Transgressive Desire:
A Comparison Between the Subversive Thoughts of Oscar Wilde and the Role of Inconsistency in the Orientalist Works of Pierre Loti

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Introduction: contradictions in Loti's life and work

One of the main criticisms directed at Pierre Loti is that he constantly appears to contradict himself. Inconsistency is seen as one of his defining characteristics. The response of critics to this apparent weakness has been varied. Some choose to dismiss it, as the incomprehensible whim of an otherwise great man, who should be allowed our indulgence. This is the case with biographer Leslie Blanch when she remarks in mock despair that 'Loti's character is so tangled a mass of contradictions, disguises and pirouettes that his biographer ceases to analyze and can only record' (Blanch, p.123). Others have refused this whitewash and have instead had what amounts to the opposite reaction, using examples of behavior and attitudes to which they object to dismiss claims as to the artistic merit of his work. This approach is most notably used by Tzvetan Todorov in his powerful indictment of Loti for the racism he sees in *Le Roman d'un spahi* (*A Spahi's Story*) [1881]. This he describes as 'un livre raciste et impérialiste, sexiste et sadique' ('a racist, imperialist, sexist and sadistic book'), proving the hypocrisy behind Loti's constant railing against colonialism and westernization (Todorov, p.354). Another approach is the acceptance of inconsistencies, which are seen as regrettable, but essentially irrelevant to an appreciation of his artistic achievement. This is the strategy preferred

by Alain Buisine who consciously separates the artist and his dubious behavior from his works, most notably so in his 'biography' *Pierre Loti et son double* (*Pierre Loti and his Double*), where he concentrates on literary themes. In pursuing this approach Buisine earns the ire of Loti biographer Alain-Quella-Villéger: 'Alain Buisine a choisi son camp : "il continue à [lui] sembler fort difficile de sauver biographiquement Pierre Loti : son indispensable réévaluation en passera d'abord par son écriture". Pourquoi, au nom de quelle manichéisme, faudrait-il séparer l'un de l'autre?' ('Alain Buisine has chosen his position: "it continues to seem very difficult for him to save Loti biographically: his indispensable reevaluation will start with his writing." Why, in the name of what Manicheism, must we separate one from the other?') (Quella-Villéger, p.12). This indignant defense is made in part as a justification for the very detailed biographical study that follows, in which Quella-Villéger exhaustively repudiates, with reference to a wealth of historical documentation, all the attacks that critics have made. Despite his efforts, however, there remains a high level of discomfort with many aspects of Loti's work and the life of the man it often purports to represent. One way to reconcile inconsistencies and contradictions in Loti's work has been to look at the unconscious urges that lie behind them, as I have indeed done in my book *Pierre Loti and the Theatricality of Desire*. This approach has had the inevitable effect of returning his puzzling behavior to centre stage, as opposed to ignoring or justifying it, or alternatively using it as an excuse for blanket condemnation of his work. This approach is, however, also open to questioning, as although it may help to explain away inconsistency with the complexity of unconscious urges, it fails to allow that in some cases this inconsistency may in actuality be a deliberate choice. If intentional, behavior that might be seen as a sign of immaturity may instead have to be interpreted, quite to the contrary, as part of a conscious effort to say something of serious import. Given the deliberate transgression of social norms that can be seen in his "Oriental" cultural cross-dressing, and the often shockingly openly erotic content of his writing, this

should be considered as a possibility.

Transgressive Desire: Oscar Wilde

To assess the subversive character and potential of Loti's work it is useful to make a comparison with two contemporary writers whose work was similarly controversial. In *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, Jonathan Dollimore compares the transgressive nature of the work of Oscar Wilde and that of André Gide. Both are reacting to a society repressive of their (homo)sexuality, just as Loti can be seen to be doing. They differ from each other, however, in their perception of how freedom from this repression can be achieved. Dollimore shows how 'Gide was deeply disturbed by Wilde' who seemed 'intent on undermining [his] self-identity' (Dollimore, p.3). This self-identity is described as 'rooted […] in a Protestant ethic and high bourgeois moral rigour and repression which generated a kind of conformity which Wilde scorned.' To 're-enact in Gide the creative liberation – which included strong criminal identification – which his own exploration of transgressive desire had enabled', Wilde felt he needed to 'undermine the lawful sense of self which kept Gide transfixed within the law' (p.4). To do this 'Wilde tried to decentre or demoralise Gide – "demoralise" in the sense of liberate from moral constraint rather than dispirit; or rather to dispirit precisely in the sense of to liberate from a morality anchored in the very notion of spirit.' The idea of this necessity illustrates Wilde's awareness 'of how exploitation is crucially a question of ideological mystification, and the subjective internalisation of ideology', of how ideology 'reaches into experience and identity, re-emerging as "voluntary" self-oppression' (p.7). For Wilde, freedom on an individual level requires freedom from social constraints. Dollimore quotes Wilde from his essay 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' [1891] to make this point: 'individualism as Wilde conceives it generates a "[d]isobedience [which] in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's

original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion"' (p.8). In this way 'there comes to be a close relationship between crime and individualism', in other words 'Wilde's notion of individualism is inseparable from transgressive desire and a transgressive aesthetic.' This desire and aesthetic explain Wilde's attacks on 'public opinion, mediocrity and conventional morality' which effectively forbid them.

