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PRELUDE TO A TEXT:
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ABDELKEBIR KHATIBI

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of French Studies

by
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A.B., Ohio University, 1988
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ABSTRACT

This study of Abdelkebir Khatibi's autobiography, *La Mémoire tatouée*, addresses two specific questions with respect to autobiography: What does this autobiography tell us about autobiography in general and about its own status as autobiography? What is the relationship between Khatibi's autobiography and his other more well-known texts?

Chapter One focuses on questions of autobiography and how this text challenges generic classification and definition. The analysis in this chapter focuses on a consideration of form and innovation, the multiplicity of the autobiographical subject, and questions of completeness, accuracy and memory in the creation of autobiography.

Chapter Two begins with the idea that this autobiography is a story of becoming, of how the protagonist comes to be a writer. As such, it is also the protagonist's history as a reader, from his days at the Qur'anic school, to his years in the French educational system, and to his first efforts at creative writing. The narrator's mention of a previous publication and his suggested ideas for future publications lead the reader to understand that this autobiography, as a story of writing, addresses the past writing efforts, the present autobiographical project, and possible future texts.

Chapter Three addresses the intertextual relationship between Khatibi's autobiography and his other texts. Khatibi's key concepts of *pensée-autre* and *double critique*, the *bi-langue*, and the *intersémiotique* are evaluated here with respect to decolonization, translation and bilingualism, and writing and its relationship to multiple signifying or semiotic systems such as geography and urban planning, tattooing, and calligraphy. I show in this chapter that these ideas, elaborated in Khatibi's later texts, are all present in the autobiography.

The analysis of the intertextuality of Khatibi's autobiography and his other texts reveals that the autobiography serves as a kind of introduction to Khatibi's body of work. The repeated references to music, especially in the autobiography, indicate a fugal relationship between the autobiography and the later texts: the former is the theme and the latter are the variations on that theme. Thus, the autobiography is a prelude to Khatibi's life's work, his Text.

INTRODUCTION

The quantity of publications produced in the past three decades on the criticism and theory of autobiography is staggering. It is not my goal in this dissertation to evaluate the history of this body of criticism, as that has been sufficiently addressed elsewhere, particularly in James Olney's introductory essay to Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.¹ I do think it important to note, however, that the development of criticism and theory on autobiography echoes changes and trends in literary criticism in general. While there are still some students of autobiography who attempt to discover the truth and falsity in an autobiography, this type of approach has been rejected by most scholars in favor of an analysis of autobiography which focuses more on the autobiographical text as a literary and linguistic production.

One of the most influential and well-known scholars of autobiography is the French critic, Philippe Lejeune, whose studies of autobiography in France adopt the point of view of the reader.² By focusing on the reception of autobiography, Lejeune avoids the problem of having to deal with what he considers an ultimately unknowable authorial intent. This critical shift from focusing on the author to focusing on the reader was brought on by postmodernism and caught on quickly in other fields of critical study. Theory on autobiography lagged behind slightly, and understandably so; the importance of the author to autobiography, as both the self who writes and the self being written about, was paramount and therefore difficult to dislodge. Lejeune's thorough and extensive research on autobiography helped pave the way for this change in critical perspective, and this, I believe, is perhaps Lejeune's most significant contribution to the study of autobiography.

For it is ultimately up to the reader to decide what autobiography is and how to classify – if one need do so – a particular text. The reader's decision is directly dependent on his or her approach and practice of reading, on his or her style of reading. This is why the same text can be defined by one reader as an autobiography and by another reader as a novel. The French semiotician, A.J. Greimas, puts forth a concept called the "reading grid" that is based on the notion that "a semiotic object, instead of being a given, is the result of the reading that constructs it," and that "our viewing is never naive and intuition is never pure" ("Figurative Semiotics" 636). In other words, each reader brings his or her own history as a reader and his or her own expectations to every reading experience, creating what Greimas terms the reading grid, which is what begins the process of signification and gives meaning to the semiotic object.

Paul de Man also speaks of the importance of reading in this process of signification, particularly with respect to literary texts. Reading is

an act of understanding that can never be observed, nor in any way prescribed or verified. A literary text is not a phenomenal event that can be granted any form of positive existence, whether as a fact of nature or as an act of the mind. It leads to no transcendental perception, intuition, or knowledge but merely solicits an understanding that has to remain immanent because it poses the problem of its intelligibility in its own terms. (Blindness and Insight 107)

It is important to consider both of these ideas with respect to this study of Abdelkebir Khatibi's autobiography. While his autobiography is certainly a literary text and must always be considered as such, many of Khatibi's texts, beginning with the autobiography, are also theoretical texts that address questions of identity and difference, speech and writing, signification and reading, and language and other signifying systems. It is for these reasons that I begin the discussion of Khatibi's autobiography with Lejeune's views on autobiography.

Lejeune's development of the "pacte autobiographique" as a contract between the writer and reader of autobiography comes out of the shift in focus from the writer to the reader, and the reader's interaction with the text. In this respect, Lejeune's pact is strikingly similar to Greimas' "contrat énonciatif," which "assure les conditions satisfaisantes de la transmissibilité du discours" (*Sémiotique* 25). That these two ideas so closely resemble each other as well as the historical proximity of their publication – Lejeune in 1975 and Greimas in 1976 – point to the interrelatedness of the study of letters and the human and social sciences in the French educational system. However, one difference between Lejeune's pact and Greimas' contract is that Lejeune presents his pact as something which is not to be broken: if an autobiography breaks the pact, it is no longer considered to be autobiography. Greimas, on the other hand, realizes that "un tel contrat est fragile et susceptible d'être rompu à tout instant" (*Sémiotique* 25).

Lejeune cannot allow for this fragility because his pact is used as a means to differentiate between biography and autobiography, autobiography and fiction, and between different kinds of autobiographical writings, such as autobiography proper, memoirs, and journals. The pact and Lejeune's desire to differentiate between different modes of autobiographical writings leads to a restrictive and limiting definition of autobiography. The definition itself is problematic because in attempting to present the essence of what autobiography is, Lejeune is blind to the fact that his own definition is a result of his "reading grid": it rests on assumptions and conclusions drawn by Lejeune as a result of his experience as a reader of autobiography. I once came upon a passage by Edmond Jabès, the source for which I have since been unable to find, that seems all too appropriate here. A teacher asks a student to define hospitality and the student responds by saying that to define hospitality

would be to limit it and restrict it. The teacher then praises the student, either verbally or with a nod of the head. The same situation applies to autobiography: Attempts to define it serve only to restrict and limit its potential and creative possibilities. Any definition of autobiography is problematic precisely because it proposes establishing boundaries and limits to a practice of writing which has, historically and generically speaking, defied categorization.

A recent study of Arabic autobiography, Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition,³ supports the impossibility of establishing boundaries for autobiography. Indeed, the main goal of the study is to show that what critics see as a lack of a tradition of autobiography in Arabic literature is, in fact, more revealing of the critics' reliance on Western definitions of autobiography rather than of autobiographical production in the cultural and historical context of Arabic literature. The authors of this study note that between the ninth and nineteenth centuries, there was a "steady production" of autobiography in Arabic. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, they see an awareness of the autobiographical act, and they maintain that between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a sense of "autobiographical anxiety" is evident along with elaborate defenses of autobiographical writings (241). However, despite this long history of autobiography, formal definitions and stylistic constraints never developed. Yet the authors of this study explain that "[a]lthough these texts do not display a limited set of shared formal characteristics, they were consistently grouped together as a category by medieval and early modern Arabic writers" (242). By extension, even if one considers only autobiographies produced in the past fifty years, one can see that it is quite impossible to put forth "a" definition of autobiography.

This is why I prefer the work of another well-known theorist of autobiography to that of Lejeune. James Olney's approach to autobiography is also more compatible with the work

of Abdelkebir Khatibi, the writer whose work I am studying in this dissertation. Olney's work on autobiography includes a study of African literature through an analysis of a variety of autobiographies, multiple studies of Saint-Augustine, Rousseau, and Beckett, as well as brilliant analyses of the roles of memory and narrative in autobiography. What I find most compelling in Olney's work is his insistence that the harder we try to define autobiography, the faster it will slip through our fingers or disappear into thin air, as Olney himself has repeatedly said. Olney notes that while everyone seems to know what autobiography is, "no two observers, no matter how assured they may be, are in agreement" ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 7). Throughout his work on autobiography, Olney continues to operate from the premise of the "impossibility of making any prescriptive definition for autobiography or placing any generic limitations on it at all" ("Ontology" 237).

Most critics of autobiography, Olney included, begin with a discussion of the three elements of the word autobiography: *autos* (self), *bios* (life), and *graphè* (writing). From the interrelationship of these three elements of autobiography has come a number of neologisms for autobiography such as life-writing and self-writing, or autography.⁴ But what we can see from these different attempts to label and define autobiography is precisely that it refuses definition. If one proposes to call autobiography "life-writing," the problem is that the idea of the self is omitted. Likewise, in proposing to call autobiography self-writing, the notion of the life is omitted.

Since the early seventies, when both Lejeune and Olney began working on autobiography, more elaborate – although not necessarily better – definitions, distinctions and terminology have evolved, such as the distinctions made between the author and the writer, the writer and the scribe (*scripteur*), and between the writer, scribe, narrator and protagonist.

The first distinction considers the author to be no more than the name on the title page, and it is this name which is related to publishing and legal issues such as copyrighting. The second distinction considers the writer as the person who has chosen writing as his or her professional occupation, and the scribe is the person who at a particular moment, puts pen to paper and engages in the creative process of producing a particular text. The third distinction incorporates the second and distinguishes between the career-writer, the scribe putting pen to paper, the narrator or narrating voice, and the protagonist who is the hero of the story.

In a work of fiction, this distinction between the writer and narrator, or even between the scribe and narrator, is quite easily understood. One can understand that the narrator, or what Gérard Genette calls the “narrative attitude” adopted by the scribe, is not the same person with the same beliefs and outlook as the scribe. In fact, Genette cites two problems with how narrative is evaluated:

. . . d’un côté, on réduit les questions de l’énonciation narrative à celles du “point de vue”; de l’autre, on identifie l’instance narrative à l’instance d’“écriture,” le narrateur à l’auteur et le destinataire du récit au lecteur de l’oeuvre. Confusion peut-être légitime dans le cas d’un récit historique ou d’une autobiographie réelle, mais non lorsqu’il s’agit d’un récit de fiction, où le narrateur est lui-même un rôle fictif, fût-il directement assumé par l’auteur, et où la situation narrative supposée peut être fort différente de l’acte d’écriture (ou de dictée) qui s’y réfère (226)

In Genette’s theory of narrative, the scribe and the reader are both extradiegetic, in that they are not and cannot be characters within the narrative. Each performs his or her function in the moment of encounter with the text but neither is part of the narrative. Once the scribe has finished writing and the text is in the hands of the publisher and eventually the reader, the text is, by extension, out of the scribe’s hands. The narrator, on the other hand, always remains a part of the text, as the voice who presents the narrative. What we find in Khatibi’s autobiography, however, are traces of the scribe who interrupts the narrative and comments

upon the physical act of writing in which he is currently engaged. In this sense, even though his physical function or activity is complete, his presence remains in perpetuity because of his interruption in the narrative.

The distinction that Genette makes in the above citation between historical and autobiographical narratives and narratives of fiction is extremely important. By stating that the confusion between narrator and author, and between *destinataire* and reader, is *perhaps* legitimate in historical or autobiographical narratives, Genette provides an interesting insight into the understanding of autobiography. My own thinking about the distinction between author, narrator, scribe and protagonist in autobiography has led me to conclude that perhaps the only thing that is a necessary but not exclusive element of autobiography is a collapse between the scribe and the narrator. This is not to say that the narrator and scribe are the same person or that they are identical. This idea can perhaps best be understood in the context of Genette's comment cited above and with respect to his idea that the narrator is really a "narrative attitude." However, for purposes of simplicity and clarification throughout this study, I will distinctly use the terms protagonist, narrator, and writer to refer to, respectively: Abdelkebir, the child or adolescent, who is the hero of the story; the narrator is the voice – or "narrative attitude" of the writer – telling the story of young Abdelkebir; and the writer is Abdelkebir Khatibi, or simply Khatibi, the Moroccan sociologist, career-writer, and intellectual.

Amidst the wave of interest in autobiography and the multiple efforts to describe and define it, Michel Beaujour, in Miroirs d'encre, developed a distinction between autobiography and autoportraiture. According to Paul John Eakin, Beaujour found a contradiction in Lejeune's work. First, Lejeune emphasized that autobiography was a retrospective narrative,

but he later praised Michel Leiris for subverting the importance of chronology. Lejeune also praised Jean-Paul Sartre for “having grasped . . . that the *structure* of a narrative . . . could serve as a primary mode of self-representation” (Eakin, foreword xii). Beaujour therefore proposed the idea of *autoportraiture* as a concept of self-writing that is indicated by a thematic as opposed to a temporal structure. The *autoportrait*, according to Beaujour, is a text whose “principale apparence est celle du discontinu, de la juxtaposition anachronique, du montage, qui s’oppose à la syntagmatique d’une narration . . . La totalisation de l’*autoportrait* n’est pas donnée d’avance” (9). Beaujour’s definition of *autoportrait* dispenses with the concept of the lived, historical life, and with the idea of retrospection. From this, we can see that his definition of *autoportraiture* and its distinction from autobiography is based on Lejeune’s definition of autobiography. While Beaujour’s proposal is intriguing, it belies a narrow, prescriptive definition of autobiography. On the other hand, if one has a less categorical and exclusive idea of autobiography, more in line perhaps with Olney’s understanding of autobiography, then the distinction Beaujour makes between autobiography and *autoportraiture* becomes wholly unnecessary.

The problems in defining autobiography are not limited to the word alone; there are related questions of the roles of fact and fiction, writing as representation versus creation, and the ever-problematic understanding of the autobiographical self. In his address at a recent conference, Jerome Bruner made a comment about the self that is similar to Olney’s idea about the difficulty of defining autobiography. Bruner said that even though we all seem to know what the self is, when we are asked to define it, we can most often do no more than display a puzzled expression, shrug our shoulders and meekly point to ourselves. Bruner’s comment also applies to the criticism of autobiography; while many studies address writing

and the concept of life in autobiography, the interrogation of the autobiographical subject is what seems to trouble critics the most.

My research on autobiography for this project has led me to agree with Olney and to conclude that a definition of autobiography is impossible. Therefore, the most I am willing to offer in terms of a definition of autobiography is the word itself. Autobiography involves the self, life, and writing, and each of these terms is, in its own way, problematic. Another reason for which I resist defining autobiography is that the autobiography that is the focus of this study questions the very genre to which it claims to belong.⁵ It is precisely because Khatibi's autobiography questions traditional assumptions about and definitions of autobiography that I will not impose a definition on this text. I think it wiser to see what the text itself has to say about its own status as autobiography.

This autobiography, like all of Khatibi's texts, addresses a great number of cultural, philosophical, and linguistic concerns, often resulting in a *mélange* of both content and form. I will not, therefore, attempt to "read" Khatibi's autobiography or his other texts by or through a particular school of thought. A strictly postcolonial perspective may fail to consider the very important formal and stylistic elements of Khatibi's work. A psychoanalytic approach may leave out some important socio-historical elements. A formalist approach may treat the text as art at the expense of the very message it puts forth. In the introduction to Paul de Man's Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, Wlad Godzich maintains that "the practice of any methodological approach can be self-governing, whereas the question of the necessity of methodology raises the issue of what reading is" (xix). As explained earlier, critical studies on autobiography have come to focus on the reader and his or her interaction with the autobiographical text. However, at the same time, critics

still approach texts with a view to apply a particular theory or methodology, to interpret a particular text from a particular perspective. That the reader approaches a text with certain ideas about what writing, art, literature, and reading mean is an inescapable element of reading. The danger, however, is that this can lead to tunnel vision on the part of the critic, closing off avenues to be explored only because they do not fit with the model the reader has in mind. I therefore believe that the best approach to Khatibi's autobiography and to his other texts is one that is open, eclectic, and ever-mindful of the importance of reading and intertextuality in Khatibi's work. In this study, I will consider theories of autobiography, linguistics, narratology, semiotics, and postcolonial or cultural studies as they relate to this text. This critical *bricolage* is my attempt to avoid placing limitations on such a rich text; the criticism and theory used in this study are used either because of their direct relationship to points made in the text itself, or because they address questions of what it means to read and to interact with a text. The autobiography, then, will speak for itself and will tell us about itself as autobiography, about its self, life and writing.

But why autobiography? Why North African autobiography? Why Abdelkebir Khatibi? James Goodwin has noted that "[a]utobiography has made significant contributions to social history and political thought, for it offers to individuals otherwise excluded from the spheres of political representation and publication the opportunity to address the public in their own voices" (18). Many writers from under-represented groups choose to begin their writing careers with autobiography. This is certainly true in North Africa, where writers have felt a need to explain the very fact of their human existence to a powerful and condescending colonial Other. As Frantz Fanon states in The Wretched of the Earth, "Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person

all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: ‘In reality, who am I?’”⁶ The question “Who am I?” is a natural question, but what Fanon demonstrates here is that this question takes on a sense of urgency because of the colonial system of colonization, acculturation and assimilation. As members of groups who have been colonized and oppressed, North African writers feel compelled to share their stories of exclusion and alienation, in which the question “Who am I?” is simultaneously the question “Who are we?” The interesting twist, of course, is that they tell these stories in the language of the colonizer, appropriating it for their own purposes.

Autobiography, then, is a common form of literary expression among North African writers, even if it is presented as fiction by the writers themselves or by the French publishing firms. There is another reason for looking at North African autobiography. Most historians of autobiography consider Saint-Augustine, born in what is now Algeria, to be the first autobiographer. So in addition to a personal interest in this particular author and autobiography, I thought it might be interesting to “return” – if we can say such a thing – to North Africa to look at contemporary autobiography from this region. Of course, there are critical distinctions to be made between contemporary North African autobiography and Saint-Augustine, especially differences of language, era, and religion. But the common geographical fact of belonging to southern Mediterranean cultures is really too tempting to ignore.

Another historical fact that cannot be ignored is the influence of Arabo-Islamic culture on contemporary North African literature. This is especially striking with respect to autobiography which, in the Arabic literary tradition, was intended to be read as part of a larger body of work produced by the same scholar. Some scholars wrote their

autobiographies in order to “speak of God’s bounty,” while others wrote autobiographies in order to eliminate errors in biographies written about them by others (Reynolds et al. 59-68). This is an interesting twist to the Western idea that biography, as a third person and therefore more “objective” account, is more reliable than autobiography, a first person “subjective” account. In the Arabic literary tradition, the reverse is true: “The judgment that an autobiography is a more reliable account than a biography fits quite closely with the structure of Islamic historiography and religious sciences in general, where eyewitness accounts were carefully transmitted for centuries in both oral and written form” (Reynolds et al. 68). The status of the *hadith*, or sayings of the Prophet, are directly dependent on the reliability of first-person eyewitness testimony. In cases where the Qur’an does not address a particular problem, religious scholars turn to the *hadith* for guidance, because Muhammad, as the last and greatest prophet of God, is the supreme role model and is to be emulated by all Muslims. Autobiography then, in the Arabic tradition, carries the weight of first-person eyewitness testimony. However, the problem of one’s ability to witness *oneself* and to offer testimony about *oneself* with any degree of accuracy, honesty or faithfulness remains problematic, as we shall see in the discussion in Chapter One.

So then, why treat autobiography and why study this text and this author? It is certainly not with an eye to determine the accuracy of the autobiography, nor to attempt to define autobiography through the study of one text. On the contrary, this text formulates more questions than it answers and this is why I have chosen to study it and its relationship to Khatibi’s other texts, as well as its relationship to the larger fields of Francophone literature and other artistic practices. Furthermore, Khatibi has become an important intellectual figure not just in terms of North African Francophone studies, but also as one of the members of a

particular generation of French-speaking intellectuals whose influence is felt not only in France and throughout the Francophone world, but also in American academia.

Abdelkebir Khatibi was born in the coastal town of El Jadida, Morocco, in 1938, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Although most likely too young to remember many of the particular events of what he describes as “la guerre des autres,”⁷ Khatibi seems marked by the horror and uncertainty of a world at war. In addition, he was born in a colonized country, Morocco having become a protected territory of France in 1912. So while Khatibi seems to suffer from the same angst as many intellectuals of his generation throughout the world, the general sentiment of insecurity and uncertainty about oneself and one’s place in the world is compounded by colonialism. Having grown up in an environment of contrasts and tensions between two cultures and two modes of seeing the world, Khatibi turns to literature, sociology, and philosophy in an effort to make sense of his world and where he fits in that world.

As a child, Khatibi attended Qur’anic school, and then entered the French educational system. Upon completing his secondary studies, he moved to France to pursue university studies, eventually earning a doctorate in sociology. He returned to Morocco and participated in the group which published the review Souffles (1966-71), and embarked on his career as a teacher, scholar, and writer. He traveled frequently to other countries, participating in various conferences and colloquia. He has published more than a dozen books and many essays which cross generic boundaries and include autobiography, novel, drama, poetry, literary criticism, art criticism and, of course, sociology. He is now one of the most well-known North African writers and thinkers of his generation, and is currently a professor at the Université Mohamed V in Rabat, Morocco.

It is important to situate Khatibi and his work in their historical and intellectual context, that of France in the middle of the twentieth century, particularly during the fifties and sixties. This was a period of time during which the intellectuals who have now come to be associated with poststructuralism were finding their own intellectual path amidst the dominant academic and philosophical trends of existentialism and structuralism. A common theme, for example, among Khatibi, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu, and A.J. Greimas, is the re-evaluation of binarisms and dialectical thinking. But for Khatibi and other North African writers and intellectuals studying in France, this struggle between two predominant modes of thinking was compounded by their own struggles with tradition, heritage, and identity brought on by the French colonization of North Africa. Because of this, Khatibi's texts are difficult to classify with respect to a particular field of study or with respect to generic categories of literature. His most well-known texts are probably the "novels" Amour bilingue and Le Livre du sang, his autobiography La Mémoire tatouée, and collections of essays such as Maghreb pluriel and La Blessure du nom propre. However, there are lesser-known texts which are just as valuable, such as the collection of poems Le Lutteur de classe à la manière taoïste, and the play Le Prophète voilé. Khatibi has even published critical texts on Moroccan painting and rugs, as well as an interesting analysis of Islamic calligraphy which, in its English translation, includes beautiful reproductions of calligraphy from throughout the Arabic-speaking world.

Although there are some interesting essays which treat Khatibi's autobiography, most of the scholarly work done on Khatibi's texts focuses on his later publications, especially Maghreb pluriel and Amour bilingue. Criticism on these texts tends to fall into two categories: those which focus on postcolonial studies, and those which approach the texts

from a formalist stance. The studies which have addressed the autobiography also seem to fall into these categories, with very few studies considering the autobiography as it relates to other autobiographies and to current theory and criticism on autobiography. Another weakness in the body of critical work on Khatibi's writings is that many of the essays are just that: articles in scholarly journals. Even though the quality of some of this work is outstanding,⁸ there is a lack of in-depth study of Khatibi's work, and this is especially the case with his autobiography. Khatibi is hyper-aware of questions of language and representation and that is one of the reasons why an analysis of his autobiography is both intriguing and fruitful. This dissertation is an effort to add an in-depth study to the body of critical work on Khatibi, and to enrich the criticism of autobiography by including an author who is a comparative newcomer to the autobiographical scene.

Chapter One of this study will consider the ways in which Khatibi's autobiography, La Mémoire tatouée: Autobiographie d'un décolonisé, challenges our understanding of autobiography. In this chapter, I evaluate how Khatibi's text interrogates notions of self, life and writing in autobiography and, therefore, how the text comes to problematize its very status as autobiography. The discussion in this chapter begins with Lejeune's definition of autobiography and the ways in which La Mémoire tatouée do not fit either Lejeune's definition or traditional expectations of autobiography. This is evaluated in the context of form, the unity of the autobiographical subject, the representation of the whole life in the autobiographical text, and problems associated with accuracy and memory in autobiography.

The intertextuality of and in Khatibi's autobiography is a theme throughout this project. In a discussion of the Anglo-Irish literary and autobiographical tradition, Olney explains that we can consider autobiography as intertextual in three ways: the relationship

between the writer's life, as a text, and his or her autobiography; the relationship between a particular autobiography and autobiographies by other writers of the same group; and the relationship between a particular autobiography and other texts by the same writer ("On the Nature of Autobiography" 115).

Chapters Two and Three of this study consider Khatibi's autobiography with respect to this idea of intertextuality. In Chapter One I show that the challenges to autobiography presented by Khatibi's text lead one to understand that the story of this autobiography is not simply a story of young Abdelkebir's childhood. This autobiography tells the story of *becoming* – how young Abdelkebir comes to be Khatibi, the writer, as he is in the present moment of writing. Chapter Two continues with this idea and focuses on Abdelkebir's coming to be a writer, and part of this story of coming to be a writer is Abdelkebir's history as a reader. From the texts he reads in school, to compositions assigned by teachers, to his endeavors at creative writing, and finally to the reference to his own previous publication, Le roman maghrébin.

But the intertextuality and story of writing does not end with the autobiography. In the autobiography itself, the narrator proposes topics for future texts, and indeed, Khatibi continues to write and publish a great deal after the autobiography. Chapter Three, then, is a reading of the relationship, the intertextuality, between Khatibi's autobiography and his future – with respect to the autobiography – texts. What I show in this chapter is that some of the concepts for which Khatibi is now quite well-known are ideas that are already present in the autobiography and are taken up again, elaborated upon, and re-presented in his other texts. In this sense, Khatibi's autobiography can be seen as a prelude or preface to his life's work.

And taking the idea a step further, we can say that Khatibi's autobiography, La Mémoire tatouée, functions as an introduction to his real autobiography which is his life's work.

The references to music throughout all of Khatibi's texts are now reconsidered, and we can see that the intertextuality between the autobiography and Khatibi's other texts functions in much the same way as a fugal arrangement in music. The autobiography is the exposition of the themes, and the other texts are variations on those themes. Khatibi's expressed affinity for jazz also begins to make sense in that it is the musical equivalent of his concepts of *pensée-autre*, *double critique*, *bi-langue*, and *intersémiotique*. Jazz is the grand success story of these concepts that Khatibi proposes in order to re-think difference and to spur literary and artistic innovation in North African literature.

The title of this study, Prelude to a Text: The Autobiography of Abdelkebir Khatibi, was chosen to reflect the references to music in Khatibi's autobiography and the importance of intertextuality in Khatibi's life's work. Music provides a structure to the text but it is also important in terms of both sound and rhythm, in terms of musicians' willingness to experiment, and in terms of the relationship between the language of music and the language of literature. This relationship will be evaluated with respect to Khatibi's concept of *intersémiotique* and as it relates to the notion of intertextuality – music being a predominantly aural text and literature being a predominantly written text.

My emphasis on the word text is also related to intertextuality in that a text is not a finished product, closed off to meaning and interpretation. My concept of text is heavily dependent on Barthes' distinction between "work" and "text" and is similar to what Greimas calls a "semiotic object." It is in the *reading*, in the viewer's or reader's interaction with the text, that signification takes place. The relationship between texts, the intertext, enhances the

reading experience by opening up avenues for the reader to explore. Just as Arabic autobiographies were intended to be read in conjunction with the author's other texts, so we should read Khatibi's autobiography *intertextually*, considering its participation in Khatibi's Text, which is his life's work. Seen in this light, and bearing in mind that Khatibi's autobiography was published toward the beginning of his career, we can see that the ways in which this autobiography relates to other "texts" make it an introduction to his life's work: a prelude to a Text.

End Notes

¹ James Olney, ed. Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980). Many of the essays on autobiography to which I will refer are found in this text. I believe it is the best source for criticism and theory on autobiography and that is why I cite it so frequently.

² Philippe Lejeune, Autobiographie en France (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971); Lire Leiris, autobiographie et langage (Paris: Klincksieck, 1975); Le pacte autobiographique (Paris: Seuil, 1975); and Je est un autre, l'autobiographie de la littérature aux médias (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

³ Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001). This study was edited by Dwight F. Reynolds and co-authored by Kristen E. Brustad, Michael Cooperson, James J. Elias, Nuha N.N. Khoury, Joseph E. Lowry, Nasser Rabbat, Dwight F. Reynolds, Devin Stewart, and Shawkat M. Toorawa. Future references to this text will be parenthetical and attributed to Reynolds et al.

⁴ H. Porter Abbott, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories," New Literary History 19 (1987-88): 597-615.

⁵ Indeed, Paul de Man suggests that autobiography should not even be considered a genre: "Empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm" "Autobiography as De-Facement," Modern Language Notes 94.5 (1979): 920.

⁶ Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove/Présence Africaine, 1963) 250. Originally published as Les damnés de la terre (Paris: Maspero, 1961). References to Fanon were added toward the end of this project, at which time the only edition available to me was the English translation. The same is true of Fanon's L'An V de la révolution algérienne (Paris: Maspero, 1959), translated as A Dying

Colonialism, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove/Monthly Review P, 1965). Future references to these texts will be parenthetical and abbreviated WE and ADC, respectively.

⁷ Abdelkebir Khatibi, La Mémoire tatouée: Autobiographie d'un décolonisé (Paris: Denoël, 1971) 10. In Chapters Two and Three, parenthetical references to this text will be abbreviated MT.

⁸ In my opinion, Eric Sellin and Réda Bensmaïa have produced the best critical work on Khatibi's texts, but neither of them has produced a lengthy study of Khatibi's autobiography.

CHAPTER ONE: EST-CE POSSIBLE LE PORTRAIT D'UN ENFANT?

Introduction

Abdelkebir Khatibi's autobiography La Mémoire tatouée performs a curiously double function with respect to the study of autobiography. While it announces itself as an autobiography on the title page, it also calls into question our very concept of what autobiography is. This paradox raises two questions to bear in mind throughout the discussion in this chapter. First, what does this autobiography tell us about autobiography and about its own status as autobiography? Second, why does this autobiography problematize the very genre to which it claims to belong?

In an effort to understand how Khatibi's autobiography challenges traditional assumptions about autobiography, let us begin with Lejeune's definition of autobiography to see just what assumptions we make when approaching an autobiography. In Le pacte autobiographique, Lejeune revises his prior definition of autobiography put forth in L'Autobiographie en France to arrive at the following: Autobiography is a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality."¹ The critical position Lejeune assumes as a reader of autobiography demonstrates a generalized concern in literary studies about authority over the text, and criticism has gradually turned away from what the author intended to say and moved toward focusing on what the text itself tells us. In this respect, Lejeune's work on autobiography as textual criticism from the perspective of the reader is invaluable. However, I find two weaknesses in Lejeune's approach: first, his attempt to define autobiography and distinguish it from memoirs, journals, novel, fiction, and biography results in the imposition of what I consider rather strict limitations on autobiography; second,

the definition itself is based on Lejeune's own assumptions and historical experiences of reading autobiography. These assumptions, in turn, have come to be taken as authoritative and definitive due to Lejeune's influence and standing in the field of critical studies of autobiography.

Lejeune's lengthy explanation of the different elements of his definition softens the dogmatic tone of the definition itself. He admits that the characteristics of narrative, prose, retrospection, and individuality may vary from one autobiography to the next, and that the differences in each of these characteristics may be only a question of degree. But despite Lejeune's best efforts to broaden his definition and allow for a certain degree of variety from one autobiography to the next, his definition still betrays a reliance on traditional assumptions made by readers when they approach an autobiography. Foremost of these is that an autobiography is the biography of the author written by himself or herself,² or in Lejeune's words, that it is a form of writing "written by a real person concerning his own existence." The very presence of such words as "real" and "existence" reveals yet another common assumption about autobiography – that it is an accurate representation of the writer's life. Indeed, the reader's desire for verisimilitude plays a fundamental role in the reception of autobiography.³

These questions of accuracy, representation and verisimilitude are inextricably linked to the idea that autobiography is, above all, a narrative. Defining autobiography as narrative is not, in and of itself, problematic; one could – and perhaps should – say that autobiography is nothing but narrative, in that any attempt to recount episodes of the past is an event of creation in language and necessitates a narrator who always approaches the story with a particular point of view. In this sense, narrative is not truth; it is first and foremost the

presentation of an event from a particular point of view. In other words, there is no such thing as an objective or unbiased narrative. It is the ability to narrate – the ability to signify and to order our life experiences – that sets us apart from other animals. David Rubin recently made an interesting comment about the differences between language, memory, and narrative: If one loses speech, it is termed aphasia; if one loses memory, it is called amnesia; but what do we call the loss of narrative? *Dementia*.⁴ The loss of narrative is the loss of the ability to recreate, in language, events and experiences; without narrative, communication has neither signification nor order, and is therefore a lack of communication. While narrative is a universal human quality, the process of narrating is contextual, and the forms and methods one employs are related to (but not necessarily subordinate to) specific social, historical, cultural, and artistic conventions and expectations.

With respect to autobiography, Avrom Fleishman points out that “one does not sit down to write an autobiography without a narrative language in which to compose the sentences of one’s life story” (471). Autobiography, then, is narrative in that it signifies and it orders. Following Roland Barthes’ suggestion that “to write” is better seen as an intransitive verb, I suggest that we might also do well to consider “to narrate” an intransitive verb: one narrates, that is one signifies and one orders, and the question of *what* one signifies or orders is perhaps less important than the activity itself. And it is precisely this “what” that leads critics and students of autobiography to develop new terminology and new definitions for an activity which resists limitations. What is problematic in Lejeune’s definition is that autobiography is seen to be a prose narrative. The only thing that leads one to this assumption is one’s historical experience with autobiography: most autobiographies are prose narrative.

But this does not mean that they must be; there is nothing inherently prosodic about autobiography.⁵

Lejeune's definition of autobiography brings up two other troubling concepts, those of individuality and retrospection. Because Lejeune's focus is on Western autobiography, the importance of the self as an individual is paramount. Indeed, many critics have noticed this near obsession with the individual both in autobiography and in the criticism of autobiography.⁶ However, one must indeed wonder about the status of autobiography in cultures which are less preoccupied with a notion of the self as an individual and more concerned with the self as a member of a community. The recent study cited earlier of the Arabic autobiographical tradition, for example, indicates that a different conception of self as well as different ideas about what constitutes "the story of one's personality" do not preclude such texts from being autobiography.

The final problematic element of Lejeune's definition, that autobiography is a retrospective narrative, is again based on historical experience. It is this idea of retrospection which allows Lejeune to make the distinction between autobiography and personal journal. But the difference between these two, as Lejeune rightly points out, is one of degree. Journal writing also requires retrospection, but the past in the journal is typically closer to the present than is the past in autobiography. But retrospection is not a necessary condition of autobiography, as Olney has pointed out in his elaboration of three conceptions of *bios*. Olney offers four alternatives to the understanding of "life" in autobiography as the individual, historical, lived life: "the vital impulse – the impulse of life"; "consciousness, pure and simple"; "participation in an absolute existence"; and "the moral tenor of the individual's being."⁷

The individual elements of Lejeune's definition of autobiography reveal that the definition itself is based on assumptions about autobiography which are, in turn, based on our historical experience with autobiography. Because most autobiographies are retrospective prose narratives, Lejeune concludes that this must be part of what defines autobiography. Because most autobiographies are written by real people and are concerned with individual, personal existence, Lejeune concludes that this also must be a condition or defining characteristic of autobiography. Many autobiographies, of course, challenge Lejeune's conclusions and definition, even autobiographies in France which were the focus of his first study.⁸

Khatibi's autobiography, by virtue of its circulation in and around French literature – belonging to French literature by language yet remaining in the margin as “post-colonial” or North African literature – is at an excellent vantage point from which to challenge Lejeune's definition of autobiography. In the discussion which follows we will evaluate how Khatibi's autobiography problematizes Lejeune's definition, as well as our assumptions about autobiography and the expectations we bring to the experience of reading autobiography. We will focus on Lejeune's ideas of retrospection, verisimilitude, and the unified autobiographical subject. In addition, we will also evaluate how Khatibi's autobiography challenges our belief that autobiography is an account of a whole life, in terms of both life-span and a complete account of one's life experiences, as well as how this autobiography challenges our expectations as to form.

Form and Innovation

As Lejeune indicates, most autobiographies are prose narratives and follow a linear, chronological progression of time, beginning with birth and ending at or near the moment of

writing. But this is not a necessary condition of autobiography; it is a description of autobiography as it has existed in the West, and particularly in France. In the Arabic autobiographical tradition, autobiographies were often appended to other works or written separately and later published in conjunction with other works by the same author.⁹ These autobiographies were intended to be read as part of the body of work produced by a particular individual, most often a religious scholar. The fact that autobiography in the Arabic literary tradition involves a significant amount of genre-mixing leads to a lack of formal limits or constraints on what autobiography is or what it should be. Furthermore, there are different varieties of Arabic biography, two of which developed a corresponding autobiographical form: the *sira* and the *tarjama*.¹⁰ Reynolds et al. maintain that even well-known critics such as Edward Said, Stephen Humphreys, and Albert Hourani are guilty of assuming that there is a lack of tradition of Arabic autobiography (26). Reynolds et al. further suggest that the Western tradition of autobiography is that of “individual texts describing ‘types’ rather than a type of text describing individuals,” and that “[t]his construction is based on a model so steeped in a particular modern western conception of biography and autobiography that scholars are unable to address effectively an auto/biographical tradition possessed of different literary conventions” (29).

It is precisely this question of literary conventions that is at the heart of generic criticism and discussion on autobiography, and this is particularly evident in both Lejeune’s and Olney’s work on autobiography. Both scholars, each in his separate way, want to carve out a niche for autobiography and establish it as a particular literary creature that deserves the same respect and attention as other modes of literary and artistic discourse. Lejeune’s attempts to define autobiography result more in statements of what it is not, than in statements

of what it is; Olney, on the other hand, is so open in his consideration of autobiography that virtually everything counts, provided that one not expect complete historical accuracy as has come to be expected from biography. It is important to consider both Western and Arabic traditions in this study of Khatibi's autobiography because Khatibi's thought and his work are informed by these traditions. First, one must consider the ways in which the two traditions treat autobiography as a particular kind of literary production and, second, one should also consider the criticism on autobiography related to these different traditions.

The influence of these two traditions on Khatibi's work, combined with a consideration of the cultural and historical context in which the autobiography was produced, result in an acknowledgment of and appreciation for formal and stylistic variations in Khatibi's autobiography. Instead of simply following the traditional Western model of autobiography as a chronological and retrospective account, and instead of simply following a slightly less personalized form seen in the Arabic tradition, Khatibi also looks to other kinds of artistic production to provide him with possibilities for formal and stylistic innovations. For example, Khatibi's autobiography is structured more like a musical composition than a traditional autobiography, and the vocabulary in the titles of the sections and chapters reinforces this veiled reference to music. There are two main sections in the autobiography, "Série hasardeuse I" and "Série hasardeuse II." In the first "Série" there are seven chapters:¹¹ "La mémoire tatouée", "Deux villes parallèles", "Ainsi tourne la culture", "Adolescence à Marrakech", "Le corps et les mots", "Par gestes décrochés", "Rive gauche". In the second "Série" there are three chapters: "Fugue sur la différence (sauvage)",¹² "Variation sur la différence", "Double contre double (Dialogue)".¹³ The titles of the chapters indicate the strangeness of this autobiography. Perhaps the only title which seems as if it could appear in

a traditional autobiography is “Adolescence à Marrakech.” At first glance, the chapter titles do not seem to follow any kind of logical progression; they disorient the reader by defamiliarizing the structure of the text. Instead of relying solely on a linear progression of time to structure the autobiography, Khatibi employs what we might call a thematic or unit-based structure which, in a very general sense, progresses chronologically.

The abundance of musical terminology in the section and chapter titles further points to the rather unconventional form of the autobiography. *Série, parallèle, fugue, variation, dialogue*, and *double* are all terms used in musical composition. The arrangement of the chapters into two *séries* is also indicative of the changes in musical composition in the twentieth century: from the rather simple seven-note scale (the number of chapters in the first section of the autobiography), composers moved to the use of the tri-tone (the number of chapters in the second section of the autobiography) and the dodecaphonic or twelve-note scale (the total number of chapters and sections in the autobiography).¹⁴ This culminated in the advent of atonal music, and particularly the compositions of Wagner, Schoenberg and Stravinsky.¹⁵

The changes in Western classical music in the twentieth century reveal a desire to be imaginative and creative, to expand the boundaries of possibility in music. In Khatibi's autobiography, the seemingly passing mention of Beethoven, Wagner, and jazz musicians such as vocalist Billie Holliday and saxophonist John Coltrane demonstrates Khatibi's awareness of and appreciation for innovation in music. And like many young people of his generation, he was especially taken with jazz. In an interview with I.C. Tcheco, Khatibi himself points to this link:

Je m'attèle aux possibilités de travail sur le mouvement de la phrase. C'est quelque chose qui, dans mon esprit, a rapport d'ailleurs avec la carte sensible

de l'Afrique qui, entre autre, se situe dans la musique. . . . Le démêlé avec le texte, chez moi, passe aussi par le jazz. J'ai écrit La Mémoire tatouée en écoutant de temps en temps la musique de jazz d'un Noir américain. Je travaille sur le rythme, sur le chant intérieur de la langue.¹⁶

Khatibi's appreciation for jazz may also be due to the fact that it is a successful fusion of different cultural influences: Western classical music, Spanish or Latin music, and African music.¹⁷ Khatibi's appreciation for innovation in music reflects his own desire for artistic innovation in North African literature. His autobiography, by its very strangeness and refusal to conform to traditional expectations of autobiography, is an example of how one can be innovative with both form and content. Perhaps two of the best examples of innovation in North African literature are the Algerian writer, Kateb Yacine, with his "autobiographie au pluriel" in Nedjma, and his "oeuvre en fragments,"¹⁸ and the Moroccan writer, Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, with his rather Faulknerian, surrealist style.¹⁹ The narrator mentions Kateb in Khatibi's autobiography, thanking Kateb for helping him find his roots, so to speak: "Je fus reconnaissant à Kateb – notre meilleur écrivain – de susciter en moi un encerclement mythique, ce contre quoi toute histoire s'effiloche. Nedjma, merveilleuse incandescence! Avec ce poète errant, j'ai réappris ma rue d'enfance et son énigme, l'égarement des souvenirs quand me harcelait la guerre" (127). Khatibi and Khaïr-Eddine both published essays and poetry in Souffles, a review which was very much focused on poetic and literary innovation as a kind of decolonizing gesture.²⁰

The writers who contributed to Souffles were all profoundly influenced by colonialism, decolonization, negritude, Marxism, and the seeds of what would come to be known as post-structuralism. Indeed, the focus of the review was directly related to the contributors' knowledge of world events such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and African nations' struggle for independence, and knowledge of political movements and leaders such

as Ché Guevara and Patrice Lumumba. The focus of the review evolved with time and this change is evident not only in the content of the articles, but even in the modifications of the review's self-description. What began as a literature and poetry review became "Revue maghrébine littéraire culturelle trimestrielle" and, beginning with the double issue 16-17 (1970), it became "Revue culturelle arabe du Maghreb," a review much more focused on social and political *engagement* and action than on poetry and art. This last title may seem odd, given that the majority of the issues were still written in French, and this is a fact that the *comité d'action* and the contributors discuss many times in the review itself. Khatibi, Khair-Eddine, and Abdellatif Laâbi, another Moroccan writer and the founder of Souffles, were all Francophone writers who displayed an ambivalence toward their creative activities in French.

Frantz Fanon explicitly addresses this question of continuing to write in the colonizer's language in The Wretched of the Earth, and he is especially critical of intellectuals who attempt to "put their mark on" the language or system of the colonizer:

At the very moment when the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work he fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country. He contents himself with stamping these instruments with a hallmark which he wishes to be national, but which is strangely reminiscent of exoticism. The native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner. (223)

There is a clear contradiction in Fanon's thought here: he criticizes intellectuals' use of the French language, even if they appropriate it for their own subversive or revolutionary purposes, and yet he applauds the use of French technology (the radio) and the French language on the revolutionaries' "Voice of Algeria" radio broadcasts. Fanon's extreme Marxist ideals and his own ambivalence about his role as a foreign – albeit colonized – intellectual lead him to accept in the "peasantry" what he refuses to accept among the

“intellectuals.” He refuses to see the subversive nature of the very act of writing in French as appropriating and transforming the language and the established artistic systems of the colonizer.

Although Fanon’s description of intellectual activity during colonization and decolonization appears to have clear parallels to the activity of the intellectuals involved with Souffles, there is one very important distinction which must be brought to light. These writers were fully aware of their use of the language of the colonizer and of all the underlying cultural and imperial implications of their decision to continue to use French. So while they clearly were bothered by what some considered the hypocrisy of continuing to write in the language of the colonizer, they hoped that by recognizing, understanding, and evaluating French as the language of the colonizer and that by continuing to use this dominant mode of expression, as well as their own intellectual and philosophical heritage, they could bring a kind of novelty to literature published in French by the fact of their “belonging” to a different culture. Khatibi’s autobiography is but one example of this kind of novelty so desired and sought after by this generation of North African writers. And it is a particularly effective example of the use of two systems of thought because despite his resentment and anger toward the colonizer, the narrator performs a kind of intellectual *bricolage*, using any parts of his mixed heritage which seem appropriate to him at that moment – much like jazz musicians whose repertoire includes African, Classical European, and Latin or Spanish influences.

Perhaps the most innovative part of Khatibi’s autobiography is the last chapter of the second section, “Double contre double (Dialogue).” It is a kind of *mini-théâtre* with three scenes, two characters and stage directions. One does not expect to find theater in autobiography and yet it is an effective demonstration of some of the themes developed

throughout the autobiography, particularly identity and difference, construction and re-creation of the self, and direct engagement with the reader. In fact, Nkashama Pius Ngandu suggests that Khatibi's autobiography is a "mise-en-scène du je."²¹ In the last chapter of the autobiography, character A says:

Tu penses me faire basculer dans un bout ou l'autre du noeud, je suis vivant, divisé de multiples façons. . . . Serions-nous capables d'en séparer la gamme ou la contradiction sans paralysie des signes? En vérité, il suffit de produire pour un temps quelques identités folles. . . . Que dirions-nous d'un théâtre sans acteurs? . . . nous concluons que la différence, comme l'identité, est un rythme et une danse douloureuse. (180)

Character A resists B's efforts to define and compartmentalize him, and A emphasizes the dynamic nature of his identity, itself divided and multiple in many ways. A's question, "Que dirions-nous d'un théâtre sans acteurs?", seems at first out of place amidst these comments about identity and difference. But in fact the narrator has already provided an answer to this question in his discussion of the play the protagonist wrote while studying in Paris: "J'appris auprès de Lavelli la manière de 'recréer' l'acteur, de le rendre transparent à toute fantaisie. . . . J'avais donc créé un nouveau théâtre où l'auteur, le metteur en scène et les personnages ne servaient plus à rien. Admirable technique pour détruire l'art et recréer la vie!" (132). According to the narrator then, "un théâtre sans acteurs" is the simultaneous destruction of art and the recreation of life. Life is, as Shakespeare says, like theater; it is a continual staging of events and characters, and humans are the actors who portray different roles in different scenes.

Khatibi's expressed fidelity to Brecht's principle of distancing, the narrator's mention of the play the protagonist wrote while a student in Paris, and the repeated references to staging and monologue all point to this autobiography as a kind of *nouveau théâtre* where the traditional roles of actor, character, narrator, and spectator are all transformed and turned

in on each other. Similarly, autobiography has traditional roles – those of the writer, narrator, protagonist, reader, etc. – whose limits and boundaries are stretched almost beyond recognition by Khatibi’s text. The final section of the autobiography is Khatibi’s adaptation of Brecht’s technique, where an actor ceases being an actor portraying a character and becomes a narrator speaking directly to the audience, thus breaking down the traditional established boundaries between actor and character, and actor and spectator.

Jean Starobinski has pointed out that it is difficult to speak of “a” style in autobiography because style can really only be considered at the level of the individual writer (73). Although there are moments in Khatibi’s autobiography in which one senses a collective concept of self, it is certainly in the structure and style of the autobiography that we sense that this is uniquely his individual story. Perhaps this is why Khatibi chose to begin his career with autobiography: it a custom-made medium in which he can interrogate identity and subjectivity, and it is also a medium with plenty of room for play in terms of style and form.²² The fact that this autobiography surprises us by its novelty and by the ways in which it does not meet our expectations makes it precisely the successful experimentation Khatibi hopes to achieve.

The Unified Autobiographical Subject

One of the effects of the innovation of this last chapter is that it forces us to reconsider our understanding of subjectivity in autobiography. Lejeune’s idea of the unified autobiographical subject is based on Benveniste’s concept of “l’unicité” of the subject. It is both interesting and appropriate here to consider that in Benveniste’s essay on the relationships of person in the (French) verb, he includes a discussion of the Arabic notions of first, second, and third persons: “Pour [les grammairiens arabes], la première personne est

al-mutakallimu, ‘celui qui parle’; la deuxième *al-muhatabu*, ‘celui à qui on s’adresse’; mais la troisième est *al-gha‘ibu*,²³ ‘celui qui est absent’” (228). According to Benveniste, what we call the “third person” should not really be considered in terms of “person” because it falls outside of the intersubjective “I-you” relationship. That “I” has meaning only in the moment of enunciation, that it has a specific referent at that moment and corresponds to an interlocutor “you” which also has a specific referent at that moment, these are all central to Benveniste’s discussions of language and subjectivity. In contrast, “il,” according to Benveniste, lacks the unique reference carried by “je” and “tu”: “. . . le ‘je’ qui énonce, le ‘tu’ auquel ‘je’ s’adresse sont chaque fois uniques. Mais ‘il’ peut être une infinité de sujets – ou aucun” (230). It is important to understand that Benveniste is speaking of only the moment of enunciation. For example, in the question, “He called me yesterday,” “me” corresponds to a specific referent – the speaker – and, by extension, incorporates an understanding of a specific “you” whom the speaker is addressing. But the subject pronoun “he” does not indicate a specific referent *in this moment of enunciation*. One need refer to a prior moment of enunciation to understand who “he” is, to understand to what person the subject pronoun “he” corresponds.

