

Searching for the Absolute:  
Postmodern Truth in the Novels of Paul Bowles

Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Council of  
Southwest Texas State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Nancy L. Mohn, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas  
May 2001

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For as long as I can remember, people whom I barely know have confided in me—they tell me their life stories and their deepest darkest secrets. People perceive me as a trustworthy, caring, and sincere person. In addition, people think that I am a ‘pushover.’ Although there is some truth in these perceptions, I certainly do not possess these traits to the extent that people presume. In actuality, many elements of my personality oppose these perceptions. Indeed, although those who know me better would not deny that I possess these traits, they would argue that I reserve these ‘nice’ qualities for my closest friends only. Moreover, my friends would argue that to my acquaintances, often, I act sarcastic and a bit cold. So, why does this misconception of me exist? In part, because I am a good listener. My parents raised me to be a ‘polite young lady’ and in part, this persona involves listening politely in conversation. However, many people misinterpret good listening skills for a sympathetic ear; they mistake my manners for something they are not. In actuality, I am equally absorbed in my own problems but no one seems to realize the existence of this self-absorption. It is a mystery to me that my self-perception does not match with how others perceive me. Perhaps my self-perception is wrong; perhaps their perception is wrong. I often wonder if both perceptions will ever reconcile. Indeed, my problem is not unique. Many people suffer between conflicting self and public perceptions. It is difficult to distinguish what constitutes truth when

facing this issue. One is forced to question the existence of truth on a basic level. Is there one absolute truth? Will this self-analysis yield any answers? This issue seems to constantly plague the human race.

From the beginning of civilization, the human race has been obsessed with the quest for truth. In the beginning of Christianity, this quest began as the search for God and the truth of our creation. Truth, in the first 1500 years AD, had a decidedly spiritual bent. However, during the eighteenth-century and the Scientific Enlightenment, the search for truth entered a new realm; the search for truth became a scientific pursuit. With the advent of the Scientific Method, scientists hoped to arrive at a non-spiritualist answer to explain life and our existence. According to the scientific community, if something cannot be proved through science, it cannot be considered truth.

What, then, is truth? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one can define truth as follows: “faith, trust, confidence . . . disposition to speak or act truly or without deceit . . . conformity with fact; agreement with reality; accuracy, correctness . . . the matter of circumstance as it really is” (627-628). This definition is interesting because it describes ‘truth’ as belonging to both the spiritual and scientific realms. Spiritually speaking, truth is abstract because it requires faith and trust in religion. ‘Truth,’ then, in relation to ‘faith, trust, and confidence’ hints at the spiritual quest for truth.

However, the remainder of this definition suits the scientific community’s perception of ‘truth.’ ‘Truth’ in relation to ‘conformity with fact’ and ‘agreement with reality’ is decidedly scientific in nature. Even so, stating that ‘truth’ must conform to reality contradicts ideas that truth lies in faith because ‘faith’ often involves trusting something that is abstract, ‘unproven,’ or not grounded in reality. This definition clearly

reflects the lasting impact that modern science has had on our civilization's quest for an ultimate truth.

Now, we live in a post-Scientific Enlightenment world in which the scientific model has permeated all disciplines of academic study and existence. For example, consider the field of anthropology; the scientific model particularly influences this field. In the early 1900's, Margaret Mead wrote an anthropological study entitled *Coming of Age in Samoa*. In this book, Mead examines a group of adolescent girls in the hopes of discovering whether or not adolescence is a biological or cultural phenomenon. Mead primarily bases her conclusions on cultural observations of the Samoan population by residing with this community:

I concentrated upon the girls of the community . . . I studied most closely the households in which adolescent girls lived. I spent more time in the games of children than in the councils of their elders. Speaking their language, eating their food, sitting barefoot and cross-legged upon the pebbly floor, I did my best to minimise [sic] the differences between us and to learn to know and understand all the girls of three little villages on the coast of the little island of Tau, in the Manu'a Archipelago. (10)

At the time of publication, Mead's book was a success, receiving great acclaim from the anthropological community and the public reading audience. However, eighty years later, Derek Freeman attacks Mead's study in his book, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. He claims that her analysis of the Samoan population is unscientific because she did not take into consideration biological factors. Freeman's criticism of her work reflects how science continues to permeate

fields of study: Mead's study cannot be considered an accurate portrayal of the Samoan population because her study lacks a scientific approach and hence, lacks the proper analysis that would result in the 'truth.' Instead, Freeman labels Mead's work as a travel narrative. However, by labeling Mead's work as a travel narrative, Freeman indirectly calls into question the validity of travel narratives.

If everything must fit into the scientific model to be considered truth, where does this paradigm leave the travel narrative? Because travel narratives are written in a journalistic style without focusing on the biological factors that may contribute to one's culture, one may argue that Freeman would not trust this type of account. Indeed, in his book he explicitly states: "The time is now conspicuously due, in both anthropology and biology, for a synthesis in which there will be, in the study of human behavior, recognition of the radical importance of both the genetic and exogenetic and their interaction, both in the past history of the human species and in our problematic future" (302). Although Freeman is specifically addressing the field of anthropology, he nonetheless implies that the only way to trust information on other cultures is through studies that consider both cultural and biological factors. Hence, one can surmise that Freeman would not trust information in travel narratives. As both his writings and this quotation imply, Freeman would not trust information that is based on perception; rather, Freeman would only put faith in 'truths' that have been proven through scientific studies. And yet, intuitively, something does not seem right with this conclusion; there are many things that science has yet to prove within this model of research.

Similarly, the eighteenth century Scientific Enlightenment has also had its effect upon literature, as is evidenced by the popularity of literary theories that attempt to

deconstruct narratives in order to arrive at some ultimate truth. Never mind that many literary works are fictional--many academics believe that there is still some ultimate truth to be arrived at by careful analysis of the narrator; the setting; and structural, biographical, and thematic elements. Consider, for example, the literary works of Postmodern authors such as Georges Perec. His novel, *Life a User's Manual*, is set in an apartment complex that contains one hundred apartments. Perec created the plot of this story by using a one hundred square grid into which he placed the different apartments of the building. Then, he worked with mathematicians to develop a formula, similar to 'The Knight's Tour' formula used in chess, to create a story line for his book. Hence, the plot of *Life a User's Manual* is essentially random because the story line reflects the results of Perec's experimentation with the one hundred square grid. As a result, it is difficult to argue that this book was written with any 'truth' in mind. Indeed, this lack of a definable truth is definitive of Postmodern writings. Nonetheless, the knowledge that Postmodern writers are playing with ideas of truth does not stop academics from ruthlessly pursuing a detailed analysis of these works. It is ironic that Postmodern narratives belong to the realm of academic studies because analysis opposes Postmodernism; Postmodern theory maintains that both the author and the reader bring their own 'truth' to the work. And yet, this determination to arrive at some type of truth, especially in fictional narratives, implies a search beyond scientific reasoning, because by definition 'truth' cannot exist in fiction.

In this thesis, I am revealing that I am nothing less than human by the very nature of this discourse; I also want to discover if there is an ultimate truth. With hopes of discovering to what extent the scientific revolution has had a negative and positive effect

on our quest for truth, I will focus on the fields of anthropology, literature, and travel writing to examine concepts of truth within these fields. Within the field of literature, I will examine literary works that cross genres into the field of travel narratives in an attempt to argue that these particular stories hold validity according to the principles of 'truth' and 'credibility,' as defined through the fields of anthropology and travel writing.

Because this discourse will primarily concern itself with an examination of truth and credibility within fictional travel narratives, it is best to use an approach that deals explicitly with these issues, namely Postmodern theory. Hence, the following section will offer a brief discourse on Postmodernism. 'Postmodernism' is a label that has been applied to the modern experience after the modernist period. The theory focuses on a fragmented world and all that an existence in this world entails. Because the field of quantum physics also examines what it means to exist in this world, it is useful to consider this field when studying Postmodernism. Indeed, it can be argued that Postmodernism has its roots in the advances of quantum physics theory.

In many ways, Postmodern theory begins in the 1920's with the German physicist, Werner Heisenberg. In his book, *Theology and Scientific Knowledge*, Christopher F. Mooney discusses one of Heisenberg's most famous quantum theories, the Uncertainty Principle. According to this principle:

The more accurately one knows by repeated experiment the position of any subatomic particle, the less accurately one knows its momentum and vice versa. The quantum state of a subatomic particle (its position and momentum) can thus never be known or predicted with certainty. There is, in other words, a minimum amount of uncertainty, an irreducible

fuzziness, which we can never escape in our observations of the subatomic world, a certain limit on the accuracy with which position and momentum can be simultaneously known. (83)

Heisenberg developed this principle as a result of experiments conducted by physicists that attempted to discover both the position and momentum of subatomic particles. It was during these experiments that seemingly unanswerable problems arose:

The light particles (or photons) [the physicists] were using, with their very short wavelength and high frequency, also had a very high energy. These photons could therefore locate a particle's position with great accuracy, but their energy was found to disturb the particle's momentum . . . , so that the direction and speed became much less clear. If, however, they used a light with a lower frequency (hence with longer wavelength and less energy) to "see" the particular particle, its direction and speed could be known much more accurately but its position would then be much less clear. (82-83)

In these experiments, scientists were unable to execute an accurate observation of the subatomic world because each experiment yielded a different answer. Hence, one can only be "uncertain about the totality of what is taking place" (83). The scientists were closer than ever to observing the subatomic world and yet, they were unable to understand why they could not pinpoint the exact location of these subatomic particles.

Inevitably, then, the next question to arise in the minds of scientists was what "is responsible for this knowledge limitation?" (89). Heisenberg believes that this knowledge limitation occurs during observation. "The observation . . . selects of all

possible events the actual one that has taken place . . . . Therefore, the transition from the 'possible' to the 'actual' takes place during the act of observation" (qtd. in Mooney 90). Mooney further explains: "The observer's influence in the measurement process thus does not consist in disturbing a previously precise though unknown value . . . , but of forcing one of many potentialities to be actualized. The observer's action in this way becomes part of the atomic entity's real and objective history" (90). In other words, by the mere act of observing an object, the observer affects the object. Hence, any conclusions that might be reached from observation will be subjective. This theory then, has grave implications for science. Society is conditioned to believe that discoveries made through the Scientific Method are 'truth.' However, according to this principle, there is no truth because scientists affect the outcome of their experiments with their presence. 'Truth' is subjective according to individual perspective.

When applying this idea to literature, many questions arise. Consider, for example, fictional narratives that dabble in the travel writing genre. Paul Bowles is a fictional writer who bases the majority of his stories in Morocco. His stories vividly describe both the Moroccan people and the landscape of Tangiers and Fez, as is illustrated by the following passage from his novel *Let it Come Down*. In this passage Thami, one of Bowles' Moroccan characters, is walking to a café:

He turned into the Siaghines and strode rapidly downhill between the money changers' stalls, past the Spanish church and the Galeries Lafayette. Ahead was the little square, the bright lights of the gasoline lamps in the cafes pouring into it from all four sides . . . He climbed

the steps to the deserted terrace and pushed inside, taking a seat by the window. The Tingis dominated the square; from it one could look down upon all the other cafes. (44)

Bowles attempts to paint a vivid picture of the world that his characters inhabit.

Throughout this passage, he refers to specific landmarks. One senses that Thami's route can literally be traced on a map.

