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THE PAINTING AND WRITING OF GUSTAVE GUILLAUMET

Born in Puteaux, France, in 1840, artist and writer Gustave Guillaumet participated in various Parisian *expositions* and *salons*¹ prior to his death in Paris in 1887. Between 1861, when he visited Algeria almost by chance, and 1867, he traveled to North Africa ten times. These trips left Guillaumet with vivid impressions that would converge in a series of sketches, works of art, and journalistic-literary texts that are of unquestionable interest both for their expressive force and for the insights they provide into colonial life as it was being established during the second half of the Second Empire. The articles he wrote about his experience in North Africa were initially published in the *Nouvelle Revue* and were collected one year after his death in *Tableaux algériens*, presented in the original 1888 edition as “illustrated by 12 etchings by Guillaumet, Courtry, Le Rat, Géry-Bichard, Muller and Toussaint; six photogravures by Dujardin; and 128 relief engravings after paintings, drawings and sketches by the artist”.²

Unlike Guillaumet’s pictorial works and the exhibition context of the *Expositions* and the *Salons*, his published texts are part of a process to narrate the French appropriation of North African territory. Indeed, they are directly tied not only to the colonial enterprise but also to an effort to understand the local populations that was just beginning to take shape. French critics responded to Guillaumet’s pictorial works in an ambivalent and often contradictory way. Alongside positive appraisals from people like Théophile Gautier and Paul de Saint-Victor were the perplexed comments from 1868 of Paul Pierre, who considered *Désert* a painting with an impossible subject,

1 Amongst the others: Exposition universelle of 1867, Exposition triennale 1883, Salons 1863, 1866, 1868, 1869, 1872, 1883 and, posthumously, Exposition of 1900. I would like to thank Céline Tan for the English translation and Michelle Raissa Tarnopolsky for the editing of this essay.

2 “Illustré de douze eaux-fortes par Guillaumet, Courtry, Le Rat, Géry-Bichard, Muller et Toussaint, de six héliogravures par Dujardin, et de cent vingt-huit gravures en relief d’après les tableaux, les dessins et les croquis de l’artiste”.

“sans raison d’être”,³ a true “fantasmagorie”,⁴ and the “result of a rare yet sterile skill”.⁵ The Realist Orientalism of Guillaumet’s pictorial pursuits is echoed in his texts, which describe life in North Africa by combining unusual images (abandoned dogs, work in the fields, the poor) with scenes straight out of the European imagination about the region (caravans, Arabs praying, descriptions of raids). Dedicated to the visit of a *caïd* to Paris for the International Exposition in 1867, Chapter 22 of *Tableaux algériens* is particularly interesting for our purposes. While the other chapters mirror Guillaumet’s pictorial concerns (with their study of light and shadow, or at least a suffused, non-blinding brightness, and settings in which the everyday and the picturesque intersect), the Parisian chapter assumes ironic and paternalistic connotations. However, upon closer inspection we can see that the entire book comprehensively showcases a still-evolving, collective idea about the colonial world.

I. BACKGROUND ON LIFE AND WORKS

Little is known about the life of Gustave Guillaumet and his death is shrouded in mystery. However, we do know that in 1857, after studying under François-Edouard Picot and Félix-Joseph Barrias, Guillaumet entered the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts* in Paris where he became the pupil of Alexandre Abel de Pujol. In 1861, he applied for the *Prix de Rome* under the category “Historical Landscape” to obtain a scholarship at the French Academy in Rome. Although his name was mentioned by the Academy’s Painting section, the other sections favored and therefore awarded another candidate. This turned out to be a fateful turning point. Guillaumet decided to leave Paris, but rather than going to Rome as initially planned he crossed the Mediterranean to Algeria. There he contracted malaria, for which he spent three months at the military hospital in Biskra. However inauspiciously, this was the start of an intense and unusual relationship with the colony, where he returned nine more times and to whose life and landscape he devoted much of his work. He achieved considerable success, as demonstrated by the honors he received (in 1878 he was named Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, the highest decoration in France) and by his regular attendance to the institutional *Salons*.⁶ As mentioned above, his death is cloaked in mystery. According to some sources, he died of

3 P. Pierre, *Un Chercheur au salon. 1868. Peinture. Les inconnus – Les trop peu connus – Les méconnus – Les nouveaux et le jeunes* (Paris: E. Mailet, 1868), 25.