Lejeune is willing to accept Benveniste’s idea that “I” has meaning only in the moment of enunciation, as long as “he” can also be considered to have meaning only in the moment of enunciation. Lejeune is correct in criticizing Benveniste but for the wrong reason. Benveniste is consistent and clear in his emphasis on the moment of enunciation. However, what is truly problematic in Benveniste’s definition of “person,” and this is much like the Arab grammarians mentioned in his essay, is his underlying assumption that “person” equals “presence.” As a linguist, Benveniste’s analyses are focused more on speech than on writing, more on interpersonal or functional discourse than on literary discourse. Benveniste’s

definition of the intersubjective “I-you” relationship is based on the concept of presence in the creation of meaning. Jacques Derrida’s critique of Western thought as logocentric, as privileging the spoken word over the written word and relying therefore on a metaphysics of presence, is quite appropriate to Benveniste’s concept of person in language. Benveniste’s “I-you” relationship is one of presence: “I” and “you” are persons because “I” and “you” are present to each other. “He” or “she” cannot be considered a person because “he” or “she” is absent from, or outside of, the “I-you” dialogue: “Tout ce qui est hors de la personne stricte, c’est-à-dire hors du ‘je-tu,’ reçoit comme prédicat une forme verbale de la ‘troisième personne’ et n’en peut recevoir aucune autre” (231). The assumption on Benveniste’s part that “I” is present to “you” (and vice versa), and that “I” am present to myself and “my” voice is present to both “you” and “me,” is but one example in a long tradition of Western thought which places priority on presence and immediacy over absence and deferral. This is an important point to consider with respect to Khatibi’s autobiography and some of his other texts such as Amour bilingue, Le Livre du sang, and the play Le Prophète voilé, which all call into question our concepts of voice, subjectivity, and identity.

Khatibi’s interrogation of subjectivity is in direct contrast to Benveniste’s assertion that “[i]l est clair en effet que l’unicité et la subjectivité inhérentes à ‘je’ contredisent la possibilité d’une pluralisation” (233). For Benveniste, identity and subjectivity require unity and uniqueness, and Lejeune’s insistence on the “identicalness” (*identité*) of the autobiographical subject – that the author, narrator, and protagonist are identical – is an extension of Benveniste’s understanding of subjectivity. Neither is willing to contemplate the possibility of a plural or multiple “I,” and this is precisely where Khatibi’s autobiography comes into conflict with their theories. Even though Lejeune ultimately modifies his views of

prose, retrospection and verisimilitude, he stands firm when it comes to the unity of the author, narrator and protagonist: “Here, there is neither transition nor latitude. An identity is, or is not. It is impossible to speak of degrees, and all doubts lead to a negative conclusion. In order for there to be autobiography . . . the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical” (5, emphasis in original). Lejeune’s “identicalness” is therefore dependent on Benveniste’s concepts of *unicité*, *énonciation*, and *sujet énonçant*. The first, *unicité*, is evidenced by the signature, or the shared proper name of the author, narrator, and protagonist; the second is, of course, Benveniste’s idea that the subject pronoun “I” has meaning only in the moment of enunciation; and the third is that the “sujet énonçant” is an aggregate of the self, that it reflects a continuity of being. Khatibi’s autobiography problematizes these ideas about the unified autobiographical subject by its lack of a complete signature, its repeated distinction between the past “I” and the present “I,” and its theorizing of the self as a series of *dédoublements*. We will first consider the question of the signature and then evaluate Benveniste’s and Lejeune’s concepts of self and subjectivity in language with respect to their relationship to Khatibi’s autobiography.

Other than the announcement on the title page that a particular text is an autobiography, the most obvious indicator of autobiography is the presence of the proper name shared by the author, narrator and protagonist. The narrator of an autobiography may present this shared proper name in one of two ways: first, the narrator may present the protagonist’s name, and through the use of first person narration, signal that the narrator and protagonist are the same person;²⁴ second, the narrator may identify himself or herself as the bearer of the proper name.²⁵ In both cases, the proper name is the same as that of the author on the title page. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Confessions are an excellent and well-known

example of this kind of signature.²⁶ The name Jean-Jacques Rousseau appears on the title page, the narrator adopts the first person in the telling of the story, and the initial section in which Rousseau claims to present himself in full honesty solidifies the understanding that the proper name and the “I” refer to the author, narrator and protagonist.²⁷

In the case of Rousseau, Lejeune’s explanation of the signature as a fundamental characteristic of autobiography appears to fit nicely. But what if the signature is missing or incomplete? Does this affect our understanding or acceptance of a text as autobiography?²⁸ If we consider even a small sampling of other autobiographies, we will see that the signature is presented differently in different texts. For our purposes here, we will consider five kinds of signatures in North African autobiography and whether they fit with Lejeune’s definition of signature and the identicalness of the author, narrator and protagonist.

An example of a signed North African autobiography is Fadhma Amrouche’s Histoire de ma vie. Like Rousseau’s Confessions, Amrouche’s autobiography includes the author’s name on the title page, the use of first person narration, and even textual indications of the protagonist’s proper name. In this case, the signature seems to support the assumption that the “I” of the text refers to three distinct yet identical entities, all sharing the same proper name.

On the other end of the spectrum, contrary to the example of the signed autobiography, let us consider the possibility of an unsigned autobiography. Does such a thing exist? Can we imagine the case of an unsigned, anonymous autobiography? Lejeune, of course, would say no; in his schema, this would fall under the category of novel.²⁹ But there are two ways to conceive of such an unsigned autobiography: the first is a case in which the protagonist’s name is entirely different from the author’s name, but in which the text is

narrated in the first person; and the second is a case in which perhaps none of the names matches the others. Albert Memmi's first book La Statue de sel, narrated in the first person, is considered to be his autobiography, but the protagonist's name is Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche. Memmi himself explains in the preface to the English edition of Portrait du colonisé, (The Colonizer and the Colonized), that he wrote his "first novel, The Pillar of Salt, a life story which was in a sense a trial balloon to help me find the direction of my own life" (vii). While Memmi calls La Statue de sel a "novel," he also indicates that it is his "life story." I would argue that it is precisely because La Statue de sel is a "life story" and because Memmi wrote it in an effort to better understand himself, that this text is autobiography. Because of the mis-matched signature, this text does not fit into Lejeune's schema but it does provide us with insight into the "personality" of the writer.

Similar to Memmi's signature in La Statue de sel is Albert Camus' Le premier homme, generally considered to be Camus' autobiography and the very manuscript on which he was working when he died. However, Le premier homme has a slightly different kind of signature than La Statue de sel because it is narrated in the third person and the protagonist's name is Jacques Cormery. But what is particularly interesting about this text and its status or acceptance as autobiography is that it was published posthumously, from the manuscript and notes gathered and assembled by Camus' daughter, Catherine. Despite Catherine Camus' efforts to clearly distinguish between her father's manuscript and her and the editor's notes and comments, the status of the writer and the writer's intention is severely questioned. While the author is listed as Albert Camus, to whom should credit be given for the writing, organization, and ultimate publication of this text? It is in this sense that Le premier homme can be considered an unsigned, anonymous autobiography.

Kateb Yacine's Nedjma is also a case in which none of the names matches. It is commonly called a novel, but it also reveals a great deal of Kateb's life story, as well as the story of Algeria under French colonization and during the movement for Algerian independence. Kateb himself has called Nedjma "une sorte d'autobiographie au pluriel."³⁰ Probably the most celebrated Arabic language autobiography of the twentieth century is Taha Hussein's Al-Ayyam (The Days), a three-volume autobiography produced over a period of about forty years. Unlike Khatibi's autobiography, Hussein's autobiography does not proclaim, on its title page, to be an autobiography. Also unlike Khatibi's autobiography, The Days is narrated entirely in the third person.³¹ Hussein's autobiography is perhaps the closest thing to an anonymous autobiography: The only places in which the author's name appears are on the title page and at the end of volume one, where Hussein "signs" the last chapter, the dedication to his daughter. In this dedication, even while calling his daughter "my daughter," the narrator still refers to the protagonist in the third person. The fact that the same proper name is not shared by the author, narrator, and protagonist – in fact, the narrator and protagonist are unnamed – cannot deny this text's status as autobiography.

If we consider two kinds of "non-signatures," the incomplete signature and the veiled signature, the idea of the signature as a defining characteristic of autobiography becomes even more problematic. Mouloud Feraoun's Le fils du pauvre is an example of a text which is accepted as autobiography and yet contains what I call a veiled signature. The protagonist's name is Fouroulou Menrad, a re-organization of the letters of the author's name. According to Lejeune's chart and definition, this text does not seem to meet the criteria of autobiography; at best, it falls in the category of "indeterminate."³² Furthermore, the narrator in Le fils du pauvre serves to introduce Fouroulou Menrad's journal and speaks of Menrad in

the third person. Once we “open” the journal, the new narrator (of Menrad’s journal) speaks in the first person. To which narrator should we turn to help establish a signature? Is it possible that this kind of meta-narrative indicates a meta-signature?

An example of an incomplete or half-signature is found in Driss Chraïbi’s Le passé simple and Succession ouverte. It is interesting to note that both of these texts are considered to be Chraïbi’s autobiography, even though neither one announces itself as autobiography. In fact, Succession ouverte announces itself as a novel on the cover and is read as a sequel to Le passé simple. Unlike the autobiographies of Rousseau and Amrouche, however, Chraïbi’s texts do not have a complete signature. The protagonist’s given name is Driss but his family name is Ferdi.³³ So despite the narrator’s adoption of the “I,” the equivalence between protagonist and author is only half-met. The question becomes then, does this half-signature preclude these texts from being autobiography? Are they each somehow a half-autobiography half-full of truth and half-full of fiction?

At first glance, Khatibi’s autobiography seems to be signed in the same way as the autobiographies of Rousseau and Amrouche.³⁴ On closer examination, however, we discover that Khatibi’s signature is similar to Chraïbi’s; it is an incomplete signature or a half-signature. While the author’s name is Abdelkebir Khatibi and the narrator assumes the position of “I,” the protagonist is only ever referred to as Abdelkebir. This may seem a rather trivial observation, but it should give us pause to consider the effect of this signature, especially since such care is taken to discuss the protagonist’s given name. If the narrator provides us with only a half-signature, is the contract with the reader broken? Can we continue to trust a narrator who, by dint of providing only a half-signature, may also provide us with half-truths? Does the incomplete signature signal an incomplete autobiography?

As just mentioned, Khatibi's narrator takes great care in providing detailed analyses of the protagonist's first name. I would like to quote at length a passage which appears at the beginning of the autobiography where the narrator gives one such analysis of the protagonist's name.

De ma naissance, je sauvegarde le rite sacré. On me mit un peu de miel sur la bouche, une goutte de citron sur les yeux, le premier acte pour libérer mon regard sur l'univers et le second pour vivifier mon esprit, mourir, vivre, mourir, vivre, double à double, suis-je né aveugle contre moi-même?

Né le jour de l'Aïd el Kébir, mon nom suggère un rite millénaire et il m'arrive, à l'occasion, d'imaginer le geste d'Abraham égorgeant son fils. Rien à faire, même si ne m'obsède pas le chant de l'égorgement, il y a, à la racine, la déchirure nominale; de l'archet maternel à mon vouloir, le temps reste fasciné par l'enfance, comme si l'écriture, en me donnant au monde, recommençait le choc de mon élan, au pli d'un obscur dédoublement. Rien à faire, j'ai l'âme facile à l'éternité.

Mon nom me retient à la naissance entre le parfum de Dieu et le signe étoilé. Je suis serviteur et j'ai le vertige; moi-même raturé en images, je me range à ma question égarée entre les lettres. Pas d'herbe verte ni desséchée qui ne soit dans un écrit expicite! (7)

Two important issues are immediately brought to light in this introductory passage: this is a narrative in the first person, and the author, narrator – by the use of the first person pronoun – and protagonist share the same first name. What the narrator tells us here is that his birth and his name recall the sacred rite of sacrifice, or near-sacrifice in the case of Abraham and Isaac. The narrator explains that he was born on the day of the Great Feast (*Aïd el Kebir*),³⁵ and his name – or at least the second part of his given name – was chosen to reflect this fact. *El Kebir*, or “The Great One,” is also, in Arabic and according to Islamic tradition, one of the ninety-nine names for God. The first part of the narrator's given name, ‘*Abd*, means servant, and the combination of ‘*Abd* with one of the ninety-nine names for God is a common practice in naming male children in Morocco and throughout the Muslim world. Thus, the narrator's first name, ‘*Abdelkebir*, means literally, “servant of The Great One,” or

“servant of God.” Toward the end of this passage, the narrator says, “Je suis serviteur et j’ai le vertige” If we consider the two elements of his name separately, we can see that he is at once in a position of servitude, occupying a seemingly lowly place and casting his gaze upward; and yet he is also in a position of greatness, casting his gaze downward. He is therefore simultaneously looking both up and down at the world and at others, so that the position from which he – or perhaps we should say “I” – views the world is never stable.

Khatibi’s autobiography poses an additional question, because while the author and the protagonist do share the same proper name, it is only the first name. The family name of the protagonist is never explicitly provided.³⁶ Given that Abdelkebir is a rather common first name, could this not be a fictive narrative in the first person of an imagined character named Abdelkebir? Could not this text also be an autobiography told in the first person by a random narrator named Abdelkebir?³⁷ What at first seemed to be an innocuous sharing of the same name between the author, narrator, and the protagonist has now become somewhat problematic. If we cannot rely on the signature alone to indicate autobiography, how then shall we determine what is autobiography and what is not? The only possible answer is that it varies with every text because every text tells its own story in its own way. With Khatibi’s text, what we see is what we get: the text itself tells us that it is autobiography.³⁸

Even this small number of examples leads one to wonder how, if the signature plays such an important role in autobiography, a text can be considered autobiography and yet lack such a crucial piece of the puzzle. As noted earlier, the shared proper name is the basis for the assumption that the author, narrator and protagonist are identical and that they therefore form some kind of unified subject.³⁹ So if the signature is missing or incomplete, then it seems that we have to choose between eliminating the given text from the category that we call

autobiography, or understand that it is, in a way, an anonymous autobiography. And if we choose to accept an unsigned autobiography, then we must also be ready to admit that the presumed unity of the autobiographical subject is a myth.

While the shared proper name is what Lejeune uses to establish the “identicalness” of the author and the protagonist, it is the assumption of the subject pronoun “I” on the part of the narrator which completes the triumvirate (5). When Lejeune asserts that the author, narrator and protagonist must be identical, he does so from the understanding that if the narrator says “I” in speaking of his or her past, then the narrator and protagonist are identical, and therefore the narrator and author are identical. Lejeune’s characterization of identity as an all-or-nothing concept – “An identity is, or is not” – heads off in the direction of claiming that identity is static and immutable. But while my present “I” and my past “I” share the same name, we can in no way be considered the same person or personality, even textually. How often do we hear people say, particularly in the context of some life-changing experience, “I am not the same person I was then”?

Again, Lejeune’s insistence on identity as identicalness is based on Benveniste’s idea that the subject pronoun “I” exists only in discourse. In Problèmes de linguistique générale I, Benveniste states that “la ‘réalité’ à laquelle se réfère *je* ou *tu*” is “une réalité de discours” (252), and that “*je*” signifies “‘la personne qui énonce la présente instance de discours contenant *je*.’ Instance unique par définition, et valable seulement dans son unicité . . . *je* ne peut être identifié que par l’instance de discours qui le contient et par là seulement.”⁴⁰

Lejeune, in turn, explains that the “‘I’ refers, each time, to the person who is speaking and whom we identify *by the very fact* that he is speaking” (9, emphasis in original). The “I” therefore, according to Benveniste and Lejeune, has no fixed or universal referent, no “classe

de référence, puisqu'il n'y a pas d' 'objet' définissable comme *je* auquel puissent renvoyer identiquement ces instances. Chaque *je* a sa référence propre, et correspond chaque fois à être unique, posé comme tel."⁴¹ "Je," therefore, is a sign with meaning only at the moment of speaking, at the moment of enunciation, referring always and only to the speaker who utters it. I would argue that this is precisely what causes the ambiguity and instability of the "I." The fact that "I" is a sign with meaning only in the moment of enunciation renders it a sign with multiple meanings because the signified of the "I" includes a temporal variation. The signifier "I" can, at the same moment of enunciation, refer to both the signified "I" of the present, the narrator, as well as the signified "I" of the past, the protagonist. And as we have just suggested, we should in no way consider the "I" of the past to be identical to, to be the same person as, the "I" of the present. Moreover, the "I" of the past contains its own temporal variations: "I" as a child is not the same as and does not have the same sense of self – even from "my" present perspective – as "I" as an adolescent or young adult.

This is precisely what Gérard Genette says of diaries and "confidences épistolaires" in Figures III. In his analysis of Les Liaisons dangereuses, Genette maintains that in Cécile's letter to Mme de Merteuil confessing the former's seduction by M. de Valmont, there are two successive heroines. The second heroine is also a narrator imposing her point of view on the first heroine. It is the passage of time which creates what Genette terms "dissonance."⁴² Even in diaries, whose moment of narration is close to the moment of the event narrated, Genette sees "ce que l'on appelle en langage radiophonique le direct et le différé, le quasi-monologue intérieur et le rapport après-coup. Ici, le narrateur est tout à la fois encore le héros et déjà quelqu'un d'autre . . . ici la focalisation sur le narrateur est en même temps focalisation sur le héros" (230). Yet this is not to say that the narrator and protagonist are one, nor that

they are identical; there is, between them, a difference, a gap, a disharmony – or what Genette calls dissonance.

Benveniste attempts to address this very notion of difference between the protagonist and narrator by proposing a concept of subjectivity which he calls the “sujet énonçant,” and which is defined as “l’unité psychique qui transcende la totalité des expériences vécues qu’elle assemble, et qui assure la permanence de la conscience” (260). While Benveniste certainly deserves a great deal of credit for his contribution to linguistics and, by extension, to literary criticism and the study of autobiography, it must be noted here that his definition of the “sujet énonçant” is not something altogether new to interrogations of subjectivity. James Olney’s discussion of Heraclitus’ idea of the life stream demonstrates that Benveniste’s “psychic unity” and “totality of lived experiences” is a concept which has been addressed since at least the peak of Greek civilization. Olney explains that the life stream includes an understanding of the self as a certain continuity of being, not in the sense that the past “I” and the present “I” are the same – or identical – but in the sense that there are indeed certain traits of personality developed at a very early age which remain a part of the self even as other parts undergo renewal and change (Metaphors of Self 4-9).

Such an understanding of the duality of the self is also apparent in the Arabic literary and philosophical traditions. In Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi’s *Risalat al-hayat* (Treatise on Life), he divides the various elements of a person’s character into two general categories – those which undergo growth and development, and those which are fixed and unchanging: “Some of these dispositions can be caused to disappear through conscious effort (*riyada*) or can at least be somewhat attenuated, while the other portion constitute the very form of the soul and one therefore cannot hope to rid oneself of them or to purify them.”⁴³ What I will show in the

following pages is that Khatibi's concept of *dédoublement* is, contrary to what is commonly argued, not only a result of the French colonization of North Africa and the accompanying cultural and linguistic assimilation. It is an inherent *dédoublement* that is bound up in the traditions of both Western metaphysics and Arabo-Islamic philosophy. It is a feeling of duplicity and yet also of alienation, of belonging to everything and yet belonging to nothing.

Further complicating the issue of subjectivity is that while at any given moment "I" can signify both past and present, there are also instances where "I" refers only to the narrator, the present "I." What we have then is a multiplicity of meaning with respect to the synchronic domain – in time – *as well as* a multiplicity of meaning with respect to the diachronic domain – across time. For example, in the sentence "I remember the day I started school," the first "I" refers to the narrator, the present "I," or the enunciating subject, while the second "I" refers to both the narrator and the protagonist, the past "I." The vertical multiplicity of the second "I" is thus added to the horizontal multiplicity of the two "I"'s together in the same sentence. Both the horizontal and vertical multiplicities continue on. We may find, as soon as the very next sentence, that "I" refers to either the narrator, the past "I" as a child, the past "I" as a young adult, or even all three. The result is an incredibly dizzying effect, all caused by what is so often assumed to be an unambiguous word, "I," clearly denoting a specific person and indicating a specific identity.⁴⁴ Again, Benveniste's "sujet énonçant," as a plurisignificative and permanently elusive subject with a certain continuity of being, is his attempt to reconcile semantic multiplicity with the "unicité" he requires of the "I." But what Khatibi's autobiography reveals about the "I" is quite the opposite of any concept of unity, oneness, or uniqueness. The "I" in Khatibi's autobiography is consistently

multiple – from the narrative commentary on the protagonist’s birth to character A standing “alone,” addressing the audience/reader at the end of the *mini-théâtre*.

In Khatibi’s autobiography, we find clear examples of the plurisignification of the subject, as when the protagonist leaves Morocco to study in Paris: “Je me souviens, de même, de ma vacance dans la séparation de deux espaces, légèrement tremblant, assis dans un avion nocturne; rêve qui, depuis ma prime enfance, vieillissait dans la narration” (113). The initial “je” signifies the narrator, while the “je” of “ma vacance” signifies both the narrator and the young adult, since it was the young adult’s “vacance.” The first person reference of “ma prime enfance” is intriguing because it is a reference to a continuity of “I”; the dream was shared by the child, the adolescent, and the young adult. Even though the dream is understood to be not shared by the narrator because of the grammatical construction of “depuis” and the imperfect form of the verb, the narrator is still implicated because he is the one saying “I.” When the narrator later says, “Certes, Occident, je me scinde, mais mon identité est une infinité de jeux . . .” (171), one can understand that even while discussing his sense of inner turmoil due to conflict with the West, he is also speaking of his textual, autobiographical identity – an infinity of games, refractions, and displacements: his identity is “une infinité de ‘je.’”⁴⁵

While this multiplicity and shifting subjectivity are evident throughout the autobiography, I would like to focus on three ways in which Khatibi’s text draws attention to this multiplicity and to the distinction (or non-identicalness) of the past “I” and present “I.” The first is through narrative commentary, where the narrator offers what is clearly his present perspective on past events. The second is through the textual demonstration of growth,

development and change. The third is through the use of dialogue, especially the moments in the text where the narrator speaks directly to the protagonist.

The first three paragraphs of the autobiography cited earlier are an excellent example of narrative commentary where the writer adopts a particular narrative point of view and, in traditional autobiographical sequencing, begins his life story with his birth. In fact, the first sentence of each of the first four paragraphs of the autobiography makes some reference to the protagonist's birth: "De ma naissance, je sauvegarde le rite sacré"; "Né le jour de l'Aid el Kébir . . ."; "Mon nom me retient à la naissance . . ."; and "Je naquis avec la deuxième guerre" Even in a conventional style of autobiography, the very presence of a birth story immediately problematizes the autobiography it purports to introduce by questioning the narrator's authority to relate the event of his or her birth. How can one take up the position of "I" to bear witness to an event of which one has no memory and therefore no first-hand knowledge?

In L'Age d'homme, Michel Leiris poses a similar problem but with respect to death: "Je ne puis dire à proprement parler que je meurs, puisque – mourant de mort violente ou non – je n'assiste qu'à une partie de l'événement" (86). Of course there are obvious differences between an inability to recount one's own birth story and one's own death story: one cannot recount one's own birth story without the help of an intermediary who actually remembers the event, and one cannot recount one's death story because one is dead. However, what is common to both is the very inability to recount the story, regardless of the reasons for which one cannot do so.

The story of our birth seems so intimate and seems to individualize and personalize us; but because the only knowledge we have of this event is what has been related to us by others,

the kind of partial experience mentioned by Leiris, we have no authority to narrate this event in the first person. In a discussion on Augustine, Olney puts it this way: “If you cannot say ‘born on such and such a day,’ you cannot say ‘I’ either: if you cannot remember the event, you cannot narrate out of the continuity of being that ‘I’ implies. Augustine gets around this as best he can by writing, not of his birth to be sure but of his early infancy . . .” (“Memory and the Narrative Imperative” 862). Khatibi’s narrator circumvents the problem of narrating his birth by presenting it not as the retelling of an event, but rather as a rumination by the narrator about the event of the protagonist’s birth and the sacred rite which it recalls. By using the birth story to introduce a discussion of the protagonist’s name, Khatibi’s narrator avoids one of the problems of subjectivity in autobiography.

Because our experience of being born can only ever be told to us by others, it is to us an objective experience which we then incorporate into our life story as part of our idea of self. George Mead, a behavioral sociologist well-known in Europe in the middle years of the twentieth century, maintains that an individual “enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience.”⁴⁶ Once we have incorporated this experience into our concept of self, through the objectification of the experience, we are able to tell it or write about it as an experience of self.⁴⁷ Mead’s overall thesis is that self is dialogue with the other and this is strikingly similar to Benveniste’s understanding of “person” in linguistic theory: “La conscience de soi n’est possible que si elle s’éprouve par contraste. Je n’emploie *je* qu’en m’adressant à quelqu’un, qui sera dans mon allocution un *tu*. C’est cette condition de dialogue qui est constitutive de la *personne*, car elle implique en réciprocité que je deviens *tu*

dans l'allocution de celui qui à son tour se désigne par *je*" (Benveniste, 260). For both Mead and Benveniste, first-person subjectivity is always intersubjectivity; it is always dialogue with an already present interlocutor who, in turn, will take its place as subject through the intersubjective relationship.

Another example of narrative commentary is the way in which the narrator moves from the story of the protagonist's weaning to his mother's comparison between the French at Independence and children weaned from the breast, to his own comparison between his mother and Calypso. "Je reconnais la fraîcheur de son regard, quand elle me raconte la souffrance de mon sevrage à l'âge de dix-huit mois" (12). This sentence, which opens the entire series of comparisons, also demonstrates the multiplicity of the subject pronoun "I." Here, "je" is at once the narrator and the protagonist, but clearly not the same protagonist as in the expression "mon sevrage"; the latter protagonist is the eighteen-month-old and the former protagonist is at some undetermined age between eighteen months and the age of the narrator. In both instances, however, we still see vertical multiplicity, with "I" signifying both the narrator and the protagonist. Like the story of his birth, this passage about Abdelkebir's weaning is a story told to the narrator by someone else – in this case, told to the son by the mother. The story is then retold by the narrator to the reader. By attributing this story to a source, the mother, the narrator avoids the impossible position of saying "I" about an event which he does not remember. This story has entered his life story via the mother; as the experience is already objectified to him, he can absorb it and make it part of his own story.

What we find at the end of the passage, following the mention of the encounter between Calypso and Ulysses is a paragraph set off by a blank space: "La fraîcheur mythique de cette rencontre avec l'Occident me ramène à la même image ondoyante de l'Autre,

contradiction d'agression et d'amour. Adolescent, je voulais me définir dans l'écoute nostalgique du mythe initial" (13). The repetition of the word "fraîcheur" is the narrative link in this passage. The "fraîcheur of the look in his mother's eyes when she tells him of his weaning returns as the mythical "fraîcheur" of the meeting with the West. "Fraîcheur" begins the passage, and "fraîcheur" ends it. After another blank space, the narrator continues: "Attaque de trachome après le sevrage" (13). "Fraîcheur" completes the circle of the narrator's tangential interruption, and brings him back to his early childhood. He then continues the story.

This narrative interruption is also a commentary in the sense that the "I" of the expression "me ramène" signifies, in this moment, the narrator. The "je" in the second sentence – "je voulais me définir" – signifies both the narrator and the protagonist as an adolescent. But one has the impression here that despite the seeming similarity between the narrator and the protagonist-adolescent, the narrator is indicating a break between them. It is as if the narrator no longer wants to define himself according to this myth, and in this respect, the protagonist-adolescent is quite different from the narrator-adult.

This type of distinction between the past "I" and the present "I," particularly between the narrator-adult and protagonist-adolescent, is repeated many times in Khatibi's autobiography. There are three passages, however, which deserve special attention. They demonstrate the distinction Khatibi draws between the narrator and protagonist and they show marked changes in the beliefs or identities of the two selves. The first passage is found at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Rive gauche," when the protagonist leaves Morocco to pursue university studies in Paris. "Le colonisé que j'étais avait sa table de divination dans le flottement du temps, la féerie de l'Indépendance apparaissait couverte de sa propre fêlure,

qu'il me fallait lire sans y laisser mon âme. Et l'Occident colonial restait un déguisement à franchir" (113). When the narrator says, "Le colonisé que j'étais. . .," he demonstrates a difference between his past sense of self and his present sense of self. Young Abdelkebir, the protagonist, is "colonized"; he longs to become a part of French society and culture that he so admires, and yet resents this same society and culture for its hypocrisy and lack of respect toward North Africans. On the other hand, the narrator no longer sees himself as "colonized"; his experiences in France and in other countries have unmasked and demystified the West. For the colonized protagonist, however, the West is still at this point "un déguisement à franchir."

A similar idea is expressed when the adult protagonist is in Sofia. He attends a play in which the main character, a member of the bourgeoisie, attempts to seduce his servant and gives her some gold. During the play and during intermission, the protagonist's interpreter attempts to translate. This stirs up a vague memory in the narrator and he says: ". . . je rêvais aux visages qui défilaient, m'étais-je trompé de siècle et de miroir? . . . Le temps, mon au revoir, mon errance, n'effacent pas le pauvre mendiant que j'étais, qui ne voulait pourtant qu'un seul objet, un seul objet à travers le voile" (154-155). The narrator, older and wiser – "richer" – sees his younger counterpart as a "poor beggar." Again, his use of the imperfect form of the verb indicates that this feeling of being a poor beggar is not how he would currently define himself; however, this does not mean that this "poor beggar" is not somewhere still alive, deep in the older narrator's psyche. Even though one's sense of self changes and develops – occasionally creating sharp contrasts between a past sense of self and a present sense of self – the person one once was is not simply erased; that person, with his or

her own sense of self, does not disappear without a trace. The past self, like past experiences, is held in memory, waiting to be re-called by a present “I.”

This idea is repeated in a passage where the narrator discusses the very project he is undertaking – the self-examination and self-creation of autobiography: “Durée de lierre qui ne trahisse pas l’enfant que j’étais, l’enfant fertile qui n’est pas mort en moi!” (16). While the “I” is clearly not still a child, the narrator is sure to add that that child lives on in him, is still in there somewhere as part of his self. In Souad Guellouz’s book Les Jardins du Nord, thirteen-year-old Mostary makes a similar comment when his sisters receive a set of Russian nesting dolls (*des matriochkas*) from a family friend: “Nous pourrions toujours dire, quand nous aurons trente ans, que nous avons encore, quelque part, également dix ans. Qui nous croira? Les gens ne verront que l’homme ou la femme de trente ans. Et pourtant, il existera toujours, cet enfant de dix ans, à l’intérieur de nous-mêmes, comme cette poupée à l’intérieur de cette autre” (162).

These three passages are linked by their expression of a distinction between the past “I” and the present “I,” between the protagonist and the narrator. However, they demonstrate at the same time that difference does not mean erasure; our past selves live on.⁴⁸ These three passages are also linked by the repetition of the structure “le _____ que j’étais.” Despite the fact that these passages are found in different sections of the autobiography, each repetition of this structure conjures up the prior statement(s) and therefore reinforces the idea in each of them that there is a difference between the past “I” and present “I,” and we would do well to bear this in mind.

“Qu’avais-je retenu de ce long séjour de six ans en Europe? Question oiseuse si l’on en retient le vol. Je parle de mon passé comme s’il s’agissait chaque fois d’un temps à

expulser. Soit! Je donne la parole à un autre double” (143). “I,” the narrator in the present moment, speaks of “my” past, and each time, “I” does it as if it were something of which “I” must rid myself. Even with the addition of “Soit!” after this idea, the use of the expression “comme si” indicates that the narrator does not believe that ridding oneself of the past or the past self is possible. It is always there, somewhere, in memory, ready to be called into action, to be re-called in dialogue or narrative – even if what is re-called is in some way imprecise or imperfect.

In Khatibi’s autobiography the distinction between the past “I” and the present “I” does not mean that these two “selves” are completely separate and have no relationship or interaction. In fact, throughout the autobiography, the narrator speaks directly to the protagonist, young Abdelkebir. And yet despite the abundance of references to monologue and dialogue throughout the autobiography – as well as the *mini-théâtre* of the last chapter – there is very little dialogue between the protagonist and other characters.

Dialogue which has occurred between the protagonist and other characters is more often than not presented in the text as indirect discourse, with the narrator recounting what was said to the protagonist. For example, when young Abdelkebir’s aunt takes him into the harem at a friend’s house, the narrator presents the scene as a detached and yet not disinterested observer: “Enfant aux yeux verts, tu fais dans ton pantalon, en plein jour, et la maison pachale riait . . . Elles disent: enfant, sois fidèle à notre tendresse, les rivières couleront, c’est certain, coule-toi, enfant aux yeux verts” (47). The latter part of this passage is but one example of the narrator’s use of indirect discourse and it indicates, as Mandel points out, the impossibility of accurately reciting past dialogue (59), as well as the narrator’s

refusal to even attempt such a futile task. What the narrator relates to the reader is bits of dialogue, bits of sentences, and comments made by the women in the harem.

In quite obvious contrast to this use of indirect discourse throughout the autobiography, there are a handful of passages in which the narrator does “reproduce” dialogue. The use of quotation marks in these moments is less an indication of exact reproduction to be sure, and more an indication of the emotional effect of the experience in question on the protagonist. The heightened affectivity may preserve the memory a little more clearly, but it is the contrast between indirect and direct discourse and the rarity of the latter which reveals to the reader the importance of these experiences. One such moment of dialogue follows Abdelkebir’s overnight detainment at a Parisian police station:

. . . en pays étranger, avais-je le droit de regarder en face le dégoût de l’autre? Quand sa haine n’avait pas de prise, elle pouvait le décomposer, je souffrais d’être objet de haine, et souhaitais oublier l’insulte; mais le jeu était tentant. Une seule fois, au chemineau qui me disait schématiquement devant le peuple attentif: “Vous prenez les Français pour des cons?” – “Oui, monsieur”, répondis-je en comptant les étoiles. Déjà ma colère était tombée; content, je partais, délivré de mon petit cri. (125)

Another instance of a direct quote in the autobiography also deals with racism and the different reactions of colonized or formerly colonized people to such hatred, mistrust, suspicion and ignorance.

. . . je discutais avec passion culture nationale, identité ou pas, révolution et Islam, et comme chaque groupe français avait son Arabe de service, on écoutait d’interminables confessions. L’Arabe de service disait: “Je suis un trait d’union entre l’Occident et l’Orient, le christianisme et l’Islam, l’Afrique et l’Asie,” et que sais-je encore! Pauvre Arabe, où étais-tu, réduit à une série de traits d’union! (126)

The main difference between these two passages is that the first is presented as direct discourse where the narrator “quotes” the vagabond and the protagonist’s response. The second passage, on the other hand, contains direct discourse but it is not attributed to a

specific character. It appears, rather, that the narrator has gathered together similar sayings from a variety of sources and attributed this created quote to an “Arabe de service.” Not only does this technique mimic the way in which racial prejudice functions – attributing to the whole something done or said by a few, this technique also mimics the earlier example of indirect discourse when the narrator relates bits and pieces of what the harem women said to the protagonist. The fact that the last example, while similar to the first, is set apart by quotation marks gives it an added degree of importance within the text, especially considering that there is so little direct discourse or citation in the autobiography.

What we do find, however, throughout the autobiography, are repeated references to monologue and dialogue, culminating in the final chapter, “Double contre double (Dialogue).” There are several instances where the narrator refers to his penchant for monologue or even “monologue intérieur” and these are always with respect to his past self. For example, in telling of his shyness as a youngster, the narrator mentions that he found refuge in reading and writing, and that “je me sauvais dans le monologue intérieur” (110). Later, during a convalescence in Combloux, the narrator tells us: “. . . mon horizon restait intérieur, mon monologue aussi . . .” (142). The minimal amount of direct dialogue between the protagonist and other characters and the emphasis on monologue are in no way an indication that young Abdelkebir did not speak much to other people. Rather, the emphasis on monologue over dialogue intensifies the feeling that young Abdelkebir was a lonely boy, even when surrounded by others. The repetition of the idea that young Abdelkebir frequently engaged in “interior monologues” also reveals his desire, even need, to be a story-teller, to narrate – even if it is only to himself.

While the “I” of the protagonist speaks to himself, the “I” of the narrator speaks to others. The latter engages in a kind of one-sided conversation with both the protagonist and the reader of the autobiography. When the narrator speaks to the protagonist, he uses the familiar “tu” form of address. Many of the passages are signaled by the repetition of the phrase “enfant aux yeux verts.” The fact that the narrator addresses the protagonist in this manner reveals the protagonist’s feelings – and the narrator’s memory of these feelings – of alienation and difference from his peers, and this difference comes to be symbolized in his green eyes. Another interesting element of these moments when the narrator addresses the young boy or adolescent is that there is an overabundance of verbs in the imperative form. The use of the imperative, much like the use of infinitive forms, serves to depersonalize discourse. But the use of the imperative form in Khatibi’s autobiography also serves to widen the gap between the narrator and the protagonist, emphasizing that they are indeed two distinct entities, doubled and yet alienated each from the other. Their relationship, at least at this point in the autobiography, cannot even be characterized as intersubjective because “tu,” the young protagonist, does not, in his turn, take up the subject position “I.” The narrator controls the discourse and the dialogue, much as a puppet master controls the puppet, or a director controls the action in a play. In fact, in the following scenes, the commands given by the narrator to the protagonist call to mind stage directions, things a director might very well say to an actor:

Enfant, voici le jour faste, va, une fois par an, à la foire rurale de la tribu. Traîne ton regard sur la poussière, flotte furtivement avec la foule . . . marche parmi les charognes éentrées, scelle-toi à ton insouciance. . . . Enfant, entre maintenant dans la tente, au lieu de tourner à dextre et à senestre. La nuit tombe et tu vois une jeune paysanne. Lève-toi, enfant, mets-lui un chapelet de caresses maladroites et touche ses mains tracées au henné. (60)

Shortly thereafter, we find a similar scene, this time at a wedding:

Enfant, accompagne tes parents, de préférence ta mère, de préférence un jour de mariage. Pendant la cérémonie, il y a des femmes et des hommes, ceci est un signe qui te trouble un peu. Chante, même déguisé en fille, on te saura gré de ton ondulation, hausse les épaules et dis: qu'importe l'ondulation! Assieds-toi autour des danseurs travestis et en double robe; un violon divague en toute allégresse, il grince de longue date, il parle d'une mélodie grossière pour t'éloigner du cercle. Danse, danse, la poitrine ouverte. (61)

Another passage in which the narrator directly addresses the protagonist, calling him "enfant aux yeux verts," is in the description of young Abdelkebir's failed romance with a young woman. He publishes poetry in Jeudi littéraire and corresponds with a young woman whom he calls "Douce Colombe"; he refers to himself as "Solitriste." There is a space in the text between his introduction of Douce Colombe and the following, where the autobiographical "je" is transformed into "tu": "Adolescent aux yeux verts, tu dis mon âme, puis dans le bordel, tu descends dans des sexes de cratère. Mauvais rêve est ton adolescence. . . . Maintenant que Douce Colombe arrive pour la première fois, cours, cours, un journal à la main, ce sera votre signe de reconnaissance" (87-88). Then, at the end of this one-sided conversation with the protagonist-adolescent, the older, wiser, more experienced narrator says: "Et puis, adolescent aux yeux verts, tu as une tête pensante, crois-moi, l'histoire te guette, tu seras" (89).

In a scene toward the end of the autobiography, the narrator continues this pattern of speaking with the protagonist, who is by now a young professional, travelling to conferences and colloquia throughout the world.

Te voilà maintenant parmi des vrais Bédouins. . . . Le désert surveille de longue date les fantômes comme toi; ils se fracasseront sans fin, c'est écrit, dans tout ce silence.

Je me récite toutes ces formules et m'en vais, le désert ne basculera pas, et moi je ne mordrai que du sable.

Fume avec les pêcheurs que tu rencontres, attends, le désert est attente, une immense attente. Dis: sans doute suis-je venu, mais qu'ai-je fait? J'ai voyagé en dehors de moi-même, mais qu'ai-je fait, récité, lu, écrit? Que vienne le grand départ! (165-166)

We might be tempted to conclude from these examples that all of these one-sided conversations amount to little more than monologue on the part of the narrator. However, the very presence of the interlocutor “tu” indicates the presence of a second entity that even the narrator understands is different from himself. The fact that “tu,” the protagonist, remains silent demonstrates the impossibility of the protagonist speaking back to the narrator, although even this is called into question by the dialogue in the last chapter. Even though the protagonist is different from the narrator, the former cannot be considered as separate from the latter. Young Abdelkebir lives on in the memory of the narrator and the narrator, then, is a kind of puppet-master – or better still, a ventriloquist – directing the speech and actions of the protagonist. The protagonist cannot speak, cannot take up the subject position “I,” without the intervention of the narrator. The “I” of the protagonist always refers to a double signified – the protagonist and the narrator – and this doubling results from the passage of time.

There is another kind of doubling of subjectivity in Khatibi’s autobiography. Unlike the doubled “I” of the protagonist and narrator whose difference is one with respect to the passage of time, the protagonist’s and narrator’s feelings of *dédoublement* are inherent and, in a sense, timeless. Fanon attributes such a doubling to the event of colonization, suggesting that even the colonized person’s refusal to enter the colonial city and to mingle with the colonizer is a refusal of the forced duality of colonization: “. . . all these reactions signified that to the dual world of the settler he opposed his own duality” (WE 139). However, Fanon clearly sees this psychological doubling as a result of colonization; what Khatibi demonstrates

in his autobiography is that the doubling arising from colonization is added onto an already present doubling, a doubling which is, in a sense, the protagonist's fate or destiny. This is evident in the autobiography in how doubling is first presented – not as a factor of colonization but as an element of the narrative commentary on the protagonist's birth and discussion of the protagonist's name. The duality and vertigo expressed in the commentary about the name are completely unrelated to colonization.

What we have then is not only a doubling across time (the diachronic), but also a doubling at any moment in time (the synchronic). The narrator presents these feelings of *dédoublement* as inherent, as beginning at birth, “. . . double à double, suis-je né aveugle contre moi-même?” (7), and continuing through the last chapter even though the birth story is clearly an act of narrative commentary. Indeed, in the narrator's commentary on the event of his birth, he again mentions doubling, suggesting that writing, “. . . en me donnant au monde, recommençait le choc de mon élan, au pli d'un obscur dédoublement” (7). The discussion of his name, '*Abd* (servant) *el Kebir* (The Great One) reinforces this idea of doubling and only a few pages later, the narrator indicates that even his profession – “regard dédoublé sur les autres” (10) – involves a kind of doubling.⁴⁹

But all of this doubling does not come without its dangers. There are scenes in which the double either dissolves into another character (or vice versa) or disappears all together – albeit momentarily. In a passage in which the narrator describes his relationship with “la fille de Hollande,” he says that he did not know what to do with her, so he dragged her around Paris, from café to café.

Interminable marche à travers Paris. Fuir, la tête ouverte, surprendre le vol d'un oiseau ou un regard brusque, je me rêvais à travers ces ruptures successives. C'était ainsi que je m'évadaïs, de regard en regard, dans ce jeu de miroir, tel le voyeur devant certaine fresque chinoise: devenant lui-même

personnage il peut s'y dérouler ou s'en détacher selon la grâce du conteur, comme si le réel et le rêve ne faisaient qu'une seule scène, elle-même illusoire. (135-136)

This passage is quite fascinating for two reasons. It foreshadows an event which occurs during the last part of the autobiography in which character B jumps into the Chinese fresco and disappears. It also describes the perils of the very act of creating autobiography. The distinction between the past "I" and present "I" is indeed a slippery one, and one risks falling into the tale, collapsing the distinction between reality and fantasy, past and present, protagonist and narrator. A very good example of just this type of danger comes in the scene where the protagonist is in Cordoba looking for a prostitute. This scene is reminiscent of an earlier scene during his childhood when American soldiers in Casablanca would ask the children on the street where to find the local brothel by saying "Fuck fuck lady." Older Abdelkebir, now in Cordoba, poses the same question to a young Spanish boy:

La nuit, fuck fuck lady, demandai-je à un enfant qui criblait mon passé. Lui et moi, l'enfant semblable qui parlait entre nous, en dehors de nous, les mains dans les poches, et moi-même, père d'un enfant et d'une enfance, maintenant signes lointains, de par mon livre partagé, signes basculants vers la mort. Pas d'argent, disait le garçon espagnol, pas de femme, rien du tout, le touriste s'excite, petit ou grand, il demande la seule direction. (157)

The young Spanish boy metamorphizes into young Abdelkebir; it is as if the narrator is the American soldier of his youth being guided by himself as a boy (in the personage of the young Spanish boy) to a place where he might momentarily fulfill his desire.

The *dédoublement* to which the narrator so frequently refers throughout the autobiography and which re-appears in his later works, is more than this distinction between young Abdelkebir and the older, narrator. There is also a sense that there is always a doubling of the personality. At times, it seems to be more like a splitting or fissure; at other times, it seems to be more on the side of fusion, with doubled or multiple subjectivities or identities.

Indeed, both Gérard Genette and A.J. Greimas have addressed the issue of subjectivity and its dynamic, not static, nature. Greimas maintains that “le sujet compétent du discours . . . peut être considéré comme un *sujet en construction* permanente, sinon un sujet à reconstruire” (*Sémiotique* 12, emphasis in original). Genette, for his part, states that “[l]a conquête du *je* n’est donc pas ici retour et présence à soi, installation dans le confort de la ‘subjectivité,’ mais peut-être exactement le contraire: l’expérience difficile d’un rapport à soi vécu comme (légère) distance et décentrement . . .” (256-7). For example, in the last section in which Khatibi creates a dialogue between two characters, A and B, A says: “Supposons nulle cette hypothèse du désenchantement, je serais donc quelque part, entre toi et moi, division et rythme, dialogue de la mer et de mon enfance, possédé par ma double identité – par ma culture et l’Occident –, tournant à l’intérieur même de mon masque . . .” (176-177). Without this idea of multiple or doubled subjectivities, or even a decentered subject “under construction,” it is difficult to imagine how “I” can be between “you” and “me.”

During his years at the boarding school in Marrakesh, the narrator describes himself as solitary, preferring reading to socializing. “J’étais un autre . . . Vivre, le jour et la nuit, de rêves empruntés, était l’image absente d’un corps déréalisé, comme traversé par une simple divagation d’un désir contourné, vibratoire et jamais nommé” (81). In this scene in the autobiography, the narrator also tells us that the protagonist fancies himself a kind of “Julien Sorel” (80), and that the protagonist and his friends wonder what the world would be “si les Arabes avaient battu Charles Martel et conquis toute l’Europe” (81). Here, we see a double doubling: The protagonist, already sensing an inner duality, is confronted with the event of colonialism and its accompanying efforts of acculturation. When the narrator says, “J’étais un autre,” he can just as easily say, “J’étais des autres,” because of this series of doublings.

The myth of Calypso and Ulysses mentioned earlier is another example of such doubling. By drawing parallels between the relationships of Calypso and Ulysses, the French and Moroccans, Abdelkebir and his mother, an infant being weaned and his mother, the narrator is again showing a doubled sense of self and subjectivity, and is simultaneously creating a subject which is both singular and collective. The conflicting emotions of love and aggression when the infant (or Abdelkebir or Ulysses or the Moroccans) is separated from its mother (or Abdelkebir's mother or Calypso or the French) illustrate the child's desire for independence and thus the need to push the mother away; but at the same time, the child craves security and draws the mother closer.

This inherent doubling of the self in Khatibi's autobiography takes center stage in the last chapter, "Double contre double (Dialogue)." The dialogue between the two characters, A and B, is itself a doubling in the sense that "Double contre double" is really "A contre B." This rather antagonistic relationship between A and B calls to mind Greimas' explanation of the relationship between the "destinateur" and the "destinataire": they are "deux types d'actants qui, tout en étant reliés par une relation de subordination (*destinateur* vs. *destinataire*) et de complémentarité (l'actant du pouvoir oeuvrant au profit de l'actant du vouloir), étaient en mesure, du fait de leur autonomie, de se retrouver en situation de conflit" (Sémiotique 121). It is precisely this relationship of conflict that stands out in the presentation of A and B, despite the difficulty one has of determining precisely "who" these two characters are or what role they fill.

The characters themselves seem to refer to any number of possible relationships: A as the narrator and B as the protagonist, A as the narrator and B as his double or alter-ego, or A as the narrator and B as the reader. More specifically, we can read this scene in Genette's

terms of narrator and narratee, where A is at once a narrator and a character, and B is at once a narratee and a character. However, even this model does not hold because by Genette's own definitions, it is impossible to determine whether A and B should be considered intradiegetic or extradiegetic, especially given the fact that they are characters in the staging of this *mini-théâtre*. According to Genette, there can be no correspondence between an intradiegetic narrator and an extradiegetic narratee, or even a reader: "Comme le narrateur, le narrataire est un des éléments de la situation narrative, et il se place nécessairement au même niveau diégétique; c'est-à-dire qu'il ne se confond pas plus a priori avec le lecteur (même virtuel) que le narrateur ne se confond nécessairement avec l'auteur" (265). In a striking example, Genette maintains that "Nous, lecteurs, ne pouvons pas plus nous identifier à ces narrataires fictifs que ces narrateurs intradiégétiques ne peuvent s'adresser à nous, ni même supposer notre existence. Aussi bien ne pouvons-nous ni interrompre Bixiou ni écrire à Mme de Tourvel" (265). Likewise, an extradiegetic narrator can relate only to an extradiegetic narratee "qui se confond ici avec le lecteur virtuel, et auquel chaque lecteur réel peut s'identifier. Ce lecteur virtuel est en principe indéfini . . ." (266).

