

***Allouma and Marroca, Uncensored...:* Seduction and Temptation in Maupassant's Vision of the Orient**

Céline BROSSILLON
Université de Paris III—Sorbonne Nouvelle

In the 19th century, romantic and post-romantic literature became fascinated by the Orient, which symbolized mystery to the French reader. After Guy de Maupassant traveled to Algeria in 1881 to report on the anti-French upheavals for *Le Gaulois*, and then between 1887 and 1890, he attempted to depict the colonial world, its people, and mostly its spell-binding, lascivious women. His short stories *Allouma* and *Marroca* elicit several types of exoticism: temporal, geographical, and ethnographic.

Both *Marroca* (1882) and *Allouma* (1889) recount the story of a double encounter: between the narrator and a foreign country, and between the narrator and an exotic Other. They both take place in Algeria, a far away land calling for a sense of *dépaysement*.

The oriental woman is presented as a sexual beast that uses her body as a means to seduce men. Her body becomes her language of seduction. Her spell-binding power forces roles to be reversed. Even though the oriental woman belongs to a dominated people, she dominates the physical encounter with the colonist. Even though she is presented as intellectually inferior, she manages to make the master a slave to his own desire.

The description of the exotic woman as sensual represents the erotic fantasy of the occidental male, the oriental love he is longing for. *Allouma* and *Marroca* embody primitive exoticism, and only serve one purpose: to satisfy the narrator's craving for a physical encounter. Both *Marroca* and *Allouma* are women whose pleasure has no limits; the narrator mentions *Marroca*'s "inapaisables désirs"¹ (Maupassant 1974: 371)². *Allouma*'s black origins also define her as a sexual object, since black women are described as a sexual tease: "Les négresses, on le sait, sont fort prisées dans les harems où elles jouent le rôle d'aphrodisiaques"³ (Maupassant 1979: 1103)⁴. *Allouma* is fire (*allume/allumeuse*). Auballe says: "L'éclair de cette vision m'avait traversé et brûlé [...]"⁵ (1099).

Allouma's and *Marroca*'s nudity contributes to their eroticization – *Marroca* is first caught by the narrator naked in the transparent water of the ocean, and then walks around naked on his roof, while *Allouma* is discovered by Auballe in his bedroom, wearing only bracelets and tattoos. There are no preliminaries. For *Allouma*, the physical encounter takes place on a rug in Auballe's bedroom. Since they cannot aptly communicate because Auballe does not speak Arabic, he "balbutie"⁶ a few words (Maupassant 1979: 1098), the body becomes a means of communication, the language of seduction. The narrator uses all his senses to experience *Allouma*: the vision of her naked on his rug, the sound of her bracelets, the taste of her kisses, the smell and softness of her skin.

The force behind the narrators' attraction to these women is their animal sensuality. *Allouma*'s face is "un peu bestiale" (Maupassant 1979 : 1101), she is described as "une bête

¹ "unquenchable desires"

² Guy de Maupassant. *Contes et Nouvelles*, volume I, Paris, Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1974.

³ "Female negroes, as we know, are strongly solicited in harems where they act as aphrodisiacs."

⁴ Guy de Maupassant. *Contes et Nouvelles*, volume II, Paris, Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1979.

⁵ "The fire of this vision had pierced me and burnt me [...]"

⁶ "mumbles"

sensuelle, une bête à plaisir qui avait un corps de femme⁷” (1114). Marroca is also “d’un type un peu bestial,” her body has “quelque chose d’animal” (Maupassant 1974 : 371). After the sexual encounter, Marroca’s skin, like Allouma’s, exhales this very animal smell: “[...] l’accablante chaleur [...] dégageait d’elle [...] cette odeur fauve qui plaît aux mâles⁸”. The oriental woman is ferociously sensual, animal; she fulfills her primitive desires and follows her instincts.