4 Pierre, *Un Chercheur au salon*, 25-26.

5 Pierre, *Un Chercheur au salon*, 26; “résultat d’une habilité rare autant que stérile”.

6 For the history of the *Salons*, see: G.-G. Lemaire, *Histoire du salon de peinture* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2004); D. Lobstein, *Les Salons au XIXe siècle. Paris, capitale des arts* (Paris: La Martinière, 2006); J. Kearns



Gustave Guillaumet, *Le Sahara*, 1867, Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay).

peritonitis. On April 6, 1887 the *New York Times* reported that “a strange story is current anent the death of painter Guillaumet”. According to the article, the peritonitis leading to the painter’s death was caused by a bullet that perforated his intestines. The painter had fired the gunshot following an argument with a young woman he lived with in Paris and for whom he had abandoned his wife and son. It seems the artist spent his last moments in agony in his study, whither he was brought upon his request so he could look at his Orientalist works one last time, while his wife, called to his side, looked after him. It is worth noting that his son, also Gustave, assumed the patronymic of Guillaume and became a famous linguist. Beyond the tragicomic *fait divers* in which Guillaumet’s life ended, we may infer from this story that the artist had a visceral attachment not only to his own work but also to the context within which it developed.

While the artist never attained the kind of fame achieved by fellow Orientalist painters and writers like Delacroix or Fromentin, his work still marks a turning point in Orientalist painting when a romanticized or anecdotal idea of North Africa was abandoned in order to portray the harshness of life in that desert region. In this respect, Guillaumet’s oil painting on canvas *Le Sahara* (1867), also known as *Le désert*, which was presented at the Salon of 1868 and was admired by Théophile Gautier, is particularly telling. The critic, who had repeatedly shown himself to be in favor of Orientalism and

et P. Vaisse, *Ce Salon à quoi tout se ramène. Le Salon de peinture et de sculpture, 1791-1890* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2010).

had travelled himself to Algeria and the Middle East, recognized in the painting an exceptional representational force – an infinite space uniting simplicity, grandeur, and emotion. The painting is quite large (110 x 200 cm) and shows a camel carcass in the foreground, a caravan on the horizon, and an empty desert in between. The emptiness is absolute. Even the image of the caravan looks more like a mirage than a real convoy. Paul de Saint-Victor made similarly positive remarks about the painting in *Moniteur universel*. Today, Gustave Guillaumet's works are exhibited in some of the world's most important museums, including the Musée d'Orsay, the Chrysler Museum of Art, and the National Gallery, London. One hundred and fourteen of his drawings are kept in the Cabinet des Arts graphiques du Louvre, and the Département des Estampes et de la photographie in the Bibliothèque nationale française preserves some of his prints, reproductions, and photographs. The lack of handwritten documents, letters or notes makes it difficult to study the genesis of the French painter's pictorial work and forces researchers to limit their analysis to the texts he published in journals and books.

II. GUILLAUMET AND THE INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION OF 1867

The International Exposition of 1867, whose full name was *Exposition universelle d'art et d'industrie*, was the seventh edition overall and the second world's fair to be organized in Paris, after the one held in 1855. Forty-one countries participated in the event, which took place from April 1 to November 3. Philippe Hamon has called it a "total" exposition, since the entire city was mobilized and put on display. As highlighted by contemporary critics, the widespread sentiment was a mixture of fascination and disquiet, something Guillaumet himself made clear: "the Champ de Mars exhibition puts the whole world in turmoil".⁷ Designed by architect-engineer Krantz and engineer Frédéric Le Play, the spatial logic behind the exposition was circular. A single building housed "several large circular iron and glass galleries, arranged concentrically and set one inside the other".⁸ As a whole, the exposition presented itself not only "as a painting summarizing the achievements of the time"⁹ but also as a circular and rectilinear "double-entry painting".¹⁰ Visitors were meant to cross the space in both directions and with two objectives: to search for the same kind of product from different countries or

7 G. Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie Imprimeurs-Editeurs, [1888] 1891), 242; "l'exposition du Champ de Mars [...] met en émoi le monde entier".

8 P. Hamon, *Expositions. Littérature et architecture au XIX siècle* (Paris: José Corti, 1989), 102; "une série de grandes galeries de fer et de verre circulaires, concentriques et enchâssées les unes dans les autres".