However, as mentioned earlier, Genette suggests that there is some confusion between diegetic levels when it comes to autobiography, and this is indeed the case with La Mémoire tatouée. In this last section of Khatibi's autobiography, B can be seen as what Genette calls the "narrataire intradiégétique" who is transformed into a character, and also as an extradiegetic (virtual) reader, who is "en principe indéfini." B is presented in a similar light as "un décolonisé" of the subtitle. B is at once quantifiable and indeterminate, "indéfini" in the sense that it is impossible for us to attribute B to a single person or subjective or diegetic

position. And yet, the kind of reader that B might be is suggested by the fact that this text is written in French, a fact that both implicates and excludes certain readers.

However one may interpret B, A continues in the same voice (or in the same collection of voices) and from the same perspective as the narrator. While at least one critic has focused on the second possibility, that A is the narrator and B is his alter-ego, suggesting that the reader, especially the Western reader, “might just as well disappear,”⁵⁰ the consistent doubling throughout the autobiography requires that we consider A and B as multiple subjectivities with multiple signifieds. The case seems rather obvious for B, and less so for A. But even if we do consider A to be the narrator, we must remember that by the narrator’s commentary about his birth, name, and other life experiences, he indicates his own sense of *dédoublement*.

Mead’s explanation of the self as a social process is remarkably appropriate here: “The ‘I’ is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the ‘me’ is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized ‘me,’ and then one reacts toward that as an ‘I’” (175). Bearing this in mind, let us look at the first exchanges between A and B:

- A. – Ecoute-moi sans me trahir, ou va, accuse le vent.
- B. – Je t’écoute, je te trahis. Tu racontes ton enfance, tu fais le tour de ta petite vie qui n’a rien d’exemplaire, il faut l’avouer. Mais malin que tu es, malin que tu penses être, tu amalgames ta déperdition dans les signes, tu retires la main quand l’histoire te harcèle: syllabe par là, voyelle par ici, et enfance, ploc!
- A. – Pauvre égaré! Bien que je sois le fils dégradé de mon père, je désire – désir, pourtant, sauras-tu jamais? – te faire frôler la nécessité de mon partage. Je t’ai souvent répété que mon être n’est pas ce vide que tu nommes, cet oeil noir où je me perdrais dans la mortelle fascination, même s’il y a au fond de la pupille la peur d’être dévoré par une simple fumée de tabac, quand, revenant vers ma fatigue, elle s’enroule et disparaît dans ma propre chair. Supposons ce vide irrévocable dans le battement, n’est-ce pas que le souvenir est pure rature? On peut commencer par n’importe où, et

tout le reste est hasard, chaque fois le souvenir est à gagner ou à détruire, une fois pour toutes, dans une fraude inavouée.

B. – Je me rappelle tout cela, et je me rappelle tes illusions quand tu te résumes par un saut de chèvre. (175-176)

Drawing an analogy with Mead's distinction between "I" and "me," we can say that A is "I," "the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others," and B is "me," "the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes." A/"I" assumes the attitudes of others, B/"me," and then reacts to those attitudes as A/"I." At the end of Khatibi's autobiography, B jumps into the Chinese fresco and disappears, leaving A to stand alone (if we can say such a thing) and speak to his "invités du jour."⁵¹ A has assumed the attitudes of B and, in a sense, consumed B. But A will not be alone long; another B will soon come along and add to A's already doubled and redoubled sense of self. B, as other, becomes part of A: self is dialogue with the other.

With all of this doubling, it is no wonder that the narrator – even at the very beginning of the autobiography – expresses a sensation of vertigo. Doubling lurks behind every corner in Khatibi's autobiography, problematizing the idea that the autobiographical subject is unified. Not only are the author, narrator and protagonist not identical, but each one in and of itself lacks its own unity. The autobiographical "I" is doubled across time and in time and forces the reader to re-evaluate his or her understanding of identity and subjectivity.

The Whole Life

Much like the assumption of the unified autobiographical subject, the assumption that autobiography represents a whole life is based on our historical experience with autobiography. A writer or famous person of some other sort nears the end of his or her life, and decides to put down in writing the story of his or her life. It is from this idea of autobiography that we understand it as a retrospective account of one's life, and this

retrospection usually takes the form of a significant difference in time: an elderly person tells of the events of his or her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. He or she tells of a long life lived, often relating the personal story to larger historical concerns which in some way affect the outcome of the story. Despite sometimes tragic circumstances, there is often a very nostalgic tone to autobiography, a longing for the past when life was simpler and the writer more innocent. In all of this, we assume that the autobiography we read will be a kind of written recording of the writer's entire life, and of how the circumstances of that life have come to bear on the writer's concept of self.

While Khatibi's autobiography fulfills our wish to have an understanding of his concept of self, it challenges the assumption that autobiography is the account of a whole life. La Mémoire tatouée was published in 1971, when Khatibi was only in his early thirties.⁵² His previous publications were a book-length critical essay on the Maghrebien novel and some poetry and essays in the review Souffles.⁵³ The fact that Khatibi's autobiography was published so early in his life poses an interesting question for the student of autobiography: How can one presume to write an autobiography, to write one's life, when perhaps only one-half or one-third of that life has been lived? How can one imagine that the first thirty years of one's life contain material that will interest, both by its quality and quantity, a reading public?

Toward the beginning of the autobiography, Khatibi asks: "Est-ce possible le portrait d'un enfant?" (16). In keeping with the metaphor of portraiture, we might ask if it is possible to compose a portrait, a process which takes place over a period of time, and yet ends up with a product that does not reflect the passage of time. Further complicating matters, the narrator asks this question within the autobiography and therefore can be understood to be asking whether it is possible for one to compose a portrait of oneself as a child. We might ask, by

extension, is autobiography possible? It must be, of course, because people do it all the time; it must be possible because here we are with one in our hands.

Yet the acts of self-reflection and shifting subjectivity required by self-portraiture or autobiography are necessarily wrought with problems. In a general, theoretical sense, a complete autobiography is an absolute impossibility because of the impossibility of giving an account of an entire life, regardless of one's good intentions to do just that. The function of memory and the role of the unconscious are important factors in the inability to provide a complete rendering of one's life story, as we shall see shortly. But just as important is the fact that, in most cases, the life continues on during and after the writing and publication of the autobiography, and thus the autobiography enters what Paul John Eakin calls the "life stream": "As the act of composition extends in time, so it enters the life stream, and the fictive separation between life and life story, which is so convenient – even necessary – to the writing of autobiography, dissolves" ("Malcolm X" 192). When autobiography enters the life stream, it becomes a part of the very whole that it purports to represent.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the autobiographer creates this text for us and in so doing, comes to the task with a purpose in mind. He or she chooses which parts of his or her life to include. This is certainly true with Khatibi, whose autobiography is but the first step in the delineation of theoretical concepts discussed in his future works.

Ross Miller has pointed out that readers of autobiography expect to encounter a completed self: "The pose of the autobiographer as an experienced man is particularly effective because we expect to hear from someone who has a completed sense of his own life and is therefore in a position to tell what he has discovered."⁵⁵ Many North African writers, Khatibi included, and many African-American writers wrote autobiographies that were

published at the beginning of their careers.⁵⁶ Had these writers already become “experienced” men and women? What had they discovered that they felt was worth sharing with a reading public? Did they, in fact, have a “completed sense” of their own lives?

Undoubtedly one of the primary motivating factors for Khatibi’s autobiography, both in terms of his impulse to write and a reader’s desire to read this text, is the event of colonization and its impact on the lives of the people who were colonized. Khatibi is not alone in this desire to share with others the effects of colonization. Many other North African writers, especially during the period between the end of World War II and Algerian Independence in 1962, began their careers with and through autobiography. For example, even though La Mémoire tatouée is the only text to call itself “autobiography,” the first books written by Taos Amrouche, Mouloud Feraoun, Albert Memmi, Mouloud Mammeri, and Driss Chraïbi are all generally considered to be autobiographies.

What does seem clear about these writers publishing autobiographies so early in their careers is that even though their lives are not complete, they feel that they have experiences which should be shared with a reading public. What is important and significant about their life experiences and their sense of self at the moment of writing are things which have already happened. In other words, their autobiographies are less about a complete life than they are an expression of how their lives have shaped their present perspective. Their life experiences have spurred these writers on to bear witness both as individuals and as representatives of a larger collectivity with similar experiences.

This tension between the individual and collective in minority autobiography is evident in Khatibi’s autobiography. The sub-title, “Autobiographie d’un décolonisé,” demonstrates this tension with the use of the indefinite article “un.” It denotes the singularity

or specificity of one particular decolonized person, yet it also indicates a plurality, or at the very least, an indeterminacy with respect to number, because it can also mean “a” decolonized person, one among many others. Another example in which the narrator indicates just this kind of tension between individual and collective subjectivity is a scene in which he describes a particular kind of haircut he had as a young boy. “Garçon de mon âge à la tête rasée, à l’exception d’une longue mèche au centre du crâne indiquant la direction du vent ou de l’école. Qui n’a eu une mèche au milieu du crâne, ne comprendra pas, de toute évidence, ce que j’oserai dire sur ma génération, celle justement des mèches, la dernière race qui disparaît maintenant, sous des ventres de grosseur irrésistible.”⁵⁷ In this passage, the narrator makes himself representative of a larger collectivity, as if he is speaking for an entire generation. He also implicates the reader as a maker of meaning: those readers who had a *mèche* and therefore belong to the narrator’s generation will understand his perspective because they had similar life experiences; those who did not have the *mèche* will not understand, at least not in the personalized way in which the narrator’s generation will.

Despite his nod to members of his own generation, the narrator also displays a decidedly individualistic tone in his autobiography. He asks: “Qui dira mon passé dans l’effacement d’une page, qui saura varier l’obscurité au seul arrachement d’ailes? Plus que mon vouloir, le voici, le souvenir plaintif, le voici libre de sa figure” (16). The narrator asks who will write his past, his autobiography, if he himself does not do it? Who will tell his story? Who will know how to tell his story? The very question relates to both the content of his life story and to theoretical questions about autobiography. Given Khatibi’s status as a formerly colonized Francophone intellectual, is there anyone better to tell his story of belonging to and alienation from two different cultures? Can anyone other than Khatibi better

relate his experiences within these cultures and the effects of these experiences on his intellectual, emotional, and psychological development? In posing these questions, “Est-ce possible le portrait d’un enfant?” and “Qui dira mon passé . . .?”, Khatibi is pointing to the importance of autobiography to provide the writer’s perspective of himself or herself. This first question also asks if autobiography can be considered as an accurate representation of a life. Is a complete and accurate portrait of a child possible? From this line of questioning, we can draw out two important points for discussion: the understanding of autobiography as a representation, with its accompanying expectations of accuracy; and the primary role that memory plays in any attempt to portray one’s self in the past.

Accuracy and the Problem with Memory

The idea that autobiography is an accurate representation of a life raises questions about the very concept of representation in art. In Blindness and Insight Paul de Man suggests that representation – as the word itself indicates – is founded on presuppositions of presence and absence, and the ability of art to render present what is absent: “Representation is an ambivalent process that implies the absence of what is being made present again, and this absence cannot be assumed to be merely contingent” (123). De Man explains that the model for this idea of representation is the painted image, where the object is restored to view “as if it were present and thus assuring the continuation of its presence” (123). He also states that “[t]he possibility of making the invisible visible, of giving presence to what can only be imagined, is repeatedly stated as the main function of art” (124). What is interesting in all of these descriptions of the traditional notion of representation in Western art is that there is a fundamental reliance on the importance of presence as well as the importance of the visual, of what is visual and therefore visible.

When it comes to language, however, the idea of making what is absent present and visible becomes, in Benveniste's work, reproducing what is absent and making it present and audible:

Le langage *re-produit* la réalité. Cela est à entendre de la manière la plus littérale: la réalité est produite à nouveau par le truchement du langage. Celui qui parle fait renaître par son discours l'événement et son expérience de l'événement. Celui qui l'entend saisit d'abord le discours et à travers ce discours, l'événement reproduit. (25)

Language, therefore, according to Benveniste, has a double function: "pour le locuteur, il représente la réalité; pour l'auditeur, il recrée cette réalité" (25). Again, we see Benveniste's reliance on presence as a condition of language: the speaker makes present again "reality" and in so doing, creates anew this "reality" for the listener. Benveniste's concept of language is that it is a relatively transparent medium or vehicle used to convey content, experiences, or "reality." Because of this, Benveniste does not question what it means for language to "represent"; he does not consider the *concept* of representation which is so fundamental to artistic and literary activity.

Is art an imitation of life or is it its own creation, expressing its own kind of truth? If we look at this issue from the end of the spectrum where imitation lies, it is important to understand that there is no such thing as a perfect imitation. A perfect imitation of a tree, for example, is a tree; no photograph, painting, sculpture, or verbal description of a tree can ever be a tree. By extension, an autobiography cannot perfectly imitate a life; so at most, an autobiography is an imperfect imitation of a life. Now, if we consider this issue from the opposite end of the spectrum, we must understand that there is no such thing as spontaneous, originary creation. There is no work of art that has no referent, even if the referent is art or

language itself. Similarly, there is no autobiography that has no referent, even if the referent is the very creation of the autobiography or the autobiographical act.

Olney points to a similar dichotomy, suggesting that there seem to be two camps in the study of autobiography: those who say there is no such thing as autobiography, and those who say there is nothing but autobiography (“Autobiography and the Cultural Moment” 4). These two arguments are really the same in the sense that the answer probably lies somewhere in the middle of the two extremes. Likewise, the differing concepts of representation in autobiography – whether we call it presentation, representation, imitation, creation or re-creation – amount to a difference of degrees of imitation and creation. What the two have in common, however, is an expectation on the part of the reader of autobiography of some degree of truth, honesty or accuracy. We can be as philosophical as we please, but the fact is that readers do expect at least a degree of truth in autobiography,⁵⁸ much in the same way that they expect believability in a work of science-fiction. Every detail of a work of science-fiction need not be “true” or even believable, but the overall tone of the work – the plot, events, and characters – must in some way be believable so that readers can relate to the story. This degree of truth or believability is called verisimilitude. The most important way in which verisimilitude differs between autobiography and, for example, science-fiction, is that the expectation of verisimilitude in autobiography lies in the idea that one is accessing and re-creating one’s past through the operation of memory.

However, autobiography is above all a type of literary discourse and as such, it cannot be held to pre-established standards of truth. In a discussion of Rousseau, Paul de Man questions the very idea of accuracy in representation, especially in literature, because everything is mediated by language: “The only literal statement that says what it means to

say is the assertion that there can be no literal statements” (Blindness and Insight 133). In an earlier essay in the same volume, de Man states that literature “is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated expression” (17). De Man further explains that Rousseau’s text accounts for the “‘rhetoricity’ of its own mode” and “postulates the necessity of its own misreading. It knows and asserts that it will be misunderstood . . . In accordance with its own language, it can only tell this story as a fiction, knowing full well that the fiction will be taken for fact and the fact for fiction; such is the necessarily ambivalent nature of literary language” (136). Autobiography, as a particular mode of literary language or expression, is necessarily ambivalent about its own claims to fact and fiction. Khatibi’s autobiography both demonstrates and capitalizes on this ambivalence by calling attention to its own status as staging or creation and to the narrator’s own stated problems with memory.

The traditional model of memory which accompanies readers’ desire for verisimilitude assumes an operation of memory that is trouble-free. Life events are objectively and accurately encoded and then later objectively and accurately recalled. Current research on autobiography as well as research conducted in psychology and neurobiology demonstrate that memory is a problematic, incomplete and inaccurate mental faculty.⁵⁹ One of the “natural” problems of memory is forgetting, and this is a problem usually associated with recall.⁶⁰ However, Khatibi’s autobiography indicates that in addition to faulty recall, there may also be errors in the encoding of memories. The narrator reflects on his travels and his impressions of various places including, in this scene, England: “J’avais vu, mais le regard abuse; revenir chaque fois à la mémoire et cette chose est déjà attitude ou cendres?” (151). The narrator points out here that what we see or experience is etched into our memory and takes on a life of its own – apart from the event itself – based on our perspective at the time

the memory is encoded. Our view is always a point of view, and our memories are informed and shaped by this point of view even at the moment of encoding. Khatibi's narrator says, "J'avais vu, mais le regard abuse"; Greimas, cited earlier, says that "our viewing is never naive." In psychology, bias is considered as a factor in misremembering and is called an error of commission.⁶¹ Bias refers to our attitude about an event or experience; if we like something or believe something about it, we are more likely to remember or misremember it. If we deem an event less important or mildly pleasant or unpleasant, our memory of it may dissipate; if we deem an event more important or an experience exceedingly pleasant or unpleasant, it becomes part of us, shaping us and our present and future.

The relative importance of an event when it is encoded in memory is often linked to an emotional response about the event itself. As discussed earlier, the protagonist's experiences with racial prejudice stand out textually because they are presented as direct discourse in an autobiography which uses mainly indirect discourse to relate past conversations. These experiences with racism also reveal the emotional and psychological impact on the protagonist. In a similar scene, the protagonist has surgery to have his tonsils removed:

. . . ainsi, cette atroce nuit entre les mains de médecins racistes après une longue opération bénigne des amygdales. J'avais, devant la table d'opération, vomi une partie de mon sang. Etendu, j'écoutais leur discours sur notre ingratitude et notre barbarie. Ils disposaient de ma vie et de ma mort; mais mon coeur était excellent, j'étais sauvé. Ce long cauchemar que je subissais, les yeux ouverts, me tortura toute la nuit. (96-97)

The operation, the racism of the doctors, the vomiting of blood: one can certainly understand the psychological impact of this experience on the young protagonist. The narrator highlights the emotional effect of this experience by emphasizing the fear of the adolescent; the doctors had his life in their hands, and the long nightmare tortured him all night.⁶²

The strong emotions associated with this memory – the fear of death and the disgust over the doctors’ comments – are what help to encode and store the memory. Thomas Carew explains that the part of the brain involved in emotional and fear-based memory and learning is the amygdala.⁶³ The amygdala helps encode emotional and fear-based memories. *Amygdales* derives from the Latin word *amygdala*, meaning almond.⁶⁴ It is no small coincidence that the operation to remove Abdelkebir’s tonsils, *les amygdales*, is expressed in the context of racism and fear, because it was encoded as a memory with the help of the amygdala; this is just the kind of clever word-game one can expect from Khatibi. The removal of the tonsils combined with the role that the amygdala plays in memory and learning calls to mind Khatibi’s accusation to the West: “Occident . . . tu m’as arraché le noyau de ma pensée . . .” (169). The relative clarity of this memory results from the operation of the amygdala. The intensity of Abdelkebir’s emotional reaction helps ensure the encoding and storage of this memory and it becomes an “attitude” (as opposed to “cendres”) that the narrator still carries with him.

The narrator in Khatibi’s autobiography also recognizes the fact that sometimes memory has a mind of its own, that as hard as we try, we cannot focus in on the memory or render it any more clear; it remains rather hazy, more like a hallucination than a clear image. When discussing his school-age years, the narrator mentions that he was somewhere in between two groups of students: those who studied and knew their lessons, and those who goofed off. “[J]’étais entre les deux, si je ne m’abuse, si le souvenir se prétend étrange, si j’ai le moindre pouvoir sur mes mirages . . .” (56). The narrator suggests that he has no control over his “mirages”; they come and go as they please, which is essentially the very way in which memory operates. No matter how we try to order them, memories seem to find their

own path, their own organization. Reynolds et al. point out that linearity is an imposed structure, a function of narrative tradition and not of memory: “. . . there is nothing inherently natural about linear chronologism: human memory is not linear and indeed is far more susceptible to associative linkages” (246). Indeed, what we see in Khatibi’s autobiography is an imposed, “artificial” structure designed to mimic the natural ways in which memory operates, with associative linkages, voids, and haziness. The use of the word “mirages” reinforces this idea of the haziness of memories, a certain lack of clarity of remembered and recalled events. A mirage is, in effect, a hallucination. We must then ask ourselves to what sphere this memory belongs: is this memory referring to a “real” event or is it a hallucination? And does it even matter to us, the readers? Is it the specific event that interests us or is it rather the general feel for the narrator’s youth, for his sense of self as a youngster?

In Khatibi’s autobiography, memory has a dynamic and organic quality. In discussing his days at the Qur’anic school, the narrator talks about how the *fqih* (religious teacher) tried to help the young students develop their faculty of memory, especially by writing and re-writing Qur’anic verses: “La petite planche sur laquelle devait se développer mon savoir resta longtemps blanche. . . . Le fqih . . . nous enseigna quelques procédés mnémotechniques. Ma mémoire s’épanouit vaguement, puis elle devint vite une pomme gâtée” (29). Memory is something that can be developed and that can also easily deteriorate, but it is still its own organism and cannot be consistently consciously controlled.

However, despite the text’s suggestion that memory operates of its own free will, the text also suggests that memory can certainly be influenced. In addition to certain kinds of “natural” problems with memory that one can – and indeed should – expect in autobiography, Khatibi’s autobiography portrays the event of colonization as having had great effect on the

protagonist's, and even the country's, memory. The effort of the colonizers to "civilize" North Africans was also, in effect, an effort to create a kind of cultural amnesia.⁶⁵ The language, culture, and sometimes even religion of the "uncivilized" North Africans were to be replaced with the language, culture, and religion of the French. The narrator tells of the feelings of alienation this produces in the protagonist and his classmates. When the students read excerpts from French literature, for example, they are asked to write essays about what they read. The narrator states: ". . . parler dans nos rédactions de ce qui se disait dans les livres, du bois brûlant dans la cheminée, . . . partir dans la neige quand on imaginait difficilement son existence" (56). The lack of cultural context for these types of experiences leaves the students at a loss, wondering who they are and where they fit in – if they fit in at all.⁶⁶ The narrator continues: ". . . on se sentait des enfants conçus en dehors des livres, dans un imaginaire anonyme. Et de cours en cours, disparaître derrière les mots, en prenant soin d'éliminer toute trace suspecte" (56). The desire to eliminate any trace of nativeness, Moroccaness, or North Africaness – often symbolized by an accent – is not only a desire to acculturate or assimilate; it is a desire to become the Other through mastery of the Other's language. Like many North African writers, the narrator tells us that, at least for a time, the protagonist believes to have accomplished this. When he finds himself in a class which is, for the first time in his life, majority female and majority French, the narrator tells us: "On m'acceptait parce que j'étais semblable, annihilant d'avance toute mon enfance, toute ma culture" (112). The protagonist not only physically resembles his French classmates with his green eyes and light skin, but he speaks like them and acts like them.

This attempt to wipe out or annihilate one's past in order to be accepted by the colonizer nearly succeeds, despite the resistance and resentment that builds along the way. At

a certain point, the young protagonist realizes that he will never be accepted by the colonizer; he cannot become one of them no matter the lengths to which he goes. This realization provokes a rather violent reaction during which the narrator says, “Occident, tu m’as écharpé, tu m’as arraché le noyau de ma pensée” (169). The protagonist realizes that all of his efforts to become acculturated will not be rewarded; through the forgetting forced on him by the colonial system and through his own desire for similarity, he has nearly lost himself, his past, his culture, his language. This realization is mirrored in a scene describing a celebration of Moroccan independence:

Au programme, des pièces poétiques en arabe classique. A la fin du spectacle, le public était toujours assis, il n’avait rien compris à cette langue des livres. Un acteur cria que c’était réellement la fin et qu’il pouvait partir. Cet échec nous donna une raison, on se réfugia dans la tradition, seule manière de séduire. (102)

The narrator situates this scene in the context of Moroccan independence, thus suggesting that the reason the audience does not understand Classical Arabic is because of French colonization. However, it is also an indication of the difference between Moroccan Arabic, the spoken dialect, and Classical Arabic, the “language of books.” The audience’s failure to understand is emblematic of a double failure within Moroccan society. The uneducated, illiterate portion of the population has difficulty understanding Classical Arabic, and so does the educated, elite portion of the population, the former because of their lack of education and the latter because of their education under French colonial rule. But this double failure within Moroccan society also indicates the success of the colonial mission. The people who “benefited” from the presence and system of the colonizer have been alienated from their history and traditions through the loss of language in the colonial project of cultural assimilation.

Interestingly, Fanon notices a similar phenomenon during the struggle for Algerian independence, but instead of seeing this lack of understanding as failure, Fanon seems rather charmed by the sight of peasants huddled together listening to radio broadcasts that they do not fully understand: “Few understand the literary Arabic used in these broadcasts. But the faces assume a look of gravity . . . when the expression *Istiqlal* (Independence) resounds in the *gourbi* (shack). An Arab voice that hammers out the word *Istiqlal* four times in an hour suffices at that level of heightened consciousness to keep alive the faith in victory” (ADC 87). It is quite ironic that Fanon, who typically rails against the colonial project of assimilation and acculturation, does not seem to appreciate the truly sad state of this scene. Instead of viewing this scene with his ordinary outrage, Fanon overlooks the fact that the “people,” whom he simultaneously valorizes and patronizes, do not understand the Classical Arabic radio broadcasts for two reasons: French colonization in North Africa *as well as* the high rate of illiteracy among the North African population.

Khatibi’s narrator, however, does recognize the negative implications of this kind of failure, and that this failure, or rather the realization of this failure, is what provides the impetus for turning to one’s roots, for “burying oneself in tradition.” Despite the narrator’s seeming understanding of this desire at that point in time, Khatibi later tells us that this kind of “retour aux sources” is impossible: “Il n’y a pas de retour en soi, rien, rien que des transformations critiques”⁶⁷ Just as it is impossible for the protagonist to erase his otherness in order to assimilate into French society, it is also impossible to erase all traces of acculturation in order to return to one’s roots. For these roots to which one would like to return and for which one is nostalgic no longer exist in any kind of pure state. The effects of time and cultural interaction have transformed them. The memory or trace of these roots, as

well as the memory or trace of colonial acculturation, will always be there, just as the past “I” is always, somewhere, somehow, part of the present “I” in autobiography.

The memory or the trace of the past self, as a sign of otherness, is a site of resistance in much the same way as the old city or medina resists colonization. The narrator contrasts the Cartesian, mathematical order of the colonial city with the labyrinthine order of the medina:

On connaît l’imagination coloniale: juxtaposer, compartimenter, militariser, découper la ville en zones ethniques, ensabler la culture du peuple dominé. En découvrant son dépaysement, ce peuple errera, hagard, dans l’espace brisé de son histoire. Et il n’y a de plus atroce que la déchirure de mémoire. Mais déchirure commune au colonisé et au colonial, puisque la médina résistait par son dédale.⁶⁸

The colonizer’s efforts to erase any trace of the colonized, to reduce their existence to dust or “cover it with sand,” will only result in failure because the contact between the two cultures and two peoples has already left its mark. Moreover, the medina as a labyrinth makes a clean, easy escape impossible. The very tearing apart of the society of the colonized also leaves negative side-effects on the colonizers.⁶⁹

In the passage cited above, the narrator establishes a link between the medina and memory. The medina, by its labyrinthine complication and confusion, resists the kind of forced forgetting brought about by colonization. The description of the medina as a labyrinth is repeated throughout the autobiography; here it is established with the word “dédale,” meaning complication or confusion, but also referring to Daidalos, builder of the mythical labyrinth on Crete.⁷⁰ Labyrinth becomes both a spatial metaphor for memory as well as a description of the way in which memory functions. The labyrinth of the medina is at once a vessel which holds memories and a model for the very operation of memory; we thus find the protagonist “taking a stroll down memory lane”: “Je traverse mon enfance dans ces petites

rues tourbillonnantes, maisons de hauteur inégale, et labyrinthe qui se brise au coin d'un quelconque présage. Qu'est-ce encore une rue? Ce feuillage de chaux, usé par la pluie; je traverse mon enfance . . ." (30). The city streets are the various memories from the narrator's childhood, worn away – but not completely – by time and the elements. Walking through the familiar labyrinth of the “worn” city streets is like walking through the familiar territory of his faded childhood memories.

Unlike the familiar labyrinthine streets of his childhood, Casablanca seems like an anomaly to the narrator: “Au sortir de la médina, tout se résumait en une image fanée de l'Occident, rondement dépaysé dans un style néo-mauresque. Comment se souvenir de cette ville quand tout y confluaient en explosion?” (110). Indeed, how can he remember what the city once was when the visual indicators are no longer there? How can he remember the city at all when it no longer fits the model of memory he has established for himself? Despite being a little worn or run down, the medina is still the medina of his childhood memories; the colonial city, on the other hand, makes him feel out of his element, a stranger in a city in which he once lived. The absence of familiar landmarks, or rather their transformation to a different style of architecture, results in a feeling of *dépaysement* because there is nothing there now to trigger his memory.

The contrast between the geometric colonial city and the labyrinth of the medina is an appropriate analogy to the contrast between our expectations of how memory functions and how memory actually works. This is particularly evident in autobiography which is assumed to be a written record of the writer's past, of his or her memories. Any stroll down memory lane is not a walk down a long, straight street with cross-streets at measured and expected intervals, with signs to help indicate one's location and direction. As Khatibi's autobiography

suggests, when we walk the streets of our childhood, we are bombarded with detours, unexpected twists and turns, new alleys to explore, and dead-ends which force us to double back and re-trace our steps. A good example of this concept of memory as labyrinth is the passage cited earlier in which the narrator speaks of his parents, then tells the story of his weaning, then tells of his mother's comparison between the French at independence and the infant being weaned from the mother's breast. This then reminds him of the tenderness his mother showed when she saw him being held at gunpoint by a French soldier, which then reminds him of the myth of Calypso and Ulysses. After a brief reflection on this myth, he returns to the story of his weaning, only to explain that he came down with an eye infection shortly thereafter. While the narrator certainly could have progressed straight from the story of his weaning to his contracting an eye infection, saving the other tid-bits for later, he presents these memories as if this is the way in which they all came to him. These memories do not follow any kind of chronological pattern that one expects to find in autobiography; they are separate little detours in the labyrinth of his memory.

The inaccuracy and incompleteness of memory in Khatibi's autobiography, and especially the text's awareness of these problems, points to the inaccuracy and incompleteness of the autobiography itself. Indeed, if any autobiography presents itself as a retrospective account, we must understand that it will necessarily be incomplete. Any reliance on memory will reveal gaps that the narrator then attempts to fill. This is certainly the case with Khatibi's autobiography where the narrator puts these gaps on display and then covers them up, in a sense, with narrative commentary. An autobiography, therefore, is somehow always less than what we expect and yet it is also more than what we expect.

Conclusion

Autobiography has been criticized for being an attempt at a kind of literary or artistic totalization.⁷¹ I would argue that it is precisely autobiography's inability to achieve totalization that makes it so intriguing. Readers begin with the assumption that the writer will provide an honest and complete account of his or her own life. However, because of errors in memory, unstable and shifting subjectivity, and the impossibility of accounting for the "whole life," readers come to understand that while they may not have had their expectations met, they do still come away with a general feeling for who the writer is and how he or she came to be out of the circumstances of his or her life.

When Khatibi's narrator tells us about reading texts about summer in the fall and writing compositions about snow, he says: "Mon enfance, ma vraie enfance, je ne pourrai jamais la raconter" (57). Because the "I" refers to both the protagonist and the narrator, and because the verb *pouvoir* is in the future tense, it is clear that in addition to the protagonist's feelings of not being able to tell his story, his "true" childhood, the narrator is expressing a similar idea. Even the narrator, the older, wiser, and more experienced "I," will never be able to tell his true story. This little sentence throws the entire autobiography in doubt. If this is not the story of his "true" childhood, then how are we to take the very text we have in our hands? While it may not take a giant leap to understand and accept inaccuracy and incompleteness in autobiography, this type of statement is baffling because it seems to nullify the whole enterprise. But this statement also begs the question: If this is not the story of his "true" childhood, what is his "true" story? If the autobiographer is indicating that he will never be able to reveal his true past, then what is the past of this autobiography? What is it that the writer wants to reveal about himself that he also wants to share with a reading

public? As we shall see in Chapter Two, Khatibi's autobiography is less a story of who he was than a story of who he has come to be; it is less the story of his being than the story of his becoming – becoming a writer.

End Notes

¹ Philippe Lejeune, On Autobiography, ed. and foreword Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989) 4.

² Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 73.

³ Barrett J. Mandel, "Full of Life Now," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 53.

⁴ David Rubin, address, International Interdisciplinary Conference on Memory and Narrative, Baton Rouge, 18 Oct. 2001. According to Rubin, tests for aphasia are conducted at the level of individual words.

⁵ See James Olney's discussion of Valéry's "La jeune parque" in "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of *Bios*: The Ontology of Autobiography," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 249-259. See also Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," Modern Language Notes 94.5 (1979): 920.

⁶ Ilya Farber, address, International Interdisciplinary Conf. on Memory and Narrative, Baton Rouge, 19 Oct. 2001. Also see Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," p. 30, and William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," p. 84, both in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980).

⁷ Olney, "Ontology," 236-267.

⁸ Lejeune, L'Autobiographie en France (Paris: Armand Colin, 1971).

⁹ For a more thorough discussion of this aspect of Arabic autobiography, see Reynolds et al. 5, 42-43.

¹⁰ Reynolds et al. 38. The authors cite Ihsan Abbas, Fann al-Sira (1956) (The Art of the Sira), who describes five kinds of *sira*; and Shawqi Dayf, al-Tarjama al-shakhsiyya (1956) (The Self-Authored Tarjama), who describes five kinds of *tarjama*.

¹¹ The use of the term chapter is my own; they are not called chapters in the text. I use it here to distinguish from what I am calling the main sections.

¹² “Sauvage” is in parentheses because while it appears in the table of contents, it does not appear as part of the title on p. 149 of the text.

¹³ Here we have the opposite case: the word “dialogue” does not appear in the table of contents but it does appear as a kind of sub-title on p. 175 in the text.

¹⁴ Tom Gullion, e-mail to the author, 12 Mar. 2001.

¹⁵ Wagner is mentioned in the autobiography in the context of the protagonist’s relationship with a young woman whom he calls “la wagnérienne” because of her love for Wagner’s music.

¹⁶ Abdelkebir Khatibi, “Quelques aspects de la pluralité chez Abdelkebir Khatibi,” interview with I.C. Tchaho, Revue CELFAN / CELFAN Review 6.1 (1986): 8.

¹⁷ Ted Gioia, The History of Jazz (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 6.

¹⁸ Kateb’s influence on Khatibi as a writer and thinker relates to art, form and innovation. Although the two share common cultural backgrounds, they are from different countries and different colonial situations. Algeria was a *département d’outre-mer*, or what Fanon calls a “settler’s colony” (ADC 28). Morocco, on the other hand, was officially a protectorate, not an official *département*. There are, of course, other differences such as the lesser influence of the Ottoman Empire in Western North Africa, but these differences do not in any way negate the influence Kateb has had over young writers in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

¹⁹ See, for example Kateb Yacine, Nedjma (Paris: Seuil, 1956) or Le polygone étoilé (Paris: Seuil, 1966); and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, Agadir (Paris: Seuil, 1967) or Soleil Arachnide (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

²⁰ Khatibi contributed three poems, “La rue,” “Devenir,” and “Emeute” to Souffles 2 (1966); two essays, “Roman maghrébin et culture nationale” and “Justice pour Driss Chraïbi” to Souffles 3 (1966); the “Avant-propos” to Souffles 10-11 (1968); and a review of Abdellatif Laâbi’s Race (1967) and El-Mostafa Nissaboury’s Plus haute mémoire (1968) to Souffles 13-14 (1969). It is interesting to note that in the Arabic version of Souffles 10-11, Khatibi’s “Avant-propos” is not included. In its place is another short text, in Arabic, titled “*al-Jil al-mutawar*” (“The Developed Generation”) written by Mohammed Berrada.

²¹ Nkashama Pius Ngandu, Personal communication with the author, 12 Dec. 2001.

²² William L. Howarth, “Some Principles of Autobiography,” Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 87. Howarth states: “Style, then, is not subservient to content, but is a formal device significant in its own right.”

²³ This word is transliterated differently in Benveniste's text; I have altered it here for consistency with transliterations from other cited works and with my own transliterations throughout this study.

²⁴ This idea of the same person is, in itself, problematic, and we will return to it shortly.

²⁵ Lejeune, On Autobiography 14. Lejeune adds to this that the narrator may, in an initial section of the text, enter "into a contract vis-à-vis the reader by acting as if he were the author, in such a way that the reader has no doubt that the 'I' refers to the name shown on the cover, even though the name is not repeated in the text."

²⁶ Olney's discussion of Rousseau's Dialogues indicates not only the fission of the subject but the omnipresence of the signature as well. See "Transmogrifications of Life-Writing," The Southern Review 33.3 (1997): 565.

²⁷ Of course, another well-known example of this kind of signature is Marcel Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu.

²⁸ Lejeune himself points to the case of a pseudonym as a pen name and explains that the use of a pseudonym does not alter the contract with the reader because the reader still equates the narrator with the author, 12.

²⁹ Lejeune 16-19.

³⁰ Cited in Jean Déjeux, La Littérature maghrébine d'expression française (Paris: PU de France, 1992) 21.

³¹ It is unfortunate that Kenneth Cragg, the translator of the third volume, A Passage to France, in The Days (Cairo: American U in Cairo P, 1997), chose to use first-person narration in his translation. His reasoning is that Hussein's use of the third person felt artificial and less charming. I would argue the exact opposite: there is something particularly warm and endearing about Taha Hussein calling himself "the lad," or "the young boy," and something slightly troubling about Hussein referring to himself as "the blind boy."

³² Lejeune, On Autobiography 16.

³³ In Arabic, *fardi* (or *ferdi*) means single, solitary, individualistic, odd.

³⁴ To my knowledge, Khatibi's autobiography is the only one to call itself autobiography on the title page.

³⁵ The difference between *kébir* and *kebir* is strictly one of transliteration; French speakers tend to use the former while English speakers tend to use the latter.

³⁶ There are, however, veiled references to the author's family name which shall be discussed later.

³⁷ The idea of the random narrator named Abdelkebir is not entirely without merit given that the subtitle of this text is "Autobiographie d'un décolonisé." The indefinite article "un" is open to interpretation as either "one," a specific individual, or "an," any one of a number of decolonized people.

³⁸ I am aware that this comment seems to contradict my earlier remarks about Chraïbi et al. The definition a text gives itself is not always how the text is generally accepted by the reading public, and this is especially true when the readers are academics. We always look to the text to see how it defines itself but we still make our own judgments about it. This is how, for example, some of these "novels" have come to be considered "autobiographies."

³⁹ Roger Rosenblatt's amusing comment about the "whole unholy trinity" nicely summarizes the problems involved in talking about autobiographical subjectivity. "Black Autobiography: Life as the Death Weapon," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 169.

⁴⁰ Benveniste 252. By "discours," Benveniste means the actualization of language: "le langage mis en action" (258), or "l'exercice de la langue" (262).

⁴¹ Benveniste 252. Benveniste makes a similar point with "expressions déictiques" such as "here," "now," "today," etc. (254).

⁴² Genette 230. Genette discusses this passage with respect to what he calls "l'immédiat après-coup," that *just enough* time has passed "pour faire dissonance." By extension, a narrative situation which demonstrates a greater passage of time will also display this dissonance.

⁴³ Cited in Reynolds et al. 244. The year of al-Tawhidi's birth is not provided, nor is the publication date for his Treatise; however, he died in 1023 A.D.

⁴⁴ In a discussion on Samuel Beckett, Olney suggests that "the little pronoun is, in the textual disruption it creates, really more trouble than it is worth." "Transmogrifications," 568.

⁴⁵ I would like to thank R. Matilde Mesavage for pointing out Khatibi's play on words here. Personal communication with the author, 15 Nov. 2001.

⁴⁶ George H. Mead, Mind, Self and Society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1934) 138. Contemporary critics of autobiography would be well served to take a look at Mead's work. He said in the thirties what we have been hearing in literary criticism for only the past few decades.

⁴⁷ Stephen Spender, "Confessions and Autobiography," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 115-122. Spender

develops a similar argument: “Until [the writer’s] subjective experiences have become objectified – have become of a kind that he can identify and project into life outside himself – they are of no use to him for his art” (117).

⁴⁸ As Starobinski says, “. . . the ‘first person’ embodies both the present reflection and the multiplicity of past states” (79).

⁴⁹ This is especially true when we consider that Khatibi is a sociologist by training, as well as a poet, essayist, playwright, novelist, and autobiographer.

⁵⁰ Ronnie Scharfman, “Maghrebian Autobiography or Autoportriature?: Abdelkebir Khatibi’s *La Mémoire tatouée*,” Revue CELFAN/CELFA Review 8.1-2 (1988-89): 8. Scharfman uses Michel Beaujour’s distinction between *autoportrait* and *autobiography* to explain the difference between the two main sections of Khatibi’s autobiography. I find the very distinction between *autoportrait* and *autobiography* unnecessary; it reveals Beaujour’s very limited and restrictive definition of *autobiography*, similar to the problems I find with Lejeune’s definition. Scharfman concludes that Khatibi succeeds in “decolonizing his own text” by the fact that A wins out over B, the colonizing reader. Her assumption that B is the reader closes the reading, establishing a unity of subjectivity which simply does not fit with the rest of the text.

⁵¹ This scene is foreshadowed by the narrator’s earlier mention of Brecht: “Je reste fidèle au principe brechtien de la distanciation” (130).

⁵² Abdallah Memmes, Signifiante et interculturelité (Rabat: Editions Okad, 1992) 55. Khatibi has said that he began writing the autobiography in 1968.

⁵³ Khatibi, Le roman maghrébin 2nd ed. (Rabat: Société Marocaine des Editeurs Réunis, 1979).

⁵⁴ Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 28-48. Gusdorf states: “Any autobiography is a moment of the life that it recounts; it struggles to draw the meaning from that life, but it is itself a meaning in the life. One part of the whole claims to reflect the whole, but it adds something to this whole of which it constitutes a moment” (43).

⁵⁵ Cited in Paul John Eakin, “Malcolm X and the Limits of Autobiography,” Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 181.

⁵⁶ Olney makes a similar point about African-American writers in “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction,” Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 15-16. It would be interesting to contrast Francophone and Arabic language North

African autobiographies to see to what degree this observation might also hold true for Arabic-language writers.

⁵⁷ Khatibi, *Mémoire* 37. The narrator's prediction that those who did not have the *mèche* will not understand is similar to Aimé Césaire's comment in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1983) 21: "Qui ne me comprendrait pas ne comprendrait pas davantage le rugissement du tigre."

⁵⁸ Mandel 53-58.

⁵⁹ Experts in these three fields recently gathered at Louisiana State University for the International Interdisciplinary Conference on Memory and Narrative, Baton Rouge, 18-20 Oct. 2001.

⁶⁰ By "natural" I mean psychological and neurobiological problems of memory, which will later be contrasted with the kind of forced forgetting brought on by the colonial system. There are, of course, all sorts of problems with memory and to discuss them all is beyond the scope of this project. I will therefore focus on how memory is presented in Khatibi's autobiography.

⁶¹ Jason Hicks, "False Memory: The By-Product of an Organized Memory System," International Interdisciplinary Conference on Memory and Narrative, Baton Rouge, 19 Oct. 2001.

⁶² Fanon also describes the fear and reticence of colonized people to go to the hospital to be treated by European doctors, due to their "lingering doubt as to the colonial doctor's essential humanity" and the colonialists' experimentation on live patients (ADC 124).

⁶³ Thomas Carew, "Memory: From Mind to Molecules," International Interdisciplinary Conference on Memory and Narrative, Baton Rouge, 18 Oct. 2001.

⁶⁴ I would like to thank Jerome Bruner for explaining the common source of the words, and for explaining that *amygdala* is also used in French to refer to the same part of the brain. Personal interview, 19 Oct. 2001.

⁶⁵ Fanon also addresses this issue and his ideas will be considered in Chapter Two, as they relate to Khatibi's autobiography.

⁶⁶ The most frequently cited example of this is North African schoolchildren reciting the famous line: "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois"

⁶⁷ Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983) 24. Future references to this text will be parenthetical and abbreviated MP.

⁶⁸ Khatibi, *Mémoire* 44. The combination of the adjective "hagard," a homonym of "Hagar," and the verb "errer" signals a comparison between the Moroccans and Hagar, and

the French and Sarah, Abraham's wife, who banished Hagar and Ishmael after the birth of Isaac. Islamic tradition has Hagar wandering back and forth between two hills looking for water for her son. God reveals a water source on her seventh trip. Muslims on pilgrimage to Mecca re-enact this scene, going back and forth between the two hills seven times. This re-enactment is similar to the re-enactment of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac that Khatibi's narrator describes in the commentary on his name.

⁶⁹ For an excellent explanation of this double-edged sword, see Albert Memmi, Portrait du colonisé précédé du Portrait du colonisateur (Corrêa: Editions Buchet/Chastel, 1957).

⁷⁰ Le Grand Robert des noms propres (Paris: Dictionnaires le Robert, 1989) 846.

⁷¹ Jill Robbins, "Circumcising Confession: Derrida, Autobiography, Judaism," Diacritics 25.4 (1995): 24.

CHAPTER TWO: ON BECOMING A WRITER

Introduction

James Olney maintains that it is a “categorical error” to assume that autobiography is the biography of the writer.¹ While this distinction may be important to critics of Western autobiography and to the history of the genre, the distinction itself betrays an assumption that biography is somehow more accurate or factual because it is considered historical and more objective. Autobiography, on the other hand, distinguishes itself from biography by the very addition of the “auto-,” the self; it is therefore taken to be subjective and less accurate. We have already seen that in the Arabic autobiographical tradition, however, scholars often wrote their autobiographies to correct mistakes in biographies already published or to prevent mistakes in future biographies. Despite these scholars’ insistence that they could present a more accurate portrait of themselves than could a third party, and despite the importance given to first-person eyewitness testimony in Arab and Islamic culture, we must understand that these accounts of self are not without their own problems.

In a discussion of contemporary Arabic autobiography, Sergei Shuiskii points out the problems involved in the autobiographer’s process of self-analysis:

Writers are only too aware of the fact and are ready to acknowledge it. Thus, Mûsâ believes that “even the most intelligent people find it hard to analyse their mind (*nafs*) and to treat its history.” He admits that the genre contains a defect: “The autobiographer will not disclose all he knows,” and he is “blind to much that is easily seen by the rest.” (121)

When Salama Mûsâ says that an autobiographer will not disclose all he knows, we should understand that the autobiographer cannot disclose the entire story of his or her life, and more importantly that the autobiographer often chooses not to disclose all that he or she knows. The autobiographer chooses which parts to include in and which parts to exclude from his or

her autobiography based on the point he or she wants to make. In Benveniste's discussion of the function of language in Freudian psychoanalysis, he points out that the patient uses both "parole," the individual, personal, intersubjective use of language, and "discours," the manifestation of language in living communication, as a means to represent himself or herself as he or she wants to see himself or herself and as he or she calls upon the other to observe him or her (77-78). This process sometimes leads to an incomplete or falsified story of the self. Michel Leiris, in L'Age d'homme, expresses a similar idea: "Je ne suis ni plus ni moins *pur* qu'un autre, mais je veux me voir pur; je préfère cela à me voir *impur* . . ." and, "Je porte dans mes doigts le fard dont je couvre ma vie. Tissu d'événements sans importance, je te colore grâce à la magie de mon point de vue" (155). Ahmed Amin puts it this way: "To be one's own just judge or upright umpire is a rare quest, even for philosophers and wisemen."² Nietzsche takes the argument a step further, suggesting that not only is it difficult or nearly impossible to know oneself, there is also always the danger that one will intentionally misrepresent oneself: "The danger of the direct questioning of the subject *about* the subject and of all self-reflection of the spirit lies in this, that it could be useful and important for one's activity to interpret oneself falsely."³

Salman Rushdie's concept of "imaginary homelands" strikes right at the heart of this discussion. In trying to explain one's past, one always re-creates it and it is always one's own particular version of that past.⁴

But if we do look back, we must also do so with the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

What Rushdie says about the imaginary homeland or India of the mind, can also be said of the imaginary homeland of our past in memory. Indeed, Saint-Exupéry makes a comparison between the past and homeland: “L’enfance, ce grand territoire d’où chacun est sorti! D’où suis-je? Je suis de mon enfance. Je suis de mon enfance comme on est d’un pays.”⁵ Rushdie also draws this comparison between the past and one’s country of origin, and suggests that for the immigrant or formerly colonized subject, the sense of loss and desire to re-create are perhaps even more critical: “It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form” (12). In the case of Khatibi, he was both out-of-language and out-of-country, in that Morocco under colonial rule instilled a sense of *dépaysement*, a feeling of alienation within his own country.

