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The Self and the Other: Quebec Travellers in the Middle East at the End of the Nineteenth Century

S'il n'y a pas d'Ici sans Ailleurs, et vice-versa, on conviendra du moins que l'examen d'une identité collective, quelle qu'elle soit, gagnera à prendre son matériau non seulement dans ce que la collectivité dit d'elle-même à tel moment, mais aussi dans ce qu'elle dit, en même temps, de son Autre (ou de ce qu'elle pose historiquement comme son Autre). (Halen 8)

Travel accounts of voyages to the Middle East are unthinkable without the question of representation of the Other. Numerous recent studies of nineteenth-century European travellers address the subject,[1] focusing on works such as the Middle-East travel writings of Chateaubriand (1811), Lamartine (1835), Nerval (1851), Gautier (1853), Renan (1878), Doughty (1888), Chevrillon (1893, 1897) and Loti (1895), all of which provide an eloquent testimony to the evolution of the Other through the nineteenth century. As Todorov has written, Chateaubriand's texts in particular, "susciteront d'innombrables imitations et influenceront, directement ou indirectement, le genre entier, et, à travers lui, toute la perception européenne des autres" (315).

Quebec travel narratives are no exception. At the end of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of Quebec travellers were making pilgrimages to the Holy Land, aided by advances in transportation (especially the steamboat, which reduced Atlantic crossing time to less than ten days) and the opening of the Holy Land from Turkish control in 1868, as well as the creation, in Paris, of "un comité composé d'ecclésiastiques et de laïques pour préparer l'organisation de caravanes, assurer par des relations déjà établies en Orient la sécurité et la bonne direction des voyageurs, et enfin

servir pour la réduction des prix, d'intermédiaire officieux entre les pèlerins et les compagnies qui se chargent d'ordinaire du transport pour ces contrées" (Provancher 8-9).

Quebec was a society shaped by religious principles and ultramontane values, which gave destinations like Italy and the Middle East genuine appeal.[2] Rome was a sacred place to French Canadians, a kind of Catholic Promised Land chosen by God as the site of His terrestrial representative.[3] Jerusalem, on the other hand, represented a kind of *imago mundi*, a centre of the world, which allowed them to return to the source of Christianity and, therefore, to engage in a form of apologetics. "Dans ces derniers temps d'impiété et d'affaiblissement de la foi," Father Léon Provancher wrote, "les pèlerinages ont semblé se réveiller, comme pour opposer une nouvelle barrière à la libre pensée qu'on prêche de toute part" (8).

Guided by this spirit of devotion, many French Canadians, particularly members of the clergy, dreamed of setting foot on "le sol sacré" (Dupuis 312). "Nous ne sommes pas des touristes," Bishop de Goesbriand clarified, "mais des pèlerins; ayons garde de l'oublier" (27). Several of the pilgrims published accounts of their voyages in periodicals[4] and books.[5] Four years after returning to Canada, for example, Father Joseph-Médard Émard published *Souvenirs d'un voyage en Terre Sainte* in 1884. The same year, Bishop Louis de Goesbriand published *Voyage en Terre Sainte* and Father Léon Provancher, *De Québec à Jérusalem: journal d'un pèlerinage du Canada en Terre Sainte en passant à travers l'Angleterre, la France, l'Égypte, la Judée, la Samarie, la Galilée, la Syrie et l'Italie.* In 1886, Gaston P. Labat's *Les voyageurs canadiens à l'expédition du Soudan ou Quatre-vingt dix jours avec les crocodiles* appeared. In 1892, Father Henri Raymond Casgrain offered his memoirs of voyages in Italy and the Holy Land to readers of *La Semaine religieuse de Québec.* Father Joseph-Fernand Dupuis released *Rome et Jérusalem* two years later and, finally, Henri Cimon, who accompanied Father Casgrain in 1892, published *Aux vieux Pays* in 1895 (followed by two subsequent editions in 1913 and 1928).

For most of these authors, a trip to the Holy Land fulfilled a profound hope, not the desire for exotic escape longed for by French Romantics of the early nineteenth century but a return to the origins of Christianity. The Orient gave Quebec travellers the opportunity to admire *in situ* relics that anchored the foundations of their religion. It was a place of cultural significance often disproportionate with the actual environment; indeed, a notable gulf existed between the physical Jerusalem and its mythic and symbolic

importance. In this sense, these voyages were part of a ritualistic return to the Holy Land as readers of the Scriptures imagined it to be. "Il nous est impossible d'oublier un instant," Father Provancher noted, "que nous foulons à nos pieds la terre des merveilles, la terre des miracles, la terre des mystères, car à chaque pas que nous faisons, ce sont des événements bibliques, évangéliques ou historiques que chaque localité rappelle à notre souvenir" (143).