In addition to vividly describing the setting of Morocco, Bowles also attempts to depict elements of the Moroccan culture. Consider the following passage. In this passage, Thami recalls his behavior after his brothers Abdelmalek and Hassan throw him out of the house:

He (Thami) committed the unpardonable offense of speaking against [Abdelmalek and Hassan] to others, dwelling upon their miserliness and their lecherousness; this trait had gradually estranged him from practically all his childhood friends. Everyone knew he drank and had done so since the age of fifteen, and although that was generally considered in the upper-class Moslem world of Tangier sufficient grounds for his having been asked to leave the Beidaoui residence, still, in itself it would not have turned his friends against him. (40-41)

Through Thami's character, Bowles describes the customs of upper-class Moslem Moroccans. It is commonly known that Moslems do not drink alcohol. Hence, Bowles is accurate in this assertion. However, this truthful assertion inevitably leads one to question: Can there be 'truth' in fictional narratives? According to the Uncertainty

Principle, yes, because Bowles is writing his own personal truth and this idea matches with the Principle's belief that truth is subjective according to one's perspective.

Unfortunately, the quest for an accurate definition of 'truth' is further complicated by later experiments in the field of quantum physics. Although Werner's Uncertainty Principle has been proven, there exists, strangely enough, another proven theory that contradicts Werner's Principle. This conflicting theory is known as the Chaos theory. According to James Gleick's *Chaos: Making a New Science*, Chaos theory developed in the 1970's among a group of scientists seeking to explain disorder in nature (3). Gleick explains:

For as long as the world has had physicists inquiring into the laws of nature, it has suffered a special ignorance about disorder in the atmosphere, in the turbulent sea, in the fluctuations of wildlife populations, in the oscillations of the heart and the brain. The irregular side of nature, the discontinuous and erratic side—these have been puzzles to science, or worse, monstrosities. (3)

This quest for making sense out of disorder led to the development of computer programs that can create "pictures that capture a fantastic and delicate structure underlying complexity" (4). These pictures are called fractals, and they reveal patterns at levels of reality that scientists had previously deemed chaotic [Appendix I]. According to this theory, everything in existence has a mathematical pattern. Even in what appears to be chaos a pattern can be found. However, a problem arises when one tries to reconcile this theory with the Uncertainty Principle. These two theories outright oppose one another; unlike the Uncertainty Principle, the chaos theory implies that there is an existing truth.

Because no one has been able to reconcile these two theories, a great tension is created; and in many ways, this tension is the contradiction of modern life. Humans no longer know what to believe in; we seek truth and yet we realize that there may not be an absolute truth. This unsettling conflict is the Postmodern experience.

In part then, Postmodern theory explores the concept of truth. As a result, Postmodern theory has crossed boundaries beyond science into other fields that also deal with this issue. According to Patricia Waugh, the editor of *Postmodernism: a Reader*, “for over a decade, Postmodernism has been a key term in the vocabularies not only of literary theorists but also political scientists, philosophers, geographers, media theorists and sociologists” (1). Waugh argues that what all of these fields have in common is “Story telling” (1). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a ‘story’ can be defined as follows:

A narrative, true or presumed to be true; an allegation, statement; an account or representation of a matter; a particular person’s representation of the facts in a case; a narrative of real, or more usually, fictitious events, designed for the entertainment of the hearer or reader; a series of traditional or imaginary incidents forming the matter of such a narrative. (797)

An examination of this definition proves that Waugh is correct in classifying these fields as professions in which storytelling is involved. What is interesting, however, is that all of these fields are exploring ‘truth’ through Postmodern applications. This trend reflects a certain level of suspicion and distrust with the traditional scientific methods employed in these endeavors. Hence, an argument can be made that the institutionalized method of scientific inquiry for finding the truth is being called into question. Because all of these

professions are held to some accountability for the information that they report to the public, it is only natural for them to explore all possible ways for obtaining the truth, even if they employ the controversial methodology of Postmodernism.

Postmodernism further reflects the tension between the Chaos theory and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle because it focuses on human alienation in a fragmented world. Just as the contradiction between these two theories leaves an individual feeling alienated in the hopeless search of an ultimate truth, Postmodernism specifically focuses on feelings of isolation from mankind. Indeed, the technological age is Postmodern. The advancement of technology allows humans to essentially become hermits; one can exist in this world with virtually no need of human contact ever. From a home computer, one can order groceries, clothes, airline tickets—it is possible to even buy a car over the Internet. In today's age, one can argue that man has no need for his fellow brethren.

Hence, when engaging in a study of what defines 'truth' in the twenty-first century, it is appropriate for one to focus primarily on Postmodern theory. Postmodern theory is applicable to the discussion of 'truth' because one can argue that it is the theory that most accurately reflects our modern-day living conditions. As we will see in later chapters, environmental factors help shape the methodology that one uses to look for 'truth' in the world. The modern-day world is no exception--we have access to an overwhelming influx of information. With an abundance of informational sources available through the Internet, television, radio, and libraries, those who seek the 'truth' in the modern-day world must sift through information and decide what (if any) sources are trustworthy. Indeed, the modern world is jaded towards anything that claims to be the

'truth.' Therefore, Postmodernism, with its focus on questioning traditional notions of 'truth,' is the most affective and applicable approach for the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EVOLUTION OF TRUTH

In order to understand the development of Postmodern theory and how it seeks to implement a new methodology for understanding truth, it is first helpful to examine the historical context for the human race's ever-present obsession with the quest for truth. With the advent of religion, the search for 'truth' was initially a search for God through interpretation of significant spiritual texts; many sought the scriptures to explain both our existence and nature. However, the Middle Ages saw a new development in the search for God with the rising popularity of Natural Theology. It is with Natural Theology that modern science truly begins.

Thomas L. Hankins, author of the book *Science and the Enlightenment*, explains that in the Middle Ages 'Natural Theology' advocated that "truths could be found through the use of reason alone, without the Revelation of the Bible" (3). Natural Theologians believed that the very existence of nature evidenced the existence of God and that "there were also truths about God that could be known from an examination of his creation" (3). Hence, the Bible and organized religion were not necessary to prove God's existence (3). In these early stages, science was essentially a means to better understand God and his workings. Therefore, to the Natural Theologians, science and faith in God's existence were inseparable.

This philosophy marked a change in the concept of ‘reason.’ According to Hankins, the word ‘reason’ had many implications during this era. “‘Reason’ was the key to a correct method, and the model of reason was mathematics . . . . It could [also] mean order imposed on recalcitrant nature, or it could mean common sense . . . or it could mean logically valid argument, as in mathematics” (2). Whereas reason was predominately associated with mathematics, the Natural Theologians began to apply reason to nature in hopes of discovering the more abstract notion of God. Hence, the meaning of the word ‘reason’ changed during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment:

Reason changed from the methods of formal logic to those of the natural sciences, and the laws of reason became identical with the laws of nature. This change in the meaning of reason also caused a change in the way one learned about the natural world. Because the laws of nature were chosen freely by God for his creation, they could be known only by experiment; no logical argument alone could fathom God’s free choice. Thus in the seventeenth century experiment became part of the ‘reasoned’ approach to nature. (3)

Hence, the beginning of the Enlightenment can in part be attributed to “this shift from reason as the perfect intelligence to reason as the law of nature” (6). This change of focus in reasoning set the stage for the advent of scientific experimentation. Scientists hoped that through experimentation they would discover God’s reasoning and through this discovery, the ability to decipher both how to live in the world and how to predict future events. In other words, the scientists hoped to revolutionize the way humans understood existence.

Another factor contributed to the Scientific Enlightenment, namely the transfer of Ancient Greek texts to the European nations. In his book *The Geography of Science*, Harold points out that “European learning is indebted to Islam for transmitting Greek philosophical and scientific texts” (128). Dorn explains how Islam first introduced Europeans to these studies:

Although Islam . . . . embraced a state religion, that condition did not foreclose the possibility of the exchange and comparison of ideas with the non-Islamic world. On the contrary, in the cities of Islam, Christians, Jews, and Muslims debated the tenets of religion, and since, prior to their acquisition of Greek learning, Muslims were often bested in these controversies the early caliphs encouraged secular learning in order to provide Muslim scholars with the logical and analytical means to defend the faith. (113)

Therefore, in order to allow Islamic scholars to defend their faith, the Abbasid caliphs provided the writings of Greek philosophy and science in Arabic translations. However, giving Islamic scholars the tools to better defend their faith was not the caliphs’ only motives; they also wanted to master the fields of medicine and astrology.

Indeed, it is interesting to consider the fact that astronomy was one of the most commonly studied sciences in Islamic universities. Astronomy studies were encouraged mainly for the knowledge that they could contribute to the field of astrology and the perfection of ceremonial religious devotions. The Islamic world believed in astrology as a means to predict the future. Moreover, as mentioned, studying the sky had another benefit, namely, the ability to pinpoint the exact direction a Muslim should face while

praying towards Mecca. Hence, even in the early Middle Ages, science in Islam was used in order to find 'truth' as defined through God (117). Through the scientific study of astronomy and the application of astronomical findings to astrology, the Islamic world believed that God would give them the answers they were looking for.

When one considers the differences that exist between Islamic and European culture, one cannot help but think that it is ironic that this transfer of Greek texts occurred. One of the reasons that Islamic cities came into contact with the western world is because of the crusades. Many Christians traveled to Islamic cities in the hopes of converting Muslims to the Christian faith. These missionaries hoped to teach the Muslims that Christianity is the 'truth' of God. It is ironic then that the missionaries should find truth through the Islamic world, the very people that Christians considered heathens. And yet, it is the 'truth' of the Greek philosophical and scientific texts, found through the missionary's travels, that revolutionizes the western approach of 'truth' through science.

Although Europeans did not necessarily use science to further their knowledge of astrology, they were essentially seeking the same thing as the Islamic world; they were seeking a way to discover the 'truth' through God's creations. Science, then, began as an epistemology and indeed, in the Enlightenment, the term 'Natural Theology' was replaced by 'Natural Philosophy.' According to Hankins, Natural Philosophy is the beginning of modern-day science:

What we call science today was more commonly called natural philosophy during the Enlightenment . . . . Natural philosophy was still part of philosophy and still struggled with philosophical questions such as those

concerning the existence of the soul, the activity and passivity of matter, the freedom of the will, and the existence of God. (11)

Although the Enlightenment sought an ordered reasoning in nature, their aim was not to completely destroy religion. Rather, they sought to find concrete facts that proved the existence of God rather than relying on the Augustinian hermeneutics that had dominated earlier searches for truth. Perhaps Marquis de Condorcet, a member of the French Academy of Sciences, sums up the motives of the Enlightenment best through his eulogies written for academy members. He states “that the pursuit of natural philosophy was morally good. The most virtuous pursuit of all would be the creation of a science of man that, through reason, would destroy prejudice and superstition and build a new society on objective scientific principles” (8). Indeed, in the era before the modern scientific method, superstitions must have abounded in an attempt to explain the unknown world. Moreover, both racism and class distinction divided society at the time. It is interesting, however, that Condorcet mentions that one of the aims of science is to dispel prejudices because, as we will later see with a discussion of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, the opposite was attained as scientific thought continued to flourish in the nineteenth century. However, before we discuss Darwin, it is important to understand the development of the methodologies that led Darwin to develop his theory.

With this new focus on reason and experimentation, the scientific method forever became a part of scientific inquiry, in part through Isaac Newton’s experiments. During the eighteenth century Enlightenment, Newton approached experimentation through analysis of simple components and then a recombination of these elements through synthesis (20). Prior to Newton’s experiments, “analysis and synthesis were regarded as

two separate methods: Analysis, or ‘resolution,’ was a method of discovery, whereas synthesis, or ‘composition,’ was a method of proof. With Newton, however, they became one method and were applied not merely to the course of thought but also to the actual doing of experiments” (20). With the implement of the scientific method firmly in place, the field of science in European studies flourished with new discoveries.

