

**The Western Gaze Balked:
Wyndham Lewis's *Filibusters in Barbary*
Paul Scott Stanfield**

In a possibly fictional account of his travels, the possibly fictional Sir John Mandeville describes a visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. He was able to enter the sanctuary, he writes, because of a unique privilege he enjoyed:

But the Sarzines wole not suffe no Cristene man ne Iewes to come therein, for thei sey that none so foule synfulle men scholde not come in so holy place. But I cam in there and in othere places there I wolde, for I hadde lettres of the Soudan with his grete seel ... in the whiche lettres he commanded of his specyalle grace to alle his subgettes to lete me seen all the places and to enforme me pleynty alle the mysteries of every place (Seymour 60)

Mandeville perhaps inaugurates here one of the archetypes of western travel writing: the moment when the European traveler manages to see an interior or an object that no European has seen before, or not seen and lived to describe, because Europeans or other outsiders have been expressly forbidden to behold the interior or object in question. The reasons why such anecdotes proliferated in travel writing are easily understood. Such anecdotes not only illustrate the resources of the traveler (his impenetrable disguise, her intimacy with native customs), but also figure the western desire to see and to know as an irresistible force. These conditions hold not only for the traveler in his or her own person, but also and crucially for the traveler as the west's representative, for once the traveler publishes, all Europe sees what he or she has seen, however sacred the site, however powerful the native authority that protects it. The traveler almost never imagines this relationship to be reciprocal; he assumes he knows the other, but does not believe that the other to the same extent

knows him—his interior remains hidden. Able, like Mandeville, to enter “there I wolde” and unveil “alle the mysteries of every place,” the traveling westerner presumes himself (and much more rarely, herself) to be an unknowable knower, with all the power that position implies.

Presumption, in every sense, defines what will herein be called “the Mandeville trope.” To insist on being present in a place where one is not welcome, to assume that merely being present there grants one understanding of another’s culture, to believe that one reveals nothing of one’s own character and culture by behaving in such a way—all this carries arrogance to the point of fatuity. Sir Richard F. Burton, the Victorian adventurer, was a master of the Mandeville trope. In Arabia, in east Africa, in Dahomey, and in the Amazon he made a point of enduring “the hot, enervating, and unhealthy climates” (*First Footsteps* 9) that most Europeans could scarcely survive and of observing that which outsiders, especially European ones, were reputedly not permitted to see. *First Footsteps in East Africa* narrates Burton’s visit to Harar and the palace of its king. Harar’s remoteness appealed to Burton (it “had never been visited” 11), as did the fact that Europeans were actually prohibited: “It was said that some Hamitic prophet had read Decline and Fall in the first footsteps of the Frank, and that the bigoted barbarians had threatened death to the infidel caught within their walls” (Hayman 69). Burton, of course, survives entering the palace, which he minutely describes, just as he had earlier described the interior of the Ka’aba, another forbidden zone: “However safe a Christian might be in Meccah, nothing could save him from the ready knives of enraged fanatics if detected in the House” (*Personal Narrative* 1: 207). And, he would later describe the ceremony of human sacrifice in Dahomey: “As yet, no traveler has, I believe, described the ceremonies of the So-sin, which, however, differ but little from those of the Atto” (*Mission* 1: 347).

It seems obvious that witnessing a ceremony is not the same as understanding it; nor will a stolen peek inside Islam’s holiest site enable one to explain the power of that faith. The logic of the Mandeville trope, however, insists that to see is to know. The sheer effort involved in reaching the faraway place and the ingenuity required in gaining access to the prohibited interior seems to have justified western travelers through

their assumption that the sight of the other's secret somehow put one in possession of it. Mary Louise Pratt has argued that in imperial-era travel writing "the act of discovery itself, for which all the lives were sacrificed and miseries endured, consisted of what in European culture counts as a purely passive experience—that of seeing" (202–03) and that the drive to be what she calls a "seeing-man" was underwritten by the assumption of a "relation of *mastery* predicated between the seer and the seen" (203; Pratt's emphasis).