Any attempt to “reclaim” a past, to give an account of it, results in the creation of fiction. Our longing and nostalgia for what is lost distorts what it was, and it therefore becomes a product of imaginative processes. Thus, we should understand that autobiography results from the writer’s desire to explain his or her present self by assembling bits and pieces of his or her past self which he or she believes will help the reader understand who the writer is today. However, the very assembling of these bits and pieces only ever results in a kind of fiction, an “imaginative truth” (Rushdie 10). Likewise, Paul John Eakin maintains that autobiography is a process “in which the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness” (*Fictions in Autobiography* 5). Leiris also discusses this project of self-examination and self-creation, and indicates that for him, it results in a sense of confusion about his past and about his present project:

Me voici loin de ce que je me proposais de raconter en abordant l'avant-dernière partie d'un chapitre consacré à ce qui, parmi les événements de ma vie, se rattache pour moi au thème de l'"homme blessé." A mesure que j'écris, le plan que je m'étais tracé m'échappe et l'on dirait que plus je regarde en moi-même plus tout ce que je vois devient confus, les thèmes que j'avais cru primitivement distinguer se révélant inconsistants et arbitraires, comme si ce classement n'était en fin de compte qu'une sorte de guide-âne abstrait, voire un simple procédé de composition esthétique. (128)

Although I would agree that autobiography is subjective and necessarily inaccurate to one degree or another, I would like to point out that even biography is problematic. Any life is a text, in the sense that it is ready to be read and interpreted by any reader. If this interpretation or reading of the life/text is done by the person who has lived the life, the account of the life is called autobiography; if the interpretation or reading of the life/text is performed by another person, the account of the life is called biography. But even in this seemingly objective act, that of biography, it must be understood that any account of a life/text is already a narrative.⁶ It is already an interpretation – possibly even a double interpretation, first in the reading and again in the writing. And every reader and writer – especially the autobiographer – has an agenda; every reading of a life/text becomes a biography/autobiography because the writer has a specific point to make.

When the narrator of Khatibi's autobiography states that "Mon enfance, ma vraie enfance, je ne pourrai jamais la raconter" (57), he is making a statement not only about the protagonist's inability to tell his true story within the confines of the French colonial educational system, he is also making a statement about the very project in which he, the narrator of the autobiography, is currently engaged. He will never be able to recount the truth of his past in the sense that he will never be able to replay a previous, perfect recording of the events and experiences of his childhood.

Khatibi's youth, as it is told in the autobiography, is marked by a series of tragic and important events. The protagonist is born at the outbreak of the Second World War, "grows up in its shadow",⁷ and remembers only the fear and misery of his surrounding community, threatened by a world at war. The misery and insecurity of those in Abdelkebir's milieu make a lasting impression on the protagonist, as is later related to us by the narrator: ". . . longtemps après, quand j'essayai de transcrire cette misère, je ne pus le faire que par un désordre aigu de tout le corps, barbelé dans la plus complète incertitude" (9). The reference here to transcription is perhaps an indication that all one can hope for in re-presenting the past is a kind of transcription, a rendering of the "unwritten" into a formal, written account of one's life. The use of the word transcribe also points to the difference between the mother tongue, a spoken dialect of Arabic, and French, the adopted language used in the autobiography. The difference between the two is not only one of two different languages, it is also the difference between the illiterate and the literate, the vocal and the visual, the oral and the written.

Perhaps the only thing an autobiographer can attain to, in undertaking to write his or her autobiography, is an approximation of the past. If one can not "tell" it, perhaps one can "translate" or "transcribe" it. In fact, one of the Arabic terms for autobiography is *tarjama li-nafsihi* (or *tarjama nafsahu*). The verb *tarjama* has three "central and interrelated ideas": explanation and interpretation; transformation into a different medium; clarification by means of division into sections, and labeling (Reynolds et al. 42). *Tarjama nafsahu* or *tarjama li-nafsihi* means "to compile a titled work/entry on oneself" or "to translate/interpret oneself" (Reynolds et al. 2-3). It is intriguing that the Arabic expressions for autobiography are verbal expressions, that they indicate an activity and not a product. In Barthes' frequently cited

terms, we can say that the Arabic terms for autobiography denote a text, not a work. Any event of translation is interpretation; it is both reading and writing, both fidelity and infidelity. A translation may be inaccurate in that it is not a literal translation, one word to another, but this might at the same time make it more accurate if it captures the spirit of the original text. The reverse situation may also hold true, when a translation is literally accurate but does not capture the artistry of the first version. In both cases, it is the translator who interprets the text and re-presents it according to his or her own vision. Likewise, the autobiographer as translator reads the life and interprets it, according to his or her own creative spirit. Khatibi's autobiography, through its refusal to be completely faithful to the life, points to the important function of imagination and creativity in autobiography. La Mémoire tatouée reveals itself as a created text, all the while telling the story of the protagonist's introduction to writing, his development as a writer, and his attitudes toward writing.

When the protagonist is still very young, his younger brother dies, and following his father's death shortly thereafter, young Abdelkebir is sent to live with an aunt in Essaouira. His sense of abandonment by his parents seems to have had some degree of psychological impact; were it otherwise, the narrator would not mention it at all. But while psychologists might argue that death and abandonment would scar a child for life, these events do not have an overbearing impact on the life as it is narrated in the autobiography. In fact, the narrator uses these events to explain the present "I," the present sense of self, much in the same way the birth scene is used to explain the protagonist's name and his sense of *dédoublement*. The narrator, reflecting back on the loss of his father and temporary abandonment by both his mother and aunt, says: "Orphelin d'un père disparu et de deux mères, aurais-je le geste de la rotation?" (16). This question posed by the narrator calls to mind once again the earlier

discussion of the name, in which the narrator expresses a feeling of vertigo. Having lost his parents, he feels ungrounded. He is spinning like a top, bouncing around the surface, unable to find a niche in which to settle. The spinning and dizziness stop only when the top has used all of its energy, tumbling over on its side.

Despite the brief history of his family presented early in the autobiography, and despite the narrator's repetition of the idea of being orphaned, these events and the accompanying sense of loss do not bear the same level of importance as other events in the autobiography. It can certainly be argued that perhaps the "true" childhood is precisely this time in Khatibi's life when he first, and quite acutely, experiences loss. But we are then still left with this autobiography that does not tell the "true" childhood, but instead is a kind of bildungsroman of Khatibi-the-writer. It tells of his introduction to reading and writing, explains his thoughts on writing and what it is to be a writer, and in so doing, this autobiography explains more about the present "I" than the past "I." The present "I" has created a past, a life story, which tells only what he wants to tell and only that which he is willing – and psychologically able – to tell.

In the previous chapter, we saw that even though Khatibi's autobiography announces itself as such, it questions the very elements of the definition of autobiography proposed by Lejeune. In so doing, the autobiography challenges our attempts to neatly categorize works of literature as belonging to a particular genre. Indeed, Paul de Man concludes that autobiography, because it cannot be neatly categorized in terms of its aesthetic and historical functions, "is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" ("De-Facement" 921). Even though de Man calls autobiography a "figure of reading" and therefore comes very close to Lejeune's definition of autobiography,

de Man does not try to limit the scope of this figure of reading in the way in which Lejeune limits the scope of what is – and what is not – autobiography. The style of Khatibi's autobiography as well as its incompleteness as autobiography due to problems with memory, subjectivity, and narrating the "life," point to the possibility that this autobiography is both less than what it tells us it is, and somehow more. It tells of the life, or at least part of the life, but it also offers a revealing commentary on what the writer feels is important to share about his life as it relates to his present condition.⁸

In this chapter, I will evaluate the presentation of coming to writing in the autobiography. In the first section, I will explain how the protagonist's name is important in that it is a sign of his destiny; it predetermines his occupation as a writer and an orator. In the second section, his initial experience of learning to read and write at the Qur'anic school will be compared and contrasted with his experience of learning to read and write French at the colonial primary school. From this kind of "physical" learning to read and write, I will then move to how the protagonist becomes a creative writer and how this activity is tied to his history as a reader. In the final section, we will see how this autobiography tells the story of writing: it tells the story of coming to writing; participates in that very story, emphasizing its own status as writing and creation; and looks ahead to future writing activities.

Writing and Destiny

In a passage at the very beginning of Khatibi's autobiography, the narrator calls attention to the importance of writing, very nearly comparing writing to a woman giving birth: ". . . le temps reste fasciné par l'enfance, comme si l'écriture, en me donnant au monde, recommençait le choc de mon élan, au pli d'un obscur dédoublement. Rien à faire, j'ai l'âme facile à l'éternité" (7). It is writing which has brought him into the world. The argument can

be made that it is, in fact, language which brings us into the world, creating us as it allows us to create with it.⁹ But what is it about writing in particular that holds such power here? Why does writing occupy such a privileged place in this scene and in this autobiography?

In the previous chapter I explained that the narrator offers a commentary on his name as a way to recount the story of his birth. I also suggested that the signature of this autobiography is incomplete in that the protagonist's family name is never explicitly mentioned. There are, however, multiple allusions to the family name Khatibi, as well as to the idea that the protagonist is in some way destined to become Abdelkebir Khatibi, the famous writer, scholar, and speaker. Reynolds et al. explain that "[t]he single most common dream motif in this corpus of autobiographies, however, is a dream seen by one of the author's parents that is a harbinger of his birth and that, in addition, sometimes leads to the choice of name or profession for the child" (93). Reynolds et al. cite an example which is especially appropriate in this discussion of Khatibi's autobiography because of its emphasis on the relationship between the name and the child's destiny. Ibn Buluggin, the last member of the Berber Zirid dynasty to rule Granada, was deposed by the Almoravids in 1090 A.D. and exiled to Morocco. During his captivity, he wrote his memoirs (circa 1094 A.D.). Following the first section of the memoirs, an apologia for Ibn Buluggin's dynasty, "Ibn Buluggin then turns to the horoscope cast by the court astrologers in his youth and compares it to his life as it actually unfolded" (75):

Everything is set at one's conception and birth. In the predictions calculated from the hour of my birth, I have read of characteristics that I have indeed noted in my nature and disposition, despite the fact that those who made those predictions wrote them down when I was but a child and could not have known anything of my circumstances in life. This document was hidden from me by [the minister] Simaja for a time, until it came into my hands against his will. This disturbed him, for he

feared I would grow vain from the good fortune foretold therein. In it I read of wondrous and strange things. (qtd. in Reynolds et al. 75)

In La Mémoire tatouée, the narrator's discussion of the protagonist's birth story and name are not recounted in the context of a parent's dream, but the very fact that the name is a topic of discussion in both the Arabic tradition of autobiography and in this text cannot be overlooked. And Khatibi's autobiography is certainly not the only North African literary text to use the author's or the protagonist's name as fodder for discussion. Abdelwahab Meddeb's Talismano, for example, includes a scene in which the narrator explains that the protagonist's first name is chosen based on the grandfather's dream. This text also includes a reflection on the narrator's family name and how it has come to be transformed in the changes between Classical Arabic, Arabic dialect, and transliteration into French. Talismano is so like La Mémoire tatouée that it is almost uncanny; and yet in Khatibi's own reading of Meddeb's text, he in no way alludes to the similarities between his own autobiography and the text that he is reading and explicating for his essay.¹⁰

In Khatibi's autobiography, the narrator's concept of destiny is displayed by the fact that he mentions several times the belief that everything is "written"; what will come to pass will do so only because it is preordained by God. Even in daily life, the understanding of God as the master planner is not limited to writing. In any discussion of future plans, dreams, or ambitions, Moroccans include the expression *Insha'Allah*, meaning "God willing." One's destiny is left to God, and things will come to pass only if God wills it. In two similarly expressed ideas, the narrator underscores the notion of writing as destiny: "Pas d'herbe verte ni desséchée qui ne soit dans un écrit explicite" (7), and "Pas de guérison qui ne soit dans un écrit explicite" (14). While this belief stems from the Islamic theological concept of the *maktoub*, meaning "it is written", it also bears striking similarity to the ancient Greeks' belief

in Destiny, as well as the conflict between the concepts of free will versus predestination within certain sects of Christianity. It is as if, at least according to the narrator here, he is in some way destined to write, to become a public figure, to fulfill the destiny of his name: “Et je pense bien que ma profession – regard dédoublé sur les autres – s’enracine à tout hasard à l’appel de me retrouver, au-delà de ces humiliés qui furent ma première société” (10).

Finding himself above the people of his childhood is not necessarily the arrogant statement it at first seems to be. And it is precisely the family name that helps explain this statement.

Khatibi is a Moroccan name derived from the word *khatib*, meaning a public speaker, orator, lecturer, preacher, and even suitor. A common Moroccan practice is to add the suffix “- i” to a noun to form a family name, as we add “- er” to a verb in English to designate a person who performs that action. The noun *khatib* is derived from the root verb *khataba*, meaning to deliver a public address or to make a speech.¹¹ However, a derivative form of this root verb (form VI, *takhataba*) means both to carry on a conversation and to carry on a correspondence in writing. Another noun derived from this same root is *khitaḥ*, meaning speech or oration as well as letter, note, or message. Still another noun derived from this root is *khitaḥa*, meaning oratory, rhetoric, or the art of eloquence.

In the scene in the cemetery for the burial of the protagonist’s father. The protagonist sees the rain carry the red dirt down onto his father’s tombstone and he imagines an epitaph: “Ci-gît la rhétorique glaciale, au coeur de mon enfance” (18). This glacial rhetoric is contrasted in the final chapter with a contemporary rhetoric, “notre livre” (183). The two kinds of rhetoric are a linguistic intergenerational conflict. The death of the protagonist’s father is symbolic of the death of an older, outdated mode of thought and expression; the contemporary rhetoric, associated with the writing in this autobiography, comes to life out of

the death of the older, antiquated rhetoric, replaces it and attempts to move beyond it with new ways of thinking, seeing the world, and expressing oneself in that world.

Given that the author's surname, *khatibi*, means "orator," and that the word itself contains references to writing and rhetoric, he is destined to be someone who will write and someone who will speak to the public, someone with a certain degree of authority to whom others will turn for information and counsel. As an adult, he stands before his community and beyond his community – before communities across the world – as a public speaker, an orator, a rhetorician. Because the proper name itself includes the concept of writing, we can see that in the protagonist's destiny there is both speaking and writing, a combination of visual and vocal/auditory activities, a combination of sight and sound in the use of language. The understanding of language, particularly reading and writing, as this combination of vocal and visual elements is critical to understanding the role of reading and writing in Islamic cultures. These two language skills are first taught in a religious setting, the Qur'anic school, and they hold an especially important connection to the voice in Islamic theology and education.

Learning to Read and Write: Qur'anic School

In this section we will evaluate young Abdelkebir's introduction to reading and writing at the Qur'anic school and explain the concepts of reading and writing in Islamic culture. The understanding of the Qur'an as the word of God revealed orally to the prophet Muhammad is crucial to understanding these concepts of reading and writing. Furthermore, attending Qur'anic school, for young Moroccans, poses an additional linguistic problem in that the language of the Qur'an is very different from their spoken dialect.

Therefore, understanding this autobiography as the story of the protagonist's coming to be a writer draws attention to two related issues. The first of these is that learning to write, for the protagonist and members of his generation, involves learning what are essentially two foreign languages: Classical Arabic and French. The difference between Classical Arabic and the Moroccan dialect of Arabic is indeed great, with variations in sound, structure, grammar and vocabulary. The difference is so great that the audience at the *spectacle* in the scene discussed earlier does not understand the reading of poetry in Classical Arabic. Even the difference between Moroccan Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic is so great that Arabic speakers from Egypt and the Middle East have trouble understanding a conversation in dialect between Moroccans. For young Abdelkebir, then, learning to write is not a simple connection between grapheme and phoneme; it involves, rather, learning an entirely new system of sounds and symbols – almost a new language. Later, when the protagonist learns French, he must then learn yet another system of phonemes and graphemes, as well as understand the relationship between these two new systems.

The second issue related to our understanding of Khatibi's autobiography as the story of his coming to be a writer is that this very becoming a writer is also the story of his history as a reader. As we shall soon see, it is the protagonist's introduction to literature that inspires him to become a creative writer.¹² It is interesting to note, however, that the protagonist's first experience with writing has a somewhat different relationship to reading than does his later experience with reading and writing at the French school.

Young Abdelkebir's first experiences with writing are at the Qur'anic school, where North African children are first taught to read and write.¹³ This form of religious education usually precedes enrollment at a primary school but in some cases, students continue their

studies in the Qur'anic school if their families hope to produce a religious scholar. Children, then, enter Qur'anic school around the age of four or five, and thus begins their initiation into reading and writing. The protagonist, as with many young men and some young women of his generation, attends Qur'anic school prior to enrolling in the French primary school, or "l'école franco-marocaine," as the narrator calls it (16). In a passage discussed earlier, the narrator explains that the beginning stages of the Qur'anic school are focused on memorizing Qur'anic verses, and that the *fqih*, the teacher, tries to help the young students develop their faculty of memory by teaching them such tricks as mnemonic devices. The *fqih* or a senior student writes a verse on each student's board. The student practices reciting the verse until he or she has memorized it and can recite it without hesitation. The verse is then washed off the board and the *fqih* or senior student writes a new verse to be memorized.

Ngandu explains that the title of Khatibi's autobiography has a direct relationship to this emphasis on memorizing Qur'anic verses.¹⁴ According to Ngandu, "la mémoire tatouée" is a methodological and pedagogical principle by which information becomes "tattooed" or "burned" into one's memory. Through constant repetition and recitation, the children memorize these verses until they are so ingrained in their memories that they cannot be forgotten, just as a tattoo cannot be removed from the skin. This methodological principle teaches the children the Qur'an and it also introduces them to Classical Arabic, a language which, for some of them, may only ever be heard at school, in the mosque, on the radio, or on television. In the colonial situation, the replacement of Arabic with French was extremely dangerous in that, for those children who began attending the French school, it meant a gradual wearing away of the very system by which they could recall previously encoded information.

The encoding of information and its relationship to the linguistic sign is also addressed by Benveniste in his criticism of Saussure's concept of the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. Benveniste states:

Le concept ("signifié") "boeuf" est forcément identique dans ma conscience à l'ensemble phonique ("signifiant") *böf*. Comment en serait-il autrement? Ensemble les deux ont été imprimés dans mon esprit; ensemble ils s'évoquent en toute circonstance. Il y a entre eux symbiose si étroite que le concept "boeuf" est comme l'âme de l'image acoustique *böf*. L'esprit ne contient pas de formes vides, de concepts innommés. (51)

According to Benveniste, language itself operates in a manner similar to the methodological principle of "mémoire tatouée." Benveniste even expresses his idea in a similar manner: the signifier and the signified are simultaneously imprinted in one's brain together. If, as Benveniste proposes, the signifier and signified are encoded together and are inseparable, one must wonder what the effect of second language acquisition has on this encoded or "imprinted" information. According to Benveniste, the second language should not theoretically impose itself on the first because "le langage se réalise toujours dans une *langue*, dans une structure linguistique définie et particulière, inséparable d'une société définie et particulière" (25, emphasis in original). However, writers like Khatibi, who were educated in the French colonial system and who have come to conduct at least their professional lives in French, frequently express the effect of the imposition of the second language on the signifying processes of the first. Benveniste's theory, then, is challenged by the linguistic disjunction experienced by generations of North Africans under the French colonial system.

If the Arabic signifier and signified are encoded together as a sign, and the corresponding French sign is later added, the predominant use of the French signifier will eventually crowd out the Arabic signifier in their relationship to the signified, the concept. This is not to say that the French signifier erases the Arabic signifier; rather, because of its

more frequent use, it becomes the first signifier called upon to signify the signified. The very wearing away of the Arabic signifier results in what Khatibi variously calls a palimpsest or “rature”: the erasure or scratching out always leaves at least a trace of what was previously inscribed. The methodological principle of “*mémoire tatouée*” is thus jeopardized by the colonial project of linguistic and cultural assimilation. This can be true even of previously encoded religious information such as Qur’anic verses. Ngandu suggests that in this principle of “*mémoire tatouée*,” if one changes the figures or the system of representation, the material is no longer recognizable because the signifying process has become disjointed by the nearly complete replacement of one language with another. This is again, one of the dangers of the colonial “*mission civilisatrice*,” and it is especially grave when what is seen as profane (French) comes to take the place of what is seen as holy (Arabic). Thus we see one of the reasons for which many people found refuge in extreme forms of religious practice during and following the colonial period, a facet of North African postcolonial culture that will be discussed more in the following chapter.

Reading and writing carry a different connotation in Muslim cultures than they do in Western cultures, and the curriculum and methodology employed in Qur’anic schools reflect this philosophy of reading and writing. In the introduction to his translation of al-Ghazali’s theory on recitation and interpretation of the Qur’an, Muhammad Abul Quasem calls al-Ghazali, “the greatest religious authority of Islam after the Prophet” (12). Al-Ghazali holds particular importance for our study because Khatibi cites him in future essays. Quasem states:

The reading or recitation of the Qur’an is enjoined by God and His Messenger so that the reciter may know the principles of guidance contained in it and live his life in all its aspects according to these principles; the consequence of all this is salvation (*najat*) in the eternal life of the Hereafter. (10)

When Quasem speaks of Qur'anic recitation as being "enjoined by God and His Messenger," he is referring not only to the belief that the reader is speaking the word of God, but also that the ideal Qur'anic recitation involves the rise to a higher spiritual state in which the reader hears not his or her own voice, but the voice of God. In fact, one of al-Ghazali's ten mental tasks in Qur'anic recitation is the "magnification of the Speaker": The reciter must realize "that what he is reading is not the speech of a human being," but rather the "speech of God" (60). And al-Ghazali's ninth mental task is "the Qur'an-reader's gradually rising to [a state in which he feels that he is] hearing the speech of God from God (great and mighty is He!) and not from himself" (80).

Alfred Guillaume calls al-Ghazali "one of the greatest figures in the religion of Islam."¹⁵ Al-Ghazali (1059-1111 A.D.), known in the West as Algazel, was considered the greatest contemporary authority on theology and law, and held a post at the famous Nizamiya Madresa in Baghdad. Despite al-Ghazali's reknown, Guillaume explains that al-Ghazali's most famous text, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, was an attack on classical philosophy and was heavily criticized by his contemporaries. A great dispute arose between al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes, who wrote The Incoherence of the Incoherence as a response to al-Ghazali's text.¹⁶ These two major figures of the eleventh century had differing opinions about God, the universe, divine will, and creation. Al-Ghazali, for his part, had become disenchanted with contemporary practices of theology and law: "Convinced that God could not be found by speculation and study, he was thrown into such anguish of spirit that he abandoned his professorship and went about in search of truth," attending different theological schools and eventually turning to Sufi mysticism."¹⁷

Guillaume draws a comparison between al-Ghazali and Saint-Augustine, and it is precisely this interest in mysticism which the two have in common with Khatibi.

[Al-Ghazali's] autobiography has often been compared to the Confessions of Saint-Augustine. In it he tells us that he found that the mystic path involved abandoning the delights of the flesh and getting rid of all evil thoughts and desires so that the mind could be cleared of everything but the thought of God. The way was to practise *dhikr*, that is the commemoration of God and the concentration of the mind upon him. He read the books of the Sufis and absorbed what he could, but he perceived that the real secret of the mystic cannot be learnt. It must be experienced in ecstasy and transformation of the self. (148)

The concept of *dhikr*, as practiced by the Sufis and al-Ghazali, is evident even in the latter's stated mental tasks of Qur'anic recitation, the goal of which is communion with God.

Khatibi, centuries later, is also interested in and influenced by Sufi mysticism, especially in the achievement of a kind of spiritual ecstasy through communion with the sacred and transformation of the self.

It is not only the importance of Qur'anic recitation which relates to our study here; it is also that the Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be the word of God, revealed to Muhammad, God's final messenger. And the language of the Qur'an, known to us now as Classical Arabic, is believed to be sacred because it is the language chosen by God for the revelation of his message to Muhammad.¹⁸ Quasem elaborates on this connection between Arabic and the sacred in the minds of many Muslims:

This forms a point of disagreement between Islam and Christianity. There is no absolutely holy language in the Christian religion, for the language of the Gospel is not generally believed to be wholly divine; hence Christians do not recite the Gospel to gain any blessings, nor do they respect it in the way Muslims do the Qur'an, such as keeping it above all other books on a shelf or on a table, for its language, like its meanings, is purely divine. (10)

As the Qur'an is the word of God, any recitation or reading is an imitation or quotation of the word of God. Muslims take great care in their recitation to do so without mistakes, and

this is why, even for young children, the reading of the Qur'an is also an exercise in memory.¹⁹ One must learn to correctly recite the word of God in order to allow for the required reflection on the content of the recitation. Thus, the methodological principle of "mémoire tatouée" is such that from intense repetition comes complete mastery, in terms of encoding and recalling the required information, which in turn allows the very contemplation of content which is the ultimate goal of Qur'anic recitation.

Therefore, in the context of Islam and Qur'anic school, reading is also reciting, as the first word of the Qur'an indicates: "*Iqra'*." This is the imperative form of the verb *qara'*, meaning to read or recite, and the very word *Qur'an* is derived from this verb. Khatibi and Sijelmasi remind us: "Recall the first words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, 'Read, recite.' Does not the word Qur'an also mean the act of reading and recitation?" (6). One of al-Ghazali's external rules of Qur'anic recitation is that the Qur'an should be read aloud: "There is no doubt that it is necessary to read the Qur'an loud enough so that the reader can hear it himself because reading means distinguishing clearly between sounds; thus sound is necessary . . . If he cannot hear himself in a ritual prayer (*sala*), his prayer is not correct" (49). Reading the Qur'an is never a silent reading; it is always, if properly done, a recitation. In a similar vein, noting the importance of the voice, Lucy Stone McNeece has pointed out that the "role of the writer and of writing has been inextricably linked to oral speech in the sacred traditions of the Maghreb" (64). What we have then, is a very strong connection, both in Islamic tradition and in popular rituals, between voice or sound and the written word, like the author's name in which concepts of speaking and writing are inherent.²⁰ In fact, Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmasi state: "The written text is inseparable from voice" (215). In their discussion of Islamic calligraphy, they explain that the development of calligraphy includes

the development of the Arabic writing system. For example, the diacritical marks were not initially part of the writing system but were later added to Qur'anic manuscripts to aid in learning and recitation, such as which consonants require stress (indicated by the *shadda*), and where the reciter is to pause in his or her recitation. This connection between writing and speaking is in contrast to the concept of reading in the West, which is more focused on the visual aspect of reading and does not necessitate a vocal or auditory element.

So in addition to the notion of Arabic as the sacred language, the language of God, the concept of reading is always accompanied by sound. Because Gabriel reveals the word of God to Muhammad orally, the latter receives this command not visually but aurally. Thus, unlike the Western concept of reading as a visual process, the Muslim concept of reading is at once a visual process and an oral/auditory process – “reading aloud.” Gabriel’s command to Muhammad is a command to listen and to repeat, transforming the reading into an activity of repetition and recitation. This is the model upon which learning in Qur’anic schools is based. Young children emulate Muhammad’s “reading” and obey Gabriel’s order, “Recite!”

There is a great deal of debate among historians and intellectuals – mostly Western scholars – as to whether Muhammad was literate or illiterate. Most Muslims, however, believe that Muhammad was illiterate and this serves to further support the belief that the Qur’an is a text revealed by God. The Qur’an is considered a perfect text, indeed the only perfect text, and in this perfection one can find the handiwork of no human, certainly not an illiterate merchant.²¹ The Qur’an is perfect because it is God’s creation. One cannot help but wonder, from either a Western or Muslim perspective, if it is perhaps because of Muhammad’s illiteracy that the Qur’an was revealed orally, received aurally, and recited orally. According to most scholars, it was not until after Muhammad’s death that his

followers began transcribing the verses that he recited to them. Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist well-known for her research on women and Islam, states:

The order of the written Koran was decided on just after the prophet's death, according to some sources; others maintain that it was put together by six people during the prophet's lifetime; and still others hold that it was done during the reign of caliph 'Umar, who acceded to power in 13/634. . . . The official version we have today was collected and written down during the reign of the third caliph, 'Uthman, (23-35/644-55). (76)

Similarly, in the final chapter of Khatibi's autobiography, A says to B: "Rappelle-toi Muhammad – le prophète sans écriture. . . . Il se laissait porter et dire, par une multitude de palpitations, ce sont ses femmes, ses amis ou sa tribu qui transcrivaient son souffle" (177).

The fact that the Qur'an was not initially a written text begs the question: If the sacred text is an oral text, where does that leave writing? Again, the strong link between the voice, an auditory component of language, and both reading and writing, visual components of language, renders this question moot for many Muslims. The Qur'an as a sacred text is at once believed to be a quotation, an exact rendering, of God's revelation to Muhammad, and yet it is also accepted that the Qur'an is a transcription – a transformation from the vocal into the written – of the word of God. Like translation, which in Khatibi's view is a situation of being in more than one language, transcription is a situation of being in both the vocal domain and the visual domain. In other words, because it involves a transformation of the vocal to the visual, of speech to writing, transcription necessarily implies both of these elements of language. They are not entirely distinct and easily separated. Reading and writing are at once visual and auditory acts, especially in Khatibi's texts where the sound of words and the rhythm of the phrases take on a primary importance.

Learning to write at the Qur'anic school is similar in practice to learning to read. The *fqih* or one of the senior students writes a Qur'anic verse and the students begin copying it.

The emphasis is first on imitation, trying to produce as closely as possible a copy of the verse written by the *fqih* or his aide. As students progress in their physical coordination and knowledge of the writing system, they may then begin to produce more elaborate written versions of Qur'anic verses. Much like Muhammad's entreaty to "[a]dorn the Qur'an with your voices" (al-Ghazali, 53), the students are also encouraged to adorn the Qur'anic verses with calligraphy. Indeed, al-Ghazali includes writing in his ten external rules for Qur'anic recitation: "It is praiseworthy to make the writing of the Qur'an beautiful and to make its [letters] clear and distinct. There is no sin in dotting letters and writing different marks with red and other colours, because these colours adorn the Qur'an, make its [letters] distinct, and avert its reader from making mistakes and incorrect reading" (39). In Khatibi's autobiography, the narrator explains:

J'avais fréquenté l'école coranique pendant un certain temps.
On me demanda de m'exercer à la calligraphie, parce qu'elle mène, nous
répétait le *fqih*, droit au paradis. Pour écrire sur la planche en bois, il fallait
tailler un roseau fin, le tremper dans une écritoire profonde, et recomposer
patiemment les paraboles coraniques jusqu'à la vision chantante. (28-29)

It is interesting to note here the narrator's concept of audience or reader in this passage.

While he does not address the reader directly, the explanation of how the students prepare the reed, dip it in ink and re-write the Qur'anic verses is clearly intended for a Western reader.

The narrator's "frères de sang," whom he addresses at the end of the autobiography, do not need this explanation; they, too, had this experience.

This introduction to writing at the Qur'anic school is what forms the basis for the link North African writers make between writing and the sacred. The narrator says that the protagonist was asked to practice calligraphy, to concentrate on his writing, because it is calligraphy, according to the *fqih*, that leads straight to heaven. I would like to point out that

while Quasem views Qur'anic recitation as the key to salvation (10), Khatibi's narrator tells us that the *fqih* indicates that it is calligraphy – beautiful, artistic writing – that leads one to paradise. It is the exercise of graphically copying and adorning the word of God that opens the door to paradise. In the earlier scene from the protagonist's days at the Qur'anic school, the narrator mentions memorization and recitation of the word of God, but there is no mention of paradise in that scene. Here, on the other hand, it is calligraphy – formally beautiful, artistic writing of the word of God – that leads to paradise. This is an echo of my earlier comment about the narrator's mention of being born of writing, as opposed to simply being born of language. The emphasis in both instances is on writing.

The emphasis on memorization, recitation, and imitation in the early stages of Muslim religious education seems to point to a preference for rote learning over interpretation. Guillaume states that “[i]n many places children under ten years of age are required to learn by heart [the Qur'an's] 6200 odd verses. They accomplish this prodigious feat at the expense of their reasoning faculty, for often their minds are so stretched by the effort of memory that they are little good for serious thought” (74). But the goal of the Qur'anic school, in its first stages, is to help young Muslims memorize the Qur'an; understanding and interpreting the memorized verses are left for later stages of religious education. Like many other North African writers, Assia Djebar has explained that at the Qur'anic school, she learned without understanding: “J'apprenais sans comprendre . . .” (82). This attitude is evident even in young Abdelkebir's introduction to literature at the French school. Despite his intense involvement with reading, often preferring the company of books to that of his classmates, he must also keep it at arm's length: “. . . il me fallait lire sans y laisser mon âme” (113), and “Devant l'explosion des sens, j'évitais de comprendre, j'y aurais laissé mon âme.

Comprendre était de belle mort” (79). The protagonist fears understanding, as if his comprehension is in some way a death sentence. The belief that one should read or recite the Qur’an without understanding or interpreting it is quite common in North African culture. The protagonist’s fear may actually be a combination of this belief and the seemingly opposite idea that interpretation is a religious duty required of all Muslims. Understanding is akin to giving up one’s soul, that sacred part of oneself which is forever linked to our moral or religious upbringing.

Some followers of Islam insist that individual interpretation of the Qur’an was forbidden by Muhammad, as when he said, “The man who explains the Qur’an according to his personal opinion (*bi-ra’yihī*) shall take his place in Hell” (al-Ghazali, 86). This *hadith*, or saying of the Prophet, is often invoked to prohibit personal interpretation of the Qur’an. In Christopher Gibbins’ reading of Fatima Mernissi’s Islam and Democracy, he highlights the historical and political reasons behind contemporary injunctions against individual interpretation. The Abassids, rulers of the majority of the Islamic world from 750-1258 A.D., “condemned ‘private initiative’ . . . as a ‘foreign enterprise’ and cultivated an alternative tradition based on *ta’a* (obedience), which banned reflection” (29). However, al-Ghazali, like many Muslim scholars, shows that this prohibition was put in place to discourage the use of the Qur’an as support for a previously held belief, to discourage misinterpretation by those ignorant of Islamic tradition (*shari’a*), and to discourage the development of opinions influenced by an individual’s nature or emotions (92-93).

While al-Ghazali does point to the necessity for exegesis by religious scholars, he also includes personal reflection on the content of recited Qur’anic verses as one of his mental tasks. Indeed, Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi have stated that “the Qur’an intends to

provoke thought, not lay everything out for passive reception.”²² Moreover, according to al-Ghazali, not only is the reader required to reflect on the verses, he or she must “render [the teachings of the Qur’an] specific” (72). The reader should understand that any command or any prohibition is intended for him or her personally. Kenneth Cragg further elaborates, insisting on the necessity for analysis and interpretation of the Qur’an, particularly given the lack of a “monumental” religious authority in Islam: “Short of a sacrosanct exegesis uniformly acceptable, all commentary must proceed in measure by private decision” (9). So despite the insistence by some Muslims that interpretation of the Qur’an is a sin, there are also those who view reflection and interpretation as a duty of every Muslim.

But this interpretation, or exegesis, is very often left to the scholars. It is certainly not the goal in the early stages of Qur’anic school, where children are not yet of the intellectual capacity for such understanding and interpretation. The teaching methodology employed in the Qur’anic school points to an ancient Semitic concept of doing before understanding, discussed by Jill Robbins in an article on Jacques Derrida’s Circonfession. Doing before understanding “perform[s] a relationship to the law that does not proceed by trial and error, that does not ‘try’ the law first or subject it to rational examination before adherence to it” (23). Doing before understanding is much like the “proper” manner of reciting the Qur’an espoused by al-Ghazali and the Qur’anic schools. One first learns how to do the recitation, then one does it, and once one has mastered the doing, then one may reflect on the content, understand it, and apply it to one’s life.

In Khatibi’s autobiography, there is no mention of understanding or interpretation in the presentation of young Abdelkebir’s attending the Qur’anic school. The narrator indicates neither to what extent the protagonist memorizes the Qur’an nor to what extent he learns to

write. What is clear, however, is that the protagonist's religious education is rather abruptly interrupted by his father's decision to send him to the "école franco-marocaine" (16), or to what the narrator later in the autobiography calls the "école franco-musulmane" (52). Still involved in the tasks of memorization and imitation, the protagonist's experience with reading and writing Classical Arabic, the language of the Sacred, remains more at the level of an unexplained phenomenon. The verses he has memorized and copied retain a mysterious and mystical quality due to the lack of explanation on the part of the *fqih* and the lack of understanding on the part of the protagonist. His involvement in the French educational system keeps him at a distance from a strictly religious education, and therefore the mystery and mysticism of his first experience with reading, writing, and religion never dissipate.

Learning French

Abdelkebir's entry into the French colonial school system marks a turning point in his development as a reader and writer. Not only is he now in a system which operates in a different language and whose teaching methodology is different, he is also in a secular system. French eventually becomes his dominant mode of expression but this is not to say that it has completely erased his native dialect nor his knowledge of Classical Arabic. But in the autobiography, the protagonist's enrollment at the French school coincides with a marked decrease in the number of references to reading and writing Arabic.

In this section, I will discuss the protagonist's introduction to reading French literature and how this inspires him to become a creative writer. Even though he initially experiences alienation and embarrassment when confronted with reading and writing French, this new language also opens up a new world and offers another perspective – even if this new point of view is not always one with which Abdelkebir agrees. Mastering language, especially the

language of the Other, gives him a sense of power which eventually serves to lessen his feelings of subordination and inferiority created in his first encounters with French.

In his discussion of violence in Khatibi's autobiography, Cyril Mokwenye explains the link between Abdelkebir's name and his birthday, the day of Aïd el Kebir: ". . . un jour qui rappelle cet acte symbolique de la part d'Abraham de vouloir sacrifier son fils pour l'amour de Dieu" (39). This sentence, in combination with the way the narrator describes the father's decision to send his son to the French school, "J'arrivais en troisième position: mon père accepta de m'expédier à l'école franco-marocaine, je devins la conscience dégradée, donnée à la mécréance" (16), leads one to wonder if the father's decision to send Abdelkebir to the French school is, in a sense, an inverted sacrifice. Abraham decides to sacrifice his son out of love for God, nearly giving his son over to God, to forever reside in God's paradise. Abdelkebir's father, on the other hand, decides to "sacrifice" his son, to give him over to the other side, perhaps in an effort to learn the ways of the French – the enemy – in order to better understand them. But French school, and indeed most of Abdelkebir's experiences with the French, are anything but heavenly.

It is when young Abdelkebir enrolls at the French primary school that he begins to understand and process the event of colonization. School becomes the forum for his intimate involvement with the French colonial system, the most important element of which is the French language. The fact that colonization has little impact on young Abdelkebir prior to his enrollment at primary school is understandable, partly because such a young child does not have the intellectual capacity to understand the implications of colonization, even if he or she is aware of changes in society. What is most significant about the link established in the autobiography between school and colonization is the protagonist's introduction to French

language, literature and culture.²³ Of this introduction, the narrator says: “A l’école un enseignement laïc imposé à ma religion; je devins triglotte, lisant le français sans le parler, jouant avec quelques bribes de l’arabe écrit, et parlant le dialecte comme quotidien. Où, dans ce chassé-croisé, la cohérence et la continuité?” (52). Unlike young French schoolchildren who follow the same curriculum at school, the protagonist is at an immediate disadvantage because of the lack of linguistic continuity. The normally smooth progression from the language used at home to the language used at school is anything but smooth for the protagonist. Having already adjusted, to a certain degree, to one system of writing and making the connections between sounds and letters, the protagonist now must learn another system. What we also see in this passage is not only a discontinuity from one language to the other, but a discontinuity within each language. The narrator expresses that he can read French without speaking it, read and write a little Classical Arabic without speaking it, and speak dialect without reading or writing it.

It is important to point out here that the criticism of this lack of continuity relates to the understanding of language as a multi-faceted operation. As we saw earlier, the concepts of reading and writing in Abdelkebir’s culture incorporate a visual as well as vocal and auditory performance. When the narrator says that he became tri-lingual, he really has become, in a sense, an imperfect polyglot. In each language, there is a lack, an inability to perform one of the skills required of a true polyglot, and indeed, required of language in general. While the narrator bemoans the lack of coherence and continuity in all of this language learning, we can also see that in some respects, he has an advantage when it comes to learning to read and write in French. Having already had the experience of learning to read and write a “foreign” language (“l’arabe écrit”), of learning how to make the connection

between phoneme and grapheme, the protagonist can now apply these skills to learning French. The challenge for the protagonist is to make sense of it all when he feels as if he's getting only half the story. Each language, while expanding his horizons, also limits him – at least at this stage of his life – to either a verbal or written domain.

The process of colonization is an effort on the part of the colonizers not only to impose their way of life on the people being colonized, but also to erase the way of life of the colonized. There is perhaps no more effective way of doing this than by educating generations of young people in the language and system of the colonizer. In the Moroccan socio-cultural context, the replacement of Arabic with French as the institutional language was particularly effective. The already high rate of illiteracy in Morocco combined with the difference between Classical Arabic and Moroccan Arabic, provided an ideal venue for a linguistic take-over. For children of Khatibi's generation, the only exposure they may have had to reading and writing in Arabic was at the Qur'anic school; once they enrolled at the French primary school, core subjects were taught in French. Arabic was taught as a separate course, more in the model of a foreign language course. Assia Djebar explains that she had to study English and Greek before Arabic, because it was not until high school that there were enough students wanting to study Arabic to justify the school's hiring of an Arabic instructor (83).

This is certainly the case with Khatibi, whose narrator rarely mentions reading or writing in Arabic following the protagonist's enrollment in the French educational system. The narrator does briefly mention the adolescent protagonist's affinity for pre-Islamic poetry: "La poésie fit le reste. Je l'aimai d'abord bédouine, brûlée dans l'allégorie, celle des bardes préislamiques et surtout Imrou Al Qaïs et sa tendre incantation" (78). Shortly thereafter, the

narrator indicates that the protagonist also reads contemporary Arabic literature: “Grâce au frère aîné, je bifurquai un moment vers le roman arabe moderne” (86). Toward the end of the autobiography, the narrator mentions Antar, “le barde arabe” (165), in the context of his voyage to the desert, a region less marked by French colonization than were other parts of Morocco. These brief passages as well as a fleeting comparison the narrator makes between the protagonist and Khalil Jibrane (81) are the only moments in the text where the narrator speaks of reading Arabic. In fact, the narrator does not even explicitly say that the protagonist reads these texts in Arabic, but the inference can be made, given that he also briefly mentions his short-lived attempt at writing Arabic poetry (86). So while the narrator does make clear his ability to read and write in Arabic, the vast majority of the discussion of language, reading, and writing is tied more to his experience with French.

Learning the language of the colonizer within the colonizer’s educational system creates feelings of alienation, subordination and inferiority. In the previous chapter, we saw the difficulty with which the protagonist is faced when asked to write a composition on a reading passage about winter in France. A similar scene is played out in the narrator’s description of the colonizer’s division of the year into seasons: “Les hommes qui me colonisaient et leurs enfants semblaient vivre au rythme des saisons, à l’harmonie cosmique cataloguée, retransmise. Jusqu’à dix-sept ans, je n’avais jamais vu ni la neige, ni la forêt, la vraie et la grande” (20). Asking young Moroccan students to write essays about seasonal changes and other events of which they have no direct knowledge is a strikingly effective way to assert the colonizers’ dominance and superiority. It is perhaps even more effective because of its subtlety; it is not a direct insult or condescension, but it displays the ignorance of the

colonized children and makes them feel ashamed of their own lack of experience and sophistication.

The narrator expresses the child's sense of guilt and shame in the face of the teacher who asks him to write compositions about an experience of winter that is far beyond his understanding of the world: "Cela ne changeait rien de notre culpabilité, on se sentait des enfants conçus en dehors des livres, dans un imaginaire anonyme" (56). According to Fanon in A Dying Colonialism: "It is not the soil that is occupied. It is not the ports or the airdromes. French colonialism has settled itself in the very center of the Algerian individual and has undertaken a sustained work of cleanup, of expulsion of self, of rationally pursued mutilation" (65). It is not just erasure of the "native" culture that colonialism pursues, it is also the replacement of that "native" culture by the culture and cultural references of the colonized, and this is what Fanon sees as expulsion of the self and mutilation of one's concept of self and identity.

On the other hand, when the young Moroccan children do read texts for which they have a cultural context and therefore to which they can better relate, the texts present their own country from the perspective of the colonizer, and not always in the most flattering way.

Certes, le Maroc, dans ces textes, sous la forme d'un joyeux folklore, tuniques blanches, babouches vif écarlate, pastèques ensanglantées, et que dire? Un muezzin mécanique, enfourchant une humanité endormie et qui ne se réveillait que pour se mouiller le bout des doigts, ébauchant quelques génuflexions. La prière, c'était parler au vide. Etonnés par cette image de nous-mêmes, nous gloussions, un peu honteux (57)

Young Abdelkebir's reaction to this, like that of many young people of his generation, is to hide that part of themselves that they feel degrades them in the eyes of the colonizer. By erasing their own past and their own sense of self in order to please and be accepted by the colonizer, they sell their souls to the devil, so to speak. They try, in every way possible, to

become the Other, to adopt what they see as a better identity and a better way of being in the world in which they live. Fanon explains that this is precisely the ultimate goal of colonization, to convince the colonized people that the civilization of the colonizer is a better way of life: “When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness” (WE 210-11). Khatibi’s narrator tells of young Abdelkebir’s desire to be accepted by the young French girls in his class at school, necessitating an erasure of self and the adoption of a persona:

. . . ces filles que je désirais profondément me caressaient de loin. Elles disaient que je différais de mes compatriotes. On m’acceptait parce que j’étais semblable, annihilant d’avance toute mon enfance, toute ma culture. Devant un tel plaisir complexe, je me mis des moustaches et une cravate de soie bariolée. Le personnage se donnait un certain air dévergondé. J’apprenais aux autres à écrire leur propre langue. (112)

The narrator, even in telling the tale of his past self, uses the word *personnage* to refer to this past self, as if this character is somehow unrecognizable even to the narrator. In choosing the word character, the narrator also signals the idea that in adopting this persona of an acculturated young Moroccan who “belongs” with the group at school, the protagonist is only playing a role, and a temporary one at that. The narrator already knows what the protagonist does not yet see: any attempt to pass, fit in, belong, or assimilate, will result in the double failure of not achieving one’s goal and of losing a part of oneself in the process. Earlier in the autobiography the narrator tells of the protagonist’s feelings of otherness: “J’étais un autre. . . . Vivre, le jour et la nuit, de rêves empruntés, était l’image absente d’un corps déréalisé, comme traversé par une simple divagation d’un désir contourné, vibratoire et jamais

nommé” (81). The borrowed dreams and unnameable desire of the young protagonist will, in the end, either turn on themselves in revolt or lead to the demise of the protagonist.

The protagonist’s desire to fit in is most obvious in his desire for mastery of the language of the Other. As we have just seen, the narrator tells us that the protagonist teaches others how to write in their own language, indicating a very high level of proficiency and sophistication with the foreign language. For many formerly colonized writers, this mastery of French is seen as a kind of conquest of the Other. Rushdie notes a similar phenomenon with British Indian writers, and suggests that it is perhaps through mastery of the English language that these writers can finally begin to taste freedom (17). Memmi, in La Statue de sel, mentions giving private lessons in French, helping his classmates with their assignments, and being the best student in his class. Djébar has also spoken of her desire to always be first in her class, but less out of a desire to conquer the Other than to demonstrate to the colonizer the worth of those in her community: “Je me suis dit: ‘Le français n’est pas ma langue mais je vais être la meilleure. Si je suis la meilleure dans cette langue, ce sera une manière de montrer qu’à travers moi tous les miens sont aussi bons que vous!’” (82).

The desire to master the language of the Other and even to surpass the skills of native speakers demonstrates the ambivalence toward the language of the colonizer. While learning French produces feelings of inferiority and alienation in the protagonist, it also serves as his introduction to literature, to reading, and to creative writing. Looking back to the past and to the protagonist’s coming-to-being a writer, the narrator makes it clear that becoming a writer is inseparable from his history as a reader. And it is at the French school that the protagonist discovers literature and develops a love for reading, writing and language. This discovery of literature takes place during the protagonist’s adolescence when he is already deeply

entrenched in the French language and educational system. This might explain why so much of the discussion of reading literature revolves around French and not Arabic; at the time in the protagonist's life that he discovers literature, his language of study is French.

The narrator's first mention of a particular book he reads comes toward the beginning of the autobiography when, chronologically, the protagonist is still a very young child. The young protagonist's near-drowning calls to mind a dream he had over and over as a child, the only dream "dont je n'oublie pas la précision" (20). Recalling this dream causes the narrator to reflect on his fascination with the sea and Nature's other wonders, which then leads him to thinking of the "catalogued cosmic harmony" of the colonizer's division of the year into measured, nearly equal seasons. This, then, causes him to recall the birds he used to catch on the roof of his family's home, which then reminds him of a book he recently read:

En lisant récemment *Cosmos* de Gombrowicz, j'ai reconnu comme mienne l'image forte du livre: spectacle d'un oiseau pendu dans la forêt, à l'intersection de deux sentiers. L'assassin n'est à aucun moment désigné, parce que tout simplement nous sommes tous enchaînés à ce geste suspendu et que le massacre d'oiseaux, fureur au travers de l'écriture blanche, signe mon entière participation. (21)

The narrator as reader calls the image of the dead bird his own. The assassin, or the creator of the image, is not named but no matter; it is the shared experience of killing birds that "signs his complete participation." And yet it is not this shared experience alone that signals our participation in the making of meaning. The narrator indicates that as readers we are all implicated in this scene and through our continued reading we become writers. The signature, a symbol of authority and authorial intent, of the assassin is absent. It is therefore up to the viewer or reader to establish the significance of the image. The reader, then, becomes a writer, and this idea is demonstrated in the way in which the narrator recounts the protagonist's adventures with reading and his first attempts at writing.