9 Hamon, *Expositions*, 102; "comme un 'tableau-bilan' des réalisations de l'époque".

10 Hamon, *Expositions*, 102; "tableau à double entrée".

to browse through the different products of each country. Overall, the effect was that of a labyrinthine space that was all-inclusive and in which everything had its place.¹¹

The 1867 International Exposition was also the first world's fair that gave prominence to the French colonies. While Algeria was assigned a predominant role,¹² the other colonies were represented as well, albeit gathered in a single section. As the editor of the catalog, the *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, pointed out regretfully, "to comply with the program they had to merge their richness into a single exposition, despite the great differences that distinguish them".¹³ As mentioned above, unlike those of the other colonies, the Algerian section was quite vast and extended along the entire left-hand side of the Dutch aisle. It represented an important gallery, which served to assess the consolidation of the French Empire as a colonial power in full expansion. One need only flip through the catalog to recognize this. The Algerian exposition was placed immediately after the French one to emphasize the desire for an ideological and territorial continuity between the two sides of the sea: "the exhibition dedicated to France ends on one side, on this shore of the Mediterranean, and [...] a new France begins on the other side, on the other shore of the Mediterranean".¹⁴

In this respect, it is worth remembering that the International Exposition took place at a crucial moment in France's policy toward Algeria, characterized by the shift from conquest to colonization. Napoleon III, who had risen to power in 1852, had not immediately implemented a proper colonial policy because Algeria's conquest had not yet been concluded, not to mention the fact that the prince-president wanted to move from the military phase to the creation of an "Arab kingdom". Both the actions of Napoleon III toward the old leaders of the Arab resistance and the official statements he made during trips to Algeria in 1860 and 1865 were intended to recognize the value and importance of the country's Arab component, albeit within an ideology that blended military honor with forms of paternalism. As he stated in Algiers on May 3, 1865, before a small group of colonists, "treat the Arabs, among whom you must live, as compatriots".¹⁵ Even the press covering the Exposition showed traces of this historical ambivalence. On

11 Hamon, *Expositions*, 102.

12 The importance given to Algeria and to the territories of the Arab world in the 1867 *Exposition* prepares, in some way, the first *Exposition d'art musulman*, that took place in Paris, at the *Palais de l'industrie* in 1893, in which several recently lost works (of the artist) were exhibited.

13 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée. Publication internationale autorisée par la Commission impériale*, vol. 2 (Paris: Bureaux d'Abonnements, 1867), 386; "[elles] ont dû, pour se conformer au programme, confondre leurs richesses en une seule exposition, malgré les grandes différences qui les distinguent".

14 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 182; "d'un côté finit l'exposition de la France, en deçà de la Méditerranée, et [...] de l'autre côté commence une France nouvelle, celle au-delà de la Méditerranée".

15 Quoted in B. Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale (1830-1954)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004), 18; "Traitez les Arabes, au milieu desquels vous devez vivre, comme des compatriotes".

the one hand, it stressed the “libéralité” and “générosité” that assigned “a prominent place to the Arab war arsenal”.¹⁶ On the other hand, it presented a substantially negative image of the idle Arab as compared to the hard-working Berber. The Exposition catalog – an international publication authorized by the imperial commission and directed by François Ducuing – presented Algeria as a land that was “partly Muslim, partly Christian, and still sparsely populated by Europeans colonists (around 250,000, not including the occupying army)”.¹⁷ Conquest of the territory was called “both legitimate and glorious”¹⁸ but above all “recommendable for its many benefits”.¹⁹ The catalog summarized these benefits and examined the products, the natural and secondary resources, and the ethnographic peculiarities of the colony, all on display for Exposition visitors. Of particular interest is the distinction made between Arabs and Berbers, which, though present, played a very different role in Guillaumet’s writings. As we know, the nineteenth century witnessed a real “growth of knowledge about colonized peoples: regular censuses, the collection of customs, systematic intelligence, ethnic classification, cartography, land-based ethnography, and the development of the colonial sciences”.²⁰

All this work foreshadowed a deliberate policy of differentiation intended to control the population by supporting certain “socio-cultural groups considered more deserving”²¹ and alluring prominent individuals. By endorsing the idea that “promotion, [...] association or [...] assimilation”²² was possible for the “good pupils of colonization”,²³ the notion of a desirable, if problematic, assimilation spread. Along the same lines, the *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée* allowed the “indigenous population of Algeria”²⁴ to be ethnographically distinguished as “Berber and not Arab”.²⁵ While “the pure Berber race is represented at the exposition by two young Kabils carving corks”,²⁶ the

16 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 238; “une place importante à l’arsenal de guerre des Arabes”.

17 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 182; “en partie musulmane, en partie chrétienne, encore peu peuplée de colons européens (250,000 environ, non compris l’armée d’occupation)”.

18 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 182; “aussi légitime que glorieuse”.

19 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 182; “recommandable par de nombreux services”.

20 *Les mots de la colonisation. XIXe-XXe siècles*, dirigé par S. Dulucq, J.-F. Klein, B. Stora (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail-Toulouse, 2008), 93; “accumulation de connaissances opératoires sur les peuples colonisés: recensements réguliers, recueil des coutumes, renseignement systématique, classification ethnique, cartographie, ethnographie de terrain, développement des sciences coloniales”.