The eighteenth century Scientific Enlightenment increased scientific study and paved the way for Charles Darwin’s discoveries in the nineteenth century. It is through the use of the scientific method that Darwin is able to both analyze and synthesize his research into the theory of *The Origin of Species*. With the publication of Darwin’s book in 1859, a revolution in the idea of ‘truth’ ensued. According to scholar J.W. Burrow, editor of the 1968 edition of *The Origin of Species*, until Darwin’s findings were published “Religion seemed guaranteed by ‘Natural Theology’” (17). However, after *The Origin of Species’* publication, ideas of ‘truth’ as defined through Natural Theology were seriously in danger. Burrow explains the impact that the publication of *The Origin of Species* had on the field of Natural Theology:

It destroyed at one blow the central tradition of recent English Protestant apologetics—Natural Theology. All the beautiful and ingenious contrivances in nature which Rational Christianity had explained as evidence of the benevolent design of an Almighty Clockmaker, Darwin’s theory explained by the operation of natural selection: the struggle for life resulting in the preservation of certain random variations in offspring. (40)

Hence, with the publication of *The Origin of Species*, Darwin caused many people to doubt the validity of Natural Theology. Indeed, until the time of *The Origin's* publication, religion and Science were inseparable. This interconnectedness is proven through the commonality of clergymen who dabbled in natural history. “To follow the workings of nature was to explore the mind of its Creator and to receive renewed assurance of his benevolence. The proudly displayed ‘collection’ [of leaves and insects] was almost the equivalent of a bible laid open on a table. God was sought, not in mystical exercises in one’s chamber—that would have been ‘enthusiasm,’ which was both morbid and ungentlemanly—but at the bottoms of ponds and in the midst of hedges” (19). However, with the publication of *The Origin of Species*, Darwin caused people to question these endeavors; he made nature seem cold and removed from the human species. Darwin’s theory implies that creation occurs randomly through transmutation, and as a result, many clergymen lost the joy that they found in marveling over God’s artistry. Hence, people grew confused about where to seek nature: “Unlike nature as conceived by the Greeks, the Enlightenment and the rationalist Christian tradition, Darwinian nature held no clues for human conduct, no answers to human moral dilemmas” (43). However, as we shall see later on in this section, many people nonetheless discovered a method, albeit a false application, to solve this problem.

First, however, it is important to consider another impact of Darwin’s theory. Darwin’s publication also called into question the human species’ seeming superiority over other creatures in nature. Burrow explains that “Darwin became specially notorious for something he had deliberately *not* said in *The Origin*, though his argument undoubtedly implied it: that man was first cousin to—not descended from, though this

was an error often made—the apes” (41). Indeed, until this point in time, man saw himself as the favorite of God’s creations; many believed that nature’s creations existed solely for the pleasure of man; this belief then explains the popularity of Natural Theology. Hence, Darwin’s argument forced many people to question the story of creation in Genesis by implying that God had not specially created man, but rather that man exists because transmutation occurred somewhere in the evolutionary ladder.

In part, because of the implication that man is related to apes, people sought a way to reassert their superiority over both nature and other humans. Moreover, because the Natural Theologians’ concept of God’s ‘truth’ through studies in nature was challenged, those who subscribed to Darwin’s theory sought ‘truth’ in another manner. In part, this trend occurs because people did not abandon the idea that nature still holds ideas of ‘truth;’ at this point in time, the idea of ‘truth’ in nature was too ingrained in their belief system. Unfortunately, the truth people sought through nature was an application of Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection to justify social position:

In the latter part of the nineteenth century [*The Origin of Species*] helped to create a particularly vehement version of [moral prescriptions from nature]. Those who accepted it found the prescription they were looking for in ‘the survival of the fittest.’ They adopted natural selection as the key to ‘progress,’ though Darwin had not spoken of progress, only of adaptation. In any case, the theory yields radically different results according to what one takes as the competing units: individuals? notions? races? or classes? This very ambiguity, however, meant that there were

many fields in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to which the formula seemed conveniently to apply. (43)

People who enjoyed affluent positions in society or those who wanted to justify racial inequalities pointed to Darwin's theory of Natural Selection to justify their superiority over others. It is interesting to note that this trend contradicts the aims and goals of science as espoused by Marquis de Condorcet in the eighteenth century. As mentioned, Condorcet maintained that one of the aims of science was to dispel prejudices. Instead, science followed the opposite course in the nineteenth century—people used Natural Selection to hold the institutions of prejudice firmly in place. Although misapplied, Natural Selection became a means for those in power to justify the 'truthfulness' of their positions. In many ways this misapplication of Natural Selection is the beginning of the public's tendency to distrust science. As one can imagine, those who were not in affluent positions had difficulties accepting that they were not as 'fit' for survival as those who enjoyed the luxuries of wealth or Caucasian heritage. Although Darwin is not to blame for how people applied his theory, this misapplication of Natural Selection nonetheless causes people to have negative feelings towards science. Indeed, as science continues to flourish in the twentieth century, many people no longer see this field as a means to discover the truth and thereby create a model of moral living. In part, this negative perception of science occurs when science becomes a means of power and destruction. Hence, science loses the faith of the people because they begin to fear the scientific community.

However, before discussing science in the twentieth century, it is first important to digress in order to point out that Darwin's discoveries on Natural Selection are made

through his travels to the Galapagos Islands. Throughout this trip, Darwin carefully records his observations on the wildlife that inhabits these islands. This travel journal is later published as the *Voyage of the Beagle*. Darwin would later use these observations from his journal to formulate his theory on *The Origin of Species*. Hence, because Darwin records his observations of the natural world while traveling, it can be argued that Darwin is a travel writer and that his theory on the *Origin of Species* was inspired by his travel journal. It can be argued then, that two of the most important movements in western science occur because of information discovered on travels; it seems that the catalysts for scientific revolutions occur when one travels abroad and comes into contact with foreign cultures/environments.

Although science continues to flourish in the twentieth century, Darwin's theory of Natural Selection is not the last scientific discovery that calls religion into question. Consider, for example, discoveries made in astronomy and the subsequent formation of the Big Bang theory. This theory forces people to once again reconsider the creation myth. With this theory, people realize that the Earth was not constructed solely for the delights of man but rather that our existence can be attributed to universal chance. Both the Big Bang theory and the subsequent discovery of the Earth's age allowed scientists to reconstruct the elemental conditions on earth that allowed the human species to develop and evolve. These theories contradict the idealized explanation of creation as depicted in Genesis. Hence, as science progresses, it becomes increasingly disconnected from religion because many of the theories expounded by scientists contradict the biblical myths. Indeed, one can argue that in the twentieth century, science becomes a religion all its own, a religion in which truth is defined through scientific discoveries and not God.

However, this new positioning of science only furthers people's distrust in the scientific institution.

Consider, for example, the creation of the atomic bomb. With the advent of the atomic bomb, science could no longer claim as its goal the desire to further moral living. Instead, science was now being used as a means of mass destruction, and destruction of life is by no means moral. Or consider a more recent example: scientists' ever-present obsession with cloning humans; this is a project that frightens many people because of its implications, namely a world that resembles Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*. Although scientists claim that their intent for cloning humans is simply to uncover the secrets that will allow humans to lead lengthier, healthier lives, the implicit power that scientists will hold in achieving the goal frightens people. As a result, many people have grown distrustful towards the scientific community. The public now questions what truth scientists are attempting to discover. Indeed, the goals of science have surpassed the initial humble goal of simply searching for the truth to enhance one's knowledge of God. Thanks to science, the definition of 'truth' has changed. 'Truth' is no longer defined through God and morality. Rather, from an admittedly pessimistic outlook, the 'truth' that scientists are looking for is a 'truth' that will give them the power to control the fate of humans. In this sense, science has betrayed humanity by attempting to master nature. From a theological standpoint, nature is God's creation. Therefore, in attempting to master nature, are scientists not attempting to master God?

This question does not escape the general public and as a result, a general lack of trust exists towards many institutions; both science and religion have proven to be inadequate vehicles for discovering the truth, and this inadequacy is reflected in modern

education. Now, education teaches students to question everything; anyone who claims to be telling the truth should be questioned. Consider, for example, people who use statistics as a means of proving both individual and institutional claims. Education teaches people that a statistic can be found to support any possible claim. Hence, who can be trusted? In the modern world, people reshape and bend the truth to suit their own aims and goals.

This general lack of distrust is one of the reasons that Postmodernism is popular. With its claim that all truth is subjective, this movement appeals to many people. The only way to trust information in this day and age is if the informer admits his/her limitations. This request is a humble one. Society realizes that any claim can easily be disputed by other studies that prove the opposite. Hence, one can only be trusted if he/she makes no claims about having an 'absolute truth.' Moreover, Postmodernism maintains that everyone interprets information through one's own individual truths/life experiences. Hence, Postmodernism places an emphasis on the self; one can only trust his/her self and those who recognize their limitations. Therefore, because this thesis examines concepts of 'truth' in application to twentieth century fictional travel narratives, it is appropriate to use a methodology that reflects modern perceptions of 'truth.' As argued earlier, Postmodernism is the most suitable approach because of its treatment of this concept.

## CHAPTER III

### DEFINING TRAVEL NARRATIVES

Before beginning a discourse on the literary works of Paul Bowles, it is important to first engage in a brief discussion on travel narratives. Through this discussion, one will understand why Paul Bowles' fictional stories can be cross-listed under the travel narrative genre. For the purposes of this discussion, I will examine the research compiled on the travel narrative genre by Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, authors of *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. In this book, Holland and Huggan examine the tradition of travel writing in order to ascertain if it is possible for readers to trust these narratives.

Holland and Huggan launch their discussion on the travel narrative genre by first comparing this genre to the field of anthropology. Both authors believe that this discussion is useful because both fields share many of the same goals. As seen earlier with Margaret Mead, it is often difficult to distinguish the fields of anthropology and travel writing. By understanding both the similarities and differences between these two fields, one can gain a better understanding of how these fields treat notions of 'truth.' In their discussion of the similarities and differences that exist between these two fields, Holland and Huggan cite Valerie Wheeler, who begins by explaining the similarities between these two genres:

Both traveler and anthropologist are strangers who deliver the exotic to an

audience unlikely to follow them to the place they have visited, but likely perhaps to follow their explorations of them. In neither case is the account written for the people or places experienced, but for person and profession. (qtd. 11)

Wheeler makes some important assertions that are relevant to a discussion on Paul Bowles. The Bowles' novels that will be discussed in this thesis focus on American travelers who are voyeurs of the Moroccan culture. Because when Bowles was writing Morocco was not a typical destination for tourists, his depictions of the Moroccan culture are often exoticized. In particular, this exoticism is noticed when Bowles discusses the city of Tangiers. At the time Bowles resided in Morocco and wrote his stories, Tangiers was divided into three different international zones. As a result, Tangiers lacked a unified government. This lack of a unified government meant that general lawlessness abounded in the city. For a western reader, this type of anarchy is unimaginable; anarchy has not been present in the western world since the Old West. Moreover, if after reading Bowles' novel *Let it Come Down*, a western reader wanted to travel to Morocco in order to experience this lawlessness, the reader would be unable to experience the Morocco depicted in Bowles' writings. Bowles points out in his preface to *Let it Come Down* that "at the time of publication the book already treated of a bygone era, for Tangier was never the same after the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1952" (7). *Let it Come Down*, although a fictional novel, serves as an account of a bygone era in Morocco, an era experienced by few western travelers. Bowles further emphasizes the inaccessibility of the Moroccan world portrayed in this narrative by stating that "like a photograph, the tale is a document relating to a specific place at a given point in time, illumined by the light of that

particular moment” (7). Hence, *Let it Come Down* cannot help but exoticize the Moroccan culture not only because the audience is primarily western but also because this world no longer exists. Therefore, if one applies Wheeler’s argument to the writings of Paul Bowles, one can argue that his narratives contain elements found in both anthropological accounts and travel narratives.