When one of the teachers at the French school asks the protagonist and his classmates to re-write the ending of Horace, “supposing that Curiace kills Horace,” young Abdelkebir makes fun of the “radically administrative” response of a classmate and brandishes him a boy with no respect for culture:

Cela commença en liberté franche, Curiace dit au vieil Horace: “J’ai l’honneur et le regret de vous annoncer que j’ai tué votre fils.” La culture ne concernait pas ce garçon, il préférait se faire enculer par la chaise. Il écrivait comme il saluait le directeur, confondait l’art avec la censure et les mots avec leur arbitraire. Il appelait les écrivains par leur prénom . . . (84)

This passage is revealing not only in what it says about the classmate’s lack of concern with culture, art, and language, and lack of respect for the writers; it also reveals the protagonist’s reverence for all of these things. In criticizing his classmate, young Abdelkebir, as well as the older narrator, demonstrate their own attitudes about art and writing. It is not for the timid, not for the weak, not for those who are not willing to risk experimentation and who are not willing to put the necessary thought and effort into the task. For both the protagonist and the narrator, art is in the effort and the form, not just simple or simplified content. Unlike his classmate, young Abdelkebir spends a week rewriting the ending of Horace:

Maniaque dans les imitations, je racontais la suite de l’histoire en alexandrins laborieux, torchés. Je voulais plaire au professeur de français, puisque par Corneille je serais entré dans l’éternité de l’Autre. L’Occident nous offrait ses paradis. Je me rêvais extrait choisi, dieu parmi les dieux. Pendant toute une semaine, je m’étais appliqué à ficeler des alexandrins. Sauvage et épique pendant toute une semaine, j’avais enfin la démesure d’un rythme cosmique. Le drame finissant ou non en queue de poisson, j’étais déjà en haut avec Corneille . . . (84)

When Abdelkebir re-writes the ending to Horace, he does it in the classic style of the alexandrin, a style of writing whose rhythmic beauty lies in its vocal performance. It is not just his classmate’s lack of imagination that Abdelkebir criticizes, it is the classmate’s lack of

attention to the art of writing, to the form, rhythm, and musicality of the example set by the masters.

It is significant that Khatibi's narrator chooses to tell about the protagonist's reading and subsequent re-writing of Corneille's Horace. The original ending to the play has Julie remaining on stage, reciting the last twelve lines of the play.²⁴ The last four lines of her monologue are a repetition of the oracle which, by virtue of the temporal difference evidenced by the verbs, has now come true. Sixteen years after the play's debut, Corneille dropped this scene. Khatibi's narrator's specific mention of the protagonist's re-writing the end of this particular play draws yet a further comparison between the protagonist and Corneille, one of the "dieux officiels" of French literature, who also re-wrote the ending of his own play. The monologue of the original ending to Horace is similar to both the ending of the *mini-théâtre* of Khatibi's autobiography and similar, in a slightly different way, to Brecht's characters' use of monologue in addressing the audience.

This scene is also interesting in how it relates to a scene in Memmi's La statue de sel. Memmi's narrator tells of reading Racine's Andromaque and his elation at correctly answering the professor's question: "Quel est le vers le plus racinien de cette scène?" (128). Later in the text, the narrator returns to this story, explaining how the protagonist came to despise and quarrel with this particular professor. The professor, like young Abdelkebir and Khatibi's narrator, placed a particular emphasis on form as the most important element in art. Memmi's narrator says of Professor Marrou: "Parce qu'il était passionné et impulsif, Marrou n'acceptait d'art que parfaitement dominé. Il n'est d'art que classique, tranchait-il comme avec fureur" (238). Memmi's protagonist feels that Marrou does not understand him because of Marrou's preoccupation with form; the protagonist, on the other hand, is more interested in

content and consciously begins challenging his professor's notions of art: "Connaissant ses préférences, j'en prenais le contre-pied, objectant systématiquement au nom du fond contre la forme, de l'abondance généreuse contre la beauté du détail . . ." (239). Considering that La Mémoire tatouée and La Statue de sel are both autobiographical texts, we can see the disagreement about art not only between the two protagonists but also between the two writers. In fact, in Le roman maghrébin, Khatibi criticizes the first generation of North African writers, Memmi included, for writing like schoolteachers, with no demonstrated interest in form and experimentation.

In a particularly telling passage, Khatibi's narrator describes the protagonist's discovery of literature in terms that are usually reserved for religious conversion or the rite of baptism in Christianity:

J'attendais que se dénouât le temps, que commençât ma vraie vie dans l'exaltation d'une nouvelle naissance. Si l'adolescence est donnée au cri proche de la reconversion, je pense avoir espéré que me bousculât la réalité. L'histoire se passait, j'étais dans mon trou, m'observant me réveiller, étudier, manger et dormir parmi les autres, actes court-circuités par un voyeurisme hagard.

J'écrivais, acte sans désespoir et qui devait subjuguier mon sommeil, mon errance. J'écrivais puisque c'était le seul moyen de disparaître du monde, de me retrancher du chaos, de m'affûter à la solitude. Je croyais au destin des morts, pourquoi ne pas épouser le cycle de mon éternité? Mon choix se retenait, je ne voulais pas payer le prix de cette souffrance²⁵

Corneille and Racine are called the "dieux officiels," and it is through reading them that one may attain to the West's paradise. But when the narrator speaks of reaching the West's paradise through Corneille, it is not just for the fact that young Abdelkebir passively reads Corneille's plays; it also because his active reading is a way of signing himself into the text, inspiring his re-writing of the ending, and this establishes his own power as a maker of meaning.

Plusieurs fois, je m'étais hasardé, au gré de mes lectures, à travestir les dieux officiels, à les neutraliser par des exercices d'imitation, d'abord en m'identifiant à eux, et comme ce voisinage me pesait, j'avais viré carrément vers la parodie que je croyais décolonisante. Docile avec mes idoles, je torturais les autres, ajoutant à leurs oeuvres des morceaux inédits, sortis de ma bibliothèque mobile, fourmillante, tyrannique. (85)

He begins with imitation and moves to parody, the latter being what the protagonist considers at the time to be a kind of decolonizing gesture. Again, the older, wiser narrator suggests that he no longer believes this, just as mastery of the Other's language does not guarantee a victory over the colonizer. The protagonist ultimately reaches a level of creativity which he, in all his adolescent naiveté, vainly considers to be equal to that of the very literary giants he is emulating.

The protagonist's introduction to literature is a kind of renaissance; young Abdelkebir finds new life through reading and writing. Indeed, the narrator points to feeling exalted with this new life, his "true life." If we recall the narrator's earlier comment in which he insists that "Mon enfance, ma vraie enfance, je ne pourrai jamais la raconter" (57), and put it alongside this comment about the beginning of his "true life," we see that the coming to reading and writing is very much like a conversion experience. And it is this experience, this true life, that is told in this autobiography.

In addition to Corneille and Racine, the "most famous authors" mentioned above, the narrator also mentions countless others, including but not limited to Hugo, Prévert, Valéry, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Ségalen, and of course, the protagonist's mentor in creativity and imagination, Kateb Yacine. The narrator mentions that the protagonist briefly dabbles in Arabic poetry, publishes poetry in a weekly newspaper, writes love letters for his classmates to send to their girlfriends, and imitates the style of great writers. Other than viewing the mention of these authors as simply the protagonist's history as a reader, we can also see that

the presentation of this history is in line with elements of the Arabic autobiographical tradition in which authors took care to establish their authority by stating what texts they had read and with whom they had studied. This tendency to “demonstrate their part in the passage of history” by establishing “the transmission of authority, legitimacy, and descent” comes from the tradition of the *hadith*, which could be accepted only after the line of transmission was deemed plausible, authoritative, and therefore accurate (Reynolds et al. 244).

In the context of French colonialism in North Africa, the establishment of authority takes on an added dimension. By including in his autobiography the names of authors he studied, read, preferred, and even disliked, Khatibi’s narrator establishes the protagonist as a kind of legitimate heir to the West’s inheritance precisely because of his abundant knowledge of the French classics. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon cites René Depestre’s poem “Face à la nuit,” in order to describe the colonized individual’s desire for knowledge of the high culture of the colonizer:

He will not be content to get to know Rabelais and Diderot, Shakespeare and Edgar Allen Poe; he will bind them to his intelligence as closely as possible:
La dame n’était pas seule
Elle avait un mari
Un mari très comme il faut
Qui citait Racine et Corneille
Et Voltaire et Rousseau
Et le Père Hugo et le jeune Musset
Et Gide et Valéry
Et tant d’autres encore. (219)

The narrator looks back, at times fondly and at other times scornfully, at the protagonist’s efforts and desire to attain this knowledge and to become a writer in his own right. One of the first descriptions of the protagonist’s writing activity is in a scene at the boarding school in Marrakesh where the protagonist writes love letters for his classmates:

Je devins écrivain public; le dimanche, des internes me chargeaient de leur dicter des lettres d'amour qu'ils devaient envoyer à leurs amies. Pour exciter l'inspiration, on m'apportait des photos. Entouré de mes dictionnaires, j'étais exalté, multiple à travers ces passions épistolaires. Je gérais ainsi, jusqu'à midi, la sensibilité du monde. (77)

In describing this scene, the narrator tells of becoming a “public writer,” a *kateb* in North African culture. But he then goes on to explain that the protagonist dictates the love letters to his classmates and they, in turn, copy what he has said. Young Abdelkebir, in this case, is a writer by proxy. The cultural reference to the North African *kateb*, one who writes what is dictated to him by others who cannot write, is turned on its head. In this scene, the *kateb*, the “écrivain public,” is the one who creates and composes, and the scribes are the dutiful students transcribing his every word. We again see a repetition of the idea that reading and writing, in this cultural context and as presented in this autobiography, are a combination of sight and sound.

The fact that the protagonist begins his serious literary endeavors with imitation is reminiscent of the beginning stages of his religious education at the Qur'anic school. The protagonist's coming to writing is, as mentioned previously, similar to a religious conversion experience. Reading and writing arouse fear in the heart of the young protagonist, a fear which does not seem to dissipate as the years go by: “Comme inceste miroitant, cette peur devant l'écriture, peur d'être dévoré par elle, le plus loin possible, et de mourir en conspirateur à la fin d'un interminable monologue” (53). This fear, like the primary fear of breaking the incest taboo, is the fear of death, the fear of losing oneself to the open and inviting text. The narrator repeats this message several times in the autobiography, as in this passage in which he discusses his similarity to Jibrane/Zarathoustra: “Bientôt je confondis les deux. L'un mourut jeune, il le savait, je savais moi aussi que je mourrais jeune. Rêve vite

défleuri qui s'expatrie maintenant dans cette adolescence, je serai mort au moins une fois dans les mots" (81). Reading and writing symbolize death for the narrator and for the young protagonist who, like Jibrane/Zarathoustra, predicts that he will die young. If his death is not biological, it is linguistic or textual; having bared his soul to the text, he comes away without it. The phrases I cited earlier, ". . . il me fallait lire sans y laisser mon âme" (113), and "Devant l'explosion des sens, j'évitais de comprendre, j'y aurais laissé mon âme. Comprendre était de belle mort . . ." (79), point to this fear of death, of giving oneself so completely to reading and writing.

Herein lies one of the paradoxes of the narrator's presentation of his and the protagonist's relationship to reading and writing. While it can cause death, the loss of the soul, it also offers an opportunity for salvation. This is true in a rather general sense, in that the protagonist finds refuge and comfort in these solitary activities: "La lecture me rendait à la vie, à la mort. Le parfum d'un mot me bouleversait. Je tremblais" (78-79); "Ce fut le bonheur de l'écriture qui me sauva. Je devais mon salut à l'amitié des livres . . ." (77); "Ecrire était une manière de survivre au souvenir . . ." (91). The idea that reading and writing preserve life and keep death at bay reflects the influence of one of the most important texts in the Arabic literary tradition. In the Thousand and One Nights, Sheharazade must persist in telling stories to counter her husband's threat: "Tell me a story or I will kill you." Khatibi uses this formula in the opening of Ombres japonaises: "Raconte une belle histoire ou je te tue . . ." (11). This idea gives a whole new dimension to what Olney calls the "narrative imperative," or the impulse to write, to tell one's story. The narrator claims that writing is "une adolescence prolongée" (MT 91), and therefore a way to always keep death at bay. Reading and writing not only preserve life, they offer eternal life, a notion which we saw

earlier in the narrator's comment about entering the Other's eternity through Corneille. The protagonist continues this practice of reading and imitating the works of many famous authors:

En établissant ma tyrannie, je vidais tel livre de sa pourriture, en sauvais, pour le bonheur de l'auteur et le mien, quelques phrases immortalisées par moi, dans un carnet de citations, attribuées d'un trait désinvolte aux écrivains les plus célèbres. Les professeurs se taisaient, j'avais donc un pouvoir irréversible . . . Et comme les endormis de la caverne, les mots naissaient au désir, escortaient mes pas, et redoublaient, en reflet, ma divination. (79)

The reference the narrator makes to "les endormis de la caverne" is to the earlier presentation of the myth of Calypso, "la toute-divine au langage ailé," and Ulysses. Like the divinity Calypso, it is language that gives Abdelkebir – and certainly, at a different level, the narrator as well – power, more power even than the protagonist's teachers who are rendered speechless by his wizardry with words. The fact that Abdelkebir immortalizes these great writers through reading and writing opens the door to the possibility that he, too, may one day be immortalized by a young man who emulates him. Much earlier in the autobiography, and in apparent contradiction to this view of writing both as a death-sentence and as a means to achieve a kind of immortality, the narrator points to what he calls an adolescent desire to leave one's mark on the world: "De même à cet âge la tentation d'être utile à tout hasard, d'être nécessaire, de laisser une histoire ou un personnage, de forcer le destin à coups d'idées et d'actes généreux. Il y a de quoi rire quand des autobiographes astucieux prennent cela pour un goût d'éternité!" (25). The narrator, the older, wiser version of the protagonist, ridicules this wish to leave something of oneself, and to believe that in making one's mark one will be immortalized and remembered.

In this passage we also see that the narrator's reference to autobiography reveals the kind of cat-and-mouse game he is playing with the reader. At times, he hides himself in order

to highlight the protagonist; at other times, he unmasks himself and lets us know that in his telling the story of a life, he is also telling a story about story-telling. In other words, this autobiography both presents the story of the life of the writer and comments on and participates in the very activity of which it is an end result. Yet another way to understand this is that the story of becoming a writer looks back on the development of the protagonist as a writer, comments on its own participation in this story of writing, and it also looks to the future with suggestions for future writings. We might also say that there are three distinct and yet inseparable stories here: the story of the protagonist and how he has come to be a writer; the story of the narrator who is telling the story of the protagonist coming to be a writer; and the story of the writer who speculates about texts he may produce in the future.²⁶

In his discussion of Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, Genette describes the increasingly narrowing gap between the protagonist and the narrator: "Le narrateur conduit précisément l'histoire de son héros – sa propre histoire – jusqu'au point où, dit Jean Rousset, 'le héros va devenir le narrateur' – je dirais plutôt *commence de devenir* le narrateur, puisqu'il entre effectivement dans un travail d'écriture" (237). This is very similar to what takes place in Khatibi's autobiography and to what both Olney and Eakin have discussed in terms of Heraclitus' "life stream," where the protagonist slowly approaches the narrator and the autobiography enters the stream of the life it is recounting. For his part, Genette states that "[l]e sujet de la Recherche est bien 'Marcel devient écrivain,' non 'Marcel écrivain': la Recherche reste un roman de formation . . . c'est un roman du futur romancier" (237). According to Genette, the narrative must end before the protagonist becomes – in the sense of conjoining with – the narrator because "il n'est pas concevable qu'ils écrivent ensemble le mot: Fin" (237). In Khatibi's autobiography, we also see such a narrowing gap between the

protagonist and the narrator, and this is perhaps why he resorts to theater in the last chapter. The temporal *rapprochement* of the narrator and protagonist has become such that traditional narrative structure can no longer be maintained. Genette calls Proust's Recherche "un récit autodiégétique, où le héros-narrateur ne cède pour ainsi dire jamais à quiconque, nous l'avons vu, le privilège de la fonction narrative" (254). In Khatibi's text, however, we do see the narrator giving up some of his narrative control to character B in the final chapter. But ultimately, character B disappears into the Chinese fresco, restoring narrative control and authority to A.

In La Mémoire tatouée, the protagonist's impulse to write is continually demonstrated in more creative and more sophisticated ways. While studying in Paris, the protagonist writes a play that his friend, Lavelli, directs. The narrator describes it as a "fable cybernétique sur la mort de l'Art" (130). Some of the characters in this play are Mlle Cocorico, Frankenstein Malabar,²⁷ Monsieur X, a poet, a philosopher, a painter, a soldier and a beggar. The staging of this play results in a rather interesting conclusion, although it is not very clear to whom credit should be given – to Abdelkebir or to Lavelli – for having created "un nouveau théâtre où l'auteur, le metteur en scène et les personnages ne servaient plus à rien. Admirable technique pour détruire l'art et recréer la vie!" (132). In this theatrical production, the playwright and director appear to take Brecht's principle of distancing to the extreme, almost completely eliminating the notion of art as representation, and "recreating life," according to the narrator. What is rather ironic about this statement is that at least one character, Frankenstein Malabar, is derived from another literary work, another artistic production. While the narrator claims to have destroyed art and re-created life, it is simply a

pretense because the play itself is based on art; it is a re-writing of art, not a re-presentation of reality.

Another example of the narrator's mention of a past text, one created by the protagonist, follows the narrator's interpretation of the "Arabe de service," who reduces himself to nothing more than a hyphen. "Les écrivains que j'ai décrits dans un mauvais livre – mon premier enfant naturel avec l'Occident – écrivaient comme des instituteurs, à qui, en plus, on devait octroyer une gloire passagère et maigre, pour la cause des opprimés" (127). The reference here is to the first text that Khatibi published, Le roman maghrébin. It was originally Khatibi's thesis and included a section on Arabic-language writers in North Africa; the published version excludes this section, focusing instead on Francophone North African writers. It is interesting to note that even in the second edition, published in 1979, Khatibi does not change this. He leaves the text as is, allowing it to circulate on its own and as its own, not as the property of the writer.²⁸

In this passage in the autobiography, the narrator refers to this text as his "first natural child with the West." The French expression "enfant naturel" means an illegitimate child and in this case, the narrator considers this text on the Maghrebian novel to be the product or offspring of an unsanctified and even unjust union between France and North Africa. In this "bad book" Khatibi is quite critical of the generation of North African writers that preceded his own, accusing them of writing like schoolteachers and chastising their admirers for praising their texts "in the name of the oppressed." This attitude, carried over into the autobiography, is representative of the distinction many critics, as well as the authors themselves, make between these two generations. Some, with a specific focus on Morocco, divide the two generations into pre-Souffles and post-Souffles.²⁹ Regardless of the way in

which the generations are divided, the general consensus is that the generation of writers between 1945 and 1960 either wrote “tourist literature” that explains the colonized to the colonizer, realist novels à la Zola with plenty of descriptive detail, violent anti-colonial texts in which the protagonists reject the colonizers and their way of life, or texts in which the protagonists reject their maternal culture in favor of the West, despite their objections to colonialism.

In many ways, the narrator’s comment is unfair to this generation of writers. The immediate concerns of many of these writers were primarily political: In putting themselves on display for the West, they seized an opportunity to force the West to see their humanity, and to recognize their claim to self- and national validation. Writers of the second generation, while still confronted with economic and cultural imperialism, did not have the same immediate political issues with which to contend. In a way, these later writers had the luxury of not having to or not being expected to confront issues of colonization head-on.

The narrator’s critique of this earlier publication while using the first person narrative in autobiography once again clouds the issue of autobiographical subjectivity. The “I” of La Mémoire tatouée mentions a text written by the protagonist, offers his current opinion of the text as the narrator of the autobiography, and yet also functions as the writer – the writer of this text on the Maghrebien novel who is also the writer of the autobiography. I contend that this is yet another moment where we see a collapse between the different subjects that make up the autobiographical “I.” The writer, the creator of the “bad book,” who is also the creator of the autobiography as well as the creator of the narrator of the autobiography, steps into the ring momentarily. It is this very interruption by the writer which reminds us that this is a created text, and that behind the protagonist and the narrator, there is a writer willing to share

not only his past writing experiences, but also to point to his current creative project, and suggest that there may be others yet to come.

The exception to the narrator's critique of the first generation of North African Francophone writers is Kateb Yacine, whom the narrator calls "our greatest writer" (127). The respect and deference the younger generation showed Kateb was due primarily to his success in experimenting with language and form. Kateb's influence on the later generation of North African Francophone writers was indeed significant, and this is especially evident in Khatibi's work. Both of these writers experiment with form and structure, work with the rhythm and musicality of language and incorporate ideals from Sufi mysticism. Mysticism and orthodox religion are often contrasted in North African texts, with the orthodoxy and officiality of Islam being linked to the masculine or the father, and mysticism and superstition being linked to the feminine or the mother. This kind of gender-related distinction finds a parallel distinction in these writers' discussions of bilingualism.

It should be stated, however, that there is a contradiction here with respect to such a socio-linguistic distinction. While North African writers, Khatibi included, tend to equate their native language with the mother, they also commonly refer to France or to the West as a woman who must be conquered. This is particularly striking in Khatibi's autobiography where the narrator, speaking directly to the West, threatens to lay her down and violate her alabaster body (169). The psychoanalytic explanation of the Oedipal complex and the law of the father takes us only so far with respect to the socio-linguistic predicament of North African Francophone writers. Instead of a triangular relation between the individual, the feminine/maternal and the masculine/paternal, these writers express the intrusion of a fourth member, often personified in the feminine but which also has the repressive force of the

paternal law. This is perhaps where the death of the protagonist's father plays a significant role, and we should emphasize that it is significant precisely because of the link to language that the narrator makes. In the cemetery for the burial of his father, the protagonist essentially hallucinates an epitaph on his father's tombstone: "Dans ce terrain vague, la pluie emporte la terre rouge, s'annoncent dans le soleil quelques graffiti sur la tombe du père. Ci-gît la rhétorique glaciale, au coeur de mon enfance" (18). This expression, "glacial rhetoric," is repeated in the narrator's discussion of Racine and Corneille, the classic playwrights of the seventeenth century. Their classicism in both form and content stirs up the memory of the now dead glacial rhetoric: "Sans doute, ce qui me rattachait par quelque fibre à cet univers sonore et équilibré fut le souvenir rappelé d'une rhétorique glaciale et d'une incantation redoutable" (83). But it is toward the end of the autobiography where another reference to this passage about glacial rhetoric strikes with full force. In the last chapter, the dialogue between A and B, A tells B: ". . . la parabole coranique . . . figure la mémoire d'une identité, que le savoir peut redoubler dans quelque rhétorique contemporaine – notre livre. Dans ce combat, on sauve l'image d'un enfant, chose faite, chose enterrée, cela a surtout lieu, le livre, d'où partira la série de parallèles. Il y a là encore la marque d'un autre rythme" (183). The death of "glacial" rhetoric, an antiquated, rigid and cold system of expression, is symbolized in the death of the father and replaced by a contemporary system of expression, an example of which is the very text that the narrator is narrating.

Recalling that Khatibi's family name is etymologically related to *khitaba* or rhetoric, the death of the protagonist's father is almost literally the death of an older, antiquated rhetoric which is contrasted with a new, contemporary rhetoric, "our book." The generational conflict between father and son, and between first- and second-generation North African

writers, is expressed in terms of rhetoric: the death of the old is the birth of the new. The protagonist's history as a reader has exposed him to new ways of thinking, seeing the world, and expressing his views. In terms of the protagonist's experience with literature, this shift from glacial rhetoric to contemporary rhetoric is identified with the work of Kateb.

Another interesting element of A's comment to B about contemporary rhetoric is that he equates contemporary rhetoric and "our book." B is implicated in the creation of this text, co-authoring it in a sense. This is but one example of many moments in which the text is conscious of itself as text, aware of its own status as creation in writing. In telling of the protagonist's writing, of his becoming a writer, the narrator also comments about his own activity of story-telling, as we see in comments such as "Choisir le moment du désir pour inaugurer chaque fois le monde" (92), where the narrator not only expresses the idea that one creates a world in every instance of writing, but also that the writer is rather god-like in that he chooses when to create a world and what to include in that world. The passage which describes the visit to the healer and ends in the labyrinth of the narrator's sentences is but one example of how Khatibi's autobiography shows that it is conscious of its own status as text. This autobiography knows that it is narrative, a creation on the part of the writer, presented from a particular point of view, his narrator.

This autobiography is also conscious of the creative aspects of the autobiographical project. In a scene shortly after the death of Abdelkebir's younger brother, the narrator says: "Et ce petit frère me laissa un signal secret: avec ses jouets, je recommençais le montage de notre passé, théâtre premier où je dialoguais, les yeux fragiles, avec un cadavre" (7). This one sentence presents us with a *mise-en-abîme* of the autobiography itself. The protagonist, still a toddler according to the time line of the autobiography,³⁰ reconstructs the past he shared with

his brother, creates it through imagination and dialogue; he assembles the bits and pieces that he, a toddler, remembers of life with his little brother and through imaginative play with the brother's toys, creates theatrical scenes. The narrator, like Abdelkebir the toddler, assembles bits and pieces of his past in order to create, this time with language instead of toys, a story that reflects his present understanding of self and how he has come to be who he is. The creation of the past, the construction of the past in dialogue, theater, or any narrative form serves in turn to strengthen the connection with the past and reinforce memories and our present interpretation of them.

Immediately following the narrator's question, "Est-ce possible le portrait d'un enfant?", is another example of the narrator's openness about his role in the creation of autobiography, in the selection of events to include: "Car le passé que je choisis maintenant comme motif à la tension entre mon être et ses évanescences . . ." (16). The "I" here is the narrator, clearly stating that not only is he choosing which past, or which past events, to relate to the reader, he is also making these choices with a particular objective in mind. He is using the past to explain the present, to explain the tension between his being and its "évanescences." At the end of this narrative commentary, the narrator says, "Faire une enfance, rien ne fermera l'idée d'une transcription" (16). The use of the verb "faire" indicates that the narrator sees his current project as the making or creating of a childhood. The use of the word "transcription" underlines the idea that autobiography is not an exact representation of the childhood; it is an approximation. These are two important ideas, and the narrator links them together here; autobiography can only ever be an approximation of the past because it is a creation in the present.

When the narrator tells of a beggar named “Pas-de-chance” by the neighborhood children, the narrator again reveals that the autobiography is the result of a creative process: “En se reconstituant, le portrait de ce voyou . . . me renvoie maintenant à la sophistication des personnes – ou personnages – de ma prédiction . . .” (11). Again, the idea that the portrait of the beggar reconstitutes itself emphasizes that this autobiography is a present creation, and as such, it almost takes on a life of its own. The narrator then corrects himself by inserting “ou personnages,” suggesting that even though he is aware that he is creating a story with characters, he sometimes becomes so involved in the story that it is as if he has fallen into it, much like the scenes discussed earlier in which B jumps into the Chinese fresco and disappears, and the one in which the adult protagonist suffers from a moment of *déjà vu* with the young Spanish boy in Cordoba.

The danger in creating autobiography, in which there exists a fine line between subject and object, is this very collapse, this falling into the story. In his description of Pas-de-chance, the narrator catches himself just in time. He later says, “Non point le bonheur fêlé, ceci est un miroir dont je bricole les reflets, mais la projection d’un enfant au-delà de ses signes” (14). The narrator is caught in an endless refraction of mirrored images, from which he picks and chooses which images to incorporate into his story.

The narrator makes a similar point much later, in telling of the play the protagonist wrote while studying in Paris: “Si je ne suis pas quitte avec mon passé proche ou lointain, je me permets de visiter une salle de théâtre . . .” (130). The narrator, like a visitor to a wax museum with historical displays, turns round and round, trying to decide which vignette to turn to next. Unable to decide, he falls back on simple chronology to provide the link. But because he says “*If* I am indebted to my past . . .”, it is clear that he feels no obligation to

narrate in a strictly chronological manner. It is almost by default that he tells the story of the play, using chronology only for the sake of convenience. Indeed, in the dialogue in the last chapter, A says: “Supposons ce vide irrévocable dans le battement, n’est-ce pas que le souvenir est pure rature? On peut commencer par n’importe où, et tout le reste est hasard, chaque fois le souvenir est à gagner ou à détruire, une fois pour toutes, dans une fraude inavouée” (176). In telling one’s life story, one can begin anywhere and go anywhere, creating the story in both memory and imagination.

During one of Abdelkebir’s visits to the healer, the latter gives him a talisman and lightly sprinkles incense on the young protagonist. At the end of this scene is the following sentence: “J’ai alors la certitude d’être protégé, la rue m’enveloppe de si près que la médina et ses allégories se répercutent dans le labyrinthe de mes phrases” (42). This passage points to the multiple signifieds of the “I.” The second sentence can be read as the protagonist feeling protected by the talisman, but it can also be read as the narrator’s commentary on his current activity. The very end of the passage surprises the reader; the narrator says “le labyrinthe de mes phrases” where one might expect to read “le labyrinthe de ses rues” – the labyrinth of the medina’s streets. Our earlier analysis of Khatibi’s analogy between memory and the medina is again supported by this passage. His certainty of being protected by the talisman conjures up his feelings of familiarity and security in the streets of his childhood. This latter memory incites a brief reflection on memory itself and on his current project. His sentences and his writing are labyrinthine because memory itself is labyrinthine.

While this passage serves to strengthen the connection the narrator makes between memory and the city – both as labyrinth, I propose that it also serves another very important purpose in the act of writing autobiography. It reveals the act of creation essential in

autobiographical writing. There are perhaps two ways in which one can view autobiography: it is either an account of one's life based on memory, or it is an account of one's life created through imaginative processes. The distinction between the two lies primarily in one's definition of memory. Because memory is not a flawless recorder, because memory always involves interpretation both at the time of encoding and at the time of recall, what we call memory is inextricably linked to interpretation and imagination. This is especially evident in autobiography because the text of the autobiography is what the writer has created, what the writer chooses to share with his or her audience about his or her life. Because Khatibi's autobiography is acutely aware of its own status as text, it makes the reader aware of the creative work of the writer. There are three ways in which this text demonstrates its self-awareness with respect to creation: there are numerous references to editing and assembling, the narrator occasionally speaks directly to the reader, and the narrator reveals that he has an agenda in presenting this particular story of his life.

In the passage just cited about the protagonist's visit to the healer, the narrator ends the scene with the phrase "le labyrinthe de mes phrases." There are other, similar moments in the text where the narrator reminds us that this is a text, not a simple transparent rendering of a life. The text calls attention to itself through the narrator's oddly placed references to figures of speech, editing marks, and writing as a creative endeavor. For example, the protagonist and a friend have long discussions about cinema and artistic technique in film. At the end of this passage, the narrator states: "On discutait dur sur la fuite d'un plan, et comme dans les morceaux choisis de mon enfance, on s'amusait à zigzaguer entre les virgules" (128). The "morceaux choisis" of the past are the elements chosen and assembled by the narrator, the present "I," to tell his version of his past.³¹ Zigzagging between commas bears little

relationship to film, a primarily visual and aural artistic experience. The very word “virgules” seems oddly out of place here, and it therefore draws attention to itself and reminds us that we are simultaneously confronted with the telling of two stories: what is being revealed about the past, and what is being told about the present activity of creation and story-telling.³²

Here, Khatibi’s autobiography appears to violate the very theoretical distinction that critics of autobiography have come to make: that the writer is not to be confused with the narrator, and the narrator is not to be confused with the protagonist. In all of the discussion of the autobiographical subject as a textual element and not as a sign referring to some external reality, the writer has been relegated to nothing more than the author, the name on the title page. What I propose is that in this particular autobiography, the story of becoming a writer is also a story of the act of writing in which the writer occasionally projects his own voice into the text and makes us aware of his role in the creation of the writing sample we have in hand. The references to commas, parentheses, and conclusions to paragraphs indicate the writer’s interruption into the text. I do not believe that these interruptions are done with a view to establish any kind of authority over the text; they are, rather, simply a device to call our attention to this text as writing, as creation.

Another example of this textual self-consciousness is at the conclusion of the scene in which the protagonist is detained at a Parisian police station. The following morning, he is released: “On me renvoya aux études, je pris le métro, les pantoufles béantes, en rêvant au maquis, ceci pour terminer la suspension du paragraphe” (125). The addition of this last phrase here not only calls attention to the text as writing, it also places a certain amount of doubt in the mind of the reader. Was the protagonist really dreaming of the maquis, or is this a device used by the writer to bring closure to this scene? Yet another example of the text’s

self-awareness is when the protagonist is in math class, watching the teacher write on the board. The narrator states: “Distinctement, j’ouvre une parenthèse contre une autre, pour me séparer, corps et passé, dans un livre à traduire en autant de petits cris” (71-72). The “I” of this passage can be seen to refer to both the protagonist and the narrator. The protagonist, watching his teacher write on the board, hallucinates himself into the mathematical formula. The narrator, on the other hand, exists only in writing. We can say that the narrator’s body, the only physical presence possible for the narrator, is the words on the page. Without the words on the page, the narrator of this text does not exist in his role as narrator. This link between the body and writing is a constant theme in Khatibi’s autobiography, as if the body is a carrier of graphic symbols. This is most clearly stated in exergue at the beginning of the chapter entitled “Le corps et les mots”: “*J’ai rêvé, l’autre nuit, que mon corps était des mots*” (77).

That this sentence is placed at the beginning of this section and in italics makes it stand out and gives it a particular importance in the text. Reynolds et al. make an intriguing comment about the presence of dreams in Arabic autobiographies, and it is applicable here to this dream of the body being made of words:

Arabic autobiographies most often do not include dreams as reflections of their personalities but rather as messages from outside themselves that act as portents of the future or as authoritative testimony affirming or legitimizing a particular action or an individual’s status. The deployment of the dream thus betrays a moment of “anxiety” reflected not so much in the content and symbolism of the dream itself but rather at the point of its inclusion in the text. What assertion or action in the account does the author feel requires this supporting testimony? (90)

The previous chapter ends with the narrator speaking directly to the protagonist for several paragraphs, and then the narrator says: “Demain, tu te réveilleras et tu auras quinze ans et tu seras triste et défiguré” (76). Following the mention of his dream, the narrator, at the

beginning of the chapter entitled “Le corps et les mots,” says: “On est toujours l’adolescent de quelque obscure mémoire. Ce fut le bonheur de l’écriture qui me sauva” (77). It is writing which saves the protagonist from the sadness of adolescence; it is to writing that the protagonist turns in times of loneliness and uncertainty. Thus, adolescent sadness, loneliness and uncertainty can be alleviated by finding refuge in writing. Furthermore, the narrator tells the protagonist that he will wake up tomorrow “disfigured”: the anxiety over a lack of physical beauty, evident throughout Khatibi’s autobiography, is presented at this moment as a dream in which the body is not simply covered up by something else, but in which it has taken a completely different form. In addition, the mention of this dream is a clear reference to Islamic calligraphy which, due to artists’ reticence to portray the human form in artistic creation, often creates human and animal forms out of calligraphic inscriptions.³³ In this sense, the narrator’s mention of this dream indicates that he himself is calligraphy, his body is the destined site of written language. This is an especially intriguing idea with respect to considerations of autobiography in that the autobiography, as words on a page, come to represent the person himself or herself. Again, there is a similarity between La Mémoire tatouée and Leiris’ L’Age d’homme. Leiris says of literary activity: “. . . l’un des buts les plus hauts qui puissent être assignés à sa forme pure, j’entends: la poésie, est de restituer au moyen des mots certains états intenses, concrètement éprouvés et devenus signifiants, *d’être ainsi mis en mots*.”³⁴ It is as if, for both writers, it is not enough to be represented by written language; they must be physically conjoined with it.

In the dialogue in the last chapter, B becomes so frustrated with what he sees to be A’s hiding behind language that he becomes angry (as the staging directions indicate) and lashes out at A: “Renseigne-moi sur ton identité actuelle plutôt que sur ta prose rimée ou ta

divination” (177). B wants substance not style, content not form. In fact, at the beginning of the dialogue he criticizes A, albeit in a slightly more even tone: “Je t’écoute, et je te trahis. Tu racontes ton enfance, tu fais le tour de ta petite vie qui n’a rien d’exemplaire, il faut l’avouer. Mais malin que tu es, malin que tu penses être, tu amalgames ta déperdition dans les signes, tu retires la main quand l’histoire te harcèle: syllabe par là, voyelle par ici, et enfance, ploc!” (175). One can certainly imagine B as the reader who, nearing the end of a difficult and sinuous autobiography, lashes out at the writer for making the task so difficult.

Khatibi’s autobiography also shows its self-awareness in the moments in which the narrator speaks directly to the reader. The narrator abandons all pretense of a kind of transparent narrator and makes himself known as the storyteller, the guide through the labyrinth. While we know he is there and we walk through the streets and alleys together, he occasionally stops and looks us in the eye. Upon the protagonist’s arrival at the boarding school in Marrakesh, he and his classmates form different cliques: “Notre groupe s’organisait pour la défense et la bagarre, je transmettais l’ordre, je me blotissais. Lâche? Non point, mon lecteur” (70). And as the narrator tells of his convalescent stay at Combloux, he says: “Voici, mon lecteur, le triste spectacle d’être embarqué un jour à Combloux” (140-141). At the end of the episode at Combloux, the narrator again turns to the reader: “Et ce n’est pas simple fugue entre toi et moi, lecteur, d’imaginer pour un instant un papillon de neige . . .” (142). Like the critique of the earlier publication, Le roman maghrébin, this speaking to the reader can be seen as a temporary collapse of the different subjects of the autobiographical “I.” And like the earlier scene, I would go so far as to say that this is the writer speaking to the reader, by the very fact of his use of the word “lecteur.”

It is at the very end of the autobiography, however, that the narrator truly acts out of character, so to speak. In the “Image finale” of “Double contre double (Dialogue),” B jumps into the Chinese fresco and disappears, and A begins a monologue: “Salut pourtant à vous, mes invités du jour et mes frères de sang” (185). A, the only remaining character in the *mini-théâtre*, directly addresses the audience of the play who is also the reader of the autobiography. A’s actions here are foreshadowed by the narrator’s earlier comment: “Je reste fidèle au principe brechtien de la distanciation” (130). Indeed, the scenography and stage directions are a rather interesting combination of surrealist and brechtian elements: the props are minimal – a window, a Chinese fresco, a photograph – but the way in which they are used is quite unfamiliar and unexpected. B jumps into the Chinese fresco and disappears, and immediately thereafter, a goat, seen from the window, hangs itself from a tree. Character A then faces the window, “exalté,” and begins speaking to his “invités du jour” and his “frères de sang” (185).

The actor steps out of his role as the character and becomes a figure who addresses the audience. In most plays, and in most autobiographies, the actors or characters perform as if they are completely unaware of the audience and unaware of their own status as artistic creation. In Brecht’s plays, however, the actors do not identify with their characters or their roles; they simply demonstrate the actions of the characters.³⁵ By directly addressing the audience/reader, A, like Brecht’s characters, demonstrates his awareness of both the creative enterprise in which he is engaged and the audience/reader’s involvement in this enterprise. Brecht’s principle of distanciation creates a curious side-effect: In establishing a “distance” between the actor and the character and in having the actor directly address the audience, the “distance” between the audience and the actor decreases.

In Khatibi's autobiography, the narrator's "distanciation" underlines the distinction between the narrator and protagonist and creates a *rapprochement* with the reader. In discussing the role of the reader in Le Livre du sang, Réda Bensmaïa draws a parallel with the *hikayat*, or North African oral poetry: "Le Livre du sang is a book that demands to be re-written, or, one might say, written *in concert*" (105, emphasis in original). Bensmaïa continues: "By mobilizing the mimetic and dramatic power of the mystical *Hikayat*, the narrator and the reader become the 'actants' as well as the actors in the metafictional narrative. The story isn't 'told' to them: they are its agents, its actors, and its active subjects" (112). The narrator leads us through the story he creates but also occasionally addresses us directly, involving us in the task at hand instead of allowing us to passively and comfortably follow along. As Genette says: ". . . le véritable auteur du récit n'est pas seulement celui qui le raconte, mais aussi, et parfois bien davantage, celui qui l'écoute. Et qui n'est pas nécessairement celui à qui l'on s'adresse: il y a toujours du monde à côté."³⁶ In The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy, Khatibi and Sijelmassi begin with the sentence: "Every text, whether sacred or secular, carries within it a desire to imagine the reader who approaches it. Therein lies its dream of eternity" (6). In Khatibi's autobiography, as well as in his other texts, the imagined reader is not one who will sit idly by, but one who is willing and committed to working.

The reader's expectation that La Mémoire tatouée will be a simple *récit de vie*, or story of a life, is not fulfilled. This autobiography tells the story of a life, but does so in a manner in which it constantly multiplies the life told: it is the life of the protagonist, the life of the creative impulse involved in telling the story, and the life of the text, how it functions and circulates in its own world. The narrator's emphasis on writing as a creative activity and

his mention of the protagonist's past forays into creative writing open the world of text. It is not a text which sits alone, but rather a text which functions in a much larger system of texts, some of which are referenced with respect to the past – books the protagonist reads and plays, poetry and essays that he writes; still others are referenced with respect to the future.

One such case of reference to a future work is the following comment on the protagonist's experience with two languages steeped in two vastly different traditions:

De là, à comparer mon français à la langue du Coran exige un autre parchemin, qui arrivera le jour où rien ne m'empêchera de sauter de page en page, eu égard à mon dédoublement furieux, et le livre que j'écrirai sera alors pensée religieuse. Arbre de mon enfance, le Coran dominait ma parole alors que l'école, c'était une bibliothèque sans le livre. (55)

Can the narrator, who exists only in the present of the text, refer to a future event? Perhaps, especially if we bear in mind Augustine's threefold concept of memory, that there exists a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future. As I have already mentioned, the narrator of Khatibi's autobiography presents the story of coming to be a writer which includes references to past texts, references to his current project and the ways in which he makes us aware of it as writing and creation, and references to ideas he has now for texts he will write in the future. And we can expect to see this narrator again, as A indicates toward the end of the autobiography: "Il sera dit que je reviendrai parmi vous . . ." (186).

Conclusion

From the understanding of the ways in which Khatibi's autobiography challenges traditional assumptions about autobiography, to seeing how the narrator consistently makes us aware of this text as a creation, I have come to read this text as less the story of Abdelkebir's childhood than as his development as a writer. Not only do we follow young Abdelkebir

through Qur'anic school and through his years in the French educational system, we see that the narrator spends a considerable amount of time presenting the protagonist's introduction to reading and writing. We see the young protagonist's first attempts at creative writing: re-writing the ending to Horace in alexandrins, dictating love letters for his classmates, and publishing poetry in a newspaper.

The protagonist's later efforts are described in slightly more detail. In fact, the narrator speaks at great length about the play he wrote that was directed and produced by his friend, Lavelli. It is interesting that the narrator does not go into more detail about the writer's only prior publication, Le roman maghrébin, the text which he refers to as a "bad book." This is perhaps due to a sense of modesty on the part of the writer, or perhaps it is because he really does feel that it was not a good book, and therefore not worth spending his narrative time describing. But it is significant that his previous creative efforts, as well as his history as a reader, are mentioned in that they all lead to a strong sense of intertextuality in Khatibi's autobiography.

That the narrator describes in detail the protagonist's education – the books he reads, the professors with whom he studies – is not at all unlike the Arabic tradition of autobiography which Devin Stewart calls "the pre-modern version of a curriculum vitae" (52). Although Khatibi's autobiography seems focused more on his involvement with the French colonial educational system, I propose that there are also aspects of his story which point to a knowledge of and appreciation for the Arabic literary and artistic tradition. The narrator's mention of several Arabic-language poets supports this idea. Furthermore, Khatibi's later discussions of Islamic calligraphy, Moroccan rugs, Sufism, and popular rituals in Morocco provide more evidence of his appreciation for this cultural influence. And at the same time,

the Arabo-Islamic cultural influence offers both a means and a topic for Khatibi's criticism of dialectics and metaphysics.

Khatibi's autobiography provides us with a glimpse into his development as a writer and at the same time, we can also see his development as a thinker. From those early days in the Qur'anic school where the narrator describes the protagonist as a rather passive learner, memorizing without understanding, to the protagonist's introduction to the colonial system and the literature and culture of the colonizer, we already see the protagonist starting to read, interpret and critique his surroundings. During his years as a student in Paris, he even musters a few rebellious cries, all the while seeing both the bad and the good that the West has to offer him. By the end of the autobiography, the protagonist's career as a scholar, speaker, and writer is taking off, and the autobiography thus enters the life stream mentioned earlier. The autobiography, usually seen as a part taken for a whole, becomes part of that whole, and in this particular case, that part of a whole, the autobiography, also serves to introduce what is yet to come.

End Notes

¹ Olney, "On the Nature of Autobiography," Biography and Autobiography: Essays on Irish and Canadian History and Literature, ed. James Noonan (Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1993) 113.

² Cited in Sergei Shuiskii, "Some Observations on Modern Arabic Autobiography," Journal of Arabic Literature 13 (1982): 121.

³ Cited in Michael Sprinker, "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 334.

⁴ Azade Seyhan, "Ethnic Selves/Ethnic Signs: Invention of Self, Space, and Genealogy in Immigrant Writing," Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literary Studies. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) 175-194. Seyhan establishes this link between autobiography and imaginary homelands in his discussion of autobiographies by immigrant writers. I believe Rushdie's idea is applicable to autobiography in general.

⁵ From Pilote de guerre, cited in Souad Guellouz, Les Jardins du Nord (Tunis: Editions Salammbô, 1982) 99.

⁶ By narrative here, I mean not only a linguistic process which signifies and orders, but also a product whose fundamental structure is the sentence. Anything beyond “Born 1950. Graduated high school 1968. etc.” is narrative; the moment that the facts are used to construct sentences, that is to narrate, is a moment of interpretation. A good example of this concept is the content and “spin” of history books which claim a high degree of accuracy and objectivity. However, if we look back, we find omissions of information about minority groups and bitter military defeats, as well as interpretations of events according to the audience to whom the text is intended.

⁷ Khatibi, Mémoire 9. This and any other translations from this text are my own.

⁸ The concept that autobiography reveals as much or more about the present state of the writer as it does about his past sense of self is generally accepted in theory and criticism of autobiography.

⁹ Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi also state this in The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy, trans. James Hughes and E. J. Emory (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996): “A man’s birth is ordained, and occurs in the context of a language already articulated and formed” (31).

¹⁰ Khatibi, “Bilinguisme et littérature,” Maghreb pluriel 177-207.

¹¹ The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, 4th ed., ed. J. Milton Cowan, (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1994).

¹² The discussion of reading in this chapter focuses on his introduction to reading at the Qur’anic school and to literature at the French school. In Chapter 3, I will evaluate how Khatibi’s writing reveals his expanded view of reading which includes a variety of semiotic systems.

¹³ The practice of Islam in Morocco is that of Sunni Islam. Generally speaking, there are two main branches in Islam – Sunni and Shi’i – whose differences date back to the dispute over the succession of leadership of the Muslim community following the Prophet’s death. Scholars of Islamic history and theology divide the Muslim community into even more sects and sub-sects, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this project. Although I speak in general terms about Islam and the Qur’an, my discussion here is focused on the practice of Islam in Morocco and the religious views and practices of Moroccan Muslims. The very fact that Morocco’s king claims descendancy from the Prophet and is therefore seen not only as a political leader but as the “Commander of the Faithful” makes Moroccan Islam quite different from the brand of Islam practiced in other countries, with the possible exception of Jordan, whose king also claims descendancy from the Prophet.

¹⁴ Ngandu, Personal communication with the author, 12-13 Dec. 2001.

¹⁵ Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1954) 147. While Guillaume's book is certainly informative, he does, at moments, come across as judgmental and negative toward Islam. He also frequently compares Islam to Christianity, evidently with the aim to help the reader understand the points he is trying to make.

¹⁶ Guillaume 136-8.

¹⁷ Guillaume 147-8.

¹⁸ The use of the word "sacred" is my own; I use it to mean "holy" or "of God."

¹⁹ Indeed, a mistake means a "translation" of an untranslatable text: "In Islamic thought the Qur'an is held to be untranslatable both in that it contains a multitude of meanings only a fraction of which can be conveyed in a translation and in that its beauty and stylistic features are inimitable. A rendering into another language can thus only remain a specific human interpretation of the divine utterance and not a translation, which is only possible when transforming one human text into another human text" (Reynolds et al. 49-50).

²⁰ Khatibi and Sijelmassi note that "[s]ome Moroccan *fuqaha* recite a religious invocation as they make their signature, speaking the first word as they write the first letter, and ending with the last movement of the hand" (152). They also note that there is an Arab saying that "'The pen is one of the two tongues'" (101).

²¹ According to Guillaume, there are also many people, such as the scholar Sayyid Amir 'Ali, who consider Muhammad to be "the author of the Qur'an" (160). Guillaume further states that "the doctrine that the Qur'an is 'uncreate,' i.e. literally the word of God, was not finally established until the third century of the *hijra*" (160).

²² Cited in Christopher Gibbins, "Dismantling the Maghreb: Contemporary Moroccan Writing and Islamic Discursivity," *The Marabout and the Muse: New Approaches to Islam in African Literature*, ed. Kenneth W. Harrow (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996) 27.

²³ Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of language and education, in which he develops the notion of linguistic capital and linguistic habitus, are an interesting avenue to explore with respect to the acquisition of the colonizer's language. According to Bourdieu, it is the linguistic habitus of upper-class students – their tendency toward more abstract and intellectual expression – which ensures their success in the French educational system. This is what the schools want from their students, and these students are thus predisposed to success. See James Collins, "Determination and Contradiction: An Appreciation and Critique of the Work of Pierre Bourdieu on Language and Education," *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 118-122. Unfortunately, I have only recently begun studying Bourdieu and my current knowledge of his work is therefore too limited to pursue this connection.

²⁴ Pierre Corneille, Horace (Paris: Editions Bordas, 1984) 114. The comments cited here are by the editors to this edition.

²⁵ Khatibi, Mémoire 85-86. I would like to point once again to the proximity of the words “hagard” and “errance.” As we have already seen once, the narrator’s use of these terms conjures up the image of Hagar wandering in the desert looking for water for her infant son. The relationship between the spoken and the written is frequently highlighted in this manner in Khatibi’s autobiography.