Both short stories describe the North African climate as having a numbing effect on the intellect, and a euphoric effect on the body and use it as an excuse for the narrator’s own behavior. Right from the start the narrator of *Marroca* adopts the custom of the afternoon nap. While lying there naked, in the warmth of the Algerian summer, he finds himself craving for a physical touch, and he claims to be “torturé par [s]a continence”. He later justifies his conquest of a married woman by blaming “la chaleur palpable” (Maupassant 1974: 369).

In Africa, men can suffer from two things: lack of water and lack of women. *Marroca*’s narrator wonders which one is worse for they both would make any man lose his reason and do things he would never do in his own country. The African climate just enhances this physical desire, this longing for the pleasures of the flesh: « La chaleur, cette constante brûlure de l’air [...] vous enfièvre [...] embrase[nt] le sang, affole[nt] la chair, embestialise[nt]⁹” (367-368). Men become deprived of the faculty to think, and enslaved to their sexual desires. The so-called civilized man can turn into a savage.

What Auballe loves about Allouma at first is the way she gives herself to him, “ses doux abandons” (Maupassant 1979: 1107), and her “attitude de fière soumission” (1101). Allouma’s force of seduction is her passivity, her submissiveness and faculty to give herself completely. When he comes back home, their position as colonizer/colonized is symbolized by the attitude they adopt: “Elle s’assit, baissa les yeux, et je demeurai devant elle, l’examinant¹⁰” (1101). Allouma does not look at Auballe but he stares right at her. She knows she is here to serve him, “Je ferai ce que tu exigeras de moi¹¹” (1106), and she kisses his hand as a sign of submission. Auballe decides to make her his sexual slave: “j’en ferais une sorte de maîtresse esclave, cachée dans le fond de ma maison, à la façon des femmes des harems. [...] ces créatures-là, sur le sol africain, nous appartenaient presque corps et âme¹²” (1102). Arabic women are the property of the colonizer. They are to be possessed and used so long as the master’s physical desires need to be quenched.

As the short story progresses, this dominant-dominated relationship evolves and roles are inverted. Even though *Allouma* recounts the union between a colonist and a young nomad, Allouma is the one who finally leaves Auballe and he cannot do anything to stop her. In the end, Maupassant depicts men as preys for the oriental women who conquer and leave them whenever they feel like it. Women master the physical encounter, and the seduction process.

When Allouma leaves Auballe for the first time, he becomes physically dependent on her. He misses her touch: “Moi je souffrais; elle me manquait; ma maison semblait vide et mon existence déserte¹³” (1111). Marroca uses the same trick to get the narrator to come to

⁷ “a sensual beast, a pleasurable beast with a woman’s body”

⁸ “the overpowering heat [...] released from her body [...] this very animal smell that men love.”

⁹ “Heat, this constant burning air [...] gives you a fever [...] burns your blood, shakes your flesh, turns you into a beast.”

¹⁰ “She sat down, lowered her gaze, and I stayed in front of her, examining her.”

¹¹ “I will do what you will ask of me.”

¹² “I would make of her a kind of slave mistress, hidden in the heart of my house, like you would of women in harems. [...] on the African soil these creatures’ body and soul almost belonged to us.”

¹³ “I suffered; I missed her; my house seemed empty and my existence lonely.”

her house. Since he refuses to come, she leaves him for eight days. She manipulates him into doing something against his will not by using rational arguments, but by depriving him of her, by making him a slave to his own desire. The narrator laments : “Huit jours, c’est long, mon ami, et, en Afrique, ces huit jours-là valaient bien un mois. Je criai: " Oui " et j’ouvris les bras¹⁴” (Maupassant 1974: 373).

Auballe becomes haunted by the vision of Allouma, he is left with “l’émotion agressive du souvenir de cette fille arabe étendue sur un tapis rouge¹⁵” (Maupassant 1979: 1100). The emotion he feels is an “aggressive” emotion, a primitive, savage emotion. He is seduced, under the spell of the African sensual and sexual beauty. He even goes around Mohammed’s tent, like a stalker, wanting, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. He transforms into an animal of prey, waiting to catch her.