For Wilde the 'public voice which [he] scorns is that which seeks to police culture' (Dollimore, p.8). Expression of what is aesthetically unconventional is met with either the accusation 'that the work of art is unintelligible' or that it is 'grossly immoral' ('The Soul of Man under Socialism', p.273). Wilde is not, however, pointing to 'the true nature or essence of man', as his conception of individualism is that it 'will generate the cultural difference and diversity which conventional morality, orthodox opinion, and essentialist ideology disavow' (Dollimore, p.8). This idea is summed up in Wilde's axiom '*Selfishness is not living as one wants to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live*' ('Soul', p.285). Individualism is in this way equated with 'unselfishness', which 'recognizes infinite variety of type as a delightful thing'. It is positioned in direct opposition to 'the immoral idea of uniformity of type and conformity to rule' (p.286). In advocating the abolition of conformity, Wilde's concept of individuality reveals its political aspect: 'Individualism is both a desire for a radical *personal freedom* and a desire for *society itself* to be radically different, the first being inseparable from the second' (Dollimore, p.9). This is where Wilde's ideas diverge dramatically from 'the concept [of the individual] which signifies the private, experientially self-sufficient, autonomous but ultimately quietist, bourgeois subject'. He rejects the idea of such self-absorption with the memorable dictum 'Personal experience is a most vicious and limited circle' ('The Decay of Lying', p.310). Elsewhere he urges that 'to know anything about oneself one must know all about others' ('The Artist as Critic', p.382). There

is no constant essential subjectivity, as Wilde insists that 'the only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes. Change is the one quality we can predicate of it ('Soul', p.284). Wilde reluctantly does accept the existence of 'that dreadful universal thing called human nature' ('Decay', p.297), making the 'humiliating confession [that] we are all of us made out of the same stuff", but focuses on the need to defeat such banal reality: 'what is interesting about people […] is the mask that each of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask.' For Wilde, what is important is the effort we make to assert our differences.

Wilde argues that it is the task of Art to challenge society's conventions: 'Art is Individualism and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit' ('Soul', p.272). It is, 'like individualism, […] orientated towards the realm of transgressive desire' (Dollimore, p.11). This is summed up in the maxim in 'A few Maxims for the Instruction of the Overeducated': 'What is abnormal in Life stands in normal relations to Art. It is the only thing in Life that stands in normal relations to Art' (*The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.1203). The artist is a 'cultured and fascinating liar' ('Decay', p.305), who 'is important because he or she contradicts not just conventional morality, but its sustaining origin, "truth"' (Dollimore, p.11). The artist and the lies he tells are portrayed in terms of the liberating expression of a transgressive desire: 'Art, breaking free from the prison-house of realism, will run to greet him, and will kiss his false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone is in possession of the great secret that Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style' ('Decay', p.305). Wilde is rhetorically subordinating 'Truth, the epistemological legitimation of the real', to its 'antithesis – appearance, style, the lie', so it is 'simultaneously both appropriated, perverted, and displaced' (Dollimore, p.11). As for 'Life – poor, probable, uninteresting human life', it is left to 'follow meekly after [the artist]. And try to produce, in her own simple and

untutored way, some of the marvels of which he talks' ('*Decay*', p.305). It 'can only find expression through the forms which art offers it' (Dollimore, p.11). This subordination implies that 'supposed natural cause [is merely] cultural effect.' Wilde shows the implications of this in 'The Critic as Artist' where he insists that 'Form is the beginning of things':

> The Creeds are believed, not because they are rational, but because they are repeated. Yes: Form is everything. It is the secret of life. Find expression for a sorrow, and it will become dear to you. Find expression for a joy, and you intensify its ecstasy. Do you wish to love? Use Love's Litany, and the words will create the yearning from which the world fancies that they spring. (p.399)

Here Wilde is recognizing 'the priority of the social and the cultural in determining not only public meaning but "private" or subjective desire' (Dollimore, p.11). The implication of this is that 'although desire is deeply at odds with society in its existing forms, it does not exist as a pre-social authenticity; it is always within, and informed by, the very culture which it also transgresses.'

Transgressive Desire: André Gide

Wilde's anti-essentialism stands in clear contrast to the essentialism which characterizes the French writer André Gide's transgression of social "norms". Gide realizes the need to free himself from the bonds of social control. He expresses this in *Si le Grain ne meurt* (*Unless the Grain Dies/If it Die*) [1920] in terms of the myth of Prometheus. He has to rid himself of the chains that restrain him, in order to no longer feel the gnawing of remorse: 'J'étais pareil à Prométhéé qui s'étonnait qu'on pût vivre sans aigle et sans se laisser dévorer' ('I was like Prometheus who was astonished that one could live without an eagle and without letting oneself