²⁶ This is an adaptation of Saint-Augustine’s concept of memory as discussed in Olney, “Memory and the Narrative Imperative: St. Augustine and Samuel Beckett,” New Literary History 24.4 (1993): 859. Augustine presents a concept of memory which involves three kinds of time: a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future. This idea applies to Khatibi’s writing in the autobiography and the idea of intertextuality between the autobiography and his later works.

²⁷ This character is also mentioned much earlier in the autobiography in the context of a brief commentary about the ogress Aicha Kendisha, 45.

²⁸ In this respect, Khatibi sees his text as a text, an open and unfinished creative activity over which he can no longer assume control or authority. His comments reveal the similarity in his thinking about writing to that of Valéry, for whom a text is never finished, and to Barthes, for whom a finished literary product is a work, not a text.

²⁹ Abdallah Mdarhri-Alaoui, “Le roman marocain d’expression française,” Littérature maghrébine d’expression française, eds. Charles Bonn, Naget Khadda, and Abdallah Mdarhri-Alaoui (Vanves: EDICEF, 1996) 141, and Zohra Mezgueldi, “Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine,” Littérature maghrébine d’expression française, eds. Charles Bonn, Naget Khadda, and Abdallah Mdarhri-Alaoui (Vanves: EDICEF, 1996) 153; Jean Déjeux, La Littérature maghrébine d’expression française (Paris: PU de France, 1992) 39-45.

³⁰ By the mention of fragile eyes we can assume that this is not much later than the eye infection he developed shortly after his weaning at around 18 months of age.

³¹ This expression also calls to mind the narrator’s description of the protagonist re-writing the ending to Horace. It is during the presentation of this scene that the narrator says: “Je me rêvais extrait choisi, dieu parmi les dieux” (84).

³² In Leiris’ L’Age d’homme, he uses a similar metaphor: “. . . (puisque ma vie était ce qu’elle était et qu’il ne m’était pas loisible de changer d’une virgule mon passé. . .)” (21). Of course, with Leiris, the effect is slightly different in that this expression is commonly used in French. However, Leiris chose it for a reason and I maintain that it is precisely his continued awareness of his writing project that led him to, consciously or unconsciously, choose such a formula.

³³ Despite the common belief that there is an Islamic injunction against the representation of the human or divine forms, Khatibi and Sijelmassi state that “the Qur’an does not expressly forbid the representation of the human form. In fact, the subject is not mentioned anywhere” (128). However, they note that there is a *hadith* cited by al-Bukhari which “expresses the prohibition on figurative art straightforwardly: when he makes an image, man sins unless he can breathe life into it” (128). They explain that “this alleged prohibition was directed against contemporary forms of totemism which were anathema to Islam, but could conceivably reinfiltate it in the guise of art . . . In one sense, theology was right to be watchful; it had to keep an eye on its irrepressible enemy – art” (128). However, even Khatibi and Sijelmassi, for all of their effort to clarify this issue, later contradict themselves: “By contrast, a Muslim artist – constrained as he is by a general prohibition preventing any figural treatment of the divine or human countenance . . .” (169). Nonetheless, there is a widespread belief that Islam does prohibit the figurative representation of the human form, and this is why many artists simply do not do it.

³⁴ Leiris 22-23, emphasis added. Although it is far beyond the scope of this project, a comparative analysis of these two texts would be quite interesting, given the overall themes and some of the specific, almost coincidental similarities. For example, Leiris also mentions his traumatic experience of having his tonsils removed, and throughout L’Age d’homme, he expresses an affinity for the theater which shows through in various instances of the text itself, such as when the narrator indicates: “Le décor change . . .” (207).

³⁵ Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed. (New York: Columbia UP, 2000).

³⁶ Genette 267. The last part of this citation is a reference to Genette’s discussion of Bixiou’s comment about eavesdropping. Genette’s idea about the reader being as much a maker of meaning as the writer is also similar to Barthes’ concept of the writerly text which Bensmaïa uses in his discussion of Le Livre du sang.

CHAPTER THREE: RE-WRITING THE TEXT OF THE LIFE

Introduction

In the previous two chapters we saw how Khatibi's autobiography tells more than a simple story of his childhood. It tells of his coming to writing and of his relationship with language and writing. Khatibi's future texts, too, are unable and even unwilling to loosen themselves from the bond with language and writing as creative endeavors and subjects for analysis. These texts address some of the same issues raised in the autobiography; in this respect, we can see that the autobiography, already a re-writing of the text of the life, is in turn, re-written by Khatibi's later publications. There is thus an intertextual relationship we will explore in this chapter between Khatibi's autobiography and some of his later texts such as Le Livre du sang, Amour bilingue, Maghreb pluriel, Le Prophète voilé, Figures de l'étranger, La Blessure du nom propre, and The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy.

Like the autobiography, Khatibi's play Le Prophète voilé also addresses questions of subjectivity and voice, with the character of the Prophet having three distinct voices:

“Remarque très importante: la voix du Prophète se fera en trois registres: – Voix I: quand le Prophète parle normalement, comme tous les mortels. – Voix II: off. – Voix III: off-echo.

Les voix II et III se feront entendre en présence du Prophète ou en son absence. Ce qui suppose, scéniquement, un enregistrement sur bandes magnétiques laborieux.”¹ In the

opening scene of the play, the Prophet (Voice II) says: “Je suis revenu parmi vous après une si longue absence . . .” (17). This expression is similar, although transformed through the use of a different verb tense, to A's comment at the end of the autobiography: “Il sera dit que je reviendrai parmi vous . . .” (MT 186). It is as if the narrator of the autobiography has been resurrected and takes on the persona of the Prophet in Khatibi's play.

Furthermore, a mother and daughter are described as tattooed, on their faces, hands and arms, at the beginning of Tableau IV (PV 39). In the second part of Tableau VII, the scene between two characters, le Prophète et la Prophétesse, calls to mind a story told by the narrator of the autobiography: “Dans mon histoire, il y avait deux prophètes de sexes et de peuples opposés . . .” (MT 171-72). And the khalifa’s harem in Le Prophète voilé consists of women named Yasmina, Emeraude, Ambroisie and Nectar, with Houri added to the harem in the second part. The names Ambroisie and Nectar recall the myth of Calypso and Ulysses (mentioned several times in the autobiography) due to the narrator’s description of their last night together: “Leur dernière nuit se déroula dans l’ambroisie et le nectar” (MT 13). In Tableau III of Le Prophète voilé, the Prophet (Voice I) says, “Quand je serai délivré de cette souffrance infligée à moi par moi-même, dites partout que la main coupée est la mienne” (33). In The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy, Khatibi and Sijelmassi discuss Ibn Muqla, whose hand, and later tongue, were ordered by a minister of the government to be cut off. The re-appearance of this hand, detached from the body, is symbolic of Khatibi’s use and re-use of symbols, expressions, and fragments throughout his body of work.

This intertextuality is not just evident between Khatibi’s own works, however; in Le Prophète voilé, Khatibi explains that “l’idée de cette pièce nous est venue en lisant le conte de Borgès, *Le teinturier masqué*: Hakim de Merv” (7). At the beginning of the second part of the play, a quote by James Joyce about the body and writing and hieroglyphics is placed in exergue (57). I cite these examples at length in order to provide a more complete understanding of the ways in which intertextuality makes itself known throughout Khatibi’s body of writing. There are, of course, many, many other possible examples in any given combination of Khatibi’s texts.

As we have already seen, intertextuality is also an important concept in the tradition of Arabic autobiography as autobiographies were intended to be read in conjunction with an author's other texts, be they poetic, religious, or philosophical. According to Reynolds et al., premodern Arabic autobiographies "did not represent a unique moment for self-representation but rather a frame or summation for revealing a certain portrait of the whole, a context within which one's work would then be placed and evaluated" (247). This is what I propose to do with Khatibi's autobiography, to situate it and evaluate it within the larger context of his life's work, or his Text. But unlike premodern Arabic autobiographies, Khatibi's autobiography is not a summation or conclusion to his Text; by the fact that it was one of his first texts published, it serves, rather, as an introduction to his Text. It is certainly possible, of course, to read Khatibi's autobiography alone, as a text within its own right. But the recurring themes, methods of presentation and analysis, and repeated expressions all point to the importance of intertextuality in his texts.

In the foreword to the second edition of Blindness and Insight, Paul de Man makes an interesting comment about his attitude toward his own previous publications. He says that he is not given to retrospective self-examination and tends to forget what he has written, even though a few phrases at times return to haunt him: "When one imagines to have felt the exhilaration of renewal, one is certainly the last to know whether such a change actually took place or whether one is just restating, in a slightly different mode, earlier and unresolved obsessions" (xii). Khatibi's texts present us with a similar phenomenon: his interests in language, representation, reading, art, identity, difference, philosophy and theater become, by their very repetition throughout his texts, topics of obsession with which Khatibi cannot quite seem to come to terms. These themes continually recur, even if in "slightly different modes."

As Maurice Blanchot says: “L’écrivain ne sait jamais si l’oeuvre est faite. Ce qu’il a terminé en un livre, il la recommence ou le détruit en un autre” (11).

This emphasis on openness and intertextuality is generally taken to be a preoccupation of modern or even postmodern writers. However, Reynolds et al. indicate that premodern Arabic autobiographies also demonstrate a variety of forms of intertextuality, and are therefore difficult to categorize according to genre, an act that would “close them off” from the potentially limitless field of meaning:

Some Arabic autobiographies therefore pose a serious challenge to any methodology that might attempt to read them as closed texts, as complete statements on their own. . . . Some medieval and early modern Arabic autobiographies do not possess the “boundedness” or “insularity” of more recent examples but rather emerge from a literary context in which various types of borrowing, imitation, reworking, unattributed quotation, and allusion – virtually every possible form of intertextuality – were commonplace. (248)

These types of intertextuality are all present in Khatibi’s autobiography, and some of them are present in some of his later texts as well. For example, in La Mémoire tatouée, there are unattributed quotes or veiled references to authors such as Memmi, Césaire, and Valéry. We have already discussed Kateb’s influence on Khatibi’s writing and his efforts to imitate not only the “dieux officiels” but also to imitate the experimental style of Kateb. We also find a reworking of some of Fanon’s ideas on revolution and decolonization, but they are presented in a less violent manner in Khatibi’s autobiography.

There are also moments in Khatibi’s autobiography where the intertextual references are clear, such as the protagonist’s re-writing of the ending of Horace, and the narrator’s specific references to texts read by the protagonist. This, as we have also already seen, is in keeping with the tradition of Arabic autobiography in which the autobiographer attempts to establish his legitimacy as a scholar or writer by stating as complete an account as possible of

his education. There is another example of this in the modern Arabic autobiographical tradition as well. The publication of the Egyptian poet laureate Ahmad Shawqi's autobiography *al-Shawqiyyat* in 1898 created quite a scandal because in addition to including an account of his personal life, he also included discussions of both Arabic and European literary texts that he had read.² In addition to the references to European literature, al-Shawqi was criticized for not following the strict classical guidelines of form and correctness. The ensuing debate between al-Shawqi, his supporters, and his critics, led to what is now known as the Arab renaissance. It is interesting that even now, there are critics like those of al-Shawqi who insist on linguistic and cultural purity, especially in a postcolonial context. A similar debate was frequently waged in the pages of *Souffles*, despite the inability of any of the parties to come to a mutual understanding of the pitfalls and benefits of continued cultural interaction with an imperial or neo-imperial Other.

North African Francophone writers such as Khatibi have felt the sting of such criticism and for Khatibi especially, it remains an evident concern throughout his work. The themes repeated in Khatibi's texts are so varied and the quantity of his publications so vast that I will limit my discussion of intertextuality to the texts cited above and to three main themes: *pensée-autre* and *double critique*, *bi-langue*, and *intersémiotique*. The discussion of the last concept is especially important to the growing body of critical work on Khatibi's texts because very few scholars have chosen to address the *intersémiotique*, even though in many ways, it is quite similar to *pensée-autre* and the *bi-langue*.

Decolonization, Double Critique, and Pensée-Autre

In Khatibi's autobiography, the narrator mentions two ways in which the formerly colonized people of Morocco, and one could say the same of Algeria and Tunisia as well,

come to see the path of decolonization. One path toward decolonization demonstrates the desire for a *retour aux sources* in which the formerly colonized people attempt to erase the colonizer's presence and influence, and rediscover their own tradition and heritage. An example of this is mentioned during the narrator's description of the *spectacle* to celebrate Morocco's independence from France, during which the audience does not understand the Classical Arabic poetry. The narrator explains that "[c]et échec nous donna une raison, on se réfugia dans la tradition, seule manière de séduire" (102). The narrator also mentions his brother's attempt to learn of the family's Andalusian ancestors: "Mon frère erra dans ces déserts de la belle mémoire, cherchant la trace de ses ancêtres andalous. L'Andalousie respirait maintenant une autre fureur" (156-57).

Both of these examples demonstrate the desire to find one's roots, to return to an earlier, more pure state of being. But this ideal is impossible because there is no such thing as a pure origin, and the historical situation of the Mediterranean is perhaps the best example of this. In wanting to dissociate themselves from the language and culture of the colonizer, France, the formerly colonized North Africans turn back to the past; but to which past should they turn? Every era of their history is filled with cultural interaction and exchange, war and conquest, and religious and linguistic tension. The French were simply the most recent in a long line of invaders which includes Turks, Arabs and Romans. The idea that there is an uncontaminated origin or source to which one can return is a fallacy, as the narrator indicates in this comment: "Belle illusion est le retour au pays! On ne revient jamais chez soi, on retourne dans le cercle de son ombre" (143). This is, once again, similar to Rushdie's idea of imaginary homelands. As I mentioned earlier, this is also an idea that is repeated in Maghreb

pluriel: “Il n’y a pas de retour en soi, rien, rien que des transformations critiques, selon notre perspective” (24).

The other path toward decolonization is at once a distancing from the capitalism and bourgeoisie of the former colonizer, a member of the “First World,” and a *rapprochement* with the ideals of Marxism being employed in the “Second World.” The influence of Marxism on the young protagonist is great, even though the narrator admits that the protagonist, like many other members of his generation, uses Marxism when it suits him: “J’étais du côté de Marx, et je le suis toujours; militant divisé, je choisisais l’action quand elle me chantait, disparaissait quand elle devenait psychodrame dérisoire. Etre lutteur de classe à la Maison du Maroc devenait un mythe livresque, les groupes se constituaient par affinités, se dévoraient en se dispersant souvent lors du retour au pays” (MT 126). Despite the narrator’s indication that he is still a Marxist, what we find twelve years later is a version of these Marxist ideals tempered by Khatibi’s realization that Marxism itself derives from Hegelian dialectics and therefore, from Western metaphysics: “. . . la pensée de Marx, plus ou moins dissociable de celle de Hegel et, donc, de la métaphysique occidentale, cette pensée a réalisé une forme absolue du Savoir absolu, en ébranlant le monde par une dialectique inexorable” (MP 53). In this comment, we can also see Khatibi’s critique of Fanon. Even though Fanon calls for colonized countries to “find their own particular values and methods and a style which shall be peculiar to them” (WE 99), Fanon’s reliance on theoretical Marxism undermines this very suggestion. This is precisely where Khatibi’s *double critique* shows its effectiveness: Khatibi’s call is similar to Fanon’s but Khatibi’s strategy and method – the consideration of the multiple and varied facets of any situation – do not undermine this very call. Furthermore, while Fanon is extremely critical of “native intellectuals” and

presents himself as the champion of the masses, his own words display his arrogance and condescending attitude toward the very people with whom he claims a brotherly solidarity: “We ought not to cultivate the exceptional or to seek for a hero, who is another form of leader. We ought to uplift the people; we must *develop their brains, fill them with ideas, change them and make them into human beings*” (WE 197, emphasis added).

The two distinct and disparate paths chosen by North Africans as a means to achieve decolonization, or more precisely to re-construct a post-colonial society,³ represent a kind of all-or-nothing mentality: in choosing to seek refuge in the past and in tradition, one turns one’s back on the recent Western influence; in choosing Marxist socialism, one turns one’s back on Islamic cultural tradition. Khatibi sees each path as an inevitable failure. The Maghreb is made up of so many different cultural and historical influences and one cannot simply turn one’s back on any of them. In fact, the practice of Marxism in Morocco is quite distinct from the practice of Marxism in Algeria and Tunisia because of the fact that Morocco’s form of government is a constitutional monarchy whose leader claims descendency from the Prophet Muhammad and is therefore seen as the “Commander of the Faithful.” And unlike the practice of communist Marxism in the “Second World,” Moroccan Marxism can never separate itself from – let alone outlaw – Islam. The ruling royal family, along with a very wealthy upper class (often friends and associates of the royal family), enjoys extraordinary financial privileges in a financially bereft country and creates a society with very distinct social classes. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon notes that “decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution” (35). The Moroccan upper class, the elite, have replaced the French, and the

situation of the lower class, with respect to the continued advantages enjoyed by the upper class, has not changed much since the departure of the French. And yet Marxist groups in Morocco never publicly go so far as to cry for the ousting of the king, which would be tantamount to a kind of religious treason.⁴

In a discussion of two Moroccan artists, Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui, Khatibi suggests that the differing styles of the two painters are perhaps linked to their names which mean, respectively, Oriental and Occidental. Khatibi then highlights the similarity between the origins of the words Barbary and Maghreb. The root verb of the word Maghreb is *gharaba*, whose corresponding noun is *gharib*, meaning both strange and stranger (*étrange* and *étranger*). Barbary was the name applied to the region whose inhabitants did not speak the language of the invading Romans; in this sense, these inhabitants – Berbers/Barbarians – were strange, strangers to the Romans (MP 214-15). Two words from two different languages are applied to the same geographical area and carry the same meaning; it is thus historically defined as strange, or a place of strangers, with respect to powerful invaders.

Emphasizing Morocco's position as a site of cultural interaction throughout the ages, Khatibi points to Europe's prolonged engagement with the southern coast of the Mediterranean: "Le Maroc fut ainsi chanté par l'Europe, Homère déjà, et vers 1300, par Dante: chanté comme une contrée lointaine rêvée dans l'éclat du mythe. Celui d'Ulysse, et ce n'est pas un hasard: Ulysse est le récit premier de l'errance" (MP 215). The Mediterranean is a site of travel, and Morocco's geographic position at the extreme Western end of the Mediterranean, as well as its Arabic name, *al-Maghrib*,⁵ nearly link it to the horizon, the end of the earth. Khatibi states: "Le mot *maghrib*: lieu où le soleil se couche,

occident. Par extension, extrême éloignement. Toujours un horizon qui appelle le voyage, l'exil, la séparation avec le lieu natal" (MP 214).

Fanon criticizes the recognition of the Arab invasion of North Africa as a kind of colonialism, calling it a mere justification for European colonialism (WE 160). Fanon also states that "[t]he native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal" (WE 46). According to Fanon, Mediterranean ideals of humanity go up in smoke during colonialism. However, Khatibi points out that these Mediterranean ideals and Greco-Latin influences are just as much a part of North African culture and history as Islam and the Arab invasion. Indeed, intellectual and cultural exchange between Greek and Arab civilizations is a generally accepted historical fact, one which Fanon refuses to admit, preferring instead to bemoan the Arab world's involvement with Mediterranean societies. Khatibi's point is that we cannot change the past; we must, rather, consider every part of who we are and all of our influences, and move forward with this knowledge.

Khatibi's view of Morocco as a horizon and a space of travel, exile, and separation from the homeland is repeated in the introduction to his collection of essays entitled Figures de l'étranger,⁶ a study of the ways in which other geographical areas and other peoples are presented in contemporary French literature.

Or, nous savons que le récit homérique, premier récit occidental et qui est un passage de la littérature *vocale* à la littérature écrite, est une initiation à l'extranéité, c'est-à-dire au monde en tant que narration du dehors, de l'étrange, de l'étranger, du barbare. Ce récit est autant le noyau mythique de la figure des autres qu'un itinéraire de voyages merveilleux; il est autant cette initiation qu'une pensée magique sur les modes de *se* représenter, de *se* dire ce qu'est le dehors (territorial, langagier, culturel, spatial, cosmique) que les Grecs imaginaient. Et ce dehors – dans le récit homérique – est aussi ce voyage qu'aucun retour (du récitant, du voyageur) ne peut détourner. (10-11, emphasis in original)

Khatibi again repeats this idea in the conclusion, and using almost the same wording:

Je rappelle que le récit d'*Ulysse* et qui est lui-même un passage de la littérature orale à l'écrite – est une initiation à l'extranéité et au monde en tant que narration du dehors, de l'étrange, de l'étranger, du barbare. Le récit est autant le germe de la figure de l'autre qu'un itinéraire de voyage. Il est autant cette initiation à l'étranger qu'un *récit de récit* dans ses possibilités de dire non seulement ce qu'est le dehors, mais aussi ce qu'est le dedans, ou plutôt le *dehors du dedans* qu'aucun retour (du conteur, du voyageur) ne pourrait clôturer. (205, emphasis in original)

I cite Khatibi at length here in order to show the repetition of this idea and how the story of Ulysses is re-written several times over in Khatibi's *oeuvre*. Remember that it is in the autobiography that we first encounter Ulysses, in the context of his "mythical encounter" with Calypso, "la toute-divine au langage ailé."

The importance of this tale to the development of Khatibi's critical thinking about the Maghreb must not be underestimated, and yet no one has addressed how this episode functions in the autobiography and how it functions in Khatibi's other texts. Let us recall that the encounter between Ulysses and Calypso is mentioned in the context of Abdelkebir's weaning from his mother's breast. His mother later compares the French withdrawal from Morocco to weaning, and the narrator draws the comparison between Calypso and his mother when the protagonist is taken away by the French soldiers. Khatibi's later development of this encounter as a microcosm of the long historical interaction between different civilizations of the Mediterranean provides the ideal metaphor for his development of the concepts of *pensée-autre*, *double critique*, and *non-retour*.

These three concepts are inter-related and are all tied to Khatibi's understanding of what it means to be decolonized, or more precisely, to decolonize oneself. As explained above, Khatibi is critical of the two most common paths chosen by formerly colonized people

in their efforts to construct a post-colonial society: Marxism, based on Hegelian dialectics and Western metaphysics; and an impossible *retour aux sources*, which, in the Muslim world, has most often taken the shape of radical Islamic fundamentalism.⁷ Fanon maintains that this is a result of the colonizer's struggle for control of the colonized country which he presents to the colonized and to the outside world as a battle between backwardness and modernity, religion and science, emotion and reason – in short, between Islam and France:

This expression indicates that the occupier, smarting from his failures, presents in a simplified and pejorative way the system of values by means of which the colonized person resists his innumerable offensives. What is in fact the assertion of a distinct identity, concern with keeping intact a few shreds of national existence, is attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior. (ADC 41)

The current controversy over the wearing of the veil in French schools is a good example of the turn toward a “native” culture – and thus away from that of the colonized – and the (former) colonizer's claim that this reaction is religious fanaticism. Fanon even explicitly states, in the context of Algeria during the war for independence, “To the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized opposes the cult of the veil” (ADC 47).

Khatibi, for his part, focuses mainly on the actions and ideas of the formerly colonized people and wonders:

Qu'avions-nous fait, sinon reproduire une pensée simplifiée de Marx et, en parallèle, l'idéologie théologique du nationalisme arabe. Or, ces deux idéologies, et chacune sur son propre terrain, sont tenues par une tradition métaphysique, morale et intellectuelle, dont l'édifice conceptuel demande de notre part une élucidation radicale. Nous avons échoué devant l'exigence de cette tâche. (MP 16)

Khatibi insists on the idea that it is impossible to return to an original state of civilization, devoid of outside influence. Because, in effect, just where is such a site? To what spatial and temporal zone must one travel to reach it?

Khatibi argues that it certainly does not exist in the present and that it cannot even be considered to have existed in the past. It does not exist, indeed never existed, and can only ever be considered with respect to the idea of *non-retour*.⁸ His insistence on the history of interrelations of Mediterranean civilizations provides the example of the very impossibility of the kind of cultural purity sought after by the traditionalists. He proposes that instead of trying to erase one element of the current cultural landscape, he and his compatriots should evaluate that very landscape according to what he calls a *double critique*:

Critique de ces deux métaphysiques, de leur face-à-face. En fait, il n'y a pas de choix. Il faudrait penser le Maghreb tel qu'il *est*, site topographique entre l'Orient, l'Occident et l'Afrique, et tel qu'il puisse se mondialiser pour son propre compte . . . D'une part, il faut écouter le Maghreb résonner dans sa pluralité (linguistique, culturelle, politique), et d'autre part, seul le dehors repensé, décentré, subverti, détourné de ses déterminations dominantes, peut nous éloigner des identités et des différences informulées . . . Tel est l'autre versant de notre relation à une telle pensée de la différence; car, l'originarité (*açala*) dont on nous intoxique, est encore un poison de la théologie. (MP 38-39)

The *double critique*, then, calls for re-thinking the supremacy of the West and the subordination of the East, the Orient, the Third World, or any number of other names used by the West to designate areas that are not the West. It also calls for re-thinking the Maghreb, the home country, and considering it *as it currently is*, with all of its elements of diversity, difference, and plurality. This *double critique* also leads to an examination of the binary concepts of West and East, Occident and Orient, and the philosophical, metaphysical, and theological traditions propagated in each domain.

Again, the similarity between Khatibi's thinking and that of Derrida is quite clear. In fact, Khatibi repeatedly applauds Derrida for his approach to thinking difference, and borrows Derrida's term "deconstruction" to evaluate the Western ethnocentrism of sociology. Khatibi also specifically mentions Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Blanchot as examples of Western

thinkers “of difference.” Khatibi sees a continuing “dialogue” with these thinkers as a means to work toward a *pensée-autre*: “. . . nous prenons en compte non seulement leur style de pensée, mais aussi leur stratégie et leur machinerie de guerre, afin de les mettre au service de notre combat qui est, forcément, une autre conjuration de l’esprit, exigeant une décolonisation effective, une pensée concrète de la différence” (MP 20). Khatibi proposes what he alternately calls a sociology of decolonization and a decolonization of sociology, and finds in Derrida’s deconstruction the philosophical equivalent of decolonization.⁹

Another practitioner of such an approach is the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, who insists that sociology must be aware of and transcend “inherited oppositions and dichotomies and the limitations of vision they always entail.”¹⁰ According to Bourdieu, interrogating the very practice of sociology is also a work of diminishing the difference between theory and practice. In his efforts to re-evaluate binary oppositions and constructions, one can see the clear similarities between Bourdieu, Khatibi, and Derrida. Bourdieu’s relational analysis and his concepts of field, habitus, and capital, Khatibi’s *double critique* and *pensée autre*, and Derrida’s deconstruction are all efforts to move beyond the dichotomy established in French academic and philosophical circles between structuralism and existentialism. However, these ideas are also a mode of thinking that translates to other fields of study as well.

The decolonization or deconstruction of sociology (or vice-versa), according to Khatibi, necessitates the use of the *double critique*, which he re-states as a double task:

Or, comme toute sociologie de la décolonisation (mais qu’est se décoloniser?), celle du monde arabe consiste à mener une double tâche: a) une déconstruction du logocentrisme et de l’ethnocentrisme, cette parole de l’autosuffisance par excellence que l’Occident, en se développant, a développé sur le monde. . . . b) Cela suppose aussi, exige, tout autant, une critique du

savoir et des discours élaborés par les différentes sociétés du monde arabe sur elles-mêmes. (MP 48-49)

Khatibi's concept of the *double critique* is not simply a concept for philosophical reflection; it is a reading practice. As such, Khatibi provides examples of the *double critique* as a tool for analysis. One such reading is of Abdelwahab Meddeb's Talismano, a text which, as I have already mentioned, bears an uncanny resemblance to Khatibi's own autobiography. But the more interesting and exemplary example of the *double critique* as a reading practice comes in Khatibi's discussion of Ibn Khaldun, the celebrated North African sociologist. In fact, he is considered the father of sociology throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Despite Khatibi's evident admiration and respect for Ibn Khaldun, the latter is not exempt from Khatibi's critical attention.¹¹ Like Derrida, Khatibi is critical of Hegel's dialectics, a philosophical paradigm most often associated with Western metaphysics. However, Khatibi points out that Ibn Khaldun's sociology also involves dialectics: "L'ambition d'Ibn Khaldun est d'avoir voulu construire, par la théorie du temps cyclique, un système social, comme un ensemble signifiant, mettant au jour l'interdépendance des sous-systèmes sociaux et la tension entre les différentes instances. Bref, il s'est voulu dialecticien" (MP 68). Like Hegel, Ibn Khaldun noted that the real locus of power in a dialectical relationship is in the acceptance by both the master and the subject of their roles with respect to each other: "La monarchie est une relation entre deux termes. Le gouvernement devient une réalité, quand il y a un monarque qui règne sur ses sujets et qui gouverne leurs affaires. Le sultan est celui qui a des sujets (*ra'aya*) et les sujets sont des personnes qui ont un sultan."¹²

The dialectics presented by Ibn Khaldun and Hegel are also at the base of the philosophy of European colonialism: There is a master, there is a subject, and this relationship will always hold true. In this system, the players may change, the subject may

one day become the master, but the system itself remains in place. And this is precisely why Khatibi takes issue with this way of thinking. The system itself is based on dominance and a will to power over (or overpower) someone else.

While Khatibi credits Derrida for his efforts to re-think and deconstruct the very concept of dialectics, Khatibi himself performs a similar maneuver in his presentation of the encounter between Ulysses and Calypso in his autobiography. The comparison drawn between Ulysses and Calypso and the French colonization of Morocco is presented as a scene of mutual seduction where Ulysses plays a willing partner to Calypso. Unlike the traditional understanding that Ulysses was held prisoner by Calypso, the tale presented in the autobiography is devoid of any relations of power and dominance in the reciprocal seduction of Ulysses and Calypso.

However, there are also scenes in the autobiography which seem to contradict this notion of mutual or reciprocal seduction, seeing the West's seduction of generations of young Moroccans as a relationship of power. When Abdelkebir and his classmates read texts about Third World history and Morocco, they are both shocked and ashamed by the way in which these different civilizations are presented in their schoolbooks. For example: "A l'école, on retrouvait le chaos. Page tournée, dynastie tombée; la tête d'un roi! Les dynasties se bouscullaient, les tribus piaffaient dans la poussière . . . Emu par ce désordre, l'Occident colonial décida d'intervenir pour le bien de tout le monde" (MT 58-59). Recalling the passage cited earlier about the presentation of Morocco in French schoolbooks, we see this: ". . . le Maroc . . . sous la forme d'un joyeux folklore, tuniques blanches, babouches vif écarlate, pastèques ensanglantées . . . Un muezzin mécanique . . ." (MT 57). When the narrator explains that the Moroccan schoolchildren slid down in their chairs, ashamed of this

image of themselves, we can understand why. Not only has the colonial administration developed its own image of Morocco, it is also convincing the Moroccans themselves that this is who they are, how they are perceived, and how they should perceive themselves.

In an essay published in Maghreb pluriel entitled “L’Orientalisme désorienté,” and dated 1976, Khatibi provides a three-fold definition of what he calls Orientalism:¹³

- 1) En tant qu’il vise l’analyse d’un étant (linguistique, historique, religieux) déterminé et appelé l’Orient, sans poser la question de l’Être et du simulacre selon une pensée vigilante et rigoureuse de la différence, l’orientalisme demeure enraciné, en ses stipes, dans le sol métaphysique. (120)
- 2) Le deuxième trait dominant de l’orientalisme consiste dans son positivisme, non contradictoire avec son spiritualisme. Nous dirons donc qu’il y a une unité solidaire entre l’essentialisme, le positivisme et la métaphysique. (122)
- 3) Qu’il soit chrétien, idéaliste ou rationaliste, l’orientalisme est solidaire de l’humanisme. Bien plus, l’humanisme théologique y trouve un abri de repli. Au moment où, au XIXe siècle, le Dieu scolastique se retire de la scène de l’Occident, cédant place à l’homme en tant que sujet de l’histoire, voici que l’orientalisme le récupère chez les Arabes. Selon quelle nécessité intérieure l’orientalisme est-il attiré par l’Islam? Est-ce parce que le Dieu a abandonné l’Occident à une démonie technique? (123)

According to Khatibi, the metaphysics of Orientalism is tied to its lack of critical attention to the difference between the *être* and the *étant*, where the former is existence as abstraction, and the latter is being in terms of phenomenon, and that Khatibi also calls “Dieu.” He elsewhere calls God “un étant premier, déterminant la hiérarchie des existants” (MP 120). This is remarkably similar to what Said states in Orientalism, that “it would be wrong to conclude that the Orient was *essentially* an idea, or a creation with no corresponding reality” (5, emphasis in original), or an abstract idea of existence as opposed to the physical reality of humans who actually live in the area called “the Orient.” Both Khatibi and Said indicate that one can not consider the idea of the Orient without considering the reality of the Orient;

indeed, Said points out that the Orient is a “location is in the East,” and it is inhabited by people who have their own languages, histories and customs (5).

Another scene in which the notion of seduction as power is almost an inversion of the Orientalist descriptions cited above is in the protagonist’s encounter with the girl from Holland, whom, incidentally, is never named (MT 132-33). The protagonist meets her at a Parisian train station as she is preparing for a trip to her native country. The narrator calls her “la fille d’Hollande” and “la fille rêveuse du Nord,” and his description of this encounter is filled with expressions such as “des yeux bleus,” “rêve hivernal,” and “enneigé.” The protagonist even tries to speak to her about her own country, mentioning Van Gogh, while the narrator admits the protagonist’s limited knowledge of Holland. The narrator’s description of how the protagonist sees the girl from Holland is phantasmatic, reminiscent of the ways in which Westerners have tended to describe the Orient: exotic, colorful, sensual, mysterious, etc. The passage ends with the departure of the train: “Le train partit, je repris la direction souterraine. Au revoir, fille rêveuse du Nord que j’aimais comme une nostalgie renversée!” (MT 133).

The phantasmatic description of the girl combined with this notion of “nostalgie renversée” points to the operation of a kind of reverse-Orientalism. While the narrator admits that the protagonist’s knowledge of Holland is limited, the young woman is still described in terms that are stereotypically associated with Holland and with northern countries. Nostalgia, a longing for the past, is here reversed; it is a longing for the future, for what one has not experienced, an expectation. The lack of knowledge and experience combined with the stereotypical descriptions of the young woman and her country reveal the very kind of discourse which imaginatively reproduces the “North” for the protagonist and narrator, and

which has no connection to the young woman's experience of the North or of her country. This is interesting because of its similarity to the way in which Said describes the operation of Orientalism;¹⁴ the important difference between the two being, of course, the absence of political or ideological power on the part of the protagonist and narrator. Indeed, the protagonist continues in the "direction souterraine," indicating that despite his appropriation of certain aspects of the young woman's identity in order to create his own idea of Holland and the North, he still feels that he is beneath the young woman, her country, and even his created image of that country. Comparing this scene to Khatibi's later work, particularly the essays in Maghreb pluriel, we can see the development of Khatibi's critical thinking about issues such as identity, difference, representation and subjectivity, both with respect to the Self and the Other. The *pensée-autre* and *double critique* developed by Khatibi in this text are ways to evaluate the processes by which imaginative creations of the Other take place.

Another scene in the autobiography which reveals the development of Khatibi's critical thinking is one in which the adolescent protagonist and his classmates, learning the history of the Moors in Spain and the ultimate victory of Charles Martel, wonder:

"... si les Arabes avaient battu Charles Martel et conquis toute l'Europe? Séduits par l'Occident, nous nous arrachions à la différence et voulions défaire sa mémoire. Fallait-il choisir entre le rêve et l'histoire?" (MT 81-82). Faced with the dominance of the French under the colonial system, the young boys can not help but wonder what their lives would be if Charles Martel had been defeated. But the narrator's question at the end of the passage seems to indicate that the outcome of one particular war would not have changed the very interaction and mutual influence between Mediterranean civilizations. Was it necessary to choose a version, to choose between the adolescents' dream and History? Had the Arabs

won, the same relationship between conqueror and conquered would have existed. It is therefore the relationship itself which needs further examination.

Similarly, Khatibi's critique of Fanon focuses on the idea that Fanon's call for revolution does not include an evaluation of the relationship between the powerful and the powerless, nor the metaphysical and ideological assumptions behind that relationship. In the conclusion to The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon calls to his brothers struggling for independence, warns them of the danger in following Europe's path, and suggests finding their own path: "For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man" (316). In response to Fanon's continued call, "Allons, camarades, le jeu européen est définitivement terminé, il faut trouver autre chose," Khatibi states, "Oui, trouver autre chose, se situer selon une pensée-autre, une pensée peut-être inouïe de la différence" (MP 11). This *pensée-autre* is a way of re-thinking difference and identity without recourse to dialectics or philosophical or theological absolutes. This is precisely the problem Khatibi sees in Fanon's call, whose critique of the West "était encore saisie dans le ressentiment et dans un hégélianisme simplifié. . . . Et nous sommes toujours en train de nous demander: de quel Occident s'agit-il? De quel Occident opposé à nous-mêmes, en nous-mêmes? Qui, nous-mêmes dans la décolonisation?" (MP 14-15).

Khatibi's line of questioning points to the difficulty of defining oneself and defining the Other. By casting the West as the Other, Fanon lumps together countries and cultures which are quite different from one another. Perhaps it is a strategic move on Fanon's part in an effort to counter what he sees as the West's lack of differentiation of countries it commonly categorizes as "Third World" or "developing." But according to Khatibi's line of

thinking, even if this was Fanon's intention, it can result only in failure. All Fanon has done is turn the binary distinction around; the necessary step for Khatibi is to go beyond Fanon's critique, and that is to question both elements of the binary and to question the very concept of the binary itself. Moving beyond the binary in order to re-think difference is what Khatibi calls *pensée-autre*:

Ce qu'il *faut* (devoir d'une pensée-autre), c'est élargir notre liberté de penser, introduire dans tout dialogue plusieurs leviers stratégiques: évacuer par exemple du discours les absolus de la théologie et du théocentrisme qui enchaînent le temps, l'espace et l'édifice des sociétés maghrébines. Cela ne suffit pas. Le dialogue avec toute pensée de la différence est monumental. Il vise l'ébranlement de ce qui nous abrutit dans le ressassement et la reproduction. Une pensée-autre est toujours un complot, une conjuration, une révolte soutenue et un risque implacable. Et nous sommes si démunis devant la puissance du monde. Telle est notre "histoire," qui aura été frappée au corps. (MP 33-34, emphasis in original)

The practical means by which this re-thinking of difference takes place is the *double critique*, which, in the case of Morocco, involves a critique of its "héritage occidental et celle de notre patrimoine, si théologique, si charismatique, si patriarcal."¹⁵ Khatibi asks: "Mais qui, parmi nous – groupes et individus –, a pris en charge le travail effectivement décolonisateur dans sa portée globale et déconstitutive de *l'image que nous nous faisons de notre domination, exogène et endogène?*" (MP 16-17, emphasis added). The only way, according to Khatibi, that one can be decolonized is by examining the roles of the colonizer and the colonized, the relationship of power that exists between them, and the concepts on which this relationship is based. Decolonization, or the process of building a post-colonial society, is first and foremost a process of decolonizing oneself through a critical evaluation of all aspects of the current culture and its philosophical underpinnings.

An important part of this process is a continued dialogue with the West because it has come to be part of how Moroccans currently define themselves. For Khatibi, the West is a

part of contemporary Moroccan culture and ideology, and as such, it must be interrogated along with other systems of thought such as Islamic theology. Khatibi suggests a critique of all cultural influences as they exist in dialogue with each other, not as entirely separate and distinct systems of thought. The West is already part of the collective “we” and this cannot be changed, just as Islamic theology is a part of the collective “we”; the *pensée-autre* requires the consideration of all the elements that make up the “we,” and no element is to be excluded. A very simple example of this idea is found in Khatibi’s autobiography, when the adult protagonist is in a bar in London. Stokeley Carmichael is criticized by one member of the audience for wearing Western pants and an Indian tunic. The narrator, recalling this scene, is obviously critical of the “imposteur” who criticized Carmichael, and ironically gasps, “Scandale!” (MT 152). The narrator’s reaction to this scene reveals that he does not see this kind of mixing of cultural influences as problematic. It is the “imposter’s” desire to see Carmichael “purify” his wardrobe that troubles the protagonist and the narrator. The issue of clothing as a figure in decolonization should not be underestimated; we need only consider the example of women, particularly in Algeria, who have lost their lives for not wearing what one group considers proper attire. Here, however, the question of proper attire is not nearly so grave. But it does point to a desire among certain members of the post-colonial population to choose between two traditions, as if it were as simple as an “either/or” selection. The narrator of Khatibi’s autobiography, as well as the writer of Maghreb pluriel, point to the impossibility of such a choice, a choice based on exclusion. They prefer, rather, an approach of inclusion and incorporation because this is what permits the development of the *pensée-autre*.

Pensée-autre, which Khatibi also calls “la pensée du ‘nous,’” is not found “dans le cercle de la métaphysique (occidentale), ni selon la théologie de l’islam, mais à leur marge.

Une marge en éveil” (MP 17). Situating his concept of re-thinking difference at the margins of both Western metaphysics and Islamic theology is a critical step for Khatibi and it demonstrates his desire to interrogate both systems of thought from the perspective of the margin. The margin, for Khatibi, is neither a position of being completely inside nor a position of being completely outside; it is the only proper location from which one can begin to develop a *pensée-autre*. Khatibi is careful to point out that this *pensée-autre* must not replace the very ideological traditions it interrogates because these traditions are based on dominance: “. . . une pensée qui ne s’inspire pas de sa pauvreté est toujours élaborée pour dominer et humilier; une pensée qui ne soit pas *minoritaire, marginale, fragmentaire et inachevée*, est toujours une pensée de l’ethnocide” (MP 18, emphasis in original). It is not that he encourages a “philosophie du pauvre”; he is instead calling for a “pensée plurielle qui ne réduise pas les autres (sociétés et individus) à la sphère de son autosuffisance. . .” (MP 18). Khatibi says that he and other formerly colonized people should “décentrer en nous le savoir occidental, nous dé-centrer par rapport à ce centre, à cette origine que se donne l’Occident. Cela en opérant déjà dans le champ d’une pensée plurielle et planétaire, différence qui s’acharne contre sa réduction et sa domestication” (MP 54). Khatibi’s *pensée-autre*, then, is a third path toward decolonization:

. . . nous pouvons, Tiers-Monde, poursuivre une tierce voie: ni la raison ni la déraison telles que les a pensées l’Occident dans son tout, mais une subversion en quelque sorte double, qui, se donnant le pouvoir de parole et d’action, se met en oeuvre dans une différence intraitable. Se décoloniser serait l’autre nom de cette pensée-autre, et la décolonisation: l’achèvement silencieux de la métaphysique occidentale. (MP 50-51)

Pensée-autre, as the result of Khatibi’s *double critique*, is a double subversion of the Western and Eastern traditions in Morocco. Khatibi suggests that this is the means by which formerly

colonized nations can decolonize themselves and in so doing, signal the death of the dominance of Western imperialism and metaphysics.

Translation, Bilingualism and the *Bi-Langue*

Khatibi's concepts of *pensée-autre* and *double critique* are closely tied to his concept of the *bi-langue*. Understanding the *double critique* as a practice by which one interrogates different systems of thought, and the *pensée-autre* as a way to re-think difference, goes a long way toward helping to understand Khatibi's concept of the *bi-langue*. In keeping with the themes of dialogue and inclusion presented as part of the *double critique* and *pensée-autre*, Khatibi offers the following explanation of the relationship of languages in the *bi-langue*:

. . . la langue dite étrangère ne vient pas s'ajouter à l'autre, ni opérer avec elle une pure juxtaposition: chacune *fait signe* à l'autre, l'appelle à se maintenir comme dehors . . . toute cette littérature maghrébine dite d'expression française est un récit de traduction. Je ne dis pas qu'elle n'est qu'une traduction, je précise qu'il s'agit d'un récit qui *parle en langues*. (MP 186, emphasis in original)

In the sense that the *pensée-autre* is an inclusive dialogue between different modes of thought, it can be said that it speaks in tongues, and so does Maghrebian literature of French expression. In both cases, we can say that they operate within the realm of the *bi-langue*. Khatibi arrives at this concept of the *bi-langue* by using the *double critique* to interrogate concepts of unicity and the One in Islam, particularly as these relate to language.

As we have already seen, the *double critique* is a process by which one interrogates metaphysical assumptions that have come to be taken as truths. Khatibi is as critical of Islamic theology and tradition as he is of Western metaphysics and philosophy. He goes to great lengths to explain the importance of Arabic, the language of the sacred, to the philosophy of the One in Islamic theology.

. . . en donnant aux peuples des langues différentes, Allah introduit, dans le même acte, une différence fondatrice dans le concept même de création des langues. Cette différence est entre la langue arabe révélée dans un “Ecrit explicite” (*Kitaboun moubine*) et les autres langues. Différence qui institue l’islam dans *une* langue, de telle façon que l’idée de l’Un (et du monothéisme islamique) et l’unicité de la langue soient strictement solidaires . . . C’est pourquoi lorsqu’on nomme l’islam, lorsqu’on en parle ou qu’on écrit sur lui (comme je le fais ici même), il s’agit toujours de *traduire* cette indissociabilité principielle de l’Un et de l’unité absolue . . . (MP 155, emphasis in original)

Because the language of the sacred cannot be imitated, its perfection and inimitability being signs of it as the very word of God revealed to Muhammad, it can be conceived of only as translation in the *bi-langue*. The *bi-langue*, the situation of living in multiple languages and their dialogue with each other, subverts the very concept of the One: “La vie m’avait dé-totalisé, la bi-langue scindé en moi toute nostalgie de l’unique.”¹⁶ Any act of enunciation in the language of the sacred is an act of translation, a proposition that questions the One’s very status as One. Thus, translating the One gives more than one, but without any notion of genealogy or parentage – an impossibility for the One. The act of translating is relational; the language of the One relates to, “fait signe à,” another language, any other language or many other languages. In this translating, in the *bi-langue*, no one language takes priority over any other: “En fait, aucune langue ne se décidait à s’imposer, à être la loi supérieure, à prendre toujours le devant de la scène” (AB 70). In this respect, we can see the relationship with *pensée-autre*:

. . . le texte bilingue ou plurilingue ne relève plus d’un seul et unique mode de pensée qui soit capable de les rassembler. Toute langue (se) propose à la pensée plusieurs modes, directions et sites, et tenter de tenir toute cette chaîne sous la loi de l’Un aura été l’histoire millénaire de la métaphysique, et dont l’islam représente ici la référence théologique et mystique par excellence. (MP 200-01)

As we saw earlier, the narrator of the autobiography tells us that he became a “triglotte,” reading French without speaking it, playing with a little bit of written/Classical Arabic, and

speaking dialect/Moroccan Arabic on a daily basis without reading or writing it: “. . . deux langues et une diglossie, scène de ses transcriptions. Il avait appris que toute langue est bilingue, oscillant entre le passage oral et un autre, qui s’affirme et se détruit dans l’incommunicable” (AB 27). In his position of being what I earlier termed an imperfect polyglot, there exist the two concepts of diglossia and bi- or plurilingualism: “On ne peut dire qu’il s’agit là d’une situation bilingue stricte selon l’usage courant, ni non plus de trois langues absolument hétérogènes, mais d’un code tiers qui entame une diglossie et transforme le tout du dire et de l’écrire” (MP 188). This “code tiers” is the *bi-langue* which includes diglossia and bi- or plurilingualism. Diglossia, according to Khatibi, is the disparity between the language of speech and the language of writing, where these two languages have the same linguistic source. Bilingualism or plurilingualism is the fact of speaking more than one language, especially when the languages in question do not share the same linguistic source.

. . . [l’écrivain maghrébin] n’écrit pas sa langue propre, il transcrit son nom propre transformé, il ne peut rien posséder (si tant soit peu on s’approprie une langue), il ne possède ni son parler maternel qui ne s’écrit pas, ni la langue arabe écrite qui est aliénée et donnée à une substitution, ni cette langue apprise et qui lui fait signe de se désapproprier en elle et de s’y effacer. (MP 201)

Not only is there a distinction made here between diglossia and bilingualism, but Khatibi also makes the point that language is not something that can be possessed. We might use it and work in and around it, but it is never really ours. This is especially so for North African writers whose entire historical relationship with language is that of not belonging; they are doubly, triply, and in some cases even quadruply alienated from language, especially if their native language is Berber, or if they grew up in those parts of Morocco – particularly the North – in which Spanish is a common second language.

This alienation in language results in what Khatibi calls radical bilingualism, which can also be called radical plurilingualism. He first mentions this in his criticism of Orientalists,¹⁷ whom Khatibi considers to be translators but who dream of being bilingual (MP 138). Because the Orientalist does not critique the language he uses – either his native language or his adopted language – as a discourse and a metaphysical movement, he or she cannot achieve this radical bilingualism. Khatibi asks: “Doit-on être poète ou philosophe si l’on est radicalement orientaliste?” (MP 139). Given his answer, we can see that Khatibi is also asking if one must be a poet or philosopher in order to be radically bilingual:

Sans doute oui, quand on ne sépare pas la pensée de la langue qui l’abrite, ni le signifiant du signifié, ni la forme de la matière; sans doute oui, lorsqu’on chemine vers une pensée de la différence. Pourquoi cela? Une langue qui transporte une autre doit se transformer au cours de ce voyage tout en restant elle-même. Transformation bien étrange et redoutable quand deux langues appartiennent à des sources linguistiques différentes, à deux mouvements métaphysiques différents. Si bien que pour être rendue en un transport lisible, cette étrangeté doit obéir à une pensée dédoublée de la différence, à un écart radical. (MP 139-40)

For Khatibi, then, to be radically bilingual is to be aware of language itself. The Orientalist uses language as a means to an end; the poet or philosopher, on the other hand, is aware that the very tool he or she uses must also be the object of constant study and attention. And unlike the Orientalist or the radical anti-colonialist, Khatibi asserts that “. . . nous ne voulons prêcher aucune finalité, ni lancer aucun cri fanonien. De toutes les manières, il nous faut marcher, marcher infiniment. Et en cette marche, nous sommes liés au rêve bilingue. Mais l’essence de la poésie est d’être intraduisible. Comment approcher et écouter cet intraduisible” (MP 139). Often criticized for not being more politically active, Khatibi is here presenting his own version of what it means to become decolonized, to free oneself from

domination of the Other through critical inquiry into multiple languages and multiple systems of thought.