During the high tide of empire, popular British fiction often relied on the Mandeville trope. Burtonesque, the English protagonists of H. Rider Haggard's *She* are the first Europeans to reach a remote region in Africa—"No man had ever known or heard of white strangers arriving in the country of the people of the rocks" (68)—and are seeking "to know that which is unknown" (63). They encounter the mysterious, goddess-like Ayesha. Rather than use her astonishing powers to kill them, she is so taken with them that she leads them into the recesses of a cavern, where they gaze on the most awful knowledge of all: "Behold the very Fountain and Heart of Life as it beats in the bosom of the great world" (212). Similarly, Athelstan King, the hero of Talbot Mundy's *King—of the Khyber Rifles*, is seeking knowledge about "a holy war such as the world has not seen" (8), knowledge obtainable only by penetrating (in disguise) the impenetrable Khinjan Caves: "You know we've sent men to Khinjan who are said to have entered the Caves. Not one of 'em has ever returned" (6) and grasping the secret of "the Heart of the Hills." This entity turns out to be the mysterious, goddess-like Yasmini, who, rather than using *her* astonishing powers to kill King, is so taken with him as to lead him into the dangerous and forbidden recesses of the Caves. Fiction makes the promises underlying the Mandeville trope particularly plain: no prohibited interior will remain un-entered, no secret will remain unpublished; even that which is, under pain of death, to remain unseen and unknown will, inevitably, be seen and be known, and the West's taking of dominion will proceed uninterrupted.

Given the near inevitability of the Mandeville trope in western travel literature (even, as we shall see, in the 1930s), it is all the more striking that Wyndham Lewis's 1932 travel book *Filibusters in Barbary* not only

avoids it, but also ridicules it. The book's tenth chapter, "Important Interiors," cast as advice to western tourists to Morocco, insists that they make a point of viewing interiors, especially those forbidden to outsiders. "But now for some important interiors—for in the Mohammedan East you must contrive to enter behind the rebarbative walls or battlements" (58), Lewis insists, urging the western traveler to see the interiors of a *foudouk*, a Berber brothel, and a Moorish bath: "It is of critical importance to get into the Bath. Only Moslems are supposed to enter, in the stricter Morocco":

you must get inside all and especially the cheaper ones! They are all *important* interiors. They cannot be looked at from the outside—there is nothing to see. They are packed with "Islamic Sensations." If you only have say forty-eight hours at your disposal, then it would be best perhaps to stay at the Bath. Go straight from the station to the Bath. (59)¹

You may omit the mosque, he notes—"Not an important interior—though it has to be walked around for the say-so. All the powerful 'Islamic Sensations' are elsewhere" (61). Lewis's deeming the mosque deficient in Islamic sensations tips off the joke. Insofar as the western traveler seeks to master the essence of the other, the quickest, most efficient way (we have learned to assume) is to enter a place he is forbidden to enter and see what he is not privileged to behold. The bath meets the criterion ... so, if you are in a hurry, go straight to the bath.

The chapter's closing sentences cap the irony. The rushed traveler may omit not only the mosque, but also the *Koubahs*:

The *Koubahs* the same—*Koubah* is a saint's tomb—a white-domed cube: they swarm everywhere—they are all the sanctuaries of Andalusian Saints, expelled from Spain, and all date from the time of the Arab expulsion. *Never* fret because you cannot get inside them (it is forbidden). There is absolutely nothing inside! (61)

Here is a promisingly forbidden interior, but one that, Lewis warns, will disappoint. However, on what grounds can he assure us that there is

“nothing inside”? Has he looked? Perhaps, but he does not mention that he has, and simply by leaving the question open he breaks precedent. There was nothing much inside the Ka’aba, either, but Burton itemized its ordinariness detail by detail, even estimating its dimensions. By not specifying whether he has seen, been told, or just guessed that there is “nothing inside,” Lewis leaves the interior blank. This absence suggests that Islam can successfully withhold something from the western gaze, that the gaze is not omnipotent. By adopting the complacently fatuous tone of “there is nothing inside” while noting in an aside the history and meaning of the *koubabs*, Lewis allows us to read his bluff assurance of there being “nothing” to see in them as a kind of blindness: a faith resides in the memories, convictions, and practices of its believers, rather than in the merely visible.