be devoured) (Gide, p.269). Liberation comes from a questioning and consequent refusal of the values of his Puritan education: 'Au nom de quel Dieu, de quel idéal me défendez-vous de vivre selon ma nature? Et cette nature, où m'entraînerait-elle, si simplement je la suivait?' ('In the name of what God, of what ideology do you forbid me to live according to my nature? And this nature, where would it take me, if I simply followed it?'). It is at this point, however, that Gide's rebellion diverges from that of Wilde. Dollimore describes how 'having allowed Wilde to subvert an identity which had hitherto successfully, albeit precariously, repressed desire, Gide does not then substitute for it the decentred subjectivity which animates Wilde's own aesthetic' (Dollimore, pp.12-13). He instead 'reconstitutes himsef as an essentially new self' (p.13). He reconciles his previously double nature with the belief that God does not require him to deny his "true nature" : 'Mais j'en vins alors à douter si Dieu même exigeait de telles contraintes; s'il n'était pas impie de regimber sans cesse, et si ce n' était pas contre Lui; si, dans cette lute où je me divisais, je devais raisonnablement donner tort à l'autre' ('But I came to doubt that God even demanded such constraint; if it wasn't impious to constantly resist, and if it wasn't against Him; if in this struggle in which I was dividing myself in two, I should reasonably think my other half wrong') (*Grain*, p.269). Assertion of his right to self-realization leads to a radical revision of his concept of self. Forcing himself to live according to a false set of rules had a profoundly upsetting effect on him: 'Pour m'efforcer de m'y soumettre, je n'avais obtenu qu'un profound désarroi de tout mon être' (By forcing myself to give in, I had only achieved a profound sense of confusion'). No longer divided by this unnecessary struggle, he is free to pursue the true harmony of his sense of self: 'J'entrevis enfin que ce dualism discordant pourrait peût-être bien se résoudre en une harmonie' ('I finally saw that this discordant dualism could perhaps resolve itself into a harmony'). The pursuit of this harmony becomes the main goal of his life: 'Tout aussitôt il m'apparut que cette harmonie devait être mon but souverain, et de chercher à l'obtenir la sensible

raison de ma vie' ('Instantly I realized that this harmony should be my ultimate goal, and my quest for it my very reason for living') (pp.269-70). Gide describes this search for self as the true object of his journey to the "Oriental" paradise of Algeria: 'Quand en octobre 93, je m'embarquai pour l'Algérie, ce n'est point tant vers une terre nouvelle, mais bien vers *cela*, vers cette toison d'or, que me précipitait mon élan' ('When in October of 93 I embarked for Algeria, it wasn't at all towards a new country, but towards *that*, towards that golden fleece that I was being hurried') (p.270). This quest for self-fulfillment requires the "Oriental"/Algerian setting to serve as an escape from the cultural constraints of Europe. His concept of self is of a pre-social essence, obtainable only outside the bounds of the society which has hitherto been the cause of his self-repression: 'Culture has repressed this authentic self and the individual embarks on a quest to uncover it, a quest which is also an escape from culture' (Dollimore, p.13).

Subversion and Insincerity

For Dollimore the contrast between Gide and Wilde is clear. Whereas for Gide 'deviant desire' creates 'a new integrity of self', for Wilde it 'actually decentres or disperses the self' (Dollimore, p.14). For Wilde 'experience of deviant desire […] leads him not to escape the repressive ordering of society, but to a reinscription within it, and an inversion of the binaries upon which that ordering depends; desire, and the transgressive aesthetic which it fashions, reacts against, disrupts, and displaces from within.' His transgression serves a diametrically opposed purpose to that of Gide:

> For Gide transgression is in the name of a desire and identity rooted in the natural, the sincere, and the authentic; Wilde's transgressive aesthetic is the reverse: insincerity inauthenticity, and unnaturalness become the liberating

> attributes of decentred identity and desire, and inversion becomes central to Wilde's expression of this aesthetic […].

Dollimore identifies 'the most general inversion in [Wilde's] work [as that which] operates on the most dominating of binaries, nature/culture' and gives a list of substitutions:

X	for	Y
surface		depth
lying		truth
change		stasis
difference		essence
persona/role		essential self
abnormal		normal
insincerity		sincerity
facetious		serious
narcissism		maturity

(Dollimore, p.15)

For Gide the desire he feels 'may be proscribed but this does not affect its authenticity or its naturalness', in fact quite to the contrary it is 'society which is inauthentic.' In other words 'deviant desire is legitimated in terms of culture's opposite, nature'. This means that 'Gide shares with the dominant culture an investment in the Y column […]; he appropriates its categories for the subordinate.' For Wilde, on the other hand, 'transgressive desire is both rooted in culture and the impetus for affirming different/alternative kinds of culture (X column).' This would seem to be a contradiction, as 'desire which culture outlaws itself [remains] thoroughly cultural'. This 'shared cultural dimension' enables Wilde to 'enact one

of the most disturbing of all forms of transgression, namely that whereby the outlaw turns up as inlaw, and the other as proximate proves more disturbing than the other as absolute difference.' Wilde reinstates that 'which society forbids *through and within* some of its most cherished and central cultural categories – art, the aesthetic, art criticism, individualism.' He 'appropriates those categories' and simultaneously 'transvalues them through perversion and inversion'. They 'now signify those binary exclusions (X column) by which the dominant culture knows itself', meaning that 'abnormality is not just the opposite, but the necessarily always present antithesis of normality'. Dollimore remarks that this inversion is a '(perversely) appropriate strategy for a transgressive desire which is of its "nature", according to this culture, an "inversion".'