The last two chapters of Khatibi's autobiography demonstrate quite effectively the problems involved in grappling with bilingualism, political activism, and trying to free oneself of the concept of being colonized. Despite the anger and violence directed at the West, the narrator of the autobiography – as well as the writer in Khatibi's future texts – continues to engage the West (France) by directing his message of anger at her in her own language. As we saw in Chapter Two of this study, mastery of the language of the Other was, for many writers, a powerful achievement – in the fullest sense of the expression. For these writers, using the language of the Other and transforming it to meet their social, cultural, or artistic agenda is every writer's right, and it is indeed empowering.

Khatibi takes exception to Jacques Berque's comment that it is not "normal" for the Arabic literary avant-garde to use the language of the Other. Khatibi responds:

L'être d'une langue est tourné vers celui qui va vers elle, vers celui qui – en lui-même – s'inscrit radicalement dans l'intervalle entre identité et différence. Cet intervalle est la scène du texte, son enjeu. Dans la littérature maghrébine, un tel intervalle – quand il devient texte et poème – s'impose par son étrangeté radicale, c'est-à-dire une écriture qui cherche ses racines dans une autre langue, dans un dehors absolu. Comment mesurer ce qui peut advenir en cette étrangeté radicale? Si notre désir est, en son fond, bilingue, au nom de quoi Berque nous empêchera-t-il de lui répondre dans sa propre langue et en dehors de sa rhétorique guindée? (MP 140-41)

Khatibi's reaction is certainly understandable, and he explains in no uncertain terms that the French cannot have it both ways. They cannot expect to come into a country, educate generations of young people in their language, and then deny these young people the right to use the adopted language in their own way. Fanon calls the colonized people's appropriation of the French language for their own purposes a kind of exorcism in which the "native" can

almost be said to assume responsibility for the language of the occupier” (ADC 90).

However, this idea is in direct contradiction to what Fanon states in The Wretched of the Earth, where he criticizes intellectuals for using the language and techniques of the colonizer and stamping them “with a hallmark which he wishes to be national, but which is strangely reminiscent of exoticism” (223).

Berque’s critique of the use of French by the Arabic literary avant-garde also indicates a complete abdication of responsibility on the part of the French for the current linguistic predicament of these writers. For most of them, their entire *formation* was in French; their “choice” to pursue writing careers in French was really not a “choice” at all. This rather strong reaction elicited by Berque’s comment is common among North African writers. It was a recurring theme throughout the various issues of the review Souffles (1966-1971), with the contributing writers feeling as though they constantly had to justify their use of French to both the former colonizers and to Arabic-language writers.

In the fifth chapter of Maghreb pluriel, entitled “Bilinguisme et littérature,” Khatibi again comes back to these ideas of diglossia, bilingualism and plurilingualism:

Mauvaise plaisanterie: nous, les Maghrébins, nous avons mis quatorze siècles pour apprendre la langue arabe (à peu près), plus d’un siècle pour apprendre le français (à peu près); et depuis des temps immémoriaux, nous n’avons pas su écrire le berbère.

C’est dire que le bilinguisme et le plurilinguisme ne sont pas, dans ces régions, des faits récents. Le paysage linguistique maghrébin est encore plurilingue: diglossie (entre l’arabe et le dialectal), le berbère, le français, l’espagnol au nord et au sud du Maroc.

Malgré cette importance, le bilinguisme et le plurilinguisme sont peu analysés. (MP 179)

That the linguistic landscape of the Maghreb has not been sufficiently studied is an idea first put forth in Khatibi’s preface to Marc Gontard’s La Violence du texte:

Tant que la théorie de la traduction, de la bi-langue et la pluri-langue n'aura pas avancé, certains textes maghrébins resteront imprenables selon une approche formelle et fonctionnelle. La langue 'maternelle' est à l'oeuvre dans la langue étrangère. De l'une à l'autre se déroulent une traduction permanente et un entretien en abyme, extrêmement difficile à mettre au jour . . . (qtd. in MP 179)

In "Bilinguisme et littérature," Khatibi offers a reading of Meddeb's Talismano in which he puts these questions of diglossia and plurilingualism at the forefront. He begins this reading by looking at the cover of the book, noting that in the very transcription of the author's name, there is already a translation. The first letter of the author's first name is, in Arabic, 'ain, not alif, which has a more direct correspondence of sound to the French letter "a." But as there is no equivalent for 'ain in French, and indeed in the Latin alphabet, one must perform a translation of the letter itself.

In the author's name, Khatibi sees "l'effet littéraire du bilinguisme et l'opération de traduction qui s'annoncent ainsi, dès le début, comme une introduction double au texte encore fermé, et qui attend d'être déchiffré" (MP 180). Khatibi likens this translation, or what he later calls a "complete transformation" (MP 181), to "le rêve dont parle Maurice Blanchot. Comme si: tel est le texte bilingue, aux marges de l'intraduisible" (MP 183). This idea is repeated in Amour bilingue, with only a slight variation in terminology: ". . . que toute langue soit bilingue! Asymétrie du corps et de la langue, parole et écriture – au seuil de l'intraduisible" (AB 11).

A passage from Amour bilingue frequently cited by critics of North African literature as an example of language play, translation, and the *bi-langue* is found at the very beginning of the text, in the introductory section entitled "Exergue."

Il se calma d'un coup, lorsqu'apparut le "mot" arabe "kalma" avec son équivalent savant "kalima" et toute la chaîne des diminutifs, calembours de son enfance: "klima". . . La diglossie "kal(i)ma" revint sans que disparût ni

s’effaçât le mot “mot”. Tous deux s’observaient en lui, précédant l’émergence maintenant rapide de souvenirs, fragments de mots, onomatopées, phrases en guirlandes, enlacées à la mort: indéchiffrables. (AB 10)

The *passé simple* of the French verb *se calmer* immediately calls to mind the Moroccan Arabic word *kalma*, meaning “word,” and its equivalent in Classical Arabic, *kalima*. When Khatibi speaks of diglossia, he is referring to the difference between the spoken and the written which, for him, is most strongly associated with the difference between Moroccan Arabic and Classical Arabic. The former is a spoken dialect of Arabic, whereas the latter is a written language, the language of the Qur’an and the sacred. Classical Arabic is not a language used in Arabic-speaking countries as a means of day-to-day communication. Every region of the Arabic-speaking world uses a dialect, and we even find dialects which are specific to particular countries and to particular regions within countries. Some dialects are closer than others to Classical Arabic, but none is, strictly speaking, the same as the language of the Qur’an.¹⁸

In Amour bilingue, it is the notion of the untranslatable that permits the presentation of doubling. Khatibi states: “Dès lors, se construit la scénographie des doubles. Un mot: déjà deux: déjà un récit. Te parlant dans ta langue, je suis toi-même sans l’être, m’effaçant dans tes traces” (AB 11). As we just saw in the discussion of the words “se calma” and “kalma,” one word conjures another, and in this automatic translation – the operation of the *bi-langue* – there is already a translation, already a *récit*. The kind of translation in question here is not one at the level of the signified, as we usually tend to think of translation; the mode of translation presented in this passage is at the level of the signifier. The correspondence of sound, even in the writing of the word, is what initiates the translation of *calma-kalma*, which

also includes another kind of translation, that of the transliteration of the Arabic letters into letters of the Latin alphabet.

This transliteration raises an interesting question about translation. The words *calma* and *kalma* are homonyms and, thus, equivalent with respect to sound, but *kalma*, already a transliteration, is graphically presented with a “k” and not with a “c.” From this rather simple example, we can see that any act of translation, and I include here everything from transliteration to reading and interpretation, is only ever an approximation, and that some trace of difference will always remain. Khatibi’s adoption of Blanchot’s idea of the *intraduisible* theoretically presents this very case: translation is impossible and yet there is nothing but translation.

In Amour bilingue, Khatibi compares the relationship of two multilingual lovers who do not share the same native language to the relationship between languages themselves: “Ce n’était pas une symétrie de l’un à l’autre, un vis-à-vis vertical et parallèle, mais une sorte d’inversion, la permutation d’un amour intraduisible, à traduire sans répit. L’intraduisible!”

(AB 26). In Figures de l’étranger, Khatibi elaborates on this notion of the untranslatable:

Je précise que l’*intraduisible*, ici, n’est pas uniquement ce qui fait barrière d’une langue à une autre, à d’autres, mais c’est une force intérieure à toute écriture, c’est-à-dire une diglossie en acte (entre voix et écrit), c’est-à-dire ce “bilinguisme” structural inhérent à chaque langue, c’est-à-dire encore ce jeu indéfini entre parole et écriture. (204, emphasis in original)

Translation, as this relationship between languages, can never be assumed to be a perfect transformation; like any act of writing, reciting, or creating, translation is only ever a permutation, an approximation. We can say the same of transcription, and this is why Khatibi emphasizes the concept of transcription in his autobiography. Writing the past, writing the

present, and writing the self can be nothing more than an act of translation or transcription, an approximated creation of a life in narrative.

A similar process of translation is also in operation at certain moments in the autobiography, and this is why I pointed earlier to the importance of the relationship between “hagard” and “errance,” which appears twice in the autobiography. It is the correspondence of sound between “hagard” and Agar which creates a supplemental meaning due to a translation at the level of the signifier. In this example, the translation continues to the level of the signified. Agar, in Arabic, is Hajar, whose related meanings include Muhammad’s emigration to Mecca, emigration in general, and the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. While *error* indicates the lack of a sense of destination, emigration and pilgrimage include a sense of destination, and both terms are used to denote the idea of travel. In his discussion of British Indian writers, Rushdie has pointed out that the very word “‘translation’ comes, etymologically, from the Latin for ‘bearing across.’ Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained” (17).

The importance of sound in the translating process arises in another passage in Amour bilingue. “Il” is swimming in the sea – which itself becomes the object of translation later in the book (38) – and the sea brings on a sense of nostalgia for his childhood spent by the ocean.

Il nageait lentement, saisi par ce ruissellement, cet éclat de son passé, là où reposent l’inoubliable et la nostalgie. Nostalgie qu’il aimait prononcer, penser aussi dans le mot arabe: “Hanîne”, anagramme d’une double jouissance. Il décomposa ce mot: “h”, spirante du pharynx, puis un “a” murmuré, avant “n-î-ne”, modulation soutenue par le “i” long. A dire ce mot, à le répéter, comme un baiser de souffle qui vibre encore dans le pharynx, souffle régulier, sans déchirure, mais extase vocale, un appel euphorique, à lui seul un chant, infiniment chuchoté à l’absent aimé. (AB 13-14)

Hanine is a word that “il” likes to pronounce in Arabic, and he also likes to think in the Arabic word. *Hanine* means longing, yearning, desire, or nostalgia. One of its related forms is *hanan*, meaning sympathy, love, affection, tenderness; it is also a woman’s name. Pronouncing the very word brings on an overwhelming sense of nostalgia, but the abundance of words with a sexual connotation also point to the idea that “l’absent aimé” can be considered the female character “elle/tu,” or love or desire itself.

On the cover of Amour bilingue is a calligraphic inscription with the title of the book in Arabic: *‘Ishq al-Lisanain*.¹⁹ The grammatical name for this kind of construction is the *idafa*, which in Arabic is a way of expressing the possessive: the first noun, the object possessed, is presented without an article, but is considered definite through the presence of the definite article with the second noun, the possessor. The second word, *lisanain*, is the dual form of the noun *lisan*, meaning tongue or language. These two grammatical components of the Arabic title represent two characteristics of Arabic that are not shared with French. These grammatical components of the Arabic title provide a supplemental meaning, a meaning that can be approximated in another language but not completely achieved: “Une langue qui transporte une autre doit se transformer au cours de ce voyage tout en restant elle-même” (MP 139). The move from one language to another always leaves a trace; in some small way the first language is transformed and yet retains something of its difference with respect to the second language.

The first word of the Arabic title, *‘ishq*, is a noun derived from the root verb *‘ashiqā*, meaning to love passionately or to be passionately in love with someone or something.²⁰ Another verb (form II) derived from this same root means to fit tightly together, to interjoin closely, to dovetail, and also to couple or connect together. Yet another verb from this same

root (form V) means to court, woo, or make love to someone. Literally translating from Arabic to English, then, the title is “The Passion of Two Tongues,” an expression which, through the use of the word *‘ishq*, also implies coupling.

The choice of the word *lisan*, instead of another word for language like *logha*, is also interesting. It is at once the word for a bodily organ, the tongue, and its root verb, *lasina*, means to be eloquent and the corresponding noun is *lasan*, eloquence. Remember that the word *khatib* is related to one of the Arabic words for rhetoric and eloquence. What we see in all of this is a repetition of the link established in the autobiography between the body and writing, the vocal and the visual, as well as the veiled reference to the author’s name, to the signature that lurks in the shadows, in the margins of the text, in the area of the *bi-langue*.

The calligraphic inscription of the Arabic title on the inside cover of the book is slightly different from the one on the outside cover. The one on the inside cover is written so that the tail end of the *qaf*, the final consonant of the first word, *‘ishaq*, seems to swirl up to form one arm, shoulder, and neck; looping around, it forms a head; then sweeping back down the other side, it forms the other shoulder and arm of a figure who gathers the two words in its arms, cradling them, loving them.²¹ Loving and nurturing the love, the passion; and loving the two tongues: This, I believe, is the best definition of all for Khatibi’s concept of *bi-langue*.

Nevertheless, given that Khatibi devotes an entire text to his concept of the *bi-langue*, I will proceed with an evaluation of this text as well as other texts in which he discusses this concept. Trying to define *bi-langue*, even for Khatibi, is very much like trying to define autobiography: we sense what it is and perhaps even believe that we know what it is, and yet, when it comes to providing a definition, words escape us. We can not pin it down, and every

attempt to do so results only in creating boundaries for a concept that questions those very boundaries. Khatibi does not define *bi-langue*; he approaches it, works around it and out of it, trying to explain what it means to him. “La bi-langue? Ma chance, mon gouffre individuel, et ma belle énergie d’amnésie” (AB 11). The *bi-langue* is at once an internal chasm, dark and endless, and yet it is also a chance, an opportunity. What the protagonist of the autobiography experiences as the negative effects of colonialism, the writer comes to see as his particular advantage in that these experiences have permitted him to see the world in a constantly doubled or multiplied perspective. His “belle énergie d’amnésie” is really the transformative power of his critical thinking which allows him to re-evaluate the events of his past from his present perspective, and give them new life as strategic levers on which to position his thought.

Amour bilingue, like Khatibi’s autobiography, is a text which tells a story about an idea and also puts the idea into practice. Khatibi himself notices a similar phenomenon in his reading of Meddeb’s Talismano, and chooses his dual method of analysis accordingly:

. . . d’abord, ce lieu que j’appellerai l’atelier de travail tel que le propose le roman, lequel s’explique souvent sur ses intentions (commentaire du livre par le livre, en s’écrivant); ensuite, je poserai mon interrogation sur ce qui ne relève plus de l’intention de l’auteur, de sa volonté de tenir le texte sous l’emprise de ses lancinances et sous le poids d’une certaine spéculation théorisante. (MP 192)

In the autobiography, we saw that the life story presented is the story of becoming a writer and that the autobiography, as writing, participates in and is the very practice discussed in the story. This is precisely what Khatibi shows in his reading of Talismano. There is a parallel strategy at work in Amour bilingue: the relationship between two languages, which in fact, are multiple languages – French, Arabic, English, Berber, Spanish, Swedish – is played out in the relationship between the “je,” a presumably male character, and the “tu,” a presumably

female character. The plurilingualism of the characters in their ill-fated love story is also the plurilingualism practiced by the narrator.

Some critics have suggested that translation itself is a character in Amour bilingue. I would simply like to modify this notion because the idea that translation is a character does not mean translation in the sense of a finished product; it is translation as the act or process of translating, the very situation of being in more than one language which is, in effect, the *bi-langue*. Khatibi himself states: “La bi-langue sépare, rythme la séparation, alors que toute unité est depuis toujours inhabitée. La bi-langue! La bi-langue! Elle-même, un personnage de ce récit, poursuivant sa quête intercontinentale, au-delà de mes traductions” (AB 109). It is, therefore, more accurate to speak of translating, of the *bi-langue*, as a character, and even perhaps the central character, in Amour bilingue.

In another passage found between “Exergue” and Part I, and which is set apart from both sections by parentheses, Khatibi suggests that the *récit* itself is a character, if there is a character at all in this text:²² “(Ce début du texte semblait dévorer le récitant, qui le lisait sans relâche. Il s’approchait chaque fois de ce début qui l’excluait: un récit sans personnage; ou, s’il y en avait, ce serait le récit lui-même, s’entendant dire ce seul mot: Recommence)” (AB 12). Despite the suggestion that this is a narrative without characters, we still find an “il” and an “elle” who are alternately referred to as “je” and “tu.” The following passage provides an excellent example of this alternating subjectivity in Amour bilingue:

Tout recommence. Je m’aperçois que je dis “je” au présent. Il? Il est tombé. Mais où donc? Dans son strict anonymat? Je n’ose en tirer la conséquence stricte. Il est, il est le récitant, et ce que je construis il l’a déjà détruit; ce que je mets au jour, il le fait reculer sans cesse. Je suis lui-même sans être ni lui ni moi. Et toi? Toi l’irremplaçable? Je te le demande. Es-tu satisfaite de ma nouvelle déclaration d’amour, si tardive par rapport aux événements? (91)

This doubled subjectivity, carried out throughout the entire text, is reminiscent of the *dédoublement* expressed in the autobiography. In the latter, the doubling is presented as a distinction between the past “I” and the present “I,” as well as a doubling at any moment in time. In the discussion in the first chapter, I argued that autobiography itself requires a certain kind of doubled or multiple subjectivity because the autobiographical subject cannot be considered as unified.

I propose that in Amour bilingue, a text which does not announce itself as autobiography, the narrator constantly shifts back and forth between “je” and “il” in an effort to repeatedly remind the reader that subjectivity is neither fixed nor unitary. The distinction made between the author, writer, narrator, and protagonist in a work of fiction is significantly clearer than it is in autobiography.²³ We can easily imagine that in a novel, the narrator and writer and the protagonist and the writer are altogether different entities, and should not be confused with one another. But in autobiography, this distinction becomes a little murky because of the overriding expectation on the part of the reader that the “I” of the protagonist and the “I” of the narrator directly correspond to the author whose name appears on the title page. Readers do not generally hold fiction to this standard. It is therefore created in Amour bilingue as a way to draw attention to itself and reflect the constant sense of doubling and otherness which “je/il” experiences.

Eric Sellin has discussed this transformation of subjectivity in Amour bilingue and Khatibi’s other texts, highlighting the idea that it is yet another way of denoting *dédoublement*:

. . . there is a tendency on the part of the narrator to contemplate himself as another . . . Such doubling is a trademark of Khatibi’s writing, which is obsessed with separation and identity, with disintegration and integration, with stillness and gyration, and with silence and effusiveness – all of these opposed

qualities being somehow in symbiosis with one another even as they experience antagonistic tension. (“Compte-rendu” 53)

That *dédoublement* plays such an important role in Amour bilingue (and in Le Livre du sang as well, through the figure of Muthna, the androgyne) is of no surprise here, given the repeated references to *dédoublement* in Khatibi’s autobiography. What is interesting, however, is that while most critics seem to recognize the importance of doubling in Khatibi’s works of “fiction” – particularly Amour bilingue and Le Livre du sang – few have addressed it in the autobiography, and even fewer have analyzed it with respect to autobiography itself, autobiographical subjectivity or current theory of autobiography.²⁴ Bilingualism, translation and *dédoublement* are ideas presented in the autobiography and repeated in Khatibi’s later texts; they are all related to the development of Khatibi’s concepts of *pensée-autre* and *bi-langue*.

Another idea presented in the autobiography and repeated in Amour bilingue is that Khatibi feels as if he was born of language itself. In the autobiography, the narrator states, “. . . comme si l’écriture, en me donnant au monde . . .” (MT 7); in Amour bilingue, the narrator states, “La langue n’appartient à personne, elle appartient à personne et sur personne je ne sais rien. N’avais-je pas grandi, dans ma langue maternelle, comme un enfant adoptif? D’adoption en adoption, je croyais naître de la langue même” (11). Related to this feeling of being born of language is the idea of adoption. Remember that in the autobiography, the narrator tells of the protagonist’s abandonment by his parents, first through his father’s death, then by his mother sending him to live with his aunt, and finally by the aunt’s marriage, which is presumably when the protagonist is sent back to live with his mother. Khatibi draws a parallel between this experience of being shuffled from one caretaker to the next and his feeling as if he also shuffles back and forth between languages. This is his *bi-langue*,

belonging and yet not belonging to language, possessing it to use it but never really possessing it at all. The lack of a firm bond to a parental figure, the lack of a firm bond to a particular language, and the lack of a firm bond to one particular school of thought all lead to a denial of unilateral and exclusive modes of thinking which Khatibi equates with metaphysics and theology.

There are also passages in Amour bilingue that through their tone, vocabulary, or structure, seem as if they are pages taken from the autobiography. In Chapter One, I pointed out the dialogue between the narrator and the protagonist, and cited examples of different expressions the narrator uses to address the protagonist. The “enfant aux yeux verts” of the autobiography becomes, in Amour bilingue, “l’enfant océanique.” I cite here the entire passage in order to show how the manner in which the narrator addresses the protagonist/child in Amour bilingue is strikingly similar to the way in which the former addresses the latter in the autobiography:

Tel est le récit du vent et de la mer, enfant océanique. Oui, tu grandissais dans tes désirs humiliés. On t’avait élevé dans des lois rigoureuses, te baptisant dans le sang, et il le fallait. On t’avait offert aux esprits invisibles: ensorcellement, peur du péché, souffrances de l’enfer imaginaire. Les ordres étaient scellés sur tes yeux, et les villes, les paysages défilaient devant toi, en une pensée délabrée dans cette fantasmagorie de l’invisible. Tu ne voyais rien, tu n’entendais rien. Puis la pensée extatique t’éleva à la loi des choses, à toute parole. De nouveau, tu épelas ton enfance selon l’inconçu. Alors, avait jailli en toi le minéral qui te pétrifie, qui sculpte tes silences, tes colères, tes étouffements. Pétrification, afin que la terre te porte en elle, comme un fragment de sa pensée, devant la présence totale du visible, ici et maintenant, dans un pur amour. (22)

The similarity between the “enfant océanique” of this text and the “enfant aux yeux verts” of the autobiography is itself transformed as the passage continues to a similarity between the “tu” of this text and the “tu” of the autobiography in the chapter entitled “Fugue sur la différence (sauvage).” In this chapter in the autobiography, the narrator speaks directly

to the protagonist in the presentation of Abdelkebir's travels to different countries for professional conferences. Here, Abdelkebir is on a visit to the desert:

Tu n'auras pas de lieu, pauvre poète, dans le cimetière marin proche, tout en bois, épaves gravées au signe de la chamelle et de l'arbre généalogique de la tribu. Arrête la gazelle au seuil de l'Océan, caresse-la de loin et laisse-la courir sur la plage . . . Evite le serpent du désert qui ne mord qu'une seule fois, écrase-le à jamais sous la pierre, dans de toute ta force avant qu'il ne te fasse danser. Peut-être disposeras-tu du pouvoir de sang, l'oeil est mortel, même si se prolonge la nuit dans la nuit. Peut-être planteras-tu ta tente sur un sol stable, le sommeil entre hyène et étoiles.²⁵

The paragraph immediately following this passage in the autobiography has the narrator addressing an unknown interlocutor and referring to the protagonist as "il": "Eh quoi! croit-il, l'invité du désert, jouer avec cet espace sans danger . . . Eh quoi! croit-il, l'invité, divaguer plus fort que le désert . . . Eh quoi! croit-il rebondir avec les Bédouins par-delà les siècles . . ." (MT 164). Then, toward the end of this rather lengthy passage about Abdelkebir's stay in the desert, the narrator returns to the use of the first person.

The similarities in style and story between the narrators of La Mémoire tatouée and Amour bilingue leads one to wonder if the latter text is not perhaps a kind of sequel to the former. The narrator of the autobiography suggests, in rather Christian, prophetic language: "Il sera dit que je reviendrai parmi vous, tel que la vie m'aura atteint" (MT 186). Seen in this light, the shifting subjectivity again played out in Amour bilingue, with the doubling of "je/il" and "tu/elle," is a recontextualization, a re-writing of the *dédoublement* seen in the autobiography. But in Amour bilingue, there is also a multiplicity of the subject position "tu," in that the narrator sometimes speaks to the protagonist as "tu," and other times speaks to his lover as "tu." Furthermore, there is also a doubling of the "il": the narrator has a character to whom he refers as "il" and there is also another "il," the one presented in the segments set apart by parentheses and also referred to as "le récitant," the first reader of this text.

At the beginning of the section entitled “Exergue,” the narrator presents “il”: “(Il partit, revint, repartit. Il décida de partir définitivement. Le récit devrait s’arrêter ici, le livre se fermer sur lui-même)” (AB 9). At the end of “Exergue,” in a passage I cited earlier, we see: “(Ce début du texte semblait dévorer le récitant, qui le lisait sans relâche. Il s’approchait chaque fois de ce début qui l’excluait: un récit sans personnage; ou, s’il y en avait, ce serait le récit lui-même, s’entendant dire ce seul mot: Recommence)” (AB 12). At the end of Part I, there is another sentence set apart by parentheses: “(Le récitant tourna les pages, se leva, puis marcha droit devant lui, face à la mer)” (AB 84). The “il” in these parenthetical passages denotes “le récitant,” and describes his actions as though “il” were the narrator himself, reading the beginning of the book, closing it, starting over, re-reading. While it might be tempting to consider “il/le récitant” as distinct from “je/il,” the indefiniteness and undecidability of the pronoun make this an impossible task. Furthermore, we later see that this “récitant” is also a “premier lecteur” which is associated with “je”:

Oui, mais de langue en langue, un événement apparaît et disparaît, un événement exceptionnel qui demande une énergie extraordinaire. Événement que nous appelons bi-langue, différence de toute pensée qui s’affirme et s’abolit dans la traduction. Je dirai même que ce ‘nous’ est la scénographie du premier lecteur que je suis, face à tout lecteur, et que dans ce face à face, je finirai bien par me reconnaître en lui, par lui donner une partie de mon âme divisée. (AB 76)

All of these questions of subjectivity, like the ones in Khatibi’s autobiography, amount to a state of extreme textual self-awareness. Like Khatibi’s reading of Meddeb’s Talismano, our reading, indeed any reading, should consider the “atelier de travail . . . commentaire du livre par le livre, en s’écrivant” as well as “ce qui ne relève plus de l’intention de l’auteur” (MP 192). Amour bilingue, like Khatibi’s autobiography, is a text which is acutely aware of its status as text, and the story it creates is double: the story of the young boy becoming a

writer or the story of an ill-fated, plurilingual love affair; and the story of the texts creating themselves, where the tool of the trade is also the material being crafted. Thus, we find the characters in Amour bilingue playing the alternate and yet similar roles of lovers and languages, the union of which produces off-spring, a child or yet another idea of language: “T’engrosser? Si, si . . . Je t’avais baptisé: bi-langue. Et maintenant, pluri-langue. En somme, une question de traduction . . .” (AB 113). At the end of this relationship with “tu/elle,” the narrator does not despair; he holds out hope for a woman/language who can become his companion in the *bi-langue*: “J’ai toujours rêvé d’une femme qui s’embrouillerait dans ses robes du soir et moi dans mes écritures; l’inverse aussi, car elle parlerait en langues” (AB 130).

Calligraphy, Tattooing and the *Intersémiotique*

Upon first encountering Khatibi’s autobiography, one is immediately confronted with the question, Why is memory “tattooed” and not just “written?” Does this autobiography somehow establish a relationship between the two? What is the importance of the body as a site of writing, the tattooed object, in the autobiography and in Khatibi’s other texts?²⁶ What is autobiography, after all, if not tattooed or written memory?

I propose that Khatibi’s use of “tatouée” – as opposed to a more general adjective such as “écrite” – is designed to draw our attention to what Lucy Stone McNeece calls a “different notion of literature (a different conception of the sign and of representation) – in turn grounded in a different epistemology – than that which has often prevailed in the West” (60). She explains that Khatibi himself calls for a new tradition in which the past is included in the present, and “traditional modes of thinking and perceiving the world” are embraced along with technology and science (61). I suggest, in turn, that tattooing is representative of a

cultural tradition in which graphic art and design operate as carriers of meaning, and therefore function as another form of written language.

In Khatibi's discussion of Moroccan painting, particularly the artists Cherkaoui and Gharbaoui, he proposes the idea that Cherkaoui's work is "monogrammatique," that the monogram, as an abbreviated signature, points to what Khatibi calls "la calligraphie des racines":

Une peinture est monogrammatique quand elle rend visible le dessin,
l'entrelacs de son identité. Identité comme calligraphie des racines: l'art
s'éveille dans la durée de ce retour . . . l'art signe dans l'oeil transposé du soleil
le tracé d'un nom propre, il croise l'Orient et l'Occident comme deux épées
transfigurées par la subtilité d'un tatouage. (MP 216)

The abbreviated signature Khatibi discusses here is quite similar to the function of the veiled or half-signature, in his autobiography. Comparing Khatibi's description of the monogrammatical in Cherkaoui's work, we can see that Khatibi's own autobiography is monogrammatical: it has an abbreviated signature and it highlights its own status as text, in the same way that Cherkaoui's painting "rend visible le dessin." This is also what Khatibi appreciates in Meddeb's Talismano, and what both La Mémoire tatouée and Amour bilingue achieve artistically, by calling attention to themselves as creation.

The "calligraphie des racines" is a concept mentioned in several passages in this essay on Moroccan painting. In typical khatibian fashion, he does not define this term; he points to it and writes around it: "En un sens général, le monogramme désigne un paraphe, une signature abrégée, la forme d'un nom propre. Il renvoie donc à la calligraphie des racines" (MP 216). If we take into account Khatibi's belief in the impossibility of a *retour aux sources*, his critique of the very concept of roots or origin as a symptom of a metaphysics of presence, and the way in which he plays with language and questions the very concepts of

reference and representation, we can understand “la calligraphie des racines” as the notion that a work of art can only ever be considered as a textual system in relation to other textual systems. In other words, the roots are in the work of art, not in some prediscursive reality, and the art, the calligraphy, draws attention to the roots as art.

These ideas are explained in different contexts in Khatibi’s collections of essays, La Blessure du nom propre, Maghreb pluriel and Penser le Maghreb, and put into practice in his La Mémoire tatouée, Amour bilingue, and Le Livre du sang. In the latter three texts, Khatibi tells a story – the relation of one textual system to another being, in the autobiography, the intertextual relationship between the writing and the life or the text of the life – and also tells the telling of the story, drawing attention to the act of writing as a creative process. This is why he approaches other texts and other signifying systems with a double strategy for reading; in his view, it is precisely this doubling of purpose that defines art.

Khatibi’s concept of the *intersémiotique* as it will be discussed in this chapter is similar to Greimas’ semiotics in that Greimas considers different fields of study as different “sémiotiques,” and that it is more useful, especially in the study of the social sciences, to consider individuals as participants in a variety of semiotic groups rather than as participants in socio-economic practices:

Si l’individu, intégré dans les processus de communication sociale généralisée, participe en même temps à un certain nombre de groupes sémiotiques utilisant des réseaux de communication restreints, il ne s’en trouve pas moins exclu d’un très grand nombre d’autres groupes sémiotiques dont il n’entend, de temps à autre, que des bruits assourdis et des bribes de conversation.²⁷

Greimas’ concept of semiotic groups arises from his focus on the “discursive microuniverse,” that is, the “different types of social discourses (genres, legal discourse, ethnic literature, mass media languages, forms of the city, sociolinguistic variants, history) and the way in which

they construct signification.”²⁸ One can see here the similarity between Khatibi and Greimas, in that they both are willing to step outside the box, so to speak, to analyze and comment upon fields which relate to their specialties but in which they themselves are not necessarily specialists. Like Khatibi, Greimas insists on expanding the field of his semiotic study to pursue comparative analyses between different cultures and different semiotic groups. In this respect, Greimas’ approach is also similar to that of Bourdieu, whose relational analyses also call into question boundaries and categorization. Speaking about Greimas, Fabbri and Perron explain that Greimas’ theory and practice are ideally suited for comparative literary studies. Greimas himself states: “It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the notion of intertextuality, once it has been more rigorously elaborated, might bring comparativism into literary semiotics.”²⁹

The importance of comparativism and intertextuality to Khatibi’s thinking and creative endeavors cannot be overstated. For Khatibi, everything is a text to be read and interpreted, everything from fingerprints to tattoos, from architecture to urban planning, from calligraphy to carpets.³⁰ Everything is a text in that it demands to be read, interpreted and re-written, like the life of the autobiography, the love/language story of Amour bilingue, or the seductive androgyne of Le Livre du sang. What Khatibi and Greimas have in common is that they are both extraordinary readers, whether the text be legal discourse or a prayer mat. In fact, reading takes a primary importance for both of these thinkers. Greimas states that “semiotic objects are not given but are the result of reading constructions” (“Figurative Semiotics” 636). Greimas’ idea that “meaning can be apprehended only as articulated meaning” (“On Meaning” 539), is similar to de Man’s idea that all language is mediated and therefore can only be known through language, just as all figures can be known only through

reading them as figures. The emphasis on articulated meaning as the means of apprehension leads Greimas to develop his reading grid:

It is this grid through which we read which causes the world to signify for us and it does so by allowing us to identify figures as objects, to classify them and link them together, to interpret movements as processes which are attributable or not attributable to subjects, and so on. This grid is of a semantic nature, not visual, auditive, or olfactory. It serves as a “code” for recognition which makes the world intelligible and manageable. Now we can see that it is the projection of this reading grid – a sort of “signified” of the world – onto a painted canvas that allows us to recognize the spectacle it is supposed to represent. (“Figurative Semiotics” 632)

In Khatibi’s autobiography, the protagonist’s introduction to reading (mostly French) literature in the autobiography leads to his first attempts at creative writing. But it is the protagonist’s observation or reading of other kinds of signifying systems and the way in which they function, particularly in the North African context, that leads the writer to develop his notion of the *intersémiotique* in La Blessure du nom propre:

Le livre rêvé aura voltigé, en ses instants les plus intenses, autour de quelques motifs insistants: mouvement giratoire, blessure du nom propre, ciselé volatil, frappe oblique, point/pointe. Et en cette agitation un peu oisive, les signes migrants – d’un système sémiotique (comme le tatouage ou la calligraphie) à un autre (comme l’écriture) – auront retenu un mouvement interrogatif, sans cesse provocateur.

D’un système sémiotique à un autre: quelque chose comme l’intersémiotique existe-t-il?³¹

The answer to the question is clearly yes, even from the beginning of the discussion.

Khatibi’s concept of *intersémiotique* is parallel to his concept of *bi-langue*; in the plurality of languages and semiotic systems, the site of these two concepts is the very relationship or dialogue between the multiple languages or semiotic systems. Khatibi’s suggestion that in the *bi-langue*, one language “fait signe à une autre,” is also applicable to his idea of *intersémiotique*.

I would like to suggest that his concept of *intersémiotique* is important because of its interrogation and interpretation of semiotic systems – some of which have come to be de-valued and defined as popular art instead of high art – and their role as makers of meaning in North African culture. In turning to popular art, Khatibi focuses his attention on the margin, performing a *double critique* of various art forms as signifying systems and de-centering our very understanding of art and signification. Khatibi himself says: “Prendre en écharpe toute cette agitation du signe et du sens, tel est le projet ici éparpillé . . . les textes et les systèmes sémiotiques ici retenus appartiennent tous à la culture populaire marocaine; ils sont réunis dans un souci d’ordonnance intersémiotique. Les signes migrants en sont le motif de giration” (BNP 13).

Khatibi then explains that he wants to use semiotics as a critical science of the text and its laws, and that intertextuality will be an important “motif” in this questioning. Once again, he discusses Derrida’s work, noting that because of Derrida’s attention to and knowledge of Arab culture and its theories of the sign, his work is quite appropriate to Khatibi’s discussion:

Un argument décisif nous engage en son texte. En ceci que la méta-physique du signe en renvoyant à une tyrannie logocentriste occidentale, se masque elle-même tout en masquant l’intelligibilité des autres cultures: toute écriture critique ne peut donc être qu’un déchirement héliotropique de l’être historique, effaçant, à partir de son interrogation, les limites de cette tyrannie: centre, origine, oppositions signifiant/signifié, intelligible/sensible . . . critique monumentale (à peine questionnée), à partir de laquelle les concepts de l’être et du non-être seraient excédés. (BNP 15-16)

Khatibi takes a moment to define the word “intersigne,” a term critical to his concept of the *intersémiotique*:

Intersigne signifie: marque, indice, ‘relation mystérieuse entre deux faits’ (le Robert) . . . De la première définition à la seconde, c’est toute la question du signe qui se joue; d’une sémiotique positiviste à une intersémiotique transversale, c’est encore le concept d’écriture qu’il faudra investir dans le corps en le confrontant au texte coranique et à la langue arabe. (BNP 16)

The *intersémiotique*, then, is the latter part of the definition provided here, the relationship between systems and the translation, the bearing across (“transversale”), in operation between them. In La blessure du nom propre, Khatibi focuses on North African semiotic systems – calligraphy, tattooing, proverbs and folkloric tales – in their relationship to the fundamental semiotics of Islam. However, in my discussion here, I would like to focus on semiotic systems that are brought to light in the autobiography, some of which, such as calligraphy, tattooing, and geo-graphy, reappear in Khatibi’s later texts. My discussion of Khatibi’s *intersémiotique* will, in fact, focus on these three signifying systems, but I would first like to take a moment to show the extent to which the idea of the *intersémiotique* is present in the autobiography.

In Chapter One of this study, we saw that the narrator’s descriptions of the colonial city and the medina are quite different, and that the medina, as a labyrinth, reflects the narrator’s view of the operation of memory. The differences between the colonial city and the medina are also representative of the way in which the narrator sees French/Western civilization and modes of thinking, and the way in which he views these aspects of his own culture. The Cartesian rationalism of the colonial city is contrasted with the labyrinthine and seemingly random design of the medina. The following passage is found immediately after the protagonist’s visit to the healer, which ends thus: “. . . la rue m’enveloppe de si près que la médina et ses allégories se répercutent dans le labyrinthe de mes phrases” (MT 42):

. . . le parc Spiney, arrangé – m’a-t-on dit – selon la phrase cartésienne, claire comme la clarté et pure comme la pureté, balancé selon la métrique de l’ordre militaire, de l’agréable excitant, du beau, du Vrai et peut-être même d’autres choses. “Eh quoi! les Arabes aiment regarder des roses en papier, ou en plastique, la nature leur a échappé d’entre les doigts, ils croupissent, grisés par le thé et l’absinthe. Et pour cacher leur misère, ils forniquent toute la journée. Il faut créer des jardins rationnels, des villes géométriques, une économie en

flèche, il faut créer des Paradis sur terre, Dieu est mort, vive le colon.” Voici la parole du colon dessinant la ville comme une carte militaire.

Un pas de plus et tu es embarqué dans la zone interdite, le terrain sacré du conquérant. C’était cette étrangeté grinçante qu’on me forçait à lire entre les quartiers . . . Voici le Parc, voici un petit musée de fleurs et de plantes, dont les parfums se perdent dans la géométrie maniaque.³²

The geometry of the colonial city is also a geo-graphy; the inscription of colonialism on the Moroccan landscape is a kind of colonial writing. Interestingly, Greimas also addresses the city as a semiotic object and suggests that the city can be seen in two ways: “la ville considérée comme un énoncé global lisible par le destinataire,” and “la ville énoncée par le destinateur.”³³ This is precisely what we see in Khatibi’s autobiography: the colonial city, written by the French, the destinateur, is contrasted with the colonial city as seen or read by the Moroccans, the destinataires. The reverse can be said of the medina, whose labyrinthean passages leave most foreigners lost and confused. Fanon also sees the city as a text to be read, although Fanon’s reading is obviously more violently anti-colonial than those of both Khatibi and Greimas:

The European city is not the prolongation of the native city. The colonizers have not settled in the midst of the natives. they have surrounded the native city; they have laid siege to it . . . To get an idea of the rigor with which the immobilizing of the native city, of the autochthonous population, is organized, one must have in one’s hands the plans according to which a colonial city has been laid out, and compare them with the comments of the general staff of the occupation forces. (ADC 51-52)

In the passage cited above from Khatibi’s autobiography, the narrator’s sarcastic “citation” of the colonizer’s description of Moroccans reflects the irony inherent in the colonizer’s perspective. Accusing the Moroccans of not appreciating nature, the colonizers see the construction of perfectly laid-out flowerbeds in parks as a way to appreciate nature. The narrator indicates that in this imposition of structure on nature, the colonizers have destroyed the very “parfum” of the nature they so desperately want to appreciate.

Several pages later, the narrator makes an amusing comment about another difference he sees between his own culture and that of the West. In this comment, we again see the paradox of the West's view of nature; the West wants to appreciate nature but only in a rather sterile, controlled environment. The narrator says: “. . . le sacré de mon enfance, savoir séparer les rites du corps par l'eau, ceci est utile et ceci est nuisible par l'eau, l'Occident par le papier rose et la fourchette carnassière” (MT 47). The narrator remembers that in his childhood, he had to learn certain rituals associated with water such as the hand-washing required after being in the bathroom and before eating, and the obligatory ablutions before prayer. Elsewhere, Khatibi points out an interesting relationship between the body and semiotics in the Muslim rituals of prayer and ablutions. Muslims are taught precisely how to wash each part of the body and in what order; while praying, Muslims repeatedly touch their heads to the ground, the “tombeau des signes” (BNP 30-31).

The traditional way of eating in Morocco is with the hand, but only the right hand, as the left hand is reserved for cleaning oneself after using the toilet. The narrator's reference to the West's “papier rose” is a reference to the most common brand of toilet paper in Morocco, which is pink and comes on a roll. This, combined with the mention of the fork, creates the comparative association with Moroccan hand-washing after using the bathroom and before eating. Remember that in the earlier passage about the geometric colonial city, the narrator's “citation” of the colonizer includes a reference to “des roses en papier, ou en plastique.” The repetition of the words “rose” and “papier” together recalls the earlier observation about the irony of the West's geometrizing of nature; the West's attempts to appreciate nature only create a distance, and the use of toilet paper and the fork signifies the introduction of a

foreign, and in the narrator's view, a superfluous object to accomplish perfectly natural and ordinary tasks such as going to the toilet and eating.

In his description of the geometric colonial city, Khatibi's narrator states that he reads the city; he also reads the West's ambivalent relationship with nature and how his own social and cultural practices differ from those of the West. Another example of a kind of reading by both the narrator and the protagonist is the repeated association between the flight of birds and reading a written text. It is as if the protagonist and narrator can see a trace in the sky left behind by the bird's flight, as if the bird has somehow inscribed its very presence in the invisible – the air of the sky. The ideas of "souffle," echo and scent are similarly presented, as if any sight, sound, or smell leaves a trace to be read and interpreted. Through these examples we can see that the protagonist's and narrator's reading of semiotic systems in the autobiography is not limited to the sense of sight; rather, the reading and interpretation include the other senses and incorporate them into the *intersémiotique*, valuing them as makers of meaning within the larger, plural system of signs in dialogue with each other.

Other images are also presented as semiotic systems and these, like tattooing, have a physical connection to the body. Writing itself, the act of putting pen to paper, is presented in the autobiography as a very physical act. For example, when the narrator attempts to write about the misery and suffering of his community during the Second World War, he tells us that he could transcribe this misery only by a "désordre aigu de tout le corps . . ." (MT 9). The dream cited earlier, that "mon corps était des mots," reinforces this strong connection between the body and writing, between the body and language. Even the image of dancing is linked to the acts of reading and writing, as in "la danse des yeux et des doigts, ratures, folle écriture . . ." (MT 67), and "la danse exacte dans la fureur des mots" (MT 182). In a scene

when the adult protagonist is in India, he watches a woman dancing and her dance is presented as another kind of semiotic system to be read:

Le soir, tu dances, tu renverses les mains, voici encore d'autres graphes aériens . . . Tes mains approchent de moi; en leur danse, je lis, récites, écris ma propre parabole. Et je demande à tes doigts ce que je ne sais point, je me scinde, je suis ton mouvement, je m'envole, je reviens, pacte de toi à moi, lettre de toutes les lettres, graphe final et douloureux qui me fait dormir la nuit à mon hôtel, projeté contre la calligraphie du désir. (MT 155)

The dance of the Indian woman is at once a writing in air by the contrast of her hands moving against the blank page of the sky, and it is also the act of the body writing and as such, it underscores the physicality of writing in Khatibi's texts.

Other kinds of associations between the body and writing involve an even closer link between the two. With tattooing, fingerprinting, circumcision, and the use of henna, we see the mark on the body itself, whether that mark be made with ink, blood, scarring, or a plant extract. The celebration of the protagonist's circumcision discussed by the narrator of the autobiography involves two types of bodily inscriptions: the first, the use of henna, which can be considered a kind of temporary tattoo; and the second, the blood and scarring of circumcision. Henna is used in celebrations such as marriage and circumcision, both of which also involve the shedding of blood and either the hymen or the foreskin. Through the mention of henna, the narrator returns to the idea of a kind of tattoo, but this one forbidden: the protagonist's father warns him not to let his ceremonial white garment rub against his penis, so that there will be no blood stains on the garment. "Alors, pour toute mobilité, l'éclosion d'une fleur de sang, tatouée entre les cuisses" (MT 27). This is in direct contrast to the role of blood in a marriage ceremony, where the presence of blood on the bedsheet or nightgown of the bride is desired, as inscribed proof of her virginity. As the blood of the bride is read and

interpreted, so is the tattoo, and privately, the circumcised penis: “Ceux qui s’érigent, le sexe non-circoncis, ne connaîtront que tourment et déplaisir!” (MT 27).

In more traditional ceremonies, henna is placed in the hand of the person(s) whose life event is being celebrated. The narrator describes the use of henna during the protagonist’s circumcision: “Ma mère me mit du henné sur la main, ce jaune rouge pâle jamais transgressé” (MT 28). He later explains the significance of the use of henna as a sign in sacred ceremonies: “A côté du Coran, il y avait le talisman et la magie des femmes, par le henné aussi et le tatouage” (MT 55). Henna, whether simply a red-orange spot on the hand, or an intricate design resembling a spider’s web, is related to a certain feminine mysticism which, in Moroccan culture, exists side by side with the Qur’an. This distinction made between religion and mysticism bears parallel distinctions made in other parts of the text to the masculine and the feminine, and the visual and the verbal. But Khatibi does not clearly offer an advantage to one over the other, suggesting instead that they are equally important in his concept of plural social structures, cultural traditions, and languages – in other words, plural semiotic systems whose relationships and interactions are to be explored.

These forms of body-writing – tattoos, henna, circumcision, and the loss of virginity/the hymen – are reflective of both an individual uniqueness and a collective form of self-expression and self-identification in which the self is at the same time “je” and “nous.” They reflect a belonging to a particular group of individuals (traditional Berber women, brides or grooms, circumcised males, and virgin brides) while celebrating an individual’s coming to belong to that group. They are all physical examples of how writing can define us. In a similar vein, the narrator offers a description of his father and then tells the reader, “La seule photographie que j’ai conservée de lui me renvoie un visage de bagnard, la tête nue, les

cheveux coupés ras, les oreilles en flèche, le regard d'une douceur acide, et en bas de la photographie des empreintes digitales bien fanées" (MT 14). In describing this photograph of the father, the narrator tells us what the father looked like, identifying the father for us. The fingerprint at the bottom of the photograph is an even further mark of identification, one which, like the tattoo, involves a very corporeal experience with writing. The fingerprint is also interesting in that it functions very much like a Derridean signature: it is used as a form of identification or verification of identity because of its uniqueness to each individual. And yet it is also endlessly repeated, ensuring the bodily inscription of identity.

Although Khatibi's concept of *intersémiotique*, as a relationship or dialogue between multiple systems of signification, would resist the privileging of any one system over the others, tattooing does seem to have a special place for him in these intersemiotic relationships. Khatibi calls tattoos ". . . signes tantôt inscrits dans le corps, tantôt migrant dans d'autres espaces, signes dont le symbole originaire est souvent perdu pour nous, mais dont l'inscription encore vivante défie nos théories du signe" (BNP 64). Greimas' distinction between iconicity and representation bears mentioning here. The difference is that an icon resembles the object it signifies whereas in representation there is no resemblance, there is "an arbitrary relation between the representing and the represented" ("Figurative Semiotics" 630-31). For example, in French, there is no resemblance in the relationship between a letter and its corresponding sound. Generally speaking, then, tattoos are icons in that they resemble the object that they signify; they are "naturally motivated" signs representing their referents.³⁴ This resemblance in iconicity, according to Greimas, is at the level of the signifier. If there is resemblance in representation, "it is at the level of the signified – that is, at the level of the reading grid" (632). Greimas' reading grid carries with it three important considerations: it is

of a social nature, it is subject to cultural relativism, and it is variable in time and in space (633). In other words, the reading grid is contextual, dependent on its environment and surroundings as well as its specific usage by particular individuals from particular backgrounds. The reading grid I bring to any act of reading – in this case, the reading or viewing of tattoos – will to some degree differ from the reading grid which a North African brings to this reading and signifying experience.