21 *Les mots de la colonisation*, dirigé par Dulucq, Klein, Stora, 93; “groupes socio-culturels jugés plus méritants”.

22 *Les mots de la colonisation*, dirigé par Dulucq, Klein, Stora, 93; “promotion, [...] association ou [...] assimilation”.

23 *Les mots de la colonisation*, dirigé par Dulucq, Klein, Stora, 93.

24 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 182; “population indigène de l’Algérie”.

25 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 182; “est berbère et non arabe”.

26 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 182; “la race berbère pure est représentée à l’Exposition par deux jeunes Kabiles qui taillent des bouchons dans des lièges de leur pays”.

representatives of the Arab ethnic group were displayed in a different part of the Algerian section, so that, “in order to get acquainted with the Arab and his culture, the visitor [would] have to [...] leave the area of the Palais and move among the tents erected in the south-western part of the Park, near the Port de Grenelle”.²⁷

It was in this open space that he “[would] find a camp with six tents arranged in a circle, in the shape of a *douar*, around a group of kneeling camels and, in the largest tent, some sleeping camel drivers”.²⁸ The few colonists living in Algeria, some of whom had accompanied the exhibited goods to Paris, are also mentioned. These two descriptions, which could almost have been taken from any Orientalist catalog, offer an image of the French colony that is both realistic and picturesque. In fact, the visitor could only plunge into the Exposition through the intermediation of a pre-established and openly asserted image (“the Arab as portrayed by novelists and as he really is”).²⁹ The distinction between Berbers and Arabs centered on a double opposition between town-dweller/nomad and worker/“ennemi-né du travail” (“work foe from birth”).³⁰ Here the distinction reveals a political tension. On the one hand, Louis Napoleon aimed to be “the Emperor of both the Arabs and the French”.³¹ On the other hand, the ultra-colonialists and great landowners supported what would become “complete and utter submission of the work ties and workforce of its people to the needs and interests of colonization” after 1871.³²

The fact that the emir Abd-el-Kader and the Ottoman sultan Abdul Aziz were among the illustrious visitors to the 1867 Exposition certainly contributed to the ambivalent and ambiguous image of the Arab world therein. Their visits received a lot of press, with images and references included in various articles about the Exposition and specific publications.³³ In the French imagination, the emir Abd-el-Kader was not just the proud commander who had opposed the French army for fifteen years. He had also become an “ami des Français” (friend of the French), in addition to being a personal friend of

27 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 183; “pour faire connaissance avec l’Arabe et sa civilisation, le visiteur de l’Exposition devra [...] quitter l’enceinte du Palais et se rendre au milieu des tentes dressées dans la partie Sud-Ouest du Parc, près de la porte de Grenelle”.

28 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 183; “trouvera un campement de six tentes rangées circulairement, en forme d’un *douar*, autour d’un groupe de chameaux agenouillés, et, dans la plus grande des tentes, quelques chameliers endormis”.

29 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 183; “l’Arabe tel quel les romanciers les dépeignent, et tel qu’il est réellement”.

30 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 183.

31 Quoted in B. Stora, *Histoire de l’Algérie coloniale (1830-1954)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004), 19; “aussi bien l’empereur des Arabes que celui des Français”.

32 Stora, *Histoire de l’Algérie coloniale*, 20; “assujettissement absolu et complet des liens et de la force de travail de sa population aux besoins et intérêts de la colonisation”.

33 For example, the *Notice pour accompagner la médaille commémorative* published in the same year as the Exposition.

the Emperor, and was awarded the Legion of Honor in 1860 for having stopped the massacre of Christians in Damascus. The presence of the Arab visitors, famous or not, represented a veritable role reversal, since they had come to Paris as spectators and became themselves part of the spectacle as objects of public curiosity³⁴ to be put on display, with respect or with suspicion. Particularly telling in this regard is the mention made in the *Expositions illustrée* of the Ottoman sultan's presence at the Exposition alongside the Emperor. The second volume of the catalog also refers to the sultan's portrayal in "a fine portrait [...] beautifully sketched in black pencil by Ahmed A'ali Effendi".³⁵ Elsewhere in the catalog military honors are also conferred, to a certain extent, upon the former enemy, hinting at the presence of some "weapons abandoned by former Abd-el-Kader soldiers, of whom the last survivors are in Damascus".³⁶ Elsewhere still the commander is blamed for "cutting off the source [of an oasis] during a day of vengeance", after which "the palm trees, deprived of water, had dried-up; the sand, like leprosy, had corroded the gardens previously filled with pigeons who had swiftly escaped".³⁷