Dollimore continues his analysis of Wilde's strategy of inversion, showing how 'he insistently subverts those dominant categories which signify subjective depth' (Dollimore, p.15). The categories, those in the Y column, are used to 'ideologically identify (inform) the mature adult individual' (pp.15-16). They 'operate in terms of their inferior opposite', a character trait being confirmed by what it is not and what it must not be. Through Wilde's inversion 'the excluded inferior term returns as the now superior' one (p.16). One example given is a passage in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1891] where the concept of insincerity is brought into question:

> Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities. Such, at any rate, was Dorian Gray's opinion. He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion […].
> (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, pp.174-5)

Transgressive desire inverts the 'categories of subjective depth [here of sincerity] which hold in place the dominant order which proscribes that desire' (Dollimore, p.16). Dorian's inversion of the accepted views of sincerity and shallowness acts as a part of his strategy to experience a wide range of sensual pleasures. The 'intimate connection between perversity and paradox' seen here is an illustration of Wilde's remark on this link in *De Profundis*, the letter he wrote from Reading Gaol in 1897 to Lord Alfred Douglas: 'What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion' (*De Profundis*, p.152). To put it simply, this close association arises from the concept of eroticism being 'definitive of the truth of our being', and as such 'in its normative forms [constituting] a "truth" connecting inextricably with other truths and norms not explicitly sexual' (Dollimore, p.309). The threat posed by erotic deviance is that 'in deviating from normative truth and the "nature" that underpins it, such deviance shifts and confuses the norms of truth and being throughout culture.' The 'inextricable connection' between erotic perversion and social subversion are in this way 'simultaneously confirmed and exploited' by Wilde's transgressive aesthetic.

Transgressive Desire: Pierre Loti and the "Orient"

The complexity of the persona Loti presents would seem to align his experience of transgressive desire more with that of Wilde, in which a sense of identity is decentered, rather than with that experienced by Gide which strives towards the recognition of an essential self. The presence of so much inconsistency in Loti's work would seem to rule out a parallel with Gide, although, as Dollimore notes, Gide does accept the existence of contradiction (Dollimore, p.76). Whilst searching for his "true essence" Gide admits that the search is not straightforward. In answering a criticism from his friend Roger Martin du Grand, he writes that in trying to be 'naturel' ('natural') he tends to oversimplify: 'Sans doute un besoin

de mon esprit m'amène, pour tracer plus purement chaque trait, à simplifier tout à l'excès' ('Doubtless my mind makes me oversimplify everything to more clearly understand each characteristic') (*Grain*, p.267). He recognizes the inevitably selective nature of this oversimplification and acknowledges his struggle to represent what is much more complex: 'on ne dessine pas sans choisir; mais le plus gênant c'est de devoir présenter comme successifs des états de simultanéité confuse. Je suis un être de dialogue; tout en moi combat et se contredit. […] tout est toujours plus compliqué qu'on ne le dit.' ('one can't draw without choosing, but the annoying part is to have to show as successive what is confused simultaneity. My existence is a dialogue; everything in me fights and contradicts itself. […] everything is always more complicated than we're told.') Gide's acceptance here of 'the conflict and contradictions of experience' (Dollimore, p.76) does not imply, however, that his experience can be used as a parallel to that of Loti. Contradictions, whilst acknowledged in passing, are left out for a purpose. His ultimate 'belief in sincerity and naturalness of self' lead to a strategy of 'simplification in pursuit of purity'. Contradictions in Loti's work, far from being carefully edited out, occupy instead a quite prominent position.

Wilde's focus on disobedience, on a liberation from moral restraints, would appear to offer a closer parallel with Loti. Loti's outrageous and quite deliberate flouting of dress codes, despite his military rank and social position, seems to correspond with Wilde's rejection of social pressure to conform. Loti's adoption of various costumes from different "Oriental" countries has been used, by contemporaries and critics alike, as an illustration of his lack of maturity. The confusion of societal and cultural boundaries which his social/cultural cross-dressing caused leads to its condemnation, either as a childish form of practical joking, or as a sign of inadequacy, of a lack of a clear sense of his own personality. This perception of his confusing behavior echoes the reception given to Wilde's inversion

of the surface/depth binary. Dollimore shows how Wilde's critics take sides, finding him to be '*really* sincere' or '*really* inadequate', in other words presenting him 'in terms of the conventional identities – ethical, psychological, and sexual – which he challenged' (Dollimore, p.77). For Dollimore, on the other hand, 'Wilde's aesthetic was not so much a self-concealment as an attempted liberation from "self" – and what was at issue here was less his actual self, than selfhood as culturally and oppressively conceived.' Similarly with Loti, it is possible to view his theatrical adoption of different "Oriental" costumes and personas as a rejection of the oppressive bourgeois identity to which he was expected to conform. Viewed in this way, Loti's "Orientalist" social/cultural transvestism is neither childish nor a sign of inadequacy but can instead be seen as a rejection of the societal values which form the basis of such judgements. The desire to identify the "real" Wilde seen here can be seen as similar to the frustration felt by critics faced with Loti's contradictions and inconsistencies. The confusion caused by both writers has its basis in eroticism, and again in this realm we can see the desire to classify. In *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, Marjorie Garber comments on the inappropriate nature of these attempts to categorize Wilde, noting that to say he is bisexual or gay is 'merely to repeat the gesture of fragmentation and compartmentalization, the gesture of essentializing, that is contrary to his own practice and thought' (Garber, p.355). Similarly with Loti, society's labels are inappropriate as they are representative of what he is rejecting through his behavior.