In this context, it might be assumed that Quebec travel narratives offered few depictions of Oriental people, whether Turkish, Arab, Jewish, Persian, or other. Indeed, from the outset it is clear that the first objective of Quebec travellers, mainly members of the clergy, was not the encounter with the Other. They were there to visit the Holy Land, and the Other seemed an obstacle in the way of this quest. The cities and villages were not a part of their destination; the customs of the Other were far removed from the Biblical existence that Quebec pilgrims were hoping to find, and they needed to ignore the Other in order to preserve the biblical "mirage" they carried in their luggage. As R. Jouanny describes, "le voyageur est en quête du temps de l'Histoire, temps de la légende biblique ou du rêve oriental, temps hors du temps, et se trouve confronté au temps contingent d'un monde dont le fait même qu'il soit en devenir lui apparaît comme une trahison" (270-71). The pilgrims preferred landscapes of ancient ruins and uninhabited sites such as the desert, which spoke of eternity and where they could relive a mythic past: "Rien de plus facile," Provancher wrote, "que de le peupler, par la pensée, de tous les grands personnages bibliques qui ont marqué de l'empreinte de leurs pieds le sable sur lequel nous volons en ce moment emportés par le souffle de la vapeur" (171).

If the Other was not entirely overlooked by some travellers, it was regarded with scorn, accused of the destruction of celebrated sites. Anti-semitic prejudice was rampant. According to Henri Cimon, "la désolation règne aujourd'hui en ces lieux. Les hommes n'ont pas voulu reconnaître le Messie qu'ils attendaient, et le déicide a apposé un sceau de malédiction sur toute la contrée. Il y règne un deuil de mort" (172).

Throughout the many books published in the nineteenth century (called, by Abdeljilil Lajomri, "le temps du mépris" [83]), it is possible to see a growing awareness and a general acceptance of the Other. What was this perception of the Other and what motivated it? I have touched on the question in *Le récit de voyage: aux frontières du littéraire* (1997) by discussing the specific notion of intertextuality in connection with travel in the Near East,

or what I call "the Other through another's eyes." In the present study I look briefly at three general tendencies: the representation of the Other through another's eyes, the representation of the Other transformed into the Self, and the representation of the Self transformed into the Other.

The Other through another's eyes

A study of Quebec travel accounts at the end of the nineteenth century demonstrates that the Other was of interest mainly when it corresponded to the mythic Orient. Generally speaking, travellers represented the Other using stereotypes that provided a convenient way of limiting otherness or keeping the unknown within familiar boundaries. Thus Orientals, however different from one another, were converted into the archetypal characters that made up the Orient's immutable "landscape," most notably among these the dragoman or Oriental interpreter, the saïs, the fellah, the bedouin, the patriarch, the muezzin, the veiled woman, and so on. Father Casgrain writes:

> Un des traits les plus caractéristiques et qui peint bien l'Orient est celui qu'offrent les cavaliers montés sur de petits ânes que suit au grand trot le valet à pied qui, un roseau à la main, aiguillonne la monture. Un autre est l'aspect des femmes musulmanes qui au premier abord ressemblent à des religieuses vêtues de noir. (356)

For Western travellers, the East embodied the dream of permanence: "immuable, il continue le passé, sans le modifier" (Berchet 18). It satisfied nostalgia for the origins that pilgrims had so far experienced only through paintings and books. "Oui, pour le chrétien pieux, et surtout pour le prêtre," Father Provancher noted, "visiter les Lieux-Saints, c'est ouvrir un livre qui sera sa lumière de tous les instants" (551-52); through travel, one could "traverser ces mêmes contrées que les héros d'Homère, de Virgile et des autres classiques que vous avez étudiés, ont illustré[e]s de leurs noms et étonné[e]s de leurs exploits!" (551). More important still, the travellers went to observe *in situ* the biblical Orient. Any young woman they encountered became Rebecca or the Virgin Mary, any Bedouin a patriarch. To borrow Jean-Claude Berchet's expression (18), they were re-actualizing myths, finding living examples of an imagined reality. In this sense, the pilgrims were involved in symbolic verification:

> Je voulais voir de plus près si je ne retrouverais pas chez ces jeunes filles juives cet idéal de la beauté des filles de Sion, dont la mère de Jésus est le type le plus parfait, de cette beauté qu'ont chantée les poètes, à laquelle les prophètes ont si

> souvent emprunté des termes de comparaison. Pulchra es et decora, filia Jerusalem . . . nigra sum sed formosa. . . . Et de fait, il ne me fut pas difficile de reconnaître que ces figures juives étaient bien les plus régulières, les plus agréables de celles que nous rencontrons dans ces contrées. (Provancher 341)

Here, representation presupposes an *a priori* perspective. A young Jewish woman's objective reality was obscured to fulfill an ideal of beauty, to correspond to a predetermined model (and stereotype). Young women were looked upon as miraculous survivors from the past, embodiments of a traditional view of the Middle East, where modern visitors were thus able to see female figures from the Bible.