At the 1867 Exposition, Gustave Guillaumet showed the painting *Prière du soir dans le Sahara* (*Evening Prayer in the Sahara*) (1863), previously exhibited at the Salon of 1863 and now property of the Musée d'Orsay. The large (1.37 x 3.005 m) oil painting on canvas presents a traditional image, a perfect expression of the Orientalist style: a nomad encampment at dusk with some white figures praying, one with arms stretched to the sky, another one bowing, all facing the same direction, presumably toward Mecca. The pink-purple light, with the blue hills along the horizon, produces a special effect. It is important to note that the painting serves as a primary reference for one of the 23 chapters in *Tableaux algériens*. In fact, *Prière du soir dans le Sahara* is described in "Prière du soir", the tenth chapter of the posthumous volume. The narrator travels southwards, "in high summer"³⁸ with "a *spahi* for a guide, followed by a mule-driver".³⁹ After a day of walking in the desert and joining "a group of biblical-looking Arabs",⁴⁰ they reach "a

34 T. Mitchell, "The World as Exhibition", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31, 2 (April 1989): 217-236. See also Cristiana Baldazzi's essay in this volume.

35 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 2, "un beau portrait [...] dessiné magistralement au crayon noir par Ahmed A'ali Effendi".

36 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 238; "épaves de l'armement des anciens réguliers d'Abd-el-Kader, dont les derniers survivants sont à Damas".

37 *Exposition universelle de 1867 illustrée*, 474; "coup[er] les sources [d'une oasis], dans un jour de vengeance. Les palmiers, privés d'eau, s'étaient séchés: les sables, comme une lèpre, avaient rongé les jardins, la veille pleins de colombes qui avaient fui à tire-d'aile".

38 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 87; "en plein coeur d'été".

39 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 87; "un *spahi* pour guide, et suivi d'un muletier".

40 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 89; "un groupe d'arabes [...] d'allures bibliques".

douar of nomads”⁴¹ whose “*brown-striped tents arranged in circle*”.⁴² At nightfall, while the women and the shepherds gather the flock, “a vibrant male voice rises. It modulates the appeal to prayer as in a chant, repeated four times in echoes and ending with long and resonant notes”.⁴³ At the same time, “behind them the halo of the setting sun still reddens the white clothes and blue reflections fall from heights of the zenith in the sky onto all the backs bowing to the ground”.⁴⁴

The article that Guillaumet dedicated to the 1867 International Exposition was published as the penultimate chapter of the *Tableaux algériens*, “Un Caïd à Paris”. Originally printed between 1880 and 1884 as an article in the *Revue française*, the story is set in Paris in 1867. Significantly, the original article was published about fifteen years after the Exposition to which it is devoted, and just a few years after the 1878 Exposition, as though to emphasize the enduring influence of the event, not to mention all the related exhibits. The story recounts the visit to Paris of Si-Ladkar-ben-Saoui to request the Legion of Honor. After arriving at the narrator’s home with a letter of introduction signed *De S...*, *Commandant supérieur* (in which the sender strongly discourages the recipient from granting the request), the young chief of the Algerian tribal territory of Beni-Ouassine is accompanied on a visit to the *Exposition universelle*. After much insistence, he manages to ensure that his French host serves “the need for a secretary [to grant] the request”.⁴⁵ Obviously the desire of this “chief full of illusory expectations”⁴⁶ goes unfulfilled and the *marabout* returns to Algeria disappointed and vexed, without the honors he yearns for. The story has a melodramatic epilogue whereby the French narrator returns to the “province of Oran, the least frequented by tourists”,⁴⁷ despite being “interesting for its customs and traditions as yet unchanged by our proximity”,⁴⁸ and learns that Si-Lakdar-ben-Saoui’s life had ended miserably, as a beggar who died alone in his tent.

The entire story presents some useful elements for understanding the attitude of this Frenchman in his search of a “true Algeria”. When he goes to stay in the oldest part of

41 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 89; “un douar de nomades”.

42 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 89; “tentes, zébrées de bandes brunes, forment le cercle”.

43 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 90; “une voix d’homme s’élève, vibrante. Elle module, ainsi qu’un chant, l’appel à la prière, quatre fois répété aux échos, et dont les terminaisons meurent en notes longues et sonores”.

44 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 91; “derrière eux l’auréole du soleil disparu empourpre encore la transparence des vêtements blancs, et que, des hauteurs du zénith, le ciel laisse tomber des reflets d’azur sur tous les dos courbés vers la terre”.

45 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 239; “au besoin de *krodja* (secrétaire) pour la requête”.