Moreover, Wheeler also points out that both the anthropologist and the travel writer write for an audience beyond “the people or places experienced” (11). Once again, as mentioned, this statement furthers the argument that Bowles should be examined as both a travel writer and an anthropologist. English is not widely spoken in Morocco. Indeed, one of Bowles’ many projects involved translating Moroccan tales such as Mohammed Mrabet’s stories *The Lemon* and *The Boy Who Set the Fire* into English for the western reader. The fact that Bowles acts as a translator, in addition to embarking on a project not yet attempted by other Moroccans, proves the lack of both western visitors and the unfamiliarity with the English language in Moroccan culture. Bowles’ novels are written exclusively in English and, hence, are written not for the Moroccan people but for a western audience who, indeed, will not fail to recognize the exotic nature of the culture that Bowles is writing about.

Holland and Huggan also discuss some of the primary differences between travel writers and anthropologists. It is through this discussion that one can argue that Bowles can be more accurately categorized as a travel writer rather than an anthropologist. According to Holland and Huggan, the primary difference between these two genres lies in method and audience. In terms of methodology, “Travel writers are bricoleurs, unashamed dilettantes; ethnographers are research scholars” (12). Travel writers hope to

offer a travel account that will appeal to the ordinary individual. Indeed, from this point of view, travel narratives are perhaps more informative to the average individual than the anthropologists' ethnographic accounts. Most travelers are not anthropologists and, hence, most travelers will not experience a culture through an anthropologist's eyes because the anthropologist will focus more on biological factors that contribute to the overall ethnocentric identity of the culture. Therefore, a travel writer's individual reaction to a particular culture is perhaps more realistic and relevant to the average traveler. This conclusion is supported because both Holland and Huggan point out that the travel writer and anthropologist's audience differs; "travel writing is written for a lay readership; ethnography aims at a more specialized audience" (12). In relating this definition of audience back to Paul Bowles, one can then argue that Bowles better fits the description of a travel writer because his writing is for a lay readership; he does not use scientific terms. Because his novels are primarily fictional, Bowles is writing for a more general audience. Most anthropologists do not read fiction to further their ethnographic studies. Instead, anthropologists read documented research; documentation is a necessity in this field because it proves that the research is grounded in the scientific method.

Holland and Huggan discuss another feature of travel writers that is also applicable to Bowles as a travel writer. They argue that "Travel writing is self-consciously autobiographical, intentionally anecdotal, and (in some cases) deliberately ethnocentric" (11). Indeed, in Bowles' novels, there are elements of the autobiographical. Bowles points out some of these autobiographical elements in the preface to *Let it Come Down*:

At the end of 1950 I was back in Tangier; it was a memorably stormy

winter and I was living in a newly opened *pension*. It was also newly (read *badly*) built, so that the rain ran down the walls of my room, across to the door into the corridor, and thence down the stairs into the reception hall below” (8).

Bowles’ experience at the pension is reflected in the narrative of *Let it Come Down*.

Dyar, the main character of the novel, stays at the Hotel de la Playa. According to Dyar, “The building had the kind of intense and pure shabbiness attained only by cheap new constructions” (18). Moreover, in the reception hall, “The rain that was beating against the glass had leaked through and was running down the wall” (24). These descriptions of the Hotel de la Playa are similar to Bowles’ experience in the Moroccan cheap pension. Hence, Bowles undoubtedly draws from autobiographical experiences in his writing.

Indeed, Bowles further explains in his preface that many of the characters in the novel are based on actual people who resided in Morocco:

[Dyar] is the only totally invented character; for all the others I used as models actual residents of Tangier. Some of these people have moved away and the rest have died. The sole character whose model remains here is Richard Holland, and this is because I am still here and he is a caricature of myself. (9)

The fact that Bowles points out these autobiographical elements to his readers proves that Bowles attempts to include some elements of ‘truth’ in his fictional narratives. Hence, Bowles can be considered a travel writer despite the fact that he is writing predominately fictional narratives.

Moreover, Bowles further fits Holland and Huggan's description of travel writers because there is evidence that Bowles' stories are, in part, based on anecdotes. Once again, consider for example the preface to *Let it Come Down*. In this preface, Bowles explains that the robbery that occurs in the novel is based on an actual incident that occurred in Morocco. However, Bowles claims that "the theft of the money as it actually occurred was so improbable that I had to modify it to give it credibility" (9). It is interesting that although this novel is fiction, Bowles is concerned about issues of believability, to the extent that he takes the time to explain how he has changed the original anecdote for the purposes of the story.

However, it is also interesting to note that through this action Bowles separates himself from other travel writers. According to Holland and Huggan: "Travel writers . . . flirt—quite literally—with charlatanism, claiming certain 'truths' even when they know these to be dubious" (12). Through his preface, then, Bowles proves to perhaps be a more 'credible' source than travel writers because he explicitly explains the changes he has made to the story. Bowles' explanation implies that Bowles is concerned with whether or not his readers believe him; he wants the reader to see the truth in his story and his honesty. Hence, through this preface, one can see that there are elements of truth in Bowles' fiction. Unlike many travel narratives that tend to exaggerate anecdotes to make for better reading (12-13), Bowles purposefully downplays his anecdote in an attempt to make it more believable to the reader.

Perhaps Bowles was ahead of his time because he explains in his preface how he has imposed his own subjectivity on elements of the narrative. According to Holland and Huggan this honest admission of individual subjectivity is a characteristic of

contemporary travel writing: “Contemporary travel writing, in postmodern vein, often plays on such notions of authenticity, either showing how the traveler imposes subjectivity on the narrative or laying bare the power structures underlying claims to truth” (16). This statement is directly applicable to Bowles’ preface in *Let it Come Down*, as the earlier discourse in this section demonstrates. According to this assertion, then, it can be argued that Bowles is a contemporary travel writer in the “postmodern vein” despite the fact that Bowles is writing in the early nineteen fifties, and hence, before the Postmodern movement begins.

Although Bowles admits that he imposes his own subjectivity upon his narratives, he does not impose his subjectivity in an ethnocentric manner; Bowles is never ethnocentric in his stories. Bowles differs from other travel writers in this manner and, hence, Bowles does not fully fit Holland and Huggans’s description of travel writers. Rather than being ethnocentric, Bowles appears to dislike American culture as is evidenced by the many years he spends as an expatriate in Morocco. If anything, Bowles romanticizes the Moroccan culture; Bowles believes that there is something inherently magical about Morocco. In his autobiography *Without Stopping*, Bowles describes his first reaction to Morocco:

Straightway I felt a great excitement; much excited; it was as if some Interior mechanism had been set in motion by the sight of the approaching land. Always without formulating the concept, I had based my sense of being in the world partly on an unreasoned conviction that certain areas of the earth’s surface contained more magic than others. Had anyone asked what I meant by magic, I should probably have defined the word by

calling it a secret connection between the world of nature and the consciousness of man, a hidden but direct passage which bypassed the mind. (The operative word here is 'direct,' because in this case it was equivalent to 'visceral.')

Like any Romantic, I had always been vaguely certain that sometime during my life I should come into a magic place which in disclosing its secrets would give me wisdom and ecstasy—perhaps even death. (125)

Morocco offers Bowles something that he cannot find anywhere else; Morocco offers Bowles the possibility of living in a magical world in which he can gain both wisdom and ecstasy. This offering of knowledge and happiness is not something that Bowles could ever hope to find in American culture. Therefore, one can argue that Bowles sees the Moroccan culture as superior to American culture because of what it offers. Gena Dagal Caponi explains in her book, *Paul Bowles: Romantic Savage* that “Bowles sided with mystery and the imagination, with the savage mind” (161). For Bowles, the American culture was neither mysterious nor inspiring.

Bowles' appreciation and love for the Moroccan culture is evident through the character of Stenham in *The Spider's House*. As an example of Bowles' respect for this culture, Caponi cites the prologue when Stenham reflects that the “unaccountable behavior on the part of Moslems amused him, and he always forgave it, because, as he said, no non-Moslem knows enough about the Moslem mind to dare find fault with it” (6). Through the character of Stenham, the reader can see where Bowles again admits the limits of his own penetration into the Moroccan culture. He understands that it is difficult to penetrate the Muslim mind but whereas many people condemn cultures that are

difficult to understand, Bowles refuses to pass judgment; he is fair to the Moroccan culture and understands that the mystery lies in his own inability to comprehend their culture. Caponi further applauds Bowles because “[he] retains this uncritical attitude even as he attempts to crawl inside the mind of the Muslim through Amar and through Stenham’s relationship with Amar and other friends in Fez” (181).

Although Bowles does not meet Huggan and Holland’s description of a travel writer who is deliberately ethnocentric, Bowles can nonetheless still be considered a travel writer. Indeed, one can argue that through his avoidance of ethnocentrism, Bowles proves himself to be a trustworthy writer because he at least attempts to include some objectivity in his descriptions; he admits the limitations of his own understanding. Whereas most travel writers tend to make judgments of that which they do not understand, Bowles finds no fault with the Moroccans but rather with the western world for being unable to penetrate the Moroccan mind.

Holland and Huggan leave a vital (although somewhat obvious) element out of their definition of what constitutes a travel writer; namely, the inclusion of actual geographic locations in the travel writing narratives. Although Bowles is writing fictional stories, he is nonetheless concerned with issues of believability in terms of geographical location. Consider, for example, the preface to *The Spider’s House* in which Bowles shows his concerns with these issues. Although Bowles points out that this story is fictional, he nonetheless calls attention to his accurate use in setting:

Only the setting is objective; the rest is invented. The focal point of the action is the old Hotel Palais Jamai, before it was modernized. I called it

the Merinides Palace because one had to pass the tombs of the Merinide kings on the way to the hotel. There is now an actual Hotel des Merinides, built in the sixties on the cliff alongside the tombs. (Preface)

In addition to calling attention to the fact that his setting is objective, Bowles further points out that the focal points of action occur in a hotel that once existed. Bowles even explains that in the sixties a hotel with the same name as his fictionalized hotel was actually built in Fez. It is interesting that Bowles chooses to point out this detail. By explaining to his readers that the hotel built in the sixties was not the hotel in his novel, one can argue that Bowles anticipates the possibility of his readers journeying to Fez in an attempt to locate the places he mentions in this novel.

Bowles' inclusion of specific landmarks causes the reader to suspect that one can examine a map and trace the route of his characters through the city. To test this hypothesis, I examined specific town plans of the cities in which Bowles' stories take place. These maps are from the 1930's and the 1940's and although they do not contain the specific names of businesses (therefore making it impossible to trace the actual existence of hotels and restaurants mentioned in Bowles' writings), they do contain specific street and area names. By examining these maps, one can see that Bowles does include actual places in his stories. In this analysis, I will primarily focus on the settings that lie outside of the Medina mainly because the Medina does not have specific street names; it consists of narrow, winding, maze-like passageways, thereby making it impossible to find some of the locations that Bowles mentions. However, because the Medina *is* the focal point of Moroccan cities, I will situate the areas that Bowles mentions in relation to the Medina.

Several times *The Spider's House* Amar mentions “swimming in the river, or playing soccer outside Bab Fteuh” (22). Amar further describes this area as being surrounded by a cemetery (32). In examining a map of Fez from 1941 [Appendix II], one can locate the area known as Bab Fteuh; it lies to the southeast of the Medina and is, indeed, surrounded by a cemetery. Moreover, in chapter four, a bus station that lies outside Bab el Guissa is mentioned. Again, by examining the map, one can locate Bab el Guissa; it is located to the north of the Medina. And a little later in this same chapter, Amar and his employer sojourn to a “café near Bab Sidi bou Jida” (45). The Bab Sidi bou Jida is located northeast of the Medina. Although there are many other landmarks mentioned in this story, I have chosen to simply offer a few examples so as not to be repetitive. I believe that the few offered examples are sufficient enough to prove that Bowles indeed refers to actual areas within the city of Fez in this novel.