The quest for “Islamic Sensations”—always capitalized, and usually placed in quotation marks for good measure—becomes a satiric leitmotif in *Filibusters in Barbary*. Lewis gets his first dose in Oran, in a “small *café-chantant*” where “five Turko-Berber instrumentalists sit, fezzed and trousered, and dispense ‘native’ music” (48). Their performance delights a “Colonial Briton,” who begins “shouting out answers to the pentatonic balladist, springing to his feet, and sending more money up to make him go on” (49). Finally, “literally intoxicated with Islamic Sensations” (49), the happy patron collapses at his table. The group’s drummer, meanwhile, “did not *go aside* to take cocain [sic], but sniffed it up without stopping his performance” (49), and when he sang, “did so in howling spasms, pumping the dismal hollow sounds out of his vitals” (50). Seeking the pure native essence in an important interior, the British colonial has found only empire: a Turkish musician in Moroccan dress performing under the influence of a South American drug for a European audience. A “quite good ‘Islamic Sensation’,” Lewis concludes, “for a first night” (50).

Throughout *Filibusters in Barbary* we meet the colonial Briton’s counterparts, various Europeans seeking or relishing Islamic sensations. Lewis’s foreword notes his having chosen an unusual route to North Africa precisely in order to avoid “the stupefying squalor of Anglo-American tourism about one, poisoning the wells and casting its Baedekered light”

(25), but this strategy evidently failed, for his text repeatedly dwells on westerners and reserves the bulk of its rhetorical energy for scathing, often vituperative portraits of them. The social cynosure of the boat trip across the Mediterranean is the wife of a French colonial administrator, presented by Lewis as an “obese groceress wallowing in the profitable squalors of the Third Republic . . . whose husband got the pip in his but-tonhole from Herriot, probably, for two decades of dirty work!” (36). At high table, this woman’s husband and a French officer “exchanged anecdotes which never failed to secure a good hearty colonial laugh, about various indigenes—the natives they administered; and the droll sayings and doings of Ali and Mohammed . . . were greatly relished” (37). The condescension towards those they govern shown by these functionar-ies of a famously corrupt government (the Oustric scandals had already erupted and the more spectacular Stavisky scandals would soon follow) marks this as “a good solid colonial evening,” Lewis notes (37).

Later, in Agadir, Lewis meets “a queer middle-aged middle-class Bulldog Drummond of an ex-Temporary Major. This odd, smug, highly respectable-looking filibuster lives outside Agadir in a smug white ‘Arab’ house he has built for himself” (107). The “Filibuster of Tooting Bec,” as Lewis calls him, is “a house-agent of a peculiarly Moroccan order” whose qualifications for his work, Lewis surmises, include “his typically British appearance” (he is a “good, solid, pink, fetch-and-carry order of faithful dog-Toby of a man”) and his “invaluable air too of righting wrongs . . . and assisting the poor down-trodden Arab against the wicked French” (107). The impression the Major gives of being a righter of wrongs is helped along by

a good bit of beefy romanticism of the station-bookstall shil-ling-a-volume order (the Briton in foreign parts what what!—a bit of ‘secret service,’ a dash of free-lance, but always sure to be anywhere there’s a ‘scrap,’ what what) though doubtless aware of which side his bread is buttered. (107)

Despite having resided in the area for quite a while, the ex-Temporary Major can answer none of Lewis’s questions—“Doubtless he had been too busy bull-dogging about, and defying the French, to find out any-

thing about the ancient social organization of the people of the Sous, or any such boring subjects as that, though he regarded himself as a great authority" (108)—and discourages Lewis from trying to find the answers himself. It is interesting to note that Major T. C. MacFie's recognition of himself in this description and in even less flattering passages led to a libel suit, and thus to the publisher's withdrawal of the English edition, one of Lewis's many legal setbacks in the 1930s (Meyers 218; Fox 169–70).

The most comic of these encounters are those with two film crews, one French, one American, both seeking "to afford their sham-sheiks a Hispano-Mauresque photographic setting" (84). The filmmaker has, for Lewis, a tiny moral advantage over the other westerners in Morocco insofar as he seeks to exploit not the natives, but rather "the whispering masses in the Film-palaces" by "throwing up shoddy images, with his photographic sausage-machine, of the desert-life—so falsely selected as to astonish into suspicion sometimes even the tamest Robot" (84). These filmmakers nevertheless provide the text's purest example of arrogant Orientalist ignorance in the person of the American "Producer, Director, Author, Continuity-Man, Supervisor, Star—all rolled into one" (92) who "had become Mohammedan—at least his publicity staff interpreted his fascination for Islam and for Islamic Sensations in that way" (93):