46 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 239; “chef plein d’illusions”.

47 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 259; “province d’Oran, la moins fréquentée du touriste”.

48 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 259; “intéressante par ses moeurs, par ses traditions, que notre voisinage n’a pas encore altéré”.

the white “Djézaïr des Arabes”,⁴⁹ he looks regretfully at the “loss of poetic traditions”,⁵⁰ which seems to be “everywhere the price of the progress of humanity”.⁵¹ In the story we encounter expressions of anxiety and attraction regarding the exhibition, receptiveness and curiosity regarding the foreign guest, and sensitivity and complacency regarding the human drama. The beginning and the end convey a situation of superiority that is more symbolic than spatial. Indeed, the tale begins with the narrator’s gaze from above (“from my window I witnessed the slow awakening of a Sunday morning”),⁵² presented as the gaze of an omniscient observer even though in first person. This gaze will lead us into the story and guide us through both the city and the panoptic device that will turn out to be the Exposition. In the end, it is always Guillaumet’s voice that reveals the moral: “Today these stones without epitaph remind themselves of the course of this human existence, which like a comet carried out of its axis had gone through Paris only to return and extinguish itself, at thirty years of age, on the land that the *caïd* should never have left”.⁵³

In fact, the narrative dynamic aims to keep the narrator’s voice in an apparently external position with regard to both the foreign guest and the Parisian context. Only through this estrangement, which takes its distance from the external world so to speak, can Guillaumet seize upon the profound significance of the narrated story. The narrator, who is used to traveling in territories precluded to tourists, differs not only from the “two Arabs whose clothes broke the gray harmony of the street”,⁵⁴ but also from the “onlookers who peered curiously at their get-ups”.⁵⁵ The opening of the story is built on the presentation of a duo that is both real and symbolic. The theoretically comic potential of this pair (the *caïd* and his assistant) will be suspended throughout the story to make room for some true comedy in one case, a contrast between the two actors in another case, and, when the lens closes in on the young *caïd* back in Algeria, a feeling of sympathetic commiseration. As is customary with theatrical couplings, while the two share ethnic origins the difference in their roles is emphasized by a physical and social

49 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 272.

50 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 272; “perte des traditions poétiques”.

51 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 272; “partout le prix des progrès de l’humanité”.

52 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 223; “J’assistais, de ma fenêtre, au lent réveil du dimanche”.

53 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 264; “Ces pierres sans épitaphe rappellent seules aujourd’hui le passage de cette existence humaine qui, ainsi qu’une comète entraînée hors de son axe, avait traversé Paris, pour revenir s’éteindre tristement, à trente ans, sur la terre que le *caïd* n’aurait jamais dû quitter”.

54 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 223; “deux Arabes dont le costume tranchait dans l’harmonie grise de la rue”.

55 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 223; “badauds qui considéraient d’un regard curieux leur accoutrement”.

asymmetry. One of the characters is “six feet tall, dressed in the red uniform of a *spahi*”,⁵⁶ and he accompanies a “stocky but sturdy” *caïd*.⁵⁷ The *caïd* seems to socially dominate the *spahi*, who carries his luggage and acts as his interpreter. As the story progresses, the roles reverse and the *caïd* demonstrates his own inadequacy, while his companion proves shrewder and, more importantly, better attuned to the colonial mechanism. The *spahi* even openly criticizes his superior. At a certain point, he says to the narrator, “Don’t worry about this savage. He knows nothing. He’s an idiot”.⁵⁸ Even the visit to the Exposition will transform the chief of the Beni-Ouassine – there to attend an exhibit of products from around the world – into a spectacle to be witnessed with amusement and curiosity. The International Exposition appears as a “whirlwind”⁵⁹ of men, objects, and buildings in which a truly cosmopolitan city has been reconstructed “of palaces, improvised gardens, café-concerts, restaurants, beerhouses, [and] works of art and industry are installed here and there around the buildings alongside the inventions of men”.⁶⁰ Confronted by the world’s diversity, the Arab becomes distressed. At first he is frightened by the “collection of machines whose rotating mechanisms deafen the ears”⁶¹ and only “the atmosphere of the gardens can happily bring him back to his senses”.⁶² Then the “childish forms, supple as she-cats” of some Japanese restore his vigor. Meanwhile, he seems almost indifferent to “the many things brought together to please the eyes”.⁶³ He finally finds something that truly interests him in the Arab section (“he walks by without remarking on a thing, except for the Caire artisans in the Egyptian bazaar or the palace of the Bey of Tunis, whose Oriental luxury momentarily delights his eyes”).⁶⁴ At the Moorish café, he is treated as a “grand seigneur”⁶⁵ by those present, who reassure him “with a shower of salutations”.⁶⁶ “Among this group of people

56 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 224; “haut de six pieds, vêtu de l’uniforme rouge des *spahis*”.