For Khatibi, tattooing is a privileged form of writing because it challenges our reading; it challenges our conception of the sign as a signifier referring to some kind of extra-linguistic reality. The fact that North African tattoos are based on systems of writing and ancient symbolic codes that are now, for the most part, lost, makes the tattoo a signifier with no signified: “. . . le tatouage en tant que jeu graphique est à l’encontre d’une certaine métaphysique de l’être: la perte du contexte entraîne celle de l’objet perçu originellement; le géométrisme entraîne de son côté la défiguration du sujet. Un simple motif décoratif concourt à ruiner délicatement la dialectique sujet/objet” (BNP 78). In this sense, because the ancient writing systems and symbolic codes are no longer in popular use, tattoos, in the North African context, have moved, in Greimas’ terms, from the status of icon to the status of representation. But it is an incomplete or false representation in that the tattoo as signifier has become disconnected from its signified, leading to what Khatibi calls “la paralysie des signes.” But in Khatibi’s *intersémiotique* the absence of a signified does not negate the sign in the same way that division by zero is a mathematical impossibility. Paradoxically, the paralysis of the sign allows the tattoo, as a kind of free signifier, to circulate without limits or constraints, forcing us to re-evaluate our very understanding of the sign and of the relationship between signifier and signified: “Témoin d’une écriture morte, le tatouage git, selon un tracé presque

immuable, dans le champ d'une différence si oubliée et si sommaire que la scène devient libre pour une méditation décorative sur la mort" (BNP 76). Khatibi and Sijelmassi express a similar idea which also relates to Khatibi's idea of the impossibility of returning to a pure or originary source:

. . . epigraphy attempts to trace different scripts back to a single source and a common origin. This is an extraordinarily difficult task, where certainty is impossible (and in a sense useless), when one thinks of the languages and scripts that have been lost for ever, the chain of their connections broken and dispersed among many other languages. How are they to be reconstituted when their most subtle signs and remnants have been scattered beyond recall? (37)

What Khatibi and Sijelmassi say here about language is clearly what Khatibi believes about tattooing and the disjunction between signifier and signified. The disjunction is permanent and the connection cannot be recovered but, for Khatibi, this does not negate the status of the tattoo as a sign and a participant in a larger signifying system.

Tattooing appears in the title of the autobiography and is thus given a rather prominent role as a form of writing very early in Khatibi's career. Indeed, the use of the adjective "tatouée" in the title is similar to Khatibi's use of popular art in the later development of the *intersémiotique*; they both exist at the margins of what Khatibi calls "la tyrannie logographique": ". . . semblables au langage des rêves, ces hiéroglyphes défigurés déchirent notre imaginaire et regreffent dans le corps et l'inconscient le geste d'une séparation élastique, exigeant – pour être lus – un véritable dessaisissement par rapport à la tyrannie logographique" (BNP 20). Khatibi considers the tattoo as a rebel sign: the interdiction imposed against tattooing by the major monotheistic religions makes of the tattoo an exile, an outlaw:

Une autre raison suscite notre intérêt pour le tatouage: il s'agit de l'interdit jeté sur lui par les grandes religions monothéistes, comme si l'écriture divine

voulait effacer d'un trait palimpseste toute écriture ultérieure, surtout celle tracée sur le corps . . . la religion, en se liant à la logographie, a poussé le tatouage dans le champ du profane et de l'impur. (BNP 66)

However, Khatibi also notes that there is no explicit interdiction in the Qur'an against tattooing; there is only the *hadith* in which Muhammad is reported to have said, "Maudites sont la tatoueuse et la tatouée" (BNP 69). Khatibi explains this attitude by noting that tattooing presents the risk of destroying the hierarchy of signs established in the sacred language (BNP 69), much in the same way that the God of the Old Testament forbade the worship of idols.

Unlike writing, which holds an extremely privileged place as a form of high art, tattooing exists at the margins of both art and society. In Morocco, the bearers of tattoos tend to be mainly older, traditional, Berber women from rural areas; this is not to say that young, city-dwelling, Arab women do not have tattoos – it is simply not as common. Ronnie Scharfman has also noted the predominance of tattoos among Berber women and calls it "ethno-graphy."³⁵

In his discussion of tattooing in La Blessure du nom propre, Khatibi indicates that tattooing is a rather common practice among prostitutes and that one can read the history of colonization in Morocco by reading the tattoos on a prostitute's body (104-106). In addition to the geometric designs of the traditional Moroccan tattoos, one also finds flowers, trees, and proper names, figures of tattooing more commonly found in the West than in North Africa. Thus, the very mention of tattooing as early as the title itself calls forth questions of gender, memory, tradition, contemporary social changes, and ethnic background – not to mention the question of the sacred in the memorization of the Qur'an.

Khatibi also equates tattooing with writing in a very interesting and revealing comment at the end of La Blessure du nom propre. There is a short paragraph entitled “Remerciements” in which Khatibi thanks friends who helped him “réaliser ce texte, soit par le dessin, soit par la traduction. . . . Ce tatouage mutuel, qui se passe d’un certain protocole, doit cependant afficher en exergue le jeu de son inscription” (243). Earlier in the same text, Khatibi equates tattooing and writing in his discussion of “The Apocalypse of John,” a work of art by A. Durer. The angel is pointing a kind of stylus at the head of a kneeling priest. “On ne saura peut-être jamais si l’ange tenait un calame ou une pointe destinée au tatouage : peu importe! . . . dans un cas (tatouage) comme dans l’autre (écriture sur le front du prêtre), la pointe aura lieu” (BNP 61). In the case of this painting, Khatibi indicates that it does not matter what the angel is holding in his hand, nor does it matter what the angel’s intentions are; contact will be made and something will be inscribed, whether it be on the body of the priest or on a page of the book he is holding.

Tattooing is the ultimate form of a model of writing involving the body and the senses; the body becomes the blank page, open and receptive to inscription. This brings us to an interesting comparison between tattooing and autobiography. The “author” of the tattoo is quickly forgotten, and the tattoo then becomes an autonomous maker of meaning. The structure, placement, and type of tattoo speak of the person bearing it more than they do of the “author,” but being open to reading and interpretation, the tattoo invites the observer to join it in its signifying party. This is not altogether unlike what many critics now say of autobiography: the meaning of autobiography, like any other text, is less dependent on the author’s intention than it is on the reception of the text in the act of reading. In Greimas’ terms, it is the actualization of the reading grid that provides meaning to a semiotic object.

Khatibi takes it a bit further and suggests that “[l]e corps tatoué est une graphie qui défigure la notion d’appropriation, il est une écriture qui exige d’être lue, aimée, désirée dans son mouvement le plus émouvant, le plus trouble.”³⁶

The title of the autobiography suggests that tattooing and writing are equal, pointing to the de-centering and de-colonizing gesture evident throughout all of Khatibi’s texts. But in the autobiography, tattooing also plays an important role in memory, as the title also suggests. It serves as a methodological principle in Qur’anic memorization as well as a symbol of a kind of collective memory of tribal ancestors:

Me saisit la même fascination devant toute Bédouine tatouée. Quand celle-ci ouvre la main ancestrale, j’épouse ma fixation au mythe. Toute calligraphie éloigne la mort de mon désir, et le tatouage a l’exceptionnel privilège de me préserver. Aucun point de chute dans le chaos, seulement la force d’une impulsion dénouée, un graphe prompt comme un clin d’oeil. (MT 11-12)

In the last chapter of the autobiography, A says that tattooing is the “premier signe [qui] m’initie à me souvenir” (MT 184). Tattooing keeps and preserves, and initiates memory of the past – of the narrator’s past and the milieu of his childhood, and of the past of his people, symbolized in the hand of the distantly related, tattooed Bedouin woman. Not only is tattooing a signal for memory, it is also an indication of order, as we see in the narrator’s comment that when he sees a tattooed Bedouin woman, he feels that all is right with the world; his fear of falling into chaos or becoming chaos himself is assuaged.

The link that Khatibi establishes between tattooing and writing, and more specifically between tattooing and calligraphy, is repeated throughout his many different texts. But there is one example of this relationship between tattooing and calligraphy that is particularly striking. As mentioned earlier, Ibn Muqla is one of the calligraphers discussed in The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy. After his right hand was ordered cut off by a government

minister, Ibn Muqla continued to write with his left hand. Ibn Muqla's amputated right hand and the tattooed hands of women are figures which haunt Khatibi's texts; they appear in various scenes and contexts, but always in relation to calligraphy, tattooing, and writing. In Tableau III of Le Prophète voilé, le Prophète (Voice I) says: "Quand je serai délivré de cette souffrance infligée à moi par moi-même, dites partout que la main coupée est la mienne. Main douloureuse . . . main tatouée et sèche, quelle transfiguration de ma volonté!" (33). In this scene, the amputated right hand of Ibn Muqla becomes the Prophet's hand, which is then transfigured into the mythical amputated, mummified, tattooed hand found in the desert.³⁷ This ghostly hand, separated from its body, reappears continually as a figure of the *intersémiotique*. In this one figure, we see the hand that writes, the amputated hand of the calligrapher Ibn Muqla, the tattooed hand of Berber or Bedouin women, as well as the hand of the Indian woman dancing which the narrator of the autobiography describes as a kind of writing. In this one figure, there is the relationship between different semiotic systems which, like the function of languages in the *bi-langue*, "fait signe" to each other, establish and maintain a dialogue with each other throughout Khatibi's body of work.

Another expression which is frequently repeated throughout Khatibi's texts is the wink of the eye. This expression is most often used in conjunction with a reference to mysticism or the sacred, as in "as if the calligrapher were inducing a mystical trance in the wink of an eye" (Splendor 72), and "a kind of sublime signal, a wink of the eye, a tip of divine intuition penetrating the cycle of existence" (Splendor 139). It is also used with reference to writing, calligraphy, and even tattooing, as just one example, cited above, from the autobiography demonstrates: "un graphe prompt comme un clin d'oeil" (MT 11). The wink of the eye in Khatibi's texts is two things: it is, first of all, the very moment at which, in reading a text or a

semiotic object, the reader/viewer experiences a flash of insight, a sudden appreciation of the significance of the art; the wink of the eye is also a subtle means of communication by which different semiotic systems acknowledge each other and their dialogue or relationship with each other.

In Greimas' description of iconicity mentioned earlier, we saw that the distinction Greimas makes between icon and representation deals with resemblance. I noted that in French, there is no resemblance, for example between a letter and its corresponding sound. However, in Arabic the case is different. Khatibi and Sijelmassi give examples of the iconography of the Arabic alphabet, and suggest that at least some of its letters are "pictographic remnants" of their early origins (231). The letter *'ain* in Arabic is an exact homonym for the word *'ain*, meaning "eye," and the form of the letter itself resembles the eye. Another example is the letter *jim* which begins the Arabic word for camel, *jamal*, and which resembles the silhouette of the camel. The fact that certain letters still contain traces of what were once iconic signs is similar to what Khatibi sees with tattooing; some tattoos are iconic in their resemblance to and signification of a particular thing, while others are graphic symbols which continue to flourish despite their disconnection from a particular signified. These tattoos, then, instead of being forms which designate content, have become both form and content – a kind of self-conscious text – and result in an overdetermination of these symbols as signs. This is similar to what Khatibi explains about calligraphy and how it destroys the traditional linguistic understanding of the sign.

Khatibi also proposes, in the passage cited above about the tattooed Bedouin woman, that tattooing is a kind of calligraphy. We saw earlier in the autobiography how the protagonist feels saved by his discovery of reading and writing; here we have the narrator

expressing a special affinity for a particular kind of writing, calligraphy. In a chapter in La Blessure du nom propre entitled “Le tracé calligraphique,” Khatibi explains his fascination with calligraphy and the relationship between calligraphy and the *intersémiotique*:

Ecriture souveraine, la calligraphie dénonce, subvertit, renverse la substance même de la langue en la transportant en une espace autre, une combinatoire autre, qui soumettent le langage à une variation surdéterminée. C’est ce mouvement vacillant entre phonie et graphie que nous interrogeons ici. Comme la chinoise, la calligraphie arabe est une écriture inouïe du signe et la rhétorique d’une sur-signification . . . *l’écriture calligraphique est un système de figures rhétoriques, qui double et dédouble la langue par le procès d’une sur-signification ordonnée. C’est un système qui met la langue en dialogue intersémiotique.* (177, emphasis in original)

In this explanation of how calligraphy disrupts the sign, Khatibi points to the overdetermination of the calligraphic figure, where the form is not subordinate to the content; in fact, the form becomes the content as the eye follows the artistic tracings of the stroke. In some examples of calligraphy, we might even say that form almost comes to dominate over content because the artistry and intricacy of the design at times render the message nearly indecipherable.

La calligraphie n’a fait qu’exaspérer le partage entre phonie et graphie; elle sera considérée, dans le meilleur des cas, comme une figure rhétorique. Mais on verra que la calligraphie est une rhétorique délirante, qui dynamite le signe linguistique. Son procès rejoint le flottement intersémiotique de Mallarmé: le geste calligraphié enfouit le signe linguistique dans la géométrie et l’éparpille dans l’artifice blanc des formes. La lettre calligraphiée n’est plus tout à fait une lettre, c’est plutôt quelque chose entre la lettre et la note de musique. (BNP 75)

In this passage, as in the previous one, Khatibi calls calligraphy a rhetorical figure and “an unheard writing of the sign.” However, Arabic calligraphy challenges the separation of spoken and written by the very fact that it incorporates the voice and the vocal element of Qur’anic recitation in its own system of signification. Calligraphy therefore serves a purpose similar to the *double critique* in that by its very nature, it contests the anteriority of the spoken

and the dependence of the written on this “anterior” form of language. Similarly, it calls into question the universal application of the linguist’s distinction between signifier and signified. Calligraphy, in “dynamiting” the linguistic sign, operates within the parameters of Khatibi’s *double critique* and *pensée-autre*, functioning as one of many interrogators of binary systems, relations of power, and identity and difference.

Greimas also discusses calligraphy in his essay “Figurative Semiotics” and explains:

Certain signifieds, postulated during the figurative reading, are detached from their figurative formants to become signifieds of the plastic formants that are being constituted. Certain features of the plastic signifier are at the same time detached from the figurative formants with which they are integrated and, obeying the signifier’s autonomous organizing principles, become constituted as plastic formants. (646-47)

This idea helps explain the operation of signification in calligraphy in which the signifier denotes a signified and yet at the same time, becomes itself a signified. It draws attention to itself and its form as artistic content in its own right, not just a vehicle for conveying content. Greimas considers this transformation as more than the subversion of the figurative; he calls it the birth of a second language. This is what happens with calligraphy which, according to Greimas, is “already partially diverted from its functionality” (647). This last remark represents a point of disagreement between Greimas and Khatibi. What Greimas sees as calligraphy’s diversion from functionality is precisely what Khatibi considers calligraphy’s “supplementary form”: “The letter recreated as image follows three rules of composition: phonetic, semantic and plastic. Calligraphers create their compositions by joining letters together, and by adding vowels and diacriticals. Thus they give supplementary form to the meaning of the text which one is reading” (Splendor 7).

The understanding of calligraphy as the incorporation of both vocal and visual elements is similar to the concept of reading as both a visual and vocal performance in

Qur'anic recitation. Khatibi and Sijelmassi point to the very strong link between a sense of the divine and calligraphy: "At the point where the meaning unfolds, an image appears which enchants language, in the original sense of incantation, that is, it transforms it into a divine (or magical) formula. . . . The Arab calligraphers considered that their art was the geometry of the soul expressed through the body . . ." (14).

In Chapter Two of this study, I explained that the link drawn between reading as a visual and a vocal activity arises from the very nature of the Arabic language itself; the Qur'an was revealed aurally and Gabriel's command to Muhammad was to read, recite. In their discussion of the history of Islamic calligraphy, Khatibi and Sijelmassi explain that the "rescensions [of the Qur'an] . . . were transcribed in an orthographically incomplete form of writing: the system of vowel and diacritical signs – so important in calligraphy – was deficient. This is a major (but not the only) reason for the custom of chanting and reciting the text" (18). In fact, the development of the diacritical system in Arabic calligraphy is tied to the vocal performance; the addition of short vowels, marks of nunnation and stress, as well as consonantal stops all aid the reciter in his or her vocal performance of the written text. Khatibi and Sijelmassi also indicate that many calligraphers, with the exception of Ibn al-Bawwab, included marks (notated by a small *sah*, for "silence") to indicate at what point in the text the reciter should pause (118).

The conjunction between sound and sight in calligraphy and in Qur'anic recitation is often expressed in Khatibi's texts as rhythm and movement. Khatibi and Sijelmassi call calligraphy "the art of the linear graphic" and maintain that "it restructures one's visualization of a language and its topography" (6). The importance of rhythm to calligraphy is highlighted twice in the opening paragraphs of The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy: "The originality of

this written form, which in some respects has no equal, is created by the architecture and rhythm of the letters,” and “[c]alligraphy reveals the plastic scenography of a text: that of a letter turned into image, caught in the physical act of creating a line which is animated and led onwards by an inner rhythm” (6). For example, Khatibi and Sijelmassi explain that “[t]he consonantal frame is set along a horizontal line, on each side of which come and go – in chromatic and musical interplay – the vowel triangle, the diacritical signs, and the other special signs. This establishes a mode at many different levels, departing from, but connected to, a firm rhythm” (90). The insistence on rhythm in calligraphy seems at first odd to one not familiar with the conjunction between sight and sound in the Arabo-Islamic concept of reading. Westerners, for example, tend to think of rhythm as being associated less with the visual and more with the auditory because most of our cultural references to rhythm relate to sound and music. If we consider calligraphy for a moment in the comparison to music, however, we can begin to understand what Khatibi means by the rhythm of the letters and the rhythm of the design.

A musical score, like Arabic calligraphy, is its own particular language that uses its own particular system of notation to indicate the ways in which the text should sound as it is being read. A trained musician, for example, will hear a kind of inner musical performance as he or she reads the musical score. Both music and calligraphy have vertical and horizontal elements to their writing system, and both systems have developed visual ways to indicate speed and rhythm. For example, a whole note – a steady note which generally lasts the full count of the bar – appears simple and unadorned. A sixteenth or thirty-second note, or even a trill, for example, are quite the opposite; their appearance is almost frenetic in comparison

with that of the whole note, and the visual business of these notes indicates activity – more physical activity and more speed than one finds with the whole note.

Activity, rhythm and movement are also elements of Arabic calligraphy that affect the very reading of the text. Like music, “[a] page of calligraphy at once invokes a feeling of movement and rhythm” which “reveals something in common with” music.³⁸ What Khatibi and Sijelmassi call the “kinetic rhythm” (214), is the involvement of the body in this performance of reading. Aside from the voice, they also note that some exceedingly intricate and complicated examples of calligraphy, such as in certain Persian or Turkish books, require the reader to actually turn the text around to read it from a different angle: “. . . the marginal commentary may consist of a word or phrase belonging to the body of the text, put in so that this commentary breaks the line of the script and gives it an unsuspected drift. The book then has to be turned around in all directions so as to follow the line of the script. Thus, too, the body turns with the book, joining in a little dance” (*Splendor* 148). The reference to dance here is Khatibi’s own wink of an eye to the reader who, if carefully following Khatibi through his corpus of texts, will immediately recognize the call of the *intersémiotique* in the reference to dance as a kind of semiotic system.

The comparisons between music and calligraphy cover the act of reading and also the manner in which reading is performed. With the calligraphic text, like the musical text, reading is “not a matter of following a single line of text . . .” (*Splendor* 91). Both calligraphic and musical texts have horizontal and vertical planes which constantly demand attention by the reader; the reader’s focus shifts back and forth between these two planes. This is quite unlike the generally accepted hypothesis of reading as a linear process. Greimas is quick to point out that linearity is not a necessary mode of reading, and that there is nothing

that requires us to perform a “linear and continuous reading” as the only way to apprehend a text. There can be what Greimas calls “simultaneous graspings of the terms” (“Figurative Semiotics” 644). This is similar to what Khatibi says about calligraphy and how it forces the diversion of the reader’s attention, and that it is in the interstice between the horizontal and the vertical that the meaning – both in terms of form and content – is appreciated.

In the opening section of The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy, Khatibi and Sijelmassi state that “[c]alligraphy . . . implies a theory of language and of writing. . . . Calligraphy is here under examination only insofar as calligraphy itself examines the nature of the language in which it resides” (14). The authors explain that their use of the term calligraphy denotes “an all-embracing cultural manifestation which structures the philosophical basis of regular language” (15). Calligraphy, like tattooing, music, dance, geo-graphy, and even architecture, is a semiotic system which calls into question the supremacy of writing over other systems of signification. What is repeated throughout Khatibi’s work is the importance of re-thinking traditional notions of priority and supremacy, particularly in binary relations, and applying to them his *double critique*. It is through this kind of re-evaluation that one comes to see the importance of the relations between systems of signification and the ways in which they operate together in society, culture, and art.

Conclusion

In The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy, Khatibi and Sijelmassi dedicate a separate section to the question of the margin in calligraphy. The section begins with this view of the margin:

A margin may perhaps be defined as something totally outside the law and statutes of the text. Totally, because the margin breaks all the rules and all the limits of authority. In vain does the writer put a frame round his text,

protecting it from harm with vigilant ceremonial: the margin breaks through the frame, goes through the looking-glass and creates a general scandal. (148)

The general view of the margin is precisely that it is marginal, and therefore less important than the “main” text. However, as Khatibi and Sijelmassi show, Arabic calligraphy presents a challenge to this notion of the relative unimportance of the margin:

. . . in the art of Arab calligraphy the margin may include alongside the actual text a parallel text; or marginal motifs may be transplanted into the text; or the reader’s attention may be diverted by making the margin easy to read and the text very difficult. Or the margin may rob the text of its central position by framing it with script on all sides . . . the marginal commentary may consist of a word or phrase belonging to the body of the text, put in so that this commentary breaks the line of the script and gives it an unsuspected drift. (148)

The question of the margin is relevant with respect to Khatibi’s entire body of work.

Beginning with the autobiography and continuing through his *oeuvre*, one finds that an underlying theme in Khatibi’s thought is that of the relationship between the margin and the center. Of course, Khatibi is not the only thinker to question the very concept of the center, nor is he the only one to evaluate the relationship between what is “central” and what is “marginal.” What we find in Khatibi’s texts, however, is that in this very interrogation of central and marginal – which is, in effect, a binary construction – Khatibi practices what he preaches, so to speak. He takes marginalized elements of his native artistic culture such as tattooing and prayer rugs and sets them alongside such valorized art forms as architecture, painting and calligraphy.

This is similar in practice to the way in which he approaches his decolonization of sociology. He is not content to simply criticize Western sociology and philosophy; he also looks to Arab and specifically North African traditions of sociology and philosophy in an effort to evaluate the two traditions on an equal footing. Khatibi’s recurring disagreements

with Fanon are emblematic of their different approaches. While Fanon violently criticizes the West and valorizes the “native,” Khatibi points out that there are certainly things to be learned from the West, things to be appropriated and used for one’s own purposes. Even Khatibi’s concept of *bi-langue* follows a similar ideological plan. The importance and novelty of the *bi-langue* is precisely in its emphasis on the relation between languages, as opposed to one language dominating another. For Khatibi, French may be his mode of expression as a writer, but Arabic is always infiltrating his writing; it is ever-present.

The *intersémiotique* is also based on the interaction of different semiotic systems and the re-evaluation of what is generally accepted to be central or important, and what is seen as marginal or less important. This focus on interaction, relationships and dialogue between signifying systems is also reflected in the intertextuality of Khatibi’s body of work. When we speak of intertextuality of and in Khatibi’s work, we must understand that this intertextuality incorporates the idea of the *intersémiotique* as well as the intertextuality between Khatibi’s texts and those of other writers. The intertextuality between Khatibi’s autobiography and his other texts has been used here to show the importance of this kind of relational analysis in Khatibi’s work. Although I have clearly given the autobiography priority in this study, it is the autobiography’s relationship to Khatibi’s other texts and to the other kinds of signifying systems mentioned in them, that gives the autobiography itself an added dimension within Khatibi’s Text.

End Notes

¹ Khatibi, *Le Prophète voilé* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1979) 15. Future references to this text will be parenthetical and abbreviated PV. In this brief description, we can see the influence of Brecht on Khatibi’s presentation of voice in that text.

² Reynolds et al. 249.

³ By post-colonial I mean after the period of colonialism, the period following the colonizer's withdrawal from the colonized country.

⁴ For an astonishing description of the wealth and lifestyle of the Moroccan royal family, as well as the ruthlessness of former King Hassan II, see Malika Oufkir and Michèle Fitoussi, Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail, trans. Ros Schwartz (New York: Hyperion, 2001).

⁵ The Arabic name is also related to the spread of Islam which was to reach the ends of the earth, as far as the land of the setting sun.

⁶ Khatibi, Figures de l'étranger dans la littérature française, (Paris: Denoël, 1987). Future parenthetical references will be abbreviated FE.

⁷ We need look no further than the recent atrocities in Algeria to see the failure and incompatibility of these two systems.

⁸ We again see a similarity between Khatibi's thinking and that of Salman Rushdie. What Rushdie calls the creation of imaginary homelands, "Indias of the mind," Khatibi considers as the *non-retour*. Even Ulysses, upon returning home, is not returning to the same place he left. While he is away, his memory distorts his view of home, and upon his return, his experience of exile and estrangement distorts his view of home.

⁹ Mary Ellen Wolf, "Rethinking the Radical West: Khatibi and Deconstruction," L'Esprit créateur 34.2 (1994): 58.

¹⁰ Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives 2.

¹¹ This admiration, however, is later called into question in The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy. Khatibi and Sijelmassi mention Ibn Khaldun's views of the art of Islamic calligraphy: "Ibn Khaldun contrasted the refinement of the Andalusian with the barbarism of the Maghrebi peoples. But this was the viewpoint of an aristocrat unresponsive to popular art, the subtle force of which requires a different approach" (80). One cannot be sure if Khatibi's opinion of Ibn Khaldun has changed with time or if this is Sijelmassi's opinion of Ibn Khaldun.)

¹² Cited in Khatibi, Maghreb pluriel 76-77.

¹³ According to the date given, this essay was written two years before the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism, first published by Pantheon in 1978. The edition to which I will refer is Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1979).

¹⁴ Said, Orientalism 6-7.

¹⁵ Maghreb pluriel 12. Khatibi's line of thinking here is similar to that of the Indian poet Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938), who, according to Guillaume, maintained "that the

modern Muslim must study what Europe has thought, and work out how far European conclusions can help in the revision, and, if necessary, the reconstruction of theological thought in Islam. He must rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past” (161).

¹⁶ Khatibi, Amour bilingue (Paris: Fata Morgan, 1983) 94. Future parenthetical references will be abbreviated AB.

¹⁷ Khatibi’s use of the term “Orientalist” is more neutral than it is taken to be today, despite his criticism of Orientalists. He uses it to refer to people who study the Orient.

¹⁸ The language used in the media today is called Modern Standard Arabic and as a standardized form of Arabic, it is probably the closest thing to Qur’anic Arabic.

¹⁹ Eric Sellin also discusses the Arabic title in his review essay of the English translation. My comments about it here are mine; I did not come across his interpretation until after developing my own argument.

²⁰ Hans Wehr (1994).

²¹ A similar idea is expressed in Splendor, but without reference to the cover page of Amour bilingue: “In the *shefih* script, which is derived from ta’liq, the letters interlock in a kind of lovers’ embrace” (82).

²² This is similar to some of the passages in the autobiography. They are set apart from the preceding chapter by a blank space, and it is therefore not clear if they are part of the preceding chapter or if they stand on their own.

²³ Calling Amour bilingue a work of fiction is problematic because just as Khatibi questions identity with respect to narrative subjectivity, he also questions textual identity as it relates to pre-established generic categories.

²⁴ Scharfman’s articles on autobiography versus autoportraiture in Khatibi’s autobiography are the exception here.

²⁵ Khatibi, Mémoire 164. The intertext here is, of course, to Valéry’s poem “Le cimetière marin.” The fact that Abdelkebir is visiting the desert, but the narrator speaks to “tu” about a “cimetière marin” seems a bit odd, at first leaving one to wonder whether the “pauvre poète” is Abdelkebir or Valéry. However, if we consider that “le cimetière marin” in Valéry’s poem is a reference to his hometown, where he was born and was buried, we can consider “tu” as the protagonist, to whom the narrator says, “Tu n’auras pas de lieu . . .” because of the impossibility of return to a pure source.

²⁶ Tattooing, in both North African culture and in Khatibi’s texts, is strongly associated with the female body. In the autobiography, we see the Bedouin woman’s tattooed hand and the tattooed woman in the Chinese fresco; in La Blessure du nom propre, Khatibi’s

essay on tattooing is focused not only on the kinds of tattoos common in North Africa, but also on the bodily location of these tattoos. The fascination with tattoos as they relate to the female body is worthy of its own study and is, rather unfortunately, too vast a topic to be addressed here.

²⁷ Greimas, Sémiotique et sciences sociales 54.

²⁸ Paolo Fabbri and Paul Perron, foreword, The Social Sciences: A Semiotic View, by A. J. Greimas, trans. Paul Perron and Frank H. Collins (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990) 7-8.

²⁹ Cited in Fabbri and Perron ix. The quote is taken from Greimas and J. Courtès, Semiotics and Language, An Analytical Dictionary, trans. L. Criste, D. Patte, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982) 42.

³⁰ The concepts of intertextuality and *intersémiotique* can also be related to the Arabic concept of *al-Adab*, “a very subtle concept which acts upon the whole range of the Arabic language and its linguistic theory. *Al-Adab* combines the logical and the imaginative approach – two methods which should never have been separated – and rejects the primacy of any single system, summoning, instead, a whole range of disciplines (science, literature, education, legend, etc.)” (Splendor 23).

³¹ Khatibi, La Blessure du nom propre (Paris: Denoël, 1986) 11. All future parenthetical references to this text will be abbreviated BNP.

³² Mémoire 42-43. The “quote” by the colonizer in this passage is reminiscent of Fanon’s statement that the “native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil” (WE 41). Fanon also likens the colonial attitude to “a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from mangaining to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself . . .” (WE 211).

³³ Greimas, “Pour une sémiotique topologique,” Sémiotique et sciences sociales 151.

³⁴ Greimas, “Figurative Semiotics” 631. Greimas further explains that “the recognizable relation” established by iconic systems of representation “between two modes of ‘reality’ is not arbitrary but ‘motivated,’ because [iconic systems of representation] presuppose a certain identity, total or partial, between the features and figures of the represented and the representing” (631).

³⁵ Ronnie Scharfman, “Autobiographie maghrébine: *La Mémoire tatouée* de Abdelkébir Khatibi,” Abdelkébir Khatibi (Rabat: Editions Okad, 1990) 63.

³⁶ Blessure 97. This idea is similar to the passage in the autobiography in which the narrator reads the image of the dead bird in Cosmos. The narrator explicitly states that the

assassin is unnamed, undesignated, and therefore not a factor in the reader's creation of meaning of the image.

³⁷ This mythical hand also appears in the work of Assia Djébar and Andrée Chédid.

³⁸ Splendor 49. Khatibi and Sijelmassi state that the relationship between calligraphy and music is “not precisely homologous in kinetic terms” but that “both arts share a dynamic which separates logic from its rationality and its rhetoric” (49). In the context of this relationship between calligraphy and music, they cite Massignon: “The ‘triple vowel’ . . . is the basis of Arabic grammar, the *Iʿrab*, and it is the basis of Semitic musical theory” (90).

CONCLUSION

In this study of Abdelkebir Khatibi's La Mémoire tatouée, we have seen that this autobiography challenges generally accepted definitions of and assumptions about autobiography. Philippe Lejeune's definition of autobiography was used as a starting point for this discussion because Lejeune is currently one of the most well-known scholars of autobiography. His definition, therefore, carries with it a certain amount of scholarly and academic authority. But Khatibi's autobiography works against the very foundations of Lejeune's definition, the most important of which is the identicalness of the author, narrator, and protagonist, or the idea of the unified autobiographical subject. The emphasis on the doubling of the subject in Khatibi's autobiography resists this notion of identicalness or unity, and leads us to conclude not only that Lejeune's definition is not universally applicable but that at its very core, it is perhaps more an expression of what a reader would like to find in autobiography rather than what a reader actually does find. For it is a much simpler task to unequivocally accept that the author is the narrator is the protagonist.

The lack of cohesion between Khatibi's autobiography and Lejeune's understanding of autobiography led me to another well-known scholar of autobiography, James Olney. It is interesting to note that both Olney and Lejeune began their studies of autobiography around the same time; Olney's Metaphors of Self appeared in 1972, and Lejeune's L'Autobiographie en France in 1971. However, their approaches to autobiography are vastly different. Lejeune's concept of autobiography is related to French structuralism and linguistics, and Olney's understanding of autobiography draws from both Classical philosophy and post-structuralism. These differences may be due, in part, to particular academic and cultural influences, but the texts chosen for their studies are, I believe, indicative of their approaches

to autobiography. While Lejeune has focused primarily on French – meaning here from *l'hexagone* – autobiography, Olney's work on autobiography includes studies of African, American, African-American, Irish and French literature, as well as the autobiographies of Saint-Augustine, Darwin, and Jung. Lejeune's specific focus on autobiography from France is reflected in his willingness to impose a definition on such a vague category of literature; Olney, on the other hand, refuses to define autobiography because in so doing, he would have to set limits and restrictions on a genre which is so varied. To impose limits on the genre would be to impose limits on the very texts one chooses to study.

There are, of course, many other scholars whose work on autobiography has come to define current studies of autobiographical texts. Roy Pascal and Paul John Eakin, for example, have both addressed the question of accuracy in autobiographical narrative, and have both concluded that fiction, or design, is an inescapable element of autobiography. As such, autobiography ought not be considered as a strictly historical, factual, retrospective account of one's life. In the final analysis, it is preferable to not impose a definition at all, but rather to consider autobiography in the way in which it is seen in the Arabic autobiographical tradition: an activity of translating or interpreting the self, and of conveying this understanding of self in some "written" form to an audience who will, for some reason, be interested by this interpretation. I feel obliged to use the word "written" here, only because it is part of the very word autobiography; however, it is important to understand, especially after studying Khatibi's autobiography, that there are perhaps other ways to "write" one's interpretation of one's self. For example, consider the tattooed Bedouin woman from Khatibi's autobiography and who reappears throughout his texts. Her tattoos reflect her life, her sense of self, and are written directly on her body: is this not the ultimate form of

autobiography? We might also consider autobiography and film, where the “reading” of the autobiography is actually viewing. Even these two examples demonstrate that the very concept of writing in autobiography should not be limited to historically accepted examples of words on a page.

Although Khatibi’s autobiography presents itself as precisely this kind of historically accepted example of autobiography – words on a page, it questions our underlying concepts of what autobiography is, and perhaps even more fundamentally, what reading and writing are, and what the self is. In Chapter One, I showed that even while seeming to follow along with the traditional notion of autobiography, La Mémoire tatouée challenges assumptions and definitions that readers bring to autobiography. Khatibi’s autobiography presents alternative ways of understanding form in autobiography, and it consistently reminds us that it is a story created out of bits and pieces of the past and molded together in a structure which fits a present need of the writer. It is interesting to note that that this “present” of the writer of Khatibi’s autobiography, published in 1971, coincides with the publication of both Lejeune’s and Olney’s first studies of autobiography. One must wonder, then, why interest in autobiography, both in terms of literary and scholarly production, seems to have taken off in the late sixties and early seventies.

With respect to Khatibi, we saw in Chapter One that the presentation of the autobiographical self in La Mémoire tatouée is such that the subject is a constant site of doubling, both in time and across time. Many scholars of North African literature and postcolonial studies attribute this kind of doubling to the psychological impact of colonialism. However, what we find in Khatibi’s autobiography is that the self, or even the concept of the self, is that it is an unstable, ever-changing, de-centered performance of identity. While there

may be certain elements of our personalities that we carry with us throughout our lives, there are other elements of our selves which are transformed and which develop with the passage of time and with our increased exposure to and interaction with the world in which we live. The world in which Khatibi's protagonist lives is one of patriarchal and religious authority combined with feminine mysticism, inherited traditions from various Mediterranean civilizations, contemporary colonial dominance and aggression, and multilingualism. The world in which Khatibi's narrator lives is one of rebellion and the questioning of authority, anxiety over identity and belonging, post-independence nationalism and development, and still, multilingualism. Therefore, the present need of the writer to explain his past incorporates all of these elements.

However, it is in the interrogation of subjectivity and the questions of language, reading, and writing that we find the most intense challenges to the traditional beliefs about autobiography. In Chapter Two of this study, we showed that this autobiography is more than a simple recounting of a life lived; it is also the story of becoming, how the protagonist comes to be the writer, and how the protagonist's history as a reader and his past creative writing activities lead up to who the writer is at the present moment. And in this, the present need of the writer is fulfilled: in his effort to explain who he is at the present moment – a writer and intellectual – he resorts to his past experiences, foremost of which will be his academic experiences and his development as a writer. The protagonist's education takes place primarily in the French colonial system, but begins with a brief period at the Qur'anic school. This introduction to reading and writing as both concepts and practices has enormous impact on the protagonist. He not only learns another language, Classical Arabic, he also develops

his faculty of memory and an understanding of reading as an association between a visual text and a vocal performance.

Once he begins studies at the French school, however, he begins to adopt an identity that is more suitable to the colonizer's tastes even though he knows full well that he will never be accepted by the colonizer as an equal. His introduction to French is the addition of yet another language, and yet another system and philosophy of reading and writing. As the narrator of the autobiography indicates, the protagonist's education includes all of the classics of French literature, from Corneille and Racine to more contemporary giants such as Valéry and Sartre. The narrator also indicates that the protagonist was at least to some degree familiar with Arabic-language authors such as the pre-modern poet Imrou al-Qaïs and the Lebanese poet Khalil Jibrane. The protagonist finds refuge in reading and writing, an easy escape from the anxieties and fears of adolescence.

This involvement with reading and writing and the protagonist's experience of living in two vastly different cultural environments leads him to explore questions of subjectivity, reading, and writing through his writing itself. He seems to constantly be asking himself what it means to write and what it means to him, personally, to write. His questioning about writing involves questions about reading, about how he views and interprets the world around him. From these questions of writing and reading, Khatibi re-evaluates aspects of his own culture which he feels are directly related to these questions of reading and writing, such as geography and urban planning; tattoos, henna, and circumcision; calligraphy; painting; and traditional Moroccan crafts. These topics of study are set alongside evaluations of Islamic thought, contemporary North African and French literature, and European and Arabic philosophy, sociology, and history. The consideration of all of these topics begins in the

autobiography and continues throughout Khatibi's body of work, in essays, plays, poetry, novels, and art criticism. The questions of reading and writing presented in the autobiography are now objects of study in their own right, and the intertextuality in the autobiography – both overt and covert – between Khatibi's autobiography and texts by other writers progresses into an intertextual relationship between Khatibi's own texts.

This was the focus of Chapter Three of this study which, for academic purposes, had to be limited to a discussion of three of the main themes and ideas repeatedly presented and developed in Khatibi's *oeuvre*: *pensée-autre* and *double critique*, *bi-langue*, and *intersémiotique*. In the first section of Chapter Three, I discussed *pensée-autre* and *double critique* in terms of Khatibi's writings about decolonization; in the second section, I discussed his concept of the *bi-langue* as translation and bi- or plurilingualism; and in the third section, I discussed his idea of the *intersémiotique* with respect to literature and other signifying systems such as calligraphy, tattooing, and geo-graphy. Although these concepts are specifically presented and elaborated upon in certain texts, they are ideas which float freely among all of Khatibi's texts. For example, in the autobiography, we find the narrator offering commentary about colonization, decolonization, plurilingualism, tattooing, geography, calligraphy, music, and theater. In Maghreb pluriel, Khatibi discusses literature, sociology, plurilingualism, Orientalism, sexuality, and art. In La Blessure du nom propre, we find essays on tattooing, reading, calligraphy, voice, and sexuality. In Amour bilingue, Le Livre du sang, and Le Prophète voilé, we find questions of subjectivity presented as shifting subject pronouns and voices. It is important to remember that even though Khatibi seems to approach these issues from the standpoint of a philosopher, a literary or art critic, or even an anthropologist, Khatibi's professional training is in sociology. In some respects, he

consistently steps outside his domain, working in the variety of fields mentioned above. However, if we consider that art, language, culture, and civilization all relate to questions about human social interaction, we can see that Khatibi's many interests all relate to the condition of humans in their societies and in their relationships to other individuals and other societies. Khatibi has been criticized by some for being a humanist; if interest in and concern for issues which relate to social interaction is humanism, then Khatibi would surely not mind such a label.

Throughout Khatibi's texts, there are recurring themes which relate to, and in some sense, explain his interest in the fields mentioned above: questions of subjectivity and *dédoublement*, plurilingualism, intertextuality, sociology and (de)colonization, Islam and the divine or sacred, language and reading/writing, semiotics and signification, and identity and difference. The two most important themes addressed in this study are subjectivity and reading. The only reason for which I can so easily choose reading as a main theme, both in Khatibi's work and in this study, is that Khatibi's concept of reading and the way in which he reads are directly related to some of the other repeated ideas such as semiotics and signification, *intersémiotique*, *pensée-autre* and *double critique*, and language and the *bi-langue*. Reading, for Khatibi, is not simply reading a book, reading words on a page; it is the sometimes difficult process of viewing a variety of texts and holding them to equal standards. Reading is a consideration of both the giants of academia and the labor of local artisans. Reading, in Khatibi's view, is an equal opportunity activity; everyone can do it, even those who are illiterate, and everyone should do it. But reading is also re-reading, and in this sense reading is always intertextual. Reading should always consider the merits of multiple systems

from multiple sources, and it is up to the reader to choose these sources and to re-evaluate them.

Another interesting element of the predominance of questions of reading and subjectivity in Khatibi's work and in this study is that these are also primary concerns in current theory and criticism on autobiography. At the beginning of Chapter One, I posed two questions to which I would now like to return. First, what does this autobiography tell us about autobiography and its own status as autobiography? Second, why does this autobiography problematize the very genre to which it claims to belong? To these two introductory questions I would also like to add a third: What is the relationship between this autobiography and other texts by the same author?

In response to the first question, we must understand that autobiography is as much creation as it is history, as much fiction as it is fact. An autobiography may or may not present a retrospective account of a life lived, and even if it does, what leads us to believe that the writer, whose living depends on creation through writing, can be trusted? The question of autobiography, then, lies in the reader's understanding that a given autobiography is a particular version of the writer's concept of self that he or she wishes to share. Khatibi's autobiography announces itself as such on the title page and we can accept it as such only if we also accept that this text is a version, one of many possible versions, of this writer's life, his concept of self, and what he feels at present is important to reveal about himself to a reader.

In response to the second question, the most we can say is that this autobiography demonstrates the very impossibility of defining autobiography. As I mentioned above, autobiography is best considered as an activity of interpretation and translation, an

approximation of the self – in both its past and present forms – in a particular kind of writing or textual form. Khatibi's autobiography problematizes autobiography in ways that are similar to both those in which Brecht's plays challenge traditional concepts of theater and the dramatic arts, and the ways in which jazz problematizes generic classifications in music and musical performance. Like Brecht's plays, Khatibi's autobiography presents itself as belonging to a particular category or artistic production; however, it simultaneously questions the limits and boundaries of that category, and challenges classical expectations as to both form and content. And like jazz, Khatibi's autobiography synthesizes material taken from distinctly different cultural and artistic traditions, producing an innovative and yet still recognizable artistic endeavor. The defamiliarizing gesture evident in Brecht's plays, in jazz music, and in Khatibi's autobiography are all efforts on the part of the artists to draw the reader's attention to the art as art, to make the reader pause and consider not just the product of artistic creation but also the process of creation and representation. This consideration on the part of the reader necessitates a reflection on the act of reading, for as the reader becomes conscious of the artist's process of creation, so he or she becomes conscious of his or her act of reading, and therefore of his or her participation in giving meaning to this creative process.

We now arrive at the third question, that of the relationship between this autobiography and other texts by the same writer. Let us reconsider first the different categories drawn by critics to evaluate the autobiographical subject: the person, the writer, the scribe, the narrator, and the protagonist. I proposed earlier that what we find in autobiography is a collapse between the scribe and the narrator. When I described this collapse between the narrator and the scribe, I also suggested that this collapse is not in any way an erasure. We can perhaps consider this idea in different terms. The protagonist is, in a

sense, a part of the narrator – remember young Mostary’s comment about the child living on in the adult. The narrator, in turn, is at the very least a part of the scribe, a particular voice or attitude adopted by the scribe in the moment of writing in order to present a given story. The scribe is a part of the writer in that the function of the scribe of a given text is but a brief chapter in the career of the writer. The writer is the professional who has chosen to make a career of writing, and is a part of the person who is also a son or daughter, brother or sister, mother or father, friend, lover, neighbor, or acquaintance. These relationships are different from what one may find associated with a text of fiction: the protagonist is not necessarily a part of the narrator, and the narrator is not necessarily affiliated in any way with the writer. What we have, then, with autobiography is a series of synecdoches – figures which take the part for the whole – linking the protagonist to the narrator to the scribe to the writer to the person. Thus, the autobiographical subject is perhaps best considered as a synecdoche, a “taking up together” of the various personages of the elements which combine to form the autobiographical “I.”

James Olney’s essay “On the Nature of Autobiography” first introduced the notion of synecdoche with respect to autobiography, but his focus was on the relationship between an introduction or preface to the text itself, and the relationship between autobiography and the life it represents: “And this is what autobiography is as well, for an autobiography is a part of a life, a view taken from within a life, that yet claims to account for or give the story of the entire life. Autobiography thus bears a synecdochic relationship to the whole life – a part taken for the whole . . .” (118). I propose that we extend Olney’s analysis to the autobiographical subject as well, considering its different elements in synecdochic

relationship with each other – parts taken up together, each of which is often seen to stand for the whole in its multiplicity and combination.

This type of relationship is also what we find in discussions of intertextuality. We speak of Khatibi, for example, to denote a particular idea expressed in his work, a particular text, or his body of work taken together. Chapter Three of this study focuses on the intertextuality of and in Khatibi's autobiography, with respect to the texts and authors mentioned in the autobiography and with respect to Khatibi's own texts, most of which were written after the publication of the autobiography. The relationship of Khatibi's autobiography to these other texts is very much like an introduction to his body of work. His autobiography can thus be seen as a double synecdoche in that it is a part of the life representing the "whole" of the life, and it is a part of his body of work in which he first exposes the themes and ideas taken up again in his later texts.

There is yet another way to state this idea about the intertextual relationship between Khatibi's autobiography and his other texts. In musical terminology, a fugue is a compositional technique whereby a theme is proposed in the exposition or introductory portion of the piece, and the later segments of the piece are variations on this theme. The variations elaborate upon the main elements of the theme, but the theme is always recognizable in the variations. This is precisely what we find with Khatibi's body of work, or what I more appropriately called in the introduction his "Text": the autobiography is the exposition of the theme, and the later works are the variations which pick up the theme, elaborate upon it, but in which the theme is always recognizable. We can thus say that Khatibi's autobiography has a fugal relationship to his other texts. Certain fragments, phrases, and even general ideas are taken up again and embellished in new ways. It is a

constant process or activity of renewal and regeneration. It is a circular and cyclical haunting of the later texts or variations by the autobiography or the theme. As a writer, Khatibi operates in much the same way as a jazz musician who returns to a favorite piece of music, but in every performance, improvises with different fragments from other pieces or with fragments he or she has more recently developed. Khatibi's expressed admiration for such jazz greats as John Coltrane, known most of all for his innovation and improvisational skills, and the musical references throughout Khatibi's Text support this link between his writing and music. The reader, of course, is always implicated just as the listening audience is implicated in a jazz performance, recognizing the theme and appreciating the ways in which the artist elaborates upon and embellishes the theme. Khatibi's autobiography, therefore, can be considered a preface or introduction, or, in keeping with the musical terminology, a prelude to future variations of its theme.

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VITA

Ruth Louise Gaertner was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1966. She lived in Avon Lake, Ohio, until her graduation from Avon Lake High School in 1984. She then attended Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, where she played volleyball for three years and earned both the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in French. Immediately following her graduation in 1990, Ms. Gaertner entered Peace Corps and served as a Volunteer and Instructor of English at the Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Université Cadi Ayyad, in Beni Mellal, Morocco. Her experience living and working in Morocco was the beginning of her interest in North African languages, literature and culture.

Upon completion of her Peace Corps service in 1992, Ms. Gaertner married Khalifa Bakhouch in Rabat, Morocco. In the Fall of 1993, she entered the doctoral program in French at Louisiana State University, and pursued research on a variety of topics related to North African literature. Her desire to continue studying Arabic and to eventually incorporate Arabic-language literature into her research led her to attend Middlebury College's Arabic School during the summers of 1996, 1997 and 1998.

In 1999, Ms. Gaertner moved to Tallahassee, Florida, where her husband was attending graduate school. In May of that year, their daughter, Yasmina, was born. The three currently reside in Winter Springs, Florida, and Ms. Gaertner is employed as a French instructor at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. In her dreams, Ms. Gaertner enjoys traveling, exercising, and spending time with her friends and family. In reality, she enjoys working, reading, and spending time with her friends and family.