Escaping the bonds of stereotype was not easy. Travel accounts are constrained by the ineluctable presence of an observed or extra-textual reality. Further, the expectations of readers already familiar with contemporary writings on and ideas about the Middle East must be considered. In a way, the act of writing about the voyage duplicates a liturgy. Its goal is not the discovery of the Middle East, but rather its rediscovery according to ritual formulas and cultural archetypes. Isabelle Daunais explains why travellers prefer what others have already seen and written about: "Dans le jeu de renvois et de superpositions des livres aux livres, le récit se construit dans un rapport d'addition et de soustraction, d'ajouts et de silences. On ne dira pas ce qui a été dit (encore qu'on finisse souvent par le répéter), on y ajoutera des variantes qui deviendront l'objet du récit" (26). Dominique Jullien adds that under these conditions "le récit de voyage relève donc, par essence, de la variation sur un thème commun. L'aventure individuelle de l'auteur devra s'y raconter sur le fond de représentations collectives" (7). The travellers' challenge was therefore to write about an otherness that already belonged to history and literature. Some undoubtedly sought originality by avoiding clichés. But more often they reinforced clichés with greater detail or created new ones.

The rare openness toward the dragoman or Muslim religion bears witness to this variation on the common theme. The dragoman, or Middle Eastern interpreter, had long been the principal contact between travellers to the Middle East and the Other. In the nineteenth century, most authors condemned the dragoman as incompetent and parasitic. Quebec travellers generally shared this opinion. On their arrival in Alexandria, most denounced the harassment they faced from *moukres* and dragomans offering their services—the "onzième plaie d'Égypte," in the words of Joseph Émard (290). Others, such as Fernand Dupuis (344-47) and Henri Cimon (204), con-

stantly allude to their guides' alleged incompetence, particularly regarding sites related to Christianity.

For Henri-Raymond Casgrain, on the other hand, the dragoman was an appreciated guide who kept travellers out of trouble. Unlike other authors who focused on their difficult first contact with the dragoman upon arrival in Alexandria, Casgrain described the unhappy moment of separation. If other travellers emphasized the fact that they felt harassed at the beginning of the voyage, Casgrain insisted that he had become attached to his servant:

> Dans la matinée du 16 mars, Simon Sélek, le fidèle drogman qui, d'Alexandrie nous a accompagnés en Terre Sainte, nous attendait à l'embarcadère. Il n'a pas voulu nous quitter avant de nous avoir conduits jusque sur le bateau qui devait nous transporter en Grèce. Le brave guide s'était attaché à nous, et nous avions pris l'habitude de voyager sous sa direction. Il faut dire que Simon Sélek est un type à part parmi la race des drogmans. (428)

Although Casgrain describes his dragoman as an exception to the rule, his discourse nonetheless suggests a spirit of rapprochement. Discredited by most travellers, the dragoman and his status are here reconsidered. However, Casgrain's representation is in fact just another variation on the theme of the "grotesque Oriental." He substitutes the cliché of the "incompetent," "hypocritical" and "parasitic" dragoman with that of the "infantile" and "amusing" guide, thus recalling servants from Molière and Beaumarchais, or epic and picaresque characters. Casgrain wrote:

> Notre drogman tient à la fois de Sancho Pacha et de Gil Blas. Les courses qu'il a faites, les aventures dont il a été le héros ou le témoin, fourniraient le thème d'une Odyssée. . . . Au demeurant Sélek est le meilleur garçon du monde, doux et obligeant à nous faire regretter les oignons d'Égypte. Il nous a servi gratis des scènes d'un comique qui plus d'une fois nous ont fait oublier les fatigues du voyage. (428)

Clearly, the pilgrim was unable to escape the stereotypes that had expanded into a considerable repertoire of nuances over time. Stereotypes from different eras also co-exist in the same text. Rare expressions of openness toward Muslim religion illustrate the point well. In part, the interest expressed by travellers in Islam is borrowed from Lamartinian romanticism which was enchanted with the strong and expressive faith of Islam. Sarga Moussa recalls:

> À Jérusalem il [Lamartine] va jusqu'à déclarer que la voix du muezzin est "bien supérieure . . . à la voix sans conscience de la cloche de nos cathédrales." Affirmation scandaleuse pour de nombreux lecteurs contemporains et qui, certainement, contribuera à la mise à l'Index du *Voyage en Orient*. (89)