57 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 224; “trapu, mais bien pris sur sa taille”.

58 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 244; “Ne te tourmente pas pour ce sauvage. Il ne connaît rien. C’est un imbécile”.

59 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 242.

60 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 242-243; “de palais, de jardins improvisés, de cafés-concerts, de restaurants, de brasseries, installés çà et là autour des bâtiments sont exposées, avec les inventions des hommes, les œuvres de l’art et de l’industrie”.

61 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 243; “assemblage de machines dont le mécanisme en rotation assourdit l’oreille”.

62 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 243; “l’air des jardins lui fait heureusement retrouver le sens”.

63 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 244; “tant de choses réunies pour l’agrément des yeux”.

64 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 245; “[il] passe sans rien remarquer, hors les artisans du Caire au bazar égyptien, ou le palais du bey de Tunis, dont le luxe oriental charme un moment ses yeux”.

65 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 245.

66 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 245; “sous une pluie de salamalecs”.

of his own race”⁶⁷ the young man feels more confident and “speaks with mastery”,⁶⁸ while onlookers “kiss the tail of his burnoose whenever he offers a round of coffee”.⁶⁹ Let us leave aside the irony in Guillaumet’s descriptions and focus on the mechanism that transforms the young Si-Lakdar-ben-Saoui from character-as-spectator to character-as-spectacle (indeed spectacular). The young *caïd* becomes a sort of person-object put on display within the Exposition. The narrator resorts to a narrative strategy whereby initial disorder is followed by the construction of a final order. While it is true that these same feelings characterized the gaze and sensations of European visitors, all the publications dedicated to the Expositions were in fact meant to lead visitors from disorder to order. Yet, it is striking that there is no redemption for the Oriental visitor. The Oriental traveler will never come to represent the gaze through which the spectacle is seen and reconstructed. Only through an Orient that has no value will he be able to recover his peace of mind and make sense of the world again. Furthermore, and this is key, he will only do this at the cost of becoming an actor himself. To underscore the falsity of it all, the narrative voice will underscore the *caïd*’s choice to present his least favorite wives with fake gold jewelry, thus resorting to an irony that surreptitiously involves the reader in an aesthetic and moral judgment. Ultimately, his trip to Paris – the very heart of the colonial empire – will prove to be just the beginning of a drama that inevitably ends with the protagonist’s death.

III. THE *TABLEAUX ALGÉRIENS*: THE PAINTINGS OF AN EXPOSITION

Gustave Guillaumet never took an anti-colonial stance in his writing. Even the epilogue of the story “Un *caïd* à Paris” seems to demonstrate a condition of subalternity, which can only be escaped through condemnation. All honors, medals and jewelry are, or at least seem, fake. Everything serves to construct the representation of an inescapable world.⁷⁰ The colonized subject cannot change his condition, and the role of the conniving colonized subject in the artist-writer’s story, played by the indigenous auxiliary figure accompanying the *caïd*, is obscure rather than cynical. Acting as an intermediary between two worlds and therefore equipped with a know-how unusual

67 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 245; “Au milieu de cette petite cour d’hommes de sa race”.

68 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 245; “parle en maître”.

69 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 245; “[ils] baisent le pan de son burnous chaque fois qu’il les régale de quelque tournée de café”.

70 On the other hand, a century had to pass before Albert Memmi, in his *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1957), would reveal the paradox of a colonial society that claims redemption for the colonised subject, but who in fact cannot allow herself to make this come true.

among Guillaumet's compatriots, he must simultaneously remain aloof and be a shadow, an alter ego of the *caïd* and of the French. The 'evil colonized one' is set up against the 'good one'. The former is evil because he is inadequate; the latter is good because he refrains from undermining, through unseemly behavior, the good organization of the colonial and exhibition-related mechanism.