One of the ways in which conformity is rejected by Wilde and Loti reveals a remarkable similarity between them. In *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*, Regenia Gagnier remarks on 'the absence of middle-class life' in Wilde's life and work, of how his associations in both are only 'with aristocrats, artists, or grooms' (Gagnier, p.11). She shows how the connection between his private life and his art was one of the main focuses of his trial for gross obscenity:

> As the prosecutors pushed the connections between the art world and domestic and sexual deviation, aestheticism came to represent a secret, private realm of art and sexuality impervious to middle-class conformity. In other words, aestheticism came to mean the irrational in both productive (art) and reproductive (sexuality) realms: a clear affront to bourgeois utility and rationality in these realms and an apparent indication of the art world's divorce from middle-class life.

This conscious avoidance of contact with the middle-class is also a characteristic of Loti's life and work. His snobbish pride in associating with the aristocracy and royalty is well-known and seems at odds with his equally renowned frequentation of common sailors and the lower classes. As with Wilde, however, the apparent contradiction can be seen as implicit of a deeply felt aversion to contemporary bourgeois values. Loti's refusal to conform to middle-class norms of behavior, based in his transgressive "Orientalist" exoticism/eroticism, is accompanied by a physical exclusion of the middle-class from his work, and as far as was possible, from his social acquaintance. This exclusion is, however, as with Wilde's, merely an illusion. Transgression is of its essence dependent on the authority it subverts, and as has been shown, Wilde's transgressive aesthetic 'leads him not to escape the repressive ordering of society, but to a reinscription within it' (Dollimore, p.11). Gagnier comments on how Wilde's 'mind was stocked with commonplaces [which] seem to have been there for the sole purpose of their subversion' (Gagnier, p.8). He uses 'the reflective apparatus of the dominant group […] to mock' them, and in this way 'endears [himself] to the group at the moment he mocks it.' This approach, 'the use of ironic reference', allows him to be 'both commercially competitive and critical' at the same time. It is a reconciliation of 'the bourgeois artist's dilemma between private art and the need for a public' (p.19). Something very similar can be observed in Loti's case. By basing his work in the commonplaces of "Oriental"

exoticism, he is firmly rooting it within the very bourgeois culture he is rejecting/attacking. His immense popularity and considerable financial success as an "Orientalist writer" seem to pay ironic witness to this double standard and point to the skeptical conclusion that he is a perfect example of the saying that 'there is nothing so bourgeois as the desire to scandalize the bourgeoisie' (Dollimore, p.82). This would appear to be an appropriate comment, but it should also be recognized that as the attacks take place within the culture they are subverting, as do Wilde's, their potential to undermine that culture's values is greatly increased.

Loti's "Oriental" fantasy

Loti would therefore appear to be rejecting the values of nineteenth-century French society through his deliberately outrageous behavior. His experience of "Oriental" eroticism goes hand in hand with the adoption of "Oriental" costume and a constantly stated identification within Muslim culture. This way of expressing rebellion is by no means unique, however, and seems to follow a recognizable pattern. This pattern is identified by Dollimore: 'For homosexuals more than most, the search for sexual freedom in the realm of the foreign has been inseparable from a repudiation of the "Western" culture responsible for their repression and oppression' (Dollimore, p.339). He gives the example of T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia) for whom 'this entailed not just the rejection of a repressive social order, but a disidentification from it requiring nothing less than the relinquishing of the self as hitherto constituted and inhabited by that order.' This rises from 'the Western integration of subjectivity and sexuality', an integration which causes 'deviant desire [to become] also a refusal of certain types of subjectivity.' The search for a new self through the experience of transgressive desire in the new "Oriental" cultural setting is not, however, a straightforward one. One consequence of the new identification is that 'the other of sexual fantasy may be stereotypical or two-dimensional in a way somehow at