Bowles is consistent in referring to actual areas in his stories as is further proven by an examination of *Let it Come Down*. Like *The Spider's House*, one can also trace the route of the characters in Tangier, the main setting, on a city map from the 1930's. For the purposes of this argument, I will again use a passage from one of our earlier discussions. In this passage, Bowles' mentions specific place names in Tangier. This passage is from the perspective of Thami, a Moroccan character:

He passed along the Place de France under the low overhanging branches of the liveoaks in front of the French consulate. Neither the Café de Paris nor the Brasserie de France was open. The city was deserted, the Boulevard Pasteur reduced to two converging rows of dim lights leading off into the night. (43)

In examining a map of Tangier [Appendices III and IV], one can see that Bowles' is accurate in describing the surroundings of the area in which Thami walks. On the map, the "Place de France" is called the Plaza de France and as mentioned in Bowles' passage, the French Consulate is indeed located in this Plaza. Moreover, the map shows that the Boulevard Pasteur leads southeast of the Plaza de France. Therefore, in this passage one can literally trace Thami's route through the city. Because like *The Spider's House*, much of the action occurs in the Medina, it is again of interest to point out that the Plaza de France is located slightly southwest of the Medina.

Throughout *Let it Come Down*, much of the action occurs in the Zoco Chico. It is in the Zoco Chico that the characters often meet to dine and drink. According to the town map of Tangier, the Zoco Chico is a plaza located in the Medina. Dyar explains his surroundings as he stands in the Zoco Chico. He mentions how "the clock in the belfry of the Catholic Church in the Siaghines [strikes] the quarter of the hour" (169). Dyar mentions the Siaghines and when one can look at a map of Tangier, one sees that the Siaghines is a street that leads to the southwest from the Zoco Chico.

Because in both of Bowles' novels one can locate the specific spaces his characters inhabit on a map, one could arguably travel to Morocco and use Bowles' books as a travel guide. His books not only resemble travel guides in terms of referring to specific geographical locations but they also resemble travel guides because they contain anecdotal stories from the writer; Bowles points out these anecdotal stories in his preface. Because Bowles points out these elements of truth in his Prefaces, it is arguably important to Bowles to explain what elements of truth exist within his novels; he is concerned with issues of believability; a characteristic that most fiction writers are not

often concerned with. Moreover, despite the fact that his stories are fictional, those who claim to be travel writers cannot often be trusted because of their tendencies to exaggerate their experiences. Therefore, even the most legitimate travel writer has fictional elements in his/her writings. Indeed, the lines between fiction and travel writing are at best blurred. In terms of believability then, who is one to trust: The travel writer who claims to tell the truth or a fictional writer such as Paul Bowles, who points out both the fictional and truthful elements of his story? As an inhabitant of a Postmodern world, Bowles is arguably more trustworthy than other travel writers because he is conscious of both his limitations and his skeptical readers. Although Bowles writings are published under the genre heading of fiction, his stories nonetheless contain some elements of truth. Bowles, then, somewhat defies categorization because his stories are not solely fictional. How then should Bowles be classified? Because his stories do contain some elements of truth, one can argue that Bowles can be cross-listed under the genres of both fiction and travel writing.

## CHAPTER IV

### TRUTH IN CONTENT

One can further argue that Paul Bowles' novels contain elements of truth because of Bowles' attempts to describe the Moroccan culture. In his novels *Let it Come Down* and *The Spider's House*, Bowles examines the results of two cultures colliding, the American culture and the Moroccan culture. As mentioned, most of his stories revolve around an American traveler visiting Morocco. In order to fully explore what happens when these two cultures collide, it is essential for Bowles to discuss the Moroccan culture in detail. Hence, Bowles makes an effort to give his readers a sense of the Moroccan culture. In order to accomplish this feat, Bowles will often include a Moroccan narrator. In *The Spider's House*, the majority of the narrative is told from the perspective of the Moroccan character named Amar. Through Amar's character, the reader sees how Bowles attempts to include elements of the Moroccan culture in his narratives. In part, Bowles attempt to describe this culture manifests itself through depictions of Muslim culture in Morocco. For example, in *The Spider's House*, Amar is a character that struggles with his identity as a Chorfa, a position of religious significance within the cult-like sects that constitute Muslim religious communities within the Moroccan culture. As a Chorfa, Amar and his family are descendents of a prophet. Because of this sacred lineage, Amar's family is expected to adhere more strongly to the tenants of Muslim faith

than other families who do not have such notable ancestors, in part, because Amar's family has more *baraka* than the average citizen:

If someone were ill, or in a trance, or had been entered by some foreign spirit, even Amar often could set him right, by touching him with his hand and murmuring a prayer. And in his family the *baraka* was very strong, so powerful that in each generation one man had always made healing his profession . . . . Thus there was nothing surprising about the fact that Amar himself should possess the gift. (19)

Because Amar possesses more *baraka* than the average person, he will be expected to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors and choose healing as his profession.

Amar, however, senses that Morocco is changing and is on the brink of a political revolution. He questions both the necessity and the role of the Chorfa as leaders within the politically charged city of Fez: "To whom could the people turn in times of difficulty, if not the the Chorfa? Every Cherif was a leader. It was true, but he knew there was something wrong with the picture. The Chorfa were the leaders, but they could lead their followers only to defeat . . ." (29). Amar doubts the structure of 'maraboutism' in Muslim religion in part because he believes that the practice of maraboutism is out-of-date in the current political situation of Fez; traditional marabouts are not the type of leaders that are needed to rid Morocco of French rule.

Bowles is accurate in his depictions of the important roles that religious sects play in Muslim Moroccan culture. To prove Bowles' accuracy, I will refer to Clifford Geertz's book *Islam Observed*. In this book, Geertz examines the development of Muslim culture in Morocco while discussing the concept of 'maraboutism' and the role it

occupies within the Muslim world. Geertz explains that a Marabout is “a man tied, bound, fastened to God, like a camel to a post, a ship to a pier, a prisoner to a wall” (43). These holy men possess what is called ‘baraka’ and according to Geertz, ‘baraka’ can be defined as follows:

Literally, ‘baraka’ means blessing, in the sense of divine favor. But spreading out from that nuclear meaning, . . . it encloses a whole range of linked ideas: material prosperity, physical well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion, luck, plenitude, and, . . . magical power. In broadest terms, ‘baraka’ is not . . . a parapsychical force, a kind of spiritual electricity. . . . Like the notion of the exemplary center, it is a conception of the mode in which the divine reaches into the world. Implicit, uncriticized, and far from systematic, it too is a ‘doctrine.’” (44)

Although many men can have baraka, Marabouts have baraka to a greater degree than ordinary men, in part because they are miracle workers: “Maraboutism, the possession of baraka, was indexed either by wonder-working, a reputation for causing unusual things to occur, or by descent from the Prophet” (45). However, simply being a descendent of the prophet does not guarantee that one will be a Marabout because baraka is not always evenly distributed. Geertz further explains that “baraka is . . . unequally distributed among [the descendents] so that . . . two or three men in most cases, in many only one—will, as demonstrated by their wonder-working capacities, actually be saturated with it, be true living marabouts. Generations may even go by in which no true marabouts in this sense appear” (50).

As mentioned earlier, Amar identifies himself as a Cherif, or a descendent of the prophet. In addition to possessing the baraka passed down through his ancestral lineage, Amar possesses more baraka than the average man and hence, has potential to be a Marabout. Amar, however, reacts to the possibility of occupying this position in the future mainly because holding this position would mean dedicating himself to God and hence, isolating himself to the mosque and home. With the ongoing political strife in Morocco, Amar realizes that his people need leaders more than ever and he questions if the traditional Cherifs can fulfill this leadership role. The Cherif have little worldly knowledge, they almost never leave the Medina. Amar believes that his people need a leader who possesses baraka and yet, has seen the world beyond the mosque:

The thought that [Amar's] own conception of the world was so different from his father's [Si Driss] was like a protecting wall around his entire being. When his father went out into the street he had only the mosque, the Koran, the other old men in his mind. It was the immutable world of law, the written word, unchanging beneficence, but it was in some way wrinkled and dried up. Whereas when Amar stepped out the door there was the whole vast earth waiting, the live, mysterious earth, that belonged to him in a way it could belong to no one else . . . . The world where the old man lived, he imagined, must look something like a picture in one of those newspapers that were smuggled in from Egypt: gray, smudged, meaningless save as an accompaniment to the written text. (28)

Amar has a different understanding of religion than his father; he is not willing to completely abandon his duties as a Cherif and yet, he is not willing to limit his existence

to the Koran and the mosque. Rather, Amar believes that he is the chosen one, although he is not sure what that means exactly; perhaps he believes that he will be a new type of leader for his people; a more worldly Cherif.

It is interesting to consider the political strife that is at the center of action in *The Spider's House*; political tensions are caused as the Moroccans seek independence from French rule. In an attempt to colonize Morocco, the French removed the Sultan, Sidi Mohammed, from power and replaced him with Ben Arafa, "a doddering old man who might as well be deaf, dumb and blind" (47). The Moroccans saw the removal of their Sultan as an especially hostile act on the part of the French government. As a result, the political tensions within this novel center on the Moroccan Nationalists' desire to both remove the French presence from Morocco and to restore the Sultan to power. These tensions are expressed when Amar has tea with his employer, the potter. The potter discusses how Morocco can return their Sultan to power: "I swear if I had power I'd shut the doors of every mosque in the country until we get our Sultan back. And if that doesn't bring him, you know what will" (46). When the potter states: "And if that doesn't bring him, you know what will" he is speaking of the "*jihad*, the wholesale slaughter by every Moslem of all available unbelievers" (46-47). With the mention of the 'jihad,' Bowles introduces yet another detail that is central to Muslim culture and beliefs.

Indeed, as the political tensions continue to escalate in the novel culminating in the French slaughter of Muslim dissidents, the jihad is an ever-present threat. In order to better understand the Muslim notion of 'jihad,' it is useful to examine Mordechai Nisan's book *Identity and Civilization: Essays on Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. In this book

of essays that compares Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Mordechai Nisan explains the jihad:

The jihad serves as the permanent, just and legal, war of Islam against unbelief and the unbelievers. All Muslims are obligated to participate in this struggle that will continue until the Day of Judgement. Although the goal of Islam is peace in the whole world, this can only be achieved through Muslim warfare conducted from *daral-Islam* (the territory of Islam) against *dar al-harb* (territory of war). In the interim, periods of peace or armistice are acceptable, and at times necessary, but only until the moment when Muslim warfare can and will be renewed. (135)

Whereas Si Drissi is content to wait until the jihad is necessary, the growing numbers of Nationalists are not. Hence, Amar is torn between the tension of two worlds; his father's old world view that waits for the jihad with patience and the Nationalists angry desire to begin the jihad immediately. As mentioned, Amar is confused about which is the right path to follow.

In addition to chronicling Morocco's political tensions, Bowles also allows westerners to briefly glimpse how women are treated in Muslim society. In *The Spider's House*, Bowles again uses Amar's character as a vessel of Muslim beliefs. For example, in Book one, chapter three, Amar is served a meal by his youngest sister. As Amar eats, he reflects on the pleasure that his sister Halima gives his mother. The men of the household are almost never home to keep his mother company. "But a daughter, since she was not allowed to stir from the house alone, even to fetch a kilo of sugar from the shop next door, could always be counted on to be there when one needed her (34).

Because Halima is a woman, she cannot enjoy the same independence as men, she must never leave the house without a chaperone. As a result, her mother can always count on her daughter for company because as women, they are both resigned to a life of isolation.

