et qui t'a souri d'un rayon de ses yeux divins. Heureux poète, tu as commencé par réaliser ton Egypte avec des feuilles et des livres; aujourd'hui la peinture, la musique, la chorégraphie s'empressent d'arrêter au vol tout ce que tu as rêvé d'elle; les génies de l'Orient n'ont jamais eu plus de pouvoir. L'œuvre des pharaons, des califes et des soudans, disparaît presque entièrement sous le poudre du Khani ou sous le marteau d'une civilisation prosaïque; mais sous tes regards, ô magicien! son fantôme animé se relève et se reproduit avec des palais, des jardins presque réels, et des péris presque idéales! Mais c'est à cette Egypte-là que je crois et non pas l'autre.

The two new literary signs that Nerval creates for the Orient are the stories 'la Reine du Matin' and 'L'Histoire du Calife Hakem', both fabulous adventures depicting mythical lands and characters. The legend of Adoniram, telling the story of Solomon and the building of the temple of Jerusalem, is in the biblical tradition. However, Nerval substitutes for the Bible story a heterodox version, borrowing from Islamic sources and the Masons, as well as incorporating numerous esoteric speculations. He creates a subterranean population who are hostile to the Holy Laws. These are the creators of art and the masters of fire. They have great occult powers and consider the God of
the Jews to be only a genie among others. In this story there is no unique God, and Truth is hidden, not to be found in the Bible nor in Jerusalem, but in another paradise more oriental than the Orient.

The other legend, 'Histoire du Calife Hakem', takes place in Cairo and is based on the Druze religious tradition. The hero Hakem is a rebel and visionary, who considers himself to be a god. He elaborates a new doctrine and begins a new cult, the Druze faith. Like the subterranean people found in the other story, Hakem believes himself to be divine and defies the idea of a single God. In the same way that Adoniram wishes to marry his sister, Hakem prepares to consummate an incestuous marriage in order to perpetuate the purity of his race. The confusion and struggle which results from Hakem's visions end in his death and the birth of a new religion.

These stories are literary signifiers or aesthetic objects, which convey as signifieds the ideal and magical universe of Nerval's imagination. They also engender numerous levels of interpretation. Barthes describes this multiplicity of meaning as being the intrinsic quality of symbolic language:

La langue symbolique à laquelle appartiennent les œuvres littéraires est par structure une langue plurielle, dont le code est fait de telle sorte que toute parole (toute œuvre), par lui engendrée, a des sens multiples. 4

Nerval creates this fantasy world by means of an eclectic combination of codes including magic incarnations, Islamic folklore, astrology, cabalistic signs and masonic mythology. These various code
systems produce an atmosphere of enchantment, like the imaginary cities from *A Thousand and One Nights*. The author transports his reader outside reality into the world of legendary beings. The various codes not only produce the feeling of an exotic Orient, which is itself a message, but also reveal Nerval's own interests, knowledge and ideals. Pierre Guiraud in *La Sémiologie* notes that this combination of codes permits the sign to be open to interpretation. In our decoding of the text it is essential to be aware of the number and choices of codes used by the author:

Dans la pratique, nombreux sont les systèmes où un signifiant peut référer à plusieurs signifiés et où chaque signifié peut s'exprimer au moyen de plusieurs signifiants. C'est le cas des codes poétiques dans lesquels la convention est faible, la fonction iconique développée et le signe ouvert.

En ce qui concerne le langage articulé où la polysémie est la règle générale, il semble que la situation tienne au fait qu'on a moins affaire à un code qu'à un agrégat de codes superposés et imbriqués. Sans doute n'y a-t-il pas des codes polysemiques mais des systèmes d'expression qui recourent simultanément à plusieurs codes. Quoi qu'il en soit, il en résulte une possibilité de choix qui est génératrice du style. Dans la mesure où l'émetteur dispose de plusieurs possibilités pour formuler son message, son choix devient significatif. 5

Nerval's fantasy universe is a mythical one, veiled in mystery by the esoteric code systems he uses. In this way he keeps his text at a seductive distance from the reader. However, as with all occult systems and hermetic texts, the keys to understanding are available
through initiation and knowledge of the secret societies and hidden codes. For example, the story of Adoniram changes from a fantasy to a religious myth, when interpreted within the Masonic system.

In his stories Nerval postulates the possibility of a higher spiritual reality. He constructs an elaborate mental structure which is apparently based upon "Truth", as both stories are religious. However, the Truth, or promise, remains concealed and unknown, veiled by layers of occult codes. Even if the codes could be known and the hidden message revealed, the experience would remain intellectual. The hidden truths can only become part of the reader's imagination: they become transcendental ideas, inaccessible and enticing. In this way Nerval's aesthetic signs become inspirations for the reader to travel to the East in order to experience the promised truths concealed within the sign.