Allouma seduces Auballe into submission. The roles are inverted, she now dominates the situation and subdues him. He says:

Ses yeux, allumés par le désir de séduire, par ce besoin de vaincre l’homme qui rend fascinant comme celui des félins le regard impur des femmes, m’appelaient, m’enchaînaient, m’ôtaient toute force de résistance, me soulevaient d’une ardeur impétueuse. Ce fut une lutte courte, sans paroles, violente, entre les prunelles seules, l’éternelle lutte entre les deux brutes humaines, le mâle et la femelle, où le mâle est toujours vaincu¹⁶ (1101-1102).

She does not use words, her eyes express her desire. The language of the eyes is a substitute for words. It is a fight and Auballe will lose because he will not be able to master his senses. He cannot resist her. He is a slave to his physical attraction for her.

Love in Africa is passionate: “Sache qu’ici on aime furieusement¹⁷” (Maupassant 1974: 367) tells us the narrator of *Marroca*. And yet love in Africa is purely physical: “Entendons-nous bien. Je ne sais si ce que vous appelez l’amour du coeur, l’amour des âmes, si l’idéalisme sentimental, le platonisme enfin, peut exister sous ce ciel; j’en doute même. Mais l’autre amour, celui des sens, qui a du bon, et beaucoup de bon, est véritablement terrible en ce climat¹⁸” (367). Here, there is no connection on the spiritual level.

Auballe’s feelings for Allouma are not those of a man for a woman, but of a man for a little creature, an animal of sorts. He feels no jealousy when she leaves him, he does not feel uncomfortable when he thinks about the people she might be sleeping with because for him jealousy can only spring from love. Yet, he would have killed her if he had found her with someone else, but the only motive would have been pride, not jealousy or love. He would have killed her like “un chien qui désobéit¹⁹” (Maupassant 1979:1114). He stresses:

Je ne l’aimais pas - non - on n’aime point les filles de ce continent primitif. Entre elles et nous, même entre elles et leurs mâles naturels, les Arabes, jamais n’éclôt la petite fleur bleue des pays du Nord. Elles sont trop près de l’animalité humaine, elles ont un coeur trop rudimentaire, une sensibilité trop peu affinée, pour éveiller dans nos âmes l’exaltation sentimentale qui est la poésie

¹⁴ “Eight days is a long time, my friend, and, in Africa, these eight days were well worth a month. I cried: “Yes!,” and I opened my arms.”

¹⁵ “the aggressive emotion of the memory of this Arabic girl lying on a red rug.”

¹⁶ “Her eyes - lit by the desire to seduce, by this need to overcome man which makes women’s impure glance attractive like that of felines - called me, tied me, removed from me any force of resistance, lifted me with an impetuous heat. It was a short fight, without words, violent, between the pupils alone, the eternal fight between two human beasts, the male and the female, during which the male is always overcome.”

¹⁷ “You have to know that here, we love with fury.”

¹⁸ “Let us be clear. I do not know if what you call the love of the heart, love of the souls, if the sentimental idealism, finally platonism, can exist under these skies; I even doubt it. But the other love, that of the senses, which is good, and even very good, is truly terrible in this climate.”

¹⁹ “a dog that disobeys”

de l'amour. Rien d'intellectuel, aucune ivresse de la pensée ne se mêle à l'ivresse sensuelle que provoquent en nous ces êtres charmants et nuls²⁰ (1107).

Arabic women cannot be loved because they are not women in the noble sense of the term, they are not objects of affection, they are objects of desire, passion. They are too primal to be able to feel or trigger such a noble feeling as love. Their intellect is too limited to elicit a connection that would go beyond any sexual pleasure.

Both Allouma and Marroca are considered to be inferior beings, who follow their instincts, their passion. Their asset is their seduction skills. They inspire pure lust to the narrator who stresses their unsophisticated backwardness. Allouma is compared to a child: she stares at herself in the mirror, at her dresses, her jewels, her walk, like a little girl. She looks vulnerable, and simple-minded. Marroca's nonchalance roaming naked on the roof also places her in the realm of fantasy. The narrator describes her as "une sorte d'être inférieur [...]"²¹ (Maupassant 1974: 371), while Allouma's observations are "délicieusement puériles," and she has "une cervelle d'écureuil"²² (Maupassant 1979 : 1103). Marroca's intellect is also questioned : "Son esprit [...] était simple comme deux et deux font quatre, et un rire sonore lui tenait lieu de pensée"²³ (Maupassant 1974 : 371).