It would nonetheless be easy to dismiss Guillaumet and his work as products of an inexorable, intolerable (and intolerant) colonial mechanism. Guillaumet did not know, and could not give voice to, the colonized. We will have to await decolonization to find a colonist of goodwill who wishes to try this (e.g. Albert Camus, Jean Pélégri, etc). It was impossible for Guillaumet to go that far. He lived during the wrong time. History had not yet developed the cultural codes required for such an achievement, however problematic. For Guillaumet, the world was simple. Colonization was useful and necessary and Algeria was an Arab and military territory, still devoid of colonists. He rarely mentioned colonists in his writing, and only indirectly represented them in his art. Guillaumet lacked Flaubert's disdainful gaze, which viewed colonists as disturbing the old, picturesque image of the Orient (which led Flaubert to write what would become a famous expression in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*: "COLONIES (nos): S'attrister quand on en parle" ["Our colonies: we grow sad when we talk about them"]). For Guillaumet, not only was the colony necessary but colonists also had a very difficult and important task, which could only be carried out "if they do not fold their arms at the first obstacle".⁷¹ Simply put, if it is true that he went to the Orient to find what he had left at home,⁷² then his purpose was not to represent an old-fashioned world or a mysterious Orient but rather, to paraphrase Courbet, "to represent the customs, ideas, and appearance" of the new France lying south of the Mediterranean. In fact, the Orient as a symbolic place for Antiquity is a persisting feature in Guillaumet's art and writing. As he writes, the "Moroccan mountaineers from Béni-Snassen are recognizable for their very robust limbs, the black pigtailed hanging on their napes, and especially for the noble way they toss the end of their haïks over their shoulders, looking like Romans dressed in togas".⁷³ However, they are not alone, so to speak. On the contrary, they gradually make way for another image, one in which a Realist aesthetic accompanies a sharing of the drama. This sharing involves human emotions rather than political or ideological bias. Guillaumet exhibited paintings like *Le Labourage* and *La Famine en Algérie* at the

71 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 40; "[s'ils] ne se croisent pas les bras devant les premiers obstacles".

72 "On retrouve encore bien plus qu'on ne trouve"; Flaubert, *Correspondence*, au docteur J. Cloquet, le 15 janvier 1850.

73 Guillaumet, *Tableaux algériens*, 112; "[les] montagnards marocains des Béni-Snassen, se reconnaissent à leurs membres robustes, à la tresse de cheveux noirs qui leur tombe sur la nuque, et surtout à cette façon noble de jeter par-dessus l'épaule l'extrémité du haïk, ressemblant ainsi à des Romains drapés dans leur toge".

1869 Salon. That same year, in an article for *Illustration*, Théophile Gautier analyzed and expressed his appreciation for these paintings, which would later form the basis for the stories “Les labours” and “La famine”. Once again, the written text echoes the figurative work, constituting both an explanation and an amplification.

According to Timothy Mitchell, the mechanism of the world’s fairs, deployed alongside the great nineteenth-century expositions, is based on the construction of a labyrinthine space from which it is impossible to free oneself. Representations assert themselves as plausible, and the exhibition apparatus tends to incorporate any potentially external element. Indeed, the great expositions grow ever larger, they include an ever-growing number of objects, and they divide into increasingly specialized sections. Images of the world beyond Europe multiply inside and outside the exhibition spaces and are thereby incorporated into the same device that objectifies the world as an item on display. The development of Orientalism belongs to this same pattern of appropriating the unknown, which tends to incorporate anything that was originally external. A visitor to the actual Orient carries out various strategies that allow him to find order in a collection of data and a territory whose laws he does not know; he dives into an unknown reality in search of contact, but ultimately remains an outsider. Once again, what follows are the same ambivalent feelings of fascination and repulsion, exaltation and criticism referred to above. The narrative that leads to the Orient must be plausible. The traveler must therefore erase his own presence. Yet, paradoxically, the same traveler finds himself forced to put his own gaze (his own perspective, his own ideology) at the center of the representation. While erasing himself may guarantee authenticity, mythologizing contact with and immersion in the Orient only exacerbates the individualistic aspects of the image: exotic for some, bizarre for others, tragic and moving for Guillaumet. Orientalism is built on this contradiction. Traveling to the Orient becomes traveling to an International Exposition *en plein air*, and the visitor who crosses that space in order to learn about an unknown world will never truly understand. Driven by the urge to expand the world on display, the Oriental traveler enhances, so to speak, the effect of the filter through which he sees the world. His attitude is at once romantic, archaizing, exoticizing, realist, and dreamlike. All artists and writers have their own unique features, their own way of fitting into this pattern. Without ever freeing himself from an underlying exoticism, Guillaumet sought scenes in which contact with reality is mediated by empathy and the sharing of a social and individual drama. It is an entirely emotional sharing that leaves no room for ideological critiques of colonization; on the contrary, it provides grounds to justify it. Guillaumet’s gaze legitimizes a world on display over which he, as a European, can exert some control; but it is also a world that, as a painter and an exhibitor of pictorial works, he penetrates and gets lost in.

Legend has it that Guillaumet died gazing at his Orientalist paintings – a final, definitive plunge into a world he had not only helped showcase but in which he himself had been an actor rather than a director.