At the end of the century this representation of the muezzin had been incorporated into the stereotypes propagated by pilgrims to the Middle East. Almost all our authors, following Lamartine's example, expressed their admiration for the "cloches vivantes" (Cimon 193) that were the muezzins. But contrary to Lamartine (who attempted to place the two traditionally opposed religions at the same level, occasionally appealing to Islam as a model of piety[6]), the admiration professed by other authors was rarely anything more than a pretext for stigmatizing Muslim religion. Casgrain writes:

> À trois heures sonnant ils se levèrent et commencèrent leur chant sur un ton grave et lent, modulé par de superbes voix qui se répondaient dans l'espace avec une poésie indéfinissable. Nos cloches sont très belles: nous ne cessons de les admirer; mais il faut convenir que ces cloches humaines ont des accents, un genre de beauté qu'il serait absurde de nier. Pourquoi n'annoncent-elles que la plus fatale des erreurs, une doctrine qui conduit au plus honteux esclavage et à la barbarie? (380-81)

In Casgrain's text, two stereotypes from different eras come into play: Eastern despotism, a myth maintained since the seventeenth century,[7] and the exotic fantasy of Romantic literature. The tension between the two concepts cannot be reduced to an opposition between the stereotypical and the personal, but rather confirms two contradictory visions of the Middle East which co-exist in the same text and which leave little room for true otherness.

Under such circumstances these travel accounts can hardly present a clear image of the Other. Given the authors' often contradictory reflections, the reader is unable to discern how writers actually perceived the Other. One cannot determine, for example, whether or not, in their view, the Bedouin is brave. According to Father Cimon, "le bédouin du désert est fort et brave. Le vol est dans ses habitudes, mais le vol à force armée et non à la dérobée" (218). In the eyes of Father Provancher, however, "la lâcheté fait le fond de son caractère. La rapine à la faveur de la nuit, va mieux à ses dispositions que le brigandage à découvert, l'attaque en pleine face" (391). "Sous le rapport religieux," Father Émard wrote, "le sectateur du Coran est maintenu dans le fanatisme et l'ignorance" (84). Yet Father Provancher appears to believe the opposite when he states: "Allez donc, grands moralisateurs modernes, prendre des leçons de tolérance et de philosophie des mahométans Turcs!" (228). At times the Arabs "ne manque[nt] pas de dignité" (Cimon 202), while at other times they are "des figures rebutantes, des yeux fauves, et semblent faire parade de la saleté des guenilles qui les couvrent à peine"

(Provancher 406). Authors envy the Oriental's "liberté d'action presque illimitée, [car] on dirait qu'ici chacun est maître partout" (Provancher 367); however, they condemn his doctrine, which "conduit au plus honteux esclavage et à la barbarie" (Casgrain 381). The Arabs have "l'air défiant, la mine très peu rassurante" and are "indolents, ignares et replongés dans la barbarie" (Provancher 112); but they are also "fort gentils, vifs, pétulants, au regard subtil et intelligent" (165).

These contradictions indicate the extent to which the authors are constrained by their own prejudices, the expectations of their audience, and the rules of the genre. Their writings face the seemingly insurmountable difficulty of recognizing an otherness created by a collective unconsciousness. Caught between the clichés of common memory and the literary styles of the day, the authors have little access to alternative approaches.

The Other in the Self

In addition to giving writers the opportunity to evoke the mythic Orient or to adapt themselves to the literary styles of the century, openness to the Other presupposes that it be brought into the Self. Travellers could account for the difference with the convenient inversion that reduces otherness to an anti-self. The process works as a heuristic principle: it allows understanding and gives meaning to an otherness that would otherwise remain completely opaque. "L'inversion," François Hartog writes, "est une fiction qui fait 'voir' et qui fait comprendre: elle est une des figures concourant à l'élaboration d'une représentation du monde" (227). Or, as Michel Tournier formulates it, "un concept isolé offre à la réflexion une surface lisse qu'elle ne parvient pas à entamer. Opposé à son contraire en revanche, il éclate ou devient transparent, et montre sa structure intime" (12). Therefore, to represent otherness and make it easier to understand for Western readers, many travellers created a catalogue of traits which stood in opposition to practices in the West. According to Father Provancher, for example, "les orientaux sont l'envers des occidentaux":

> Chez nous, nous écrivons de gauche à droite; en Orient on écrit de droite à gauche. Nous saluons les femmes et nous en demandons des nouvelles; en Orient on ne les salue jamais, et on n'en demande pas de nouvelles. Nous ôtons notre chapeau en signe de respect; en Orient on ôte sa chaussure. Chez nous les femmes vont la face découverte et se couvrent la poitrine; en Orient on va la poitrine découverte et on se voile la face. Nous avons des vêtements étroits; les orientaux en ont des larges. Nous baissons la tête pour affirmer; eux la relèvent. (487-488)