The possibility of finding the oriental truths, an idea encouraged by literature and other sources, is what motivated the hero of the *Voyage en Orient* to begin his journey. We have seen that Gérard's imagination projected an exotic Orient around him, but it was one he could not find. Throughout the narration there is a tension between dream and reality, but just as the two legends suggest a higher reality, Gérard continues to hope and search for the Orient he desires. His experience with the Druze princess suggests that if circumstances had permitted, his ideal would have been realized. Nerval too reflects this idea of oriental truths still being possible, in a letter he
wrote to his friend Jules Janin:

En somme, l'Orient n'approche pas de ce rêve éveillé que j'en avais fait il y a deux ans, ou bien c'est que cet Orient-là est encore plus loin ou plus haut. 6

An episode at the end of Gérard's adventures provides an image for this possibility. Gérard receives the gift of a precious stone, but he is unable to see beyond its rough surface. It is only when his friend breaks open the stone that Gérard can see its true beauty:

Satisfait d'avoir vu, dans Istamboul même, les trente nuits du Ramazan, je profitai du retour de la lune de Schewal pour donner congé du local que l'on m'avait loué à Ildiz-Khan. L'un des Persans, qui m'avait pris en amitié, et qui m'appelait toujours le Myrza (lettré), voulut me faire un cadeau au moment de mon départ. Il me fit descendre dans un caveau plein, à ce qu'il disait, de pierreries. Je crus que c'était le trésor d'Aboulcasem; mais la cave ne renfermait que des pierres et des cailloux fort ordinaires.

"Venez, me dit-il, il y a là des escarboucles, là des améthystes, là des grenats, là des turquoises, là encore des opales: choisissez quelqu'une de ces pierres que je puisse vous offrir".

Cet homme me semblait un fou; à tout hasard, je choisis les opales. Il prit une hache, et fendit en deux une pierre blanche grosse comme un pavé. L'éclat des opales renfermées dans ce calcaire m'éblouit aussitôt. "Prenez", me dit-il en m'offrant un des fragments du pavé (p. 623).

The stones, which at first seemed useless and ugly, proved to be precious gems. This story suggests that if Gérard had a guide or had been able to marry his princess, then the secrets of the Orient would
have been revealed.

**Voyage en Orient** is a complex text which weaves together numerous messages, none of which are definitive statements about the Middle East. It illustrates Eco's description of art as being a "super-system of homologous structural relationships".

Thus art seems to be a way of interconnecting messages in order to produce a text in which:
(a) many messages, on different levels and planes of the discourse, are 'ambiguously' organized: (b) these ambiguities are not realized at random but follow a precise design; (c) both the normal and the ambiguous devices/within a given message exert a contextual pressure/or both ..... on both the normal and ambiguous devices within all the others; (d) the way in which the norms of a given system are offended by one message is the same as that in which the norms of other systems are offended by the various messages that permit.

In Nerval's novel the various messages urge the reader to make an interpretative effort and incite him toward the discovery of multiple images of the Orient. The planes of expression and content create an ambiguous impression, as they alter according to the messages Nerval communicates. The reader must attempt to understand the author's messages and faithfully interpret the text. The ambiguity of the messages, especially in the complex legends told in the work, allow the reader to fill out the text with his own codes or interpretations. Thus he can imagine the marvelous oriental universe projected by Nerval, through his own imagination.

Eco defines the aesthetic text as being a form of "communicative interplay" in which the reader collaborates with the author to interpret
Thus the aesthetic text becomes a multiple source of unpredictable 'speech acts' whose real author remains undetermined, sometimes being the sender of the message, at others the addressee who collaborates in its development. 9

Through his collaboration with the author, the reader absorbs the images from the text and transforms them into a personal vision. In the case of the *Voyage*, Nerval's Orient can become the reader's own exotic land of promise. At the end of his travels Gérard notes:

... je regagne le pays du froid et des orages, et déjà l'Orient n'est plus pour moi qu'un de ces rêves du matin auxquels viennent bientôt succéder les ennuis du jour (p. 624).

Gérard goes full circle from imagining the Orient, to discovering the real East, to once again fantasizing an ideal land. The reader too follows this pattern and the image of the Orient which remains is the one created through the stories and legends. The promise of hidden truths, beauty and exotic customs predominates because of the decoding process: the reader's personal connotative system allows him to imagine his own Oriental ideal.

In this work Nerval achieves the symbiosis between dream and experience. Consistently, he unites his love of illusion and his demand for clarity, his fascination with and criticism of the ideal. At the centre of his discourse Nerval conveys the projection and love of the mysterious as well as mundane everyday events, by combining
the effects of both introspection and documentation. By recreating his model Orient through his stories he is able to perpetuate his ideal. The reader participates in the process of decoding this ideal image and helps to create it as well. In the end Gérard's quest becomes the reader's dream, and the literary sign Nerval created may serve as the inspiration for our own "Voyage en Orient": our own search for the ideal Other and spiritual home.

Japan, 1983
Footnotes for Chapter Five


2. Nerval to Théophile Gautier, Oeuvres I (op. cit), p. 945.

3. ibid.


8. ibid.

9. ibid., p. 276.
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