Bowles is accurate in depicting women's roles in Muslim society. In the Muslim world, women are not only forbidden from leaving the house without a chaperone but they are often veiled as well. Nisan explains the role of women in the Muslim world:

The Muslim woman, who was modestly attired and physically removed from public sight, conveyed an inner paradise in this world. Be it in the context of the harem where women of the household were forbidden to be seen by visitors to the home, or in the street where women were only permitted to walk accompanied by a male chaperone, the woman was elevated to the rung of virtual sanctity . . . . She was largely hidden from view, yet her impact on society and family evolved out of the recesses of her own hidden 'being.' (78)

Nisan further explains that although women are hidden from society in the Muslim world, it is not because they do not play an important role. Women are of vital importance in childrearing, especially the rearing of a male child. "The son is pampered by his mother, as he enjoys a longer period of breast-feeding and is the beneficiary of special attention provided by his mother. The mother bestows a 'warm, intimate, loving relationship' upon her son prior to his entrance into the tougher, more demanding world of the males that is symbolized by the role of his father" (79). Indeed, most westerners would scoff at the notion that a woman's most important role is childrearing, especially the rearing of

sons. However, this view is nonetheless presented in *The Spider's House* and Amar's family exemplifies this description of the mother/son relationship.

For example, in chapter two, Si Driss beats Amar. Because the father is the obvious disciplinarian of the household and he uses physical brutality to enforce his rules, one can argue that Si Driss represents the "tougher, more demanding world of the males" that Nisan discusses. Indeed, Amar is used to these beatings, it is not uncommon for the father to show his concern in the form of violence. After the beating, however, it is Amar's mother who gently nurses him back to health; she shows her favor towards Amar by serving him soup with almonds and chickpeas. Amar suspects his mother's favor as he wonders "whether the whole family was having [chickpeas and almonds] too, or whether they had been bought especially for him and for him alone" (31). Amar is not yet old enough to be a member of the adult male world and hence, his mother pampers him by offering Amar chickpeas and almonds in his soup, an expensive treat usually reserved for special occasions.

Bowles is careful in this novel to accurately depict the Muslim culture because the novel is political and Bowles is attempting to express his opinion. Bowles' deplors the behavior of both the Moroccans and the French during this struggle for Moroccan independence. In order to accurately explain why he deplors their attitudes, Bowles had to create a work that is fair in its descriptions of the Moroccan people. It can be argued that Bowles was successful in his goal to paint an accurate picture of this culture because he mentions in the Preface that, "Much later Allal el Fassi, 'the father of Moroccan nationalism,' read it and expressed his personal approval" (Preface). By mentioning that Allal el Fassi personally approved of *The Spider's House*, Bowles gives his portrayal of

the Moroccan culture credibility. It is doubtful that a powerful leader such as Allal el Fassi would approve of this story if Bowles had been unfair in his descriptions of the Moroccan people.

Until this point, this discourse on the descriptions of Moroccan culture in the narratives of Paul Bowles has focused primarily of *The Spider's House*. It is useful, however, to consider some of the cultural descriptions that are present in *Let it Come Down*. In reference to the earlier discussion on the favored treatment of sons within Moroccan households, it is important to point out that Bowles briefly touches on this issue in *Let it Come Down* as well. In *Let it Come Down*, one can further see the importance of sons for Moroccan families. In chapter three, for example, Thami bemoans his choice of an illiterate wife from the country. As her nose bleeds, Thami's wife ignores their crying son while she attempts to stop the bleeding. Thami, however, does not care that she has a nosebleed; rather, he is incensed with her for neglecting their son. He reflects, "if it were not for his son . . . he would send [his wife] back where she belonged to her family in the Rif" (40). Thami's wife is not important beyond her childrearing abilities. Therefore, as seen with Nisan's explanations about the role of women in Moroccan society, the reader can see that Bowles is accurate in depicting women's roles in *Let it Come Down* as well as *The Spider's House*.

In *Let it Come Down*, Bowles also offers westerners a glimpse into the rituals of Moroccan brotherhoods. In book four, chapter twenty-four, Dyar stumbles into a Moroccan café and witnesses the rituals of a Sufi brotherhood:

According to Dyar's eyes, the man now at last moved his hands, reached inside his garments and pulled out a large knife, which he flourished with

wide gestures. It gleamed feebly in the faint light. Without glancing behind him, one of the drummers threw a handful of something over his shoulder and resumed beating, coming in on the complex rhythm perfectly: the smoke rose in thicker clouds from the censer. The chanted strophes were now antiphonal, with 'Al-lah!' being thrown back and forth like a red-hot stone from one side of the circle to the other. At the same time it was as if the sound had become two high walls between which the dance whirled and leapt, striking against their invisible surfaces with his head in a vain effort to escape beyond them. (270)

According to Gena Dagal Caponi the brotherhood rituals that Dyar witnesses have evolved in part from “indigenous tribal practices” but also from “the Sufi branch of Islam” (167). She explains: “Sufi teachings approach spirituality from an intuitive and emotional stance and aim toward achieving a state of oneness with God. Music was out of place in Islamic worship, but it came to be of great importance to the Sufis . . . . Their techniques assailed all of the senses, using perfume and incense, music, chanting, drugs, dancing, and occasionally alcohol” (167). Moreover, Caponi also explains that this scene is based on a time that Bowles witnessed a similar scene. In *Without Stopping*, Bowles recalls the time he was sitting in a café and “a mountain Jilali came in, sat beside [Paul and Jane Bowles], and soon went into a trance. As he danced, he slashed himself, covered his face with the blood, and licked it from his arms and fingers” (310). Caponi argues that this experience is the basis for Dyar’s experience. So, once again, Bowles includes elements of the autobiographical in his narratives.

Although political tensions are not present to the same extent as in *The Spider's House*, Bowles nonetheless mentions some of these tensions in *Let it Come Down*. Once again, Bowles uses the Moroccan character Thami to express these tensions in the novel. As in *The Spider's House*, these tensions focus on the Moroccans' resentment towards French rule. One of the ways that the Moroccans subtly attempt to undermine French rule is through smuggling and in *Let it Come Down*, Thami engages in this enterprise. Thami justifies this occupation by explaining that "Every franc out of which the French customs could be cheated . . . was another nail in the French economic coffin" (41). Although Thami's brothers scorn him for engaging in this illegal activity, Thami explains that though illegal, smuggling is actually a moral occupation. Thami explains that he approves of smuggling "on moral grounds, because it was important to insist on the oneness of Morocco, to refuse to accept the three zones into which the Europeans had arbitrarily divided it" (41). Similar to the Moroccan characters in *The Spider's House*, Thami also wants Moroccan independence.

In addition to expressing characteristics of the Muslim population in Morocco, Bowles also presents elements of culture that are removed from Islam, namely, prostitution. In *Let it Come Down*, both Dyar and Eunice Goode are enamored with a young prostitute named Hadija. Although Hadija's age is not known, the reader can presume that she is under the age of eighteen because she is referred to as a *girl* and not as a *woman*. Although under-aged prostitutes undoubtedly exist in the western world, sex with minors is considered a taboo and is not often discussed. In contrast, under-aged prostitution is not as shocking in Morocco. Michael Moran recalls the time he spent in Morocco as a Peace Corps volunteer in his memoirs *Younger Than That Now*. While in

Morocco, Moran befriends a janitor named Driss who offers to arrange a meeting with two prostitutes. Moran agrees and is then shocked when Driss arrives with the two prostitutes, neither much older than twelve years old (79). Although Moran is shocked, it is apparently quite common for girls to enter prostitution at such a young age in Morocco. Therefore, although Hadija's character might shock western readers, Bowles is simply presenting his readers with a factual element of Moroccan culture.

Through Bowles' careful attention to content in his novels, the reader gains an understanding of Moroccan culture during the time that Bowles was writing. As one can see by the many sources that support Bowles' description of the Moroccan people, Bowles is accurate in the picture he paints of this country.

## CHAPTER V

### POSTMODERN NARRATORS

In the previous chapters, I have argued that Bowles should be considered a travel writer because he employs many of the same techniques used in this genre. However, because travel writers are known for exaggeration in their writings, credibility is always an issue when considering the literature within this genre. Indeed, if one is to classify Bowles as a travel writer, one must question whether or not Bowles is a credible source on the Moroccan culture. Like all travel writers, Bowles' credibility needs to be examined.

The first chapter began with a discussion of Postmodernism, which maintains that truth is subjective. Bowles addresses this issue in the Preface to *Let it Come Down* by explaining what elements of the story are fictional and what elements of the story are based in truth. By including this discussion in his Preface, Bowles alerts his readers to the subjective nature of this narrative. When examining *The Spider's House*, however, Bowles is not so forthcoming about the elements of fiction and truth.

In *The Spider's House*, Bowles does not claim a resemblance to any of the characters. However, in her book *Paul Bowles: Romantic Savage*, Bowles' biographer Gena Dager Caponi points out that the character of "Stenham has more in common with Bowles than any previous protagonist. A writer living in Fez, he does not drink; he comes from a New England family that considered both religion and sexuality

unmentionable subjects; and his fascination with Moroccan culture developed from a trip he made as a college freshman twenty years previously” (182). Because of the many similarities shared between Bowles and Stenham, the reader inevitably assumes that Bowles bases the character of Stenham on himself. Indeed, although Bowles claims in the Preface that *The Spider’s House* is in no way autobiographical, he does not mention whether or not he has included a characterization of himself. Therefore, it is difficult to read this novel without assuming that Bowles shares the same opinions as Stenham; the similarities between the two are too numerous and, indeed, Bowles does nothing to direct his readers to a different reading.

Because Bowles does attempt to assume the role of a Moroccan through the character of Amar, credibility is an issue. How can the reader trust a westerner to understand the Moroccan mind? Indeed, if the reader assumes that Stenham is a representation of Bowles, then this issue is even more important to examine because of Stenham’s admissions. In the Prologue, Stenham is being led back from the home of Si Jaffar to his hotel. Si Jaffar has employed a Berber to lead Stenham through the Medina, and when the Berber chooses a non-direct path, Stenham reflects on the Moroccans’ tendency for mysteriousness:

Unaccountable behavior on the part of Moslems amused him, and he always forgave it, because, as he said, no non-Moslem knows enough about the Moslem mind to dare find fault with it. ‘They’re far, far away from us,’ he would say. ‘We haven’t an inkling of the things that motivate them.’ There was a certain amount of hypocrisy in this attitude of his; the truth was that he hoped principally to convince *others* [his italics] of the

existence of this almost unbridgeable gulf. The mere fact that he could then even begin to hint at the beliefs and purposes that lay on the far side made him feel more sure in his own attempts at analyzing them and gave him a small sense of superiority to which he felt he was entitled, in return for having withstood the rigors of Morocco for so many years. This pretending to know something that others could not know, it was a little indulgence he allowed himself, a bonus for seniority. Secretly he was convinced that the Moroccans were much like any other people, that the differences were largely those of ritual and gesture, that even the fine curtain of magic through which they observed life was not a complex thing, and did not give their perceptions any profundity. (6)

Stenham admits that it is impossible to truly understand the Moroccan mind and if Stenham is an embodiment of Bowles, then Bowles is also admitting through Stenham's character his own inability as well. And yet, a good majority of this novel is told from Amar's perspective; as argued in earlier chapters, Bowles attempts depict the Moroccan culture through Amar's character. However, how can the readers trust Bowles' depiction of the Moroccan culture when he admits through Stenham his limitations?