I next heard my man laying down the law of Islam. He was quoting the Koran. And he was laying it down to his rather jumpy young Berber interpreter, who was, no doubt, a fairish interpreter, but perhaps not much of a Tolba student. When corrected in this way upon some matter of Islamic doctrine by his Sheikish boss (who even at times, when feeling particularly fine, taught him a little Arabic, as well as a little Koranic law, and the young Berber's eyes danced up and down with annoyance) he often showed signs of great strain. (95–96)

Gradually, a reader of *Filibusters in Barbary* gathers that the true subject of the book is not North Africa, but the European presence in North Africa. Reviewers wondered whether Lewis had forgotten his purpose

and lost control of his narrative; the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer objected that “to read the diatribes which constitute some three-fourths of his book is to wonder who the people are who make it worth his while to set them down on comparatively valuable paper” (“Mr. Lewis in Barbary” 553). The text’s odd title, however, suggests that Lewis knowingly took Europeans in Barbary, not Barbary itself, to be his theme. The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of “filibuster” sends the reader first to “freebooter,” defined as “one who goes about in search of plunder,” then mentions “a class of piratical adventurers” who operated in the West Indies in the seventeenth century, and concludes, more generally, “one who engages in unauthorized and irregular warfare against foreign states.” The history of Europeans in this part of the world, Lewis points out, is a history of filibustering. The “first European to get his foot upon these shores” was a Captain Wyndham in 1551, and as Lewis notes, “I fear his trade was that of a *filibuster*” (101; original emphasis). Lewis devotes a chapter to the “Clubman Filibuster of the ‘Nineties,” a species he distinguishes from the 1930s variety, “the coarse flag-wagger or vulgar humanitarian who affects to be the friend of the ‘poor *native*’ (who inveigles the poor *fellah* into transaction undertaken oh! Entirely in his behalf, and then proceeds to rob him of his land or whatever else he may possess)” (124; original emphasis). Gordon Canning, “the famous English filibuster,” was reported to be in the vicinity of Gibraltar during Lewis’s visit, bringing with him “a brisk *va-et-vient* of cases of cartridges” (62). Of Agadir Lewis records: “Today there is absolutely no question that there are more filibusters to the square-inch at Agadir than in any other part of the Globe” (102). Beyond the plunder, piracy, and irregular warfare brought in by the Europeans, there are the film crews, or “Film-Filibusters” (a chapter title), with a novel way of extracting profit from the natives. Conversely, Lewis defines “natives” as “the people to whom the country belongs, as much as anything belongs to anybody” (41).

Throughout *Filibusters in Barbary*, the landscape, the architecture, and the customs of North Africa recede to become the backdrop against which one filibuster after another poses for a savage Lewisian portrait. As a travel book, Lewis’s text is in revolt against its genre. The photo-

graphs that accompany the text in the New York Travel Club edition highlight the difference between what the book ordinarily would have been and what Lewis produced instead. Obviously neither selected nor captioned by Lewis, the sepia-toned images juxtapose “Fez, ‘The Sacred City,’ ... famous for its mosques and medersas” with Lewis’s sociological dissection of the French film crew (*Filibusters* 113–14) or “the sheltered patio of an Arab house” with one of several analyses of “that queer bird, peculiar to European climes, the filibuster” (*Filibusters* 193–94). Lewis capsizes the genre most dramatically by first invoking, then undoing the Mandeville trope.

The “Author’s Foreword” with which *Filibusters in Barbary* begins identifies the Rio de Oro region as the object of the journey, hammering at the obligatory point that no westerners are allowed to visit: “The Occidental Sahara is *verboten* as far as the Paleface is concerned. No European, I discovered to my extreme astonishment, is able to set foot upon those forbidden sands and steppes.... The Rio de Oro is a closed book.... No European has ever been able so far to penetrate it” (25). At the book’s midpoint, the conclusion of the fifteenth of its thirty chapters, Lewis reaffirms the Rio de Oro as the *telos* of the text, saying he will omit description of his passage through the Atlas Mountains (“Mountains, like the ocean (height and depth being equal) are much the same everywhere in the world” [98]) so as to proceed the quicker to “the ultimate object of this book—namely the western and southern limit of the Maghreb ... and the ‘Blue’ deserts into which it melts” (99).