The paradox here stands in the fact that both Allouma and Marroca are presented with limited intellectual faculty and yet seem very powerful. They tempt the narrator, they seduce him, and they make him lose his reason. But their power resides mainly in the fact that they do not get attached. They get the narrator "hooked", they put him on a leash, but Allouma and Marroca are free spirits, they do not belong to any man.

Both Marroca and Allouma come from un "peuple vaincu" (Maupassant 1979 : 1104). Yet Auballe admits that the French never really conquered them fully²⁴. They escape the colonist. They remain a mystery to him and he will never get to fully understand the complexity of this people.

Auballe feels this cultural barrier with Allouma: "Or, cette infranchissable et secrète barrière que la nature incompréhensible a verrouillée entre les races, je la sentais soudain [...] dressée entre [...] cette femme qui venait de se donner, de se livrer, d'offrir son corps à ma caresse et moi qui l'avais possédée"²⁵ (1104). Paradoxically, even though she just gave him her body, he cannot go beyond the physical level, he does not understand her difference.

Even though she is very submissive, Allouma is a free spirit and he cannot control her. She roams the earth, she is a nomad, "une rôdeuse du désert" (1103). She could not stay with him, it was not in her nature. She felt like a prisoner in his house:

²⁰ "I did not love her - no - one does not love the girls of this primitive continent. Between them and us, even between them and their natural males, the Arabs, the small blue flower of Northern countries never blooms. They are too close to human animality, they have too simple a heart, too unrefined a sensitivity, to give birth, in our souls, to the sentimental exaltation which is the poetry of love. Nothing intellectual, no intoxication of the mind combines with the sensual intoxication which these charming and null beings elicit in us."

²¹ "a kind of inferior being"

²² "a squirrel's brains"

²³ "Her mind [...] was simple like two and two make four, and her thoughts were replaced by a loud laughter."

²⁴ Auballe observes: "Jamais peut-être un peuple conquis par la force n'a su échapper aussi complètement à la domination réelle, à l'influence morale, et, à l'investigation acharnée, mais inutile du vainqueur" (Maupassant 1979: 1104). (Never perhaps a people conquered by force managed to escape so completely from the real domination, the moral influence, and, the fervent yet useless investigation of the winner").

²⁵ "However, I felt suddenly this insurmountable and secret barrier - which incomprehensible nature locked between races - [...] drawn up between [...] this woman who had just given herself to me, abandoned herself, offered her body to my caress and me who had possessed her."

[...] elle éprouvait en son cœur de nomade, l'irrésistible envie de retourner sous les tentes, de coucher, de courir, de se rouler sur le sable, d'errer avec les troupeaux, de plaine en plaine, de ne plus sentir sur sa tête, entre les étoiles jaunes du ciel et les étoiles bleues de sa face, autre chose que le mince rideau de toile usée et recousue à travers lequel on aperçoit des grains de feu quand on se réveille dans la nuit²⁶ (1113).

Allouma is like a wild animal, she longs for freedom. Mohammed calls Allouma "r'ézale" which means a "gazelle", "comme pour exprimer qu'elle courait vite et qu'elle était loin²⁷" (1111).

Marroca also wants to feel free. Even though she is married, she does not want to belong to any man. When her husband comes in the room where she is with the narrator, she takes out a machete, in case her husband figures out that her lover is lying under the bed. She loves her husband and yet she would kill him if she had to. She wants to be free to do whatever she pleases. Another example is when she walks around naked on the roofs: "elle circulait, courait, gambadait dans ma maison avec une impudeur inconsciente et hardie²⁸" (Maupassant 1974: 371).