odds with the intensity and density of the desire which constructs it.' Another is that the fantasy 'indirectly registers the resilience of the individual's own immediate cultural past'. To deliberately forget this past is an escape from it, but the struggle to forget '[registers] its continuing presence.' The feeling of foreignness must be constantly evoked both for the attainment of pleasure and to sustain the new identity. This necessary insistence on repetition of the exotic leads again to the dangers of stereotype. For Loti, rebellion against Western values leads to an identification with the "Orient", but this identification comes to be expressed in terms of the very clichéd view from which he is trying to escape. Any suggestion of modernization or Westernization threatens his self-image and denies the possibility of erotic fulfilment. Examples of his frustration abound, with his deception by the 'désenchantéés' ('the disenchanted') being a particularly good illustration. This episode was the infamous literary deception played on Loti by Marie-Amélie Hebrard, a French journalist who wrote under the name of Marc Hélys. Hélys and two Turkish friends succeeded in persuading Loti to write about the suffering of Harem life in Turkey, providing him with a fictitious account of their lives. Loti published his version of their 'story' in *Les Désenchantéés*' (*The Disenchanted*) [1906]. While critics say it must have been obvious to him that he was being duped by the journalist posing as the unhappy captive of a harem, it should be recognized that he was duped more by himself and his need to have his clichéd view of Turkey confirmed. Without this confirmation his identity within it would collapse. Another good example is the infamous Séniha episode in *Aziyadé* [1879] where her arrival in western dress for a tryst spoils his "Orientalist" exotic/erotic fantasy, leading him to send her away in bewilderment. His fantasy is very fragile, being reliant on his newly constructed "Oriental" identity. Her western-style clothes, worn in an attempt to please him, serve as an unavoidable reminder that he is also only playing a role, leading to his seemingly inexplicable sudden dismissal of her. Refusal to allow any suggestion of the West, a determination typified in his insistence in setting up an "Oriental"-style house, that 'il n'y a urgent

que le décor' ('only the décor is important'), in *Suprêmes Visions d'Orient* [1921], reveals the fragility of the fantasy and the continuing presence and importance of the ostensibly rejected culture (*Suprêmes Visions*, pp.90-91). Accusations of clichéd representation levelled at Loti might seem at first to reveal his complicity in promoting a facile western view of the "Orient" but should instead be seen as part of an essential strategy in the rejection of his own culture, and in an identification with the "Oriental" "Other".

Dollimore shows how Wilde's transgressive aesthetic leads to 'his attack on public opinion, mediocrity and conventional morality' (Dollimore, p.8). In his rejection of the values of western society, Loti can be seen to be doing the same thing. He has of course been widely criticized for his constant attacks on westernization and colonialism, whilst as a French naval officer effectively acting as a tool of such policies, and indeed personally while benefitting from them as an "Orientalist writer". This apparent contradiction, however, increases the subversive potentiality of his rebellion. As with Wilde he remains within the culture he attacks, and parallel to Wilde his 'experience of deviant desire […] leads him not to escape the repressive ordering of society, but to a reinscription within it, and an inversion of the binaries upon which that ordering depends; desire, and the transgressive aesthetic which it fashions, reacts against, disrupts, and displaces from within' (Dollimore, p.14). Corresponding with Wilde's attack on the mainstream values of 'public opinion, mediocrity and conventional morality' Loti can be seen to be attacking perceptions of "Western" superiority over the "Orient", the dreary banality of modernization and the lack of imagination in the spread of uniform westernization, and western attitudes towards sexuality. He has himself been attacked for his own abuse of his position of superiority towards "Orientals", for the way his attacks on modernization deny the "Orient" the chance to join the modern world, and for his indulgence in what often seems to amount to little more than sexual tourism.

In making these accusations against him, however, we should not lose sight of the effect his attacks actually had. Outrage at his hypocrisy should not obscure the undeniable influence he had on the politics and society of his day, nor indeed should it cloud our perception of the way in which he drew attention to the hypocrisy of his contemporaries.

Loti's "Oriental" exoticism/eroticism and the desire to shock

All of Loti's attacks, on the idea that western society is superior to its "Oriental" counterparts, on the spread of westernization/modernization, and on repressive western attitudes to sexuality have been met with accusations of a double standard. His claim to be a champion of the oppressed colonial subject whilst at the same time enjoying the privileges of a coloniser has been widely ridiculed. This view is crystallized in Alec Hargreaves' comment on Loti's erotic motivation. Hargreaves derides Loti's claims to want to understand the mysteries of the "Orient" by assimilating himself to native lifestyles. 'It does not take much imagination to see that […] the professed desire to penetrate the soul of [a country] amounts to little more than a polite but transparent disguise for a basically erotic desire to physically penetrate the girl' (Hargreaves, p.34). This opinion effectively identifies the hypocrisy behind all of Loti's attacks. He is placed firmly within the role of sexual exploiter, with no claim to an interest in culture beyond the erotic. As far as the idea of his liberating himself from sexual repression is concerned, his behavior is characterized as having no more significance than that of a sexual tourist. This reaction and its refusal to credit Loti with any depth fails to recognize, however, the deliberately shocking nature of Loti's writing. Not only does he quite openly describe erotic adventures, but also goes out of his way to draw attention to them. The high-profile dedication of *Madame Chrysanthème* [1887] to 'Madame La Duchesse de Richelieu' shows this. The book describes his short "marriage" to Chrysanthème in

Japan, a relationship which is basically nothing more than a commercial contract. Loti urges the Duchess to accept the book with 'un sourire indulgent, sans y chercher aucune portée morale dangereuse ou bonne' ('an indulgent smile, without looking for any morally dangerous or good implications') and claims that it is 'le journal d'un été de ma vie, auquel je n'ai rien changé' ('the diary of a summer of my life, which I have not changed in any way') (*Romans*, p.650). The subject matter is unashamedly erotic. Loti's experience of the new culture is then, as Hargreaves says, primarily erotic, but far from being politely disguised the motive is quite brazenly advertised. Much of Loti's writing is similarly themed, and also quite openly so. A particularly good example is 'La Naïl', an article he wrote in 1882 which was published in the national newspaper 'Le Figaro' on May 8, 1912. In this article he writes about his visit to a Moroccan prostitute, extending a description of his weakness to all of us and our inability to control our desire:

> Oh! l'éternelle derision que ce besoin d'embrasser et d'étreidre qui nous talonne tous, qui parfois nous semblerait presqu'un appel divin, un élan sublime pour fondre deux âmes en une seul, mais qui n'est plutôt que le piège grossier de la matière toujours obstinée à se reproduire. Oh! si on pouvait au moins secouer cela, en être affranchi et purifié!... (Oh! what eternal derision is this need to kiss and embrace which torments us all, which sometimes almost seems a divine call, a sublime transport to meld two souls into one, but which is rather a vulgar trap of nature which is always striving to reproduce. Oh! if we could only shake ourselves of it, be rid of it and purified!...)
> (*Nouvelles*, p.159)

Erotic desire is reduced to the biological, and in including his readers as complicit in the lament, the spiritual side of eroticism, the possibility that it can be 'un élan sublime pour fondre deux âmes en une seul' ('a sublime transport to meld two souls

into one’) is denied. Loti continues by describing his unsuccessful struggle against desire, again making it universal, and extends his theme to encompass the mysteries of religion:

> J’avais eu envie de m’en aller, mais je retombai sur les cousins préparés par l’Ouled-Naïl… Qu’aurais-je gagné, après tout, à regimber contre cette loi des étreintes, imposée à tout ce qui respire? En quoi la révolte d’un atome éphémère comme je suis pourrait-elle atteindre la Cause inconnue qui nous à jetés pêle-mêle pour quelques heures dans le tourbillon des êtres? Non, autant vaut céder, s’abaisser sans comprendre et accepter lâchement l’aumône qui nous est faite de ces pauvres crises brèves…
>
> (I did want to go but fell back on the cushions prepared by the dancing girl. What would I have gained to struggle against this rule of sensuality, imposed on everything that breathes? How could the revolt of the ephemeral atom that I am affect the unknown Reason that has thrown us pell-mell for a few hours into the maelstrom of life? No, better to give in, to abase ourselves without understanding and weakly accept the alms of these poor brief attacks…)

Loti describes fighting desire as meaningless in the face of his insignificance. This idea of being no more than ‘un atome éphémère’ (‘an ephemeral atom’) leads into the realm of religion, of ‘la Cause inconnue’ (‘the unknown Reason’). Loti is using doubt here to undermine the assertions of Christian morality. His reduction of our desires to the biological drive to reproduce, ‘cette loi des étreintes’ (‘this rule of sensuality’), and linkage of this with the “why are we here?” idea of ‘la Cause inconnue’ becomes almost sacrilegious, especially when he describes having intimate relations with the prostitute in terms of an ‘aumône’ (‘alms’). Loti is deliberately undermining Christian ideas of morality here, and makes sure to reinforce the doubts he suggests at the end of the account. As he prepares to leave and a group of nomads

get ready to visit the prostitutes themselves, we are reminded of the cultural setting and the piety of Islam: 'Le muezzin répétait au quatres vents le nom d'Allah, et les nomades choisissait des places pour se prosterner, le front dans la poussière' ('the imam called the name of Allah to the four winds, and the nomads looked for places to prostrate themselves, forehead in the dust') (*Nouvelles*, p.161). Respect for another religion and culture is being shown in an account which goes beyond erotic exoticism to explain the value of such a different culture. Loti is careful to show how the women are culturally valued: 'On sait que, suivant l'usage immémorial de la tribu, celles-là, les déjà riches, allaient bientôt s'en retourner au fond du desert, redevenir des filles de la tente, et créer une famille avec quelque beau nomade de leur choix, dont elles seraient l'épouse voilée, fidèle, docile et humblement soumise' ('We know that, following the time-old custom of the tribe, those already rich would soon return to the depths of the desert, become women of the tent once more, and raise a family with some handsome nomad of their choice, to whom they would be the faithful veiled wife, docile and humbly obedient') (pp.157-8). His account has been undeniably motivated by erotic desire, but this is by no means the sole motivation, or the sole effect it has. Through the description of an erotic encounter, he has effectively attacked his favorite targets of perceived "Western" superiority and repressive morality and has asserted the value of a uniquely different culture. As with Wilde, transgressive desire is inextricably linked with social subversion. Dismissal of Loti's writing as mere sexual cynicism ignores the centrality of the idea of transgression to his work.