The chapter titled “The Sous” insists repeatedly on the inaccessibility of Rio de Oro. It is “one of the most intensely mysterious countries in the world” (160), one which “has never been properly penetrated or explored by Europeans” (160), and “is an almost complete *terra incognita*” (161). Westerners enter it at the risk of their lives; airmen forced to land there “are either killed or held to ransom. There is no exception to that rule” (161). The region furthermore contains the key to a crucial global-political secret, for it is “the great messianic territory selected by prophecy as the birthplace of that ultimate Man of the Hour—the Deliverer that is to come” (158). So, all is in place; Burton himself could not have more fully deployed the discursive panoply of the Mandeville trope. The

logic of the genre demands that the region now be “properly penetrated” and yield to the gaze so that the traveler can unveil its secret and cancel its threat to western hegemony.

Nothing of the sort occurs. Although Rio de Oro is nominally under Spanish control, “the Moors remark contemptuously that the Spaniards do not give them any trouble” (163):

not only do the Spaniards give their Mauretanian “subjects” no trouble, but are so terrified of them that the officers will not move more than a few yards outside their fort, from year’s end to year’s end. It is incredible ... how abjectly they are the prisoners, in this small and mournful fortress, of the nomads outside its walls. (163)

The western gaze is not merely impotent here, but is even a liability, for the Mauretanians will not suffer themselves to be looked upon. “You must not under any circumstances ‘fix’ a Mauretanian ‘Blue Man.’ It is quite essential to remember that for these most fanatical of all Moslems, your glance is a serious defilement” (163). Since any European visitor will inevitably be “identified with the strange terror-stricken garrison,” within the fort, he or she must avoid “anything that could be even remotely interpreted as taking a liberty,” and must above all not meet the other’s gaze:

But should they find you looking at their faces, much more should you seem to stare at them, that is quite fatal: immediately the muzzles of all their rifles rise, focused menacingly upon the offending person—to teach manners, at least, to the unclean one who has ventured to poke his nose outside his prison. At their feet you may look. Out of sheer contempt, that is allowed. (163–64)

The European visitor being, by proxy, the powerful West itself, this confrontation is a cultural showdown that the West loses:

what an odd *reductio ad absurdum* of the arrogant European idea of a Conquering White Race! ... It is the only territory of

any dimension in the world where, definitely, it is quite impossible for the White Man to go. No Paleface can walk into it and walk out again, without paying a crushing ransom, becoming a slave, or being killed. (164)

This rebuff to white supremacy, despite its having rounded his book with a thuddingly hollow anticlimax, dismays Lewis not a whit. In the chapter's final paragraph, he seems relieved, even pleased that Europe has been forced to avert its gaze:

Yet there are only two places in the world to-day where no moneyed legginged globetrotter (prancing forward with pistols and puggaree determined to write a book) is refused admittance by the inhabitants. Tibet is a mere tourist centre.... All the Pacific and Patagonian cannibals have become vegetarians. There are only *two* forbidden lands. One is in equatorial or sub-tropical South America. The other is the Rio de Oro. (169)

Edward Said's famous thesis that western travel literature and scholarship about the "Orient" had everything to do with "preserving the Orient and Islam under the control of the White Man" (238) is now over twenty years old and doubtless needs qualification, as David Cannadine and Charles Allen have recently maintained (see Cannadine xix–xx and 3–6; Allen 4–6). Even so, Said's thesis has been in circulation for as long as it has mainly because it is so often confirmed. The Mandeville trope is a case in point. It inhabits the ideological structure Said described in *Orientalism*, reproducing in miniature the assumptions of the larger pattern in which it figures as a recurring detail: seeing is understood to translate automatically into knowing, and knowledge is the precursor to control. Said emphasizes how the project of imperial-era scholarship seems to be a relentless making-visible, from Napoleon's Egyptian archaeologists, with their ambition to render Egypt "completely open, to make it totally accessible to European scrutiny" (83), to Edward William Lane's 1836 *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, which sought "to make Egypt and the Egyptians totally visible, to keep nothing hidden from the reader" (162), and on to Burton

and Charles M. Doughty, rendering the East's "mysteries plain for and to the West" (20–21).