Both Marroca and Allouma only focus on their own desire, their own pleasure, their own fantasies. They are free spirits, they do what they want. They represent sexual pleasure free from any constraint. By the end of the short story, Allouma has reached the status of a human being, of a woman. When Allouma leaves, Auballe finally realizes that she is like any woman. He concludes: "Mon Dieu, c'est une... une femme, comme bien d'autres²⁹" (Maupassant 1979: 1116). He recognizes in Allouma a very feminine characteristic: the lack of consistency, and the desire for independence. Women change their mind quickly, they are like "une girouette qui tourne au vent³⁰" (1116). They just follow their heart. Auballe tries to look for a reason for her to have left him, but he concludes "Parce qu'elle était Allouma, une fille du sable³¹" (1116). She is a seducer and went on to seduce other men. By cheating on her master, she showed the very ultimate feminine characteristic in the eyes of Auballe, and in fact, Maupassant.

While the typical 19th century western woman was portrayed as not having any sexual drive or desire, *Allouma* and *Marrocca* depict two very sensual women whose power of seduction drives the white colonist to lose his mind and become a slave to his own desires. Even though Auballe plans to make a slave of Allouma, he ends up being seduced by her and becomes a slave to her and his sexual longings. The master turns out to be the slave. The only language possible between these two is the language of the body, they communicate through their senses, they touch, smell each other, like animals.

In these two short stories, the narrator conveys the European myth of the noble savage with physical beauty. But this ideal beauty is counter-balanced in the narrators' discourse with negative stereotypes and colonial clichés. *Allouma* and *Marrocca* go beyond a simple analysis of two women, they extend to a judgment on a whole people. Maupassant does not offer a critique of Western European social and cultural values. On the contrary, he glorifies its civilization, and proposes it as a counterpoint to the Arab's animality and

²⁶ "[...] she felt in her nomad's heart, the irresistible desire to return to the tents, to sleep, to run, to roll in the sand, to wander with the herds, from plain to plain, to no longer feel above her head, between yellow stars in the sky and the blue stars on her face, anything else than the thin curtain of worn and sown again fabric through which you can see grains of fire when you wake up in the night."

²⁷ "as if to signify that she would run fast and was far away."

²⁸ "she would circulate, run, gambol in my house with a oblivious and bold shamelessness."

²⁹ "My God, it's a... a woman, like many others."

³⁰ "a wind vane turning with the wind."

³¹ "Because she was Allouma, a woman of the desert."

primitivity. The reader is left with representations of Africa as a continent of seducing, sensual people, geared towards their pleasure rather than work.

Bibliography

- BARROW, Susan, "East/West: Appropriation of Aspects of the Orient in Maupassant's *Bel-Ami*". *Nineteenth Century French Studies* – Volume 30, Number 3 &4, Spring-Summer 2002, pp: 316-329.
- BOISSY, Eva, "Maupassant l'Africain", *Acta Fabula*, Mai 2008 (Volume 9, numéro 5), [En ligne] URL : <http://www.fabula.org/revue/document4153.php>
- Little, Roger, "Tiens, Forestier !" : Maupassant et la colonisation, SIELEC, [En ligne], URL : http://www.sielec.net/pages_site/DESTINATIONS/MAGHREB/little_maupassant.htm
- LORETI, Alessio, "Désirs d'Orient : Guy de Maupassant à la découverte du Maghreb", *Africultures*, [En ligne], URL : <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=4687>
- MAUPASSANT, Guy De, *Contes et Nouvelles*, volume I, Paris, Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1974.
- _____, *Contes et Nouvelles*, volume II, Paris, Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1979.
- MEDIENE, Med, "Guy de Maupassant: Allouma et autres nouvelles", [En ligne], URL: <http://mediene.over-blog.com/article-12388805.html>
- RIEGERT, Guy, "La chevauchée algérienne de Maupassant", *Le Français dans tous ses états*, numéro 33 : Le Paysage, [En ligne], URL : <http://www.crdp-montpellier.fr/ressources/frdtse/frdtse33d.html>