It is interesting to point out, however, that Stenham admits that his primary goal is to convince *others* that an unbridgeable gulf exists. This statement is interesting because as this chapter will discuss later, both Bowles and Stenham romanticize the Moroccan culture. Perhaps Bowles and Stenham enjoy that many westerners find Moroccans to be different and hence, unapproachable. By convincing other westerners that an unbridgeable gulf exists, Bowles and Stenham can prevent both western penetration and

western influence on the Moroccan culture. Because Stenham and Bowles believe that both the Nationalists and the French should stop interfering with Morocco, one can argue that this opinion stems from their romanticizing Morocco as a medieval country; their opinion is self-serving because they want Morocco to remain the mysterious and magical medieval country that they love. Indeed, although Stenham suspects that the Moroccans are much like everyone else, it is their differences in ritual and gesture that he wants to protect; it is the superficial differences that give the Moroccans their magical aura and it is this magical aura that is threatened by progress.

Yet despite this desperate desire to protect the Moroccan culture, neither Stenham nor Bowles can escape their ego. This inability to escape the ego is emphasized when Stenham admits that he enjoys pretending that he understands the Moroccans' behavior; he believes that this pretence is his due for living in Morocco for such a long time. Stenham's admission shapes how the readers read the rest of this novel because it raises questions about credibility. If Stenham is really an embodiment of Bowles, how can the reader trust Bowles' depiction of the Moroccan character Amar when through Stenham, he admits his limitations? Indeed, Stenham's admission that he simply pretends to understand the Moroccan culture causes the reader to question if Bowles is simply pretending to understand Morocco as well? Perhaps because Bowles has lived in Morocco for such a long time, he also believes that it is his due to pretend that he understands the Moroccan culture.

The issues raised in this passage are Postmodern in nature. As Stenham's character illustrates through his admissions, truth is subjective in nature. Although Stenham does not understand the Moroccan culture, he attempts to convince others of his

understanding. By attempting to convince others of his knowledge, he attempts to shape their perceptions of truth; in their eyes, Stenham does understand the Moroccan culture. However, as the reader knows, the notions of truth that shape Stenham's perspective are different from how his friends perceive him. Although many westerners can only focus on the otherness of the Moroccan culture, Stenham believes that in actuality, the Moroccans are not any different from other cultures. Rather, their differences lie in ritual and gesture. This opinion reflects Stenham's perception of the Moroccan culture and proves that truth is subjective according to the individual. Moreover, as discussed in the above paragraphs, this passage is further Postmodern because both Bowles and Stenham admit their limitations. This admission protects the depictions that Bowles and Stenham offer of the Moroccan culture from critique. One cannot accuse Bowles and Stenham of presenting false information because both admit that their perspective is limited.

Stenham's inability, and in turn Bowles' ability, to understand the Moroccan culture is further emphasized when he has dinner with Si Jaffar. At dinner, Si Jaffar tells Stenham a traditional story from Fez. Although Stenham listens to the story, he does not understand it. Rather than admitting his ignorance, however, Stenham simply "smile[s] and nod[s] his head" (222). Unlike Stenham's western friends, Si Jaffar is not fooled by Stenham's pretensions. After Si Jaffar finishes his story, he acknowledges Stenham's ignorance and politely explains that the story is difficult for anyone to understand: "There are too many things to explain. Some of our stories are very difficult. Even the people from Rabat and Casablanca often must have them explained, because the stories are meant only for the people of Fez. But that's what gives them their perfume. They wouldn't be amusing if everyone could follow them" (222). In this passage, Si Jaffar

further emphasizes the inability of westerners to understand the Moroccan mind. If Moroccans from different cities cannot understand the stories of Fez, how can a westerner hope to accomplish this feat? Nonetheless, Si Jaffar's eldest son recounts another tale that Si Jaffar classifies as "shocking" and again Stenham does not understand the story. He again pretends, however, to understand the story by joining everyone in laughter when the story is finished. Although Si Jaffar's family realizes that Stenham does not understand their stories, Stenham is insistent in continuing with his pretence. Perhaps Stenham is unwilling to admit to himself that his knowledge of the Moroccan culture is even more limited than he believes.

Because Stenham and for that matter, all westerners, are unable to understand the Moroccan mind, as mentioned, one must question Bowles' portrayal of Amar. In an earlier chapter, this thesis discusses how Bowles attempts to create an accurate portrayal of the Moroccan people by including specific cultural details. Bowles attempts to create this cultural portrayal by using words such as 'baraka.' Bowles explains that Amar possesses an extraordinary amount of baraka, which he defines as a healing power. However, if one refers to the definition of baraka as stated in Clifford Geertz's book *Islam Observed*, one sees that Bowles chooses to present only one meaning of this term; namely, baraka as a healing power. One inevitably questions, then, why Bowles chooses to focus on this one particular aspect of baraka.

This question can be answered when one examines Stenham's beliefs. Through the political views that Stenham espouses, one can argue that Stenham romanticizes the Moroccan culture. As mentioned earlier, he is against both the Nationalists and the French because both parties want to make Morocco a progressive nation. Stenham is

against progressiveness because he does not want the essence of Morocco to change; he wants Morocco to remain a medieval country. Stenham's political opinions then, are self-motivated; he does not want Morocco to change because he enjoys Morocco as it is. Stenham justifies this belief by claiming that the Moroccans are happy; he refuses to consider the Moroccans' discontent. Because Stenham refuses to acknowledge the possibility that Morocco is in need of change, Mme Veyron accuses Stenham of being a romantic and attacks his belief that all Moroccans are happy:

Will you please tell me what makes you think those helpless serfs are *happy*? Or haven't you ever given it a thought? Are they just happy by definition because they're absolutely isolated from the world? They're slaves, living in ignorance and superstition and sickness and filth, and you can sit there and calmly tell me they're happy! Don't you think that's going a little far? (238)

As evidenced by the Nationalist party's existence, a good number of Moroccans are not happy with the current state of affairs. Nonetheless, Stenham continues to believe that progress is wrong. Perhaps Stenham is against progress because he fears that the elements he admires in the Moroccan culture will disappear, namely the mysterious and magical nature that seems to surround Morocco. In the above passage, Mme Veyron mentions that because of the Feudal nature of Morocco, the Moroccans live in ignorance and superstition. Indeed, superstition is often the result of ignorance. Therefore, because Stenham values the Moroccan culture for its mysteriousness and superstitions, one can argue that Stenham is against progression because he fears that if the Moroccans are educated, they will no longer be the superstitious and mysterious people that he loves.

Indeed, because Stenham is a characterization of Bowles, then an examination of Bowles' Preface further supports the assertion that Stenham is against progress. In his Preface, Bowles explains his initial motives for writing this book: "I wanted to write a novel using as backdrop the traditional daily life of Fez, because it was a medieval city functioning in the twentieth century" (Preface). Bowles, like Stenham, is drawn to the city of Fez because it is not a progressive city; this backwardness is in part what causes the magical aura that hovers about Morocco. As discussed earlier, Bowles candidly admits in *Without Stopping* that he is attracted to Morocco because of this seemingly magical aura. Hence, one can therefore understand why Bowles chooses to point out only the magical aspects implied in the term baraka; he chooses to explain the aspect of baraka that most interests him.

As seen with the discussion on baraka, one must question Bowles' use of Arabic words in this novel; one cannot trust that Bowles will give his readers the full meaning of the Arabic words that he chooses to include. For example, in chapter seventeen, Book three, Stenham engages in a playful argument with Rhaissa, a servant at his hotel. Rhaissa ends their argumentative discussion by simply saying "*Hachouma*" (172). Immediately following Rhaissa's statement, an explanation appears in parentheses: "[Hachouma] was the classical Moroccan reply, which along with '*Hara*,' provided an unanswerable argument that could end any discussion; Shame and Sin were the two most useful words in the common people's vocabulary" (172). This comment is obviously not Stenham's, he is not mentioned in this paragraph. Rather, the explanation is given in an omniscient voice and therefore it must be Bowles' explanation. However, because this thesis presumes that Stenham is the fictional representation of Bowles, this statement

must be questioned because of Stenham's earlier admissions. How can the reader trust this omniscient voice after Stenham/Bowles has admitted that his knowledge of the Moroccan mind is limited? Again, our only conclusion can be that, because Stenham/Bowles openly admits his limitations, the reader can only presume that this parenthetical assertion is true in Bowles' mind.

Bowles further plays with issues of trust through an episode that occurs between Moss and Si Jaffar; this episode further emphasizes the westerner's inability to understand the Moroccan mind-set. While conversing with Stenham and Kenzie, Moss retells a recent experience he shared with Si Jaffar. He explains that he had wanted a model for his artwork, so he asked Si Jaffar about the prostitutes in the Moulay Abdallah quarter in Fez. Although Moss knows that Si Jaffar visits the quarter every week, Si Jaffar claims that it has been years since he has been to Moulay Abdallah. Nonetheless, Moss asks Si Jaffar to procure a model under the age of fifteen, and after much discussion and denial, Si Jaffar agrees to his request. However, Moss soon discovers that the model that Si Jaffar procures for him is an old man.

Moss's experience is interesting on several levels. On one level, this story is decidedly Postmodern in nature. Because Si Jaffar is a holy man, the reader automatically presumes that he is also a moral man. Therefore, in the eyes of the reader, holiness and morality are the truths that define Si Jaffar. However, this notion of truth in regards to Si Jaffar is wrong. He is a holy man but not necessarily a moral man; as Moss mentions, Si Jaffar is a frequent visitor to the prostitutes that inhabit the Moulay Abdallah. Although Moss knows that Si Jaffar is hypocritical because he visits this quarter, he nonetheless trusts Si Jaffar, again, because he is a holy man. What Moss

presumes to be the truthful nature of Si Jaffar's character again proves wrong when Si Jaffar does not deliver a fifteen-year-old child but an old man. This story, then, is Postmodern in nature because it emphasizes the fact that things are not often as they appear. Although this thesis discusses truth in Postmodern terms as being subjective, subjectivity is another way of saying that there is not an ultimate truth. This story emphasizes this belief. Just because Si Jaffar is a holy man does not mean that this identification is the only truth of his 'self.' The only truth to be found is one's own subjective truth.

The exchange between Moss and Si Jaffar also serves as a means to further the idea that the Moroccan mind is impenetrable for westerners. Indeed, one can argue that the Moroccans enjoy having impenetrable minds. Through his actions, Si Jaffar creates boundaries between the Moroccan and western worlds. Although he visits the young prostitutes, he will not admit to these visits nor will he aid westerners in this endeavor. Perhaps the Moroccan mind is impenetrable because the Moroccans do not want westerners to understand their culture.

In his memoirs *Reflections of Fieldwork in Morocco*, Paul Rabinow agrees with the assertion that the Moroccan culture is hostile to western penetration. For example, Rabinow explains how he attempts to learn Arabic from a Moroccan named Ibrahim. Unfortunately, the Arabic that Ibrahim teaches Rabinow is useless for communicating in everyday Moroccan life. Rabinow finally discovers the Arabic phrases he learned are useless. He explains: "[Ibrahim] was packaging Arabic for me as if it were a tourist brochure. He was willing to orient me to the fringes of the Moroccan community, to the Ville Nouvelle of Moroccan culture, but there was a deep resistance on his part to any

further penetration" (27). This desire to protect Moroccan culture from westerners stems in part, from living under the French rule; by preventing westerners from learning fluent Arabic the Moroccans hoped to protect their culture from French influence. Bowles captures this resistance to western culture through the exchange between Moss and Si Jaffar.

It is important, however, to note that Bowles does attempt to establish credibility beyond simply admitting his subjectivity. Bowles also builds credibility by using his characters to present multiple viewpoints concerning the political upheaval in Fez: Stenham is against progress; Mme Veyron supports the need for change; Moss is pro-French and Kenzie is pro-Nationalist. Although the novel undoubtedly focuses on Stenham's beliefs, Bowles is at least fair to other opinions by including them in his story.