In taking seeing to be a means to power, the Mandeville trope is a variation on what Pratt calls the "monarch of all I survey scene"—the familiar image of the traveler standing on a promontory or an urban balcony, imaginatively taking possession from horizon to horizon with a *coup d'oeil* (201–08)—adapted to an interior, particularly a prohibited one. Assuming as it does an almost magical synergy between sight, knowledge, and control, it aligns with the set of tropes that Anne McClintock has described as subtending not only the kinds of inquiry that supported colonialism, but also western investigation in general since Bacon:

All too often, Enlightenment metaphysics presented knowledge as a relation of power between two gendered spaces, articulated by a journey and a technology of conversion: the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its "secrets" into a visible, male science of the surface. (23)

That the westerner supposes he knows the non-western other so intimately—"knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves" (Said 35)—serves all the better to justify western rule if the westerner simultaneously supposes he himself *cannot* be so known by the non-westerner. This discrepancy licenses the westerner to imagine himself superior, more advanced, and so forth. Timothy Mitchell explains the imperial traveler-scholar's desired point of view as a vantage from which one could observe without being observed, like that of "the authorities in the panopticon" (24); such a position, almost inevitably, is "a position of power" (26). The unseen seer, who detects but is not detected, who knows but is not known, enjoys in advance the prerogatives of a ruler. Mitchell sees disguise, frequently adopted by Edward Lane while gathering material for his book on the Egyptians, as a strategy that follows logically from such an ambition, and disguise, as we have seen, is a frequent feature of the Mandeville trope. By disguising themselves to pass as non-westerners, actual west-

erners like Lane and Burton and fictional ones like Talbot Mundy's Athelstan King seek to demonstrate and increase their knowledge of the other while remaining unknown themselves; their success seems to them an entitlement to define, to judge, ultimately to rule. The important corollary assumption, or delusion, is that the trick is irreversible—that the “mimic man” non-westerner attempting to pass as a westerner will get something wrong, misjudge some nuance, commit some excess that reveals the imperfection of his knowledge, as Homi Bhabha thoroughly examines in his well-known essay “Of Mimicry and Man.”

Increasingly successful resistance to colonialism during the interwar period should have made the naïveté that enables the Mandeville trope impossible to sustain. However, the dream of the prohibition-defying western gaze and its concomitant illusion of entitlement to power persist in the travel writing of the 1920s and 1930s, even when the tone in which these episodes are narrated is less that of irresistible imperial inquiry than that of outwitting the headmaster. Evelyn Waugh is not permitted to enter the sanctuary at the Debra Lebanos monastery in Abyssinia, but he nevertheless manages “a short glimpse of the dark interior” and sees “an astonishing confusion of litter. . . . a wicker chair, some heaps of clothes, two or three umbrellas, a suitcase of imitation leather, some newspapers, and a teapot and slop-pail of enamelled tin” (117). In *Hindoo Holiday*, J. R. Ackerley is advised “not to try to enter any of the temples, for this was not permitted” (17), but nevertheless does enter a Jain temple, having been told it contains “some highly indecent sculptures,” which he soon finds: “a long file of soldiers marching gaily along, and another smaller, more elaborate design which was frequently repeated. They were both sodomitic” (18). In Robert Byron's witty *Road to Oxiana*, his plan to visit the masterpieces of Persian architecture is frustrated in Meshed when, being an unbeliever, he is forbidden entrance to the Shrine of Imam Riza. Adopting—what else?—the stratagem of disguise, he gains access to the interior, which he describes in detail, concluding that “the use of coloured mosaic out of doors reached its climax at the Timurid Renaissance,” although “the beauty of it in the shrine here is nevertheless surpassed on six of the seven minarets at Herat, whose remains have an even finer quality and purer colour, and

are not interrupted by plain brickwork” (213). Inquiry prevails; knowledge has been made complete.