Some of the contrasts may have been designed for aesthetic effect to provoke surprise in readers surfeited by the abundance of detailed description. But more often than not, the inversion of observed qualities in Western and Oriental people implies the ideological finality of religious conversion. "De l'inversion à la conversion," to borrow from the expression of Francis Affergan, "l'innocence, la nudité, la douceur apparente des mœurs permettent, comme un creux attendant d'être comblé, l'entreprise de la conversion"(86). Practically all travellers, who were for the most part members of the clergy, describe at length the benefits of a Catholic education offered to young Arabs, notably by Franciscan missionaries. Otherness is therefore altered, recovered by the Western drive to make the world over in its own image (and thus for its usage). The following passage, which reports on young girls at an orphanage run by Catholics, illustrates this transformation, as well as the reduction of the Other into a semblance of the Self.

> Dire ce qu'il a fallu de patience et de dévouement pour plier ces caractères orientaux, dont la paresse fait le fond, à des habitudes d'ordre, de propreté et de travail, ne peut être compris que par celles-là seules qui ont eu à lutter contre ces obstacles, surtout dans le début. Mais à présent le pli semble bien pris, les plus jeunes n'ont qu'à suivre et imiter leurs devancières pour faire des filles d'ordre, rangées, de tenue convenable. Immense bienfait de l'instruction chrétienne et surtout catholique, qui pourrait se lasser d'admirer ici comme partout ailleurs, tes inappréciables résultats! Ces jeunes filles aux allures policées et pleines de réserve, au maintien décent et propre, semblent former une caste nouvelle au milieu de leurs compatriotes. Elles ne leur ressemblent plus que par le langage, encore arrive-t-il même que très souvent entres elles c'est en français qu'elles conversent; car l'éducation est avant tout française. Si on leur conserve le costume du pays, c'est toutefois avec une manière toute différente de le porter, qui dénote de suite que les règles de la modestie et de la bonne tenue sont connues et qu'elles savent s'y conformer. À l'encontre des musulmanes, elles ne redoutent nullement de se montrer la figure, mais sont très attentives à se couvrir la poitrine. (Provancher 353-54)

This was no longer a representation of the stranger, but a way of turning the stranger into something no longer strange. When different, the Other is either of little interest or draws hostile reactions. Once reduced to the Self, and therefore stripped of its true identity, it suddenly becomes a phenomenon worthy of the reader's attention, while at the same time accentuating the benefits of religious conversion. The Other is then no longer a representation of other worlds, but rather the object of a civilizing mission. "En arrachant ces pauvres indigènes à leurs croyances absurdes," Father Provancher wrote, "on leur inculquera en même temps des idées d'ordre et

de travail au moyen desquelles on pourra en faire des citoyens utiles et respectables" (346). Gaston P. Labat was ecstatic with the work of Franciscan missionaries in Muslim countries and particularly with the results in two "jeunes néophites [*sic*] du christianisme":[8]

> Quelle différence entre ces enfants de la Vérité et ceux de l'ignorance! quelques milles plus bas, la mosquée froide et mercantile enseignant les vices et la rapine à ses renégats; ici, dans une oasis perdue, deux jeunes lys, fleurissant sous la hampe du sanctuaire et aspirant sans cesse à la rosée du Ciel. N'avais-je pas raison de dire que la civilisation porte ici semence. . . . je leur détachai une médaille au chapelet que je tiens de ma pauvre mère, et je la leur donnai. Un général recevant la croix du Grand Turc n'aurait pas été plus fier! (96)

After meeting a converted Arab woman, now a nun in the Catholic Church— the height of cultural integration—Father Provancher could not but admire such apostolic success:

> Arabe de nation, elle avait reçu son éducation à Beyrouth où elle avait fait profession . . . . Elle parlait très bien le français. Les enfants du désert admis à la profession de la pratique des conseils évangéliques, n'est-ce pas Agar devenant l'égale de Sara? Esaü recouvrant son droit d'ainesse? Qu'il est beau ce spectacle de la charité chrétienne qui fait de tous les enfants d'Adam de véritables frères, quelque soit leur couleur, leur nationalité, leur degré de civilisation, leurs habitudes de vie! (429)

Ethnography gives way to ethnocentrism, anthropological observation to proselytism. For many travellers, otherness was not so much a question of race or language, but rather of religious practice—to the point that even an unconverted Muslim provoked their admiration simply because of his religious fervour. As a result, the Self may be considered more other than the Other. According to Father Provancher,