Although Bowles' depiction of Amar is questionable because of Stenham's admissions, the reader need not completely disregard the cultural portrait that Bowles attempts to depict in this novel. If one approaches this novel from a Postmodern perspective, then one can argue that Bowles is presenting the truth; he is presenting the truth as he knows it. Through Stenham, Bowles admits his limitations in understanding the Moroccan mind. This admission may affect whether or not the reader perceives Amar as a sound representation of the Moroccan culture. However, even if the reader doubts the accuracy of Amar's portrayal, with a Postmodern approach, one can interpret Amar's character as a representation of how westerners process and explain the behavior of Moroccans. In this sense then, Bowles again acts like a travel writer. He presents a western view of an exotic culture.

## CHAPTER VI

### **“The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded” –*The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, Samuel Johnson**

In a conclusion, a writer is typically expected to resolve the many questions that have been raised in the discourse; the conclusion is the writer’s last chance to leave readers with a provocative thought. Unfortunately, I can offer no such resolution in this thesis. Indeed, throughout my research, the only ‘truth’ that I have discovered lies in the way one approaches explorations of this concept. I have discovered the truth of Postmodernism, in that there is no ultimate truth. Rather, truth is subjective; each individual shapes the truth according to her life experiences.

Not surprisingly then, the conclusion I have reached is that Bowles’ work is best understood if read from a Postmodern approach. I chose to study Paul Bowles with a Postmodern approach because Postmodernism is arguably the most appropriate study for not only examining concepts of truth but for studying Paul Bowles as well. Indeed, a Postmodern approach is a necessity in the globalized world in which we live. As travel becomes easier for people, one needs a methodology to process the different cultures that one experiences. A Postmodern approach allows one to approach another culture without judgment. If one understands individual limitations, then one will realize that how people process the experiences enjoyed in another country, whether good or bad, are shaped by a person’s perception of the world. Because Bowles’ stories focus on

American travelers in Morocco, then, Postmodernism is the best approach to reading his novels.

In his stories, Bowles attempts to accurately describe the Moroccan culture. Because even the most objective of readers are often influenced by what they read, it is important to have a critical approach that allows one to examine the contents of any book that attempts to paint a portrait of another culture. One may argue, however, that because Bowles is classified as a fiction writer, his readers are aware of his fiction and are hence, not influenced by the contents of his writing. But, as we have seen in our analysis of his novels, Bowles stories contain too many elements of the 'actual' to be dismissed simply as purely fictional. Indeed, Bowles points out in his Prefaces the many elements of truth within his novels. Simply by reading the Preface, then, one's reading of the novel will change. Because the reader knows that there are elements of truth in the stories, Bowles is more likely to influence his readers with his cultural depictions. A Postmodern approach, then, is the only suitable way to read Bowles' writings because one can approach Bowles with the knowledge that he makes no absolute claims of truth. Rather, he depicts the Moroccan culture, as he understands it, according to his own notions of truth.

Indeed, because Bowles' fiction can be read like a travel narrative, his fiction is unique because it in many ways defies classification. This inability to classify Bowles is itself Postmodern. Classification is a means to define, and by attempting to define something, one attempts to project a truth on to it. For example, consider publishers; publishers attempt to define literature through categorization. However, what happens when literature defies classification and cannot be placed within one category?

Publishers nonetheless attempt to categorize these difficult works and hence, classification is often misleading. These categories do not always represent the broader boundaries of the contents. For example, Paul Bowles' writings are classified as fiction. And yet, as this thesis demonstrates, Bowles' writings have characteristics associated with travel writing. Nonetheless, Bowles is not classified as a travel writer.

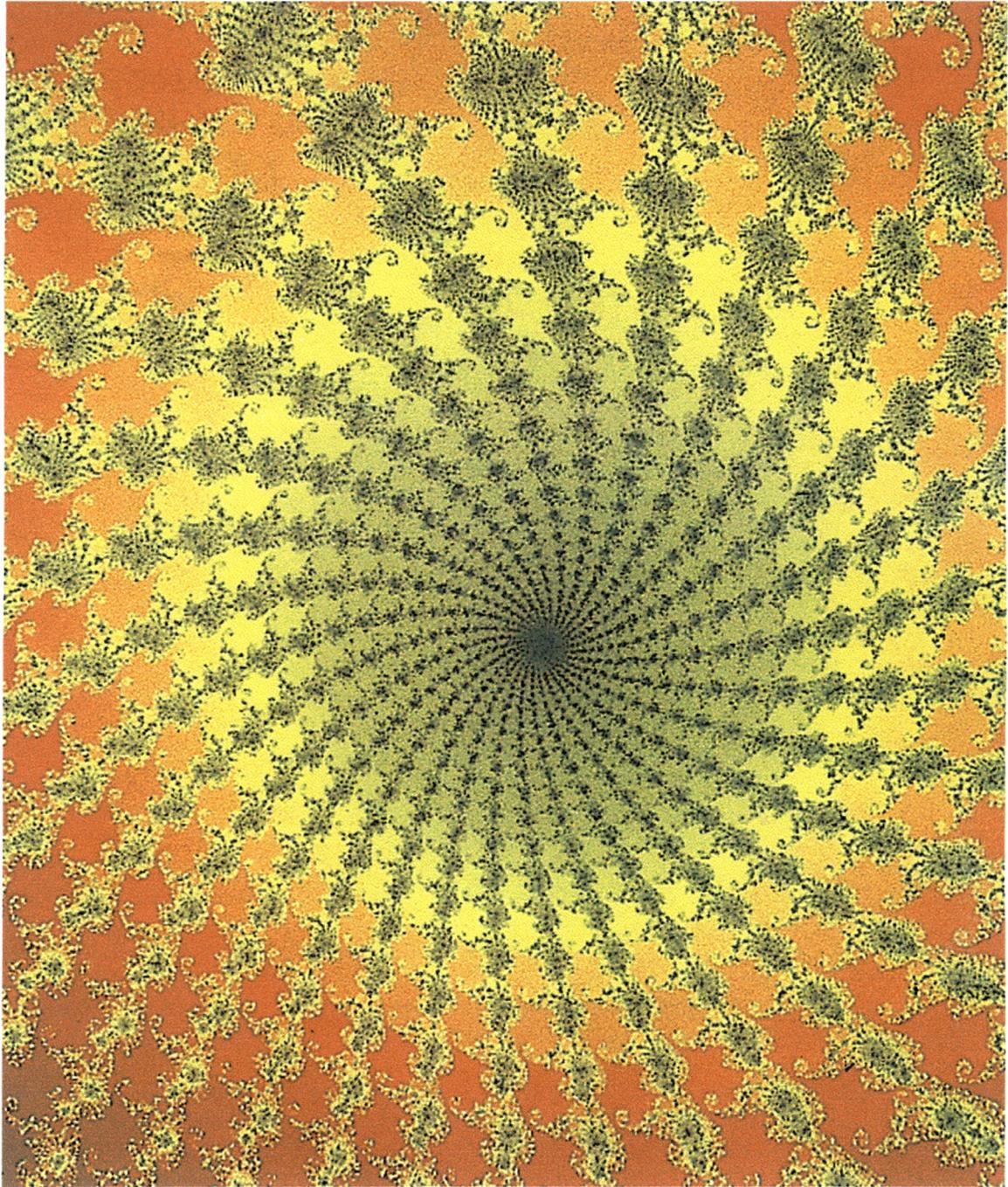
Postmodernism allows one to question the human desire to classify, define, and label; all of these actions are attempts to define truth. As this thesis has shown, these attempts are fruitless. Postmodernism allows us to examine our own tendencies and it analyzes the motives behind these attempts.

Although a book may be classified as fiction, this classification does not mean that a reader cannot learn from the contents of the book. While all fictional novels may not contain as much truth as the novels of Paul Bowles, nonetheless, one can learn a lesson. Indeed, many claim that literature's primary function is to teach and to delight; even the novels with the least amount of truthful elements often have a moral lesson for the reader. Perhaps it is our obsession with finding the truth that causes us to believe the classifications that publishers give literature; humans so desperately want an ultimate truth to exist that we are willing to settle for labels and classifications. These classifications allow us to deceive ourselves in believing that the truth does exist. Most people probably never think about this issue, but it does exist; we constantly apply labels to others in an attempt to categorize them within our own notions of truth. This attempt to classify the world is ironic because it is Postmodern in nature. In defying classification, then, Bowles further proves that he is a Postmodern writer.

Initially I was simply planning on using a Postmodern approach to read the novels of Paul Bowles. However, as I continued writing and researching, I discovered that the goals of this thesis began to change. In addition to attempting to better understand ideas of truth and credibility within the fields of academia, I became interested in yet another goal, namely, I hoped to prove to my readers the validity of Postmodernism as a means of living in the modern world. Hence, in the later chapters, my thesis became a discourse to herald the wonders of Postmodernism; a discourse arguing that Postmodernism is the only approach that will allow one to live in the twenty-first century without driving one's self mad.

In every paper, I always enter my research with the expectation that I will learn more about both the literature and the author that I am studying. This thesis, however, has been a unique experience. In addition to learning more about Paul Bowles and Postmodernism, I have learned about life. This study has allowed me to examine my own perception of truth and has taught me to not make absolute statements. By being aware of how I perceive truth, I am better able to understand how others perceive me. For example, when people now comment on my 'nice' personality, I no longer question why they do not notice my sarcasm or my indifference towards them. I understand that they have preconceived notions that define who a 'nice person' is. I can only presume that somehow, according to their notions of truth, I meet this definition.

## APPENDIX I

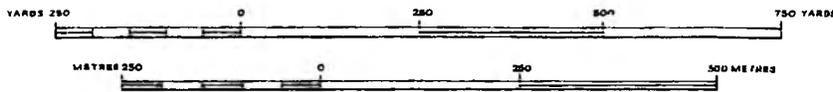




APPENDIX III

# TOWN PLAN OF TANGIER

Scale 1:7,500



REFERENCE

Railways, normal gauge	
Main Roads	
Other "	
Tracks	
Footpaths	
Mosque or Shrine	
Cemetery, Christian	
Jewish	
Moslem	
Lighthouse or Harbour Light	
Bridge	
Woods	
Sand	
Cliffs	
Important Buildings	
Other	
Contours at 5metres interval every 25m. accentuated	

AUTHORITIES

Villa de Tanger 1:10,000. Servicio de Obras Municipales.  
2ª Edición 1935.  
Tanger 1:10,000 D. Domingo Meseguer. 1921.  
Intelligence Reports, 1942  
Intelligence Information, 1942.

KEY TO NUMBERS

- 1 Jewish School
- 2 Italian School
- 3 Covered Market
- 4 Spanish Arab School
- 5 Municipal Dispensary
- 6 Spanish Telegraph Office
- 7 " Post Office
- 8 Cherifian Post, Telegraph & Telephone Of.
- 9 German Legation
- 10 Red Cross Dispensary
- 11 British Post Office
- 12 U.S. Legation
- 13 Spanish Schools
- 14 " College
- 15 Hotel El Minzeh
- 16 Police and Fire Station
- 17, 30, 31 Hotels
- 18 Spanish Civil and Military H.Q.
- 19 Tangier - Fez Railway Office
- 20 Zoco Chico
- 21 Police H.Q.
- 22 Netherlands Consulate
- 23 Lycée Saint Aulaire
- 24 Lycée Regnault
- 25 School
- 26 Jewish College
- 27 Eastern Telegraph Co.
- 28 Ecole Perrier
- 29 " Adrien Berchet
- 32 Frunton
- 33 Fondak Waller
- 34 " Schott
- 35 Bab el Behar (Marine Gate)
- 36 Bab Kasba (Gate)



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