These texts differ in tone from those of the nineteenth century, but nonetheless reassert that whatever the westerner desires to see and know he will, one way or another, contrive to see and know. Empire, even in its most nearly benign manifestation as the educated, intelligent amateur traveler, claims to penetrate all secrets and expose all pretensions; the narratives situate their authors as more knowing about the religion, the sexuality, or the architecture of the colonized than are the colonized themselves. *Filibusters in Barbary* is remarkable because it can envision a reversal of this one-way imperial cognitive circuit. The western subject, who sees and understands, becomes the western object, seen and understood. Lewis knows he has transgressed against the code of the travel genre, and at one point owns up:

But there is a law, an unwritten law, perhaps, and it is this. Nothing proper to *Chicago* can happen in London: all “Orientals” (it is in their nature) are *mysteriously* obstructive and untruthful! Britons never! To tell about your *adventures among Europeans* in the same tone you would use for adventures among “Orientals”—that is absurd—I have offended. (128)

Lewis’s reason for choosing to travel to Morocco “is not wholly clear,” according to C. J. Fox (168). He may have mainly wanted a place to work; “I have a whitewashed cell where I can write,” he told one correspondent (*Letters* 203), and he evidently hoped to write (but did not) the next installment of *The Childermass*. Lewis’s biographer Jeffrey Meyers writes that Lewis’s having “heard about the Rif Wars of 1921-1925 on news broadcasts” formed part of the background of the visit (193). Further, in 1931 Morocco was famous as a place where European imperialism had lately and noisily broken down in the face of a highly effective guerilla war led by Muhammad Abd el Krim. Both Henri Massis and Maurice Muret—cultural reactionaries of the 1920s with whom Lewis had, up to a point, much in common—took Abd el Krim’s rebellion as disturbing evidence of the erosion of European hegemony.

Muret devoted several indignant pages to the topic in his *Twilight of the White Races* (90-97); Massis wrote in his *Defense of the West*: “As for the public conscience in France, the revolt of a Berber chieftain was required to give it a glimmering of the profound significance of an event that is less important for what it is than for what it presages,” that is, “the awakening of the nations of Asia and Africa, united by Bolshevism against Western civilisation” (17).

The particular significance of Abd el Krim’s uprising lies in his understanding of modernity. He had a Spanish as well as a Koranic education and had served in colonial administration; his war made use of modern artillery, motorized vehicles, and a rudimentary but functioning telephone system (Woolman 75-76, 152-53). A former journalist, he made expert use of his contacts with western journalists and left-leaning politicians (156). To the West, he was a new kind of native resistance leader. André Maurois, whose 1931 biography of Hubert Lyautey is likely being reviewed in the press clipping Lewis quotes in *Filibusters*,² asks in that book, “Qu’arriverait-il si un Musulman vraiment ‘moderne’ devenait pour un mouvement hostile à la France, un centre de cristallisation?” (230). Maurois sees Abd el Krim, “s’instruit de la politique mondiale” and possessed of “une certaine connaissance des Européens, le goût de leur méthodes” (231), as the realization of that possibility. The advent of Abd el Krim means the fall of the Rome-emulating imperialism of Lyautey and the beginning of an era of colonial confrontation with a whole new kind of antagonist. “Caliban, Caliban, thou hast indeed profited by our lessons, and it is not in vain that thy sons attended Harvard and Oxford, the Sorbonne and the German Universities,” groans Muret. “We have taught you to speak, and you know how to curse us: ‘The red plague rid you!’” (29).

Lewis’s text mentions Abd el Krim several times; conspicuously absent, however, are the anxiety and resentment conveyed by Massis, Muret, and Maurois. He sometimes finds the colonists’ fears risible:

Many reports were current in the Moroccan papers in May and June of the recrudescence of the traffic in arms.... *The Riff is arming again!* That was the cry.... Now, as I am writing

this, it is reported that Abd el-Krim has escaped from his island prison and has been signalled off the Riff coast. He will soon, once more, be sending his envoys to Rabat, Fez, and Tetouan, and also to Geneva! But I expect this “escape” is apocryphal. (62–63)

Elsewhere, Lewis takes the exiled rebel’s possible return seriously, but contemplates it with equanimity, almost a mild satisfaction: “I think it is highly feasible, that, when the time is ripe, the French will find themselves confronted once more with their old friend Abd el Krim” (*Filibusters* 284–85). What is more, an uprising parallel to Abd el Krim’s in the north could occur to the south, in the Rio de Oro, perhaps led by the “Blue Sultan,” Merebbi Rebo (*Filibusters* 287). It is simply a matter of time, Lewis maintains, since the European imperial project in Morocco is based on unsustainable acts of presumption. Casablanca, extensively built up by Lyautey, is for Lewis “an enormous whitewashed fungus-town” (73) that gives him “unmistakable sensations of violent impermanence,” its “gigantic architectural confectionary” likely “to collapse at a touch, administered with force enough, almost anywhere” (74). It is “built upon sand, in every conceivable sense” (76):