Conclusion: the calculated cynicism of an "Orientalist"

As seen in the dedication to *Madame Chrysanthème* Loti's desire to shock leads him to claim that he is relating his own experiences, in this case claiming that what he writes is simply his diary 'le journal d'un été de ma vie, auquel je n'ai

rien changé' ('the diary of a summer of my life, which I have not changed at all') (*Romans*, p.650). This claim has been revealed to be false, most notably by Suetoshi Funaoka in *Pierre Loti et l'Extrême-Orient – du Journal à l'œuvre* (*Pierre Loti and the Extreme Orient – from Journal to Novel*), and the issue has been used in both attacks on, and defenses of Loti and his work. When Loti's work is read in terms of Wilde's transgressive aesthetic, however, this point appears important from a very different perspective. For Wilde an artist is a 'cultured and fascinating liar' ('Decay', p.305) whose task is to challenge society's conventions, in particular the idea of "truth". He describes the welcome this liar will receive: 'Art, breaking free from the prison-house of realism, will run to greet him, and will kiss his false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone is in possession of the great secret that Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style'. Wilde's subordination of truth to style/lying here offers a way of understanding Loti's deliberate lie. "*Loti*" is the fictional creation of the writer whose own 'poor, probable, uninteresting human life', in Wilde's words, can only 'try to produce […] some of the marvels of which he talks'. Loti's deliberate confusion of himself with his protagonist is done in order to shock and should be seen as a part of his attack on traditional morality. In creating this new persona, he is rejecting his identity as Julien Viaud (his real name), and all of the bourgeois values that go to construct that identity. Loti's work is therefore based on a deliberate lie with the specific purpose of subverting an oppressive culture, and as with Wilde's transgressive aesthetic 'insincerity inauthenticity, and unnaturalness become the liberating attributes of decentred identity and desire' (Dollimore, p.14). The confusing contradictions we see in Loti's work are a result of this quite deliberate insincerity. What is disturbing about his rebellion is that, as with Wilde's, it 'leads him not to escape the repressive ordering of society, but to a reinscription within it'. This reinscription, for Loti as for Wilde, involves an 'inversion of the binaries upon which that ordering depends' so that 'desire, and the transgressive aesthetic which it fashions, reacts against, disrupts, and displaces from within.' Loti must have

been fully aware that the dubious nature of his behavior and of that described in his work did not sit well with the high position in society he held as a naval officer, and from 1891 as a member of the prestigious Académie Française. It is precisely this incongruity and discomfort that he seems to be trying to create.

Recognition of the central importance of insincerity in Loti's work as a part of a subversive strategy, helps to explain what has often been seen as his callous attitude. For Loti, just as for Wilde's Dorian Gray, insincerity is 'merely a method by which [he] can multiply [his] personalities' (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p.174). He is attacking what Dorian describes as 'the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence' (p.175), in other words rejecting the role his family and society expect him to adopt. His insincerity is a conscious affirmation of the validity of his difference from this stifling identity that has been constructed for him, that he is, as Dorian realizes, 'a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion'. Wilde is of course making a coded reference to homosexual experience here, in describing 'strange legacies of thought and passion' and is asserting the validity of this experience. Loti's insincerity serves a similar purpose, allowing him to escape from the rigid confines of the Christian morality inculcated in him by his strict Calvinist upbringing. Identification of insincerity and its purpose in Loti's work also involves, however, a recognition that what he writes is "*Oriented*" (pun intended) almost exclusively around himself and his own sense of identity. The other characters in his books are subservient to this theme. He has been castigated for having a callous attitude, for "loving and leaving", but were "*Loti*" to stay faithful to any of his "Oriental" lovers he would be conforming to societal expectations and would again be confined within the very sort of narrow role he is rejecting. That all of the affairs he writes of must end in departure or even in death can in this way be seen as a part of his strategy

of insincerity. Sincerity or truth is being made subservient to style and insincerity. Tragic endings thus serve an artistic purpose. In Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, there is an interesting parallel with this valuing of style over sincerity when Lord Henry comments to Dorian on the tragic suicide of his lover Sybil Vane:

> Someone has killed herself for love of you. I wish that I had ever had such an experience. It would have made me in love with love for the rest of my life. The people who have loved me […] have always insisted on living on, long after I have ceased to care for them, or they to care for me. They have become stout and tedious […].
> (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p.130)

Lord Henry's cynicism, his valuing of style over sincerity, is remarkably similar to "*Loti's*" musings on the possibility of meeting his one-time Turkish lover Aziyadé again in *Fantôme d'Orient*: 'Et comment serait-elle alors, comment serait son visage de vingt-huit ans? dans toute sa beauté de femme […]? ou bien flétrie, […] finie à jamais en tant que créature de chaire et d'amour?' ('And how would she be then, what would her twenty-eight-year-old face be like? in all its womanly beauty […]? or wrinkled, […] finished forever as a creature of flesh and love?') (*Fantôme d'Orient*, p.28). His prefered ending to his story is to find her grave : ''C'est presque sacrilège de le dire: en ce moment, je crois que je préférerais être sûr de ne trouver là-bas qu'une tombe. Pour elle et pour moi, j'aimerais mieux qu'elle m'eut devancé dans la finale poussière qui ne pense ni ne souffre' ('It's almost sacrilegious to say it: at this moment, I think that I would prefer to be sure to only find a tomb there. For her and myself, I would prefer her to have gone ahead of me to the final dust which neither thinks nor suffers') (p.29). Viewed from a standpoint of traditional morality Loti is being horribly self-centered here. It is, however, precisely this idea of traditional morality that he seems to be determined to undermine through the insincerity of his

artistic creation. His insincerity is shocking, but would appear to be intentionally so.

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※　ピーター・ターバーフィールド先生（Prof. Peter Turberfield）は、2022 年 11 月 10 日にご他界されました。謹んでご冥福をお祈りいたします。