> La voix de ces prêtres de l'erreur [muezzins] n'a rien du solennel de nos cloches, cependant ces appels et ces invocations d'Allah (Dieu) sur tous les tons, avec l'âme qu'on y met souvent, ont quelque chose qui impressionne et qui contraste singulièrement avec les prétendues lumières de notre civilisation qui s'efforcent de nos jours, de faire disparaître même jusqu'à l'idée de la divinité de parmi le peuple. Oh! combien de fois je me suis dit, en entendant ces appels réitérés à la prière: comme les coryphées de la libre pensée et les athées qui conduisent actuellement la patrie de mes pères à sa perte, pourraient avec profit, malgré la jactance dont ils se targuent, venir prendre ici des leçons de sagesse et de haute philosophie de l'ignare muezzin. (129-30)

Evidently, openness to the Other was not an end in itself, but rather a means of denouncing the liberalism threatening Western society. Since at the end of

the century the unanimity of the Catholic faith was no longer assured, and there were no guarantees against defection, appreciation for the Other provided a lesson to be learned. "Ils savent mieux pratiquer leur fausse religion que nous-mêmes, qui sommes en possession de la vérité" (Émard 87). As such, the Other embodied the myth of the "noble savage." Simultaneously objectionable and admired, the Other had a dual role by providing the perspective of a man uncontaminated by the "errors of the century." Against all expectations, the Other is no longer a Muslim with whom the reader suddenly discovers some affinity, but rather the liberal, the freemason, the free thinker. Nevertheless, Muslim religion is not really considered for its own sake.

The Self in the Other

Openness to the Other required that this Other no longer be of an otherness, but rather become an idealized Self. However, the reverse is also possible. Openness to the Other is sometimes associated with transformation of the Self into the Other. We know, for example, that French travellers Nerval and Lamartine dreamed of being Other and camouflaged their physical identity to blend into the indigenous mass. Quebec travellers did not adopt this radical approach, but nonetheless manifested an interest in cultural mixing. Virtually all of the authors studied here described at length their meeting with Westerners serving as intermediaries between the pilgrims and the Arab world. These "arabized" Westerners prepared travellers for their encounters with the Other, a task that could only be accomplished by a person with a foot in both worlds. Most often they were Franciscan missionaries who had lived in the Middle East for many years. Saturated with local customs and language, they embodied the possibility of cultural interpenetration. Father Cimon wrote:

> Le père Berer connaît les mœurs des Bédouins et les a adoptées; ainsi ce géant de près de sept pieds n'aime pas à faire usage de chaise. La langue arabe lui est devenue plus familière que sa langue maternelle; il nous en dit la richesse et la poésie, et son caractère biblique; elle n'est pas du tout la langue dégénérée que parlent les Arabes et les Turcs. (218)

Whereas Chateaubriand considered cultural mixing a flaw, this sort of blending was increasingly perceived as allowing access to the Other. Although the result was still an indirect otherness, it permitted the questioning of certain prejudices. For Léon Provancher, meeting a French nun who spoke Arabic was a revelation:

> Un peuple qui n'a que des aspérités, des bonds et des chutes dans sa langue, doit nécessairement posséder un caractère âpre, rude et grossier, sinon brutal. Telle était la conclusion à laquelle j'en étais venu, lorsque j'entendis une religieuse, de haute éducation et de fort bonnes manières, maniant la langue de Mahomet avec une délicatesse qui n'excluait pas une certaine élégance. Ces sons hachés, grinçants, qu'on ne croirait pouvoir s'échapper sans grand effort de la poitrine, revêtaient, en passant sur des lèvres féminines et françaises, une élégance qui ne manquait pas d'un certain charme. Jusque-là j'avais cru que les doux épanchements, les tendres effusions du cœur ne pouvaient se trouver chez ce peuple, vu que ces sentiments me paraissaient incompatibles avec son langage aussi bien qu'avec ses allures extérieures. (127)

Once again, openness to the Other is one of interposed literature. In fact, a recurring motif in Romantic travel narratives is an appreciation for the intermediaries who, by their cultural mixing, served as a bridge between cultures. Sarga Moussa argues that Romantic travellers idealized some figures, such as the French consul in Beirut, Henry Guys, or Lady Esther Stanhope,[9] because they bridged a cultural divide. Most of the missionaries described by the travellers in this context have a decidedly mythic dimension. Despite their Western origins, they embody the primitive Orient, timeless and patriarchal in the very land of the patriarchs. Brother Liévin is a perfect illustration. According to Father Casgrain, the travellers' first objective upon arrival in Jerusalem was "se mettre en relation avec le frère Liévin, ce moine franciscain si connu du monde catholique depuis qu'il a publié le *Guide-Indicateur de la Terre Sainte*" (377). A Belgian by origin, Brother Liévin was also the living portrait of the patriarchal virtues:

> Le frère Liévin est un vieillard de soixante-dix ans, Belge de naissance, qui habite la Palestine depuis trente-trois ans. . . . Avec sa robe de bure, ceinte d'une corde blanche, sa tête rasée, son visage placide, d'où tombe une abondante barbe blanche, il figurerait bien dans un tableau parmi les prophètes d'Israël. (Casgrain 377)

Oscillating between patriarch and Western missionary, Brother Liévin is a symbol of the ideal of cultural mixing advocated by Romantic authors such as Lamartine, Gautier and Nerval. Venerated by Arabs, particularly "à cause de sa belle barbe" (Émard 24-25), and by pilgrims "à cause de sa piété, de son affabilité, et de son empressement à nous faire profiter de sa science si profonde" (Émard 25), he personified a harmonious balance of opposites. The coexistence, if not fusion, of these two images in one person is obtained through a double reversal: on the one hand it reverses the exclusive focus on the missionaries' European origins, and on the other, it reverses the

Bedouin stereotype, which at the end of the eighteenth century moved "du statut de créature effrayante à celui de modèle de vie libre et patriarcale" (Moussa, "Limites de la description" 231).

There are many more examples that demonstrate more openness to Romantic literature on the Orient than to the Orient itself.[10] Apparently, no personal representation of the Orient could exist, since each single experience occurs on a road already well travelled. The reader need only recall the question of the perspective given to the Other. For centuries, most travellers to the Middle East limited their depictions of the Other to its differences, denying it any right to a perspective of its own. But in some travel accounts from Quebec, the Other is occasionally granted its own perspective, announcing a change in the conditions of the encounter. At most, some travellers were aware of the effect they had on the Other, bringing out their own difference to themselves. "Leur regard", Léon Provancher wrote, "semble nous dire qu'ils sont étonnés de notre étonnement à leur vue, ne croyant, eux, faire que ce qu'il leur convient de faire" (317). As Sarga Moussa demonstrates, this type of meeting "trahit un trouble de l'identité chez celui-là même qui devrait rester maître du regard" (*La relation* 60). This indicated to what extent the traveller considered himself the Other in the eyes of the Middle Easterner. "Diacres, servants avec leurs habits en drap d'or ou leurs tuniques blanches, nous lancent de toute part des regards de curiosité, mais sans aucune manifestation de mécontentement ou d'opposition à notre intrusion" (Provancher 317). This exchange of perspective represents a significant displacement by revealing to intermediaries their reciprocal otherness, or even more what Moussa calls "le traumatisme de la rencontre" (62). This situation was probably uncomfortable to the observed observer, but also encouraged a kind of mutual understanding. "Si la langue est souvent impuissante pour se faire comprendre, les yeux parlent en son lieu, et la communauté de sentiments sait se faire comprendre du cœur" (Provancher 370). This "droit de regard" granted to the Other is also borrowed from Romantic travellers. The egocentric approach represented by Chateaubriand, which dominated until the 1830s and reduced the Other to a degraded image of himself, was thereafter replaced by the idea of being viewed by another. This raised the question of identity: who am I in the eyes of the other? From the perspective of observation, the Middle East now became a subject in its own right. The Other gradually acquired "un droit de regard sur le regard" (Moussa, *La relation* 60).

A number of facts, both motivational and methodological, therefore

hampered the natural representation of the Other. The travellers' discourse was thoroughly shaped by Western culture. Most often they built bridges between the two worlds by finding more or less approximate analogies likely to give readers an understanding of the Other and, in so doing, "il[s] attire[nt] l'Autre dans la sphère culturelle des interactants de la communication" (Magri 401). Under such circumstances, according to Véronique Magri, "le discours sur l'Autre se réduit à un discours du Même au Même sur l'Autre qu'on essaie de ramener encore au Même" (405).

Conclusion

Accounts by Quebec travellers to the Holy Land provide very specific insights into their perspective of the Other. For most authors studied here, a pilgrimage to the Middle East was a pure voyage to countries of the past and was offered as a kind of collective anamnesis that reduced encounters with the Other to virtually nothing. Their focus on the Other was not a recognition of otherness, but the cult of a bygone past and a "mirage biblique" that upheld conventional admiration (Dupuis 307). Some travellers did begin to take notice of and observe the Other, but never really let go of stereotypes. Rather than try to understand and explain the human reality inherent in the Other, writers used it to prop up their aesthetic aspirations, to adjust to nineteenth-century literary styles, or to bolster their ideological aims, denounce liberalism and magnify the works of the Catholic Church. These ways of representing (or not representing) the Other are far from being specific to Quebec travellers; the Western world in general attempts to appropriate the Other by transforming it into absolute legibility. The Oriental existed only to the extent that the traveller made him transparent with the help of the writer's own prejudices. Numerous critics of the genre have pointed out that the travel narrative therefore becomes an instrument of power over the Other, appropriating its past, present and future. As Edward Said (1978), Rana Kabbani (1986) or Bénédicte Monicat (1996), among others, have demonstrated, "Écrire une littérature de voyage implique nécessairement une relation coloniale. L'on prétend que l'on voyage pour s'instruire, mais en réalité, on voyage pour exercer son pouvoir sur un territoire, des femmes, des peuples" (Monicat 46).