What is it doing there all of a sudden then, *Casa-la-Blanche* in the midst of an ancient piratic empire—pretending to be a European “conqueror”—with all the white, impressive power it has brought together, or that has been brought together for it (that is nearer the mark I think!). Will it not as suddenly disrupt, escape perhaps with the hiss of a puncture, one fine night—one of the Thousand and One Nights of Arab phantasy! (74)

Lewis emphasizes that he is neither for nor against empire; he does not actively oppose it, but neither does he seem to have any wish that either the French or the English version continue:

In this brief account I merely indicate what I believe to be the situation—I am not for or against colonists, either English or French. (I should not regard it as a fearful tragedy if the French were “kicked out” of Morocco, or if the English found that

Warren Hastings had bitten off more than his descendants were able to chew.) *Je constate*—that is all. (*Filibusters* 286)

Here we see Lewis's peculiarity. He dissents from those, like Massis and Muret, who do imagine the end of western hegemony as "a fearful tragedy," yet refuses to cast himself as friend to the native, and would satirize anyone who did. Sartorial details in his text emphasize his odd position. Somewhat unwisely, he declines to wear a pith helmet in the desert heat, "as I particularly desired to distinguish myself from the British filibusters" (141), but neither will he adopt Arab dress *à la* T. E. Lawrence, "For what other European, except the Englishman, has that childish passion for *dressing himself up as an Arab*? None" (185). Instead, he goes about as he does in London, in his black "Enemy" wide-awake hat, unwilling to pose either as conqueror or as advocate for the conquered. The conquered can, and he seems certain will, fend for themselves.

Ironically, given Lewis's dislike of the novelist D. H. Lawrence, and almost in spite of himself, he was at times susceptible to the emotional pull of the romanticized other. In a letter from Morocco to Naomi Mitchison, he both mocks what he imagines would have been Lawrence's response to the Berbers—"I have been to places, and broken bread with people, calculated to lay him out in a foaming ecstasy"—and seems to share it: "they are as brave as lions (so the French say) and surely one of the handsomest peoples in the world" (*Letters* 203, 204). In *Filibusters in Barbary* Lewis asserts that the Berbers represent a kind of civilization that "is better than ours—*better* if you mean by that adjective possessed of more dignity, possessing all the grand attitudes and habits impossible to that 'hurried man' of transatlantic pattern" (42). He no sooner sounds this mornings-in-Mexico-like note, though, than he scurries to cover his tracks:

So it can be said quite soberly—with none of the emotional romancing of a Lawrence—that Oran is more interesting than anything upon the European side of the Latin Sea (without setting up Carthage against Rome, because the former is so deliciously 'oriental' or any such exotic shallowness of the marvelous savage of the West). (42)

Lewis's pretensions to impartiality will not stand up any better than such pretensions ever do, but his text still marks an early recognition that the direction of scrutiny is about to be reversed, that the other is no longer surrendering to western understanding, that the regime of knowledge is becoming destabilized. It fails as a travel book because it fails, even refuses, to provide that sense of vicarious intimacy with the unknown by which travel books win readers. Yet even while Lewis's intolerance with what he took to be romanticized exoticism keeps the text from providing certain pleasures, it creates another kind of interest by pointing out, sometimes with relish, the cracking of imperialism's cognitive model.

Notes

- 1 The most recent, most useful, and most widely available edition of *Filibusters in Barbary* is a volume titled *Journey into Barbary*, edited by C. J. Fox. Though admirable in many ways and enriched by Lewis's own drawings and some of his previously unpublished writings, this edition omits several passages published in the original 1932 text. In quoting from the text, I will generally cite the page number in Fox's edition; when I quote a passage omitted in his edition, this will be signaled by including "*Filibusters*" in the parenthetical citation. These quotations will be taken from the American edition of the book published by the National Travel Club.
- 2 In *Filibusters* (95), Lewis quotes from a Moroccan newspaper article ("I believe the writer was reviewing some book or other") Lyautey's lament on leaving Morocco that "je ne baterai plus de ville" [sic]. The same anecdote appears in Maurois's biography (239), with more orthodox spelling ("je ne bâtirai plus de villes").

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