In the minds of Quebec travellers, as for most travellers of the nineteenth century, the Orient was not a one-dimensional entity. Although often linked to processes of negation or exclusion, and to xenophobia, the Other was also an appealing object of exotic fascination. As Hans-Jürgen

Lüsebrink has pointed out (using the works of Mario Erdheim), these two diametrically opposed approaches have "en commun de semblables stratégies d'évitement psychologiques (*Vermeidungsstrategien*) détournées de toute tentative sérieuse de compréhension et de connaissance de l'Autre" (53). Pilgrims failed to think critically about either their own perceptions or the Orientalism that conditioned them. Generally, travellers never saw themselves through the eyes of the stranger, became conscious of their own strangeness or achieved an understanding of their cultural predispositions as determined by the social and ethnic group to which they belonged. None adopted an exceptional attitude like the British traveller Richard Francis Burton: to Burton, the Orient in general and Islam in particular were systems of information, behaviour and belief, in which "to be an Oriental, or a Muslim, was to know certain things in a certain way, and that these were of course subject to history, geography and the developments of society in circumstances specific to it" (Said 225).

In fact, perception of the Other, as much in its rejection and exclusion as in its exotic idealization, reveals the hidden face of identity, as advanced by Julia Kristeva. Nineteenth-century French Canada, as a society seeking to protect its nationality, used otherness not to destabilize, but rather to reinforce a Catholic and French Canadian identity. Consequently, the most common approach at the time was to use the Other's culture to confirm oneself, and more specifically to find the elements of the writer's own culture in that of the Other. Upon arriving in Saint-Jean-du-Désert, for instance, Father Cimon sees in Saint John the Baptist's mission an illustration of French Canadians' destiny:

> Saint Jean-Baptiste est le patron des Canadiens-français. Comme le saint précurseur, notre peuple a sa mission. Comme lui, il s'est préparé dans les épreuves à la remplir. Les débuts ont été rudes dans un pays neuf et sauvage; il a grandi au milieu des persécutions; il a souffert pour conserver sa langue et sa religion. Que deviendra-t-il? S'il est fidèle à sa vocation, il paraît appelé à de nobles destinées sur cette terre du Nouveau-Monde. (197)

In surveying the Other, late nineteenth-century travellers could not avoid describing the Other in indirect terms, using preconceived notions and preestablished cultural models. Whether the mediation is reiterated, reviewed or corrected, the representation is reduced to the Other among others, the Other in the Self, or the Self in the Other.

NOTES

1 See among others: Barthélemy, Berchet, Droulia and Mentzou, Kabbani, Magri, Moussa, Redouane, Thomas, Todorov, Zinguer.

2 This is also true for their Protestant counterparts in Canada and elsewhere who travelled avidly to these places. See Kröller.

3 Regarding pilgrimages in Italy, see especially Pierre Savard and Pierre Rajotte (forthcoming).

4 Some publications, such as the *Semaines religieuses de Québec et de Montréal*, the Franciscans' *La Petite revue du Tiers Ordre* and the *Annales de la Bonne Sainte Anne de Beaupré* advertised and recommended group pilgrimages, and published correspondence from several pilgrims.

5 At the end of the nineteenth century, accounts of voyages in the Middle East comprised only fifteen percent of such works produced, but these were particularly representative of the several ways that existed of expressing otherness in Quebec travel writing of the era. See Rajotte (151-76).

6 "Ce culte [musulman]," Lamartine wrote, "est plein de vertu et j'aime ce peuple, car c'est le peuple de la prière" (103).

7 See Stelling-Michaud.

8 Regarding Egyptian soldiers, whom he considered to be "lazy and dirty," Labat wrote: "Je crois cependant qu'ils deviendraient bons, s'ils étaient européanisés" (143).

9 Even by the century's close, Father Provancher dedicated two pages (539-40) to the ambiguous figure of Lady Stanhope. She died in 1839, but travellers who had read the Romantics still were not able to avoid the stereotypes she had created.

10 Although French Canadians were suspicious of French Romantic literature, they seemed to appreciate Romantic travel narratives about the Orient, starting with Chateaubriand's account in which he praises Christianity. More specifically, Chateaubriand's and Lamartine's travel writings were frequently quoted by French Canadian travellers.

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